

**RETHINKING POLITICAL POWER:  
THE CASE OF THE FRENCH DOCTRINAIRES**

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Although the French doctrinaires built up one of the most important political theories of the nineteenth-century and had a decisive influence on Tocqueville, Marx, and J. S. Mill, they remain largely unknown in the English-speaking world. This paper examines the doctrinaires' theory of political power by concentrating on François Guizot's *On the Means of Government and Opposition* (1821). Special attention is paid to Guizot's critique of Rousseau and *laissez-faire* liberalism and to his theory of "the new means of government." The paper argues that an understanding of liberalism as a crusade to restrict state power amounts to a misreading of the nature and dignity of political power. Guizot's theory of power goes beyond the ordinary dichotomy small vs. big government to stress the importance of the communication between government and society and the mutual empowerment of state and society. The paper also points out the ways in which the rediscovery of the doctrinaires' ideas can heighten our awareness of the internal diversity of liberalism and the multifarious dialects that have been spoken by liberal thinkers over time.

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*I love power because I love struggle. (Guizot)*

**In lieu of introduction**

Liberal thinkers have traditionally been skeptical toward political power and made "don't cross the line" their ultimate battle cry against the state. This attitude has dominated the Anglo-American liberal tradition and has deep roots that go back to Locke and the Declaration of Independence. As a result, contemporary liberal political philosophers have concentrated first and foremost on the protection of individual rights and autonomy against the encroachment of the state, turning liberalism, to quote Benjamin Barber, into "a politics of negativity, which enthrones not simply the individual but the individual defined by his perimeters, his parapets, and his entrenched solitude" (Barber 1989, 59). In turn, contemporary political theory has become identical with the search for a theory of rights and justice that specifies the basic liberties held by free and equal citizens in a liberal state that is ostensibly neutral between competing conceptions of the good life.

The French liberal tradition, with its emphasis on state power and its own version of individualism and constitutionalism, poses a set of interesting challenges to this dominant view and reminds us that political theory might have an agenda beyond the provision of a neutral grid that allows self-governing and autonomous individuals to pursue their own conceptions of the good life. In an interesting conversation with Steven Lukes, Isaiah Berlin said that what is truly exciting is to read those who speak a different conceptual language than us because they can

point to the weak points in our own theories and might suggest ways of correcting them.<sup>1</sup> He was right. At the risk of simplifying a diverse picture that includes writers as diverse as Bodin, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Constant, Tocqueville, Foucault, Sartre, de Jouvenel, and Raymond Aron, one might argue that French liberal thinkers have put forward novel ways of thinking about liberty, government, and authority that may provide us with a more complete picture of our own liberal principles. Furthermore, the unfamiliar guise in which these ideas were developed on the Continent should renew our awareness of the diverse solutions individuals can devise for enduring political dilemmas.

The French doctrinaires are, to use an unconventional metaphor, one of the last great virgin forests in modern political theory. Given, their originality and importance as political thinkers, it is surprising to note that they have been almost completely ignored in the English-speaking world and that they have only recently been rediscovered in France after more than a century of oblivion.<sup>2</sup> The word *doctrinaires* initially referred to a small group of French liberals who tried to break a middle ground in French politics during the Bourbon Restoration (1814-1830) and the July Monarchy (1830-1848). The name was a misnomer because it given to them in 1816 by a right-wing opponent, not for the alleged rigidity of their ideas, but because the doctrinaires frequently referred to "principles" and "doctrines" in their speeches. The original group included François Guizot (1787-1874), Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard (1763-1845), Prosper de

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<sup>1</sup> Berlin argued: "I am bored by reading people who are allies, people of roughly the same views, because by now all these things seem largely to be a collection of platitudes because we all accept them, we all believe them. What is interesting is to read the enemy, because the enemy penetrates the defenses, the weak points, because what interests me is what is wrong with the ideas in which I believe" (Berlin 1998, 90).

<sup>2</sup> In France, the publication of Pierre Rosanvallon's *Le moment Guizot* in 1985 sparked a new interest in the doctrinaires, more than fifty years after the publication of C.-H. Pouthas' book on Guizot (Pouthas 1923). The only attempt to discuss the doctrinaire liberalism as a whole was made by the late Spanish historian Luis Diez del Corral, author of *El liberalismo doctrinario*, 1956. For other studies of the doctrinaires, see Jaume 1997, Roldán 1999, and Craiutu 1999a; also see Siedentop 1979, 153-74; 1994, 20-40; 1997, vii-xxxvii. Two biographies of Guizot are worth consulting: Johnson 1963 and de Broglie 1990. While throwing light on many aspects of Guizot's life, Johnson's book downplays the significance of his *political* thought.

Barante (1782-1866), Victor de Broglie (1792-1867), Hercule de Serre (1776-1824) and Camille Jordan (1771-1821). Other figures such as Charles de Rémusat (1797-1875), Jean-Philibert Damiron (1794-1862), Theodore Jouffroy (1796-1842) and Pellegrino Rossi (1787-1848) joined the original group later. The French doctrinaires played a crucial role in the history of nineteenth-century French political thought, at a point in time when the legacy of the French Revolution was strongly contested and the task of reconciling liberty and order was far from being completed. As Ortega y Gasset once wrote, the doctrinaires thought "deeply and originally" about the most important issues of French political life and "built up the most admirable political theory of the entire century." They represented "an unusual case of intellectual responsibility that is of the quality most lacking to European intellectuals since 1750" (y Gasset 1962, 60; 61).

More importantly, the doctrinaires developed, in the footsteps of Montesquieu, a coherent *sociological* approach to political theory that highlighted the dependence of political institutions on social order. Recent scholarship has shown that Tocqueville saw America through the pre-existing conceptual lenses framed by the French doctrinaires and that he wrote his masterpiece, *Democracy in America*, under their decisive influence. We cannot understand Tocqueville's major themes and his sociological approach to democracy which made him famous unless we first read Guizot's *History of Civilization in Europe*, the *only* book that Tocqueville asked a friend to send him from France, a week after his arrival in America.<sup>3</sup> Guizot also influenced two other major nineteenth-century political thinkers: Karl Marx and J. S. Mill. Marx borrowed from Guizot the idea of class struggle which appeared for the first time in Lecture VII of Guizot's *History of Civilization in Europe* (1828). J. S. Mill's theory of liberty was indebted to Guizot's theory of civilization and pluralism, above all to Guizot's idea that the essence of liberty

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<sup>3</sup> For more details on the doctrinaires' influence on Tocqueville, see del Corral 1989; Siedentop 1994, 20-40; Craiutu 1999b. For Guizot's influence on Marx, see Siedentop 1997, xxxiii-xxxv. J. S. Mill reviewed Guizot's *History* and praised the consistency, coherence, and comprehensiveness of his historical vision (Mill 1985, 259). On J. S. Mill's debt to Guizot, also see Varouxakis 1999.

lies in the manifestation and simultaneous action of all interests, rights, powers, and social elements.

The originality and importance of the political thought of the French doctrinaires can be measured not only by their writings that cover topics in disciplines as diverse as politics, philosophy, history, literature, and religion, but also by the multifarious challenges that they pose to our traditional ways of thinking about liberalism, state power, representative government, sovereignty, and democracy. For example, an English-speaking reader, educated in the tradition of the Declaration of Independence and the spirit of the American Constitution, will be surprised by the doctrinaires' reluctance to idolize individual rights, or by their nuanced critique of modern individualism, while classical liberals will most likely struggle with the doctrinaires' theory of government, that advocates a strong role for the state, in particular for the executive power. Furthermore, the writings of the doctrinaires can enrich our understanding of classical liberalism insofar as their political thought is critical of contract theory and *laissez-faire*, is based on a more sociological and less economic approach, shows how dignity can be restored to government, and finally offers a unique theory of publicity and a new way of understanding the relationship between government and social sphere.

In this essay, I concentrate on the theory of political power and the new means of government developed by the most important member of the doctrinaires' group, François Guizot, in *On the Means of Government and Opposition in the Current State of France* (1821), a seminal yet unduly neglected book that has not been translated into English yet. Additional comments will be made about Prosper de Barante's *On the Communes and the Aristocracy*, published in the same year (1821) and dealing with much the same set of ideas and problems. Written almost two centuries ago, Guizot's book offers a strikingly original reflection on power and modern society and retains to this day a surprising freshness compared to many other books of the period. A true manifesto of government, *On the Means of Government and Opposition* was hailed by a leading

democratic theorist such as Claude Lefort<sup>4</sup> as one of the best treatises on government ever written; it appeals to those interested in such issues as political crafting, statesmanship, and the mutual empowerment of state and society. Along with other writings published during the Restoration, it established Guizot's reputation as one of the most astute theoreticians of executive power and consolidated his unique place in the history of nineteenth-century French thought. Guizot succeeded more than anyone else of his epoch in combining a literary, political, academic, and religious career and was the author of a vast historical, political, literary, and religious corpus that still awaits its translators and critics. Unlike Tocqueville and Constant, to name just two of the most famous French political thinkers of the first half of nineteenth century, Guizot was both an accomplished statesman *and* a major political thinker, a point that is essential in understanding his political philosophy. As an article published in the famous *Edinburgh Review* (CCXX, October 1858) argued, Guizot had no equal in giving "the authority of a minister to the principles of a philosopher" and in him more than anyone else "the speculative genius of the one was united to the practical authority of the other" (1858, 410).

Our foray into the history of nineteenth-century French political thought should also make a more general contribution to the existing literature on liberalism. By reading and reflecting on the writings of French liberals such as the doctrinaires, we can enlarge our theoretical imagination, a vital prerequisite to the preservation of the rich liberal tradition. Inspired by Berlin's words quoted earlier, I argue that the rediscovery of important thinkers such as Guizot should heighten our awareness of the internal diversity of liberalism, a topic that might be of interest to contemporary liberals, who often tend to gloss over the multifarious dialects that have been spoken by liberal thinkers over time. In particular, Guizot's theory of power invites us to revisit the traditional interpretation of liberalism as exclusively anti-statist. *On the Means of Government and Opposition* shows that an understanding of liberalism only as a crusade to

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<sup>4</sup> For more details, see Lefort 1988 and Manent 1994.

restrict state power is inadequate and amounts to a misreading of the nature and dignity of political power. Guizot's model goes beyond the ordinary of dichotomy small vs. big government and highlights the importance of publicity and communication between state and society. As such, Guizot ideas on power and society confirm the centrality of the issue of *social legibility* to statecraft and shed light on the ways in which state and society are involved in a complex process of mutual empowerment.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the paper argues that the liberalism of the French doctrinaires that was developed during a period of *transition* to parliamentary government might help us rethink some of the dilemmas facing Eastern Europe today. In particular, Guizot's writings demonstrate that, during a transition period, building strong institutions appears to be just as important as placing limits on power and that the state must be simultaneously liberalized and strengthened. Guizot also predicted that the development of representative government would inevitably lead to a considerable extension of state power over society, and grasped that this extension was made possible by a social demand unseen before.

### **A new way of conceptualizing political power**

As already mentioned, the doctrinaires played an active role in French political life and espoused a pragmatic and realistic conception of government. Critical of their predecessors' approach to government and political power, the French doctrinaires elaborated a theory of government whose principles marked a significant departure from the previous attitude espoused by eighteenth-century thinkers, who often spoke *against* power without having the opportunity to participate directly in the government of society. Guizot and his fellow doctrinaires were keenly aware of the daunting task facing their post-revolutionary generation: a new constitutional regime was needed in order to end the Revolution and reconcile order and liberty. "We must govern now," Guizot argued (1821, 21); in his view, this meant making new laws, building new

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<sup>5</sup> For more details on social legibility and state power, see Scott 1998.

institutions, and finding a reasonable compromise between all social interests. To this effect, the doctrinaires approached the problem of power and government in a different manner from their English and French predecessors such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. They developed a new conception of the relations between the political and the social: power is generated *within* the social realm and cannot be conceived of as separated from the latter. Guizot's emphasis on the need to study first *society* in order to understand the nature of its political institutions is a logical outcome of this view. Furthermore, Guizot stressed the *natural* character of power and authority and no longer worked within the framework of social contract theory and natural rights. He argued that, contrary to what the defenders of the night-watchman-state paradigm believed, political power properly exercised and properly limited should play a key role in building, preserving, and strengthening any political community. In his opinion, there should be no *a priori* opposition between individual liberties and state power properly exercised or between the rights of the individual and the authority of the state.

Another important feature of Guizot's approach to political power refers to the interplay between social order and political institutions. In order to understand the nature of government, Guizot claimed, one must first examine the social condition as illustrated by the mores, the customs, the manner of life of individuals, the relations of the different classes, and the distribution of property. "It is by the study of political institutions, Guizot wrote, "that most writers have sought to understand the state of a society, the degree or type of its civilization. It would have been wiser to study first the society itself in order to understand its political institutions" (Guizot 1866, 73).

Guizot's views on political power and sovereignty and his opposition to Rousseau's political ideas illustrate the ways in which the doctrinaires parted company with their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century predecessors who reflected on the same topics. The doctrinaires rejected the fundamental principle of Rousseau's political philosophy that equated

liberty with man's sovereignty over himself and refused to accept the idea that the only legitimate law for every individual is one's individual will.<sup>6</sup> Guizot believed that both popular sovereignty and the sovereignty of divine right were two different ways of usurping the sovereignty of right that can belong only to reason, truth, and justice. In his view, it would be mistaken to attribute to any individual or group an inherent right to sovereignty; instead, legitimate sovereignty must be endlessly sought out and must remain subject to public scrutiny, while all political actors and institutions must constantly strive to make their actions conform, as much as possible, to the principles of reason, justice, and right. According to Guizot, the best way of achieving this goal was to distinguish between *de facto* and *de iure* sovereignty and to foster an "organized antagonism" that presupposed "the confrontation of independent and equal powers capable of reciprocally imposing on each other the obligation of seeking the truth together" (Guizot 1985, 343). None of these powers must ever be allowed to reign uncontrolled or to become absolute to the point of stifling the development of others. Hence, pluralism and constitutionalism ought to be instrumental in dividing and limiting *de facto* sovereignty and achieving a reasonable compromise between competing social, economic, and political interests.

*Pace* Rousseau, Guizot claimed that the true contract which brings individuals together and allows them to cooperate and live in peace can only be a "divine contract" that creates a new form of political obligation to the laws of "reason, truth, and justice." For Guizot, Rousseau's social contract was both a figment of the imagination and a futile thought experiment because the origins of society and government cannot be separated from each other. Government and society appear at once, more precisely at the moment when individuals feel that they are united by bonds that are not based on sheer force; hence, it would be meaningless to imagine a hypothetical situation in which individuals living in an alleged state of nature come together and agree to form

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<sup>6</sup> For more details on Guizot's critique of Rousseau, see Lecture X, Vol. II from Guizot's *History of the Origins of Representative Government in Europe* (Guizot 1861, 334-49) as well as his unfinished treatise on sovereignty, *Political Philosophy: On Sovereignty* (1985).

a government (Guizot 1985, 333). Furthermore, Guizot claimed that, by virtue of a natural law *sui generis*, the bravest and the most skillful individuals always manage to assert their will and rule over the entire society. This is tantamount to arguing that power is a natural phenomenon that manifests and accompanies natural superiorities, that is to say, exquisite leadership skills, abilities, and exceptional achievement. In other words, as long as no external or violent cause occurs to upset the natural course of things, power will always be placed in the hands of those who demonstrate the highest capacity (*capacité*)<sup>7</sup> to exercise it and satisfy the common interest, which amounts to saying that power would ineluctably be seized by the bravest and the cleverest. It worth noting, though, that Guizot did *not* equate superior force with capacity and virtue.<sup>8</sup> The upshot of this view is twofold. First, power and government do not--and cannot--arise out of a social contract between individuals seeking to place their lives under the protection of a sovereign. Second, the true origin of political obligation is the recognition of--and acquiescence to--"natural superiorities," a theme that returns time and again in Guizot's writings:

Power accompanies and reveals superiority. In making itself recognized, power makes itself obeyed. ... This is the origin of power; there is no other. Power would have never been born between equals. The superiority that is felt and accepted represents the original and legitimate link in human societies; it is both the fact and the right; it is the true and only social contract (Guizot 1821, 164).

As Pierre Manent remarks, Guizot's position is radical in the sense that it amounts to asserting that the characteristics of human nature can be fully reconciled with the evolution of history. In other words, for Guizot (as for Hegel) "history's authority is one with that of nature" (Manent 1994, 99) and actually replaces it. Fact and right seem to coincide, and the evolution of

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<sup>7</sup> Guizot defined this concept as "the capacity to act according to reason, truth, and justice" (Guizot 1861, 71). The concept of capacity also appears in the works of other nineteenth-century liberals such as J. S. Mill, who argued for "the concession to others of a more potential voice, on the ground of greater capacity for the management of joint interests" (Mill 1972, 288).

<sup>8</sup> "Comment naît le pouvoir? À qui va-t-il comme par sa pente naturelle et de l'aveu de tous? Au plus courageux, au plus habile, à celui qui se fait croire le plus capable de l'exercer, c'est-à-dire de satisfaire à l'intérêt commun. Tant qu'aucune cause extérieure et violente ne vient déranger le cours spontané des choses, c'est le brave qui commande, l'habile qui gouverne" (Guizot 1821, 163-4).

civilization (defined as progress) tends to bring human nature to its fulfillment by giving legitimacy to the tendencies rooted in human nature. This idea appears, albeit in a slightly different form, in Guizot's *History of Civilization in Europe* (1828), where he outlined the factors that contributed to the development of European civilization and pointed to the political effects of the equality of conditions, a theme which was fully explored a decade later by Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*.

These insights lie at the core of Guizot's *On the Means of Government and Opposition in the Current State of France* written and published in 1821, in the aftermath of the inauguration of the ultra-conservative Villèle government whose policies and principles Guizot strongly opposed. It does not take long for any reader of *On the Means of Government and Opposition* to discover that the book has the style of a true political leader and the mind of an astute political philosopher. Guizot displayed an unparalleled awareness of the complex nature of the society in which he lived and strongly criticized those who failed to grasp the direction in which French society was heading. In his political writings written and published in the early 1820s, he took ultra-conservatives to task for advancing an inefficient model of government that was anachronistic and did not suit the new spirit of the age, which demanded representative government, accountability, and publicity. His theory of the new means of government was supposed to offer a coherent alternative based on constitutionalism and decentralization. In *On the Means of Government and Opposition*, he appears as the spokesman of the new France that had resulted from the ruins of the Revolution and the Empire. He describes the most important political actors, identifies the chief mistakes committed by them, and indicates the causes of the sterility of the ultra-conservative government. More importantly, Guizot elaborates an original theory of the new means of government and argues that in modern society, the development of liberty is necessarily accompanied by the extension of state power and influence.

Let us have a closer look at Guizot's approach. He begins his analysis by pointing to the difficulty of reconciling liberty and power (authority), "the eternal problem of human societies" (Guizot 1821, 6). Too often, notwithstanding their generous intentions, the true friends of liberty failed to find viable solutions for reconciling liberty and authority. They advanced grandiose schemes and plans that proved in the end to be highly unrealistic and even dangerous to the stability of social order. The friends of the new France whose task is to found a new government, must first and foremost become well acquainted with the nature and conditions of power in modern society:

We must found an entire constitutional order and reject the Old Regime. This is the essence of our situation. The revolution had destroyed the government of the Old Regime, but had not built its own government yet. The true government of the Revolution is a system of institutions and influences that guarantee constitutional equality and legal liberty. ... The Revolution, so to speak, continues to live in the air; ... the principles it had proclaimed have not been converted into practical institutions and efficient laws yet; the interests it had founded are still dispersed and badly linked to each other (Guizot 1821, 2-3).

This passage sheds light on the ambitious mission that Guizot set for his post-Revolution generation. The entire political order had to be reformed and new institutions built on a new set of ideas and principles were required. The Revolution, writes Guizot (1821, 4-5; 17), had brought us the victory over the Old Regime, but not yet a regular and well-ordered government which must consummate and guarantee the definitive triumph of Revolution over the Old Regime. In the opinion of the French doctrinaires, the ideas and principles enshrined in the Charter of 1814 were supposed to provide the foundation of representative government in post-Revolution France.<sup>9</sup> Guizot argued that, in order to advance the interests of the nation, the government should be independent *vis-à-vis* the factions that at once divide the country and threaten to delay the consolidation of the new institutions. At the same time, he stressed the need for the government to pursue a new set of policies grounded in liberal principles, fixed rules, and

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<sup>9</sup> For the full text of the Charter of 1814, see Anderson 1967.

general interests that were appropriate to a rapidly changing social condition. To this effect, he emphasized that government and society ought to work together, "listen" to each other, and be engaged in a constant dialogue mediated by the free press and the other institutions of representative government. This idea undergirds a new conception of the relations between the political and the social: power is generated *within* the social realm and cannot be conceived of as separated from the latter.

This sociological approach to power helps explain Guizot's critique of laissez-faire liberalism that looms large in *On the Means of Government and Opposition*. Addressing those who distrusted power, Guizot rejected the idea that the scope of state intervention could be increased *only* at the expense of individual liberty. Instead, he believed that state power properly exercised and limited could be an effective means of protecting and strengthening individual freedoms. While remaining faithful to the principles of constitutionalism and limited government,<sup>10</sup> Guizot criticized those classical liberals who wanted government (in this case, executive power) to be humble and its tasks and authority severely limited. To this effect, he denounced the (then) widespread belief that likened government to a hired servant that can be paid at a bargain rate and whose sphere of action ought to be severely restrained (Guizot 1821, 142). For Guizot, to require that government be nothing more than a passive umpire was tantamount to a wholesale subversion of authority and society; moreover, he feared that such a course might also jeopardize individual freedoms and rights. Government as a passive and powerless umpire, he opined, might have been useful as a weapon against an absolute regime, but it was certainly ineffective for building a new political order because it ignored fact and right, misunderstood the complex architecture of representative government, and, last but not least, denied the dignity of governing:

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<sup>10</sup> Writes Guizot: "J'accorderai donc très volontiers que le pouvoir ne doit intervenir que là où il est bon, et qu'il est fort souvent intervenu là où sa présence n'était qu'un mal et un obstacle" (Guizot 1821, 172). For more details on Guizot's defense of limited power, see footnote 24, *infra*.

What are you doing then, you who proclaim that power is only a hired servant who can be paid at a bargain rate, who must be reduced to the lowest degree, in activity as in wages? Do you not see that you misunderstand completely the dignity of its nature and its relations with all peoples? ... Are nations made up of superior beings who, so as to attend freely to more sublime work, would have inferior creatures responsible for the material aspects of life under the name of government? This is an absurd and shameful theory that ignores equally fact and right, philosophy and history. Undoubtedly, ... true superiorities do not always rule the roost, and even when they do, they do not always make legitimate use of the position. ... Also, with institutions and laws, there must be guarantees on the one hand against the reign of false and fragile superiorities, on the other against the corruption of the most authentic ones. But these necessities of the social condition change nothing about the nature of things. They do not prevent the fact that generally speaking power belongs to superiority, and therefore superiority is the natural and legitimate situation of power" (Guizot 1821, 166-7).

As this passage eloquently shows, Guizot believed that to claim that power could only be used to prevent and punish evil actions amounted in the end to misunderstanding the dignity and nobility of governing by confounding power with a mere top-down command system. Those who hold such a view, Guizot claimed, would in fact condemn the entire political community to anarchy. Power provides the necessary centers of decision and institutional design that are required for the maintenance and stability of society and the protection of its political institutions.<sup>11</sup>

Hence, Guizot's opposition to *laissez faire* stemmed from his belief in the positive role that power could--and should--play in modern society. "The axiom *laissez faire, laissez passer*," Guizot wrote, "is one of those vague axioms, true or false depending on how it is applied; it can warn us against dangers, but it gives us no guidance" (Guizot 1821, 172-3). He preferred instead a more active and properly limited government, that is to say an executive power that works with society, seeks to understand the logic of social interests, and is in turn respected by citizens. Do not ask power to abdicate by humiliating itself, Guizot warned, since only a power that is

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<sup>11</sup> Writes Guizot: "Qu'on dirige toute cette théorie contre un pouvoir qu'on veut démolir, je le conçois; l'instrument est bon et d'un effet sûr. Mais qu'on prétende la prendre pour règle lorsqu'il s'agit de fonder un ordre nouveau, de constituer un pouvoir durable; l'erreur est bien grande" (Guizot 1821, 172).

respected by society can duly fulfill its task. A weak and unstable power is a power condemned to death or usurpation. Hence, what should be feared is not power *tout court*, but weak and unaccountable power that might be easily tempted to resort to arbitrary means in order to extend its prerogatives and influence.

### **A critique of centralization**

At the core of the doctrinaires' new theory of political power also lies a powerful critique of centralization that has been neglected by commentators. Like many of their contemporaries, Guizot and his fellow doctrinaires tried to explain the factors that had contributed to the growth of administrative centralization and absolutism in France, a topic which was quite popular in the epoch and found its *locus classicus* in Tocqueville's writings. It will be recalled that in *Democracy in America* (1958, I, 89-101), Tocqueville drew a famous distinction between centralized government and centralized administration. The existence of a centralized government, he wrote, inevitably requires that the power that directs political affairs be concentrated in one single place in order to be able to make decisions necessary for the security of the nation. A centralized administration is neither inevitable nor essential for the preservation of the country; it concentrates under the umbrella of a huge bureaucratic apparatus the direction of all local interests and, as a result, stifles self-government and furthers political apathy.

More than a decade before Tocqueville, the doctrinaires struggled with much the same problems, albeit in a different way. Guizot, for example, did not draw a clear distinction between centralized government and centralized administration. Instead, his framework of analysis was the development of European civilization which, in his view, had been characterized by a tendency toward political centralization and the predominance of general interests. As he explained in Lecture XI of *History of Civilization in Europe*, the fifteenth century marked the

beginning of the "silent and concealed work of centralization" (Guizot 1997, 183) that led to the creation of what had hitherto never existed, nations and governments. Yet, despite its inevitable character, Guizot was keenly aware of the nefarious implications of political and administrative centralization in the history of France, an idea that was shared by other doctrinaires such as Pierre Royer-Collard and Prosper de Barante. In one of his parliamentary speeches from 1821, Royer-Collard explicitly linked the art of being free to the preservation of local independent institutions, "true republics in the bosom of the monarchy" (Royer-Collard 1861, II, 130-1) that had provided a countervailing force to the power of the kings. A similar point can be found in Barante's seminal book, *On the Communes and Aristocracy*, where he called these local institutions "fragments of a constitution" (Barante 1821, 7) that had never been fully established or recognized, but served an important role in bringing citizens together and allowing them to form common bonds. The interesting point made by the doctrinaires is that, under the Old Regime, the communes formed a surprisingly diverse society characterized by customs, unwritten laws, and various associations--Barante refers to them as "communal societies"--all of which were destroyed under the rule of Louis XIV and the administration of Richelieu. The disappearance of local institutions was an event of momentous significance because it paved the way for the growth of absolute power and administrative centralization.

Moreover, the doctrinaires warned that centralization would be the "natural" government of a democratic society, a rather paradoxical idea that had a deep impact on Tocqueville. "I think," Royer-Collard argued, "that in the democratic centuries to come, individual independence and local liberties will always be a product of art and culture, while centralization will be the natural government" (Royer-Collard 1861, II, 131). It is worth pointing out that Royer-Collard's emphasis on individual independence and local liberties foreshadows Tocqueville's description of the art of being free in *Democracy in America*. In his turn, Guizot deplored not only the centralization of political and administrative affairs, but also the "centralization of the mind"

(Guizot 1859, II, 57). In a revealing (yet neglected) letter sent to Charles de Rémusat in June 1821, Guizot explicitly stated what the government ought to do in order to unleash the energies of the country and successfully combine liberty and order:

Providence did not place in the middle of the world a great basin from which thousands of channels originate; Providence placed in thousands of places live sources which flow naturally. It is vain to pretend to widely distribute political and moral life through a system of administrative navigation which originates solely from Paris. To trigger action, spontaneity, this is the condition of liberty. This is the only way to obtain the real influences that you need in order to govern. These influences exist here [in the bosom of society] more than anywhere else; but they languish in obscurity and perish by inaction. (Guizot 1884, 13).

Guizot believed that everyone must be allowed to "shine freely in his own sphere" (1884, 14) and form local associations to pursue common interests. A new form of absolute power would only strengthen the country's long tradition of centralization, while a free constitutional regime based on decentralization and local government would respect the liberties of the individuals who must be free to conduct their own affairs according to their interests and the common good.

Reason, wrote Guizot to Barante in 1821, can only come from above, but life can only rise from below; it exists in the roots of society as much as in the roots of a tree. "There is everywhere a government already made,"<sup>12</sup> a government that is born in--and provided by--society. Guizot pointed to the existence of numerous capable individuals who lacked opportunities to use their skills and talents. These "unemployed superiorities" (Guizot 1821, 264-5) were propertied individuals, lawyers, notaries, entrepreneurs, manufacturers and merchants who represented the backbone of the emerging middle class in France. While visiting the small towns and villages of France, Guizot met such individuals capable of undertaking many new enterprises, but he was surprised to discover that they rarely cooperated with each other, lacked

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<sup>12</sup> Here is the entire passage from this revealing letter to Barante: "Il faut sortir de cette ornière, appeler les influences au pouvoir et permettre à la vie de se manifester là où elle est; la raison ne peut venir que d'en haut, cela est sûr; mais la vie ne peut monter que d'en bas; elle est dans les racines de la société comme dans celles de l'arbre; notre problème est la création d'un gouvernement; or il y a partout un gouvernement tout fait: il faut l'accepter et le régler nous avons beau broyer et faire fermenter à Paris des députés et des ministres, il ne sort de ce

mutual bonds, and thus were condemned to political powerlessness and apathy. He heard them speaking of their local affairs and noticed that they talked about them as if those local matters were foreign to their own interests and preoccupation. The art of association was unknown to them and they lacked a true public sphere in which they could meet and cooperate with each other to promote common interests.<sup>13</sup> In spite of their growing force, Guizot wrote, they lived scattered and in isolation, separated from each other, with no close ties between them. Barante also spoke about the “complete isolation of each citizen in his own interest” (Barante 1821, 17) as a result of the growing privatization of life and denounced the subsequent atrophy of public (political) life.

The important point made by both Guizot and Barante--a version of this idea also appeared in Constant's essay on the liberty of the moderns--is that it would be a great mistake to encourage individuals to channel all their energies into the pursuit of their private interests at the expense of participating in public life. This tendency might further, in fact, new and perverse forms of despotism that would seek to foster the increasing privatization of life; hence, citizens must overcome their apathy, form new bonds, and learn how to deliberate together about issues of common interest. Moreover, the doctrinaires argued, the general attitude toward government

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laboratoire unique ni de chaleur, ni lumière" (Guizot 1884, 10-11).

<sup>13</sup> Here is an important passage in which Guizot discusses the role of local associations: "C'est que les citoyens n'ont point de centre autour duquel ils puissent se grouper, point d'affaires à diriger en commun, et où ils étudient les nécessités positives, les intérêts véritables de l'ordre public. Là ils apprendraient à se connaître les uns les autres, à transiger sur leurs prétentions réciproques, à se concerter pour un résultat déterminé. ... Les individus vivent isolés; rien ne les amène à traiter ensemble; rien ne les oblige à chercher le point, l'idée, la résolution où ils pourraient s'unir" (Guizot 1821, 268-9). The same issue is addressed by Barante: "Mais pour n'être pas encore apparens, les effets de cette indifférence sociale, de ce complet isolement de chaque citoyen dans son propre intérêt, n'en sont pas moins tristes et maçons. Aucun, n'étant pour rien dans la chose publique, se trouvant séparé de toute action politique, s'accoutume chaque jour de plus en plus à regarder le gouvernement comme un pouvoir étranger, qui, moyennant un tribut, vous doit repos, justice et bien-être. ... Il n'existe pas, dans les provinces, un objet quelconque qui puisse occuper les esprits, absorber les ambitions, former aux affaires par l'expérience, remettre les imaginations vides dans le vrai et dans le positif" (Barante 1821, 16-7).

ought to change; citizens should regard power, not as foreign to their interests, but as a partner in ongoing projects. Writes Guizot:

I lived in the counties, in the bosom of this society which, it is said, contains only scattered, isolated individuals, without any links between them. This fact seemed to be apparent but not real. I found everywhere ignored links, lost influences, unemployed superiorities. I met individuals who had money but had nothing to do with it, who could have done many things, but who were nothing in reality. I heard them talking about public affairs, local affairs, but it was as if they were talking about things that were irrelevant, if not to their destiny, at least to their interests. They were talking about them as if they were talking [superficially] in a coffee house or in theater; not as if they were discussing their own affairs. ... They needed to understand themselves, to unite, in order to give life to their influence and substance to the links that existed between them (Guizot 1821, 266-7).

The situation described by Guizot in this passage was, in fact, the legacy of the French Revolution that had completed the process of social leveling, destroyed intermediary bodies, and ended the tradition of local freedoms and institutions that had served as a countervailing force to the power of the monarchs during the Old Regime. The outcome of this process was an atomized society, *la société en poussière*, that created the conditions for the development of administrative centralization.

This famous theme also occupies a central place in both Barante's *On the Communes and the Aristocracy* and Royer-Collard's parliamentary discourses. Barante noted that the Revolution had completed the destruction of local "communal societies" and swallowed them up in the centralized nation. When the communes disappeared, the "rule of the administrators" began and gave birth to a new system in which prevailed the absolute will of the king's ministers (Barante 1821, 8). For Royer-Collard too, the factor that had made possible the rise of absolutism in France was the vanishing of intermediary bodies<sup>14</sup> that had traditionally opposed the growth of centralized administration and protected local liberties by acting as a buffer between the king, the nobles, and the commons. In the absence of these intermediary bodies, the trend toward

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<sup>14</sup> Royer-Collard referred to them as "*cette foule d'institutions domestiques et de magistratures*"

centralization was irresistible. In his speech on freedom of the press (1822) that reminds one of Burke, Royer-Collard explained:

We have seen the old society perish, and with it that crowd of domestic institutions and independent magistracies which it carried within it, strong bundle of private rights, true republics within the monarchy. These institutions, these magistracies did not, it is true, share sovereignty; but they opposed to it everywhere limits which honor defended obstinately. Not one of them has survived and nothing else appeared to replace them. The revolution left only isolated individuals standing. The dictatorship that ended it consummated, in this regard, its own work. From an atomized society has emerged centralization (Royer-Collard 1861, II, 130-1).

Royer-Collard referred to the emergence of a nation of isolated and powerless individuals governed by an incompetent bureaucracy. When only isolated individuals are left standing, with few ties among themselves, the state inevitably acquires a huge power and its sphere of influence and power increases. "We have become," Royer-Collard concluded, "a nation of administered people, under the hand of irresponsible civil servants, themselves centralized by the power of which they are agents" (Royer-Collard 1861, II, 131).

With the benefit of hindsight, it is evident that one of the main obstacles to the establishment of free and stable government in France had been the gradual disappearance of local and intermediary institutions that conjured up "a monstrous and dysfunctional power" (Royer-Collard 1861, II, 230).<sup>15</sup> One can clearly see is the similarity between the doctrinaires' and Tocqueville's arguments on the importance of local freedoms and the parallel between democracy and aristocracy. Thus, more than a decade before Tocqueville, the doctrinaires highlighted the connection between administrative centralization and atomization and explained how the process of social leveling completed the destruction of intermediary bodies. They also arrived at the conclusion that democracy is compatible with new forms of despotism and

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*indépendantes*" (Royer-Collard 1861, II, 130)

<sup>15</sup> Writes Royer-Collard: "C'est parce que les institutions se sont écroulées que vous avez la centralisation; c'est parce que les magistratures ont péri avec elles que vous n'avez que des fonctionnaires" (Royer-Collard 1861, II, 226). On this topic, also see Barante 1821, 8; Rémusat, 1861, 804.

domination that, instead of using soldiers and prisons, would resort instead to new and softer means of power.

### **The new means of government**

This section examines Guizot's theory of the new means of government that undergirds his trenchant critique of the Villèle ultraconservative government which came to power in 1820. The return to parliamentary politics made possible the passing of important legislation such as the Elections Law, the Law on the Reorganization of the Military, and the Law of the Press that were seen as crucial to the consolidation of the new representative institutions. The first measures taken by the new ultra-conservative government were meant, however, to delay or even reverse this evolution. Outraged by the blindness of the new political leaders, the doctrinaires denounced the futility of their attempt to restore the Old Regime. The Counter-Revolution, Barante wrote (1821, 88-9), is simply impossible; France cannot return to the mores and institutions of its past and the principles of the Charter of 1814 cannot be ignored. In turn, Guizot pointed out the paradoxical situation in which the new government found itself:

Why does a new government show itself from the very beginning stagnant and powerless? Everything moves around it; the social movement has not ceased, its direction has not changed; the classes that follow it continue to rise, while those which refuse to take part in this movement remain behind; the division of properties, the development of industry, the rapid circulation of wealth, the diffusion of ideas, all these elements that are constitutive of the new order grow and develop every day (Guizot 1821, 119).

Worth noting here are the two words that Guizot chose to describe the new government: stagnant and powerless. This is all the more surprising since the Bourbon Restoration (1814-1830) was a period of great social, economic, and political change. The feeling of living in a time of profound transformations was echoed by many writings and memoirs of that age. For example, Edgar

Quinet called the decade 1815-1825 "a sort of intoxication of reawakened thought"<sup>16</sup> and Tocqueville himself nostalgically remembered this period as one "of great issues and great parties." The Revolution had created a new social order, characterized by a new structure and circulation of property and wealth as well as by an unprecedented development of industry and commerce.

Nonetheless, those who held power, Guizot remarked, showed themselves incapable of understanding and fostering this change. In his view, the main reason for the inefficiency of the new government was that it did not work with the proper means of government and failed to elicit the cooperation of new social forces and interests. The central government, Guizot wrote, mistakenly believed that it could govern solely from above, as if society were a large and deserted field in the hands of a powerful landlord or a huge mass of anonymous individuals who were waiting everything from their government without having the power to change their lives. Nonetheless, society can be compared neither to an obedient herd nor to a barren field waiting for the government to come and cultivate it. On the contrary, political leaders should start from the assumption that each society contains its own means of government and ought to take into account "the dominant opinions and the general interests" (Guizot 1821, 134).

In the doctrinaires' view, given the profound transformations that had occurred in the social order, those who exercise political power had to open and institutionalize new channels of communication with society by establishing a permanent dialogue between government and ordinary citizens through publicity and a free press. It is important to note that publicity should perform the task of the former intermediary powers; in other words, it must create a new type of relation between government and society so that power does not descend from the top down "without any other intermediaries than its servants" (Barante 1821, 20). When this dialogue and these intermediaries do not exist, the government is unable to work with the new ideas and social

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<sup>16</sup> Quinet quoted by Johnson 1991, 882.

interests, confounds power and command, and mistakenly conceives itself to be foreign or superior to society. As a result, it tends to interpret any social initiative as an immediate threat to its own stability and legitimacy.

Caught between the fear of revolution and the specter of the counter-revolution, the (Villèle) government mistakenly believed that the only way of intervening in society was to increase the number of the civil servants and policemen. In doing so, it attempted to avoid accountability and public scrutiny by conducting its business behind closed doors, with no regard for deliberation in the public arena. Hence, the new political leaders proved that they could neither understand nor work with the elements of the new social order and that they only knew one single policy, that of temporary survival, personal intrigues, and ministerial arbitrariness. In other words, the government was unable to benefit from the new ideas and social interests, because it distrusted them and found itself incapable of controlling and supervising their evolution. Yet, in reality, Guizot opined, these new liberal interests and ideas were not a hotbed of anarchy, as their opponents claimed, but a genuine source of social order and progress. Given the new distribution of properties and the influence of new ideas, more individuals acquire a stake in the system by becoming "stockholders in this great association of public interests" (Barante 1821, 111-2). Their interests are legitimate, peaceful, and strong; the future belongs to them and any attempt to oppose or slow down their development will be futile (Guizot 1821, 203-7).

As I have already shown, the doctrinaires criticized the policies carried out by the ultra-conservative government for being anachronistic and unrealistic and they identified why the government came to rely on the wrong means of governing that ultimately failed to obtain the cooperation of social forces. We had had thus far, the doctrinaires argued, only agents of power who wanted to administer everything and did not know how to influence over the nation in order to create new bonds between society and its government. But what should government do in

order to elicit the cooperation and enlist the participation of these new interests in the direction of public affairs? Guizot believed that every society contains a number of gifted individuals whom he called "natural (social) superiorities" that, along with the new ideas and social interests, ought to be considered the true means of government. In each department, town, or village, there are many propertied individuals who could form an essential part of the true government of society, but who are not involved in public life because they lack the opportunities to participate in the management of local affairs. The only way to solve this problem was to adopt new laws and build new institutions that would encourage local government and allow individuals to use their talents, skills, and resources.<sup>17</sup> Given the fact that French society had become more complex and diverse, the doctrinaires argued, those who hold political office must give up the ludicrous pretension to control everything and ought to foster instead the rise of the new social forces, above all the middle class. In other words, the government must encourage and protect the circulation of property, the diffusion of ideas, and the development of industry that are the constitutive elements of the new social order.

Thus, Guizot's *sociological* approach to political power ushered in a new interpretation of the relations between power and society and an original theory of the new means of government. He offered a new way of conceptualizing political power as intrinsically linked to-- and rooted in--*society*. Effective political power requires close cooperation with those means of government that exist in the bosom of society, the diffused powers such as those represented by

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<sup>17</sup> This is what the government should do according to Guizot: "C'est là [dans la société] qu'il faut les chercher pour les trouver, là où il faut les laisser pour s'en servir. Grâce au ciel, la société humaine n'est pas un champ que vient exploiter un maître; elle vit d'une autre vie que le mouvement de la matière; elle possède et produit elle-même *ses plus sûrs moyens de gouvernement*, elle les prête volontiers à qui sait les manier; mais c'est à *elle* qu'il faut s'adresser pour les obtenir. Il est vain de prétendre la régir par des forces extérieures à ses forces, par des machines étalées à sa surface mais qui n'ont point de racines dans ses entrailles et n'y puisent point le principe de leur mouvement (Guizot 1821, 129-30; all emphases added). Also see Barante: "Ici on a vu jusqu'à présent des ministres qui veulent tout administrer et qui ne savent pas influencer sur la nation" (Barante 1821, 72-3); "Ce qui importe le plus, c'est de laisser la société manifester librement ce qui est en elle, et donner une expression de ce qu'elle est" (249).

local notables and small entrepreneurs who remain politically inactive until they are given the opportunity to use their resources by forming various civil associations or participating in local government. On this view, the very task of the institutions of representative government is to seek within society the very means of governing it. If you want to benefit from all the resources contained by particular superiorities and influences, writes Guizot, the only way to obtain that is to hand over a part of government to society. To resort only to the traditional agents of power such as policemen, tax collectors, soldiers, civil servants, and members of the cabinet in order to govern a rapidly changing society would be a fatal mistake and a costly illusion:<sup>18</sup>

The true means of government are not these direct and visible instruments of power. They reside in the bosom of society and cannot be separated from the latter ... In each county, each town, each place there are individuals who have nothing to do with the government, who have no close relation, no positive link, but who exercise around them a more or less decisive and extended influence. These are small owners, lawyers, notaries, capitalists, manufacturers, and tradesmen who keep themselves far from public affairs in order to devote themselves to their own business, but who have nonetheless a considerable influence (Guizot 1821, 129; 264-5).

In Guizot's opinion, the new and true means of government were the small owners, the lawyers, the notaries, the small entrepreneurs, and tradesmen whose initiatives and resources represented a huge potential that remains untapped as long as these individuals are prevented from participating in the direction of local affairs. Hence, those who hold power must actively look for these social superiorities and properly reward them by giving them a stake in the system and opening for them new opportunities for participating in public life and local government (Guizot 1821, 265).

More importantly, Guizot's sociological approach suggests a new conception of the art (nobility) of governing. To make of power what the miser makes of gold, he wrote, would be in

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<sup>18</sup> Writes Guizot: "Le pouvoir est souvent saisi d'une étrange erreur. ... Des ministres, des préfets, des maires, des percepteurs, des soldats, c'est là ce qu'il appelle des moyens de gouvernement; et quand il les possède, quand il les a disposés en réseau sur la face du pays, il dit qu'il gouverne, et s'étonne de rencontrer encore des obstacles; de ne pas posséder son peuple comme ses agens. Je me hâte de le dire; ce n'est point là ce que j'entends par moyens de gouvernement" (Guizot 1821,

fact a great and irreparable mistake. As long as one tries to accumulate as much power as possible in order to control society, power will be sterile and incapable of tapping into the multifarious resources and ideas of society. The true art of governing lies in locating, employing, and fostering all the fragments of power, knowledge, and reason that exist in the bosom of society:

In government as well as in education, the art does not consist in trying to do everything. ... Try instead to understand in what ways the public is inclined to act reasonably, search for the good principles, the just feelings, the legitimate inclinations, use and cultivate them. ... The art of governing does not consist in appropriating for oneself all the social power, but in using all the power that already exists [in society] (Guizot 1821, 224; 271).

What are the theoretical implications of this statement? Guizot refuses to equate statesmanship and government with mere command and is far from endorsing a certain type of strategic opportunism. On the contrary, for him, the nature of politics is different from that of artisanship in the sense that the true politician, free from any *libido dominandi*, does not resemble the artist who seeks to impose form upon matter. Furthermore, for Guizot, power cannot be conceived as a fixed quantity, but as an element in flux that ought to adapt itself to the changing needs and interests of society. Those who hold power must engage in a constant dialogue with society through *publicity* and a *free press* in order to grasp the ideas of the public and the rapidly changing nature of social interests.<sup>19</sup> They must be responsible not only before their own superiors, but also before public opinion; they must first familiarize themselves with the ideas and interests that had gained wide recognition in society, with "the instincts and sentiments of the people" (Barante 1821, 122; 72) in order to understand the direction of social change. If they fail to do that, they will inevitably pursue anachronistic policies and will lose power.

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128-9).

<sup>19</sup> For more details, see Guizot 1821, 122; 132-4. Writes Guizot: "Il faut se saisir fortement de la société, étudier partout ce qu'elle désire, ce qu'elle craint, *agir sans cesse sur elle*, déployer enfin, sur tous les points, une *prévoyante activité* et, dans l'activité, une longue persévérance" (Guizot 1821, 122; all emphases added). For a more critical reading of Guizot's elitist liberalism, see

To summarize, the doctrinaires believed that the true task of government was to rally around its banners the new social interests and forces, to foster the emergence of new talents in society, and to elevate the moral condition of the country. In their view, the two principles that are instrumental in establishing and preserving liberty were the spirit of association and the employment of “social superiorities.”<sup>20</sup> The statesman ought to take into consideration not only brute economic, political, or social facts, but also opinions, passions, and ideas. This ambitious task conveys the image of an active executive power that fosters and promotes both *Bildung* und *Besetzt*, education and property. Appearances notwithstanding, this conception should *not* be interpreted as the theoretical foundation of a new type of bureaucratic power *à la française*, nor should it be taken as an indication of the doctrinaires’ intention to manipulate society in order to promote the interests of a single social class. Their ideal society was the opposite of a society that expects everything from its government and they correctly grasped that the solution to the problems facing the country was not to increase the number of civil servants who would fulfill the orders received from Paris. Instead, what was necessary was a flexible political system that governs over a nation of individuals who administer themselves (Barante 1821, 72).

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Jaume 1997.

<sup>20</sup> According to Barante, “Une administration des intérêts locaux instituée sur de telles bases ferait naître et perpétuerait les deux élémens les plus moraux et les plus salutaires qui puissent garantir la liberté d’une nation: l’esprit d’association entre les citoyens; et l’emploi des superiorities sociales à l’intérêt general (Barante 1821, 22). According to Guizot, the government must “S’unir plus profondément à la France, de rallier les intérêts qui se méfient d’elle, de changer enfin, dans l’état moral, dans les instincts et les pressentimens de ce peuple, ce qui la rend elle-même, sinon étrangère, du moins trop extérieure à l’existence publique, trop peu ancrée dans les besoins et dans les forces qui semblent appelés à décider du sort futur de tous. ... [Être] à l’affût de toutes les existences un peu importantes qui se formaient, de tous les talents qui s’élevaient, de toutes les considérations naissantes, de toutes les activités qui aspiraient à se déployer. Là aussi sont les auxiliaires du pouvoir” (Guizot 1821, 121). The task of government is: “Recueillir les vraies et naturelles influences de la société pour les mettre à profit en les réglant, pour les consolider en leur donnant une part dans les affaires. ... S’emparer des principes féconds, des intérêts permanents, des passions fortes et légitimes. ... *Le public, la nation, le pays*, c’est donc là qu’est la force, là qu’on peut la prendre” (Guizot 1821, 68; 225-6; 133; all emphases added).

As advocates of executive power wisely exercised, Guizot and his fellow doctrinaires remained true to their belief in the need for genuine pluralism in society and maintained that no class or group of interests should be allowed to reign absolutely. They were persuaded that society itself will remain weak as long as a sharp division will continue to exist between government and the predominant social forces and interests. If society is separated from its government, or to use Guizot's own words (Guizot 1821, 267-8), if society does not respond to the appeal of government, this is because government "lies" to society. The new institutions of representative government were supposed to collect from the bosom of society all the fragments of "reason" and "knowledge" and constitute with them the government of the country. In practice, this task requires a mechanism of discovering these prominent individual influences and involving them in the government of the country; this was precisely what representative government was supposed to achieve. If those who exercise power no longer distrust society's initiatives and cease to pretend to be above society, then society will readily offer its own means of government:

It is necessary that the lie vanish, that central power give up its pretension to be everything, and soon it will cease to be alone; soon, it will notice that our society does not lack individuals capable of participating in its government by virtue of their position, preeminence, and credit. ... In order that the superiorities and natural influences that exist in a country not to get lost, it is necessary that they be employed. ... They render themselves useful only where they feel that they are necessary. ... Hence, if you want to benefit from all the means of government that individual superiorities and influences contain, give them a part in government (Guizot 1821, 268; 270-1).

Guizot correctly understood an essential aspect of modern society that puzzled his contemporaries who saw in the growing influence of state intervention an aberration rather than a logical outcome of social and political trends. Guizot did not share this view. He anticipated that the trends at work in modern society would eventually trigger not the withering away of the state (as Marx argued) or the development of night-watchman state (as classical liberals wanted), but rather a paradoxical two-way process in which political power would gain more influence over

society while society and public opinion would acquire an increased influence over those who exercise power. Guizot elaborated a sophisticated theory of publicity and public opinion that was supposed to act as the most important link between government and society.<sup>21</sup> Guizot summed this up with a favorite motto: "to constitute the government by the action of society and society by the action of government." He predicted that the scope of government intervention would increase as a result of profound changes in social condition brought about by economic, political, cultural, and social factors.<sup>22</sup> Finally, in keeping with his theory of publicity, Guizot stressed the need for more transparency between society and government, a point that returns time and again in his political writings:

If power no longer holds any mysteries for society, this is because society no longer holds any mysteries for power; if authority meets everywhere minds claiming to judge it, this is because it has something to ask or to do everywhere; if power is always asked to legitimize its conduct, this is because it can use all its force and has a right over all citizens; if the public is getting much more involved in government, the government is also acting on quite another public, and power has grown hand in hand with liberty. If you are in harmony with society, the whole society concentrates and contemplates itself in you. ... Now, politics must be true, that is to say national, and this puts a restraint on the capricious action or the arbitrary opinions of individuals (Guizot 1822, 85-6).

Guizot's paradoxical conclusion is that the growth of liberty is accompanied by a simultaneous extension of state power. He correctly understood that the development of representative government would inevitably lead in the end to a considerable extension of state power over society, and grasped that this extension was made possible by a social demand

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<sup>21</sup> Habermas (1991, 101) credited Guizot with providing the classical formulation of the rule of public opinion in connection with representative government. For a detailed discussion of Guizot's theory of publicity, see Craiutu 1999a.

<sup>22</sup> Writes Guizot: "Ce gouvernement, qui alors avait aussi sa sphère à part, plus élevée, plus grande, mais cependant spéciale et restreinte, ce gouvernement est devenu lui-même beaucoup plus général, plus directement, plus universellement associé aux intérêts et à la vie de tous les citoyens ... Il a partout quelque effet à produire, peut recevoir de toutes parts quelque motif d'action. Quoi d'étonnant que la condition du gouvernement et la disposition du peuple soient changées? Ces changements sont réciproques et se correspondent" (Guizot 1986, 148-9).

unseen before.<sup>23</sup> In Guizot's view, the two tendencies were not contradictory, but represented two sides of the same phenomenon. If Guizot did not fear the extension of state power over society, it is because, as a nineteenth-century liberal, he believed in the virtues of constitutionalism and advocated limited power, division of powers, free movement of ideas and persons as well as civil rights.<sup>24</sup> One might argue that Guizot had too much confidence in the nobility of governing and underestimated the danger of state mismanagement and incompetent bureaucracy. Be that as it may, the arguments advanced by Guizot in *On the Means of Government and Opposition* persuasively demonstrated the need for an intelligent, if properly limited, state power that opens and institutionalizes new channels of communication with society in a process of mutual empowerment.

### **In lieu of conclusion**

The doctrinaires' ideas on the nobility of government and the embeddedness of power in the social sphere has several important theoretical implications for scholars interested in the future of liberalism. Therefore it is appropriate that we end our analysis by highlighting the contemporary lessons that we can learn from our foray into nineteenth-century French political thought. The doctrinaires' theory of power and the new means of government demonstrates that liberalism is *not* essentially a negative or critical political doctrine concerned *only* with the preservation of individual rights against the encroachment of the state. Their ideas question the validity of the orthodox view of classical liberalism that identifies individual freedom with the absence of government involvement in society. The doctrinaires' writings demonstrate that is

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<sup>23</sup> For a similar point of view, see Manent 1994.

<sup>24</sup> For Guizot's defense of free movement of persons and ideas, see 1821, 157-8; for his defense of limited power, see 1821, 172; 299; Guizot 1985, 326-7; 359; 379; Guizot 1861, 77-80; 441-2. For Guizot's views on constitutionalism and the division of powers, see Guizot 1821, 277-81; Guizot 1985, 343-5; Guizot 1861, 79.

possible, on the one hand, to cling to principles of constitutionalism that are supposed to prevent those who hold political power from doing evil, and, on the other hand, to believe that power properly exercised can do much good for the entire political community, especially during a period of *transition* following a revolution that created a new social order.<sup>25</sup> As such, the political vision of the doctrinaires was a liberalism *through* the state, not *against* the state, that emphasized the dignity of governing and defended the virtues of intelligent executive power.

Needless to say, the doctrinaires' ideas on government show both the virtues and limitations of the French tradition of thinking about state and individual liberty. This is a tradition that differs in many respects from ours and has often been criticized for its emphasis on centralization and bureaucracy.<sup>26</sup> Yet, an encounter with authors that (sometimes) speak a conceptual language different from ours is a refreshing intellectual adventure because it allows us to appreciate better the strengths and weaknesses of our own political tradition. In particular, I would like to stress that the rediscovery of the liberalism of Guizot and the other French doctrinaires offers us a timely opportunity to reflect on the internal diversity of liberalism. Why is it important to stress the diversity of liberal doctrine? I can think of at least two answers to this question. First, there is a general tendency among scholars to ignore the diversity of liberalism and to offer a simplified picture that seeks to elevate one type of liberalism above all others and to make it *the* representative of the entire liberal tradition. Second, as a result of this trend, liberals have sometimes had a hard time responding properly to their critics who, following in their footsteps, conveniently (and shrewdly) adopted a simplified picture of liberal doctrine as

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<sup>25</sup> On the original features of French constitutionalism, see Keohane 1980 and Jaume 1997.

<sup>26</sup> The originality of the French position toward the state can be seen by comparing, for example, Raymond Aron's ideas with those of Hayek. Unlike the author of *The Road to Serfdom*, Aron accepted the idea that an intelligent state can exercise an important role in advancing general interests and preserving freedoms; Aron denied that the welfare state necessarily leads to totalitarianism. At the same time, he was and remained to his death a staunch anti-Communist who valued individuality and individual responsibility and denounced Marxism for being the opium of the intellectuals.

their target.<sup>27</sup> It has been remarked that liberalism enjoys a paradoxical status. It is at once quasi-hegemonic, in the sense that its principles are vindicated by a growing number of individuals and nations and jeopardized, in the sense that it tends to become, to quote again Isaiah Berlin, a collection of platitudes and commonplaces accepted by (almost) everyone. If the first aspect is more or less obvious, the latter needs further explanation. I believe that liberalism is jeopardized, not only by anti-liberal spirits who reject the entire liberal orthodoxy, but also by liberals themselves who, by neglecting the complexity and the diversity of the liberal tradition, have impoverished their discourses and, thus, have become more vulnerable to the criticism of their opponents and enemies.<sup>28</sup>

As this paper attempts to demonstrate, the study of nineteenth-century (French) liberals such as the French doctrinaires shows that liberalism has been a movement that has united a variety of values, ideas, discourses, practices, and rhetoric. This point becomes evident if we study the liberals' attitudes toward political power. It would be a mistake to explore nineteenth-century liberal ideas on government by resorting only to the concepts developed by eighteenth- or twentieth-century liberals. Too often, the standard picture of liberalism offered by many textbooks starts by locating the origins of liberalism in seventeenth-century theories of the state of nature and social contract, and then goes on to interpret the entire history of liberalism in terms of its opposition to arbitrary state power. According to this view, J. S. Mill's defense of (negative) liberty appears as an organic outcome of Smith's theory of the invisible hand, and liberalism is presented as the philosophical counterpart to *laissez-faire* political economy.

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<sup>27</sup> For a detailed treatment of this issue, see Holmes 1993.

<sup>28</sup> A prominent historian, James Sheehan, wrote: "Fifty years ago, liberalism seemed to be overwhelmed by its enemies. Today, it is more likely that it will be forgotten by its friends" (Sheehan 1984, 58). In turn, a well-known political theorist, Peter Berkowitz, noted: "Its enemies charge that the liberal spirit is hegemonic. Its friends sense that the liberal spirit is imperiled. To understand why liberalism is worth defending, it is important to see that it is both" (Berkowitz 1997, 32).

Moreover, this type of reading makes the central political issue of liberal thought that of the proper extent of state intervention in economic life.

Our study of the doctrinaires' theory of political power shows why this traditional model of classical liberalism ought to be revised. If we try to apply it, for example, to Guizot's liberalism, the latter appears meaningless or incomprehensible. Nonetheless, Guizot's theory of the new means of government developed in his writings during the Bourbon Restoration (1815-1830) was *liberal* by nineteenth-century standards, insofar as he believed that social, economic and political progress could be achieved only by means of free institutions. As historian Irene Collins once remarked, "When Englishmen wanted to refer to a French liberal they usually chose Guizot, who seemed a fairly near approach to their own Mr. Gladstone" (Collins 1957, 106). The English were right. Guizot went to great length to argue that "no really existing power can be a rightful power, except in so far as it acts according to reason and truth, the only source of right. ... No actual power is, or can be, in itself a power by inherent right." (Guizot 1861, 77). And he insisted that the essence of a liberal regime lies in the endless questioning of power through publicity, elections, civil associations, and the free press (Guizot 1985, 375-80).

At the same time, Guizot promoted a discourse of government that was supposed to illustrate both the dark and the bright sides of political power. As the violent episodes of the French Revolution proved, the power of the state in the hands of irresponsible leaders can, indeed, inflict a lot of harm on innocent citizens, but government can also contribute to elevating the intellectual and moral condition of the country (it is no mere coincidence that, as minister of education, Guizot founded the system of primary education in France). Guizot warned against the one-sided view of the state as a Leviathan ready to usurp our rights and liberties<sup>29</sup> and stressed

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<sup>29</sup> Writes Guizot: "Je pense que l'autorité n'est pas bonne à tout, ni toujours salubre; mais je répète qu'il est vain en pratique et absurde en principe de prétendre réduire le gouvernement à un rôle subordonné et presque inactif. Il est le chef de la société. C'est à lui qu'appartient et qu'échoit naturellement l'initiative de tout ce qui est objet d'intérêt public ou occasion de mouvement général" (Guizot 1821, 175).

the importance of the type of communication and interaction between government and society. *On the Means of Government and Opposition* shows that an understanding of liberalism as a crusade to restrict state power is inadequate and amounts to a misreading of the nature and dignity of political power. The book also demonstrates that, while opposing arbitrary power, liberals should also seek solutions for what Guizot considered the key challenge to any government in modern society: the discovery of institutions and policies capable of tapping into, gathering, and using the decentralized pool of resources, knowledge, and reason that exist in society. This points out the importance of *social legibility* to statecraft, a theme that has only recently become of interest to political scientists.<sup>30</sup> Guizot's theory of government shows that, on the one hand, those who hold power must be able "read" the social map in order to pursue efficient, diverse, and adaptable policies that rely on the skills, knowledge, and experience of ordinary citizens; on the other hand, they must resist the temptation of becoming arrogant social engineers who use a rigid language of command that is blind to the complex nature of social life. In other words, to use a famous metaphor introduced by Isaiah Berlin, power holders ought to resemble *both* the hedgehog, who knows only one big thing and has a panoramic view of reality, *and* the fox, who knows many small things about the details of social life and is attentive to context and particularity.

The fact that the doctrinaires lived in a period of *transition* in the aftermath of a great revolution allowed them to develop original insights into the nature of social change, political reform, and the relation between social and political order. Guizot's theory of political power was meant to offer an answer to the question that haunted all French liberals: how can the Revolution be completed? As such, it might have important lessons to teach those who are currently trying to "complete" the Revolution of 1989 by building representative institutions in Eastern Europe. Guizot's ideas seem to have a particular relevance in this context. His emphasis on the

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<sup>30</sup> I borrow this concept from Scott 1998.

dependence of political institutions on social order shows the importance of examining the social underpinnings of liberal democracy, that is to say, the mores, individual and collective beliefs, the manner in which individuals live together and pursue common goals, the structure of property, and the relations between different classes. Consequently, we must first study and understand society before we try to reform its political institutions; in order to be effective, political reform must be accompanied by profound changes in ideas, customs, mores, and habits of the heart.

Finally, Guizot's defense of an efficient and intelligent executive power that is engaged in constant dialogue with society and employs all the means of government that exist in the bosom of society goes beyond the ordinary dichotomy of small vs. big government. In reality, we are often faced with a more prosaic choice: simply put, intelligent and flexible vs. anachronistic and rigid government. Proper policy does not consist in simply getting out of the way, to allow the natural laws of society and market to work unimpeded. As Stephen Holmes argued, Eastern Europeans today “have more reason to worry about the debility of the state than about its power” (Holmes 1997, 30). The current political situation in Russia buttresses this conclusion. The previous assumption that a decentralized and unplanned economy alone could provide the basis of prosperity and political freedom proved to be inaccurate. Incoherent state institutions poorly connected to a demoralized and uprooted society can threaten liberty just as much as the former communist Leviathan.

In other words, what the liberalism of the French doctrinaires teaches us is that a government which is too weak, fragmented, and unaccountable is unable to secure individual freedom and cannot bring economic prosperity. During a transition period, the “capacity of government to unify power in accountable hands and to use it effectively” (Holmes 1997, 33) might be essential to reaching a reasonable compromise between order and liberty. But this should *not* be seen as a blank check given to the executive (or legislative) power. On the

contrary, the lesson that we can draw from the writings of the French doctrinaires is that power is born *in society* and that the proper means of government include the dominant opinions, interests, and ideas that can be found in the bosom of society. A power that is not rooted in society is doomed to failure. That is why the wise statesman seeks to constitute the government by the action of society and society by the action of government. He tries to understand what the public interest requires and attempts to “read” the passions and opinions of the public; this explains both the importance of social legibility and the salience of publicity as the cornerstone of representative government. Yet, as Guizot once argued, society should *not* be compared to a barren field waiting for the government to “cultivate” it; it contains diffuse powers whose cooperation must be actively sought and encouraged. The challenge facing those who hold power is to understand that the solution to the problems they are facing is not to increase the number of civil servants, but to give up the pretension to do everything top-down and to create a flexible political system that governs over individuals who must learn and practice the art of self-government.

These are only several reasons why contemporary liberals should not hesitate to turn their attention to nineteenth-century thinkers such as the French doctrinaires whose political wisdom, far from fading with time, only seems to be more and more relevant today.

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