The Rise of Post-Modern Conservatism

Neoliberalism, Post-Modern Culture, and Reactionary Politics

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Dedicated to Marion Nadezhna Trejo with love.

Foreword

The expected mark of competent books, articles, or introductions concerning post-modernism is an opening set of cautions, qualifiers, and anticipatory retreats from definition. Post-modernism after all, has long been a witching term, and one that undoubtedly calls for such lists. It is, conversely, a mark of ignorance to use it too boldly, or to deploy it without restraint. Much like other relics pillaged from the shrines of academic discourse—words like *culture* and *ideology*—*postmodernism* is no longer the sole possession of specialists; today it is rather more portentous. Rather than perform the usual rites, I suggest that the reader pretend to have found all required provisions here, such that I may go on to spin other yarn.

In this volume, Matthew McManus dissects the forked tongue of post-modernism while extending the definition to recent phenomena, particularly its deployment as rhetorical strategy by nationalists. Although the term was once limited in association to Parisian academics, McManus demonstrates its aptitude in describing the contemporary trolls of neoliberalism—Brexiters and Eurosceptics, xenophobic nationalists, and brazen politicians who refuse to be cowed by political correctness. How then did a pathogen cooked up in the lecture halls of Paris 8 come to contaminate the spiritual aquifers of rural Kentucky? What is the connection between "deconstruction" and the erection of a massive fence in the Great Hungarian Plain?

The connection between the two is thoroughly examined by McManus in the following pages, and while I shall defer most of the discussion to the author, there's one particular similarity worth emphasising, even when comparing narratives as dissimilar as those of UKIP on the one hand and the 60s' post-structuralists on the other. First, their identities are defined by the transgression and disruption of a particular, local status quo. Second, this disruption has a distinctly narrative structure.

In some cases, post-modern transgressions are gleeful and satiric, exemplified by political animals like Roger Stone. In other cases it comes with bereavement, as in the later reflections of Jean Baudrillard. Of course transgression alone is by no means a criterion of the post-modern. As McManus argues, it is "profitable and edifying to examine post-modernism as a culture which has emerged in tandem with the neoliberal societies of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries" (78). If we should, with McManus, label it a culture, it is then a culture of disruption. More than that, as I shall argue here, it is a disruption of a history as inherited by particular politics. My method in this introduction is thus a historiography of such disruptions in the post-modern genre, a narrative of rising action whose climax remains to be seen.

Whereas *news* is rhetoric of the present, *history* is rhetoric of the past. The quiet correlate of *fake news* (the 2017 Word of the Year, according to the American Dialect Society) is *fake history*, which has perhaps not yet received the analysis it is due. In this context *history* is an imagined but contentious territory, an absent object of appeal and desire. Nationalists, for their part, often use history as a store for pernicious rhetoric—the Third Reich was the *third*. This is no *reductio ad hitlerum*. Of course, these three events are not even superficially symmetrical, but the wanton heroism of nationalists is nothing if not self-serving. For their parts, Marine Le Pen and her party eagerly solicit comparisons with Joan of Arc, and thus any critical responses may be rendered as further persecution of the Lord's unassuming instrument. Elsewhere still we hear the pangs of nostalgia echoing in slogans like *Make America Great Again*, as the past becomes a sort of guarantor of right action (political correctness is the *true* slavery). History here is strapped to the Procrustean beds of malapert sloganeers, their truths are appeals to imagined worlds, story worlds—the rites of ancestor worship for ancestors who never lived.

Here we must draw the distinction between two fundamentally incommensurable conservative narratives. There is, on one hand, the rhetorical veneration of "Western values." This is usually presented as an appeal to the greatness of the Western tradition as the progeny of Jerusalem and Athens, to both the moral authority and universal desirability of Judeo-Christian values. More often than not, these are invocations used to defend the status quo from a perceived threat. The most popular personae of the "Intellectual Dark Web," Jordan Peterson and Ben Shapiro, defend their Western values by deriding and antagonising leftists, liberals, neo-Marxists, post-modernists, identity politics, and whomever else is conspiring against liberal democracy on any given day (and McManus examines these claims and others more thoroughly at the end of Chapter 1). For the most part, these "provocateurs" theorise from the perspective of *Intro to Political Philosophy 101*, and only faintly echo the sources of their conservative slogans. For example, arguing over which "–ism" is the greatest danger to free speech on YouTube is a far cry from Leo Strauss's plea for a liberal education which "consists in the constant intercourse with the greatest minds, [and] is a training in the highest form of modesty."[1] Although eulogies to "Judeo-Christian morality" can be criticised for various forms of Eurocentric historiographical naiveté, this veneration of *The Great Tradition* is at least partially justified—if poorly argued—in the telling title: *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great*. This position is conservative, and yet remains rooted in the historical sense.

The second conservative narrative, post-modern conservatism, abandons the pretences of the historical sense, and if these figures can be said to make any arguments at all, they are the emotionally charged invocations of pithy conflicts, martyr complexes, and mythological explanations of what can be done to bring chaos to heel. History, here, is not Cicero who comes to guide us through the hell of mass culture (as it was for Strauss and other Western values apologists), but the ascendency of heroes in cosmological conflicts. The post-modern conservative narrative resembles a theogony replete with nefarious titans—such as the mainstream media, globalist elites, Islam, the deep state—which are faced by salvific heroes: politicians like Wilders, the self-proclaimed reincarnation

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[1]Leo Strauss. "What Is Liberal Education?" In *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays* by Leo Strauss, ed. H. Gildin (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989) at pg 319.

of Charles Martel; Le Pen, the spiritual descendent of Joan of Arc; Steve Bannon has compared himself to Napoleon, and Trump's proudest moment seems to have been the slaying of the mighty gorgon, Hillary, in 2016. Tellingly, they appeal not to ideas, but to war heroes—the *winners* of grand-scale civilisational conflicts in which the *Volk* triumphed (so you have heard it said). Unsurprisingly, they defend monuments and narrative as sources of Western identity in lieu of values. Post-modern conservatives in this context are Nietzschean mythmakers, beyond good and evil, and the historical sense Strauss appealed to is deposed.

Among the Europe's anti-immigration nationalists, the defence of something like Christendom from the unholy alliance of the secular globalist elites and the invasion of North African or Middle-Eastern Muslims is a rallying cry. Here Christendom is, narratively speaking, the gilded figure of primordial unity, one now under threat. The decline of these bonds, according to Benedict Anderson's account of nationalist *imagined communities*, "drove a harsh wedge between cosmology and history. No surprise then that the search was on, so to speak, for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together" (36).[2] Post-modern conservatism accomplishes this linking with myths. Although most of Anderson's account of nationalism deals with the advent of nationalisms—both right and left—in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we can observe the schism here between those conservatives who appeal to values, and conservatives who appeal to conflict; the latter thumbs its nose at contingency and historical fact, opting instead for a reunification between fraternity, power, and time. It's odd to see the return of the mythology of Christendom in the post-truth era. As McManus notes in his second chapter, conservatives, such as the Bushes, "occasionally flirted with traditionalist language, and were … vocal in pushing for the advancement of ethno-cultural projects. But by and large globalization carried on unabated, the liberalization of culture advanced with increasing rapidity, and nationalist rhetoric fell by the wayside" (86). Flirtation is an apt description here, for while the Bush admins may have used terms like "crusade" to denote their political and military goals, these were structured as arguments based on testable evidence (in principle, if not in practice). Even if evidence was fabricated, and even if the administration lied, their lies at least held to the structure of

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[2]Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities,* 2nd ed. (London, UK: Verso, 1991).

consensual truth, there, in the world. Post-modern conservatism on the other hand disregards even the structural appearance of truth—for example, this crowd "was the largest audience ever to witness an inauguration, period"—and conservative narratives of the anti-immigration, nationalist genre seek to disrupt this specific contingency, and to replace it with *Volk* mythology, a forgotten class now marching under the banners of reincarnate heroes. It is this distinction that lies at the heart of McManus' analyses of post-modern conservatism.

Of course, mythological narratives and imagined communities are *eo ipso* neither post-modern nor conservative. However, if Enlightenment political philosophy (in its Kantian genre at least) were definitive, we should be surprised to see that the West, made great by reason and moral purpose (according to Ben Shapiro) today harbours such a reinvigorated mythos post-disenchantment of the world by modern science. This is where we find the other side of the post-modern coin that of the post-war left. Under the auspices of postmodern critique, it may be the case that we had too much faith in Western rationality to begin with; according to Nietzsche, Western rationalism is yet another story (albeit the most efficacious story ever told). Similarly Max Horkheimer, after Germany's great lapse into the tribal mythology of Nazism, argued that the definition of human as a rational individual, proved unable to survive the disruptions of the modern world; the result is that "the illusion that traditional philosophy has cherished about the individual and about reason—the illusion of their eternity—is being dispelled" (87).[3] The Petersons of our political landscape blame "postmodernism" for this development, but the return to tribal mythologies is a symptom which was already diagnosed by post-modern theorists, which originates in Western rationality's self-*méconaissance*.

Jacques Derrida, for example, is a horseman of post-modernism. His critique of Hegel's historical realisation of concepts informs doubts about the inevitability of reason in history because Hegel relies on certain suppressions of the way meaning actually functions for peoples and traditions. Not that Hegel's historiography is incoherent, but that it is made coherent by the articulation, which is actually a misrecognition of rather unstable elements (though this misrecognition has, with some exception, been very useful to "the West"). Derrida writes that

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[3] Max Horkheimer. *Eclipse of Reason* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004).

"the passage through the certitude of oneself and through lordship as the independence of self-consciousness was itself a phase of play…and includes them not in terms of knowledge, but in terms of inscription; meaning is a function of play" (260).[4] The un-self-conscious effect then, is that Hegel's notion of self-consciousness depends upon the very recognition he seeks to lay out in his historiography: "freedom" is a mode of interpretation, and for Derrida, "Hegel's own interpretation can be reinterpreted against him" (260).[5] While it is a common false claim that post-modernism reduces all narratives to the same level of arbitrary play, it does introduce a certain cynicism into all narratives, which is to say all histories.

Hegelian histories always give reason a chance, and thus, faith can be maintained even in the bleakest times. After all, Minerva's owl flies at dusk. Not everyone agrees in the model for this development, however. In 1988 (several years before he would commit suicide), Guy Debord wrote a short book looking back on his 1967 *Society of the Spectacle*. Like Derrida, the means of inscription, which is to say the medium of history, is indelible to its meaning. For Debord, narrative connects history to politics. He writes (in the past tense) that "history's domain was the memorable, the totality of events whose consequences would be lastingly apparent. And thus, inseparably, history was knowledge that should endure and aid in understanding, at least in part, what was to come: 'an everlasting possession,' according to Thucydides."[6] History, Debord suggests, was eradicated by mass media, which produce only an "eternity of noisy insignificance" in a deluge of images, sounds, and slogans.[7] This deluge has also destroyed politics, or in his more polemical metre: "in Greece history and democracy entered the world at the same time. We can prove that their disappearances have also been simultaneous" (20). The extent to which such lamentation is warranted is a matter of perspective. However, it opens onto a number of topics relevant

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[4]Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[5]Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[6]Guy Debord. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Malcolm Imrie (New York, NY: Verso, 1998) at pg 15.

[7]Guy Debord. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Malcolm Imrie (New York, NY: Verso, 1998).

to a discussion of post-modern conservatism, namely: the disruption of a particular experience of time, or the historical sense; the role of mass media in this disruption; and the portentous effects of these shifts on politics. At last, we are getting to something of a thesis here. The advent of post-modern conservatism and the attenuation of the historical sense is something somehow related to an environment of communication, rather than a condition of an amorphous territory of "thought."

The Historical Sense

History, in Debord's perhaps rosy estimation, was *once* a measure of the importance of events, until it was annihilated by spectacle. It was something we held in common, and for that reason it was a source of collective wisdom required for grand narratives, but also for the realisation of ideals or long-term goals. In contrast, "When the spectacle stops talking about something for three days, it is as if it did not exist. For it has then gone on to talk about something else."[8] The Hegelian territory of the "world of learning," which believes that history deserves to be known, wears ever thinner when knowledge participates in spectacle only as "breaking news" laden with gossip, opinion, and a general disregard for the historical sense espoused by traditional conservatives. Post-modern conservatism and its imagined ego cults depend in no small part upon pithy slogans, the appropriation of history through symbols, transgression for its own sake, and disinformation. Although it does not create these conditions, it is proving to have new vitality within them. Under such conditions, we have to once again dust-off the settled arguments that Enlightenment writers like J.S. Mill, Kant, and the Federalists laid out against intolerance, the dangers of self-incurred tutelage, and the susceptibility of the masses to demagoguery.

The historical sense provides narrative continuity for individual and social identities; we might call it "rootedness." Nietzsche for his part sought a reinvigoration of a historical sense, on the condition that it offers energy for life: "History belongs to the preserving and revering of the soul….by tending with loving hands what has long survived [one]

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[8]Guy Debord. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Malcolm Imrie (New York, NY: Verso, 1998) at pg 20.

intends to preserve the conditions in which he grew up for those that will come after him—and so he serves life."[9] There are, for Nietzsche, three types of history, and each can be used to preserve or destroy a collective *élan vital*. Already in 1875, Nietzsche argued that modern history had grown harmful. Intellectuals gorged on knowledge for its own sake, and did not properly narrativise it in service to life: "Our modern culture is nothing living just because it cannot be understood at all without opposition, that is: it is no real culture at all, but only a kind of knowledge about culture, it stops at cultured thoughts and feelings but leads to no cultured decisions" (24). This provides something of an impetus for the advent of post-modern reactions: there was too much history or an *inevitable* history, without enough *story*. Together the whiggish heralding of a globalist, neoliberal status quo has made life stale, and some tragic hero or artist would inevitably arrive to shake it up—the dialectical return of heroes, martyrs, and the clash of civilisations.

Post-modernism of the Derridean genre, with an energy derived from disruption, is critical history, and the critical historian "must have the strength, and use it from time to time, to shatter and dissolve something to enable him to live" (20).[10] There are risks to such critical-mindedness as well, as Nietzsche notes, once the "past is considered critically…one puts the knife to its roots, then one cruelly treads all pieties under foot. It is always a dangerous process, namely dangerous for life itself: and men or ages which serve life in this manner of judging and annihilating a past are always dangerous and endangered men and ages" (22). Like Derrida, post-modern conservatives are also a symptom of a critical age, however reductive, inane, intolerant, and stupid—by any inherited methodological standard we may hold them to—they nonetheless do offer renewed vitality in politics.

In Charles Taylor's estimation, which McManus rearticulates throughout Chapter 2, histories are part of a social imaginary, a local milieu of identities and narratives which play a role in subjects' general sense of the possibilities of the future, both in terms of individual agency and social change, that is, an imagined community.[11] Taylor uses the concept

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[9]Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1980) at pg 19.

[10]Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1980).

[11]Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

of social imaginaries as means of comparing historically or geographi-
cally dissimilar societies. It describes a pre-theoretical self-understanding
(146), or the affordances and limits of identity formation. He summa-
rises the social imaginary as "the ways in which [people] imagine their
social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on
between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally
met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie
these expectations" (171). The *imaginary* aspect of history is a "mat-
ter of identity," particularly "the contextual limits to the imagination of
the self—and of the social imaginary: the ways we are able to think or
imagine the whole of society" (156), including its future. While critical
history sets out to deconstruct harmful biases of a tradition, the broader
purpose of social imaginaries concerns the construction of identities,
which is particularly relevant during periods of rapid disruption—like the
one in which we find ourselves. As Debord argues, this disruption is in
part technological, and influenced by the play of images, but at bottom
identity requires a story.

   There is an implied communality and constructivism in the social imag-
inary postulate. It refers to a general milieu; a constellation of narratives,
images, concerns and anxieties that together shape the boundaries of
identity-formation by social situations. Each represents a future coming
into focus—one in which we are as yet unsure of our place. Post-modern
conservative apparatuses cast their followers in unambiguous roles:

1. We are to follow them into transgressing the rules of political
   correctness
2. We shall charge them to take back the land from the bureaucrats
   and political elite
3. We shall support their purification of the land, purging illegals and
   Muslims and
4. Support their defence of the land with walls, both procedural (for
   immigration) and physical.

There is no ambiguity to such plans. They are not open to rational, dis-
cursive analysis or argumentation—all of that business takes too long
anyway, and cannot be sustained in our communication environment
today.

   I argue with Debord that the destruction of the historical sense
is an event brought about by the medium of history and a shift in

historiographical communication. In our context, social media has wrought the disruption. Just as the wide geographic success of Nazi nationalism would be unthinkable without affordable radios as *Volksprodukte*, it is difficult to imagine the success of post-modern conservatism in our age without the filter bubbles of social media. *All* conservative demagogues and social media celebrities can now speak directly to their followers, and all of the followers of such narratives can retreat to private enclaves beyond the public sphere, as McManus argues in Chapter 1. From a theoretical perspective, what we observe here is a technological disruption of the historical sense, which is based in literacy, by anti-historical digital media: feed-based social media attempt to replace the past as quickly as possible with the latest scandal, the newest story, and breaking news. McManus correctly notes that

> attempts to argue against the vulgarity of his mannerism or the cruelty of Trumpian policies were ineffective, since the mediums used to promote Trumpism were unamenable to such literate forms of dispute. They were drowned out in the sensationalism of hyper-partisanship and spectacular political entertainment.

Post-modern conservatism is as much a media event as a political one, something their political opponents seem not yet to have grasped to the same degree. Feed-based media thrive where there is rapid feedback, an over-indexation on image instead of long-winded argumentation, and appeal to the hot immediacy of the present.

Let us briefly evaluate the relationship between the historical sense and media, and why it seems incommensurable to return to the cool, gentlemanly, discursive space of the common public sphere. The disappearance of the historical sense as that which provides ethical consensus is at issue here, yet the capacity to manipulate opinion with media, especially opinion that can be converted into legislative power, has always been a goal of political agents. Even before Facebook was accessible by the general public in 2006, the *New York Times* reported that "while the Internet is efficient at reaching supporters, who tend to visit and linger at political sites, it has proved to be much less effective at swaying voters who are not interested in politics," and quoted a campaign advisor as saying "The Holy Grail that everybody is looking for right now is how can you use the Internet for persuasion."[12]

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[12]Adam Nagourney. "Politics Faces Sweeping Changes Via the Web." *The New York Times*, April 2, 2006. www.nytimes.com/2006/04/02/washington/politics-faces-sweeping-change-via-the-web.html.

Feed-based social media are this Holy Grail: the recommended videos of YouTube, the Twitter feed, and Facebook's News Feed create entire worlds of content based on what individual users already want to believe. As many alarmed journalists note, a consequence of the efficacy of automated reactions to content is the threat of popularising false or misleading information, for content need not be *true* for its visibility to be increased either by humans, bots, or inorganic manipulation (including buying reactions or followers). "True" here is defined as a corroborated consensus (coincidently, "consensus" resembles a social contract, a general will, as what a community considers *true* is relatively stable through time). That is, information can be validated outside the system. However, in an ecology defined by the Facebook News Feed, exaggerations or even intentional falsehoods are likely to be *more* seductive than the truth, and thus are likely to be ranked higher. Filter bubbles generate communication circuits—and in-group narratives—that are virtually impervious to correction from the public sphere.

The displacement of corroboration as an informational procedure is a direct result of the affordances of social media and its algorithms, which certainly do not promote the progressive emergence of self-conscious history. Instead scandal, conflict, violence, and other norm-deviant behaviour are much more likely to become normalised: social feeds resemble offline reality less and less over time. Reactionary politics, the proliferation of strange conspiracy theories, and weird lies are incentivised more than carefully considered (i.e., time-consuming) argumentation—character limits reinforce this trend. As post-modern conservative politicians have realised better than their neoliberal counterparts, the primary goal of feed-based social media is return traffic, not a rational or historically sensible user base. These behaviours are considered dangerous to some because they threaten the Enlightenment values at the heart of status quo political institutions, and it is precisely this status quo that has failed from the post-modern conservative perspective. Truth is rather less important than popularity. The result has been something of a moral panic over the disruption of norms, as well as a breeding ground for trolling, hyperbole, tribalism, and reactionary politics—a media environment in which post-modern narratives thrive, if only for their unambiguous distinctions and sloganised simplicity.

Rewarding reaction rather than responsibility generates the conditions for widespread behaviours of actors who "game" the system, viz. the spread of false and misleading information. The virtual indifference of the social media platforms to truth resulted in much speculation

over the role of Facebook's News Feed in the outcome of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. In the post-election weeks, articles appeared online such as *The Guardian*'s "Facebook's failure: did fake news and polarised politics get Trump elected?",[13] and *Wired*'s "Here's How Facebook Actually Won Trump the Presidency."[14] These articles argue that Facebook not only "helped generate the bulk of the campaign's $250 million in online fundraising" (Lapowsky), but also that "the bitter polarization of the social network over the last eighteen months suggests Facebook is actually doing more to divide the world" (Solon). The following year, *The Atlantic* published the article "What Facebook Did to American Democracy" which claims "that the very roots of the electoral system—the news people see, the events they think happened, the information they digest—had been destabilized."[15] Each of these articles argues that, in the months leading up to the 2016 Presidential Election, there was a widespread circulation of patently fake news and conspiracy theories on Facebook: ranging from the conceivable false-hood that the Pope had endorsed Donald Trump, to the bizarre story that Hillary Clinton was involved in a child sex ring in the basement of a pizza shop (known as pizzagate). The summary case made by these journalists is that the very basis of democratic institutions may be funda-mentally undermined by the operations of feed-based social media plat-forms. Beyond fake news and conspiracy theories, even those stories that are contrary to the goals of particular communities could be pushed out of visibility by strategic downvoting by automated programs. The capac-ity to influence communication on this scale is an indirect cause of the incommensurability of the historical sense with our changing media eco-logy, as online social media makes all information suspect, in principle.

Now forced to compete with the information value of social media systems, even established broadcast news corporations are compelled to find ways to artificially increase the seduction value of their content—this

[13]Olivia Solon. "Facebook's Failure: Did Fake News And Polarized Politics Get Trump Elected." *The Guardian*, November 10, 2016 www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/nov/10/facebook-fake-news-election-conspiracy-theories.

[14]Issie Lapowsky. "Here's How Facebook Actually Won Trump The Election." *Wired*, November 15, 2016 www.wired.com/2016/11/facebook-won-trump-election-not-just-fake-news/.

[15]Alexis C. Madrigal. "What Facebook Did to American Democracy." *The Atlantic*, October 12, 2017. www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/10/what-facebook-did/542502/.

includes airing post-modern conservative narratives. Everyone must play the same game, or be condemned to invisibility. They maintain a figurative veracity through the traditional tenets of journalistic integrity, while working around it with numerous strategies, such as hosting talking heads with deviant viewpoints to express their opinions—with the disclaimer that they do not reflect the viewpoints of the organisation—op-eds, expert panels, and debates abound as news, a hyperreality. In effect, postmodern conservatism is legitimised, as mouthpieces like Stephen Miller, Kellyanne Conway, and Sarah Huckabee Sanders are invited to present "their side of the story." Concurrently, these debates and bad-faith obfuscations are *themselves* news. In this media ecology, events are replaced with opinions *about* events, and the most compelling narrative wins the day, as in the sophists' symposia.

This is not a case of a few bad actors telling stories, rather, it signals the return of the effectiveness of narrative at a grand scale; it was for this potency that Socrates banished mythmakers, the poets, from the republic of philosophy long ago. For the character of Socrates, myth and poetry are threats to the stability of both the soul of man and the society in which he lives. The tenth book of *Republic* opens with Socrates' statement: "of the many excellences which I perceive in the order of our State, there is none which upon reflection pleases me better than the rule about poetry… [that is] our refusal to admit the imitative kind of poetry, for it certainly ought not to be received."[16] Socrates ensures his partner in dialogue that he does not wish to expel the poet simply because he does not enjoy poetry, for even he has an "awe and love of Homer."[17] Rather, he suggests it is necessary because "a man is not to be reverenced more than the truth."[18] If the poet and the passions he inspires are not directly supervised by reason, represented by the philosopher-king caste, it is preferable to banish the poet from civil life altogether.[19] In the post-modern conservatives, who certainly revere their leaders and mythmakers more than truth, we find the

[16]Plato. "The Republic, Book X." *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Matrins, 2007) at pg 30.

[17]Plato. "The Republic, Book X." *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Matrins, 2007).

[18]Plato, "The Republic, Book X." *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter. 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Matrins, 2007).

[19]Plato, "The Republic, Book X." *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter. 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Matrins, 2007) at pg 37.

fulfilment of that which Nietzsche hoped for (or its obscene inversion): the reversion of Platonic metaphysics and the dawn of new myths.

Post-modern conservatism figures as incredulity towards metanarratives: the narrative of globalists, that neoliberalism will forever be the only game around, or that an ambience of tolerance and respect should rule in society. As opposed to more traditional conservative voices, they withdraw from the story that "the West is best," replacing it with simpler "the West is us." A rift opens between cause and effect, what was once and is again filled by the yarns of tribal elders and the poets Socrates banished. Heroes once again tame the primeval chaos, as the Hegelian wheel turns over once again. This disruption is political on its face, and technological in its mouth, but its beating heart is the age-old conflict over the historical sense, and that is what is at stake today. For the historical sense, there has always been weal and woe, and whether it shall survive the present moment remains to be seen.

Writing for the tempered intellectual class, McManus offers progressives something of a genealogy, a cross-disciplinary narrative with no shortage of evidence both from history and the contemporary news media. This history explains how we arrived here, and charts where we may now go to put this *panikon deima* behind us. Progressive liberalism, for its part, also writes narratives, and the writing of this book, it seems to me, is propelled by a deep respect for historical sensibility. McManus concludes with something of unction for progressives who want to challenge the rise of post-modern conservatism which is mainly to "support policies which will garner the public greater opportunities to make meaningful deliberations and decisions" (293). Phrased another way, he suggests something akin to guaranteeing individuals some narrative control in political processes, such that they do not need to turn to the latest self-proclaimed reincarnation of St. George to war on their behalf. Another of McManus' suggestions is also a plea for narrative, noting that "the EU lacks a distinct political culture and recognizable participatory institutions which enable citizens to feel involved in the project…Shifting this should be a special priority for progressives" (294). Once more, it seems that the way to compete with the trolls who stamp on the historical sense is not to provide more reasons, but to tell better stories, stories that do provide both responsible history and, thereby, a direction for the future.

Toronto, Canada   Dylan De Jong

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Introduction

THE OPTIMISTIC END OF HISTORY

> Truth is not truth.
> *Rudy Giuliani*, August 20, 2018[1]

In 1987s *The Art of the Deal*, Donald J. Trump, then a rising star in the world of New York real estate, argued that in business honesty isn't always the best quality. Filtered through the words of ghost writer Tony Schwartz—a man who many years later would publicly express regret for abetting Trump's rise—the young Donald argued that people have a compelling desire to believe in things that were bigger and greater than them.[2] It was his belief that when promoting oneself and one's business, one should always want to play to people's fantasies and desire for what is grand and spectacular. Trump called this "truthful hyperbole." Echoing the work of Harry J. Frankfurt, one might also call it "bullshit."[3]

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[1] NBC. "Rudy Giuliani: Truth Isn't Truth." *NBC News*, August 19, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CljsZ7lgbtw.

[2] Jane Meyer. "Donald Trump's Ghostwriter Tells All." *New Yorker*, June 18, 2016. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/25/donald-trumps-ghostwriter-tells-all.

[3] Harry G. Frankfurt. *On Bullshit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

The final key to the way I promote is bravado. I play to people's fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts. People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration—and a very effective form of promotion.[4]

Three decades onwards, Donald J. Trump was elected President of the United States, coming to power on a platform characterised by nationalist grandiosity, plenty of "truthful hyperbole" about his own successes and aspirations, and a consistent appeal to narratives of victimhood and resentment. The latter broke with a decade old consensus on the part of both Democrats and Republicans, wherein the United States consciously postured as the benevolent hegemon responsible for the preservation and advancement of the liberal international order. Most worryingly Trump appealed to xenophobic sentiments which had long been latent within American political culture, and especially on the political right in the aftermath of the Civil Rights movement, but which many liberal commentators thought were long buried or at least permanently comatose. His election to the most powerful office in the Western world sent shockwaves through the neoliberal establishment, which had already been rocked by earlier populist uprisings.

Earlier that same year, a slim majority of British citizens voted to leave the European Union. Brexiters, as they came to be called, chief among them scion of Eton and Oxford Boris Johnson, cited concerns about national sovereignty, immigration, cultural homogeneity, and a sense that Britain was being victimised by out of touch Eurocrats who demanded the British pay more than their fair share. With that, one of the founding countries of the Eurozone struck a hammer blow against internationalist universalism.

This came on the heels of destabilising efforts by right-wing populists across the continent, many of whom climbed to power through appealing to similar binary narratives of national pride and concurrent victimisation by foreign invaders. In 2015 Poland, once held up as the brightest success story of the new European order, elected the far-right Law and Justice Party, which for the first time in the country's post-Communist

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[4] Donald Trump. *The Art of the Deal* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1987) at Chapter 2.

history won an outright majority in the Sejm. They quickly stirred substantial controversy around the globe due to their nationalistic rhetoric, their denial of Polish participation in the Holocaust, and transparent efforts to seize control of the country's media and judicial apparatus. They also adopted an increasingly virulent anti-Islamic tone, with Interior Minister Marisuz Blasczak nostalgically comparing himself to Charles Martel "who stopped the Muslim invasion of Europe in the 8th century."[5]

All of these contemporary movements owe a debt to Viktor Orban, who became Prime Minister of Hungary in 2010 when his conservative nationalist party Fidesz won 52.7% of the popular vote and two-thirds of the seats in the National Assembly.[6] Orban swiftly went about changing the constitution to enshrine traditional definitions of marriage and to reduce the number of seats in the legislature from 386 to 199. This latter change would prove beneficial in the 2014 election when he won a second large majority with only 44.5% of the popular vote while becoming a paradigmatic of Fidesz's signature tactics of changing national institutions and challenging liberal norms to benefit the government. This shift was articulated with impressive honesty by Orban, who in 2014 overtly called for Hungary's transition to an "illiberal state."[7] In 2015, the consequences were demonstrated with dramatic clarity as Orban became a vocal critic of the European Union's handling of the refugee crisis, demanding the refugees not enter Europe. As the crisis progressed, the basis for this hard-line policy became more and more clear. Orban increasingly criticised the European Union for infringing Hungary's sovereignty, and allowing tens of millions of Islamic "invaders" onto the continent.[8] In 2018, he claimed that "multiculturalism is only an illusion" and declared that Christians and Muslims could never live together.

[5] Polish Radio. "Blazer About Refugees: Charles Martel Stopped the Muslim Invasion in the 8th Century." *TN 24*, June 2017. https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/blaszczak-o-uchodzcach-karol-mlot-zatrzymal-nawale-muzulmanska,748547.html.

[6] Paul Lendval. *Orban: Europe's New Strongman* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[7] Paul Lendval. *Orban: Europe's New Strongman* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[8] Paul Lendval. *Orban: Europe's New Strongman* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

At the time these events were occurring, I was completing my Ph.D. in Socio-Legal studies at York, writing a dissertation arguing for the extension of voting rights to a wider swathe of people and arguing that international institutions and human rights law should be greatly strengthened. Much of this made its way into my first book *Making Human Dignity Central to International Human Rights Law: Overcoming False Necessity* for the University of Wales Press' series on international law. Naturally I watched these developments with considerable alarm and frustration. It seemed like events were moving in the opposite direction to what I wanted. Such is life of course.

But there was also a sense that something more significant was happening than just a few nationalist movements growing in strength and disrupting international institutions and liberal norms which were always deceptively fragile to begin with. Throughout my childhood from 1988 onwards, the end of the Cold War had led many to believe that sincere ideological conflicts were on their way out. The old isms which had rocked the twentieth century, and which I had been taught to regard with scepticism and even dismissal, seemed to many like relics of an earlier time. Nationalism, fanaticism, ethnocentrism, racism, and so on all appeared to be losing force. This was well captured in texts like Francis Fukuyama's famous *The End of History and the Last Man*, which argued that one way or another a relatively tolerant form of liberal democracy and globalising capitalism was likely the way of the future.[9]

Of course, Fukuyama's argument was always more cautious than some suggested. Moreover his triumphalist claim that liberalism was going to everywhere triumph seemed overstate, particularly once the American lead "War on Terror" brought immense disruption to the Middle East. But the overall atmosphere was one of relative optimism and an implicit belief that things would only improve. The United States would eventually elect a new President and cease its violent quest for what Michael Ignatieff once called a liberal "empire lite."[10] It would settle into its role as a relatively benign hegemon using soft power to push for greater internationalisation and multicultural inclusion. Russia would continue its path to greater democratisation and liberalisation.

[9] Francis Fukuyama. *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1992).

[10] Michael Ignatieff. *Empire Lite: Nation Building in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2003).

China's economic prosperity and entry into the digital community would lead to the Communist party gradually reforming. India would take its rightful place as a great power and the world's largest liberal democracy. The European Union would continue to expand, perhaps to include the Ukraine, Turkey, and in our wildest dreams, even Russia. Proponents like Habermas were especially optimistic about the global ramifications of the latter development, hoping that the European project of promoting international law and the softening of borders would serve as a model for other states.[11] And many of us in Canada felt that our country's open—if often troubled—embrace of multiculturalism and the withering away of nationalist sentiments would prove an inspiration for countries into the twenty-first century. If we would never be a world power, at least we could struggle towards being a moral model. Looking back, much of this seems remarkably naïve. One of the primary goals of political analysis must now focus on developing an understanding of how such a dramatic shift occurred.

In hindsight we have no one but ourselves to blame for these developments, as few were willing to look closely at the cracks in these sunny narratives. When fissures appeared they were quickly dismissed as aberrations, states of exception, economic crises which deviated from the normally smooth operation of the neoliberal economic order, and so on. Even the Left, which one would expect would be critical of the developments listed above, very grudgingly came to accept them. As Slavoj Zizek repeatedly observed, we all became unwitting Fukuyamists.[12] The collapse of the communist regimes was the final nail in the coffin for Marxist grand narratives about a utopian post-capitalist and liberal future to come. Most leftists in the developed world tacitly seemed to accept that the liberal-capitalist order was here to stay. Some, like Habermas and other deliberative democrats, accepted this development and sought to soften its impact by offering defences of a more robustly democratic welfare state. Some Marxists and post-Marxists like David Harvey[13] and

[11] Jürgen Habermas. *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2012).

[12] Slavoj Zizek. *The Parallax View* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

[13] David Harvey. *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

Ernesto Laclau[14] looked to more local and experimental movements, such as anarchist communes and the Mexican Zapatista movements in Chiapas, for inspiration on how to potentially enact small-scale regional change. Finally, many others, and by far the most infamous, turned to various forms of identity politics and affiliated theoretical positions, leaning heavily on the post-modern theories and philosophies presented by often brilliant thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, and others. These identity politics movements and their related philosophies became so affiliated with the Left, that by 2010 the two were almost interchangeable in popular discourse.

These movements are complex and multi-faceted, and I shall discuss them at length later. But characteristic to all of them was a reluctant acceptance of the liberal-capitalist status quo. While some of the more radical proponents at least presented themselves as opposed to liberal capitalism, their tactics and immediate ambitions were all predicated on contemporary structures remaining more or less intact. The ambition of the various identity politics movements was not about institutional or structural transformation. Rather their bywords were "inclusion" and "participation" for ethnic and religious minorities, women, members of the LGBTQ community, the working class, and so on.[15] Proponents of identity politics tended to push for these historically marginalised groups, in all their intersectional complexity, to have a greater say in the cultural and political dynamics of the day. Oftentimes this was given both a constructive and a critical dimension. They would put forward constructive proposals on how to better include marginalised groups, while offering criticisms of the pervasive social forces and actors who remained a barrier to full participation and inclusion. In the stereotyped form presented in right-wing discourse, this was seen as primarily arguing for greater power at the expense of straight white men who were economically well off. But even if left-wing proponents of identity politics did want to enhance the power of the marginalised at the expense of straight white men, they put forward few attractive arguments which envisioned a system to replace the one that had been built by these figures. The Fukuyamist optimism—or at least resignation—appeared strong.

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[14] Ernesto Laclau. *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London, UK: Verso Books, 1990).

[15] Butler's early work was criticised on these points. See Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, UK: Routledge, 1990).

Each of these positions, from the more standard liberal internationalist visions to left-wing identity politics, operated on a fairly constant set of assumptions. The most obvious is that the political culture and technologies of the twenty-first century would operate in more or less the same manner as those of the twentieth century. Even when it was accepted that political culture and technologies were shifting society and culture in particular respects, there was little sense of the more general and transformative changes that were taking place. In other words, many of us failed to recognise the full transformative impact of an epoch of neoliberalisation[16] and what Jameson would call "post-modern culture."[17] We assumed that the politics affiliated with post-modern culture would simply be continuous with modernism. Post-modern politics would be the continuation of modernist politics by digital means. Following Mark Fisher, we are now recognising that post-modern politics looks quite different than what preceded it.[18]

Nowhere does the difference between post-modern politics and modernist politics appear starker than when we analyse the question of technology and its impact on political culture. Despite the pioneering efforts of thinkers from Heidegger to Ellul, most analysts within post-modern culture still adopt a functionalist understanding of technological media. This functionalist understanding framed how technology was interpreted and deployed by individuals across the technological spectrum. Liberals, neoliberal conservatives, leftists interested in identity politics, and even some traditionalists all jumped at the chance to deploy new technological media to advance their individual political objectives. What wasn't recognised is that the aggregated consequence of these efforts could dramatically change political culture as a whole. The problems were diagnosed early on by prophetic voices such as Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, and Jean Baudrillard. But their insights were largely ignored by the mass of political activists, who hastened onto Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other new media confident that it would abet a string of future victories. Their efforts gradually established

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[16] I use the term neoliberalisation here quite loosely to describe a variety of transformations **associated with epoch I will?** specify the nature of these in more detail later.

[17] Fredric Jameson. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review*, Vol. 146, 1984.

[18] Mark Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

hermetically sealed digital spaces where individuals operated within partisan and sensationalist communication bubbles, where every word and gesture of a perceived opponent was subject to pedantic scrutiny and deconstruction. All the while the political positions presented by television and radio were becoming increasingly defined by greater and sharper levels of partisanship and signalling. Competition for ratings, attention, and advertisers generated an increasingly shrill political climate which had more in common with a wrestling match than a polis. This would be an environment in which the truthful hyperbole and scandal-driven infotainment of someone like Donald Trump, a reality TV star, who literally presided over a wrestling match could thrive.

At the same time, the impact of post-modern culture ran deeper still, destabilising our very sense of location and identity. The technological and aesthetic influence of post-modern culture has led to a gradual destabilisation of identities at both the individual and the group level. As already mentioned, technological mediums gradually enclosed many in ever smaller communication bubbles. But it also dialectically fractured identity into countless new mediums, and exposed individuals to an immense volume of new information and an associated range of existential possibilities. Some reacted to this with a disposition akin to what Baudrillard called the "ecstasy" of communication.[19] But for many others, it generated an ever-growing sense of anomie. Informational content frequently became flatter within digital space while also becoming more available. Constant exposure to the complexities of the world, often boiled down to their simplest and most partisan form, resulted in growing anxiety about who people were and where they belonged. Paradoxically, this drove many to adopt an even closer relation to digital spaces, increasingly integrating them into their preferred communication bubbles.

At the same time, as Jameson pointed out, post-modern aesthetics became increasingly defined through its transformation of previously stable identities into ironic and holistic pastiches. This was best demonstrated in the ascendency of a far vaster "culture industry" than ever before, which gradually came to colonise and permeate all areas of social life.[20] The icons and ideology of the post-modern culture industry

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[19] Jean Baudrillard. *The Ecstasy of Communication* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotexte, 2012).

[20] Theodor Adorno. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London, UK: Routledge, 1991).

presented the culture as nominally liberal, and even progressive in its apparent presentation of a broader and representative array of social identities. However, in practice, it contributed to the creation of the conditions which spawned reactionary politics. It did so unintentionally but inevitably, through its consistent deconstruction and commodification of previously sacred identities and symbols, enacting a process of desacralisation which would have awed and terrified Max Weber.[21] Jesus Christ became a cartoon character in South Park fighting alongside Morpheus from the Matrix and Gandalf from the Lord of the Rings. American patriotism came to us filtered through the rhapsodic explosions of the Transformers films. Madonna, after appropriating a revered name, had the audacity to sing "like a virgin." Danish cartoonists staunchly defended their right to portray Mohammed as a cartoon character. These new "commodities"—revered individuals and honoured symbols from earlier eras—were desacralised and presented using the brightest CGI effects money could buy. These processes played a role in the development of an ironic and cynical body politic that increasingly found itself facing the tedious reality that if everything is permitted, then even blasphemy becomes a hollow gesture. Traditionalists looked upon these developments with alarm, with the canniest among them recognising that one could not fight against these trends, only appropriate them. This became exceptionally important when post-modern conservatives came to power, as the performative enactment of traditional symbols, rituals, and identities became a new form of ideological spectacle and entertainment. In its ugliest variants, especially filtered through social media, this took the form of a competitive struggle for attention and sponsors.

These technological and cultural developments might have remained relatively inert as a matter of politics. Certainly, by themselves, they would be of interest primarily to cultural theorists and media critics. But post-modern culture emerged as part of a dynamic and mutually determinative process in tandem with neoliberal society. And neoliberal society, which only a decade before had seemed the invincible end state of history itself, was in serious trouble by the mid-2000s.[22] The War on

[21] Max Weber. *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1958).

[22] See Wendy Brown. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015) for an account of these post-Recessionary problems.

Terror was exceptionally expensive and damaging and eroded the fragile liberal faith that a new era of peaceful internationalisation and tolerance was replacing one of violence and conflict. In addition to the material costs to many Western states, it caused a tremendous amount of moral damage to the conceit that the United States and its allies were invariably on the just side of history. This was exacerbated as we witnessed the first signs that xenophobia and nationalist paranoia were not just relics of a bygone era, but very much alive and waiting for the right cultural conditions in which to flourish.

Then there was the 2008 financial crisis, which was a tipping point for many of the political actors involved.[23] On the left, Occupy Wall Street and other movements directed against the so-called 1% emerged, marched, and fizzled out very quickly. But on the right, many new populist movements, including some of those discussed above, realised that their time had come. In the United States, the Tea Party emerged, with its strange combination of beliefs in limited government involvement in the economy, occasional flirtations with racism and xenophobia, nationalism, and so on. This often inconsistent pastiche of value systems was well reflected in its spokesmen, including Donald Trump and his "birtherism" campaign, who often embodied brazen contradictions within both their person and their principles. While the left-wing reactions to the economic crisis had (or have) since faded into history, the Tea Party gradually went through several metamorphoses before partially morphing into the Make America Great Again Movement.

In the United Kingdom there was a similar development. Initial anger and discontent at the global recession, and the feeling that elites got rich at the expense of the now unemployed working classes, evolved in several different ways. At points, it expressed itself as bursts of anger towards the capitalist system and the Labour and Conservative governments, where both were seen as being the capitalist system's puppets. This coincided with growing popular support for third parties, including the Liberal Democrats, but also the United Kingdom Independence Party and the British National Party. This support would grow by the time of the 2015 election, where Nigel Farage and UKIP saw their share of the popular vote grow to 12.6% of the total, up from 3.1% in 2010.

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[23] As I will explain later, the Recession was a catalyst for many of these trends to emerge, not the exclusive or direct cause.

In Poland, the story seemed superficially rosier on the surface. Since the fall of Communism, Poland had often been considered a model of liberalisation and democratisation. The country's economy was doing well, and it joined the European Union and other liberal institutions. What was never acknowledged was that beneath this optimistic picture, tensions were brewing. Economic benefits were very unevenly distributed, with many in the country's west becoming far wealthier than those in the east. This coincided with changing cultural values, as primarily urban poles in the western parts of the country became increasingly secular, internationalist, and liberal. This worried those in the conservative east of the country, who were generally poorer, more nationalistic, more religious, and resentful of the unequal distribution of economic goods to the developed west.

In Hungary, more than any of the other countries, one saw many of these tensions exhibited most starkly and with the broadest popular support. The Hungarian Socialist party was seen as badly mismanaging the economic crisis, as well as being corrupt and intensely tied to foreign interests. The broader left fragmented and fizzled out, providing ample opportunity for Fidesz and its leader Viktor Orban to ride to power in the European elections of 2009 and the Hungarian elections of 2010.[24] They campaigned on an aggressive nationalist platform, promising to rid the country of foreign interests and seize back sovereignty.

In each of these countries, one sees how destabilisation and inequalities provoked by neoliberal economic and social policies helped generate tremendous resentment and anger which gradually mutated and grew stronger over time. While the political left never managed to channel the energies unleashed into any substantial programs, the right took great advantage of them. Here it is important to be careful. Many may be tempted to simply cast blame for the decline of the neoliberal order of global governance at the feet of the 2008 crisis. This is too simple an explanation. On the one hand, the instabilities and inequalities produced by neoliberal governance were also going to generate tensions at the material level. But more importantly, neoliberal apologists never recognised two important and interrelated dynamics of the system they supported.

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[24] Paul Lendvall. *Orban: Europe's New Strongman* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Firstly, and most importantly, they failed to recognise that neoliberalism is inherently a revolutionary form of governance. It transforms human societies, uprooting cultural norms and traditional geographical spaces in its quest for markets and the creative-destructive process of creating new values and affiliated commodities. Neoliberals, long allied with various types of conservatism, never recognised how tenuous this alliance actually was at the level of ideology. The transformative consequences of neoliberal governance—whether demographic through supporting the free movement of labour, spatial and economic through engendering greater capital mobility, or cultural through the continuous development of new values and affiliated commodities—would inevitably inspire forms of reactionary pushback.

Secondly, more insightful neoliberal apologists always assumed that these transformations, and, it is important to stress, inequalities in power and wealth, would be indefinitely tolerated by democratic polities so long as everyone's absolute standard of living continued to improve. To invoke Fukuyama, there was an almost total indifference to existential problems of identity and related problems of dignity in favour of crudely material concerns about welfare.[25] These problems were highlighted even by post-Rawlsian liberals, who consistently observed that the unfairness generated by such rampant inequalities in wealth and power would ultimately serve to destabilise otherwise prosperous societies. These concerns were often swept away by appealing to extreme comparators and hyperbolic instances of those cheating the system, from pointing out that poor Hispanics and blacks living in ghettoised communities still enjoyed a quality of life higher than that of most sub-Saharan Africans, to the Reaganite invocation of welfare queens with their fancy cars and idle lifestyles.

The situation might have carried on indefinitely if neoliberal governance was genuinely able to deliver on its promise to raise all ships by continuously improving the overall quality of life. The 2008 crisis put this optimism to an extreme test. It also demonstrated the extent to which corporations, governments, and the affiliated cosmopolitan elites seemed little concerned with the actual conditions of many working-class people. As Schumpeter predicted, they had taken on the appearance of a managerial class more concerned with overall economic performance than

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[25] See Francis Fukuyama. *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York, NY: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

the fact that countless jobs were increasingly being lost with the exportation of many heavy industries to the developing world and the increasing computerisation of the workplace.

These problems became exacerbated when the freer movement of labour and support for generous immigration policies led to the understandable migration of millions of people to developed countries where they could at least aspire to a better quality of life for themselves, or at least their children, while establishing a vast pool of readily available labour. This benefited the socially liberal but fiscally conservative urbanites, who were largely uninvolved in the industries appropriated by migrants or by the loss of well-paid heavy industry jobs. They could present themselves as progressive and multicultural, all while enjoying the benefits of the cheaper labour and products provided by the immigrant labour force.

In addition, the majority of the urbanites were oblivious to the impact these social and cultural transformations were having on many rural areas, which were increasingly depopulated and pushed to the political margin by the processes of neoliberal governance. This was related to the broader shifts of post-modern culture, which presented the neoliberal subject—broadly tolerant but also ambitious, urban, and often wealthy—as the norm, while deconstructing the traditional values and identities which more rural and conservative people related to.

The transformation also forged a shift from a liberal education emphasising shared norms and civic values, to one emphasising training in powerful but also narrowly directed technical subjects. As Marcuse, and others in the Frankfurt school pointed out, we became so focused on learning "how" to do something that we ceased to be interested in the moral "what" and "why," let alone the broad societal and cultural implications of what we did.[26] This had substantial consequences, as those same neoliberal cosmopolitan elites who were the apparent zealots of consensual and tolerant politics became unable to sufficiently grasp the concerns of their fellow citizens. And as already mentioned, much the same was true for the political left, which also abandoned concern with the "what" and the "why" of universal concerns in favour of the "how" to advance a given marginalised group's political agenda. Many of these efforts were admirable and necessary, and the still-partial inclusion of

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[26] See Herbert Marcuse. *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

ethnic minorities and LGBTQ individuals as formal participants in neo-liberal governance remains a victory to be cherished and deepened. But as mentioned, none of these efforts adequately addressed the deeper and more problematic dynamics, even while they set themselves up as targets for the reactionary pushback to come.

This brings me to the heart of what this book is about. Under better circumstances, the developments summarised here might have led to greater efforts on the part of sincere conservatives to shift the dialogue. Figures like Patrick Deneen, John Paul II, George Grant, and Leo Strauss paid substantial attention to these issues and often offered compelling solutions (albeit none that I would endorse). But instead, the reaction was to become the mirror image of their liberal and left-wing counterparts, except even less critical. In the course, many conservatives came to embody the post-modern characteristics they claimed to despise while being unable to move past the neoliberal capitalist society they resented but were unwilling to abandon. They became post-modern conservatives.

The Rise of Post-modern Conservatism

Post-modern conservatism emerged as a reaction to the dynamics of post-modern culture and neoliberal society. It vulgarised earlier conservative appeals to traditional social identity by affiliating with group identities and values they felt were being disrupted by a vague host of antagonists. The identities the post-modern conservative appeals to are varied, and includes the nostalgic quality which is highly characteristic of post-modern culture. Many of the affiliated identities overlap or contradict each other when examined at the level of ideological and historical consistency. The pastiche can include a national identity as an authentic Pole or American, a religious identity such as being a member of Christian society, or a civilisational identity, such as being a part of the Western as opposed to the Islamic world. The antagonists of the post-modern conservative are similarly connoted in a pastiche-like way. They can include liberal and left-wing elites, globalists, urbanities, "cultural Marxists," and so on, and affiliated but less powerful groups such as immigrants, minorities, vulnerable populations, and so on. These antagonists are seen as disrupting a naturalised social hierarchy, where the identity and values the post-modern conservative affiliates with were once dominant.

In practice the characteristic feature of post-modern conservative politicians, from Donald Trump to Viktor Orban, is to invoke the identities post-modern conservatives affiliate with while castigating their perceived enemies. The goal is to stoke their resentments to seize political power. In the course of these efforts, post-modern conservative politicians will often aggressively deploy many of the same technologies and techniques characteristic of post-modern culture and neoliberal society.

Post-modern conservatives are remaking the world order in their image. From the United States to Poland, Hungary to Italy, their rise and emergence signifies the end of the Fukuyamist complacency we were long beholden to. While this book is primarily intended as a descriptive account of a political phenomenon, it is also intended as an immanent and moral critique of this trend. As I shall argue, post-modern conservatism is subject to many inherent limitations and contradictions. These include the limitations inherent to all politics predicated on resentment, including the obvious one that the post-modern conservative's triumph is inherently self-defeating. In the absence of their projected antagonists, the stability of the post-modern conservative identity as a victimised group evaporates along with the justification for its particular form of politics. This will necessitate that there shall always be new antagonists generated, along with an associated set of anxieties and paranoia. Moreover, post-modern conservatism is wracked by even more serious tensions. It is unable to actually rectify the social instabilities generated by inequality; it can only ameliorate them with yet another inverted promise—that the state can successfully negotiate more successful economic terms for itself and its people. Even if that were true, as Harvey would observe, this can only export economic problems elsewhere across the globe.[27] And so long as markets operate, the instabilities they provoke in one end of the globe will ultimately produce a ripple effect which will be felt elsewhere, sometimes as a small wave, and other times as a tsunami.

None of this is to suggest that post-modern conservatism is doomed to failure due to some inherent dialectical process. But it does suggest that it is utterly unable to rectify the political problems of the day. At the conclusion of this book, I will suggest other paths we might take towards fulfilling some more basic ambitions of liberal individualism and

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[27] David Harvey. *The Limits to Capital: New and Fully Updated Edition* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2006).

internationalism without generating the inequities and instability which plague neoliberal society and post-modern culture. These will be tentative suggestions, but my hope is they will provide a suggestive guidance for the future.

Chapter Breakdown

This book will be divided into five chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 will discuss the formation and dynamics of post-modern culture and neoliberal society. These chapters are a necessary preparation for the more specific discussions to come, as they outline the social conditions which prompted the emergence of post-modern conservatism. Chapters 3 and 4 will look more intently at post-modern conservatism itself including its theoretical origins in the writings of right-wing luminaries such as Edmund Burke, Joseph De Maistre, and Michael Oakeshott. They will also provide an analysis of the specific impact of post-modern culture and neoliberal society on conservative movements in various countries. I will then move on to discuss the emergence of post-modern conservatism as a political force across the developed and now developing world. This will include case analyses of the rise of post-modern conservatism in the Anglo-American world, continental Europe, and finally in Latin America with the ascendency of Jair Bolsonaro. Each of these contexts is, of course, quite different, and it will be important to note how post-modern conservatism has taken on different forms in these various locations. Nonetheless, I will stress the sociological claim, throughout that there are common outlooks and styles of governance which typify post-modern conservatism in practice. Finally, I will conclude by briefly proposing strategies for halting the rise of post-modern conservatism, while laying out a more progressive agenda for the future. These arguments will draw heavily on the theoretical and practical guidance of egalitarian liberals such as Rawls, Nussbaum, and others. It will also offer an analysis of the contemporary failure of the left to adequately deal with the conditions of post-modernity and neoliberal society and argue that aesthetic and theoretical changes will be necessary if progressives hope to seize the political agenda.

Post-modernism as Philosophy and Post-modernism as Culture

THE END OF MODERNISM

Post-modernism is one of the most frequently referenced and yet rarely described terms in both academia and increasingly the public sphere. For many radical leftists, including luminaries such as Gayatri Spivak, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Edward Said, post-modern literary and theoretical projects offer the possibility of a richer, more inclusive, and critical understanding of a cultural history and its discontents. For Richard Rorty, on occasion Charles Taylor, and a select contingent of other (mostly left leaning) liberals, post-modernism offers, welcome critiques of Enlightenment totalisation. They see it as abetting a new and more refined conception of liberalism which is more focused on solidarity and toleration, rather than the militant advancement of a liberal monoculture characteristic of Kant and Mill.

Interestingly, a small contingent of conservatives holds a similarly positive appraisal of post-modernism, albeit interpreted very differently. For self-identified post-modern conservatives such as Peter Lawler, the scepticism and social constructivism of post-modernism constitutes a return to a more modest "realism" about the limitations of the human understanding.[1] For these radical leftists, post-modern liberals and a small number of conservatives, post-modernism is to be praised.

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[1] Peter Augustine Lawler. *Postmodernism Rightly Understood: The Return to Realism in American Thought* (Lanham, MA: Rowan and Littlefield, 1999) at pg 196.

Others have a far more damning interpretation. For many on the radical left, notably Slavoj Zizek, David Harvey, and Wendy Brown, post-modernism is a problem. While aspects of it can be harnessed for their emancipatory potential, these figures are acutely worried that post-modernism can engender a sense of scepticism and political moderation antithetical to the ambitions of any sincere radical politics. These sentiments are even more prevalent among self-described liberals, including those with an egalitarian bent. Martha Nussbaum has dismissed "post-modern" authors such as Judith Butler as professors of parody.[2] Ronald Dworkin offered sharp criticisms of post-modernism's scepticism in tersely titled pieces such as "Objectivity and Truth: You Better Believe It."[3] And perhaps most infamously, Alan Sokal, as part of a self-described quest to save the left from a "trendy" version of itself, criticised post-modern philosophy as "fashionable nonsense" with little scientific value.[4] These attacks from scholars broadly on the political left pale in comparison to much of the vitriol directed against post-modernism by those on the political right. Allan Bloom famously condemned post-modernism for contributing to the "closing of the American mind" and collapsing respect for the canonical works of Western civilisation.[5] The libertarian Camille Paglia has sharply criticised post-structuralism and French thinking for leading to collapsing academic standards and a distrust of freedom.[6] Stephen Hicks in his *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* condemns post-modernism for abandoning the Enlightenment commitment to reason and science, while using its concepts to support misanthropy and Soviet style socialism.[7] And most recently, Jordan Peterson has rocketed to fame by condemning "post-modern neo-Marxists" and their politics

[2] Martha Nussbaum. "The Professor of Parody." *The New Republic*, February 22, 1999.

[3] Ronald Dworkin. "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 25, 1996.

[4] See Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont. *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York, NY: Picador Press, 1999).

[5] Allan Bloom. *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

[6] Camille Paglia. *Sex, Art, and American Culture: Essays* (New York, NY: Random House, 1992).

[7] Stephen R.C. Hicks. *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault: Expanded Edition* (China: Ockham's Razor Publishing, 2004).

of resentment.[8] While rarely presented in a systematic manner, Peterson has accused post-modernists such as Foucault and Derrida of promoting sceptical and nihilistic philosophies which abet the emergence of totalitarian politics. This was most infamously expressed in his comparisons between a trans-rights activists and a Maoist totalitarian, when he claimed that the "philosophy which guides their utterances" is the same.[9]

Each of these authors presents a different conception of the virtues and defects of post-modernism to try and explain their reactions to it. For proponents, post-modernism is understood and admired for a wide variety of reasons. It is a theoretical means of achieving emancipation, a call to solidarity and multiculturalism over individualism and monoculture, or even a "return to realism" in conservative thinking.[10] This diversity is true for opponents as well, who see post-modernism as the servile ideology of "late capitalism,"[11] the end of reason itself, or indeed a gateway to totalitarianism and nihilism, if one follows Peterson's account. This poses a problem for anyone wishing to provide a comprehensive account of post-modernism—at least understood as primarily an academic discourse—since the variety of viewpoints does not lend itself to easy thematic and theoretical summations.

Nonetheless it is crucial to the remainder of this book to have a solid understanding of post-modernism before moving on to discuss its contemporary conservative variants. This is true for two inter-related reasons. Firstly, despite its relative ambiguity, post-modernism has itself become a symbolic trope deployed in contemporary political disputes. Indeed, over the last few years, there has been a remarkable growth in the number of prominent and very public critics of post-modernism. It must be said that many of these critics seem to have a tenuous understanding of its complex intellectual history. This has been matched by the emergence of various defenders, including myself at some points, who

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[8] Jordan Peterson. *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto, ON: Random House Canada, 2018).

[9] Channel 4 News. "Jordan Peterson on the Gender Pay Gap, Campus Protests, and Postmodernism." *Channel 4 News*, January 16, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMcjxSThD54&t=3s.

[10] Peter Augustine Lawler. *Postmodernism Rightly Understood: The Return to Realism in American Thought* (Lanham, MA: Rowan and Littlefield, 1999).

[11] Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991) at pg 1.

have offered defences ranging from the lukewarm to the highly enthusiastic. Given the prominence of this dispute in the public sphere, it is important to have a solid grip on the broad contours of this discourse going forward. Secondly, and far more importantly, is that it is essential to have some definition of post-modernism in order to describe what constitutes a specifically post-modern form of conservatism.

THE END OF GRAND NARRATIVES: WHAT IS POST-MODERNISM?

To accomplish this goal, I will provide my own conception of post-modernism over the course of this chapter. This conception is predicated on a typological distinction between what I believe are the two most prominent categories of post-modern authors.[12] The first category of authors work in post-modernism as a philosophical tradition. The second category of authors understand post-modernism as a cultural development in neoliberal society. This typology is obviously highly idealised and artificial, as many post-modern authors have arguments which could locate them into either category. Nonetheless, I believe the distinction is useful in framing the parameters of this discussion. That said, as this is not first and foremost a philosophical treatise, I will have relatively little to say about the first category of authors; those who work in post-modernism as a philosophical tradition. I will only discuss them insofar as vulgarised approximations of their ideas and arguments appear in the public sphere, necessitating an analysis of the cultural and political controversy surrounding their work. Most of my discussion will be focused on the second category of authors working in the tradition of post-modernism, those who treat it as a cultural development. This is both because I sympathise with that approach, and because it is more useful for my purposes in this book.

The first category applies to authors and trends that are part of what I call the post-modern philosophical tradition. It is a rich, illuminating, and occasionally maddening school of thought which emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s, and reached the height of its influence in the 1980s to the early 2000s. At that point, post-modern approaches dominated many social science and humanities departments in universities across the Western world, sparking both an innovative surge in research

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[12] A similar distinction is described by Eagleton in his polemic on the subject, though it is not germane to the rest of his text. See Terry Eagleton. *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

and intense pushback. This was the era when Derrida's lectures were attended by thousands, critical legal theories inspired by post-modern philosophies often dominated debates in the Anglo-American legal world, and post-modern authors or their disciples were uniformly the most cited authors in the social sciences and the humanities. It was also the era that saw John Searle[13] and W.V.O. Quine ruthlessly dismiss Derrida and other post-modern authors as charlatans, *The Closing of the American Mind* become an unexpected bestseller,[14] and Alan Sokal initiated his famous hoax to prove post-modern philosophers peddled "fashionable nonsense."[15] Since then, the debate died down for a while, before recently exploding again with the rise of Trump, the popularity of critics of post-modernism such as Jordan Peterson and various new media outlets such as *Quillette*, and the infamous Sokal Squared hoax perpetuated against several popular post-modern outlets. This vehemence persists despite the fact that the actual academic influence of post-modernism has been waning significantly since the mid-2000s. At this point several of the most famous post-modern philosophers, including Derrida and Rorty, have passed away. In their place, a new generation of continental philosophers emerged who were at times supportive, and at other times critical of post-modern positions including Alain Badiou, Slavoj Zizek, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Quentin Meillasoux, and so on. This turnover seems to support Rorty's somewhat morbid Kuhnian observation that academic disciplines are as prone to the whims of generational fashion as any other social institution, and that new generations of thinkers will invariably seek to overturn the settled dogmas of their predecessors.[16] Post-modern philosophy is no more immunised against this than any other, ironically the victim of its own process of historical marginalisation as, but one more discourse among many.

The second category of authors are those who regard post-modernism as a cultural development within neoliberal society. These authors are

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[13] John Searle. "The World Turned Upside Down." *New York Review of Books*, October 27, 1983.

[14] Allan Bloom. *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

[15] Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont. *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York, NY: Picador Press, 1999).

[16] See Richard Rorty. "Thomas Kuhn, Rocks and the Laws of Physics." In *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1999).

considerably more eclectic in their own philosophical and political positions. Some, like David Harvey and Fredric Jameson, fit nicely into the Marxist tradition. They tend to emphasise the relationship between post-modern culture and the evolving dynamics of capitalist societies and globalisation. Others, including the aforementioned Slavoj Zizek or the late Mark Fisher, reference Marx but tend to draw more heavily on a combination of Hegelian and Lacanian insights. Jean Baudrillard and Neil Postman were media theorists who wrote extensively about how new communications and entertainment technologies were transforming the way individuals interact with and understand one another. Jean Francois Lyotard regards post-modernism as a cultural condition driven by technological and social transformations; though he seems to regard the shift as more permanent and even praiseworthy than most of the other authors in this category. Jürgen Habermas sees post-modernism as simply the latest phase in the ongoing "philosophical discourse of modernity."[17] To his mind, post-modernism is not especially new, but merely the latest "cultural understanding of modernity" perpetuating an ongoing and misguided attack on the Enlightenment that has been going on since the early nineteenth century.[18] And even conservative critics such as Patrick Deneen attack post-modern culture (though he does not use the term) as the logical endpoint of liberal capitalist societies who have abandoned all links with tradition and community.[19]

For years, these authors remained respected but comparatively minor figures in many of the debates surrounding post-modernism. In some respects this disinterest in political or cultural critiques or analyses of post-modernism are unsurprising. On the political left it was easy—in many ways far too easy—to regard the critiques of Harvey, Jameson, and Habermas as simply the resistance of the old intellectual guard being supplanted. And indeed, many of these authors did display a lack of interest or at least a relative quietism concerning the struggles for political inclusion and respect for difference that came—rightly or wrongly—to be associated with the writings on post-modern philosophy.

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[17] Jürgen Habermas. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

[18] Jürgen Habermas. "Modernity vs. Postmodernity." *New German Critique*, Vol. 22, 1981.

[19] Patrick Deneen. *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018) at pgs 131–153.

And on the political right it was unlikely, particularly in the midst of Reaganite-Thatcher style euphoria over the triumph over communism and the emergence of neoliberalism, that many people would pay that much attention to criticisms rejecting the ascendant culture for being increasingly in the midst of an identity crisis. Even otherwise sharp critics like Allan Bloom tended to limit their critiques to fairly mundane issues about curriculums, blaming post-modern philosophers for transforming the culture without probing into its deeper problems.[20] However, with the aforementioned decline of post-modern philosophy on the left and the emergence of post-modern conservatism on the right, many authors seem more willing to at least take the "post-modernism as culture" position more seriously.

Unfortunately, these critiques remain infrequently invoked compared to the far more popular and infamous works of post-modern philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. This is especially true of right-wing critics such as Stephen Hicks and Jordan Peterson, who seem unwilling to contemplate any scenario where a liberal-capitalist society might create the conditions for the emergence of post-modern philosophies. This is true even when figures such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, who both endorsed a transition to post-modern culture and supported it philosophically, make exactly that claim.[21] For these reasons, it is important to analyse these two categories of interpretation to better understand the phenomena we are looking at. We should focus on this issue given that post-modern philosophy remains an often invoked trope in the cultural disputes of our time, and more importantly, because of the strange connections between post-modern philosophy and elements of the conservative philosophical tradition which shall be analysed later. Understanding these connections will later become extremely important when trying to understand how certain conservatives could be inspired to adopt post-modern philosophical positions, however unwittingly. For now, I shall be focusing on understanding the way these different categories of post-modern authors understand the phenomena. I will begin with post-modern philosophers.

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[20] Allan Bloom. *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

[21] Jean Francois Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

The Emergence of Post-modern Philosophy

Many of the controversies around post-modernism focus on its political rather than its specifically philosophical claims. The most prominent of these have become known even to the broader public: that post-modern philosophers support identity politics at the expense of tradition and liberalism, or that post-modern philosophers are anti-reason, or anti-Enlightenment, and so on.[22] While there are important truths to some of these accusations, the history of post-modern philosophy's politics is more complex than first glances suggest. Unfortunately post-modern philosophy is very difficult to summarise, both due to its complexity and, occasionally, the opacity of presentation. I will be generalising and abbreviating a fair bit in what follows, since a thorough understanding of the technical details of various philosophical positions isn't central to my purposes. While there is certainly a need for a more thorough analysis, both to highlight post-modern philosophy's weaknesses and to discredit ill-founded critiques, I will not be engaging in this task here.

The best way to understand post-modern philosophy is, appropriately enough, as both a continuation of and a reaction against philosophical modernism. Modernism was an intellectual period characterised by a number of contradictory dimensions. On the one hand, science and technologies were advancing at an unprecedented clip. The nineteenth century was the epoch of the Industrial Revolution, an age of rapid advancement and development that showed little sign of slowing down. However, progress was hampered by fundamental problems in putting the foundations of knowledge, morality, and even our conception of self-hood on a firm footing. In mathematics, Hilbert's famous program in foundational meta-mathematics was partially successful in some areas.[23] But the quest to put mathematics on a firm logical foundation faltered on the shores of Russelian paradoxes, Godelian incompleteness theorems, and other problems affiliated with clarifying the logical and practical implications of infinite quantities.[24]

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[22] For a readable if tedious example in this genre, see Ben Shapiro. *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great* (New York, NY: Broadside Books, 2019).

[23] See John D. Barrow. *New Theories of Everything: The Quest for Ultimate Explanation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[24] My admittedly peripheral understanding is drawn primarily from Bertrand Russell. *Principles of Mathematics* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2010).

Similar problems emerged in the humanities. Marx's class analyses[25] and Nietzsche's[26] proclamation of the death of God were both epochal in their own right. The former challenged the authenticity of the broadly liberal outlook's commitment to human emancipation and progress, while the latter opened up new moral and aesthetic horizons that had been held back by conservative attachments to tradition and religion. They were followed by existential writers, including Heidegger on the far right and Sartre on the far left, who stressed the radical contingency of self-hood and human existence itself. Early post-colonial theorists such as Franz Fanon drew on the thinking of figures like Sartre to argue that just as the conception of the permanent self was to be done away with, so too could we rid ourselves of the contingent imperialism of arrogant European empires.

Many of the first distinctively post-modern philosophers and arguments appeared as both a reaction to and an extension of these modernist claims. As with any significant intellectual movement, it is challenging to demarcate a singular turning point. There were substantial developments that anticipated the emergence of post-modern philosophy. Many of these were French, signifying, as Badiou would later put it, the initiation of a golden age in the philosophical influence and reputation of France.[27] There was the 1953 publication of Barthes' seminal *Writing/Degree/Zero*, a watershed in stressing both the ambiguity and political dimensions of language.[28] Ludwig Wittgenstein's posthumous classic *Philosophical Investigations* was a decisive nail in the coffin of the logical positivist ambition to unite logic, mathematics, and language into a single philosophical framework (as Wittgenstein himself had attempted in the earlier *Tractatus*).[29] Lacan's break with French psychoanalysis in the

[25] Karl Marx. *Capital Volume One: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ernest Mandel (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1990).

[26] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000).

[27] See Alain Badiou. *Pocket Pantheon: Figures in Postwar Philosophy* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2009).

[28] Roland Barthes. *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1968).

[29] See Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) and Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

1940s, apparently with the aim of an orthodox "return to Freud," was followed by his influential and occasionally elliptical seminars throughout the 1950s.[30] These were attended by many future superstars in French intellectual circles. The 1965 publication of *Reading Capital* by Louis Althusser, Etienne Balibar, and others was a watershed.[31] Much like Lacan's questionable professions of pious orthodoxy, the book marked a transformative moment in the development of Western Marxism. It was a very significant step in the movement away from seeing Marxism as an account of political economy, and towards reinterpreting Marxism as a philosophical critique of ideology as filtered through the philosophical analytics of structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

These antecedent developments were all essential to the emergence of post-modern philosophy as a distinct philosophical tradition. To my mind, 1966 is the key year in the transition from modernist philosophy to post-modernism. In that year, Michel Foucault published his magnum opus *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, launching the intellectual equivalent of a ballistic missile at teleological visions of history, progressive understandings of science, and structuralist holism.[32] 1966 was also the year Jacques Derrida presented his paper "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" at the colloquium on structuralism at John Hopkins University.[33] This paper was a daring grenade thrown at the dominant structuralist conceits, presented by a young philosopher who hadn't even been granted a Ph.D. yet. The spirit of these developments was nicely captured in Jean-Francois Lyotard's classic *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* a few years later, which featured his famous observation that intellectual culture was moving away from a belief in objectivity and "grand" or "meta" narratives and towards a more pluralistic approach to knowledge.

[30] I ventured into those ambiguous waters with a guide. See Slavoj Zizek. *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Lacan but Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock* (London, UK: Verso Books, 1992).

[31] Louis Althusser. *Reading Capital* (London, UK: Verso Books, 1997).

[32] Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[33] Jacques Derrida. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

In contemporary society and culture - post-industrial society, postmodern culture - the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation.[34]

These seminal works were followed up by a near constant stream of intellectual landmarks which would shortly come to frame much of the philosophical discourse in the so called "human sciences" for a generation to come. The time period between 1966 and the 1990s saw the publication of most of the now classic texts in post-modern philosophy. This includes the work of the aforementioned thinkers of course, but many others. In 1979 Richard Rorty published *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, which did a great deal to make a uniquely Americanised version of certain post-modern positions palatable to more analytically trained readers.[35] In 1976 Duncan Kennedy published "Form and Substance in Private Law Adjudication" and became the most prominent member of the critical legal studies movement to draw heavily on post-modern philosophy.[36] Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau inaugurated a decisive intellectual break with orthodox Marxism in 1985s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, arguing that "society" itself did not really exist.[37] In 1988 Gayatri Spivak published her influential "Can the Subaltern Speak?" extending Derridean analysis to the examination of cultural practices and post-colonial studies,[38] following on the heels of writers like Edward Said, and his invocation, in 1978, of Foucault

[34] Jean Francois Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) at pg 37.

[35] Richard Rorty. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

[36] See Duncan Kennedy. "Form and Substance in Private Law Adjudication." *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 89, 1976. For a more sustained treatment of the ideas, see Duncan Kennedy. *A Critique of Adjudication (Fin De Siècle)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[37] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Verso Press, 2014).

[38] Gayatri Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

in *Orientalism*.[39] Finally, in 1991 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari famously argued that philosophy should cease focusing on dialectical argumentation and appeals to empirical science, and instead focus on the creation of novel "concepts."[40] In an ironic sense this manifesto in some ways formalised the dimensions of this philosophical shift, away from argumentation and universalism and towards novelty and particularism.

Now that we have briefly discussed the milestones in the development of post-modern philosophy, what, if anything, can we say are its common characteristics? Generally I believe the primary characteristic defining post-modern philosophy was and is its unique form of epistemic scepticism.[41] Defined crudely, this means scepticism concerning claims that we can obtain certain knowledge in our moral, philosophical, and scientific reasoning. In particular, post-modern philosophy was especially sceptical of what Lyotard aptly characterised as "meta-narratives," though it was by no means limited exclusively to such grand critiques. Post-modern scepticism also directed its gaze against seemingly more mundane, but perhaps more pervasive, positions as well. Epistemic scepticism manifested itself in a myriad of different forms and was given a wide variety of different justifications. We will look at some of the most prominent of these.

Post-modernism and Language

One of the major interests of most post-modern philosophers was language. Indeed, they were deeply embedded in the so-called linguistic turn which defined much of mid-twentieth century philosophy in both its continental and analytical streams. And it was through an analysis of language that the most transparent forms of post-modern scepticism emerged. Post-modern philosophers reacted strongly against claims that language could accurately "picture" the empirical world as the early Wittgenstein believed it could, let alone that it could be used to speak

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[39] Edward Said. *Orientalism: 25th Anniversary Edition* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2004).

[40] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996).

[41] This is less true of Gilles Deleuze than many of his peers.

with certainty about moral and philosophical issues.[42] Their arguments for this philosophical position varied widely.

Philosophers such as Lyotard and Rorty appealed to the thinking of the late Wittgenstein, who famously argued against his earlier claims that language could accurately "picture" the empirical world. Instead, Wittgenstein encouraged us to look at language as a sequence of games people played in various different "forms of life."[43] These games were oriented around the achievement of practical goals, and the rules for how to play them did not rest on some kind of epistemologically firm foundation. Lyotard and Rorty agreed with Wittgenstein. They encouraged us to abandon meta-narratives of NeoKantian style quests for representative certainty in language, for instance, where there can be a one-to-one association between the words used to talk about things and things themselves. Instead we should look more anthropologically at the way people play different language games and what they hope to achieve by them. For Lyotard, this realisation has emancipatory political consequences. For Rorty, it demonstrates how we should humble ourselves in the face of uncertainty by banding together in solidaristic enterprises[44] aimed at making the world a better place for our "great grand-children."

Foucault and Derrida reacted against structuralist holism to raise a different set of arguments against the possibility of linguistic certainty. For Foucault, a historical look at the archaeology of knowledge demonstrates the contingency of many of the ways we talk about the world. Knowledge takes the form of discourses or "ways of speaking" about the world which are distinct and often incompatible.[45] Discourses tend to be internally interconnected, forming what Wittgenstein might call an "immense system" that often clash with other discourses.[46] They operate according to their own internal rules, and are given material heft by

[42] See Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

[43] See Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) at para 241.

[44] Richard Rorty. "Solidarity and Objectivity." In *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*, ed. Michael Krauscz (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre-Dame Press, 1989).

[45] Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

[46] Ludwig Wittgenstein. *On Certainty*, trans. Dennis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1969).

the social institutions and powers responsible for the reproduction of a discourse. But this does not make them entirely resistant to change and destruction, since changes in social institutions and power can lead to a discourse being abandoned or fundamentally altered. This abandonment or fundamental alteration does not take place because a discourse was invalidated or lacked insight into the actual "order of things,"[47] but rather because the broader social conditions necessary for the reproduction of that discourse changed.

To give just one example, Foucault demonstrates in *Madness and Civilization* that the ways we speak about mental illness have changed profoundly over the past few centuries. From being perceived as prophets and seers, the mad eventually came to be seen as undesirable aberrations from the norm of a mentally healthy subject.[48] The discourse and affiliated values surrounding mental illness had shifted, and as Foucault observes, may very well shift again. This is true despite the pretentious desire to achieve scientific certainty in the study of the mad.

Derrida meanwhile focused his early work on an analysis of how literary texts were interpreted, drawing on the phenomenological research of thinkers like Husserl and Heidegger. Contrary to some caricatures, he never claimed that all interpretations are equally valid. Nor did he argue against the necessity of having standard interpretations of certain phenomena. As he put it in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences":

> The function of this center was not only to orient; balance, and organize the structure—one cannot, in fact, conceive of an unorganized structure—but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the freeplay of the structure. No doubt that by orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the freeplay of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself.[49]

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[47] Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[48] See Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1988).

[49] Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978) at pg 280.

What Derrida was keen to demonstrate is that these central interpretations were inherently unstable. Moreover, analysis of a given interpretation could bring to light the textual "trace" of different potential interpretations which were latent within the language.[50] Consider for instance, an interpretation of death as simply the absence of life. Following Heidegger and Kierkegaard's existential analysis, Derrida observed that many of our actions demonstrate the instability of such an interpretation.[51] Throughout our life, we take many actions designed to ward off death. This can include anything from going to the doctor to taking vitamins daily. So the apparent stability, one might even saw the banal obviousness of simply claiming that life is the absence of death, can be deconstructed once one recognises that a great deal of life involves thinking about and acting upon the possibility of our deaths. The lesson of this is to recognise that any interpretation we give of the world, however rich and informative, will always remain incomplete and open to deconstruction. Spivak would later politicise this deconstructive approach to interpretation more radically, using it to probe the different ways many have written or spoken in place of the colonial subaltern.[52]

The various justifications for epistemic scepticism varied widely. Some of the arguments were quite original, though it is important not to overstate their novelty even at the time. In many respects the scepticism of the post-modern philosophers was a conclusive development to the modernist dilemmas discussed earlier, which had been noted and well discussed by modernist philosophers who influenced post-modern philosophy itself, such as Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Husserl. Heidegger was already moving towards declaring the end or completion of Western metaphysics in the 1930s (when he was not flirting with National Socialist vulgarities),[53] the formerly strident Husserl had already

[50] Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

[51] Jacques Derrida. *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret*, trans. David Wills (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[52] Gayatri Spivak. *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[53] Martin Heidegger. *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Daniela Vallega-Neu (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012).

declared a "crisis" in the European sciences as early as 1936.[54] Even the Wittgenstein of the apparently positivist *Tractatus* had already declared that philosophy and empirical reason can tell us nothing at all about morals, aesthetics, and religion.[55] The wise person therefore recognises the uselessness of the former endeavours to achieve any sense of meaning, and once recognising this will cast aside the propositions of a logical and empirical philosophy like a ladder that has fulfilled its use. But as the dark and even tragic quality of their work indicates, there was a despairing quality to these earlier philosophers' arguments.

By contrast, the post-modern philosophers were often more hesitant in regarding epistemic scepticism as a largely negative development. Some were even positively buoyant about it, which probably contributed a great deal to the dismissal of the philosophical tradition as engaging in a willful dalliance with nihilism. I feel this is a manic interpretation that in itself overstates the novelty of many aspects of post-modern philosophy. For all their epistemic scepticism and punk aesthetics, most post-modern philosophers were never able to break out of the traditional Western appreciation for freedom and self-development as a basis for normative claims. This is true whether it is Foucault calling for our partial emancipation from the deadening discourses of power, Derrida criticising the pervasiveness of logo-centric interpretations which limited our ability to freely deconstruct and then play with the understanding of the world and the self, Spivak condemning colonial and post-colonial reasoning for not allowing the marginalised to speak, or Deleuze and Guattari celebrating the esoteric nature of the schizo-personality.[56] This appreciation for freedom and self-development was often implicit within the works of the various post-modern philosophers. It was rarely argued for, relative to other potential bases for normative claims, whether these be utilitarianism in either its rule or act variants, communitarianism, or egalitarian liberalism. As Eagleton pointed out, it also went some way to

[54] Edmund Husserl. *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1970).

[55] Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) from paras 6.42 to 6.423.

[56] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Huerley, Mark Seem, and Helen B. Lane (New York: Penguin Books, 1977).

reinforcing the neoliberal society many post-modern theorists claimed to decry. As he put it in his excellent *Ideology—An Introduction*:

> It is clear enough, then, what a 'radical' pragmatism or neo-Nietzschianism finally comes down to. It is a shamefaced apologia for the Western way of life, more rhetorically suasive than some explicitly redneck propaganda on behalf of the Pentagon. We begin with a proper dismissal of disinterestedness, a suspicion of objectivity and an apparently hard-nosed insistence on the realities of incessant conflict, and end up playing obediently into the hands of Henry Kissinger. In some such styles of thinking, a transcendentalism of truth is merely ousted by a transcendentalism of interests. Interests and desires are just 'givens,' the baseline which our theorizing can never glimpse behind; they go, so to speak all the way down, and we can no more inquire where they actually come from than we could ask the Enlightenment ideologues about the sources of their own Olympian rationality.[57]

The epistemic scepticism and vague approval of freedom and self-development as the basis for normative claims did make post-modern philosophy highly appealing to the many proponents of what came to be known as identity politics in the latter years of the twentieth century. But this association of post-modern epistemic scepticism with identity politics, whether of a liberating or conservative kind, is far more complex than is typically understood. Those who pay Foucault and Derrida the backhanded compliment of assuming they are largely responsible for the emergence of identity politics vastly overstate the influence of intellectuals on the general culture; often slipping into a kind of crude Heideggerian style idealism where the history of an entire culture is really little more than the history of its metaphysical disputes.[58] Flattering as this might seem to intellectuals, I believe the development of identity owes far more to the development of post-modernism as a culture than to the more narrow impact of post-modern philosophy. It is to this that we shall now turn.

[57] Terry Eagleton. *Ideology—An Introduction: New and Expanded Edition* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2007) at pgs 172–173.

[58] See Martin Heidegger. *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 2nd ed., trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

Understanding Post-modernism as a Culture

The argument that post-modernism is more than simply a philosophical outlook was prevalent almost from the inception of the term. Indeed, Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition*, which did more than virtually any other work to popularise the term, already interpreted post-modernism as a social condition—the condition of "post-modernity" as it is sometimes called—rather than just an esoteric claim about the epistemic tenability of meta-narratives. For Lyotard, the distrust of meta-narratives—whether Christian, Marxist, or Liberal—was now a culture-wide phenomenon in various developed states. His pioneering observations were greatly deepened and broadened by Jean Baudrillard, who in 1981 published *Simulacra and Simulacrum*.[59] If Lyotard's book is the manifesto of post-modern culture, then the latter book is probably the closest thing to a sacred text; a deserved accolade given Baudrillard's unequalled insight into the post-modern condition. Indeed, its status as such was parodied in the 1999 classic, *The Matrix* directed by the Wachowski siblings. Early in the film, Thomas "Neo" Anderson, played by Keanu Reeves, is visited by a collection of cyber-punk stereotypes looking to pick up illegal software. Neo closes his door, and goes to collect the good, hidden inside an appropriately hollowed out copy of Baudrillard's book. The symbolism, though heavy-handed, is accurate. Baudrillard's argument is that we increasingly live in a culture characterised by the "rule of signs" rather than physical things and material institutions. But unlike in the science fiction classic, there is no world of the real to which we can return for Baudrillard. The current rule of signs is not meant to conceal some real world from us, *a la* the classic account of ideological super-structures propagated by variants of Marxism.[60] It is not even a form of interpellation into contingent subjectivities as with Althusser.[61] The rule of signs is meant to conceal that we increasingly lead lives where there is nothing behind these very signs that the simulacrum in which we live is indeed the world as it now is.

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[59] Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Fraser Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

[60] The base/superstructure distinction famously gave way to more nuanced arguments in Marx's later works such as Das Kapital. Nonetheless, its influence on Marxist theory remains prominent, particularly the more economically driven variants of that tradition. See the "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy." In Karl Marx. *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 1992).

[61] Louis Althusser. *On Ideology* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2008).

EuroDisney land is not attempting to copy the real Europe as faithfully as it can. It has created a simulacrum which is more real than Europe; a hyperreal environment which is now the cultural world which we inhabit.

As David Harvey pointed out, Baudrillard always did have a taste for exaggeration—though I would add his was the hyperbole characteristic of genius.[62] But regardless, his belief that there had been an epochal cultural shift of sorts was highly intriguing and widely disseminated in the following decades. In 1985, Neil Postman published *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, which followed Marshall McLuhan in arguing that new media and technologies were having a profound impact on the way the public thought about and discussed the issues of the day.[63] In particular, television significantly impeded the public's capacity to consider complex topics in a literate manner. Postman observed that at one point, the largely literate American populace would turn to books and extensive debates to learn about political and social issues and make nuanced determinations about their preferences. With the advent of television, these same issues were increasingly disseminated through a medium oriented around 5 minute sound bites and imagistic presentation. Postman worried that this was having a profoundly negative impact on the ability of the public to analyse and develop reasoned judgements about the same topics which they had handled with ease before.

In 1987 Allan Bloom published his bestseller, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, to considerable controversy.[64] Bloom's focus was far more limited than some of the other authors in this category. But his work is significant, both for its popularity and its commonality with other authors discussed here. Bloom noted that the disposition of modern students at elite American universities was notably different than it had been in the past. Earlier American students had frequently been impassioned advocates for different conceptions of justice, truth, and the good life. Some of these conceptions were notably

[62] David Harvey. *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

[63] Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York, NY: Penguin University Press, 2005).

[64] Allan Bloom. *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

bizarre, and Bloom acknowledged that in such circumstances adopting a moderating scepticism *a la* Socrates could be a healthy development. But (post-) modern students displayed none of this same Euthyphroic vigour in arguing for even false positions. They believed the entire notion that there could be an accurate conception of justice, truth, and the good life, was nonsense. These students were broadly tolerant of opposing views, but not out of a classical liberal commitment to individual freedom and freedom of expression. Instead they were apathetic; the students of the 1980s were simply indifferent to the presence of alternate conceptions of truth and justice, and felt little desire to examine the views of people they felt were entitled to believe whatever they wanted, no matter how bizarre or immoral.

On the opposite end of the political spectrum, in 1989 David Harvey published *The Condition of Postmodernity*.[65] This was among the first major works analysing post-modernity from a thoughtful Marxist perspective, rather than simply dismissing it or assimilating into the tradition. Harvey made the powerful argument that post-modernity is the latest example of the cultural transformations generated by capitalism, as the modes of production transitioned from Fordism to the more flexible and compressed space-time conditions of the globalised market economy. This resulted in profound social transformations and anxieties and a growing scepticism towards meta-narratives, which seemed incapable of describing the process of social transformation and dissolution which was occurring at accelerating speed. Local traditions, identities, and values came ever more rapidly into contact, and often conflict, with one another within space and therefore were increasingly annihilated within time. For Harvey, the post-modern condition is a natural symptom of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century capitalism which has dialectically produced both promising developments pointing towards emancipation, and deeper systems of control and marginalisation.

Harvey's work was followed in 1991 by Fredric Jameson's magisterial *Postmodernity, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. This work famously described post-modernism as a peculiar kind of aestheticised culture which had emerged under the material conditions of what

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[65] David Harvey. *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

Mandel called "late" capitalist society.[66] In a brilliant series of analyses, Jameson looked at the commonalities and disruptions in post-modern philosophy, economics, film, painting, architecture, and many more genres. His central claim is that post-modern aesthetics still (almost paradoxically) adopts a set of principles and trope, which can be discerned in the individual artistic and cultural productions regardless of genre and form. The most prominent among these is the use of pastiche, as a way of trying almost desperately to draw some connection between the past and the increasingly disconnected present.

In the mid-1990s, the writings of Slavoj Zizek—the Elvis of Cultural theory—gained increasing prominence for his philosophical breadth and his sharp leftist critique of post-modern philosophy and culture. Against post-modern philosophy's scepticism, Zizek insisted that we needed a staunch return to the material "real", albeit, one understood in the eclectic sense implied by Zizek's Lacanian/Hegelian ontological commitments. This was because the once radically subversive quality of post-modern thinking had been co-opted by neoliberal society and contemporary capitalist dynamics, and incorporated into new ideological forms designed to repress people's emancipatory inclinations.[67] For instance, the philosophical scepticism deployed by post-modern philosophers had been transformed into a demand for tolerance of all differences because that was amenable to deepening a consumer society where "choice" in products and signifiers associated with identity became increasingly important.

The work of figures like Jameson and Zizek found attentive ears, and was in some respects, synthesised in 2009 by the late Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*.[68] This book did much to combine Jameson's Marxist analytic of post-modernity with Zizek's loose but intriguing Lacanian/Hegelian ethics. With considerable power, Fisher argued that the contemporary capitalist social order was increasingly being naturalised, making it difficult to even conceive of the possibility that the world might be any different. This Fukuyamist sentiment—that history had

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[66]Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

[67]Slavoj Zizek. *The Plague of Fantasies* (London, UK: Verso Books, 1997).

[68]Mark Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

fundamentally ended—somewhat counter-intuitively resulted in an increasingly angst-ridden society. With the possibility of real change precluded, individuals in post-modern culture were compelled to turn to the past to assemble almost mocking aesthetic representations of a time when there was sincere meaning in the world because it was, as Marx put it, possible to "change it."

Finally, Patrick Deneen's blockbuster book *The End of Liberalism* presents the most concise and deep conservative critique of (post) modernity in recent memory.[69] Deneen argues that the current malaise in culture and society, far from being an illiberal reaction, is in fact an inevitable consequence of liberalism's internal logic. Its myopic focus on means over ends, driven by the power and nihilism of a detached scientific rationality, produced a society where individual communities were gradually destroyed and people's affective attachments ripped from them. Politically, people were granted ever greater individual rights while seeing their capacity to actually enact meaningful change in society diminish to an ever greater extent. Economically, capitalist dynamics overthrew old ways of life and social mores, replacing them with a society where the customer is always right because no one cares what s/he does with her time and money. Deneen argues that in such a cultural and social context, it was inevitable that there would be some kind of reaction, much like the one we are seeing now with the rise of post-modern conservatism.

These are just some of the most prominent authors who have characterised post-modernism—though not all have called it that—as a cultural phenomenon first and foremost. More than even the post-modern philosophers we analysed earlier, these authors constitute a diverse group with many eclectic opinions and perspectives. We have seen everyone from Marxists and post-Marxists to conservative Roman Catholics and Straussians make the contention that something is unique about contemporary post-modern culture.

So what arguments, if any, unite these various thinkers? While there is some overlap between what they say—that modern society is prone to instrumentalisation, that capitalist dynamics have played a role in constituting post-modern culture, that we are witnessing the further breakdown of traditional social systems and mores in the face of

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[69] Patrick Deneen. *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

transformative cultural dynamics—the arguments they give for these overlapping positions deviate so wildly that it would be misleading to lump them together. It makes greater sense to say that these authors are united less by a set of ideas and arguments, and more by a shared outlook on contemporary post-modern culture. For a variety of different reasons, each believes that post-modern philosophy is in many senses the product of a deeper cultural malaise. The more interesting, or at least more productive, authors in this genre all associate this in some respects with changing social and cultural dynamics which go beyond individuated intellectual efforts. Following the Jamesonian language I will be referring to in the rest of the book, these authors are prone to regarding post-modernism as an emergent culture which has a complex but dynamic—dare I say dialectical?—relationship with contemporary developed societies.[70] For the purposes of this book, as will be explained later, I will refer to such developed societies as neoliberal societies. These respective terms—post-modern culture and neoliberal society—are obviously not deployed by many of the authors mentioned. But I feel they are the most accurate terms when trying to summarise the conceptual frameworks of the various authors discussed above. Post-modern culture is the dominant ideological "logic" of neoliberal society, and neoliberal societies are characterised by social, economic, and technological transformations which can birth post-modern cultures.[71] The specific character of these social, economic, and technological transformations vary in different neoliberal societies. But they have tended to produce post-modern cultures wherever these transformations occur.

This argument undermines the claims of many conservative thinkers who have long criticised post-modernism, but who are often unwilling to analyse it as a specific culture which emerges in neoliberal societies. With the exception of Bloom, Lawler, Deneen, and a few others, there have generally been very few conservative authors who have been willing to analyse post-modernism as a cultural logic. Indeed there are often very few willing to analyse post-modernism at all on its own terms. My suspicion is this is largely because interpreting it as such might lead to the conclusion that the capitalist social, economic, and technological

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[70]Fredric Jameson. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review*, Vol. 146, 1984.

[71]For the reference to the logic of neoliberalism, see Wendy Brown. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015).

transformations of neoliberalism played a substantial role in leading to the emergence of post-modernism.[72] This would obviously be an unattractive conclusion for many conservative thinkers, who may despise post-modern culture but often remain unremitting in their support of neoliberal economic policies and "free" markets.

Post-modernism as the Culture of Neoliberal Societies

In this chapter, I discussed some of the ways post-modernism has been interpreted by the scholarly community and the public at large. The two most prominent categories were interpreting post-modernism as a philosophy, and interpreting post-modernism as a culture. This leads us to one of the key claims of this book. I think that post-modern philosophy, as I understand it, is an interesting and informative variant of scepticism that can teach us a great deal about the power dynamics and social determinants of knowledge claims. My reservations about the breadth of its critical insights notwithstanding, there is much that can be profitably mined by a reasonably charitable reading of Foucault and Derrida. But the time when these authors were academically omnipresent is long past, and even in their heyday their cultural reach relative to other factors was comparatively limited. I think it is far more profitable and edifying to examine post-modernism as a culture which has emerged in tandem with the neoliberal societies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The take away from this is, of course, that the conservative criticisms of post-modernism are at their very best far too narrow and at worst misguided. Post-modernism is not first and foremost a development in academic philosophy which emerged from the universities and colonised the broader culture. In a Hegelian vein, it is closer to say that

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[72]Remarkably this has started to change quite drastically over the past few years, with many conservatives becoming increasingly critical of capitalism directly. Traditionally most conservative critiques limited themselves to moralistic injunctions against consumer culture, without analysing the underpinning structural dynamics. Some, such as Ben Shapiro, still fall into this crude vein. See Ben Shapiro. *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great* (New York, NY: Broadside Books, 2019). Later critics like Patrick Deneen and Yoram Hazony are more probing. See Patrick Deneen. *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018) and Ofir Haivry and Yoram Hazony. "What Is Conservatism?" *American Affairs*, May 2017. https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2017/05/what-is-conservatism/.

post-modern philosophers reflected their own time in thought.[73] Indeed, this was nicely captured by Jean Francois Lyotard when he observed that post-modern philosophical attitudes are now a social "condition" which individuals inhabit and replicate in their daily lives.[74] Naturally understood in this way, post-modernism also becomes a far more complex reality than conservative critics are willing to allow.

One of the upsides of this approach is that it allows us to better understand the concrete political movements which have emerged and are often associated with post-modernism, albeit in a highly ambiguous manner. By far the most prominent of these are the various identity politics movements which have come to dominate the political scene in various Western countries. Identity politics is a notoriously protean term. But it has generally been taken to refer to the various "isms" invoked, in most instances by the political left, to agitate for greater power on behalf of a traditionally marginalised group. These groups include women, trans-individuals, gays and lesbians, ethnic and religious minorities, and so on. Superficially, many blame the ascendency of these identity politics movements on the influence of left-wing academics. Certainly there is some truth to that, and many academics have been prominent proponents of greater inclusion for these marginalised groups. But it does not explain why the shift towards this type of politics has occurred in these types of societies and in this given culture. For my purposes in this book, understanding post-modernism as a culture existing in a mutually constitutive relationship with neoliberal society, provides a rich analytic for understanding how these post-modern identity movements emerged and gradually came to dominate the political optics of many developed states.

And most importantly for our purposes, by locating the source for these identity politics movements solely in the academic political left, we are unable to understand the sudden attraction of identity politics to many on the political right. It is crucial to bridge this gap in our understanding if we are to understand how the political right—apparently without warning—very quickly shifted its emphasis from universalistic support for neoliberal capitalism and negative rights and

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[73] Georg Willhelm Hegel. *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. S.W. Dyde (New York: Dover Press, 2005).

[74] Jean Francois Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

towards the unique and reactionary kind of identity politics currently reshaping the global order. We must understand how the political right came to embrace a distinctively post-modern conservatism.

To do this, we must recognise that this conservatism is similar to left-wing post-modern politics in emphasising identity as the locus for epistemic and normative authority. It is also similar to its left-wing counterparts in deploying many of the same tactics and even rhetoric. But it is distinct in both its extreme partiality and the kinds of agonistic groups, post-modern conservatism targets. Left-wing post-modern politics never entirely abandoned the universalistic basis of older progressive movements, even while it gutted their philosophical and strategic universalism. In theory left-wing identity politics movements aspired to create more pluralistic societies which would be amenable for all, though their concrete political choices and tactics often belied that aspiration. Post-modern conservatism has no such aspiration. It is characterised by a nostalgic desire to retrench the cultural influence and political power of traditionally dominant groups who feel their position atop social hierarchies has been threatened. One of the ways it does this is by construing other identities, and the social pluralism they present, as enemies and threats to the homogeneity and stability of the post-modern conservative's identity. I shall discuss how this development arose in the next chapter.

The Emergence of Post-modern Culture in Neoliberal Society

THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism is an eminently contentious term. Interestingly, most efforts to define it have been made by self-described opponents of neoliberalism. Many of the alleged neoliberals—from F.A. Hayek to Milton Friedman—have rejected the label; often preferring to be associated with more traditional labels such as "liberal."[1] This may in part be due to the strong pejorative connotations associated with the term "neoliberalism" by its opponents.[2] Neoliberalism been characterised as a distinct economic philosophy formulated by an international cabal of figures emerging from schools of thought in Vienna, Chicago, and Geneva, respectively. It has been characterised as a "logic" of cultural governance by Marxists such as David Harvey,[3] a "political rationality" by democrats such as Wendy Brown,[4] and a way of producing certain kinds of

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[1] See F.A. Hayek. "Why I Am Not a Conservative." In *The Constitution of Liberty: The Definitive Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) for a characteristic defence.

[2] A good treatment of this history is by Philip Magness. See Philip Magness. "The Pejorative Origins of the Term Neoliberalism." *American Institute for Economic Research*, December 10, 2018. https://www.aier.org/article/pejorative-origins-term-%E2%80%9Cneoliberalism%E2%80%9D.

[3] David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[4] Wendy Brown. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015).

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subjects by innumerable Foucauldian.[5] It is only in recent years that the term neoliberalism has been accepted by proponents of the neoliberal projects, with many coming out of the closet to profess their adherence to its creeds. Often this takes the form of an apologetic.[6] My suspicion is that this is due to the current ubiquity of the term. Like post-modernism itself (or existentialism before it), neoliberalism has become such a popular term in political discourse that many proponents simply feel there is little point in rejecting it any longer. Embrace it and make it yours.

But I think the deeper reason, as demonstrated by the increasingly manic defence of the international status quo by its free market defenders, is that neoliberalism is increasingly under assault from all sides of the political spectrum. This is no surprise coming from the political left. Progressives have been unfailing in their intellectual attacks against many aspects of neoliberal thinking and practice: the neoliberal theorising of the subject has been condemned as atomistic and economistic, its account of the economy ridiculed as immaterialist, the politics of neoliberalism dismissed as abetting authoritarianism (or at least quashing democratic mobilisation), and its policies characterised as destroying local cultures and replacing them with one dimensional individualistic consumers. There is something to many of these criticisms, but it is worth noting that few of them were able to generate enough influence to stymie the flood of neoliberal reforms prior to the 2008 financial crisis.

This can be chalked up to the fact that neoliberals have long been able to count on the support, or at least the tolerance, of centrist liberals and traditionalist neoconservatives in many powerful Western countries. This support was vital as neoliberal proposals began to have a real and global impact in the late 1970s, before becoming hegemonic as the century drew to a close. It was crucial to the neoliberal agenda that the reforms and ideological shift enacted by Thatcher, Reagan, and Mulroney, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, would not be rolled back through subsequent democratic efforts. Centrists and neoconservatives happily obliged. Centrist liberals, including Tony Blair, Angela Merkel, Jean Chretien, and of course Bill Clinton, may have pushed against

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[5] Nikolas Rose is a prominent example, and probably the most articulate. See Nikolas Rose. *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London, UK: Routledge, 1999).

[6] Perhaps the most famous example has been the IMFs' use of the term to describe certain detrimental trends in global inequality. See Jonathan Ostry, Prakash Loungani, and Davide Furceri. "Neoliberalism Oversold?" *Finance and Development*, Vol. 53, June 2016.

some aspects of neoliberalisation. But there was no grand retrenchment of the welfare state, no return to Johnson or Trudeauesque rhetoric about the "great" or "just" society. Conservatives such as George W. Bush, Stephen Harper, David Cameron, and Atal Vajpayee were even more acquiescent. They occasionally flirted with traditionalist language, and were of course far more vocal in pushing for the advancement of ethno-cultural projects. But by and large, globalisation carried on unabated, the liberalisation of culture advanced with increasing rapidity, and nationalist rhetoric fell by the wayside next to waves of immigration bringing cheap labour to the Western world. Both centrists and neoconservatives accepted neoliberal governance as an accomplished fact which even wealthy states could do little to change. Thatcher's dictum that "there is no alternative" seemed to become conventional wisdom (though we all know the problems with that).

Yet in the post Recessionary climate, this alliance began to fracture at its seams. And the heaviest blows came not from the political left, as many expected. Progressives did win some ground in putting inequality back on the political map, and various Occupy Movements gained considerable traction. But it was the political right that began to drift away from neoliberalism and towards new kinds of nationalism, identity politics, and denunciations of internationalism and globalisation. This might have been a transient problem, but the power of the drift was suddenly and dramatically demonstrated in 2016 when Britain voted to begin the process of withdrawing from the European Union, stunning its neoliberal Prime Minister David Cameron and leading to the complete shakeup of his Conservative party.[7] The rise of Donald Trump followed on Brexit's heals, with his promise to implement immense protectionist measures, cutting the world's largest economy off from global markets. His election led to the abandonment or renegotiation of agreements—from NAFTA to the TTP—that had bordered on holy writ for many neoliberals.

The move away from internationalism by what were formerly its most powerful proponents was consistent with the efforts of other far right post-modern conservatives across Europe. While figures like Viktor Orban occasionally introduced fiscally conservative measures reflecting neoliberal ideology, like the institution of a flat tax, other policies

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[7]See Kevin O'Rourke. *A Short History of Brexit from Brentry to Backstop* (London, UK: Pelican Books, 2019).

such as withdrawing from the European Banking system, proposing an "internet tax," immigration restrictions, and growing Euroscepticism, indicated that history had restarted and was moving in the wrong direction. Even the international institutions designed to insulate neoliberal markets from political pressures, including the WTO and the IMF, have begun moderating their tune in response to populist criticism and pressure.

I suspect it was these developments, more than any other, which led proponents of neoliberalism to increasingly embrace the term. The possibility of instituting a background set of reforms that would seem to transcend politics, the dream of Hayek and others, was increasingly a failure.[8] The secret was out, and people were angry that their governments seemed beholden to neoliberal technocrats and elites who apparently had the power to dictate policy for allegedly sovereign nation-states; Greece being perhaps the most stunning example. This necessitated emerging to do battle with a political right which seemed determined to throw away the neoliberal system it had once done a great deal to prop up. Interestingly, the developing battle has occasionally led to some Faustian bargains and makeovers with progressives who once seemed intractable enemies of the neoliberal system but now face the even more frightening spectre of post-modern conservative nationalism, from Jeremy Corbyn's elevation to proponent of European markets, to Emmanuel Macron's journey from member of the Socialist party to defender to the neoliberal status quo.

So everyone now seems to admit that neoliberalism is something distinct. Leftists view it with disdain, though many are increasingly willing to accept compromises with neoliberal policies to strategically block the emergence of far-right nationalists. Those same far right nationalists have developed their own terminology to describe neoliberals, often deploying rhetoric far harsher than even the left critics. Neoliberals are condemned as elites, rootless cosmopolitans, disloyal, out of touch, and so on. And even proponents of neoliberalism, once reticent to accept the label, have come to acknowledge and embrace the label. What then is neoliberalism?

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[8] My understanding of the project is here inspired by Quinn Slobodian. *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

Neoliberalism as the Governance of Society

> Neo-conservatism shifts onto cultural modernism the uncomfortable burdens of a more or less successful capitalist modernization of the economy and society. The neoconservative doctrine blurs the relationship between the welcomed process of societal modernization on the one hand, and the lamented cultural development on the other. The neoconservative does not uncover the economic and social causes for the altered attitudes towards work, consumption, achievement, and leisure. Consequently, he attributes all of the following - hedonism, the lack of social identification, the lack of obedience, narcissism, the withdrawal from status and achievement competition - to the domain of 'culture.' In fact, however, culture is intervening in the creation of all these problems in only a very indirect and mediated fashion.
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> Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity vs. Postmodernity."[9]

While Habermas understates the significance of culture in generating many of the problems of post-modernity, he is not wrong that many contemporary conservatives who identify with neoliberalism have been dismissive of the "economic and social" causes of post-modernity in capitalist societies. This section will rectify this problem via an analysis of neoliberal society and its peculiar dynamics of governance and transformation. For the purposes of this book, I have chosen to characterise neoliberalism as a particular kind of society with a unique form of governance and characterised by peculiar transformations.

Neoliberal society primarily emerged in developed states in the latter half of the twentieth century. I have chosen to describe it in this manner not to preclude other interpretations, such as that neoliberalism is an economic philosophy,[10] an ethics,[11] or a kind of political rationality.[12] In various different discursive contexts, neoliberalism can justifiably be termed any of these things. The primary reason to characterise it as a society with a unique form of governance characterised

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[9] Jürgen Habermas. "Modernity vs. Postmodernity." *New German Critique*, Vol. 22, 1981 at pg 7.

[10] Milton Friedman. *Capitalism and Freedom: Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[11] David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[12] Wendy Brown. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015).

by peculiar transformations is that my approach to neoliberalism will draw its primary inspiration from various forms of philosophical and sociological materialism. I am primarily interested in interpreting the material conditions and forces generated by or unleashed by neoliberalism in order to examine their impact on political culture. In particular I am interested in the social, economic, and technological transformations which have taken place within neoliberal society since its origins in the 1940s, through its heyday between 1979—when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister—and onwards to the present day. These material developments are crucial to understanding the emergence of post-modern conservatism in the early 2010s, both in themselves, and as they operate in tandem with post-modern culture.

There are some critics, notably Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who might argue that this approach risks or even embraces an essentialist approach to society.[13] On this reading, my interpretation is flawed the whole way down. The philosophical and sociological materialism I am deploying results in a discredited classical approach to understanding society as a closed totality. Laclau, Mouffe, and their followers might argue that such an approach is entirely what post-modern philosophy—at its best—warns against. But this would be to misunderstand both my intention and ambition. I am not trying to claim that society is some totality which can be examined in isolation.

Firstly, my understanding of neoliberal society is that it very much exists in a mutually determinative relationship with post-modern culture. Unlike traditional distinctions, such as the Orthodox Marxist distinction between the base and the superstructure,[14] I make no suppositions about the economy or any other material social process being determinate, even in the so called "last instance." In certain contexts, the hyperreality of post-modern culture may be even more important than neoliberal social, economic, or technological transformations.

Another criticism might be that my approach inserts a form of dualism into an otherwise materialist analysis. But that is also not my intention. Indeed, my interpretation of culture is as an intersubjective social production materialised through art, communications technologies, the media, and the development and performance of various kinds of

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[13] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Verso Press, 2014).

[14] Louis Althusser. *Reading Capital* (London, UK: Verso Books, 1997).

subjectivities. I am largely sceptical of attempts to assimilate interpretations of culture into a materialist framework. This does not mean that I am ontologically committed to materialism the whole way down. But for the purposes of this book, my approach is strictly neutral on questions about the ontological status of questionable entities; for instance, cognitive states, physical or natural laws, fundamental forces, imagined entities, and so on.

Secondly, I am not attempting to characterise society as some kind of ontological totality, material or otherwise. Society very much "does not exist" as Laclau and Mouffe put it, at least if what we mean by existence is instantiation as a singular "thing" characterised by some kind of essentialism.[15] But following Zizek, I think we must go further than just this recognition. We need to accept that the concept of society is not a static "thing" but an intersubjective cultural production—what is sometimes variously called an imaginary, or the "Big Other" in Lacanian language—which determines how people behave. Individuals in a society both create the social imaginary and are determined by it. They realise its imperatives through art, communications, the media, and their own subjective performances.[16] These in turn operate in relation to the varied material practices and social transformations which develop as a result of this behaviour and which in turn feed back into the culture. One of the upsides of recognising society as an evolutionary process is the realisation of how dangerous it is to the stability of one's subjective sense of self, one's identity as it were, once the socially produced nature of society is exposed. And one of the things that makes neoliberalism unique is that it was precisely in society where this very illusion was exposed time and time again, or as I put it later, the post-modern culture of neoliberalism "makes explicit" the destabilisation of this assumed solidity. The conservative conceit that traditional values held society together as a kind of organic and historical glue was perpetually undermined and broken down by the material transformations and related cultural productions which have occurred through time. This was eventually recognised by

[15]Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Verso Press, 2014).

[16]Slavoj Zizek. *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2014).

neoconservatives and traditionalists, who came to see that the neoliberal reforms they had supported were actually destroying what they set about to protect. However, this disillusionment did not produce some kind of awakening or efforts to generate new kinds of societies and cultures in a controlled and positive manner. Instead it resulted in a mass turn to the past as a nostalgic pastiche that could be mined to enable people to enter into an even deeper illusion. This is at the root of post-modern conservatism's emergence as a political force.

So when I discuss neoliberal "society" in this book, it by no means refers to some essentialist totality. Instead it refers to something which increasingly has come into question, both philosophically and politically. Post-modern philosophers like Laclau and Mouffe gave theoretical expression to what would ultimately become a deeper problem across the body politic, resulting in the often reactionary movements we see today.[17] To understand how this occurred, we need to first understand the roots of neoliberal society and the socio-political, economic, and technological transformations which characterise it. These transformations are both deepened by and serve to deepen post-modern culture.

Following Slobodian, I would argue that neoliberal societies have their nascent roots in the post-World War II efforts of neoliberal governments to protect, defend, and isolate the market from redistributive efforts by democratic polities and Keynesian reformers.[18] However, unlike classical liberals, neoliberal architects were well aware that this protection/defence/isolation would need to take place on a global scale and involve new forms of governance. While they applauded the emergence of a more globalised community, seeing it as an opportunity to eliminate nationalist barriers to market integration, they were concerned about the possibility that the United Nations—influenced by the demands of the newly independent developing states—would foster global Keynesianism. This was an unacceptable possibility to men like Hayek[19] and Von Mises, who became determined to orient the new international system in a more palatable direction. So they undertook a

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[17] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Verso Press, 2014).

[18] Quinn Slobodian. *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[19] See F.A. Hayek. *Law, Legislation, and Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) for the most mature espousal of Hayek's philosophy.

massive intellectual and public labour to create national and international legal systems and institutions to encase the market from these pressures, while simultaneously spurring the breakdown of nationalist barriers to capitalisation. This spurred a swathe of socio-political transformations impacting us to this day.

Initially the struggle was truly epic, as marked by the rather schizophrenic makeup of the post-War international systems. On the one hand documents like the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* seemed to enshrine just the kind of global Keynesianism the neoliberals feared. On the other hand, they were ultimately very successful in ensuring that barriers to capitalisation were swiftly liquidated. Over the protests of some of the neoconservative wing, the neoliberals largely (but not uncritically) supported the formation of the European Economic Community. Some took it as a model for what they wished to achieve globally, albeit stripped of its all too labour-friendly protocols. Then as the '60s came to an end, neoliberal reforms firmly seized control of the political agenda. Between the late '60s and the 2008 recession, one saw the birth or expansion of "free" trade agreements such as NAFTA and ASEAN, the emergence of the WTO, and the ongoing expansion of international economic law. These international developments came to profoundly transform everything from broad national polities to unknown local communities, giving birth to the specifically neoliberal societies we see today. While the intention of the neoliberal reformers were largely just to make the world safe for capital, their efforts were to generate far more complex and interconnected consequences.

As mentioned before, the primary material transformations characteristic of neoliberal society were social, economic, and technological. These are of course interconnected in various ways, making it difficult to distinguish them in practice. Nonetheless it is important for the sake of exposition to discuss each of these transformations in turn to give a relatively complete image of the way they have shaped society. As I shall conclude, the overall take away is that both social and individual identities have been profoundly shaken by the advent of neoliberal societies. Here I follow Francis Fukuyama's thesis in *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment.*[20]

[20]Francis Fukuyama. *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York, NY: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

Following the philosophers of recognition such as Hegel, Kojev, and more recently Charles Taylor, Fukuyama observes that many neoliberal thinkers overestimated their capacity to reshape individuals into a pure *homo economicus* through neoliberal governance alone. These individuals would ignore immense inequalities in resources and power so long as their individual welfare continually improved under the conditions of neoliberal society. For Fukuyama, what they failed to understand is that many of us do not just seek to improve our welfare. We also want recognition of our dignity from others. As he put it in the introduction to his book:

> …The inner sense of dignity seeks recognition. It is not enough that I have a sense of my own worth if other people do not publicly acknowledge it or, worse yet, if they denigrate me or don't acknowledge my existence. Self-esteem arises out of esteem by others. Because human beings naturally crave recognition, the modern sense of identity evolves quickly into identity politics, in which individuals demand public recognition of their worth. Identity politics thus encompasses a large part of the political struggles of the contemporary world, from democratic revolutions to new social movements, from nationalism and Islamism to the politics on contemporary American university campuses. Indeed, the philosopher Hegel argued that the struggle for recognition was the ultimate driver of human history, a force that was key to understanding the emergence of the modern world.[21]

I would add to this that given the material transformations which shaped neoliberal society, the instabilities around identity could have only been tolerated had societies been sufficiently democratic and egalitarian to enable individuals to accept this destabilisation as the price of a dynamic but relatively fair society. In other words, the unfairness of neoliberal societies would contribute to the resentment which would lead to the emergence of post-modern conservatism. One way to understand post-modern conservatism is as a demand for recognition on the part of once powerful social groups which have seen their hierarchically entrenched dignity ebb away. But rather than being replaced by a fairer and more equal world, new hierarchies took their place, driven by these social, economic, and technological transformations.

[21] Francis Fukuyama. *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York, NY: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 2018) at pg 10.

What Characterises Neoliberal Societies? I: Socio-political Transformations

The socio-political transformations characteristic of neoliberal society were perhaps the most foreseeable. Many neoliberal proponents even welcomed them. Not coincidentally these would also become the locus of post-modern conservative criticism after its rise. Most notable are the demographic transformations to society brought about by the freer movement of labour. This complemented the emergence of a more pluralistic form of politics which was welcomed by many political liberals, but came to be resented by many of the citizens who later became attracted to post-modern conservatism.[22]

The demographic changes are well known and understood. Firstly, as a result of the economic need for both partners in a nuclear family to have a job, in conjunction with changing sexual mores, women's emancipation, and the technologically driven availability of birth control, the domestic birth rates of many Western countries began to decline sharply. Secondly, ever cheaper and faster transportation technologies made the possibility of mass migration from all parts of the globe an ever more expedient **solution to?** This marked a pronounced shift away from communitarian homogeneity and towards greater ethnic and religious diversity within a given social group. The results of these transformations have been dramatic. Many developed countries are now more ethnically diverse than at any other time in their history, though the vulgar arguments of some post-modern conservatives about the "ethnic replacement" of original populations are hugely overstated. In recent years this trend has increased, as many countries have embraced substantial immigration as a means of countering a below replacement-level birth rate. It also had the effect of transforming domestic cultures. More ethnically diverse countries are increasingly multilingual, are characterised by changing cultural practices in urban areas, are religiously pluralistic, and often bear witness to profound changes in the symbolism of space. Many urban areas are now home to a diverse array of ethnic enclaves (some say ghettos) which are markedly different than others. These societies are

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[22] Relatedly, there are the spatial transformations brought about, in David Harvey's terms, to "fix" the problems posed by time for capital. This had the impact of profoundly changing the urban and rural geography of many citizens living within neoliberal societies. I will discuss these in more detail in the section on post-modern culture and space below.

also more competitive, as the free movement of global labour makes it increasingly possible to bring in skilled and unskilled workers if domestic employees are not up to snuff. While some developed states have tried to mitigate this through legislation which favours domestics, this has been subjected to intense pressure from a myriad of social and corporate groups. In the end, driven by a combination of material demands for more labour and a degree of moral pressure, developed states have gradually extended legal rights and eventually permanent citizenship to migrants and their children.

In general, neoliberal reformers also tended to support such measures, as they facilitated the free movement of labour across the globe in a manner consistent with their economic philosophy. In a world where the global economy needed to be understood as a holistic entity of which national economies were mere organs, it made little sense to privilege one population over another. They were supported in this by proponents of liberal multiculturalism, many on the political left, who argued for greater toleration and acceptance as an antidote to racism and international tensions. Figures like Jack Donnelly played their role in international law as well, arguing that populations had little to fear from ethnic change since the differences between various cultural groups had been exaggerated.[23]

The transformations discussed above pertain to enhanced immigration—legal and otherwise—which changed social conditions for domestic populations. But they are hardly the only, or even the most significant, transformations characteristic of neoliberal society. At the same time, economic and political pressures forced lawmakers to grant ever greater rights and privileges to domestic groups which had historically been marginalised; most notably women, ethnic minorities, and members of the LGBTQ community. There is no time to discuss these developments in great length here. Many of them are exceptionally well known. Second and third wave feminists challenged the dominance of patriarchal structures while demanding greater legal and material equality. Initially these demands were limited to demanding greater access to a safe and fair workplace. But eventually they were extended to calls for transformation in the dynamics of the family, divorce law, sexual relations, and so on. The feminist creed "the personal is the political" was nothing less than a cry for the full scale

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[23] Jack Donnelly. *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

transformation of patriarchal social relations, though how this was to be carried out remains a matter of debate even among feminists.

At the same time various minority rights groups—most notably the civil rights movement—advocated strongly for the rights of ethnic minorities and against the entrenchment of white legal privileges. These movements were initially successful in breaking down many of the formal legal barriers to full participation in the social process by domestic ethnic minorities. However, the long history of marginalisation and exploitation ensures that demands for greater substantive equality for minorities remain very much a contentious political issue. And finally, starting in the 1950s and 1960s, the first prominent political movement advocating for gay rights began. By the 1960s, gay rights activists were able to successfully push for the decriminalisation of homosexuality in many countries. By the mid-2000s this had extended to demanding rights to marry, adopt, and to be treated fairly in the workplace. However, members of the LGBTQ community continue to face considerable formal and informal discrimination and bigotry, and efforts are still being made to ameliorate this situation.

Each of these social developments had the effect of dramatically changing society in a comparatively short period of time. Concurrently, one saw the emergence of various theoretical approaches to justify or at least explain these new social transformations in neoliberal society. Some focused on cultural and political challenges generated by demographic change. Most of these were an attempt to explain how minorities could be incorporated within liberal democratic polities. These include various "political liberalisms" from Rawls[24] to Nussbaum,[25] and theories on political and legal multiculturalism presented by authors such as Taylor[26] and Kymlicka.[27] Other academic observers focused on the social transformations going on within

[24] See John Rawls. *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[25] Martha Nussbaum. "Political Liberalism and Respect: A Response to Linda Barclay." *SATS: The Northern European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 4, 2003 and Martha Nussbaum. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006).

[26] Best expressed in his seminal paper on the politics of recognition. See "The Politics of Recognition." In Charles Taylor. *Multiculturalism and the 'Politics of Recognition': An Essay with Commentary* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[27] Will Kymlicka. "Communitarianism, Liberalism, and Superliberalism." *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society*, Vol. 8, 1994 and Will Kymlicka. *Multiculutral Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

those polities. These include the Marxist inspired critiques of the Frankfurt School (especially Marcuse),[28] third and fourth wave feminist theories, queer theories, and of course post-modern theorists who tended to celebrate the growing capacity of individuals to develop new kinds of subjectivity and find legal recognition for them.

As mentioned, today these various critiques are often lumped together, and the significant differences between them effaced. One of the few characteristics which does unite them is their tendency to demand or defend greater social pluralism and respect for previously marginalised identities. On the political right, a growing number of libertarian and neoliberal thinkers also came to applaud many of these social developments. While they certainly had little time for radical left critiques of society, they broadly embraced social pluralism due to its associations with liberty.[29] Sometimes these libertarian and neoliberal figures supported these social developments simply because they drove the creative destructive process of establishing new values which could be commodified and affiliated with previously marginalised identities.

Of course, the proponents and defenders of social transformation, from the moderates to the radicals, were matched by a number of conservative critics who either disdained these transformations, or at least warned that they were taking place too quickly and were bringing about changes which were too comprehensive.[30] However, these critics were largely marginal figures even within broadly conservative parties. This is largely because many of the neoliberal economic imperatives driving these social transformations were supported by the leaders and majorities within conservative parties. To the extent a few savvy conservative officials were willing to recognise that many of the social changes they

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[28] Herbert Marcuse. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974).

[29] Robert Nozick is a prominent example, particularly in his pluralistic account of utopia. See Robert Nozick. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1974).

[30] Interestingly, relatively few of these authors, whether the proponents or the critics, tended to look very closely at the material dynamics generating the social conditions for this ever greater pluralism. They tended to engage exclusively in political analysis and normative apologetics or criticism. The Frankfurt school was a notable exception to this rule, but their approach fell out of favour relative to discourse analytics and other aligned theories.

disdained were driven by neoliberal economic imperatives, they either simply ignored the tension or applied characteristically modest solutions. Too much normative weight was placed on the possibilities, and as Thatcher might say, even the necessity, of neoliberal economic development. I shall discuss this below.

What Characterises Neoliberal Societies? II: Economic Transformations

As Quinn Slobodian makes clear in his excellent new book *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*, the conceit that neoliberals disdained the state in favour of markets remains largely a popular cliché.[31] Neoliberal ideologues such as Ludwig von Mises were quite happy to see the state crack down on labour disruptions, political dissent, and even to enact racist policies so long as markets were "encased" from political pressures. This is because the savviest among them—most notably Hayek—were aware that the neoliberal economic project would be tied to global transformations which would inevitably invite pushback.[32] The goal became to ensure that economic transformations were encased through the law, putting them beyond the reach of democratic polities. The tight intersection between law and economics was no small matter, as a host of international institutions—from the IMF to the WTO—assumed the role of the legal guardians of economic processes which brought about massive transformations in the lifestyles and relative wealth of many across the globe. The gamble of the neoliberal economists was that these transformations—in particular the inequality which emerged—would be broadly accepted. So would the shrinking of the welfare state, the rise of neoliberal governance and the legal encasement of the economy. This is because neoliberal economics was supposed to bring about an era of prosperity and trade freedom which would ultimately increase the aggregate welfare of all. The assumption underpinning this is that the subjects of neoliberal economics would accept

[31] Quinn Slobodian. *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[32] This comes through most clearly in his book F.A. Hayek. *The Constitution of Liberty: The Definitive Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

transformations such as growing inequality since that would seem comparatively unimportant next to improvements in their private welfare.

Determining what constitutes welfare is a notoriously complex, economic, and philosophical problem. I will therefore not engage with it as a conceptual issue, and instead limit myself to a few broad observations on this point. Along those lines, many dimensions of the neoliberal assumption were problematised by the reality of economic policies in practice. In many ways the welfare of neoliberal subjects did improve, driven in part by technological changes and in part by overall increases in development. These changes were less dramatic in developed Western countries than in developing states such as China and Korea, but they are nonetheless quantifiable and significant.[33] However, it is also true that in many respects things got worse for a significant portion of the population in developed states. The real purchasing power of many family wages declined relative to earlier generations.[34] At the same time, expenses related to home ownership, training (especially post-secondary training) to enter the workforce, and inflation increased.[35] Perhaps most dramatically of all, job security, and the related pension and benefit programs available to the previous generation, declined substantially. The percentage of individuals involved in precarious labour increased substantially, at least in the private sector.[36] This was due both to the replacement of permanent white collar jobs with short-term contract positions, and the increasing threat of relocation by internationalist firms which, more than ever before, demonstrated that their loyalty was first and foremost to shareholders rather than to host countries or employees. Globalisation

[33] David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[34] Lawrence Mishel, Elise Gould, and Josh Bivens. "Wage Stagnation in Nine Charts." *Economic Policy Institute*, January 8, 2015. https://www.epi.org/publication/charting-wage-stagnation/ and Adam Jezard. "Where in Europe Have Wages Fallen Most?" *World Economic Forum*, April 3, 2018. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/where-in-europe-have-wages-fallen-most/.

[35] Pew Research Center. "Changes in the American Workplace." *Pew Research Center: Social and Demographic Trends*, October 6, 2016. https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/10/06/1-changes-in-the-american-workplace/.

[36] Henry S. Farber. "Job Loss and the Decline of Job Security in the United States." In *Labor in the New Economy*, ed. Katharine Abraham, James Spletzer, and Michael Harper (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

and deindustrialisation dramatically changed the style of work. While this happened, many of the government programs and labour unions designed to protect workers in such positions gradually ceded ground to neoliberal policies determined to roll back the welfare state.[37] This further exposed already vulnerable people, and, with surprising speed, middle-class workers and their families, to increasing economic uncertainty and potential precarity.[38] As strikingly put by David Harvey:

[37] The Piketty Line. "How the Decline of Unions Will Shape America." *The Economist*, July 10, 2018. https://www.economist.com/united-states/2018/07/19/how-the-decline-of-unions-will-change-america.

[38] These fairly abstract observations can perhaps be concretised through the following parable. Consider a typical citizen in his or her forties in a state implementing neoliberal economic policies. When she began adult life, it was more difficult and expensive than ever to start a career. For some, they may very well have had to assume considerable levels of debt to acquire post-secondary training of some sort in order to remain competitive. For others, higher education became an unreachable goal, meaning they entered the workforce with only a high school education. This would later prove a significant barrier to economic prosperity, as it increased the likelihood of their working in a precarious and increasingly disdained industry. When our neoliberal citizen did begin her career, holding down the job was likely to be contingent upon working long hours for considerably less money and fewer benefits than she might have been led to expect given their parents' history. Even once the position was locked down, expenses were high enough to prohibit enjoying the lifestyle one might have expected. And our neoliberal citizen could expect this situation to carry on well into her 60s and even 70s. There are few opportunities to agitate for economic change, since both politicians who represent her and the corporate leaders who employ her insist that there is no alternative to the status quo. Remaining competitive is the top priority. Moreover, a growing number of laws passed by foreign or international institutions require that things carry on as is. Finally, in the back of everything is a stark warning. Try to change things too much, and the company might very well ship itself overseas, costing her job. Worse, if things change dramatically, the industry as a whole may relocate, ensuring she will never have a job in her field again. On top of that, there are now few, if any, government programs available to support her in such a situation. Even in situations where a modest welfare state does still exist—such as the United Kingdom—becoming dependent on it damages the recipient's pride, and forces her to give up some independence to the government. Her meagre savings have to be tapped into while looking for a job—if any are available—in the service industry. At the same time, immigrants continue to flood into the country—sometimes illegally—at the behest of politicians and corporate industries. It is very difficult to understand how a country which seems poorer and with few jobs available is nonetheless taking in large numbers of people, especially when they seem to have little in common with the resident population. All of this generates a considerable amount of anxiety, and eventually resentment. These simmering emotions were merely waiting for the right political outlet.

From the 1980s onwards, a massive wave of plant closures hit older industrial cities like Detroit, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Sheffield, Manchester, Essen, Lille, Turin and the like. Lest it be thought that this phenomenon was confined to the advanced capitalist countries, the losses of the traditional textile industry of Mumbai and the distress of older industrial areas of Northern China were just as violent. Whole communities that had focused on industrial work were destroyed almost overnight. Some 60,000 jobs were lost in Sheffield over a three year period in the 1980s, for example. The desolation this wrought was everywhere apparent. When people looked for explanations, they were told it was all the result of a mysterious force called globalization. When trade unions and social movements protested and sought to stem the hemorrhaging of jobs and livelihoods, they were told the mysterious force was both inevitable and unstoppable.[39]

On top of these factors we need to look at the other aspect of the neoliberal economic assumption, that inequalities would be tolerated so long as one's personal welfare increased. We have already seen how the second part of the assumption is problematic. While welfare did improve along some metrics, life became more difficult in other respects. The first part of the assumption is that inequalities generated by neoliberal policies would be inconsequential. This has certainly not proven to be the case. As documented in excellent works such as Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, the era of neoliberal governance saw inequality skyrocket in many developed states.[40] Between the 1970s and the 2010s, the share of income going to the top 1% of the population in developed states increased dramatically. In the United States, the share of income going to the top percentile increased from 12 to nearly 25%. Their share of the national wealth increased from 33 to over 40%.[41] Meanwhile, the actual incomes of many in the middle class continued to fall, with men without college degrees being the worst hit. This reflects the global concentration of wealth in the hands of the super-rich, with the wealthiest individuals often owning as much as entire segments of society. What is

[39] David Harvey. *A Companion to Marx's Capital: The Complete Edition* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2018) at pg 420.

[40] Thomas Piketty. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

[41] Joseph E. Stiglitz. "Of the One Percent, by the One Percent, for the One Percent." *Vanity Fair*, May 2011. https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2011/05/top-one-percent-201105.

more unfortunate, qua Piketty's analysis, is many of these inequalities cannot be chalked up to greater contributions of productivity on the part of the super-rich. This might have helped sustain the meritocratic arguments of crasser neoliberal proponents who lack the candidness of figures like Hayek, who at least acknowledged that his policies would produce inequalities which would have little to do with the merits or demerits of particular individuals. As Piketty indicates, in many circumstances wealth is inherited and passed on to future generations of increasingly aristocratic families, such as the Loreals and the Waltons.[42] This has exacerbated fears that we are entering into a new Gilded Age, after a brief period of greater equality generated by the two World Wars, the Depression, and the rise of the welfare state.

Affiliated with such economic inequalities is a growing sense that neoliberal elites possess excessive political power and lack any loyalty to a given polity. There is undeniably something to such claims. Scholars such as Gilens and Page have empirically demonstrated how greater levels of affluence provide concurrently greater levels of political influence in representative democratic systems.[43] These tendencies stretched the limit of neoliberal ideology's claim of a link between a meritocratic economic system and a representative liberal democratic politics, since increasingly it looked like unequal wealth became a cycle enabling some individuals to get ahead regardless of effort and to assume ever greater levels of political influence as a borderline birthright. These developments occurred in tandem with technological advances which would fundamentally transform political communication and would highlight the social and economic tensions produced all the more starkly.

WHAT CHARACTERISES NEOLIBERAL SOCIETIES? III: TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

The theoretical discourse on technology has been a hallmark of the modern era. Since at least the Renaissance's revolution in epistemology, philosophers and critics have observed that modernity has a unique

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[42] Thomas Piketty. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

[43] Martin Gilens and Benjamin. **I Page**. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics*, American Political Science Association, 2014.

relationship to technology—and its growing power—that demands special theoretical attention. Neoliberal society is no different, if anything the discourse on technological transformations has grown immensely over the past decades to address the epochal changes to everything from how human beings communicate, to the potential opportunities and dangerous posed by genetic engineering technologies such as CRISPR. These discourses have reached a variety of conclusions on the transformations wrought by technological change. They have ranged from the apocalyptic in figures such as Theodor Adorno, George Grant, and Jean Baudrillard to the triumphalist via such thinkers as Steven Pinker, Ray Kurzweil, and K. Drexler. These disputes have even come to pervade pop culture, with television shows like *Black Mirror* taking the side of the techno-sceptics and *Star Trek* presenting a more optimistic outlook.

The projected ramifications for politics are also ambiguous. Some authors argue that digital technologies will lead to a democratic boom as e-democracy enables greater civic participation than has ever before been possible. The geographical and practical limitations on democratic participation via processes such as referenda seem to be entirely effaced by the power and convenience of digital technologies. Others contend that digital technologies open avenues for new forms of authoritarianism and surveillance. More subtle critics still, such as Patrick Deneen[44] and Neil Postman[45] follow Jurgen Habermas[46] in arguing that communication and entertainment technologies are gradually eating away at the public sphere, so vital for democratic will formation. For instance, Postman observes that the gradual flattening of political discourse in conventional media has led to a dumbing down of the general citizenry.[47] Complex issues are reduced to sound bites and partisan bickering, making it increasingly difficult to depend on an informed and relatively impartial citizenry when making political decisions.

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[44] Patrick Deneen. *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

[45] Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York, NY: Penguin University Press, 2005).

[46] Jürgen Habermas. *The Theory of Communicative Action Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985) and Jürgen Habermas. *The Theory of Communicative Action Volume Two: Lifeworld and System—A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985).

[47] Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York, NY: Penguin University Press, 2005).

My position on these issues is generally consonant with the views of Marshall McLuhan; whatever normative conclusions one might reach about technological transformations, we must always avoid the instrumentalist temptation to regard technology as a neutral tool which merely enables us to pursue preexisting ends more effectively.[48] One still sees these sentiments expressed by certain liberal thinkers, for whom the neutrality of a technological mindset which emerged with the liberal vision of the self and society appears self-evident. Technological change is independently transformative. While I find the apocalyptic sentiments of Adorno, Horkheimer,[49] Grant,[50] and others to be overstated and even misanthropic, it is also difficult to accept the neo-Enlightenment optimism of figures like Stephen Pinker. I also think it is possible that new technologies could be used to engender a more informed and participatory politics in the future. But as I shall discuss below, I think we are currently seeing quite the opposite happening on many fronts. Neoliberal societies suffer from a notable democratic and epistemic deficit, largely as a result of technological transformations. Being sensitive to how this occurred is a necessary perquisite to understanding how something like post-modern conservatism might have emerged.

The sociologist Neil Postman was perhaps the most prescient analyst of how changes in communication and information disseminating technologies would play a role in the emergence of post-modern conservatism.[51] His book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* was written and published in the 1980s, and reads like prophecy today. Postman observes that the twentieth century witnessed profound transformations in the way that we communicated and shared information, particularly about politics. He claimed that, while far from the idealised bourgeois public sphere or polis sometimes idealised by figures like Hannah Arendt or Habermas,[52]

[48] Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

[49] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[50] George Grant. *Technology and Justice* (Concord, ON: House of Anansi Press, 1991).

[51] Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York, NY: Penguin University Press, 2005).

[52] Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

political communication in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was in some way superior to that of the neoliberal era. This is because increasingly literate populations often shared and interpreted social and political information through various print mediums, including newspapers, long form magazines, and of course books. While imperfect, these mediums did inspire individuals to reflect upon the complexity of social and political issues in a comparatively nuanced manner. This was reflected in the way political debates took place. Postman presents the epochal public debates between Abraham Lincoln and defenders of Southern slavery as an example. He observes that many literate Americans learned about these disputes through popular and lengthy books and articles, and that this was reflected in their patience when witnessing the extensive debates between Lincoln and his rivals. Many of these debates would go on for an entire day, addressing many facets of the issue. The public was willing to accept speakers delving into such time-devouring nuance because they had been led to expect it by the technological mediums through which they typically learnt about the issues. As McLuhan might have put it, the technological medium of print generated a kind of nuanced messaging which facilitated the emergence of a robust public sphere.[53]

Postman observes that a shift occurred in the mid-twentieth century as new technological mediums became widely available to a broader swathe of the population. As a growing number of people increasingly consumed political and social information through mediums like radio, television, and now of course the internet, it concurrently changed the way information was presented and interpreted. These new mediums enabled the development of far more dynamic and spectacular ways to disseminate information. As time went on, the internet especially enabled a broader swathe of individuals to generate new informational content. But these mediums also had the effect, as Marcuse might put it, of "flattening" social and political discourse in a manner that couldn't have been readily predicted.[54] As put by Postman, when discussing the growth of political agitation through television commercials and attack ads:

[53] Marshall McLuhan. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

[54] Herbert Marcuse. *One Dimensional Man* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964).

Because the television commercial is the single most voluminous form of public communication in our society, it was inevitable that Americans would accommodate themselves to the philosophy of television commercials. By 'accommodate,' I mean that we accept them as a normal and plausible form of discourse. By 'philosophy' I mean that the television commercial has embedded in it certain assumptions about the nature of communication that run counter to those of other media, especially the printed words. For one thing, the commercial insists on unprecedented brevity of expression. One may even say, instancy…This is a brash and startling structure for communication since, as I remarked earlier, the commercial always addresses itself to the psychological needs of the viewer… The commercial asks us to believe that all problems are solvable, that they are solvable fast, and that there are solvable through the interventions of technology, techniques and chemistry…The commercial disdains exposition, for that takes time and invites argument. It is a very bad commercial indeed that engages the viewer in wondering about the validity of the point being made. That is why most commercials use the literary device of the pseudo-parable as a means of doing their work. … Moreover, commercials have the advantage of vivid visual symbols through which we may easily learn the lessons being taught. Among those lessons are that short and simple messages are preferable to long and complex ones, that drama is to be preferred over exposition, that being sold solutions is better than being confronted with questions about problems. Such beliefs would naturally have implications for our orientation to political discourse. For example, a person who has seen one million television commercials might well believe that all political problems have fast solutions though simple measures - or ought to. Or that complex language is not to be trusted, and that all problems lend themselves to theatrical expression. Or that argument is in bad taste, and leads only to an intolerable uncertainty. Such a person may also come to believe that it is not necessary to draw a line between politics and other forms of social life…[Political figures] have become assimilated into the general television culture as celebrities.[55]

For instance, market competition between news networks inspired them to increasingly turn to sensationalist rhetoric more notable for its entertainment value than its substantive content. The demand to attract attention also compelled networks to gradually decrease the amount of time spent analysing an issue, while increasing the hyperbole

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[55] Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2005) at pg 132.

surrounding it. This resulted in the flat and hyper-partisan discourses which characterise Fox News in the United States, or HIR TV in Hungary. Moreover, growing access to the internet exacerbated this tendency. Simultaneously making available a near infinite volume of social and political material, coupled with the immense competition for attention, resulted in subscribers gradually filtering out moderate or nuanced voices in lieu of radical and superficial sloganing. Discourse gradually became framed around an increasingly partisan polarity, as tribalism flourishes in such a high intensity and low content environment. It also made fact checking increasingly difficult, as the anonymity of authors and the sheer volume of misinformation made protestations of untruth a meek antidote to a massive social problem.[56]

On top of the changes brought about by transformations in communications technologies, we also need to consider the now less important, but more subtle, ramifications of other kinds of technological

[56] This of course culminated with the Trump administration, which is almost a case study in Postmanian arguments. Within the course of a year and a half, a former reality TV star turned "Birther" conspirator went from being a political outlier to President Elect of the most powerful country in the world. Trump achieved this in spite of his outlandish rhetoric, seeming inability to concentrate on any idea for a sustained period of time, and a mercurial ideological outlook. This is because Trump understood, or at least is a product of, the political imperatives demanded by technological transformations in political communication. In this he followed Newt Gingrich, who two decades earlier had paved the way from Trumpism in America with his vulgar and hyper-partisan political showmanship. The last vestiges of a literate vanguard in the Republican Party, by that point reduced to a semblance of influence in think tanks and magazines like *The Weekly Standard* and the *National Review*, was brushed aside.

Once in power, Trump's administration became famous for its bunker mentality, ongoing campaigning, and grandstanding. Trump in particular became infamous for its vitriolic use of Twitter to attack ideological opponents, whether through boiling complex policy questions down to a few hundred characters or deploying his undeniable talent for naming and shaming ideological opponents. Attempts to argue against the vulgarity of his mannerism or the cruelty of Trumpian policies were ineffective, since the mediums used to promote Trumpism were unamenable to such literate forms of dispute. They were drowned out in the sensationalism of hyper-partisanship and spectacular political entertainment. Trump's boasts, attacks, rambling diatribes, and policy about faces could be quickly disseminated to partisans and supporters through new communication applications, many available on cell phones and other everyday devices; a development which played a key role in the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. All these developments were enabled by the emergence of incredible new forms of communication which emerged as part and parcel of the more general processes of technological transformation which characterised developed neoliberal societies.

transformations. Many of these are related to the economic transformations brought about by neoliberal capitalism theories and practices discussed earlier. As Baudrillard and others have mentioned, the development of hyperreal media has brought about transitions in both the way we produce goods and the kinds of goods we produce.[57] While it is going too far to claim that we have gradually moved towards a largely symbolic economy, there have, no doubt, been significant transitions in that direction. The movement towards post-modern economics is characterised by the gradual detachment of capital from traditional material production and commodities and towards the development of symbolic value. This is in keeping with Marx's prediction in the *Grundrisse* about the possibility that liberal democratic capitalist societies would technologically develop to the point where they could transition to an economy directed by the "general intellect" with increasingly less effort directed towards the strict materiality of nature.[58]

But Marx could not have anticipated what Baudrillard analyses with great power, which is a society where technology enables the "general intellect" to fetishise and commodify forms of symbolic capital which are almost entirely stripped of any traditional material basis. But this is increasingly the kind of economy which characterises neoliberal capitalism. The economic power of branding, advertising, and presentation has grown exponentially. Where this occurs, the traditional industries associated with local societies fall to the wayside. Industrial production has increasingly been taken over by automisation and mechanical production, thereby destroying many of the small and medium sized communities which depended on heavy industry as lifeblood. Simultaneously, countless people now work in some way for the various "culture industries" discussed with great power by Adorno.[59] These individuals produce symbolic commodities whose value often exceeds the value of commodities produced by industrial labour. This heightens the tension between those engaged in traditional industries and the hip and mostly urban

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[57] Jean Baudrillard. *Screened Out* (London, UK: Verso Press, 2014).

[58] Karl Marx. *Grundrisse: Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1973).

[59] Theodor Adorno. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London, UK: Routledge, 1991).

generations living in mega-cities and producing value which older generations may consume, but have difficulty understanding and appreciating.[60]

This brings to a conclusion my brief analysis of neoliberal society and the socio-political, economic, and technological transformations which have characterised it over the past several decades. Obviously a great deal more could be said about any of these transformations; my analysis here has only scratched the surface of a vast and multifaceted set of problems. I have focused my attention on those transformations which I feel are most responsible for the emergence of post-modern conservatism in developed states. To understand why, we will need to take a deeper look at the nature of post-modern culture. As mentioned earlier, post-modern culture developed in tandem with neoliberal society as part of a mutually constitutive dynamic. And it helped generate the kinds of agitation which now characterize politics in developed states. Understanding how this is so is crucial to understanding the emergence of post-modern conservatism.

"Everything That Is Solid Melts into the Air": Post-modern Culture and the Commodification of Spheres of Life

Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of

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[60]These processes have even extended beyond the traditional forms of work to what was once called the private sphere. There is now intense pressure put on individuals, especially those working in culture industries, to transform their private lives into a symbolic commodity which can be used to solicit attention and financing. The optics of such a transformation have deepened the divide between those engaged in industrial practices and still wish to live "authentic" lives rooted in tradition, and those who easily mesh with the demands of symbolic commodification required in the new, technologically driven forms taken by neoliberal capitalism. This is exacerbated by the requirement that many participants in culture industries live unrooted lives, willing to relocate as necessary and therefore having few loyalties to any geographic place in particular. This has helped to calcify the belief of post-modern conservatives that they are opposed by inauthentic cosmopolitan elites who have little connection to the real world and the "real" people of the heartland. What is missed is the extent to which it is technological transformations, many of which are embraced by post-modern conservatives, which are responsible for these developments. Moreover, few recognise that the demands placed on participants in this new economy include their own strains and challenges. Many of these are associated with the more general strains imposed by the emergence of post-modern culture, which I shall discuss in the section below.

all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.[61]

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the characterisation of post-modernism as a condition, era, or cultural logic is the second of the major ways the subject has been treated by scholars. In Chapter 1, I limited myself to examining the scholarly literature while postponing the presentation of my own analysis. This was done in part to distinguish the scholarly approach to post-modern culture from what I chose to call post-modern philosophy, a new form of epistemic scepticism which primarily, but not exclusively, critiqued grand meta-narratives. By contrast, scholars of post-modern culture tended to accept that many people were becoming more sceptical, but had very different explanations of its causes and virtues. Moreover many of these scholars were highly critical of post-modernity.

Here, I am going to presume that readers largely accept this categorisation, and at least affirm that there are two distinct (but overlapping) ways to analyse post-modernism. In what follows, I am largely going to be ignoring the philosophical debates on post-modern philosophy and focusing on the impact of post-modern culture. In Chapter 1, I argued that there was little, if anything, that united scholars who look at post-modernism as a culture except perhaps the belief that it was brought about by social forces which went beyond simple intellectual efforts by a few sceptical scholars and writers. The advantage of this eclecticism is that my own presentation of post-modern culture isn't beholden to any canonical or determinative figures or tropes, as would be an interpretation of post-modern philosophy. The downside is that interpreting post-modern culture is such an immense task that it would require a separate book to do the subject proper justice. For this reason, I will not be analysing all the myriad processes and characteristics

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[61] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008) at pg 5.

of post-modern culture in this work. Instead I am going to focus on the features of post-modern culture which I think were most amenable to the emergence of post-modern conservatism. The first is the tendency of post-modern culture to culturally "make explicit"—in Robert Brandom's memorable formulation—the way in which neoliberal societies were characterised by profound transformations.[62] I will be analysing this in the current section. The second is the way in which post-modern culture made explicit how neoliberal and earlier transformations destabilised our sense of identity and belonging. This latter point is especially important, as I shall later demonstrate, it goes a long way to explaining the tremendous anxiety felt by many post-modern conservatives. I will be devoting the next section to analysing the destabilisation of identity in post-modern culture in much more detail.

Before I begin, I would like to issue one final caveat. Some analysts of post-modern culture may criticise my account by arguing that it is precisely the "ideological" function of post-modern culture to conceal both the social transformations of neoliberal society and the destabiliation of identity. They may therefore take issue with my claim that post-modern culture "makes explicit" both of these features. Instead, post-modern culture is precisely characterised by its tendency to conceal such transformations with the aim of depoliticising them. Such a position was nicely articulated by Mark Fisher in his classic *Capitalist Realism*, where he argues that post-modern capitalism is characterised by its tendency to produce disengaged spectators who keep an "ironic distance" from problems of social transformation and identity.

> …This turn from belief to aesthetics, from engagement to spectatorship, is held to be one of the virtues of capitalist realism. In claiming, as Badiou puts it, to have delivered us from the 'fatal abstractions' inspired by the 'ideologies of the past,' capitalist realism presents itself as a shield protecting us from the perils imposed by belief itself. The attitude of ironic distance proper to post-modern capitalism is supposed to immunize us against the seductions of fanaticism. Lowering our expectations,

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[62] For a good introduction to Brandom's rich theory of semantics, see Robert Brandom. "Intentionality and Language: A Normative, Pragmatist, Inferentialist Approach." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. N.J. Enfield, Paul Kockelman, and Jack Sidnell (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

we are told, is a small price to pay for being protected from terror and totalitarianism.[63]

Such a criticism would misunderstand what I am arguing. It is a prevailing tendency of all cultures and cultural productions to both conceal and reveal their underlying dynamics. In this respect, post-modern culture is no different in "making explicit" these dynamics at some moments, while concealing them through others. In this respect, post-modern culture is no different than modernism, romanticism, and so on. My position here is little different than any other form of analysis which claims to see in cultural productions the inner dynamics of a society. And indeed, there are some respects in which I am interpreting cultural productions and tendencies with an eye to their inner truth. Some cultural productions reveal a truth about the culture they are nested in despite the intention of their creators, while others—particularly great works of art—are defined by an intentional, profound, and explicit reflection of the dynamics I am talking about.

But there is another reason why we should look to post-modern culture for the explication of inner dynamics. This goes beyond just the assertion that any culture has something to teach us in that regard. Postmodern culture has unique characteristics that make the task of interpreting it a distinct enterprise particularly in the way that it tends to go about concealing its dynamics through revealing and even revelling in them. As Fisher and Jameson observe, one of the imperatives of post-modern culture is to inspire subjects to recognise social transformations and the destabilisation of identity as an aesthetic development which they should embrace. As I indicated in the section above, social transformation and the destabilisation of identity are the necessary prerequisites for establishing a prosperous neoliberal society. Rather than regard them with disdain, neoliberal citizens should embrace them as chances to develop their symbolic capital, to encounter or generate new forms of commodification and so on. To the extent neoliberal citizens are unwilling or unable to do this, post-modern culture encourages them to take an "ironic" disposition towards these developments. Until the rise of post-modern conservatism, this led to impotent forms of resistance and criticism which were largely limited to the production of alienated aesthetic politics.

[63] Mark Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009) at pg 9.

At its deepest level, even this ironic disposition itself came to be associated with neoliberal subjectivity and commodification, closing the circle and making any deep criticism exceptionally difficult. This was well articulated by Slavoj Zizek, who observed that a continuous feature of modern criticism was to be superficially critical and self-reflective, while inwardly believing that no change was truly possible.[64] By "making explicit" its own underpinning dynamics with unparalleled transparency, for a time post-modern culture succeeded in generating a sense of inexorability.[65] This made the need to conceal such dynamics, a characteristic of earlier accounts of culture and ideology, unnecessary and indeed outdated. That is, at least until the current crises revealed that discontent remained alive and well, though all too often directed in ways that remained beholden to post-modern culture.

With these preliminary remarks out of the way, let us dive into the first major tendency of post-modern culture, to make aesthetically explicit the transformations neoliberal society enacts in various spheres of life. This section opened with a lengthy quote by Marx and Engels where they discussed how capitalist societies were characterised by radical transformation unseen in other kinds of social organisations. Where earlier societies saw slow and gradual change, capitalist societies saw continuous revolutionising of the world around subjects. Whatever one thinks of their moral arguments against capitalism (more on that later), this claim strikes me as undeniably true. It was also noted by less critical figures such as Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter, who examined how the "creative destruction" of capitalism brought about continuous social transformations which were inimical to the preservation of traditional mores and ways of life.[66] As mentioned above, neoliberalism radically expedited these tendencies and brought about more transformations in a few decades than earlier societies would see over millennia of existence.

To give just one example, neoliberalism radicalised and made transparent the extent to which capitalist societies had effectively trans-valuated all values into commodities whose worth could be measured according

[64] Slavoj Zizek. *The Parallax View* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

[65] Robert Brandom. "Intentionality and Language: A Normative, Pragmatist, Inferentialist Approach." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. N.J. Enfield, Paul Kockelman, and Jack Sidnell (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[66] Joseph A. Schumpeter. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2008).

to their exchange value. Even Marx would have been stunned at the extent to which "all that was holy" become profaned through commodification. Take note of the endless articles which sought to quantify the exchange value of everything from an average human life to the worth of a human body if broken into its constituent organs and parts. This propensity was nicely traced by figures like Michael Sandel, who in *What Money Can't Buy*, speaks of the corrupting influence of commodification in contemporary neoliberal societies. This goes beyond even the coercive impact of inequalities of power and influence, and speaks most directly to why post-modern culture emerged. Its profound transformation of different spheres of life brought about a tremendous sense of desacralisation.

> [The argument from corruption] points to the degrading effect of market valuation and exchange on certain goods and practices. According to this objection, certain moral and civic goods are diminished or corrupted if bought and sold for money. The argument from corruption cannot be met by establishing fair bargaining conditions. If the sale of human body parts is intrinsically degrading, a violation of the sanctity of the human body, then kidney sales would be wrong for rich and poor alike. The objection would hold even without the coercive effect of crushing poverty.[67]

The propensity to increasingly view everything in terms of its exchange value constitutes a fundamental shift in the value systems of many Western states. For a long period of time, it was assumed that certain values were non-fungible and could not be accorded a market price. A characteristic example would be Kant's claim that each human being had an intrinsic dignity which placed them "beyond price."[68] These values posed a limit on the extent to which commodification could colonise all spheres of life, since many of these were considered sacrosanct.[69]

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[67] Michael Sandel. *What Money Can't Buy: The Tanner Lectures* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998) at pg 94.

[68] Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1964).

[69] Other examples would include the democratic belief that all children should have access to a comparable level of education, or that affirmative action should occur to ensure full civic and professional participation by individuals from a variety of different backgrounds, including from traditionally marginalised groups. While such non-fungible values could also play a role in inhibiting potentially beneficial progress—for instance, by placing

One suspects this might be at the root of some post-modern philosophers', particularly Foucault's, admiration for neoliberal doctrines.[70] The tendency to "rationalise" values by reducing them to quantifiable variables affiliated with the market can seem like a liberating development.[71] The sweeping away of traditions and value systems which posed a limit to the commodification of the social world could be seen as the ending of restrictions on certain kinds of behaviour which previously would have been morally condemned. And indeed, there is some truth to this which is likely why Foucault and others admired it. What went unrecognised was the extent to which this could have a profoundly corrosive impact on so many values that it would leave individuals feeling increasingly unmoored from both place and history. This sense of both spatial and temporal displacement—of belonging to non-places and times[72]—became a characteristic feature of neoliberal societies. As neoliberalism gradually succeeded in removing barriers to capitalist commodification, post-modern culture emerged to reflect the impact these transformations

restrictions on scientific developments and procedures which could improve human life to maintain the abstract integrity of an individual's original body—they did demonstrate that certain values were indeed beyond price. In neoliberal societies, such a limit was unacceptable. Religion, politics, and family life were all colonised with the ethos of capitalist valuation. This was perhaps best reflected in the propensity of the most radical neoliberal apologists to measure the most sacrosanct objects and institutions according to their exchange value.

[70] This appears most prominently in his lectures. See Michel Foucault. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France 1978–1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008).

[71] Max Weber. *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1958).

[72] Peter Osborne is perhaps the most articulate thinker associated with discussion of non-places. My argument would be that post-modern culture and neoliberal societies are defined by a general process transforming them in their entirety into non-places and times. But Osborne's innovative argument is to be more specific. He observes how post-modernity is characterised by the emergence of spatial and temporal configurations and structures whose purpose is entirely transient. Consider spaces such as subway stops, airports, and so on. These configurations only exist for us in a transient and fading sense, as locations we enter for a brief moment so as to transport ourselves to another space in another time. They lack the solidity of earlier spatial and temporal configurations and structures, which even if functional, had a comparatively concrete quality. This is to say nothing of the formation of so-called "digital spaces" which have further radicalised each of these propensities.

had on society. As Virillio points out, a feature of post-modern culture, often underestimated by other commentators, is the speed with which they take place.[73] In particular, it took comparatively very little time to traverse or transform the myriad spaces we inhabit compared to similar, but much less dynamic transformations in the past. Whatever the case, the picture painted by these figures is often quite damning. I will begin by examining the treatment of this phenomenon in aesthetics, before moving on to analysing it theoretically.

THE AESTHETIC REPRESENTATION OF CHANGING EXPERIENCE OF TIME, SPACE, AND IDENTITY

The many and varied productions of post-modern culture are characterised by an increasingly fractured and unstable relationship to space and time, reflecting the profound transformations being wrought across society. In post-modern cultural productions, one is presented with a world that is increasingly shrunk, and where the linear experience of time is of decreasing significance. It is also characterised by a growing feeling that identity is becoming destabilised. In this brief section, I will examine some artistic productions which treat these topics in an interesting or representative manner. My hope is, this momentary aside will help clarify some of the topics discussed in a slightly different manner than is possible in an academic volume.[74]

It was perhaps science fiction which best expressed the changes of post-modern culture. Films such as Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report* and David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*, adapted from earlier works by Phillip K. Dick and William Burroughs, respectively, reflect the social transformations of neoliberal society in two distinct manners. The first initially presents a subject who accepts the dynamics of his society, the second one who takes a position of "ironic distance" towards it.[75]

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[73] Paul Virillio. *The Information Bomb*, trans. Chris Turner (London, UK: Verso Books, 2006).

[74] I also hope that, given the dense theorising earlier in the chapter, that section provides a welcome reprieve for some readers!

[75] My decision to analyse these two science fiction films was partly inspired by Jameson's pioneering reading of the genre. See Fredric Jameson. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2005).

In *Minority Report* an officer named John Anderton—played by Tom Cruise, the superstar of neoliberal film—works for a specialised police force called PreCrime. Using psychics known as PreCogs, the officers at PreCrime can foresee an act of murder before it happens. They then intervene before the killing happens, arresting and imprisoning the "perpetrator" who has not yet done anything. Despite the proven efficiency of PreCrime in reducing murder, the world Anderton inhabits is a long way from utopian. It is ridden with low-level crime, drug use, and mass poverty. Many of the inhabitants live securely, but aware that their society is increasingly authoritarian and deterministic. Near the end of the first act, Anderton himself is accused of being the future killer of a man he's never met and goes on the run from PreCrime.

Anderton exists in a strange Deleuzian apparatus. His actions are determined not just by the weight of the past (Anderton's irresolvable loss of his son provides the character's primary motivation) and the crushing authoritarianism of present-day social structures, but by the future itself which can be analysed by carceral authorities and used to control the population for their own safety.[76] Once he recognises that he himself has been interpellated into the disciplinary matrix of the State, he becomes a Deleuzian Nomad, on the run from what he once sought to protect. But Anderton is never certain whether, despite his superior abilities and inside knowledge of PreCrime, he can actually escape the temporal trap he is caught in. The film ends on an ambiguously happy note, with Anderton being mysteriously rescued from imprisonment within a permanent dream state and very quickly defeating his myriad oppressors. The film, in a major thematic reorientation for the usually middle of the road Spielberg, plays with the themes of temporal dissociation brought about by social transformations, changing technologies, political structures, and biological evolution. As a result of these developments, the human experience of time changed, allowing some to see the future. These gifts were then appropriated and exploited by carceral authorities to subdue a frightened populace.

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[76] See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* is a much more mysterious film. Based on William Burrough's path breaking 1959 novel about heroin addiction,[77] the film plays around with various conceptions of space in a manner similar to *Minority Report's* later deconstruction of time. In *Naked Lunch* the "protagonist" William 'Bull' Lee (based on Burrough himself) is working as an exterminator in a mysterious mid-century American city. This metropolis has the feel of 1950s New York, but is nonetheless populated by myriad and fused cultures, particularly a growing LGBTQ and addict community, and occasionally even literal aliens. Lee is convinced to shoot up his bug powder by his wife Joan Lee, and, under the influence of the drug, is quickly convinced he has been set up by a mysterious cabal for a fall. His fears are confirmed when he is brought in for possession of narcotics, and is given a mission by a mysterious bug like creature who insists his wife is an agent of a foreign company known as Interzone Inc. Extremely intoxicated, Lee plays a game of "William Tell" with his wife Joan's consent and ends up killing her. He then flees to Interzone Inc., which is a pastiche like city in North Africa where he primarily interacts with expats and eccentric characters from across the globe. Many of these have alien characteristics, which, coupled with his deepening drug use, convinces Lee he remains a target. He eventually becomes involved in international drug smuggling via individuals with multiple and shifting identities, and is forced to flee again, this time to Annexia. There he reenacts the game of "William Tell" with his current girlfriend, also named Joan, and once again misses and kills her. He is subsequently welcomed into the country by Annexian authorities.

Cronenberg's movie may be unable to capture the cry of pain hurling from every part of the book, but its fantastic treatment of space—in every respect—does a great deal to showcase the hyperreal and druggy quality of post-modern spatiality. Lee inhabits a world where the traditional barriers of space—geographic, cultural, and even bodily—are breaking down. This generates what I earlier referred to as exotic nonplaces such as Interzone, a city which seems populated by the peoples of the world, existing nowhere except in the drug induced fantasias of its cosmopolitan inhabitants. The harlequin like quality of his interlocutors contrasts with Lee's inner sense of belonging nowhere, even within the

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[77]William Burroughs. *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2013).

confines of his own body. Much as his hands betrayed him, resulting in the death of his wife, and his genetics inclines him to homosexual urges he has little interest in, his remaining (?) body (the ultimate spatial site for any subject) becomes little more than an empty receptacle—almost a literal Deleuzian body without organs—for narcotics transported and developed from across the globe.[78] Like Faust before him, even this non-place carries with it too much belonging and solidity for Bull Lee to remain for long. As he was compelled to flee America, he abandons Interzone for Annexia, a grey and bureaucratic state where the spatial signifiers of difference have gradually been effaced and buried in its indistinguishable snows and plains.

What both of these films reflect is the fractured sense of world which is characteristic of post-modern culture. *Minority Report* more directly explores the sense of temporal dislocation brought about by the transformations of neoliberal society. While the world Anderton inhabits is safer than ever before, it is increasingly unequal and unfree. Technology and the compulsion for strict and efficient order has gone so far that powerful elites have even seized upon speculative powers—such as the ability to see the future—to try and keep the population in line. The result is a future where past, present, and future are so intertwined that there is no sense of dynamism or change. The system has become so efficient that it has erased its own history, much as Anderton suspects his "minority report" and the history of the psychic PreCogs have been erased. What makes Anderton unique is his willingness to hold onto history as a source of pain, but also of strength. He remains solidly linked to his past through the trauma of his son's kidnapping and murder, which in turn inspires Anderton to work against the prophecy that he is destined to become a killer in turn. The rest of the population, lacking this connection to history, has come to accept their fate due to fear of the authorities and the pacifying power of drugs and virtual entertainment.

Naked Lunch examines many of the same themes, but more through spatial metaphors and analysis. Lee is defined by the non-spaces in which he lives. The gloomy cities which he inhabits seem to have little fixed geography, and certainly nothing like a permanent set of cultural signifiers. The post-modern New York he begins in differs little from the pastiche of cultures found in Interzone; it is in effect the same meaningless

[78] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Huerley, Mark Seem, and Helen B. Lane (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1977).

locales and cosmopolitan eccentrics surrounded by semi-tropical environs. The personalities he meets in New York are in many ways more culturally varied than in Interzone, as he huddles in the comparatively wealthy and safe neighbourhoods inhabited by upper middle-class Western bohemians. Eventually even the eccentrics start to blend together. One of the most notable scenes of the movie entail his friends Hank and Martin (modelled after Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac) appearing after a night of heavy drug use, to inform Lee that his novel *Naked Lunch* is going to be published. Even his Interzone lover Joan Frost, played by the same actress who played his first wife Joan Lee, seems to occupy a space which is both geographically and metaphysically incomplete. These spatial ambiguities run right down to the liquid spatiality of the human bodies displayed in *Naked Lunch*. Throughout the film, Lee engages with myriad associates and lovers, all of whom attain little bodily permanence in his mind's eye. At points, he seems aware of the strangeness of this situation, pointing to a reflective capacity still displayed in modernist fiction and cinema. But he quickly slides back into an ironic and occasionally nihilistic acceptance of his situation, indifferent to his status as a permanent exile belonging nowhere and, by the film's end, to no one. At most he has adjusted to the fantastic spaces he now inhabits in his mind, which differ little from those he actually resides in.

These two films brilliantly reflect the sense of profound transformation which have occurred in post-modern culture, commenting on and criticising the once stable categories of time and space. Where liberal thinkers, most famously Kant, characterized time and space as enduring and universal intuitions which were common globally, *Minority Report* and *Naked Lunch* take a far more dynamic view. Technology has profoundly transformed the world of *Minority Report*, establishing new relationships to temporality for different subjects. The inability to deviate from a pre-set future, calcified by an authoritarian government which increasingly has mastered all contingencies in human life, has left many with a sense of bleak meaningless and ennui. This is exacerbated by the growing inequality of society, brought about by economic and social changes the film does not explore. Many of the characters, including Anderton even before he is a fugitive, respond through the use of technologically developed narcotics and entertainment systems. Politics has increasingly become a matter of optics and supposition, increasingly pivoting around the few unseen opportunities which might emerge in the future.

The characterisation of *Naked Lunch* is even bleaker. The middleclass subjects of New York live in squalor and uncertainty, with the world continuously destroying and reconstructing itself in rhythm. There is little sense of belonging or cultural stability, with characters increasingly sliding from one geographic space into another. Even the characters cannot occupy lives with one another with any degree of permanence. Lee unwittingly kills or rejects his family and friends, becoming ever more an exile in every meaningful sense of the word. Characters shift relationships and homes with little thought or consideration, each taking the same ironic disposition towards one another and their own fate. And of course, the turn to narcotics is presented in far starker terms than in *Minority Report*. In the former film drugs are an escape from an increasingly bleak world. In the latter, there is no meaningful difference between being high and being sober. If anything, the former reveals the utter nothingness beneath the spectacle with more bracing lucidity. It established that behind the Kafkaesque door presented in *The Trial*, there is truly nothing to find. The deep discovery is that there is no higher meaning, it is the fantasy that there must be a higher meaning which truly drives us. This conceit is the social ideology which holds the disparate spaces of the world together, and which narcotics effortlessly wipe away.

Post-modern Culture and Changing Relationships to Space

These movies (and their affiliated works in print) demonstrate what Jameson and Harvey both describe as the spatial and temporal shifts characteristic of post-modern culture within neoliberal societies (or late capitalism as it were). Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* analyses spatial shifts, particularly, how architectural developments reflect the new ways in which individuals within post-modernity perceive and inhabit more dynamic and fluid spaces.[79] Like Burroughs and his interpreter Cronenberg, Jameson recognises that within post-modernity, our relationship to space has been transformed to such an extent that new aesthetic forms were developed precisely to

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[79]Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

make sense of it. In the field of architecture, the austere gigantism of modernism, with its rigid assertion of certainty, gave way to the eclectic and pastiche-like forms of post-modern culture. This took many forms. Some architects developed more fluid and unsymmetrical forms to break from the linearity of modernist conceptions. Others fused different culture traditions together, giving rise to bizarre and even vaudevillian structures. Perhaps the most obvious include Las Vegas and Euro-Disneyland Land, the latter of which Baudrillard saw as the culmination of his arguments about the symbolic taking over the real.[80] Both Vegas and Euro-Disneyland present spatial structures drawing inspiration from cultures throughout the world, but with little fidelity to any of them. They are commodified and transformed into spectral attractions, museum pieces in a post-modern culture which has abandoned spatial fidelity and localisation to appropriate the forms of different spaces.

While his analysis is brilliant, the concrete ramifications of these spatial shifts are under-analysed in Jameson's work. He tends to focus on relatively high-end analysis. We are brought much more to earth in Harvey's analysis. In *The Condition of Postmodernity*[81] and *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*[82] *I*, Harvey observes how neoliberal societies are defined by the rapid destruction and recreation of living spaces, under pressure from the myriad transformations discussed in the section above. This is particularly true of social and economic transformations. Harvey notes that within post-modern culture, cities are not so much concrete places of permanent habitation as fluid spaces undergoing constant changes. Of course all earlier places of habitation were characterised by change. But what is noteworthy about post-modern culture is the extent and rapidity of these changes. Changing demographics, from the influx of new cultures to the rise and fall of economic classes, can shift the nature of neighbourhoods and boroughs in the course of a few decades. The rise and fall of new industries and retailers, part of the creative-destruction of neoliberal capitalism prophesised so accurately by Schumpeter, is even more dramatic. Harvey notes how capitalist competition between industries and retailers can

[80] Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Fraser Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

[81] David Harvey. *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

[82] David Harvey. *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

completely change the composition of entire cities in a very short period of time.[83] His most prominent example is the city of Baltimore, long the subject of racist opinions castigating it as the black waste bin of lily-white Washington, DC. Harvey observes how a combination of racist post-segregation housing programs, shifting industrial focus towards tourism and the affiliated gentrification, and a desire to modernise all functioned to fundamentally change the makeup of Baltimore in less than three decades. The city went from being a working-class town defined by racial tensions, to one presenting the relatively hollow image of a successful and flashy urban space near the sea.[84] This brought in the usual suspects—a combination of hipsters, corporate elites, and high-end service industries—to the refurbished town square, while exiling the actual residents to decaying suburbs and all the associated demographic problems.[85]

The creative-destruction of spatial areas is even more dramatic in the countryside where many post-modern conservatives draw their support. Urbanisation and economic globalisation have transformed rural life, bringing about shrinking populations and rapidly shifting industries. The result has been a transparent decline of rural spaces, many of which have been long abandoned by neoliberal governments. For many rural people, these changes have resulted in their being forced to choose between staying in an often declining space, or moving to the cities where they are further exposed to entirely new modes of life. In particular, it is in the cities that they are more fully exposed to the compression of cultures one sees in a globalising context and which is increasingly the norm in any post-modern urban space.

[83] The sense of spatial dissociation this provokes cannot be adequately chalked up to a sense of urban anomie, which is a modernist problem highlighted by authors such as Durkheim and Arendt. For Harvey, the feelings of post-modern instability **are not just provoked by the loneliness** and isolation characteristic of modernist urban space.

[84] David Harvey. *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

[85] In fictional form, post-modern authors like Don DeLillo developed complex and moving histories of these shifts in modern classics like *Underworld*. This book traces the way **new spaces of refuge have (had)?** been created in the United States before the turn of the century (nineteenth, twentieth or twenty-first?), leaving the citizens of advancing neoliberal societies increasingly afloat in a world they no longer recognise.

Post-modern Culture and Changing
Relationships to Time

The new relationship to time associated with post-modernity is perhaps more complex and less obvious than what one sees spatially. Charles Taylor observes in *A Secular Age* that modernity's conception of time was characterised by its linearity, as best exemplified in the Newtonian inspired ontologies of figures like Benjamin Franklin and later in the more sophisticated teleological visions of figures like Hegel and Marx.[86] This one dimensional[87] linearity was appropriate to the progressive historical vision of the era, and persists today in defenders of modernity such as Stephen Pinker. It contrasts with the conception of time one saw in earlier cultures, such as Greco-Roman and Christian culture. In both of these cultural settings, time was conceived as something akin to the "moving image" of eternity, forming a dualistic system. The time of human life was related in some fundamental sense to the eternity apprehended by God, and significant political consequences were derived from this. For a number of reasons, modernity's conception of time became far more fractured, giving rise to the post-modern temporalities one sees in our culture today.

Unfortunately the shift between modernist and post-modern conceptions of time remains undertheorised. As observed by figures like Osborne,[88] much of modern critical theory has turned to examining space at the expense of time, in part as a needed reaction against the fixation on temporality shown by early twentieth-century figures like Bergson[89] and Heidegger.[90] The "global village" of McLuhan isn't just a new kind of space, it signifies a world where time no longer has the kind of significance it did except to private individuals. While we cannot escape the phenomenological relationship we have with time, we can change our relationship to other conceptions of temporality.

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[86]Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

[87]Herbert Marcuse. *One Dimensional Man* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964).

[88]Peter Osborne. *The Politics of Time—Modernity and the Avant Garde*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Verso Books, 2011).

[89]Henri Bergson. *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001).

[90]Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*, trans. Jogn Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1962).

The most obvious is the way the relationship of time to geographic space has changed. Here David Harvey, who, following Marx, has capably analysed the way in which modern neoliberal societies attempt to "overcome space through time."[91] This has impacted people who have experienced the neoliberalisation of society, particularly in terms of work. As mentioned, the sense of precarity created by an increasingly migratory capital, and workers for that matter, is just one effect. One can also consider the ways in which people are increasingly encouraged to produce commodities which are immaterial and entirely transient, even banal. As Harvey puts it in *The Condition of Postmodernity*:

"In the realm of commodity production, the primary effect has been to emphasize the values and virtues of instantaneity (instant and fast foods, meals, and other satisfactions) and of disposability (cups, plates, cutlery, packaging, napkins, clothing, etc.) The dynamics of a 'throwaway' society…began to become evident during the 1960s. It meant more than just throwing away produced goods (creating a monumental waste-disposal problem), but also being able to throw away values, life-styles, stable relationships, and attachments to things, buildings, places, people, and received ways of doing and being. These were the immediate and tangible ways in which the "accelerative thrust in the larger society" crashed up against the "ordinary daily experience of the individual."[92]

According to Harvey, post-modern culture changes our relationship to time through this process of creating disposables. This is consistent with Virillio's observation that post-modern culture is one where "speed" assumes greater and greater prominence. Greater speed is associated with efficiency, and therefore an ability to control and manipulate a given situation in line with our pre-established values. This is well reflected in *Minority Report* where the capacity to know the future establishes a culture of such rapidity that events can be predicted and manipulated even before they happen. Put more generally, what figures like Virillio[93] and Harvey draw our attention to is the way that post-modern culture frames a new relationship with temporality. The cultural consequences of this

[91] David Harvey. *The Limits to Capital: New and Fully Updated Edition* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2006).

[92] David Harvey. *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990) at pg 286.

[93] Paul Virillio. *The Information Bomb* (London, UK: Verso Press, 2006).

have been to conceive of time in a manner that is substantially different from that of the moderns and their Enlightenment forebears.

Nonetheless it does not constitute some kind of return to the Ancient and medieval conceptions of time, as some post-modern conservatives such as Peter Lawler occasionally imply.[94] Rather, overcoming space through time has brought about a compressed conception of the world in which its history takes on the form of a kind of museum like pastiche. The cultures, images, aesthetics, and peoples of the world are increasingly intermixed into post-modern spaces defined by their indifference to different temporal eras. Post-modern aesthetics are a good place to look for this kind of disposition, as seen in my account of *Minority Report*. Post-modern cities especially express this kind of historical intermixing. Travel to any sufficiently large urban setting, and one can see it organised not just along ethnic and class lines, but in terms of levels of "historical development"—a fact which does not go unnoticed by the general populations relegated to the bottom level of the ladder. On some occasions, these earlier time periods are given a kind of nostalgic grandeur, becoming reinvented and re-popularised. The primary feature of both of these attitudes, whether resentment at being left behind by development or nostalgic pining for the past, is the sense of their being the culminating point to history which the world has already reached, and which it is our duty to embody. *Minority Report* exemplifies it in its gloomy sense that there is no more room for agency or significant action. The future being already mostly known reinforces the quiescence of the population, which increasingly falls into the patterned behaviour characteristic of docile populations. This signifies the deeper sense in which post-modern culture has a significant problem with historical time, which is the primary conception modernists took towards temporality more generally.

Post-modernism's relationship to a conception of historical time can be understood in many different senses. One of the most mundane is the creation of historical pastiches in architecture and aesthetics. Some of this takes on a vulgar form, but can also be associated with various forms of ecstatic enjoyment. As discussed earlier with the references to Vegas and Euro-Disneyland, the relationship of capital to history has changed profoundly. Historical vestiges like churches and tombs are reassembled into

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[94] Peter Augustine Lawler. *Postmodernism Rightly Understood: The Return to Realism in American Thought* (Lanham, MA: Rowan and Littlefield, 1999).

urban pastiches designed for spectatorship and amusement, rather than (as is often the case) worship and veneration. Or one can think of the kinds of cinema produced in post-modern culture, replete with images of Captain America of the Second World War fighting alongside the Viking son of Odin. These architectural and filmic developments make explicit the new conception of historical temporality operating within post-modern culture. Much more could be said about this. But for our political purposes, the most pressing way to understand these developments is as a sense of foreclosure, preventing individuals from engaging in any substantial acts of agency to bring something new into the world.

This tendency was best reflected in the young Fukuyama's seminal essay and book on the "end of history." These works, written at the end of the Cold War and witnessing the triumph of liberal capitalism over all formidable opponents, have often been misunderstood even by otherwise savvy and original interpreters. Fukuyama claimed that with the collapse of Communism as a viable political ideology, some form of neoliberal capitalism must now reign supreme for the remainder of human existence.[95] The great spiritual and political debates of the day were going to concern comparably technocratic matters of how large the state should be, what percentage of the GDP should go to fund social welfare programs, and so on. But the great political questions had been resolved in favour of neoliberal capitalism and liberal democratic institutions. Far from celebrating this as a mindless triumphalist, Fukuyama recognised very early on that this end to history may well prove highly stultifying and even nihilistic for many people. As he put it in the conclusion to the initial essay:

> The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed. Such nostalgia, in fact, will continue to fuel competition and conflict even in the post-historical

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[95] Francis Fukuyama. "The End of History." *The National Interest*, Summer 1989.

world for some time to come. Even though I recognize its inevitability, I have the most ambivalent feelings for the civilization that has been created in Europe since 1945, with its north Atlantic and Asian offshoots. Perhaps this very prospect of centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again.[96]

Echoing Russell Kirk's observation in *The Conservative Mind* that boredom is an underappreciated force in politics,[97] Fukuyama observed that if history restarted, it would likely be due to conservative figures dissatisfied with the affectless consumer culture of "last men" they had long fought for.[98] This was because without the kind of apocalyptic and historically significant conflicts which defined their ancestors, these conservative figures would feel they lacked a sense of thymotic recognition. Fukuyama even invoked Trump as far back as the 1990s as a figure for these kinds of personalities; an individual who has such a strong desire for thymotic recognition of his greatness that he feels compelled to project a sense of greatness and historical significance onto his accomplishments. And indeed, Corey Robin's pioneering examination of conservative thought in the 1990s, included in *The Reactionary Mind*, bears this out. Robin observes that, qua Fukuyama's predication, almost immediately following the end of the Cold War, many conservatives came to pine for the good old days of mass conflict and potential nuclear annihilation.[99] Such times produced a sense of social cohesion and belonging centred around dramatic figures—usually heroic white men—who demonstrated strong and manly virtues. By contrast, the post-modern culture which emerged at the end of history was boring and unadventurous, lacking a genuine enemy to provoke any strong feelings or ambitions. Ironically, this relatively peaceful and prosperous society is what many conservatives from Burke onwards claimed to aspire to. But the desire to live within history and its mess proved exceptionally strong for many conservatives, who as Robin observed, found it difficult

[96] Francis Fukuyama. "The End of History." *The National Interest*, Summer 1989.

[97] Russell Kirk. *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, DC: Gateway Editions, 2016).

[98] Francis Fukuyama. *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1992).

[99] Corey Robin. *The Reactionary Mind Second Edition: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018).

to cure themselves of a mixed attraction to potential cosmic conflict.[100] The sense that history had passed them by, and left them as little more than last men concerned with profiting and polo, was unacceptable to many individuals within developed countries.[101]

The sense that history is foreclosed has undoubtedly brought about a tremendous sense of anomie on the part of many individuals. This is the point made by Mark Fisher and others in works like *Capitalist Realism*.[102] Fisher observed that in post-modern cultures, our fundamental relationship to historical time becomes dramatically transformed. One witnesses the faltering symbolic images which demonstrated the relatively linear history of a given society break down and become reinterpreted in strange ways. This is driven in no small part by the commodifying power of neoliberal economics, which as mentioned at the beginning of this section, tends to reduce all values into a market quantity.

> The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history: one effect of its 'system of equivalence' which can assign all cultural objects, whether they are religious

[100] At points Robin makes the more controversial claim that this is hardly an exceptional feature of conservative thought at the end of history. Rather it is a characteristic of conservatism more generally. As he observes: "Conservatives thrive on a world filled with mysterious evil and unfathomable hatreds, where good is always on the defensive and time is a precious commodity in the cosmic race against corruption and decline. Coping with such a world requires pagan courage and an almost barbaric virtue, qualities conservatives embrace over the more prosaic goods of peace and prosperity." Whether this characterisation is true is a point I will take up in the next chapter, when I analyse the history of conservative thought more carefully.

[101] This sense that history was leaving many people behind has become more acute as our sense of identity gradually became unmoored as a result of the spatial and temporal reconfigurations characteristic of post-modern culture. Fukuyama's history, with its quasi-Hegelian linearity, provides the sense of ecstatic completeness many desire from their experience of time, a belief that the past determines our experience of the present which in turn frames our expectations of the future. This is true both at an individual level, and when one looks at the society to which we belong. The fractured and strange temporalities characteristic of post-modern culture, with what Fisher calls its museum-like tendency to take the past of other societies and transform it into cultural artefacts in our own, reinforce the sense that something important is slipping away. Not only was our history at an end, but the very identity that was the product of that historical process had become a thymotic relic worthy only of commodification and ironism. I will elaborate on this below.

[102] Mark Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

iconography, pornography, or *Das Kapital*, a monetary value. Walk around the British Museum, where you see objects torn from their lifeworlds and assembled as if on the deck of some Predator spacecraft, and you have a powerful image of this process at work. In the conversion of practices and rituals into merely aesthetic objects, the beliefs of previous cultures are objectively ironized, transformed into artifacts. Capitalist realism is therefore not a particular type of realism; it is more like realism in itself.[103]

Now if the only consequence of post-modern culture was the emergence of a "museum like" approach to the symbology of the past, and a consequent ironism when considering the history of a given society, one would not expect to see radical movements like post-modern conservatism emerge. Fisher notes that this ironism is exactly what one might expect in the aesthetics and symbology of a culture that conceived of time as history, and later conceded that history was done.[104] In this sense, we had literally run out of time. Following Jameson, he observes that the reaction to this has been to ironically loot the past for aesthetic forms that can be reassembled into a nostalgic, but largely ineffective, pastiche.[105] Ironism tends to exhibit a quietist disposition rather than one provoking demands for radical change. We turn to irony when we feel unable to substantiate our identity in relation to a culture and society which reflects who we are. This alienated belief that the culture and society we inhabit does not reflect our identity is perhaps the most important factor in explaining the rise of a specifically post-modern kind of conservatism. It is to this tendency that I will now turn, to analyse the impact of post-modern culture on identity.

POST-MODERN CULTURE AND THE DESTABILISATION OF IDENTITY

The fierce debates concerning "identity politics" in many developed countries belie the fact that issues of identity have long dominated political discourse. Indeed, one could follow Derek Parfit in arguing

[103] Mark Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009) at pg 7.

[104] Mark Fisher. *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology, and Lost Futures* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014).

[105] Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

that the entirety of Western thinking pivots on a belief that the "self" and its myriad projects,[106] are "what matters" from a moral point of view.[107] Going back to Plato's concern with the "soul" and its perfection, one can trace a genealogy from his early concepts as amended and developed by the Christian church through the doctrine of individual immortality,[108] to Kant's emphasis on personal autonomy to will the moral law as a matter of practical reason, and the existential and communitarian focus on self-creation whether as an authentic person apart from the crowd or within a rich social community.[109] These philosophical and theological developments find their corollaries in political and social movements spanning millennia. Cleisthenes' revolution demanding democratic self-rule for the Athenian elite bears some resemblance to the demands of Martin Luther for the Catholic Church to cede greater power to the individual laity, which in turn can be connected to the demand for universal enfranchisement in the twentieth century. While the first is undoubtedly an elite revolution, and the second only impacted a limited area of western and central Europe, what one sees is the gradual unfolding of a belief that the distinct identity of a social group or individual imposes obligations on political communities. It may be too much to argue, with Kymlicka, that one of the themes in this development is the gradual but consistent spread of the idea that the emphasis on identity means that everyone should be allowed a form of political participation.[110] But one way to frame the discourse of Western politics is as a continuing and sometimes violent conflict over how identity is to be politically understood, and what consequences that should have for institutions and people's participation in those institutions. And indeed, the great conflict of the twentieth century was between three competing

[106] Derek Parfit. *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[107] Derek Parfit. *On What Matters: Volume One* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Derek Parfit. *On What Matters: Volume Two* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[108] Plato. *The Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1992).

[109] Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1964) and Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[110] Will Kymlicka. *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

conceptions about identity and its relationship to politics; the fascist fetishisation of the total community and its strength, the Communist emphasis on class identity and its destiny, and the liberal commitment to individual rights and a balance of powers between competing factions in society.[111]

Given this, why has identity and "identity politics" become such an issue of contention within post-modern culture? Aren't we just dealing with more of the same? A simplistic answer might be to say yes to the last question; identity has always been a problem and we are simply being ahistorical in ignoring the complex dynamics summarised above. This is true insofar as it goes, but it doesn't address the specific reasons identity has become socially problematised within post-modernity. In the section above, I discussed the way that post-modern culture explicated shifts in our approach to spatiality and temporality. These shifts were made explicit in the various products of post-modern culture, such as its art and its urban spaces. I focused on the development of a new conception of temporality over the development of new kinds of space because it is more salient to analysing the political developments that are ultimately the chief focus of this book. In particular, the sense of historical foreclosure brought about by the "end of history" and the emergence of "capitalist realism" is essential to understanding how the relationship between identity, society, and culture changed in post-modernity.[112] In this section I will look more deeply into this issue. Because the issue of identity is so consonant with Western thinking, leading some like Habermas, to label it the "philosophical discourse of modernity"[113] (and now one might add, post-modernity). I will be going back further in time to demonstrate the roots of this condition earlier in history. My argument is that post-modern culture constitutes the culmination of a long trend, making more explicit than ever the challenges posed to our sense of identity and the "sources of the self" within the developed world.[114]

[111] Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Charles R. Kesler (New York, NY: Signet Classics, 2003).

[112] Mark Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

[113] Jürgen Habermas. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

[114] Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

I will suggest that the emergence of the post-modern destabilisation of identity has its roots in three overlapping dynamics. The first is the impact that growing secularism has had in destabilising identities and values which were historically cast in religious terms. This development has often been undervalued by otherwise sharp progressive critics of post-modernism, who tend to look too exclusively at the impact of capitalist dynamics. The second is the ascendency of political liberalism as the sole mode of politics at the "end of history." Political liberalism was an emancipatory and essential development in history, and I by no means intend to condemn it.[115] But I will suggest that critics[116] have been correct in arguing that it placed too much pressure on individuals to abandon thick "sources of the self" which led to a depoliticised and largely dissatisfying sense of identity on the part of many liberal individuals.[117] Finally, I will draw on the earlier section about post-modern culture and spheres of life to argue that capitalist markets have played a role in further destabilising identity, by helping to break up traditional communities and inclining individuals to express themselves exclusively through means amenable to economic imperatives. This has been cast in many ways, from the emergence of consumer culture to the admiration for capitalism's powers of creative destruction, all of which force changes to individuals' and communities' identities and their affiliated values. Together, these three processes led to the sense of instability we feel about our identities within post-modern culture. And the anxiety and resentment this produces was exceptionally conducive to the rise of post-modern conservatism.

In Charles Taylor's excellent book *Sources of the Self*, he observes that modernity has been characterised by a loss of meaning, or what Weber would call a disenchantment of the world.[118] Individuals increasingly feel themselves to be "atomised" subjects existing in a society which

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[115] I am drawing on the insights in Rawls primarily. See John Rawls. *Political Liberalism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[116] Sandel is an especially sharp critic here. See Michael Sandel. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[117] Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[118] See Max Weber. *The Vocation Lectures*, trans. Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2004).

treats them as purely instrumental means to a set of greater ends, such as stimulating greater economic growth. As Taylor notes, these observations about modernity began very early, most notably in the work of Rousseau, and have stimulated extensive commentary on both the political left and the political right. Figures on the left make the convincing argument that capitalism destroys meaning-giving communities, and consequently argue for a broader set of rights or powers beyond liberal rights (especially property rights) while maintaining that our technocratic societies might be economically efficient but they also generate this sense of atomism and one dimensionality. Critics on the right tend to have a more eclectic array of views about capitalism, are historically sceptical of any extension of rights (except for property rights), and tend to support economic efficiency so long as it is coupled to other stabilising institutions such as religion. What is common to all of these critiques is that the claim that much of the richness of life and identity one found in the "enchanted" world of antiquity has fallen to the wayside. Modern political societies regard the world in a manner not that different from how Heidegger describes it in "The Question Concerning Technology." The world, and the people within it, are little more than "things" to be manipulated to the ends we unreflectively pursue.[119] Our identity, as it were, becomes exceptionally thin as the "background" sources of the self give way to a society completely oriented around the social imperatives of instrumental rationality.

It is impossible to discuss this development (though many have tried to find a way) without discussing the influence of secularism and the decline of religiosity. Yet this is increasingly what has happened, even by very sophisticated commentators such as Habermas (until late in his career) and Jameson. As Charles Taylor observes, one of the great stories of modernity is how in 500 years, the Western culture went from one where belief in God was the absolute norm, to one where secularism increasingly holds sway.[120] This reorientation of our spiritual inclinations transforms a—perhaps the—major "source of the self" and poses new opportunities and challenges when formulating a sense of identity in

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[119] Martin Heidegger. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1977).

[120] Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

modernity, and now, post-modernity. This story has been told in many different ways by many different figures. While there has always been atheists and various people who criticised them for undermining society and its values, it is in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the prospect of widespread secularism truly became a political issue. Some, like Marx, warmed to this development while understating its significance, others like De Maistre regarded it as flirtation with Satanic conceits. Perhaps the most even handed was Nietzsche, who recognised it as both an opportunity to emancipate people's sense of identity from religion's vulgarising tendencies, and a crisis without equal. In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche reflected on how the social "death of God" would have dramatic consequences for our sense of how the world operated, and most importantly for our purposes, our sense of identity.

> Where has God gone?' he cried. 'I shall tell you. We have killed him - you and I. We are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is it not more and more night coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we not ourselves become gods simply to be worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whosoever shall be born after us - for the sake of this deed he shall be part of a higher history than all history hitherto.[121]

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[121] Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix in Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Random House, 1974) at pg 108n.

Nietzsche's claims about the transformative influence of secularism were quickly acknowledged in their time and just as quickly forgotten by many in ours. One of the points he makes in the *Gay Science* is that our sense of identity becomes fundamentally changed in a post-God world. Monotheistic ontotheologies have always tended to place human beings at or near the very centre of creation, with Christianity being perhaps the exemplar in that God literally becomes human and dies on the cross to redeem his creation. In Christian ontotheology, drawing on the history of Platonism, human identity was centred on a soul which formed the essential core of who we truly were. This soul denoted our unique position within space and time, since we were located in the centre of the universe to battle for our eternal soul against the temptations presented to us by the temporal world. God had made us his singularly unique creation, crafted in his own image, to wage a cosmic struggle for salvation to stand for what was eternal and best within us.

Over the course of secularism's long path, this sense of identity and our unique importance second only to God faded away, taking with it a major stabilising feature of our identity. After all, what can be more stable than an immortal soul which constitutes what we truly are? Its passing took with it a great deal of the sense of enduring meaning many acquired from religious belief, as discussed above. There are a wide variety of reasons for this, well traced by Taylor in *A Secular Age*, and I will not discuss all of them. Instead I will simply highlight what Zizek observes as the three massive intellectual hits our sense of identity took with the advent of secularism.[122] The first is the realisation, following Copernicus and Galileo, that we are not in fact the centre of the universe. This immediately decentred our place in the cosmic drama and relegated us to a more contingent space in the universe. The second was the emergence of Darwinian theories of natural selection, something Nietzsche was aware of, as an explanation for the evolution of human life. While a great deal has been written about the compatibility or not of Darwinism with religion, there is no doubt that the explanation it gave about our superiority stemming mostly from adaptability to a given environment countered the more auspicious narrative put forward in

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[122] Slavoj Zizek. *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology* (London, UK: Verso Books, 1999).

Genesis. And finally, the emergence of modern psychology (I expand the label beyond just the psychoanalytic tradition favoured by Zizek) was the final blow to the old idea that there was an essential self located in something like the soul. Instead, we were left with the murky realisation that human beings were very much not master's in their own house; instead our identity is very much a process where behaviour is often driven by unconscious factors we have little control over and may be unaware of. This profoundly shook our sense of identity and the values that we affiliated with it.

This last point is especially important. The sacred world of pre-modernity was immensely flawed, and critics such as Kant were not always wrong to criticize it for its frequent adulation of power and hierarchy. It was also tightly in the grip of epistemic and ontological suppositions which have since proven theoretically untenable, whether due to philosophical deconstruction or scientific falsification.[123] But that society was inhabited by individuals whose religious sense of identity clarified the specific values by which they were to order and give significance to their lives. While stripping this away undoubtedly had the emancipatory effect of freeing reason and agency to develop new and often superior forms of life, it also left a significant hole where certainty had once existed. As Taylor artfully put it:

> …We can read the cross-pressure within the buffered identity, if we stand back from the see-sawing battle [between Orthodoxy and materialist atheism], and look at certain features of the culture as a whole. Although we respond to it very differently, everyone understands the complaint that our disenchanted world lacks meaning, that in this world, particularly youth suffer from a lack of strong purposes in their lives, and so on. This is, after all a remarkable fact. You couldn't even have explained this problem to people in Luther's age. What worried them was, if anything, an excess of 'meaning,' the sense of an overbearing issue - am I saved or damned? - which wouldn't leave them alone.[124]

[123] Immanuel Kant. "What Is Enlightenment." In *On History*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1957).

[124] Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008) at pg 303.

In some respects, the "philosophical discourse of modernity" has been framed around attempts to fill this hole,[125] without falling into the trap of "emotivism" and subjectivism,[126] which are at best relativistic and at worst, nihilistic. At a social level, many of the great political movements of modernity were marked by the rise and fall of attempts to provide a sense of meaning and direction to people's lives. As discussed in the last section, looking to history to provide an answer was a common tactic by many Marxists and even some liberals. But such attempts seem to have buckled by the time we reached the "end of history" where a certain kind of "political" liberalism came to be ascendant in societies with post-modern cultures. This brings us to the second process which conduces to the destabilisation of identity.

Liberalism gradually emerged as a distinct doctrine in the seventeenth century in the work of figures like Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza, and others. While the seeds had already been laid by Renaissance humanism, the Reformation, and other developments, there is no doubt that its rapid ascendency must have been shocking even to some of its proponents (it is hard to read the works of the American Revolutionaries and not be struck by their pride in the novelty of their creation). But almost as soon as liberalism emerged, it was attacked on a number of fronts. Some of the attackers were simply religious reactionaries determined to preserve the established order, and figures like John Bramhall have consequently been consigned to mere historical interest. What has persisted is the belief that the liberal identity is a vulgar conception of the human being. This claim has been so remarkably persistent that it has attracted adherents from wildly different ends of the political spectrum. And it persists to this day, as the popularity of works like *Why Liberalism Failed* can attest.[127]

The butt of this critique runs something like this. The liberal conception of identity is interpreted as being exemplified in an isolated but rational individual whose chief merit was his ability to step outside of

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[125] Jürgen Habermas. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

[126] This is of course the butt of Macintyre's critique of liberal modernity. See Alasdair Macintyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre-Dame Press, 1981).

[127] Patrick Deneen. *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

heteronymous ideological contexts, such as religion. The virtue of this isolated rational self was its capacity to regard the world as an instrumental means to the achievement of its private and subjectively determined ends, reached while remaining true to equally private and subjectively determined values. According to critics, liberalism has always attempted to soften or avoid the consequence of this flat identity and its associated nihilism. From Kant, through Mill, and down to Rawls, Nussbaum, and others, the liberal tradition has struggled mightily to overcome these objections. Obviously, according to the critics at least, it has failed and was always destined to do so.

To the critics, while the popularisation of the liberal identity was in some respects an emancipatory development, it also heralded a new age of vulgarity which would culminate in the rise of Nietzsche's dreaded "last men."[128] This in part explains why liberalism was condemned as horrifying as soon as it gained significant political traction. Figures on the left like Rousseau and the right like De Maistre condemned the liberal individual as a hollow, selfish being. These critiques continued with considerable success throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from figures like Marx to Nietzsche, and onwards in the work of the Frankfurt School and Heidegger. While they attacked the flatness of liberal identity and societies from many different angles, the overlapping sense that it was vulgar and unworthy persisted through all of them.

Gradually, many of these critical ideas gained considerable popular traction even in places where liberalism was ascendant. Obviously there were the great Communist revolutions of the early and mid-twentieth centuries, though curiously few occurred in countries with deeply embedded liberal or even capitalist traditions as Marx might have predicted. While important, I will not be focusing on these left critiques of liberalism here. Instead I will be focusing on the right-wing critiques, for reasons which will hopefully become obvious. By the early twentieth century, many right-wing critiques of liberalism had achieved considerable success and influence. For instance, in 1912 two French men by the names of Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde published a pamphlet: *The Young Men of Today*. They condemned the hollow liberalism of bourgeois French society, calling for a restoration of hierarchy and traditional Catholic values. Their work would not be out of place in the

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[128] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000).

post-modern conservative lexicon today. It echoed the calls of figures like George Sorel and Oswald Spengler, who similarly saw the liberal self as a decadent and one-dimensional being. These figures of course became important intellectual inspirations or supporters of the Fascist and Nazi movements which emerged in the 1920s. While these kinds of critiques lost traction with the defeat of Fascism and the advent of the Cold War, they have notably come back to prominence. Figures like Ricardo Duchesne[129] in Canada, Renaud Camus in France, and Steve Bannon in the United States fit nicely into this tradition of critics of the liberal self and society, even if they are less willing than their predecessors to completely abandon its language and rhetoric.

I think there is something to these critiques that helps explain the crisis liberalism is now facing within post-modern cultures. However overstated many of them are, there is no doubt that the kind of post-national, post-religious, consumer-oriented liberal identities which individuals were supposed to adopt at the end of history have proven dissatisfying to many. Political liberalism insisted that many of the thick "sources of the self" which people relied on to frame their identity either had to be abandoned or sufficiently depoliticised in order to maintain the stable functioning of the status quo.[130] To the extent that these identities were invoked, it was often by political leftists who demanded greater inclusion for traditionally marginalised groups within liberal policies. Admirable as these efforts were, they did little to actively challenge the liberal status quo, nor were they intended to. Often times, the sole way that these thicker "sources of the self" could be expressed was through various forms of commercialisation and consumption. This brings us to the last sense in which identity became destabilised within post-modern culture, under the pressure of capitalist markets.

The capitalist neoliberal societies which generate post-modern culture destabilise identity in a host of material ways I already examined above. I have already looked at how capitalism influences the commodification and desacralisation of different spheres of life. Now we must look more closely at the ways which market processes are conducive to generating a post-modern culture and a more individuated sense of destabilisation.

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[129]See Ricardo Duchesne. *Canada in Decay: Mass Immigration, Diversity, and the Ethnocide of Euro-Canadians* (London, UK: Blackhouse Publishing, 2017).

[130]Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

As discussed, figures as far back as Marx, were aware of these processes of destabilisation, though it took some time to get an adequate theoretical account of them up and going. The argument that capitalist dynamics have tended to culturally flatten our sense of identity and its affiliated values was put forward at least as far back as Adam Smith. In the *Wealth of Nations*, he observed that many labourers were reduced to little more than cogs in a greater machine, stripped from the more complex activities they might have engaged in agricultural societies.[131] Variations of this argument have been put forward by Marx, Max Weber, and others down to Fisher and company today. The claim is that with the reduction of life down to an instrumental pursuit of commodities, alongside the destruction of traditional communities and ways of life discussed earlier, the thick sources of our identity are gradually stripped away. Over time, we are interpellated into a culture where we are to understand our identity first and foremost as consumers and labourers. Contemporaneously, the values associated with traditionally significant identities also began to fall away under the pressures imposed by capitalist dynamics.

As with the claims about the flattening of identity, this theory has been formulated in many different ways. The most interesting is some variant of the Schumpeterian account of the "creative destruction" of values that occurs within capitalist cultures.[132] While Schumpeter's account of this was largely positive, later critics like Kenneth Gallbraith saw little to celebrate in the "affluent" society and its varied ups and downs.[133] The reduction of values down to a quantifiable set of variables strips them from the original contexts which gave them significance, and gives them a plasticity and contingency they did not have before. One might indeed ask how a set of values could be such if they can be traded in for an assumed more profitable set under the right conditions.

This brings us to the most important authors to analyse this phenomenon: the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, from Adorno up to Habermas and Seyla Benhabib. One of their observations about the rise of a "culture industry" in capitalist societies was to note its flattening

[131] Adam Smith. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations: Selected Edition* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[132] Joseph A. Schumpeter. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2008).

[133] John Kenneth Gallbraith. *The Affluent Society: 40th Anniversary Edition* (New York, NY: Mariner Books, 1998).

impact on identity. It did this through the establishment of an administered world where identity was to be expressed through various forms of commodity fetishism and consumption. For instance, in a haunting essay on "Free Time," Adorno observes that leisure periods have been structured so as to encourage individuals to spend their time consuming and seeking idle entertainment.[134] There are few social incentives to engage in more complex, and potentially edifying activities which might lead to an awareness of an individual's anomie and alienation from the society they live in. The weekend becomes a time for drinking, taking a vacation, seeing a movie, eating out, and of course shopping. This lifestyle was encouraged and catered to with the emergence of new kinds of social spaces, like shopping malls, where families would go to spend their free time, and commodities such as television and the advertisement industry. Adorno's prescient examination of cultural transformations in mid-century capitalist societies influenced the extensive analyses of post-modern culture carried out by later leftist figures such as Jameson, who famously understood post-modernism as the "cultural logic of late capitalism"[135] and Mark Fisher, who heralded the age of "capitalist realism."[136] Their convincing argument is that the particular kind of post-modern capitalism which has emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century is characterised by the final flattening of liberal-capitalist identities, combined with a growing inability to historically reflect on how this development emerged in the first place. Post-modern culture has seen this flattening of identities and the creative destructive rise and fall of new values accelerate and climax. Neoliberal societies were characterised by the gradual removal of the last significant barriers to the market, resulting in a cultural condition where everything (and everyone) was up for grabs.

Identities became increasingly determined by commercialisation and affiliated with a collection of commodities and aesthetic products. As a result, stripped of meaningful contexts which enabled individuals to develop relatively stable identities derived from thick sources, they more

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[134] See Theodor Adorno. "Free Time." In *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London, UK: Routledge, 1991) from pgs 187–197.

[135] Fredric Jameson. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review*, Vol. 146, 1984.

[136] Mark Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

and more turned to what Jameson called a "pastiche" like construction of their sense of self, using the hyperreal and heavily anesthetised tropes and symbols presented by the new technologies associated with the twenty-first-century culture industry. As Jameson observed, following Baudrillard, in earlier generations some of these hyperreal kinds of identities would be taken as a kind of parody.[137] There was still some connection to the contexts which birthed the original identities individuals were attempting to represent in their lives. But in post-modern culture, with these contexts gradually being stripped away under neoliberalism, the pastiche-like identity inhabited by individuals could no longer pretend to represent anything real. The contexts which had birthed those original identities were gone. This is particularly significant for understanding the emergence of post-modern conservatism, with its peculiar and brazen use of pastiche-like identities to agitate for reactionary political positions. I will discuss this in more detail in the chapter below.

In the realm of values, the creative-destructive process described by Schumpeter in *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* also reached a kind of climax.[138] The metaphor of creative destruction might have inspired a kind of awe in the early twentieth century, with its comparatively permanent contexts providing security to those bearing witness to emerging forms of liquidity. But the creative destructive process has become such a part of life in the twenty-first century that Marx and Engel's observation that everything that is solid melts into the air under capitalist conditions now indeed seems like prophecy.[139] The influx of new and transformative material commodities into the market—from cellphones to digital computers—impacts more than just the society we inhabit. The same is true of the consequent geographical transformations which reshape communities, shifting populations out of rural areas and in some cases turning them into suburbs and eventually multicultural urban hubs. And, as mentioned earlier, these transformations also change the way we labour and the expectations affiliated with our labour. The totality of these changes shifts our cultural sense of what constitutes the enduring mores and expectations

[137] Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

[138] Joseph A. Schumpeter. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2008).

[139] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

by which we can make our decisions and guide our lives. Our understanding of things and relationships (including relationships between both humans and material objects and between humans and humans) has undergone radical shifts in the space of a few decades, compressing a process which might have taken centuries in earlier historical periods. In a sense we are fortunately compensated (if, in the long term, falsely) by the sense that however much things change, history will remain as it is, because the neoliberal society we inhabit is the one best suited to the efficient realisation of capitalist processes.

This brings to an end my analysis of secularism, liberalism, and capitalism and how they contributed to the destabilisation of identity. My brief survey of these dynamics by no means implies that they occurred discretely. In fact, analysing how they operate together, as Patrick Deneen does in *Why Liberalism Failed*,[140] can help us get a sense of the scope of the process and why it inevitably led to the emergence of post-modern culture. Consider post-Revolutionary American society. As early as the 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville noted that the radically liberal—really Lockean[141]—society of the United States was marked by a growing subjectivist relativism which levelled out important cultural and moral distinctions between individuals.[142] This was especially true in America, where individuals saw any talk of higher values as characteristic of uppity people. This sentiment was deepened by the market culture of the United States, where fellow citizens were first and foremost customers. It therefore made sense to cater to their value systems even if you didn't share them, in turn discouraging deep reflection on the nature of value itself. The aristocratic claim that people should value ideals beyond self-interest and subjective opinion came across as elitist, and according to de Tocqueville, nineteenth-century Americans would have none of it. The combination of liberal democracy and bourgeois capitalism created immense pressures for individuals to regard themselves as self-interested subjects merely pursuing their private desires, and not inquire too deeply into why they or anyone else happened to value what they did. While

[140] Patrick Deneen. *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

[141] John Locke. *Second Treatise on Government* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1980).

[142] Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, trans. Gerald E. Bevan (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2003).

these tendencies were of course countered by the Christian religious traditions of the United States,[143] De Tocqueville often worried that religion could do little more than temporarily hold back the destabilising tide produced by liberal democracy and capitalism.[144]

This is an exceptionally unusual situation that could not have been predicted by Orthodox Marxism, which always supposed that changes in material conditions would largely determine changes in cultural and values, and that this in turn would lead to historical shifts.[145] In postmodernity our material conditions and values continue to change, but without the sense that history is capable of shifting in any significant way. We are stuck, as it were, on a treadmill. The insistence that we could inhabit the end of history, but that our material conditions and values would continue to change, was of course always an ideological conceit. But what was amazing was how many individuals bought into this sentiment, leading Hegelian-Marxists like Zizek to observe that even radical leftists were effectively Fukuyamists at the end of the twentieth century.[146] It was, after all, easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Or at least it was until we saw its neoliberal variant

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[143] And still might today even given declining religiosity.

[144] I would also argue that this insight was not lost on the early founders of classical political economy and Enlightenment philosophy. These works were often more subtle and morally oriented than that of their later disciples, including in the present day. For instance, Mandeville's Fable of the Bees and important sections of Adam Smith's *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* observe how the old traditions and religious faiths which many interpreted as holding society together were either breaking down under pressure from modernisation, or would lack a degree of legitimacy in an increasingly sceptical age. This was of course also Hume's atheistic insight in *An Enquiry into the Principles of Morals*, building upon the radical nominalism brilliantly set out in the *Treatise of Human Nature*. These developments or insights led to questions about what firm set of universal and objective values everyone might agree upon. The triumphant efforts of the classical political economists were centred on showing how subjective desire can be at the root of a stable and even vital economic and political system. This insight is found in de Tocqueville as well; "who cares which God the butcher or baker worships so long as he bakes decent bread for a low price? I do not need a virtuous baker, but a hungry one." See David Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003) and David Hume. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983). For the Smith reference, see Adam Smith. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations: Selected Edition* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[145] Louis Althusser. *For Marx* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2006).

[146] Slavoj Zizek. *The Plague of Fantasies* (London, UK: Verso Books, 1997).

come under great pressure not just from its adversaries on the political left, but from the right as well. To understand this, we need to move from the myriad complexities and vulgarities of post-modern culture to analyse the particular forms of post-modern politics.

Conclusion: Post-modern Politics

This long chapter analysed a myriad of different issues, diving into the strange characteristics of neoliberal society and the condition of post-modern culture. No doubt there is much more that could have been said about any number of the issues discussed, though that would have taken us farther afield from the purpose of explaining the rise of post-modern conservatism. I chose to emphasise those issues which were most conducive to accounting for this development. As such, my ambitions were far more limited than providing a full account of either neoliberalism or post-modern culture; both phenomena were little more than sketched out here in very broad strokes.

There were two purposes to this chapter. The first was to show that neoliberal societies were characterised by immense socio-political, economic, and technological transformations which profoundly changed the material conditions of life for many in the developed world. These transformations brought about an improvement in life along some metrics, but were also predicated on the false assumption that individuals would continue to tolerate growing inequality, precarity of all sorts, limited political participation, and the anxiety of societal-wide transformations so long as economic growth and technological improvement continued apace. This assumption was rocked by the 2008 Recession, the fiscal crisis and the imposition of austerity by the European Union states, and various migration crises. These displayed the problems of neoliberal society in their starkest colours. Compounded by the power of new technological media, this enabled the discontent which had been suppressed within neoliberal societies to express itself in more virulent and radical forms.

The second point of this chapter was to analyse post-modern culture and its varied aspects. I analysed how post-modern culture made explicit many of the transformations characteristic of neoliberal society. For instance, one witnessed the commodification of many spheres of life which had previously been held sacred. In addition, new aesthetic forms showcased how our experience of spatiality and temporality had shifted

in the late twentieth century. Spatially, the world became considerably more compressed and characterised by distinctively post-modern environments, hyperreal pastiches of cultural settings, non-places whose purposes were entirely functional, and multicultural and pluralistic urban spaces dissociated from history. This brought us to the way our experience of temporality changed within post-modern culture. In particular, I emphasised that we had reached an "end of history," the sense of which produced a great deal of anomie among populations, who increasingly related to their historical past in a museum like manner.

This in turn became significant when I looked at the effect of post-modern culture on identity. I suggested post-modern culture is the culmination of a much longer process generated by secularisation, liberalism, and capitalist dynamics. These processes left many feeling that the thick "sources" of the self they relied on had faltered. In this concluding section, I will argue that this last development goes a long way to explaining the particular form of post-modern politics which emerged starting in the 1980s' identity politics.

Identity politics is often used as little more than a dismissive slur for various forms of progressive agitation conservatives dislike, much like "post-modern neo-Marxism." And indeed, identity politics has deep roots in liberalism. Earlier I discussed how liberalism was an emancipatory movement that nonetheless corroded the thick sources of the self many individuals relied on to maintain their sense of identity, in effect, freeing themselves from the very things within which their identities were rooted. Similar tensions were latent within all of the various emancipatory movements which emerged in liberal societies, from the abolitionists to the various feminist movements. There was always a tendency to move back and forth from framing these emancipatory movements as part of the universal process of liberalisation, to very particular demands for political participation on the part of a given identity. As in all the cases where such tensions exist, concrete problems can arise (consider the dispute between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, or pro- and anti-sex feminists in the 1980s), but the tension could also become a source of dialectical drive. What is unique about the identity movements which became infamous starting in the 1980s is how they were seen as entirely abandoning the universalistic tenor of earlier movements, and doubling down exclusively on demands for political inclusion by particular

identities. This development has been criticised by many on the left and right, with Harvey's denigration of militant particularism[147] and Jordan Peterson's distaste for political categorisation being representative.[148]

These critiques of particularism misunderstand its attraction in post-modern culture. In some respects, the particularism of identity politics isn't a deviation from liberalism. It is the kind of politics which will emerge in neoliberal societies and post-modern cultures where identity is increasingly challenged and the possibility of participation in broader historical developments is precluded. Identity politics and its militant particularism is the form political agitation is bound to take at the end of history. With the horizon of more structurally transformative historical possibilities closed, individuals tend to engage in agitation for greater inclusion within the established set of institutions and laws. They reveal the past and present mechanisms which hinder or prevent them from full participation in neoliberal society. They then interpret their identity through the intersectional lens of the historically relevant features of their group which precludes them from full participation in civic and political institutions by various forms of repression. Their finding their identities within a group structure has the added effect of stabilising that sense of identity through the duration of political agitation, via a kind of "strategic essentialism" as Spivak puts it.[149] But this essentialised association with the given identity is only transient and strategic. There is an irony to this, because as soon as the repressive systems which precluded those intersecting identities from full participation are gone, the people are thrust fully into the destabilising and flattening imperatives of neoliberal society and post-modern culture. The identities deployed by identity politics exist only as long as the struggles which birth them, in a sense reflecting the point made by Judith Butler and Wendy Brown about how a "wounded attachment" to repression can be a lifeboat in the moor of post-modern destabilisation and neoliberal precarity.[150]

[147] David Harvey. *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

[148] Jordan Peterson. *Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999).

[149] Gayatri Spivak. *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[150] Wendy Brown. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

This is in no way meant to denigrate many of the important struggles for equality and participation engaged in by activists throughout the world. The drive for greater ethnic, gender, and sexual equality is exceptionally important, and can often result in very concrete benefits for the individuals who associate with those identities. My point is merely to observe the contingent purposes these identities have for the purposes of political agitation, and the way they tend to become flattened and depoliticised after the demands for inclusion are met. There is a tendency for these movements to have an ahistorical character to them. The identities they appeal too are never universal enough so they can be the locus of a broad political push to fundamentally challenge the structures of the status quo. Indeed, they are so contingent that the association with those identities tends to become less important as the repressive mechanisms through which they were constituted are challenged and reversed. This is a triumph to be sure, but success can preclude a broader interrogation of the surrounding society and culture, not to mention the inequities it abets. Moreover, as a form of politics, it becomes problematic because it makes intersectional and strategic appeals to identity the primary locus of epistemic and moral validity. This poses a danger when more reactionary variants of politics emerge willing to embody the same forms and tactics, but deploy them for less emancipatory and representative purposes.[151] Post-modern conservatism is exactly this vein of reactionary identity politics, and it is well suited to the culture and society which formed it. I will analyse why in the chapter below.

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[151] Kevin Mattson approaches post-modern conservatism from just this "tactical" perspective in a manner that is frequently illuminating. See Kevin Mattson. "The Rise of Postmodern Conservatism." In Martin Halliwell and Catherine Morley. *American Thought and Culture in the 21st Century* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

Post-Modern Conservatism in Theory and in Practice

CHAPTER 4

Who Are the Post-modern Conservatives?

The Genealogy of Post-modern Conservatism

…Questions of epistemology are deeply bound up with matters of political history. Once some realist ambitious political experiment has run aground, the realist assumptions implicit in such practice are bound to seem less persuasive…Everything would become an interpretation, including that claim itself, in which case the idea of interpretation would cancel all the way through and leave everything exactly as it was. A radical epistemology would issue, conveniently enough, a conservative politics.[1]

The term post-modern conservatism, so far as I know, originated in the work of Peter Augustine Lawler. Professor of Government at Berry College until his tragic and early death in 2017, Lawler argued passionately for the value of post-modern conservatism and its relevance in contemporary culture. While he certainly did much to popularise the term in works such as *Postmodernism Rightly Understood*[2] and in magazines such as *First Things* and *The National Review*,[3] I argue the intellectual roots

[1] Terry Eagleton. *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996) pg 13–14.

[2] Peter Augustine Lawler. *Postmodernism Rightly Understood: The Return to Realism in American Thought* (Lanham, MA: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 1999).

[3] Many of these are reprinted in excellent collections such as Peter Augustine Lawler. *Stuck with Virtue: The American Individual and Our Biotechnological Future* (Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2005).

of post-modern conservatism go considerably deeper than just Lawler's work. And as I will present it, we need to understand post-modern conservatism as more than just an idealised political stance developed in reaction to the limitations of the modernist outlook. One way to understand post-modern conservatism is as the kind of right-wing politics which emerges in neoliberal societies with post-modern cultures. I have already gone some way to presenting this position in the Chapter above, and will elaborate on this in far more specific detail below. But it is also important to note—as Lawler himself was aware—that various strands of conservatism were amenable to mutation into post-modern form under the right conditions. There is much more overlap between these strands of conservatism and post-modern culture than many on the political right may expect. This includes some of the most prominent variants of conservatism to have emerged since the modern tradition began in the eighteenth century.

Demonstrating this will necessitate a brief excursus into the genealogical roots of post-modern conservative thinking. This will inevitably involve challenges, since it would be exceptionally difficult to summarise the rich and varied complexities of conservative thought in an entire book, let alone in a few sections. As a result, I will be focusing attention mainly on those figures whose positions were amenable to mutation into post-modern forms, including many whom Frank Meyer would earlier associate with "New Conservatism," which links a critique of reason to a normative argument for traditionalist reason.[4] I will be ignoring the work of figures who do not fit into this genealogical narrative, including such seminal authors as the late Hegel and various right Hegelians, critics of modernity such as Max Weber and Leo Strauss, neoliberals such as F.A. Hayek and Milton Friedman, and libertarians such as Robert Nozick. These figures obviously had a profound impact on the intellectual history of conservatism as a whole. But since their underlying philosophies strike me as being unamenable and even hostile to mutation under post-modern cultural conditions, they will only figure in this genealogy to the extent that contrasting their positions with our main players can help us better grasp the more general historical point.

[4]Frank S. Meyer. *In Defense of Freedom and Related Essays*. With a Foreword by William C. Dennis (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1996) at pg 60.

This brings up a more important point about the dangers of generalisation and bias. My analysis of conservatism is obviously quite critical. In broad strokes, it owes a considerable debt to other critical analyses found in such works as Corey Robin's provocative book *The Reactionary Mind*[5] and Ian Shapiro's *The Moral Foundations of Politics*,[6] and less of a debt to the more favourable interpretations of conservatism found in Roger Scruton's *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition*[7] and Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*.[8] This is in part because, while not intended as a critique of political conservatism as a whole, this book is clearly not supportive of a right-wing approach to politics. This will be made clearer towards the end when I sketch out some solutions to the problems of post-modernity which draw on the tradition of progressive liberalism and deliberative democracy pioneered by figures like Kant, and continued in the current era by Rawls, Guttmann, and Nussbaum among others.

Despite these political inclinations, I attempted to be as even handed in this section as possible. This is in part because I want to suggest that conservatives who do not embrace post-modern conservatism can look for resources in the tradition to ameliorate the current vulgarising tendencies gripping post-modern conservatism. So while my general outlook on the tradition is critical, I will not follow figures like Robin in suggesting that all conservatism can be characterised as a kind of reactionary support for hierarchy, even though this is one of the features of post-modern conservatism I will highlight. My hope is that though my generalisations about certain aspects of the tradition may not be palatable to many conservatives, some will nonetheless consider the points I am trying to highlight.

[5] Corey Robin. *The Reactionary Mind Second Edition: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[6] Ian Shapiro. *The Moral Foundations of Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

[7] Roger Scruton. *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition* (New York, NY: All Points Books, 2017).

[8] Russel Kirk. *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, DC: Gateway Editions, 2016).

The Early Modern Origins of Post-modern Conservatism: Edmund Burke

The conservative political tradition can be traced back as far as any, with contemporaries drawing plausible inspiration for current right-wing positions from such ancient figures as Aristotle and Confucius. For many, the arguments of medieval schools, particularly Thomism, remain integral to defending certain forms of today's religious conservatism. In the Anglo-American tradition Richard Hooker is an important forefather, as are David Hume[9] and Robert Filmer. Locke is of course claimed by many across the political spectrum, but he is noted for formulating powerful defences of private property which would later become very influential in right-wing circles. In continental Europe, Johann Herder was instrumental in establishing the nationalist theories which would later play a key role in criticising Enlightenment progressivism, particularly in its Jacobin forms.[10] In a less Romantic vein, Montesquieu argued for a more liberal kind of prudential politics aimed at putting a check to the excesses of state power.[11] His arguments for a division of state powers would become significant for later conservatives, eager to push against Rousseauean inspired notions of the total state legitimated by the "General Will" of the entire people.

Nonetheless, I think it is safe to follow Corey Robin[12] and Russell Kirk[13] in framing Edmund Burke as the truest father of the modern conservative movement. He combined in his personality and writings, many of the qualities that conservatives would come to cherish: caution, a respect for tradition, empiricism stripped from its more radical philosophical origins, and so on. Unlike his theoretical adversaries such as Rousseau, Burke was also a long serving statesman with plenty

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[9] In particular his work on morality. See David Hume. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983).

[10] J.G. Herder. *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. Joannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Inc., 2004).

[11] Montesquieu. *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent (New York, NY: Hafner Publishing Company, 1966).

[12] Corey Robin. *The Reactionary Mind Second Edition: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[13] Russell Kirk. *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, DC: Gateway Editions, 2016).

of experience in practical politics. This is reflected in his writings, which, excepting the *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, tended to engage in speculation only when confronted with the concrete issues of the day. This of course is best reflected in his most famous writings and speeches concerning British colonialism, and the American and French Revolutions.[14] He also has the virtue of having been right, at least in the short and medium term, about the negative influence of the French Revolution. It was his analysis of the Revolution which made Burke's name permanently as a political thinker of the highest order. But as we shall see, what is remarkable about his writing is not just his insights into historical events of great import, but also his capacity to develop a particular kind of conservative outlook[15] which would later be complemented and contradicted by the more radical positions of De Maistre. Burke had a lukewarm attitude towards Enlightenment reason. He distrusted its rationalistic and uppity pamphleteers, who lacked sufficient fidelity to and respect for both tradition and traditional authorities. He recognised that in many circumstances, it was difficult to provide a truly objective philosophical defence of tradition and authority, but often seemed tempted to then retort that it was all the worse for philosophy and reason. This was because Burke's outlook was first and foremost concerned with improving the lot of a specific social identity and value system which had developed over history. This has an uncanny resemblance to certain variants of post-modern thinking and politics. As put by Terry Eagleton, who himself observed some connections between certain variants of conservatism and post-modern theory:

> Postmodernism then, is wary of History but enthusiastic on the whole about history. To historicize is a positive move and History only stands in its way. If postmodern theory really does believe that historicizing is *ipso facto* radical, then it is certainly mistaken. It assumes that historicizing belongs largely on the left, which is by no means the case. You do not need to tell the Edmund Burkes, Michael Oakeshotts and Hans-Georg Gadamers of this world that events can only be understood in their historical contexts. For a whole lineage of liberal or right wing thinkers, a sensitive attunement

[14] Edmund Burke. *A Philosophical Enquiry in the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1998).

[15] Ian Shapiro. *The Moral Foundations of Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

to historical context, to the cultural moldings of the self, to the subliminal voice of tradition and the force of the local or idiosyncratic, has been a way of discrediting what they take to be the anemic ahistorical rationality of the radicals. Burke's appeal to prescription, venerable custom and immemorial heritage is in this sense much the same as contemporary pragmatisms' appeal to our received social practices, even if the former is thinking of the House of Lords and the latter of baseball and free enterprise. For both schools of thought, history - which comes down to something like 'the way we happen to do things and have done so for rather a long time' - is a form of rationality in itself, immeasurably superior to such jejune notions as universal freedom and justice.[16]

While Burke recognised that protecting a given social identity and values might necessitate adaptation to ensure preservation, this was in some respects a necessary evil resulting from mankind's status as a temporal being. It was certainly not something to be welcomed, and indeed, Burke was among the first major modern thinkers to situate himself against both the more extreme thinking of the Enlightenment, and more ambiguously the personality and attitude its *philosophes* seemed to embody. In this respect especially, he anticipated the polemical and highly personal style that characterises post-modern conservatism. Burke is not just keen to vigorously uphold a certain political position, but to damn the idle speculators and out-of-touch philosophes who ignorantly challenge the social identities and values they ought to treat with greater respect. It is not just their ideas, but their ungrateful attitudes and rebellious personalities which are problematic.

Ironically enough, Burke was born into an unconventional family more reflective of the pluralistic future than the traditionalist past. His father was originally a member of the Church of England, and his mother was a Roman Catholic. Edmund was a practising Anglican throughout his life, while his sister accepted the faith of their mother. Burke would later follow this practice by himself marrying a Catholic. The family was part of the emerging bourgeois class of Ireland, a fact that Robin observes complicated Burke's attraction to aristocracy and the economics of inherited privilege.[17] He had a complex relationship with

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[16] Terry Eagleton. *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996) at pg 33.

[17] Paul Langford. "Edmund Burke." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Accessed January 2, 2019.

his Irish heritage, occasionally seeming to reject it when referring to himself as an "Englishman."

Burke went to college to follow in his father's footsteps by studying law, but later abandoned that pursuit to travel and write. During this time period, he published his early essays defending natural society, taking a healthy stab at writing a history of England, and examining the nature of the sublime; the latter was the closest Burke ever came to writing an abstract philosophical treatise. He entered politics in 1765 as the Member of Parliament for Wendover, and held various political appointments until 1794. Around this time he ceased writing directly about abstract issues and even the historical past, instead developing his ideas in various letters, speeches, and pamphlets.[18] It is to Burke's endless credit that he supported both the American Revolution and the cessation of British colonialism in India, something even future progressives such as J.S. Mill couldn't bring themselves to do. While he didn't initially condemn the French Revolution, he soon soured to its extremism and published *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790, unambiguously condemning the revolutionaries and their folly.[19] Interestingly, he was joined in these efforts by Jeremy Bentham, who would later become the great nemesis of British conservatives.[20] After retirement, Burke received a small pension from the British government. Nonetheless he was always short of money and apparently cantankerous that many in his social circle were better off than he was due to accident of birth rather than through merit.[21] He died in 1797 at the age of 68, having accomplished a great deal but with the British failure to halt the spread of the French Revolution hanging over him.

Burkean conservatism differs profoundly from many variants of Enlightenment thought popular among literate people at the time. But

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[18] See David Womersley. "Introduction." In Edmund Burke. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, UK: Penguin University Press, 2004) pgs xxvi–xxvii.

[19] Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[20] See Jeremy Bentham. "Anarchical Fallacies." In *Selected Writings on Utilitarianism* (Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Editions, 2000). This point of connection is highlighted by Douzinas. See Costas Douzinas. *The End of Human Rights: Critical Thought at the Turn of the Century* (Portland, OR: Hart Publishing, 2000).

[21] This observation is made by Corey Robin in his analysis of Burke's theory of value. See Corey Robin. *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018) pgs 105–132.

unusually, the difference is not so much substantial and formal as dispositional. It is also quite difficult to summarise in a theoretically clear manner, in part because Burke disliked all such attempts at abstract theorisation. His work is characterised by an eclectic array of appeals to different kinds of reasoning and authorities. This gives it a richness and breadth one does not often see in major political "theorists," but it also frustrates easy summation. This is reflected in the myriad interpretations of Burkeanism, a variety one wouldn't necessarily see when looking at someone like Locke or Kant.

Some proponents of Burkeanism have put forward that the fundamental basis of his outlook was a kind of empiricism, which in a certain respect is true. But it is an unusual and broad kind of empiricism, to invert Mill, an empiricism grounded in "man's nature" as a conservative being. Following Hazony and Haivry, we might well call it a "historical empiricism."[22] It is far vaguer than the empiricism of someone like Locke, who took in not just sensations and their affiliated material objects, but features like history, customary practice, and speculations about affective psychology. Not coincidentally, contemporary proponents of Burke such as Yoram Hazony picked up on this in their criticisms of figures like Locke.[23] Normatively Burkeanism is also very hostile to strictly empirical approaches to morality and politics which try to settle moral questions through quantification and calculation, as for instance, Condorcet and later the Utilitarians wanted.

For other commentators,[24] Burkeanism is a providentially minded theory.[25] This certainly appeals to those who want to connect Burke's conservatism to a more religious outlook. And indeed, he did write about how God reveals himself in a myriad of ways through divine providence. But Burke was also a worldly man, and even his works which deal more profoundly with the abstract and potentially transcendent characteristics of spirituality tend to celebrate these for their capacity to make us recognise

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[22] In a weird irony, I remember describing Foucault et al. as "historical empiricists" some time ago. Apparently this is a better description of true conservatives. See Ofir Haivry and Yoram Hazony. "What Is Conservatism?" *American Affairs*, May 2017. https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2017/05/what-is-conservatism/.

[23] Yoram Hazony. *The Virtue of Nationalism* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2018).

[24] See Garrett Sheldon. "Burke's Catholic Conservatism." *Intercollegiate Institute*, June 12, 2015. https://isi.org/intercollegiate-review/burkes-catholic-conservatism/.

[25] Russell Kirk occasionally put forward this interpretation, though he was more prone to characterising Burke as a prudentialist. See the analysis below.

the slight nature of our problems and the immensity of the world and society around us. There is little interest in, say, Kierkegaardian concerns about the radical and even revolutionary dimensions of religious belief.[26] Burke's providential God is always moving the world towards orderliness, and our duty is to recognise and participate in that. But we cannot truly know God, and any efforts to try will run up against insolvable epistemic and moral difficulties.

Finally, some might characterise Burke as a prudentialist first and foremost. I think this is the most accurate account, since an account of Burke as a prudential thinker can explain the eclectic but nonetheless savvy nature of his various appeals and references. Russell Kirk certainly puts forward this interpretation more frequently than the providential one.[27] For that matter so does Uday Mehta on the political left. He interprets Burke's prudentialism and broad empiricism as distinct from the stricter utilitarianism of Mill, which goes a long way to explaining why the former was more critical of rash colonial policies than the latter.[28] But prudence is a virtue which is inherently difficult to define, despite its consistent association with good sense in Burke's work. It has no foundational solidity, and provides no useful guidance when making determinations about what ends to pursue or what means to use.[29] It refers at best to an individual's set of worldly experiences, broadly understood, which are not replicable in others. As Ian Shapiro and Frank Meyer both observed, prudentialist accounts of Burkeanism can only frame it as an outlook which can be personally and collectively developed, rather than a philosophy or set of principles which can be explicated and evaluated rationally.[30] Given

[26] See Soren Kierkegaard. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) and Soren Kierkegaard. *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Alastair Hanney (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2008).

[27] Russell Kirk. *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, DC: Gateway Editions, 2016).

[28] Uday Mehta. *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[29] Like "pragmatism" prudence isn't very useful in generating a reflective account of the kind of reasoning deployed in making epistemic and normative judgements.

[30] Ian Shapiro. *The Moral Foundations of Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) and Frank S. Meyer. *In Defense of Freedom and Related Essays*. With a Foreword by William C. Dennis (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1996). Meyer's primary criticism is that Burkeanism is insufficiently principled to serve as an effective philosophy for the conservative movement.

that, prudence may well come to mean different things, a position Burke would surely agree with. But one may then ask how general might we say this prudential outlook is? As is famously observed, for Burke a prudent outlook almost always counsels caution and restraint over adventurism in the name of higher ideals. Not a few conservatives have disagreed with that position.

On my reading, Burke grounds his conservatism, and thus much of the modern conservative tradition as a whole, in an outlook which is suspicious of all strands of epistemic and normative foundationalism. Of course, this does not reach the level of post-modern scepticism one sees in contemporary conservatives. Burke's suspicion of philosophical foundationalism is balanced in a way his post-modern progeny is not. In particular, the constant counter weight to his philosophical anti-foundationalism is Burke's prudentialist appeals to various forms of authority. In certain moments, his empiricism takes on the veneer of the normative positivist, calling for individuals to respect existing social institutions and traditions, even if various sophisticates can contemplate speculative arguments against their legitimacy. At other moments, as in his work on the sublime, he switches gears and points to the efficacy of positing transcendent authorities such as God who instill reverence and humility in our natures. These sublime sources of authority are by definition inexplicable to reason; what matters is their affective function. For Burke, the sublime awakens us to the finitude of all of our projects, serving a useful function in instilling in us humility and a recognition of the limitations of our metaphysical aptitudes. But, characteristically, Burke also demonstrates a partial hostility towards the sublime. It instills us with "horror" and "pain," forcing us to recognise the inadequacy of all of our projects, traditions, and expectations. By contrast, the beautiful is so because such objects are what "flatter" us by submission to our power.[31] The beautiful is often small and contingent, but can be understood by the human mind and to a certain extent controlled by us. Unlike De Maistre, who sublimates earthly authority by associating it with the divine,[32] Burke seems to argue that the operations of civil

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[31] Edmund Burke. *A Philosophical Enquiry in the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1998).

[32] Joseph De Maistre. *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment* (London, UK: Routledge, 1965).

society are, in a sense, beautiful. We appreciate them because they provide us with a sense of regularity and permanence in a world where the sublime horror of nature always threatens to overwhelm us. However, Burke suggests that it is this mish mash of worldly beauty, civil society, and the sublimated transcendence of authority, that explains our affective loyalties. The dialectic between these is complex, but whether it is the beautiful which inspires our affection or the sublime "which inclineth men towards reverence," the end result is a certain passivity.

One can also examine the early emphasis on the personality and identity in Burke's work. His writing is novel in its constant denunciations of not just the ideas and actions, but also the character of his opponents. This is in part because he regards them as not simply attacking a given set of institutions or values, but the authorities which are foundational to our sense of identity. There is an irony here that displays why Burke's anti-foundationalism only goes so far. As mentioned, there are some respects in which Burke is more sceptical than his Enlightenment opponents, since he is continuously critical of their attempts to place reason on an unwarranted pedestal. But at the same time, his scepticism never extends to a deep critique of the sources of authority which are foundational to our sense of being a distinctive people. His criticisms of the British are always internal and faithful, the foundations never feel the barbs of the great Irish anti-foundationalist. If anything, his experiential conception of proper reasoning leads Burke to argue that there is a deeper and affectively determined point to these authorities which the pure reason of the Enlightenment misses. He offers withering criticism of those figures who seek to rationally demonstrate why these authorities can be questioned using the tools provided by metaphysical abstraction. This is also a problem when the identities and traditions associated with authority are destabilised by philosophical criticism. Burke criticises the philosophes for revering the power of pure reason, while being highly sceptical of sources of authority which stabilise our identity and which have proven themselves experientially. This is vulgar in the extreme. In the *Reflections*, he consistently criticises the vanity and hubris of these intellectual elites. He instead sides with the common people who Burke construes as more virtuous and wise, if less obviously intelligent, than the intellectual elites who feel entitled to rule. He places far more trust in good hearted patriotism and a love of what is, than speculative conjectures about what might be.

Selden, and the other profoundly learned men, who drew this petition of right, were as well acquainted, at least, with all the general theories concerning the "rights of men" [as any defenders of the revolution in France].... But, for reasons worthy of that practical wisdom which superseded their theoretic science, they preferred this positive, recorded, hereditary title to all which can be dear to the man and the citizen, to that vague speculative right, which exposed their sure inheritance to be scrambled for and torn to pieces by every wild, litigious spirit.[33]

This of course does not mean that Burke was an unthinking or uncritical proponent of authority. As with everything in the Burkean outlook, there are qualifications. These stem from the fact that, unlike some of the other figures we will look at in this Chapter, Burke's scepticism of reason only goes so far. He believes that a society of free and liberal individuals who are capable of deploying their independent reason in the pursuit of self-interest is a very good thing. And indeed, he consistently expresses admiration for British political culture and its role in developing such conceptions, though this does not mean such ideas can or should be universalised. Indeed, in an admirable series of speeches and letters, Burke is highly critical of politicians who are willing to deny such rights to their cultural offspring, the Americans. As individuals of British descent, the Americans are entitled to claim their rights as such.[34] Though even here, Burke is careful to point out that these rights develop as a result of interaction with a particular set of traditions and practices. Indeed, he is characteristically appalled by the "abstract" reasoning of those who claim that sovereign authority can supersede the affectively driven believe of those who have been brought up to feel entitled to certain rights and to a degree of self-government. The extent to which the Americans had become men of reason desiring freedom was not due to nature, but rather thanks to history and tradition, which most notably the black slaves of the South seem to lack. One of the reasons the Revolution of Jefferson and Hamilton could be justified is precisely because the Stamp and Tea acts broke from this history and its traditions.[35]

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[33] Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009) at pg 32.

[34] Edmund Burke. *A Philosophical Enquiry in the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1998).

[35] Edmund Burke. *A Philosophical Enquiry in the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1998).

Considered as a whole, I think we can see how under the right conditions the Burkean outlook might have been conducive to mutation within post-modern culture. At moments in his work Burke moves close to anti-foundationalism and epistemic scepticism. This is of course countered by his unwillingness to extend the scepticism of reason too far. More importantly, it is also countered by an unwillingness to display a weighty scepticism of authority, to extend anti-foundationalism to the foundations of political life itself. Saying that, what makes Burke's work still of a piece with the Enlightenment is his unwillingness to entirely abandon reason for *fiat*. Instead he continuously insists that a prudent experiential reason shows us that we are affectively attached to those authorities which care for us and provide us with a sense of greater identity. His distaste for Enlightenment rationalism comes from this different emphasis while the Enlightenment rationalists believed in reason and were sceptical of authority, Burke thought that right reason showcased its own limits and demonstrated the need to respect authority as it was.[36] Later conservatives—Oakeshott being the most important—would have fewer qualms about offering even this small olive branch to rationalism,[37] perhaps sensing that its fundamental ambiguity belied a deeper vulgarity within the heart of reason itself. This is where the work of Joseph de Maistre comes in.

The Early Modern Origins of Post-modern Conservatism: Joseph de Maistre

More than any other intellectual figure, De Maistre anticipated the emergence of post-modern conservatism. Isaiah Berlin famously condemned him as the father of fascism, and it is not hard to see why.[38] Where Burke was never entirely willing to abandon a commitment to Enlightenment reason, even while condemning its levelling impact and propensity to undermine faith in authority, De Maistre had no such qualms. His writings openly embrace irrationalism and often condemn reason for its role

[36] Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[37] Michael Oakeshott. *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1991).

[38] Isaiah Berlin. *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997).

in deconstructing the relevance of throne, altar, and all other traditional and vital sources of identity. De Maistre also shares the disdain of Burke for the character of Enlightenment figures, but his condemnations go well beyond the distinctively British tartness of the latter author. De Maistre loathes the Enlightenment figures, occasionally associating their ideas and actions with Luciferian pride and other apocalyptic forms of evil.[39] Saying that, as Jack Lively observes in his trenchant introduction to De Maistre's work, this hatred is always comingled with a degree of admiration and even veneration of his opponents.[40] De Maistre thought in terms of titanic binaries, and nothing stimulated his imagination and energies more than the French Revolution. It crystallised the possibility that liberal and other progressive forces could truly carry the day and remake society along more egalitarian lines, albeit, initially only through terror and destruction. De Maistre's reaction to these developments was paradoxical. He became a reactionary by taking on or inverting many of the insights of his opponents, abandoning the scholasticism of the continent and the half-way rationalism of Burke as dull blades. Instead he appealed to irrationalist faith in authority, backed by a reverence for the majestic possibility of violence.

De Maistre came from far more auspicious beginnings than Burke. While Burke was an up and comer from a bourgeois family, which may well account for his partial sympathy for liberal rationalism, De Maistre was manor born. His father started out as a Senator in Savoy and was later promoted to Count by the King of Piedmont-Sardinia. He received a good education with the Jesuits, and later trained in law at the University of Turin. De Maistre followed in his father's footsteps and became a Senator. Unfortunately, the French Revolution threw his life into chaos. Initially a very tepid liberal in his youth, De Maistre had supported the efforts to get Louis XVI to convene the estates general, probably because as a landowner in France he stood to gain from such efforts.[41]

[39] Joseph De Maistre. *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment* (London, UK: Routledge, 1965).

[40] See Jack Lively. "Introduction." In Joseph De Maistre. *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment* (London, UK: Routledge, 1965).

[41] I am drawing a great deal on Berlin's seminal essays on De Maistre's biography and thinking. See Isaiah Berlin. "The Counter Enlightenment." In *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar,

But the Revolution's ambitions grew entirely disproportionate to his modest reformism, and De Maistre quickly emerged as its most venomous critic. He spent the rest of his life working for the King of Piedmont-Sardinia in exile, being forced to flee from country to country as the Revolutionary and later Napoleonic armies swept aside the aristocracies of Europe one after another. De Maistre eventually settled in St. Petersburg as the Ambassador to the Russian Empire, writing a sequence of works in political theory and (largely religious) philosophy. After the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, he returned to Savoy, serving as Minister of State in Turn until his death in 1821.[42] One suspects that after an extreme lifetime of high drama, a man of De Maistre's nervous temperament might have taken some consolation in seeing the status quo restored (temporarily of course).

Even more than Burke, it is exceptionally difficult to situate De Maistre's philosophical opinions on a clear foundation. While he was trained as a Jesuit, there is little of the sober and scholastic ruminations of Thomism in his work. There is some of Loyola's reverence for Church authority, but little connection to the Church father's spiritual concerns. Indeed, there is very little interest in the nature of God and spirituality generally across De Maistre's work. His outlook was one of hostility and conflict, rather than argument and apology. As a result, there was little interest in consistency in his writings. De Maistre took himself to be an intellectual defender of the Ancient Regime, and he was concerned to crush its enemies by any means necessary. In his *Considerations on France*, he selects historical facts to present the King as a benevolent monarch one moment, then decries his unwillingness to use violence and destroy the Revolutionaries the next.[43] In the *St. Petersburg Dialogues*, one gets some moderately interesting speculations on ontology and epistemology, but always in the service of a largely uncritical

Straus and Giroux, 1997) and Isaiah Berlin. "Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism." In *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Knopf, 1991).

[42] See Jack Lively. "Introduction." In *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment*, ed. Joseph De Maistre (London, UK: Routledge, 1965) at pg 2.

[43] Joseph De Maistre. *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment* (London, UK: Routledge, 1965).

defence of Christian approaches to theodicy, etc.[44] He condemned the Revolution and its violence as the inexorable and logical consequence of Enlightenment thought one moment, often barely concealing a degree of reverence for its earth shattering glory and willingness to do all that was necessary to achieve its ends. The next moment, De Maistre condemns the folly of believing that human conceits can truly influence God's plan, castigating the revolutionaries as tiny and irrelevant specks next to the majesty of divine reason and its representatives on earth—the monarchy and aristocracy. Little effort is made to assemble these divergent concepts into some coherent position. In many ways De Maistre anticipated the reasoning of post-modern conservatism in selecting those ideas which spoke to his identity and affiliated values, without much concern for rationalising justifications or logical coherence.

Unlike Burke however, De Maistre is far more ideologically pure and clear at the extreme edges of his outlook. Burke still argued that there was a reason for the emergence of traditions and authorities, but that this must be recognised through experiential prudence demonstrating the affective association between these traditions and authorities and the identities of those who submitted to them. De Maistre is far more willing to argue that there was an irrationalist basis of these attachments. In his *Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions and Human Institutions*, he concedes that these affective attachments are merely that—based on emotion—and that it is any attempt to rationally make the justification more explicit that brings societies to ruin.

> Some of the men of this age seem to me to raise themselves at moments to a hatred for Divinity, but this frightful act is not needed to make useless the most strenuous creative efforts: the neglect of, let alone scorn for, the great Being brings an irrevocable curse on the human works stained by it. Every conceivable institution either rests on a religious idea or is ephemeral. Institutions are strong and durable to the degree that they partake of the Divinity. Not only is human reason, or what is ignorantly called philosophy, unable to replace those foundations ignorantly called superstitions, but philosophy is, on the contrary, an essentially destructive force.[45]

[44] Joseph De Maistre. *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment* (London, UK: Routledge, 1965).

[45] Joseph De Maistre. *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment* (London, UK: Routledge, 1965) at pg 71.

This comment appears in his essay "Considerations on France" written in 1796 near the peak of the Revolutionary wars, when it became apparent that the French were not going to buckle under the assaults of the aristocratic European powers. It therefore has a relatively shrill tone. But De Maistre never abandoned this fundamentally irrationalist commitment to the mystical roots of society. While he was eventually willing to accept a place for reason via the empirical sciences, feeling they produced useful goods and enabled us to better meet human needs, human reason had no business analysing the foundations of political order. When it dared to tread in that direction, it had to be sternly dismissed and even attacked with violence if necessary. While De Maistre was willing to grant God a more complex role as the guarantor of justice in the world, he makes it clear that God's authority is as terrifying as it is loving. His God never abandons the world, but he shows it little mercy when people deviate from the providential plan established.

Following from this, De Maistre believes that reason has no real place in determining our epistemic and normative beliefs. This is because reason, when applied to epistemological and normative questions, can only ever undermine respect for stabilising authority, and intolerable situation which should only ever be met with reactionary violence. Authority is here understood in a totalising way, with the authority figure sharing a kind of identity with their subjects through the maintenance of social order and tradition. Like God, the loving father figure of the monarch is Janus faced, benevolent when obeyed and unquestioned, but a figure of terror when faced with intellectual or concrete dissent. The irrationalist basis of authority meant that too much reason could dissolve the affective attachments and require tragic but necessary violence. This is true even if many or most individuals in the state wish for regime change. Ponder the remarkable passage in his essay "Considerations on France" where he almost welcomes the death of millions as a just punishment for the execution of the French monarch.[46]

> …every offense committed against sovereignty, in the name of the nation, is always to a greater or lesser degree a national crime, since it is always to some degree the fault of the nation if any faction whatever is put in a position to commit the crime in its name. Thus, although no doubt not all Frenchmen have willed the death of Louis XVI, the immense majority

[46] Joseph De Maistre. *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment* (London, UK: Routledge, 1965).

of the people have for more than two years willed all the follies, injustices and offenses leading up to the catastrophe…Now, every national crime against sovereignty is punished swiftly and terribly; that is a law without exception…Each drop of Louis XVI's blood will cost France torrents; perhaps four million Frenchmen will pay with their lives for the great national crime of antireligious and antisocial insurrection, crowned by regicide.[47]

This might simply seem like pure reactionary vitriol, but there is a concealed point here. De Maistre is essentially assimilating the identity of the "nation" with that of its rightful authority figures. These figures exist as the mortal Being which heads the nation, and in many respects provides the form for the nation as a whole. De Maistre has little concern for the actual individuals who make up the French nation, seeing the lives of 4 million of them as secondary to the authority vested in the life of the King. This tendency to connote the nation with a certain kind of authority—along with other features of De Maistre's writings of course—would later become a paradigmatic feature of various right-wing authoritarians and movements.

This includes post-modern conservatives. As Mueller points out in his excellent book *What Is Populism?*, one of the characteristics of right-wing populists to this day is a tendency to conflate the "people" with themselves, and claim that the success of the former reflects on the status of the latter.[48] This conflation is drawn paradigmatically in De Maistre, who pushes it to the highest pitch. Like his post-modern conservative offspring, De Maistre justifies the ontological claim that there exists a given social identity through appeals to irrationalist sources and violent emotions. Like the post-modern conservatives, this identity is often presented via an eclectic set of characteristic which different reactionaries find appealing.[49] He then claims that this identity is stabilised and unified in the persona of an authority figure, who is divinely ordained to maintain order and tradition against rationalist intellectuals determined to undermine them both. The call is then made for crackdowns and even violence against those who destabilise this

[47] Joseph De Maistre. *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment* (London, UK: Routledge, 1965) at pg 53.

[48] Jan-Werner Muller. *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[49] Joseph De Maistre. *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment* (London, UK: Routledge, 1965).

relationship between the identity and the authority, dismissing or ignoring the fact that these destabilising actions are often driven by individuals who should technically share in the identity cherished by the traditionalists. This is because the actual empirical characteristics associated with the identity—whether nation, religion, or geography—are not as important as the reverence for authority figures and their legitimacy. The authority appealed to is the ontological locus of this political outlook, and challenging it by definition places one beyond the pale into the realm of enemy of the people.

While the Burkean outlook took a tentative step in this direction, Burke never took the paradoxically radical and reactionary step of developing such an irrationalist political theology. While he took steps down the road to an anti-foundationalist emphasis on identity and authority as the basis for politics, it was De Maistre who truly leapt head first into this mire. What these two figures, and especially the latter, demonstrate is that the anti-foundationalism and reverence for traditional social identities affiliated with authority characteristic of post-modern conservatism isn't an aberration. While neither De Maistre nor especially Burke was proto post-modern thinkers, they laid bricks on the road which can help us understand how we got here. This will become clearer when we move into the twentieth century and modernism, a time period which I have already mentioned anticipated post-modern culture in problematising the relationship between social identities and political authority. Their reaction was to double down and clarify the tight relationship between anti-foundationalism and conservative respect for identity and authority. These positions would later become radicalised in the twenty-first century.

THE MODERN ORIGINS OF POST-MODERN CONSERVATISM: OAKESHOTT, LORD DEVLIN, BORK

To be conservative … is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss.
    Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative."[50]

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[50]Michael Oakeshott. *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays: New and Expanded Edition* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1991) at pg 408.

Perry Anderson claimed the four great thinkers of twentieth-century conservatism were Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, F.A. Hayek, and Michael Oakeshott.[51] As Corey Robin observes, Anderson has a strange amount of respect for Schmitt and Strauss as worthy foes, an ambivalent relationship to Hayek, and is all but dismissive of Oakeshott.[52] This is a shame, since, with the exception of Schmitt (more on him later), few thinkers can help us better understand the ambivalence of certain conservatives towards abstract reason. Oakeshott can also help us understand why some conservatives regard identity and even emotional affect as more important than reason in political life. While Burke and De Maistre lived through a period of revolutionary drama, Oakeshott's life was framed by truly apocalyptic events and acts of mass evil. Despite this his work often resists the sardonic bite of Burkeanism, and certainly the shrill and paranoiac visions of De Maistre. He is remarkably even handed, generous to his political opponents, and ever curious. Despite this comparable modesty—not a usual characteristic of post-modern conservatives in the twenty-first century—Oakeshott's attitudinal differences belie a commonality with many right-wing positions now in vogue. In particular, Oakeshott's seminal essay "Rationalism in Politics" and affiliated writings are profound in how they anticipate the epistemological and normative outlooks of post-modern conservatism.

Oakeshott was born the son of a left-wing civil servant and friend of the socialist George Bernard Shaw. After witnessing the First World War from afar throughout secondary school, he enrolled in Gonville and Caius College at Cambridge. There Oakeshott was initially attracted to the study of history and the work of the British idealists. The anti-utilitarian outlook of the idealists was especially important in framing his intellectual outlook, especially given the close association of the British left with policies for utility maximisation in the middle of the century. He became distrustful of political radicalism through the 1930s, witnessing the rise of Marxism and Nazism with alarm. Oakeshott served in the British army through the Second World War, before returning to academic life via a series of prestigious appointments at Oxford and

[51] Perry Anderson. "The Intransigent Right at the End of the Century." *London Review of Books*, Vol. 14, 1992.

[52] Corey Robin. *The Reactionary Mind Second Edition: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018).

the London School of Economics.[53] Through the 1960s to the 1980s, he wrote his most famous works, including the essay "Rationalism in Politics" and *On Human Conduct*, while expressing some disdain for the disruptive forces of the 60s' counterculture. These made his name as a seminal conservative thinker. He was famously something of a Luddite, though a social one, inviting many students to his cottage in the south of England for late nights of conversation and drinking. Oakeshott also had a notably wandering eye, marrying three times and having multiple affairs. He refused Margaret Thatcher's offer to become a Companion for Honor, and died in 1990 at the age of 89. Oakeshott had witnessed many of the cataclysmic shifts of the twentieth century, and might have been somewhat content that the conservative liberalism he argued for over the decades was ascendant across the globe.

Oakeshott shares some similarities with the thinkers analysed earlier. While *On Human Conduct* takes a stab at a more systematic philosophical position, the essays which made him famous tend to support the view that conservatism is an outlook rather than a theory.[54] Unlike Burke and De Maistre however, Oakeshott was a professional academic, so this outlook is spelled out in more rigorous and explicit detail. Like Burke, he is unwilling to entirely abandon a commitment to reason to seek solace on the comforting shores of De Maistrean irrationalism. However, Oakeshott is more aware of the problems which lie in justifying experiential conservatism by appealing to even empirical, let alone pure, reason. This is because his experiences with British utilitarianism and the expansion of the welfare state gave him a deeper awareness of how empirical reason was just as likely to support progressivism as the *a priori* reasoning of the Jacobins et al.[55] Most of his work is therefore centred on developing a competing conception of traditionalist reason

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[53] John Gray. "Last of the Idealists." *Literary Review*, July 16, 2014. https://web.archive.org/web/20140717092255/http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/gray_07_14.php.

[54] This has some relation to Oakeshott's position within the idealist tradition. While Oakeshott's earlier philosophical idealism never entirely disappeared, as reflected in the tendency even in later essays to focus more on the history of ideas than on material processes and technological developments, the metaphysical drama often associated with idealism became remarkably muted in his work, particularly relative to auspicious predecessors such as Hegel and the British idealists like Bradley.

[55] The exemplar of course being Bentham. See Jeremy Bentham. *Selected Writings on Utilitarianism* (Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Editions, 2000).

that most resembles the epistemic outlook of figures like Richard Rorty in his most post-modern moments.[56] For Oakeshott, we are left with a contrast between pure or empirical rationalism with its normative support of progressive programs, or with traditionalist reason which normatively emphasises the historical and affective use of various practices and concepts. In "The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Skepticism," Oakeshott implies that in many respects, traditionalist reason is based more on faith and constancy than on a commitment to sceptical enquiry, though in an unusual way. Its faith in traditionalist reason paradoxically flows from a scepticism about rationalism and its potential defects. We must therefore choose whether to commit ourselves to a faith-based politics predicated on traditionalist reason and be sceptical of rationalism, or commit ourselves to a rationalism which is equally sceptical of traditionalist reason.[57]

What is noteworthy in Oakeshott's account is precisely this play on the relationship between scepticism and choice. This is reflective of his earlier idealism, where ideas posited by human conduct take on an independent existence and epistemic status on their own. While Oakeshott never claims to be completely sceptical about the possibility of developing an accurate epistemological or normative outlook, for practical purposes he does not seem to think that one is forthcoming, nor even that we need one. What we have instead are a sequence of historically generated epistemic traditions which constitute a kind of Heideggerian "gift"[58] which we can dwell within and understand as we please.[59] Rationalism of the empirical or pure kind is one such outlook, but it isn't the only one we have available to us at any given time. Oakeshott's criticism of rationalism seems mostly centred on its imperial ambitions, the desire of rationalists to eliminate all other epistemic and normative outlooks. Traditionalist reason does not do this, instead displaying a

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[56] See Richard Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[57] Michael Oakeshott. *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

[58] For Heidegger's own critical account of modernity, see Martin Heidegger. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1977).

[59] See David Boucher. "British Idealism and Michael Oakeshott's Philosophy of History." *History and Theory*, Vol. 23, 1984.

willingness to let individuals choose which outlook is most epistemically and normatively useful to them in a given context. Like Lawler, the original self-proclaimed post-modern conservative, Oakeshott rejects the pretensions of modernism and rationalism to technocratic superiority over other ways of knowing and being. He concedes that not everyone will make such a choice, but stubbornly insists that it is a legitimate choice which respectable thinkers can make. The goal of achieving one epistemic and normative outlook which is correct and universalisable is one we should reject.[60]

Interestingly, this Oakeshottian framing of a choice between progressive rationalism and conservative traditionalist reason is perhaps best articulated by two twentieth-century jurists: Lord Devlin and Robert Bork. Both of these figures follow Oakeshott in framing contemporary politics as a competition between a progressive and a conservative orientation (following Robin's interpretation of conservatism as at base a reactionary outlook), obviously opting for the latter. What is interesting is how they call back to the Burkean admiration for the common man and its conflation of progressivism with elitism of some sort, while appealing to a more obviously democratic ethos which would have appealed vulgar to Burke. What is even more striking is how they associate this democratic ethos with a particular theory of jurisprudence. They ground a normative interpretation of law as based on the sentiments of the everyday person, who is almost invariably understood to be a conservative. This normative interpretation of law is then linked by Bork and his descendants to a fanatically positivistic account of the law as having an undeniably plain meaning, a meaning which upholds conservative principles because they are what the average person wants. The average person rejects progressivism and its pretentious rationalism, preferring the stability and identity offered by traditionalist reason.

The origins of this position are best seen in Lord Devlin's famous exchange with H.L.A. Hart, arguably the greatest legal theorist of the twentieth century.[61] Devlin grew up the son of a Roman

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[60]Michael Oakeshott. *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1991).

[61]His classic book is of course H.L.A. Hart. *The Concept of Law*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). For Hart's persuasive rebuke to Devlin type arguments, see H.L.A Hart. *Law, Liberty, and Morality* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1963).

Catholic architect, though emulating Burke, his mother was a Scottish Protestant.[62] Devlin flirted with a life in the priesthood, before turning to law in the 1920s. He later became a High Court judge, an auspicious position that placed him on a trajectory towards public dispute. Hart was a utilitarian thinker and a proponent of liberalisation who argued powerfully for adopting a more liberal approach to LGBTQ rights. While it is hard to think of anyone who would contemporaneously disagree with Hart, at the time Devlin led the spirited defence against the ambitions of the legal philosopher and others. Responding to the Wolfenden report of 1957, Devlin prepared a seminal lecture series "The Enforcement of Morals" which was delivered in 1959.[63] He contended that society, and social morality generally, has an integral relationship with religion. Interestingly, he does not claim that the Christian religion he defends is correct, but merely that it has been chosen as the basis for the social morality of British society in the 1950s.

> Morals and religion are inextricably joined - the moral standards generally accepted in Western civilization being those belonging to Christianity. Outside Christendom other standards derive from other religions. None of these moral codes can claim any validity except by virtue of the religion on which it is based….Between the great religions of the world, of which Christianity is only one, there are much wider differences. It may or may not be right for the State to adopt one of these religions as the truth, to found itself upon its doctrines and to deny to any of its citizens the liberty to practice any other. If it does, it is logical that it should use the secular law wherever it thinks it necessary to enforce the divine. If it does not, it is illogical that it should concern itself with morals as such. But if it leaves matters of religion to private judgement, it should logically leave matters of morals also. A State which refuses to enforce Christian beliefs has lost the right to enforce Christian morals.[64]

In this fascinating articulation, Devlin shifts the Oakeshottian point about a choice between rationalism and traditionalist reason to refer

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[62] James Morton. "Obituary: Lord Devlin." *The Independent*, August 11, 1992. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-lord-devlin-1539619.html.

[63] Patrick Devlin. "The Enforcement of Morals." *Maccabaean Lectures of Jurisprudence*, March 1959.

[64] Patrick Devlin. "The Enforcement of Morals." *Maccabaean Lectures of Jurisprudence*, March 1959 at pg 133.

to political theology and theology more generally. Christianity—and Christian morality along with it—is simply one religion we may have chosen to "adopt" among others. But once that choice has been made, it becomes "logical" that the state should use the law to enforce this chosen system of belief, regardless of what others in the society might believe. A society which has ceased to enforce the morality of its chosen religion will not remain stable, and individuals will increasingly question its right to enforce morality at all. The enforcement of a public morality, even at the expense of what individual reason may tell us is correct, is the "price" one has to pay to live in a (homogenous) society.

How do jurists know what morality has been chosen by "society" as whole, and how to interpret it from a legal standpoint? It isn't by looking to rational standards, or even to the positions put forward in the holy books of the chosen faith. It is by looking to the right-minded man, his judgements and even his feelings, the man on the Clapham omnibus.

> How is the law-maker to ascertain the moral judgements of society? It is surely not enough that they should be reached by the opinion of the majority; it would be too much to require the individual assent of every citizen. English law has evolved and regularly uses a standard which does not depend on the counting of the heads. It is that of the reasonable man. He is not to be confused with the rational man. He is not expected to reason about anything and his judgement may be largely a matter of feeling. It is the viewpoint of the man in the street - or to use an archaism familiar to all lawyers - the man in the Clapham omnibus. He might also be called the right-minded man. For my purpose I should like to call him the man in the jury box, for the moral judgement of society must be something about which any twelve men or women drawn at random might after discussion be expected to be unanimous.[65]

Lord Devlin is admirably straightforward about the contingent basis of his position, though he maintains throughout that society cannot continue to function without the enforcement of even a speciously selected and felt morality.

Lord Devlin's Oakeshottian modesty isn't shared by Robert Bork, who is a less sophisticated thinker but a more prominent antecedent to the rise of post-modern conservatism. Bork grew up in a middle-class

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[65] Patrick Devlin. "The Enforcement of Morals." *Maccabaean Lectures of Jurisprudence*, March 1959 at pg 142.

family, pursued legal studies at the University of Chicago, and eventually became a Professor at Yale Law School. The peak of his career came in 1987 when he was nominated to the Supreme Court by President Ronald Reagan. He faced intense scrutiny from the Senate due to his conservative views and racy comments, eventually being denied the appointment. In a huff, Bork retired from his Appellate Court Judgeship, mostly devoting himself to scholarship and agitation until his death in 2012. A great deal of his writing was vitriol directed against the judicial system which had seemingly rebuffed him, though in the process he sketched out a theory of legal originalism remarkable for its philosophical rejection by most legal originalists. Despite this, he remains an important thinker not because of the quality of his ideas, but because of the unique synthesis he formalised and the tone with which he expressed his positions. He frames the judicial system as captured by a "New Class" of progressives who are determined to overturn the will and mores of the venerable man on the Clapham omnibus. Invoking the populist creed which would be made famous by Trump and others, Bork claims progressives were capable of overturning public morality despite being a minority of the population:

> The New Class's problem in most nations is that its attitudes command only a political minority. It is able to exercise its influence in many ways, but, when cultural and social issues become sufficiently clear, the intellectual class loses elections. It is, therefore, essential that the cultural left find a way to avoid the verdict of the ballot box. Constitutional courts provide the necessary means to outflank majorities and nullify their votes.[66] The judiciary is the liberal's weapon of choice. Democracy and the rule of law are undermined while the culture is altered in ways the electorate would never choose.[67]

Bork is unsparing in his denunciations of the judiciary and the contemporary left; the tone he adopts is often quite close to what one sees in De Maistre. He believes that members of the judiciary overwhelmingly belong to, or are at least influenced by, what he alternately calls the

[66] Given the changing demographics of American society, which some expect will lead the majority to increasingly vote for the left liberal causes, one wonders if Bork might have to revise his thesis.

[67] Robert Bork. *Coercing Virtue: The Worldwide Rule of Judges* (United States of America: Vintage Canada, 2002) pgs 8–9.

"New Class," the "cultural left," the "intellectual class," and of course simply "liberals." The New Class believes in universalism, and is therefore inherently attracted to "socialism" as the only remaining secular theology which has worldwide, or "universal," appeal.[68] The New Class also "despises" the few Conservatives[69] who become intellectuals because conservatives are prone to believing in "particularity—respect for difference, circumstance, history, and the irreducible complexity of human beings and human societies."[70] He believes that Judges should strictly interpret the letter of the law when making decisions and refrain from involving themselves in activism, especially since that typically involves upholding liberal values.

If much of this sounds trivially familiar, it is in part because Bork and his ilk paved the way for a peculiar style of intellectual conservative activism in American political culture. On the one hand, there are appeals to a nebulous people who would apparently reject progressive policies under many circumstances. This virtuous majority is situated against a corrupt and incompetent, but nonetheless omnipresent and extremely powerful, group of left-wing elites who use coercive institutions to move society in their preferred direction. Without the interference of the elite New Class, democracy would hold sway and conservative values would be upheld.

Bork's tirades against progressives is matched by a surprising and often selective set of appeals to both epistemic scepticism and the certainty provided by populist appeals to authority. Bork is tremendously disdainful of the claims to moral universalism and rationality put forward by the "New Class." In its stead, he anticipates the post-modern tendency of conservatives to appropriate the language of progressives and claim that it is really conservatism which respects "difference."

[68] Robert Bork, *Coercing Virtue: The Worldwide Rule of Judges* (United States of America: Vintage Canada, 2002) at pg 5.

[69] Oddly, in Bork's case this does not appear to extend to respecting individuals of different sexual orientations, acknowledging the adverse circumstances which still prevent women from obtaining equality with men in the workplace, recognising the parallel moral histories of America and other states which share its "Anglo American heritage" when making legal decisions, or acknowledging that it might be "useful" to look at how countries with complex relations to capital punishment might render decisions in cases related to the death penalty.

[70] Robert Bork. *Coercing Virtue: The Worldwide Rule of Judges* (United States of America: Vintage Canada, 2002) at pg 5.

Of course, this respect for difference operates only at the extremely high level of the nation-state, where theoretical conservative majorities have an unbridled right to enforce moral homogeneity against, say, LGBTQ individuals if necessary. This point is key, since Bork's scepticism only goes so far. The potentially emancipatory and relativistic consequences of anti-universalism are obviously not to Bork's taste. This is where he uncritically embraces a populist democratic theory of political legitimation, arguing that a theoretical conservative majority has every right to have its expectations obeyed and translated into law. This is where his appeals to intentionalist theories of language as a necessity for "objective" legal interpretation come in, since if the democratic will of the people cannot be known with certainty, it cannot be rigidly enforced by judicial officials.

Bork's legal work is largely uninteresting and resentful in itself, and was largely superseded in the imaginations of conservative jurists by the textualist originalism of Antonin Scalia and the semantic originalism of Lawrence Solum.[71] What is historically important is both the way Bork frames a narrative and the tone with which his position is expressed. At the heart of Borkianism is a unique combination of epistemic scepticism towards universalistic claims (particularly those made by the leftist New Class) whose emancipatory consequences are avoided through the construction of a nebulous conservative majority whose opinion is always correct, in turn necessitating shockingly ambitious claims about the possibility of knowing what that opinion is and how to interpret and apply it.

Tonally, the message is delivered in a tremendously Schmittian format.[72] The New Class is invariably framed as the elitist enemy of the people. It is the job of the conservative intellectual to combat the enemy at all cost. As with De Maistre, this loathing is tinged with more than a slight hint of admiration and envy for the perceived power of the New Class.[73] What is new in Bork is the resentment expressed by a wealthy and powerful man denied a prize which seemed just within reach.

[71] See Antonin Scalia. *A Matter of Interpretation: Federal Courts and the Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[72] Carl Schmitt. *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[73] Joseph De Maistre. *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment* (London, UK: Routledge, 1965).

Bork is characteristically unreflective about the irony of discussing, how the despised New Class "despises" the few conservative intellectuals in its midst.[74] This flatness of reflective capacity was generated by Bork all on his own, but would become tonally generalised as post-modern culture became more and more impactful on the lives of individuals.

From the even-handed scepticism of rationalism demonstrated by Oakeshott, we move very close to the post-modern conservative ethos with Bork. Devlin had already made a close connection between the "man on the Clapham omnibus" and the right of the state to enforce a degree of moral homogeneity across society. Bork's key step was to provide this everyman with a leftist enemy whose elitist interests made him the enemy of the people, while unreflectively failing to recognise how he was looking more and more like the post-modern leftists he despised. As put by James Boyle, who cannily observed the post-modern tendencies in Bork's work *The Tempting of America*:

> Scattered throughout this work are fragmentary arguments and statements which, if pieced together, represent a fundamental conservative challenge to the framework of liberal rationalism, the very framework into which Mr. Bork has been trying to shoehorn his ideas. This challenge could be described as Burkean conservatism. Or, given its low opinion of the value of rationality, its critique of liberal epistemology, and its cut-and-paste approach to historical tradition, it could with equal justice be called "post-modem conservatism." Because it does not fit within the ruling epistemology, most readers will not even recognize this second argument as an argument. It is exactly for that reason that it deserves our attention.[75]

While Boyle characterised Bork as the "herald" of post-modern conservatism, this is somewhat misleading. The first figure to truly recognise this transition and formulate it theoretically was the original self-described post-modern conservative Peter Lawler. In the next section I will discuss his work and why he first made the connection between post-modernism and conservatism theoretically tenable.

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[74] Robert Bork. *Coercing Virtue: The Worldwide Rule of Judges* (Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada, 2002).

[75] James Boyle. "A Process of Denial: Bork and Post-modern Conservatism." *Yale Journal of Law and Humanities*, Vol. 3, 1991 at pg 266.

Peter Lawler as the Apologist of Post-modern Conservatism

Conservative thought today is authentic postmodernism, but it is, obviously, not postmodernism as it is usually understood. Most allegedly postmodern thought emphasizes the arbitrary character of all human authority, the freedom of each human being from all standards but his own will or creativity, and the death not only of God but of nature. These allegedly postmodern characteristics are really hypermodern; they aim to "deconstruct" as incoherent and so incredible any residual modern faith in reason or nature. They shout that everything modern—in fact, everything human—is nothing but a construction. Postmodernists in the usual sense often do well in exposing liberal hypocrisy, but they can only do so in the name of completing the modern project of liberating the individual's subjective or willful and whimsical perspective from all external constraints. Conservative postmodernism, by acknowledging and affirming as good what we can really know about our natural possibilities and limitations, is radically opposed to liberated postmodernism—and to the modern premises it radicalizes.[76]

Peter Lawler, "Conservative Postmodernism, Postmodern Conservatism"

Peter Augustine Lawler was, as far as I know, the first scholar to seriously argue for a position called "post-modern conservatism," though others have followed in his wake.[77] In works like *Postmodernism Rightly Understood: The Return to Realism in American Thought* and via blog posts and essays for the *Nation Review* and *First Things*, he often cheekily argued for an idiosyncratic conception of conservatism which drew respectful though hardly enthusiastic support from some on the right. Though his understanding of post-modernity and conservatism differ wildly from my own, it is worth looking into his pioneering examinations to understand how a self-described conservative would come to associate himself so routinely with post-modernism. Particularly when, as stressed

[76] Peter Augustine Lawler. "Conservative Postmodernism, Postmodern Conservatism." *Intercollegiate Studies Institute*, October 8, 2014. https://isi.org/intercollegiate-review/conservative-postmodernism-postmodern-conservatism/.

[77] See Kevin Mattson. "The Rise of Post-modern Conservatism." In *American Thought and Culture in the 21st Century*, ed. Martin Halliwell and Catherine Morley (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

in Chapter 1, post-modernism was so prominently associated with various strands of leftism, or what Lawler would call hyper-modernism.

Lawler was born in 1951 in the midst of the Cold War. His father worked for the CIA through the decade and into the 70s, while also engaging in a fruitful secondary career as an interpreter and some-time publisher of seminal Catholic texts. Peter Lawler inherited his father's religiosity, though his style more cannily resembles iconoclastic G.K. Chesterton than what one might expect from a sober-minded Church father. He acquired his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia, and later became Dana Professor of Government at Berry College, a Christian liberal arts school in Georgia. Lawler's affection for the American South came through in a number of his writings, which were always even handed, though occasionally perhaps too soft on the history of racism and discrimination which has made the region infamous. His career peaked in 2004 when he was appointed to President George W. Bush's council on bioethics, which was shut down in 2009 when the Obama administration swept to power. When Donald Trump returned the conservatives to power in 2016, Lawler displayed a cautious optimism about the development, strategically sensing that an opportunity had finally arisen to question the liberal—more particularly techno-libertarian—status quo which had long prevailed in American politics. Sadly Lawler passed away in May 2017 at the relatively young age of 66; a tragedy given the insights he might have contributed on our troubled times.

Lawler's academic work on post-modern conservatism was inspired by an impressive range of intellectual figures. Strauss, Augustine, Tocqueville, Macintyre, Aquinas, Bloom, and others join hands with lesser known luminaries such as Walker Percy and the populist Christopher Lasch. What is most notable about Lawler is how few figures one would often associate with post-modernism actually appear. Richard Rorty is a typical foil, as is his synthesis of a distinctively American form of politically liberal pragmatism and European ironism.[78] Yet Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, and all of the usual contenders are nowhere to be seen. This is in part because of Lawler's idiosyncratic approach to academic work, where he often seems admirably determined to push against the grain. It seems unlikely that he would be satisfied doing the expected thing and simply

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[78] This is more Rorty the ironist and social commentator than the analytically minded philosopher engaging with W.V.O. Quine and Kant. See Richard Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

write about conservatism from a post-modern perspective. Part of this reticence may be attitudinal; one often suspects that Lawler's gentle and gentlemanly Southern disposition was ill-suited to tarrying with the pretensions of European sophisticates. But more important than either of these factors is Lawler's determination to recast post-modernism in a way that supports a distinctively conservative kind of realism.[79] This realism is most certainly not the empirical realism of technocratic positivism, which Lawler emphatically rejects. Instead it is a more Scholastic realism; the belief that each thing has a fundamental nature which it is attempting to realise through time. What makes this post-modern is Lawler's belief that such Scholastic realism is consistent with a belief that human knowledge is always finite and subject to being disproven. This leads to the conservative thesis that we must not attempt to subject the world to some progressive form of organisation with the aim of recreating both the natural world and our bodily identity along dimensions consistent with our will. This would only lead to distortions and corruption which would ultimately lead us to the unhappy and unfulfilled lives characteristic of modernity.[80]

Understanding Lawler's position means grasping his interpretation of modernity. Lawler was among the first contemporary conservative scholars—a list that now includes luminaries such as Yoram Hazony[81] and Patrick Deneen[82] among others—to follow the auspicious precedent of Edmund Burke in breaking sharply with the influential thinking of John Locke.[83] Often held up as an icon by right-wing Libertarians, the end of the Cold War slowly led conservatives to reevaluate the English empiricist's value of the traditional. Lawler was a pioneer in arguing that Locke set the stage for modernity and many of its problems.[84] He did this in a number of ways. The most notable was a shift away from the actual

[79] Peter Augustine Lawler. *Postmodernism Rightly Understood: The Return to Realism in American Thought* (Lanham, MA: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 1999).

[80] Peter Augustine Lawler. *Stuck with Virtue: The American Individual and Our Biotechnological Future* (Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2005).

[81] Yoram Hazony. *The Virtue of Nationalism* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2018).

[82] Patrick Deneen. *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

[83] The reference to a speech by Burke appears in Ofir Haivry and Yoram Hazony. "What Is Conservatism?" *American Affairs*, May 2017. https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2017/05/what-is-conservatism/.

[84] Peter Augustine Lawler. *American Heresies and Higher Education* (Indianapolis, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2016).

realism of Scholastic thinking, which held that each thing had an essence to it determined by God, and towards the nominalism of the modern world. According to Lawler, Locke's empiricism followed Bacon's in claiming that this scholasticism of essences was nothing but speculative nonsense. There was nothing behind nature but matter to be manipulated in the pursuit of our particular, subjective, passions. Eventually this conceit extended even to our own sense of self and our own bodies. We came to see ourselves as fungible matter to be manipulated in the service of our enjoyment and in the realisation of our chosen self. Everything from the limitations imposed by various handicaps and imperfections to our gender itself became a restriction which it was the job of technology and human rationalism to overcome. According to Lawler, this Lockean outlook has grown so powerful that it has coloured every form of Western politics since its inception.[85] Even the Cold War was little more than the Left Lockeans and the Right Lockeans disputing with one another as to the best way to further the technocratic project of removing all limitations to human action. This normative quest to completely remove all barriers to the emotivist pursuit of our interests is combined with an ontological commitment to nominalism about human nature,[86] the belief that we are effectively plastic beings who can be manipulated and refashioned under the auspices of technocratic reason.

This brings us to post-modern conservatism. For Lawler, the conservative is a post-modern realist who rejects the normative quest to remove all limitations and the ontological nominalism which underpins it, and instead holds to the belief that there is a fixed human nature which coincides with concrete human needs, while respecting that our understanding of this nature and the world around it will always be limited. For Lawler, this is a good thing since a degree of alienation from the world provides us with the manna we need to make concrete choices reflecting the virtues of our character. Happiness in this respect depends on our limitations, and the technocratic attempts to overcome them and the alienation they engender can only transform us into flat and unhappy beings. The progressive utopia conceived of by modernists, including

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[85] Peter Augustine Lawler. *Postmodernism Rightly Understood: The Return to Realism in American Thought* (Lanham, MA: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 1999).

[86] The critique of emotivism I am referring to is best expressed by Macintyre. See Alasdair Macintyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre-Dame Press, 1981).

figures like Rorty, Foucault et al. would "actually be hell." Echoing critics from Max Weber to Aldous Huxley, Lawler declares that in the fully modernist society there would be "no place for moral, death and God-haunted, and curious human beings like themselves. There is nothing to admire, no one to love, and no work to be done in a world without virtues, Kojev's end of history."[87] Post-modern conservatism awakens us to this and demands we return to the richer conception of human life provided by Christian realism.

> Realism, Christopher Lasch and Walker Percy agree, is postmodernism rightly understood. It is the view of both human nature and morality that returns with reflection upon the failure of the modern project to extinguish the mystery of being and human being and bring history to an end. Death has not been put to death. It cannot be talked to death, as Richard Rorty hopes. It even resists scientific efforts to suppress the self or soul with chemicals. Human beings, when they tell the truth to themselves about themselves, remain aware of their ineradicable limits as thoughtful beings with bodies.[88]

How realistic such a comprehensive normative position could be without either falling into thoroughly modern naturalism or speculative Thomistic scholasticism I will leave to the reader. Needless to say, for reasons I will shortly elaborate upon, I remain sceptical of the more substantive philosophical and normative project underpinning Lawler's work.

What I wish to focus on here is the extent to which Lawler can contribute to our understanding of post-modern conservatism as I have framed it in this book. Obviously as the originator of the term, his position carries some weight, though as should be clear by now, the way it is deployed in his writings is radically different than my own. Part of this is due to the differences in our constructive moral outlooks referenced above. Lawler's interpretation is that a sincere post-modern conservative realism is conducive to a kind of virtue ethics necessary to achieve a fulfilling life. Obviously, the kinds of post-modern conservatives discussed

[87] Peter Augustine Lawler. *Postmodernism Rightly Understood: The Return to Realism in American Thought* (Lanham, MA: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 1999) at pg 187.

[88] Peter Augustine Lawler. *Postmodernism Rightly Understood: The Return to Realism in American Thought* (Lanham, MA: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 1999) at pg 179.

in this text rarely live up to this auspicious standard. But the more sub-stantial issue is the way Lawler frames the evolution of conservatism under the conditions of post-modernity. His conservatism is quite lit-erally one that has gone beyond modernism, understood as a kind of Lockean nominalism which begets a technocratic normative outlook. But this "beyond" is in fact a kind of return to pre-modernity commu-nitarianism and religiosity. His conservatives understand themselves as finite members of a given community who are responsible for develop-ing certain virtues in themselves. They are sceptical of technocratic rea-son, modest in their ambitions, and accepting of liberalism so long as it is tempered by the usual supporting institutions of nation, family, culture, church, etc. They tend to support neoliberal markets and globalisation so long as they keep to their place. And of course, they are realists in the Lawlerian sense.

What I call post-modern conservatives bear little resemblance to these mirthful quasi-Thomists. The finite and humble individual theorised by Lawler bears little resemblance to the angry and prideful post-modern conservative who seeks to totalise their identity across society. Far from being sceptical of technocratic reason, they are very much the unreflec-tive products of the technological developments of neoliberal society. Far from displaying moderation, they demonstrate a reactionary demand to reassert the authority of historically powerful social groups. They are of course critical of and even outright dismissive of liberalism. And while they do tend to support institutions such as nation, family, culture, church, and so on, this support is at least in part driven by a desire to sta-bilise their sense of self in the uneven seas of neoliberalism.[89]

And most importantly, post-modern conservatives as framed in this book are not typically realists in the Lawlerian sense. They are not post-modern in the sense of having gone beyond modernism, but very much what Lawler might consider the ideological product of a kind of hyper-modernity. The identity adopted by the post-modern conserv-ative is not one of virtuous authenticity grounded in concrete attach-ments to real communities and their values. It is instead a pastiche of

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[89] American post-modern conservatives may even admire the inequities produced by cap-ital, giving them a naturalistic justification based on civilisational, ethnic, racial, and gender prejudices. But post-modern conservatives as I frame them disdain neoliberalism capitalism specifically for its role in undermining national sovereignty and promoting a cosmopolitan vision of the world which destabilises the sense of identity and order they feel entitled to.

different tropes and identities, often though not always assembled through consumption of hyperreal media, which are assembled despite their contradictions and tensions to help stabilise the post-modern conservative's sense of self in an unstable post-modern culture. So in practice post-modern conservatives are in no sense realists about the self and human nature. They construct their sense of identity out of the materials made available by post-modern culture. The normative and epistemic judgements of post-modern conservatives flow from the perceived need to maintain this pastiche like identity, meaning that they are not realists about the external world either. If anything they deepen the commitment to modernism condemned by Lawler, making their sense of how the external world operates dependent on what is needed to satiate their personal need for stability. Far from abandoning Locke, their historical empiricism radicalises his project so thoroughly that even the tangential connection of Lockean empiricism to scholastic-style realism and natural law theorising is cut and entirely abandoned. For the post-modern conservative, the world exists as it does because if things were otherwise, he could not know who he was and what his role was in the social hierarchy.

Where I think Lawler was insightful is his recognition that, whether or not it is achieved, post-modern conservatism is characterised by a profound desire to return to the stability of realism. Where he went wrong was assuming that such a demand for realism would be met by moving beyond the problematic forms established within neoliberal society and post-modern culture. What we are instead seeing is the demand for realism being made by post-modern conservatives who are indelibly the product of neoliberal society and post-modern culture. They therefore frame their demand for a kind of realism in a very particular way, one which is shaped by the social and cultural conditions which determine them. The most significant of these is the sense that the traditionally powerful identities which the post-modern conservative assembles into his or her pastiche of a self are under attack and being dissolved.

The Emergence of Post-modern Conservatism

We have to remember that our defense is not just a commitment of money, it is a commitment of will. Because as the Polish experience reminds us, the defense of the West ultimately rests not only on means but also on the will of its people to prevail and be successful and get what you have to have. The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the

will to survive. Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at
any cost? Do we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our bor-
ders? Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in
the face of those who would subvert and destroy it? We can have the larg-
est economies and the most lethal weapons anywhere on Earth, but if we
do not have strong families and strong values, then we will be weak and we
will not survive.

   Donald Trump, Speech in Warsaw Poland, July 6, 2017

The earlier sections of this Chapter were meant to develop a sug-
gestive genealogy of post-modern conservatism (rightly understood),
positioning it within a broader right-wing intellectual history. As I high-
lighted in the first section of the Chapter, this is not to suggest that all
forms of contemporary conservatism can be characterised as post-mod-
ern, let alone that all earlier forms fit neatly into this genealogy.[90] The
figures discussed in this section, from Burke to Oakeshott and Lawler,
were analysed because they each embody a very distinctive type of con-
servatism ranging from scepticism to outright hostility towards rea-
son (or at least rationalism). Each in his own way embraces the often
non-rational or even irrational bases of social practices and traditions,
emphasising the role faith and practice play in framing or stabilising our
sense of identity in an often unmoored world. Though Burke avoided
this temptation, his descendants in these respects often frame politics
through contrasts, claiming that the sense of stable identity provided by
these non-rational social practices and traditions are being undermined

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[90]To give just a few examples, I do not think the neoliberalism of figures like Hayek
or Friedman prefigures the emergence of post-modern conservatism. Indeed the lat-
ter often see themselves as superseding the former. The anti-modernism of T.S. Eliot or
Russell Kirk cannot be easily placed in this genealogy, though their positions do overlap
in some respect. The classicism of Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom, and the religious con-
servatism of Finnis are almost radically opposed to the epistemic and meta-ethical posi-
tions of the post-modern conservatives. Indeed the Jaffa v Bork debate highlighted these
tensions quite early. The individualistic and experimental libertarianism of Nozick in
many respects has more in common with left accounts of self-creation such as the work of
Roberto Unger, than it does any of the tradition-focused variants of conservatism discussed
above. The doggedly moderate conservatism of Roger Scruton is temperamentally allergic
to the extremes of post-modern conservatism. The neoconservative internationalism of fig-
ures like Bill Kristol or Steve Frum bears some resemblance, but remains too committed
to an aggressively and militaristically asserted universalism to be classed as a kind of proto
post-modern conservatism.

systematically by various iterations of progressives. For figures like Burke and Devlin, these progressives typically think and act very differently from the common "man on the Clapham omnibus," who may be unable to explain or rationalise his positions but whose opinions should nonetheless be politically dominant even where they cannot be fully explicated. Finally in Bork, the man on the Clapham omnibus becomes the virtuous and conservative "people," whom the rationalistic progressive of the New Class despises and wishes to suppress. As put by Boyle:

> Much everyday political debate consists of a slinging match between liberals who appeal to a reified notion of "progress" and conservatives who appeal to an equally reified notion of "the free market." In such a world, an openly Burkean, a defiantly post-modern conservative philosophy would have at least novelty to recommend it. Instead of conducting all political discussion at one remove-aiming at whatever temporary shelter the opponent has constructed to shield herself from the relativity of value–one could discuss the political visions themselves. Instead of arguing about who has isolated the correct neutral principle guiding our busing decision, one could argue about whether integration would help or hurt. Instead of coating his arguments with spurious references to the true meaning of the history of the fourteenth amendment, Mr. Bork could come right out and reason from his faith in tradition, his trust of hierarchies, his unwillingness to disturb the edifice of civil society.[91]

Bork in turn makes express a tendency latent within many of the figures discussed, bubbling out in Burke's more acidic moments and flowering prominently in the work of De Maistre, that it is the duty of political authority to empower these non-rational traditions and enforce them if necessary against the wishes of the New Class. Bork is especially important in combining a deeply sceptical account of rationality with the demand that epistemic and meta-ethical positions be determined backwards according to the opinions of this virtuous conservative people. His scepticism abruptly gives way to rigid dogmatism in the enforcement of these opinions; even language itself must conform to a hyper-positivism if that is what is needed to ensure there is no ground for progressives to interpret law or statutes in a left-wing direction. While unimpressive as an argument, it is nonetheless highly expressive of the disposition which

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[91] James Boyle. "A Process of Denial: Bork and Post-modern Conservatism." *Yale Journal of Law and Humanities*, Vol. 3, 1991 at pg 313.

would later mutate into post-modern conservatism. Finally, I looked at some of the arguments made by Peter Lawler to suggest that there is little sense in which post-modern conservatism as I understand it, is a kind of realism.

Taken together, these authors demonstrate where even a reflective conservative outlook might be amenable to mutation under the conditions of neoliberal society and post-modern culture. The social, economic, and technological transformations which characterise the former brought about a world where for many "everything that is solid melts into the air."[92] The demographic and political makeup of society has changed dramatically in the past few years. Inequality has risen and the ability of the average citizen—the proverbial man on the Clapham omnibus—to have a substantial say in politics has dramatically declined. New technologies exacerbate partisanship and encourage insulation in political communication bubbles, many of which emphasise that the conditions, and those responsible, for these changes are still at work and are very dangerous.

At the same time, the influence of post-modern culture can make explicit the sense of destabilisation brought about by these, and other, transformations. Our sense of the linearity and regularity of space and time has given way to a more fluid and dynamic conception, troubling the sense of there being a permanent and enduring social world which we inhabit and which we can expect our children to inhabit as well. And most importantly, the sense of having a stable identity shaped by regular sources of selfhood has been profoundly shaken. This often has political consequences, as previously marginalised or newly formulated social identities agitate for inclusion. While admirable, these efforts can further shake the already vulnerable sense of identity of many individuals within neoliberal society.

[92] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

The "Dissolution" of Traditionally Powerful Identities and the Formation of the Post-modern Pastiche

Given all of the above, it should be of no surprise that a reactionary form of identity politics would emerge from the current cultural conditions. Proponents of identity politics assert that it is in fact those who agitate for irresponsible changes who are to blame for many people's current feelings of destabilisation, not the dynamics of society or culture. Those who are experiencing this destabilisation would naturally be attracted to those (political) figures who affirm their beliefs and promise to eliminate the Schmittian enemies[93] of the post-modern conservative.

Post-modern conservatives are like their progressive counterparts in locating the source of epistemic and meta-ethical validity in their identity. But they are unlike progressives in the kinds of identities and values they associate with as a source of selfhood.[94] Many progressives embraced the destabilising imperatives of post-modern culture, adopting a fluid conception of identity which eluded easy definition. Theorists like Gayatri Spivak are exemplars of this position.[95] By contrast, post-modern conservatives turn to identity very much to stem the destabilising tide of the surrounding culture. But they do so in a way which reflects it quite emphatically. Often, though by no means always, using the new media which emerges through the technological developments of neoliberal societies, post-modern conservatives assemble their sense of identity by drawing on "sources of the self" traditionally associated with authority

[93] Carl Schmitt. *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[94] Progressives in the late nineteenth (**or do you mean late twentieth and early twenty-first?**) and early twentieth century tended to associate with historically marginalised groups, and formulated the relationship between these identities and politics in a myriad of reflectively critical ways. Theoretically, they often stressed the fundamentally plastic and fluid qualities of the associated identities, either referring to their intersectional character or stressing that they were only being invoked as a kind of "strategic essentialism" to mobilise political energies. In practice, this meant that many leftists had a mixed relationship to the identities they affiliated with; neither wanting to abandon their political potential nor being entirely defined by them. Of course many progressives were unable to abandon this latter temptation, giving into what Wendy Brown would call their various "wounded attachments." These individuals and groups would often be the most vocal in defining themselves in a manner similar to the post-modern conservatives, as we shall see shortly.

[95] See Gayatri Spivak. *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

and social prestige in societies.[96] This can include nationality, sexuality, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, civilisational attachment, and in very insidious cases, race. These sources of the self are then blended into a pastiche-like identity which ignores the substantial tensions between them. The term "pastiche" of course refers to Fredric Jameson's famous use of the term in his work on post-modern culture.[97] While he gives several definitions of it across different mediums, perhaps the most comprehensive can be found in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. In a haunting passage referring to the way Americans increasingly frame their sense of identity by looking to its interpretations through simulated mediums such as film and technological art, Jameson observes:

> This approach to the present by way of the art language of the simulacrum, or of the pastiche of the stereotypical past, endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage. Yet this mesmerizing new aesthetic mode itself emerged as an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way. It cannot therefore be said to produce this strange occulation of the present by its own formal power, but rather merely to demonstrate, though these inner contradictions, the enormity of a situation in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience.[98]

In this passage, Jameson describes how pastiche involves looking to a stereotypical past as presented in the simulacrum of the present. While this past has a "mesmerising" quality when presented in such new media, it is nothing more than a symptom of our belief that we can refashion the world to reflect our current experiences. Where I think it is important to go beyond this Jamesonian insight is recognising how the pastiche-like identity of the post-modern conservative is very much conceived and fashioned to try and empower a sense that we can move past the current historical situation. Indeed, post-modern conservatives look

[96] Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[97] I delayed explaining my earlier use of the Jamesonian term until here, since this topic is where it is most relevant.

[98] Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991) at pg 21.

to and identify with the "stereotypical" identities presented in the past for inspiration for their future political projects. They identify as members of Western civilisation, and try to assume its alleged and real glories. They identify as members of the Judeo-Christian culture, turning to Christianity stripped of God and religiosity for a sense of transcendent historical importance in a secular world of liberal individualism. They identify as men, who have, according to their narrative, suffered more in the Great Wars of the twentieth century than feminist icons can understand, and are still serving as the primary pool of military or militarised recruits on guard for their homeland. They identify as straight, responsible for fulfilling the Aristotelian task of reconstituting the human race for another generation. They identify as ethnic or national Americans, Hungarians, or Poles, who feel undervalued by the cosmopolitan elites and yet who are forced to take in foreigners and aliens by those who care nothing for the country's heritage and traditions. And they identify as white, the race which, again according to their narrative, has given more than any other to the world and yet which is continuously attacked and ridiculed for its accomplishments and contributions.

In each circumstance, the identity or identities the post-modern conservative dons is characterised in a stereotypical vein which emphasises its past glories, seriously understates its failings, and which is regarded as the group which rightfully wielded political authority in the society the particular post-modern conservative identifies with. Interestingly, the stereotyped history of these identities is understood and presented in a highly selective manner, post-modern conservatives are a very politically correct group. Any crimes or failings associated with the invoked identities are often underplayed or even dismissed as part of an "elite" misrepresentation. The actual history of these identities matters far less than the politically correct stereotype which entrenches the post-modern conservative's sense of self-worth and desire for authority. This in turn makes them exceptionally hostile towards any efforts to present a more complex narrative which nuances the history, whether that be through political gestures which dismiss the importance of the national flag due to its association with systemic racism, reminders of participation by members of the ethnic group in the Holocaust, or observations about the ongoing consequences of misogyny for the attainment of full sexual equality in the present.

Moreover, the potential contradictions between identities and values the post-modern conservative affiliates with through their pastiche are

ignored or underplayed. The tension between Christian and meritocratic universalism and the particularism of national and ethnic identity are a prominent example. The disconnection between claiming to identify as one of the ordinary people while also presenting oneself as a persecuted and often lone voice is another, which we shall come back to shortly. On occasion intellectual efforts are made to order these identities and their contradictory values according to certain principles of integrity. But these efforts are often unconvincing and secondary, and moreover can even be treated with suspicion by post-modern conservatives prone to distrust any form of intellectualism.[99]

Despite the eclectic sources of the post-modern conservative's identity, there are some commonalities across the board that explain its appeal and association in the reactionary's mindset. The most obvious is that all of the identities assembled into the pastiche have historically been associated with a significant amount of political and social authority which is seen as slipping away. A heteronormative culture where white males belonging to a Western Christian nation situated themselves at the top of socio-political hierarchies has given way to a more pluralistic society where efforts are made to diffract power more generally across the population. Combined with the anxiety about identity already generated by post-modern culture and the precarious transformations of neoliberalism, this leaves many post-modern conservatives to regard their identities and value systems as being deliberately undermined. Part of the goal of mobilising politically, as we shall see, is to reverse this decline, with the white males reassuming their status at the top of the socio-political hierarchy.

[99]One might object to this by claiming that this account of contradictions presupposes a kind of authentic identity which individuals might have inhabited prior to the post-modern period when no such thing existed. Individuals, it may be claimed, have always assembled their sense of identity by appeal to myriad and sometimes contradictory sources. This is certainly true, and as mentioned earlier, it has become a deepening problem throughout the course of modernity. My point is that in post-modernity the qualitative aspects of this trend become more apparent as the destabilisation of traditional sources of the self reaches its climax. Consequently, the depth of the contradictions also reaches a new level with pastiche, in no small part because the identities the post-modern conservative affiliates with are so much the product of technological imperatives and isolation within various communication bubbles. This highlights their inauthenticity to a new degree. As Jameson might say, what matters is the cleaned up simulacrum presented through new media and the fantastic qualities associated with the stereotyped pastiche. The reality of these identities as they might have been in the past has long since faded away.

Another characteristic of post-modern conservatism is the adoption of a particular mode of making epistemic and normative judgements which are filtered through the needs of the identity. Part of this is generated by concerns of identity decline, which leads post-modern conservatives to attach themselves very tightly to the values they affiliate with that identity. Another part of it is of course the communication bubbles through which the pastiche is formulated and validated. Consistent exposure to invocations of the assumed identities and their declared values normalises and conflates the two in the communication horizons where many reactionaries cluster. Finally, the fear generated by the destabilising impact of post-modern culture results in conservatives being strongly attached to the pastiche that makes up their identity and exceptionally unwilling to have it further challenged. As a result, post-modern conservatives make epistemic and normative judgements based on a compulsion to stabilise an inherently unstable pastiche. They do this by adopting a De Maistrean process of submitting reason to authoritative figures and sources that solidify their sense of identity and values.[100] They also reject alternative ways of rendering epistemic and normative judgements, and of course resent the contrary authority figures associated with these alternatives. The combination of these reactionary postures inhibits conservatives from reflecting upon and understanding modernist forms of rationalisation, which might convince them to open up to new social and political possibilities. As Oakeshott might have observed, the post-modern conservative has adopted an epistemology and morality of faith over one of rational scepticism.[101] They do this to demonstrate fidelity to authoritative sources of identity stabilisation.

And naturally this has consequences for the politics of post-modern conservatism. In other circumstances, post-modern conservatism might have remained a relatively obscure form of identity formation in an increasingly unstable culture. Clearly, part of its appeal lies in the offer of stability and the restoration of socio-political authority for post-modern conservatives. But it also provided a narrative of victimisation which coincided nicely with that articulated by progressive elements in the county. However, while some moderate and neoliberal conservatives

[100] Joseph De Maistre. *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions: Studies on Sovereignty Religion, and Enlightenment* (London, UK: Routledge, 1965).

[101] Michael Oakeshott. *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

still largely accepted the politics of liberal consensus building and deliberation, reactionaries seeking a retrenchment of their political and social clout did not. They saw politics as a combative, often dualistic enterprise defined by the friend/enemy distinction formulated with such power by Carl Schmitt in the early twentieth century. For post-modern conservatives, the point of politics was to win and maintain power at the expense of other groups in society.

The Schmittian Enemies of Post-modern Conservatism

The rejection of figures and ideas associated with alternative epistemic and normative modes of judgement is one part of the more complex puzzle associated with the enemies of post-modern conservatives. Post-modern conservatives differ substantially from other forms of twentieth-century conservatism—particularly neoliberals—in framing politics as a zero-sum match where socio-political power operates along vertical lines and the goal is always to be at the top. Naturally this makes for a combative politics, but to understand why this occurs we need to look more deeply into the emotional basis of the post-modern conservative identity.

Many commentators have noted how a lot of contemporary conservative politics can be neatly explained by Nietzsche's analysis of the politics of resentment.[102] And just as many, of course, reject this characterisation, often feeling that it infantilises right-wingers by either making them out to be victims or denying the plausibility of their claims. Here we must be careful in noting that Nietzsche never claimed that a politics of resentment didn't often have its roots in genuine victimhood and marginalisation, though of course, he would not be especially sensitive to political efforts to ameliorate these feelings. Nietzsche's point is about how individuals and groups react to the experience of victimhood and marginalisation. In this circumstance we can see how post-modern conservatives, facing greater precarity, the destabilisation of identity, and feeling that their socio-political power was declining, may have developed strong feelings of resentment towards those they regarded as their Schmittian enemies.

Resentment is formulated by Nietzsche in several ways, primarily throughout his masterwork the *Genealogy of Morals*. It is variously

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[102]As presented in "The Genealogy of Morals." In Friedrich Nietzsche. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2000).

associated with the psychology of the priest, slave morality, Christendom generally, and other famous targets of Nietzschian jabs. As he presents it in Section 10 of the First Essay:

> The beginning of the slaves' revolt in morality occurs when resentment itself turns creative and gives birth to values: the resentment of those beings who, denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge. Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying 'yes' to itself, slave morality says 'no' on principle to everything that is 'outside', 'other', 'non-self ': and this 'no' is its creative deed. This reversal of the evaluating glance – this essential orientation to the outside instead of back onto itself – is a feature of resentment: in order to come about, slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world, it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all, – its action is basically a reaction.[103]

This is obviously an exceptionally provocative statement, suggesting that the morality of slaves is defined purely as a negative, reactionary position. As is often the case with Nietzsche, metaphors of biological health and infirmity are associated with these psychological and moral dispositions. This tendency is carried forward by his interpreters. Perhaps the best summarisation of resentment is given by Gilles Deleuze in his fine and uncharacteristically clear book *Nietzsche and Philosophy*:

> Ressentiment (sic) designates a type in which reactive forces prevail over reactive forces. But they can only prevail in one way: by ceasing to be acted. Above all we must not define ressentiment (sic) in terms of the strength of the reaction.[104]

Resentment is, in other words, the "spirit of revenge" which becomes perceptible through its framing of a moral dualism. The good and righteous person is rendered powerless, and rather than attributing this primarily to self-weakness, the cause is externalised onto an outside persecutor. This is why, as Deleuze points out, resentment always involves the "imputation of wrongs, the distribution of responsibilities, perpetual

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[103] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 2000) at pg 472.

[104] Gilles Deleuze. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983) at pg 111.

accusation"[105] instead of real aggression. Real aggression has a proud quality to it which disdains even association with any kind of weakness or victimhood, regarding that as beneath a real human being. Resentment by contrast embraces victimisation because the resentful person needs others to be evil in order to regard themselves as good, to regard their victimisation as some kind of persecution for possessing superior moral qualities one's enemies must inherently lack. As a result, the resentful individual breaks out in "bitter disappointment" whenever expectations are blocked, or more fundamentally, when faced with an epistemic or normative judgement which cannot be reduced to a formula which reaffirms the fundamental superiority of the "victimised" personality.

The sense of resentment characteristic of post-modern conservatives is of a very specific type. Unlike the various kinds of "slave" cultures criticised by Nietzsche, a large element of their discontent stems from the fact that the identities they adopt are historically associated with socio-political power. This contributes to the bitter disappointment felt when their expectations are blocked, since the barriers to the expression of their will were historically illegitimate or comparatively marginal. It adds a dimension of decline and loss to the narrative of resentment. Moreover the feelings of powerlessness experienced by post-modern conservatives, brought about through the transformations of neoliberal society and the influence of post-modern culture, are experienced differently. While the meek Christians of Nietzsche's critique never had power and superficially came to disdain it, post-modern conservatives define themselves as members of a historically powerful group and crave a return to that status. To invoke Hannah Arendt, the resentment of these reactionary figures has a kind of impotent bigness about it.[106] They feel robbed of a power they believe they should legitimately possess, and covet it again. Yet no retrenchment of authority or political gain seems sufficient to compensate for the sense of powerlessness and decline. More important still, it reduces to antagonistic politics what is ultimately a much deeper and more intractable set of transformations in society and culture. Rather than rising above this, or actually analysing the social and cultural roots of their anomie, the post-modern conservative redirects their resentful feelings of impotent bigness outwards against their enemies.

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[105] Gilles Deleuze. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983).

[106] Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, NY: Harcourt, 1955).

These enemies are seen as responsible for their ongoing victimisation, and therefore must be combatted and "owned" as often as possible.

The reference to "enemies" is drawn from Carl Schmitt, the German constitutional theorist and perhaps the most eloquent defender of fascist politics. For Schmitt, all politics is ultimately predicated on the friend/enemy distinction,[107] which is framed by fundamental differences in political theology.[108] Since all political concepts and values are ultimately secularised theological concepts and values, enemies cannot be overcome through consensus building or deliberation. Politics is about aligning with friends to establish dominance through conflict with enemies over mutually exclusive theological visions of the world. The point of victory is to obtain the tremendous power to enforce this theological vision across society through the deployment of sovereign authority. For Schmitt, the sovereign is always that person or body that rises above the everyday morass of policy disputes and "decides on the exception."[109] They are capable of suspending the normal operation of law to crack down on dissenters who fundamentally challenge the theological vision of the sovereign and his friends. In other words, the sovereign is a paradoxical figure, someone or something which stands outside of society but which can decide to exceptionally override society's normal rules to maintain existential consistency and political homogeneity through the application of power.

In *Constitutional Theory* Schmitt strikingly connects this sovereign to Rousseauean theory, arguing that in ideal circumstances it is this figure who speaks for the true "General will" of the people.[110] This of course may well be different from the aggregated will of all the individuals who make up the body politic, since many of them may resist. For Schmitt this is irrelevant, since the people must always be existentially constructed as a whole through the application of sovereign power. The sovereign constructs the public by deciding on the exceptional moments when certain antagonistic foreign or extrinsic elements must be excluded.

[107] Carl Schmitt. *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[108] Carl Schmitt. *Political Theology* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[109] Carl Schmitt. *Political Theology* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) at pg 5.

[110] Carl Schmitt. *Constitutional Theory*, trans. Jeffrey Seitzer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) at pg 260.

This approach to politics is in keeping with the worldview of post-modern conservatives. The impotent bigness of their resentment is always directed at real or perceived enemies who are responsible for undermining the legitimate socio-political authority of the post-modern conservative and generating social decline. These are typically those groups who are regarded as disrupting the existential consistency and social homogeneity of the body politic, necessitating that a strong leader assume the position of sovereign to expel or eliminate them. As put by Goodwin and Eatwell in their helpful book *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*:

> The national populists' narrative focuses less on the detail of policy and far more on claims about national decline and destruction, which they link not only to immigration and ethnic change but also to what they see as culturally incompatible Muslims and refugees. This is blamed too on an established political class that is in cahoots with capitalists to put profits before the people, encouraging endless flows of low-skilled or unskilled workers to satisfy the neoliberal economic system and 'betray' the nation (in Eastern Europe the more extreme movements link these changes to Jews). It is primarily a narrative rooted in fears of destruction-in Hungary, Victor Orban presents refugees as 'a Muslin invasion force,' in France Marine Le Pen warns that 'the whole of France will become a gigantic no go zone,' in Austria Heinz-Christian Strache tells voters that unless they end the policy of 'Islamization' Europeans 'will come to an abrupt end', in the Netherlands Geert Wilders warns that Europe will 'cease to exist' if it does not slow the growth of Islam, and in Italy the Leader of the Italian League Matteo Salvini warns that centuries of European history are at risk of disappearing 'if Islamization, which up until now has been underestimated, gains the upper hand.[111]

The same can be said in the United States, where Muslims partner with Latinos in being the primary foreign groups brought in by elite internationalists to destroy the American way of life. And in Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro has pulled the country out of the United Nations Global

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[111] Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin. *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2018).

Compact on Migration[112] after flirting with the construction of camps for Venezuelan refugees.[113] Exactly who the antagonistic groups are varies depending on the context, and we shall analyse them in more detail in the next Chapter. The typical antagonists tend to be identified as a combination of internal cultural and occasionally business "elites" and liberal leftists allied to a collection of external foreign nationals. This reflects the very Schmittian outlook on politics held by post-modern conservatives, where internal concerns about maintaining social homogeneity are matched by external concerns about constraining entry and preventing disruption of an existentially pure body politic. This point is nicely emphasised by Kevin Mattson when discussing his own interpretation of post-modern conservatism, referencing the "rebel" identification of many reactionary figures:

> Postmodern conservatism takes from Buckley's model of the conservative the stance of the rebel (still, against a liberal establishment, but as that establishment has taken numerous blows). From the sixties, post-modern conservatism takes "hipness" and the "new sensibility." And then it bundles these things together with an interest in the postmodern ideas of "diversity" and "anti-foundationalism." Consider the use of the term "diversity" in the original Academic Bill of Rights. The justification for ABOR also argued that "there is no humanly accessible truth that it not in principle open to challenge." The argument is thus infused with post-modern theories about knowledge – knowledge as contingent, grounded in language games, never foundational, etc. But the conservative weds this postmodern outlook with a stance of war – the "political war" that Horowitz outlines in one of his more popular books (popular among elected Republicans). The postmodern style is also found in two other important struggles in the conservative culture wars recently – namely an attack on "objectivity" and the mainstream media as well as an attack on the teaching of evolution in public schools and an argument for the

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[112] Ernesto Londono. "Far Right President Jair Bolsonaro Pulls Brazil from UN Pact Designed to Protect Migrants." *Independent UK*, January 10, 2019. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/jair-bolsonaro-brazil-migration-accord-united-nations-venezuela-refugee-crisis-a8721461.html.

[113] Bruce Douglas. "Brazil's Bolsonaro Considers Refugee Camps for Venezuelans." *Bloomberg*, November 24, 2018. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-11-24/brazil-s-bolsonaro-considers-refugee-camps-for-venezuelans.

alternative paradigm of Intelligent Design. Postmodern conservatism is also the style of the existential rebel taking down an establishment.[114]

Perhaps the most characteristic antagonists of the post-modern conservative are the cosmopolitans and their alliance with the foreign national. The cosmopolitan adopts a pluralistic epistemology and democratic normative position which is antithetical to the post-modern conservative world views. To invoke the rhetoric of Stephen Harper, the cosmopolitan is an "anywhere" who is apparently unconcerned with the well-being of their nation-state. Or to go further with Bork, the cosmopolitan belongs to the New Class which is unconcerned with national "particularity" and wishes to see everyone embrace their liberal values across the globe.[115] Of course this respect for particularity, to the extent it even shows, only goes so deep. It applies only in abstraction, as an external out there, rather than as Other who is present and demands political equality and rights to participation. This is why the cosmopolitan's alliance with the foreign national is so dangerous. Because they are an anywhere who is indifferent to the well-being of their particular nation-state, the cosmopolitan is indifferent to immigration—legal or otherwise—which changes the social and ethnic makeup of their original society. In many cases, they may favour ever looser immigration laws since that works in their personal interest. This abets the arrival of foreign nationals who destabilise existential consistency and social homogeneity, triggering the identity-oriented anxieties of the post-modern conservative and fuelling their resentment towards both the new arrivals and the cosmopolitans who welcomed them.

Another characteristic enemy are various feminist groups, though here post-modern conservatives in culturally liberal countries tend to be careful. They highlight that their opposition isn't necessarily to feminism rightly understood, but rather towards various forms of "intersectional" or "radical" feminism which seeks more ambitious goals than just the attainment of formal equality. This seemingly pragmatic distinction often leads to many strange ideological reorientations depending on the

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[114] Front Page News. "Kevin Mattson Interviewed About His New Book on the Conservative Mind." *History News Network*, October 13, 2008. http://hnn.us/roundup/entries/55679.html.

[115] Robert Bork. *Coercing Virtue: The Worldwide Rule of Judges* (Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada, 2002).

context and the public's perception of what constitutes legitimate efforts and goals in the pursuit of gender equality. To the extent that policies of so-called "intersectional" or "radical" feminists are criticised, they tend to be a motley collection of affirmative action programs, domination of university gender study programs, policing of free speech, and alleged efforts to achieve equality of outcome rather than formal equality of opportunity. That one would be hard pressed to find any credible feminist author or activist who pushes for such radical equality is irrelevant. The framing of feminists as an enemy of post-modern conservatism is, to invoke Shapiro again, more one of "outlook" than policy.[116] Like immigrants, post-modern conservatives tend to regard feminist activism as responsible for the destabilisation of traditional mores and identities. They are correct of course, but their opposition is framed along different epistemic lines than those accepted by most feminist critics. In many respects feminism was inaugurated as the archetypal modernist project alongside campaigns for racial equality, with authors like Wollstonecraft and Woolfe stressing the equal worth and capacity of women to contribute to society. While it has certainly evolved far beyond these beginnings, this modernist striving for emancipation has never fully gone away, even in the work of more draconian authors like Catherine MacKinnon.[117] The reaction of post-modern conservatives is predicated on different epistemic and normative lines, underplaying the worth of emancipation for women relative to the need to stabilise the values and authority of the pastiche-identity they affiliate with. Because feminist emancipation constitutes such a perceived or real threat to the stability of many of these forms of authority and values, it has to be resisted politically and at a gut level where necessary.

The emphasis on enemies demonstrates the fundamental trouble at the heart of post-modern conservatism, and indeed within any kind of Schmittian politics more generally. Schmitt once observed that the end of the friend/enemy distinction would mean the end of politics

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[116]Ian Shapiro. *The Moral Foundations of Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

[117]Herself quite a prominent critic of post-modern theorising. See Catherine MacKinnon. "Points Against Postmodernism." *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, Vol. 25, June 2000.

as we understand it.[118] Whether this is true or not, the kind of resent-ment-driven politics the post-modern conservative engages in can never allow for the final elimination of foes. It thrives on an opposition to stabilise the sense of identity and values, always returning to the "spirit of revenge" which insists that the enemy's wickedness demonstrates the post-modern conservative's fundamental goodness. Indeed, post-modern conservatism follows De Maistre and Robert Bork in being almost as fascinated by the hegemonic powers it associates with its ene-mies as it is repulsed by them. More fundamentally, the lack of a genu-ine antagonist would in many respects be the death knell for the political impetus of post-modern conservatism. It would be forced to recognise the depth of the social transformations wrought by neoliberalism and explicated by post-modern culture, and to recognise that they could only be rectified through radical changes. As conservatives, this poses a funda-mental dilemma, since the reactionary impetus can only seek to reform so far before it risks losing even a semblance of ideological consistency. So the enemy must persist for the post-modern conservative to continu-ously have a target to blame for the failure of his or her policies to actu-ally bring about the world they want.[119]

The political dynamics discussed above are obviously highly unstable and characterised by numerous deep tensions. Any politics of resentment always will be. But they can also be extremely powerful when channelled by skilful hands, and manipulated through the news media and com-munication spheres which emerged with neoliberal society. In the next chapter, I will be analysing several post-modern conservative movements which successfully achieved power, or at least were able to substantially alter the public agenda in the case of Brexit. The aforementioned anal-ysis is by no means intended to suggest that the actual leaders of these movements were irrelevant tropes in a historical process to which they were indifferent. As we shall see, many of the leaders who came to the fore as Schmittian proto-sovereigns were wily and cunning figures with

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[118] Carl Schmitt. *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[119] One might even be willing to go so far as to posit, in a Zizekian style, that the antag-onist is in fact the foundational element of the entire post-modern conservative worldview. The policies which post-modern conservatives put forward are in this sense ancillary to the more basic and confrontational resentment. This thesis strikes me as too extreme, but it is by no means implausible.

formidable political skills. Whether through intellectual analysis, or more often gut feeling, they sensed the sea change that was taking place and marshalled them to take advantage of it. The story of their emergence and rise is the most public and dramatic one associated with post-modern conservatism. It is also where we can start to see some of the cracks in post-modern conservatism emerging, as it was confronted with the problem of not just being a resentment-driven form of Schmittian politics, but an actual style of governance. This proved too much for many post-modern conservatives, who retreated from policy-making to a very agonistic kind of politics where the enemy is both powerless and always thwarting their ambitions. Of course the enemies were never fully or even mostly to blame for these failures, which instead reflect the fundamental tensions latent within the post-modern conservative worldview. In the final Chapter, I will discuss several proposals which may actually go some way to ameliorating these problems in a more substantial way than post-modern conservatism.

Brexit, Donald Trump, and the Rise of Post-modern Conservatism Across the Globe

THE POLITICAL MOBILISATION OF POST-MODERN CONSERVATISM ACROSS THE GLOBE

Consequently, what is happening today in Hungary can be interpreted as an attempt of the respective political leadership to harmonize relationship between the interests and achievement of individuals – that needs to be acknowledged – with interests and achievements of the community, and the nation. Meaning, that Hungarian nation is not a simple sum of individuals, but a community that needs to be organized, strengthened and developed, and in this sense, the new state that we are building is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state. It does not deny foundational values of liberalism, as freedom, etc. But it does not make this ideology a central element of state organization, but applies a specific, national, particular approach in its stead.

Victor Orban, Speech to Baile Tusnad on the 26th of July 2014

Like all political movements, post-modern conservatism looks different depending on where and when it gains substantial traction. These differences can be seen along several dimensions: from the political identities which form the post-modern pastiche of self to the specific enemies they target as part of their agonistic politics. Each dimension feeds on and flows from the others. This spectrum of post-modern conservatisms is to be expected because post-modern conservatism is less defined by a specific set of policy preferences and more by an outlook; in particular a reactionary outlook which embraces forms of illiberalism which haven't been seriously contemplated for many decades. Nonetheless

there are substantial overlaps in both the histories and policies of post-modern conservative movements which highlight their consistency with one another. Indeed, this is often very transparently reflected in the support they give one another; often via encouragement through the new media which helped them rise in the first place, and sometimes via more concrete forms of aid. In this section I will briefly summarise the rise of post-modern conservatism as a global movement, before turning to analyse its particular instantiations throughout the rest of the chapter.

As mentioned in the Introduction, one of the most substantial catalysts for the rise of post-modern conservatism was the 2008 Recession. It is important here to stress that the Recession was not the cause of this rise, though the immediate and dramatic economic impact certainly played a role. Rather it brought to the fore many of the tensions generated by neoliberalism which had been papered over before. In particular, it highlighted the social transformations which had been wrought under neoliberal governance; especially its production of socio-political and economic inequalities that were starker than those which existed in the mid-twentieth century. In the case of the 2008 recession, financers and bankers hedged their tremendous influence to secure hundreds of billions of dollars for both themselves and the financial institutions they owned and controlled, at a time when the homes and livelihoods of millions of people across the globe were at serious risk. The implementation of austerity and cost-cutting measures, for instance, in the United Kingdom under the Cameron and later May governments, hammered home the fact that while some individuals and firms were apparently too big to fail under neoliberalism, plenty of others were entirely disposable. This apparently included substantial segments of the working and middle classes, who were met by moralising commentary about thrift and the virtues of austerity emanating from the very people who profited from the collapse, issued through the very news media which they had subverted to their use. More dramatic still was the enforcement of austerity on tiny Greece by a transparently forceful Eurozone, where the democratic will of a member state was overruled to preserve the integrity of the continental currency. In each of these instances the systematic disparities of the system were made explicit, generating outrage which had been brewing for some time among those left behind by neoliberal governance. Unfortunately, this outrage has often been channelled by post-modern conservatives towards many of the wrong targets. The agonistic politics of Schmittian "enemies" which defines post-modern

conservatism means it rarely takes steps to reform the worst inequities produced by neoliberal governance, let alone to counter the destabilisation of identity made explicit by post-modern culture. Despite this it has proven impossible to put the genie back into the bottle after ten years, especially as each electoral victory by post-modern conservatives convinces them that the next is within easy reach.

The first major victory for post-modern conservatism came in 2010 with the election of Victor Orban and his nationalist Fidesz party in Hungary. Ending 8 years of rule by the Socialist party, Fidesz quickly went about creating a new kind of "illiberal" democracy in Hungary centred on demands for ethnic and cultural homogeneity, disdain for immigrants, and support for traditionalist Judeo-Christian values. They gradually seized control of much of the country's media and institutional apparatuses, tightening their grip on power. Helped further by Hungary's unusual system of proportional representation, which tends to reward electoral winners, the party's grip on power now seems assured into the foreseeable future.

The next domino to fall was Poland, which in 2015 elected the Law and Justice party to a majority government. It in turn proceeded to follow the Fidesz route of concentrating power in the party's hands, through establishment of party-run media outlets and the gradual diminution of civil society groups and the judicial system. These two central European elections were run ups to the transformative impact of 2016, which was to have worldwide significance. In the summer of that year, voters in the United Kingdom elected by a small margin to leave the European Union. Many Brexit supporters expressed a desire to regain control of their national sovereignty, particularly over issues pertaining to immigration.

Then in November, despite losing the popular vote by a significant margin, Donald J. Trump was elected President of the United States of America. He had run on a campaign emphasising fear of immigration and social change, using new media like Twitter to level constant attacks against alleged enemies of the people. Inspired by this unexpected and strange victory, a number of parties in Europe quickly rose to power or saw their level of support increase by using similar rhetoric and tactics. In 2017 the ANO party won election in the Czech Republic after promising to implement immigration quotas and oppose deeper European integration. That same year the far-right French National Front increased its share of the vote and came very close to winning power in France.

They were only blocked by the unexpected emergence of Emmanuel Macron as a charismatic centrist politician who was able to rally opposition to the National Front and eke out a victory. Since then his support has dwindled under pressure by populist movements opposed to his "stay the course" approach to European integration and neoliberalisation.

In October 2017, Austrians overwhelmingly voted for conservative and far right parties. The result was a coalition between the Austrian People's Party and the anti-immigrant and anti-Islam Freedom Party of Austria, which has since pushed for a nationalist agenda emphasising the need to retrench social homogeneity. The pro-immigration CDU–SPD coalition which had governed Germany for years lost votes to the far-right Alternative for Germany Party, which became the third largest in the Bundestag. This produced such tensions that shortly after Angela Merkel declared that she would not seek reelection again. Italy followed suit in 2018, with the nationalist Lega party winning the most votes and forming a coalition government with populist parties like Five Star.[1]

Post-modern conservative movements have seen some setbacks to their ambitions. The generally more pro-Brexit Conservative party has been draining support to the Labour party since at least 2016, losing seats and votes to Labour in 2017. Since then Brexit efforts have stalled in Parliamentary debates and negotiations with the European Union, leading many to now support remaining. In the 2018 midterm elections, Donald Trump's party lost seats and support to a resurgent Democratic party, which won the popular vote by 8.6%. This was in spite of gerrymandering and the implementation of various GOP-sponsored voter repression actions. Post-modern conservatives have also seen recent setbacks in Spain and The Netherlands. But by and large these are rearguard successes for opponents of post-modern conservatism. Many post-modern conservatives are optimistic their support will continue to grow, thus securing their power for decades to come. To understand this optimism, we will need to look more closely at how these movements won big in the first place.

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[1] In October of 2018, Brazil also turned towards a hybrid form of conservatism, partly post-modern, partly pure reactionary despotism, by electing the eccentric and vulgar Jair Bolsonaro as President. Bolsonaro campaigned against the left-wing Workers Party which was then mired in a corruption scandal, promising to bring integrity back to Brazil by curbing gay rights, stemming liberalisation, and turning the clock back to the country's days as a military dictatorship. He won a major victory, inspiring many to claim that the populist uprising had come to Latin America.

The Rise of Post-modern Conservatism
in the United States

At the center of this movement is a crucial conviction that a nation exists to serve its citizens. Americans want great schools for their children, safe neighborhoods for their families, and good jobs for themselves. These are just and reasonable demands of righteous people and a righteous public. But for too many of our citizens, a different reality exists: mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; an education system flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of all knowledge; and the crime and the gangs and the drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential. This American carnage stops right here and stops right now.

Donald J. Trump, Inauguration Speech, January 20, 2017

Post-modern conservatism burst forth in the Anglosphere in 2016, breaking apart decades of consensus on neoliberalisation. This is all the more striking since the United Kingdom and the United States are the two countries most indelibly associated with neoliberal governance. The policies, and perhaps just as important the outlook, of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan remain paradigmatically associated with the movement. And indeed, the chief accomplishment of both figures was to (momentarily) make it seem like there was indeed "no alternative" to neoliberalisation after it had been implemented. When asked what her greatest accomplishment was, Thatcher proclaimed: "Tony Blair and New Labour. We forced our opponents to change their minds." And indeed, Blair's well known Third Way approach to politics seemed to reinforce the Fukuyamist belief that the primary form of political deliberation from here on in would simply be about whether to have softer or harsher variants of neoliberal governance. The same is true with Bill Clinton, who proclaimed in his 1996 State of the Union Address that the "era of big government was over." It is therefore strange that the most dramatic pushback against neoliberalisation would occur in the same countries so closely associated with it.

In the United States, the rise of post-modern conservatism might have been foreseen some time ago. In few countries was a neoliberal society and concurrent post-modern culture as developed, characterised simultaneously by dramatic transformations on a vast scale and immense anxieties about the destabilisation of traditional mores,

identities, and hierarchies. For a long time, American conservatism was able to paper over the pronounced tension between supporting neoliberalisation while expressing concern about social transformations and post-modern culture through the power of fusionist ideology. Fusionism is the distinctively American combination of traditionalist—often Judeo-Christian—social conservatism with support for capitalist markets. While most commonly associated with the somewhat heady intellectualism of the *National Review*, particularly its founding figure William. F Buckley, and others such as Frank Meyer,[2] it has deep roots in the individualistic Protestantism of the early American colonies. This was noted by figures as diverse as Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber, who observed how many ordinary Americans associated their striving for wealth and status with a kind of religious duty. This was connoted in many different ways, from the Calvinist belief that prosperity signified God's blessing was upon you, to the Puritan mentality that committing one's self to hard work protected against sinful temptations. While sometimes framed in more secular terms today, the fusionist belief that capitalism is connected to the stability of moral institutions and character has often been at the heart of American conservatism and the outlook of its proponents.

The fusionist outlook's ideological power was only ever matched by its failure to translate it successfully into practice. I have already observed how the transformations of neoliberal society had a profoundly destabilising effect on traditional identities and hierarchies. In the United States, these transformations were often dismissed by more traditionalist conservatives through the Cold War, as the necessary price to be paid for generating the economic growth needed to defeat the "evil empire" of the atheistic Soviet Union. But as Corey Robin notes in *The Reactionary Mind*, almost from the moment of victory, many conservatives started to worry. The triumphant capitalism increasingly sweeping the globe struck them as decadent and amoral. The influence of critics like Alasdair Macintyre and now Patrick Deneen demonstrates how deep-rooted this concern was; a concern that only grew more critical of neoliberalism as the decades wore on.[3] Some neoconservatives, such as David Frum and

[2] See Frank S. Meyer. *In Defense of Freedom and Related Essays*. With a Foreword by William C. Dennis (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1996).

[3] See Alasdair Macintyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre-Dame Press, 1981) and Patrick Deneen. *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

Bill Kristol, tried to resolve this tension between supporting permissive capitalism and traditionalist moralism by calling for imperial projections of strength. The United States would counter the impact of neoliberal post-modernisation and its attendant materialism through assuming the open-ended task of remaking the world order in America's image. This of course was always an unusual view, as American conservatives decided to avoid the decadence of neoliberal materialism by making themselves responsible for exporting it globally. This internationalist solution reached its apex under the Presidency of George W. Bush, who as Ignatieff observed, projected American strength across the Middle East as a kind of "empire lite."[4] Of course it soon lost its appeal as the immensity and expense of the task made itself plain, and the Obama administration constituted a return to what should have been relatively normal American politics. Like Clinton and Blair before him, Obama kept the general process of neoliberalisation going, while tempering its worst tendencies through modest redistributive efforts and a less obviously strident foreign policy.

Unfortunately, this was not enough to temper the growing reactionary hostility towards neoliberalisation which was bubbling up from below. Indeed, as a well-educated and suave member of a racial minority, to many post-modern conservatives Obama symbolised much of what was wrong with the current system. His efforts to ameliorate the consequences of economic precarity were relatively minimal, though it is worth noting even these were dogmatically opposed by fusionist Republicans. And more importantly, his commitment to higher levels of immigration, growing pluralisation, and emphasis on political participation by previously marginalised groups made it easy for his opponents to characterise him as the force driving social transformations and the breakdown of traditional hierarchies. Obama's efforts, as slight as they were, fed into the fear that neoliberalisation was fundamentally changing the experience of geographic space around many Americans, and the demographic transformations in urban areas were bringing about profound changes to the status of the American identity.

American post-modern conservatism really came of age as a serious force in politics through relatively new forms of media organisation. This includes conservative radio, movies, YouTube, Twitter, broadcasters

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[4] Michael Ignatieff. *Empire Lite: Nation Building in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2003).

like Fox News, and outlets such as *American Greatness* and of course *Breitbart*. Its early spokesmen include figures like Dinesh D'Souza, Alex Jones, and Steven Bannon. One can search in vain for a common commitment to specific policy changes and principles among these outlets and figures. Like most variants of post-modern conservatism, its American iteration is predicated on a highly agonistic approach to politics. Much of this is driven by the format of these new media, which as Postman observes, tend to reward hyperbolic and identity-oriented partisanship and aggression over nuanced appeal to myriad sources of epistemic authority. Whether it is D'Souza claiming that Obama is driven by a deep rage rooted in the post-colonial anti-Americanism of his father,[5] Alex Jones railing against big government's efforts to normalise and spread homosexuality through chemical conspiracies, or Steve Bannon's castigation of out of touch elites in the liberal media, the common thread of post-modern conservatism in America is its resentment-driven antagonism towards political enemies who are accused of destabilising identity and traditions while undermining socially useful hierarchies. This was well expressed by Bannon in 2014, where he followed Bork in railing against a political "class" of global elites and conjured images of a revolt which was brewing against them:

> There is a growing global anti-establishment revolt against the permanent political class at home, and the global elites that influence them, which impacts everyone from Lubbock, Tex., to London, England…We look at London and Texas as two fronts in our current cultural and political war.[6]

One might find this anti-elitist mentality odd given that there hasn't been a shift under Trump towards greater efforts at ameliorating economic inequality. And indeed, more than other variants of post-modern conservatism, the American approach does tend to be more favourable towards economic inequality than its European counterparts.

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[5] My friend and collaborator David Hollands has written on the cinematic aesthetics of post-modern conservative by referencing the films of D´Souza. See his essay in Matthew McManus. *What Is Post-modern Conservatism: Essays on Our Hugely Tremendous Times* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2019).

[6] Leslie Kaufman. "Breitbart News Network Plans Global Expansion." *New York Times*, February 16, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/17/business/media/breitbart-news-network-plans-global-expansion.html?smid=pl-share.

This reflects the deep hostility towards "socialism" of any sort still pronounced by male American conservatives. This was in no way blunted when Trump came to power. While Bannon and even Trump railed against the influence of "global elites" whose wealth gave them the political clout necessary to push for greater levels of immigration and globalisation, the attacks were not very specified and rarely extended to a more general critique of capitalism or inequality. To the extent Trump emerged as a reaction against globalisation and elites, it was to attack neoliberal capitalism, not capitalism itself. This was of course important since much of Trump's political branding was predicated on his wealth and the perceptions of success and merit that were associated with that in American political culture.

Donald J. Trump is easily the world's most famous post-modern conservative, but he is also its least substantial. While figures like Victor Orban and Matteo Salvini have doggedly earned a kind of vulgar majesty from their hierarchy climbing efforts, Trump's comic lack of substance makes him more interesting and important as a phenomenon than as a personality. Having inherited hundreds of millions of dollars, and having eked out a narrow electoral win against the wishes of the population even after being abetted by gerrymandering and voter suppression, he has relatively few accomplishments which are singularly his own. The one talent which Trump has always had is for marketing and branding, increasingly stripping the fetish from any solid commodity to develop a very spectral kind of social capital. These talents were on full display starting in 2015, when he opened his election campaign with a speech light on proposals but heavy on apocalyptic hyperbole and self-aggrandizement. In his opening speech Trump railed against the danger of immigrants and bashed their allies, while claiming that other countries were beating Americans and laughing at them.

> The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems. Thank you. It's true, and these are not (?) the best and the finest. When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with them. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.[7]

[7] PBS News. "Watch Donald Trump Announce His Candidacy for US President." *PBS News Hour*, June 1, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SpMJx0-HyOM.

The remainder of the speech invoked fears of automation and the loss of jobs to globalization resulting from ineffective or weak trade deals, made much of Trump's self-identified personal accomplishments, and invoked the tropes of American nationalism. What made the speech and the subsequent campaign unique was its use of both hyper-modern media and good old-fashioned grassroots mobilisation, as well as the tremendous ability of Trump to unabashedly and continuously resort to falsehood while maintaining, at least among his supports, an aura of plain-speaking truthfulness. In the course of the campaign, Trump made very few concrete policy commitments. He vacillated on a number of points, lied with unparalleled frequency, and often seemed oblivious to even the most basic issues. When combined with the stark revelations about his personal immorality and gilded upbringing, one has to wonder what made Trumpism so appealing to conservatives. Many of them pride themselves on maintaining personal morality, often wish to appear as self-made individuals, and posture as individuals of integrity and honesty. And of course, many commentators, including many conservatives, pointed out exactly these problems.[8]

Such accusations miss the post-modern attraction of a figure like Trump to many reactionaries, most of whom had long been prepped for his emergence by the agonistic conservative media discussed earlier. The turn to Trumpism was motivated by a number of factors. Some believed he would keep his promise and bring back jobs. Others were simply tired after 8 years of rule by Democrats, regarding Hilary Clinton as simply more of the same. This was especially true in areas that had never fully recovered from the 2008 Recession, and for whom Obama was a disappointment. And of course, many were motivated by the pure xenophobia and racism which has never been entirely exorcised from American politics. What is common to all these individuals is that the very emptiness of Trump as a signifier allowed these different motivations to find their expression in him. Trump's hyperreality has a clownish quality only for those who have managed to avoid the worst impacts of neoliberal transformations and inculcation in post-modern culture. For many, his braggadocio and outlook were enough to reassure them that he was the

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[8]A good example of such a figure would be David Frum, who was a substantial presence in the Bush regime. See David Frum. "The President Is a Crook." *The Atlantic*, August 22, 2018. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/08/the-president-is-a-crook/568123/.

individual who was capable of countering the enemies of post-modern conservatism and restoring stability to traditions and identities deflated by neoliberal culture. This was true from the get-go due to his status as a so-called political outsider who had no prior relations to party politics. This strategic positioning became even more obvious when virtually every major establishment Republican attacked him, reinforcing Trump's self-projection of being simultaneously a victimised Cassandra speaking for the persecuted and the inevitable frontrunner leading the charge against "weak" and "low energy" opponents. This alchemical mixture of factors all contributed to Trump's initial appeal to American post-modern conservatives, and despite more than two years of scandal in office, the shine has largely not gone away.

One of the major advantages Trump has enjoyed has been the missteps of his various opponents, all of whom have been felled through a combination of their hubris in underestimating his skills at marketing while failing to recognise that he embodies precisely the characteristics need to appeal to reactionaries in a post-modern epoch. Opponents frequently criticised Trump for lacking substance and failing to present genuine arguments and proposals beyond the fantastic—like the infamous Wall—or the impossible, such as the claim that Mexico would pay for it. While these accusations are no doubt true, they missed the strategic irrelevance of such issues in this day and age. The changing dynamics of space and time characteristic of post-modern culture are best seen in the acceleration of the political cycle to such a pitch that few, if any, are able to dwell on such matters before the next issue comes up. More importantly still, many of Trump's opponents in the GOP failed to see that a significant number of Americans were embracing an agonistic politics oriented around pastiche-like identities. Combined with the dominance of the new right-wing media, this made it extremely unlikely that post-modern conservatives would drift away from Trump. The outlets post-modern conservatives turn to are unlikely to ever become substantially critical of Trumpism.

These factors were most prominently displayed when the issue of Trump's lack of moral integrity and his continuing dishonesty came up, as they so very often did. Trump was always known to be an amoralist, meaning that the evidence of his sexually assaulting women and bragging about it was doubly shocking because it took so long for it to emerge. The shock was made exponentially worse when the allegations and

evidence were essentially ignored by his supporters, and had no discernable effect on his reputation or his growing political power.

Trump was recognised as a liar by his intimates well before he ran for political office, and the awareness of his complete disregard for the truth became a matter of public record after 2015 when literally hundreds of falsehoods and half-truths were recorded. The reason why the evidence of his dishonesty failed to weaken his political support was because Trump is not in his essence a liar. As I mentioned in the Preface, Trump is instead a bullshitter, and thus well adapted to the epistemic and normative variances of post-modern culture.

As Harry J. Frankfurt observes in *On Bullshit*, there is a fundamental difference between a liar and a bullshitter.[9] A liar is someone who, despite being dishonest, remains cognisant that there is a difference between truth and falsehood. They also operate under the assumption that most people appreciate this distinction, and therefore attempt to conceal their dishonesty. Richard Nixon is a useful parallel to Trump here, as he of course went to great and fruitless lengths to cover up his illicit behaviour and lies. By contrast Trump's entire life, and indeed his great skills at marketing and self-promotion, are predicated on bullshitting. In effect Trump denies that the distinction between truth and falsehood has any meaning if some form of falsehood is necessary to advance his cause, which has always of course been himself first and foremost.

The glossy name given to this, in true Trumpian fashion, is "truthful hyperbole" which he used because … "people want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular" whether that means the campaign or of course Trump himself. To invoke Frankfurt one final time, the basic difference between a bullshitter and a liar is that the latter still takes the truth seriously while the former is indifferent to it or unaware of it. For post-modern conservatives, lying can have little impact, because the meta-ethical and epistemic frameworks for making rationalistic judgements have given way to those required to maintain the stability of the pastiche-like identity and advance its political power. Trump's words came to be seen as not necessarily true in a literal sense, but expressing a deeper truth about the greater reality which must come about; a fantasy world in which America becomes great again and the nostalgic stereotypes on which post-modern

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[9] Harry G. Frankfurt. *On Bullshit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

conservatives built their sense of self have new life breathed into them. When Trump promised to "Make America Great Again" this wasn't a lie, so much as it was a bullshit claim about his own independent ability to turn back the clock and to restore a 1950s or for that matter a 1980s that never really existed to begin with, but which made for a great post-modern myth about a time of integrity and dominance which had been allowed to slip away. Or, to expand the myth even more, a golden era which had been actively dismantled by the enemies of post-modern conservatism. Given the power this narrative has on the post-modern conservative imagination, the dissolution of other sources of meta-ethical and epistemic authority, and the deep desire for both the stabilisation of identity and the defeat of one's perceived enemies, no amount of prodding by the enemies of post-modern conservatives to point out Trump's dishonesty was going to have an impact. The resentment-driven agonism of their politics meant that post-modern conservatives rejected the very basis for opposing judgements about truth anyways.

The result of all these factors was Trump's ascendency to the White House and his current status as nominally the world's most powerful man. In the years since his victory, the Trump White House has benefited from high economic growth and a fiercely loyal base. Its policy accomplishments have primarily been negative rather than constructive; a huge number of real or threatened withdrawals from a number of major agreements, the imposition of tariffs on a number of competitors and trade partners, and dismantling of the regulatory state. One of the main features of post-modern conservative approaches to international relations was displayed quite prominently with the ongoing Trumpist attacks on internationalism and international law. The appointment of well-known critic and chicken hawk John Bolton to the position of national security advisor is emblematic. Trumpist international relations were going to be defined by throwing off the yoke of hidden constrains and unleashing unrestrained Americanism that would outdo the average Michael Bay movie in its gaudy banality. As John Bolton once put it:

> "Another hidden agenda is making the unilateral use of United States' force harder by raising the political and military risks and costs of such action, thus making it less attractive to senior decision makers; requiring other nations (whether through the Security Council or other mechanisms) to participate in the consideration of the use of force by the United States; and locking the United States into interpretations of "international

law" rather than relying on constitutional or statutory reasoning. Since the national security of the United States is the ultimate responsibility of its central government, the weakening of that authority is perhaps the most definitive and most crippling paralysis of "international law…"[10]

Its few constructive gestures, such as recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, securing more funding for the defensive wall along the Mexican border and granting massive corporate tax breaks, range from the symbolic but dangerous to the substantial but ineffective. It is unclear whether any will have persisted given the tumultuous political climate in the United States. The Trump administration has also been consistently undermined by near constant scandal, appeals to some of the worst elements of American society, and not a small amount of incompetence driven by fear or self-interested vanity. In many respects this is little different than Trump's career in real-estate, though more consequential.

The main "accomplishment" of the Trump Presidency, appropriately, lies at the ideological and hyperreal rather than at the material level. It has been to shift the political discourse from issues primarily related to economic growth and prosperity, to those concerning identity and the affiliated culture. The election of Trump to the presidency of the world's largest neoliberal state effectively marked a political break with neoliberalism and the emergence of post-modern conservatism as a dominant inegalitarian viewpoint. And more than any other event, the spectre of Trump's rise has inspired other post-modern conservatives, filling them with the conviction that real and lasting success is within close reach.

Post-modern Conservatism in the United Kingdom

Allied to the rise of Trumpism is the more ambiguous fallout from the 2016 Brexit referendum and the ensuing crisis that developed. It is more ambiguous because, despite eking out a narrow popular win during the referendum, Brexit has since been mired in immense controversies and difficulties which leave its future enactment clouded as of this writing. Nonetheless, the Brexit vote was an important win for post-modern conservatives since it not only solidified the efficacy of similar political tactics as those emphasised above, but signified that class anger at neoliberalism

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[10]John Bolton. "Is There Really 'Law' in International Affairs?" *Transnational and Contemporary Problems*, No. 1, 2000 at pg 37.

and the power of international regulatory bodies could be channelled into hostility towards internationalism more generally. As put by Boris Johnson in a May 2016 speech:

> If you walk around London today, you will notice that the 12 star flag of the EU is flying all over the place. That is because this is Schuman day. It is the birthday of the founder of this project, and the elites have decreed that it should be properly marked. Do we feel loyalty to that flag? Do our hearts pitter-patter as we watch it flutter over public buildings? On the contrary. The British share with other EU populations a growing sense of alienation, which is one of the reasons turn-out at European elections continues to decline. As Jean-Claude Juncker has himself remarked with disapproval, "too many Europeans are returning to a national or regional mindset". In the face of that disillusionment, the European elites are doing exactly the wrong thing. Instead of devolving power, they are centralizing. Instead of going with the grain of human nature and public opinion, they are reaching for the same corrective behavioral therapy as Monnet and Schuman: more legislation, more federal control; and whenever there is a crisis of any kind the cry is always the same. "More Europe, more Europe!"…They persist in the delusion that political cohesion can be created by a forcible economic integration, and they are achieving exactly the opposite.[11]

What is fascinating is the rhetoric deployed here operates on a conceptual logic of loyalty and control. For Johnson, the anti-Brexiters' counter-arguments regarding the economic benefits of Europeanisation were either false or beside the point. What mattered was romantic nostalgia for the Union Jack and a demand that the people take back "control" from the European Union. This would, of course, benefit many post-modern conservatives, for whom control of the nation by no means meant control over one's personal fate. Freedom from Eurocratic domination was never meant to be a stepping stone to making greater efforts to ameliorate the actual plight of the Brexit voting working and middle classes. It does potentially mean a place at 10 Downing for Boris Johnson though, which is, apparently, accomplishment enough.

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[11]Conservative Home. "Boris Johnson's Speech on the EU Referendum." *Conservative Home, the Home of Conservatism*, May 9, 2016. https://www.conservativehome.com/parliament/2016/05/boris-johnsons-speech-on-the-eu-referendum-full-text.html.

British conservatism has long been far more secular than its American counterparts. Nonetheless it is no less given to ideological tensions and even contradictions which can realise themselves in practice with a vengeance under the right circumstances. In particular, the wholesale embrace of neoliberal capitalism by many British conservatives was always tempered by various affective attachments to distinctive ways of life and traditions which were eroded by internationalism-inspired globalisation and open borders to goods and migration. As Roger Scruton would put it, to be a British conservative meant wanting to hold on to a peculiarly British way of doing things and not to fall victim to the various malaises of relativistic modernity and specious internationalism.[12] This kind of British conservatism is remarkable for its melancholy dignity; the sense that the world will inevitably take things away but it is their moral duty to preserve them as long as possible. After all, a thing is not less beautiful because it ends; indeed sometimes it becomes more so due to the finitude of its existence.

On occasion, this melancholy but deep British conservatism has given rise to admirable moral sentiments, as embodied in the outrage Burke felt towards the destruction of Indian culture by arrogant English colonizsrs.[13] But this British conservatism could also assert itself as a more shallow and universalistic nationalism, insisting on the superiority of its own way of doing things and seeking to enhance sovereign control by mastering the destiny of the world. This romantic grandeur was characteristic of imperialists like Winston Churchill, who saw little contradiction in fighting fiercely for independence at home while seeking glory and dominion abroad. As O'Rourke argues in his *A Short History of Brexit*:

> Conservatives were…very keen on another aspect of nineteenth-century globalization, the British Empire. They were proud of Britain´s many possessions in Africa and Asia, but of special emotional importance were Australia, Canada, and New Zealand…But all three were also on their way

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[12] Roger Scruton. *How to Be a Conservative* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014).

[13] Uday Mehta. *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

to becoming effectively independent, and there were some who feared that this might in the long run deprive Britain of a vital strategic asset and undermine her greatness.[14]

This more romantic strain of British conservatism was on full display during the Brexit vote, embodied in the buffoonish figure of eternal Eton boy Boris Johnson and the harlequinesque pastiche of Englishness that is Nigel Farage. Unable to unleash their romantic energies by advancing imperial sovereignty, they settled for demanding national sovereignty against an alleged European empire instead. The Brexit campaign was characteristically post-modern in its combination of appeals to national identity, rampant deployment of Frankfurtian bullshit, and an unwillingness to accept the credibility of alternative judgements when they came from the enemies of post-modern conservatives. Most of these judgements came from a meta-ethical and epistemic stance which reeked of neoliberal ideology, emphasising the likely consequences of leaving the European Union on economic growth and efficiency. These accurate but dry narratives were readily dismissed by post-modern conservatives as indicatory of the "out of touch" character of Europhiles, and anxieties about economic deprivation could be readily countered by plastering lies about EU funding on the side of a bus and driving the magical mystery tour across the country.

The campaign for Brexit does illustrate something important about the post-modern conservative's agonistic approach to politics; particularly their hostility towards most forms of internationalism.[15] More than any other political position, this signifies the break with neoliberal variants of conservatism and the reactionary emphasis on both reaffirming a seemingly stable collective identity in the morass of post-modern culture, and seeking to retrench or "take back control" of the political community on behalf of that identity.

This isn't to suggest that there were no very legitimate grievances one could level against the European Union. In particular its lack of democratic accountability, and failure to establish what Habermas called chains

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[14] Kevin O'Rourke. *A Short History of Brexit from Brentry to Backstop* (London, UK: Pelican Books, 2019) pgs 24–25.

[15] I will discuss some variants of internationalism supported by post-modern conservatives later.

of legitimation, have been an immense letdown for those of us who believe in the internationalist project.[16] As already mentioned, these failures were on full display in 2015 when the Eurozone effectively imposed strict austerity measures on a Greek population which voted emphatically to reject it. But the attacks of British nationalists against the Eurozone were not motivated first and foremost by concerns about concrete infringements on national sovereignty which had an impact on the material well-being of the citizenry. As many commentators have observed, the alleged economic and bureaucratic inefficiencies of the Union were highly overstated and pale next to the challenges which would result from even stating an intention to leave. Even many of the alleged economic privileges a fully sovereign Britain would apparently enjoy, such as an unrestricted right to fish in waters near the island, were largely aspirational fantasies given the reality of twenty-first-century diplomacy. There are few economic rights pertaining to non-domestic goods and resources which the British can exercise unilaterally outside of the Union; indeed, in many respects leaving places them at a disadvantage next to the European bloc's superior clout.

The critiques levelled at something much more spectral—the mere notion that a foreign power assumed the right to direct any British affairs—was taken as an insult to the identity and weight of a great but declining old power. As mentioned, this narrative of decline is one frequently invoked by post-modern conservatives, who regard any shift in hierarchical relations affecting the identities they associate with as a danger. This was best indicated in the consistent demands to retake control of the United Kingdom's borders and impose more serious restrictions on immigration. Though the UK still retained immense power to restrict immigration from non-European countries, the belief that floods of Eastern European and Balkan hordes were pouring into the country and taking British jobs had a powerful impact on the post-modern conservative imagination. In its ugliest iterations, this took the form of overt Islamophobia and racism. This was combined with a desire to reassert the "Englishness" of the United Kingdom against such foreign interlopers; though of course, without substantially coming to grips with the politically fraught history of imperialist interventionism of the UK.

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[16]See Jürgen Habermas. *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2012) and Jürgen Habermas. *The Divided West*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (London, UK: Polity Press, 2006).

The tropes of sovereign assertiveness had to substitute for the characteristically British romanticism about imperial glory and influence. While the return to Rule Britannia was never going to fully arrive, implicit and sometimes explicit nostalgia for this epoch consistently framed the Brexit narrative. As nicely put by Virdee and McGeever:

> Brexit draws on deep reservoirs of imperial longing in the majority population. When Prime Minister Theresa May gave her first speech following the vote to Leave, she made reference to a "Global Britain" no less than seventeen times. We contend that the allure of this "Global Britain" acquires resonance among large swathes of the Eurosceptic population in part because of its association with Empire 1.0. That is, to speak of a Global Britain is to not only suggest how great Britain can be in the future, but also to invoke warm collective memories of a now lost world where Britain was the global hegemon of the capitalist world economy. It is to remind that population of those glory days of economic, political and cultural superiority, where everything from ships to spoons were marked with a Made in Britain stamp.[17]

The objective of all this then was to reassert the identity of Britishness—and especially Englishness—as rightly situated at the top of the social hierarchy in the United Kingdom and to expunge the influence of foreign elements. As Nigel Farage endlessly pointed out, directly appealing to the most stereotyped nostalgia, he disliked it when elite, self-important, overpaid "faceless bureaucrats" with useless degrees who have "never done a proper day's work in their lives" imposed rules on a country they "didn't even live in."[18] Far better to trust the "good sense" of the "ordinary" British people over the "arid intellectualism" of the foreign Eurocrats. The agonistic politics of leave is nicely demonstrated in this rhetoric, combining many elements associated with the enemies of post-modern conservatism together. The enemies of Brexit are elites, arid intellectuals, foreigners, lazy, and "faceless"—lacking attachment to a stable identity. This is combined seamlessly with the presentation of

[17]Satnam Virdee and Brendan McGeever. "Racism, Crisis, Brexit." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 41, 2018 at pg 1805.

[18]Nigel Farage. "Brexit: Why Britain Left the European Union." *PragerU*, March 12, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLp7LtXmy68&t=2s.

stereotyped English subjects as having sufficient "good sense" to expel these antagonistic elements from society.[19]

This exceptionally agonistic vision was on full display shortly after the Brexit vote, where Farage wasted no time in grandstanding before the European parliament. Rather than emphasise constructive points about moving forward cooperatively, or establishing amicable relations between equals, Farage framed Brexit in a highly personal and resentment-driven manner by stating that the despised Eurocrats had long laughed at him, but they weren't laughing anymore. That this is closer to the comic mentality of adolescent impotence than the grandeur of even romantic imperial statesmanship never seem to have occurred to him.[20] Greater awareness of these dynamics might have prepared Farage for the farce that was to overtake both UKIP and Britain over the next few years.

The end result of Brexit is well known. The United Kingdom triggered Article 50 stipulating a desire to leave the European Union in two years. A long period of negotiations began, during which it became obvious that the United Kingdom was in the weaker bargaining position and would not receive the concessions nor the deal that Brexiters had promised. This was followed by news that Leave had received aid from foreign parties hostile to the European Union, resulting in investigations and controversy over the referendum's legitimacy.

The ruling Conservative party bled seats and support in the 2017 election, raising the frightening prospect of a far left Labour party seizing power under the leadership of the avowedly socialist Jeremy Corbyn. In late 2018 Prime Minister Theresa May presented her initial deal to Parliament, indicating that Donald Tusk and the European Union negotiators were not prepared to grant any more concessions. The deal was widely reviled for effectively making the United Kingdom into a second tier member of the Eurozone, with many of the obligations being maintained but none of the previously favoured concessions. May protested that the reality was that this was the best deal the UK could conceivably get, and it is hard to disagree with that uncharacteristically candid

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[19] Nigel Farage. "Brexit: Why Britain Left the European Union." *PragerU*, March 12, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLp7LtXmy68&t=2s.

[20] RT. "You Are Not Laughing Now Are You? Nigel Farage at European Parliament FULL SPEECH." *RT News*, June 28, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJzRa7HWVqs&f-bclid=IwAR2BSFuDaLcVXjMwPyaImEGe_LjH8x9LynhB0Br5MmLlBIpIlf11dnqGgSs.

evaluation. As put by O'Rourke, the negotiation process was often fuelled by the sense that, to invoke Johnson's unfortunate gaffe, the British wanted to have their cake and eat it too:

> And so the British government´s opening position was that it wanted to restrict immigration from the EU, regain control over its own laws, leave the jurisdiction of the ECJ, and therefore leave the EU Single Market, despite this, it also wanted to preserve the City of London´s privileged access to European markets, it wanted to do free trade deals around the world, and therefore did not want to join a new post-Brexit EU-UK customs union, and yet at the same time it also wanted to maintain frictionless trade with the EU - or at least trade that was as frictionless as possible. In other words, the UK wanted to keep the bits of EU membership that it valued and get rid of the rest: it wanted to have its cake and eat it. Famously Boris Johnson had once said as much, and in November 2016 an aide leaving DExEU was photographed clutching a notepad on which the words ´What´s the model? Have cake and eat´ were clearly visible to photographers. A new word has thus entered the European political lexicon: cakeism, the policy of wanting to have your cake and eat it.[21]

To the surprise of no one except the most adamant Brexiters, this turned out to be an unsustainable bargaining position, and things very quickly went pear shaped during the negotiation process. Support for Brexit gradually slipped below 50%, and the British parliament routinely rejected May's deal, the prospect of a hard "no deal" Brexit, and another referendum returning the matter to the British people. It remains to be seen what will come of all this, but it is a spectacular demonstration of the incredible damage post-modern conservative resentment can cause in a very short period of time.

Post-modern Conservatism in Poland

While the rise of post-modern conservatism in the Anglosphere was more dramatic and shocking, its climb to power in central and Eastern Europe was steadier, carefully orchestrated and runs the risk of being more permanent. In some respects, it also has the capacity to be more impactful in the long run. While Trump and Brexit both entailed more

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[21] Kevin O'Rourke. *A Short History of Brexit from Brentry to Backstop* (London, UK: Pelican Books, 2019).

prominent world powers, the fragility of their victories combined with the instability provoked by their actions can lead one to question the permanence of the change from a purely political standpoint. By contrast the rise of post-modern conservative parties in central and Eastern Europe shows little sign of slowing. And once in power, these parties have been strategically adept at holding on to the reins of power while quietly and slowly marginalising all forms of opposition in the country. The geographic and ideological affinity of these parties to Russia, a great and increasingly assertive conservative power, also raises substantial questions. Indeed, one of the great ironies of twenty-first-century European politics is how many of these eastern European countries threw off the yoke of Soviet tyranny only to find themselves junior partners at best to a right-wing Russian autocrat.

Post-modern conservatism in Poland and Hungary has its roots in precisely the breakup of the Warsaw pact in the late twentieth century. For many liberal commentators at the time this was considered a triumphant moment, and indeed it was for many of the people eager to cast aside the harshness of Soviet rule. But it also created a tremendous amount of societal uncertainty in a region which had been subjected to horrific catastrophes for almost a century. Liberal commentators also sublimated many of these movements, regarding them as motivated almost exclusively be a desire for liberty and of course for neoliberal capitalist markets and the prosperity they would apparently bring. While this was often the case on the surface, and was even felt sincerely by young revolutionaries like Victor Orban at the time, it underestimated the degree to which nationalism and religious traditionalism played a role in motivating the uprising. This misjudgement would later become apparent when post-modern conservative governments, many of them led by the same anti-communists praised in the 1990s, rose to power in Eastern Europe.

The Polish Law and Justice Party were founded in 2001 by the Kacynski brothers, Lech and Jaroslaw. Both began their political careers as critics of the Communist government, which gradually evolved into a starker rejection of the political left more generally. They began as centre-right politicians with the Christian Democratic Centre Agreement party, agitating for liberalisation, but with one eye to respecting Poland's national identity and Christian heritage. At the time, they appeared little different than other Christian Democrats in Europe.

The change came in 2001 when the Kacynski's split from Centre Agreement to found the more transparently right-wing Law and Justice Party.[22] Law and Justice broke with the Christian Democratic tradition in being far more militantly aligned with Catholic institutions, and expressing a willingness to impose socially conservative policies even if they clashed with liberal values. They also were concerned that too many former Communists retained substantial political and social power. Law and Justice continued to gain seats and support, particularly in rural areas, in the 2005 and 2007 elections. Lech Kacynski became President of Poland in 2005, but died in a plane crash in 2010. Rather than destabilise the party, there was a surge of support in the wake of the tragedy. Eventually the party won a majority of seats in the Sejm and the Senate, and have since engaged in a number of practices to tighten their grip on the country's politics.[23] These include the extensive use of newly introduced media, continuous and agonistic appeals to Polish nationalism partnered with allegations that the Polish identity is under permanent threat from nefarious individuals across the globe, and, perhaps most worryingly of all, the denigration of immigrants and the turning of a blind eye to the country's anti-Semitic past; tactics designed to appeal and broaden their primarily rural and Eurosceptical base in the east of the country.

Once in power, Law and Justice seized control of state run media and used it to propagate stories and ideological tropes which fit the Party's nationalist narrative while introducing measures to muzzle alternative media. The party also infamously changed the structure of the Polish judiciary, lowering the age of retirement, thereby forcing many Judges opposed to their more illiberal policies out of the public service. This was accompanied by low key purges of civil servants and efforts to undermine the authority of institutional checks on the Party's supremacy such as the Constitutional Tribunal.

These efforts are often justified as part of a process of "curing" the country of "25 years of liberal indoctrination."[24] Nowhere is this more

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[22] Anna Gwiazda. "Party Patronage in Poland: The Democratic Left Alliance and Law and Justice Compared." Paper Prepared for ECPR Conference 2006.

[23] Politico. "Is Poland a Failing Democracy?" *Politico*, January 13, 2016. https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-democracy-failing-pis-law-and-justice-media-rule-of-law/.

[24] Politico. "Is Poland a Failing Democracy?" *Politico*, January 13, 2016. https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-democracy-failing-pis-law-and-justice-media-rule-of-law/.

evident than in the staunchly anti-immigration stance taken by the party since 2017. Members of Law and Justice have frequently invoked national identity to call for a halt to immigration and the "Islamization" of Europe. On occasion, these policies are glammed up in a distinctively post-modern way via appeals to the legacy of Charles Martel, the Frankish commander who halted the expansion of the Islamic caliphate into Europe at the Battle of Tours in 732 AD. That this invasion amounted to little more than a raid into Frankish territory later elevated to epochal status is less important than the mystique associated with it, and the prestige Law and Justice hopes to accrue through such appeals.

This is not the only pastiche-like appeal to history in order to identify current Poles with a nebulous "Western civilization" or "Christendom" under routine attack by internal and external enemies. In an especially vile turn of events, the Law and Justice Party has taken strides to downplay the participation of a significant number of Poles in the Holocaust, framing Poland as a victimised country that exclusively sought to aid Jews being rounded up by the Nazis.[25] This is especially worrying in light of a growing wave of anti-Semitic outbursts and even attacks by far right terrorists in the United States and elsewhere. These kinds of xenophobic efforts and appeals to stereotyped forms of identity persist despite Poland having one of the most ethnically homogenous populations in Europe, with 96% of the country identifying as ethnically Polish in 2011.[26] This remarkable homogeneity is partly a result of the genocidal efforts of the Nazis to liquidate the Jews and other minority populations, and the refugee crises which occurred in the immediate aftermath of the war. That Poland would continue to display such rampant paranoia about identity speaks volumes about the power of the post-modern conservative narrative when deployed in the right manner.

One of the more interesting facets of rule by Law and Justice Party has been its redistributive efforts. The party supports a robust safety net

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[25] Mateusz Mazzini. "Poland's Historical Revisionism Is Pushing It into Moscow's Arms." *Foreign Policy*, February 12, 2019. https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/12/polands-historical-revisionism-is-pushing-it-into-moscows-arms-smolensk-kaczynski-pis-law-justice-holocaust-law/.

[26] Government of Poland. "The Results of the Nation Census on Population and Housing 2011." *Government of Poland*, March 2012. "https://web.archive.org/web/20130116214520/http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/PUBL_lu_nps2011_wyniki_nsp2011_22032012.pdf.

and has advocated for many pro-labour interests. This includes lowering the age of retirement, offering low interest housing loans, and providing extensive resources to the disabled.[27] Many of these initiatives are guided by Law and Justice's social conservative ideals; they've provided substantial financial aid to families which have large numbers of children, increased parental leave, and made most forms of commerce on Sunday illegal so that workers may spend time with their families. In many respects, these policies are quite admirable, and one's distaste for post-modern conservative xenophobia shouldn't preclude this admiration. But there is a darker side to this story, with Law and Justice also imposing substantial new restrictions on access to abortion, taking an exceptionally hard line anti-LGBTQ stance,[28] and of course showing little such generosity to refugees and others fleeing exceptionally challenging circumstances.

The motivation behind these policies appears to be both ideological and strategic. Law and Justice is opposed to the kind of neoliberal internationalism which posits that the world consists of individual economic actors who are supposed to rise and fall on their own merits. Its redistributive policies are part of an effort to counter this individualistic narrative, and encourage Poles to have larger families and devote themselves to the community and nation. The form of conservatism the party endorses is therefore more Bismarkian than American; stressing the role and influence the state can have in maintaining the nation and its identity. More disturbingly, the Law and Justice party has used these financial levers to further tighten its grip on power. It uses economic policy to structure incentives, and rewards groups in society which demonstrate loyalty to the party while punishing those that do not. While such pork-barrel politics is present in virtually any major democracy, the pace and scope with which they are deployed in Poland are drastic, and the ambition to centralise being carried out far more effectively than elsewhere. In this, as in much else, Law and Justice is drawing on the playbook established by Fidesz and Victor Orban in tiny Hungary. It is there we now turn.

[27] Remi Adekoya. "Why Poland's Law and Justice Party Remains So Popular." *Foreign Affairs*, November 3, 2017. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/central-europe/2017-11-03/why-polands-law-and-justice-party-remains-so-popular.

[28] Human Rights Watch. "Poland: Official Homophobia Threatens Basic Freedoms." *Human Rights Watch*, June 4, 2006. https://www.hrw.org/news/2006/06/04/poland-official-homophobia-threatens-basic-freedoms-0.

The Long March of Fidesz in Hungary

Victor Orban may not be the most important post-modern conservative in the world, but he is undoubtedly the most effective so far. Trump, Johnson, and Farage can only envy the Machiavellian skill and increasingly absolute power wielded by Hungary's football loving sawdust despot. While Trump and the Brexiters are beset by constant scandals generated through a combination of incompetence and hubris, Orban up until now has been ruthlessly capable of never allowing his ego to get in the way of pursuing his ambitions. The result increasingly looks like one party rule hidden by the forms of democratic deliberation and opposition. In this sense Hungary is the most paradigmatic post-modern conservative state; one where many of the reactionary objectives posited have been achieved and it looks like there is no end in sight to the dominance of the ruling party.

As with Law and Justice in Poland, Fidesz was birthed in the aftermath of the Cold War. Many of its early members, including Orban himself, were proponents of liberal democracy. They denigrated the country's flirtation with right-wing totalitarianism under the Nazi puppet Miklos Horthy, and of course were equally antagonistic to the left-wing totalitarianism of Soviet style communism as a member of the Warsaw Pact.[29] Orban even attended school with funds provided by George Soros, a fact that would become deeply ironic a few decades later. Since those transformative days, the country has sadly slid back into quasi-authoritarianism; albeit with a not insignificant role still played by the people in legitimating the rule of Orban.

Victor Orban was born in very modest circumstances in the small city Szekesfervar, the son of middle-class entrepreneurs. His family moved to the countryside, and lived in several small villages in central Hungary. The one most associated with Orban, Felcsut, now hosts the Pancho Arena, a soccer pitch capable of sitting more than twice the population of the village. This narrative tells one more than might appear about Victor Orban and Fidesz. He grew up in precarity revering competitive sports, which was one of the few means of advancement available to a young man from no special background. Though he was never particularly gifted at soccer, Orban soon found his true calling in politics, which

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[29] Paul Lendval. *Orban: Europe's New Strongman* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017) pgs 11–17.

he treats with the same zero sum mentality of a professional athlete striving to compete outside his weight class.

Orban quickly recognised the political opportunities offered by the fall of Communism, and with some friends from university, founded Fidesz.[30] Its roots as a countercultural youth party are still occasionally evident, with many members still portraying themselves as victimised outsiders who need to protect Hungary from the vicious interference of left-wing elites, whether communists, socialists, or liberals. This under-lies the almost Augustinian tragedy of Fidesz's corruption, as they moved from outsiders challenging the tyranny of the Soviet system to illiberal democrats concerned above all else with holding onto the reins of power.

Fidesz initially presented itself as a liberal party, with Orban himself expressing a desire for post-Communist Hungary to align itself with the West. Whether for tactical reasons of due to a genuine shift in ide-ological orientation, the trappings of liberalism gradually fell away from Fidesz's early history as an opposition party to the reigning Socialists. Gradually Fidesz increased its share of the votes, finally winning power for the first time in 1998 in a coalition with the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Independent Smallholder's Party. Orban's first term in office between 1998 and 2002 was comparatively unremarkable for its policies. They did take drastic steps to centralise economic organisation, and reduced the power of opposition parties to challenge the govern-ment's legislative agenda by ensuring the National Assembly would only meet every three weeks.

Fidesz and Orban would lose the 2002 election to the Socialists led by Peter Medgyessy. The socialists would hold onto power for almost a decade, though their tenure would be marked by substantial turmoil and controversy. Medgyessy was eventually ousted and replaced by the charismatic Ferenc Gyurcsany, who at first appeared to be the salvation for the incumbent government. Unfortunately his 2006 speech, which came across as arrogant and dismissive of corruption, sealed Gyurcsany's fate and that of his party. Fidesz gained power in municipal elections and saw its support among the electorates steadily increase. It won a major-ity of the Hungarian seats in the 2009 European elections, and swept to power with a two-thirds majority in the legislature in the 2010 elec-tions. This was significant since it gave Fidesz the power to change the

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[30] Paul Lendval. *Orban: Europe's New Strongman* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017) pgs 11–17.

constitution without requiring support from the other parties. Part of this sweeping majority can be attributed to Hungary's unusual electoral institutions, which tend to concentrate power in the hands of major parties rather than distribute it more proportionately. But there is no doubt that Orban was popular, winning over 52% of the vote and banishing the socialists to opposition, a shadow of their former glory.[31]

This was of course only the beginning for Orban, who was determined to ensure that his defeat in 2002 would not be repeated. He swiftly set about concentrating as much power as possible in Fidesz's hands, using carrot and stick as necessary. They lowered the number of seats in the National Assembly from 386 to 199, enabling the party to marginalise opposition parties and make it easier for Fidesz to maintain an absolute majority in the future. Orban proposed a substantial tax on the internet and was frequently accused of using state media to propagate materials sympathetic to the party rather than of purely neutral interest. Fidesz supporters came to occupy many of the most prominent posts in the public service, which both shored up their support while ensuring that, in the unlikely event that they lost formal power in the legislature, the executive branch would continue to operate as a kind of "shadow" government in waiting.[32] It was also during this time period that Orban made his famous speech declaring that Hungary was to become an "illiberal democracy"; one where elections would still be held and relatively fair, but where the voting bloc would be increasingly homogenous and fewer rights would be granted to minorities and other groups.

These efforts proved fruitful in the 2014 election, when Orban's party saw its support dip by almost 8 points from 52.7% of voters in 2010 to 44.54% four years later.[33] While impressive, the more tepid victory may have inspired Orban to more radical measures to shore up his support

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[31] Paul Lendval. *Orban: Europe's New Strongman* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017) pgs 90–96.

[32] Paul Lendval. *Orban: Europe's New Strongman* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017) pgs 100–110.

[33] Cas Mudde. "The 2014 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections, or How to Craft a Constitutional Majority." *Washington Post*, April 14, 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/04/14/the-2014-hungarian-parliamentary-elections-or-how-to-craft-a-constitutional-majority/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4c754e63491e.

where needed. The opportunity came with the 2015 refugee crisis, which Orban quickly mobilised into a political crusade on behalf of not just Hungary, but European Christendom more generally. In his speech to the European People's Party Congress, meeting in Madrid in 2015, Orban cast vitriol on migrants and their leftist allies for playing tricks designed to destroy conservatism and establish progressive rule across the continent under the banner of humanitarianism:

> We cannot hide the fact that the European left has a clear agenda. They are supportive to migration. They actually import future leftist voters to Europe hiding behind humanism. It is an old trick but I do not understand why we have to accept it. They consider registration and protection of borders bureaucratic, nationalist and against human rights. They have a dream about the politically constructed world society without religious traditions, without borders, without nations. They attack core values of our European identity: family, nation, subsidiarity and responsibility.[34]

The rhetoric of agonistic politics combined with post-modern techniques carried through Orban's second term, and often had a direct impact on policies. Perhaps the most infamous was his militarisation of the Hungarian–Serbian border to "clamp down" on illegal immigration, though there was little evidence that this was an overwhelming problem. He also took other steps to prevent the entry of refugees, eventually forcing Angela Merkel into her fateful decision to admit a million Syrians into Germany. Throughout this time period, Hungarian media increased its attacks on immigration and Islam in particular. Perhaps most vulgarly, this is also when Fidesz and Orban began to vehemently attack George Soros. The billionaire Holocaust survivor and founder of the Central European University was cast as a shadowy influence impacting all levels of society, propagating left and liberal ideology and promoting the destabilisation of Hungary's national identity and support for Judeo-Christian values.[35] At points the rhetoric of globalist conspiracies about the Jewish billionaire's reach echoed Hungary's Nazi past, though this did not seem

[34]Website of the Hungarian Government. "Speech of Victor Orban at EPP Congress." *Hungarian Government*, October 26, 2015. http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/speech-of-viktor-orban-at-the-epp-congress20151024.

[35]Paul Lendval. *Orban: Europe's New Strongman* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017) pgs 190–197.

to negatively impact Orban's friendship with Benjamin Netanyahu. In the 2018 election, the xenophobic conspiracy mongering seemed to have played its part. Despite a desperate alliance by various left-wing and liberal groups, Fidesz increased its share of the popular vote to nearly 50% and won another majority. Orban continued to tighten his grip on the country, forcing the Soros' associated Central European University to close its doors at the end of the year. The Central European University had long been regarded as a bastion of liberalism in Hungary, and its final demise meant that one of the last major institutions outside of government control had finally been ousted.[36]

Orban has not simply focused his efforts on Hungary, making him a more significant figure in the post-modern conservative movement than the relatively slight status of Hungary might suggest. He has been very active in building coalitions and networks with other nationalist and far-right groups across Europe and beyond. He has courted the approval of Putin, who has rewarded Hungary with significant investments and attention. Orban has also supported Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, rightly seeing both as providing strategic momentum to the internationalist nationalist movement (pun intended). In 2019 he praised the election of Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro.[37] And of course he has been heavily involved in conservative European groups such as the aforementioned European People's Party. This testifies to the sweep of his vision as a post-modern conservative, and testifies to how post-modern conservatives can think globally even while reacting against Kantian and neoliberal variants of internationalism. It also demonstrates the strategically pastiche-like quality of his outlook, where foreigners and foreign interests are regarded as dangerous interlopers until they seem to reflect a similarly reactionary view. One might see this as a contradiction in some respects, but this overstates the significance of such epistemic and normative standards to issues of identity as framed by post-modern conservatives. For many, especially Orban, agonistic politics means that one

[36] Marc Santora. "George Soros Funded University Is Forced Out of Hungary." *New York Times*, December 3, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/03/world/europe/soros-hungary-central-european-university.html.

[37] Alexandra Bessi. "Orban: Time to Take Hungarian-Brazillian Ties to the Next Level." *Daily News Hungary*, November 20, 2018. https://dailynewshungary.com/orban-time-to-take-hungarian-brazilian-ties-to-next-level/.

can reframe the parameters of who is welcome in the hierarchically superior group as needed to expand the global reach of post-modern conservatism. In such circumstances, a country like Brazil under Bolsonaro, though continents away and with a prodigiously different culture and history, can become "the most apt definition of modern Christian democracy" yet seen.[38]

If there is one weakness to the seemingly invincible grip of Fidesz on Hungary, it is Orban and his follower's inability to put even post-modern principle ahead of the far more ancient vice of greed. Since coming to power, Orban and other party officials have perpetuated and even worsened the corruption which has long characterised modern Hungarian politics. Though corruption has not reached the truly epic scale seen with Vladimir Putin, who remains the undisputed godfather of graft, Orban himself is worth tens of millions of dollars. And other members of Fidesz are not far behind. Whether this will catch up to them in the long run is another question. Fidesz's grip on power may not be quite tight enough to weather the tempestuous Hungarian population's distaste for corruption, or it may well prove resilient and manipulative enough to even overcome a major scandal which would have brought the once dominant Socialists to their knees. In either case there remains no doubt that Orban has elevated himself while Fidesz entrenches itself. It has evolved from a liberal, to a conservative, and now post-modern conservative party, and perhaps more than any other post-modern conservative government, enjoys virtually limitless power to remake Hungarian society in its image. Perhaps this success, more than any other, explains Orban's elevated status among many post-modern conservatives.

The Showbiz Conservatism of Italy

The latest European domino to tumble has been Italy. As with Hungary, this is obviously more concerning than typical given the country's historical association with far right movements. Unlike the other countries examined, Italian politics in the modern era has frequently been marked by association with post-modern tropes and techniques. This was best

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[38] Pablo Gorondi. "Hungary's Orban Wants Anti Migration Forces to Control the EU." *AP News*, January 10, 2019. https://www.apnews.com/3e0d443c759f494e9c2249d9041a4d75.

embodied in the long tenure of Silvio Berlusconi, who held power briefly in the 1990s before utterly dominating the country's politics through the 2000s. Slavoj Zizek presciently observed that the future of liberal-capitalist politics may well resemble Berlusconi's Italy. As he put it in his 2009 article "Berlusconi in Tehran" for the *London Review of Books*:

> Berlusconi is a significant figure, and Italy an experimental laboratory where our future is being worked out. If our political choice is between permissive-liberal technocratism and fundamentalist populism, Berlusconi's great achievement has been to reconcile the two, to embody both at the same time. It is arguably this combination which makes him unbeatable, at least in the near future: the remains of the Italian 'left' are now resigned to him as their fate. This is perhaps the saddest aspect of his reign: his democracy is a democracy of those who win by default, who rule through cynical demoralisation. Berlusconi acts more and more shamelessly: not only ignoring or neutralising legal investigations into his private business interests, but behaving in such a way as to undermine his dignity as head of state. The dignity of classical politics stems from its elevation above the play of particular interests in civil society: politics is 'alienated' from civil society, it presents itself as the ideal sphere of the *citoyen* in contrast to the conflict of selfish interests that characterize the *bourgeois*. Berlusconi has effectively abolished this alienation: in today's Italy, state power is directly exerted by the *bourgeois*, who openly exploits it as a means to protect his own economic interest, and who parades his personal life as if he were taking part in a reality TV show.[39]

According to Zizek, the reality TV show of Italian politics was an eerie predictor of the future form politics would take. The pretence of liberal elections would be maintained, increasingly partisan but emptied of real alternatives, and of course highly glamourised. It will still be possible to remove the ruling party and figures from office through traditional means, but concerns with procedural fairness and watchdog institutions would gradually wane. At the same time, politicians would be increasingly willing to act in an openly corrupt manner, as Berlusconi did when maintaining his media empire while remaining Prime Minister. Scandals may ensue, but the never-ending sequence of them alongside

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[39] Slavoj Zizek. "Berlusconi in Tehran." *London Review of Books*, July 2009.

the emergence of distracting infotainment would generate such a severe cynicism that even the worst acts wouldn't necessarily bring down a government if its supporters remained loyal. Seen with the benefit of hindsight, Zizek's observations to this effect now look like nothing so much as prophecy. Though Berlusconi was eventually brought down through a combination of corruption and the people's dissatisfaction with the economy, his style of politics anticipated the more overtly post-modern conservatives which would emerge in the 2010s. And oddly enough, the man himself has recently resurrected from the ashes as a quasi-successful Italian politician hawking increasingly anti-immigrant sentiments.

Italy's flirtation with post-modern conservatism took firm root as a result of the 2008 Recession, which hit the country hard and resulted in the imposition of significant austerity measures. These were poorly received in a country where stark inequalities persist along regional lines, especially the long running divide between the highly developed and comparatively cosmopolitan North and the more rural and traditionalist but underdeveloped South. As is often the case with these movements, the Five Star populist movement found the base of its support in these poorer regions. Initially Five Star lacked a concrete ideological position, mostly operating as a protest movement against the imposition of austerity measures and government corruption. However, as time went on the party took an increasingly anti-immigrant line, particularly in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee and migrant crisis, when Italy was particularly hard hit by migration and refugee issues, with many people fleeing across the Mediterranean to seek refuge in the country from various conflicts in Africa and the Middle East. This was accompanied by frightening images of impoverished families in dangerous vessels, and more than a few stories about the tragic deaths of those attempting to cross the sea. At the same time, Italy's ongoing economic and social divisions contributed to in an increasingly anti-migrant stance by many parties, including in the north, where Matteo Salvini was particularly successful.

This shift in a national populist direction became very evident before the 2018 election. The most dramatic reorientation was by the Five Star movement, which moved from highly vague populist protests to more specified demands that migration be restricted. In 2016 Beppe Grillio, the comedian who was at the forefront of the party, wrote a blog post calling for all illegal immigrants to be expelled from Italy and for a

temporary halt on free movement in the Schengen Zone.[40] This was followed by various claims that the individuals transporting refugees from North Africa were working with human smugglers. Finally in the 2018 campaign, the new leader of the Five Star Movement, Luigi de Maio called for an immediate halt to the transportation of migrants into the country.[41]

However, this rhetoric paled next to that of Matteo Salvini. The leader of the Center-Right coalition with its base in Northern Italy, Salvini shares with Orban a penchant for both soccer and xenophobia. While campaigning, he frequently invoked rhetoric of a tide of immigrants and Muslims coming into destroy the integrity of the Italian population. More worrying still, he occasionally flirted with outright fascist rhetoric when describing a reckoning that was to come.

The 2018 election resulted in a fractured legislature, with a new governing coalition between Five Star and the Center Right coalition forming. It quickly became noted for both its draconian policies on immigration and its rhetorical grandstanding. Echoing Trumpist rhetoric on Mexicans, the new government got mired in a diplomatic scandal with Tunisia after claiming that the country only sent criminals to Italy who intended to commit crimes.[42] In June 2018, Salvini, now Interior Minister, chimed about expelling the Roma from Italy before expressing regret that they "had to keep them."[43] These are simply a few examples of the rhetorical vitriol directed against migrants, and it is worth noting, the liberals and Eurocrats who allegedly support them. Drawing parallels with Poland, Salvini openly stated that a "new Europe" could be built by

[40] Bepe Grillo. "Grillo Calls for Mass Deportations." *Ansa En Politics*, December 23, 2016. http://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2016/12/23/grillo-calls-for-mass-de-portations-2_c2583737-0f97-4157-a2f3-d2a9137728b6.html.

[41] Valentina Za. "Italian Prosecutors Widen Investigation to Include MSF Over Migrant Rescue." *Reuters*, August 5, 2017. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-migrants-medecins-sans-frontier-idUSKBN1AL0HZ?il=0.

[42] ANSA. "Tunisia 'Stunned' by Salvini on Exporting Convicts." *ANSA News*, June 4, 2018. http://www.ansa.it/english/news/2018/06/04/tunisia-stunned-by-salvini-on-ex-porting-convicts-3_c4da5f18-e8c7-450a-aab8-49ff45b8a726.html.

[43] Elisabetta Povelodo and Gaia Pianigiani. "Italian Minister Moves to Count and Expel Roma, Drawing Outrage." *New York Times*, June 19, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/19/world/europe/italy-roma-matteo-salvini.html.

right-wing populists who reject the liberal values propagated by countries like France and Germany.[44] Perhaps most strikingly of all, in the summer of 2018, Salvini officially closed Italy's ports to migrants, joining Austria and Hungary in a wholesale rejection of foreigners.[45]

Italian post-modern conservatism may not currently enjoy the tight grip on power wielded by Victor Orban's Fidesz, and increasingly the Freedom and Justice Party in Poland. It has not yet taken significant steps towards solidifying its hold through the watering down or wholesale destruction of liberal and democratic institutions such as the Central European University. But in many respects, the shift to post-modern conservatism in Italy is just as worrying, and not purely for historical reasons. While Hungary and Poland are minor and medium powers at best, Italy is a major member of the European Union. It is a founding member of the European Economic Community, and the world's 9th largest economy. After the election of Trump, it is the most prominent country yet to elect a post-modern conservative government.[46] As mentioned, Italy is also interesting for the distinctively aggressive flirtations with post-modern tropes and politics by major political figures. This was prefigured by Berlusconi, who as Zizek points out was the original reality TV style leader, a man whose personal failings and dishonesty became as much a part of the show of governing as his actual policies. This model was followed by Five Star, with Beppe Grillio not so much putting forward solutions to Italy's many problems, but using new social media and celebrity to rail against the inadequacies of neoliberal technocracy and the impact of migrants and refugees on the country. And it was certainly followed by Salvini, who has a Trumpesque capacity to use "truthful hyperbole" to obfuscate and draw attention to the issues he cares about. More importantly, both Grillio and Salvini were exceptionally capable at the agonistic approach to politics characteristic of post-modern culture.

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[44] Angela Giuffrida. "Matteo Salvini Says Italy and Poland Could Build a New Europe." *The Guardian*, January 9, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/09/matteo-salvini-says-italy-and-poland-could-build-new-europe.

[45] Thibault Larger. "Matteo Salvini: Italian Ports Closed to Migrants." *Politico*, December 23, 2018. https://www.politico.eu/article/matteo-salvini-italian-ports-closed-to-migrants/.

[46] I address the more complex issue of Brazil's flirtation with post-modern conservatism in a footnote below.

Next to the hyperreal flamboyance of these figures, the ordered facticity of Matteo Renzi could only come across as staid support for a status quo no one was especially enthusiastic about. He certainly could not compete with an anti-immigration rally in Rome where Matteo Salvini called the incumbent Renzi a "dumb slave at the disposal of some nameless person who wants to control all our lives from Brussels."[47] It is a testament to how much politics has become assimilated into show business that quasi-competent mediocrity has less appeal than rhetorical pastiche and excess.

The transition to post-modern conservatism in continental Europe has been evident for a far longer time than in the United States or the United Kingdom. Many of the parties which are currently sweeping to control were marginal players, often dismissed by neoliberal experts, throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. Few recognised how shallow the support for the status quo was, especially with new policies resulting in profound transformations expressed in myriad ways in the broader post-modern culture. Those that did, such as Etienne Balibar and Slavoj Zizek, are no doubt highly disturbed by the form the reaction against neoliberal Eurocracy has taken.[48] While disturbing, the shift to post-modern conservatism isn't shocking. What is novel about it relative to its American and British counterparts is the facility with which European post-modern conservatives have forged new international alliances and networks, almost paradoxically seeking to build coalitions with other nations and peoples in order to solidify their status in both Europe and the world. In many respects, we have obviously come a very long way in a very short while from Habermas'[49] dream of an ever more unified Europe fulfilling the cosmopolitan dream of Immanuel Kant. This is a great disappointment for those of us who believed and still believe in Europe, which, for all its flaws, remains a remarkable achievement for a continent that less than a century ago fought a war which brought nations to their knees.

[47] BBC. "Italy Anti-immigration Rally Draws Thousands in Rome." *BBC News*, February 25, 2018. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31674709.

[48] Etienne Balibar. *Citizenship* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015).

[49] Jürgen Habermas. *The Divided West*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (London, UK: Polity Press, 2006).

The Political Practice of Post-modern Conservatism[50]

Post-modern conservatism has taken many forms in practice, including some which break open typical presuppositions about the political spectrum. Many of these variances relate back to the economic policies adopted by the various governments. Here I disagree with David Harvey that post-modern conservatism can be exclusively understood as a new alliance with neoliberal governance designed to insulate it against a legitimacy crisis. In some countries, this may well be true, although one must note that the alliance is highly tenuous and not without powerful detractors on both sides.[51] But I do not think such a claim can be generalised across the board.

[50] I deliberated for some time on Adding a section on post-modern Conservatism in Brazil given the emergence of Jair Bolsonaro. This struck me as a crucial effort, given the prominence of Brazil in the global order and the potential of Bolsonaro to spark a right-wing populist surge in parts of Latin America in the country's orbit. but upon closer examination, I began to question whether Bolsonaro's election can sincerely be characterised as the emergence of post-modern Conservatism in Latin America, or simply the latest reactionary authoritarian to seize power in a region which has historically been fertile ground for such figures. I came to the conclusion that post-modern Conservatism in Brazil is closer to a hybrid movement than its counterparts in the United States and Europe, with one eye aimed at the post-modern future of Conservatism and the other aimed at becoming a purely reactionary disposition against Modernism. the distinction is important, since post-modern conservatism is a Reactionary Movement which deploys hyper-modern tropes and technologies to advance its agenda. Jair Bolsonaro has certainly been willing to flirt with the former, and indeed modern technologies such as Whats App and YouTube played a major role in his election. but in many respects he is also highly emblematic of reactionary authoritarianism, in both his willingness to invoke the previous military dictatorship which he supported and his stated intentions to support military autocracy again if needed. One of the characteristics of post-modern Conservatism is a tendency to retain the features of democratic rule while either undermining them or eschewing their particularly liberal forms. Bolsonaro has gone far beyond that in his admiration for militarism and open dictatorship; something even Victor Orban has never dared aspire to thus far. It therefore remains to be seen whether this hybrid system gives way to the ethos of illiberal Democracy characteristic of post-modern Conservatism, or chooses to retreat into the naked force of reactionary military rule in South America's largest country. as such I am currently regarding it as a hybrid system which cannot unambiguously be characterised as post-modern Conservatism without further research and tracking developments.

[51] Jipson John and Jitheesh P.M. "The Neoliberal Project Is Alive But Has Lost Its Legitimacy: David Harvey." *The Wire*, February 9, 2019. https://thewire.in/economy/david-harvey-marxist-scholar-neo-liberalism?fbclid=IwAR39-HMdn0gkeo9-19cpnQ06x-_KqBsOW4kCwaXyAKOQixvbE7-1MpEgEK0.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, post-modern conservative governments and movements have indeed reacted less strongly against the inegalitarian dynamics of neoliberalism. While they remain intent on withdrawing from the neoliberal global order, even this should not be interpreted as pure isolationism. As powerful countries with large economies, the ambition of the United States and the United Kingdom is not to cease acting internationally, but to act unilaterally and reassert Anglo-American dominance in a global order post-modern conservative regarded as too prone to deliberation and consensus building. Their approach to neoliberal internationalism is in many respects more hierarchical than that of the neoliberals; they wish to abandon the pretence of legal neutrality between states and assert their economic clout without inhibition. This can also be seen in the economic policies pursued by the Anglo-American post-modern conservatives, which perpetuate the neoliberal effort to dismantle vulnerable forms of welfarism and regulation wherever they may rear their heads. American post-modern conservatives have been especially prone to implementing regressive tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans; a policy that had long been an ambition of Republicans through the Obama years and which changed little when the populist Trump seized power. British conservatives have not been so overt in their retrenchment of economic inequality, though they have enacted serious cuts to welfare programs since the Brexit vote.[52]

Whether these policies will seriously shake the faith of their base is unknown at the moment. As Eatwell and Goodwin point out in their sympathetic analysis of right-wing populism, the economic motivations of post-modern conservative supporters are often less important than their anxieties about national identity and its relationship to democracy.[53] This means that a substantial number of people may remain loyal to Trump and Brexit even if efforts to ameliorate inequality and precarity don't materialise; indeed, they may be willing to even accept greater poverty if their concerns about the destabiliation of identity are temporarily eased. Eatwell and Goodwin go far too easy on right-wing populism, but they are correct than many socially liberal commentators

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[52] Michael Savage. "Millions of Families on Brink Face Deepest Cuts in Years." *The Guardian*, March 10, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/mar/10/poverty-benefits-families-cuts-austerity-hammond-poor-welfare.

[53] Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin. *National Populism and the Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2018).

who often overstate the importance of material goods relative to identity and culture when voters cast a ballot. If post-modern conservatives can convince the citizenry to accept the inequalities associated with neoliberalism in exchange for promoting national, and even ethnic or racial, homogeneity they may be able to hold onto power. The anxieties produced by the destabilisation of identity are powerful. On the other hand, there is a very good chance that left-wing populists or social democrats like Bernie Sanders or Jeremy Corbyn may be able to reemphasise material concerns about inequality. In such a situation they may be able to successfully attack Trump and the Brexit Conservatives for not really caring about the material concerns of the many working-class voters who brought them to power. In such a case there may be a drastic shift towards either a nationalist or internationalist left.

Things are slightly different in continental Europe where the response of Poland, Hungary, and Italy to neoliberal governance has been more complex and varied.[54] I will explore these differences below.

Firstly, Poland, Hungary, and Italy experience a more direct and horizontal relationship with neoliberal institutions and practices than the United States and the United Kingdom. This is of course due to their ongoing involvement in the European Union and the contentious European project. The Anglo-American countries, despite being at the

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[54] In their book Eatwell and Goodwin try to make the case that right-wing populists, at least on the continent, are actually distinguished by their greater respect for direct democracy. They point to the emphasis placed on referenda and consultations with the people. I find this claim highly specious. It does not take very seriously the significant problems with these consultations, which as many international watchdogs and commentators have pointed out, are often hedged in favour of the ruling populist party. A good example would be the 2016 question on Migrant resettlement in Hungary, which Fidesz won with a stunning 98% of the vote, but with too few voters participating for the referendum to be considered binding. Commentators criticised everything from the manipulative way the referendum question was presented to the dishonest information propagated by Fidesz and the state media it increasingly controlled. See Leonid Bershidsky. "Hungary's Manipulative Referendum." *Bloomberg*, July 5, 2016. https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2016-07-05/hungary-s-manipulative-referendum and Heather Grabbe. "The Long Reach of Orban's Referendum Experiment." *Open Society*, October 10, 2016. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/long-reach-of-orb-n-s-referendum-experiment/. Moreover, Orban later ignored the fact that turnout was too low for the referendum to be legally binding and advanced his policy anyway. See Lili Bayer. "Mission Accomplished for Victor Orban." *Politico*, October 3, 2016. https://www.politico.eu/article/mission-accomplished-for-viktor-orban-hungary-referendum-europe-migration-crisis-refugees/.

forefront of neoliberalisation, have always been more willing to stand apart from the institutions they helped found and develop. This was less of an option for the poorer or less developed continental states, who both legally and in practice have had to cede greater control to neoliberal institutions to reap the anticipated economic and political benefits. In practice this means the continental European states have been less willing to entirely embrace nationalism at the expense of international institutions. However, this situation has consequently been trickier for these countries when trying to deal with issues like immigration and refugees.

Secondly, the continental European countries do not have the same commitment to unbridled capitalism as their Anglo-American counterparts. In the Anglosphere, one still sees broad support for the ideal of a capitalist "meritocracy" even among post-modern conservatives. This means they are unlikely to take significant structural steps to interfere with the promotion of neoliberal policies domestically beyond the standard compromises any political movement must make.[55] By contrast the eastern and central European states are experimenting more boldly and directly with policies which challenge every aspect of neoliberal orthodoxy. This includes adopting many economic policies typically associated with the political left, from lowering the age of retirement in Poland[56] to raising the minimum wage in Hungary[57] and flirting with a universal basic income in Italy.[58] In some respects these are tactical maneuvres designed to outflank the left on economic policy and entrench the authority of post-modern conservative parties. But there are also some ideological bases for these positions that relate back to political culture. There is a sense in many of these countries that cultural attachment brings with it certain—though highly particular—obligations.

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[55] Trumpist subsidies for the agricultural industry being a good example.

[56] Marcin Goettig. "Polish Cut to Retirement Age Comes into Force, Bucking European Trend." *Reuters*, October 1, 2017. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-pension/polish-cut-in-retirement-age-comes-into-force-bucking-european-trend-idUSKCN1C60Z6.

[57] Oliver Moody. "Victor Orban Buys Off Protesters with Rise in Minimum Wage." *The Times UK*, December 31, 2018. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/viktor-orban-buys-off-protesters-with-rise-in-minimumwage-vd9zv0zft.

[58] Ferdinando Giugliano. "Italy Starts Handing Out Free Money." *Bloomberg*, January 28, 2019. https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-01-28/italy-s-populists-hand-out-some-free-money.

On this mindset, tending to the national polity means ensuring everyone, who is a member, is entitled to a certain quality of life.[59]

Thirdly, the central and Eastern European states are also less committed to pure unilateralism than their Anglo-American counterparts. This is in part due to disparities in power and history. The United States can aspire and the United Kingdom fantasise about being hegemonic powers, muscling out competition across the globe. This possibility is not available to middle or minor powers like Poland, Hungary, or even Italy. More practically, both Poland and Hungary are net beneficiaries of billions of Euros worth of monetary transfers and aid each year.[60] So all three countries have oriented themselves around a soft-Euroscepticism which doesn't call for "exits" from the Union. Rather they wish to see it made up of states governed by other post-modern conservatives, who will respect or even emulate their efforts to close down borders and reduce the influence of foreigners in the national polity.

The three European countries have also been more engaged in directly building links with post-modern conservative governments in the Anglosphere, sympathetic regimes flirting with post-modern conservatism like that of Sebastian Kurz in Austria, and with hybrid regimes like that of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. The ambition seems to be a realignment of the European project in an exclusionary direction, promoting greater respect for the Westphalian sovereignty of its members while taking coordinated efforts to keep out non-European migrants like Muslims, Africans, and others. In part due to the aforementioned efforts at changing electoral systems and wearing down institutional protections against one party rule, these efforts may prove more permanently successful than the grandstanding post-modern conservatism of the United States and the United Kingdom.

European post-modern conservatives are also savvier and more capable than their Anglo-American counterparts, who often seem in a race to delegitimise themselves. While the efforts of European post-modern

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[59] Of course, this also means that immigration and cultural pluralism must be avoided since that would water down the resources which can be allocated to the deserving group. This orientation was succinctly captured by the Swedish Democrats, whose recent electoral campaign presented welfare and immigration as competing objectives voters had to choose between.

[60] European Commission. "Spending by County." *European Commission*, 2014–2017. https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/eu-budget_en.

conservatives have hit a bump in the road with the election of Emmanuel Macron in France, their agitation has contributed to pushing Angela Merkel out of the German Chancellorship. It is quite possible that without concerted efforts, post-modern conservatism could come to dominate European politics for some time.

These different policies highlight the distinctions between the post-modern conservative movements. But their similarities are much more prominent. Each of them emerged in part as a reaction against neoliberal society and as a product of post-modern culture. They channelled resentment about the changing nature of the work place and society and the destabilisation of identity into an agonistic politics which stressed how the internal and external enemies of post-modern conservatives were destroying the integrity of the people. These internal and external enemies are remarkably consistent across the board; internally liberals, feminists, the (over) educated, cosmopolitans, and leftists make up an elite which are working to remake the culture by bringing in their foreign allies to change the national, religious, ethnic, or racial makeup of the nation. These foreigners may be Latin Americans, Africans, or most especially Muslims. These groups often come from especially vulnerable parts of the world, and targeting them is by far the ugliest dimension to post-modern conservatism.

While some post-modern conservatives differ from conventional neoliberals in supporting redistributive economic policies, their vision of the world remains rigidly hierarchical. There is a "them" and an "us," and benefits are to be retained exclusively for the dominant group and denied even to the most deserving and needy non-members. This belies the irony in Orban and others claiming to represent a Christian democracy. Perhaps the lesson of the Good Samaritan parable, that we are responsible for helping everyone who is in need regardless of who they are or where they came from, is just another kind of fake news.

More pressing than this moral objection is my claim that post-modern conservatism cannot resolve the problems it emerged in reaction to. As a product of post-modern culture, its attempts to turn back the clock can only end up reinforcing the instabilities it claims to despise. This is especially true of the destabilisation of identity which is at the heart of most post-modern conservatives' resentment. The agonistic politics of post-modern conservatives will always need an enemy, exacerbating anxieties about the future of the group. Moreover, post-modern conservatism is utterly unable to deal with the most pressing problems facing

humanity today—from climate change to the advent of new post-human futures. This of course does not mean post-modern conservatism must inevitably falter as a political movement, but only that it cannot succeed in its ambitions. Indeed, the post-modern conservative grip on power may well be tightened as a result of its failures to address environmental and technological changes. Uncertainty often breeds reactionary impulses. This could lead to a frightening process of escalating antagonism and radicalism. The consequences could be disastrous, and underpin how necessary it is to develop an alternative politics to that promoted by reactionaries. In the last chapter of this book, I will speculate on what such an alternative and progressive politics might look like.

Conclusion

CHAPTER 6

An Egalitarian Agenda for the Future

Contra-Fukuyama: Post-modern Conservatism and the Re-emergence of History

The preceding chapter examined the rise of post-modern conservatism and the important role the destabilisation of identity, characteristic of post-modern culture, played in its rise. I stressed how this sense of destabilisation encouraged many to turn to narratives of decline which fuelled the rise of resentment-driven politics and the figureheads of the post-modern conservative movements and parties, from Donald Trump to Matteo Salvini.

In Chapter 2 we discussed the way in which post-modernity culture explicates our changing understanding and experience of space and time, and consequently, history. In that chapter, I pointed to Fukuyama's end of history thesis as the exemplar of this mindset. For Fukuyama in the 1990s, history properly had reached a somewhat melancholic end with the arrival of the "last man." These individuals would largely accept neoliberal governance as a given, adopting classical liberal social values while voting for incremental increases or retractions to the few safety nets still intact. They would live out their days in relative comfort, but feel a deep emptiness due to the lack of opportunities to gain recognition for their individual identity and accomplishments. Fukuyama brilliantly predicted that in such an environment, right-wing desire for thymotic recognition might lead to a political transformation, since succeeding in the market and the acquisition of personal wealth were one of the few

modestly grand activities left available for persons of means and ambition in neoliberal society.[1] Many progressives seemed to tacitly accept Fukuyama's claim, as exemplified by their failure to construct meaningful alternatives to the status quo in lieu of understandable calls for ever greater political participation and tolerance. Neoliberal society was largely receptive to these calls, in part because the social and economic transformations it brought about always risked prompting a legitimacy crisis among marginalised groups. It was easier by far to gradually include them in what, after all, were very modest processes of democratic participation and deliberation on concrete policy. This also had the added benefit of generating new consumer values and identities which could become tied to novel commodities and services. This led more ambitious leftists such as Zizek and Fisher to their infamous comments about our indefinite neoliberal future governed by an ideology of "capitalist realism."[2]

This experience of history as closed would obviously lead to a substantial reconfiguration of the human experience of time and freedom, particularly various forms of civic freedom and responsibility, as discussed by figures like Amy Guttmann, Dennis Thompson,[3] and most acutely by Axel Honneth, among others.[4]

Since Plato and Aristotle, political thought has always emphasised a dualism between the conceptualisation of time as eternity, history, or evolution and our individual experience of time as temporality, transcendental intuition, or duration. Some figures like Hegel and Heidegger have attempted to reconcile the two, with the latter noting that modernity poses unique challenges to such a project. The interpretation of this dualism has a special significance for our understanding of freedom, since as Heidegger stresses, before we can even develop a sense of ourselves as spatially oriented beings, we exist within time. Our world is one in which our past as memory, present as immediate experience, and future

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[1] Francis Fukuyama. *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, NY: Avon Books, 1992) at pgs 300–313.

[2] Mark Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

[3] Amy Guttmann and Dennis Thompson. *Democracy and Disagreement: Why Moral Conflict Cannot Be Avoided in Politics, and What Should Be Done About It* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996).

[4] Axel Honneth. *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, trans. Joseph Ganahl (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016).

as various forms—anticipation—interact with our subjectivity in profound ways. Our sense that the future remains open to us, at least before death, is a perquisite to our feeling the "anxiety" of authentic freedom expounded upon so beautifully by Kierkegaard.[5]

In post-modern culture, what we see explicated is the Fisheresque sense that the future is now largely closed to us. This is in part because the dualism propounded earlier has collapsed. Secularism has denied us eternity, while neoliberalism closes off the possibility of history and social evolution. What we are left with is the sense that our individual future remains partly open to us, though still highly conditioned by intractable social dynamics. We are free to live out our lives as we wish with minimal interference, so long as the material social conditions of neoliberalism remain untouched and untrammelled. In other words, our civic and deliberative freedom is to remain immensely constrained by the parameters set by neoliberal governance. And more importantly, our actual capabilities to make meaningful choices about our lives and the kind of self we wish to be is heavily curtailed by the economic imperatives of the system, which take priority over the individual lives of the citizens that make it up. This dynamic becomes very obvious, as Donnelly points out in his great book on human rights, when we are told that corporations are to enjoy legal personhood but rights to food and water are impossibilities.[6] This is stunningly odd given that the meaningful freedom provided through access to food or water would be far more significant for many than the right of a corporate body to spend money to influence elections.

Post-modern culture reacts against these tendencies in a vulgar way by replicating the ideological tropes of neoliberal society without critical examination or reflection. At its best, as with *Minority Report* or *Naked Lunch*, the products of post-modern culture explicate this sense of a lack of freedom and hypothesise on various, sometimes utopian solutions to the problem. As Jameson observes in his tremendous *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*,[7] it is quite

[5] Soren Kierkegaard. *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

[6] Jack Donnelly. *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

[7] Fredric Jameson. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2005).

telling that in spite of the neoliberal insistence that we live in the best of all possible worlds, the utopian and dystopian sub-genres in fiction have flourished as never before. These works, often taken to be little more than diverting science fiction by their critics, express a deep desire to have our relationship to time reopened and a new set of possible futures to appear on the horizon. That these aspirations are derided as impossibly utopian—indeed the very fact that Utopia itself has become a pejorative term—demonstrates the affective and ideological power of neoliberal capitalist realism at the beginning of the new millennium. Of course, these accusations should always be taken with a grain of salt, given that it is frequently those who want to see society remain unchanged who insist most vehemently that things must remain as they are.

Post-modern conservatism is one reaction against this feeling that history is completed and that we must simply settle into our dreary roles as the chestless last men of a mechanical society. But as a reaction, as I have mentioned above, it is utterly incapable of actually resolving many of the challenges facing us in post-modern neoliberal society. Here, I will only mention four reasons why. Doubtless the list could be extended if needed.

THE CHALLENGES FACING POST-MODERN CONSERVATISM

Firstly, post-modern conservatives have often reacted to legitimate grievances by seizing political power, ostensibly to address these grievances. But once in power, one sees little to demonstrate that they have any interest in actually carrying out the substantial reforms required to change society. Even where they make some incremental gains, the cost is incredibly high. The Anglo-Saxon reactionaries promised to address the concerns of the working and displaced classes by engaging in redistributive efforts and enhancing democracy. But they have more or less carried on the inegalitarian policies of the neoliberal technocrats while either cracking down upon or at least manipulating democratic procedures and marginalising huge swathes of the population which disagree with them. This repressive aspect of "populist nationalism" was picked up on by Muller[8] while being largely ignored by sympathisers like

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[8] Jan-Werner Muller. *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

Eatwell and Goodwin.[9] Where post-modern conservative governments made efforts to ameliorate inequality, as in Poland, Hungary, and Italy, at the same time they actively curbed opportunities for democratic participation and change—particularly for those considered "not us." In either case, practice has demonstrated that post-modern conservatism has little interest in granting its people genuine freedom and power. In the Anglo-Saxon countries the people are to attain purely symbolic power through their conscripted spokesmen. In continental Europe they are to receive a degree of economic empowerment, but only as a reward for loyalty to the ruling party.

Perhaps more pressing still, post-modern conservatism is largely ill-equipped to undertake the reforms necessary to ameliorate the impact of climate change, which many predict will substantially change the human relationship to nature over the next few decades. Climate change as an existential threat, is an issue that fundamentally illustrates the problems with myopic nationalism and fixation on particular identities while still wanting the benefits of modern industrial society. The nation-state model favoured by many post-modern conservatives may have been a viable form through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it is unclear how it can deal with global problems like climate change without falling prey to "free rider" and "tragedy of the commons" type problems. Moreover, the ubiquity of climate change stresses the ontological commonalities of the human race in its relationship to space and the world, rather than highlighting differences. We all inhabit the same increasingly fragile global ecosystem, and what impacts one will invariably impact others. This perhaps explains why many post-modern conservatives are dismissive of the problems posed by climate change; the challenge it poses to their anthropocentric us/them worldview are formidable and quite possibly irresolvable without ideological shifts.

Secondly, post-modern conservatism is a resentment-fuelled politics predicated on postulating enemies everywhere. When these have largely been eliminated, as in Hungary and increasingly in Poland, the agonistic approach must be perpetuated internationally. This has proven a difficult project to carry on indefinitely, given the tremendous and still increasing interconnectedness of the global economy. Trump and the Brexiters may dream of a return or even expansion of global hegemony for the

United States and the United Kingdom, but the fickleness of their own domestic support means that they cannot do this at the expense of trade deals and economic policies requiring a high degree of multilateral cooperation. Where they do take a strong position—for instance, withdrawing from the TPP or advocating for a No Deal Brexit—the Anglo Saxon post-modern conservatives have seen the economic and political clout of their nations decline, while other nations, particularly China and Russia, gladly occupy the abandoned international space. The situation for Poland, Hungary, and Italy is even starker, since these countries are highly dependent on not only maintaining but actually in many circumstances increasing European integration. For Poland and Hungary especially, integration brings with it the promise of higher levels of development and an improving quality of life, necessary benefits if these illiberal Christian democracies are to remain fiscally viable. As a consequence of these difficulties, many post-modern conservatives have begun to temper their response to internationalism, instead framing their agonistic politics in a conspiratorial manner against shadowy figures like George Soros or picking vulnerable targets such as immigrants and refugees. It is possible that these agonistic efforts may work for a while, but it is also unclear whether the population will remain consistently impressed, especially if it begins to have consequences for individual prosperity.

More ambiguously, the resentment fuelled politics of post-modern conservatism requires the population to continuously frame its political identity in a hyperreal and anxious fashion. As a political emotion, resentment can be exceptionally powerful in the short to medium term. But it tends to burn out quite abruptly barring continuous grave crises to stoke it. In the worst case scenario post-modern conservatives may well choose to reenergise their base through stoking new or reinvigorating old agonistic conflicts. Decades ago Walter Benjamin observed in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* that fascism, with its bizarre symbolism, comical strutting, and lust for conflict could almost be described as a kind of social entertainment.[10] This is not to say that post-modern conservatism is fascistic, as some commentators

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[10]Walter Benjamin. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2008).

like Timothy Synder have claimed.[11] But in addition to a love of kitsch, post-modern conservatism does share with this earlier variant of hyper-real identity politics an almost adolescent love of competitive spectacle and entertainment.[12]

Thirdly, post-modern conservatism's embrace of hyper-modern technology is also problematic. As discussed in Chapter 2, technology has long been misunderstood as a simple, ideologically neutral tool for pursuing one's preferred ends. From the nineteenth century onwards, social theorists and empirical observation has showcased the limitations of this position. Technology is an independent catalyst for societal change, and as the pace of innovation increases, so too will the transformations associated with it. Post-modern conservatism has few means at its disposal to counter the technological tendencies which destabilise norms and identity without denying itself access to this major political resource. This is particularly obvious in the fields of communication studies. It relies on hyperreal media like Twitter or Facebook to advance its messaging, or sometimes even on direct control of the newspapers, internet feeds, and so on. But while post-modern conservatism thus far has attempted to use these media to monopolise attention and focus it on its own political narratives, it is largely unable to restrict the persistent generation of counter and critical narratives without adopting more overt forms of authoritarianism. As the number of new communication media grows, so too will the plurality of viewpoints being expressed and interpreted. Indeed, the rabid fascination with university curricula which dominates a great deal of American and British post-modern conservative paranoia seems quite anachronistic at this point. Universities are probably not going to go away as some predict, given that the social capital accrued by having an accredited degree is becoming more important than ever in the knowledge economy. But Universities are hardly the sole or possibly even the major forum through which the public explores critical

[11] Timothy Snyder. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Tim Duggan Books, 2017).

[12] There are few more dramatic forms of spectacle than at least the prospect of war, whether with North Korea, Venezuela, or Iran. It is quite likely that post-modern conservatism will generate short term gains in agonistic enthusiasm in return for the long-term destabilisation and anger typically generated in democracies engaged in politically motivated military conflict. Given this, it remains possible that post-modern conservative administrations may come to distract from domestic problems through external conflict.

ideas anymore; everything from left-wing YouTube to independent online publishing is gaining ideological ground. This poses a major problem for post-modern conservative nationalism, given that national identity was developed through the use of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century media and institutions such as print and education, which are easier to control or at least dominate.

Additionally, post-modern conservatism is highly challenged by new forms of post-humanism which are emerging and increasingly promise and deliver remarkable results. The original post-modern conservative, Peter Lawler, was far more sensitive to the challenges these developments will ultimately pose than his myriad and unreflective progeny.[13] It is relatively easy to maintain moral objections to biotechnologies and genetic engineering based on traditionalist or Judeo-Christian values when they remain experimental and largely ineffective curiosities. It is quite another thing to maintain these objections if the prospect of life enhancing genetic engineering becomes real, let alone the possibility of using CRISPR technologies to create genetically perfect infants. It is unlikely that the wealthy proponents of post-modern conservatism, not to mention the increasingly gilded figures of the various post-modern leaders themselves, will long tolerate moral prohibitions on such pursuits when the accomplishments of these technologies are within their easy reach.

Since global warming is a problem that cannot be solved within the parameters of the nation-state because of its global impact, the problem of trying to bar from the wealthy, the advances in technology or science available to those in non-post-modern conservative states is a human one. If these technologies become available elsewhere in the world but are denied due to Judeo-Christian moral objections at home, then those with the resources, driven by greed or self-preservation or some other human emotion, will flock to these areas to take advantage of them, politically motived moral objections be damned. As Donna Haraway put it, for many the prospect of a biotechnological future where they can shape their individual identity as they wish will prove far more compelling than any national-Christian fidelity to the past.

> Cyborg imagery can help express two crucial arguments in this essay: first, the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that

[13]Peter Augustine Lawler. *Stuck with Virtue: The American Individual and Our Biotechnological Future* (Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2005).

misses most of reality, probably always, but certainly now; and second, taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an antiscience metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skillful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts. It is not just that science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction, as well as a matrix of complex dominations. Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the super savers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.[14]

Fourth and lastly, in so far as post-modern conservatism is a reactionary movement, it constitutes a rear guard effort against deep social trends which may well supersede what any form of politics can sincerely accomplish. One prominent example would be the relative demographic decline of the identities post-modern conservatives affiliate with, if not nationally, then certainly internationally. It is of course impossible to predict the future with any certainty, especially given the many social transformations we are already experiencing, and those yet to come brought about by climate and technological changes. But with domestic birth rates sinking to 1.76 for Americans and below 1.6 for Europeans—with Poland and Hungary actually being below this rate[15]—and the population rapidly aging,[16] these states have few options available to them if they want to avoid rapidly shrinking populations. There is simply little chance that parents will assume the responsibility for raising a large family unless there are redistributive mechanisms in place which will both enable one or both parents to leave a competitive workplace for a time, and to assume the growing and more time-consuming costs of childcare

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[14] Donna Haraway. "A Cyborg Manifesto." *The Socialist Review*, No. 80, 1985.

[15] Charlotte-McDonald Gibson. "The Far Right Has Capitalized on the West's Population Problem: These Policies Could Help." *Time Magazine*, June 5, 2018. http://time.com/5291439/west-population-problem-white-nationalists-policies/.

[16] Eurostat. "Population Structure and Ageing." *Statistics Explained*, May 2018. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Population_structure_and_ageing.

in the twenty-first century. Post-modern conservatives may attempt to compensate for this by encouraging people to have more children, but that seems highly unlikely to occur without investing in a level of state intervention which is antithetical to many of these movements. Even where these efforts are undertaken, results have been discouraging.[17] Unless post-modern conservative states are willing to take in higher levels of migrants, the population of many of these countries will stagnate or shrink, which could well be a problem when interacting with growing and far larger powers like India and China.

Another social trend post-modern conservatives are unlikely to solve is the problem of secularisation and the meaninglessness many associate with it. By this I do not imply that atheism will necessarily increase. It is quite possible that what we will see is the ongoing establishment of more agonistic or individuated religious perspectives, particularly as many leave traditional churches and religious establishments to shape new kinds of relationships with the divine.[18] Some post-modern conservatives who define themselves through tight association with a communal religious identity they wish to see generalised across society may ultimately find this disappointing, and even nihilistic. But this showcases the limitations of politics to resolve what are ultimately bigger and more philosophical questions about meaning, ontology, and theology. Nihilism is not first and foremost a political problem, but a philosophical and spiritual one. As long as no unobjectionable answer exists as to the purpose of life, if there is one, individuals will continue to question and fashion their own answers. Idolatrous political mobilisation may be able to stymie this trend, but it cannot halt the existential despair single individuals feel when confronted with the fact that the mass may simply be deluding itself.[19] If and when the religiously minded supporters of post-modern conservatism recognise this, they may gradually turn away from the movement in the hope of a religious reawakening for themselves and the identity groups they affiliate with.

[17] Lyman Stone. "Poland's Baby Bump." *First Things*, March 2, 2018. https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/03/polands-baby-bump.

[18] Michael Lipka. "Five Key Findings About the Changing US Religious Landscape." *Pew Research Center*, May 12, 2015. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/5-key-findings-u-s-religious-landscape/.

[19] Soren Kierkegaard. *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1989).

As mentioned, none of these four challenges is meant to suggest that post-modern conservatism is doomed to political failure in a conventional sense. They are meant instead to observe that it is doomed to failure on its own terms, that post-modern conservatism cannot resolve the problems it emerged to confront. While some, like Roger Scruton, might protest that this is simply true of every conservative movement, and that a thing may be worth preserving even if it must falter in the end,[20] this difficulty may well be hard to swallow for those who put their faith in post-modern conservative movements. This is especially true given its association with a populist and charismatic style of politics, which implies that sweeping—if reactionary—changes can be readily achieved. It is also especially problematic given that these movements often present themselves in apocalyptic and agonistic terms which exceed the boundaries of normal political discourse. When it becomes apparent that many post-modern conservatives are simply politicians, often with few plans on how to deliver on their grandiose promises and more than a little prone to the human temptations of corruption, it is possible their supporters may turn on them.

In such an event, we might wonder what kind of politics can and should replace post-modern conservatism. Since the end of the Cold War, most of the major progressive movements have faltered or more or less conformed to the neoliberal third-way political rhetoric adopted by figures like the two Clintons and Tony Blair. But with post-modern conservatism breaking down the neoliberal consensus which has functioned for the past 30 years, it once more becomes possible to theorise on more ambitious and sweeping ways to realise a more democratic and egalitarian society. Such a political left could be more suited to addressing the needs of societies in a post-modern culture, but only if it offers the kind of deep and structural changes many citizens wish to see, which post-modern conservatism is unlikely to offer. This question is of course too big to analyse in any great depth here, at the conclusion of an explanatory book. Many of the major ideas I would like to see put forward have already been presented in my book *Making Human Dignity Central to International Law.* Rather than providing an extensive rehash of these positions, I will sketch them out briefly and indicate why they may be suited to addressing the needs of post-modern cultures turning away from neoliberalism.

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[20]Roger Scruton. *How to Be a Conservative* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014).

Conclusion: What Can Be Done?—Modernising Left Democracy for a Post-modern Epoch[21]

> In a world of democracies, in a world where the great projects that have set humanity on fire are the projects of the emancipation of individuals from entrenched social division and hierarchy; in such a world individuals must never be puppets or prisoners of the societies or cultures into which they have been born.
>
> Roberto Unger, *The Left Alternative*

One of the reasons for the varied failures of progressivism over the past 30 years has been the lack of structural ambition. Progressive movements, often taking a post-modern form or even drawing directly on post-modern theorising, have been highly successful in agitating for the inclusion of groups who have historically be excluded from social recognition and political participation. It is a testament to how successful these initiatives have been that many post-modern conservatives even invoke the toleration or promotion of groups like LGBTQ or women to justify the superiority of their civilisation over those they regard as competitors. In a slightly vulgar moment, the Trump administration even announced an LGBTQ rights campaign in February 2019.[22] But these efforts at political

[21] I reflected at some length about including a longer and more elaborated section on the topic of what can be done to combat these movements, and how progressives might regain substantial political ground against the reactionary impulse of post-modern conservatism. I decided against doing so for two reasons. The first is this book is primarily framed as a critical examination rather than a constructive piece of political and legal theory, which would make the addition of a lengthy new argument at the conclusion structurally unusual. Readers who have followed along thus far may understandably be hoping to reach the end with some firm critical conclusions, but wish to be spared related examinations on a different topic. The second and more important reason I refrained from a lengthier conclusions is, whatever one's politics, I believe they may gain from considering the description of post-modern conservatism provided here. A lengthy rumination on my own political project may prove a distraction from this point, since readers unsympathetic to this project could very well find it tedious. Rather than alienate such readers, I chose to simply gesture to the project here. Those who do share my political sympathies may be interested in reading *Making Human Dignity Central to International Human Rights Law*, which elaborates on them in far more detail.

[22] Chelsea Ritschel. "As Trump Administration Announces Gay Rights Campaign—Here Are Eight Anti-LGBT Things the President Has Done." *Independent UK*, February 19, 2019. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/trump-homosexuality-lgbt-rights-gay-decriminalisation-campaign-administration-a8787446.html.

inclusion within neoliberal societies, while highly admirable on their own merits, also left intact many systematic structures exacerbating inequities in power and resources. These inequities have become a source for the resentment-driven politics we have seen recently, though as mentioned many of its policies have been misdirected or are unlikely to accomplish the aims their supporters intend.[23] As Eatwell and Goodwin observed, the persistence of these inequities drove many to supporting post-modern conservatives who promised to return power to the people from international elites and the institutions they supported.[24] Many were also highly concerned with greater precarity and a sense that others were getting ahead unfairly, though the promises of post-modern conservatives were understandably vaguer on those fronts. Progressives have an opportunity to outflank their political opponents on issues related to both democratisation and economic inequality. They can do this in a number of ways.

Progressives can support greater democratisation by formulating and promoting polities and institutional changes designed to cede greater powers to domestic polities. What form these should take can vary by region. They might by encouraging more direct democracy in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom. While the consequences of the Brexit referenda may give some pause on this front, I follow the adage that the only way to permanently shift public support away from reactionary movements is to support policies which will garner for the public greater opportunities to make meaningful deliberations and decisions. While it may be too much to expect each individual citizen to become highly knowledgeable of political issues, developing a democratic culture and learning how to convince the public as a whole to become more participatory are principles most progressives should regard as desirable.

Progressives can also take greater steps to truly "drain the swamp" by breaking up the influence of special interest groups and lobbyists, and encouraging greater inclusion by civil society groups with a concerted interest in public policy.[25]

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[23] By contrast, an invigorated conception of left-wing democracy can serve as a viable alternative to the temptations of post-modern conservatism in many countries.

[24] Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin. *National Populism and the Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2018).

[25] Gilens has done solid work analyzing the influence of special interest groups in American politics. See Martin Gilens. "Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 69, 2005.

Finally, and most importantly in the European context, there has to be greater efforts made to secure what Habermas would call "chains" of democratic legitimation between polities and international or transnational institutions.[26] While the faltering Brexit ambitions may temporarily put a halt to hard Euroscepticism, particularly from the post-modern conservative administrations reliant on EU funds, this only delays the problem. The reality is that even Europhilic progressives such as Habermas, Yanis Varoufakis (and myself for that matter) have long observed that the EU lacks a distinct political culture and recognisable participatory institutions which enable citizens to feel involved in the project, or to engage in democratic will mobilisation.[27] This applies even more stringently to international institutions such as the United Nations or the growing numbers of regulatory bodies, many of which are recognising that they have an (often deserved) reputation for superseding democracy to institute undesirable neoliberal reforms. Shifting this should be a special priority for progressives committed to the cosmopolitan project, but who also feel strongly about the need for greater democratisation. If reforms along the lines sketched out here were proposed and implemented, I believe progressives could seize control of the current surge for greater democratisation[28] and nip in the bud post-modern conservative movements which have often invoked its energies and directed them to anti-democratic purposes.

Progressives should have an even easier time mobilising behind calls for greater economic equality and redistributive efforts. Neoliberal society has been characterised by very stark levels of inequality and greater levels of precarity. It has long been an ambition of the left to buck these trends, and there have never been more ideas available on how to do so than in the current epoch. One of the major problems is that the social-democratic ambitions of the 1940s and 50s cannot be accomplished through

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[26] Jürgen Habermas. *The Divided West*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (London, UK: Polity Press, 2006).

[27] Yanis Varoufakis and David Adler. "The European Spring Holds the Answer to the Fragmenting EUs Plight." *The Guardian*, March 11, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/11/european-spring-eu-macron-bureaucrats-new-deal-yanis-varoufakis.

[28] Well traced by Eatwell and Goodman. See Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin. *National Populism and the Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2018).

the same means in the twenty-first century. The power of capital to trans-
fer its resources elsewhere has exponentially grown, and even modestly
wealthy individuals have the capacity to move their funds to tax shelters
to shield their wealth from redistributive efforts. This means that efforts
need to be taken inter- and trans-nationally, further necessitating some of
the legitimating reforms suggested above. Once accomplished, the first
step might be for progressives to adopt Piketty's proposal for a wealth
capital tax and to ensure it is implemented as broadly as possible.[29] This
can be combined with other domestic taxes, and used to fund redistrib-
utive programs and safety nets. If possible, one could even reach out to
moderate conservatives to support certain proposals. For instance, calls
for the implementation of the Universal Basic Income have been grow-
ing recently, though sadly, empirical research on the topic remains thin.[30]
Experimentation with such flexible policies, which can ensure a decent
standard of living for many while precluding the formation of a robust
state apparatus, may prove popular across the political spectrum. Of
course in other instances more traditional redistributive efforts may be
called for, for instance, by securing universal Medicaid for American cit-
izens. Where possible such efforts should be done in an environmentally
friendly manner, or through investment in sustainable industries. This
could have the compounding benefit of reducing damage to the ecosys-
tem while ameliorating the concerns of populations who may be tempted
by coal-loving reactionaries.

If these economic initiatives were successful, a progressive democ-
racy would go a long way to eliminating inequality and providing a suf-
ficient standard of living for all. This would have the benefit of barring
post-modern conservatism from appealing to economic populism as a
way to generate support. One of the tricky elements to such initiatives,
particularly those generated at the global level, will be determining who
is to benefit from redistributive mechanisms. As mentioned, many of
these initiatives will have to be coordinated internationally if they are
going to be effective in the twenty-first century. But this brings with it

[29] Thomas Piketty. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer
(Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

[30] One book that does some of the hard lifting on this is by Ferguson. See James
Ferguson. *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution* (Durham, NC:
Duke University Press, 2015).

the possibility of reaction, since how redistributive mechanisms allocate resources will surely be a matter of controversy. An egalitarian proposal, such as the models put forward by figures like Sen and Nussbaum, or even my more modest proposals outlined above, may well be theoretically and humanely sound.[31] But any of these would likely produce a backlash from wealthier or more developed countries which may be willing to engage in redistributive efforts, but wish for their populations to be the primary beneficiaries. Dealing with this means recognising that problems of democracy and equality remain tied to identity, and that the latter cannot simply be reduced to the former.

Indeed the most difficult challenges facing progressives in post-modern culture will likely be the concerns about identity. As mentioned, some progressives have dealt with this by focusing on an inclusive approach to identity, accepting institutional structures as they are while calling for more seats to be placed at the deliberative table. These efforts are fine in so far as they go, but will always risk producing a backlash from reactionaries who wish social identity to move back in a more homogenous rather than a pluralistic direction. In some cases they can be ignored, but not when millions of voters or even a majority feels this way. Many progressives have tried to push aside these concerns by reducing them to the aforementioned democratic and economic concerns. There is a tendency to want to reduce concerns about homogenous identity down to a kind of false consciousness which will evaporate once the left addresses the more foundational issues. There might be some truth to this, but Eatwell and Goodwin are right to point out that this doesn't address the reality that many post-modern conservatives are independently concerned about stabilising the pastiche of identities they affiliate with.[32] These concerns stem from the destabilisation produced by post-modern culture in neoliberal society. And while it operates in a mutually constitutive relationship with the political and economic (and of course technological) transformations of neoliberal society, the process of destabilisation has deeper roots than the twentieth century. This will make it very hard to stymie, including for post-modern conservatives. Depending on one's inclinations, this may well come as a striking disappointment to those

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[31] Martha Nussbaum. *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

[32] Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin. *National Populism and the Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2018).

who wish a return to the pre-modern and integrated identities looked upon with nostalgia by Marx Weber[33] and T.S. Eliot.[34]

It may even be problematic for some leftists, notably anti-neoliberal Foucauldians such as Rosemary Coombe, who have a communitarian attachment to these kinds of integrated identities and the traditional practices associated with them, and are highly critical of neoliberal capitalism for disrupting them.[35] While some of these progressives, notably Costas Douzinas,[36] have made interesting arguments for why such a more communitarian approach might be amenable to progressive goals without reverting into the same myopia as nationalist populism, I remain unconvinced. A return to communitarian attachments and political obligations which does not take seriously our duties to the less fortunate in the developing world strikes me as a very partial and arbitrary kind of progressivism, little different from what Law and Justice are trying to economically implement in Poland. Moreover, it would be largely incapable of resolving the global issues discussed above, most notably those concerning climate change and the advent of technological posthumanism. So one of the tasks of a twenty-first-century progressivism will need to be reconciling a desire for an egalitarian democracy with internationalism, while still dealing capably with the desire of millions for a more homogenous sense of social identity. My suspicion is that the answer may lie in the push for greater democratisation, including in international and transnational institutions. The national identity pushed by post-modern conservatives is in some respects a kind of compensation. It enforces a hyperreal homogeneity driven by resentment over a lack of recognition by the polity. Recognition by the Other is one means of providing stabilisation for identity within post-modern culture. Enabling individuals to participate more meaningfully in all levels of government might be a way of providing that recognition, at least to enough

[33] Max Weber. *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1958).

[34] T.S. Eliot. *The Idea of a Christian Society* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1949).

[35] See Rosemary Coombe and Lindsay Weiss. "Neoliberalism, Heritage Regimes, and Cultural Rights: Politics in Assemblage." In Lynn Meskell. *Global Heritage: A Reader* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).

[36] Costas Douzinas. *The End of Human Rights: Critical Thought at the Turn of the Century* (Portland, OR: Hart Publishing, 2000).

individuals that the reactionary impulse will be tempered. It will also allow individuals to recognise themselves in their political institutions and the laws which flow from them, rather than agonistically seeing them as an alien imposition by internal elites allied to foreign populations. This is why progressives must take the democratic aspect of egalitarian democracy seriously, rather than simply imposing it in the technocratic manner characteristic of Gallbraith, Kojev, and others throughout the twentieth century.[37] It also means that progressives should refrain from the kind of agonistic politics one sees practised by post-modern conservatives.

Unfortunately the left has been successfully painted as practitioners of disruptive and destabilising agonistic politics by provocateurs like Jordan Peterson.[38] Moving towards a more engaged style of leftism will mean dropping some of the agonistic rhetoric and tone associated with so called "identity politics" movements and advancing in a more deliberative and democratic direction. This cannot be accomplished by practising politics along the agonistic lines proposed by figures like Carl Schmitt. The point cannot just be to overcome and defeat post-modern conservatism. That is indeed an important task, but it can only be successfully carried out by appealing to those for whom it is attractive and inspiring them to embrace egalitarian democracy. While there should be little sympathy shown to the most aggressively bigoted post-modern conservatives, we must recognise that many of their supporters turned to them as anchors in the unfair world produced by neoliberal society and the instability generated by post-modern culture. We must provide a better outlet for the energies currently being channelled as resentment by presenting a constructive and optimistic alternative, one that looks rather like the realistic Utopia put forward by John Rawls,[39] a society where the dignity of all is respected, where each person receives recognition for their contributions to democratic processes, and no one is denied the chance to lead a meaningful and flourishing life free of economic deprivation and precarity. Such a society would be far more attractive to many people than the vulgarities offered by post-modern conservatism.

[37] John Kenneth Gallbraith. *The Affluent Society: 40th Anniversary Edition* (New York, NY: Mariner Books, 1998).

[38] Jordan Peterson. *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto, ON: Random House Canada, 2018).

[39] John Rawls. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

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