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LIBERALISM'S VULNERABILITIES AND TWO PATHS FOR THE FUTURE

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Predicting the future is a fool's fancy. I will not end this book with a claim to predict how things will develop.[1] Throughout the volume, contributors have drawn up cases in which liberal democracy is endangered by Far-Right Newspeak. But by 2023 liberal democrats could find some reasons for relief, even if they may not wish to express such comfort publicly for fear of tempting fate in favor of the right-populists they consider dangerous to their way of life. In the United States, Donald Trump was ejected from office—not without event, but certainly without a doubt. In Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro departed with less disturbance than anticipated and went from worrying liberal democrats to wandering supermarkets in Florida. In the United Kingdom, the Conservative Party's flirtation with right populism diminished with the ascension of milquetoast banker Rishi Sunak to Number 10 Downing Street, and Labour leader Keir Starmer, far more Blairite than Corbynite, appears poised to win a majority government. Brexit may not be fully reversed, but the forces that propelled it have been—at least for now—tamed.

On the continent, France's Emmanuel Macron handily won a second term over Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour. Germany's Red/Green/Yellow leadership, though increasingly unpopular, is not seriously at risk of falling to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), however increasingly well the AfD is polling. The AfD's popularity may well be tempered by other non-mainstream political movements such as Sara Wagenknecht's new leftist party. Poland's Law and Justice (PiS), which along with Hungary's Fidesz is a bête noir of traditional liberals, saw its support diminish in recent elections.

Nonetheless, parties like the AfD in Germany and the Netherlands' Party for Freedom have shown impressive staying power. Far-right parties remain influential and imposing in a way that simply was not the case

DOI: 10.4324/9781003436737-18

for many decades after the Second World War, as this volume's chapters show. A. James McAdams and Alejandro Castrillon's 2021 volume, *Far-Right Thinkers and the Future of Liberal Democracy*, surveyed and analyzed some of the most significant figures in the "new right." This volume, by contrast, has considered a single curious aspect of these figures' thought and rhetoric: their use of traditionally liberal language. As the essays in the preceding pages have argued, these figures have used the language of liberalism, such as the rights of minorities, appeals to equality, and democratic rule, while remaining—sometimes openly, sometimes esoterically—opposed to liberal democracy as it is understood by its defenders.[2] We have called this phenomenon "Far-Right Newspeak." The "new" refers to the fact that this development appears to be recent, or at least has recently intensified. Far-Right Newspeak, the volume's contributors have also argued, has been instrumental in making seemingly illiberal, or anti-liberal, ideas more appealing to broader audiences.

In this concluding chapter, I will not simply summarize the other contributors' arguments. I will rather comment upon what we have learned from the examples in this volume, and what the far right's challenge might teach us about what the defenders of liberal democracy must recognize and do. I intend to offer a more thorough approach to the topic that synthetizes contributors' suggestions to illuminate the present state of liberal democracy. I proceed in two main parts. First, speaking more empirically, I argue that mainstream understandings of the concepts employed as Far-Right Newspeak are—and remain—vulnerable to losing control over how these ideas are understood at large. By focusing on four key areas, including power centralization, information dissemination, gender, and the rule of law, I argue that shortcomings of traditional liberal forces in Western polities have helped to deplete public trust in them, making their opposition to the far right less persuasive than it might otherwise be. In a way this section serves to complement the foci of this volume's chapters. In addition to trying to understand purveyors of Far-Right Newspeak, liberal democrats should also look inward towards their own failings. Encouraging self-reflection and admission of shortcomings is one of liberal democracy's inherent strengths. Contrary to absolutist regimes wherein leaders admit no fault, liberal democracy's capacity for self-criticism is what allows it to improve and continue to exist.

In this chapter's second section, I focus on the theoretical question of what liberalism is. I argue that opponents of Far-Right Newspeak have two main options for successful resistance. Their first option is to defend an account of liberal ideas that does not reduce them to merely discursive—that is, socially constructed—status. Since without some definite idea of what liberal democracy is they cannot condemn any uses of liberal concepts as abuses, committed liberals must insist that liberal ideas are to some degree "thick," that is, hold some correspondence to a transhistorical understanding of justice and

how humans should live with each other. This might be called a conservative liberalism. Their second option is to abandon any devotion to traditional liberal definitions altogether. This alternate route, I argue, means opponents of Far-Right Newspeak should openly endorse the redefinition of traditional liberal ideas and embrace a new mantle: leftist postliberals. While progressive postliberalism, as I describe it, will reject the way in which rightist figures redefine liberal concepts, they will—and already are—radically redefining traditional liberal language while retaining the familiar words. I conclude by suggesting that, to understand politics today, we must also study how leftist thinkers and political figures have transformed liberal ideas.

As A. James McAdams outlined in Chapter 1, it is not easy to say precisely what liberal democracy is. Contributors to his volume have used a general account of it as a system of institutions including the rule of law, free press, fair elections, separation of powers, and mixed representation. This has involved key concepts such as equality, democratic representation, and freedom. Liberal democracy has been instantiated in the constitutions and political traditions of North American and western European states. But contributors have also noted how liberal democracy is represented by more than just governments. Indeed, large and powerful media organizations see themselves as defenders of democracy.[3] When I describe liberal democrats in this chapter, then, I refer to mainline institutional powers in these states against whom far-right figures contrast themselves.

Vulnerabilities of Liberalism's Language

The contributors to this volume do not intend to generally endorse the ideas or actions of the individuals profiled in its pages. But, as scholars, they have been clear that there are numerous cases in which exponents of Far-Right Newspeak often have legitimate critiques of how the language of liberal democracy has been recently employed by established liberal political powers. Here, I argue that these critiques are connected to shortcomings in how liberal political concepts have been instantiated. I do not mean to suggest that all these conditions are directly attributable to failures of liberalism, merely that they have arisen under the watch of established political leadership that opposed the far-right figures profiled in this volume.

Centralization of Economic and Political Power

Scholars do not agree about liberal democracy's history, including whether liberalism is more properly Anglo-American or Franco-Germanic.[4] Yet in broad strokes we can recognize that it emerged primarily in monarchical societies that were gradually (and sometimes abruptly!) hemming in the power of the monarch. The emergence of liberal democracy was roughly

contemporary to the mass centralization of power at the level of large states, first for the monarchy and its court, and then for a government more generally comprised of the people.[5] Thus liberal democracy has always had a contradictory relationship with the centralization of power. On the one hand, it seems to have historically required a significant centralization of political power to emerge, and then once it did emerge it acquired far more governing power than most monarchs ever had. On the other, critical to liberalism is some sense that government should be both limited and somewhat diffused—that is to say, authority ought to be split between different parts of society. Different liberal regimes reflect these principles in different ways. Bicameralism, for instance, typically involves one house with elite or aristocratic elements of society and another house representing the commons. Likewise, the intellectual elite is generally represented in the judiciary. Power is supposed to be separated between the judicial and legislative branches, and republican regimes have the added feature of dividing the executive from the legislative. Liberal democracy almost always involves regional representation and administration. And finally, liberalism is generally understood to involve some serious distinction between economic and political power, meaning that the government does not plan the economy and intervenes only when doing so would be both pragmatic and beneficial to the people whom the government is supposed to represent.

Yet in recent decades, Western liberal democracies have seen an unprecedented centralization of political and economic power. It is because of this centralization, I would like to suggest, that figures such as Marine Le Pen are so easily able to frame their vision as more democratic than the new "dominant ideology" liberalism has become, akin to the "divine monarchy" to which it initially arose in opposition.[6] Some of this increased power is both justifiable and inevitable, especially the economic interventions developed in the first half of the twentieth century in response to the privations of industrial capitalism, laid bare most grotesquely during the Great Depression. None but a few arch-libertarians could countenance returning the state to its pre-1900 size.

In many ways the centralization of political and economic power in Western liberal democracies has left many people—if not most—with the distinct sensation that the established political authorities favor government less for, of, and by the people than *over* them, an *over* that occurs in concert with big business. In the words of Joseph II of Austria: "Everything for the people, but nothing by the people." As economist Matt Stoller and others have convincingly shown, far too many sectors of our economy are run by monopolies or firms with strong monopolistic tendencies.[7] This trend, which began in the 1970s, reversed the anti-monopolistic efforts of democratic politics in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. Now, in areas as distinct as advertising, news media, supermarkets, and general retail, citizens of liberal

democracies must buy from an ever-diminishing number of firms—firms that exert ever-increasing power on markets and public policy.

The trend is even present in the realm of residential real estate, long the most reliable route to the middle class in North America and, to a lesser degree, in Europe. After the 2008 economic disaster, largely caused by egregiously irresponsible risk-taking in the finance industry, the collapse in house prices left millions of people underwater on their homes, and in many cases foreclosed upon. Yet, as has been well documented, the financial relief packages offered by the United States government overwhelmingly supported the very industry that had caused the crisis in the first place. Professional investors quickly created enormous real estate investment funds, buying up affordable housing and then renting it back to the individuals they had outbid.[8]

This gambit is reflective of many of the largest and most powerful firms in the world, which extract rents from local economies to be centralized in a few key population centers—in the United States, usually some combination of New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle, and in Europe, London, Paris, and Berlin. Take Uber as an example. When it first launched, users flocked to the application for its convenience and cost, which was typically significantly less than established taxicab services. Yet this lower cost was entirely a mirage. For many years, Uber aggressively subsidized rides with its vast reserves of venture capital funds. Uber only had a net quarterly profit in the second quarter of 2023, 13 years after its founding. Later, having effectively extinguished the local taxi industry in most places, Uber could cease subsidizing fares, leaving locals with prices no lower than before. Uber naturally long argued that they were actually *disrupters* of monopolies, since in most cities taxis functioned as local cartels with the number of medallions restricted by the municipal government. The key difference, though, is that these were *local* cartels, and there were hundreds—if not thousands—of them across the world. The decisions about the medallions were made by local authorities and fare money remained local. But now, the Uber monopoly (possibly a duopoly with Lyft) means that every cab fare in the world sends a significant percentage as rent directly to San Francisco.

The taxi industry is but one example. We could tell a similar story about the media or any number of other industries where ownership has concentrated ever more centrally to certain population centers around the globe.[9] This concentration, as José Pedro Zúquete shows in Chapter 10, is one important trend that anti-globalist agitators latch upon in their crusades against the "elite."[10] The central foe of these anti-globalist activists, who believe that a global elite is conspiring to enslave them and feed them a diet of insects, is the World Economic Forum (WEF). The WEF is the organization that holds the annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, that has become a "Who's Who" of global power brokers. In 2016, the WEF published an essay that predicted that by 2030 "You'll own nothing, and you'll be happy."

Anti-globalists insist that this is a goal of the WEF, and, as Zúquete shows, argue that responses to the Covid-19 pandemic were intended to usher us closer to such a world—with some even arguing that the entire pandemic was a ruse for the Davos class to extend control.

Many of Zúquete's subjects see a planned plot of domination for which there is little evidence, and they lace their musings with antisemitism. Yet the degree to which private ownership of major parts of the economy has centralized in recent decades means that contemporary liberalism is deeply vulnerable to conspiracies like the ones Zúquete outlines. After all, even if the WEF was not endorsing a vision in which "you'll own nothing," many of the businesses represented at Davos surely are working towards a world in which they indeed do the owning and the rest of us the renting—at least for the assets that are likely to go up in value.

Likewise, had governments been more attuned to the perils of corporate power in today's liberal democracies, they might have been in a better position to understand some of the wariness of Covid vaccines I discuss later. Liberal democrats occupying institutional positions of power failed to reckon with citizens' legitimate worries that discussions around Covid-19 were being manipulated by corporations. Though I do not defend any particular position taken by those skeptical of official positions regarding Covid-19, I want to emphasize why many citizens might not have felt that their health authorities were genuinely oriented towards the interest of the general public. Widespread vaccine hesitancy emerged in a specific context, especially in the United States. This is a context in which large pharmaceutical companies have deliberately oversaturated Americans with prescription opioids, often in concert with medical doctors. Covid-19 and its accompanying vaccines—produced by Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Moderna, among others—came immediately on the heels of this crisis. Most famous among opioid producers and pushers was Purdue Pharma, which was not involved in Covid vaccines. But Johnson & Johnson was. In Oklahoma, for instance, a state court ruled that J&J must pay $572 million in damages for its role in pushing opioids. The presiding judge wrote that J&J promoted the idea "that chronic pain was under-treated (creating a problem) and increased opioid prescribing was the solution." Among other things, the judge continued, J&J "sent sales representatives into Oklahoma doctors' offices to deliver misleading messages, they disseminated misleading pamphlets, coupons, and other printed materials for patients and doctors, and they misleadingly advertised their drugs over the internet."[11] Indeed, when Donald Trump was president, major media outlets paid some attention to this problem. Throughout 2020, the *New York Times* published a series of articles that outlined concerns about the connections between pharmaceutical companies and government operations.[12] But, seemingly when Trump left office, such matters were no longer considered sufficiently serious.

Covid vaccines are not opioids. But the point is that Americans learned that pharmaceutical companies lied to get them addicted to their products, addictions that have killed hundreds of thousands of citizens, especially the young. Two years later, amid another intense marketing push, this time for Covid vaccines (including Johnson & Johnson's), it is understandable that Americans might not have fully trusted the companies who produced them. It should not be surprising that many were skeptical when they were told that they needed an ever-long series of injections—extremely profitable ones for the producers—simply to eat at a restaurant or board an airplane. Liberal democracy's entanglements with the interests of corporations that too often seem unconcerned with the truth—not to mention the health and well-being of regular people—make many believe that medical and public health authorities are not really working for them. Liberal democrats' continual unwillingness to understand these conditions of broken trust makes them lastingly vulnerable to far-right figures who insist that they alone offer true democratic openness.

Though I have focused here on economic power, I need not detail just how much this centralization of economic power has centralized political power, too. Vast swaths of Western liberal democracies, often areas blighted by deindustrialization, grow increasingly distant from the centers of mainstream economic, cultural, and political power. Such areas include the United States' Midwest and the north of England and France—all areas that increasingly favor far-right politics. If liberal democrats do not work to redistribute institutional power and prosperity across political classes and geographic areas, liberal democracy will remain deeply vulnerable to charges that it is not democratic at all.

Government Legitimacy and Openness

As liberal-democratic ideas of limited government emerged in response to political absolutism of pre-Enlightenment Europe, liberal-democratic ideas of open information arose in response to the epistemological absolutism of that same time. Against the absolute power of churches and monarchs to declare what was true and false, liberal democracy heralded a new era in which legitimate knowledge came not from above but from the reasoned debate in which all parts of society could participate. The emergence of a free and critical press was critical to the spread of open information and skepticism of government claims. Liberal democracy, in its emphasis on dialogue and self-correction, is supposed to encourage governments to admit their own errors and to avoid them in the future.

In Chapter 9, Steven Pittz argues that conspiracy theorizing can be dangerously anti-liberal, with participants engaged in solipsistic storytelling without regard to verifiable evidence or the realities of the shared world. But Pittz

argues that pragmatic conspiracism can also be constituted by liberal virtues. After all, as I have suggested, liberalism has always been distinct from absolute monarchies or totalitarian regimes where the power to set political realities resides in a single place. The liberal virtues of pragmatic conspiracism encourage citizens to be active participants in political life. They make it possible to question the claims of authority, and of those who seek to exempt themselves from such questioning. In recent years, governments in liberal democracies have been struggling to control the potential for chaos posed by the unlimited flow of information (of varying veracity) on the Internet while remaining committed to the freedoms necessary for pragmatic conspiracism.

We need not align ourselves with Raw Egg Nationalist and others that Zúquete profiles to say that, in recent years, liberal democracies have not always achieved an appropriate balance. As Pittz's and Zúquete's chapters indicate, liberal democracies are threatened by far-right figures who accuse mainstream figures of hiding important truths and manufacturing consensus. We need not agree with these far-right figures on substantive issues to see that liberal democracies' recent heavy-handed efforts to dominate information narratives from above have left many citizens no longer convinced that liberal democrats are oriented towards truth. Such citizens will be vulnerable to the messages of far-right conspiracists that Zúquete describes.

This much was evident in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion in Iraq, when parts of the United States government misled the public about Saddam Hussein's possession of weapons of mass destruction. This misleading was enabled by credulous media organizations, including the *New York Times*, which consistently ran coverage that was insufficiently skeptical of the administration's claims.[13] The US government, as well as other states such as the United Kingdom, used the tense circumstances following the 9/11 attacks to discourage the virtues of pragmatic conspiracism, which if properly practiced would have given citizens grave doubts about the Bush and Blair (in the UK) administrations' decision to invade Iraq. Though there were dissenting voices in government in the US and UK, the war initially received broad mainstream support. Tony Blair's Labour Party supported it in the UK, and many Democrats did in the United States. These governments did not practice censorship, per se, but they created an environment in which any sustained criticism of their policies was supposedly unpatriotic and potentially treasonous. When their accounts were shown to have been inaccurate, enormous trust was lost in government. By the 2016 Republican primary, Donald Trump could accuse the Bush Administration of lying about WMDs and win the nomination of Bush's own party. The primary campaign of Bush's brother Jeb, initially the preferred establishment candidate of the Republicans, wilted to pitiful finishes in the first two primaries before he withdrew.

Ultimately the virtues of pragmatic conspiracism triumphed in the case of Iraq, as it is now almost universally seen as an immense failure. But we

could look to government responses to Covid-19 as a more recent example of more subtle failure when liberal-democratic governments did not always maintain an appropriate balance between openness to criticism and combatting forces of instability. Covid-19 is in part the subject of both Zúquete's and Pittz's chapters, and it is the most controversial recent political event. It also provides an instance where the failures of liberal democrats are less obvious and less universally acknowledged than in the case of Iraq, yet nevertheless resulted in considerably less trust in governments than before. The pandemic was a flashpoint for unhinged conspiracy, akin to Pittz's systemic classification. I pay these conspiracies little attention here, since as Pittz outlines such practices are not characteristic of liberal democracy. While liberal democrats have focused their Covid post-mortems on such systemic conspiracism and its detrimental effects, I consider it a mistake to place blame solely on this conspiracism for the damage done to trust in liberal democracies.

The rapid spread of Covid-19 posed a generational challenge to governments. This was not least because some extreme politicians and citizens refused to acknowledge that Covid-19 was a dangerous virus or that governments should enact policy responses to mitigate the number of casualties from it. Conspiracy theorists claimed many things, as outlandish as that Covid vaccines contained microchips or that they were intended to sterilize those who receive them. As Zúquete details, these conspiracy theorists came up with intricate accounts of a shadowy global cabal using Covid as a pretext to enslave populations with a series of technological interventions. Rightfully, governments saw it as their duty to combat false narratives in the public sphere. Yet there were times when the efforts of liberal-democratic governments to control the narrative around Covid-19 were too heavy-handed and failed to permit genuine discussion about the reality of the situation and the appropriate policy responses. These failures have left liberal democracy even more vulnerable to the spread of Far-Right Newspeak.

As knowledge of the virus increased, authorities too often presented the changing information as infallible, an infallibility undermined by how quickly the information changed.

Many originally criticized fears of the virus or suggestion of travel restrictions from China as anti-Asian racism. Former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Anthony Fauci initially said that masks were not effective in preventing transmission of the virus, and that "there was no reason to be walking around with a mask."[14] Then, within months, mask wearing became compulsory in all social settings. Citizens were commanded by public health officials to remain sequestered in their homes, at times indefinitely. Until, that is, amid widespread racial justice protests in the summer of 2020, the very same public health officials said that these gatherings were permissible because of the ongoing effects of racism in

society. As even the *New York Times* put it, "Are Protests Dangerous? What Experts Say May Depend on Who's Protesting What: Public health experts decried the anti-lockdown protests as dangerous gatherings in a pandemic. Health experts seem less comfortable doing so now that the marches are against racism."[15] Understandably, this change in messaging—from insisting that the science should govern policy to focusing on politics—undermined the credibility of "trusting the science."

Even more troubling was the discourse around Covid's origins. At the very beginning, mainline politicians, media figures, and certain scientists claimed there was no doubt that the virus emerged naturally, probably in a wet market in Wuhan. They insisted that speculation of a leak from the Wuhan coronavirus laboratory was dangerous conspiracy. Pressured by certain American politicians, social media companies labeled discussion of the possibility of a lab leak "misinformation." But within a year, it emerged that there was considerable evidence that a lab leak was possible, and two US federal agencies eventually concluded as much. (Other agencies were less certain, yet recent reporting indicates that some of the very first people infected with Covid-like symptoms were employees of the Wuhan lab, among other irregularities.[16]) Fauci himself conceded that it was possible, and investigations continue. Many questions remain about to what degree the United States funded the lab's research via the NIH's grant to Ecohealth, and whether officials attempted to obscure this fact afterwards. As Stanford microbiologist David Relman told *Vanity Fair*, "It's just another chapter in a sad tale of inadequate oversight, disregard for risk, and insensitivity to the importance of transparency."[17]

Then came the battles over vaccines. At the same time as conspiracy theorists were musing about microchips, Fauci and President Joe Biden insisted that the vaccines were so effective that, having receive a full dosage, one could not transmit the virus to others. In Fauci's words, the vaccine made you a "dead end" to Covid-19. As it turned out, Covid vaccines did not create "dead ends" for the virus or prevent the vaccinated from spreading the virus to others. Nor did many research scientists say so at the time. In late 2021, *The Lancet*, the world's "highest-impact academic journal," published research suggesting, "the impact of vaccination on community transmission of circulating variants of SARS-CoV-2 appeared to be not significantly different from the impact among unvaccinated people." Wrote one contributor, "The scientific rationale for mandatory vaccination in the USA relies on the premise that vaccination prevents transmission to others." Yet since research indicated that vaccination did not prevent community transfer, the author called for "a reassessment of compulsory vaccination policies leading to the job dismissal [of the unvaccinated]."[18] Those who were even slightly hesitant in any way of vaccination were branded as dumb or malevolent. To defend these stances and the policies that followed from them, established

authorities in liberal democracies appealed to "scientific consensus," even though such a thing did not exist precisely the way that authorities said it did.

With time we can see how murky this concept always was.[19] There was and is scientific consensus that Covid-19 was real and causing the deaths of a great many people. There was and is a consensus that the vaccines are generally safe and effective in mitigating the worst symptoms of the virus. But it was never clear that vaccines were entirely without risk for *all* people, or that they were a net benefit for every single individual. Side effects remain extremely low and nowhere remotely near what opponents claimed, but studies have indeed suggested that for some—especially young men—there may be some risks in receiving the vaccine. These risks mean that for certain people for whom Covid-19 is not a serious threat, it is not clear that receiving the vaccine is the correct medical decision.[20] The CDC itself now says that "evidence from multiple monitoring systems in the United States and around the globe support a causal association between mRNA COVID-19 vaccines (i.e., Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech) and myocarditis and pericarditis."[21] Even back in 2020, scientists were publishing about the need for restraint on claims about what we knew about what vaccines could do, as there simply had not been sufficient research.[22] This does not mean that Covid vaccines should not have been encouraged or even required in certain environments. But it does mean that some of the official narrative around them was inaccurate and should have been subject to greater debate at the time, and if mandatory vaccination was going to be a policy aim it should have been debated with all relevant information.

Similarly, there was no scientific consensus on what sort of far-reaching damages certain lockdown policies could have. Very early on in the pandemic, it was clear that those at risk from Covid were the elderly and individuals with comorbidities. Considering this, some called for a policy response that focused protective efforts at those actually at risk, rather than at the entire population, protective efforts that could have oriented government resources towards preventing those actually at risk of dying from Covid from contracting the virus. While many factors were at play, it is unclear whether the low risk to children from Covid-19 justified the many pernicious effects of having no education and social interaction for up to two years—effects even more pronounced on the poorest and most disadvantaged children in society.[23] Indeed, laboratory research could only offer general guidance on such issues, and health officials who encouraged media organizations to discredit and dismiss medical professionals who offered conflicting evidence and analysis—for instance decrying professors from Harvard, Oxford, and Stanford as "fringe"—undermined considerable trust in their offices.[24]

Covid-19 presented a profoundly complicated situation for leaders, and at any given moment it was unclear what was true and which policy should have been pursued. Politicians and bureaucratic officials in liberal democracies

had to make decisions with limited information as millions were falling sick. But, at times, the unwillingness of authorities to engage open debate about eminently complicated questions, or to admit that "the science" did not prescribe any one policy response, has understandably left millions of citizens of liberal democracies doubtful that current institutional powers truly wish to protect traditionally open liberal dialogue. When liberal democrats turn out to have been wrong—in addition to heavy-handed—they lose even more credibility. Their failings, especially when they are unwilling to admit error, provide ammunition for purveyors of Far-Right Newspeak, who use this as evidence that liberal democracies today have perverted the principles of openness and free debate.

Rule of Law

Perhaps no liberal principle is more important than the rule of law, which traces its roots in the Anglo-American tradition back to Magna Carta's restrictions on King John's powers in 1215. Far-right thinkers now challenge mainline understandings of that concept. As Tímea Drinóczi and Agnieszka Bień-Kacała show in Chapter 5, in Hungary and Poland leaders in recent years have redefined the rule of law to minimize the institutional limits on majorities, instead equating the rule of law with majoritarianism. Petra Mlejnková indicates in Chapter 4 that Tomio Okamura would do the same thing in the Czech Republic if given the opportunity.[25] Frank Wolff, likewise, demonstrates in Chapter 6 that certain figures have attempted to reframe the rule of law in Germany's constitutional tradition by arguing that the rule of law should have prevented Angela Merkel from admitting one million refugees in 2015. In the words of these far-right constitutional scholars, Merkel's acts made Germany an "unlawful" state.[26] And unsurprisingly, Donald Trump's attempts at self-pardoning and general belief that Richard Nixon was correct that "when the President does it, that means it's not illegal" evinced little respect for the rule of law. Trump's media and party supporters seem to generally agree that—at least when their man is in power—there ought to be no legal limits on the executive. They have even recently propounded the theory, in response to federal charges against Trump for mishandling classified documents, that he could legitimately take documents with him from the White House merely by thinking that they were not prohibited.

Why are liberal democracies vulnerable on this front? The issue is related to a general sense among citizens in liberal democracies that there is a class of people in society for whom law does not apply, while the state's policing power against everyone else only increases. Increasingly, I suspect people do not believe liberal institutional claims about equality under the law. Traditionally this was a position of the left. The experience of anti-Communist witch-hunts of the 1950s, FBI harassment of the Civil Rights movement

and the Black Panthers in the 1960s and 1970s, and the emergence of mass incarceration of Black Americans leave many left-leaning Americans with the distinct impression that there exists no legal equality in the United States.

Likewise, in Canada, the policing and incarceration of Indigenous peoples elicits similar consternation. In France and the United Kingdom, scholars and more general observers have long noted that after 9/11 and other terrorist attacks by Islamic extremists, police scrutiny expanded.[27] Equality under the law, in the view of many critics from the left, was for non-Muslims only. Indeed, research has made it clear law enforcement agencies in the West were not only scrutinizing Muslim communities. They often employed undercover agents who essentially entrapped disaffected young Muslim men. Far from preventing radicalization, police forces helped to create radicals who mused over or actively plotted attacks, and then arrested these individuals for plans they would likely have never made without encouragement. The events occurred roughly contemporarily to conduct that produced the financial crisis of 2008. As has been well established, this catastrophe was largely produced by investment bankers engaging in profoundly reckless behavior. This was true especially around the creation of mortgage-backed securities based on subprime mortgages, securities that had been falsely represented as reliable investments.

The lives of millions of people were irrevocably damaged. People lost their homes, went bankrupt, and died prematurely. Yet virtually no one responsible was punished, and this reinforced the idea that equality under the law was nothing more than a liberal sham since there were either insufficient laws to govern financial criminals or the law was simply not enforced. The lack of consequences for those responsible for the cataclysm only solidified the impressions of many that financial crimes committed by the wealthy are prosecuted at subterranean levels.[28] Indeed, Josh Vandiver's contribution to this volume in Chapter 11 reveals that for "Bitcoin bros" and other right-wing figures seeking alternatives to state-backed currencies, the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis was critical. As Vandiver details, in 2008 "existing financial laws and norms would have allowed large banks to fail like other businesses do when they make poor decisions. Yet policymakers across the West prevented these bank failures and claimed they saved the financial system . . . [deploying] extraordinary powers during an economic state of emergency."[29] These extraordinary powers, of course, a prorogation of the rule of law, were used most immediately to benefit the rich.

Such positions, as I said, are the traditional purview of the left, and I return to the left in the next section of this conclusion. Right-wing movements and thinkers, meanwhile, tend to support law enforcement, exemplified most by the "Thin Blue Line" pennants that fly as responses to Black Lives Matter flags. But far-right redefinitions of legal equality, and allegations of "deep state" conspiracy against major law enforcement agencies, are

surely informed by a bipartisan sense that law enforcement acts less as a contributor to the common good than an independent center of unaccountable power. Who could forget, in the end, that as the FBI stormed the camp of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, in 1993, these right-wing extremists hung a banner from their fortress that read: "Rodney King We Understand." This was a reference to the Black Angelino who was beaten by police the previous year, sparking mass anti-police protests and riots. We do not have to agree with this equivalency. King was an unarmed Black man assaulted without legitimate cause by law enforcement. The Branch Davidians were a cult with an amassed armory. Law enforcement intervention at Waco may have been justified, but as Jeff Guinn's recent work shows, there was no reason why the group's leader could not have been arrested when he was outside of the compound or why the FBI could not have attempted to de-escalate the situation before it got out of hand.[30] But, instead, the FBI deliberately deployed military force against Americans living in their homes, and the result was that over 70 people (including 24 children) were killed. The FBI's behavior at Waco was a radicalizing moment for right-wing extremist and Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh.

The far right tends to justify intense policing of ethnic minorities. Mainstream liberals and more leftist figures call for more policing of far-right movements. But both sides—to varying degrees—have the same intuition: Too often the liberal state and its policing powers are more interested in controlling populations far from the levers of power than in making sure established political and economic power is well-policed, too. Both sides also recognize that the police forces of liberal democracies (especially the United States, but also France and other European states) increasingly resemble militaries, from their equipment and weaponry to the way in which they speak. Some of these policed populations—be they Islamic extremists, gangs comprised of ethnic minorities, or white militias—indeed pose threats to the liberal order. Yet the way in which financial and political interests and others with established power have often flouted laws to augment their wealth and authority over others makes equality under the law less and less believable. Far-right figures who seek to redefine "equality under the law" to suit their political ends will continue to be aided by liberal democrats who accept over-policing in marginal communities while under-policing the rich and powerful.

Gender

Sarah Shurts shows in Chapter 3 how, in France, Marine Le Pen has articulated a theory of equality for women that diverges from most contemporary understandings of feminism. Le Pen, Shurts argues, abandons the feminist principle of absolute equality with men for an account that draws on some elements of complementarity among the sexes. For many of Le Pen's critics,

this redefinition is a regressive reaction to the gains of feminist movements in recent decades. They also suggest that Le Pen is cynically articulating a form of feminism that aims to exclude and marginalize France's Muslim communities.[31] In a more radical realm, George Hawley describes the changes in discourse in the so-called manosphere. The story begins with activists making liberal arguments about the ways in which men's legal rights were being sidelined in favor of women, especially in divorce and child custody settlements. Hawley traces how these movements have largely lost this element of liberal language, in an opposite trajectory to many of the other phenomena in this volume. Instead, they have become increasingly more virulent in their hostility to women, often using outright misogynistic and even violent rhetoric. As Hawley writes, "energy within the manosphere shifted away from those calling for improvements in the cultural and legal treatment of men in contemporary Western democracies, and became increasingly dominated by the most hateful and bitter critics of both feminism as a movement and women overall."[32]

Hawley draws attention to the most worrying aspects of these uses and abuses of liberal language regarding contemporary gender relations. A. James McAdams details how Jordan Peterson has achieved enormous popularity among disaffected young men, as he peddles an evolutionary theory-infused Nietzscheanism as a paean to their sufferings.[33] But Hawley and Shurts also outline that the failure of liberal democracies to foster good relations between men and women has left societies open to these abuses of language. At least since the days of Mary Wollstonecraft and the French Revolution, in the late eighteenth century, liberalism and women's social and political recognition have been tied together. The twentieth century, and especially the availability of reliable birth control in the 1960s, saw women leave the household and enter the workforce in stupendous numbers. Abortion became widely accessible and largely unopposed in any significant sense in most liberal democracies, apart from the United States. On average people married later, if at all, and divorces became so common and accessible that the rate of divorce becomes a joke at every wedding. Falling birthrates in liberal democracies are kept afloat only by the families had by immigrants to these societies.

Most of these developments are championed by liberal democrats as the manifestation of genuine equality among men and women, a legal and cultural equality necessary for the emergence of social relations among peers. Yet even the most committed liberals must acknowledge that relations between men and women remain unsettled, and not all of this can be blamed on those who refuse to relinquish reactionary attitudes. As the MeToo movement showed, women who entered the workforce were often welcomed by men who claimed to be feminists and champions of working women but who proceeded to sexually harass them. Free of the patriarchal protections of the family, liberated from the *in loco parentis* of sex-segregated college

dormitories or boarding-house landladies, women were not free of the men from whom the old system claimed to protect them.

Though the sexual revolution may have sundered sex from marriage culturally, more than one liberal has recognized that recent years have seen a general decline in satisfying sexual lives. Hawley shows that the manosphere is populated by men incensed by their inability to have romantic relationships with women. The vicious language these "incels" use rightfully makes us recoil. But their resentment may be merely a more virulent manifestation of the common experience of sexual relations today, even if we need not—following Hawley—accept incels' diagnosis for why this is so. We need only look to the female equivalent of the incel ("femcel") phenomenon to see the same dynamic at play among less unsavory subjects. Though nowhere near as prevalent as male incels, femcels describe a similar experience in their romantic lives. Femcels argue the modern dating market is structured in favor of "Stacys," their demeaning term for conventionally attractive women who have unlimited romantic options, just like male incels' description of "Chads." They find "the modern dating landscape—the image-based apps, the commodified dating 'market,' the illusory 'freedom' to be found in hookup culture—to be unnavigable."[34]

In the realm of employment, women rightly feel they remain underrepresented at the highest levels of power and earnings—from the media, to Hollywood, to boardrooms and governments. The continued dominance of men at the ceilings of various industries masks the way in which the floor has fallen out beneath an increasing number of men, meaning that while women remain frustrated that glass ceilings remain intact, men despair that their solid floors have melted away. The transformation of the economy and education system, which has generally helped women, has in some ways been zero-sum. It is not just denizens of the manosphere concerned about the state of men.[35] Men's educational achievements are cratering. For those who do not attend university, wages and employment prospects are dismal. Rates of addiction, suicide, and incarceration have continually risen. Men are increasingly absent from the economy and from familial life, and these are often the very men vulnerable to political radicalization. At the same time, the "female future" portended by women's educational success appears not to have buoyed their spirits in any meaningful way. Recent studies report that women's rates of depression and dissatisfaction with their lives are growing continuously. Especially upon young women, the effects of social media on well-being—and especially the competition that occurs on it—appear extremely detrimental.[36] For those men and women who do beat the odds, find satisfying partnerships, and plan to have families, the costs involved make doing so increasingly difficult. In short, in many ways the gender relations that have emerged under the management of traditional liberal cultural mores over the past century have replaced previous pathologies with

new ones. Many people, not just those on the far-right, sense that liberal democracies have an empty and insufficient account of equality—or relations more generally—between men and women. This insufficiency will continue to leave liberals' language on gender equality vulnerable to those who seek to redefine gender equality in ways liberal democrats find unsavory.

In this section I aimed to outline four key areas of conflict covered in this volume's chapters. These areas reflect ongoing points of vulnerability for liberal democracy. I describe them not to justify right-wing responses to these vulnerabilities, but rather to re-emphasize that it is not enough for liberal democrats to reject right-wing ideologies—they must directly address the very real problems for which right-wing figures claim to have solutions. In the second section of the chapter, I turn to outlining two general theoretical approaches those hostile to right-wing uses of liberal ideas may take to prevent even greater success of these uses and abuses in the future.

Theoretical Responses to Uses and Abuses of Liberal Language

In the first part of this final chapter, I focused almost entirely on vulnerabilities in liberalism based on empirical conditions, conditions that leave citizens willing to entertain far-right accounts of liberal concepts to which this volume is devoted. The implication of this was that these empirical issues need to be better addressed by liberal politics. In this second section, I want to briefly step away from the empirical and supplement that overview with a consideration of how those hostile to right-wing uses of liberal language might approach the question theoretically. The problem, as I see it, is that unless liberal-democratic concepts are understood to have some fixed meaning, it is difficult to condemn any one instance of Far-Right Newspeak as a perversion of liberal-democratic ideas. Yet fixing the meaning of liberal-democratic ideas also runs contrary to certain strong progressive urges among liberal democrats today. Given this dilemma, I argue that liberal democrats have two main options: They can either recommit themselves to a form of conservative liberalism that insists that liberal concepts are both good and have an essential meaning which far-right figures are perverting, or alternatively they can concede that liberal concepts have neither essential meanings nor are necessarily worth preserving. I will call these two options conservative liberalism and progressive postliberalism respectively.

Conservative Liberalism

As contributors to this volume have shown, contemporary right-wing figures have redefined and redeployed liberal terms in ways that are different from how mainstream liberal democrats understand and use those same terms. From the perspective of conservative liberalism, these right-wing

uses are generally *abuses* because they fundamentally transform the meaning of the terms. For conservative liberals, liberalism is a system of substantive ideas and institutions. It is comprised of moral and philosophic commitments to human dignity, natural equality among citizens, freedoms to expression and association, government by consent and contract, and freedoms from discrimination based on arbitrary attributes such as race and gender.

I cannot here offer a comprehensive philosophical history of these ideas, but many readers will recognize in them the principles of a foundational liberal tradition rooted in the thought of Immanuel Kant and John Locke. Lockean liberal democracy (though of course Locke's own relationship to "liberal democracy" is a complicated question) is based around the natural rights of life, liberty, and property. These natural rights predate government and the social contract, and government aims to preserve these natural rights that could not be long maintained without it. But government is also limited by these pre-political natural rights. Likewise, for Kant, ethics and politics are fundamentally grounded by the principles of reason, especially the categorical imperative. Theoretically speaking, we can contrast the conservative liberal tradition to the liberalism of thinkers like Richard Rorty and Isaiah Berlin as well as the later work of John Rawls, who whole-heartedly reject foundations and embrace value neutrality.[37]

Conservative liberalism in the twentieth century is also connected to the tradition of Christian democracy and philosophers such as Jacques Maritain, who aimed for a synthesis of Christian understandings of natural rights and natural law with liberal democracy. Conservative liberalism thus holds that liberalism is a historical discourse and praxis, but one intrinsically constrained by its correspondence with universal principles of truth and reason, as well as the pursuit of peaceful and secure domestic politics as so famously articulated by Thomas Hobbes, arguably the greatest illiberal forerunner to liberalism. By constrained by universal principles, I mean that conservative liberals understand reality to involve truths about humans and goodness—especially around natural equality, dignity, and so forth—that are transhistorical in nature. This is to say, these principles hold to a theory of truth that are not the aims of politics merely because of a contingent agreement among a certain people at a certain time.

This substantive account of liberalism offers a rebuke to the postliberalism that Laura K. Field describes in Chapter 8. The postliberals that Field profiles charge liberal democracy with having only negative understandings of freedom and equality—suggesting that liberal democracy only exists to remove external limits on individual autonomy. They argue that to avoid the emptiness of individualism, at home and in the market, we must reinstantiate older accounts of liberty and equality that are found in classical religious and philosophic traditions—ones that predate the emergence of liberal

democracy. Yet the tradition of liberalism articulated by Locke, Kant, and others offers far more positive substance than Field's postliberals are willing to allow. Whereas Field's postliberals seem to equate liberal democracy with a society of individual wills, Lockeans and Kantians disagree.

Conservative liberals, then, can make a very clear case about the ways in which Far-Right Newspeak is indeed an abuse or perversion of liberal language. If liberalism is metaphysical, this means that its concepts have essences, essences that cannot be transformed by the discourses of right-wing figures. If the uses of liberal concepts by right-wing figures run contrary to the essence of liberalism, not only as a historical tradition but also as a collection of universal and rationally necessary principles, then these uses are illegitimate abuses. Conservative liberalism can make a clear stand on what liberalism is and is not: liberalism requires the rule of law, the separation of powers, free and regular elections, civilian control of the military, broad rights and protections for minorities, and many other entrenched constitutional principles. Conservative liberalism involves the idea that all individuals were born with some intrinsic equal worth. Any efforts to eliminate these attributes from a political system make it less and less liberal. In combatting right-wing uses of liberal language, conservative liberalism has a clear advantage in firm foundations from which to condemn the right. It also has a clear advantage in its efforts to maintain the accomplishments of liberalism more broadly. After all, liberalism has more than a set of constitutional commitments. Liberal states, at least internally, have enjoyed in recent centuries the most prolonged peace and prosperity in human history.

Yet conservative liberalism will not appeal to all who oppose Far-Right Newspeak. As it is grounded in some form of universalism, especially one mainly developed in Western history and philosophy, conservative liberals will be somewhat limited in their ability to accommodate certain types of political diversity. As James Tully has argued about constitutional liberalism, its instantiation in former colonies has involved the dismantling and suppression of Indigenous peoples' governance and lives.[38] Though conservative liberals can welcome Muslims into liberal democracies, they can only accept a certain type of Islam that has accommodated itself to some liberal principles. (The same is true, I should say, of certain forms of Christianity, especially integralist Catholicism.) Conservative liberals will also be deeply skeptical of contemporary developments that question or dismantle tradition liberal categories. For instance, conservative liberalism probably cannot accept non-human animals as rights-bearers—and even political actors—as has been recently proposed.[39] Likewise, nascent efforts to eliminate the liberal distinction between citizen and non-citizen cannot comport with a conservative liberalism. Nor will conservative liberalism be easily able to accept the emergence of technological hybrids that challenge the traditional understanding of the subject. Perhaps because of its Christian inheritance, and thus

also Platonic heritage, traditional liberalism has had some sense of ensouled individuals as the base unit of political society.

Whether conservative liberalism takes a Lockean form, in which the state exists to protect a substantive idea of natural rights and individual self-ownership, or a more Hegelian form in which the state is the rational emergence of collective self-recognition of freedom required for individuals to realize their own freedom, my point is that conservative liberalism has boundaries. The concepts of freedom and equality cannot be limitlessly developed, for conservative liberals, even if plenty of people in a liberal society believe at any given point that they should be. Conservative liberalism permits some development and enlargement of democracy, freedoms, and equality to more people. But these must be amendments that correct accidental errors of liberal democracy—such as denying women the franchise—rather than essential elements, such as the distinction between citizen and non-citizen.

To summarize, recommitting to a conservative liberalism that combines both historical and metaphysical understandings of liberal concepts combats Far-Right Newspeak in several key ways. It means committing to the idea that there is something both essential and good in liberal democracy, and that it is possible to lose this essence if citizens are not attentive and do not actively nurture it. At the same time as conservative liberalism can steadfastly resist Far-Right Newspeak uses of liberal terms, it may not be able to accommodate what many progressives understand to be appropriate developments of liberal terms. For this reason, I will next outline another possible theoretical response that those hostile to Far-Right Newspeak may consider.

Progressive Postliberalism

The conservative liberalism I outlined in the last section sees the liberal-democratic constitutional state as the apotheosis of political development. Postliberal progressivism, meanwhile, argues that the development of freedom and equality do not stop in the liberal constitutional state. Freedom and equality must move beyond these liberal understandings. This postliberal progressivism is the other option to conservative liberalism for those who reject right-wing accounts of liberal concepts today, though of course it may take many different forms.

Conservative liberalism rejects the far right's articulations of liberal concepts, insisting that these articulations pervert the true meaning of liberal democracy. Progressive postliberalism, on the other hand, denies that there is a fundamental content to liberal democracy. This approach follows the philosophic critiques of thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, who argue that discourses such as rights and equality are at root manifestations of power. Progressive postliberals may also follow more recent deconstructive theory, who generally suggest that we cannot say definitively what

a particular tradition—such as liberalism—is, and therefore cannot say that any use of liberal language constitutes an abuse. (Because, for instance, liberal concepts have been used in many ways at many different times.) Where conservative liberals see the liberal discourses of rights and equality as political manifestations of genuinely good metaphysical principles, progressive postliberals see them as reflecting the particular power claims of those peoples and classes that instantiated liberal-democratic political orders. In this section I outline postliberal progressivism, an admittedly more difficult task than conservative liberalism because it is both newer and less clearly structured in thought and practice.

Postliberal progressivism cannot object to Far-Right Newspeak as a perversion of liberalism, since the approach does not entail a vision of liberal democracy that has some sort of true or good essence. Indeed, many postliberal progressives will be pleased that Far-Right Newspeak reveals the fundamental particularity and lack of universality to liberal-democratic claims. Yale law professor Samuel Moyn, for instance, one such postliberal progressive, has argued extensively that human rights in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have functionally defended conservative understandings of liberty, family, and economic justice.[40] This volume has outlined a number of far-right thinkers and politicians who argue that true democracy means redefining how foundational liberal constitutional principles—such as the separation of powers or the independence of the judiciary—are understood. The reaction of a postliberal progressive like Moyn would be to agree that these constitutional principles should be superseded, only not in the way that the right suggests. In an op-ed in the *New York Times* last year, Moyn and coauthor Ryan Doerfler argue that American progressives should abandon the Constitution. They write:

> By leaving democracy hostage to constraints that are harder to change than the rest of the legal order, constitutionalism of any sort demands extraordinary consensus for meaningful progress. It conditions democracy in which majority rule always must matter most on surviving vetoes from powerful minorities that invoke the constitutional past to obstruct a new future.[41]

Moyn and Doerfler's calls are not the same as Donald Trump's to abolish the Constitution. But they share with Trump an interest in eliminating higher-order legal principles from the past that constrain political possibilities in the present.

James Tully, meanwhile, proffers a deep critique of the universalism of liberal constitutionalism and the way in which it "yokes" irreducibly diverse cultural groups under a single political order that reflects one political tradition. To make Western societies more truly democratic, he seeks to replace

liberal constitutional orders with constantly negotiated multicultural "strange multiplicities."[42] Others have a far more radical vision of how liberal concepts such as freedom and equality should be transformed. A whole branch of transhumanist philosophy predicts and welcomes the merging of humans and machines, and the concomitant dissolution of liberal subjectivity such a merging would bring.[43] Similarly, some radical feminists today argue that technology and other transformations—such as the abolition of the family and the socialization of all domestic work—are needed for women to achieve true equality.[44] Nowhere is postliberal progressivism more prominent than in discussions surrounding policing and the justice system. Postliberal progressives argue, as I hinted in the first section, that equality under the law—or the rule of law more broadly—is a sham that does not reflect the reality of legal systems in Western liberal democracies. They argue that racialized minorities, especially Black people, bear the brunt of legal systems that do not in any sense treat them as equal.

For such postliberal progressives, legal equality must be superseded by an anti-racist legal equity. The key difference is that anti-racist equity sees any distinctions among legal (as well as socioeconomic) outcomes among racial groups as reflective of racist systemic structures.[45] Such figures see these racist structures developed most fully in the United States, which they sometimes suggest was founded to defend slavery,[46] but also in the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, and elsewhere.[47] These ideas have been extremely influential upon a new generation of legal academics, prosecutors, and politicians. The ideas generally involve a substantial transformation of the traditional liberal justice system—which focuses on individual guilt and innocence—into one which requires almost exclusive focus on social structures for the process to reflect genuine equality. It also seriously questions whether political equality among people of different races is possible, or at least suggests that this possibility requires radical changes to current politics. This skepticism of traditional liberal democracy, and accompanying redefinition of equality, is in many ways different from the Far-Right Newspeak's redefinition of equality and the critique of liberal democracy it implies. Yet they are both committed to the idea that liberal concepts such as democracy, equality, and freedom as defended by the liberal tradition are not truly just.

As I mentioned earlier, conservative liberalism may not satisfy critics of right-wing Newspeak, since a hardened understanding of liberal democracy can prevent progressive developments as well as right-wing alterations. Postliberal progressivism does not have this problem. Its critique of traditional liberal politics means that it remains open to new understandings of old liberal ideas—or left-wing Newspeak. Left-wing Newspeak, arguably, is what allows for the expansion of freedoms and equalities to people (and beings) where they were not previously found, since progressive postliberals do not recognize any distinction between "accidental" and "essential"

elements of liberal democracy as does conservative liberalism. For postliberal progressives, contrary to the negative connotation that George Orwell gave Newspeak, there is nothing wrong with redefining old liberal terms and abandoning the traditional meanings—they just should be redefined much differently from the far right.

But there is also risk in progressive postliberalism, and we can see it illuminated in Moyn and Doerfler's concluding sentence in their essay calling for the abolition of the American Constitution. They write, "A politics of the American future [without the constitution] would make clear our ability to engage in the constant reinvention of our society under our own power, without the illusion that the past stands in the way." Since the French Revolution's "Year Zero," progressive forces in society have dreamed of throwing off the yokes of the past. Yet one of the strengths of liberal democracy is its ability to put limits on power—some principles agreed upon in the past *standing in the way*. Constitutions restrain leaders as much as empower them, and they especially constrain leaders of popular majorities. One would not be crazy to look back and wish that Robespierre and Napoleon—not to mention Hitler and Stalin—had something in the past standing in their way, or be thankful that Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Donald Trump, and other power-loving American presidents did face that same obstacle. Postliberal progressivism, in its rejection of basic liberal principles, contempt for moderation, and radical openness to the future, risks abandoning the institutions and practices of limited government that have made liberal democracy so remarkably successful.

This volume's focus is Far-Right Newspeak. But, to understand the current state of liberal-democratic ideas, and what they will look like in the future, we need to study left-wing transformations of liberal language, too. We hope this volume invites readers to consider this matter, though of course many of the substantial questions around left-wing Newspeak will be different, including around the question of structural justice and policing I discussed a moment ago. To consider another example, though, we might ask how left-wing thinkers and politicians have transformed liberalism's approach to gender relations. For centuries, liberal feminists sought to achieve political and social rights for women, with women construed as a natural category of human. Yet contemporary feminist theory and politics, deeply influenced by post-structural and postmodern investigations into gender, increasingly suggest that gender is primarily a matter of self-identification. This has led to highly contentious battles between traditional liberal feminists who generally do not believe that individuals born male can truly become women, and those who insist that "trans women are women."[48]

On the issue of gender, postliberal progressive Newspeak is very different from Far-Right Newspeak. But close study of progressive Newspeak on economic issues may reveal convergence with Far-Right Newspeak. Those

committed to liberal democracy must look closely at its vulnerabilities, and especially at where left and right appear to be similarly disenchanted with the status quo, for these places offer opportunities to strengthen liberal democracy while appealing to both left and right. Liberal democracy has traditionally understood freedom to mean relative openness to the movement of capital across borders, minimal—or at least restrained—state involvement in the economy, and a general trend towards free trade. This understanding of freedom is increasingly less popular among the left and the right.

Instead, I suspect both left and right critics of conservative liberal democracy today believe that for citizens to have true (or genuine) economic freedom, the state must intervene aggressively in the economy to prevent the moneyed class from impoverishing the masses. The right and left postliberals agree that the corporate world has far too much power. They generally agree that there are too many industries in the Western capitalist world that have been subject to regulatory capture, with the foxes setting the rules about fences around the henhouse. Likewise, left and right both maintain that liberal democracies are awash with political figures who continually use their power and connections to enrich themselves.

Traditional liberal democrats inclined to resent any criticism of the established institutional order should not lament the existence of such implied critiques in left and right Newspeak. Instead, they should take these instances of Newspeak as clear smoke signals from bits of sparking dry brush in terrain where their accounts of the world are no longer accepted by many, sparks that could turn to wildfires if ignored. If they are committed to their principles, and unless they wish to abandon the idea that citizens should consent to their ruling regime, liberal democrats should view instances of Newspeak as places where they need to reconsider their own Oldspeak and why they are no longer persuading citizens. The alternative, as we may only see when it is too late to change course, is that when people no longer believe they live in a liberal democracy, they no longer act as if they do—or care whether its principles live or die.

Notes

1 My thanks to Jim McAdams and Connor Grubaugh for their comments and suggestions on this chapter.

2 I use liberal democracy and liberalism interchangeably in this chapter, though I acknowledge that this blending is historically—and contemporarily—troublesome.

3 The *Washington Post,* for instance, has as its tagline: "Democracy dies in darkness." In this conclusion, I assume that major mainline media organizations in western Europe and America (including the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *CNN*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Der Spiegel*, and others) are representatives of liberal democracy. I understand that this is a complex question, especially since media organizations are not monolithic and because these

organizations scrutinize traditional liberal-democratic politicians in addition to right-wing figures.

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6 Marine Le Pen, *Pour Que Vive La France* (Paris: Éditions Grancher, 2012), 90. See also McAdams, this volume.

7 Matt Stoller, *Goliath: The 100-Year War Between Monopoly Power and Democracy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019).

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25 See Drinóczi and Bień-Kacała in Chapter 5 and Mlejnková in Chapter 4 of this volume.
26 See Wolff, Chapter 6 of this volume.
27 See, for instance, the films and journalism of Rokhaya Diallo.
28 Sheelah Kolhatkar, *Black Edge: Inside Information, Dirty Money, and the Quest to Bring Down the Most Wanted Man on Wall Street* (New York: Random House, 2017); James B. Stewart, *Den of Thieves* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).
29 See Vandiver, Chapter 11 of this volume.
30 Jeff Guinn, *Waco: David Koresh, the Branch Davidians, and a Legacy of Rage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2023).
31 See Shurts, Chapter 3 of this volume.
32 See Hawley, Chapter 7 of this volume.
33 See McAdams, Chapter 2 of this volume.
34 Kaitlyn Tiffany, "What Do Female Incels Really Want?," *The Atlantic*, May 12, 2022, www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2022/05/femcel-meaning-female-incel-reddit/629836/.
35 Idrees Kahloon, "What's the Matter With Men?," *The New Yorker*, January 23, 2023, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/01/30/whats-the-matter-with-men.
36 "Youth Risk Behavior Survey" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011–2021), www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf; Jonathan Haidt, "Social Media Is a Major Cause of the Mental Illness Epidemic in Teen Girls. Here's the Evidence," *After Babel*

(blog), February 22, 2023, https://jonathanhaidt.substack.com/p/social-media-mental-illness-epidemic.

37 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), 4. Rawls is obviously a complicated case. From *Political Liberalism* onwards, his work was avowedly non-metaphysical. Yet, for many reasons, I maintain that the political aims of *PL* are not self-evident without the metaphysical convictions that characterized his earlier work in *Theory of Justice*.

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40 Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

41 Samuel Moyn and Ryan D. Doerfler, "The Constitution Is Broken and Should Not Be Reclaimed," *The New York Times*, August 19, 2022, www.nytimes.com/2022/08/19/opinion/liberals-constitution.html.

42 James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); James Tully, "On Gaia Democracies," in *Democratic Multiplicity*, edited by James Tully et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 349–73.

43 Nick Bostrom, "Letter From Utopia," *Studies in Ethics, Law, and Technology* 2, no. 1 (2008); Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Nick Bostrom and Julian Savulescu, eds., *Human Enhancement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

44 Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family* (New York: Verso Books, 2019); Sophie Lewis, *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation* (New York: Verso Books, 2022).

45 Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019); Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016).

46 Nikole Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York: Random House, 2021).

47 See, for instance, Rokhaya Diallo's work on France, especially her documentary film *From Paris to Ferguson: Guilty of Being Black*.

48 This issue has become particularly inflammatory in the United Kingdom, with liberal feminists such as J. K. Rowling, Germaine Greer, and Kathleen Stock generating immense backlash over their stance on transgenderism.