

THE REAL RIGHT?

New Culture, New Right: Anti-Liberalism in Postmodern Europe

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Bloomington, Ind.: 1st Books, 2004

\$14.95 paper

vi + 228 pp.

Reviewed by Samuel Francis

It tells us a good deal about the nature of contemporary American culture that Michael O'Meara's important and often brilliant (but unfortunately sometimes opaquely written) account of the thought of the French "New Right" could be published in this country only by an on-line publishing house and not by a major firm. O'Meara's book is neither a propaganda tract nor a mere regurgitation of books and writers but a careful and in many respects exhaustive examination of the major theoretical themes that characterize New Right philosophy and social and political theory. It is similar to but broader in scope than Tomislav Sunic's book of 1990, *Against Democracy and Equality*, to which O'Meara acknowledges a debt. For Americans, who even on the hard right display little familiarity with the French New Rightists, O'Meara's book is the place to begin to find out what and who the New Right is, what the writers associated with it think, and why they think it. But those who begin *New Culture, New Right* without adequate preparation may find parts of it forbidding and many of the ideas they encounter in it strange or even distasteful.

Readers should at once put out of their minds any connection with or similarity to the American "New Right" of the 1970s and 1980s, a collection of direct mail scam artists, religious nuts, and Beltway "populists" with six-digit salaries who were mostly semi-literate and proud of it. Nor is the French New Right, a school (or more accurately an "orientation") that began to emerge around the same time in the late 1960s and early 1970s, associated with the nationalist movement of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the *Front National*. Indeed, the New Right as O'Meara uses the term is aloof from practical politics. Influenced by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and his concept of "cultural hegemony," it concentrates almost entirely on

cultural and philosophical rather than formal political conflicts, an approach for which it has adapted the term “metapolitics.” (In this respect it most closely resembles the “paleo-conservatives” around the Rockford Institute and *Chronicles*, or perhaps the *Occidental Quarterly* itself, although, as will become clear, there are many major differences.) “To wage its own anti-liberal version of Gramsci’s war of position,” O’Meara writes, the New Right’s “metapolitical strategy”

sets its sights on three long-range objectives. Through its publications, conferences, and various public engagements, it endeavors to engage the ideas “that inspire and organize our age” (Madame de Staël), recuperating from them what it can for its own project. Secondly, it seeks to undermine the liberal order by discrediting its underlying tenets and affirming those traditional European ideas supportive of the identities and communities it champions. Finally it aspires to cultural hegemony, if not within civil society as a whole, at least within the elite. From the beginning, then, its “Gramscianism of the Right” privileged culture, which was taken as the “infrastructural” basis of both civil society and the state. (p. 46)

The French New Right has centered largely around an organization founded in 1968 called the *Groupement de Recherche et d’Etudes pour la Civilisation Européenne* (GRECE, or “Group for Research and Study of European Civilization”), and its major exponent has been the journalist and author Alain de Benoist. Entirely unlike the American “New Right” (or for that matter the Old Right), the French New Right is anti-Christian, anti-American, and anti-capitalist. Why then is it a “right” at all?

It is a right (a label Benoist and most of his colleagues have always hesitated to embrace) because it mounts a searching and virtually total critique and rejection of “modernity”—modern philosophy since Descartes, modern science and technology, modern materialistic values and culture, and the modern state and its tendencies toward global hegemony and technological regimentation—and it sees in Christianity the origins and underpinnings of modernity and in America and modern capitalism its most extreme representation. It affirms what O’Meara and the New Right itself describe as “traditional societies”—that is, the hierarchical, traditionalist, particularist, familistic and patriarchalist, communitarian, and usually agrarian and pagan societies that modernity destroys. “Traditional culture” as O’Meara explains in a footnote (55), “refers not to those primitive, tribal formations studied by anthropologists, but to the pre-modern formations that characterized Europe up to the 17th century—that is, to the Greek, Roman, Celtic, Germanic, and Medieval forms of the European civilizational heritage.” As the name GRECE suggests, one of the archetypal societies of this kind that the New Right idealizes is that of the ancient Greek polis itself. “Reactionary,” a term usually employed to describe portly suburban dentists or literary monarchists who wear opera capes, does not quite fit *la Nouvelle Droite*.

But what is most significant about the New Right's positions is less the positions themselves than its sophisticated and complex philosophical elaboration of them. It is O'Meara's own intimate familiarity with this elaboration by a wide range of writers over a period of some thirty years (as well as with the ideas of earlier figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger) and in a variety of disciplines ranging from philosophy to social and political theory to mythology, anthropology, and history that makes his book especially valuable and especially fascinating.

At the core of the New Right's critique of modernity is a rejection of the philosophical rationalism that drives the modern mind and of its principal source, the philosopher René Descartes. "In his quest for truth—that is, epistemological truth—," writes O'Meara,

Descartes concentrated on the length, depth, breadth, and velocity of physical objects, for these alone enabled him to quantify "the empirical unity of the world" and render nature into extensions whose measurements lent themselves to precise and predictable calculations.... His unprecedented success in reducing complex natural phenomena to simple mathematical explanations would, of course, do much to launch the career of modern science; but his success came at a steep price. Besides reducing reality to a simple expanse of matter, "understood" in abstract mathematical terms that did little to enhance man's knowledge of his world and, in some cases, further estranged him from it, his quantifying reductionism had the effect of relegating the qualitative features of the European life—all those things associated with culture and heritage—to a secondary order of significance. (p. 58)

Once Cartesian rationalism was incorporated into not only eighteenth century philosophy and science but also political and social thought—as it was through Locke (in an empiricist variation), Kant, and the philosophes of the continental Enlightenment—the result was to mandate in the name of "reason" and "progress" the "liberation" of human beings from traditional and "irrational" social bonds and relationships, thereby launching the war of modernity on tradition, buttressed by the ideologies of individualism and liberalism.

Because liberalism's quantitative optic focuses on the immediate and simplistic, with everything levelled down to choices between appetite and aversion, it lent itself to the myth of *homo oeconomicus*—or, more accurately, was the premise upon which the myth [of Economic Man] historically arose. The myth has since become the paradigm for liberalism's quantitative model of individualization. (p. 63)

In the New Right's critique of modernity, individualism itself is closely linked to the other features of modern society:

For once the social world becomes a collection of monadic individuals, inherent distinctions and supraindividual designations take on a secondary order of significance. What counts for liberalism is the basic zoological unit, which—ideally—is a self-contained rational being. The qualitative attributes of station, character, and breeding (not to mention race, culture, and history), whose

importance has prevailed in every previous civilization, are thereby ignored, for the individual—any individual—is looked on as an “instance of humanity,” worthy, in himself, of dignity. From this “naturalistic” notion of the individual, which denies everything in man that goes beyond his zoological nature, there emerges another of liberalism’s defining doctrines—that of egalitarianism and the contention that all individuals, irrespective of their inherited or acquired qualities, are bearers of equal rights and deserving of equal treatment. (p. 65)

It must be acknowledged that much of the French Right’s critique of modernity is not entirely new or unique to it—much of the critique of rationalism and the Enlightenment has been anticipated by anti-modernist Christian thinkers (C.S. Lewis comes to mind on the popular level) and philosophical conservatives like Richard Weaver. The latter argued that there is a straight road from the philosophical nominalism of the thirteenth century William of Occam to the behaviorism, Marxism, and relativism of the twentieth century. But, like Weaver’s argument, much of the New Right critique seems overdone. It is quite true that the Enlightenment put together an ideological construct that commanded the aggressive abolition of traditional social institutions and authorities, but that is not the only such construct that rationalism and naturalism can build. The early New Right in the 1970s was much attracted to such emerging disciplines as sociobiology, genetics, and ethology that were just as much developments from rationalistic and naturalistic worldviews as the behaviorism and blank-slate environmentalism the new disciplines rejected. As O’Meara writes, the New Right’s

initial challenge to liberal culture took place, for instance, in the realm of science and bore many characteristics, such as a positivist faith in scientific reason, that it later rejected. Science, however, was a “natural” starting point for its anti-liberal project. In the 18th century, the champions of liberal modernity had mobilized the New Science against their conservative foes and have since represented themselves as the political vanguard of the most advanced scientific ideas. Twentieth-century science, however, has proven to be far less amenable to liberal claims. The basic tenets of evolutionary psychology, behavioral genetics, molecular biology, sociobiology, and ethology, all, seem to contradict liberal notions of environmental primacy, natural “goodness,” the individualist nature of the social world, the irrelevance of race, or the plasticity and equality of human nature. Given liberalism’s vulnerability in this field, it was here that Grécistes staged their first critical assault on modernist values, targeting what the most recent scientific research revealed about the social, hierarchical, genetic, and hence anti-liberal foundations of human life. (pp. 26-27)

The French New Right, in other words, was heading toward what I have elsewhere called “counter-modernism” rather than the anti-modernism in which it eventually became involved. Counter-modernism is itself a form of modernism and accepts many of its metaphysical premises (including its naturalism) while rejecting the conventional implications and constructs (especially social and political) that the Enlightenment and its heirs have devised. Examples of counter-modernist thinkers in Euro-American thought

would be Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, the *Federalist Papers*, the Social Darwinists of the nineteenth century, the classical elite theorists Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, and James Burnham. Yet unfortunately, the New Right was deflected from developing its counter-modernist tendencies, for reasons that are not entirely clear from O'Meara's account. Quite frankly, it is impossible not to suspect simple expediency and safety, as the European Thought Police (both figuratively in the dominant culture and literally in the actual criminalization of the right through "race relations" laws) in the 1980s began cracking down on what were demonized as "racism" and "hate speech." The New Right may have found it safer to abandon counter-modernism and science entirely than to pursue and elaborate the logical social implications of the new science of man.

In any case, the New Right certainly did not take its rejection of modernism from the Christian or conservative right but from the movement known as "post-modernism," associated with Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, et al., a movement usually involved not with the right of any sort but with the extreme left. The logical implications of post-modernism are radically relativistic and skeptical, even nihilistic, and affirm little of anything. As O'Meara writes:

Against the rational, objective, and universal claims of the modern narrative [i.e., the modernist worldview], as it applies the timeless truths of mathematical reason to man's contingent world, they [the post-modernists] argue that the narrating subject is never autonomous, never situated at an Archimedean point beyond space and time, never able to perceive the world with detachment and certainty. Rather, representations of all kinds are entwined in sociolinguistic webs of signification that know no all-embracing truth, only their own truths, which are indistinguishable from the will to power.... All forms of human action, even (or especially) the most lofty, inevitably shatter before an elusive, polymorphous reality, represented by a now self-conscious throng of incompatible discursive traditions. This leads postmodernists to a "radical pluralism" that "deconstructs" modernist notions of truth, value, and justice in the interests of a wider field of localized representations and practices. (pp. 22-23)

Post-modernists usually apply their "deconstruction" to white, Christian, patriarchal, heterosexual Western society, arguing that its claims to truth, justice, rationality, normality, and even scientific and philosophical certainty are mere myths concocted and deployed for the purposes of buttressing the power of those who benefit from them. This position is in some respects close to those of such thinkers as Pareto and Nietzsche, at least in implication, and one that the New Right has embraced—up to a point.

The point at which the New Right breaks with conventional post-modernism is in the latter's endorsement, as a practical matter, of the "individualistic tendencies of liberal politics. In many respects they [the post-modernists] are, in fact, simply more philosophically sophisticated liberals, although ones whose principal reference is no longer the ethnically

homogeneous nation-state, but rather the rainbow world of the global market.” Given the zealous antagonism of post-modernists to any and all European identities and their passion to dissolve them, as O’Meara writes,

B and D groups, racial minorities, trance freaks, lesbian bikers, squatters, immigrants, and grunge rockers all register in their count, while Basque nationalists, Swiss Communards, and Lombard regionalists, whose communities are ancient and intergenerational, are generally suspected of being “closed” or repressive variants of the Great Narrative. (p. 23)

In fact, it is never clear in O’Meara’s account why anyone who embraces post-modernism, whether on the left or the right, would retain any logical grounds for affirming any social fabric or philosophical commitment whatsoever. Despite O’Meara’s somewhat tortured account of how the New Right tries to eat the post-modernist cake while at the same time salvaging traditional identities that post-modernism rejects, the New Right’s position appears inherently arbitrary and contradictory. “Based on a recuperation of postmodernism’s anti-liberal core,” O’Meara writes,

identitarians claim the only viable narratives for Europeans—and hence the only viable communities and identities—are those posited by the cultural, historical, and racial legacies native to their heritage. Unlike the New Left, then, whose rebellion in 1968 ostensibly targeted the America-centric order founded in 1945, the New Right fights this order not in the name of a postmodernism that extends and radicalizes its underlying tenets, but for the sake of freeing Europeans from its deforming effects. (p. 26)

Nevertheless, the latent nihilism of post-modernism appears to render any such “identitarian” commitments on the part of Eurocentric New Rightists logically and ethically impossible. The preference of one side for “lesbian bikers” and of the other for “Lombard regionalists” or the ancient Greek city-state seems to be merely that—an arbitrary preference, rooted in no logical or ethical soil, though perhaps grounded in material interests, psychological peculiarities, social habits, or the will to power.

While the New Right, like the post-modernists, rejects capitalism, it does so from a rejection of the Economic Man ideology that derives from modernism and not from the post-modernist and far left distaste for whatever is Western. “Unlike the anti-capitalists of the far Left,” O’Meara writes,

New Rightists do not oppose free enterprise *per se*, only a dog-eat-dog capitalism “unaccountable to anything other than the bottom line.” As Benoist writes, “I would like to see a society with a market, but not a market society.” Against both the liberal creed of *laissez-faire* and the left’s statist concept, New Rightists favor an organic economic system in which market activity is geared to the general welfare. For this reason they advocate a “recontextualization” of the economy within “life, society, politics, and ethics” in order to make it a means rather than simply an ends. (p. 68)

In contrast to both the classical liberal and modern libertarian (and Marxist) view of an autonomous Economic Man divorced from social and cultural reality, driven solely by rationalistic and individualistic profit motives, and indifferent to race,

culture, nation, and tradition, the New Right seeks to construct an economic vision that sees human beings as social creatures with both motivations and obligations derived from their social and historical context.

In rejecting both the principle and the intent of liberal individualism, New Rightists assume that the individual is never sufficient unto himself, but an expression of larger affiliations, of which he is not the constituent element, only the function. The whole, as Aristotle, says in reference to the human community, is necessarily anterior to its parts. Failing to recognize the individual as a bearer of such larger attachments, liberal individualism is wont to rebuff those traditional or substantive values associated with family, *ethnos*, nation, and hence those identities constituent of social cohesion and the capacity to make history. (p. 63)

Moreover, the New Right views modern capitalism as the logical descendant of the early modern bourgeoisie's adoption of Cartesian rationalism as an ideological buttress of their economic aspirations. "Rationalism's triumph, then, implied not merely a victory of quantity over quality in the realm of science, but of reason and money over culture and tradition." (p. 60)

The current incarnation of Cartesian Economic Man is the hegemony of what Catholic counter-revolutionary Thomas Molnar has called the "monoclass" of "déclassé administrators...charged with implementing the liberal managerial principles of the American conquerors" that has "assumed control of the government, the media, and the major corporate structures." This class is in fact simply James Burnham's "managerial elite" behaving according to its group interests and the dynamic of its rationalism. Whatever the label, "New Class," "monoclass," "technocracy," or "managerial elite," the system over which the modern ruling class presides is one of mass consumption, a managed and manipulated mass culture of instant gratification and sensory thrill, a "global democracy" waging virtually genocidal war against whatever remnants of traditional cultures and ethnostates it can locate and pulverizing any manifestations of traditional racial, sexual, religious, or class identity, and a massive and anonymous bureaucratized state coupled with a twin economic structure that engineers and manages the global order in the interests of its elites.

The New Right's critique of modern capitalism, as eccentric as it may seem to most on the post—New Deal American right, is in fact entirely consistent with both historic European (and some American) rightist traditions and with the New Right's general critique of modernism and of modern social and cultural tendencies in sex, race, and nation. The New Right rejects contemporary feminism and endorses social differentiations of sex and sex roles.

[W]hile subjecting feminism to their anti-liberal critique, New Rightists by no means hypostatize existing sexual roles. They fully accept that these may change over time and differ from culture to culture. They do, however, argue that sex-specific roles complementing the innate biological differences between male and

female are inherently healthy. In fact, such designated differences have always existed, because they express differences found in nature. As Benoist puts it, sexual roles are “a feature of culture grafted onto a feature of nature.” That men are aggressive, competitive, inclined to abstraction, and enterprising and that women are nurturing, seducing, patient, and receptive is not, he insists, the result of a repressive patriarchal imposition or a misguided process of socialization, but of an evolutionary process that balances and compliments the difference between each sex, for without the feminine, a masculine society would be one-sided and dysfunctional, just as the opposite would be true. (p. 73)

The New Right’s positions on sex and male-female relations as O’Meara describes them are rather more sophisticated than the sort of simple-minded 1950s prudery masked as Old Testament moralism that we get from the American evangelicals and their sermons about “family values.” As O’Meara remarks, “Conservatives...often react to feminism’s contractual and anti-naturalist view of the family by extolling what they assume are traditional familial roles (but which are actually those of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie), unconscious that several models, with different sexual roles, appear in the historical record.” The New Right therefore can less easily be accused of “perpetuating the subjugation of women” than more conventional Christian and conservative critics of feminism.

Much the same is true of their views of race. O’Meara unfortunately does not dwell on this aspect of New Right thought, though he does make plain that New Right racial thought has moved from an early endorsement of modern biologicistic accounts of race to one that today has sought to synthesize racial biological realities with anthropological theories of culture. The principal exponent of this new trend was the late anthropologist Arnold Gehlen.

Gehlen, O’Meara writes, “singles out man’s culture-making capacity as his defining characteristic” but does not deny the existence of some, though very limited, biologically given instinctual drives. Culture builds on these drives so that it becomes a “second nature” in addition to what Gehlen argued was a thin biologically endowed nature.

Virtually every conscious realm of human activity, Gehlen holds, comes to be affected by culture. In his anthropology, it is virtually inseparable from man. For without it, and the role it plays in negotiating his encounters with the world, man would be only an undifferentiated and still unrealized facet of nature—unable, in fact, to survive in nature. Contrary to a long tradition of rationalist thought (the anthropological structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss being the foremost recent example), there are no “natural men.” Free of culture, man would be a cretin, unable even to speak. Given the inescapable character of his culture, Gehlen argues that man is best described as a *biocultural* being: for although culture and nature are two distinct things, in him they form an indivisible unity. (p. 47)

Gehlen’s view of the necessity of human cultural endowments and his rejection of the concept of a pre-social “natural man” outside society and culture resemble the Aristotelian view of human nature as inherently sociable,

man as the “creature of the polis” or political society (a concept that lies at the root of philosophical conservatism), rather than the “state of nature” fictions of such thinkers as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Like Aristotelian anthropology, Gehlen’s view rejects the individualism that underlies classical liberalism as well as the social determinism pushed by Franz Boas and his school. O’Meara remarks in a footnote to the passage quoted above, “It is this emphasis on the culture-nature link that distinguishes Gehlen’s anthropology from the ‘cultural determinism’ of the [*sic*] Boas’ school, which ignores man’s animal nature, posits an idealist concept of culture, and relies on a good deal of fraudulent research.” (p. 54, n.28) Yet, if Gehlen differs from Boas and the environmentalist and egalitarian theories he and his followers have inflicted on this country and the world for the last century or so, he may also save contemporary biological racialists from a simple-minded genetic determinism that almost entirely ignores culture as a formative force.

Gehlen’s emphasis on culture does not lead him to racial egalitarianism or universalism. Indeed, on the contrary, it implies a highly particularistic, almost tribalistic, view of cultural differences and cultural mixture.

Since different families of men, in different times and environments, respond differently to the limitless choices poised by their world, their cultures grow in different ways.... As an organic unity with forms congruent with its distinct vitality, a culture, then, is understandable only in its own terms. For its essence lies neither in rationalist nor objectivist criteria, but in the conditioned behaviors and beliefs constituting the interrelated patterns and categories specific to it. As a consequence, there is no specific Culture, only different cultures, specific to the different peoples who engender them.... There can, it follows, never be a world culture, a single primary consciousness, a single mode or distillation of life common to all men. For the heritage of choices that goes into making a culture and giving it its defining forms is distinct in each organic formation in those cycles of growth and vitality distinct to it. (pp. 47-48)

Gehlen’s ideas have been used to mount arguments against immigration, multiculturalism, and the fantasies of “one world” and globalism, and legitimately so, but since Gehlen died in 1976 he was never aware of the major findings of the 1980s in twin studies and psychometrics that show clearly the existence of major genetically grounded differences in personality and intelligence between individuals as well as races. The biology of race and personality does not perhaps refute Gehlen’s “biocultural” approach, but it does suggest that regardless of his concessions to biological factors in the shaping of culture, he nevertheless continued to underestimate its importance.

In any case, the New Right itself in recent years has moved away not only from its early attraction to a biological view of human nature and society but also from its opposition to multiculturalism, if not to immigration as well. The earlier position, as O’Meara explains, offered a firm rejection of multiculturalism:

In contrast to liberalism's homogenized world of fractured cultures and peoples, New Rightists advocate a heterogenous world of homogenous peoples, each rooted in their own culture and soil. Every people, they claim, has a *droit à la différence*: that is, the right to pursue their destiny in accord with the organic dictates of their own identity. They see, moreover, no convincing reason why Europeans should feel obliged to abandon their millennial heritage for the sake of a dubious cosmopolitan fashion. (p. 77)

But the new position has changed course radically.

Recently, however, GRECE's opposition to multiculturalism has undergone a significant shift. Until 1998, it consistently opposed multiculturalist efforts to recognize immigrant communities as separate legal entities, for it claimed these efforts threatened the integrity of French identity. Then, rather unexpectedly, it reversed course, adopting a "communitarian" position favoring the public recognition of non-French communities—so that immigrants could be able to "keep alive the structures of their collective cultural existence." To some, this shift constitutes nothing less than an identitarian betrayal, for others a recognition that Europe's enemy is not the immigrant *per se*, but the system responsible for immigration. (p. 77)

The shift was not without controversy, with New Rightists like Guillaume Faye and others rejecting it. As O'Meara comments:

When Grécistes first sloganized the *droit à la différence*, they sought to rebuff liberal efforts to stigmatize European identitarianism as a form of racism. At a certain point, however, its defense of cultural/ethnic difference took on a life of its own.... This eventually led to a qualified form of multiculturalism, as the GRECE reversed much of its earlier argumentation and joined the liberal chorus demanding the institutional recognition of the immigrants' cultural identity. The problem with its metapolitics, however, did not end here, for its defense of European identity has consistently been waged on the Left's cosmopolitan terrain—in that it fought not for the primacy of their own people, but for the application of pluralistic standards to support Europeans in the defense of their heritage.... *Le droit à la différence* ended up, then, parroting the ideology of liberal pluralist society and its relativist values. Needless to add, this augurs badly for the future of the GRECE's identitarianism, for it now tacitly acknowledges the right of non-Europeans to occupy and partition European lands. (pp. 77-78)

Interestingly the same trend and its implications appear on the American hard right, as advocates of territorial secessionism and proponents of "Euro-American" identity present themselves not as the rightful heirs of the European civilization in North America but merely as one more chip in the multiculturalist mosaic demanding (or in the case of the right, begging for) recognition. One would have thought that French intellectuals intimate with Gramsci and Nietzsche would have avoided this trap.

The withering of the New Right's opposition to multiculturalism is one of the major flaws of the movement from the perspective of the American right. Two other problems that most Americans will find troublesome are the French Rightists' anti-Christianism and their anti-Americanism. Actually, both positions have a good deal to be said for them, but both are also problematical.

The New Right's distaste for Christianity owes little to the conventional rationalist and secularist critique associated with figures like Bertrand Russell and T.H. Huxley and far more to the ancient pagan criticisms of Christianity before its acquisition of power under Constantine. The New Right argues that Christianity, and more generally monotheism itself in the forms of Judaism and Islam, have been destructive forces that have spawned intolerance, dogmatism, and a narrow-minded dualism in the European mentality and have authorized massive persecutions, exterminations, and cultural genocide of its victims. Christianity did not emerge from the European folk tradition and identity but was adopted as a theological construct shaped by its Semitic origins and its underclass adherents and was then imposed by the state and the church, often through repression of its rivals and critics. Only through a long process of "Germanization" (O'Meara here cites James Russell's *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*) or "Aryanization" did early Christianity become at all compatible with European identity. New Rightists share Nietzsche's critique that Christianity represented a slave revolt against the aristocratic paganism of ancient Europe and under the sway of its otherworldly and universalist beliefs rejected "national and cultural particularisms" and promoted the destruction and amalgamation of distinct peoples. They argue that by substituting its "logos" for the ancient pagan view of nature as suffused with many divinities and supernatural beings Christianity "desacralized" nature and prepared the way for the advent of modern rationalism and the secularized depredations of modern capitalism and mass democracy.

For nearly fifteen centuries Christianity dominated the continent. In disenchanting the world, associating faith with reason, and fostering individual subjectivity, Benoist claims it prepared the present "eclipse of the sacred." As a result, Europeans now lack the spiritual references—the transcendent certainties—that once inspired them, for a post-Christian world, in which science or liberal ideology has been substituted for the church's discredited teachings, is a world that knows only life's material properties and the existential groundlessness that dooms the individual to impotence. Spiritually adrift, Europeans seem to have dissipated even their instinct for survival, as ethnomasochism becomes foremost in their hierarchy of values and effeminacy renders them defenseless before larger dangers. Faced with the nihilism born of this void, New Rightists call for "a return to ourselves"—and to the primal sources of their heritage—advocated not for the sake of some pre-Christian Golden Age, but as a means of reviving the European project—and hence Europe's will to power. (p. 98)

It has to be said that there is a good deal of truth in much of the New Right's attack on Christianity, especially as Christianity appears today, whether on the political left or the political right, with its support for an egalitarianism and universalism that reject race and nation in general and the historic European (especially pre-Christian) identity in particular. Nevertheless, the New Right's critique is also somewhat overdrawn, as O'Meara notes in his last chapter, which offers a critique of the New Right itself. Christianity, whatever its origins in the Near East and the deracinated proletariat of the late Roman Empire, was in

fact “Germanized,” as Russell argues, assimilated itself to much of the heritage of Europe, and played a major role in creating the European civilization we have known since the early Middle Ages, including its art, music, philosophy, and even science. It is simply vacuous to claim that the actual Christianity of history displays the character Benoist describes. In any case, Christianity has been the religious identity of European man for some two thousand years, and to argue, as the New Right does, for the resuscitation of paganism as the “real” tradition of Europe is simply a posture, even if it is not intended literally.

In appealing to the pagan heritage, New Rightists do not actually seek a restoration of ancient pagan practices, just as they distance themselves from New Age pagans, whose eclectic mix of ancient cults and postmodern hedonism are no less anti-identitarian than the Christian/modernist practices they oppose. Instead, their paganism strives to resuscitate Europe’s ancestral concept of the cosmos, its classical ethical principles, its notion of time and history, and its affirmation of community. It thus affirms the integrity of the European project and “all the inscrutable creative powers manifested in their nature,” rejecting, in the process, a misanthropic religious conception that leaves man begging forgiveness from a god forged in the image of a Near Eastern despot. Above all, the New Right’s paganism aims at transvaluing the Judeo-Christian values that have inverted all that is strong and noble in their heritage. (p. 99)

Christianity today is virtually extinct, at least in Europe among real Europeans, and it is not that much more alive in America, which is why American churches are so zealous in their support for a mass immigration that replenishes the stock of an institution whites have abandoned. But apart from the pop paganism of the New Age cults, there is no real sign of a revival of a serious paganism of the kind the New Right talks about at either the popular or higher levels of culture. Whatever the merits of its critique of Christianity, the New Right’s neo-paganism seems to have born little fruit.

New Right paganism looks to the studies of Indo-European mythology and social structure of the late Georges Dumézil and invokes “mythos” as a pagan counterpart to the Christian “logos.” The latter, as O’Meara acknowledges, may be a more logically, analytically, and clearly developed form of thought, but cognitively it is not superior to *mythos* and often less suggestive and encompassing. More important still, *logos*—especially in its modern form—empties the world of those mythic truths that once constituted the essence of the European project. Against this “disenchantment,” which leaves the European powerless before the great challenges threatening him, a revival of Europe’s mythic heritage holds out the prospect that the true sources of his being might be recovered and the European project reborn. (p. 102)

Just as problematic as its hostility to Christianity, at least for many on the American right, is the French New Right’s outright hatred of America itself. While the New Right is surely correct that both contemporary “mainstream” (and even “conservative”) Christianity and the hegemonic forces of contemporary America are the enemies of European Man, it insists on pushing its critique of them far beyond contemporary manifestations.

In the case of America, its critique is not confined simply to the modern post-World War II managerial regime in which state, corporation, and mass culture coalesce to dominate and deracinate the world as well as traditional American culture, but extends to America as it originated and developed. In the New Right's view, the current American regime is merely the logical and natural extension of America as it was founded and is the most complete expression of modernity itself.

The New Right's critique of America is in fact a mirror image of what the left thinks about it or would like America to be—the “proposition country,” “creedal nation,” or “first universal nation” of liberal and neo-conservative folklore. Pointing to the millennialist and utopian language of the early Puritans in New England, the egalitarian and universalist slogans of the Declaration of Independence, and the anti-European fulminations of Mark Twain and other progressivists in American history and culture, the New Right claims that this and the political and economic system reflecting it are all that exists in America. As such, it regards this country as the main enemy of European Man and his tradition and identity (as well as of the Third World peoples whose cause the New Right increasingly seems to champion).

As an anti-Europe, the United States represents the preeminent exemplar of liberal modernity. Nowhere else, the Grécistes argue, were the Enlightenment principles—of equality, rationality, universalism, individuality, economism, and developmentalism—more thoroughly realized than in this new land “liberated from the dead hand of the European past.” The country's constitutional Framers, it follows, were steeped in 18th-century liberalism—which “blended with the earlier ecclesiastical culture of New England” (Carl Bridenbaugh) and later with the Emersonian ideals of individualism. This led them to adopt a political system whose ideological underpinnings rested on rationalist abstractions exalting the individual rather than the history and traditions of its people. The federal state was thus conceived not as an instrument of its people's destiny—nationality in the European sense did not exist in America—but as a *cosmopolis*, potentially open to all humanity.

Contrary to the contention of certain paleo-conservatives, as well as the arguments of those historians associated with the school of “civic republicanism,” this propositional notion of the American state was not the invention of latter-day Jacobins, of whom William J. Clinton and George W. Bush are the descendants, but inherent to the country's original constitutional project. (p. 145)

The hostility of the New Right to America and its global hegemony leads it to sympathize with the Soviet Union, as O'Meara notes. “Given the nature of the existing geopolitical realities, the GRECE has long sympathized with Russia, even during the Cold War.” The sympathy was not due to any affiliation with Marxism but to the New Right's belief that Marxism-Leninism penetrated into and deformed Russian society far less than liberal modernism permeates American and contemporary European society, that the Russians are an Indo-European people and thus share a racial and deep-cultural identity

with Europe, and that their imperial identity is derived from what Rightists like to call “tellurocratic” (based on land power, like Sparta, Rome, and Germany) rather than “thalassocratic” (sea-based power, like that of Athens, Carthage, Britain, and America). Moreover, if Russia recovers economically, it would be capable of mounting political and military resistance to the global hegemony of American liberal modernism.

If European capital and know-how continue to penetrate eastward, contributing to Russia’s recovery, the ex-Soviet Union holds out the prospect of becoming a vast continental power, with an abundance of natural resources (especially oil), an immense reservoir of human talent, and a will to power. A Eurasian *rapprochement* (which is already occurring in numerous areas of trade, research, and development) would thus portend [*sic*] an empire of unparalleled immensity and a possible “staging area of a new anti-bourgeois, anti-American revolution” It would not be at all “unnatural,” then, if European and Russian destinies should merge and an “Empire of the Sun” stretching across fourteen times zones, arise. (p. 193)

The New Right’s anti-Americanism is not confined to a political critique but extends also to American culture or what the critics claim passes for culture in this country. O’Meara cites a recent special issue of the New Right periodical *Terre et peuple* that ridiculed America as the “Planet of the Clowns,” taking “particular delight in emphasizing the absurdity of *homo americanus*.”

From that part of the population claiming to have been abducted by aliens, to creationist accounts of human origins, to a president claiming fellatio by a student aide ought not be considered a “sexual relation,” they have had a field day. (pp. 149-50)

Any number of responses to this line of criticism may be offered, and O’Meara, though he appears to be sympathetic to much of it (recapitulating the thesis of Jewish liberal historian Louis Hartz that America is a society founded on Lockean liberalism and has neither conservative institutions nor conservative ideas), offers a response himself in his final chapter, in which he quotes paleo-conservative historian Paul Gottfried’s perfectly accurate comments that the New Right view of America is in large part simply a caricature of the reality.

First, as for America being a pure product of the Enlightenment and the triumph of modernity, that is certainly true of the system that has prevailed in this country since the New Deal era and increasingly since the Civil War. But it is arguable (indeed, it is the paleo-conservative argument) that this dominant system is by no means the only or real American identity, an identity steeped in racial and tribal realities far more than most Europeans today are. (*Pace* the French Rightists, “the preeminent exemplar of liberal modernity” is not America but the French Revolution.) Some New Rightists seem to perceive this, however dimly, but their knowledge of the realities of American history appears to be thin. O’Meara in a footnote notes that much of American modernism was simply the result of the triumph of the Northern base in the Civil War. “By contrast, the American South, closer to the legacy of the English gentry than New England Puritanism, was far more European in character,” and “In a characteristic expression of anti-liberal disdain for the North’s

'anti-culture,' Maurice Bardèche describes Sheridan's terrorist assault on Atlanta and the subsequent crushing of Southern civilization as nothing less than a 'barbarian victory.'" (p. 158)

Bardèche is correct, of course, except that someone should explain to him that it was not Philip Sheridan but William T. Sherman who burned Atlanta (Sheridan did enough damage in the Shenandoah Valley)—facts that any American schoolchild would know. That Bardèche (and perhaps O'Meara, who fails to correct his error) does not know them suggests that much of the New Right sneering and snorting about America is really not much more than an affected European snobbery and resentment of a more successful and more powerful political order.

Moreover, despite the rhetorical and ideological dominance of American political forms by Enlightenment rationalism, the reality of American national political and social life is rather different. Americans, both their leaders and average citizens, love to boast of their egalitarianism but almost all of them live in racially homogeneous neighborhoods, attend racially homogeneous churches, and place their children in racially homogeneous schools. I have no disposition to defend creationism any more than I would claims of alien abductions, but the New Right might try to grasp that the Americans who embrace creationism are rejecting the Darwinian naturalism that the New Right itself claims to oppose.

What the New Right does not appear to understand is that despite the presence and increasingly the domination of the liberal modernism it despises in this country and the American rejection of specific European traditions, American society, like any human society, re-invents itself as a naturally hierarchical, cultic, racially conscious community. The great promise of American nationhood was neither that it might replicate and perpetuate the specific obsolete and irrelevant European manifestations of such natural human formations nor that it might escape from history and nature and recreate the egalitarian Eden or construct a utopian "city on a hill," but that, having discarded many of the particular feudal, ecclesiastical, dynastic, and nationalistic distractions, deformities, and conflicts of old Europe, European Man could find in North America a more authentic destiny than the European baggage permitted. That hope remains possible of fulfillment even today, but it cannot be realized until the present managerial regime and its calculated annihilation of European Man domestically and abroad is dismantled. Only if the fundamental European character of the American nation is identified and championed can the regime be challenged at all either politically or culturally. The French New Right's total and cartoonishly simplistic rejection of all American culture *ab ovo* renders any such effort impossible.

Indeed, it is difficult to see how the French New Right could mount any kind of effective opposition to modernity, given that it rejects almost every aspect of European society. The Christian view of man and society that shaped the

classical conservatism that resisted the French Revolution and defended the eighteenth century dynastic states it rejects as bitterly as it does contemporary America. It also has come to affect a skepticism of the racial and sociobiological findings of recent science and of science as a whole. There appears to be no social or political group or force in modern European society with which it expresses any kinship or sympathy. It increasingly seems to ooze sympathy for the Third World invaders of Europe and the violently anti-Western states from which they come. And it regards the Soviet Union as preferable to the contemporary United States.

Since the collapse of American conservatism under Ronald Reagan and afterwards, there has been a desperate need for the emergence of a new identity for the right, both in Europe and America, a right that is less concerned with defending the “wisdom of our ancestors,” “the free market,” the Constitution, and similar bromides and is more interested in conserving a specific human group, its biological foundations, and its cultural extensions—in the case of Euro-American conservatism, European Man as a race and the heir and creator of a civilization, whether on the European or North American continents. There is increasing evidence that such a right is slowly beginning to emerge in the United States in the reactions against immigration and the invasion of Iraq, among other issues.

Much of what the French New Right has to offer in its philosophical critique of modernity and its defenses of the enduring legacies of ancient pre-Christian values and ideals is a valuable contribution to formulating the basis of such a right. The emerging American right (if it does or will exist) should pay more attention to what it has to say and would be well advised to emulate its intellectual depth and seriousness and to learn something from its “metapolitical” cultural war. Michael O’Meara’s book is by far the best and most comprehensive account of the thought of the French New Right now available in English, and there is far more in it than this review has been able to encompass (the influence of such thinkers as Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, Julius Evola, René Guénon, Francis Parker Yockey, and others, for example), but as a whole the specifics of much of what the New Right is offering do not really speak to either the practical issues or the underlying philosophical and cultural problems that a real new right, in either the Europe or America of today and the future, requires.

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