

navigates is compelling and the map Forestal provides is insightful and enjoyable. The book will doubtless inspire and provoke readers interested in endeavoring to make digital technologies work for all of us.

The Ideology of Political Reactionaries. By Richard Shorten. New York: Routledge, 2021. 284p. \$160.00 cloth. doi:10.1017/S1537592722002262

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The year 2016 was a year of surprises for political observers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. First, a referendum in the United Kingdom marked the start of that country's messy separation from the European Union. Polls in the lead-up to the vote on "Brexit" showed a small but consistent advantage for the camp looking to "Remain" in the Union, so the victory for the group seeking to "Leave" came as a shock. When, in November, Donald Trump defied expectations to capture the American presidency, he gave onlookers further reason to doubt the reliability of opinion polls. What Richard Shorten questions, though, is not the abilities of political prognosticators or the accuracy of their statistical models; rather, what interests Shorten is the ability of analysts to make sense of political upheavals like Brexit, Trump's electoral triumph, and surging support for parties like Marine Le Pen's National Rally in France or the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany. The discourse surrounding these events, Shorten claims, revealed "the need for a far better interpretive grasp of the modern political Right" (p. 1). He aims to help meet this need and supply this grasp in *The Ideology of Political Reactionaries*.

In the introduction, Shorten argues that common motifs used to analyze Brexit missed the mark by being either imprecise or plain wrong. Brexit was not an instance of "post-truth politics" with "charismatic" politicians appealing to "emotional" voters (pp. 1–2). Rather, it, like the election of Trump or the uptick in support for the National Rally or the AfD, is best viewed as an instance of reaction. Reaction is an "interpretive category" and an "ideology" best understood through a rhetorical approach (pp. 2–3). Examining the political Right through the lens of reaction, Shorten argues, is more fruitful than employing of-the-moment or region-specific labels like "populism" or "illiberal democracy" (p. 5). Resurrecting reaction as an interpretive category allows us to make sense of figures who are separated by time and space. We can see in reactionary rhetoric common appeals to "indignation, decadence, and conspiracy" (p. 4).

The Ideology of Political Reactionaries consists of three main parts, which a short introduction precedes and a brief conclusion follows. Part I consists of two chapters that explore the pathos of reaction (indignation). The two chapters in Part II turn to the logos of reaction

(decadence). And the three-chapter Part III looks at the ethos of reaction (conspiracy). In each of these multi-chapter parts, "historical sources of reaction are placed next to contemporary ones." Shorten does this, he notes, "partly in conscious provocation," but primarily to show that "reactionary thought and practice forms a distinct seam" that runs through time (p. 3). Thus, we see in Part I the writings of Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre compared with books by Sarah Palin and Trump. The chapters in Part II examine Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and then *Le Suicide français* by the French polemicist Éric Zemmour. Part III turns to the words of Joseph McCarthy, Anders Breivik, and Nigel Farage.

Potential readers who are part of—or who are at all sympathetic to—the mainstream Right might be tempted to dismiss out of hand a book that links a thoughtful statesman like Burke to the genocidal Hitler, or the folksy former governor Palin to the mass murderer Breivik. They should not, however, for Shorten anticipates their objection: the matching of monsters with "more benign figures," he writes, "might imply that the book is (in social science terms) guilty of lumping or (in moral terms) guilty of relativisation and equivalence. But emphatically, the intention is neither" (p. xii). This claim might seem to conflict with Shorten's aim at "provocation," but it does not. Shorten's investigation of the common rhetorical devices used by a seemingly disparate group of individuals will, indeed, provoke reflection. At the same time, he successfully avoids a trap into which he says other interpreters of the reactionary Right have fallen: "reducing [its members] to ... caricature" (p. 160). His presentation of reactionary rhetoric is largely value-neutral: When Shorten inserts his voice, he does so to assess whether a text succeeds or fails to achieve its aims—to determine if the rhetoric *works*—not to opine on the rightness or wrongness of those aims. If potential readers of a right-leaning bent need not fear derision and dismissal, prospective readers on the political left should be forewarned, for some of them might be disappointed when Shorten does not confirm their suspicions that Brexit supporters or Trump voters are actual, literal Nazis.

According to Shorten, there are major questions on which reactionaries, including the subjects of his book, disagree. With respect to morality, "some reactionaries are resolute absolutists," while others "incline to relativism." Regarding knowledge, "some reactionaries are defenders of high culture," while others dismiss "culture as the preserve of weirdos and squares." As for religion, "some reactionaries find fault with prevailing politics and society on grounds of original sin, while others are secular and may argue for banishing faiths ... from the public sphere." Even on so fundamental a concern as the goal of life, reactionaries diverge from one another: "some reactionaries glorify action and endorse a heroic conception of virtue, while others commend solitude and withdrawal"

(p. 13). Yet reaction *is*, Shorten insists, an ideology, which he defines as a “distinctive package of belief parts” (p. 3). According to Shorten, “reaction is an aggregate of rhetorical features, which all regularly relate to one another, and which in their interconnection might provide an ‘ideology’ with a sufficient internal pattern” (p. 15).

For Shorten, notes of indignation, decadence, and conspiracy are common to all reactionary rhetoric. But one of these features might be more pronounced than the others in any given text. Thus, for instance, although each of these aspects is present in the writings of Burke, Maistre, Palin, and Trump, indignation stands out especially. In works by these figures, there is a “we” that has been victimized, and who is not exactly angry and not exactly resentful (pp. 23–24). By contrast, decadence is the motif most apparent in the writings of Hitler and Zemmour, who insist that “History has a direction” and that “only the present is ill-fated,” and who “denounce who or what ought to be deemed responsible” (p. 22). McCarthy, Breivik, and Farage, in turn, “allege that guiding human affairs to a present state of woe are conspirators,” and they aim to demonstrate their own (good) character (p. 23). Pathos, logos, and ethos give reaction coherence and make it distinctive from other ideologies.

The Ideology of Political Reactionaries is a worthy exploration and assessment of reactionary rhetoric. Shorten examines well-known texts and speakers through a novel approach. Readers familiar with, for example, Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, will find oft-cited passages presented in unusual and interesting ways. For instance, Shorten helps the *Reflections* “gain some shape” by looking at the text through the framework of classical rhetoric, finding structure in a work that most readers have found lacks it. There is in the *Reflections*, he shows, an exordium, a narration, a proof, and an epilogue (p. 34). Readers who have heard Palin’s speeches but not read her book, *America by Heart*, will likely not find surprising Shorten’s appraisal of the former governor’s style as “goosey” and “simplistic” (p. 76). They might, however, be interested to see that Palin’s book “conforms to the conventions of rhetorical structure” (p. 73). Shorten shows how Palin’s prose is in line with Aristotle’s dictates. (Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is the primary text that Shorten uses to measure his subjects’ effectiveness at conveying their messages.)

With respect to prose, Shorten’s is clear, concise, and, at times, lively. To spice things up, he makes occasional allusions to popular fiction. Where he introduces jargon, he is sure to define his terms. The result is a 284-page book that is immensely readable and not at all plodding.

That being said, I do have some issues with *The Ideology of Political Reactionaries*. One is with respect to the book’s title. Shorten explores the rhetoric of political reactionaries, but I am not entirely convinced that authors or speakers employing similar rhetoric makes them ideological kin. To me, greater markers of ideological affinity

would be shared presuppositions (about human beings and the world in which we live) and common goals. But these important matters are ones on which reactionaries can disagree with one another strongly, according to Shorten. The book is a superb exploration of the *rhetoric* of political reactionaries; whether it is a presentation of a distinctive *ideology*, I am less sure.

Part of my ambivalence about accepting reactionism as an ideology also stems from the association of indignation, decadence, and conspiracy with the political Right. Indignation seems like a feature in the rhetoric of partisans from across the political spectrum. Shorten forthrightly acknowledges that nostalgia—associated with decadence—is something that is “a regular motif in the contemporary articulation of nearly all ideologies” (p. 140). (At present in the United States, three-fourths of the population sees the country going down the “wrong track,” according to multiple polls.) And I cannot disagree with Daniel Pipes, who Shorten highlights as an author who “makes the prototypical conspiracy-allegor not the reactionary anti-communist but the Leninist theorist of capitalism” (p. 191). Is not someone like Bernie Sanders indignant that “we” (the middle class) are victims of “millionaires and billionaires” who are on the “wrong side of history”? What about Greta Thunberg and other climate activists who indignantly offer bleak depictions of a current moment brought about by big businesses and the governments that protect them? Shorten argues that reactionism should be understood on its own terms, not in relation to its alternatives (p. 6). But I think that some contrast would have helped bring into sharper relief the unique features of reactionary rhetoric. Shorten does contrast reactionism with conservatism. But he suggests that the lines separating the two are fuzzy.

Shorten appears ambivalent about the need to consider reactionism an ideology. “It is rarely called an ideology,” he acknowledges. However, “on a certain understanding, it *may* [the emphasis is mine] deserve to be.” More important, he argues, is that “seldom does reaction disappear for long,” which makes it imperative “to confront what reactionaries believe in—beginning with interpretation” (p. 252).

Shorten offers us a fine interpretation of reactionary rhetoric. The chapters that make up the body of the book introduce rhetorical devices with which political philosophers and theorists and intellectual historians might not be familiar, such as accumulatio, antistrophe, enthymeme, metonymy, synecdoche, and topographia. The (perhaps too brief) conclusion ties up the loose ends of these chapters, showing or reiterating what such devices can achieve and why reactionaries might deploy them. Even where readers might disagree with Shorten’s arguments or his analysis, they should find his efforts engaging and productive. In sum, *The Ideology of Political Reactionaries* is a welcome addition to the literature on the modern and contemporary political Right.