

# Metapolitics and Demographic Anxiety on the New Right: Using and Abusing the Language of Equality

Michael Feola

The recent politics of demographic anxiety has been shaped by an influential New Right argument: a) that Western nations are experiencing an immigration crisis that threatens their cultural integrity (i.e., a “Great Replacement”), and b) that this crisis is fueled by the egalitarian commitments of liberalism. Accordingly, in this essay I engage core figures of the New Right to pursue two lines of analysis. At one level, I interrogate the asserted connection between egalitarian ideals and the demographic shifts associated with globalization. In doing so, I take on the “metapolitics” of the New Right. This “metapolitical” project does not simply diagnose the roots of population change; instead, it transforms shared normative languages in order to pursue ethnonationalist and ethnopolitist aims. My overriding argument is that this “Gramscianism of the Right” (whether pursued by the New Right or its identitarian allies across Europe and North America) does not simply turn liberal normative vocabularies toward antiliberal objectives. Rather, this metapolitical strategy ultimately hollows out the normative substance of the terms it takes over, with deleterious consequences for a democratic public.


There are few ideals that are both so celebrated and condemned as equality. For many, this value captures not only the normative heart of modernity, but the best of the political tradition. Jacques Rancière, for instance, proposes that the only thing that meaningfully counts as politics are those moments where the previously excluded seize the equality that has, to this point, been denied to them (Rancière 1999). For its critics, on the other hand, equality is an ideological disaster that undermines human distinction in favor of a bland mediocrity.

Though any full accounting of these debates would far exceed the essay form, anxieties over equality play a significant role in a narrative that has mobilized nationalist and ethnopolitist commitments across Europe and North America: the “Great Replacement.” The core intuition behind this notorious phrase can be rendered as follows: under conditions of heightened global migration,

the liberal democracies of the West have suffered a “demographic invasion” that threatens their cultural and national identities. These arguments typically begin with shifting group demographics in a given nation-state, though they quickly move to baleful normative conclusions. For instance, the public face of European identitarian literature (Renaud Camus) argues that population “replacement” is not simply a process of demographic change, but a “monstrous crime against humanity” (Camus 2018, 135). Guillaume Faye, in related terms, claims that European civilization currently faces an existential threat by the prospect of being “replaced on its own soil by the rejects of other nations” (Faye 2016, 23). And the reach of this narrative into popular political discourse is reflected by a variety of mass media figures who have invoked the “Great Replacement” to mobilize anxieties over demographic change. Tucker Carlson, for instance, recently asserted that the Democratic Party in the United States has crafted immigration policy to bring about “the replacement of legacy Americans with more obedient people from far-away countries” (Mastrangelo 2021).

Those who endorse this narrative pitch their anxieties at a number of levels. European strains of identitarian thought persistently invoke the replacement of national cultures, ethnicities, and the socio-historical worlds that these cultures render possible (or, in the more strident formulations, this process threatens a loss of European civilization *as such*). Although these concerns over cultural survival are often undergirded by racial or biological themes, identitarians in the North American context tend to be more explicitly racial in their framing and

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Michael Feola  is Associate Professor of Government & Law at Lafayette College ([feolam@lafayette.edu](mailto:feolam@lafayette.edu)). He is the author of *The Powers of Sensibility: Adorno, Foucault, and Rancière on an Aesthetic Politics* (Northwestern University Press, 2018). His current book project tracks the politics of demographic anxiety that has mobilized the far-right across the recent political stage. His articles have appeared in a wide range of journals, including *Political Theory*, *Contemporary Political Theory*, *European Journal of Political Theory*, *Theory & Event*, *Polity*, *Political Studies*, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, *Journal of French & Francophone Philosophy*, and *Radical Philosophy Review*.

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formulation. It is not the replacement of those who bear or inherit a certain culture that is pressed to the forefront, but rather an anxiety of racial replacement, organized around the specter of “white extermination” (Johnson 2015; O’Meara 2010; Bhatt 2020). What binds these narratives is a shared etiology for what they view as a world-historical catastrophe: these demographic transformations have not happened through the accidents of history or even a world defined by migration (considered as a simple movement of bodies and peoples). Rather, these changes represent the culmination of egalitarian normative frameworks. As a variety of New Right figures maintain, only when all races, cultures, and people are considered equal (in a way to be unpacked later) can they be treated as interchangeable at the demographic level.

Suspensions toward equality discourse are hardly limited to elitists, nativists, or white supremacists—but rather reflect commitments from across the political spectrum. For instance, major strands of the socialist tradition convey similar concerns once equality is conscripted by the legitimating narratives of market societies. As Anatole France famously proposed, “The law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread” (France 1916, 95). Here, the challenge takes one familiar shape: facially neutral commitments to equality elide the effects of material dispossession and thus have very unequal outcomes for those located differently on the landscape of class. Opportunities that appear to be equally available (i.e., there are no explicit prohibitions on access to a certain good) are nevertheless much less so on grounds of material availability.<sup>1</sup> Although the debate over equality and its meaning ranges over significant terrain, the essay will hew to those concerns introduced at the outset: how the contemporary politics of demographic anxiety typically targets the equality discourse that has long defined liberalism in the political imagination. And, to do justice to this body of challenges, it is necessary to situate them within what the New Right has termed its broader “metapolitical” project. That is, a staple of New Right thought (in both the European and North American context) is that meaningful political change cannot be limited to gaining power through institutions, elections, or policies; rather, efforts at reform must likewise address the field of belief, opinion, and culture that forms the political imaginary of a given community (Sunic 2011, 69-74; Krebs 1995).

To begin, some notes of clarification. Where much recent political commentary loosely refers to strains of a “new” right, this essay will limit its scope to a coherent tradition of thought: the European New Right and the identitarian movements for “cultural defense” that proliferate in its wake across both Europe and North America. Furthermore, the argument to follow moves in a number of distinct steps. First, the essay will situate these challenges to a politics of equality in such a way as

to bring out their specificity upon the contemporary political landscape (Equality, Metapolitics, and the New Right). After noting the distinct character of this line of argument, the essay will detail the theoretical grounds for the linkage between equality and fungibility—particularly in relation to groups and populations (From Equality to Equivalence). Upon detailing this conceptual and normative background, the second half of the essay will turn to how the New Right and its identitarian allies reappropriate the egalitarian vocabulary to argue that their ethnonationalist vision is the only true safeguard of both equality and diversity (Restaging the Liberal Vocabulary). That said, the essay does not simply aim to offer an intellectual history of a prominent school of political thought; rather, it will pursue a genealogical line of argument. By engaging this politics of equality, the essay will not seek to capture some timeless essence of this value, but will chart how the category is reinvested and redefined by the parties that take it over on a contested political landscape (Foucault 1977). To this end, the final section will argue that the metapolitical strategies of the New Right ultimately evacuate equality of its moral substance—thus destabilizing the normative resources of civil society in order to facilitate the spread of antiliberal ideals and projects.

## Equality, Metapolitics, and the New Right

It will be useful to open by sketching some distinguishing features of the New Right. The landscape of conservative thought has historically seen no small range of challenges to egalitarian positions. For some, this normative ideal effaces the natural hierarchies between human beings and groups—their unequal dispensation of natural capacities, tastes, preferences, or capabilities (Hayek 2011; Rothbard 2000). By doing so, a strong egalitarianism substitutes a normative aspiration for a nuanced anthropology of human life (Weaver 1948). For others, the biggest concern reflects how the politics of equalization requires an expansive state, tasked with correcting material inequalities by reaching into ever more spheres of life. It is this tendency that leads market enthusiasts such as Friedrich Hayek or Milton Friedman to deride commitments to material equality as a quick path to authoritarianism (Friedman 1962; Hayek 2001).

Even this quick rendering helps to situate the interests of this essay. Unlike many strains of conservatism, New Right concerns toward egalitarianism do not reduce to anxieties over social steering, an expansive state, or the metaphysics of justice. Instead, the politics of equality must be evaluated through the effects to which it has given rise. To set the stage, Alain de Benoist (the most prominent figure of the French New Right) describes egalitarianism as the “principal menace” of liberal modernity—one that yields the “demise of the world’s diversity” (de Benoist 2017, 16). Such charges reflect a significant

thread of New Right thought, where egalitarian commitments are figured as the gateway to large-scale immigration (i.e., “population swamping”) and the related erosion of cultural differences (Camus 2018, 45; Bar-On 2007, 91–94). Pierre Krebs, for instance, argues that “egalitarian reasoning, by walking on its head, has indeed turned the world upside down ... the egalitarian lie has turned on their heads the last two ways in which states retained their integrity; the most essential and, therefore, the most difficult to constrain: *territorial integrity* and the ethnic integrity that depends on it” (Krebs 2012, 18). What is ultimately most objectionable about the reign of equality discourse for this theoretical school, then, rests in how an egalitarian political culture has ostensibly come to threaten the “integrity” of nations—facilitating their demographic transformation by engineering support for widespread immigration and diversity initiatives.

As noted, this attention to the sphere of culture and ideology reflects a distinct concern of the New Right. According to much of the “anti-replacement” literature, systematic demographic change does not represent an accidental outgrowth of economic necessity or the labor flows that define globalized times. Rather, the policies that enable these shifts are facilitated by a social pedagogy that structures public opinion and sentiments. In the terms of the New Right, the current regime of “population replacement” (persistently described as a process of “ethnomasochism” or “ethnosuicide”) stems from the *metapolitics* of liberal societies (Faye 2016; Krebs 2012). Minimally, this neologism can be understood in self-consciously Gramscian terms, as an account of how every community is rooted within a reservoir of beliefs, ideals, values, and sentiments (Bar-On 2007, 84–90; Bar-On 2013, 10–32; Ekeman 2018; Woods 2007, 25–56). This field of “common sense” guides which normative questions can be asked and which cannot within the conversations of civil society; it structures those policies that can be reasonably proposed or supported; it shapes perceptions of threats to a polity; and, likewise, it constrains the horizon of positive value commitments—what can be legitimately hoped or pursued by the community in question.

For theorists of “the Great Replacement,” this formative role for political culture helps account for what would otherwise remain inexplicable: how native citizens could reconcile themselves to the loss of their demographic majorities and the related “erosion” of their cultures. As Renaud Camus argues, “this numbness had to be created, organized ... The principal ideal involved is *equality*. The principal interest at work is *normalisation, standardization, similarity, sameness*—needless to say, *equality* is the condition to those” (Camus 2018, 89, emphasis in original). Equality, on this reading, is both an ideological justification for policies that might otherwise be viewed as objectionable and an anaesthetic for those who suffer the

outcomes of such policies. And this broadly Gramscian approach to politics does not rest with indicting the “quasi-religious orthodoxy” of egalitarianism or its far-reaching effects in engineering perception or compliance. Rather, the New Right stakes its public work on a “positive” metapolitics—an active project to intervene within this field of beliefs, sentiments, and values, so as to provide resources for an anti-liberal public sphere. In terms offered by Daniel Friberg, this metapolitical project pursues “the process of disseminating and anchoring a particular set of cultural ideas, attitudes, and values in a society, which eventually leads to deeper political change” (Friberg 2015, 4).

Though these metapolitical commitments have been introduced via the European New Right, they likewise guide identitarian schools across North America. Richard Spencer, for instance, asserts that “metapolitics is more important than politics” (Minna Stern 2019, 22) for an alt-right movement that seeks to “capture the imaginations of our people (or the best of our people) and shock them out of their current assumption of what they think is possible” (Spencer 2016a).<sup>2</sup> And Greg Johnson, the identitarian white nationalist, argues that a meaningful Right politics demands the dissemination of counter-liberal ideas and vocabularies so as to restructure the field of political possibility. As he proposes, “we must create our own metapolitical organizations—new media, new educational institutions, and new forms of community ... We must fight bad ideas with better ideas ... This is not to say that there is no room for street activism today, but it has to be understood as a metapolitical activity, a form of propaganda, not as a battle to control the streets. Actual politics comes later, once we have laid the metapolitical groundwork” (Johnson 2018, 89–90).

If the metapolitical project of the New Right has been rendered in broad strokes, assessing the argument requires attention to its details—more specifically, the asserted link between egalitarian commitments and demographic transformations. To set the stage for this engagement, a brief formula will prove helpful. Though the figures associated with the New Right diverge in emphasis and detail as they diagnose population change in a so-called “global age,” they typically converge on the following insistence: the presumption of equality allots normative worth to human subjects on the basis of what they abstractly share. To press a step further, if there are no normatively meaningful distinctions between human beings, then there can be no normatively compelling reasons to prevent the admixture of existing populations (Taylor 2018a, 118). And these broad propositions typically end on a more pointed conclusion: equality is thus not simply an aspirational horizon for the liberal moral universe, but rather the ideological basis for policies that have a) opened nations to widespread

immigration, and b) decimated the traditional claims of culture.<sup>3</sup>

## From Equality to Equivalence

As the foregoing makes clear, the New Right challenge to egalitarianism stakes a distinctive path on the contemporary political landscape. The target is not an expansive, invasive state, but rather how a certain commitment to human equality has ostensibly facilitated sweeping ethnic, racial, and cultural transformations in liberal democracies across Europe and North America. To make this argument legible, it will be useful to untangle the disparate threads from which it draws.

First, much literature of the New Right highlights a familiar antagonist as a stepping-stone for population replacement: liberal universalism and its underlying normative framework. Where a universalist moral grammar is often presented as a historic accomplishment of modernity, the New Right typically insists that the true legacy of liberalism is a stark individualism that elides the historical and social contexts through which subjects gain their intelligibility as distinctly *cultural* beings.<sup>4</sup> These concerns can be rendered through what theorists of the New Right present as the culmination of liberal moral principles: the commitment to human beings as rights-bearers, meriting normative protections, regardless of institutional, cultural, or social memberships. Accordingly, for Michael O'Meara, the normative ontology of liberalism is not only atomistic, but fundamentally abstractive. It “promote[s] a standardizing uniformity that seeks to eliminate national, racial, and historical differences for the sake of a borderless, color-blind order subject to one law, one market, and one humanitarian creed” (O'Meara 2013b, 90). Or, Alain de Benoist argues that this homogenizing dynamic yields an incoherence within the universalist moral universe: “If all men are equal, if they are all fundamentally the same, if they are all ‘men like others’, far from the unique personality of each of them being able to be recognized, they will appear, not as irreplaceable, but on the contrary as interchangeable” (de Benoist 2011a, 81).

At one level, then, the argument follows a well-worn set of communitarian suspicions toward the universalist impulses of liberal modernity—a tradition that questions whether it is meaningful to theorize “the human” as such, outside of its social and cultural memberships.<sup>5</sup> That said, the New Right characteristically presses beyond concerns for the theoretical presumptions of liberalism, to argue for substantive political consequences that follow from these premises. At the bare level of being human, there is ultimately no normative difference between the subjects of rights; by extension, each is equivalent to any other within the normative grammar of liberal universality. Accordingly, theorists of the New Right propose that liberal modernity has ultimately arrived at its logical conclusion in the globalizing present: the large-scale

intermingling of populations, which erodes their cultural differences and specificity. As Daniel Friberg argues, “universalism is ... a view of the world in which humanity is represented as a homogeneous whole, one extended family, in which terms such as ‘people’ and ‘identity’ lose their relevance ... Universalist doctrine demands that all cultures should intermix, and thus vanish, since no relevant differences between them exist” (Friberg 2015, 107).

The New Right literature draws from a different set of critical intuitions, however, as it identifies the other significant motor behind population “replacement”: the social and economic form of global capitalism. Just as human rights discourse is thought to abstract from cultural specificity, so too is economic reason meant to diminish the differentiation of cultures and peoples toward a state of “sameness.” Alain de Benoist offers a symptomatic rendering when he argues, “in the name of the capitalist system, the ideology of the Same reduces all meaning to market prices and transforms the world into a vast, homogeneous marketplace where men, reduced to the role of producers and consumers—soon to become commodities themselves – must all adopt the mentality of *Homo Economicus*” (de Benoist 2009, 65). As the language of this passage conveys, the difficulty is not simply an abstract concern for capitalism as an ahistorical force of homogeneity, but rather the distinct reshaping of economic and social life characteristic of neoliberalism. A variety of theorists have demonstrated, for instance, that one of the defining features of neoliberalism was the pursuit of a “globalist” project, where local forms of sovereignty were dismantled to permit the rights of capital to operate at a transnational level, free of interference from individual nation-states (Slobodian 2018). Minimally, then, much of the New Right indicts neoliberalism as an economic form of imperialism, where the interests of capital are expanded across national borders and progressively immunized from the claims of non-market actors. And these “imperialist” tendencies do not simply reflect the transnational institutions that overrun expressions of local autonomy (e.g., World Bank, WTO, IMF, etc.); rather, this charge captures what Jessica Whyte has identified as one of the central neoliberal tactics for reshaping political and economic institutions: the sanctification of “free trade” as a baseline human right, to be installed in recalcitrant nations through a wide range of incentives and penalties (Whyte 2019).

Here is not the place to reconstruct the full range of New Right anxieties toward capitalism or its characteristic desire to tame (rather than eliminate) market organizations toward communitarian aims.<sup>6</sup> What is most significant at present is how the New Right highlights the costs of “market imperialism” beyond the question of nation-state sovereignty. More broadly, the neoliberal project yields a deeper, “anthropological disfigurement” of human beings once market principles come to organize more spheres of

life. From this perspective, efforts to universalize market forms and ideals represent a form of “soft totalitarianism,” where culture after culture sees the rich variance of competing values reduced to a) common icons or tastes, and b) the singular medium of utility calculations, organized toward individual consumption and market rewards (Krebs 2012, 53-54; see also Bar-On 2007, 94). And though theorists of the European Right often indict the reign of market value as a form of “Americanization,” figures from the North American alt-right likewise indict the deculturing effects of market society.<sup>7</sup> Richard Spencer, for instance, maintains that promoters of globalization “want an undifferentiated global population, raceless, genderless, identityless, meaningless population ... They want a flat grey-on-grey world, one economic market for them to manipulate” (Spencer 2016b; see also Spencer 2017b). Here, the challenge departs from the considerations of democratic sovereignty or accountability that guide many critical engagements with neoliberalism (Brown 2015; Streeck 2014). Rather, the concerns of the New Right channel and amplify the anxieties that define much neoconservative and paleoconservative literature: where market ideals threaten to crowd out regional traditions, local cultures, transcendent ideals, or extra-market values—leaving subjects increasingly homogenized in their values, aspirations, and vocations (Buchanan 1998; Francis 2000; Kristol 1978).

Some provisional conclusions can now be posed. For the New Right and its identitarian allies, large scale demographic transformation (and the cultural changes it ostensibly brings) cannot be reduced to a historical accident that follows from global flows of migration or labor, nor does it result from a patchwork of *ad hoc* policy decisions. Rather, this movement has been prepared by ideological currents and material practices through which the distinction of cultures is thought to be melted away. In programmatic form: within liberal modernity, the moral commitment to equality has effectively become a governing logic of *equalization* that promotes a decultured, deracinated equivalence between human beings. As Pierre Krebs argues, for example, these instances of “humanity as such” represent “abstract, transparent, neutral copies, models bearing no identity and consisting of pure, formless projections of a universal, archetypal man” (Krebs 2012, 72). Or, in Camus’ evocative coinage, this subject offers little more than “Undifferentiated Human Matter” [UHM]—a bare unit of population, labor, or consumption that can be moved indiscriminately through geopolitical space (Camus 2018, 191). And this push toward population mixture is only radicalized, for the New Right, by the multicultural initiatives that have shaped liberal democracies in recent decades. From the multicultural perspective, cultural or ethnic interchange is not simply an unintended byproduct of economic forces or humanitarian premises, but an ideal to be celebrated (Taylor

2018b, 29-34). If the scope of New Right challenges toward equality discourse are now legible, it would be inadequate to stop without considering how they have been pressed to reconfigure the political imaginary of late modern societies.

### Restaging the Liberal Vocabulary: The “Right to Difference”

At this point, many critical questions arise. One might challenge, for instance, the sociological claim, to ask whether currents of demographic change are meaningfully comparable to the “reverse colonisation” that is persistently invoked by figures of the New Right (Faye 2010). One might further refuse the logic under which ethnic mixture constitutes a “destruction” of a host culture, rather than a process of negotiation, enrichment, or exchange. Finally, one might resist the paranoiac element of the analysis—the insistence that these demographic changes are the result of motivated policy interventions by a shadowy set of actors behind the scenes (e.g., finance capitalists, the Davocracy, Jewish elites, the technocratic “New Class”) to serve aims at odds with national or racial integrity (Camus 2018; Johnson 2018). For present purposes, however, the most fundamental normative questions arise from distinguishing the various paths opened up by this diagnosis.

To pursue this lead, it is necessary to set aside the anti-liberal polemics that have occupied this essay to this point and engage, instead, with how theorists of the New Right have recently offered a more nuanced set of engagements with liberal normative categories. For instance, Alain de Benoist argues that “the ENR [European New Right] has always denounced what I call the ideology of Sameness, i.e., the universalist ideology that, in its religious or secular forms, seeks to reduce the diversity of the world—i.e., the diversity of cultures, value systems, and rooted ways of life—to one uniform model ... Insofar as it seeks to reduce diversity, which is the only true wealth of humankind, the ideology of Sameness is itself a caricature of equality. In fact, it creates inequalities of the most unbearable kind. By contrast, equality—which must be defended whenever it is necessary—is quite another matter” (de Benoist 2009, 65). This line of argument sidesteps an unreserved critique in order to avow a project of restitution—an effort to salvage a version of equality that would not override human difference. Such a vision is founded within what segments of the New Right have come to term (with some degree of internal controversy<sup>8</sup>) the “right to difference.” That is, a more normatively defensible form of equality would be founded in the commitment that every people (construed as a bounded cultural totality) has an equal right to secure its existence against competing cultures or the spread of global monoculture (Krebs 2012, 27; O’Meara 2013b, 104).

As the formula (the right to difference) already suggests, this version of equality is rooted within an adjacent political vocabulary: the diversity discourse that is regularly derided in the politics of demographic anxiety (Buchanan 2011; Taylor 2011). For critics of this stripe, once diversity is written into the basic table of social goods, it is immunized from scrutiny and helps to undermine the integrity of a host culture (O'Meara 2013b, 101). What defines much recent New Right literature, however, is a reappropriation of this normative language to furnish a metapolitical defense of ethnonationalism or ethnopopulism (characteristically rebranded as "ethnopluralism"). Alain de Benoist, for instance, depicts diversity as the axiological basis for policies of cultural protection

Diversity is inherent in the very movement of life, which flourishes as it becomes more complex. The plurality and variety of races, ethnic groups, languages, customs, even religions has characterised the development of humanity since the very beginning. Consequently, two attitudes are possible. For one, this biocultural diversity is a burden ... For the other, this diversity is to be welcomed, and should be maintained and cultivated ... The true wealth of the world is first and foremost the diversity of its cultures and peoples. (de Benoist 2012, 28)

Such appeals to difference are now a staple of the New Right – particularly those who invoke a language of "human biodiversity" to argue for group differences in natural capacities and intelligences.<sup>9</sup> Just as ecosystems hold together through a functionally differentiated system of life, the diversity of cultures is meant to reflect an analogous system of differentiation and hierarchy (see Taguieff 1993, 106-108). For current purposes, what is most significant is how the language of diversity is set to work by New Right theorists in order to claim its normative legacy, while presenting ethnonationalist movements as its true heirs. To put this argument in short form: because distinct cultures are the ground through which distinct forms of life are possible, any meaningful human diversity requires the preservation of their locality, difference, and situatedness.

This deployment of diversity discourse takes a number of shapes. At an institutionalist level, for instance, numerous New Right theorists have argued that cultures will meet their full efflorescence only where ethnically homogeneous peoples engage in a practice of self-governance that approximates a direct democracy (de Benoist 2012, 38-41; de Benoist 2011b, 93-99; Walker 2006). And to place this vision on a broader stage, the ethnonationalist project to halt the admixture of cultures and populations is typically presented as the sole path toward a "true" multiculturalism. As Pierre Krebs frames this ideal, "the future of this world will never stop being many-voiced, multicoloured, multicultural, and multihistorical as long as the human species that bears it remains permanently multiracial, that is to say ... as long as the homogeneity of the peoples remains a guarantee of the heterogeneity of the

world" (Krebs 2012, 29-30; see also Spencer 2015) The "right to difference" is thus presented as a normative good (rather than an unreconstructed nativism) through the role it is meant to play within a Herderian philosophy of history (de Benoist and Champetier 2012, 18-19; see also Bar-On 2013, 151-152, 168-169). If each culture represents the outcome of historical experiments, innovations, biological capacities, and structuring constraints, then each represents a unique contribution to human life that would be lost by a global "monoculture" or the influx of new populations into a given nation-state (what the biodiversity literature likens to the introduction of "invasive species" into the cultural ecosystem).

The more ambivalent legacy of this project of "cultural protection" stems from how it has been conceived and promoted. Where a broad language of difference orients much recent literature, the varied pursuit of this ideal reflects a schism that came to divide segments of the New Right. As noted, Alain de Benoist has come to depict this "right to difference" in a manner that resonates with some central commitments of liberal multiculturalism—where this right is extended to groups attempting to preserve their way of life, no matter where they find themselves under diasporic conditions (e.g., Muslims in France who wish to veil in secular spaces).<sup>10</sup> For the more radical, growing segments of the New Right, however, such a stance proves insufficiently attentive to the ostensible crisis posed by immigration in a so-called "global age." Accordingly, a wide variety of figures rejected this development to describe themselves as, instead, "identitarians"—those who seek to preserve the identity of nations (and the unified cultures that ostensibly define them), against the varied forces of cosmopolitanism, global capitalism, and homogeneity (Spencer 2015; O'Meara 2013b, 101-106; Willinger 2013; Zúquete 2018). For those who identify as identitarians across Europe and North America, the right to difference is pursued in more militant terms. Guillaume Faye, for instance, argues that any such effort to conceptualize this right of defense in a "multicultural" direction betrays its core insight and fails to address the depth of the threats faced by Europe in a global age. In Faye's terms, such a project is a "Disneyland dream" that "threatens to degenerate into a doctrine—an ethnic communitarianism—sanctioning the existence of non-European enclaves in our lands" (Faye 2010, 24). And this diagnosis of crisis yields a more extreme set of solutions for many European and North American identitarians: no remedy short of removing cultural newcomers will prove sufficient to defend the nation's integrity or preserve its identity into the future. Accordingly, the perceived threat demands a different response: a "Great Return" or "slow cleanse," where groups deemed incompatible with the host culture are expelled or repatriated to their lands of origin (Johnson 2014; Zúquete 2018, 157-159).

Before pursuing the significance of these proposals, it is necessary to note how the New Right metapolitics of equality ultimately rests upon a strategy of inversion. This theoretical lineage does not simply indict egalitarian commitments as homogenizing and “raciphobic” (Krebs 2012) in the threats they are meant to pose to cultural difference. Rather, theorists of the New Right persistently claim the *true* legacy of equality, in order to provide ideological resources for transforming debates on immigration, demographic change, and nationhood (see Taguieff 1990, 110-112, Sheehan 1980). And yet, as the foregoing already hints, this project of restitution is expressed along avenues that raise significant normative challenges. The final section will thus press these commitments in order to detail the normative legacy and costs of the New Right metapolitical project.

### Critical Questions, Normative Costs

It is now possible to address the question that guides this essay’s engagement with the New Right and its identitarian followers: how equality discourse is not only denounced as the stepping stone for demographic fungibility, but has been restaged to inaugurate a new horizon for political thought and action. The normative questions raised by the foregoing are, however, considerable. In broad terms: if the metapolitics of the New Right takes over and transforms the orientational values of the public sphere, then what is gained, lost, or threatened by this project?

There are a number of areas to focus this question. To begin, where much New Right literature enlists diversity discourse toward a project of “cultural defense,” the object of preservation demands scrutiny. As intellectual historians have demonstrated, one of the central aims for adopting this culturalist language was to distance the New Right from the discredited tradition of fascism—particularly the fascist fixation upon race as the source of existential threats and an object of ethnocidal violence (Bar-On 2007, 33-43). This effort to sanitize the image of the movement is considerably troubled, however, by those theorists who preserve a significant role for biology in their determination of peoplehood. In North American discussions, the racial dimension of these appeals to cultural defense tends to be prominently featured. White identitarians such as Richard Spencer, Greg Johnson or Jared Taylor have explicitly argued the need for a racially defined homeland (i.e., an ethnostate) in which a white population would be able to “reproduce and fulfill our destiny, free from the interference of others” (Johnson 2014). Where the European New Right tends to be more rhetorically cautious, a wide range of prominent European identitarians continue to negotiate arguments for cultural defense through an explicitly racial lens (Sunic 2011, 141-145; see also Zúquete 2018, 266-319). Pierre Krebs, for instance, makes the link explicit: “peoples, unlike man, who is made

up of an intangible humanity, exist: they are biologically definable, sociologically identifiable and geographically localisable ... when a people, unsatisfied with the contempt that they inflict on themselves in submissively assimilating the culture, language and gods of another people further submerge their biological identity ... they sign their death sentence for all eternity” (Krebs 2012, 20, 22). The most significant dimension to these arguments is the abiding presence of biological factors within their avowed project of cultural preservation—where expressions of culture represent the efflorescence of genetic and racial potencies, inflected by social, historical, and geographic factors (i.e., “bioculture”). And the work of these commitments is reflected through an organicist thesis of degeneracy: to deny or stray from this “biological infrastructure” is to court the “death sentence” of a given culture. This political organicism becomes more fraught yet through those who base their commitments to difference upon a “race realism”—that is, the speculative history according to which there are meant to be indwelling differences between races that prevent their peaceful cohabitation in a multiculturalist vein (Taylor 2011; Taylor 2018a; Taylor 2018b).

For some, these troubling appeals to biology and race are mitigated by countervailing tendencies within the New Right. Alain de Benoist, for instance, contends that the “official” position of the European New Right is a defense of cultural difference, that applies to cultural totalities no matter where they may reside. Even this stance, however, has been targeted by critics as inadequate. For Pierre-Andre Taguieff, this reformed path does not depart from the terrain of racism, but rather offers a discursively deflected form of racialized communitarianism. Where a classic racism commits to a universal table of racial hierarchy (where one race is placed at the head, against which all others can be measured), Taguieff argues that the culturalist wing of the New Right pursues what is ultimately a “differentialist racism”—founded upon the presumption of stark difference between closed, cultural totalities and vigorously opposed to any admixture between these groups (Taguieff 1990, 117-118; Taguieff 1993; see also Schlembach 2014, 97-98). Although a culturalist language figures prominently in much New Right diversity discourse, the “obsession of contact and the phobia of mixing” underpins the privilege that this vision grants to the (homogenous, bounded, fixed) *ethnos* over the (plural, contested, shared) *demos* (Taguieff 1990, 118; Bar-On 2013, 144-148). It is for this reason that Verena Stolcke charges the New Right with a “cultural fundamentalism” that uses a sanitized language of cultural defense to pursue the commitments historically associated with fascist politics of demographic purification, defined by calls to partition those groups deemed incompatible with a given *ethnos* (Stolcke 1995, 4-5).

These charges have spawned important debates, particularly in light of how arguments for cultural “defense” have been adopted across Europe and North America by a wide variety of ethnopopulist movements seeking to secure racially or ethnically homogeneous homelands. That said, the present analysis will close on a different set of difficulties—the displacement that these values (equality, difference) undergo when enlisted in the metapolitics examined to this point. To ask this question, it is useful to recall the Foucauldian premise detailed at the outset: that a genealogical inquiry does not track a unitary meaning at the heart of a given value, but rather uncovers the “substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals” that values undergo when contested, operationalized, and taken up by various parties in the civic arena (Foucault 1977, 151). This methodological insight is borne out by the discursive politics of the New Right, where political and moral values are reinvested with alternative meanings, designed to re-orient the normative landscape of civil society. In this connection, a more pointed conclusion suggests itself: if such tactics are enlisted to forge an alternative political imaginary, they nevertheless threaten to destabilize the moorings for a democratic public sphere.

One way to pursue this insight rests in the programmatic phrase by which the New Right announces an equality that would not prepare the way for population fungibility: the right to difference. Within this formulation, each of the core normative terms undergoes a fundamental alteration in meaning. What is to be preserved is not the autonomy or integrity of persons; rather, it is the historical and social conditions under which persons come to an intelligible social existence. To shift terms, it is not individuals who can claim the “right” of difference, but cultural and racial totalities that merit this status and the normative protections that follow. Pierre Krebs argues, for instance, that “it is urgent to draw up a new Declaration of the Rights of Peoples in concert with all the movements that fight on this Earth for the respect of their ethnocultural identities” (Krebs 2012, 89). Or, in more patently racist terms, Jared Taylor proposes that white identity movements claim “the right to pursue their destinies free from the unwanted embrace of others, to seek a future that is uniquely theirs within neighborhoods, institutions, regions, and ultimately nations in which they are the permanent and undisputed majority” (Taylor 2018b, 32). In such formulations, the rhetoric of rights is refashioned and absorbed into a narrative of history in which bounded “biocultural” groups are prime movers and sites of protection. To flesh out the significance of this shift, it is useful to recall the framework of biodiversity enlisted by much of the “ethnopluralist” literature where the “right to difference” evokes a moral framework, with moral grounds, the appeal to biodiversity draws from a naturalist framework that is neither the source nor the bearer of

moral predicates. Instead, the discursive guideposts for the imperative of diversity are the organic terms of life or vitality; and the implications for failure are functionalist implications such as system collapse or species extinction (reflected in the New Right’s persistent recourse to metaphors of cultural death, degeneration, and senescence).

These significant shifts in meaning make it possible to highlight the broader pathology at the heart of the New Right’s discursive politics. To recall, the official project of the New Right is not simply to challenge established narratives in the seminar rooms or professional journals of political science, but rather to inaugurate institutional change by transforming the thoughts, sentiments, values, and images that bind the public sphere. And a primary strategy toward this aim is to reengineer the normative languages that shape public debate and thought. This interventionist stance does not limit itself to diagnosing the effects of liberal normative frameworks; instead, it reactualizes these vocabularies, so as to enable a public sphere more hospitable to projects of “cultural defense”—a process that Roger Griffin describes as a rhetorical “sleight of hand” (Griffin 2000, 48). To illustrate this concern through the central threads of the essay, the New Right overhaul of equality has been used to pursue aims that are difficult to reconcile with even the most aggressive reconstitutions of the value within the liberal-democratic tradition. This elasticity is particularly manifest in those identitarians who deploy this equal right to cultural difference in order to justify commitments to a) a “hierarchical multiculturalism” (Spektorowski 2003) that ranks human cultures and races in terms of their putative value (Taylor 2017; Barnes 1980; Shields 2007, 149–152); and b) homogeneous ethnic groupings that demand the removal of non-conforming types (see Taguieff 1993). Perhaps most notoriously, this “right to difference” was prominently featured in the nativist politics of Jean-Marie Le Pen, as he pursued a “France for the French.” Or, to return to the theoretical literature, Guillaume Faye invokes this right to endorse the remigration of immigrants who (in his terms) have “invaded” the host nations of Europe.<sup>11</sup> And (as noted earlier) similar proposals have been raised by identitarians in both Europe and North America who advocate for a “Great Return” or “racial divorce”—a large-scale process of repatriation that would remove “inharmonious” groups and ostensibly restore the “demographic stock” of nations as cultural totalities (Johnson 2015; see also Zúquete 2018, 157–159).

It is tempting to conclude that these expulsionist visions represent what happens when the imperative for cultural preservation is taken up and radicalized in the unruly, polarized spaces of civil society. Such a position, for instance, has been forwarded by Alain de Benoist as he disavows those who promote nativist themes in their visions of cultural preservation. As the foregoing has detailed, however, these exclusionary proposals are



ultimately symptomatic of the metapolitical project that has defined the New Right from its first seminars and publications: to disrupt a perceived “liberal hegemony” on public discourse and thus seed civil society toward a different political imaginary. One essential avenue for this metapolitics is a polemical reconstitution of the liberal normative vocabulary—though such a project is likewise reflected in the spread of conservative media ecospheres, or the “meme warfare” that characterizes far-right internet culture. From this vantage point, the exclusionary repackaging of core liberal values does not represent a departure from the New Right project, but rather an outgrowth of its governing strategy of discursive destabilization. As Richard Wolin argues, such jarring normative proposals reveal a deeper tendency within the politics of the New Right—one that “cynically appropriated the universalistic values of tolerance and the ‘right to difference’ for its own xenophobic agenda” (Wolin 2004, 268). And Pierre-Andre Taguieff describes this metapolitical strategy as a “demagogic operation” that forges discursive “zones of ambiguity”, where liberal policies are passed off as “authoritarian” and “neo-racism is passed as the ‘right to be different’” (Taguieff 1990, 116).

Minimally, then, the New Right has provided intellectual grist for the resurgence of xenophobic, ethnopopulist, and white nationalist movements throughout Europe and North America. And these outcomes have been facilitated by the animating impulse of New Right metapolitics, where the moral categories of liberal democracies are divested of their meanings, reinvested with new contents, and then recirculated so as to gain public currency for antiliberal commitments. This strategy, moreover, is hardly limited to a localized movement within the European context; instead, it has come to define much of what is now known as the ‘alt-right’ within the North American context (a movement that also seeks political gain by transforming the tropes, vocabulary, and image repertoire of the public sphere). And, more broadly, these metapolitical initiatives have entered mainstream political discourse through mass media figures who circulate these narratives of decline, invasion, and defense throughout civil society—thus engineering a perception of demographic threat that has fueled the rise of nativist and ethnopopulist movements on the recent electoral stage (e.g., Trump, Orbán, Zemmour).

Before closing, a quick clarification will be useful. A central feature of democratic life is that values are not “shared” in any easy sense; they are instead in a persistent state of contestation and negotiation, where differing parties challenge the extension, interpretation, or core terms of their shared normative universe. Values, in this sense, are always in process, contested, and incomplete in their social realization. And yet, it is a staple of political hermeneutics that these negotiations are conducted against shared background understandings that underpin and lend mooring to

these challenges and rejoinders. To invoke the broad tradition of democratic thought, the presumption of citizen rule hinges upon common things—not simply common goods from which all civic participants might draw and enjoy, but a common stock of meanings that render possible civic conversations over a world that can meaningfully be *recognized* as common (Arendt 1998; Honig 2017; Muirhead and Rosenblum 2019). From this vantage point, the metapolitical efforts of the radical right offer a broader threat to the health of the democratic public sphere, by stretching its orienting categories to such a degree that they may no longer provide a meaningfully common normative vocabulary. Such an attenuation of these resources is particularly urgent under contemporary conditions of heightened polarization, in which citizens increasingly cannot agree on common authorities, common founding myths, common truths, or common futures. As reflected by the metapolitical initiatives of the New Right, however, it is inadequate to describe these dynamics of polarization in the passive voice. It is not simply that citizens increasingly find less purchase on a common stock of values, and rather that the normative language of the public sphere is being aggressively reconstituted as part of an ongoing, committed strategy to serve exclusionary and nativist aims. The broader threat of this metapolitics, then, is that the frayed common will become increasingly so, such that citizens occupy not only disparate epistemic worlds, but come to lose purchase on the common stock of value-commitments that enable thinking, acting, and arguing *as* a democratic public.

## Notes

- 1 Likewise, multicultural theorists have long questioned whether facially neutral public policies might unduly affect members of ethnic and cultural minorities (Okin 1999).
- 2 In related interviews, Spencer has explicitly noted the influence of the French New Right on his thought (Spencer 2017a).
- 3 These linkages between equality and population replacement have been well treated by Chetan Bhatt (Bhatt 2020), particularly as they relate to the fears of “white extinction.” The present analysis diverges from Bhatt’s in that he a) emphasizes the Nietzschean strains of the New Right’s equality critique, and b) does not disentangle the competing strains of New Right thought with regard to their visions of cultural defense.
- 4 As a broad literature notes, the social ontology of the New Right is largely communitarian, drawn from figures such as Arnold Gehlen, Konrad Lorenz, and Hans Eysenck (see Sunic 2011, 141-157; Taguieff 2001, 202-204).
- 5 For a canonical case (often cited by the New Right literature), Joseph de Maistre offers “I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians ... I know, too, thanks

to Montesquieu, that one can be a Persian. But as for man, I declare that I have never met him in my life; if he exists, he is unknown to me” (de Maistre 2003, 53). In more contemporary terms, Alex Kurtagic argues that, within such a social ontology “a person is ... always a stranger, always a meaningless atom in a sea of formica, PVC, neon, polyester, and reinforced concrete” (Kurtagic 2011).

- 6 It would require considerably more space to capture the New Right relationship to capitalism—particularly given a) the variance between figures of the New Right, and b) how some of these major positions have shifted over time. For a useful account that tracks the broad span of New Right economic engagements, including its early alliance with (and break from) from economic liberalism, see Bar-On 2007, 33-50. For a symptomatic effort to highlight the homogenizing effects of neoliberal capitalism, see Sunic 2011, 158-168. Alain de Benoist offers some symptomatic critiques of market society, along with some suggestions for domesticating market structures (de Benoist and Champetier 2012, 42-43). For accounts that extoll the productivity of economic markets, while resisting the full saturation of a “market society,” see Friberg 2015, 30-31; Faye 2011, 124-126, 245-246; O’Meara 2013b, 91-94.
- 7 A useful discussion of the New Right antipathy toward the spread of American “monoculture” appears in Lindholm and Zúquete 2010, 57-59. Or, as Michael O’Meara argues “the present globalist impetus of liberal ideology seems aimed at precisely this sort of annihilating deculturation, as the international system of acronyms (the UN, US, WTO, GATT, NAFTA, IMF, et cetera) forcibly channels the flow of money, goods, and services into markets favoring the integration of local cultures into a single global (in effect, Americanized) “culture” that takes functionalization to its ultimate extreme. The whole, as a result, is turned into what some identitarians call a ZOA: a zone d’occupation américaine, where everything is subject to the cultural imperatives of Washington’s “cosmopolitanism” (O’Meara 2013b, 72).
- 8 Guillaume Faye, for instance, has publicly broken with the New Right label due to its public embrace of a multiculturalist language (Faye 2010, 23-52) and he has, instead, taken a more clearly racist and Islamophobic position. A broader account of these critiques from previous allies of the New Right appears in O’Meara 2013b, 263-266. See also Zúquete 2018, on how identitarian thinkers broke from de Benoist for his departure from the “biological realism” that defined the early commitments of the GRECE institute.
- 9 Camus depicts the true defenders of diversity as those nations that enact immigration controls to protect “that most precious form of biodiversity, human

biodiversity. The only coherent ecologists are those who fight for the happy conservation of all races, peoples, cultures, languages, ethnic groups and civilisations, as well as for animal and plant biodiversity” (Camus 2018, 131).

- 10 See, for instance, Bar-On 2007, 201-202. More broadly, de Benoist has recently proposed a more nuanced vision of how cultural identity is forged necessarily in relation to difference. As Benoist argues in an interview with *Terre et Peuple*, “Difference, moreover, is not an absolute. By definition, it exists only in relation to other differences, for we distinguish ourselves only vis-à-vis those who are different. The same goes for identity: even more than an individual, a group does not have a single identity. Every identity is constituted in relationship to another. This also holds for culture: for in creating its own world of meaning, a culture nevertheless does so in relationship to other cultures” (O’Meara 2013a, 34).
- 11 This demand for removal is particularly clear in the work of Faye who argues that “it is wise to reject in the West multiracial society and think of returning immigrants to their own countries” (in Spektorowski 2012, 50). Camus (2018, 45-50) explicitly advocates the “remigration” of immigrant populations. And Alberto Spektorowski (2000) helpfully treats how this project of removal is often paradoxically framed as a benefit to those expelled or repatriated.

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