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## Reactionary rhetoric reconsidered

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### Abstract

This article tries to develop a new theory of reactionary ideology. It does so by applying a rhetorical approach. Because to do so is to follow in the footsteps of Albert O. Hirschman, the structure of the article is a critical discussion of his thesis. The revised theory aims to improve on Hirschman's earlier version, first by rethinking the nature of rhetoric, and second by offering a more satisfactory definition of reaction itself. It is argued that reaction should not be identified with the political Right at large. Nonetheless, it comprises a seam that runs right through the Right's history, and down into the present. This is presented as reaction's identifying 'rhetorical repertoire'. When Hirschman finds evidence of arguments from 'perversity', 'futility', and 'jeopardy', he is only offering a theory of conservatism. Reaction is distinct, even if one advantage of the rhetorical approach is to allow that its boundaries with other ideological traditions might be fuzzy, rather than rigid. Prospectively, we will better understand reaction as a repertoire of appeals to 'indignation', 'decadence, and 'conspiracy'.

### Keywords

Reaction – rhetoric – Hirschman – ideology – political Right

To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction

Isaac Newton's third law of motion<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

What is reactionary ideology? How does it function? Neither of these questions is settled, but they are prompted by basic problems of definition, which extend, perhaps, to the political Right in general.<sup>2</sup> The aim of the article is to offer a new theory of reactionary politics, one that might, in particular, give clarity to its standing in relation to the Right at large.

There is a simple sense to reaction, which is contained in Newton's laws of motion. This says that to be a reactionary is to oppose things – actions. But beyond this, it is not at all clear what the substance of reactionary ideology comprises. Nor is it readily apparent how and why it should persist, cohere and appeal. For instance, if reaction is in one aspect defined by opposition, then it must only be a mystery why any more generic ideational structure should persist over time. Since in the fullness of time, what the reactionary opposes surely changes? The nature of the appeal of reaction is no more obvious. For at some point, this can only beg the question, 'who would not back "progress"?' In contemporary politics, it is perhaps reaction's unity and coherence which is most moot, especially in respect of the broader political Right. Where does reactionary ideology begin and end? Does it come in hard and soft versions? How does this bear on the character of political parties – established or otherwise? Although the account of reactionary ideology to be developed is constructed out of intellectual history, it is hoped that what is proposed illuminates the present, too. Certainly, there is evidence of a popular perception that reaction does continue to appeal, even if the rigorous analysis remains missing. For instance, newspaper editorials quite regularly locate public support for contemporary political parties like the UK Independence Party in a 'generally reactionary ideological identity'. But they are tentative and speculative

when it comes to enumerating the content of that identity, tending to make do with vague lists of beliefs.<sup>3</sup> In the least, they provide no leverage on how the component parts of a reactionary ideology fit together, quite irrespective of whether they do identify these component parts correctly.

The principal aim of what follows, then, is to develop a new theory of reactionary ideology. The decisive move is the selection of method. In this, the article has a secondary aim in mind. This is to illustrate the usefulness of one distinct approach to the study of ideology. And to suggest that, though this approach may well be unable to do all the analytical work required in this field of study, it may have highly valuable application to certain ideological phenomena. It is, so the article contends, a rhetorical approach to ideology which has special application to reaction, ahead of the more familiar approaches.

Lastly let us clear the ground, so that the analysis may proceed, by reflecting on the advantages that a rhetorical approach has in this case.

To give analytical priority to the place of rhetoric in the study of ideology is to press for a shift in the level of analysis privileged.<sup>4</sup> So we should consider the alternative levels of analysis and their limits in application to reaction. These are threefold.<sup>5</sup>

First, 'dispositions'. In the general study of the political Right, dispositions have proven productive before. Michael Oakeshott's idea of the 'conservative disposition', for example, is well-known.<sup>6</sup> This is not the only reason to suppose that a dispositional approach might be relevant, because if to refuse to back progress is indeed idiosyncratic, then there may be something to be said for theorising the 'reactionary personality' or similar. But this points to the first advantage of rhetoric. As in the dispositional approach, rhetoric will give potential coverage to the non-rational. Yet it will make no assumption that a unique personality-type is simply 'out there', waiting for the analyst to find him or her. Still less will

rhetoric ‘demonise’ that type. One consideration in this must be that, unlike conservatives, reactionaries rarely self-identify as such, posing interpretation a distinctive challenge.

A second alternative to rhetoric is to take ‘social interests’ as the level of analysis instead. In other words, this might be called the sociological approach. Not individual personalities, but particular social groups, take up reactionary positions – consisting in, say, recurring defences of waning political and social orders. Collective, rather than idiosyncratic, articulations of reaction may therefore enter focus. But for the analyst of rhetoric, we can picture a second type of reductionism, as follows. The wise analyst will not want to rule out the presence of strategic calculations in such defences (for more on this, see below). But contrary to the sociological approach, there ought to be no prejudice against treating these defences at face value, in favour of viewing them as (mere) surface effects of underlying causes.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, a rhetorical approach will not be alone in allowing reactionaries to ‘speak for themselves’. That is because, third, a conceptual approach will provide the same rationale. But here, we may contend, there is an important space between the two which needs highlighting. The value of a conceptual approach to the study of ideology is widely appreciated.<sup>8</sup> There may be reason to think that it has good application, notably, to conservatism.<sup>9</sup> But is it best suited to apprehending reaction? At the level of analysis, by adopting the conceptual approach, we would then be encouraged to try to isolate configurations of political values, ones that we might find are recurrent in (collective) articulations of reactionary ideology; and which – crucially – exhibit logical consistency. Yet this is where rhetoric may have particular traction in a certain case. We should have no expectation that ‘reactionaries’ will necessarily speak about the world in consistent ways (opponents, after all, will likely allege the precise opposite). And it is employing the rhetorical approach which permits us to be open to this possibility. This is because the plea

of its strongest advocates is that analysts of ideology need to reallocate their labours: away from attention to the internal organisation of the object of their inquiry – where logical consistency is at a premium, and towards its external presentation, or ‘face’ – where it is not.<sup>10</sup>

Our analysis, therefore, will proceed from this plea. But it will not proceed *ex nihilo*. The thesis of Albert O. Hirschman in *The Rhetoric of Reaction* is both influential and informed by many of the methodological tenets just discussed, even if not in whole. In what follows, Hirschman’s study therefore serves as a foil to the new theory of reactionary rhetoric which the article proposes.<sup>11</sup> The structure is as follows. Initially, Hirschman’s thesis is rehearsed. Thereafter, a critical discussion is staged, and in two parts. First, this discussion figures around Hirschman’s conception of rhetoric, developing some of the tenets above. Second, the discussion concerns his conception of reaction, where it is argued that Hirschman is guilty of assimilating reaction to the political Right in general. Reconsidered conceptions of rhetoric and reaction are then used to inform the construction of the new theory, which by the point of conclusion has been developed as an alternative to Hirschman’s own. The historical character of Hirschman’s framework, to be described forthwith, is imitated in the later three sections. This is because imitation both suitably reinforces the critique of his account, while illustrating the persuasiveness of the new theory suggested.

### **The Legacy of Albert O. Hirschman**

Hirschman’s concerns in *The Rhetoric of Reaction* (1991) were very much like those so far set out. His own inspiration was present-day politics. It was in trying to explain the ascendancy, in the Anglo-American world especially, of the Right in the 1980s, that Hirschman was taken to rhetoric, and with unchecked originality in his case. His account involved disavowing both the dispositional and sociological approach: their adherents, he

said, were wrong to detract from the level of ‘surface’ expression in political life. He also rejected the conceptual approach, because he made very explicit room for the idea that reactionaries will likely invoke ‘almost opposite’ understandings of the political and social world. So his focus, instead, was on how people in modern society *argued about* their common affairs.<sup>12</sup>

What did Hirschman conclude? He came to the view that reactionary ideology consisted in three ‘major polemical postures and manoeuvres’, or three moves that were ‘likely to be engaged in by those who set out to debunk and overturn “progressive” policies and movements of ideas’.<sup>13</sup> And these, as noted, could be found in their origin at historical intervals which were largely discrete. Hence intellectual history was Hirschman’s source-material, where we follow. Hirschman drew on T.H. Marshall’s developmental model of citizenship to generate this framework. Marshall’s model stated: first civil citizenship, then its combination with political citizenship, before their extension to socio-economic citizenship. For Hirschman, those were particular ‘progressive’ achievements; they prompted corresponding reactionary ‘counterthrusts’, available for use thereafter. In sum, three reactionary arguments were (albeit distinct in origin) persistent in modern political experience, from the era of the French Revolution onwards. The following is Hirschman’s full set.

First, the ‘perversity’ argument. This initially checked the ‘Rights of Man’ and the rise of individual liberty. It asserted that, however well-intentioned, reform will render the problem at hand even worse (*‘Everything backfires’*).<sup>14</sup> Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre made this claim foundational to reactionary ideology, in denunciation of the French revolutionaries: the consequence of striving for the public good is, to the contrary, public evil. But, as Hirschman showed, at later intervals that pattern reappeared. For example, a later echo was the claim that universal suffrage leads not to freedom, but to (new) despotism.

Second, the ‘futility’ argument. This emerged, in its most characteristic expression, in response to the rise of democracy: reform will be wholly ineffective in solving whatever problem is at hand (*plus ça change plus c’est la même chose*). Thus, the maxim shared by the Italian ‘elite theorists’, Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto and Roberto Michels stated that the outward appearance of democracy changes nothing of the ruler/ ruled distinction.<sup>15</sup>

Third came the ‘jeopardy’ argument, which received particularly forceful expression in the hands of those opposing the rise of the welfare state. Reform, ‘jeopardy’ said, will imperil some gains won earlier at significant cost (*ceci tuera cela* – this will kill that). Friedrich von Hayek was emblematic of the claim that ‘collectivism’ endangers liberty. That said, jeopardy had been intimated earlier: when it did not appear futile, democracy (like collectivism also) endangered liberty.<sup>16</sup>

Together, the ‘perversity’, ‘futility’ and ‘jeopardy’ arguments form quite an established shorthand for Hirschman’s thesis. And it often appears as such in textbooks. But what we have are both strengths and weaknesses. In the interpretation of reactionary ideology, Hirschman’s legacy is to have pressed home the advantages of a rhetorical approach, by offering a particular application—neither the only, nor the best, application.

To repeat the strengths of Hirschman’s thesis first, the desire to avoid reductionism, of either the dispositional or sociological kind, is on the mark. At least, the possibility should not be discounted that reaction’s identity owes everything to real-world processes of argumentation, being very far from available to be ‘read off’ from prior dictates. Also astute is Hirschman’s appreciation that points of logical contradiction might be present in reactionary ideology; though furthermore, that these may be no necessary hindrance to that ideology’s success. The three arguments themselves contradict. Logically, reforms cannot be ineffectual (‘futile’), while jeopardising other ends. Less starkly, the background beliefs



that support perversity (myth and religion) are typically in tension with those that support futility (from ‘science’). Yet Hirschman’s theory expressly accommodates the likelihood that the different reactionary arguments will be ‘used in the course of the same debate, sometimes even by the same person or group’.<sup>17</sup>

But next, to the weaknesses. The key limitations are twofold. We aim to offer an improved application of a rhetorical approach to reactionary ideology by, first, reconsidering rhetoric and, second, reconsidering reaction.<sup>18</sup> A new term might also be useful. Hirschman proposes one ‘rhetorical repertoire’; we still stand in need of a persuasive alternative, which constitutes the repertoire to be suggested in the remainder of the article. ‘Repertoire’ is especially appropriate because of its twin connotations of performance and regularly-used techniques.

### **Rhetoric reconsidered: Beyond rationalisation and reason**

Hirschman’s practical conception of rhetoric has itself two weaknesses. The first is to model rhetoric on a theory of strategic action. The second is to present rhetoric as if it were exclusively ratiocinative. We need to move rhetoric beyond rationalisation and, indeed, beyond reason, respectively.

First, as noted earlier, a rhetorical approach to reaction will aim to transcend reductionism to ‘interests’, without precluding the possibility that reaction’s rhetoricians might make strategic calculations about the messages they transmit, on the basis of ends they have in view. The contrary would be very odd, since we might even imagine that, on the rhetorical approach, it is axiomatic that ideological messages will be tailored to projected audiences.<sup>19</sup> But Hirschman *amplifies* the role of strategic calculations. He conceives the subject-matter of rhetoric, on a model more widely shared,<sup>20</sup> as *ex post facto* rationalisation – rationalisation, that is, of an interest fixed prior to the articulation of discourse. Ultimately,

on careful consideration, this is not really a question of degree – how much, or how little, strategy to expect to be in play? Rather, it is a question of belief-formation. Practically-speaking, the relevant point is simply this: not only, with Hirschman, do the problems of a sociological approach threaten to reintrude, but before that, as it were, Hirschman curtails the capacity of rhetoric to do justice to the way that reactionaries subjectively view the world. ‘Surface’ might be tailored, but not ‘insincere’. There is a more productive conception of rhetoric in which, rather than rationalisation – or the specious explanation of beliefs – rhetoric *can be* as much about persuading oneself into beliefs, as it is persuading others.<sup>21</sup>

There is evidence for the claim that Hirschman’s rhetoric fails to go beyond rationalisation. When he finds reactionaries making recourse to inconsistent arguments, he prefers to see this as calculating, not unknowing. He sees the recourse as the rhetorician’s rather cynical exploitation of the space for contradiction, in the minds of his or her audience(s). Thus, he argues, there is a deliberate sequence of the three reactionary arguments when they are deployed in the typical instance of proposed reform. ‘Futility’ appears first. But if and when that fails to persuade, i.e. because reforms do look like they have effects, then ‘perversity’ and/ or ‘jeopardy’ are called up in futility’s place. Further evidence of the same is the basic, prudential assessment that (Hirschman thinks) reactionary spokespersons make: that since, in an unfavourable ‘intellectual climate’, an ‘all-out attack’ on progressive objectives is unlikely to command wide support, the optimal strategy instead is to make a show of endorsing those objectives, while at the same time demonstrating that ‘the actions undertaken in their name are ill-conceived’.<sup>22</sup>

So, first of all, Hirschman’s attention to rhetoric is confined unduly to rationalisation. The second limitation is to fail to go beyond the ratiocinative. Here, his interpretation is impoverished by asking only a narrow set of questions about reactionary discourse. Just as *ceteris paribus* reactionaries might sincerely hold any of the views they are given to invoke in

order to produce and extend belief, the articulation of those views may operate across any of the three modes of ‘proof’ separated in classical rhetoric.<sup>23</sup> Yet Hirschman’s account proceeds as if one of those alone were important – *logos*, so that the other two – *pathos* and *ethos* – could simply be overlooked. *Logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* might well be either more or less familiar – to the political scientist? – respectively. But the strongest conception of rhetoric will truck no favourite. Certainly, to follow without favour would be to invoke a rhetorical approach which has greater fidelity to Aristotle.

*Logos* is what Hirschman’s thesis privileges entirely. And it comprises the more ‘formal’ effort at persuasion, through (quasi-) logical reasoning. We should read ‘perversity’, ‘futility’ and ‘jeopardy’ alike as being rational ‘propositions’, albeit of a probabilistic rather than categorical type.<sup>24</sup> In common, they invoke the ‘law’ of unintended consequences; in each case, ‘how things are’ (the actual) functions as a counterweight to ‘what we want’ (the ideal). Audiences are thereby directed to reach conclusions in logical fashion. But what would make the interpretation of reactionary politics far richer would be attention to the other two ‘proofs’, that Hirschman leaves out. *Pathos*, in the classical tradition, means the appeal to emotion. So looking forward, this is one additional question to ask of reactionary discourse. What feelings and sentiments are being tapped into? And perhaps further: with what intensity? *Ethos* means the appeal to (a speaker’s) character. By personality as much as stance, *ethos* involves the activity by which a persuader establishes a connection with a persuadee – asserting a shared identity, demonstrating credentials.<sup>25</sup> So there is another kind of question that is pertinent. What can we find being communicated in reaction that has the projected effect of rendering messages ‘authoritative’? Lastly, while for the improved analysis of reactionary rhetoric two proofs simply need factoring-in, the other, *logos*, requires enlargement. Hirschman deems recurrent appeals to probability to exhaust the scope of a reactionary rhetorical repertoire. But we should be on the lookout too for the prospective

presence of reasoning in its other forms. These might include appeals to definition, to cause and effect, to similarity, to association, or even to the ‘structure of reality’.<sup>26</sup> In other words, Hirschman’s mistake seems to have been not only to reduce reactionary rhetoric to reasoning, but to reasoning of a single type.

### **Reaction reconsidered: From Change to Historical Time**

We have already, then, several pointers for rereading the history of reactionary ideology on a rhetorical approach. One should also give particular direction to that rereading by deciding whether or not to maintain Hirschman’s conception of reaction itself. A different way of putting this is to say that we need to decide whether Hirschman got his source-material right, out of which he constructed the repertoire of perversity, futility, and jeopardy. This is what we should be led to conclude: Hirschman implies that, overall, reactionary politics is oriented to the question of ‘change’. But can one better understand reactionary politics as being held together, instead, by the theme of ‘historical time’. One relevant point is that ‘taxonomies’ of the political Right have tended to be too narrow and rigid when, usually, they have isolated ‘reactionary Right’ as one discrete category – typically, as one involving the defence of the values of feudal aristocratic society.<sup>27</sup> Hirschman is onto something when he perceives that reaction may be more open-ended, in noting that ‘reaction’ may be whatever, generally, follows-and-opposes reform. Nevertheless, in the last analysis, we should be wary of identifying reaction with the political Right at large.

The reason why Hirschman makes ‘change’ into reaction’s central theme is because he understands that change is, in common, what reactionaries wish to forestall. Hence, on this account, their rhetoric is directed at persuading against reforms, so as to undermine the prospects of *the* change in question. But our initial step should be to query whether

opposition is even true of the reactionary's attitude to change, never mind its centrality. Corey Robin, for instance, in *The Reactionary Mind*, moves reaction far closer to radicalism. He contends that the spur to that radicalism is reaction's foundation in a single principle – 'natural hierarchy'. The successful assertion of hierarchy will, he thinks, in some circumstances simply have to entail radicalism.<sup>28</sup> This analysis is, ultimately, unconvincing – at least in full. (Robin leaves undefended the claim for natural hierarchy's prime importance). But his basic point should be well met: the reactionary's attitude to change may be anything other than straightforward. One of his insights is especially valid. 'Reaction' should be severed from 'traditionalism'. For rather than seeking to maintain tradition in the face of threatened change, the goods which reactionaries value may have long stopped being lived experience.<sup>29</sup>

*Prima facie*, of course, it is more likely that reaction is infused not by radicalism, rather by the spirit of 'pessimism'. This is consistent with Peter King's account, *Against the Modern World*, an account that otherwise shares the line of thought that decentres change. King, unlike Robin, rightly recognises that reaction is a variegated phenomenon. It has both its 'elitist' and 'populist' modes, for example, that definition will need to do justice. But nonetheless, King suggests that differences like this do cohere around something. This is a basic disaffection with 'the modern'.<sup>30</sup> Pessimism, in the face of the modern, is what is instructive in developing our line of thought, since change's replacement theme of historical time now comes into view. But King's account has one blind spot, which is where political action is concerned. In respect of action, King attaches reaction to quietism, seeing it largely as preoccupied with 'critique'.<sup>31</sup> Certainly, that may be true in some cases. But the following possibility is thereby overlooked. Reactionaries, as anti-moderns, may be overly pessimistic about what a present historical juncture means for individual and society, yet that pessimism may serve as an energising force.<sup>32</sup> So rather than pull toward inertia, reaction may imply

activism, in a very particular – if peculiar – key. It is another commentator, Mark Lilla, who encourages us to move towards roughly that position.

Lilla, before now, has given unqualified primacy to ‘history’ in reactionary ideology, having done so in explicit preference to themes like custom, tradition, and human nature.<sup>33</sup> But it is the move missing in his account which is our own. Lilla’s centring of historical time is premised on reactionaries arguing with revolutionaries. In the loose sense history is, for him, what these two sides argue about.<sup>34</sup> Beyond Lilla lies the scope for presenting a new conception of reactionary ideology on a rhetorical approach. Because historical time is conceived in rhetorical terms, it becomes more explicitly argumentation’s ‘point of issue’.<sup>35</sup> We should note that Lilla’s account fails to benefit from the analytical advance of conceiving matters in rhetorical terms. He still aims to apprehend reaction in the terms of ‘taxonomy’: effectively, different types of reactionary are separated in virtue of whether or not they entertain the idea of decisive action in relation to history.<sup>36</sup> But taxonomies can be too rigid – ‘boxing in’ positions taken up across the Right may not be viable. The advantage of the rhetorical approach is to give special weight to what, as we saw, was perhaps Hirschman’s most apt insight: that at different times and places, even the same individuals may take up dissimilar positions. To do so permits the likelihood that the boundaries of reaction with other ideologies, on the Right especially, will be fuzzy. This entails neither that reaction cannot be given distinct identity, nor that we have to give up on the necessary task of interpretive mapping.

Let us at this point sew up the argument being made. Going forward, if we are to flesh out the content of a new rhetorical theory of reactionary ideology, then recognising historical time to be reaction’s theme poses the analyst with the choice between two proposals, modest and strong, in which historical time may, respectively, either supplement change or supplant

change. The modest proposal would be liable to construct reactionary ideology around two ‘repertoires’ – one clustered around change (i.e. Hirschman’s set of three appeals to unintended consequences), the other clustered around historical time (i.e. so far unspecified). Alone, perhaps, the rhetorical perspective would make this modest proposal the more attractive. In respect of ideological boundaries, it would potentially capture the opportunities open to speakers to move across and between two repertoires, as occasion might demand. However, our reconsideration of reaction now supports the strong proposal, according to which appealing to historical time is not optional in reactionary ideology, but rather its characteristic mode. The opportunity that rhetorical performance opens up for the reactionary is rather (as occasion might demand) to move between appeals which *in common* cluster around historical time. This, to be clear, is the repertoire still in need of specification.

At this point, we are taken to a very precise, and perhaps equally bold, claim. Rather than two rhetorical repertoires of reaction, there are two rhetorical repertoires of the Right. What Hirschman really diagnosed was the rhetoric of conservatism.<sup>37</sup> He gave systematic rendition to Oakeshott’s dictum that, rather ‘than readily presume that all change is, somehow, for the better’, the conservative is he or she who will see change as a gamble.<sup>38</sup> Reaction has its own rhetoric. And it is, we might say, a more full-bodied affair. The remainder of this article, therefore, shifts attention to the rhetorical features that this alternative repertoire (clustered around historical time) might contain. Replicating Hirschman’s historical interpretive framework permits one to pinpoint his wrong turns while drawing out three alternative features in the process. In stages, we see that at each historical era which Hirschman isolates, a more fitting feature is exemplified. We also offer illustration of the new theory’s value. One by-product of the lack of clarity about how to map the modern political Right is that many interpretive issues concerning its history are unresolved.

We touch on one such issue in the case of each era. It is suggested that the feature of rhetoric exemplified goes some way towards resolving that issue.

### **Reactionary discourse (i) Counter-Enlightenment**

Was the Counter-Enlightenment continuous with the twentieth-century ‘radical’ Right? This is the first interpretive issue that construction of our repertoire helps to see in a new light. We will try to demonstrate that replacing perversity with ‘indignation’ provides not only a better sense of how Counter-Enlightenment discourse exemplifies reactionary rhetoric, but also of how the continuity of that discourse with later right-wing politics is subtle rather than explicit. For Hirschman, the Counter-Enlightenment seemed to be the very origin of a reactionary tradition, although he showed no interest in its connection to later extremism. Our renewal of reaction makes that a mistake. Yet the connection is not easily clarified, as disagreement between the Counter-Enlightenment’s ‘continuity’ and ‘discontinuity’ theorists attests.<sup>39</sup> We suggest that theorists of continuity and discontinuity alike neglect the basis for inscribing connections here that are non-overt – that exist in rhetoric. From one of these connections it is possible to specify the first element in the new reactionary repertoire.

To review Hirschman’s stance, in *The Rhetoric of Reaction* Counter-Enlightenment figures both as ‘counterthrust’ to early civil rights arguments and as battleground over the lessons of the French Revolution. Hirschman focuses on two texts, which he represents as persuading that political experiments staged in the name of the ‘Rights of Man’ can only call forth results contrary to those projected. These are Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Joseph de Maistre’s *Considerations on France*. Burke, for Hirschman, asks us to accept that ‘attempts to reach for liberty are bound to lead to tyranny instead’, and especially when led by abstract reason.<sup>40</sup> To that, Maistre adds the unflattering contrast between human



reason and God's designs. In this way Hirschman thinks he has shown that Burke and Maistre exemplify reactionary discourse in (his) quasi-logical appeal to perversity. But, on the basis of having reconsidered reaction, all Hirschman has shown, at best, is that their perversity arguments are typical to conservatism.

There is no problem, in this case, with Hirschman's identification of his source-material. Rather, the problem is with the narrow interpretation it is given. The 'continuity' theorists of the Counter-Enlightenment and the later Right are not without grounds and deserve to be given their due. What we must note is that they tend to try to make the connections explicit at the level of concepts, but overreach. Zeev Sternhell is one example. Sternhell builds part of his case around the continuity of exclusivist nationalism,<sup>41</sup> but the source-material will not bear this reading out. To take only the most obvious example – anti-Semitism – Maistre's *Considerations* contains no derogatory references to Jews whatsoever.<sup>42</sup> In Burke's *Reflections*, 'Jew brokers' supposedly heading the revolutionary government in Paris do figure. Yet this is a clear case where we would be wise to think of the connection to the later Right as being subtle and non-overt, rather than explicit and conceptual. Unless, that is, we wish to follow Sternhell in risking the error of anachronism, judging what came before by all that came later.<sup>43</sup> Isaiah Berlin presents a different continuity case, centred on Maistre exclusively, and is thereby at risk of reducing reaction to individual 'dispositions'. It likewise risks anachronism in assimilating Maistre to fascism all too readily: much, if not all, of what is argued in *Considerations* invokes the authority of religion, which would be difficult to say of the (Godless?) fascists. A further weakness of Berlin's case about Maistre is that what seems to be its main plank – the positive valuation of violence – is simply vague.<sup>44</sup> Yet it is in respect of violence, we propose, that the texts merit rereading.

When thought about carefully, violence offers not a conceptual continuity that overreaches, but a code to a rhetorical link that connects Counter-Enlightenment, later Right

and, indeed, reactionary ideology *per se*. Corey Robin rightly observes that not only, as Berlin would have things, is Maistre's *Considerations* 'enlivened by violence'; so is Burke's *Reflections*, too.<sup>45</sup> Robin's own mistake, however, is to run away with this idea. He is too eager to project onto reactionaries a celebration of violence. Another interpretation is more plausible: the reactionaries of the Counter-Enlightenment *did* linger on violence, though not because they wanted to mete violence out, rather because they could not see beyond it. That reluctance is cue to the innovation in rhetoric, operating with *pathos* at its 'form of proof'.

In the literature of Counter-Enlightenment, disenchantment with the French Revolution is, for 'audiences', made into a matter of correct response to violence. In *Reflections*, as Tom Paine saw, violence – which, until the Terror, was really episodic – was generalised, foregrounded, and given 'theatrical representation'.<sup>46</sup> Hence places (for Burke) were 'left swimming in blood, polluted by massacre, [...] strewed with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses'.<sup>47</sup> Violence, for Burke's post-Terror readers, also had the additional rhetorical feature of appearing prophesied, a quality buttressed by Burke's readiness to play Cassandra: 'In the groves of *their* academy, at the end of every visto, you see nothing but the gallows'.<sup>48</sup> In *Considerations*, Maistre's presentation of violence retains the quality of being foreseen, via ascription to 'Providence', and transfigures also into divine punishment, portending restoration of the monarchy in higher ('purified') form: 'Every drop of Louis XVI's blood will cast torrents of French blood'.<sup>49</sup> In passages like these, what demands careful interpretation are the *feelings* to which audiences are directed. And when we try to specify those contents, we are really led not to awe, which is what Robin finds – in incitement to admire revolutionaries' for their 'hardness' – but to indignation.<sup>50</sup>

To appreciate why, specifically, indignation is apt, we have to consider the representation of how violence is not exercised but endured – by its victims. The representation of victimhood in both texts is special indeed. This is where we are able to

pinpoint a kind of deep-lying temper or mood that may be distinctive of reactionary ideology, but nonetheless elusive to its analysts. *Considerations* makes much of Louis XVI's 'innocence': in Christianity too, 'this same dogma of innocence paying for crime'.<sup>51</sup> *Reflections* makes Marie-Antoinette synecdoche of suffering: this 'delightful vision', whose threatened insult alone ought to have seen 'ten thousand swords... leaped from their scabbards'.<sup>52</sup> Projected in these examples is the quality of sharing in victimhood. 'Identification' of who is and is not 'victim' is selective, but inclusive of author and audience alike;<sup>53</sup> hence Paine's riposte, that Burke 'pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird'.<sup>54</sup> To Paine's prescience, one may add the evoking of 'history' in hostile terms.<sup>55</sup> Thus, in reactionary rhetoric, the malleability of the 'we' placed in danger: perhaps that 'we' is an 'elite', but perhaps also a 'nation', a 'tradition', even 'the West'. Indignation, as Aristotle notes, is an emotion often mobilised in tandem with pity in any act of persuasion. In both indignation and pity, 'fortune' – whether good or bad – is experienced as undeserved.<sup>56</sup> The juxtaposition is instructive, because in the last analysis, we ought to recognise that the appeals centred on the fates of Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI exemplify reactionary rhetoric in virtue of being appeals to self-pity. Accordingly, indignation is directed outwards, towards the perpetrators-cum-beneficiaries of those fates. Self-pity may not necessarily tally with envy or jealousy, which is also why some critics only confuse when they equate reaction's *pathos* instead with resentment.<sup>57</sup> *Ressentiment* is anchored in the Nietzschean explanation of the social psychology of the weak and implies there must be a material interest at stake in the reactionary's view of the world.<sup>58</sup> But attempts to arouse grief in contemplation of those who prosper undeservedly can make for surprising targets – far from 'the strong', which is why a sociological approach may be thought implausible.

## Reactionary discourse (ii) Interwar fascism

In place of Hirschman's appeal to perversity, one might inscribe, at the level of *pathos*, the appeal to indignation. At the same time, this is a clue to how the Counter-Enlightenment might be located in continuity with later 'radical' discourses, without stretching the readings of the texts. A second historical discourse exemplifies the next feature for the rhetoric of reaction proper. Once more, its extrapolation might go some way towards resolving a contested interpretive question – this time, the relation of fascism to a politics of reaction. On this occasion, however, not only does Hirschman mistake the adaptation of reactionary ideology in evidence. He also, despite noting the significance of the early twentieth-century as an historical juncture, gets his source-material off. Hirschman separates fascism from reaction. In so doing, his view is consistent with a latter-day 'new consensus' which explicitly locates fascism in revolution.<sup>59</sup> But in this case showing that 'decadence' is the rhetorical motif exemplified by fascists is also the clue to why that consensus needs to be amended, in the detail. On the one hand, decadence should be understood as providing reactionary ideology with its distinctive appeal to *logos*. On the other, the reason why fascism must still be included under the reactionary heading is that the use of decadence involves a very special diagnosis of 'the present'.

Let us begin again by reviewing Hirschman's stance. Hirschman's attention was drawn to the early twentieth-century in considering the critical response to universal suffrage. Homing in on Mosca, Michels and Pareto, typical (he suggested) was a futility argument. This tried to persuade that democracy – for reasons premised on theories of either psychology or organisation – was destined to be a sham. But the fascists were omitted entirely from this emerging anti-democratic rhetoric.<sup>60</sup> This omission is not amenable to resolution by the simple insertion of fascism into Hirschman's existing framework. Fascism's activism sits ill with futility. Equally, despite one sympathetic appraisal to that effect, fascism is not

adequately theorised as a variation on the jeopardy argument, in which ‘democracy’ threatens ‘culture’.<sup>61</sup> To the contrary, there are good reasons to suppose that fascism has credentials that are, variously, ‘activist’, ‘democratic’ and ‘revolutionary’. But the key point is that recognition of these credentials should not lead us to place fascism outside the reactionary tradition. Rather the opposite: thinking the issue through unearths the persistence of a distinctive appeal to *logos* that holds this tradition together indeed. This, as will be shown, takes the particular form of an appeal to the structure of reality.

The argument that fascism is revolutionary, as made by ‘revisionist’ liberal theorists of fascism like Roger Griffin and David Roberts, is a sophisticated one. It is an extension of the claim (made by other liberal theorists earlier) that fascism cannot be understood solely on the basis of what it is against: anti-individualism, anti-liberalism, anti-capitalism, anti-Marxism.<sup>62</sup> And it involves the contention that fascism is not ‘modernist’ in the technological sense alone.<sup>63</sup> On that theory, what fascism articulates is no less than an ‘alternative modernity’, pointing beyond democracy in its bourgeois, parliamentary form.<sup>64</sup> One specific aspect of this articulation is the substantive content that is ‘revolutionary’ – and that has revolutionary status in fairly conscious alternative to Marxism’s own equivalent content. This content is, likewise, one of a grand future order – albeit an order based, culturally, on past-oriented myth. Interestingly, some Marxist theorists themselves may not be as resistant to the argument as imagined, since in a similar line of argument contemporary Marxists theorise the possible outcomes of modern revolutionary processes so that they include orders in which ‘workers’ are collectively constituted (not as workers) but as the ‘people’, ‘nation’, or ‘race’.<sup>65</sup>

For all the argument has going for itself, it requires some moderation. Its strengths should not be in doubt. The criticism that it takes the ‘appropriation’ of revolutionary commitments at face-value cannot hold much water, if our earlier discussion is correct: the

rhetorical approach asks us to do just that.<sup>66</sup> Further, the criticism that the argument invests ‘revolution’ with dubious definitional criteria, because they are drawn from culture or aesthetics, lacks force when the alternative (socio-economic?) criteria are no more self-evident.<sup>67</sup> But the advocates of the new consensus in fascism studies defend their case on the wrong ground. Yes, fascism has legitimate revolutionary credentials; but an argument that locates fascism’s identity *in* revolution travels too far. Its reactionary status needs affirmation. In the wake of the revisionists’ case, fascism’s connection to a broader reactionary tradition needs more careful elucidation than it may have received before, but it does not need severing. Fascism’s peculiarity, as revisionists would bid us recognise, is indeed to share with Marxism a ‘utopian’ vision of future ‘rebirth’.<sup>68</sup> And certainly, utopian prescription of the future is no common denominator between fascism and (other) forms of reactionary politics. However, one such denominator is a diagnosis of the present – absent in Marxism - and specifically of present-in-relation-to-past. It is the appeal to decadence, which one finds exemplified in fascist discourse, and explicitly so in virtue of its rhetorical contents.

To date, contemporary theorists of fascism do take note of decadence, as a foretoken of rebirth. They explain it as the ‘dread’ of a ‘diminished vitality’, open to being experienced across senses which might be either biological, moral or aesthetic.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps, though, such theorists need to sharpen their attention to the potential richness of decadence’s communication, as the numerousness of these senses indicates.<sup>70</sup> It is because decadence rests on an underlying idea of historical time that it allows for the special presentation – dramatization? – of the present, and in diverse ways. A reading of the texts of interwar fascism and, for that matter, of the proto-fascism from the decades prior, can be made to point *inter alia* to: the featuring of the word ‘decadence’; the featuring of its synonyms (decline, decay, loss); and its more oblique articulation, including via non-verbal mediums.

For example, decadence connects the street oratory of Gabriele D'Annunzio to the more cerebral formulations of figures such as Oswald Spengler, Charles Maurras, and Maurice Barrès.<sup>71</sup> Spengler's formulations include this: 'We cannot help it if we are born as men of the early winter of full civilization, instead of in the golden summit of ripe culture'.<sup>72</sup> Maurras once declared that 'nothing authorizes this act of faith in the indefinite progress of the human race'.<sup>73</sup> Visually, decadence figured, for instance, in Nazi representations of cosmetics and cigarettes as 'corrupting' of German womanhood.<sup>74</sup> Autobiographically even, decadence – together with its prospective solution through 'rebirth' – figured in *Mein Kampf*, in Hitler's narration of Germany's 'illness' and 'decay' by personification.<sup>75</sup> Decadence's ubiquity in fascist discourse is well-conveyed in the confession made by the French convert, Drieu la Rochelle: 'I am fascist because I have measured the progress of decadence in Europe. I have seen in fascism the only means of reducing that decadence'.<sup>76</sup>

Yet even if heightened in fascism's case, we should see 'decadence', along with its rhetorical richness, as stock to reaction. Colloquially, we may even give decadence representative refrain: 'the world is going to the dogs'. Those 'to blame' – deserving of comeuppance – may, in the wider practice, range beyond those protagonists who were typical in the rhetoric of interwar fascism ('the degenerate', 'the corrupt', 'the effete'). Similarly, there is enough flexibility in decadence's diagnosis to be made to promote a range of relevant modes of action, sometimes inaction. Activism, on our earlier discussion, is one possibility in reaction, but not its requirement. Decadence may in some cases be made to support 'rebirth', as a kind of novelty (the case of fascism's 'New Man'). In other cases, it may support rerun-of-the-past – more apt of Maistre's backward-looking vision for the unbounded authority of 'throne and altar' than Counter-Enlightenment continuity theorists imply.<sup>77</sup> Equally, in passive mode, it may support just plain old nostalgia.

To this point, then, we have established the evidence that decadence is both prominent and open to rich communication. We have now to clarify the mechanics of how decadence functions, when viewed from the perspective of the rhetorical approach. This capacity of ‘decadence’ to support quite diverse kinds of reactionary politics is revealing of its rhetorical properties in relation to *logos*. Unlike ‘indignation’, it does not function principally at the level of emotion; nor, unlike Hirschman’s three arguments, does it call up probability. Rather, the model of argument in use is a very particular kind of argument by analogy. Decadence, as Matei Calinescu observes, ‘is a relative concept’ – without fixed contents – evoking rather ‘a direction or tendency’.<sup>78</sup> In play is the organising metaphor of natural cycles: twilight not dawn, autumn rather than spring. And though the distinctive notion of present-in-relation-to-past will be present in reaction, natural-cycle metaphors may be evoked so as to support any of the characteristic modes of action just discussed. In the technical sense, and borrowing terminology suggested by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, we can therefore specify thus: whenever decadence is invoked, an audience is being pressed upon to assess the political world with a ‘structure of the real’ in mind which that audience already accepts in another.<sup>79</sup> It is because of this that the message is a powerful one – resistance to sharing the reactionary’s assessment of the world becomes no less than resistance to the truths of nature. Cumulatively, once we tie decadence to indignation, we might imagine further the audience’s preparation for this ‘logical conclusion’ in virtue of prior emotional (re)adjustment.

So we now have a basis, then, at a second stage, to inscribe decadence into our new reactionary repertoire, as its *logos*-component. In respect of a contested issue in the history of the modern Right, we also have an idea of where the ‘revisionist’ alignment of fascism’s ‘revolution’ to Marxism’s own needs moderation. That needs just a little more elucidation. Certainly, as the new consensus pronounces, innovations in the early twentieth-century –



towards voluntarism, away from determinism – may have taken Marxism closer to modes of diagnosis and prescription in fascism.<sup>80</sup> But the diagnosis of present-in-relation-to-past in Marxism is never ‘decadence’, for lacking – necessarily – will be the acute sense of living *after* a peak of achievement. Intellectually, Marxists may on occasion have recourse to a kind of language of ‘disappointment’, when likewise possessed of a sense that ‘history’ is not on their side (disenchantment of the world, dialectic of enlightenment). But this deviates, rather than replicates.<sup>81</sup> Politically, when the language of decadence does intrude – as in Maoist denigration of ‘the City’, or Soviet condemnation of the avant-garde – perhaps it is rhetoric, indeed, that tells us fidelity to Marxism has ended.<sup>82</sup>

### **Reactionary discourse (iii) Cold War anti-communism**

To complete the proposal for a new rhetorical repertoire of reaction, decadence and indignation should be attached to a third prospective feature. For a final time, then, we will modify Hirschman’s consideration of reaction in a particular era. Here, in order that our proposal showcases rhetoric in all three modes of proof described in the classical rhetorical tradition, an instance of the appeal to character (*ethos*) is identified. This may be taken to be whatever proves to be peculiar to the presentation of reaction’s messages as ‘authoritative’. In completion of his own repertoire, Hirschman turns to the third stage of Marshall’s citizenship-development: the expansion of ‘rights’ so as to include social support. In liberal democracies this entails the rise of the welfare state. Representative of the reactionary arguments which are presented in the postwar era (thinks Hirschman contends) are those of Friedrich von Hayek and Samuel Huntington who, via the jeopardy thesis, both oppose state interventionism in distinctive appeal to a ‘zero-sum mentality’ – with the caveat that loss-to-gain ratio is greater, not equal. To hold this claim together, Hirschman concedes that anti-statist arguments differ, precisely because the ‘good’ that is lost itself differs. On Hayek’s

portrayal, it is liberty that will be lost (the state takes on 'coercive' functions). On Huntington's version, it is stability (the state 'overloads' its activities and generates unrealizable citizen-expectations).<sup>83</sup> But Hirschman's simple equation of reactionary politics with rejection of the welfare state is dubious. A better argument will begin by noting that while Hirschman pursued the reactionary's portrayal of the welfare state in detail, he neglected the topic which has a very obvious claim to exemplify reactionary ideology in the postwar period: the characterisation of communism.

In rerouting Hirschman's path through historical political discourse, once again a particular interpretive problem is raised: this time, whether to lump or to split. Do we wish to paint Cold War anti-communism in many colours, containing many strands? Or instead to render anti-communism interpretation as 'reactionary' in whole, not part? The latter is an interpretation on the rise. Increasingly commentators, pointing to covert CIA-funding, argue the case for placing 'Cold War liberals', like Hayek, in the camp of anti-communism's aggressive pursuit.<sup>84</sup> This implies that the demarcation between anti-statism and anti-communism was fluid, so that the equation between reaction and opposition to welfare state becomes more plausible. The view entails adding to, not replacing, Hirschman's repertoire (perhaps consideration of anti-communist discourse gives us an extra argument to add to his mix?). That contention is not without basis. The source-material here confirms that in the United States, Cold War domestic political mobilisation often tacked opposition to renewal of the New Deal onto very particular attitudes to the 'Red Menace'<sup>85</sup>. However, once more, this is an interpretive problem, the resolution of which may lie in rhetoric. It is an appeal to 'conspiracy' which is exemplified in Cold War anti-communism. There is nothing in anti-statism *per se* which favours that rhetoric.

That anti-communism in its strongest strands should be split from (mere) anti-statism is pointed to by the selective presence of distinctive kinds of motif. The ‘zero-sum game’, the mental image in play in anti-statism, is fairly insipid. The motifs typical to stronger forms of anti-communism are more striking. Of such motifs, the most documented is perhaps ‘evil’, with its rich associations; best known in Ronald Reagan’s ‘Evil Empire’ construction,<sup>86</sup> but actually in use much earlier. The earlier use included the ‘birth certificate’ speech of McCarthyism in 1950, which pictured a ‘final, all-out battle between Communistic atheism and Christianity’.<sup>87</sup> The ‘argument from evil’ is, then, one strong candidate for the final addition to our rhetorical repertoire.<sup>88</sup> But ultimately, that move should be resisted in order to make a slightly more complex one. The reasons are twofold. First, to include evil in the definition would be to fix reaction in religion. This would fail to give analytical reach to evil’s secular equivalent that also appears often in right-wing politics – the appeal to moral clarity, in denunciation of moral ambiguity. Second, to inscribe evil would prove the missed opportunity to identify reactionary rhetoric’s appeal to character. To see why this is so, we may suggest that not evil, but a different trope of the McCarthyite era, is characteristic of reaction’s presentation of itself as ‘authoritative’ in this era: ‘Reds under the Bed’.

In the worlds of reactionary political discourse, it is the word ‘conspiracy’ that appears in frequent connection with evil. In their conception, conspiracies house evil designs. In their commission, the perpetrators enact evil deeds. And in Cold War America, communism and communists were pictured duly.<sup>89</sup> What separated American anti-communism from its European practice, it has been suggested, was the discursive presence of an enemy who was secretive rather than public: the representative communist ‘looked like everybody else, hidden within the middle class’.<sup>90</sup> In McCarthyism, the allegation of ‘conspiracy’ was pronounced. A speech of Senator McCarthy in June 1951, for instance, charged fellow-travellers with ‘a conspiracy so black that when it is finally exposed, its

principals shall be forever deserving of the maledictions on all honest men'.<sup>91</sup> In McCarthyism conspiracy was also capable of meshing with the appeal to indignation, which we have argued is reaction's distinct *pathos*:

The reason we find ourselves in a position of impotency is not because our only potential enemy has sent men to invade our shores, but rather because of the traitorous actions of those who have been treated so well by this Nation... *the bright young men who are born with silver spoons in their mouths are the ones who have been the worst.*<sup>92</sup>

Just as with fascism and 'decadence', so it is with McCarthyism and 'conspiracy'—namely, conspiracy extends to reactionary ideology in general, and so what is pronounced and recurrent really amounts to exemplification. The reactionaries of the Counter-Enlightenment, for example, assigned the French Revolution a myriad of conspirators: the *philosophes*, Freemasons, and the Order of the Illuminati.<sup>93</sup> Needing little elucidation is the persistence of anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, stemming back to the early twentieth-century 'discovery' of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.<sup>94</sup> But what does remain to be comprehended is why the lexicon of conspiracy should so routinely equip reactionaries with the acts of persuasion they perform.

Here, a source that helps to join up the dots is Richard Hofstadter's study *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1965). Hofstadter's analysis lays bare the connection to evil. The invocation of a secret plan comes to tally with the endowment of the protagonists with 'demonic' powers of deception. The analysis also lays bare the connection to the reactionary's sense of falling victim to historical time. When conspiracy becomes history's 'motive force', says Hofstadter, reactionaries adopt a beleaguered view of themselves.<sup>95</sup> But Hofstadter's analysis leaves the more precise clarification of the status of this secret-plan-cum-motive-force as a task for rhetorical analysis, a task that can be undertaken in relation to

*ethos*. The crux of the matter is the reactionary's claim to privileged knowledge of a conspiracy (from the outside) as 'testimony'. Privileged knowledge impresses at least three things upon the reactionary audience. First, the audience is invited to audit the veracity of the conspiracy's allegation on the standard of the reliability of the witness. This reliability is enhanced in the act of allegation itself, this being a feature that explains the otherwise curious tendency of reactionaries to appeal assiduously to 'the facts' – for example, McCarthy's estimates of the number of subversives in public administration, or the scholarly pretensions of attempts at Holocaust denial.<sup>96</sup> Second, the claim to knowledge about the political and social world that is specifically hidden amounts to disavowal of its conventional explanations.<sup>97</sup> Third, it is also in the nature of conspiracy's rhetoric that the reverse applies to any conspirator as applies to conspiracy's witness. In character, or *ethos*, the alleged conspirator is neither honourable, nor trustworthy. Everything taken together, we might even speculate this is how reactionary 'leadership' is performed. Identification is established with a lone voice – indignant, roused by decadence – who speaks 'truth'; not perhaps to power, but to progress.

## **Conclusion**

In the interpretation of modern political ideology, the absence of a convincing theory of reactionary rhetoric, in place of one that was once creative but is since well worn, is pressing. This article has sought to argue particular cases both in respect of that absence, and concerning the content for a new theory. The absence of a convincing theory has been registered at two levels. On the one hand, reconsidering rhetoric demands that a new theory apprehend reactionary ideology beyond rationalisation and, indeed, beyond reason itself. On the other, reconsidering reaction entails that a theory premised upon historical time will be more adequate than one premised upon change. The content for a new theory will,

inevitably, be more open to debate than absence alone. Nevertheless, there are good cases for foregrounding appeals to ‘indignation’, ‘decadence’ and ‘conspiracy’. Will this content prove to be convincing? Perhaps that remains for others to judge. We have, in the least, demonstrated that with its application, interpretive issues particular to the Counter-Enlightenment, fascism and anti-communism are moved some way towards their resolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in J. Starobinski, *Action and Reaction: The Life and Adventures of a Couple*, trans. by S. Hawkes with J. Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2003), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. J. White, ‘Left and Right as political resources’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 16(2) (2011), pp. 123-44.

<sup>3</sup> According to one editorial in *The Guardian* in 2014, for example, increasing public support for the UK Independence Party was based in an identity to be characterised as: ‘nostalgic, nationalist, instinctively English, individualist, anti-tax, anti-establishment, socially conservative, against equality and against foreigners’. ‘UKIP. Between force and farce’, *The Guardian*, Saturday 26 April 2014, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> A. Finlayson, ‘Rhetoric and the Political Theory of Ideologies’, *Political Studies*, 60(4) (2012), pp. 751-67; Finlayson, ‘Ideology and Political Rhetoric’, in M. Freeden, M. Stears & L.T. Sargent (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook to Political Ideologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 197-213.

<sup>5</sup> For a similar enumeration of approaches for the study of conservatism, see J-W. Müller, ‘Comprehending conservatism: A new framework for analysis’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(3) (2006), pp. 359-65.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. M. Oakeshott, ‘On being conservative’ in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Meuthen, 1962), pp. 168-96.

<sup>7</sup> For an application of the sociological approach to conservatism, see T. Honderich, *Conservatism: Burke, Nozick, Bush, Blair?* (London: Pluto, 2005). In the final analysis, and despite his disavowal, the approach of Ernesto Laclau (e.g. *On Populist Reason* [London: Verso, 2007]) to discourses of the political Right – especially ‘populism’ – belongs still to the sociological, since although Laclau restores autonomy to the articulation of ideology (and also privileges rhetoric for the apprehension of ‘signification’), ideological content remains fastened to the fortunes of class struggle.

<sup>8</sup> See esp. M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> See Freeden, *ibid.*, pp. 332-47, and R. Eccleshall, ‘Conservatism’, in Eccleshall *et al.* (Eds), *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 47-72.

<sup>10</sup> Finlayson, ‘Ideology and Political Rhetoric’, *op. cit.*, Ref. 4, p. 197.

<sup>11</sup> A.O. Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Hirschman, *ibid.*, pp. x, 72

<sup>13</sup> Hirschman, *ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>14</sup> Hirschman, *ibid.*, p. 12

<sup>15</sup> Hirschman, *ibid.*, pp. 43, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Hirschman, *ibid.*, pp. 121, 110-14.

<sup>17</sup> Hirschman, *ibid.*, p. 143. For the influence of Hirschman's thesis, see J. Adelman, *Worldly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 628-38.

<sup>18</sup> Hirschman had reason to reconsider but not amend the thesis in taking stock of the communism's collapse in Eastern Europe. Hirschman, 'The Rhetoric of Reaction – Two Years Later', *Government and Opposition*, 28(3) (1993), pp. 292-314.

<sup>19</sup> See esp. J. Martin, 'Situating Speech: A Rhetorical Approach to Political Strategy', *Political Studies* (2013) doi: 10.1111/1467-9248.12039.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. W. Riker, *The Strategy of Rhetoric: Campaigning for the American Constitution* (New York, NY: Columbia, University Press, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> V. McGeer and P. Pettit, 'Sticky judgement and the role of rhetoric' in R. Bourke and R. Geuss (Eds.) *Political Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 65-67; B. Garsten, 'The Rhetoric Revival in Political Theory', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 14 (2011), p. 170. Why Hirschman should want to take rationalisation as normal to rhetoric is not demonstrably apparent. But most likely, it is the function of his desire to run a critical project together with his interpretive one; to 'expose' as well as 'dissect' reactionary rhetoric, to rid public discourse of 'servitude' to 'imperatives of argument' that sustain reactionary discourse. Hirschman, *op. cit.*, Ref. 11, pp. 164, x.

In the main, his critical project really rests on participants in discourse simply talking past each other, sincerely or otherwise. There is, perhaps, a broader lesson for the rhetorical analysis of ideology: such analysis can only aim at undermining arguments for their 'wrongness' on condition that the following position is maintained: the rather non-rhetorical thought that beliefs not moved by coherent logic or evidence are invalid. On the possibly distinct uses of rhetoric for contemporary political deliberation and the interpretive analysis of political thought, see Garsten, *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Hirschman, *op. cit.*, Ref. 11, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. H.C. Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> S. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me? Rhetoric from Aristotle to Obama* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> R. Cockcroft and S. Cockcroft, *Persuading People: An Introduction to Rhetoric* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> Cockcroft and Cockcroft, *ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. R. Eatwell and N. O'Sullivan (Eds), *The Nature of the Right: European and American Politics and Political Thought since 1789* (London: Pinter, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> C. Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 34. The principle of natural hierarchy says that 'some are fit,

and thus ought, to rule others' (p. 18). Overall, Robin's approach is sociological. He ties his account of reaction to the loss of power by endangered social elites. Hence reaction's discourses acquire an unstated motive: to maintain the submission of 'the subordinate classes' (pp. 7-8).

<sup>29</sup> Robin, *ibid.*, pp. 25, 23.

<sup>30</sup> P. King, *Reaction: Against the Modern World* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2012), pp. 28, 149. Although King fails to develop a rhetorical approach, he does gesture towards the conceptual approach's limits: 'One cannot, properly speaking, be a reactionary on principle', since no set of principles is readily identifiable (p. 5).

<sup>31</sup> King, *ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>32</sup> J.F. Dienstag, *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit* (Oxford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. ix.

<sup>33</sup> M. Lilla, 'Republicans for Revolution', *New York Review of Books*, 59 (1), 12 Jan 2012, pp. 12-16. See also Lilla, 'A Tale of Two Reactions', *New York Review of Books*, 45(8), 14 May 1998, pp. 4-7, and 'The Tea Party Jacobins', *New York Review of Books*, 57(9), 27 May 2010, pp. 53-6.

<sup>34</sup> The centring of historical time is supported also by semantic history. Starobinski notes that, prior to the eighteenth century, reaction means as in the mechanical analogy; from eighteenth century onwards, 'history' is the field within which its meaning is reinvented, typically by being paired against 'progress' (*op. cit.*, Ref. 1, pp. 301, 318).

<sup>35</sup> Cockcroft and Cockcroft, *op. cit.*, Ref. 25, p. 110.

<sup>36</sup> Lilla, 'Republicans for Revolution'. The taxonomy separates the 'restorative reactionary' from the 'redemptive reactionary'. The restorative reactionary has vague, nostalgic dreams of 'going back'. The redemptive reactionary has eyes fixed on 'apocalyptic' action and wishes to 'redeem aspects of the past without returning there' (p. 14).

<sup>37</sup> That Hirschman's real concern is with 'conservatism' has been intimated before, e.g. J. Femia, *Against the Masses: Varieties of Anti-Democratic Thought since the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.7. Some of Hirschman's critics maintain that, strictly speaking, Hirschman's subject is not even the Right, since his repertoire also extends to the Left, cf. G. Hawthorn, 'The Logic of Pessimism', *New Republic*, 20 May 1991, p. 43. Hirschman himself entertained doubts about what he had come up with, belatedly proposing the alternative title *The Rhetoric of Intransigence* (see Adelman, *op. cit.*, Ref. 17, p. 632).

<sup>38</sup> Oakeshott, *op. cit.*, Ref. 6, p. 174.

<sup>39</sup> On the strongest case, theorists of discontinuity argue not only that the commonalities between the Counter-Enlightenment and the later Right are few and weak, but that the Counter-Enlightenment itself – latter-day analytical coinage, not original self-conception – lacks internal unity. See R.E. Norton, 'The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 68(4) (2007), pp. 635-58.

<sup>40</sup> Hirschman, *op. cit.*, Ref. 11, p. 122.

<sup>41</sup> Z. Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, trans. by D. Maisel (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 274-314.



<sup>42</sup> G. Garrard, 'Isaiah Berlin's Joseph de Maistre', in J. Mali and R. Wokler (Eds.), *Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 2003), p. 124.

<sup>43</sup> In Burke's rhetoric, we might – only? – see 'imaginary' Jews functioning (as in Marx's case, in fact), intended to evoke the abstract association between Judaism, finance and subversion. M. Walzer, 'Imaginary Jews', *New York Review of Books*, 61(5), 20 March 2014, pp. 31-33.

<sup>44</sup> I. Berlin, 'Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism' in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London: Fontana, 1991), pp. 91-174; C. Blamires, 'Berlin, Maistre and Fascism' in C. Armenteros and R.A. Lebrun (Eds.), *Joseph de Maistre and his European Readers* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> Robin, *op. cit.*, Ref. 28, p. 218

<sup>46</sup> T. Paine, 'Rights of Man' in *Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings*, (Ed.) M. Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 100.

<sup>47</sup> E. Burke, 'Reflections on the Revolution in France' in *Revolutionary Writings*, (Ed.) I. Hampsher-Monk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 73.

<sup>48</sup> Burke, *ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>49</sup> J. de Maistre, *Considerations on France*, (Ed.) R.A. Lebrun (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> Robin, *op. cit.*, Ref. 28, pp. 217-45.

<sup>51</sup> Maistre, *op. cit.*, Ref. 49, p. 31; R.A. Lebrun, *Joseph de Maistre: An Intellectual Militant* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), p. 149.

<sup>52</sup> Burke, *op. cit.*, Ref. 47, p. 77.

<sup>53</sup> K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1969).

<sup>54</sup> Paine, *op. cit.*, Ref. 46, p. 102.

<sup>55</sup> Reactionaries are characterised by a conviction that, due to the 'stubbornly progressive temper of the modern era', it is a 'hostile' world in which they live. This is a conviction that Hirschman notes, but he does not develop its implications. Hirschman, *op. cit.*, Ref. 11, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> Aristotle, *op. cit.*, Ref. 23, pp. 162-8.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. W. Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, America Style* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> N. Demertzis, 'Emotions and Populism', in S. Clarke, P. Hoggett and S. Thompson (Eds.), *Emotions, Politics and Society* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2006), pp. 103-122.

<sup>59</sup> R. Griffin and D.D. Roberts, 'Overtures of reconciliation in a forgotten conflict', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 11(4) (2008), p. 257.

<sup>60</sup> It would be wrong to align the elite theorists with fascism *per se*, although the evidence is that their arguments had influence on the emergence and character of fascist movements. See, for example, R.O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005), pp. 37, 39.

<sup>61</sup> Femia's strategy is to theorise fascism in relation to jeopardy: by associating 'democracy' with materialism, individualism and positivism, he suggests the fascists made democracy into a cultural danger. See Femia, *op. cit.*, Ref. 37, pp. 111-35.

<sup>62</sup> R. Griffin, 'Exploding the Continuum of History: A Non-Marxist's Marxist Model of Fascism's Revolutionary Dynamics', in *A Fascist Century?* (Ed.) M. Feldman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 46-68; D.D. Roberts, 'Fascism, Marxism, and Modern Revolution', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 9(2) (2010), pp. 183-201.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

<sup>64</sup> R. Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 43-66; D.D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe: Understanding the Poverty of Great Politics* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 62-8.

<sup>65</sup> E. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 81-142.

<sup>66</sup> A good textual example of the Nazis' claim to better embody revolution than the communists is the Horst-Wessel-Lied, the NSDAP anthem: 'The comrades, shot down by the Red Front and the Reaction, march in spirit in our ranks'.

<sup>67</sup> For Marxian criticism of the new consensus, see D. Woodley, 'Between myth and modernity: Fascism as anti-praxis', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 11(4) (2012), pp. 362-79.

<sup>68</sup> R. Shorten, *Modernism and Totalitarianism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), pp. 109-49. The flipside is that Marxism and fascism share a common story in which the past is structured around oppression.

<sup>69</sup> Paxton, *op. cit.*, Ref. 60, p. 35; Griffin, *op. cit.*, Ref. 64, p. 53.

<sup>70</sup> Some existing treatments of fascist rhetoric are addressed only to ideology's functioning rather than content. E.g. B. Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). On ways forward, see R. Wodak and J.E. Richardson (Eds.), *Analysing Fascist Discourse: European Fascism in Talk and Text* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>71</sup> Typical of D'Annunzio's oratory on the eve of the First World War was the following set of messages (in the words of his biographer): 'Rome was a sewer; its rulers were drivelling, stale-smelling old men; civilian life was a foul morass'. L. Hughes-Hallett, *The Pike: Gabrielle D'Annunzio, Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War* [London: Forth Estate, 2013], p. 179.

<sup>72</sup> O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West: An Abridged Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 34.

<sup>73</sup> Cited in Sternhell, *op. cit.*, Ref. 41, p. 330.

<sup>74</sup> I. Buruma and A. Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2004), p. 29. Nazism's explicit disavowal of 'degenerate art' is a related case in point.

<sup>75</sup> As Kenneth Burke recognised, the arguments of *Mein Kampf* are vivified by means of a highly personalised account of suffering and ill-treatment: 'the orator who has a strong sense of his own

‘rebirth’ has this to draw on when persuading his audiences that he is offering them the way to a new life’. Burke, ‘The Rhetoric of Hitler’s “Battle”’ in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 170.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in D. Lackerstein, *National Regeneration in Vichy France: Ideas and Policies, 1930-1944* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 60.

<sup>77</sup> The point of confusion is that Maistre’s rhetoric does make violence ‘regenerative’ – i.e. ‘sacrificial’. See J. Goldhammer, *The Headless Republic: Sacrificial Violence in Modern French Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 71.

<sup>78</sup> M. Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 155.

<sup>79</sup> C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), pp. 371ff.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Roberts, *op. cit.*, Ref. 64.

<sup>81</sup> Lilla seems mistaken on this point (cf. ‘A Tale of Two Reactions’, p. 4).

<sup>82</sup> The evidence is that neither Marx nor Engels uses the term. In historical materialism, the culture of a ruling class is, over time, subject to becoming regressive, but never decadent *per se*.

<sup>83</sup> Hirschman, *op. cit.*, Ref. 11, pp. 123, 110-121.

<sup>84</sup> E.g. F.S. Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 2000).

<sup>85</sup> M.J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combatting the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1990).

<sup>86</sup> R. Reagan, *Speaking my Mind: Selected Speeches* (New York, NY: Simon & Shuster, 1989), pp. 168-180.

<sup>87</sup> Cited in S.J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 83.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. J.A. Aune, ‘The Argument from Evil in the Rhetoric of Reaction’, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 6(3) (2003), pp. 518-22.

<sup>89</sup> Whitfield, *op. cit.*, Ref. 87, esp. pp. 27-51.

<sup>90</sup> T. Mergel, ‘The Unknown and the Familiar Enemy: The Semantics of Anti-Communism in the USA and Germany, 1945-1975’, in W. Steinmetz (Ed.), *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 266.

<sup>91</sup> Cited in R. Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 2008), p. 7.

<sup>92</sup> E.W. Schrecker (Ed.), *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, MA: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 238; italics added.

<sup>93</sup> G. Garrard, *Counter-Enlightenments: From the Eighteenth-Century to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 42-8.

<sup>94</sup> N. Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of Jewish World Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); M. Billig, 'The Extreme Right: Continuities in Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theory in Post-War Europe', in Eatwell and O'Sullivan (Ed), *op. cit.*, Ref. 27, pp. 146-166.

<sup>95</sup> Hofstadter, *op. cit.*, Ref. 91, pp. 31-2, 29-30.

<sup>96</sup> P. Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory: Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust*, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

<sup>97</sup> M. Billig, 'Rhetoric of the conspiracy theory: Arguments in national front propaganda', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 22(2) (1998), pp. 23-34.