

THE NEW RIGHT: A JOURNEY TO THE FRINGE OF AMERICAN POLITICS

(MICHAEL MALICE)

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The American conservative movement is traditionally dated to 1955, the date William F. Buckley started *National Review* to “stand athwart history.” For decades, conservatives looked back to that event as some combination of Moses parting the Red Sea and Prometheus bringing fire to Man. Some still do, dreaming misty-eyed of the past as they fumble for their dentures. But it is obvious, in retrospect, that nothing Buckley did ever accomplished anything. On the contrary, he and his myrmidons, like Judas, delivered America bound into the hands of its enemies.

That probably wasn’t their intent (though it’s hard to shake the feeling that it is the intent of Buckley’s putative successors, midgets and nonentities like Jonah Goldberg and David French). Regardless, there are many fresh voices on the Right who are keenly interested in freeing us from our chains and restoring the Republic, or, in the more likely alternative, moving on to something new. Broadly speaking, these people can be called post-liberals and here, in *The New Right*, Michael Malice profiles some of them. To my regret, the ones he profiles are all clowns. Worse, it seems disturbingly likely that most post-liberals are clowns. But not all, and I will return to which ones are not, and what that means—even though you will not find them in this book.

Something structural about this book kept bothering me. It felt rambling, yet it wasn’t obviously incoherent. Then, watching Malice on the Joe Rogan podcast, it hit me. This is basically a podcast, an unscripted conversation, in print. It covers different topics in a somewhat unpredictable manner; not exactly disorganized, but far from crisp. *The New Right* is essentially a rambling talk between Michael Malice and himself. That substantially weakens the book, which could have been a lot more if it had been tightened up and had clear points to make. Instead, it’s basically meandering exposition, and frustrating to read. Really, this book is in many ways a lowbrow version of George Hawley’s outstanding 2016 *Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, which is a far better

book to read if you are looking for actual, coherent information about these currents on the Right.

But *The New Right* is not awful, even if I am not sure why I subjected myself to another book about the topic of Right splinter movements. Malice, who views himself as an anarchist and is no way conservative, has a sharp eye and a willingness to spend time with pretty much any kind of person—including those who dislike him as a “New York Jew.” Malice doesn’t see the New Right as powerful, but as the leading edge of both “innovation and insanity.” Nothing may come of it, or the next big thing may come of it. Exploring that possibility requires talking neutrally to some people who are “irredeemable, horrible people,” though Malice doesn’t seem to apply that label to any of the people he actually met (even if he’s understandably annoyed at his constant pigeonholing as “the Jew”).

“Alt-Right” was created by Hillary Clinton as a political attack term, designed to be infinitely flexible so as to tie the conservative mainstream to whatever fringe figure was most being painted as the Devil at that moment. Like “fake news,” it was then repurposed by its targets, but also continues to be used by the Left as a meaningless propaganda term. Malice solves this nomenclature problem by defining “Alt-Right” as a subset of “New Right,” really his own term, “A loosely connected group of individuals united by their opposition to progressivism, which they perceive to be a thinly veiled fundamentalist religion dedicated to egalitarian principles and intent on totalitarian world domination via globalist hegemony.” Embodied within this is an apocalyptic, zero-sum tendency; someone on the Right who objects to progressivism *in toto* but doesn’t see it as seeking “totalitarian world domination” or “globalist hegemony” therefore isn’t New Right. In my own typology of post-liberals, the New Right is not Augustans, whose focus is use of power to create something new that is informed by the past, but a facet of the so-called Dark Enlightenment, who focus on theory as the basis for creating something totally new, and usually insane, because divorced from actual human nature.

The author begins, in 2011, with something called the Trollboard, a private Facebook group to which he was invited, devoted to anarchism in the Murray Rothbard mold—“anarcho-capitalists,” who are also admirers of the still-living Hans-Hermann Hoppe. These discussions

introduced him to new lines of right-wing thought. One was that of the Dark Enlightenment (a name not much used anymore) of whom Curtis Yarvin, whose pseudonym was Mencius Moldbug, was the most prominent member. As I have discussed at length, Yarvin offers the most thought-out alternative political system of anyone in the New Right, and is the author of the sole original concept from this group to reach broader use—the “Cathedral,” the complex of leftist organizations that dominate our society. Yarvin does not get much play here, and Malice did not talk to him, though he lurks in the background of some of his other discussions. But on the Trollboard, and in meetings with people he met through it, Malice was introduced to a wide variety of other groups, each with its own focus, and from that sprang this book.

Actually, “groups” is a misnomer. As far as I can tell, nearly all the groups Malice talks about are merely habitués of particular websites, around which a very modern type of community forms. Malice specifically mentions among many others, Xenosystems, the latter a now-dormant site that seems to mostly exist as a cross-reference for sites on the fringe Right. None of these are political organizations in the traditional sense, not even to the degree the anarcho-capitalists were in the 1960s and 1970s. That may make them even more farcical, or it may be a harbinger of how movements are created nowadays—I’m not sure, though I suspect the former. It does mean, as Malice points out, that the movement is mostly decentralized, so that taking out or deplatforming one apparent leader has little effect.

After this brief overview, Malice moves backward, talking of the Old Right, primarily what was once called paleoconservatives, such as Patrick Buchanan. He reached his apogee in 1992, when he was a serious Presidential candidate, and thundered, to the horror of the low-energy Bush Republicans, a prescient speech about the culture war which, he failed to realize, he had already lost. Buchanan’s timing was flawed—1992 was also the apogee of liberal democracy, the apparent triumph of Francis Fukuyama’s end of history, when even many conservatives believed we, the West, had won the future and the only thing necessary was making sure we had a bit more George Washington and a bit less Margaret Sanger.

In Malice’s telling, in which he wants to draw a line between Old Right and New Right, the Old Right was mostly fringe. But that is not

true, even if a few members of it were purged by Buckley. The Old Right was one part, the dominant part, of *National Review* until perhaps twenty years ago. True, they failed at the task they set themselves, but still remain relevant, and many are morphing into new types of post-liberals, none of whom are New Right in the Malice definition. Buchanan is still alive, after all, and writes occasionally for the non-fringe and non-New Right *The American Conservative* magazine.

Next we get the New Right of the internet. Reddit, 4chan, *Taki's Mag*, and *Breitbart*, which relative to Rothbard or Buchanan, have enormous, if inchoate, reach. The first two are mostly about interchange; they are sites for discussion. There are no articles, no editorial policy. The latter two have articles; *Breitbart* is the closest to mainstream, and is in essence a splashier version on the Right of what today CNN is on the Left, if without much first-hand reporting. Malice's basic point is that most people, and all people on the Left, have no grasp of how the people who frequent these sites think, and that much of their effort is directed at trolling and otherwise misdirecting and humiliating their perceived enemies, rather than traditional political work. "Describing Pepe the cartoon frog as 'associated with white supremacy' is akin to describing the Stars and Stripes as 'associated with flag burning.' It is technically correct, factually true—and utterly clueless." The same trolling attitude is on display in gamer culture, which, in "Gamergate," the social justice warriors famously tried to bring to heel, resulting in an online war with gamers who were having none of it.

Other rambling chapters talk about the New Right's opposition to democracy as an overriding good (citing James Burnham's *The Machiavellians* as formative, which it is not, except for Yarvin, whose stock in trade is claiming that obscure books explain everything). Malice covers people like Mike Cernovich, Alex Jones, Ann Coulter, Milo Yiannopoulos, and Gavin McInnes. What primarily seems to unite these people is that very few have a working moral compass, or at least one tied to any kind of traditional morality—rather, they show the instrumental morality that characterizes the Dark Enlightenment. Many are straight-up creepy, sexually and otherwise, such as Jim Goad, some weirdo who made his bones publishing obscene "zines," scatological hand-stapled "magazines" heavy on graphics, deliberately meant to mark the publisher, and the reader, as refusing to conform to any

social norms at all. Others are various manifestations of deviants, glory hounds, lucre chasers, and psychotic utopians. None have an actual following or offer a coherent philosophy. Neither the writing here, nor those written about, is impressive.

Malice also tries to cover international influences on the New Right, from Nigel Farage to Lee Kuan Yew. This is the weakest chapter of a weak book; Malice appears to know almost nothing about international affairs, much less right-wing figures internationally, and his focus is mostly demographics, which is a pretty pinched focus, if understandable since that's what in the news about Europe. He also makes bizarre statements, such as that Japan is doing just fine as a culture and country despite its plunging population because they still have a "unique culture," as shown by being "the world's largest creators and consumers of tentacle-rape pornography." He may be joking (though there's no indication of it), but this type of statement shows a key failure of Malice—as an anarchist, he thinks nothing can be bad, unless it harms others. He simply ignores, and probably doesn't see, because he can't wrap his mind around it, that Mill's harm principle, the core principle of the modern Left as well as of Malice, is rejected by most post-liberals, which is much of what makes them post-liberals.

Finally, we turn to the explicitly racially oriented groups on the New Right, though not covered here are groups arguably on the right that are not new—primarily the neo-Nazis, whose main presence is the website Stormfront, although apparently aging fellow travelers like David Duke are still floating around. New Right racially-oriented groups include the website Vdare, the refuge for many writers expelled from the polite, compliant right for political incorrectness, such as John Derbyshire and Peter Brimelow. Vdare is relatively tame, though, compared to Jared Taylor, founder of the (now defunct) American Renaissance site. This is where we slide into explicit white supremacism (called white nationalism by its adherents). Malice was in Charlottesville during the fighting there in 2017, and offers a type of behind-the-scenes account, without any relevant insights. (However, this section does contain the funniest line in the book, when one of the white supremacist types says "I'm skeptical of the Holocaust deniers because . . . everyone who says the Holocaust didn't happen thinks it *should*.")

And that's the book, which ends more or less with a whimper. Not helping is that Malice makes frequent jarring claims. He says that "The idea that 'political correctness' is a uniquely left-wing phenomenon is simply untrue." I have disposed of that canard at length elsewhere, and even if it were true, the point is that political correctness by those with power, namely the Left, is used as a weapon outside its own ranks, and the Right has no such ability. Then Malice says things that make one wonder if he is cracked, such as "Most conservatives are also averse to calm discussions of children and sexuality." (I suggest he not come anywhere near my children, for the sake of his health.) He thinks that Communism fell because Eastern Europeans were able to watch the soap opera *Dynasty*, and predicts North Korea will fall for similar reasons (and he's been to, and wrote a book about, North Korea, which makes this odd claim even more jarring). He thinks that all culture starts with "low culture," which he attributes to the marginalized, who he says are uniformly "valorized" by the Left, resulting in the Left dominating culture. No element of this analysis is even remotely true, or convincing. Malice doesn't seem to realize that it wasn't until the late 1960s that the upper classes became enamored of low culture, and true high culture then (temporarily, we hope) disappeared after thousands of years. Most weirdly of all, he claims that modern feminism resulted because other women were offended that the women who had money and independence were brothel owners, and they wanted the same money and independence. He claims the cry of nineteenth-century feminists was "If it's good enough for the lowest, surely it's good enough for us."

I have three linked thoughts after reading Malice's book. First, all the people he profiles are either clowns or irrelevant. All these men are misfits. None will occupy seats of power in the New Venice, or lead in the expansion of the Instrumentality of Man. None have any power at all now. But that they exist says something about our political moment. Second, I think the Left's reach has exceeded its grasp, so preparing for what is next is a crucial exercise. The fruit the Left fails to grasp will not drop into the hands of the New Right, but it will drop. Third, Malice ignores people with somewhat similar, but far more sophisticated, views. If the post-liberals are to gain actual power, it will come from those people, combined with a societal fracture and the emergence of

a political leader who will grasp these threads and turn them into a whip to drive the malefactors from the Temple.

Thus, we very recently had the National Conservatism conference in Washington, D.C. That sounds dull, like a thousand other think-tank offerings over the past forty years. But it was not. None of the New Right was featured, but most of the speakers, from Michael Anton to Oren Cass to Patrick Deneen were hostile to our current regime, Democrat and Republican, strongly opposed to the hegemony of the Left, and actively interested in exploring new ways to actively destroy that hegemony.

That is something, for the call to destruction must precede the call to construction. Burke was wrong, or rather he was right—if things are so far gone that incremental change is a lost cause, we must forge a new thing after reflection on a better time. But most important of all was the unapologetic nature of what these people had to say. The first, and usually only, line of defense by the Left against conservatives who actually threaten to undermine their hegemony is to shriek silencing epithets, usually “Racist!” In the past, mainstream conservatives in the Buckley mold have always immediately folded and kowtowed, despite the total falsehood of the attacks. After all, they want to keep being invited to the right dinner parties and paid to write in mainstream publications. Those at the conference weren’t having any. None of them are politicians (charisma is sorely lacking among post-liberals), but they came to fight, and they are not clowns.

If there is a seed of a new thing, this is it. All these people fall within my definition of Augustans, though there is daylight between, say, Michael Anton and Rod Dreher (maybe the bridge is Sohrab Ahmari, who has recently been punishing David French for his many political sins). A year ago, I said:

My prediction is that this is the future, and from the crumbling of the Republican Party will rise a quite different big-tent conservative party, from which the neoconservatives have fled to the Democrats (as most already have—bye, Bill Kristol!) That party will receive the unalloyed scorn of those who command the social and business heights, and the conflict will, therefore, burst the channels that confined political discourse for the past seventy years. Purges on the basis of ideology will largely become a thing of the past on the Right, and I predict

the result will be more power accruing to the Right—and a lot more people participating on the Right who have traditionally been viewed as unpleasant. I'm not sure if that's good or bad. Probably it's mostly good, if the goals of conservatives are accomplished and cemented, and the Left permanently broken on the wheel. But at least it'll be different.

Still sounds about right—no pun intended. My prediction for today is that in a year, this will be a lot clearer, and there will be a lot of water under the bridge.