Federalist Fascism

The New Right and the French Revolution

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Abstract

This article analyses the New Right's understanding of the French Revolution. Since the most prominent intellectual of the New Right, Alain de Benoist, frames 'Jacobinism' as the New Right's main enemy, the New Right may be understood as a counter-tradition to what it understands as Jacobinism. De Benoist defines Jacobinism as an ideology that makes people essentially equal and identical by means of the state. Against this, he posits what he calls 'federalism'—a project which aims at promoting and defending ethnic, cultural and other differences. In this article, the author shows how the New Right creates a mythical counter-tradition of federalism. We should understand this as a 'federalist fascism': instead of mass parties and an authoritarian nation-state, the New Right seeks the mythical rebirth of an Indo-European community consisting of various regional peoples who will supposedly realise their authentic nature through ethnically purified societies governed by a federal European-wide system.

Keywords

With increased media attention to movements such as Generation Identity and the Alt-Right and with the electoral success of parties such as the Rassemblement National, Lega Nord and the AfD the ideas of the intellectual current known as the New Right, first emerging in the late 1960s, have started to have

more of a real, political impact in recent years.[1] Originally conceived of as a 'metapolitical' endeavour—that is, as according to its own self-understanding, waging a cultural and ideological war strictly on the battlefield of ideas—the ideological basis provided by the New Right is now in the process of being translated into real politics.[2] For movements such as Generation Identity, this means using the political form of activist mobilisations calculated to draw media attention to New Right talking points such as the imagined identitarian roots of regional peoples and call for the remigration of migrants back to their alleged homelands.[3] For others, it means using legal parties and the platform of elections and electoral debates for these very same ends.[4]

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1   For general studies of the New Right, see Pierre-André Taguieff, *Sur la Nouvelle Droite* (Paris: Descartes & Cie, 1994); Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Tamir Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right* (London: Routledge, 2013). Mark Sedgwick, ed., *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) is largely focused around thinkers and themes central to the New Right tradition.

2   References to the metapolitical strategy abound in the writings of New Right authors. For particularly focused discussions, see Guillaume Faye, 'La GRECE et la conquête du pouvoir des idées,' in *Pour un Gramscisme de droite: Actes du XVI colloque national du GRECE* (Paris, 1978) ; Guillaume Faye's entry 'Métapolitique,' in *Petit lexique du partisan européen*, eds. Guillaume Faye, Pierre Freson and Robert Steuckers (Esneux-lez-Liège: Eurograf, 1985). See also Pierre Krebs, 'The Metapolitical Rebirth of Europe,' in *Fascism*, ed. Roger Griffin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 248–249 ; Jacques Marlaud, 'Métapolitique: La conquête du pouvoir culturel,' in *Interpellations: Questionnements métapolitiques* (Paris: Dualpha, 2004). For Alain de Benoist's contention that the New Right needs to move beyond pure metapolitics, see Alain de Benoist, *C'est-à-dire: Vol. 1* (Paris: Les amis d'Alain de Benoist, 2006), 181–183. For analyses of contemporary metapolitical endeavours, see Massimiliano Capra Casadio, 'The New Right and Metapolitics in France and Italy,' *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8, no. 1 (2014): 45–86; Natascha Strobl and Julian Bruns, 'Preparing for (Intellectual) Civil War: The New Right in Austria and Germany,' in *Trouble on the Far Right: Contemporary Right-Wing Strategies and Practices in Europe*, eds. Maik Fielitz and Laura Lotte Laloire (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016); Ico Maly, 'Metapolitical New Right Influencers: The Case of Brittany Pettibone,' *Social Sciences* 9, no. 7 (2020); Ico Maly, 'New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden,' *Social Media + Society* 5, no. 2 (2019): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119856700.

3   José Pedro Zúquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018); Patrick Hermansson, David Lawrence, Joe Mulhall, Simon Murdoch, *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?* (London: Routledge, 2020); Imogen Richards, 'A Philosophical and Historical Analysis of Generation Identity: Fascism, Online Media, and the European New Right,' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, published ahead of print September 30, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1662403.

4   Samuel Salzborn, 'Renaissance of the New Right in Germany? A Discussion of New Right Elements in German Right-wing Extremism Today,' *German Politics and Society* 34, no. 2 (2016): 36–63; Rasmus Hage Dalland, *Identitær: En rejse ind i Europeas nye højre* (København: Atlas,

How do we understand this current, and what should we expect from it now that it has become increasingly mainstream and more integrated into political movements and parties? Most scholars who have analysed the ideological foundations of the New Right have defined them as 'neo-fascist' or 'post-fascist', although there have also been a few who have been more hesitant of invoking any kind of derivative of 'fascist'.[5] The challenge, then, is to come up with other categories or to define precisely what 'neo' or 'post' means, and what the exact relation to fascism is. In his analysis of the New Right, Roger Griffin, on the other hand, has suggested that we simply stick with 'fascist', and then qualify what kind of fascism it is we are dealing with.[6] He has done so based on a core definition of fascism as an ideology, which has a mythical conception of an organic nation, which is to be created or reborn in a struggle against those perceived as the enemies of said nation.[7] This also means that features, which are deemed essential in other definitions of fascism, such as the mass party, the authoritarian state, or the authoritarian leader, are historically contingent features of fascism that belong to a certain context.[8] But they need not be present

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2019); Merijn Oudenampsen, *The Rise of the Dutch New Right: An Intellectual History of the Rightward Shift in Dutch Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020); Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2017).

5   For explicit discussions on how to understand the New Right in terms of fascism, see Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 115–139; Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right*. Nigel Copsey with reference to Bar-On opts for defining the New Right as a 'revisionist permutation of neo-fascism', see Nigel Copsey, '"Fascism … But with an Open Mind": Reflections on the Contemporary Far Right in (Western) Europe,' *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 2, no. 1 (2013): 13, https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00201008. Thomas Sheehan, focusing on the early period of the New Right, argues in favour of employing the notion of fascism, see Thomas Sheehan, 'Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Juluis Evola and Alain de Benoist,' *Social Research* 48, no. 1 (1981): 45–73. Somewhat more hesitant to employ the notion of fascism have been Pierre-André Taguieff, *Sur la Nouvelle droite*; Steve Bastow, 'A Neo-Fascist Third Way: The Discourse of Ethno-Differentialist Revolutionary Nationalism,' *Journal of Political Ideologies* 7, no. 3 (2002): 351–168; Alberto Spektorowski, 'The French New Right: Differentialism and the Idea of Ethnophilian Exlcusionism,' *Polity* 33, no. 2 (2002): 283–303; Alberto Spektorowski, 'The New Right: Ethno-Regionalism, Ethnopluralism and the Emergence of a Neo-Fascist Third Way,' *Journal of Political Ideologies* 8, no. 1 (2003): 111–130.

6   Roger Griffin, 'Between Metapolitics and "Apoliteia": The Nouvelle Droite's Strategy for Conserving the Fascist Vision in the "Interregnum",' *Modern and Contemporary France* 8, no. 1 (2000): 36.

7   Roger Griffin, 'Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age: From New Consensus to New Wave?' *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012): 6–7, https://doi.org/10.1163/221162512X623601.

8   Examples of such other definitions are Stanley Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980); Kevin Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) (the second edition of 2014 argues for refusing

for us to identify and understand something as fundamentally fascist (in much the same way that we accept 'socialism', 'conservatism' and 'liberalism' to be ideologies with certain core conceptions of human beings, society and freedom that are at the same time historically malleable and may be translated into a variety of political projects and formations). As Griffin has put it: 'The single party, the secret police, the public displays of Ceasarism, even the presence of the Führer are not necessarily attributes of fascism'[9]—which is to say that many 'features highlighted in the "check-list" definitions of fascism . . . have been "accidental", contingent on the way the vision of the total politico-cultural renewal of the "people" was conceived in the unique conditions of interwar Europe.'[10] Instead, with a quote from avowed fascist Maurice Bardèche, Griffin emphasises that 'the famous fascist methods are constantly revised and will constantly be revised. More important than the mechanism is the idea that fascism has created for itself of man and freedom.'[11]

In existing research on the New Right, there has been much focus on its ideology, culture wars, PR strategy, and conception of international relations.[12] This article takes a different approach in analysing what political form—that is, what form of government—the New Right envisions. In line with a newly published volume on far-right revisionism, this article seeks to tease out a core element of the New Right's politics by analysing some of its key members'—most notably Alain de Benoist's—understanding and revision of history.[13]

In this article, I analyse the New Right's, and particularly de Benoist's, understanding of the French Revolution. As Louie Dean Valencia-García has pointed out, traditionalism is a key component of the New Right's understanding of history, which means it is cyclical, idealist, and violently opposed to modernity.[14]

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to give a definition of fascism); Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

9   Roger Griffin, 'Introduction,' in *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, Tamir Bar-On (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), xi; Griffin, 'Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age,' 17.

10   Griffin, 'Between Metapolitics and "Apoliteia",' 38.

11   Ibid.

12   For international relations, see Pablo de Orellana and Nicolas Michelsen, 'Reactionary Internationalism: The Philosophy of the New Right,' *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 5 (2019); Jean-François Drolet and Michael Williams, 'Radical Conservatism and Global Order: International Theory and the New Right,' *International Theory* 10, no. 3 (2018): 285–313; Rita Abrahamsen et al., 'Confronting the International Political Sociology of the New Right,' *International Political Sociology* 14 (2020): 94–107. For the other elements, see the footnotes above.

13   Louie Dean Valencia-García, ed., *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt/Histories* (London: Routledge, 2020).

14   Valencia-García, *Far-Right Revisionism*, 4. For Evola's traditionalism and its influence of

The notion of modernity is intrinsically tied to the French Revolution, and for many—including de Benoist—the Revolution incarnates the very coming of modernity. It is, in other words, the modern event *par excellence*. As de Benoist himself sees it, there are essentially two principles or political projects in the world: that of Jacobinism and that of federalism.[15] Thus, by analysing the New Right's understanding of the Revolution and what the New Right sees as the desired alternative path that history did not follow, we can gain a clearer picture of what the New Right is against and why, but also what they are for and their reasons for being so.

In what follows, I accept the conclusions of Roger Griffin that the New Right is essentially fascist. It is so because of its mythic belief in Indo-Europeans as a distinct ethnic group, whose culture and form of life should be revived through ethnic cleansing of non-Indo-Europeans from European territory.[16] This belief coincides with the belief in the existence of a multiplicity of Indo-European sub-groups, such as Bretons, Flemings, etc., and the belief the human beings will only be capable of realising their freedom or authentic being in ethnic homogenous communities and in the struggle for such ethnic homogenous communities.[17]

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the New Right's understanding of history, see Griffin, 'Between Metapolitics and "Apoliteia"'; Stéphane François, 'The Nouvelle Droite and "Tradition",' *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8, no. 1 (2014): 87–106; Alain de Benoist, 'Julius Evola, réactionnaire radical et métaphysicien engagé: Analyse critique de la pensée politique de Julius Evola,' *alaindebenoist.com/textes*, n.d. [approx. 2002], https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/alainde benoist/pdf/julius_evola.pdf.

15   Alain de Benoist, 'Les principes du fédéralisme,' *alaindebenoist.com/textes*, 2005, https://s3 -eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/alaindebenoist/pdf/principes_du_federalisme.pdf; Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier, 'The French New Right in the Year 2000,' *Telos*, no. 115 (1999): 137.

16   For the foundations of the New Right understanding of Indo-Europeanism, see Stephane François, 'La Nouvelle Droite et les Indo-européens: Une anthropologie d' extrême droite,' *Terrain: Anthropologie & Sciences Humaines* 56 (2011): 136–151. See also Alain de Benoist, *The Indo-Europeans: In Search of the Homeland* (London: Arktos, 2016) in which he attempts to give credence to Julius Evola's Hyperborea-thesis by basing it on an extremely tendentious and manipulative reading of scientific work on Indo-Europeans (as opposed to Evola's purely mythical cum metaphysical conception). See also Alain de Benoist, *Runes* (London: Arktos, 2018) in which he attempts to sustain that the so-called Northern peoples did in fact develop their own system of writing without outside influence and that this had an effect on the development of writing elsewhere. These are both attempts to create a mythic Norther people that is free from Asiatic and Southern mixing, influence, and origins.

17   There is of course some disagreement within the New Right rather to emphasise the regionalist or the pan-European perspective. See for example Alain de Benoist, *La cause des peuples* (Paris: Labyrinthe, 1982) and Guillaume Faye's critique of what he takes to be

Researchers like Steve Bastow have argued that the New Right's turn to federalism is taking it out of the fascist space. I respectfully disagree with this reading of the New Right. I see fascism as a political ideology more or less on par with other political ideologies such as 'socialism', 'liberalism', and 'conservatism'. For these ideologies, we accept that they have quite significant variations when it comes to specific historical and political contexts and that there may even be deep divisions between members adhering to the same ideology in the same moment and place. I will argue, that we should do the same for 'fascism'. As with the other ideologies, fascism has a core. I take this core to be the understanding of humans as belonging to mythical-original ethnically pure communities and to only be able to realize themselves if living in such communities, free of contamination and mixing with other peoples. I see fascism as the political endeavor to realize this ideal.

If we accept the description of the New Right as essentially fascist, the question becomes: What kind of fascism is it? This is the question that guides the present article, and the answer I suggest is: federalist fascism. This form of fascism is articulated in opposition to what de Benoist and the New Right understands by the project of modernity born with the French Revolution: An international system of nation states, which centralises power around the state, upholds a system of universal human rights of individual persons, and creates unnaturally 'flat' relations between said individuals who are equal amongst each other and before the international system of nation states. It is therefore a centralising and equalising logic. What the New Right envisions instead is a de-centralised political system, which will uphold differences between various imagined ethnic groups and particularly between Indo-Europeans (through federal collaboration) and non-Indo-Europeans (through non-specified but quite possibly hostile relations). This vision a federalist fascism should furthermore be seen as a critique of 'really existing Fascism', which, in this analysis, failed by aligning itself too closely with the modernising project of mass society, nation-state-building, and imperialism.

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de Benoist's overly zealous regionalism in Faye, 'The Cause of the Peoples?' *Terre et Peuple* 18 (2003). These differences are emphasised by the 'gap' between American Identitarians such as Richard Spencer and Greg Johnson who envision a European ethno-state in the US, partially because of its specific history and situation, as opposed to more regionalist tendencies in Europe. See Graham Macklin, 'Greg Johnson and Counter-Currents,' in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 204–223; Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, 'The European Intellectual Origins of the Alt-Right,' *İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Dergisi* 38, no. 2 (2018): 255–266. Nonetheless, most New Right figures seem to be relatively pragmatic when it comes to bringing regionalism and pan-Europeanism together against a common enemy.

The New Right and the French Revolution

A recent issue of *Nouvelle école*, an organ of the New Right and one of the journals edited by Alain de Benoist, is dedicated to the topic of the Enlightenment (*Les lumières*). As the lead makes clear, however, the issue is primarily concerned with discussing the French Revolution and its legacy; an event which, according to the editor, 'after two centuries . . . still invokes the most opposing of passions: unconditional appreciation or unconditional rejection.'[18] Of the seven featured articles, four should be highlighted. One, by Eric Maulin, is a reconstruction and critique of the liberal theory of the *doux commerce*, an influential Enlightenment theory also central to contemporary liberalism arguing that commerce and increased trade will make people universally happy, prosperous and more civilised; one, by Alain de Benoist, discusses Rousseau and Rousseau's critique of the Enlightenment philosophers; one, by Pierre de Meuse, discusses the intellectual heritage of the Counter-Revolution; and one, by Jean-Joël Brégeon, gives a purported overview of the historiography on the civil war in the Vendée (a counter-revolutionary uprising and guerrilla war in Western France against the central government between 1793 and 1798).

This set of articles reflects de Benoist's and the New Right's interest in the French Revolution: the critique of the liberal-modernist Enlightenment, an attempt to appropriate Rousseau for a far-right cause, identification with the intellectual Counter-Revolution, and support for the Vendée regionalist and 'counter-revolutionary' uprising against the centralised state and its modernising reforms.[19] These are the four elements that constitute the de Benoist's relation to the French Revolution, and the New Right's critique of modernity.

Jacobinism as the Enemy

Let us start with the critique of the Enlightenment and the movement largely responsible for its practical implementation: Jacobinism. In 'Jacobinism or Federalism?', published in *Critiques Théoriques* and originally presented as a talk

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18   *Nouvelle école*, no. 65 (2016). All translations from the French texts referenced in this article are my own.

19   For the counter-revolutionary use of Rousseau see Joan McDonald, *Rousseau and the French Revolution* (Michigan: P. Anthlone, 1965), chapter 9, and Darrin McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). As McMahon remarks, however, the counter-revolutionaries quickly gave up appropriating Rousseau for their cause—both because the battle was already lost, but also because he in many respects fitted poorly to their defense of tradition.

in Munich on 'Political Jacobinism and Linguistic Exclusionism: The Regional Minorities, The Case of France' in 2001, de Benoist presents his most elaborate reconstruction and critique of Jacobinism. The occasion for the talk and later text was the French government's decision in May of 1999 to sign the 1992 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.[20] If actually implemented, the charter would have granted special status and protection for Basque, Breton, Catalan, Corse, Franco-German, West Flemish, Franco-Provençal, Occitan in addition to a number of minor *langues d'oïl* in Northern France and Ligurian dialectics in the Italian borderlands. The Charter would potentially also entail the protection of several languages in the overseas territories as well as 'non-territorial languages' such as Yiddish and Arab dialectics particular to France. Several intellectuals and politicians from across the spectrum came out to criticise the government's decision to ratify the Charter. Amongst them, as de Benoist writes in the opening of his text, were Jacques Myard, at the time a member of Jacques Chirac's Gaullist conservative Rassemblement pour la République and also a 'rattachist' (supporter of the Wallonian secession from Belgium and adaptation into France), who described the decision as a 'linguistic balkanisation that will lead to political balkanisation' and who called it a 'collective suicide'.[21]

In his text, de Benoist attacks this kind of French nationalism, whether right or left. As he puts it, there is an untenable inconsistency in a position which supports French culture and language in Wallonia or Québec under the name of protection of minorities, but at the same time show no support for and directly attack regional minorities within France, such as that of the Bretons—a nationalist cause particularly dear to de Benoist.[22]

According to de Benoist, the roots of this 'ideology', i.e. this coloniser mentality and imperial doctrine of French nationalism, is to be found within the longer trajectory of French history, culminating with Enlightenment philosophy, the French Revolution and Jacobinism.[23] 'Historically,' de Benoist writes, 'Jacobinism corresponds to the most extreme ideology of the modern state, i.e.

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20   While signed, the charter has never been implemented in France. The government of François Hollande resolved in 2014 to amend the constitution in ways that would enable implementing the Charter, but this process was ultimately blocked by the Senate in 2015.

21   *Libération*, May 14, 1999. Here quoted from Alain de Benoist, 'Jacobinisme ou fédéralisme?' *alaindebenoist.com/textes*, n.d., https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/alaindebenoist/pdf/jacobinisme_ou_federalisme.pdf.

22   Ibid. For de Benoist's support for Breton natonalism, see Alain de Benoist, *Vu de droite: Anthologie critique des idées contemporaines* (Paris: Copernic, 1977), 512–523.

23   De Benoist, 'Jacobinisme ou fédéralisme?'

the Nation-State.' Within this ideology, 'the nation and the state, citizenship and nationality, are treated as synonyms.'

This ideology, however, has a pre-history which dates back to the French Wars of Religion (ca. 1562–1598), and specifically to the theory of royal absolutism. The theoretical expression of absolutism is Jean Bodin's concept of 'sovereignty'.[24] According to Bodin, sovereignty is one and indivisible, which means that it cannot be parcelled out to a multiplicity of regions or corporations such as cities, guilds, or monasteries. Instead, sovereignty is located within a single body of the state. Based on the principle of sovereignty, representatives of the state see all claims to autonomous decision-making as usurpations of sovereignty and challenges to the sovereign's execution of power. As de Benoist points out, this does not necessarily mean that the sovereign must be a monarch—Bodin holds that the sovereign could also be a body of oligarchs or even what he calls 'popular government'.[25] It does mean, however, that any form of federalism or corporatism is by default excluded from the sovereign conception of just and desirable political rule.

From this perspective, the history of Early Modern and Modern France can be read as a long process of centralising power around the king and the state in opposition to the deep structures of a Medieval France dominated by the aristocracy, local custom, regional parliaments, the Church and a number of corporations and privileged bodies such as monasteries, free cities and colonial domains—i.e., feudal society. This reading, which de Benoist subscribes to, was originally the historico-theoretical foundations of the regionalist, aristocratic opposition to French absolutism and was the core of the so-called *noirs* or *aristocrates* that formed the backbone of the counter-revolution.[26] It was later picked up by Alexis de Tocqueville, and then, later again, re-articulated and turned into dogma with the revisionist historiography of François Furet and his followers.[27] In this reading, the French Revolution did not mark a break as much as it brought a process to an end. The attempts to centralise power within the state that had been initiated by French kings and courts found its apogee with the Enlightenment ideal of enlightened despotism: A strong cen-

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24   Ibid.
25   Alain de Benoist: 'What is Sovereignty?' *Telos*, no. 116 (1999): 99–118. For Bodin's expression, see Jean Bodin, *Les six livres de la république* (Paris : Iacques de Puis, 1583), Book II, Chapter VII.
26   For this understanding of French politics as forming the foundation of counter-revolutionary theory, see Jacques de Saint Victor, *Le première contre-révolution* (Paris: PUF, 2010).
27   Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (New York: Anchor Books, 1955); François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

tralised power that could guarantee the human rights of individualised subjects all equal before the state. As Tocqueville, Furet, and subsequently de Benoist saw it, the French Revolution was the consummation of this long process of state formation.[28] As de Benoist puts it, quoting Furet's *Penser la Révolution française*, this was carried out under the credo of unity before all: 'Unity is our fundamental maxim, unity is our anti-federalist defence, unity is our salvation.'[29]

According to de Benoist, the theoretical synthesis for this new revolutionary ideology taking over the reign of France was provided by Sieyès. Here, the nation is the result of 'a social pact, a subjective engagement', as de Benoist puts it. 'Far from being a product of nature or of history, the nation is the result of a voluntary creation by individuals, without pre-existing itself in any form.'[30] As a result, 'all citizens become the subject of the same laws because they are considered to be fundamentally identical to one another.'[31]

This is the crux of de Benoist's critique of modernity, whether it be liberal or communist. For both forms of modernity, de Benoist argues, 'equality is not seen as an instrument to establish the equilibrium or equity between different groups based on their difference, but to annihilate those differences.'[32] Thus, 'equality implies a central authority' that can implement equality by erasing differences, and which is 'posed as a right possessed by the individual.'[33] That is, by delinking politics from intermediary bodies and placing it with the individual as represented by parliament, the French Revolution delinks the individual human being from the embedded communities, which had until then organised social relations and wielded power legitimately. These included the village, the Church, the family, and the guild. This process of delinking or disembedding is what de Benoist associates with modernism and modernity.[34]

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28   The thesis, which posits that the French Revolution merely consolidated something that had already happened, has since lost most of its appeal. For a critique of Furet's reading in terms of political ideology, see Marisa Linton, *The Politics of Virtue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan, 2001), esp. 209–211.

29   De Benoist, 'Jacobinisme ou fédéralisme?' quoting from François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 229.

30   De Benoist, 'Jacobinisme ou fédéralisme?' For a thorough reading of Sieyès's theory, see Nicolai von Eggers, 'Towards a Materialist Conception of Constituent Power: The Constitutional Theory of Sieyès,' *History of Political Thought* 39, no. 2 (2018): 325–356.

31   Ibid.

32   Ibid.

33   De Benoist, 'Jacobinisme ou fédéralisme?' For de Benoist's most focused and sustained critique of human rights, see Alain de Benoist, *Au-delà des droits de l'homme* (Paris: Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, 2016).

34   De Benoist explicitly refers to Karl Polanyi when using the concepts of 'embedded' and

'The modern principle of citizenship,' de Benoist writes, 'thus makes an abstraction out of language, of culture, of belief, of race, of gender, etc., that is to say, of what makes humans be what they be and not something else.'[35] One could of course argue that this is a liberating process, especially for all those who do not find themselves in a particularly powerful or enviable position within traditional hierarchies of power (i.e., the grand majority of people), but de Benoist clearly sees this process as one of loss, and one which introduces a series of obstacles that prevent humans from realising who they are.

Having abstracted political power and individual personhood from its concrete context and embedded it within a central, sovereign state, the 'ideology' that is most clearly expressed in Jacobinism then starts to make individuals more equal. They do this by creating a universal system of education, a universal code of law, a universal religion (the cult of the supreme being), and a universal language to be used by all inhabitants living within the sphere of the nation state.[36] De Benoist calls this a process of "eradication-digestion" in which the new regime gobbles up old forms of life and produces one singular mass of people and way of living.[37] De Benoist particularly focuses on the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen's explicit injunction to allow 'no corporations' ('nul corps'). This was particularly aimed at the *parlements* (regional aristocratic bodies), the prerogatives to churches and monasteries, and the impenetrable jungle of law-courts, which saw regional, royal, feudal, and canonical law-courts all overlapping in various ways. But the only specific law to come out of this that de Benoist decides to mention is the Le Chapelier law of 1791, which bans association of workers; i.e. guilds primarily but also any attempts to create unions or to use strikes as a mode of collective bargaining.[38]

De Benoist argues that as a result of the principles of human rights, 'minorities find themselves cut off from any kind of political stature.'[39] This is of course

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'disembedded' to speak about pre-modern economies in contrast to a modern one, which is defined by 'a separation of the worker from the means of production'. Alain de Benoist, 'The Current Crisis of Democracy,' *Telos*, no. 156 (2011), 23. See also De Benoist and Champetier, 'The French New Right in the Year 2000,' 127: 'In all premodern societies, the economic was embedded and contextualized within other orders of human activity (Karl Polanyi).'

35   De Benoist, 'Jacobinisme ou fédéralisme?'
36   For one of the best analysis of actual Jacobins policies, see Jean-Pierre Gross, *Fair Shares for All: Jacobins Egalitarianism in Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
37   De Benoist, 'Jacobinisme ou fédéralisme?'
38   For a serious reading of the Le Chapelier law, its ideological basis and its effects, see Florence Gauthier, *Triomphe et mort de la révolution des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (Paris: PUF, 1992).
39   De Benoist, 'Jacobinisme ou fédéralisme?'

not entirely wrong—the Jacobins did attempt to unify what they say as members of the nation-state. But de Benoist's reading skews both the intentions and actual results of these reforms, which were to dismantle the system that reproduced the economic and political power of the privileged classes. that is, the feudal social and political order of Medieval France (even if these ideas were also used to attack workers and thus consolidate the power of the bourgeoisie against all its class enemies). According to de Benoist, instead of belonging to a meaningful social world, 'minorities' were from this moment on reduced to groups defined as a mere 'conglomeration of individuals' without any real power or authentic mode of existence.[40]

After having turned Enlightenment theory into actual political practice, Jacobinism and its modernising project became a banner under which multiple movements would fight during the new couple of centuries, de Benoist argues. He implicates everything in this modernising project, from liberalism to Marx and Engels to 'national-socialism', which de Benoist with a quote from François-Georges Dreyfus—a historian and political scientist with connections to the New Right—calls 'the German form of Jacobinism'.[41] This argument is repeated in Marc Muller's contribution to the 'Lumières' edition of *Nouvelle école*. Here, Muller picks up Alain de Benoist's argument from *Au-dèla des droits de l'homme* (2004) in which he contrasts ideologies of difference such as ethnopluralism with an 'ideology of the Same' ('idéologie du Même'). Thus, according to Muller (and de Benoist), communism and Nazism are both totalitarian in that they

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40   Again, this is a questionable conclusion. It might easily be argued that new group identities merely formed to replace old ones, just as one could argue that the old group identities were themselves results of historical and political processes and should not be equated with any form of 'originary' human community and way of living. Thus, identities have been shaped and reshaped throughout human history, and the revolution and the post-revolutionary era brought with it new forms of identities such as 'revolutionary', 'working-class' and 'French'. The Identitarian fetischisation of an 'originary' or authentic identity, linked to one's 'original' region, 'true' race, 'original' language, makes all other forms of identities appear as mere perversions, lies and forms of alienation.

41   De Benoist, 'Jacobinisme ou fédéralisme?' The relation between Jacobinism and fascism is often made in studies of fascism. For writers subscribing to a strong version of the totalitarianism thesis, such as Jacob Talmon (*The Originis of Totalitarian Democracy*) and François Furet (*The Passing of an Illusion*), the identity between the two is asserted relatively unproblematic. Fascism scholar, George Mosse, drew comparisons between Jacobinism and fascism on the basis that they both sacralise 'the Nation', but also calls this a mere identity of 'political style' and otherwise rejects that it is in any way meaningful to assimilate the two. See George L. Mosse, 'Political Style and Political Theory: Totalitarian Democracy Revisited,' in *Totalitarian Democracy and After*, eds. Yehoshua Arieli, Nathan Rotenstreich (London: Routledge, 1984). For a discussion, see also Enzo Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism* (London: Verso, 2019), chapter 4.

are expressions of the 'ideology of the Same'. Furthermore, it is this ideology of sameness, expressed in the universal rights of human beings, that ultimately reveal 'the totalitarian nature of liberalism'.[42] This 'anthropology' of sameness, which basically views all humans as somehow identical or equal, should be criticised as 'Nietzsche pointed out in regards to Kant and the democratic-liberal thinkers: Their pathological inability to accept multiplicity and difference.'[43] Thus, one must look beyond this universalising anthropology that underpins liberalism, communism and Nazism and try and find an alternative.[44] As de Benoist, Muller and the New Right sees it, instead of the levelling principles that subject all human beings equally to a central, sovereign state, the aim is to develop a political model that will reflect and reproduce the 'natural' inequalities among human beings. As the title of de Benoist's paper has it, the choice is between Jacobinism and federalism.

Maurras, Rousseau, and French Nationalism

De Benoist's reading of the French Revolution allows him to renew the traditional French Far Right's nationalism. One of the key intellectuals defining this far right has been Charles Maurras, a royalist and ultra-nationalist who was a leader of the *Action française*, and of which he has remained the chief ideologue until this day. Like all members of the far right and the counter-revolutionary tradition, Maurras was a vociferous critic of the French Revolution.

According to Maurras, even calling it the French Revolution is a misnomer since it was not French at all. Rather, it was the result of the importation of foreign ideals into French soil, which then perverted and destroyed a political, social, and cultural system focused around the king's person and body, which had grown and reproduced itself organically for centuries if not millennia. Thus, Maurras dwelled on the fact that Rousseau was not French but Genevan (or Swiss), that Protestantism (a Germanic religion) played a role in the Revolution, and that parliamentarism was an English form of rule, which

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42   Marc Muller, 'Les lumières contre la guerre civile,' *Nouvelle école*, no. 65 (2016), 47.

43   Ibid.

44   This project is clearly stated in Aleksandr Dugin's proposal for a 'Fourth Political Theory', which, as he states explicitly, alleges to move beyond liberalism, communism and fascism, while drawing mostly from the latter on the basis that this is the only of hitherto existing ideologies, which have been based on the principle of inequality, cf. Aleksandr Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory* (London: Arktos, 2012).

might very well be suitable for England but had nothing to do with French tradition. Thus, even if Enlightenment writers such as Voltaire and Montesquieu were properly French, their Anglophilia and admiration for the British political system made them enemies of the French tradition.[45]

De Benoist himself started out as an activist in the *Action française* supporting the French troops in Algeria and opposing French withdrawal and Algerian independence. But, as he reports himself, he helped start the New Right in order to break with the imperial nationalism, royalism, Catholicism and antiquated racism that characterised far-right milieu of the time.[46] As a consequence, de Benoist has a complex relation to Maurras. On the one hand, he clearly respects Maurras's ideas and writings and admires his contributions to the far right. On the other, his own ideological formation can be seen as a critique of these self-same ideas.

In a text published in 2003 in *La Nef*, a Catholic right-wing publication, de Benoist explicitly discusses his disagreements with Maurras: Maurras's overestimation of traditional institutions' ability to accumulate and wield power (most specifically monarchy), his belief in the return of monarchism and inability to provide a ground for it, his hatred of Germany and everything Germanic, his equation of nationalism with French nationalism, his equation of democracy with liberalism and with anarchism; but most importantly, his 'idealisation of the *ancien régime*' and his belief that 'the Revolution was antinational and of "foreign" inspiration.'[47] De Benoist argues that because of this, Maurras did not see that 'the French monarchy, in its desire to liquidate the old feudal order, constantly promoted the interests of the bourgeoisie at the expense of the aristocracy.'[48] In other words, Maurras's ultra-nationalism results from and causes him to misinterpret the causes of the Revolution. They both see it as a disaster, but in very different ways.

In his text on Jacobinism or federalism, de Benoist places the guilt less with the monarch and instead, following Ernest Renan (the French philosopher, historian and avowed racist), on the weakness and timidity of the aristocracy in the face of the Bourbon monarchy's enlightening and centralising pretensions. Quoting approvingly from Renan, de Benoist writes that 'it is essential for mod-

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45   For a longer discussion of Maurras's analysis of the French Revolution and how it relates to his body of thought, see Maurice Weyrembergh, *Charles Maurras et la révolution française* (Paris: Vrin, 1992).

46   'Entretien avec Alain de Benoist sur Charles Maurras,' *Bulletin Charles Maurras* (2001), and 'Three Interviews with Alain de Benoist,' *Telos*, no. 98 (1994), 173–207.

47   Alain de Benoist, 'Charles Maurras,' *La Nef* (2003).

48   Ibid.

ern states to have an aristocracy that may limit the monarch and hinder an exaggerated development of the idea of the state. It has to be said that the French aristocracy was never up to the task . . . For the nobility, Versailles was the grave of all virtue and all pride.'[49] What must be strengthened, therefore, is not the king or the cause of royalism. This would only intensify the already existing processes of centralisation and production of sameness (albeit in the guise of French nationalism as opposed to universal humanity). The project instead is to bolster aristocratic ideals and principles.

De Benoist's revision of the French far-right's royalist reading of the French Revolution also leads to a re-interpretation of the theory of Rousseau that takes issue with Maurras's 'xenophobic' reading.[50] Over the years de Benoist has written a number of articles dedicated to the philosophy of Rousseau, and his view of the philosopher—or at least his strategy as to how to present him—has been slowly changing.[51] In his first articles on Rousseau, de Benoist reiterated Rousseau's critique of the Enlightenment philosophers, of rationalism, of luxury and a modern, cosmopolitan outlook. He furthermore lauded Rousseau's praise of ancient societies and their models of virtue, especially that of Sparta. But he was also being critical of Rousseau's 'performative' theory of political belonging that gives primacy to political bodies as opposed to all other forms of bodies.

In later texts, however, de Benoist frames Rousseau as a champion of ultra-nationalism. He argues that according to Rousseau, all nations should become sovereign and thus become capable of reproducing their own specific *mœurs* without the interference of foreign elements and ideals. Thus, in 'Rousseau, L'anti-lumières', de Benoist tries—drawing on the work of Graeme Garrard and attacking the work of Zeev Sternhell—to insert Rousseau thoroughly within a counter-enlightenment tradition. Here, de Benoist discusses how Rousseau prefers Geneva and the austere values of Rome, the Montagons of the Jura, the

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49   De Benoist, 'Jacobinisme ou fédéralisme?' Quoting from Ernest Renan, 'Philosophie de l'histoire contemporaine,' in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris : Callman-Lévy, 1947), 41.

50   Something explicitly noted by de Benoist who concludes one of his articles dedicated to 'Rereading Rousseau' by noting that 'Maurras was evidently wrong in linking Rousseau to the liberal school'. See Alain de Benoist, 'Relire Rousseau' in *Critique-Théoriques* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2002), 313–331.

51   In addition to the above mentioned text, see also Alain de Benoist, 'Le contrat social selon Rousseau,' *Éléments*, n.d. [approx. 2012] and especially 'Rousseau, l'anti-lumières,' *Éléments*, no. 143 (2012), as well as 'Un autre Rousseau', published in *Le Spectacle du monde*, n.d. [approx. 2012]. Available at *alaindebenoist.com/textes*, https://s3-eu-west-1 .amazonaws.com/alaindebenoist/pdf/rousseau-el_2.pdf, https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws .com/alaindebenoist/pdf/rousseau__sm.pdf, accessed October 27, 2021.

peasants of Valais, and Switzerland in general to the cosmopolitan, commercial life of Paris; how Rousseau takes the side of antiquity over modernity; how 'our souls are corrupted to the same degree that our arts and sciences are being perfected' (Rousseau); and how as opposed to the Encyclopaedists who valued knowledge and truth, Rousseau 'defines humanity primarily by its instincts, not by its reason.'[52] Thus, as with Eric Maulin's article in the special issue of *Nouvelle école*, which criticises the theories of *doux commerce* and modern, cosmopolitan, commercial, scientific society, de Benoist stresses Rousseau's criticism of such theories and particularly especially his disputes with the Physiocrats (early proponents of *laissez faire* capitalism). Against these early theorists of commercial society, who argue that if people simply follow their private interest it will lead to a common good, de Benoist emphasises Rousseau's famous quip from *The Social Contract* that 'two people's interest might converge while being opposed to those of a hundred thousand.' Similarly, de Benoist transmits Rousseau's disdain for the supposed humanism of the *philosophes*, arguing that 'the more the social bound is extended, the more it is loosened.' Thus 'these pretentious cosmopolitans who justifies their love of their *patrie* by way of their love for mankind (*le genre humain*), they praise themselves for loving everybody in order to have the right to love nobody.'[53]

Against the cosmopolitanism and abstract humanism, de Benoist portrays Rousseau as a champion of nationalism. As with all nationalisms, this nationalism is ambiguous. On the one hand it should, as de Benoist puts it, be based on 'the original characters of peoples' and peoples should be careful not to mould their *mœurs* on the imitation of others. On the other hand, it is clear that nationalism is something to be formed and performed; that is, created and enacted.[54] Thus, 'every people has or should have a national character,'

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52   De Benoist, 'Rousseau, l'anti-lumières.'

53   These quotes are from an early draft of *The Social Contract*, which Rousseau eventually deleted for the published version. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes, vol. 3* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 287. De Benoist argues that Rousseau deleted them because he had to expand other arguments and that they therefore fitted in poorly. See de Benoist, 'Rousseau, l'anti-lumières,' 80, footnote 29. It could however also be argued that Rousseau deleted them because he had second thoughts and felt he had been carried away by his polemicist attitude to certain element of the *philosophes* doctrine.

54   As David Bell has put it, '[n]ationalism almost irresistibly calls forth images of immemorial pasts, of lengthy and unbroken lineages, of deep bonds between particular peoples and particular lands. New constructions therefore tend to be presented as acts of *reconstruction*, recovery, and regeneration. Yet even the nationalists most convinced of their nation's immemorial rights still also acknowledge that large-scale political action is necessary to complete and perfect the national entity, so as to forge a truly cohesive

and 'if they lack one, one must be given to them,' as Benoist puts it quoting from Rousseau.[55]

What de Benoist claims to find in Rousseau is a nationalism that can be used in France but which is opposed to French nationalism. It harbours no fantasies about the great French nation, about the royal kingdom, about a French empire, or about the superiority of French culture and history. It is critical of 'French' nationalism and instead favours a kind of France of a dozen flags (to accompany the Europe of a hundred flags that has become a rallying point for the New Right).[56] Thus, Rousseau's Genevan patriotism, as well as proposed projects for Corsica and Poland to form themselves into sovereign political communities, is used to create a Rousseau against the Revolution and against enlightenment ideals of all kinds.

In doing so, de Benoist also seems to support the ambiguity of Rousseau's nationalism. On the one hand, Rousseau stresses that all political institutions must be built on some sort of tradition and morals—what he calls *mœurs*. Thus, in concluding his discussion of Rousseau's political theory, de Benoist concludes that '*ubi patria ibi bene*', an inversion of the famous Roman dictum '*ubi bene ibi patria*' ['where one lives well there one's homeland is'], which in de Benoist's phrase becomes: 'where one's homeland is, there one lives well'. Thus, de Benoist's takes Rousseau's notion of *mœurs* and turns it into a theory of ethno-cultural roots. At the same time, de Benoist stresses Rousseau's emphasis on the production of said *mœurs* and tradition—if people lack a national character one must be given to them. In other words, de Benoist is in many ways ready to acknowledge that ethno-cultural roots and their concomitant peoples are largely constructs—myths that must be produced and reproduced. This explains de Benoist's recent playful engagement with conservatism: 'Conservative—why not? But what is to be conserved?'[57] Here, de Benoist essentially argues that a plethora of conservatisms exist, and that aside from the key insight that 'man needs rootedness and loyalty, norms that are

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body. Relevant measures have included education, the strengthening of common symbols and loyalties, the rectification of political borders, and the suppression or expulsion of minorities within those borders.' David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5.

55   De Benoist, 'Rousseau, l' anti-lumières.'

56   For this pan-Europeanism, see Tamir Bar-On, 'Fascism to the Nouvelle Droite: The Dream of a Pan-European Empire,' *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 16, no. 3 (2008): 327–245.

57   Alain de Benoist, 'Conserve What? The Equivocations of Conservatism,' *Telos*, no. 183 (2018), 135–143.

intelligible and firm', one is essentially free to choose to 'conserve' whatever tradition one likes.[58]

Thus, the counter-revolution failed because figures like Maurras were too attached to French nationalism and the centralising, state-building, modernising project that went along with it. The king, in this analysis, was little better than the Jacobins. What de Benoist finds in his idiosyncratic reading of Rousseau is a different tradition of nationalism—one which puts emphasis on local *mœurs* and the necessity to give each nation its own ruling bodies. By the time of the revolution, however, a large part of the aristocracy had already become too enmeshed in French nationalism and centralised state-building—Versailles was to be its grave. As a result, when the revolution broke out the majority of the nobility rallied to the cause of king and country. As de Benoist sees it, the counter-revolution and the nobility should instead have taken a leaf from the pages of Rousseau and concentrated their efforts around localised, regionalist struggles against the French nation-state and the modernising projects the French revolutionaries.

Federalism, the Vendée, and the Counter-Revolutionary Tradition

The counter-revolutionary tradition in France largely consists of two elements: The political theory of aristocrats and monarchists condemning the revolution, and the popular counter-revolutionary uprising and protracted civil war in the Vendée.

Counter-revolutionary theory of the Revolution is often associated with the monarchist theories of Louis de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre. It should be remembered, however, that the counter-revolution was not first and foremost a royalist endeavour. In fact, in the initial phases of the Revolution, only some supported the king and the absolutist system of old regime France. Figures of what became the right—that is, figures who had a share in some of the most powerful non-royal bodies of the old regime: the *parlements* and the Gallican Church—were extremely critical of the old regime. For decades, these people had led the opposition to the monarchical system and had sought to curb the powers of the king and retain or increase the power of the institutions they themselves dominated: the regional *parlements*, the seigneurial courts, seigneurial dues (as opposed to national taxes), and the Church and monasteries. This conflict between the central, royal apparatus and local bodies of power

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58   De Benoist is here quoting Gaultier Bès, cf. de Benoist, 'Conserve What?' 136.

was the main political conflict structuring French political life of the eighteenth century. Thus, it was only when the entirety of the old regime, including the feudal structures of power, starting coming down between 1789 and 1791 that the aristocratic opposition began to rally around the royalist cause. And even then, it was clear that counter-revolutionary politicians and intellectuals mainly supported the king for strategic reasons and that their vision of the good society and concomitant analysis of what went wrong was different from that of people surrounding the comte de Provence (future Louis XVIII) and the comte d'Artois (future Charles X), i.e. future ultra-royalists and legitimists.[59]

In his contribution to the 'Lumières' edition of *Nouvelle école*, Pierre de Meuse, a member of the Action française and thus more closely affiliated with a Maurrist perspective on French nationalism, attempts to provide a synthesis of the intellectual heritage of the counter-revolution. Here, he stresses three elements.

The first is 'authority', which is not to be seen as God-given but resting on strength and dominance. The counter-revolutionary tradition, as de Meuse sees it, does not rely on a divine right theory of authority. But nor does it see authority as emanating from the people. Rather, whoever takes power does so justly, since power is legitimated by what is seen as strength and natural superiority. A clear authoritarian structure with a dominant class and with private authority (as for instance male domination over women) is thus fully legitimate. Authority, as de Meuse puts it, 'is good because of what it does and not because of what it is.' De Meuse furthermore emphasises how this conception of power, as something which is not legitimate because of the way it comes into existence, is a core of the counter-revolutionary tradition from aristocrats like Montlosier and monarchists like de Bonald and de Maistre to people like Carl Schmitt.[60]

The second element is 'tradition'. De Meuse emphasises the links between the counter-revolution and conservatism—especially Burke—by its emphasis on the legitimacy and inherent wisdom of traditional institutions (as opposed to the supposedly empty metaphysics of universal principles). However, he also emphasises the particular French tradition of regionalism. As de Meuse argues, different counter-revolutionaries have different views on what tradition

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59   For the counter-revolutionary tradition and its political theories, see Paul Beik, *The French Revolution Seen from the Right* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956); Jacques Godechot, *The Counter-Revolution: Doctrine and Action 1789–1804* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); and Jacques de Saint Victor, *La première contre-révolution, 1789–1791* (Paris: PUF, 2010).

60   Pierre de Meuse, 'L'héritage intellectuel de la contre-révolution,' *Nouvelle école*, no. 65 (2016), 64.

to restore—'for Maistre it is saintly history; for Adam Müller it is the Middle Ages largely idealised; for Maurras it is Greek antiquity; for Bonald it is the seventeenth century; for Evola it is mythical Hyperborea'—but 'tradition', however idealised or mythologised, is nonetheless an essential feature of the counter-revolutionary tradition.[61]

The third and final element is 'liberty'. The counter-revolutionary tradition has little room for individual liberty, as de Meuse points out. Rather, it understands liberty as something that is realised by belonging to and taking up one's place within traditional structures. De Meuse here points to Bonald's invention of sociology, which treat humans first and foremost as social beings rather than as atomised individuals. For the counter-revolutionary tradition, to view humans 'sociologically' has normative function.

> It is because man only exists in relation to society that there is inequality amongst men, [that] all countries will be founded on social hierarchies, not just between individuals but between groups justified by the pre-eminence and reproduction of the superior group, which ensures the continuation of the public good. In the same way, family, in all of its genealogical dimension, is justified by the necessity of procuring continuation across the transience of human life. Individual choice is nothing compared to the absolute obligation towards the generations.[62]

Tradition, power as authority, and a sociological understanding are thus the three elements that constitute the counter-revolutionary tradition. According to de Meuse, this understanding underpins the political ideas of far-right intellectuals. However, as de Meuse sees it, these crucial insights have yet to coalesce into a singular political ideology. It is therefore the task of intellectuals like himself and de Benoist to cobble together this ideology out of bits and pieces offered by history, and to explain what the movements of their forbearers—such as the French Counter-revolution or the German conservative revolution—were really about. That is, what they themselves could not fully understand or articulate. As he puts it: 'Instead of carrying out a pure and simple return to tradition as it presented itself in the past, tradition must be reinvented.'[63]

In addition to counter-revolutionary theory, the *Nouvelle école* focuses on the single-most important manifestation of popular counter-revolution: The

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61   Ibid., 65.
62   Ibid., 67.
63   Ibid., 70.

uprising in the Vendée. This uprising was a regionalist revolt against the central government between 1793 and 1796, which saw the French army and republican volunteers fighting local guerrillas and groups supported by emigres nobles, the British and the Catholic Church. This is where most of the atrocities of the French Revolution took place—including execution by mass drowning—and where an estimated two hundred thousand people were killed (the total French population was about twenty-eight million at the time of the Revolution).

The Vendée has been the focus of intense debates in French historiography with historians like Reynald Secher defining it as a 'genocide'.[64] While picked up by partisans of the right such as Pierre Chaunu—who as early as the 1970s championed theories of a demographic 'white suicide', which is also now a talking point for the New Right—this definition of the Vendée as a genocide has been decisively rejected by the leading historians on the subject.[65] In his contribution to the 'Lumières' edition of *Nouvelle école*, Jean-Joël Brégeon, who has published work in collaboration with Reynald Secher, and who himself sees the Vendée as 'veritable politics of extermination', gives a (tendentious) overview of the historiography on the Vendée and concludes that 'today the debates [on whether the Vendée was a genocide] have lost their ferocity. For a simple reason: The extermination of the peoples in rebellion is a recognised historical fact because the archives have now spoken.'[66]

This is downright false, but the Vendée nicely illustrates the New Right's understanding of the French Revolution. It is a regionalist revolt in reaction

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64   Reynald Secher, *Le génocide Franco-français: La Vendée-vengé* (Paris: PUF, 1986).

65   For Chaunu's theories see *La peste blanche* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) as well as his introduction to the English translation of François Gendron's *The Gilded Youth of Thermidor* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993). For the more respected historiographical assessments of the Vendée, see Jean-Clément Martin, *La Vendée et la France: 1789–1799* (Paris: Seuil, 1987) and *La Vendée et la mémoire: 1800–1980* (Paris: Seuil, 1989); Peter McPhee, '[Book review of] Reynald Secher, A French Genocide: The Vendée,' *H-France Review* 4, no. 26 (2004): 93–96, available at https://www.h-france.net/vol4reviews/vol4no26McPhee.pdf; D.M.G. Sutherland, 'Review: A French Genocide: The Vendée by Reynald Secher,' *The English Historical Review* 119, no. 480 (2004): 236–237; Timothy Tackett, 'Interpreting the Terror,' *French Historical Studies* 24, no. 4 (2001): 569–578; David Bell, 'The French Revolution, the Vendée, and Genocide,' *Journal of Genocide Research* 22, no. 1 (2020): 19–25.

66   Jean-Joël Brégeon, 'L'historiographie des guerres de Vendée,' *Nouvelle école*, no. 65 (2016), 58–59. In reviewing Brégeon's published book, which purported to give an overview of the historiography of the French Revolution, the respected historian Michael Biard ascertained that he 'sincerely pity the unfortunate students who inadvertently took up the task of reading this work.' See Michael Biard, '[Book review of] Jean-Joël Brégeon, Écrire la Révolution française: Deux siècles d'historiographie,' *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 366 (2011): 181–183.

to the modernising, state-building project of the Jacobins. It formed the reactionary contingency of the so-called 'Federalist Revolt'—a series of revolts that broke out across France in response to Jacobin reforms and mobilisation of the war effort. Although reactionary in its aims of preserving a traditional form of life, the Vendée was nonetheless a popular revolt, which managed to mobilise large parts of local society. Finally, the Vendéens, in the eyes of the New Right, were a 'people' who fought for their right to live in a traditional way, which is why the New Right finds it meaningful to discuss this civil war in terms of 'genocide'.

In his own writings, de Benoist draws on both elements of the French counter-revolution. On the one hand, he engages authoritarian conception of power, with a traditionalist view of history, and with sociological / embedded conception of freedom. On the other hand, he stresses the necessity of a popular and 'democratic' ultra-nationalism. But the point is that, for de Benoist, there is no contradiction. In a key text, 'Democracy Revisited', de Benoist argues that democracy is in fact ingrained in traditional, European society. 'In Indo-European societies, kings were usually elected,' de Benoist writes before he goes on to mention the electoral processes of the Germanic tribes describes by Tacitus.[67] He furthermore lauds the traditions of the Northernes: 'The Scandinavian democracy is very old and one could trace its origins to the Viking era', whereas the 'oldest Western parliament' is 'Iceland's *allthing*'.[68] Crucially, this tradition includes France. 'For a long time in France the crown remained both elective and hereditary', and 'until the French Revolution, kings ruled with the aid of parliaments whose executive power was considerable.'[69] This is precisely the argument that permeates almost every treatise of the French counter-revolutionaries during the time of revolution. But for de Benoist, this becomes a popular, even democratic, tradition as he conveniently paves over the fact that these were oligarchic institutions through which a small, male, land-holding nobility dominated the rest of society.

Nonetheless, this 'democratic' tradition is what separates Indo-Europeans from other peoples—'unlike the Orient, absolute despotism has been rare in Europe.'[70] What is more, it is a federalist tradition. As de Benoist stresses, the *allthing* was a 'federal assembly', and so were, in a certain sense, the French Estates General.[71] The 'democratic' tradition and the counter-revolutionary

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67   Alain de Benoist, 'Democracy Revisited,' *Telos*, no. 93 (1993), 66–67.
68   Ibid., 67–68.
69   Ibid., 67.
70   Ibid., 66.
71   Ibid., 67.

tradition are in other words identical: They both draw, in de Benoist's myth-
ical view, on a deep-rooted Indo-European tradition according to which the
freemen of tribes—the natural representatives of society—elect their leaders,
and in which clan leaders meet in federate assemblies to decide on disputes
and matters of common interest.

Conclusion: A Federalist Fascism

As Alberto Spektorowski has pointed out, when carving out his vision for
the future of Europe, de Benoist holds that 'true European sovereignty can
only be attained by a regionalization of large continental assemblies.'[72] Such
federal continental assemblies are the political superstructure to govern an
'ethnic diversity within a federation of European ethnicities, banned to non-
Europeans.'[73] Belonging to this community is partly determined by genetics
and partly by culture.[74]

De Benoist contrasts this model to that of Jacobinism. As he sees it, there are
fundamentally only two principles that govern this world, two models of poli-
tics: Jacobinism and federalism. Jacobinism, in de Benoist's view, 'corresponds
historically to the most extreme ideology of the modern state', which is an ide-
ology 'that seeks to render everything within the same territory—political and
cultural unity, linguistic or ethnic—homothetic by way of a central power that
holds exclusive sovereign power.'[75] This Jacobinism of course corresponds to
a specific historical event, but, in de Benoist's theory, it also corresponds to a
conception, 'which is much older'—'notably the emergence in the sixteenth
century, with Jean Bodin, of a new theory of sovereignty.'[76] What is more, in the
international system of nation states and in the ideology of universal human
rights, it continues until this day.

It is in counter-position to Jacobinism that de Benoist's posits his ethnoplu-
ralist federalism. De Benoist describes his own position as 'not a nationalist
but a federalist'.[77] This is partially true, but only because de Benoist's ultra-
nationalism does not overlap with much traditional nationalism, such as that

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72   Alberto Spektorowski, 'Fascism and Post-National Europe: Drieu La Rochelle and Alain de
      Benoist,' *Theory, Culture & Society* 33, no. 1 (2016): 128.
73   Alberto Spektorowski, 'Ethnoregionalism: The Intellectual New Right and the Lega Nord,'
      The Global Review of Ethnopolitics 3 (2003): 61.
74   De Benoist and Champetier, 'The French New Right in the Year 2000,' 122 f.
75   De Benoist, 'Les principes du fédéralisme.'
76   Ibid.
77   Quoted in Griffin, 'Between Metapolitics and "Apoliteia",' 52, footnote 2.

of Maurras. Instead, he seeks to revive a mythical Indo-European people and all its regional instantiations. This is why I believe we best understand it by describing it as 'federalist fascism'.

As always, de Benoist has been eclectic when looking for sources of inspiration that can be used to bolster his federalist ideal. Throughout his writings one may find approving references to the 'federalism' of writers from old to new, and from left to right. From the early-modern critic of Bodin, Johannes Althusius, to the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the austro-Marxist Otto Bauer, and the syndicalist Édouard Berth, as well as from conservatives such as Alexis de Tocqueville and Ernest Renan to fascists such as Pierre Drieu la Rochelle.[78] In this context it should be mentioned that Armin Mohler, who provides the link between the German Conservative Revolution and the New Right, and whom de Benoist befriended and greatly admired, once described federalism as one of the 'fundamentals of [revolutionary] conservatism'.[79]

With Jacobinism as the main enemy, it becomes important for the New Right to draw out a quasi-mythical, quasi-historical counter-movement. This they do by cobbling together quite disparate materials: criticisms of *doux commerce* and Enlightenment theories, a counter-revolutionary reading of Rousseau, appreciation of the feudal structures of the *ancien régime* and its institutional bodies such as the *parlements* and the Estates General, elements of French counter-revolutionary theory, and emotional investment in the cause of the Vendéens and the portrayal of the civil war as a genocide that established (Jacobin) historiography supposedly paves over or even condones. Scientifically speaking, most of the New Right's readings are sketchy at best, and to speak of a current of continuous federalist traditionalism is pure invention. But this matters little for the New Right. As de Benoist and Champetier put it in the New Right 'manifesto', the rebirth of man will be accomplished by 'returning to some founding myths, and by the disappearance of false dichotomies'.[80] In this sense, the myth of the French counter-revolution as the embodiment of federalist opposition to Jacobinism and the project of modernity is a weapon in the struggle for a federalist fascism to come.

78   Alain de Benoist, 'The First Federalist: Johannes Althusius,' *Telos*, no. 118 (2000), 25–58; De Benoist, 'Jacobinisme ou fédéralisme?'; De Benoist, 'Principes du fédéralisme.'; Alain de Benoist, *Édouard Berth ou le socialisme héroïque* (*Sorel, Maurras, Lénine*) (Grez-sur-Loing: Pardès, 2013); Spektorowski, 'Fascism and Post-National Europe.'

79   Armin Mohler, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932: Ein Handbuch* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 236. My translation.

80   De Benoist and Champetier, 'The French New Right in the Year 2000,' 132.

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