

make sense of moral disagreement. When you and I disagree about the truth of *p*, what is going on is not just that *p* is true *according to me* and *p* is false *according to you*. In addition, you think that I am mistaken to believe that *p*, however consistently I endorse it given my values and aspirations. Intuitively, it is strange to say that we are equals just because we treat each other as such, and that “[i]f we collectively stop viewing and treating each other as basic equals, *then we will stop being basic equals*” (p. 174). This view fails to make full contact with the seriousness of the commitment to BE.

Many of us would say that people are basic equals even if some (or all) fail to view and treat them as such. We do not take BE to be something we create with our attitudes, but something our attitudes should reflect. These remarks line up with objectivist views in metaethics. There is underway a revival of them in moral philosophy (e.g. in recent work by Russ Shafer-Landau, Derek Parfit, and David Enoch). An objectivist approach would also motivate further exploration of what Sagar calls the “foundationalist” strategy of defense of BE. It is hasty to think that it leads to a dead end. Work on it has started quite recently and could still bear fruits. However, the debate must continue, and Sagar’s book is an important contribution to it.

**Contesting the Far Right: A Psychoanalytic and Feminist Critical Theory Approach.** By Claudia Leeb. New York: Columbia University Press, 2024. 336p. \$140.00 cloth, \$35.00 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592724002548

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In *Contesting the Far Right*, Claudia Leeb reframes a series of classical perplexities of far-right, fascist, and populist politics. If the bases of far-right politics are rationally economic, then why are its strongest followers often middle class? If, on the other hand, the appeal of far-right politics lies fundamentally in questions of identity, race, gender, or psyche, then why now? What is it about this historical conjuncture in the waning-neoliberal West that animates such a marked resurgence? Finally, what are the techniques of propaganda, leadership, action, and theater that structure far-right groups and how programmatic or value-laden are they (and, in this, how different from seemingly comparable genres of left-wing politics or populisms)?

Leeb builds on (and, in some cases, newly translates) the writings of Sigmund Freud, Theodor Adorno, and Else Frenkel-Brunswik in order to reanimate a long, contested tradition in Frankfurt School critical theory that puts psychoanalysis in dialectical relation to Marxism. In doing so, she offers, through nested theory and case studies from the U.S. and Austria, a specifically analytic vision of the

meaning and techniques of far-right politics — and of what might be required to contest them.

First, Leeb argues that irrational socioeconomic conditions can animate and redirect tendencies in unconscious life. The fetishization of structurally unachievable economic success under neoliberal capitalism creates the material and ideological bases for an unbearable tension between what Freud calls the ego and the ego ideal, between who one is and who one believes one would have to be to be whole and to thrive.

Second, the far right offers leaders and structures that promise to undo these tensions at the level of psychoanalytic technique. Trumpism, for example, functions less through identification (*I could have a beer with him*) than through a psychoanalytic concept called “introjection” (53). This way of internalizing both the conscious perfection (*the most manly man in existence*) and the unconscious unimpressiveness and flaws of the leader deflates this gap between ego and ego ideal. This loss of the demand for inner regulation that fidelity to reality would normally require is amplified by techniques of far-right leadership and ideology, which lessens the hold of the juridical agency called the “superego” over libidinal bonds, aggressive drives, and unconscious racism and sexism. The leader, in turn, need not be consciously aware of such introjective techniques, but he must fit a profile of narcissism, which Adorno identified as the paradoxical appeal of the “great little man” (76). What occurs for the follower is not an unleashing of fundamental aggression, but rather a choreographed, artificial regression and disinhibition of the legacies of violent attitudes that they find in their own family, social, political, national, and colonial histories. This binds followers to the leader consciously and unconsciously, making defection increasingly impossible. As Leeb demonstrates in a striking chapter on far-right humor, jokes in leaderless groups today can function as propaganda by playing a similar role.

What is fundamental for Leeb’s understanding of the far-right psyche, compared to regnant political science frames, is not its supposed love of order, homogeneity, in-group dominance, nor intolerance of difference, but rather that it is motivated by the drive to lessen psychic tension, which operates in large part on the unconscious level. Thus, she follows recent research that correlates far-right views with the experience of or fear of significant loss of identity. But Leeb argues (e.g. in her reading of Arlie Russell Hochschild’s *Strangers in Their Own Land*) that this existential identity threat operates not with reference to an unscarred individual or collective self that we might reclaim, but rather in the refusal to mourn this possibility of wholeness, and thus, in the domain of fantasy compelled by contemporary crises of capitalism in the West.

Third, Leeb contends that the state of disinhibition made possible through far-right politics offers real pleasures. It is a hypnotic dream state whose refrain is at once

reality-denying and reality-making — within the far-right topology, everyone else is asleep, and we are the only ones awake. To illustrate this, she distills an unexpected dimension of the Austrian case: the promise of indefatigability, which cuts against the economic torpor and taboo-laden exhaustion of daily life post-Holocaust while also dissolving questions about the actual ends of far-right politics in Austria through a sheer enervation of agency. In a jarring chapter on the Austrian documentary, *And there we are, In the middle* (2014), Leeb reconstructs a performance of violence — neo-Nazi youth shooting pellets from machine guns (163) in Austria — that is both threatening and less serious than it first seems. In this, the use of reality-denying parody is both knowing and in abeyance of any stable claim to conviction, and it serves to dangerously unite villagers across the generations by enacting their resentment about the pieties of memory culture.

Fourth, Leeb contends that far-right politics worsen the economic conditions of precarity that drive it, pursuing the further destruction of the welfare state. While violence is projected outward towards vulnerable others and enemies, it is also turned inward. The only answer, according to Leeb, will come in working through the false desires, illusions of wholeness and disavowals of reality that such politics exploit in order to inaugurate a politics that directly addresses material sources of discontent and histories of violence.

While psychoanalysis has provoked many important genres of criticism, the social sciences — including political science — have also historically (re)turned to psychoanalysis during times of what seems to be profound political irrationality, such as that proffered by far-right mobilization, when the epistemic guardrails of rational-actor theories founder. Leeb's book offers a brilliant and powerfully ethical introduction to the psychoanalytic perspective, while also responding to the field's previous criticisms by engaging with a new generation of psychosocial, feminist, antiracist, and anticolonial research.

The most difficult, immanent critiques of psychoanalysis in the study of politics concern the (dis)analogy between therapeutics and political transformation. This problem, a sign of a truly ambitious diagnostic study, becomes important at the close of Leeb's book, when she offers a program of deradicalization, by way of what Freud called "working-through." We are, she writes, "subjects-in-outline" (241) who must, together, craft "reflective embodied spaces" (237) where we can learn to do without our illusions of wholeness. This work, it has to be said, sounds a lot like psychoanalytic therapy — which is not disqualifying, especially because Leeb considers the limits of "mass analysis" carefully (244).

But it does raise questions. For example, within the spaces of this work—for Leeb, this includes not only the clinic but also the social movement, the worker's center, the polity—who occupies the analytic position, with its attendant questions of hierarchy and epistemic power? Can this work be said to be reliably without illusions in its method and its *telos*, thereby aligning nicely with socialist political economy? Or does it, *must it*, retain some connection to the non-etiological hypnotic and surreal, to the dream-world which has characterized the genealogy of psychoanalysis? Or perhaps, to put it differently, should the Left really aspire to work entirely without illusion, with its complex relations to dreams and utopia, simply because the Right abuses those imaginative tendencies?

On this front, Leeb sometimes cedes hypnosis, a domain of late-19<sup>th</sup> century research attentive to nascent ideas of the unconscious life and thus to a whole terrain of otherwise unreachable suffering, to the Right too starkly. This brings to mind a joke among historians about Freud's early training as a hypnotist: Thank goodness Freud was such an inept hypnotist; otherwise, he might never have needed to discover psychoanalysis! It is probably for the best, according to Leeb, that the same might be said of the Left — that it is unskilled at such seductions, not least because of its own principled, if often unfulfilled, commitments to organizational democracy, and therefore it will not be able to sway adherents to the kinds of hypnotic temptations of inexhaustibility that the far-right offers. Instead, the Left will be forced (thank goodness!) to undertake the real work of "touching" (241) the scarred history which has forged present-day capitalism, so that these social relations might be overthrown and remade. And yet, for psychoanalysis—whose genesis in and work with the occult is perhaps more ambivalent than Leeb allows—this laborious project requires not only the rational overcoming or concealment of the unconscious dimensions of human life. These domains, which are not just fearful and aggressive but also loving spaces, require plural forms of translation, becoming, and narration as we direct them towards collective freedom and undertake to build the world in which our opacities and weaknesses are decoupled from material humiliation, the psychosocial bind that underwrites far-right politics. That such work, which requires endurance and candor about failure, can be undertaken without illusion seems to me both a promise and a receding horizon for psychoanalytic political thought. It enters the space of a historically inflected question about the many possible relations between illusions and freedom dreams. In Leeb's hands, at a time of global far-right resurgence, psychoanalysis offers scholars an indispensable way to pose this question anew.