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Between Neoliberalism and Fascism: Louis Rougier, Race, and the Ends of Neoliberal Ideology

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Abstract

This article argues that a shared investment in racial hierarchy has historically formed a key point of convergence between neoliberal and far-right ideologies. To make this argument, the paper develops a close analysis of the career and works of Louis Rougier (1889–1982). Known principally as a prominent early free-market advocate who helped to organise the neoliberal movement in the interwar period, Rougier stands out from many other neoliberals by his lifelong connections to the French far right. The paper maps out these connections, focusing in particular on Rougier's links, first, to neo-fascist circles during and after the Second World War and, second, to the *Nouvelle Droite* as it emerged in the late 1960s. It then reconstructs Rougier's views on race, showing that he saw racial variables as a decisive factor in the historical ascendancy of Western civilisation. Late in his life he took a keen interest in a body of racialist pseudo-science to support this view. The final section of the paper explores the ideological affinity between far-right and neoliberal ideology, arguing that Rougier's signally racialised conception of Western civilisation was so closely aligned with both worldviews it was able to serve as a conceptual bridge. The paper concludes that this ideological affinity positions the far right as a more or less organic ally to neoliberalism.

> Among the various families of primates [...] who began to develop around 500,000 years ago, some remained stuck in a state of savagery, others in one of barbarism, while others passed through the Copper Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age to reach higher types of culture and organization. Human geography now provides us with a picture of the range of all levels of civilization, spread out in space. But only certain branches of the white race have crossed the threshold of the scientific and industrial revolution by themselves. (Rougier 1969a, 427-428)[1]

Introduction

In September 1957, Louis Rougier (1889–1982) attended his first Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) conference. After some internal debate, he had finally been invited to join the Society in November 1956, having been barred from membership for a decade because of his close links to the collaborationist Vichy regime during World War Two (Burgin, 2012; Denord, 2001; Dyson, 2021; Steiner, 2007). This is notable given Rougier's singularly important role, in the late 1930s, in shaping the nascent neoliberal movement into a lasting international thought collective (Mirowski & Plehwe 2009). The organiser and host of the 1938 Walter Lippmann Colloquium in Paris, the editor of a book series that released French editions of many of the founding texts of the neoliberal tradition, and a central figure in the networks that in 1947 were to sire the MPS (Schulz-Forberg 2014), Rougier undoubtedly ranks among such figures as Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, William Rappard, and Wilhelm Röpke as one of the founding fathers of the neoliberal movement (Denord 2001; 2007).[2]

Earlier in 1957, mere months after he formally joined the MPS, Rougier published an essay in the winter issue of *Défense de l'Occident*, a periodical edited by Maurice Bardèche that was positioned on the neo-fascist right (Gautier 2017). The issue was dedicated to the post-war *épuration* (purification), which saw many thousands of French civil servants, political figures, and academics who had collaborated with the Nazis or worked for the wartime Vichy regime ousted from their professional roles. Having himself been made to retire from his professorship for his wartime activities, Rougier's contribution developed a principled critique of the *épuration*, which he considered unlawful and unjust (Rougier

[1] Unless otherwise indicated in the bibliography, all translations of French and German sources are by the authors.

[2] For the purposes of this article, neoliberalism is understood as a tradition of thought that spans from the interwar period until the present day. Neoliberalism was articulated by a well-organised international intellectual movement that centred on the MPS and a sprawling ecosystem of free-market think tanks. Following established precedent, this article understands neoliberals to be those thinkers who were situated within this movement and contributed to its intellectual or organisational development (see Mirowski & Plehwe 2009).

1957). This opinion was shared by the issue's other authors, which included known neo-fascists like Bardèche as well as former Vichy officials like Xavier Vallat, Commissioner-General for Jewish Questions between 1941 and 1942 (Joly 2001). It was their reputations as well as his own that Rougier was intent on salvaging.

On the face of it, these two vignettes present us with a puzzling contradiction. Neoliberal thought is commonly understood to have been fiercely opposed to fascism. On this reading, the early neoliberals, many of whom were of Jewish descent and were forced to flee Europe in the 1930s and 40s,[3] defined their own theoretical agenda in express opposition to fascism, which they rejected as a totalitarian philosophy that unshackles state power and crushes liberty underfoot. This interpretation is put forward not just by contemporary neoliberals narrating the history of their own movement (e.g. Hartwell 1995) but also by many critics of neoliberal ideology, for whom fascism constituted a key component of what Michel Foucault once termed neoliberalism's 'field of adversity' (2008, 106; see also Biebricher 2019; Brown 2019). But if neoliberalism was always opposed to fascism, its historical counterpoint, then why would so prominent a neoliberal as Rougier publish in a periodical known for its fascist credentials to rise to the defence of Vichy officials?

The broader problem confronted here is that of how to interpret the relationship between neoliberalism and the far right (Callison & Manfredi 2020; Davidson & Saull 2017; Saidel 2023). This issue has become particularly acute in recent years, as resurgent nationalism has become a global phenomenon, seemingly mounting a challenge from the right of the electoral spectrum to neoliberalism's hegemony. As a recent body of scholarship has begun to argue, however, there are many continuities between the resurgent far right and the neoliberal project (Maher 2024; Saull 2018; Slobodian 2019; Toscano 2023). For Toscano, for example, if neoliberal statecraft always contained the echoes of fascist reason, the resurgence of far-right formations we are witnessing today should be understood as the 'reflexive affirmation of neoliberalism's authoritarian underside' (2023, 78). Slobodian (2019) has made a similar claim about the so-called "Alt Right," arguing that its intellectual history passes through the neoliberal movement and that, consequently, it should be understood as significantly continuous with, rather than a rejection of, the neoliberal order.

As Maher (2024) has observed, much of this scholarship is marked by a presentist orientation, often implicitly portraying neoliberalism's rightward turn as a recent development. This risks effacing the historical linkages that have always existed between the neoliberal movement and the far right and, in doing so, giving credence to the

[3] Early neoliberals of Jewish descent included Ludwig von Mises, Michael Polanyi, Milton Friedman, S. Herbert Frankel, Karl Popper, and Stefan T. Possony, among others. Popper, Mises, Polanyi, and Possony had to flee continental Europe during the Nazi period. Both Mises and Possony are reported to have escaped with Rougier's assistance (Berndt & Marion 2006, 50-51).

mythology that neoliberalism, at least in its early iterations, was constitutively opposed to fascism. Maher, by contrast, argues that 'a sympathy and even appreciation of fascism formed a minor but significant strand of early neoliberal thought' (2024, 394). Citing Rougier as one of his examples, Maher concludes that neoliberal and fascist ideology have always been more compatible than this mythological narrative permits.

We seek to develop this line of argument further, using Rougier's career and work as a case study to identify points of ideological convergence between neoliberal and far-right ideology. Our analysis moves along two axes, one historical and the other ideological. First, using historical methods we trace out Rougier's various and shifting connections to the French far right and identify some of the key intellectual networks to which he was affiliated at different stages of his career. Though certainly not himself a fascist, Rougier routinely moved in far-right circles, where he rubbed shoulders with Pétainists, neo-fascists, scientific racists, eugenicists, nationalists, and other right-wing extremists. This relationship culminated in the 1960s, when Rougier developed especially close ties with the so-called *Nouvelle Droite* (ND), or the French New Right, and its leading intellectuals, most notably including Alain de Benoist (Daubuis 2007; Taguieff 1994). Here our argument draws upon and contributes to a handful of studies that speak to Rougier's relationship to the French far right (Berndt & Marion 2006; Dard 2007; Daubuis 2007; Lamy 2016).[4]

Second, on the basis of this historical evidence we explore and theorise the conceptual convergence between neoliberalism and far-right ideology. We will argue that there has always existed not just individual or organisational proximity but philosophical overlap between neoliberal thought and the far right. While genealogically distinct and frequently at odds, these two traditions converge on a number of themes, including their fierce opposition to majoritarian democracy, socialism, and egalitarianism as well as a shared theoretical investment in Eurocentrism and racial hierarchy. We foreground the latter, drawing on a growing literature on the racial dimension of neoliberal thought (Cornelissen 2020; Kundnani 2023; Shilliam 2021; Slobodian 2023; Whyte 2019). Though our initial focus is on Rougier's conception of race and its position within his broader worldview, in the final section of the article we broaden our perspective to reflect, albeit briefly, on the relation between neoliberalism and far-right ideology in more general terms. Here our argument is that far from being an outlier within the neoliberal movement, Rougier's conception of race was shared by many other neoliberals, some of whom followed his example in forging enduring linkages between the neoliberal movement and far-right networks. We conclude that if there exists a strong ideological affinity between neoliberal ideology and the far right, this is because both traditions are constitutively racialised.

[4] Because it remains overwhelmingly Francophone, one of our secondary aims is to introduce some of the key findings of this scholarship into English-speaking scholarship on neoliberalism.

To avoid being misinterpreted, we should emphasise that we have no intention of depicting Rougier as a fascist or claiming that he can be reduced to a far-right thinker, much less of collapsing the categories of neoliberalism and fascism. This amounts to a form of critical overreach that is not supported by the historical record. Equally imprecise, however, is the fantasy that neoliberalism is fundamentally opposed to fascism. As we seek to show through the case of Rougier, there existed manifold linkages, both organisational and theoretical, between the neoliberal movement and the far right. By mapping out these linkages we hope to offer some empirical specificity and theoretical depth to the debate on neoliberalism's relation to the far right and show that, in the final analysis, these two traditions share certain key motifs in common that have historically constituted fertile grounds not just for strategic alliance but for enduring ideological affinity.

Between Neoliberalism and Fascism

Critics of neoliberal ideology know Louis Rougier primarily as one of the founding fathers of neoliberalism (Denord 2007). Principally as the convenor of the 1938 Walter Lippmann Colloquium in Paris, widely viewed as a forerunner event to the inaugural conference of the MPS in 1947, Rougier was one of the driving forces behind the international networks that were to mature into the neoliberal movement (Audier & Reinhoudt 2018; Schulz-Forberg & Olsen 2014). Rougier was already a prominent figure in proto-neoliberal circles in the years leading up to 1938, however. He was in close contact with many of the most prominent early neoliberals, including Mises, Hayek, and Röpke. Over the course of the 1930s he frequently lectured at William Rappard's Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, then one of the central nodes in the movement's fledgling network (Schulz-Forberg 2020; Slobodian 2018). Two of his most influential books, *Les mystiques politiques contemporaines* (Rougier 1935) and *Les mystiques économiques* (Rougier 1938), were based on lectures delivered in Geneva.

In 1937, Rougier was appointed the lead editor at the newly established Éditions de la Librairie de Médicis, which soon became the leading French publisher of neoliberal texts, carrying some of Rougier's own books, including *Les mystiques économiques*, as well as French translations of books by Mises, Hayek, Lionel Robbins, and many other prominent neoliberals (Burgin 2012; Denord 2007). It also carried *La Cité libre*, the French translation of Walter Lippmann's *The Good Society*, the book that prompted the 1938 colloquium (Audier & Reinhoudt 2018).

Though its catalogue was decidedly neoliberal, Librairie de Médicis had its roots in the pre-war far right. It was financed by Marcel Bourgeois, a wealthy far-right industrialist who some years earlier had given financial support to the Parti Populaire Français (PPF), a fascist party run by Jacques Doriot (Audier 2012). Bourgeois's support for the PPF

originated in his fierce opposition to the socialist left, which was also his reason for founding Librairie de Médicis. He envisioned a press that could contribute to the struggle against socialism by influencing France's ruling elites by means of intellectual 'propaganda' (Denord 2007, 132), leaving it to more popular movements and publications to influence the masses. To run the press, Bourgeois hired Marie-Thérèse Génin, who also had a background in right-wing politics and who some years later became a member of the MPS herself (Denord 2001). Rougier was in agreement with Bourgeois's approach to intellectual struggle and made sure to invite him to the 1938 Lippmann colloquium (Audier & Reinhoudt 2018). When, on the fifth day of the colloquium, Rougier motioned to create an international network of neoliberal thinkers, it was Bourgeois who came up with its moniker: Centre International d'Études pour la Rénovation du Libéralisme (CIRL). Though the CIRL was short-lived, being forced to close once the Nazis invaded France two years after its establishment (Berndt & Marion 2005, 52), the colloquium unanimously elected Bourgeois to be one of its six organising committee members (Audier & Reinhoudt 2018, 188).

As the point of contact between Bourgeois and the nascent free-market movement, Rougier served not just as a key organiser and thinker of early neoliberalism but also as a broker between neoliberal intellectuals keen to spread their ideas and a far-right industrialist who saw in their work a potent basis for anti-socialist propaganda. Insofar as the Paris colloquium marked the 'birth of neoliberalism' (Audier & Reinhoudt 2018), far-right capital fulfilled the role of midwife.

As the CIRL shows, Rougier's efforts to mould the Paris colloquium into a lasting network were thwarted by the outbreak of war. This marked a decisive turning point in his career. Having long moved in elite circles, soon after France's surrender to Germany in 1940 Rougier established a formal relationship with the Vichy leadership and became embroiled in a high-profile diplomatic case that ended up seriously damaging his reputation. In November of that year, Philippe Pétain, the head of the Vichy regime, sent Rougier to meet Winston Churchill for diplomatic purposes (Berndt & Marion 2006, 54). However, what exactly happened in London was subject to much controversy (see Jackson 2023). In a 1945 book, *Les Accords Pétain–Churchill: Histoire d'une mission secrète*, Rougier claimed that he was sent there to negotiate an agreement between Churchill and Pétain which involved the relaxing of the British blockade on France in exchange for the promise that France would restart hostilities against Nazi Germany (Rougier 1945a). This claim was vehemently denied by the British authorities, who reported that Churchill did meet Rougier but that no peace treaty was brokered. In their eyes, Rougier was an informant, not an official diplomat.

One of the aims of *Les Accords Pétain–Churchill* was to salvage Pétain's reputation. Rougier's argument was that Pétain had surrendered for strategic purposes, not because he was a collaborationist. In the process, however, Rougier irremediably tied himself to a

revisionist narrative, that of Pétain's '*double jeu*' (double game), which was popular amongst dwindling Pétainist and far-right circles after the war. It has since been established that Rougier tampered with the documents he produced in support of his claims (Frank, 1992; Berndt & Marion, 2006; Denord, 2007; Jackson, 2023) and, generally, grossly exaggerated his role in the war effort (Dard, 2007). Yet this did not prevent him from reiterating his claims throughout the years in several subsequent editions of the book. His reputation and credibility, both in France and abroad, were greatly tarnished as a result (Dewulf & Simons 2021). None were more vexed by his claims than the British, which might explain the reluctance of a Lionel Robbins to let the French philosopher join the MPS in the years following the war (Denord 2007, 232; Steiner 2007).

Domestically, Rougier suffered serious professional ostracism. He had obtained a reputation as a Pétainist during his time among French exiles in New York, where he lived from 1941 until 1947 (Mehlman 2000; Berndt & Marion 2006 56-71; Denord 2007, 161). During his New York years Rougier antagonised his fellow émigrés, who were overwhelmingly supporters of De Gaulle, by advocating for the relaxation of the allied blockade of France in a number of articles written for French exiles' journals like *Pour La Victoire* (Berndt & Marion 2006, 60). While he made the case against the blockade on humanitarian grounds, conjuring images of starving children in occupied France, this was interpreted in Gaullist circles as undermining the Allied war effort (Berndt & Marion 2006, 60). Additionally, Rougier adopted an increasingly hostile stance towards Gaullism, having become wary of what he considered De Gaulle's bonapartist tendencies and the cult of personality that surrounded him (Rougier 1947c).

This helps to explain why, in the years after the war, Rougier developed closer ties to Pétainist circles. Having been forced in early retirement in 1949 (Berndt & Marion 2006),[5] Rougier dedicated himself to criticising the legality and morality of the *épuration*. He helped to found the Union pour la Restauration et la Défense du Service Public (Union for the restoration and defence of public services) (Isorni 1957) and, as its President, wrote the foreword to a 1951 petition to the United Nations Committee of Human Rights, which denounced *épuration* as a gross human rights violation (Rougier 1951).[6]

As Rougier's exclusion from mainstream intellectual circles deepened, his ties to the far right likewise intensified. Even his own erstwhile publisher, Libraire de Médicis, refused to publish his writings, fearing reputational damage due to his links to Vichy (Berndt & Marion 2006, 75). Instead, Rougier began to publish with presses and periodicals known for their association with Pétainist circles and the far right. In 1947, for example, Rougier

[5] He would be reintegrated into the French civil service in 1954 following an appeal to the Conseil d'État (Berndt & Marion 2006, 77).

[6] This episode makes for an interesting case study in the history of neoliberal discourse on human rights (Whyte 2019).

published a number of books with the Geneva-based Éditions du Cheval Ailé,[7] a publisher known for carrying works by former Vichy officials and Nazi propagandists that acted as 'a bridge between collaboration and the post-war French extreme-right' (Knegt 2017, 176). During this period, Rougier contributed regularly to *Les Écrits de Paris*, a Pétainist periodical established by René Malliavin, who in 1951 went on to found the far-right and antisemitic magazine *Rivarol* (Dard 2007; Berndt & Marion 2006). He also published work in *Crapouillot*, a satirical journal then positioned on the far right (Hewitt 2007), and, as already noted above, Bardèche's neo-fascist journal *Défense de l'Occident* (Rougier 1957).

More than simply rubbing shoulders with far-right figures, in the decade following the war Rougier reproduced many of the motifs and tropes that together constituted a signally revisionist narrative about the Vichy regime and the *épuration*. He accused the allied forces of betraying France by having let Germany rearm itself during the interwar period (Rougier 1945b) and pilloried wartime French communists for risking the sacking of Paris (Rougier 1947a, 22), views that closely echoed Vichy wartime propaganda. He also rose to the defence of Vichy officialdom, arguing that Pétain's wartime government had been not only legitimate but positively heroic. It had served as a 'shield' against Nazi aggression, thus ensuring that 'soils are sown, that factories turn, that trains run', and trade could continue (Rougier 1947a, 26). But if the Vichy regime had been legitimate, the post-war *épuration* was, by implication, deeply unjust. Echoing another familiar far-right trope, he argued that the *épuration* had produced 'a veritable caste system' that completely excluded wartime officials from civic life (Rougier 1947a, 23). The *épuration* violated all the 'principles of the rule of law and all the guarantees provided by criminal procedures as universally recognised in civilised countries', he wrote in *Défense de l'Occident* (Rougier 1957, 10). As such, it represented a threat not only to 'the French soul' but 'to Western civilisation' writ large (Rougier 1951, 14).

Even as his ties to the Pétainist far right tightened, Rougier also made his re-entry into the neoliberal movement. Having joined the MPS in 1956, over the following decade Rougier spoke at four of its conferences. He contributed pieces to high-profile neoliberal journals, including the *ORDO Jahrbuch* (Rougier 1962), the flagship publication of German neoliberalism, and to book projects, including the proceedings of the 1960 MPS conference (Rougier 1961). In 1969 he published a major work, *Le génie de l'Occident*, a study of the defining traits of Western culture, which had been commissioned by the Principles of Freedom Committee, an initiative started by fellow MPS members Friedrich Hayek, John Van Sickle, and Milton Friedman, amongst others. Hayek himself provided an introduction to the English translation, *The Genius of the West*, in which he celebrated Rougier's role as one of neoliberalism's founding fathers (Hayek 1971).

[7] These included a reprint of *Les Accords Pétain–Churchill*, as well as *Pour une politique d'amnistie* (Rougier 1947a), *La France en marbre blanc* (Rougier 1947b), *La France jacobine* (1947c), and *La défaite des vainqueurs*. Cheval Ailé also published works by other neoliberals, including Röpke and Bertrand de Jouvenel.

Rougier never extracted himself from the French far right, however. Indeed, during the 1960s Rougier became closely involved with the *Nouvelle Droite* (ND), which is usually traced back to the founding in 1968 of GRECE, or the Groupement de Recherche et d'Études pour la Civilisation Européenne (Research and Study Group for European Civilization) (Gautier 2017; Shields 2004; Taguieff 1994). A far-right think tank run by Alain de Benoist, GRECE's main focus was publishing. It produced a number of racialist periodicals, most prominent of which were *Nouvelle École* and *Éléments*, and it ran its own in-house presses, Copernic and Labyrinthe, which published book-length studies. There were some antecedents to GRECE, however. Most notable amongst these was Europe-Action, a nationalist organisation founded in 1963 by Dominique Venner, who was previously associated with the neo-fascist group *Jeune Nation* (Young Nation), which was banned by the French government in 1962 (Rees 1990, 404-405; Shields 2004). Europe-Action published a monthly journal of the same name that frequently published work by Benoist, who then wrote under the pseudonym Fabrice Laroche (Rees 1990, 29).

Already in the mid-1960s Rougier had developed close ties to the right-wing circles out of which the ND was to sprout. He was admired by many in the movement and his name was frequently cited in *Europe-Action* as one of the French right's leading thinkers, including by Venner (1965, 4). Issue 14 included a pop quiz that identified his work as providing the 'philosophical basis of nationalism' (*Europe-Action* 1964, 8). Issue 31 included a lengthy quotation from Rougier about the unique qualities of Western civilisation. Writing in issue 36, Benoist portrayed Rougier as the right's answer to Jean-Paul Sartre (Benoist 1965). And issue 39 featured a letter by Rougier thanking the journal for promoting his work and informing its readers that they would likely be interested in his forthcoming work, *Le génie de l'Occident* (Rougier 1966a, 4).

During this period Rougier frequently attended far-right gatherings. In January 1964, he attended a drinks event organised by *Rivarol*, another far-right periodical (Knegt 2017), where he met Benoist, Maurice Bardèche, and Jean-Marie Le Pen, the latter of whom went on to found the Front National in 1972.[8] In December of that year, Rougier attended an event in support of Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour, a far-right candidate in the 1965 presidential election who had in the past expressed fascist sympathies and had served as a high-ranking official under the Vichy regime (Rees 1990, 390). Also present were Benoist and Le Pen, the latter serving as Tixier-Vignancour's campaign manager.[9] When the Mouvement Nationaliste du Progrès, a close affiliate of *Europe-Action*, hosted a conference in 1966 Rougier was invited to speak (Berndt & Marion 2006, 84). Though he could not make the conference, he published a short note in *Europe-Action* expressing his regret and offering the group his heartfelt support (Rougier 1966b, 19).

[8] This event was reported on in *Europe-Action*, issue 14, page 21.
[9] This event was reported on in *Europe-Action*, issue 25, page 7.

By the time they ripened into the ND, then, Rougier was already deeply embedded in these right-wing circles. It is unsurprising, therefore, that he was closely involved in GRECE and its flagship journal, *Nouvelle École*, from the start. Indeed, in a tribute published shortly after his death, one GRECE prominent observed that Rougier 'was probably the first among our elders to show us his sympathy, to participate in our seminars and to guide our steps' (Vial 1983, 28). This is by no means an exaggeration. Rougier wrote a contribution to the inaugural issue of *Nouvelle École*, which was published in February 1968 and which contained a signally racist article by Gilles Fournier (Milza 1987; Kriegel 1983).[10] He continued to write for *Nouvelle École* regularly in the years to follow, publishing in issues 6, 9, 12, 13, 15, and 24. He regularly attended and spoke at GRECE colloquiums. At one of these, in 1972, he gave a lecture on the genetic roots of inequality that was subsequently printed in a GRECE volume (Rougier 1972). When *Nouvelle École* launched a 'patronage committee' in 1970, Rougier was one of its founding members (Daubuis 2007). In subsequent years, the committee came to boast a number of internationally known race theorists and eugenicists, including Henry Garrett, Robert Gayre, Robert Kuttner, and Bertil Lundman, all of whom were closely involved in the publication of the *Mankind Quarterly*, the leading eugenicist publication during the second half of the twentieth century (Tucker 1994). For this reason, *Nouvelle École* is often considered a sister journal to the *Mankind Quarterly* (Tucker 1994). Rougier himself was in firm agreement with the ND's eugenicist agenda. In the third issue of *Éléments*, GRECE's other flagship periodical, he defended 'the right to eugenics' and argued that, without it, we risk the 'degradation of the genetic heritage of the human species' (Rougier 1973, 9).

Over the course of the 1970s, GRECE's various in-house presses published a number of Rougier's books, including a study of early Christian theology (Rougier 1977a), a reprint of a 1926 book on the Roman philosopher Celsus (Rougier 1977b), an original work titled *Du paradis à l'utopie* (Rougier 1979), and, in honour of his death, a reprint of *La mystique démocratique* (Rougier 1983). Three of these books contained laudatory introductions by Benoist, who described their author as echoing the philosophical *'masters* such as they were known in ancient Greece, who were as simple in their ways as they were subtle in their thoughts' (Benoist 1977a, 11).

In short, by his death in 1982 Rougier had undeniably become a key figure within the ND. He had particularly close ties to GRECE, which during the last decades of his life provided him with an intellectual home. The question that remains is what attracted Rougier to the ND and vice versa. Much of the scholarship in this area remains sceptical of the notion that Rougier was a true believer of GRECE's ideological agenda, observing that the ND was marked out by its fierce criticism of the very market economy that Rougier spent his career defending (Berndt & Marion 2006; Dard 2007). To explain Rougier's turn to the right, this

[10] Fournier was a pseudonym and it remains unclear who was behind it (Lamy 2016). It has been suggested, though never proved, that Fournier might be one of Benoist's many pen names (Kriegel 1983, 93).

literature frequently reaches for speculative explanations, arguing, for example, that the ageing Rougier was flattered by the admiration he received from Benoist and his colleagues, especially after having been effectively ostracised from French intellectual life since the war (Berndt & Marion 2006). While this may or may not be true, we would observe that any disagreements Rougier may have had with the ND over political economy did not extend to more fundamental philosophical principles, on which Rougier and the ND were in alignment. In other words, even if his embrace of the ND was motivated by personal circumstances, what matters from the perspective of ideology critique is which conceptual and political commitments facilitated this crossover between Rougier's neoliberal politics and the ND's exclusionary nationalism. Key here, in our view, is the theme of race, which we will discuss in more detail in the next section.

Race, Mentality, History

Rougier is rarely read as a thinker of race. Even scholars who study his links to the *Nouvelle Droite* (ND) primarily foreground his opposition to Christianity, universalist metaphysics, and socialism (Daubuis 2007; Dard 2007). This is somewhat surprising, given that the thematic of race is a leitmotif that cuts across Rougier's entire oeuvre, serving as a philosophical anchor that grounds many of his other views. In this section we reconstruct Rougier's position on race and explore its central role within his wider philosophical programme.

It is well established that Rougier had certain unshakable philosophical convictions, 'idées fixes' of which he was a lifelong adherent (Berndt & Marion 2006, 18). One of these was a firm rejection of any metaphysics with universalist pretensions. For him, no philosophical perspective could claim to have arrived at universal ontological truths, as any existing knowledge system is a matter of historical convention (Dewulf & Simons 2021). It was on these grounds that he rejected such philosophical traditions as rationalism (Rougier 1920; 1921) and scholasticism (Rougier 1924; 1925) as well as the religious teachings of Christianity (1977a; 1977b). Rougier's anti-universalism was already pronounced in his first major work, his 1920 book *Les paralogismes du rationalisme*,[11] a scorching critique of rationalist philosophy. There he argued that 'rational truths that are declared *a priori*, eternal and necessary' are, in fact, little more than 'empirical generalisations, acquired late in the course of human evolution, or simple conventions, which are neither true nor false, but only more or less convenient' (Rougier 1920, 43).

Rougier's rejection of universalism in metaphysics had its corollary in political philosophy. In his eyes, the idea of natural or divinely ordained rights possessed by all humans or cultures was a dangerous myth. And just as any ostensibly universal truths are, in fact, little

[11] This was the published version of Rougier's primary thesis, the French equivalent of a doctoral thesis.

more than historical conventions, so too any political philosophy that appeals to natural laws should be rejected. Rougier's word for such political philosophies was '*mystiques*', more or less systematic political-philosophical doctrines 'that are grounded neither in reason nor in experience' but that instead reflect 'certain sentimental attitudes, certain class prejudices, certain mental habits; in short, some passionate biases' (Rougier 1938, 7). During the interwar period he subjected a number of such mystiques, including Marxism, Nazism, collectivism, and classical liberalism, to systematic critique (Rougier 1935; 1938; 1983).

A key motif of Rougier's critique of these predominant *mystiques* was the belief in universal equality, in his eyes among the most dangerous political myths. He was committed instead to a radical anti-egalitarianism, which already emerged in *Les paralogismes du rationalisme*. There he argued:

> The historical sciences reveal that races, peoples, collectivities, social classes, and professions each have a distinct mentality, a psychology that is specific to them [...]: the mentality of the Aryan is not that of the Semite, that of the German is not that of the Latin, that of the jurist is not that of the physician, that of the capitalist is not that of the proletarian. Inequality is inscribed everywhere in nature. (Rougier 1920, 43)

His belief in natural inequality committed Rougier to a fierce elitism. 'The art of governing implies wisdom, technique and nobility', he wrote in his 1938 book *Les mystiques économiques* (Rougier 1938, 23). He continued:

> The art of governing is, consequently, eminently aristocratic and can only be exercised by elites. However, the mass left to itself is the exact opposite. The mass does not have a sense of possibilities, because it has a magical mentality: it believes that only the betrayal or bad will of its leaders prevents it from realising the miracles it demands of them. The mass is ignorant and conceited […]. (Rougier 1938, 23–24)

As these passages show, the conceptual keystone to Rougier's anti-egalitarianism was the notion of mentality (*mentalité*), which he drew from contemporary anthropologists engaged in the study of 'primitive' societies, like Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (see Rougier 1920, 433n1). As Rougier used it, however, the concept of mentality referred less to a culturally shared mindset or tradition than, more fundamentally, to a group's shared form of mental reasoning. If, for Rougier, there exists no universal Reason, no 'specific mental structure that is common to all epochs and all races' (1921, 224), the rationalist idea that the human mind is structured around universal categories must be abandoned in favour of the idea of different mentalities, each historically and geographically specific. For Rougier, 'the human mind is endowed with infinite plasticity,' meaning 'that no intrinsic necessity obliged it to evolve in a rational way as it did [...] in a few privileged families of the Western race of the Aryans' (1921, 226).

To understand the evolution of human civilisation, therefore, what is needed is not a metaphysics of universal Reason but 'a science of mental structures' (Rougier 1921, 226) cognisant of the fundamental differences in mentality that separate one group from the next. Such a science, which Rougier believed had yet to be elaborated, would be able to 'speak rigorously of the mental structures specific to certain races, characteristic of certain epochs' (Rougier 1924, 242). It is not hard to see that the resulting science would be race science by another name.

Rougier never abandoned his project to articulate an analytics of mentality. Although he used the concept of mentality throughout his life, Rougier made his most theoretically ambitious statements on this theme in his 1955 *Traité de la connaissance*, a major philosophical work on the nature of knowledge (Rougier 1955), and his 1969 book *Le génie de l'Occident* (Rougier 1969a; 1971), a lengthy essay on the history and essence of the Western mentality that systematised and formalised a thematic that had preoccupied him his entire professional life: the distinction between "occidental" and "oriental" civilisations. In Rougier's view, Western and Eastern mentalities differed from each other in fundamental ways. Western civilisation, he argued in 1947, emerged in Europe, where it was 'created by the white race', before being 'spread across the New World, across the British Commonwealth' (Rougier 1947a, 40). This civilisation

> is founded on the search for scientific truth, the work of theoretical reason, which the Westerner owes to Greece; it is founded on respect for law, the work of practical reason, which the Westerner owes to Rome; it is founded on the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual, the revelation of moral conscience, which the Westerner owes to Christianity. (Rougier 1947a, 40)

By stark contrast, 'the Oriental narrates, commands, adjures, prophesizes, prays, observes, and accumulates a collection of particular facts; he never concerns himself with justifying what he commands, explaining what he observes, demonstrating what he affirms' (1947b, 62).

For Rougier, then, the concept of mentality is the master key to understanding world history. It can explain the rise and fall of civilisations, uneven rates of cultural and material development, and the causes of global inequality (Rougier, 1971). It can offer insight into the historical fortunes and misfortunes of entire peoples, like the Jews, whose predisposition to the 'capitalist mentality' meant that they 'were predestined to be, even before the Puritans, the pioneers of capitalism' (Rougier 1928, 912).[12] And the historical

[12] Rougier derived this view from Werner Sombart, whose work on Judaism and capitalism is widely considered antisemitic and became an adherent of Nazism in the 1930s. Many decades later, a fiery conflict emerged within the Mont Pèlerin Society when Milton Friedman, himself Jewish, dedicated his presidential

development of any individual nation, like France, can be narrated as the sequence of shifts and mutations its 'ethnic mentality' has passed through (Rougier 1947b, 31).

In some of his later writings Rougier developed his conception of mentality into a theory of cultural evolution. In *Traité de la connaissance*, he argued that

> when peoples of different languages, mentalities, and civilisations come into contact and find themselves in competition, a natural selection can operate in favour of the mental structure that proves to be the most efficient, the most capable of ensuring the dominion of man over nature and the success of his endeavours. This mentality tends to merge with that which has developed in the white race since the Galilean revolution on the basis of the rediscovery of the works of Archimedes. (Rougier 1955, 426)

For Rougier, this process of cultural competition was not normatively neutral. Variation between different cultures and mentalities signifies not just bare difference but hierarchy: 'the different peoples occupy different places in the ranking of humanity' (Rougier 1979, 195). For him, this conclusion had important implications not just for historical analysis but for political science too. In his view, different forms of government were appropriate to different levels of cultural evolution, meaning that 'institutions which are suitable for one people are not necessarily transferable to another' (Rougier 1974, 36). In particular, less culturally mature populations could not be expected to engage in democratic self-rule of the kind that evolved under Western conditions. As he told his audience at the 1960 MPS conference:

> It is a grave error to believe that it suffices to transfer the democratic institutions that we acquired through centuries-long efforts to the undeveloped countries without a period of transition [...] The path to growth is a tedious path. Democracy, liberty, and prosperity are found at its end. They do not fall effortlessly into one's lap but must be won gradually. (Rougier 1961, 191)

What, then, of race? The relationship between Rougier's concept of mentality and the category of race is a decidedly complex one. Though he frequently linked certain mentalities to particular racial groups, race and mentality were not, for him, synonymic (Berndt & Marion 2006, 23). Mentality signifies a mode of reasoning shared by a particular group without specifying the type of group under consideration. While some mentalities are indeed shared by racial groups, others signify professional or theological groups: he spoke, for instance, of a 'scholastic' mentality (Rougier 1924) and a 'rabbinic' mentality (Rougier 1972, 11). It likewise follows that '[m]ultiple mentalities coexist within the same

address to Sombart's thesis, with which he largely agreed. Especially appalled was S. Herbert Frankel, also Jewish, who considered Friedman's paper 'a-historical' and 'indefensible' (Frankel 1983, 6).

individual' (Rougier 1955, 426). Even when used to refer to racial groupings, the concept was decidedly culturalist in orientation, specifying not a shared gene pool but a collective mental structure.

This is not to say, however, that Rougier saw no causal link between race, biologically understood, and mentality. As some of the passages already cited above indicate, Rougier thought that any given racial group has a mentality that is proper to it. In some of his early writings he went so far as to imply that mentalities are in part shaped by racial factors. In a book on scholasticism, for example, Rougier described the 'Spaniards, Berbers, and Turks' as 'races naturally inclined to fanaticism' (1925, 359).

In his later work Rougier developed this intuition into a more systematic theory of race. However, this effort was somewhat overshadowed by the experience of Nazism, which had rendered the concept of race deeply suspect (Kundnani 2023). As Rougier observed in retrospect, 'the word race has become taboo since Hitlerism' (1979, 195). Rougier himself was fiercely critical of Nazi race theory, which he considered a crude form of racism that 'falsely interpreted' (1945b, 280) the concept of race. By making blood and soil its principal concepts, and by pressing them into the service of a bloodthirsty nationalism, Nazi race theory debased itself into a form of zoology (1935; 1945b). For Rougier, however, its abuse by Nazism did not render the concept of race itself vacuous. No less misguided than Nazi race theory, in his view, were socialist philosophies that rejected '[t]he notions of *races* and *nations* as errors of bourgeois science' (Rougier 1935, 97). Indeed, he considered it unscientific to deny the existence of different biological races. It is 'vain' to speak about Humanity in the abstract, he argued in 1955, as 'human beings are differentiated into individuals, into ethnic groups, into more or less pure races' (Rougier 1955, 269).

The challenge was to identify precisely what role biological race has played in world history. Rougier's view was that for much of humanity's evolution racial traits were decisive in steering development. With the advent of modernity, however, its importance receded as races became more intermixed. He made this argument as early as 1945. 'The fact of race, of capital importance in early history, is increasingly weakening as a result of migrations and the incessant mixing of human families. At present, there exist no pure races. In this, human history differs fundamentally from zoology' (Rougier 1945b, 280).

Rougier repeated this line of argument in *Le génie de l'Occident*, a chapter of which was dedicated to the relation between race and development.[13] On the face of it, Rougier's point seemed to be that race no longer mattered as an explanatory variable and that only the concept of mentality could 'definitively explain the stagnation, development, or regression of different peoples' (Rougier 1969a, 396). But his actual claim was more

[13] It is worth noting that the chapter of *Le génie de l'Occident* in which Rougier discusses the concept of race (chapter 17) was not included in the English translation. This was the only chapter to be left out.

complex than that. Even as he tried to downplay their importance under modern conditions, Rougier affirmed the crucial role racial variables had played not just historically but in the present, arguing that their impact on economic development 'cannot be contested' (1961, 187). Citing a significant body of post-war race theory (Rougier 1969a, 462-463n3), he claimed that racial differences were the product of differential evolution over a long period of time between geographically dispersed populations, thus causing 'the polygenesis of the human species' (Rougier 1969a, 385). With the dawn of modernity, however, the 'mixing of peoples and intercommunications' made racial factors increasingly hard to isolate as a causal variable (Rougier 1969a, 388). Though still undeniably important as a determinant of development, it was analytically 'difficult to appreciate the impact of the racial factor' (Rougier 1969a, 388). For this purpose, mentality was better suited.

The publication of *Le génie de l'Occident* marks the point at which race theory became an explicit and enduring concern for Rougier. In subsequent writings he specified the role race plays in economic and cultural performance, arguing that genetic heritage places limits on what an individual or group is able to achieve. 'The life of individuals is the result of interactions between their genetic capital and their natural and social environment. The formative influence of the environment is considerable, but the *genotype* of each individual determines the potentialities which the environment favors or inhibits' (Rougier 1979, 195). The same applies to groups, as '[t]here exists a genetics of populations just as there exists a genetics of individuals' (Rougier 1979, 196). This meant that genetic inheritance, which is to say racial background, places a strict limit on individual cognitive ability as well as collective development.

> Just as peoples are not equally able to accommodate forms of government which have succeeded, after centuries of trial and error, in some evolved families of the human species, so all minds are not equally able to handle abstraction and logical deduction, which are the basis of the fundamental sciences. (Rougier 1969b, 66)

This line of argument, which Rougier repeated several times in a string of publications (Rougier 1969a; 1969b; 1972; 1974; 1979), came directly from a body of racialist junk science that emerged out of cognitive psychology in the 1960s. Pushed by periodicals like the *Mankind Quarterly* in Britain and the United States, *Neue Anthropologie* in Germany, and *Nouvelle École* in France, this literature posited a direct link between racial heritage and intelligence and formed part of a comprehensive reactionary backlash against the Civil Rights movement in the United States (Jackson 2005) and, more broadly, increasing racial diversity and multiculturalism across the advanced capitalist world. This literature staged the return to mainstream prominence of a form of eugenics that had languished in the fringes of academic life since 1945. Traces of this literature are especially clear in *Le génie de l'Occident*, where Rougier speculated that people of African descent had a 'structural difference in intelligence' from other populations (1969a, 400). In an extended

footnote, Rougier reviewed a slew of racialist texts before concluding that race differences in intelligence can explain 'the Black problem' in the United States, where people of African descent are, 'with some very rare exceptions, unsuited for jobs that require a qualification that surpasses them' (1969a, 466n16). Along the way Rougier cited a dozen prominent racialists, including *Mankind Quarterly* co-founder Frank McGurk, and reproduced a lengthy quote from an essay by Gérard Wintringer, taken from a book that was edited by Benoist and that mounted a defence of South African apartheid on "scientific" grounds (Rougier 1969a, 463-466n16).[14]

Rougier drew inspiration from this same body of junk science in his 1979 book, *Du paradis à l'utopie*, published by GRECE's in-house press Copernic. There he claimed that 'an individual is conditioned for 80% by his genome and only 20% by his environment' (Rougier 1979, 195). He took this claim, a very common motif in racialist writings of the period (Tucker 1994), from a German textbook in genetics that expressly defended eugenics (see Fuhrmann & Vogel 1969) and that, incidentally, featured on a reading list in issue 7 of *Nouvelle École*, dedicated to the theme of biology.

His discovery of this body of junk science allowed the ageing Rougier to return, with renewed vigour, to a claim he had been making since 1920. Already in *Les paralogismes du rationalisme* he had argued that the historical sciences show that inequality is a natural phenomenon (Rougier 1920, 43). In the twilight years of his life he claimed that new developments in biology and genetics had, in effect, proved this thesis scientifically, thus finally unmasking all forms of egalitarianism as a chimera (Rougier 1969b; 1972; 1974; 1979).

The category of race fulfilled three key functions within Rougier's broader philosophical system. First, the idea of racial differences permitted him to naturalise inequalities between individuals and groups, whether in power, wealth, or status, as an effect of uneven endowment in important traits like intelligence or mentality. Second, the idea of racial endowments gave him a means to theorise the historical superiority of Western civilisation. His thesis in *Le génie de l'Occident* and related writings was that its advantageous racial heritage had allowed the West to pull ahead of other civilisations, after which its mentality ensured its supremacy. Third, the idea of racial inequality allowed him to justify the unequal treatment of different groups. Both in the realm of education and that of government racial inequality and biological limits simply had to be respected: to push higher learning or democracy on groups not suited to them was nothing short of folly.

[14] The book in question is *Vérité pour l'Afrique du Sud*, edited by Gilles Fournier and Benoist, the latter under the pseudonym Fabrice Laroche, and published by *Europe-Action*'s in-house publishing press (Fournier & Benoist 1965). The book mainly consisted of articles written by Benoist himself and was a paean to the work of the *Mankind Quarterly*.

Ideological Affinity

If, for much of his career, Rougier had one foot in the neoliberal movement and one in far-right circles, he was by no means the only individual for whom this was true. Bertrand de Jouvenel, Wilhelm Röpke, William Hutt, Stefan Possony, Ernest van den Haag, Richard Lynn, and Charles Murray, all of whom were affiliated to the Lippmann colloquium, the MPS, or the neoliberal think-tank industry, were positioned between neoliberalism and the far right at key points in their careers (Maher 2024; Slobodian 2018; 2023; Thomas 2025).

Although the nature and extent of traffic between the neoliberal movement and the far right varied from case to case, one notable pattern is that, like Rougier, many of these neoliberals forged close links with eugenicist networks and periodicals. Hutt, for example, was a fellow of the British Eugenics Society for several decades. Van den Haag was a founding member of the International Association for the Advancement of Ethnology and Eugenics (IAAEE), an organisation that was established in 1959 and that was to launch *Mankind Quarterly* the following year. Van den Haag went on to garner a measure of international infamy when, in the late 1960s, he served as an expert witness in a number of high-profile court cases, testifying first against the racial desegregation of the American school system before the District Court of Georgia and then against the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa before the International Court of Justice (Jackson 2005). Possony wrote several articles for *Mankind Quarterly* and *Neue Anthropologie* in the 1960s and 70s and, during the same period, joined *Mankind Quarterly*'s advisory board as well as *Nouvelle École*'s patronage committee. And during the 1970s and 80s, Lynn maintained close links to both the Institute of Economic Affairs and *Mankind Quarterly*, which he would come to edit later in his life (Thomas 2025).

These linkages between neoliberalism and eugenics networks burst into mainstream consciousness in 1994, when Murray published *The Bell Curve*, a notorious bestseller that synthesised the familiar neoliberal critique of the welfare state with concepts, arguments, and datasets derived from the eugenics tradition, often taken directly from the pages of *Mankind Quarterly* (Slobodian 2023). Though the publicity it received was unprecedented, *The Bell Curve* marked less a departure from established neoliberal ideas than the cresting of a trend begun by Rougier, Van den Haag, Possony, Lynn, and others, each of whom worked to forge a network of personal and intellectual linkages between the neoliberal movement and the far-right eugenicist networks of GRECE, *Mankind Quarterly*, and other likeminded groups. The enduring presence within the history of the neoliberal movement of these linkages points to a more fundamental theoretical convergence between neoliberal ideology and the far right. Indeed, it indicates that there has always existed a pronounced ideological affinity between these two traditions.

The terrain on which this ideological affinity operated was that of race. While it is widely understood that racial constructs and logics are central to far-right ideology (Taguieff 1994), it is less well known that they likewise form a constitutive component of neoliberal thought. Although they operate in different ways and are not always dressed in the express language of race, these constructs and logics work to ground many of the concepts and arguments that mark out neoliberal ideology. In Rougier's work this dynamic is on full display, facilitated by the rare candour with which he addressed themes of race. Yet, although within the neoliberal tradition Rougier stands out for the dogged consistency with which he wrote about race, his views on this theme were shared by many others in the movement.

Rougier's claim that racial traits have exerted a decisive impact on the trajectory and development of human history, for example, was shared by Ludwig von Mises, who frequently argued that different racial groups have diverging aptitudes for achieving social order. 'It may be assumed that races do differ in intelligence and will power,' he argued, 'and that, this being so, they are very unequal in their ability to form society, and further that the better races distinguish themselves precisely by their special aptitude for strengthening social co-operation' (Mises 1951, 325). This hypothesis, he added, 'enables us to explain the development and regression of the social division of labour and the flowering and decline of civilizations' (Mises 1951, 325-326). Although Rougier's view of the relation between race and history was complicated by the concept of mentality, the basic thesis that racial heritage bears on historical development is a common thread tying together his philosophy of history to that of Mises.[15]

Likewise, Rougier's argument that different racial groups have developed different mentalities or modes of thinking was widespread amongst neoliberals. This thesis formed the bedrock of neoliberal development theory, which postulated that uneven economic performance between different groups or countries is chiefly a function of differences in cultural, habitual, and mental traditions. The neoliberal thinker to articulate this idea most systematically was Peter Bauer, for whom development and underdevelopment are largely determined by the cultural habits and social institutions of the local population. Like Rougier before him, Bauer habitually argued that what set Western cultures apart from others is that they have historically valorised enterprise, productivity, and the domination of nature. Other cultures, by contrast, have privileged the contemplative life over material advancement, preached resignation in the face of adversity, or discouraged commerce and enterprise (Bauer 1971). On this basis Bauer argued that '[t]here are manifest and striking differences between racial and ethnic groups in such qualities as industry, thrift, enterprise, and the readiness to perceive and exploit economic opportunity, and there are resulting differences in economic performance' (1957, 74).

[15] In an interview with *Nouvelle École* Rougier once identified Mises as one of his greatest inspirations (Rougier 1969c, 71). The two men were close friends.

Even Rougier's argument that Nazism had debased race theory and that racial research, if done in a scientific spirit, had a valuable role to play in historical analysis was widely shared among the early neoliberals. Mises warned that the 'dilettantism' of unscientific race theorists should not 'mislead us into skipping lightly over the race problem itself. Surely there is hardly any other problem whose clarification could contribute more to deepening our historical understanding' (Mises 1983, 11). Similar views were voiced at varying times by Wilhelm Röpke, Alexander Rüstow, and Stefan Possony, all of whom saw racial research as a legitimate area of scientific study and lamented the bad reputation it had received after World War Two (Cornelissen 2022). Possony went so far as to write an entire book, co-authored with *Mankind Quarterly* regular Nathaniel Weyl, aimed at salvaging the reputation of eugenics as a science (Weyl & Possony 1963).

If each of these resonated with some elements of the neoliberal movement, one racial construct was so crucial to its project that it formed an organising principle of neoliberal thought writ large. This was the Eurocentric mythology of Western genius that Rougier's work did so much to formalise. Indeed, a shared belief in the superiority of Western civilisation over all others, and the firm conviction that the West stood on the precipice of a fatal decline because of the end of Empire and the rise of socialism, was a unifying concern for the first-generation neoliberals. It is one of the beliefs around which Rougier structured the Walter Lippmann Colloquium and Hayek the Mont Pèlerin Society (Whyte 2019). As foundational to its political and intellectual agenda as free-market advocacy, anti-socialism, and methodological individualism, Eurocentrism has always been a weight-bearing pillar of neoliberal ideology. And though he was neither the first nor the only neoliberal to speak to this theme, Rougier was undoubtedly one of the most systematic and vocal theorists of neoliberal Eurocentrism.

It was this same Eurocentrism that constituted one of the clearest ideological affinities between Rougier's work and the French far right. While many have correctly pointed out that his rejection of Christianity in favour of Greek and Roman antiquity attracted many on the right to his work (Berndt & Marion 2006; Daubuis 2007), what has thus far been overlooked is that Rougier's conception of mentality and his Eurocentric philosophy of Western genius also left a deep mark on the ND. Benoist, for example, considered Rougier's effort to articulate a science of mentalities one of his greatest intellectual feats, one that achieved in the realm of logic what Einstein had achieved in the field of microphysics (Benoist 1977a, 15).

That Rougier's fierce defence of Eurocentrism formed a key ideological affinity between the neoliberal tradition and the ND is clearly illustrated by the enthusiasm with which *Le génie de l'Occident* was received in both circles. As Rougier (1969c) recounted in an interview published in *Nouvelle École*, the book grew out of a short essay first published in 1958. This piece enjoyed a warm reception in the neoliberal movement: it was described

by Hayek as a 'brilliant article' (1971, xvi), while John Van Sickle wrote that it 'beautifully sketched out' the key traits of Western mentality (1969, x). Shortly after its publication, the latter invited Rougier to develop it into a book project for the Principles of Freedom Committee, which became *The Genius of the West* (Rougier 1971). In the meantime, a German translation of the original essay appeared in the *ORDO Jahrbuch* (Rougier 1962). Rougier also rehearsed the essay's key argument in a paper presented at the 1960 MPS conference (Rougier 1961).

Although its publication was facilitated by the neoliberal movement, *Le génie de l'Occident* was also met with much fanfare by the French right. More than four years before the book was published, issue 31-32 of *Europe-Action* included a quote from the original 1958 essay, which also made it into the book. A year later, *Europe-Action* published a letter by Rougier saying he had just finished a book project that would likely be of interest to its readers (Rougier 1966a, 4). *Nouvelle École* also promoted the book on multiple occasions: issues 2 and 7 both alerted readers that *Le génie de l'Occident* was forthcoming and issue 9 featured a lengthy interview with Rougier about its main thesis (Rougier 1969c). Benoist drew on the book routinely in his own writings, including in his prodigious 1977 tome *Vu de droite*, an encyclopaedic overview of the philosophical principles of the ND (Benoist 1977b, 568). And in a 1977 volume published in celebration of GRECE's tenth anniversary *Le génie de l'Occident* was listed as one of 36 books from which the group took its ideological bearings (Taguieff 1994, 187n174). After his death in 1982, *Éléments* published a eulogy to Rougier that cast him as one of the ND's greatest thinkers, singling out the impact his work on 'the genius of the West' had exerted on right-wing thought (Vial 1983, 28).

In short, Rougier's Eurocentric myth of Western genius, as well as the orientalist portrayal of "Eastern" cultures that attended it, served as an ideological bridge between the neoliberal movement and the French far right. It was, and remains, an organising principle of both traditions and, for this reason, a firm foundation on which to establish strategic alliances and network crossovers.

Conclusion

The premise of this article has been that when thinking through the present conjuncture, and in particular the relation between neoliberal hegemony and fascist logics, adopting an historical perspective can help offer some analytical clarity. By revisiting the career and works of Louis Rougier, one of its founding fathers, we have drawn attention to the fact that neoliberalism was always more or less proximate to the far right in many of its different guises. Our argument has been that just as Rougier himself moved in far-right circles as well as neoliberal ones, his philosophy reconciled a classically neoliberal defense of the free-market order with a deeply racialised conception of history, civilisation, and

development. The result was a genuine hybrid of neoliberal and crypto-fascist logics, one that found its most potent expression in a Eurocentric mythology of Western genius.

The reason this myth resonated so strongly with the neoliberals and the far right alike is that both traditions are constitutively racialised. Like the far right, neoliberalism has always been politically and ideologically invested in racial hierarchy (Kundnani 2023). When it coalesces with other affective and ideological affinities, such as visceral anti-socialism (Maher 2024), patriarchal traditionalism (Cooper 2017), and a desire to mete out cruelty (Ibled 2023), this shared commitment to racial hierarchy comes to look less like an incidental similarity or a point of strategic concurrence than an expression of a more closely knit system of shared ends.

Though it is important that the very real tensions and contradictions between neoliberalism and the far right are not downplayed, neither can we afford to ignore these ideological affinities. The key question is how this field of tensions and affinities is navigated in the heat of social and political contestation–or, to put it in more directly Gramscian terms, which principles and ideologemes end up getting forged into a chain of equivalence and which are deprioritised. Crucially, however, this process of hegemonic linking is not random but patterned, following logics of ideological affinity that render some discursive formations not just passively receptive to one another but actively predisposed to what might be termed organic alliances. The historical evidence suggests that neoliberalism and fascism constitute one such organic alliance, the contortions of which we appear at present to be experiencing.

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