This is a repository copy of *The future of Europe's democratic way of life*.

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Martin Conway, *Western Europe's Democratic Age: 1945—1968* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).
Till van Rahden, *Demokratie. Eine gefährdete Lebensform* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2019).

Introduction
In 2016 the democratic world experienced two major shocks. Although support for illiberal nationalism has been on the rise for at least a decade, the events of that year, starting with the narrow victory of the Leave campaign in the United Kingdom's 23 June referendum on its membership in the European Union (EU), followed less than six months later by Donald J. Trump's election as President of the United States on 8 November, constituted a clear break. In contrast to the postwar liberal democratic, which legitimized itself through the provision of welfare benefits and effective management of competing interests, these two developments signalled seemingly a return to the more rough-and-tumble, unstable politics of the interwar period.

In their aftermath, political commentators and scholars of democracy rushed to pinpoint their causes. Numerous analyses pointed out that both Brexit and Trump's election in the US built on a deeper dissatisfaction with the postwar democratic consensus that had been building for quite some time. Given their profound effects on the everyday life of citizens across the West – as well as the growing inequalities that it revealed – most of these explanations focused on the global financial crisis of 2008 and the Great Recession that followed in its wake. While debates continue on whether economic or cultural factors are to blame, there is broad agreement that the

rise of anti-systemic, anti-status quo movements were the result of legitimate grievances among the citizens of Western democracies that had been building for some time.[1]

This diagnosis has given rise to two basic sets of responses. The first focuses on the phenomenon of populism, seeking to differentiate beneficial attempts to give voice to the people, and more dangerous, authoritarian movements.[2] Working in parallel to this literature, a second strand approaches these issues in institutional and policy terms, focusing on innovations that might prevent anti-systemic parties from taking political power and outlining interventions to address the concerns of the increasingly impoverished, fragmented populations of the West.[3]

To date this research has been dominated by social scientists applying their models to current events. Recently, however, historians have started to weigh in as well. Writing from the European continetal perspective, Martin Conway's *Western Europe's Democratic Age* and Till van Rahden's *Democracy: An Endangered Way of Life*, are exemplary of this new scholarship.[4] Both respond to the ongoing crisis of democracy by placing contemporary events within a broader timeline in order "to make the emergence of democracy in post-1945 Western Europe appear more historically complex, and also more open-ended" (MC, 20). Unlike previous approaches, they eschew judgements about the desirability of populism as well as questions of policy and institutional structure. Instead, by exploring what Conway refers to as "the social

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[1] See Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic have-Nots and Cultural Backlash," *Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Paper Series* (August, 2016).
[2] For example, Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2019); Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and them* (New York: Random House, 2018); Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2016); Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018).
[3] Yascha Mounk, *The People Vs. Democracy: Why our Freedom is in Danger and how to Save it* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Sheri Berman, "The Pipe Dream of Undemocratic Liberalism," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 3 (2017).
[4] Citations to both of these works appear parenthetically. When necessary to avoid ambiguity, citations to Conway will be marked MC and to van Rahden TvR. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from van Rahden's original German to English are mine.

textures of postwar Europe" (25), they both "explore what Till van Rahden…has termed 'democracy as a way of life'" (24).[5]

The commonalities between these two works go even further. In historicizing the postwar experience of democracy in Western Europe, both focus on the immediate postwar years. Additionally, they also identify the "trench warfare (*Grabenkämpfe*)" (29, 41) of 1968 as the key turning point that marks the end of Western Europe's postwar democratic age.[6] More specifically, Conway and van Rahden argue that the student protests calling for more participation in politics and the greater democratization of society ended the consensus that supported the elitist, technocratic regimes – famously labelled "electoral monarchies" by Jürgen Habermas, who both authors cite (MC, 89; TvR, 59) – that defined democracy immediately following the end of the Second World War.[7]

By drawing our attention to the more distant past, van Rahden and Conway remind us that liberal democracy is not "the origin and end of history" (23), nor is it "the political regime to which states revert when the specific conditions that generate anti-democratic alternatives abate" (18). Rather than focusing on populists – "or, perhaps more accurately, on those who had very different understandings of democracy" (MC, 18) – or examining "how democracies die," both of these historians instead are concerned with "what keeps them alive" (TvR, 9). Methodologically, they care less about democracy as a regime, idea or concept, preferring focus on the actions that constitute democratic practice. In this sense, Conway and van Rahden prefer to use the adjectival construction to the substantive, the democratic to democracy. Their shared

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[5] Till van Rahden, "Clumsy Democrats: Moral Passions in the Federal Republic," *German History* 29, no. 3 (2011).
[6] In an earlier piece, Conway dated the fall to 1973. Martin Conway, "The Rise and Fall of Western Europe's Democratic Age, 1945–1973," *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 1 (2004).
[7] Jürgen Habermas, "Die Bundesrepublik: eine Wahlmonarchie?" *Magnum* (1961).

emphasis is therefore on "how fragile and endangered [the democratic] social order is" (TvR, 23), rather than on democracy in the abstract.

These two works merit comparison because of their differences as well. Whilst Conway focuses on the democratization of postwar Europe as a transnational "phenomenon that transcended nation-state frontiers" (21), van Rahden narrows his gaze by telling "an alternate history of the Federal Republic of Germany" (23). Similarly, whereas the former builds primarily on secondary literature, the latter draws on stories and anecdotes culled from popular newspapers and tabloids. Finally, while Conway's project is inspired by Raymond Aron, van Rahden is more capacious, drawing not only on German thinkers such as Siegfried Kracauer, but also on international intellectuals, most notably Sidney Hook.

The Loss of Postwar Democratic Stability
Although Conway's study is motivated by what he refers to as "the present-day sense of crisis" (ix), it is inspired by Aron's real-time reflections on the state of democracy in postwar Europe. More specifically, the book seeks to "take seriously Aron's thesis of a democratic stabilization of Western Europe" (10), which the French political philosopher first presented at the Congress of Cultural Freedom in West Berlin in 1960. In his speech Aron argued that the surprisingly stable and uniform democratic regimes that had established themselves across Western Europe over the previous decade and a half signaled that the continent had finally reached a certain stage of political maturity. This was visible in the fact that the ideological arguments that had dominated the era before 1945 had been abandoned in favor of a liberal democratic model guaranteeing both liberal, individual rights and popular sovereignty channeled through representative institutions. Instead of making unrealistic, pie-in-the-sky promises, Aron praised these new democratic regimes for legitimating themselves through the provision of economic growth,

effective state-based policy-making and the resolution of social conflict via negotiation and compromise.[8]

Although the democratic stabilization of Western Europe was an important development, Conway points out that the postwar years ultimately represent "a missed moment of radical change" (36). At the societal level, the postwar desire for normality meant that gender hierarchies were quickly reestablished as women, who had been able to take on roles previously reserved for men during the war, were quickly pushed back into their traditional gender roles. Similarly, although elections became crucial markers of identity, politics remained an affair of the elites. As a result – in Aron's words – democratic practice was reduced to "a secondary activity which is mainly the business of professionals."[9] Rather than representing opportunities for fundamental change, elections became "ritualized events" in which turnout was "celebrated more than the outcome" (114).

While there can be little doubt that the regimes that were established across Western Europe at this time were democracies, they represented a "[r]estoration, rather than revolution" (50). In making this argument, Conway seeks to undermine the Panglossian picture of this period in the popular imaginary today. He works particularly hard to destroy the myth of the "economic miracle" or "glorious thirty" years between 1945 and 1975. In contrast to contemporary portrayals of this as the golden age of democratic capitalism, Conway argues that the prosperity of this period was "neither universal nor emphatic" as "[i]nequalities between regions, economic sectors, and social classes… creat[ed] an enduring sense of winners and losers."[10] He concludes

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[8] Raymond Aron, "The Situation of Democracy: Western Political Institutions in the Twentieth Century," *Daedalus* 90, no. 2 (1961).

[9] Ibid., 361.

[10] See Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014); Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 2014).

that this period's "most significant impact was therefore more psychological than material" (248), and that it – and the postwar democratic age more generally – "proved to be something of a half-victory for workers" (235).

Far from representing an era to which we should want to return to today, Conway instead focuses on the flaws and the undesirable elements of the postwar consensus. In particular, he is critical of its elitist, bourgeois character, which he describes throughout the text using different adjectives to modify the concept of democracy, including "audience" (302), "formal" (8), "management" (263), "consensual" (12) and "controlled" (88). While he argues that the postwar "allegiance of the conservative right and the socialist left to democratic procedures" helped to stabilize democratic rule by granting it an air of legitimacy, Conway makes it clear that this is hardly an era that we should look back on fondly.[11]

This narrative has much to recommend it, as I hope this brief summary has shown. In particular, Conway's attempt to brush away the overly idealistic patina with which this period is viewed today is well-taken. That said, I am skeptical of his attempt to downplay the importance of 1945 and the role that the experience of the Third Reich – as well as the crisis of the interwar years and of two world wars more generally – played in the democratic stabilization of Western Europe after the end of the Second World War. While I am sympathetic to this attempt to show that democracy in postwar Western Europe was not an inevitable product of the reaction against the suffering and atrocities of Europe's "age of total war," Conway goes too far in not considering the effects that lived experience and these vivid memories of the recent past played in the politics of postwar Europe. For example, in making his argument Conway correctly points out that although the postwar era did bring a number of new political leaders to the fore, this did

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[11] Aron, "Situation of Democracy," 360.

not lead to a broader change in the political class as "the leaders of post-war Europe were not so much new men, as new faces drawn from within those same milieux" (44).

Unfortunately, in his rush to make this point he fails to note the important ways in which the members of the interwar political establishment who took the reins of power after the war – including figures such as Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, and Alcide De Gasperi – were changed by their experience of Nazism and the Second World War. In seeking to provide a new form of "stable parliamentarism and effective government" (17) based on political negotiation and the protection of human rights, these leaders were drawing directly on their personal memories of the recent past. The lessons they drew from the failures of the interwar years are crucial not only in explaining the surprisingly similar democratic regimes they created domestically after 1945, but also to the foundation of European integration, which sought to preserve these lessons at a supranational level.[12]

The fact that Conway cannot avoid admitting that the democratic regimes of this period were "embedded in a complex and highly contested past" (17), even though this point does not fit into the framework of this broader argument, along with the short shrift he gives to pressures from the US and the geopolitical factors that shaped developments in Western Europe in the decades immediately following the end of the war, are significant lacunae in his narrative. These oversights are unfortunate, as more attention to collective memory might have helped Conway to better explain how and why 1968 brought an end to the postwar democratic consensus.[13] For example, as it stands the book presents the revolts of 1968 as a surprising development given the

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[12] Peter J. Verovšek, *Memory and the Future of Europe: Memory and Integration in the Wake of Total War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).
[13] Peter J. Verovšek, "Memory, Narrative, and Rupture: The Power of the Past as a Resource for Political Change," *Memory Studies* 13, no. 4 (2020); Peter J. Verovšek, "Collective Memory, Politics, and the Influence of the Past: The Politics of Memory as a Research Paradigm," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4, no. 3 (2016).

"often bewilderingly diverse range of issues" (256) it raised. Unable to explain its timing, Conway follows Aron in blaming the spread of "*le virus révolutionnaire*" on what he inadequately describes as "a series of accidents" (261).

Although he is right to note that the debates of that decade were "rooted in a perceived need to come to terms with that past" (258), Conway fails to connect this insight to the generational dynamics of memory at play in these developments. Most notably, in contrast to previous generations, whose political sensitivities were defined the experience of two world wars, the protesting students were driven instead by the incomplete democratization of political and social life after 1945. As a result, their attention was focused not on the need to provide stability and welfare, but on the failures of postwar democracy. Supported by a slightly older set of intellectuals like Habermas, who had come of age during the war and thus bore no responsibility for it, the students were thus able to question the achievements of postwar democracy precisely because of their generational positions.[14]

Although Conway sets out to prove Aron's 1960 thesis of democratic stabilization, he argues that the more pessimistic assessment of these *démocraties stabilisées* or *pacifiées* that the French philosopher offered in his 1977 *Plaidoyer pour l'Europe décadente* are more relevant to the present. Reflecting back on his speech at the Congress of Cultural Freedom, Conway view of Aron, which does not jive with Aron's own conclusions, is that the French political theorist's confident assessment of Europe's democratic maturity had been based "far too exclusively on the experiences of a white, educated bourgeoisie who were the principal beneficiaries of post-war economic and social change" (7). While Aron, and by extension Conway, remain critical of what they perceive as the post-1968 abandonment of the liberal values that animated Europe's brief

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[14] A. Dirk Moses, "The Forty-Fivers: A Generation between Fascism and Democracy," *German Politics & Society* 17, no. 1 (1999).

postwar democratic age, they both also recognize the flaws of a democratic society that operates "without transports of enthusiasm or indignation" (Aron quoted on 9). Ultimately, Conway concludes that "[a]ll democracies are incomplete" and that there is nothing to "suggest that the current model of democratic politics will mark the end point in its evolution" (310).

The Family and the Democratic Way of Life
In contrast to Conway's large, big picture, historicizing narrative of Western Europe's postwar democratic age, van Rahden's argument is much narrower, focusing on "the particular facets of German history since the so-called 'Zero Hour' (*Stunde Null*)" (54). Like the former, the latter is also interested in democracy as a "way of life" (*Lebensform*) rather than as an institutional regime or a political concept. However, in contrast to his English counterpart van Rahden treats society as a Matryoshka doll, with the democratic family at its core. He therefore seeks to answer the question of "how democracy maintains its shape (*Fassung*)" by focusing on the "*ethos, manners*, or *mœurs* that it presupposes" (10, italics and foreign words in original).

Drawing his inspiration from Hook, van Rahden argues that like the family, a democracy is a community created by a group of different individuals, who succeed in developing "forms and conventions, rules and procedures that enable us to live with moral conflicts that we cannot resolve but can only endure" (21). In approaching his subject in this way, each chapter focuses on a small detail from the history of the Federal Republic, ranging from the smile of a justice on the constitutional court and a young father in a baby care course to the afterlife of a communal swimming pool. Much like Conway, but using an admittedly more "eclectic approach," he also hopes to shake the existing literature out of its teleological assumptions by "opening up a view of a historical reality full of contradictions and aporias" (23).

In thinking about the family as the core of democratic life, van Rahden divides the history of the Federal Republic into three phases: the pre-democratic occupation of the immediate postwar years, the blooming of democracy in the 1950s and 1960s after the foundation of the Federal Republic in 1949, and its subsequent delegitimation by calls for the "democratization of democracy" in 1968. Like Conway, van Rahden also opposes the idea that 1945 formed a clear break from everything that came before; unlike Conway, however, he deals extensively with the legacy of the Nazi period and its continuing effects on postwar West Germany.

In addressing the immediate postwar years, van Rahden is especially sensitive to the views and reactions of German émigrés upon their return to the country after the war, particularly the emptiness that these exiles identified in their countrymen. For example, upon his return Kracauer described the German people as "formless," "*not so much human beings as raw material for human beings*," who were unable to communicate except through what he describes as "*stilted language*" (quoted on p. 63, italics and English in original). Similarly, the historian of art Julius Posener, who returned to his homeland in 1945 as a British intelligence officer, noted, "The great majority of the people has received a moral shock…which causes them to shout: *Es war alles falsch, all-les falsch!!!!!*'" ['It was all wrong, aa-all wrong'] (31).

This diagnosis leads van Rahden to oppose interpretations of the National Socialism – as well as Stalinism and fascism more generally – as amoral orders. On the contrary, he argues that these "ways of life" built on deep-seated moral convictions, at least for their supporters. Despite the "banal desire for normality" (55), which the Germans shared with their fellow Europeans, van Rahden argues that it is only possible to understand how they came to accept democracy by tracing confronting the moral challenge of Nazism. More specifically, he notes that telling this "moral history" (*Moralgeschichte*) requires a focus on "the connection between the democratic

order and private ways of life" (66), which comes to the fore "in times of revolutionary upheaval and political change" (67).

After allowing West Germany to sleepwalk through the immediate postwar years, the US, UK and France forced the population of their occupied zones to accept democratic institutions through the imposition of the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*), the Federal Republic's provisional postwar constitution. Despite its political implications, van Rahden observes that debates about democracy were primarily channeled through questions relating to family life, focusing in particular on what a "democratic family" should look like. These discussions were not confined to west German academic elites, who were obsessed by questions of childhood development during this period, but extended across the political and social spectrum, from right to left, high- to low-brow. Given the "manly" ideals of virility promoted by the Nazis, these appeals focused in particular on the father, who was encouraged to abandon the archetype of the dictatorial *paterfamilias*, in favor of a more caring, tender role that – in the words of Walter Becker – relied on "the child's deep trust in the authority figure" (quoted on 96).

The new ideal of the democratic family was not contained solely in prosaic examples, such as the image of the young father in a baby care course. It was also echoed in legal debates, particularly the 1959 decision by the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe, which dethroned the father as the unassailable head of the family by ruling that in the eyes of the law "the relationship of both parents to their children is essentially equal" (quoted on 70). Given its importance for family relations in the Federal Republic – and its global resonance at the time – van Rahden presents this verdict as the ultimate signal of "the improbable renaissance of a democratic culture in the society of postwar West Germany" (80). According to a report in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine äeitung*, the only female justice on the court, Erna Scheffler, delivered this verdict

with "a smile" (*einem Lächeln*), thus providing van Rahden with another paradigmatic image of the democratic way of life.

Much like Conway, van Rahden also focuses on 1968 as a key break in the new postwar democratic order. However, unlike his English counterpart, who repeatedly bemoans the fact that the student protests "lacked a unifying ideology" and "remained obstinately plural and diffuse" (257), van Rahden argues that the anti-authoritarian movements of this period were unified by the fact that they no longer saw the family as "a place of democratic learning, but rather as a haven of repression and an obstacle to the search for a democratic order" (108). Whereas the previous period had been unified by a search for democracy rooted in household relations and proper forms of domestic authority, the protests of 1968 destroyed this societal consensus by arguing against all forms of authority, as well as against the family as such. This constituted a clear "rupture" (*Zäsur*, 107) in West German democratic life.

This search for a "repression-free upbringing" (*represionslosen Erziehung*, 112) led the protesters of 1968 to focus on nurseries and kindergartens, as well as communes and new forms of sexual relations, in order to create "a world without the family," as the title of chapter four puts it. Interestingly, and similar to the previous two periods, this break with the idea of the democratic family spread across the social and political spectrum. Van Rahden notes that these experiments in living not only received favorable coverage in the mainstream media, such as *Die Zeit* and *Der Spiegel*; surprisingly, "even Catholic press outlets did not entirely reject the idea of a world without families" (121).

This focus on family life as the core of the increasingly threatened democratic way of life opens a number of new perspectives on how we think about both Western Europe's postwar democratic age and the crisis of democracy in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

Despite their idiosyncrasy, van Rahden does a good job of connecting his small anecdotes and stories to broader societal debates. His protestations that his claims build primarily on the quotidian discourse of the popular media, rather than "relying on prominent intellectuals such as Dolf Sternberger or Ralf Dahrendorf, Wilhelm Hennis or Jürgen Habermas" (27), notwithstanding, van Rahden repeatedly returns to these theorists of democracy as he generalizes on the basis of images like the smile of the constitutional court justice or the image of the young father in a child-care course.

It is less clear where the book leaves us or how it is supposed to help us to better comprehend our present. In reflecting back on his narrative of the flourishing of a democratic way of life in the 1950s and its collapse in 1968, van Rahden notes that "it becomes clear how alien both eras have become to us." Despite the pluralization of family life and the new "experiments in living" (Foucault) enabled by more recent developments, including feminism and the movement for LGBTQ rights, he argues that what has been lost is the "cross-party and cross-societal belief that the survival of democracy depends on a specific style of upbringing, be it in the family, be it outside the family in municipalities, nurseries or shared apartments" (124).

There may be something to the idea that the lack of a shared societal discourse around the proper forms of private life lies at the root of our public malaise today. It is possible that the contemporary fragmentation of society, as well as the loss of community reflected in our increasing apathy towards those around us, so clearly visible in the phenomenon of "bowling alone," is rooted in the fact that private life has increasingly become ensconced in the sphere of intimacy, which is off limits for public debate.[15] Indeed, it is hard to imagine how we can live together as a community – rather than as a mere aggregation of individuals located in the same

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[15] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2001).

place and time – without some shared ideas about what kinds of childrearing practices promote a democratic way of life.

Rather than focusing on the implications of the lack of a unifying societal debate on the proper practices, role and place of the democratic family, the final chapter of van Rahden's book instead addresses the destruction and legacy of a public swimming pool in the city of Offenbach, just outside Frankfurt am Main. The contrast between the inauguration of the Parkbad in 1961, which was widely celebrated both for its innovative design and for its creation of a new public space where citizens would encounter each other as equals, and its closure in 1992, when the increasingly indebted city was forced to tear it down in favor of a private luxury hotel, speaks for itself: "A symbol of the democratic awakening had thus become a symptom of the decline of public spaces" (136).

This final example does a good job of highlighting how the loss of communal parks, playing fields, libraries and other publicly-owned places robs citizens of the spaces they need to foster a democratic way of life by engaging each other in informal interactions. Indeed, there is something to this, as there is some evidence to suggest that the austerity-induced sale of public properties by local governments has played a crucial role in driving support for populist parties and movements in recent years.[16] In contrast to the dictates of contemporary neoliberal market fundamentalism, which holds that government must be as small and efficient as possible, van Rahden concludes that "the 'leaner' the state, the more endangered liberal democracy is."

While van Rahden is surely right that democracy, both as "a form of rule, but above all as a way of life, costs money" (139), this point sits somewhat awkwardly at the end of a study whose previous parts focus on the role of family life as the core and foundation of democracy.

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[16] Thiemo Fetzer, "Did Austerity Cause Brexit?" *American Economic Review* 109, no. 11 (2019), 3872.

Additionally, especially given the space that he devotes to examining the role of the father as both an authority and also a possible authoritarian figure, I was surprised not to see an engagement with the groundbreaking and increasingly salient postwar study on *The Authoritarian Personality*, conducted by members of the Frankfurt School during their exile in the US, which also argues that susceptibility to authoritarian appeals occurs early in the life of the child and is strongly influenced by the structure of the family.[17] In contrast to the final chapter on the loss of public spaces – interesting as it is – I would have preferred to see some reflection on how more recent developments in family life, including rising rates of divorce and single parenthood, both of which are often driven by economic imperatives that put the traditional bourgeois family model out of the reach of many contemporary workers, affects democracy as a way of life today.

The Return of Politics of Victory
With the exception of the final chapter of van Rahden's book – and despite their mutual desire to speak to the ongoing crisis of democracy in the first decades of the twenty-first century – both of these studies push the date of Western Europe's postwar democratic age back further than the existing literature expressing the fear that we are living after or "post-democracy."[18] Rather than focusing on 2016 or 1989, which is usually seen as the end of the postwar era, Conway and van Rahden end their narratives before the onset of the oil shocks of the 1970s and the ensuing crisis of the welfare state that followed. This fifty year gap makes it somewhat more difficult to relate their findings to the present.

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[17] This study has recently been released in a new edition after being out of print for many years. See Theodor W. Adorno and others, *The Authoritarian Personality* (London: Verso, 2019). For a wonderful example of its new salience, see Peter E. Gordon, "The Authoritarian Personality Revisited: Reading Adorno in the Age of Trump," *Boundary 2* (15 June, 2016).
[18] Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

With that being said, it is clear that the rise of neoliberalism and the starving of the state has something to do with the changes experienced by Western Europe's democracies in the aftermath of the student protests. I have already noted how van Rahden makes this point using the example of the Parkbad in Offenbach in the conclusion of his study. Similarly, Conway observes in passing how the *dirigiste* "methods and mindsets of planning" that defined postwar politics meant that neoliberal notion of "[e]conomic freedom sat rather awkwardly within the culture of post-war democracy" (210). By contrast, he notes that the waning of parties and parliaments since 1970, accompanied by the rising influence of private enterprise, financial institutions, public-private partnerships and market forces more generally, means that "Power and democracy had diverged, generating an impotence common to both rulers and ruled" (302).

As a diagnoses of the current crisis, both of these books echo many findings in the existing literature. However, reading their accounts against current trends brings some other implications to the fore as well. Although I do not wish to wade into the increasingly complex historical debates about the utility of comparisons of the present to Weimar, it is clear that stylistically today's populists represent a return to the style of politics of the democratic regimes of the interwar years, which favored winner-take-all showdowns between "irresponsible political figures, who…sought to outbid each other, thereby fostering unrealistic expectations among the electors" (MC, 128).[19]

As a reaction against the unstable parliamentarism of direct popular sovereignty promoted by the interwar regimes, Western Europe sought after 1945 to replace the "Darwinian struggles between conflicting interests by institutions of social negotiation" (139) with the "regulated

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[19] Examples of these comparative inquiries include Mark Mazower, "Weimar 2013?" *Project Syndicate,* 31 December, 2013; Daniel Bessner and Udi Greenberg, "The Weimar Analogy," *Jacobin Magazine* (17 December, 2016).

rivalry" (Burke, quoted in TvR 20) of democratic regimes in which "the citizens have to accept and agree to the rules of the game within which they seek to resolve their conflicts" (20). Over time, it is clear that citizens across the West have increasingly become fed up with what Conway calls the "process of continuous negotiation" demanded by liberal democracy. As collective memories of the instability, wars and suffering of the interwar years has faded, so has the postwar fear of a politics of direct popular sovereignty based not on compromise, but on "victory or defeat" (11).[20] At a time when the institutions of representative democracy have increasingly been sidelined by anonymous market forces, it is perhaps understandable that disaffected citizens would seek to "take back control" – as the slogan of the Leave campaign in the UK so successfully put it – by abandoning the postwar approach of negotiation and technocratic problem solving, which increasingly seems to favor the haves over the have nots.

This desire for clear victories, not compromise, is but one aspect of the contemporary malaise. The second is the return of the "cult of the great man" (128), visible in societies as disparate as the UK, the US, Brazil and Hungary, which was out of fashion for much of the postwar era. In contrast to the depersonalized politics of parliamentary committees and regulatory agencies, today's disaffected citizens desire not impartiality, reflexivity and efficient management; instead, they want to feel that they are being heard.[21] They therefore look to their leaders to give voice to their feelings and look on politics as a sport, where one plays to win, not to achieve some broader outcome. Victory is once again the overriding goal.

The effects of this new politics of performance are clearly visible in the two countries that defined the democratic crisis of 2016. For example, in accepting the Republican nomination to

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[20] Peter J. Verovšek, "The Loss of European Memory," *Social Europe Journal* (12 February, 2019).
[21] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Democratic Legitimacy: Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

run for President in 2020 while standing on the south lawn of the White House, Donald Trump noted what was ultimately important: "We're here, and they're not." Similarly, obtaining a narrow majority in favor of exiting the EU, the leaders of the Leave campaign in the Conservative party chose not to reunify the country by seeking a compromise in the form of a "soft Brexit," but instead took full advantage of their victory to push for as clean a break with the EU as possible, even touting the advantages of "no deal." This new winner-take-all mentality is particular dangerous when combined with winner-take-all votes, such as referenda and elections in first-past-the-post, single member districts, so it is perhaps not surprising that it has had the biggest effects precisely in the US and the UK in the case of Brexit.

While it may be comforting to think we can return to the postwar democratic age simply by electing mainstream, status quo, liberal leaders, this is unlikely to be the case. Our time is different from the immediate postwar era in too many ways for the solution to be that simple. That being said, the resigned optimism with which Conway ends his book, declaring that "nothing would suggest that the current model of democratic politics will mark the end point in its evolution" (310), seems far too simplistic and overly passive a response to the perils of the contemporary moment.

By contrast, van Rahden concludes, "We live in a democracy that is a form of rule and of life. It is up to us to maintain it" (141). This call to action is most welcome. Unfortunately, it is unclear what form it can and should take. That said, it is somewhat comforting to see individuals across the West increasingly taking to the streets to protest important issues that have been overlooked or exacerbated by contemporary political leaders. If Conway and van Rahden are correct in arguing that the protests of 1968 spelled the end of Western Europe's postwar democratic age, it is possible that the new racial justice protests of 2020 might represent a new

beginning. At the very least, this seems like an outcome in which we may place our Kantian

hopes (*Hoffnungen*).