

Tech Bro Messiahs: How Tech Billionaires are Spearheading Late-Stage  
Reactionary Politics

by

Benjamin Tscheschlok

A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State University in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the University Honors College

*Fall 2024*

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Robb McDaniel, Thesis Director

Dr. Michael Federici, Second Reader

Dean Vile, Thesis Committee Chair

Tech Bro Messiahs: How Tech Billionaires are Spearheading Late-Stage Reactionary

Politics

by Benjamin Tscheschlok

APPROVED:

---

Dr. Robb McDaniel, Thesis Director

Associate Professor,

Department of Political and Global Affairs

---

Dr. John Vile, Thesis Committee Chair

Honors College Dean, University Honors College

## Table of Contents

I.	A New Scene of Reaction .....	1
II.	Antagonisms to the Development of Liberal Democracy.....	10
III.	Marc Andreessen: If Lex Luthor Watched Too Much Rush Limbaugh .....	29
IV.	Peter Thiel: Saruman Falls Deeper into Madness and Becomes a Tech Bro .....	46
V.	Elon Musk: Tony Stark as the Celebrity Übermensch .....	65
VI.	The Capitalist Leviathan’s Ultimatum .....	81

## Abstract

Far-right tech billionaires are advancing a new form of reactionary ideology, one hostile to democratic power. Silicon Valley tycoons Elon Musk, Marc Andreessen, and Peter Thiel are actively pushing for a techno-capitalist political and economic order, one where the capitalist can operate in the market unimpeded from outside interests such as the state, and even democratic concerns that would only get in the way of their work. These tech oligarchs insist innovative minds like theirs are at the center of creating a brighter future, and thus deserve not just the immense wealth and power they currently hold in liberal America, but the larger concentrations of power they will inevitably receive in their ideal world without regulations, worker power, or elections. The three billionaires are notable agents in a larger reactionary movement produced by liberalism seeking to dismantle liberalism, calling into question the nature and viability of the liberal order.

## CHAPTER I

### A New Scene of Reaction

Tech billionaires such as Elon Musk, Marc Andreessen, and Peter Thiel are not only some of the world's most powerful oligarchs but are arguably, as heads of key technology industries, some of the most powerful businessmen in history. In much of the world, one would be hard-pressed to find someone who doesn't use services from the tech industry, such as social media or internet search engines. However, the prevalence of the tech titans does not end with the products and services their companies produce. Silicon Valley capitalists such as Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, and Marc Andreessen use their immense influence to alter not only the economy but the mainstream discourse around politics and even the American political mechanisms directly. Liberal columnist Paul Krugman in his New York Times article points to some notable cases of tech giants taking alarming action toward advancing far right politics. Ever since Elon Musk bought X (formerly known as Twitter) that platform has been "making more room for right-wing extremists, including a substantial number of pro-Nazi accounts, and his own embrace of antisemitic and racist conspiracy theories" (Krugman 2024). A groundbreaking instance of billionaire influence, Peter Thiel played an essential role in securing J.D. Vance Trump's running-mate spot (Krugman 2024). Both directly and indirectly, these tech billionaires play a crucial role in shaping American politics and are pushing it in a reactionary direction.

What is reactionism, and what makes one a reactionary? There is no clear-cut unanimous description, but rather a set of characteristics attributable to reactionary

tendencies in individuals or groups. I have constructed a five-pronged criteria for identifying reactionary politics, with the aim of establishing a substantive set of fundamentals. It should be noted that a thinker or set of beliefs is not required to include all listed aspects in order to be reactionary, as reaction is a spectrum.

First and foremost, reactionary politics are typically, although not exclusively, ideologically far-right. As such, the reactionary emphatically supports highly authoritarian forms of traditional hierarchal power structures. Authoritarian, as is used here, does not refer exclusively to a powerful and abusive state, although such a state would certainly qualify. Authoritarian notes an intense concentration of power among the rulers of any given hierarchy and entails domination over the ruled. A Social Darwinist of the industrial age would not only support capitalism but advocate for something close to its most extreme laissez-faire form, endorsing the authoritarian oppression of the working class through long working hours, cruel conditions, child labor, poverty wages, etc. Another example would be the Nazis, who go above supporting a strong state and insist a nation needs a totalitarian state capable of engaging in total war and exterminating those deemed problematic to a given ethnic population. The reactionary is some flavor of authoritarian, rather it be economic, social, political, or likely all three.

Secondly, reactionary politics harnesses its momentum by framing a struggle against either an exaggerated or virtually fabricated outgroup. Reactionaries need an enemy to focus their assault toward, often scapegoating them for issues the chosen target either isn't responsible for in any way or is only a factor of a greater equation. Reactionary politics relies heavily upon fearmongering that greatly dramatizes the opposition's actual aims, if not making up a threat completely. Take Donald Trump's

debate claim that Haitian immigrants were eating cats and dogs on a rampage as an example of a fabricated enemy. Any amount of research yields no evidence anywhere close to reports of Haitian immigrants consuming pets in mass (or at all), but reaction thrives on fictitious evils. In contrast, Edmund Burke's rhetoric of the French Revolution is a classic case of exaggerating the identity of a real threat, "'The real object' of the French Revolution, Burke told Parliament in 1790, is, 'to break all those connexions, natural and civil, that regulate and hold a community together by a chain of subordination; to raise soldiers against their officers; servants against their masters; tradesman against their customers; artificers against their employers; tenants against their landlords; curates against their bishops; and children against their parents'" (Burke, as quoted by Robin, 2018, 13). There is no denying the Jacobins were becoming threatening political players and radicals unleashing terror. Although Burke was correct to acknowledge some of the French Revolution's excessive violence and the use of terror, his words nonetheless mischaracterize the Jacobins' radicalness as anarchic, exaggerating their aims even if a response was warranted.

Thirdly, reactionary politics often indulges in the romanticization of a mythicized past. Notably, the idolization of civilizations prior to the world "degenerating" is a hallmark of fascism. Fascism certainly makes the most of an imagined past, such as with the Nazis and their ahistoric storytelling of the Aryan people. Fascism "established a variety of mythical lineages that were, for it, the ultimate source of what was politically truthful" (Finchelstein 2022, 26). However, other reactionaries may look back with a simpler, if not skewed, nostalgia, one that conjures images warmer than what are portrayed as current times of humiliation and frustration. Peter Thiel, like many

reactionaries, looks to the past century of American development and sees greatness, a greatness that is absent in modern America, according to Thiel (Gellman 2023). It follows that Thiel, like many others, would latch on to the slogan “Make America Great Again,” picturing days where power was wielded by great men.

Fourthly, reactionary politics tend to have an instinctual contrarianism. Predictably, when the “us versus them” tribalism of bogeyman politics lingers around and grows, the mentality finds itself in an increasingly hostile position to what are its broadly right-wing allies. The reactionary faction becomes less and less compromising, embracing the philosophy that conservatives who fail to fully endorse their program are functionally assets to the radical left. By pitting other parties as opponents, the reactionary can proudly distinguish their stance as the true defense of society’s sacred institutions. John C. Calhoun’s infamous “Slavery as a Positive Good” speech encapsulates the reactionary inclination to bring the fearmongering toward the allies it contrasts itself to. His intended audience for his impassioned defense of slavery were not the abolitionists, but the guilt-conscious slave owners, highlighting the defect in their reluctant acceptance of a power dynamic he argued they ought to be proud of. The line was drawn, and the planter class was given the choice between embracing slavery as a positive good or meeting the “aggressors” with concession. According to Calhoun, the latter category were “prepared to become slaves” (Calhoun 1837).

Lastly, reactionary politics spread through intensely reductive argumentation, defending hierarchy by obscuring its potential problems. The reactionary generally deemphasizes critical analysis of power, or at least the common objections to the systems they militantly endorse. Just as Calhoun described slavery, the reactionary defender of

whatever particular power structure they seek to uphold embellishes its accomplishments to characterize it as a positive good. Although reactionaries are not likely to openly wear the banner of utopianism, their propaganda paints a rosy picture in the absence of seriously addressing the concerns to the solutions they're trying to sell. All three tech billionaires engage in a sort of reductive argumentation, best exemplified in Andreessen's "techno-optimist" philosophy, seeing technology production and growth under capitalism as an absolute positive good (Andreessen 2023).

Where do these businessmen fit into the reactionary milieu? Peter Thiel infamously said in his manifesto *The Education of Libertarian* "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible" (Thiel 2009). Thiel's disdain for democracy is unmistakable, but his motivations for doing so are somewhat unclear. What is meant by "freedom?" Thiel's freedom is simply capitalism unbothered by state interference (he provides little explanation for how market libertarianism promotes freedom, treating the connection largely as a given). While Thiel never calls for a dictatorship or meaningfully elaborates on a different political alternative (he offers alternatives in his manifesto, but they focus more on business and effectively serve to sidestep the issue of governance rather than answering it), his rhetoric clearly spells out a desire to strip the people of political power, exposing his politically authoritarian character.

Elon Musk has used his platform as an opportunity to voice far-right conspiracy theories. One odious instance was when Musk retweeted a post from verified twitter account "The Artist formerly Known as Eric" claiming, "Jewish communities have been pushing the exact kind of dialectical hatred against whites that they claim to want people to stop using against them. I'm deeply disinterested in giving the tiniest shit now about

the western Jewish populations coming to the disturbing realization that those hordes of minorities that support flooding their country don't exactly like them too much." What was Elon Musk's response to the notion Jews were propagating "anti-white" hatred? With over five million views, Elon agreed, "You have said the actual truth" (Picchi 2023). It would not be the only incident where Musk engaged in anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, making him a perfect example of targeting outgroups on fictitious grounds.

Marc Andreessen, along with being a pioneer of early internet, also enjoys an unhealthy obsession with ancient Greece, tipping into the territory of mythological romanticization of the past common in reactionary politics. Andreessen posted an argument on his Substack in favor of MMA fighting, but there's more to the story. Along with the more reasoned arguments, such as the health benefits of the sport, he points to its earlier forms in ancient Greece as indicative of their glory and strength. Andreessen insists that learning to fight is a necessary measure of self-defense, and that violence should not be romanticized for its own sake, yet the very spark of the conversation was his enthusiasm for the much-anticipated fight between Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk over settling differences (Andreessen, Fighting, 2023). He even ends his post with, "If it was good enough for Heracles and Theseus, it's good enough for us. *Fight!*" Andreessen's fetishization of pointless, theatrical middle-school boy fight culture is a kindred spirit to the glorification of more militant violence from Palmer Luckey (more on him). Both hold an ominous adoration for power characteristic of reactionary politics.

These cases are not isolated exceptions from these individuals, nor are they insignificant in scope. Take Palmer Luckey as another prominent tech-bro example. Much younger at only thirty-one years old, Luckey is an upcoming star in the Silicon

Valley sphere and a potential snapshot for its future. Luckey, a co-founder of the weapons manufacturer Anduril, had this to say about the role of private enterprise in war, ““Societies have always needed a warrior class that is enthused and excited about enacting violence on others in pursuit of good aims,’ he told Gash. ‘You need people like me who are sick in that way and who don’t lose any sleep making tools of violence in order to preserve freedom’” (MacColl 2024). To contextualize Luckey’s comment, in the same conference he pushed for the highly controversial autonomous AI, capable of killing targets without the input of a human operator. The right-wing billionaires are a minority strain of the larger billionaire class, one particularly liberal in the case of Silicon Valley; however, the factional sliver of the American billionaire class encompasses more than strictly Musk, Thiel, and Andreessen. A certain portion of Silicon Valley billionaires are spearheading a new scene of reactionary politics in America.

Even with a robust understanding of reactionism, dispute remains over the differences between conservatism and the reactionary right. Conservatism aims to uphold “traditional” power regimes, but not necessarily to their most unbridled form, like the far-right. Conservatism believes power should be held accountable to the rule of law, whereas the reactionary favors the rule of law being wholly beholden to the powerful. A conservative in a setting such as 18<sup>th</sup> century England would have favored constitutional monarchy checked by law (Burke was a whig, but constitutional monarchy was their general platform). In contrast, the reactionary, such as Hobbes (more from him shortly), argues the king embodies the law itself, and thus cannot be below any outside authority.

Likewise, conservatism lacks the consistent bombastic and melodramatic character of reactionary politics. Unlike the reactionary right, conservatism is not

necessarily on a militant quest to rain hellfire on feared outgroups, or initiate infighting with others on the right (in fact, as demonstrated with Calhoun, the reactionary brings the fight to the conservative). However, conservatives are capable of acting reactionary when under enough pressure. Edmund Burke, for example, is often attributed as a father of modern conservatism, so why was he cited as an example of reaction? As a whole, Burke was not reactionary, as he was open to change while emphasizing the centrality of tradition, “A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation” (Tenenhaus 2009). Burke’s conservatism nonetheless morphed into reaction in certain occasions, such as with the French Revolution, or at the very least, exhibited certain reactionary characteristics in his rhetoric, namely his hyperbolic depictions of the Jacobin’s political aims. Even with the distinction between conservatism and reactionism, the two are not mutually exclusive. A connection exists, and as highlighted by Burke’s example, a conservative thinker can exhibit reactionary tendencies when the context is right.

In spite of these concerning views and behaviors from the three businessmen, an important question remains to be answered: so, what? Why should anyone care about the political views of Elon Musk or Peter Thiel? Because the social commentary of the tech bros isn’t strictly relegated to personal opinion, these reactionary perspectives are an integral component of their outlook toward society and their will to change it. At the minimum, their voices influence both public perception and those in power. When Elon Musk sends out a divisive tweet, a very large audience becomes exposed to likely toxic misinformation. When Andreessen writes a manifesto, other billionaires will begin to read and entertain his ideas. However, the impact these men have on politics goes far

beyond ideas. All three have heavily donated to political campaigns, with Musk even owning a super PAC called America PAC, giving them leverage to shape policy platforms. Some have direct connections to top power players in right wing politics, such as Thiel's connections to Vance and Musk's active involvement in the Trump campaign. It is powerful people like Musk, Thiel, and Andreessen that have a hand in shaping the nation's future.

My thesis will inspect the reactionary ideas of each tech-bro respectively and dive deeper into the extent of their political influence. Each billionaire will have their own dedicated section, ending with a conclusive analysis constructing a larger narrative on the tech oligarchs' collective ideology and political impact. Furthermore, the conclusion will contextualize the reactionary politics with liberalism and provide a fresh angle for questioning the fundamental conventions and systems of liberal society. It is pertinent however, before examining the contemporaries to analyze the historical context of anti-democratic reaction in Anglo-American politics.

## CHAPTER II

### Historical Antagonisms to the Development of Liberal Democracy

Four centuries ago, English philosopher Thomas Hobbes was crafting not only what is arguably the earliest case of counter-revolutionary political theory, but also the groundwork for similar ideological undercurrents prevalent in tech-bro reaction. It is often said Hobbes was a foundational liberal thinker. Although Hobbes borrows heavily from many liberal conventions, his primary objective was to hold the emerging liberal tides at bay in his defense of not just the crown, but absolute monarchy.

Although Hobbes upheld absolute monarchism as the end, he uniquely employed liberal argumentation as the means. Early Enlightenment liberals constructed the concept of a social contract, arguing society is (or at least ought to be) formed with people coming together to create ordered society by erecting a state with their consent. Hobbes incorporates the liberal framework of social contract, individualism, among other liberal ideas, into his argument with a twist. Instead of supporting the liberal politics limited government and electoral representation, at least in part, Hobbes places the public in a dichotomy between the state of nature, which he famously labels as “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, short,” or the more preferably order of an all-powerful monarch (Hobbes 1914, 65). Only a strong, intensely centralized authority could enforce the iron scepter of law onto society and prevent the descent into natural barbarism.

The novelty of Hobbes’s argument is not the unwavering monarchism, for others had already made that case prior. James I and Charles I previously appealed to the divine right of kings, which claimed the king was absolute through the degree of God and God

alone. What made the Hobbesian case unique and particularly ingenious was his methodology. Hobbes understood the old justifications of unrestrained kingship were unconvincing to the increasing number of parliamentary radicals arguing for either more checks on the throne or no throne at all, so by borrowing from liberal systems of analysis, he could attempt to convince others from a fresher, more appealing angle. Hobbes used the new to vigorously defend the old. The tech bros, whether they intentionally looked to Hobbes or not, took a page from him and replicated his style. Just as Hobbes embraced ideas of the social contract to legitimize the Levithan, the tech bros speak of technology advancing social justice and the collective standard of living to justify the Levithan of capital. The reward for both is reinforcing the illusion of popular power, propagating the idea, as Robin describes it, “in which the people become actors without roles, an audience that believes it is onstage” (Robin 2018, 97). In a sense, Hobbes was a tech-bro before tech-bros existed.

The similarities do not end there, however. Notably, Hobbes employs a scientific, and in particular a mechanical perspective of both human nature and the state. In the very first paragraph of *Leviathan* Hobbes establishes his “artificial” person, “For what is the Heart, but a Spring; and the Nerves, but so many Strings; and the Joynts, but so many Wheeles, giving motion to the whole Body, such as was intended by the Artificer” (Hobbes 1914, 1). He extends his metaphor to the state, “For by Art is created that great Leviathan, called a Common-Wealth, or State (in latine Civitas) which is but an Artificiall Man...” (Hobbes 1914, 1). Although the tech elites lack an explicitly mechanical interpretation of human nature, they do share an emphasis on viewing larger social structures as a rational machine, only instead of the state it is capitalism, which

Andreessen refers to, specifically the technology sector of capitalism, as the “techno-capital machine” (Andreessen 2023). Likewise, the techno sphere view humans as rational creatures, but steers the rational, decision-making aspect of humans toward consumer choices in markets.

Ironically, some of the hostility toward popular power came not just from outside liberalism, but from within the movement. The Putney debates of 1647 set the stage for what would become a centuries-long conflict over who had the right to representation. The Grandees, being the conservative wing of the parliamentary forces, supported several pillars of liberal thought, such as a social contract, a stronger legislative body, religious tolerance, and private property. However, on the subject of suffrage, voting was to be granted strictly to property-owning men, who would have been a small fraction of England’s population, excluding all women and propertyless male peasants who labored under feudal lords. The Levellers, being the more radical faction of the parliamentary forces, argued for universal male suffrage and placed greater emphasis on the natural rights of individual personhood. Thomas Rainsborough, one of the leading figures of the Levellers, would famously say, “The poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he ... I think it’s clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do think that the poorest man in England is not at all bound in a strict sense to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under” (Rainsborough 1647).

The idea of one man, one vote was one of the most contentious subjects in the debates. The name “Leveller” was an insult lauded by the Grandees across the aisle, expressing a fear that if universal manhood suffrage were implemented, the peasant

masses would weaponize legislation to abolish private property entirely, leveling the ruling structures of English society. The Leveller label was a signature of reactionary hyperbole. Lieutenant General Ireton of the rebel army and head of the Grandee position insisted property was at the foundation of the social compact, and to erroneously place natural rights as the bedrock of civil society, as the Levellers argued, would topple English civilization (Mason and Baker 1985, 24). The Grandees' common ground with the Levellers for liberal reform indicates their platform was more conservative than reactionary. Regardless, the Grandees exemplify how the lines between conservatism and reaction become blurred in the heat of a rising leftist opposition.

While reactionaries certainly overstated the stakes of popular manhood suffrage, it was not entirely unfounded either. A minority faction of the Levellers, who referred to themselves as the true Levellers, wholeheartedly subscribed to their opposition's drummed-up description. These radicals, just like the Grandees feared, aimed for manhood suffrage to abolish the vast feudal estates and convert them into a society comparable to the Christian agrarian communism ascribed in Thomas More's utopia about a century prior. And like More's social commentary, the True Levellers were compelled by similar material circumstances. Enclosure of common lands by lords was a serious problem for the number of English peasants being evicted from their land and deprived of their livelihood, largely due to the increasing profitability of wool sparking large quantities of arable land to be converted into sheep pasture. The true Levellers also earned the nickname "Diggers" for rebelliously starting farming communities on enclosed land.

The good majority of the Levellers nonetheless had no interest in the agrarian Christian communist project of their more radical counterpart. Instead, they sought to construct some of the earliest building blocks for liberal government, such as expanded access to private property and suffrage to the common peasant, exposing the dramatization of the opposition's stance characteristic of reactionary politics. However, that is not to say the Grandees and their allies had nothing to fear. While private property and the State were not being challenged anywhere near the degree being painted by reactionaries, or even at all, England's social order was. The Levellers, although tame relative to the true Leveller alternative, were championing changes that threatened powerful interests. The significant expansion of suffrage and accessibility to private property indicates the Leveller program was shifting the scales of power, even if moderately, in the direction of the masses, subsequently steering it away from being monopolized by the King, the Barrons, and the Church. The reactionary must, at all times, pit themselves in a struggle against the image of a powerful enemy. Fake enemies are only necessary when the political order is, in contrast to the reactionary's depiction, relatively stable. Once revolutionary forces grow and eventually confront the status quo, the reactionary loses the need to fabricate an enemy.

The embryo of liberalism was now, for the first time, a recognizable and serious movement. With its theoretical origins now established, liberal thought would continue to grow with intellectuals such as Locke and Smith alongside its Republican sister with thinkers such as Harrington and Jefferson, who would further emphasize democratic power, although certainly not without its weighty contradictions and shortcomings. It would take over a good century for the seeds of liberalism to sprout into a commendable

force beginning the uprooting of the old feudal order that dominated much of the world for millennia, but once revolution began it would engulf nations like wildfire and change the established paradigm.

The forces of reaction that attempted to contain liberalism's development in Putney had kindred spirits at the sunset of the 18th century. Any social movement with noteworthy momentum will inevitably undergo an identity crisis, as fissures emerge between varying factions with opposing views as to the goals of their common cause, and the United States was no exception. Questions of suffrage, property, and rights became more relevant than ever. Any meaningful victory for the revolution would depend upon what kind of society would be constructed in the wake of rebellion.

Various thinkers created several visions for what the infant nation should look like, with some embracing wider representation more than others. While Payne and Jefferson advocated for more radically inclusive forms of republicanism for their times, other key founding thinkers, such as Hamilton, were actively fighting tooth and nail against what they saw as a slippery slope toward anarchic "mob rule." When examining the instability of post-war America, Hamilton remarked "when the [minds of the multitude] are loosened from their attachment to ancient establishments and courses, they...are apt more or less to run into anarchy" (Hamilton, as quoted in Mason and Baker 1985, 134). This is not to say that Hamilton was a prominent example within the American Revolution hostile to liberalism and representation by principle. However, in expressing his support for representation Hamilton notes in *The Constitutionalist* an unsurprising but important and familiar condescension toward the people's ability to wield political power, "In comparison of our governments with those of ancient

republics, we must, without hesitation, give preference to our own; because power with us is exercised by representation, not in the tumultuary assemblies of the collective body of the people, where the art or impudence of the *Orator* or *Tribune*, rather than the utility or justice of the measure, could seldom fail to govern” (Hamilton, as quoted in Mason and Baker 1985,145).

Although arguably the most skeptical of democratic power, Hamilton was not the only American revolutionary seeking to defend liberalism against the perceived majoritarian threat. The American founders as a whole were not the champions of democracy often portrayed in media and lower levels of education, as democracy, just like it was used in classical texts such as Plato’s *Republic*, was synonymous with lawless mob chaos. Instead, the framers of the Constitution feared any who wielded political power were apt to abuse it, both the few and the many. These views are reflected in the structure of the American government, dividing power vertically through federalism and horizontally through branches of the federal government, expanding upon “mixed regime” models established and popularized by figures such as Aristotle and Montesquieu.

Regardless, controlling the development of popular power was a key priority of the framers, and the government structure reflects those aspirations. Of course, one should not be overzealous in universally characterizing the views of government for all the founders at the constitutional convention and after. Madison’s pluralistic vision of American society is quite different from Hamilton’s nationalism, and especially Jefferson’s agrarian republicanism. The Constitution is a somewhat limited consensus between the numerous competing political philosophies of governance, and democracy

was certainly no exception. The Constitution goes to great lengths to restrict the public's access to political power in several key places. Senators were selected by state legislatures and not popular elections. The electoral college decides the president, which is only compounded by the additional slant of the three-fifths clause artificially augmenting the number of representatives for the very state governments suppressing the enslaved. Another example is requiring three-fourths of all states to ratify the Constitution, eliminating the possibility of majorities unless they are overwhelming. The political infrastructure of the Constitution is a historic hallmark of Western liberalism; however, its infancy stands in history as still the embryo of a democratic society, wrapped in layers of guardrails for powerful interests against the common people and various marginalized groups.

The constitution and the generation of its creators were not reactionary. They were conservative in many respects, with their strong adherence toward hierarchies and their intellectual reinforcement that goes back at least to Aristotle, but these perspectives are not reactionary in the same way as Hobbes was. The American revolution did challenge the conventional power dynamics of its time. Its contradictions, however, over the essential questions of suffrage and property would provide future reactionaries with substance and precedent to legitimize their hostility toward democratic tendencies. Reactionaries moving forward, although marked by an inflammatory resistance to change unlike the founders, would argue they were defending the very same model that ruled and defined the nation.

Just around the same time as Edmund Burke was battling the Jacobin boogeyman under Britain's bed, American elites were grappling with similar fears over domestic

unrest. Shays' Rebellion was one such pivotal moment of unrest in post-war America. General Henry Knox described the Shaysites as "insurgents," explaining to George Washington 'Their creed' believed "that the property of the United States has been protected from the confiscations of Britain by the joint exertions of all, and therefore ought to be the common property of all. And he that attempts opposition to this creed is an enemy to equity and justice, and ought to be swept from the face of the earth'" (Knox, as quoted by Mason and Baker 1985, 171). He went on to state, "This dreadful situation has alarmed every man of principle and property in New England. Our government must be braced, changed, or altered to secure our lives and property" (Knox, as quoted by Mason and Baker 1985, 171). Much like Douglas MacArthur crushing the Bonus Army movement in 1932, militant reactionaries do not look at a crisis and see fellow human beings, countrymen, and veterans asking for the better life they had fought for, but rather as irrational rabbling crusaders of class war against property and lawful order. The federal government's roadblocks in effectively establishing the rule of law upon the radical "mob" under the Articles of Confederation were widely regarded as a driving factor in the push for drafting the Constitution.

The Haitian revolution was another event in the broader domestic sphere that sent many Americans, particularly slaveholders, into uproar, a highlight of hypocrisy against the celebrated enlightenment ideas of American Liberalism. Burke's worries capture the alarm shared across the Atlantic, "Blacks rose against whites, whites against blacks, and each against one another in murderous hostility; subordination was destroyed" (Burke, as quoted by Robin 2018, 14). British Tory and Poet Dr. Samuel Johnson brilliantly exposed the searing contradiction between the passionate idea for freedom and the monied

interests of the planter class, “How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty from the drivers of negroes” (Johnson, as quoted by Eric Foner, 440).

Although representation was a major issue in the early years of the new republic, suffrage was largely a backburner issue, with major concerns being focused more on structures of government and which parts did or did not involve election via representation. As Jefferson stated, “In truth, the abuses of monarchy had so much filled the space of political contemplation, that we imagined everything republican which was not monarchy. We had not yet penetrated to the mother principle, that ‘governments are republican only in proportion as they embody the will of their people, and execute it’” (Jefferson 1816). However, turning toward the Jacksonian era, the subject of “equal suffrage” would become a major and divisive issue. With the pressure for creating a white man's democracy gaining steam, old rhetoric began to resurface from the mouthpieces of the propertied classes. As state constitutional conventions began to revisit their suffrage qualifications, several intellectuals would take the opportunity to once again, defend property against popular access to the functions of the state. Meanwhile, the slaver aristocracy was fighting its own battles against an encroaching abolitionist consciousness. On multiple fronts, the powerful feared that their watchdog, the state, would potentially arise to challenge them.

The United States was undergoing a new age of liberalism leading up to the several decades leading up to the Civil War. The democrat coalition, marked by a Jacksonian populist push for abolishing freeholder suffrage and the stranglehold of state-sponsored monopolies, forged a powerful alliance of both small farmers and urban proletariat. The Democrats, in many ways, carried on the torch of Jeffersonian

republicanism with its emphasis on expanding suffrage and opposition commercial monopoly protected and swollen by a national bank, solidifying itself as the “common man’s” party. However, unlike their predecessors, both the value and inevitability of an industrial economy were becoming accepted. Justice Roger Taney exemplifies the Jacksonian attack on political and economic favoritism,

It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes. Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth cannot be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society—the farmers, mechanics, and laborers—who have neither the time nor means of securing like favor to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their government (Taney, as quoted by Mason and Baker, 1985, 358).

However, the forces of reaction did not see laissez-faire liberalism at their doorstep. Rising popular power, both in the political and economic realms, was feared to be yet another attack on property. One such proponent of this view was Associate Justice Joseph Story, stating at the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention, “It must always be a question of the highest moment how the property-holding part of the community may be sustained against the inroads of poverty and vice” (Story, as quoted by Mason and

Baker 1985, 362). His grievances left him with a familiar conclusion, “Gentlemen have argued, as though it was universally conceded as a political axiom, that population is in all cases and under all circumstances the safest and best basis of representation. I beg leave to doubt the proposition” (Story, as quoted by Mason and Baker 1985, 363).

One of the staunchest defenders of free-holder suffrage was head of the New York’s constitutional delegation James Kent. Kent shared Story’s concerns of the poor’s threat to the propertied classes, while displaying a whole another level of fearmongering, “The tendency of universal suffrage, is to jeopardize the rights of property, and the principles of liberty. There is a constant tendency in human society, and the history of every age proves it; there is a tendency in the poor to covet and to share the plunder of the rich...in the majority to tyrannize over the minority, and trample down their rights...” (Kent, as quoted by Mason and Baker 1985, 369). Kent, like those before, claims his skepticisms toward democracy were proven right by the sages of ages past, “That extreme democratic principle, when applied to the legislative and executive departments of government, has been regarded with terror, by the wise men of every age, because in every European republic, ancient and modern, in which it has been tried, it has terminated disastrously, and been productive of corruption, injustice, violence, and tyranny” (Kent, as quoted by Mason and Baker 1985, 369). Much like Ayn Rand, Kent acknowledges the existence of class war, rather than attempting to downplay it. However, to the reactionary defender of property, the wealthy are the victims, under barrage by the spitfire of oppression from the mob. If the rich are to secure their deserved economic status, then they must maintain their dominant hold on the state, a matter of survival for the monied classes. It is anything but shocking Kent upheld Hamilton as his intellectual role model.

The Jacksonian era also came with increasing reaction from the plantation aristocracy. Ironically, the very political party fighting reactionaries regarding suffrage and economic reform was the home of the reactionaries warring against abolitionist encroachment, with the most notable being South Carolina senator John C. Calhoun. And unlike some of the intellectuals fighting against Jacksonian liberalism, such as Kent, who openly pointed the finger at the masses, Calhoun's optics placed him on the side of the common white man. Calhoun states, "“With us the two great divisions of society are not the rich and the poor, but white and black; and all the former, the poor as well as the rich, belong to the upper class, and are respected and treated as equals”" (Calhoun, as quoted by Robin 2018, 53). This concept Calhoun highlights Corry Robin refers to as "democratic feudalism." With democratic feudalism, the common white man can be bought off into supporting the landed elites by believing he too is a member of a kind of nobility, either by the material wealth of directly owning a small number of slaves or just by virtue of being white. Reaction, therefore, is not a tendency exclusive to the elites, although they usually maintain the greatest control over its influence and direction.

Another case of Calhoun's different approach to reactionary politics was his stance on slavery directly. Perhaps most infamously, Calhoun described slavery as a "positive good" for not just the owner, but the slave,

I may say with truth, that in few countries so much is left to the share of the laborer, and so little exacted from him, or where there is more kind attention paid to him in sickness or infirmities of age. Compare his condition with the tenants of the poor houses in the more civilized portions of Europe—look at the sick, and the old and infirm slave, on one hand, in the midst of his family and friends, under the

kind superintending care of his master and mistress, and compare it with the forlorn and wretched condition of the pauper in the poorhouse (Calhoun, 1837).

Calhoun's line of reasoning reveals another side to reactionary politics. The reactionary tendencies previously analyzed are wolf-like. These thinkers in their remarks showed their teeth, doing little to hide their distrust, distaste, or downright resentment for those they fear below in their dramatic exclamations of the opposition's aims. In contrast, Calhoun, while certainly not adverse to being a wolf, comes off more as a fox in this particular instance. Instead of strictly demonizing the slave or the abolitionist, he presents himself as concerned with the interest of the slave. Calhoun executes this rhetorical style by firstly, mythicizing the condition of the slave with imagery of warmth, community, and comfort. Secondly, he follows up his distortion of African American oppression by bringing attention to the oppression of the European proletariat in a more reasonable description of its wretchedness and impoverishment. In effect, Calhoun offers sympathy for one system of oppression by drafting up a faulty comparison to another, drawing upon white anger toward the abolitionist movement. Calhoun comes off as more level-headed and rational than the overtly asinine fearmongering of most reactionary talking points, despite the ideas he communicated being even more absurd. One can only imagine it would not be the last time such reactionary cunningness would be employed.

Despite all the alarms signaled by the American reactionaries at the dawn of the 19th century, much of their efforts would be in vain. Just as Frederick Douglass predicted, the planter class and to a wider extent the whole nation was sitting atop a simmering volcano primed to violently erupt at any given moment. Likewise, freeholder requirements would fall through across the nation, eventually followed by expanding

suffrage further to African American men. Moving toward the latter half of the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution was well underway in the United States, accompanied by new emerging social stratifications. By the dawn of the Gilded Age, the capitalist class had emerged as the definitive economic powerhouse of the American economy. Consolidation of wealth in the hands of big capital intensified and urbanization took off as the industrial working class grew in size, marked by a new era of harsh working conditions and poverty wages. Technological innovations in communication, transportation, and machinery spurred economic development. Society was undergoing profound change in a relatively short period. But among the shifting societal forces, the familiar battle between propertied interests and democratic politics would reach a pivotal stage. More so than the various points of conflict before, the ruling classes were walking on thin ice, setting the stage for a new series of reactionaries to uphold the Gilded Age status quo.

The Gilded Age witnessed the birth of several original ideas rationalizing the stark disparity of power, or, at the very least is home to new iterations of arguments from the past, with Social Darwinism being one of the most influential. Credited to British intellectual Herbert Spencer, Social Darwinism was the ideological undercurrent of what Spencer called a “new liberalism,” merging industrial capitalism with laissez-faire economics. Social Darwinism established and popularized the concept of “survival of the fittest” among many political circles. The poor were a burden to society, so much so that charity was not only a waste of time but actively interfered with the natural evolution of society continually shedding the layers of its underclass populations. The rich stood atop society because they were nature’s chosen and, to an extent God’s chosen to lead society

forward with their mighty visions. “The Growth of large business is merely a survival of the fittest” as Rockefeller put it (Rockefeller, as quoted by Mason and Baker 1985, 507).

The most passionate advocates of Gilded Age capitalism not only recognized the antagonisms between the threat of democratic reform and the wealth of big capital but met the crisis with a more straightforward and honest embrace of elitist corruption than the reactionary right had of past eras. As William Graham Sumner stated, ““Our age is befooled by Democracy”” (Sumner, as quoted in Mason and Baker, 1985, 508). One such social Darwinist ideologue who embraced anti-democratic politics was evangelical preacher Russell H. Conwell. Conwell was a tevangical before tevangicals existed, earning a reputation for preaching the gospel of wealth. Cromwell states of electoral politics (Conwell, 1900-1925):

Great Men get into office sometimes, but what this country needs is men that will do what we tell them to do... I know of a great many young women, now that women's suffrage is coming, who say, 'I am going to be President of the United States some day.'... I want to say right here what I say to the young men, that if you only get the privilege of casting one vote, you don't get anything that is worth while. Unless you can control more than one vote, you will be unknown, and your influence so dissipated as practically not to be felt. This country is not run by votes. Do you think it is? It is governed by influence. It is government by the ambitions and the enterprises which control votes.

Instead of dancing around the progressive critique of colossal oligarchy bastardizing and even downright nullifying democratic representation for the general public, Conwell celebrates it as a tribute to what “great men” can accomplish. His

exaggerated admiration for the ruling classes then, pairs quite nicely with his unsympathetic treatment of the poor (Conwell, 1900-1925):

Some men say, ‘Don’t you sympathize with the poor people?’ Of course I do, or else I would not have been lecturing these years. I won’t give in but what I sympathize with the poor, but the number of poor who are to be sympathized with is very small. To sympathize with a man whom God has punished for his sins, thus to help him when God would still continue a just punishment, is to do wrong, no doubt about it, and we do that more than we help those who are deserving. While we should sympathize with God’s poor—that is, those who cannot help themselves—let us remember there is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings or by the shortcomings of someone else. It is all wrong to be poor, anyhow...

In tandem with the rise of Social Darwinism, a key element of reactionary thought was a newfound emphasis on the benevolence of the economically powerful. Praising the character of the powerful was not wholly new, but the extent to which the virtues and charitability of the philanthropist were publicized reached new heights. Rockefeller told an audience at the school he founded, “The Good Lord gave me my money, and how could I withhold it from the University of Chicago” (Rockefeller, as quoted by Mason and Baker, 1985, 507). Perhaps the most important example of billionaire philanthropy was Steel Tycoon Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie was certainly a generous donor of the vast sums he accrued, loved to not only publicize the fact (as evidenced by his series of Carnegie Libraries) but advocated other capitalists had an obligation to do the same. Carnegie stated capitalist philanthropy, when executed correctly, was, “calculated to

produce the most beneficial results for the community—the man of wealth thus becoming the mere agent and trustee for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves” (Carnegie 1889, 10). Philanthropy was, ironically, social Darwinism’s evolution into the mainstream political consciousness. It abandoned the notion that the poor were naturally selected to die, but in doing so upholds the main idea, that corporate capitalists were successful by their merit, and was the logical choice for controlling the distribution of resources via public works. The poor deserved some degree of help, but even with generous wealth distribution, the decision-making authority over the channels of wealth inevitably kept economic power monopolized in the hands of the large capitalist, who was to be the primary visionary driving society toward the future.

The eccentric celebration of capitalism was predictably paired with widespread fearmongering over socialism, communism, and anarchism threatening to do away with the whole paradigm of Gilded Age society, and for not wholly unfounded reason. The previously examined reactionaries were exaggerating the aims of the movements they opposed to such egregious magnitudes that they had practically invented non-existent boogeymen, with some exceptions. The French Revolution, although radical for its time, was nowhere close to the anarchist program of abolishing all hierarchal relationships, as Burke suggested. Neither the Shaysites nor the Levellers posed any serious intention of dismantling standard property relations. However, these fears were beginning to become more legitimate in the face of newly emerging social forces in the industrial age. The independent farmer, who was secured with private property, was disappearing, and the propertyless wage laborer, was at the mercy of the capitalist above, much like the very

dynamic between the lord and serf the early liberals denounced. It is no surprise then, that newly forming socialist ideas of the 19th century gained traction in various forms among a share of American workers, as evident from the waves of labor strikes and unionizing efforts. The challenges before the reactionary were more serious than before.

Much has changed since the first Gilded Age, but it leaves one with an understanding of the similar situation of today's second coming of the Gilded Age reign of tycoon capitalists and explosions in national wealth, coupled with mounting tensions from below. Is there anything new in the landscape of contemporary American politics to be offered by tech-bros like Musk, Andreessen, and Theil? Or is it more of the same arguments about innovative genius, benevolence, and hard work used to push the same agendas of maintaining the hegemony of monopolistic capital in the marketplace and even in politics? History does not repeat, but it does rhyme, and all indicators point toward a new tune for America moving forward, with powerful giants of the industry having a spot in the driver's seat.

## CHAPTER III

### Marc Andreessen: If Lex Luthor Watched Too Much Rush Limbaugh

“A breath of fresh air.” These were the words of Coinbase Inc.—a cryptocurrency company—executive Brian Armstrong when describing Marc Andreessen’s *Techno-Optimist Manifesto* (Chapman 2023). Other heads of big tech, such as Microsoft investor Steven Sinofsky and head of Shopify Inc. Tobias Lütke also expressed approval (Chapman 2023). Andreessen’s ideas of unapologetically embracing the relevance and continual development of big tech have become a smash hit in much of the tech elite world. His accessible essay gives like-minded oligarchs a pitch that makes several points in favor of unregulated capitalism, a tantalizing prospect of near maximum economic power for those in Andreessen’s circle. The fact Andreessen’s manifesto is easily the most recognizable billionaire essay in circulation is largely because of its recency, not to mention the pool of billionaire social commentary literature is quite small (most of them do not publish essays). Nonetheless, the work’s notoriety demonstrates Andreessen knows his audience.

Although Andreessen’s influence is arguably the greatest among the elite, it does not stop there. His brand has grown considerably, largely thanks to Joe Rogan’s podcast, which is not only one of the most widespread platforms on the internet, but also has hosted Andreessen several times. Additionally, Andreessen has a solid financial hand in electoral politics, having donated about 26 million to Trump’s 2024 campaign (Brice and Rapp 2024). Prior to 2024, Andreessen had historically leaned democrat, but felt

convinced Trump was the necessary choice to defend private enterprise and technology (Temkin 2024).

What are the origins of such a Silicon Valley titan? Marc Andreessen was born in Iowa on July 9th, 1971. From an early age, Marc Andreessen demonstrated an aptitude for programming. One of Andreessen's first notable accomplishments as a tech entrepreneur was co-founding Netscape 1994, which was revolutionary for the time as one of the world's first internet browsers, before eventually selling it in 1998 for 4.2 billion dollars worth of stock (Forbes). Perhaps his most important ongoing project, Marc Andreessen co-founded Andreessen-Horowitz along with Ben Horowitz, a Silicon Valley tech firm that invests in smaller "little tech" start-up businesses. Likewise, Andreessen makes much of his wealth as a venture capitalist investing in larger tech businesses such as Instagram (Forbes).

The *Techno-Optimist Manifesto* easily be summarized with three takeaways: boundless technological development, optimism in the future, and markets. Andreessen begins by asserting that the mainstream narrative around technology is one big lie, a lie that tells us to feel "angry, bitter, and resentful about technology," a lie that insists people ought to be "miserable about the future" (Andreessen 2023). Defiant to this blasphemous decree, Andreessen counters by claiming the exact opposite, "Technology is the glory of human ambition and achievement, the spearhead of progress, and the realization of our potential" (Andreessen 2023). Technology is the cornerstone of human civilization and its future, thus leaving one, at least according to Andreessen, at the juncture of "Techno-Optimism."

Through the innovative genius of the capitalist, society possessed the means to innovate and continually accelerate innovation's course. Much like the captains of industry in the gilded days, the modern entrepreneurs are expected to break new frontiers and move humanity forward. Andreessen's comments on the wonders of the market economy are nothing new, "We believe the market economy is a discovery machine, a form of intelligence – an exploratory, evolutionary, adaptive system" (Andreessen 2023). Subsequently, the magic of prosperity, according to the manifesto, occurs when technological advancement is coupled with the forces of capital, "Combine technology and markets and you get what Nick Land has termed the techno-capital machine, the engine of perpetual material creation, growth, and abundance" (Andreessen 2023). Technology is the catalyst for the growth of a capitalist economy, and in return, capital invests in greater technological ventures in the race for higher yields. The techno-capital machine is a harmonious cycle, and the only direction it sprints toward is up.

Even though much of Andreessen's rhetoric is identical to narratives celebrating capitalism's innovation and wealth accumulation from Milton Friedman to Ronald Reagan, his manifesto is riddled with details that add depth to his capitalistic politics. For one, although mentioned scarcely at first, the presence of social Darwinist rhetoric cannot be ignored. In the section on "lies," Andreessen establishes human domination of nature as "our birthright." Even more outright, Andreessen later claims the techno-capitalist machine "makes natural selection work for us in the realm of ideas" (Andreessen, Fighting, 2023). The Social Darwinist framework of the Industrial Age bares its mark on billionaires like Andreessen.

Andreessen's nods to Social Darwinism enter the spotlight in his fittingly named section "Becoming Technological Supermen." Andreessen openly shares the identical view of nature to his kindred industrialist predecessors, merely as something to be trumped by the strength of man. He states, "We believe in nature, but we also believe in *overcoming* nature. We are not primitives, cowering in fear of the lightning bolt. We are the apex predator; the lightning works for us" (Andreessen 2023). Or, to put it simply, as he arrived at after an attack on "victim mentality" rampant in today's world, "We are not victims, we are *conquerors*" (Andreessen, Fighting, 2023).

Andreessen's explicit militaristic fantasy carries strong undertones from similar past movements. Andreessen references one such movement in his acknowledgment of a like-minded manifesto, "To paraphrase a manifesto of a different time and place: 'Beauty exists only in struggle. There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character. Technology must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man'" (Andreessen 2023). The manifesto Andreessen quotes is from Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Marinetti's *Manifesto of Futurism* was a core text for the Italian futurist movement, describing a similar picture as Andreessen does in his manifesto but for early 20th century Italy. Futurism was primarily a cultural movement, paving the way for new forms of art and literature, fervently embracing modernity with romantic imagery, but instead of nature, it was the new (the original quote uses the word poetry instead of technology). It embraced the then-recent marvels of cars and idolized concepts of speed and efficiency. Swept in the current of 20th-century European modernity, the futurists were also militantly nationalistic, fetishizing warfare, "We will glorify war—the world's only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of

freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman” (Marinetti 1909). The seemingly shoehorned misogynistic jab was not the only attack on women, “We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice” (Marinetti 1909). In case the ardent nationalism and love of violence didn’t spell it out, Marinetti would go on to co-write in 1919 the *Fascist Manifesto* (Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, n.d.).

The delivery of Anderssen’s Social Darwinist tendencies is less straightforward than the messaging of some of the Gilded Age industrialists. Unlike Social Darwinists such as Spencer, Andreessen does not express a burning contempt for the working-class poor. Nowhere does he snarl with distrust at the electorate, nor does he emphasize using Darwinism to rationalize the condition of the lower classes. He does, however, at one point veer toward that direction with one seemingly unassuming remark in his section on intelligence, “Smart people and smart societies outperform less smart ones on virtually every metric we can measure” (Andreessen 2023). It isn’t hard to figure out what Andreessen means by “smart” societies outperforming the “less” smart societies. His metric for intelligence, as established in the section, is technological development (and subsequently the capitalist economic relations that purportedly generate such inventions the best). The claim suggests that less developed and poorer nations are intellectually inferior to their wealthier and more advanced counterparts, perpetuating the Social Darwinist narrative of European and American economic and political dominance being an innate superiority, only with slightly more palatable language than the outright bigoted cruelty of Spencer. The implications of Andreessen’s word choice are not aided by some

of his past comments regarding colonialism, such as the claim anti-colonial measures harmed India (Issac 2016).

Nonetheless, Andreessen's main objective with the Social Darwinist rhetoric hinges on elevating the qualities of the capitalist and their monumental contributions to humanity writ large. Andreessen achieves this feat by creating a more positive spin on tech-bro elitism. The tech entrepreneur is characterized as the modern *Übermensch*, but rather than being nature's cream of the crop worthy of existing at the expense of the people, as Frederick Nietzsche prescribed, the determination and creative intellect of both the *Übermensch* and the greater market system exist for the people, improving their quality-of-life leaps and bounds. Technologies are of service to the people, revolutionizing society with new sets of capabilities and greater wealth. Put simply, "We believe in making everyone rich, everything cheap, and everything abundant" (Andreessen 2023).

Nietzsche, who is identified as one of the many "patron saints of techno-optimism" at the manifesto's end, would have gone insane a second time having seen his name associated with Andreessen's vision. The man would have certainly balked at the idea of nature's gifted elite serving the general public, along with the notion of the capitalist as society's *Übermensch*. As framed by William Bank's Jacobin article critiquing the manifesto, the techno-optimist narrative maintains the spirit of what Georg Brandes coined as "Aristocratic Radicalism" over a century ago when analyzing Nietzsche's philosophy (Banks 2024). What Brandes neglects to mention is that Andreessen was not the first to use a revisionist substitute for Nietzsche's cultural Olympian Man, for that honor goes to Ayn Rand. As she states in her work *Capitalism:*

The Unknown Ideal, “The exceptional men, the innovators, the intellectual giants... it is the members of this exceptional minority who lift the whole of a free society to the level of their own achievements, while rising further and even further” (Rand, as quoted by Robin 2018, 180). But just like Hobbes, it is not unusual for reactionaries to borrow ideas opposed to their agenda and alter them accordingly.

Although the techno-optimist platform may not wholly comply with the outlook of Aristocratic Radicalism Brandes identifies, there are a few significant elements in common. Firstly, there rightfully exists an elite of some sort. For Nietzsche, it was the cultured genius, for Andreessen, much like Rand, the capitalist who has successfully become rich in the marketplace. Secondly, this elite is under attack, creating a sense of urgency for what must be done next. For Nietzsche, the masses were the primary threat, whereas Andreessen points the finger more toward narratives critical of the aims espoused by techno-optimism and the groups pushing those criticisms, namely environmentalism, communism, and the regulatory state. Andreessen’s flavor of Aristocratic Radicalism is quite different from Nietzsche's, but the consequences are still present. Andreessen argues for a system of oligarchic power by wholistically painting over its injustices toward the public writ large and its marginalized members, while (as we will shortly see) also glancing over its direct assaults on democratic institutions.

But all the same, Andreessen’s commentary, and especially his choice of role models, should sound the alarm. Among many of the overlooked issues that inevitably arise from techno-capitalism, the refusal to move on from a 19th-century industrialist view of nature spells disastrous consequences, ones that unfortunately for humanity are accelerating. Ironically, one of the greatest conflicts between the demands of the techno-

capital machine and environmental sustainability is worded out in the manifesto, “Natural resource utilization has sharp limits, both real and political” (Andresseen, Fighting, 2023). The juggernaut wheels of capital have a bottomless appetite for increasing returns, a virtually infinite demand in a world of finite resources. Andreessen sees technological growth as the alternative to growth based on natural resources, since digital intelligence is a non-tangible resource capable of surpassing such natural limits, allowing human imagination to become the new ceiling.

But advanced technologies such as the internet and artificial intelligence require real infrastructure, thus tying it all into the real world and its limitations once again. Unfortunately for the global south, various earth metals such as lithium, cobalt, and copper are deemed highly valuable and thus extracted at intense rates with the intent of minimizing the efforts and costs of mining them, leading to the reckless ecological damage that devastates those communities. An article by MIT Technology Review states, “According to the International Energy Agency, demand for rare earth elements is expected to reach three to seven times current levels by 2040; demand for other critical minerals such as lithium may multiply 40-fold.” (Fatunde 2024). Improving technology can enable humanity to do more with less, but it will not escape the fundamental character of monopoly capital. The profit incentive’s push to extract more and more will only continue to intensify as competition creates a race to the bottom for each conglomerate to acquire the upper hand in resource supply. Techno-capitalism will continue to plunder the planet until there is nothing left to be plundered, a fact Andreessen can easily overlook as just a part of man conquering nature.

Similarly, Andreessen reveals himself as being completely naïve to technology's role in exacerbating social stratification, at one point stating, "We believe technology is universalist. Technology doesn't care about your ethnicity, race, religion, national origin, gender, sexuality, political views, height, weight, hair or lack thereof" (Andreessen 2023). But technology does care about your identity. The machine itself lacks the sentience to care for those things, but how it executes its function perpetuates biases around race, gender, class, etc., since the people who programmed the technology are affected by these inclinations. Princeton's Department of African American Studies states, "We talked about where technology is making the situation worse when it comes to race and social justice in America. That includes facial recognition systems that give false positives for people of color by a factor of 10x to 100x more than Caucasians, according to research from the U.S. government. It also includes hiring systems that are meant to screen candidates in an automated, unbiased way but end up reinforcing existing divisions and biases." (Hiner 2020). Interestingly, despite overlooking these issues, Andreessen demonstrates an understanding of how human beings influence outcomes in technology. On the Joe Rogan Podcast, Andreessen brought up how AI tools such as ChatGPT were producing answers of a "liberal bias," with the speculation it is either intentionally programmed to be or pulls from a sample of sources that leans in that direction, or potentially both (Andreessen, Joe Rogan Experience #2010-Marc Andreessen , 2024). Regardless of how true his allegations are, Andreessen is conscious of the same problem in a different context. But just as with the environment, the manifesto's glossy image of techno-capitalism cannot seem to fully connect technology with its human masters.

Unsurprisingly, Andreessen also claims that Techno-capitalism is the safest vanguard of democracy around the globe, “A technologically strong America is a force for good in a dangerous world. Technologically strong liberal democracies safeguard liberty and peace. Technologically weak liberal democracies lose to their autocratic rivals, making everyone worse off” (Andreessen 2023). As expected, Andreessen subscribes to American exceptionalism as the gold standard of democracy.<sup>1</sup> Turning inward, one does not need to look far to see the corruptive influence of capital seeping its way into elections across all levels, to see the politician being bought off to do the bidding of their monied constituents. Technology that Andreessen celebrates has only added fuel to the flames. AI-generated deepfakes have also raised the threat of new and more pervasive forms of misinformation polluting the political consciousness of the voting public. More than a reasonable prediction, the consequences of AI entering politics have already begun. Shortly after dropping out, a deepfake video of Joe Biden using the f-slur, among other things, was spread by a meme account and became viral (AFP Fact Check, 2024). AI is yet another obstacle to maintaining an informed electorate vital in a republic, yet Andreessen’s inability to recognize the potential issues of technology exposes the error of his reaction.

Furthermore, technology has enabled new avenues for attacking the civil liberties integral to liberal society. Take Peter Thiel’s security software company Palantir as a case example of a technology application raising concerns about the right to privacy, among other issues (a more extensive analysis will be provided with Peter Thiel’s chapter)

---

<sup>1</sup> Supporting American hegemony’s claim to upholding Democracy against the inroads of authoritarianism requires putting aside the historic track record of U.S. foreign policy siding with the interests of capital over democracy (at least when a third-world leader dared to act outside the boundaries of what the CIA considered permissible).

(Sherman 2020). To the extent reform can address these various issues, Andreessen's techno-optimism only sees an infringing regulatory state attempting to solve technology-related problems that essentially don't exist. Andreessen may not be overtly anti-democratic, but his ideology serves to further empower the already economically powerful, even at the expense of democracy's functionality.

While Andreessen's blind spot of techno-capitalism's role in accelerating environmental catastrophe, embedding discrimination further into core digital infrastructure, and violating civil liberties symbolizes an increasingly apparent concern of powerful elites refusing to acknowledge their conduct, it is also indicative of a larger thematic problem with Silicon Valley ideology (as will become increasingly clear after a good review of the other selected profiles). Andreessen is a peddler of reductive optimism, painting a picture where technology itself is always the ultimate solution. He goes as far as to claim, "We believe that there is no material problem – whether created by nature or by technology – that cannot be solved with more technology" (Andreessen 2023). Although bold, it isn't hard to understand Andreessen's idolization of technology. Andreessen makes a genuinely strong case for the importance of technology to the formation of human civilization and more importantly its potential in humanity's future. He uses enticing imagery to praise the fruits of technology's gifts, building up innovation as the Promethean fire of human civilization (Prometheus being the capitalist), referring to technology as "the spearhead of progress." Andreessen goes further, citing multiple frontiers where technology shaped countless lives for the better. As he states (Andreessen 2023):

We had a problem of starvation, so we invented the Green Revolution.

We had a problem of darkness, so we invented electric lighting.

We had a problem of cold, so we invented indoor heating.

We had a problem of heat, so we invented air conditioning.

We had a problem of isolation, so we invented the Internet.

We had a problem of pandemics, so we invented vaccines.

We have a problem of poverty, so we invent technology to create abundance.

Give us a real world problem, and we can invent technology that will solve it.

Despite the truth to all these powerful assertions, Andreessen demonstrates a superficial understanding of how technology is dependent on the social structures which it exists within. Andreessen fails to grasp the relationship between innovation and hierarchy, or at least projects a useful narrative refusing to do so. Andreessen is aware society impacts the production of technology, hence his argument for capitalism promoting innovation through the marketplace, but his argument proves to be one-dimensional, considering only the quantity of technological innovation. More technology equals more abundance, prosperity, and new possibilities. But while partially true, the problem with Andreessen's manifesto isn't inherently its positive commentary on technology, but what it leaves out of the conversation. While the quantity of innovative production is essential for "the spearhead of progress," there is an equally, if not more valuable qualitative element to the ends of technological application. Technology is a set of tools and the knowledge to use them, both of which are produced by scientific advancement. Technology merely opens the door for new sets of capabilities, for both

positive and negative consequences. The same discovery that yielded nuclear energy also created the most destructive weapon in the history of warfare and introduced for the very first time the legitimate possibility of self-inflicted extinction.

The interplay between hierarchal power structures and the innovation they produce is the key topic missing in the manifesto, in particular with how it overlooks capitalism's inclination to negatively direct its pioneering forces.<sup>2</sup> Every new invention, every new method of exercising current existing creations must bow to the omnipresent profit motive. The captains of big tech follow innovation only to the extent it aligns with the money trail. A notorious phenomenon where profit infringes upon the quality of technological innovation is planned obsolescence, the act when a manufacturer intentionally worsens the quality of their product to pressure consumers to buy it or its replacement more frequently, which is particularly rife with modern forms of digital technology. Apple, for example, confessed to having their phones deliberately designed to perform slower as they aged, claiming it was to extend the battery lifespan yet did not feel the need to inform consumers (BBC, 2020). Unlike what tech moguls like Andreessen admit, the state is an actor interested in new technologies, but like the capitalist's profit motive, the state is moved primarily for power, i.e. the military. Much more can be said about the identity of innovation under various power structures, but the critical flaw of Andreessen's reductive argument for techno-capitalism's brilliance is clear. There exists a conflict of priority between the pursuit of profit and the possibilities of tomorrow, but it goes ignored by Andreessen because he only asks, "How much

---

<sup>2</sup> "Hierarchy" is used instead of strictly "capitalism", because similar critiques can be made of state incentives to innovate.

technology can be produced”, neglecting the greater question “Why is technology being produced?”

Andreessen’s superficial positive defense of the capitalist system and the celebration of its technological feats make up the bulk of his argument, and subsequently the basis of his reaction. Much like Calhoun’s infamous slavery speech, Andreessen’s flavor of reactionary politics does not scream a prophecy of the demise of society’s powerful at the hands of a conniving mass. Like Calhoun, Andreessen is more of a fox than a wolf. By dismissively overlooking the momentous negative consequences of technology in a particular social environment, he paints a veil of sunshine and rainbows for all of society, one that ignores the real impact of marginalized communities and the general public, one that exists to harm the bedrock of popular politics and civil liberties he claims his program promotes. Andreessen is still one to pull aspects from more radical reactionary currents, such as the Social Darwinism of the Gilded Age or the rhetoric glorifying strength and conquering from the futurist who would become a fascist, but all of it is packaged with a less fearmongering tone, except in a couple of instances, such as the “Enemies” section where he heavily attacks environmentalists and the regulatory state (Andreessen 2023). Reaction demands a boogeyman, and in Andreessen’s case it happens to largely be fictitious. The whole act is one great attempt to gaslight the audience into a toxic positive conception of capitalism and its ruling lords. Techno-capitalism is a good, a positive good.

However, unlike some of the past reactionaries, Marc Andreessen cannot reasonably style himself as an intellectual. Although each isolated thought appears unworthy of nitpicking, when strung together it paints an incoherent argument riddled

with contradictions and flat-out lies. One strong theme of contradiction is Andreessen's appeal to a populist crusade against the status quo, "We believe in adventure. Undertaking the Hero's Journey, rebelling against the status quo, mapping uncharted territory, conquering dragons, and bringing home the spoils for our community" (Andreessen 2023). At first, Andreessen's appeal was more collaborative than populist, suggesting what is good for the techno-capitalist is equally if not more beneficial to the consumer. However, the rebellion against a status quo, coupled with language pointing fingers at experts and ideas such as sustainability, brings out an ironic attempt at populism, given that tech-bros such as himself are the very foundation of the political and economic status quo. Andreessen is not the first nor the last at pretending to be among the people railing against a nebulous elite.

Another instance of both contradiction and lying is Andreessen's commentary about markets and the military. Andreessen makes the claim markets are inherently peaceful, "We believe the ultimate moral defense of markets is that they divert people who otherwise would raise armies and start religions into peacefully productive pursuits" (Andreessen 2023). Andreessen's entire moral theory for capitalism crumbles once he discovers the concept of mercenary armies, which have not only existed for ages but are becoming increasingly popular as more nations look to war for hire. And yet later on he cites private enterprise's role in the U.S. military as evidence for its reinforcement of democracy. For being so-called Silicon Valley's leading intellectual, Andreessen fails to provide a coherent, substantive perspective. Andreessen's optimism in technology is not the problem. However, his optimism is misplaced in what Ezra Klein accurately identifies as a vibe more so than a constructive vision in his article on some of Andreessen's social

politics, engaging in the misguided, ahistoric adoration of the Greeks reactionaries can't just seem to get enough of but is largely absent in the manifesto (Klein, 2023). It isn't just what amounts to a Twitter post steeped in reaction against a perceived grave attack on Silicon Valley capitalism, it is a poorly executed one at that.

The reactionary elements strewn throughout the Techno-Optimist manifesto pop out further when compared to a kindred spirit with less reactionary overtones: Carnegie's *Wealth*. The Techno-Optimist manifesto serves a similar purpose to *Wealth*, as both pieces were published by prominent capitalists and gained notable attention, with the goal of providing a general celebration for the achievements of capitalism and to mount a counterattack against its critics. Likewise, Andreessen employs similar arguments to Carnegie. Both point to tenants such as individualism and "the law of competition" as the ingredients for capitalism's ability to generate riches. Andreessen's arguments largely repackaged the core points made by Carnegie, while bringing it to a modern context and extrapolating on its implications. Just as Carnegie argued that industry was creating unparalleled creation of wealth and access to goods, Andreessen insists recent tech advancements such as the internet have done the same and will only continue to do so if the growth machine is left alone. More than Carnegie, Andreessen expresses an optimism in the growth potential of capitalism's technological production, epitomized by the belief digital intelligence is limitless.

Though both authors endorse capitalism, their approaches alter significantly. Even as Carnegie preached the gospel of wealth, he was open to acknowledging certain issues emerging with gilded age industrialism, even going far as to concede aspects of worker alienation, "The price we pay for this salutary change is, no doubt, great. We assemble

thousands of operatives in the factory, in the mine, and in the counting-house, of whom the employer can know little or nothing, and to whom the employer is little better than a myth. All intercourse between them is at an end. Rigid Castes are formed, and, as usual, mutual ignorance breeds mutual distrust” (Carnegie 1889, 2). Carnegie’s key concern was the rampant inequality and working-class deprivation, hence his proposal for capitalists to distribute their wealth, famously saying “The man who died rich thus died disgraced” (Carnegie 1889, 12). Reactionaries, however, are not interested in critically dissecting the power structures they vigorously champion, and Andreessen may be one of the worst offenders. Unlike Carnegie, Andreessen completely glosses over the defects, or at the very least the potential defects, of his techno-capital machine. Why does the capitalist need to consider philanthropy when capitalism’s engine makes everyone richer in the first place? Carnegie’s gospel of wealth was conditional on capitalists pursuing what he believed were their humanitarian obligations, whereas Andreessen’s gospel of wealth asks nothing more than for entrepreneurs to go all in on their individual interests. Individualism in the marketplace is treated, in true reactionary style, as unequivocally desirable, providing tech moguls with an easy answer to justify their exorbitant power.

## CHAPTER IV

### Peter Thiel: Saruman Falls Deeper into Madness and Becomes a Tech-Bro

“I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible.” One would (presumably) hope the person who held such a sentiment was far away from the reigns of political power. Unfortunately for the United States, Peter Thiel is quite possibly the most impactful billionaire in the 2024 election cycle. The shining gem of his political prowess was J.D. Vance securing the Vice Presidency. Thiel’s strong ties to J.D. Vance led to him playing an instrumental role in Vance becoming Trump’s running-mate. Even before that point, Vance’s introduction into Silicon Valley was in large part thanks to Thiel, who would then bankroll a combined 30 million dollars to his Senate race in Ohio, along with Blake Masters’s race, which was Thiel’s largest donation (Elizabeth Dwoskin et. Al 2024). From there, Thiel firmly pressed the Trump Administration to put Vance down for the Vice President ticket. The rest is history.

Billionaires are some of the most powerful individuals, but even among the billionaires very few, if any, have basically handpicked a Vice President. Thiel was engaged in politics beforehand, but his involvement prior to raising Vance’s career paled relative to its sharp rise afterward. Thiel was never a nobody once he became rich, but his power was based primarily on his enterprises and his ideological influence was relegated to a small few who shared his controversial outlook on democracy. Thiel’s hand in Trump’s administration has given reactionary views spanning past even democracy a funnel into the highest halls of government.

A Palantir is a powerful object capable of transferring information from one part of the world to another. Palantir provides immense power at the fingertips of its user, in particular the ability to conduct surveillance with the scorching image of an all-seeing eye. Although one could reason Palantir is not inherently good or evil, its reputation has become tarnished with the image of not just power, but an ominous and uncomfortable omniscience. Palantir's ability to snatch a unit of information globally has been weaponized to invade personal spaces with an increasingly inescapable presence.

One would be forgiven to presume the Palantir in reference was a slightly dramatized description of the "seeing stones" from The Lord of the Rings, however, it also serves as a foreboding parallel to the security software company Palantir, co-founded by Peter Thiel. Although the apparent reference to Lord of the Rings establishes the company's inspiration and aim, Palantir serves a wide range of functions worth exploring, and subsequently, a context for Palantir's hand to be dipped in multiple different controversies around a few common themes.

Palantir is a data software company founded by entrepreneurs Peter Thiel and Alex Karp in 2003. The software system essentially synthesized a large sample of data, organizing the sets of information by sorting it into various categories and presenting it in a digestible form such as a graph (Steinberger, 2020). With the ability to collect and sift through data being invaluable in the digital age, Palantir sparked interest from several parties. One of the earliest customers was the CIA, which adopted the software to help identify insurgents in the war on terror (keep the state partnership in mind), and later on, the Department of Health and Human Services incorporated Palantir technology in the

COVID-19 outbreak. Notably, embracing The Lord of the Rings imagery, Palantir solely provides its services to Western nations, likening it to saving the Shire.

Born in 1967, Peter Thiel was still a young man when he co-founded PayPal in 1998. Seeing the potential in its security algorithms, Thiel took the next steps to develop what would become Palantir along with Karp, who were friends going back to their days at Stanford Law. Their friendship dynamic was unusual, with Thiel being an outspoken libertarian, while Karp was a Marxist. Even now, Karp embodies the stereotypical blue-dog Silicon Valley elite disdained by the more right-wing faction, having supported Hillary in 2016 while Thiel endorsed Trump. Karp's politics, coupled with his Jewish and mixed-race background give him anxiety about the very far right his business partner and friend engages with, "Who's the first person who is going to get hung? You make a list, and I will show you who they get first. It's me. There's not a box I don't check" (Steinberger, 2020). However, despite these contrasting positions, both were able to unite under Palantir, sharing two professed missions of advancing national security and ironically, combating the issue of abusive surveillance and defending civil liberties. Nourishing a balance between the two was portrayed by Karp as a Hegelian dialectic.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, Palantir seems to struggle with the latter goal. Amnesty International cites a concern with Palantir's connection to ICE (Amnesty International, 2020):

In 2017, ICE relied on Palantir technology to arrest parents and caregivers of unaccompanied children, leading to detentions and harming children's welfare.

---

<sup>3</sup> After Stanford Karp went to Germany to study German philosophy

Similarly, ICE has used Palantir technology to plan mass raids, as with raids that ICE carried out in Mississippi in August 2019, which led to the separation of children from their parents and caregivers, causing irreparable harm to families and communities. These raids in turn led to cases of prolonged detention and deportations. Palantir's ICM and FALCON technology facilitated these operations by enabling DHS/ICE to identify, share information on, investigate, and track migrants and asylum-seekers to effect arrests and workplace raids.

Furthermore, Palantir raises questions about surveillance technology used by the Military being weaponized against the American public, specifically with its police contracts. While the software has certain protective infrastructure in place, the handling of sensitive data is ultimately up to the client using it, lending the government an alarming degree of free license to violate privacy. In Michael Steinberger's NYT article on Palantir, University of Texas Assistant Sociology Professor (at the time of the article's publication in 2020) Sarah Brayne studied the Los Angeles Police Department's use of Palantir, and the opportunity for abuse was alarming. One method of acquiring data was automatic license plate readers, where theoretically, nothing was preventing officers from engaging in misconduct, "A detective could conceivably use that information to squeeze a reluctant witness — say, by finding out he was having an affair. Someone in the L.A.P.D. could possibly keep tabs on his ex-wife's comings and goings" (Steinberger, 2020). Additionally, pattern recognition software can feed into racial confirmation bias through predictive policing measures. Similar issues have already emerged in other settings, "In 2018, Bloomberg Businessweek broke the story of a rogue JP Morgan Chase

employee who had used Palantir’s software to spy on colleagues, reading their emails and tracking their movements. Even some of the bank’s senior executives were unknowingly surveilled” (Steinberger 2020).

Interestingly, Thiel demonstrates an unexpected but welcome nuance with Palantir’s potential for danger in his rationalization for the company’s name, more so than Saruman had when Gandalf warned him of a Palantir’s dangers. Describing the Palantir as an “ambiguous” device, it was dangerous but also an important source for the defeat of Sauron, as Aragon showed him Anduril (the sword used previously to defeat him), tricking him to leave Mordor vulnerable and for the ring to be destroyed. And like Andreessen’s techno-optimism, Thiel is at least partially warranted to see the good in Palantir. Palantir has contributed to increased productivity, tackling COVID-19, and even identifying human trafficking across the Mexican-American border (Steinberger 2020). However, Thiel’s overall optimism does not fully appreciate the implications of the very point he acknowledged. Juxtaposed to the tech-bro image of society’s great visionary protagonist, Palantir, despite its legitimate merits, reinforces the Leviathan of both capitalism and the state. Thiel pictures himself and those who run the company as Aragon, when in reality they are more akin to Saruman, with his lord Sauron being the priority of profit or the surveillance state.<sup>4</sup> Gandalf’s skepticism proves well-placed.

Peter Thiel’s important relationship with American politics has had its ups and downs. In 2016, Thiel chose to publicly support and finance Trump's campaign. Journalist Barton Gellman published an eye-opening piece on Thiel’s political mindset in

---

<sup>4</sup> Saruman was a critical metaphor for the industrial, so basically the tech bro of Tolkien’s time.

the *Atlantic*, after scoring a content-packed interview. Thiel expressed a little uncertainty but was largely optimistic Trump would set out to make America “great again” as promised on the campaign trail, ironically because Trump wasn’t afraid to be brutally pessimistic about America’s then-current condition. As Thiel put it, “if you’re too optimistic, it just shows you’re out of touch” (Gellman 2023). Thiel was hopeful that Trump, although not a libertarian, would gut and deregulate the engorged state apparatus to a libertarian’s approval.

However, his attitude took an unexpected shift when he withdrew himself from endorsing the Trump campaign for a 2020 run after enthusiasm for 2016 dissipated into disappointment when Thiel’s wild dreams did not come true. Trump, unsurprisingly, was not thrilled with Thiel’s decision, calling multiple times to remind Thiel he backed Blake Masters and J.D. Vance, who Thiel had lobbied, and expected the same treatment. Thiel then heard through the grapevine Trump referred to him as a “F\*\*\*\*\* scumbag” to Masters. It wouldn’t be the first time Thiel was let down by politics, but fortunately for Trump, Thiel would return for 2024 swinging hard, despite him not thinking so coming out of 2020 (Gellman 2023).

Vance’s securing of the VP slot is perhaps Thiel’s greatest impact on reactionary politics in action. Unlike Andreessen, whose intellectual influence is heavily felt across the elite but has not equally translated into the American political system, Thiel has successfully demonstrated his ability to be both an intellectual influence and a direct material influence in the American government, and the consequences are heavy. Convinced America is in decline, Vance reportedly stated, “If we’re going to push back against it, we’re going to have to get pretty wild, and pretty far out there, and go in

directions that a lot of conservatives right now are uncomfortable with” (Bouie 2024). One could comb over Vance’s policy platform and his history, but this singular statement concisely captures several reactionary themes. Without going into specifics, Vance lays out his “far out there” right-wing politics, with the premise society is in decline and must be restored (made great again) presumably through emboldening traditional hallmarks of power (capitalism, patriarchy, xenophobia, etc.). Likewise, although he does not pounce on the right with contrarian hostility, he positions his stance against the more moderate conservative, framing them as potentially part of the problem. Thiel’s campaign financing is a serious vehicle for reactionary to enter the political stage front and center.

Thiel’s contributions to the political and economic life of the nation provide a glimpse into how far-right politics are unfolding in practice. The backing of Trump and the handpicking of Vance are self-explanatory examples of Thiel dousing gasoline on the flames of mainstream reaction. Palantir, by contrast, doesn’t invoke the image of reaction, so what is the company’s relationship to it? Palantir, although not draped in reactionary imagery (especially with Karp as one of the co-founders, who is ironically worried about reaction), is an end product of reactionary politics. The rapid concentration of surveillance data in the hands of government and private enterprise is but one aspect of the goal of simultaneously advancing and defending the authoritarian individualism of reactionary tech oligarchs like Thiel. However, these actions only go so far in providing insight into the reactionary politics behind the scenes. To understand the motivations guiding Thiel’s conduct, his root worldview must be examined. Fortunately, like Andreessen, Thiel wrote a manifesto laying out his ideology, one more overtly reactionary than Andreessen’s.

Peter Thiel's *Education of a Libertarian*, written in 2009, is a treasure trove of reactionary oddities. It begins with Peter Thiel laying out his libertarian values while introducing doubt on how society can support libertarianism. Thiel then makes his famous claim that "freedom" and "democracy" cannot co-exist. (Thiel 2009). Having engaged in the "trench warfare" of political debate, Thiel concedes, "The higher one's IQ, the more pessimistic one became about free-market politics — capitalism simply is not that popular with the crowd." After the 2008 Great Recession, the demand for government response over more free markets was the final indicator for Thiel that the body politic was beyond saving. Libertarianism has found itself in retreat since 1920 according to Thiel, stating, "Since 1920, the vast increase in welfare beneficiaries and the extension of the franchise to women — two constituencies that are notoriously tough for libertarians — have rendered the notion of "capitalist democracy" into an oxymoron" (Thiel 2009). Granted, Thiel later wrote a follow-up, denying the claim he was against women's suffrage.<sup>5</sup>

Thiel's disappointment with politics was so significant, that the only solution forward was to escape it altogether, "The critical question then becomes one of means, of how to escape not via politics but beyond it. Because there are no truly free places left in our world, I suspect that the mode of escape must involve some sort of new and hitherto untried process that leads us to some undiscovered country, and for this reason, I have focused my efforts on new technologies that may create a new space for freedom" (Thiel 2009). Like Andreessen, technology was the foundation for future progress, one that was

---

<sup>5</sup> His follow-up statement contradicts his previously direct attack on women's suffrage. The intended message is unclear.

threatened, or at least hampered, by the government and promoted by the market. However, his solution faces a problem. Politics has more or less dominated the four corners of the globe, leaving “no truly free places left in our world” to settle and build from. Fortunately for Thiel, technology can create the necessary spaces for escape. Cyberspace is the first listed example, where Thiel claims the internet can create new virtual worlds free from the grasp and boundaries of nation-states (Thiel 2009).

The second option is space travel, a promising but highly ambitious endeavor only feasible further into the future, once our space-faring technologies have developed significantly. The last option is what he calls “Seasteading,” an initiative of building artificial island colonies on the ocean, which Thiel sees as a more optimal option over space travel in the foreseeable future. After establishing the groundwork for some alternative technological avenues, Thiel warns against utopian thinking about technology, as the entrepreneur should be on guard against “the terrible arc of the political in our world” (Thiel 2009).

Thiel’s vision surpasses even the territory of being a naïve utopia. It is a completely incoherent one, at least at face value. Escape politics? What does that even mean? Wherever there is human civilization, there will inevitably be politics, as society and political organization are inseparable. Thiel erroneously treats politics as if it were an isolated entity, something that has dominated the globe, but we have the choice of creating a society without it. Take for example his claim that space frontiers “represent a limitless possibility for escape from world politics”(Thiel 2009). What reason would suggest the political questions dawning on the planet suddenly disappear once society has reached other moons and planets? Humanity’s limited interaction with space is already

rife with politics and will only continue to become more political as space travel expands. Who should lead, or at least participate, in space exploration? How should resources and funding be allocated for outer space? What projects will space travel aim to achieve? They are economic questions, but equally political questions (as if the two aren't intertwined), reaching vital decisions over who gets to hold power and what direction the powerholders will take society. To "escape politics" leaves all the important questions on human organization and activity for space travel and by extension all his proposed escape fantasies unanswered.

However, sifting through the illusory language of "escaping politics," Thiel's desire can be understood as capitalism's escape from the state's malevolent grasp. Despite his presentation, Thiel doesn't literally advocate for an escape from politics. The manifesto's conclusion drives home the central point strewn across the piece, "A better metaphor is that we are in a deadly race between politics and technology...", with technology being synonymous with the success of capitalism, "Unlike the world of politics, in the world of technology the choices of individuals may still be paramount. The fate of our world may depend on the effort of a single person who builds or propagates the machinery of freedom that makes the world safe for capitalism" (Thiel 2009). Thiel doesn't completely abandon the political aspect of future technology, as he makes it explicitly clear the capitalist is at the helm of society's economic initiatives, but his framing is ironically as utopian as it gets. Society would not escape politics, as society is intrinsically political, but instead escape from the politics he opposes and embrace his techno-capitalist politics. It is a set of politics that says, "to hell with what the people want" and centers on powerful individuals as the rightful holders of power and enjoyers

of liberty. “Politics” as used in the manifesto is a substitute for democracy and what he perceives, as a true reactionary, is the people’s unjust assault upon the elite.

Thiel’s interpretation of the relationship between the techno-capitalist and technology both upholds and flips the conventional narrative parroted by Andreessen. Whereas Andreessen extensively argues the capitalist plays an essential for society because of their innovation, Thiel suggests, at least in certain moments, technology serves to uphold the capitalist. Technology isn’t just a gift from the capitalist to society, it is the gift to the capitalist, the “machinery of freedom that makes the world safe for capitalism.” The “freedom” of the capitalist, translating to their ability to accrue wealth and exercise power undisturbed by outside interference, is the end that the means of technology secures. Thiel’s portrayal of the capitalist is very indicative of his reactionary worldview. While Andreessen argues for a more conventional support of laissez-faire capitalism by claiming it is a machine that produces individual liberty and is the means for higher social ends, Thiel’s “freedom” is the means for the ends of capitalist power. His heavy-handed great-man history narrative places the capitalist on a pedestal even more so than Andreessen had, describing the techno-capitalist as the last bastion of good in civilization in a world where politics becomes increasingly corrupted by the mob. Defending the Levithan comes first, even if it means crushing democracy.

Interestingly, and scarily, Thiel is not the only one in his space with overt hostility to democratic politics, as “Dark Enlightenment” thinker Curtis Yarvin pedals similar rhetoric and influences others in power, up to J.D. Vance. Gild Duran states in *The New Republic* :

Both Thiel and Vance are friends of Yarvin. In *The Contrarian: Peter Thiel and Silicon Valley's Pursuit of Power*, reporter Max Chafkin describes Yarvin as the “house political philosopher” of the “Thielverse,” a term for the people in Thiel’s orbit. In 2013, Thiel invested in Tlön, a software startup co-founded by Yarvin. In 2016, Yarvin attended Thiel’s election night party in San Francisco where, according to Chafkin, champagne flowed once it became clear that Thiel’s investment in Donald Trump would pay off.

Yarvin isn’t a tech-bro, but as the Pangloss of the alt-right milieu, he sets the standard for its most reactionary ideas. Perhaps most horrifically, Yarvin suggested genocide against the “unproductive” members of society, implying certain people with disabilities, among others who cannot work (Duran 2024). However, his willingness to remove the “underclass” is only the tip of the reactionary iceberg. Yarvin advocates for a capitalist political framework oddly adjacent to feudal kingdoms, arguing for smaller “patchworks,” which are comparable to regional corporations, to run society with absolute power and “without regard to the residents’ opinions.” Yarvin stresses that these patchworks or “realms” would have free license to rule how they please, free from state interference (or rather, the corporation assumes the state’s role). Yarvin does not hesitate to entertain his system’s implications, “The realm, having sovereign power, can compel the resident to comply with all promises. Since San Francisco is not an Islamic state, it does not ask its residents to agree that their hands will be cut off if they steal. But it could. And San Francisco, likewise, can promise not to cut off its residents’ hands until it is blue in the face—but, since it is a sovereign state, no one can enforce this promise against it” (Duran 2024). He goes on to spell the Orwellian surveillance state a

patchwork could do within their realm, among other baffling beliefs, but that ought to paint the picture.

It is not difficult to see why Thiel would find an ally in someone like Yarvin. Even if Yarvin and his most extreme stances remain in the margins of political discourse, his relationship with Thiel and Vance indicates a shared common ground, a kindred ideology that perceives the protagonist capitalist Levathan in danger. Yarvin, more than anybody, advocates the powerful and successful elites of society having complete free reign. Even when his feudalistic capitalist world makes the capitalist a king, at a certain point Yarvin doesn't care so much who the great powerful man is, but rather that society has great man to rule and lead them. In a rather contradictory twist, Yarvin reportedly told Thiel FDR and the New Deal were "light fascism," yet America was in dire need of a "president who's like FDR again" (Gellman 2023). Roosevelt took matters into his own hands, wielding strong executive authority, and was not afraid to fight with the Supreme Court. Even though FDR's policies took a share of the capitalist's pie, he exercised the initiative and strength people like Yarvin idolize in those at the top of the social hierarchy. It is comparable to the politics behind what is known as "MAGA communism", a predominately reactionary, confused, and conspiratorial online meme ideology pushed by names such as Jackson Hinkel, arguing Trump is the working class's benevolent champion. As strange as it may be to equate Trump with Lenin or Stalin, all these figures represent the desirable powerful great men who moved history in the minds of reactionaries.

Even Thiel, although not quite on the same playing field as Yarvin, shares a similar broader admiration for power and legacy. Gellman's interview with Thiel reveals

his love for luxury, but also ambitions that go beyond just making money. Thiel showed disinterest when in Zoom calls with booming start-ups he was investing in. As Gellman summarized it, “This is not what Thiel wanted to be doing with his time. Bodegas and dog food were making him money, apparently, but he had set out to invest in transformational technology that would advance the state of human civilization” (Gellman 2023). Thiel desired something more notable than building wealth, he needed to possess the power to convert his wealth into new groundbreaking technology that would garner him the coveted “great man” image. Wealth leaves one bored if they don’t accomplish historical feats with it. Thiel desperately searched for companies to support that were pushing those frontiers, dejectedly telling Gellman, “I couldn’t find them.” It would not be his last disappointment.

There is another technological holy grail Thiel is enamored by not mentioned in his manifesto: Immortality, or at least a generous extension of human longevity. He has given millions to English biomedical gerontologist Aubrey D. Grey’s strategies for engineered negligible senescence or SENS, a research project aiming to stretch the lifespan of mice. Thiel even signed up as a client for the Alcor Life extension foundation, so in case he cannot reach immortality, the next best thing will be to have their cryonics team hook him up to a capsule that will hopefully freeze-preserve his body. Yet Thiel knows these projects do not look promising, telling Gellman, “I should be investing more, way more money into this stuff. I should be spending way more time on this” (Gellman 2023). Thiel’s obsession with life-span technology and scientific research is more than a fun fact about a quirky Silicon Valley billionaire, it highlights the core of the ideology driving his ambitions. Thiel’s individualism places the capitalist in a position to

mold society to their will, to operate the levers of progress above the masses, and to even challenge the most foundational conventions of science, at the point of thwarting death itself. His politics all trace back to a ceaseless hunger for power, at times an almost god-like form of power for himself. Thiel expressed little concern about such technologies being available only to a very privileged class, “Well, I maybe self-serve, but I worry more about stagnation than inequality” (Gellman 2023).

In conjunction with Thiel’s glorification of individualistic power for the capitalist is his loathing for diversity politics. Gellman notes in a speech Thiel gave at the metropolitan club, almost every go-to talking point bashing DEI politics was made, referring to it at one point as “very evil and it's very silly,” going as far as to suggest, “When someone says ‘DEI’, just think ‘CCP.’” He claimed DEI infringed on education in college campuses, from the humanities to the science (Gellman 2023). Very recently Thiel went on the TRIGGERnometry YouTube channel, accusing Christianity as being a source for woke culture, following the spirit of Nietzsche and Rand by claiming Christianity “always took the side of the victim,” going as far as labeling wokeness “ultra-Christianity” (Thiel, "The Real Risk is Totalitarian World Government"-Peter Thiel, 2024). He elaborates:

It’s just like an extreme intensification and, you know, it’s maybe there’s no forgiveness and so it’s sort of, it’s you still have original sin and you have all these bad things that happened in the past. The past is terrible and you can never overcome it. But there’s surely a religious interpretation of this is sort of, you know, what happened is, has let’s say the church lost a certain amount of

authority, but people didn't become, you know, rationalist, atheist people. They went into the sort of woke religion...

Peter Thiel's ideology is intensely reactionary, more so than Andreessen's and arguably more than even Elon's (although the jury is still out on that one). The full extent of Thiel's reactionary ideology is somewhat unclear, as his manifesto (also applicable to Andreessen's) paints a broader vision rather than a substantive political template. But all the same, the true powerholders in Thiel's ideal world are unmistakable. Thiel endorses the something close to the absolute power of the capitalist, who is described as or merely assumed to be a mighty captain of the economy, who contributes the most to civilization and thus knows what's best for it. The extent of free-enterprise's economic reign in Thiel's vision ventures further than the goals of a simple libertarian, despite what he may claim. The capitalist has the opportunity, and the incentive, to "escape" politics, to disregard the antagonistic prodding of state interference and public interest. The techno-capitalist pours their genius into the world, having done more for humanity and projected to reach even taller heights than just about anyone. Why should they be obligated to tether themselves to the cries and protests of the ignorant masses and their representatives, as if they haven't done enough for the world? Even though Thiel has not explicitly committed to his anti-democratic rhetoric since the publication of his manifesto in 2009, the capitalist Leviathan should be left alone, even if the safest means of doing so requires escaping or eliminating democratic politics.

Furthermore, Thiel's techno-authoritarianism revolves around a fervently utopian depiction of technology. Even as Thiel rejects the utopian label, and even as he acknowledges the dual nature of technology, just like Andreessen, Thiel effectively

applies none of his rhetoric to techno-capitalism. Capitalism is the place where great men do great stuff. Cyberspace, the ocean, the outer cosmos, and even mortality are all frontiers for new achievements, yet no effort is made on Thiel's part to engage with the consequences tagged along. As evident by his apathy for the stark inequality of the human condition, among other comments and actions from Thiel, the impact of capitalist innovation is an afterthought, if a consideration at all. So what if revolutionary lifespan technology is exclusively for billionaires while much of the world languishes in squalor, or if space travel is an experience reserved for escaping from the undeserving democratic mob? So what if Palantir violates human rights across the board? To Thiel, the progress produced by technology is irrelevant, or at least secondary, when the whole pursuit exists for "great men" to make names for themselves by claiming the veneer of moving forward while enriching themselves, and to do so however they please. Ironically, Thiel finds himself a victim of his own sacred techno-capitalist system. The dissatisfaction he felt at companies wasting their time with what he perceived as frivolous pursuits is him howling against the rhythm of the for-profit capitalist machine following the money as it is programmed to do, the Leviathan roaring in defeat because the world it rules does not sufficiently conform to its desires.

Any reactionary profile would be incomplete without a good boogeyman, and Thiel is no exception. DEI and inclusivity politics serve as the useful culture war red-herring reactionaries find useful, but they also represent the direct contrary to Thiel's authoritarian entitlement, the voice of reason he could not loathe more telling him to think of others. If marginalized social groups must have their voices heard and taken seriously, then so too does the working-class producing wealth. Although Thiel does not

show any meaningful care for the struggles of marginalized populations, as evident by his attack on women's suffrage and social justice more broadly, Thiel does not despise DEI because he is being told not to be a bigot. He despises the broader message behind left-wing social politics, which he rather reductively places DEI as the face of, that "victims" of oppression should be some of the leading people changing the world when he just wishes they would shut up and keep their heads down so that great men like him can toy with the world as they please. Hence, the same logic driving his fury toward "woke" politics extends to Christianity. Thiel is a useful case study into an often-attributed side effect of radical reactionary politics by boldly attacking conventional stances held by the right in the ferocious game of upholding a particular hierarchy of powerful men. Thiel's social politics construct Ayn Rand's capitalist *Übermensch* through and through.

However, Thiel's ideology is the yin to his political power yang. Whereas Andreessen's contribution to American reaction is primarily ideological, particularly among Silicon Valley, Thiel's power is both intellectually influential and well-planted in government. Notably, Thiel's support backs politics at odds with certain principles, such as Vance's staunchly Christian nationalist platform. Better put, engaging in politics is at odds with his "libertarian" principles seeking to escape politics altogether. The money sent to Trump, Vance, and Masters indicates an expectation for the capitalist to command the statesman. And just as politics is business, business is politics. Thiel established his willingness to cooperate with the state ever since Palantir, where the federal government, particularly the CIA, which libertarians are known to be fond of, was one of his earliest and largest customers, even becoming an informant for the CIA (Gellman 2023). As powerful as "great men" like Thiel may be, they are not above the compact between state

and capital, the contract between the political and economic ruling classes ever since their inception. Without the state's aid who knows if Thiel would have ever acquired his status and wealth? Libertarianism is just an inaccurate face to Thiel's reactionary politics. The American state, in no small part due to Thiel, is heading down the an ominously authoritarian path, and his techno-capitalist Levithan has all to gain from it.

## CHAPTER V

### Elon Musk: Tony Stark as the Celebrity Übermensch

Much like the old saying “One man’s freedom-fighter is another man’s terrorist,” Musk personifies arguably more than anyone else a similar phenomenon: One person’s visionary is another person’s tyrant. Out of the three tech moguls, Musk needs no introduction. Currently sitting with an estimated net worth of about \$250 billion, Musk is the wealthiest man not just in the United States, but in the world (Forbes, n.d.). Along with his unfathomable wealth is his celebrity status, making him one of the most divisive figures in America, if not the world. He is the embodiment of a billionaire celebrity, a man with exorbitant influence and power in American society, and as increasingly evident the more political Musk becomes, a powerhouse in the political scene. A person as famous, or infamous, as Elon Musk, compels one to ask: what is Elon Musk’s backstory? How powerful is he, and how does he impact American society, particularly in a political context?

Elon Musk was born in South Africa on June 28th, 1971. Quite fittingly, the controversy surrounding Musk starts at the beginning of his life. It is often said that Elon Musk’s father owned a “blood-emerald” mine in Apartheid South Africa, providing Musk with the wealth and opportunity to rise to the top. However, certain information on Musk’s upbringing, particularly the more contentious topics of financial status, is varied and conflicting. But while the specifics of the story propagated in spaces highly critical of Musk are questionable, Musk was, at the very least, certainly born to a fairly well-off

upper-middle-class white family in Apartheid South Africa, giving him the opportunity, even if it wasn't handed on a gold platter. From a fairly young age, Musk demonstrated an interest in computers, which he would eventually pursue further once leaving for the United States, having previously been enrolled in Stanford but dropping out to pursue his entrepreneurial aspirations (Gregersen 2024).

In 1995 Musk founded Zip2, his first notable business venture. Zip2 offered maps and other business services for internet newspapers, which would be bought four years later for \$307 million dollars (Gregersen 2024). Musk then started X.com, before shortly afterward merging with the digital transaction platform PayPal.<sup>6</sup> PayPal was then bought out by eBay in 2002 for a solid \$1.5 billion. That same year, Musk would go on to pursue his dream of establishing Lunar and Martian colonies by creating his space company SpaceX. Its purpose was to launch the more cost-efficient Falcon rockets, garnering an impressive reputation and a partnership with NASA. In 2004 Musk became a major investor in Tesla Motors (renamed to just Tesla), producing well-acclaimed electric vehicles (Gregersen 2024).

Understanding the personality and image of Elon Musk is critical for getting to the roots of his political presence because his celebrity status is practically inseparable from his reactionary politics. However, Musk's rise in the spotlight was not tied up in the far-right politics he has embraced for the past several years. In about a decade, Musk became something comparable to Tony Stark. Although not universally loved, particularly among the class-conscious left who are not fond of any billionaire, Musk was

---

<sup>6</sup> Musk's proposal to name it X was shot down because it sounded like a porn site. He sure got the last laugh on that one.

quite popular in the mainstream arena. Andreessen and Thiel talked up a storm about the gifted entrepreneur pushing the frontiers of human progress with their intelligence and boldness. And while they presumably imagined themselves in that description, Musk more than anybody was the face of it, the Michael Jordan or Lionel Messi of the technocapitalist world. Above all, Musk was generally seen as a visionary, a role model for human progress, and offering the world a taste of what was possible. I was one of the people who looked up to him as a teenager. He was the cool guy wanting to build the Hyperloop. He was the innovative man leading revolutionary leaps toward Mars. He was futuristic-minded, in a largely positive sense.

Even if one wants to argue these attributes remain true, he lacked the intense pivot to the right competing for space in his image. Musk was largely apolitical, at least in the public eye, especially compared to say, Thiel, who had shown a keen interest in politics before he became big. To the extent Musk was political, it ironically leaned more Democrat. Granted, he had shown some minor financial support to conservatives as well. In a Forbes article tracking the history of Musk's financial contributions and comments, his earlier days tend to reflect the tried-and-true ruling class strategy of buying up both Democrats and Republicans (you can't lose betting on both sides of the coin). In 2003 he donated two thousand to both the Bush and Kerry presidential campaigns (Dorn 2022). Elon later donated \$25 thousand to the National Republican Congress Committee, but then also donated \$35,800 to Obama's reelection campaign and \$30,800 to the Democratic National Convention (Dorn 2022). Needless to say, Musk's sympathies with the Democrats would not last.

It is difficult to pinpoint when Elon Musk began to shift his political life, but if there were any benchmark for when Musk embraced a new set of politics, it would be the leadup to purchasing Twitter. Although only at the beginning of his political spiral, Musk's views were becoming noticeably conservative, if not so intensely reactionary. Forbes states that by November 8th, 2022, "Musk, fresh off of his Twitter takeover, urged Americans to cast their ballots for Republicans in what he said was an effort to balance power in Washington between the two parties: 'I recommend voting for a Republican Congress, given that the Presidency is Democratic,' he tweeted, months after calling the Democratic party one of 'division and hate'" (Dorn 2022). The radical departure from his previously more centrist views was in motion.

Twitter, rebranded into X after a 44-billion-dollar purchase, has become a platform for alt-right, even outright fascist politics. Bigotry has seen a skyrocketing increase on the platform. According to studies conducted by organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and Center for Countering Digital Hate found usage of racial slurs against Black Americans increased from an average of 1282 to 3876 times a day. Likewise, homophobic slurs saw an increase from 2506 to 3964 times a day on average, and anti-Semitic posts saw a 61 percent increase in frequency (Conger 2022). The problem becomes exacerbated, in large part, when previously held accounts now have avenues of legitimacy. Groups associated with QAnon, or other conspiracies can simply purchase their little blue checkmark, and their content becomes verified.

However, Musk claims his goal of purchasing Twitter was in part to create a fairer and more balanced platform. In 2022, he tweeted, "For Twitter to deserve public trust, it must be politically neutral, which effectively means upsetting the far right and the far left

equally.” His aims eclipsed profit, “having a public platform that is maximally trusted and broadly inclusive is extremely important to the future of civilization.” On October 5th, 2024, his tone changed, “Trump/Vance MUST win. I can’t handle 4 years of seeing and hearing Kamala/Walz. That would be cruel and unusual punishment!” X would be anything but politically neutral.

In conjunction with Musk’s purported commitment to an open and fair platform, one of Elon Musk’s loudest talking points was the rampant censorship of the old Twitter era, and that once he bought the platform things would change. Among the many on the right harping about the desecration of free speech in today’s “soft culture,” Elon Musk treats himself and is often seen by his allies as a paragon of open discourse. Granted, he delivered on his promise, in part. Regarding far-right presence on the platform, free speech was more or less the rule. However, when right-wing governments, such as Modi’s government in India, weaponized Twitter to censor political opponents, Musk did not show the same enthusiasm. After the Indian government conducted a manhunt for Amritpal Singh, a Sikh nationalist leader in Punjab and opponent to the current Indian administration, an internet blackout in the region and massive crackdowns on Twitter nation-wide ensued (Grim and Hussain 2023). The Intercept reports:

While Punjab police detained hundreds of suspected followers of Singh, Twitter accounts from over 100 prominent politicians, activists, and journalists in India and abroad have been blocked in India at the request of the government. On Monday, the account of the BBC News Punjabi was also blocked — the second time in a few months that the Indian government has used Twitter to throttle BBC services in its country. The Twitter account for Jagmeet Singh (no relation to

Amritpal), a leading progressive Sikh Canadian politician and critic of Modi, was also not viewable inside India.

Furthermore, “Modi’s government tried to throttle Twitter even before Musk’s takeover. Twitter India staff have been threatened with arrest over refusals to block government critics and faced other forms of pressure inside the country” (Grim and Hussain 2023). The issue was only compounded once Elon fired much of Twitter’s staff, making the Indian government’s job easier. Here’s what Elon had to say about the situation, “It is not possible for me to fix every aspect of Twitter worldwide overnight, while still running Tesla and SpaceX, among other things” (Grim and Hussain 2023). Of course, the lack of enthusiasm in dealing with the highly authoritarian use of censorship is uncharacteristic of someone who portrays himself as a free-speech warrior, but the real gut punch was him failing to respond even after 2 months (when the article was written, although he had settled on complying with their laws and shows no intent on changing course). Complying with government censorship is already bad enough, but in the context of the Indian government’s discriminatory history with the region’s population, particularly Muslims, Twitter is actively assisting in the covering up of human rights violations.

Nor would this be the last time Musk complied with authoritarian government censorship. Nearing national elections in Turkey, Twitter censored voices opposing President Erdogan (Sánchez-Vallejo 2023). Twitter in the first six months under Musk had approved 83 percent of censorship requests from governments, which was higher than the previous administration's 50 percent.

Some have echoed similar counterarguments to Musk, arguing Twitter is the one having its arm bent by the repressive regimes who should really be assigned the blame. An article from Reason.com, a libertarian publication, defended Musk, “Anger about social media censorship should be directed at repressive governments, not the companies they threaten” (Soave 2024). Or, as Musk put it on Twitter, “By ‘free speech,’ I simply mean that which matches the law. I am against censorship that goes far beyond the law. If people want less free speech, they will ask government to pass laws to that effect. Therefore, going beyond the law is contrary to the will of the people.” Musk is either ignorant, willfully ignorant, or a combination of both. It is true laws passed by the various governments are the source of censorship, and thus deserve the center of backlash. However, Twitter and other social media corporations entangled in similar dilemmas are not victims of state bullying, they are acquaintances that gain to facilitate the requests of corrupt governments. The Capitalist Levithan is a business partner to the Hobbesian Levithan. It was a business decision to place profit—continuation of business in India, Turkey, etc.—over free expression, as evident by the worsening of censorship when compared to the previous administration Musk criticized for being too comfortable with censorship. In addition to complying with censorship requests, Musk has also censored critical journalists on the platform (Grynbaum 2022). Elon Musk is as principled on freedom of expression as Thiel is principled against government oppression.

Along with enabling a sharp uptick in alt-right presence on Twitter, Musk has also used the opportunity to voice his own increasingly reactionary stances regularly, including his views on democracy. He may not have written a manifesto, but stringing his piecemeal tangents together would probably produce a dozen. Although Elon Musk has

not expressed an overt hostility to democracy like Thiel, he has comments not far from it. Musk retweeted with the caption “interesting observation” to a post made by the Twitter account “Autism Capital,” making several wild and disturbing arguments:

People who can't defend themselves physically (women and low T men) parse information through a consensus filter as a safety mechanism. They literally do not ask “is this true”, they ask “will others be OK with me thinking this is true”. This makes them very malleable to brute force manufactured consensus; if every screen they look at says the same thing they will adopt that position because their brain interprets it as everyone in the tribe believing it. Only high T alpha males and aneurotypical people (hey autists!) are actually free to parse information with an objective “is this true?” filter. This is why a republic of high status males is best for decision making. Democratic, but a democracy only for those who are free to think.

Elon Musk has made more overt anti-democratic remarks than his not-so-subtle implicature. Back in 2020, years before he bought the platform, he commented on stimulus checks being bad for the American public. A Twitter user responded tongue-in-cheek, “You know what wasn't in the best interest of people? The U.S. government organizing a coup against Evo Morales in Bolivia so you could obtain the lithium there.” Musk bluntly chided back, “We will coup whoever we want! Deal with it.” The tweet has been deleted since ((Bejarano 2020). However, Elon's arrogance is indicative of the larger individualistic authoritarian psychology prevalent in the tech-bro and larger reactionary environment. The Leviathan of capital is entitled to seize the resources of the Earth into a few elite private hands, without a care for the world for what the people

think. After all, tech-bros like Musk are the visionaries transforming society, and in the techno-optimist mindset, that equates only to improving peoples' lives. Of course, Musk is not advocating for anything new, or even unprecedented by U.S. foreign policy standards. Since the opening of the 20th century, American capital has been toppling democracies around the globe. Musk's open celebration of the behavior reflects the goals of the reactionary thinker, and the lengths reactionaries are willing to endorse as a means of securing their power.

Musk's comments at times go full fascist. Just recently Musk retweeted an interview Tucker Carlson did with Holocaust revisionist Daryll Cooper with the recommendation "Very interesting. Worth watching." Tucker described Cooper as, "the best and most honest popular historian in the United States. His latest project is the most forbidden of all: trying to understand World War Two" (Carlson 2024). It should come as no shock Cooper is not an actual historian, making claims on Tucker's show that "millions of people in concentration camps 'ended up dead' merely because the Nazis did not have enough resources to care for them, rather than as a result of the intentional genocide that it was. Mr. Cooper also claimed that Winston Churchill, the British prime minister at the time, and not Adolf Hitler, was "primarily responsible for that war becoming what it did"" (Robertson 2024). Once again, Musk later deleted the post, but the cat was already out of the bag.

If the blue checkmark verifying reactionary politics represents bogeyman politics, Musk certainly has it. One would be hard-pressed to find someone more guilty of dramatizing political opposition than Musk. Take one post of his, where AI Kamala Harris is wearing a communist military uniform, with the description, "Kamala vows to

be a communist dictator on day one. Can you believe she wears that outfit?” Although the post was clearly intended as a joke, its implied message was not. Even if Harris isn’t necessarily a communist, a hill quite a few right-wingers would die on, the message implies she runs on a heavily leftist platform. In reality, Kamala Harris is not particularly leftist. She is corporate-backed and has a background as California’s attorney general. Kamala Harris is a standard centrist Democrat who represents the status quo powers of police and corporate capital. Harris has more in common with conservatives than the left, but reactionary politics must gain legitimacy through dramatizing the radicalism of their opposition.

Arguably more than any single individual in the United States, Elon Musk steers the direction of mainstream politics, both through his platform and his financial investments. Musk’s endorsement of Ron DeSantis’s performance as Florida’s governor, and then his presidential bid begins to highlight Musk’s reach into politics. Aside from the business perks of having the Florida governor at Musk’s side, given SpaceX is based in the state, DeSantis was a key player in the culture war battles. The Tampa Bay Times points out, “DeSantis is a regular user of the phrase “woke mind virus” when describing what he sees as left-leaning cultural groupthink and pressure. The person generally credited with popularizing, if not coining, that phrase: Elon Musk” (Cridlin 2023). Joined by Musk, DeSantis then infamously launched his campaign live on Twitter Spaces, miserably flopping as the livestream continued to crash and face numerous technical difficulties. Musk also donated “more than \$50 million before the 2022 midterms to a group called “Citizens for Sanity” that ran attack ads against Democrats and spending \$10 million helping Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis’ presidential campaign in the GOP

primaries” (Durkee 2024). X was able to give politicians a major platform to reach large audiences, but the technical incompetencies, along with a wider geopolitical landscape favoring Trump with an almost unmovable dedication, demonstrated some limits to Musk’s influence.

Despite the poor launch incident with DeSantis’s troubled and brief campaign, Musk would bounce back as a titan in the political arena thanks to Trump. After the first failed assassination attempt on Trump, Musk came out on Twitter to officially endorse him, “I fully endorse President Trump and hope for his rapid recovery,” and referred to him as a “martyr” in a separate post. He also claimed after a meeting with Trump and other wealthy elites he would not be donating money to either candidate (Jin and Ulmer 2024). Elon Musk, like Desantis, invited Trump over to a Twitter Spaces livestream, although his presidency had already been announced. Elon then appeared with Trump at a campaign rally in October and gave an endorsement speech, making claims such as “they [the democrats] want to take away your right to vote, effectively...” The Trump and Elon relationship (in the public eye that is) has gone a long way since Trump called him a “bullshit artist” after Musk backed DeSantis.

However, Elon has assisted Trump with much more than word of mouth. Despite Elon at one point stating on X he would not financially back either presidential candidate, Trump told a radically different story, boasting in a speech Musk donated him 45 million dollars every month. In a misleadingly strict sense, Musk was right when he stated he wouldn’t donate directly to either campaign. However, according to Forbes, “Musk gave \$74,950,000 to America PAC between July 1 and September 30, the most recent date for which filings are available, according to a filing with the Federal Election Commission”

(Durke 2024). Super PACS are treated as separate entities from presidential campaigns, but the money being raised goes to advertising, mobilizing, and supporting election campaigns, and this case America PAC, according to Forbes, is doing much of the groundwork for Trump's campaign. Trump may have inflated his numbers, but he wasn't wrong to suggest Elon Musk was helping him with a heavy financial hand.

Additionally, Musk's financial games with the campaign have led him into a legal thornbush. Just very recently, Musk has gone viral for offering one million dollars a day until election day for registered voters to sign a petition by America PAC to support the First and Second Amendments. The timing of the event doesn't help draw suspicion either, "Michael Kang, an election law professor at Northwestern University's Pritzker School of Law, said the context of the giveaway so close to Election Day makes it harder to make the case that the effort is anything but a incentivizing people to register to vote... 'It's not quite the same as paying someone to vote, but you're getting close enough that we worry about its legality,' Kang said," (Catalini 2024). Elon Musk plays the reactionary tune of disregarding what little checks the law has on power.

Elon Musk's approach to reaction deviates from Andreessen and Thiel in a few major ways. For one, Musk is relatively less intellectual, and more personable. Musk's reactionary politics are more than capable of being ideological, but he does not expound upon it to the same degree as Thiel and Andreessen do in their manifestos. If Thiel and Andreessen are the inner workings of the capitalist Leviathan, then Elon Musk is its face. Much like the Gilded Age, the iconography of great tech-bro elites has become a foundational characteristic of the contemporary American right-wing reactionary movement. Billionaires as public figures are nothing new. Musk's character outside of

political commentary is the source of his perceived credibility in political commentary. It is the reputation Musk built up for decades as a successful and impactful entrepreneur that allows him to be the Tony Stark icon. Coupled with his constant presence online and in the public eye, Elon meets the conditions to be the pinnacle of a new type of “Übermensch” figure: the Celebrity Übermensch. His association with great capitalistic achievements would make him a candidate for Rand’s entrepreneurial spin on Nietzsche’s cultured great man, but his ability to market himself to the public adds another element.

Musk’s role as the celebrity Übermensch is the only noteworthy reason his political commentary has a significant presence in mainstream discourse. Musk’s politics are the least interesting and least original of the tech oligarchs. Andreessen has the techno-capitalist machine and a modern adaptation of futurism, Thiel offers an escape hatch from democratic politics, and Musk is left with conventional far-right politics. More than the other tech bros, Musk plays the culture war melody loud and proud. He rails against “woke” politics, passionately “defends” free speech from its perceived cultural attack, and spreads conspiracies and outlandish arguments promoting bigotry against women, Jews, and other marginalized groups. Likewise, Musk enforces the image of the capitalist spreading the fruits of their genius out into society, entitling them to their exorbitant wealth and power. His exceeding arrogance, as evident by his disregard for election law and his statement, “We will coup whoever we want,” epitomizes the capitalist Leviathan’s selfish claim to free license. Elon Musk’s commentary does not provide any intellectual contribution to reactionary politics like his tech-bro peers, but it amplifies the presence of extreme but staple ideas of right-wing reaction.

Furthermore, the celebrity *Übermensch* plays heavily into the populism reactionary politics often evokes. Musk's persona taps into the frustration of Americans who feel fed up with the "woke mind virus" that is being shoved down their throats, giving him an avenue of perceived relatability to the everyday American. In a famous interview with Canadian psychologist and conservative commentator Jordan Peterson, Musk states that his trans daughter was a "dead" son to him. He as a father is a victim to the radical leftist wave. It is a story intended to be relatable to his audience, or at least marketed as such. Fighting against the perceived transgender epidemic feeds into the foundational identity of right-wing populism: the powerful portray themselves as champions of the masses and aim their simmering frustrations at an "elite" other than them. Just as Andreessen described the fantasy of "rebellious against the status quo" in his manifesto, the celebrity *Übermensch* sheds the identity of being among the world's most vested powerful, pretending to be what they are not.

The other notable contribution Musk makes to reactionary politics is his colossal share of monopolistic control over social media. Purchasing Twitter got Musk a lot of flak, but regardless of whether or not it was a smart business decision, it undoubtedly expanded Musk's already abundant quantity of power. But more important than the increase of Musk's individual status is the golden platter Musk handed to authoritarian and reactionary politics. Musk's acquisition of Twitter may be the single greatest victory the reactionary forces could have asked for.

X's facilitation of reactionary politics is twofold. One form occurs as the natural response of X's passive policy, an embrace of "free speech" to the maximum. Reactionary rhetoric was given the stage to blossom from the general populace of far-

right accounts, anything from racial slurs to conspiracy theories. Ironically, Musk has given the far-right the exact thing they want: a safe space.

Secondly, and arguably more scarily, is the exact opposite approach. While X stood by for the accumulating mainstream right-wing reaction, it played an active role in assisting the censorship of dissident voices for authoritarian states. Instead of the platform empowering the voices that needed to be heard the most, it shut them down. Rather than creating political discourse in Turkey, it stifled it. When X could have been a space to expose the Indian government's failure to protect human rights, it complied in its crackdown on already marginalized voices. Like Thiel and Andreessen, Musk and his corporations are not above the compact between state and capital. Musk is solid proof that the Orwellian control of media and avenues for information, and thus the very ability of the public to perceive reality, is primarily in the control of the capitalist Leviathan, in the monopolistic grasp of a handful of oligarchs. Musk's advance of free speech was a deep double standard, one that in both instances aided reaction, the result of profit before values.

While Musk deserves heavy criticism and recognition for his contributions to reactionary politics, pointing the crosshairs of critical analysis exclusively at Musk and X misses the larger point. Elon Musk is just one of several billionaires who control great portions of media much like feudal lords and their claims to large swaths of land. Zuckerberg, for example, owns Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Neate 2022). Social media isn't an exclusive place for information (and disinformation), but it is an essential piece of communication infrastructure. However, oligarchs have also bought up other forms of media, such as online news journals. Jeff Bezos owns the Washington

Post, and Rupert Murdoch owns Times Magazine, The Sun, Fox News, Wall Street Journal, and the New York Post, among others. Laurene Powell Jobs, widow of Steve Jobs, owns a significant share of The Atlantic. Elon Musk is an uglier manifestation of a wider problem where capitalist elites have monopolistic power over much of the informational crossroads.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Capitalist Leviathan's Ultimatum

The Capitalist Leviathan has laid out the terms of its ultimatum, one not so different from Hobbes's ultimatum. It is Übermenschen like the leaders of Silicon Valley who know best for society, and just as Hobbes proposed for his King, these men insist we either submit to their program of absolute authority, or all hell will break loose. The tech-bro messiahs portray themselves as extending their arm to the American people, offering a path of salvation for the nation and "Western civilization" from its impending collapse if the left is to have it their way. But the scene is nothing more than an act, for the tech-bros are only interested in upholding the Techno-Capitalist Leviathan's supreme reign. The only salvation these messiahs offer is for themselves.

Three questions must be answered to see the big picture of the new reactionary upswing in American politics. Firstly, why do reactionary politics emerge? It is tempting to believe, after a dive into history and an investigation of the tech-bros, to take away a simple answer: power. While advancing the interests of hierarchal power rests at the heart of reactionary politics, power alone is insufficient. Musk, Thiel, and Andreessen represent a minority of the billionaire class. The entire capitalist class prioritizes maintaining and expanding its power and wealth, and the tech bro messiahs behave in ways largely ubiquitous among capitalist oligarchs. Most to all billionaires, Liberal, Conservative, or apolitical (to the extent there is such a thing), possess extraordinary control over the means of production, the lives of workers, the extraction of foreign resources, and the

outcomes of political institutions. Yet, despite sharing identical interests, the majority of the billionaire class are not intensely reactionary. What drives the fraction who are?

Reactionary politics spawn from one of two sources. In the infant stage of reactionary politics, a fringe minority of elites embrace reactionary politics as a preemptive response to a feared potential threat. Although the political landscape hosts minimal hostility to their power, the reactionary is either convinced monsters out to get them are lurking in the shadows, or that their safety is tentative, and opposition will become a serious problem in the foreseeable future. Early reactionary politics are an odd mixture of clever attentiveness and delusion. It is in the infant stage of reactionary politics where the distinction between conservatism and reaction is obvious. Calhoun's calls for secession during the nullification crisis are preparation based on a prediction of potential doom for slavery. Jackson's vehement disapproval of his Vice President's proposals exemplifies the stark tensions between the radical reactionary and the more traditional conservative.

The second cause driving reactionary politics takes a direct approach. The material conditions of society have changed significantly since the environment of the former case. The social, economic, and political tensions are more evident than before, and the factions posing a challenge to the status quo are no longer on the horizon but have developed into sizable movements that demand a response. The security of slavery that once could be for granted in the 1820s was in grave danger near the Civil War. The abolitionist movement, although a minority, was loud and active. Events such as Bleeding Kansas proved the westward expansion of slavery was intensely contested, and even mainstream political parties were beginning to address slavery as a central issue. The

conservatives who once balked at Calhoun's response increasingly joined the secessionist bandwagon. It ultimately did not matter whether the majority of the planter class and pro-slavery democrats supported secession or not, because as proven by the southern states separating from the union, the reactionary voice became the dominant one. Tyranny's life or death struggle inevitably produces reaction.

Where does the current political environment spurring tech-bro reaction fall into the spectrum? It is difficult to say because the distribution of reactionary politics is inconsistent. Judging solely from the politics of the billionaire class, reactionary politics currently appears closer to the first stage. The tech tycoons certainly aren't alone, and nor are they a fringe presence, but they do not hold the mainstream position among the wider billionaire class. Most of the super-rich aren't as militantly reactionary. Looking at the mainstream position of American politics they have little reason to be. Even though much has changed since the 80s, the Reagan revolution's mark on both political parties remains. Aside from a few outlier Democrats such as Bernie Sanders, the political landscape, at least within the government, is quite friendly to capital. A revolutionary presence is non-existent, and a meaningfully reformist presence is minimal. Compared to the higher tax rates and unionism of the New Deal era, the billionaire class has little room to complain. However, states of relative rest are when the reactionaries show up as the early birds, attentive to possible dangers. The general public, in particular the younger generations, are somewhat more politically radical and critical of at least the current state of corporate capitalism than most politicians. The consensus isn't radical enough to startle guys like Bill Gates or Marc Zuckerberg, but as Thiel demonstrates clearly in his

manifesto with instances of backlash such as the Great Recession, tech guys like him are spooked.

In contrast to the super-wealthy, reactionary politics has found more success on a mainstream stage among the political elite. Predictably, one word encapsulates the source: Trump. Reactionary politics had already been festering among tech-bro circles, but Trump's explosive entrance onto the political scene was perhaps the most notable catalyst for its increasing presence. From his comments on Haitian immigrants to his rejection of the 2020 election, and above all his alliance with corporate interests, Trump was about the best thing that could have happened for the tech bros. His fervent nostalgia for a mythical old America hits Andreessen's tune and his xenophobic and racist conspiracy theories align with Musk's comments. Peter Thiel acknowledged the 2020 election wasn't stolen, but his support for Trump and handpicking of Vance prove he doesn't mind (Gellman 2023). If anything, with Thiel's history of undisguised hostility toward popular power, he benefits from Trump's decision. When tech-bros cheer for Trump, they cheer for themselves. Trump went in and proved great men in power did not have to comply with the few rules that exist to hold the powerful accountable while getting fame and recognition in the process. Trump is the face of the tech-bro gospel, exemplifying everything their reactionary hearts desire.

The interests of capital are not the sole driver of tech-bro reaction. While calls for economic progress are slowly gaining steam, social justice politics have found meaningful energy in political discourse. Great men such as the tech-bros should be told what to do by anyone beneath them. They don't like feminists challenging their monopoly on the spotlight, or calling out their comments, in their manifestos or on

Twitter. They don't want to be told their technological services reinforce racial injustice. However, a developed social justice politics defines itself according to its intersectionality with the economic dimension. If significant portions of the public gain the voice to contest their power atop social hierarchies, the progressives become poised to do the same with class, hitting the tech billionaires' power where it hurts most. It is the various emerging progressive tendencies among much of the public, in conjunction with the looming fear of the ballot box as the vehicle for those antagonistic interests gaining ahold of state power, that threaten the tech bros and serve as the source of reaction. The convenient timing of Trump's rise and reshaping of the republican party only emboldened their response.

Turning to the second major question, what exactly is the tech bros ultimatum, and what might it spell about the future of the United States? The tech bros' push for free range in the marketplace comes burdened with deeply fascistic politics. The tech-bro ultimatum demands capitalist authoritarianism and stringent social hierarchies. Additionally, it declares war on liberal democracy. The capitalist Leviathan's ultimatum concentrates more power into fewer hands. Even though united by a common cause, each individual has a unique vision for what needs to change. Andreessen never attacked democracy, even if the lip service in his manifesto was unconvincing that he cared. Musk not so subtly opposes the vote, not just with his words but certainly with his money. Thiel's explicit language makes him the most explicitly authoritarian of the three.

Nonetheless, the tech-bros push for various forms of the same techno-capitalist machine. Technological innovation as a rationale for systems of domination goes back centuries in European politics. Going back to the Enlightenment, thinkers such as Turgot

argued inequality was an undesirable symptom of technological and economic progress. As anthropologists David Graber and David Wengrow observe in their book *The Dawn of Everything*, “As societies evolve, Turgot reasoned, technology advances. Natural differences in talents and capacities between individuals (which have always existed) become more significant... We progress from simple societies like those of the Wendat to our own complex ‘commercial civilization’, in which the poverty and dispossession of some—however lamentable it may be—is nonetheless the necessary condition for the prosperity of society as a whole” (Graber and Wengrow 2021, 60). Likewise, the theme continued with the industrialists. As Carnegie stated in *Wealth*, “We accept and welcome, therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality of environment, the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few, and the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential for the future progress of the race” (Carnegie 1889, 3). Technology has been the cornerstone of justifying the power of commercial elites ever since their rise in modernity.

The techno-capital machine is the accelerated evolution of the industrial capital machine. Techno-capitalism is the magical bottle creating humanity’s future, and the tech bro messiahs are the genies casting their wishes. As the internet and digital revolutions proved, the twenty-first century is the boldest frontier of technological progress, and the profit motive’s growth model will only continue to accelerate the integration of technology into more and more economic spaces, from security to outer space. Techno-optimism is the reductive rationale for all of it. Even when technology is acknowledged to be a potential source of harm, it isn’t expounded upon in any meaningful critical way.

The techno-capital machine, as Andreessen claimed in his manifesto, can solve all of humanity's problems. Give the capitalist Leviathan complete reign over the economic levers of society, free from the regressive and backward intervention of state regulation and worker movements, and the fruits of tech-bro ingenuity will trickle down across society.

The tech-bros are kindred spirits to the Gilded Age robber barons in more ways than one. The Social Darwinist climate of the industrialists had a few fascistic tendencies carried over to the tech bros. The disregard for the marginalized as nothing more than "the law of competition" or "survival of the fittest" isn't as militantly expressed among the Tech bros, but they hold similar attitudes. Musk's claim people like him can coup whoever they want or Andreessen's phrasing of more technologically developed nations as being "more intelligent" indicates a similar idea where life is a game, and the successful are entitled to do as they please because they are superior and stand above the unremarkable rest. Likewise, the industrialists and the tech-bros prefer to gatekeep political power for themselves. The industrialists, although before the time of a defined fascist ideology, had several elements of fascism's totalitarian hierarchies. The tech bros fleshed out those foundational ideas into more explicitly fascist ideology, such as Andreessen's weird romanticism for the strength of past civilizations, or Musk's race fearmongering. There is a reason all three have either quoted fascists in their manifestos, hung out with modern-day fascists, or parroted their conspiracy theories.

However, the reactionary tech-bro is more than a Carnegie or Rockefeller 2.0 because modern technology opens the door for new ideas. The tech-bros are not clamoring for a strictly orthodox fascism, but a novel technocratic fascism. The tech-bros

have contributed to the creation of a deeply paradoxical techno-dominated world. On one hand, platforms such as social media have bridged social gaps between classes. Whereas the feudal lord in one era would have possibly never even interacted with a lowly peasant, the wealthiest lord of the modern age can get into Twitter arguments with an ordinary person. On the other hand, technology is being experimented with as an avenue for escape from the masses, going, in some instances quite literally, above and beyond living in a disconnected bubble atop the masses typical of elites across civilizations for much of history. As Douglass Rushkoff states in his book *Survival of the Richest* (Rushkoff 2022, 10):

The mental gymnastics required for such a profound role reversal between humans and machines all depend on the underlying assumption that most humans are essentially worthless and unthinkingly self-destructive. Let's either change them [referring to human beings and accelerationist ideas of transforming human biology] or get away from them, forever. Thus, we get tech billionaires launching electric cars into space—as if this symbolizes something more than one billionaire's capacity for corporate promotion. And if a few people do reach velocity and somehow escape velocity and somehow survive on Mars—despite our inability to maintain such a bubble even here on Earth in either of two multibillion-dollar Biosphere trials—the result would be less a continuation of the human diaspora than a lifeboat for the elite. Most thinking, breathing human beings understand there is no escape.

The modern era is witnessing an unprecedented chasm separating rich from poor, but as evident by the wild experiments and ideas for future experiments from the tech-

bros, such as Thiel's artificial ocean islands or Musk's Martian colonies, the widening gap represents more than income inequality. Modern technologies and their future horizons have enabled a divide in possibilities and lifestyles unfathomable to any reactionary elitist from the past. Despite the tech bros' strong ideological similarities to the Gilded Age titans, the technology in their techno-capitalism, or techno-fascism, represents implications far greater than updating the old dogmas to a modern context. Reactionary tyrants of all kinds, from Hobbes's absolute king to the industrial capitalist, have treated the world as their playground, but for the first time, the powerful can ditch everyone else and find an untouched oasis all for themselves. The wild escape fantasies only possible with bold technological leaps are a large reason why Silicon Valley is the epicenter of new-wave reactionary elitism.

Techno-fascism has also empowered the Leviathan with new means of suppressing dissent and maintaining control. Equipped with the ownership of social media, the capitalist Leviathan is closer to defining truth than Hobbes's monarch could ever dream. The tech bros never make a big fuss about the idea of shaping truth, and given their straightforward rhetoric, they probably don't have much interest in it. However, the capitalist Leviathan has taken ominous steps toward molding the perception of truth for its interest. Musk has already shown his failure to uphold transparency on his platform, green-lighting authoritarian regimes around the globe if it keeps traffic on X up and running. If the capitalist Leviathan is to have its way, its war on truth would only worsen.

The tech-bros portray technology, with its omnipotent presence, as having its own teleological course. Carnegie said of the industrial age, "But whether the change be for

good or ill, it is upon us, beyond our power to alter, and therefore be accepted and made the best of. It is a waste of time to criticize the inevitable” (Carnegie, 1889, 1-2).

Although the tech-bros don’t necessarily go as far as to suggest technology is inevitable, they don’t stray far from Carnegie’s message. The tech-bros at least offer an ultimatum, going more the Hobbesian route of basically stating “join or die.” Society has a choice to reject techno-capital growth, but doing so, according to Andreessen, only leads to “stagnation, which leads to zero-sum thinking, internal fighting, degradation, collapse, and ultimately death” (Andreessen 2023).

Although no definitive prediction can be made about the long-term future impact of the tech bros’ reactionary politics on America, a few reasonable inferences can be drawn for the immediate future. For one, reactionary politics will increasingly diffuse into the mainstream, because reaction has been gaining several notable victories recently with no reason to think the impending future will be otherwise. From Trump to Vance to X, once-fringe views have disseminated into the public consciousness. And it won’t just be the tech-bros having their voices amplified either. Thinkers and their ideas that remain closer to the margins, such as Curtis Yarvin, will increasingly become relevant by extension.

Secondly, Silicon Valley's reaction will seep into both political parties. Trump has already opened the floodgates for far-right politics into the Republican party, giving the tech bros free entry to introduce their pitch to wider audiences. But the Democrats will likely see a rise in indirect influence from tech bro influence because they could not be more financially linked to the Capitalist Levithan’s home territory. Silicon Valley heavily finances Democrats, with names such as Dustin Moskovitz and Ried Hoffman donating

roughly 60 and 55 million dollars to blue PACs respectively, according to a detailed Fortune article tracking SV contributions (Brice and Rapp 2024). With Musk's heavy hand in the game, Silicon Valley isn't as overwhelmingly blue as it once was, but even the portion that donates to democrats is near the tech-bros. Due to the heavy exposure to people like Musk, Thiel, Andreessen, Luckey, etc., blue Silicon Valley donors might take in some ideas and shift the democrats, even if only moderately, toward the vision of the Techno-Capital Levithan. But only time will tell if the Democrats budge.

The final and most important question: what do tech bro reaction and reactionary politics say about liberalism? Firstly, it is a reminder that reactionary politics are inseparable from liberalism. Thiel, Andreessen, and Musk follow a sequence of events observed in previous eras. It is inevitable in a liberal society that a portion of the elite exists in a perpetual state of insecurity. Conventions such as open discourse, mass mobilization, and elections give the opposition opportunities to grow in numbers and volume. As tensions sharpen, the reactionaries become increasingly anxious and stubborn, all while grabbing more and more elites. Calhoun's words embody the universal battle cry of reactionaries, "In this case, in particular I hold concession or compromise to be fatal. If we concede an inch, concession would follow concession—compromise would follow compromise, until our ranks would be so broken that effectual resistance would be impossible. We must meet the enemy on the frontier, with a fixed determination of maintaining our position at every hazard" (Calhoun 1837). The expressed views are not only provoked in response to social change but are shaped by it. Thiel is not writing his libertarian manifesto simply as a celebration of capitalism (although that is most certainly a feature) but is convinced by the social unrest of the 21st

century's turn that radical changes are necessary to protect the marketplace from an unruly mob. Antagonisms between the powerful and the oppressed fester with time, and like a rubber band being pulled from opposite ends, politics snaps. Liberalism has a lifespan just like any organism.

Additionally, reactionary politics have evolved significantly, entering its late-stage period in contemporary liberal politics. The modern conditions of advancing social politics, class tensions, and nationalism culminate in the formation of reaction's most extreme and final form: Fascism. Fascism completes the goal of reaction. To fascism, liberalism is a sickness, a system decaying into weakness and failure. Facilitated by the left, undesirable populations, whether it be immigrants, environmentalists, feminists, communists, Jews, queer people, or other marginalized groups being targeted are poisoning the pillars holding civilization. Ideas of equality, freedom, and social justice are simply avenues for the undeserving to seize power from where it needs to remain. But civilization can be saved if the great men at the top are handed what power previously existed outside their grasp. The great statesman and capitalist will lead the nation and economy to greatness. Fascism is the "Übermensch's" Levithan, the teleological conclusion to reaction's development.

The techno-oligarchs move toward fascism for the same reason elites have historically held, at best, a turbulent relationship with democratic systems. Reactionary elites treat democracy the same way a little child plays a game. The reactionary crafts the game to favor their ability to win, and only plays the game of democracy to the extent it upholds that expectation. But the moment they lose their already rigged game, the child-like reactionary throws a tantrum and either ignores the results (Trump) or proposes to

opt out of the game completely (Thiel). Calhoun was vice president at one point and even believed slavery was in good hands under the national government, but once he had doubts, he changed his tone. Reactionaries of the Jacksonian period argued suffrage must be based on property. And as Russell Conwell argued in his “Acres of Diamonds” speech, great men decided democracy and not people. Although the child at least has some interest in making the game, the elite have historically never benefited from having democracy over an autocratic alternative. For oligarchs, democratic politics at its best is an inconvenient but harmless game they have to play.

Fascism is not a wholly new monster incomparable to liberalism. Fascism is not merely some momentous seizure of power from the ruling classes of liberal society, but rather, the further consolidation of their already established power. Fascism is liberalism in decay, the final metamorphosis toward political, economic, and social authoritarianism as a reactionary survival instinct. Fascism is the twisted, engorged preservation of certain aspects of the liberal order, such as capitalism, not its destruction.<sup>7</sup> The tech-bros are not advancing an autocratic replacement of a democratic system representing the will of popular power. American electoralism is already designed to work for the powerful. Thiel chooses Vance to be Trump’s running mate and Musk donates (as of now) 75 million dollars to Trump’s campaign. But to the reactionary, a system where the people cast the ballot and the wealthy interest groups and individuals shape the policy outcomes is not

---

<sup>7</sup> Intellectually, liberalism’s relationship to fascism varies. Certain reactionary liberals, such as Gilded age “classical liberals” like Spencer, have provided fascism with some of its ideological blueprints with ideas such as Social Darwinism. However, liberal political theory’s emphasis on equality, individual rights, and limited government demonstrates major ideological differences from fascism. However, liberalism in practice has historically provided fascism with much of its foundation. It is no coincidence, for example, that Nazi Germany looked to the American South as a source of inspiration for German antisemitic race laws (Whitman 2017, 76).

good enough. Popular opinion shouldn't even be entertained. The move to fascism is the final act, the killing blow to what stood in the way of securing power. Fascism sees itself as the last bastion of civilization's essential hierarchies, saving it not just from the radical left, but the channels of liberalism gnawing at civilization's core. Fascism is the corrupted twin to liberalism, the counterpart to liberalism in a modern application of Aristotle's regime dichotomy.

While the reactionary nature of fascism primarily serves as the final defense for the hierarchical power structures of state, class, etc., the tech bros' are a window into fascism's increasing ambition. Techno-fascism rewards the Capitalist Leviathan with more than wealth by itself. It gives the Capitalist Leviathan the keys to the forbidden palace, the opportunity to use its wealth toward maximum decision-making authority. The Capitalist Leviathan, more than ever, can direct the efforts of technology and in conjunction direct the course of society, even if its sights appear to be increasingly self-centered. Modern technology and its prospects make the forbidden fruit of power more enticing than ever before. Techno-fascism is individual authoritarianism at its ideological maximum. The selfish nature of how these tech billionaires engage in their projects, such as Thiel's quest for immortality, indicate that the "great man" mission was never about the greater good. Techno-fascism is the outcome of techno-optimism being bound by authoritarian chains, a system where powerful men do big things, without a care if the outcomes of those achievements truly advance human potential. What does it mean for liberalism? It means the reactionary's discontent with liberalism becomes increasingly inflamed. The reactionary feels more incentivized to do away with the liberal status quo than ever before because liberalism is the one roadblock in the way of obtaining power

beyond this world. These tech oligarchs fantasize themselves out in space spearheading a new age or creating seasteading colonies, yet they are stuck here on Earth with the mass of Üntermenschen keeping them down.

One could very well turn to history and challenge the theory that liberalism creates the conditions for its demise. As is the conventional view of the liberal optimist, the American experiment has survived challenge after challenge, so what is stopping it from triumphing once again? Because the past struggles, although intense fissures, were not ultimatums over the fundamental principles of a liberal social charter. When the South effectively broke from American liberalism out of a defensive reaction, liberalism changed character once the conflict was resolved. But the same would most likely not occur if the techno-capitalist ultimatum grows in momentum. Liberalism can exist without racial slavery, but it cannot exist (at least in a modern context) without capitalist property norms.<sup>8</sup> If the tech bros' reactionary politics grew into the predominant view among the elite, it would entail a fascist counter-revolution against the liberal status quo, a rebellion from powerful propertied interests against the system defined greatly by private property. Whereas the Civil War was American liberalism working out an identity crisis, a conflict over private property would lead to liberalism's foundation collapsing in

---

<sup>8</sup> I use the phrase "racial slavery" specifically and not just slavery, so to reference antebellum slavery. Whether liberalism can exist without slave labor is highly debatable, as imperialist global capitalism generates some of its profit from undocumented slave labor. Not to mention prison labor, which is becoming increasingly recognized as the replacement for the old system of slavery post-abolition.

on itself. It is the difference between powerful factions of the ruling class and the ruling class itself abandoning liberalism. The latter entails liberalism rebelling against itself.

Inevitability is a rather tricky concept when applied to historical analysis. Human beings are actors with agencies, and so no society in theory is pre-destined to move one way or another. But simultaneously, the ability to act yields to the greater material circumstances of society and even the world at any given moment. Agency is not some free-flowing abstract, but the final action people are left with in response to their situations, much like a player responding to the scenario crafted by a dungeon master in a game of Dungeons and Dragons. Even Marx, who is often attributed to having a deterministic view of history states, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx 1852). The United States is not traversing through a pre-destined course, but like all other populations and governments, America is deciding what path it goes down, which future it wants out of multiple branching options.

Subsequently, liberalism inevitably produces reaction because its social structure is imbued with antagonistic forces. The course of reaction is not entirely pre-determined, but there is a point where reaction finds itself too entrenched in the gravitational pull of escalating defense, entering an arc where its fate is sealed. The United States was not predestined to have a civil war, but once slavery became embedded in American political economy, a war over its fate was guaranteed. Has America’s current politically climate breached the reactionary event horizon? I don’t think anybody can definitively know in this current moment. Although the forces for anti-democratic reaction are growing, only

history will be equipped to look back and reach more solid conclusions about the ultimate fate of the techno-capitalist Leviathan. However, if the tumor of anti-democratic reaction is not addressed, it could become malignant.

The lifespan of reactionary politics is a case of political entropy, with the Capitalist Leviathan being a new stage of reaction in the larger process. Liberalism's internal conflicts drive its decay, spurred by social unrest and a new class of techno-capitalists with big plans too good to be disturbed by the masses. The Capitalist Leviathan's ultimatum is the old quest for power reaching a new stage of desires and identity. Reactionary politics has soared over the moon in great part because men like Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, and Marc Andreessen feel increasingly uncomfortable with economic power outside their grasp and by extension the idea of democracy. In an ironic fate, liberalism was the nursery that hatched and nourished the Capitalist Leviathan; but as the Leviathan grew the nursery's walls became too confined for its ambitious liking, and so out of self-preservation the Leviathan's eyes ominously gazed down, revealing the intention to unleash its wrath.

## Bibliography

- AFP Fact Check. (2024, July 22). *Biden deepfake spreads online after withdrawal from 2024 race*. Retrieved from FactCheck.AFP.com: <https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.364R2N9>
- Amnesty International. (2020). *Palantir Technologies Contracts Raise Human Rights Concerns before NYSE Direct Listing*. Amnesty International.
- Andreessen, M. (2023, October 16). *The Techno-Optimist Manifesto*. Retrieved from a16z: <https://a16z.com/the-techno-optimist-manifesto/>
- Andresseen, M. (2023, July 14). Fighting. *Marc Andresseen Substack*.
- Andresseen, M. (2024, June 27). Joe Rogan Experience #2010-Marc Andresseen . (J. Rogan, Interviewer)
- A. T. Mason, G. E. Baker, (1985), *Free Government in the Making* (p. 357). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Banks, W. (2024, January 9). *Marc Andreessen's "Techno-Optimist Manifesto" Is Just Old-School Reactionary Elitism*. Retrieved from Jacobin.com: <https://jacobin.com/2024/01/marc-andreessen-techno-optimist-manifesto-reactionary-elitism-nietzsche-hayek-ideology>
- BBC. (2020, March 2). Apple settles iPhone slowdown case for \$500m. *BBC*.
- Bejarano, V. P.–A. (2020, July 29). 'We Will Coup Whoever We Want': Elon Musk and the Overthrow of Democracy in Bolivia. *CounterPunch*.
- Bouie, J. (2024, August 10). Where Does JD Vance's Ideology Really Come From? *The New York Times*.
- Calhoun, J. C. (1837, February 6). *Slavery a Positive Good*. Retrieved from Teaching American History: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/slavery-a-positive-good/>
- Carlson, T. (2024, September). *Darryl Cooper: The True History of the Jonestown Cult, WWII, and How Winston Churchill Ruined Europe*. Retrieved from Tucker Carlson Network: [https://tuckercarlson.com/tucker-show-darryl-cooper?gad\\_source=1](https://tuckercarlson.com/tucker-show-darryl-cooper?gad_source=1)
- Carnegie, A. (1889). *The Gospel of Wealth*. Retrieved from Carnegie.org: [https://media.carnegie.org/filer\\_public/0a/e1/0ae166c5-fca3-4adf-82a7-74c0534cd8de/gospel\\_of\\_wealth\\_2017.pdf](https://media.carnegie.org/filer_public/0a/e1/0ae166c5-fca3-4adf-82a7-74c0534cd8de/gospel_of_wealth_2017.pdf)
- Catalini, M. (2024, October 20). Musk offers voters \$1 million a day to sign PAC petition backing the Constitution. Is that legal? *AP News*.
- Chapman, L. (2023, October 18). *Marc Andreessen Wants to Reclaim the Moral High Ground for Tech*. Retrieved from Bloomberg: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2023-10-18/marc-andreessen-s-tech-manifesto-tries-to-reclaim-the-moral-highground>

- Chapter 2 Protecting Nazi Blood and Nazi Honor. (2017). In J. Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (p. 76). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Conger, S. F. (2022, December 2). Hate Speech's Rise on Twitter Is Unprecedented, Researchers Find. *The New York Times*.
- Conwell, R. (1900-1925). *Russell Conwell Acres of Diamonds*. Retrieved from American Rhetoric : <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/rconwellacresofdiamonds.htm>
- Cridlin, J. (2023, May 24). Here's how Elon Musk became a Ron DeSantis supporter. *Tampa Bay Times*.
- Dorn, S. (2022, November 27). Elon Musk's Political Shift: How The Billionaire Moved From Backing Obama To Endorsing DeSantis. *Forbes*.
- Duran, G. (2024, July 22). Where J.D. Vance Gets His Weird, Terrifying Techno-Authoritarian Ideas. *The New Republic*.
- Durkee, A. (2024, October 15). Elon Musk Has Given \$75 Million To Pro-Trump Super PAC—So Far. *Forbes*.
- Rushkoff, D. (2022), *Survival of the Richest* (p. 10). New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Dwoskin, E., C. Z. (2024, July 28). Inside the powerful Peter Thiel network that anointed JD Vance. *The Washington Post*.
- Finchelstein, F.(2022) 2 Truth and Mythology in the History of Fascism. *A Brief History of Fascist Lies* (p. 26). Oakland: University of California Press.
- Fatunde, M. (2024, January 5). The race to produce rare earth elements. *MIT Technology Review*.
- Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*. (n.d.). Retrieved from MoMA.org: <https://www.moma.org/artists/3771>
- Forbes. (n.d.). *Marc Andreessen Profile*. Retrieved from Forbes.com: <https://www.forbes.com/profile/marc-andreessen/>
- Forbes. (n.d.). *The World's Real Time Billionaires*. Retrieved from Forbes.com: <https://www.forbes.com/real-time-billionaires/#6f5095873d78>
- Gellman, B. (2023, November 9). Peter Thiel is Taking a Break From Democracy. *The Atlantic*.
- Gregersen, E. (2024, October 27). *Elon Musk*. Retrieved from Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/money/Elon-Musk>
- Grim, R., M. H. (2023, March 28). Elon Musk's Twitter Widens Its Censorship of Modi's Critics. *The Intercept*.
- Grynbaum, M. M. (2022, December 16). In Suspending Journalists on Twitter, Musk Flexes His Media Muscle. *The New York Times*.

- Hiner, J. (2020, July 17). Why Tech Made Racial Injustice Worse, and How to Fix It. *Department of African American Studies Princeton University*.
- Issac, M. (2016, February 10). *Marc Andreessen Apologizes After Facebook Disavows India Comments*. Retrieved from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/11/technology/facebook-rejects-marc-andreessen-comments-on-india-and-he-apologizes.html>
- Jefferson, T. (1816, July 12). *Letter from Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval (1816)*. Retrieved from Teaching American History: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/letter-to-samuel-kercheval/>
- Klein, E. (2023, October 26). The Chief Ideologist of the Silicon Valley Elite Has Some Strange Ideas. *The New York Times*.
- Krugman, P. (2024, September 26). The Tech Bro Style in American Politics. *The New York Times*.
- MacColl, M. (2024, October 1). Palmer Luckey: Every country needs a ‘warrior class’ excited to enact ‘violence on others in pursuit of good aims’. *TechCrunch*.
- Marinetti, F. T. (1909). *The Futurist Manifesto*. Retrieved from ArtHistoryProject.com: <https://www.arthistoryproject.com/artists/filippo-tommaso-marinetti/the-futurist-manifesto/>
- Marx, K. (1852, March). *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. Retrieved from Marxists.org: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>
- Neate, R. (2022, May 3). Extra level of power’: billionaires who have bought up the media. *The Guardian*.
- Picchi, A. (2023, November 20). *Elon Musk faces growing backlash over his endorsement of antisemitic X post*. Retrieved from cbsnews.com: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/elon-musk-actual-truth-antisemitic-post-backlash-advertisers/>
- Rainsborough, T. (1647, October 28-29). *Col. Thomas Rainborowe: ‘The poorest he that is in England hath a right to live as the greatest he’*. Retrieved from The History of Parliament: <https://historyofparliament.com/2013/04/18/col-thomas-rainborowe-the-poorest-he-that-is-in-england-hath-a-right-to-live-as-the-greatest-he/>
- Rapp, J. B. (2024, September 25). Jenn Brice and Nicolas Rapp. *Fortune*.
- Robertson, K. (2024, September 6). Tucker Carlson Criticized for Hosting Holocaust Revisionist. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from The New York Times.
- Robin, C. (2018). In *The Reactionary Mind* (p. 13). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sánchez-Vallejo, M. A. (2023, May 24). Under Elon Musk, Twitter has approved 83% of censorship requests by authoritarian governments. *El Pais*.
- Sherman, N. (2020, September 30). Palantir: The controversial data firm now worth £17bn. *BBC.com*. Retrieved from BBC.com.

Soave, R. (2024, May 17). Don't Blame Elon Musk for Turkey's Authoritarian Twitter Censorship. *Reason*.

Steinberger, M. (2020). Does Palantir See too Much? *The New York Times*.

Temkin, M. (2024, July 16). *Andreessen Horowitz co-founders explain why they're supporting Trump*. Retrieved from TechCrunch.com:  
[https://techcrunch.com/2024/07/16/andreessen-horowitz-co-founders-explain-why-theyre-supporting-trump/?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuYmluZy5jb20v&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAGO4dTqMu0hjKnU1ItcuEZTU5iLgj1hImRViQJbbv8iK3QQrrEQ\\_e2GZnSV2bJakISE7D989ur](https://techcrunch.com/2024/07/16/andreessen-horowitz-co-founders-explain-why-theyre-supporting-trump/?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuYmluZy5jb20v&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAGO4dTqMu0hjKnU1ItcuEZTU5iLgj1hImRViQJbbv8iK3QQrrEQ_e2GZnSV2bJakISE7D989ur)

Tenenhous, S. (2009, February 17). Conservatism is Dead. *The New Republic*.

Thiel, P. (2009, April 13). The Education of a Libertarian . *Cato Unbound*.

Thiel, P. (2024, July 28). "The Real Risk is Totalitarian World Government"-Peter Thiel. (Triggernometry, Interviewer)

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (p. 65). New York: Everyman's Library.

Ulmer, H. J. (2024, July 13). Elon Musk endorses Trump in presidential race, calls him "tough". *Reuters*.

Wengrow, D. D. G. (2021), *The Dawn of Everything* (p. 60). New York: Picador.