

Cold War Prophecy and the Burdens of Comparative Thought: A Case for Revisiting Louis Hartz

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This article revisits Louis Hartz's distinctive contribution to American political thought. Pushing against his reputation as an overly complacent consensus historian, I highlight Hartz's forceful critique of America's liberal blindness, a critique reaching back to the Founding and culminating in an engagement with the politics of his own Cold War moment. Alarmed by the rise of McCarthyism, Hartz warned against an intensifying Americanism at home and advised increasing contact with cultures abroad in the hopes of facilitating the sense of relativity engendered by the experience of seeing oneself through the eyes of others. The result, I argue, is a genre of *prophetic liberalism*, which compels Americans to transcend their liberal absolutism cum isolationism, and which still affirms core enlightenment values. Hartz underscores the need for political theory's comparative vocation—one that alerts Americans to crucial blind spots within their national experience.

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“Can a people ‘born equal’ ever understand peoples elsewhere that have to become so? Can it ever understand itself?”¹ Louis Hartz asked this probing question in *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955). The search for an answer took Hartz into the deepest recesses of American history, a history he associated with the spectacular triumph of liberal ideology. Hartz attributed this triumph to two factors: first, Americans’ non-feudal birth, that is, their experience of being “born equal” without the need for social revolution; second, America’s descent into an “irrational Lockianism,” a submerged Lockean consensus that cemented the “fixed, dogmatic liberalism” of the “American Way of Life.”² Hartz insisted that two centuries of liberal dominance had left

¹ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1955), 309.

² *Ibid.*, 9–11. Hartz used “Lockianism” in place of the more conventional “Lockeanism.”

Americans in a state of blindness, robbed of alternative perspectives that could awaken them to what was valuable, but also condemnable, within their liberal experience. His critique resembled that of Frankfurt School émigrés like Herbert Marcuse, who traveled to America and encountered a “one-dimensional” society.³ Hartz was not an émigré, however, and could not easily retreat to the foreigner’s perspective. As a native son, he felt burdened to find solutions to his country’s troubled liberal experience. Hartz’s solution was radical indeed. He called for the transcending of American history, a process that required America to extricate itself from the legacy of its non-feudal past and overcome the constitutive grip of founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence.⁴

Hartz’s framing of the American dilemma is profound, if not always appreciated. Hartz, unlike the mainstream political scientists of his day, refused to attribute to America a happy pluralist landscape marked by benign agreement over basic values. Instead, he depicted a nation sickened by an entrenched ideology. Still, Hartz is often dismissed as just another consensus historian, expounding Cold War conceits of American exceptionalism.⁵ Moreover, Hartz’s liberal society thesis has been vehemently challenged by republican historiographers, such as

³ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991 [1964]).

⁴ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 32, 305, 308–09 (see note 1 above).

⁵ For noteworthy celebrations of “American exceptionalism” see Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953); Seymour Martin-Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

J.G.A. Pocock, who sought to replace Hartz's "Lockean monolith."⁶ Although *Liberal Tradition* "influenced nearly every aspect of the study of American politics,"⁷ Hartz's prestige among political scientists waned considerably after Rogers Smith's seminal call to go "beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz." Smith contests a Tocquevillian thesis that has emphasized egalitarian origins while overlooking America's ascriptive and hierarchical traditions.⁸ Recent

⁶ J.G.A. Pocock, "Between Gog and Magog: The Republican Thesis and the Ideologia Americana" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987): 325–46, at 341. On the republican and "New Whig" historiography that emerged largely in response to Hartz, see J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998 [1969]). For spirited defenses of Hartz, see Catherine A. Holland, "Hartz and Minds: The *Liberal Tradition* after the Cold War," *Studies in American Political Development* 19 (2005): 227–33; Philip Abbott, "Still Louis Hartz after All These Years: A Defense of the Liberal Society Thesis," *Perspectives on Politics* 3 (2005): 93–109.

⁷ Abbott, "Still Louis Hartz after All These Years," 93 (see previous note). For American political development scholarship influenced by Hartz, see J. David Greenstone, *The Lincoln Persuasion: Remaking American Liberalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); John P. Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁸ Rogers M. Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America," *The American Political Science Review* 87 (1993): 549–66. For a trenchant critique of

reappraisals of Hartz's legacy have so far failed to extricate him from his current place in a "nether world suspended somewhere between life and death."⁹ James Kloppenberg echoes widespread sentiment: Hartz's "oracular" writing, based on allusions and epigrams, now feels stale.¹⁰

This article attempts to rescue Hartz from that abyss by highlighting what I take to be Hartz's distinct theoretical contribution: his genre of prophetic liberalism. I conceive *prophetic liberalism* as a secularized mode of social criticism that diagnoses an impending crisis, predicts a fateful struggle between competing forces, and demonstrates how this crisis might have *redemptive* possibilities for a liberal society. For Hartz, the crisis was a foreign policy episode unlike any other, a Cold War conflict that thrust America onto the world stage even as it accelerated the inward pressures of national conformism, what Hartz called "Americanism."

Hartz see James T. Kloppenberg, "In Retrospect: Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America*," *Reviews in American History* 29 (2001): 460–78; see also Carol Nackenoff, "Locke, Alger, and Atomistic Individualism Fifty Years Later: Revisiting Louis Hartz's *Liberal Tradition in America*," *Studies in American Political Development* 19 (2005): 206–15.

⁹ See Mark Hulliung, "What's Living, What's Dead, in the Work of Louis Hartz," in *The American Liberal Tradition Reconsidered: The Contested Legacy of Louis Hartz*, ed. Mark Hulliung (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2010): 267–73, at 267. For a well-balanced assessment of Hartz's methods see Mark Hulliung, "Louis Hartz, His Day and Ours," in *American Liberal Tradition Reconsidered*, ed. Hulliung, 11–52.

¹⁰ James T. Kloppenberg, "*Requiescat in Pacem*: The Liberal Tradition of Louis Hartz" in *American Liberal Tradition Reconsidered*, ed. Hulliung, 90–124, at 108 (see previous note).

Hartz diagnosed Americanism as an ideological sin, a collective failure to properly understand the significance of America's historical experience, a failure that inhibited Americans from critically examining their liberal presuppositions.¹¹ If Americanism characterized a youthful nation safely cocooned from global responsibilities, Hartz saw the Cold War shattering that innocence. Hartz prophetically warned that a nation incapable of scrutinizing its principles at home could never hope to lead abroad. He saw Red Scare tendencies presaging America's descent into blindness and away from Enlightenment liberal values, values imperiled by the Soviet threat.

Hartz believed, however, that new forms of national enlightenment were possible, if only Americans would develop an impetus for self-scrutiny. Searching for conditions that would facilitate a new experience for the entire collectivity, Hartz prophesized the Cold War moment as an opportunity to awaken Americans from their dogmatic slumber. Hartz thought the Cold War's global frame might provide the "spark of philosophy" and "sense of relativity" obtained when contact with "alien cultures" forces people to see themselves through the eyes of another.¹² Amid the nation's ascent to global power, Hartz implored Americans to finally come to terms with the specificity of their liberal experience. It was the "entire crisis of our time" that compelled

¹¹ Hartz used phrases such as "Americanism," "irrational Lockianism," and "liberal absolutism" in tandem to diagnose an entrenched liberal ideology functioning as an "absolute national morality." Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, at 286; see also 11–14, 305–07 (see note 1 above).

¹² *Ibid*, 14.

Americans to “make that journey to Europe and back which ends in the discovery of the American liberal world.”¹³

Prophetic appeals to redemption from collective sin are a longstanding feature of American discourse. Unlike the biblically informed prophecies of civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King Jr., Hartz forewent scripture. I follow George Shulman, though, who stresses prophecy’s *secular* possibilities as a genre of “living poetry” that is “open to reworking.”¹⁴ According to Shulman, prophets help articulate the shared struggles of a political community by bringing the “constitutive power of *the past*” to bear on present dilemmas.¹⁵ Prophets are thus messengers who announce unwelcome truths and incite the community to self-reflection and acknowledgment, “mediating its relationship to the larger realities conditioning its existence and choices.”¹⁶ Hartz undertook a version of this prophetic form of mediation: alerting his countrymen to acute defects within their national experience, and showing how these defects inhibited Americans from understanding themselves and understanding their place within the world.

The content of Hartz’s prophecy pivoted, then, on his urgent appeal for a comparative vocation in American life. Conjuring neither spiritual deliverance nor an eschatological vision of divine judgment, Hartz instead sought redemption in the imaginative possibilities of contact

¹³ Ibid, 5.

¹⁴ George Shulman, *American Prophecy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3, 28.

¹⁵ Ibid, 35.

¹⁶ Ibid, 2–6.

abroad. Hartz was a prophetic *liberal* because he sought to recover, for America, the rationalist impulses of a more enlightened liberalism. Unlike conservative jeremiads that affirm the existing lifeways of an idealized national essence, Hartz's writing offered a liberal form of transcendence in the turn to the comparative. Hartz believed American liberalism, for all its warts, could regenerate itself through core enlightenment principles of rationalism, openness, and enlarged dialogue. Hartz envisioned so-called liberal society analysts, scholars who might acutely analyze America through rigorous engagement with European liberal ideas. Like contemporaries such as Reinhold Niebuhr, Hartz partook in the distinct pre-Rawlsian strand of Cold War liberalism, a liberalism prioritizing *ethos* over formal models of institutional design.¹⁷

In hindsight, however, Hartz appears as a deeply flawed prophet, one whose work underscores both the opportunities and risks of redemptive appeals. As Shulman insightfully demonstrates, prophetic speech remains discursively fluid, deployed for a range of rhetorical purposes: by civil rights activists, but also by groups favoring closure over openness, those justifying various forms of racial exclusion and cultural purity.¹⁸ For Shulman, the salient question is therefore *which* prophetic discourses are truly redemptive, and which merely advance exclusion and social hierarchies.

¹⁷ For a reading of Niebuhr that offers insightful background on Cold War liberalism more generally, see Joshua Cherniss, "A Tempered Liberalism: Political Ethics and Ethos in Reinhold Niebuhr's Thought," *Review of Politics* 78 (2016): 59–90. On Berlin, Popper, and Aron see Jan Werner-Müller, "Fear and Freedom: On 'Cold War Liberalism,'" *European Journal of Political Theory* 7 (2008): 45–64.

¹⁸ Shulman, *American Prophecy*, x–xii (see note 14 above).

While Hartz avoided the pathos of many participants in the American prophetic tradition, offering neither an idealized defense of founding principles, nor an evangelical narrative of decline from virtuous origins,¹⁹ he remained notoriously inadequate on race. Hartz followed Tocqueville in reifying the idea of a nation “born equal,” without properly confronting how racial injustices have shaped the contours of American egalitarianism. Such neglect impugns Hartz’s historiography and threatens his prophetic appeal. For if American liberalism is constituted by “disavowing its deep connection to racial domination,”²⁰ then Hartz’s work risks reproducing the liberal blindness it criticizes.

Despite these flaws, I still propose that Hartz deserves a second look, less because he got American history right than because he bore prophetic witness to America’s fraught position in the world. Hartz exposed the dangers of American blindness at the very moment when those dangers were attaining global significance. Despite his faith in the transformative potential of international contact, Hartz recognized that misunderstandings would continue to plague American engagement due to an inability to understand patterns of social revolution abroad and a messianic insistence on spreading freedom and capitalism. These tragic undertones of Hartz’s thought seem especially apropos today. Unlike both modernization theorists of his time and interventionists of the post-Cold War era, Hartz resisted the triumphalist impulse to transform the

¹⁹ These tropes are evident, for example, among evangelical Christians like Jerry Falwell. See Shulman, *American Prophecy*, ix–xi, 13–14 (see note 14 above). For a trenchant critique of the ritual of jeremiad in American life, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

²⁰ Shulman, *American Prophecy*, xiii (see note 14 above).

world in America's image. However, he also drew attention to the forces that continue to make isolationism a common American refrain. In our current era, Hartz's work thus invites us to sift through the country's flawed potential, recognizing that his struggle against American blindness remains, to some extent, our own. Doing so reveals areas where Hartz continues to cast large shadows: as a harbinger, for example, of political theory's recent comparative turn.²¹ By prophesizing on the importance of cross-cultural encounters, and imploring political theorists to cultivate a more rigorous comparative frame, Hartz anticipates more recent attempts to use comparative political theory as an antidote to existing dogmas. Building on Hartz's insights requires us, however, to acknowledge that the challenges that he identifies overcome his own theoretical offerings.

Hartz in Context: Cold War Liberalism

What does it mean to read Hartz as a Cold War prophet? This question requires some attentiveness to the intellectual milieu of the early Cold War. As historians stress, the Cold War epoch had social, cultural, and political contours that stretched well beyond the narrow confines of great power diplomacy.²² By throwing geopolitical realities into sharp relief, the Cold War

²¹ See, for example, Melissa S. Williams and Mark E. Warren, "A Democratic Case for Comparative Political Theory," *Political Theory* 42 (2014): 26–57; Fred Dallmayr, "Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory," *Perspectives on Politics* 2 (2004): 249–57.

²² On the Cold War as an object of periodization, see Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell, "Introduction," in *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War*, ed. Joel Isaac and Duncan

placed special burdens on contemporary American social scientists. Originally deployed by Walter Lippmann to describe the onset of suspended animation, a kind of global stasis, the term “Cold War” soon conjured to many a Manichean struggle against an implacable enemy, communism.²³

Some Cold War historians see a triumph of American resolve, culminating in the Reagan years;²⁴ others see a foreign policy advancing neo-imperialist impulses.²⁵ In any case, “few conflicts have been as intrinsically ideological,” as Andrew Preston argues.²⁶ The Cold War thus saw the rise of an activist social science that tasked itself with projecting American ideals abroad. Influential modernization theorists advocated a new policy science marked by tight interconnections between academia and government.²⁷ Positioning themselves as indispensable

Bell (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3–16. See also Anders Stephanson, “Cold War Degree Zero,” in *Uncertain Empire*, ed. Isaac and Bell, 19–49.

²³ Stephanson, “Cold War Degree Zero,” 26–35 (see previous note).

²⁴ See John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York, Penguin: 2005).

²⁵ Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 336–43.

²⁶ Andrew Preston, “The Spirit of Democracy: Religious Liberty and American Anti-Communism During the Cold War,” in *Uncertain Empire*, ed. Isaac and Bell, 141–63, at 142 (see note 22 above).

²⁷ These initiatives were spearheaded by empirical political scientists such as Harold Lasswell.

See Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*

“mandarins of the future,” they offered up the most “systematic blueprint ever created by Americans for reshaping foreign societies.”²⁸ Scarred by the tumultuous experience of fascism and total war, pluralists like David Truman, Charles Lindblom, and Robert Dahl sought the sources of stability that were upholding liberal institutions at home.²⁹ Other liberal thinkers probed deeper into the moral and ontological foundations of a free society.

Amid these intersecting intellectual strands, what, then, is “Cold War liberalism?” As Duncan Bell and John Gunnell have argued, the idea of liberalism is itself rather capacious, with a complex history in the Anglo-American academy. Prior to the 1930s, the term “liberal democracy” was barely visible, and accounts of Locke as a liberal thinker were generally absent.³⁰ By mid-century, however, under the influence of elite theorists such as Joseph Schumpeter, political scientists increasingly embraced liberalism as an alternative to mass

(Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 155–65; Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011), 44–64.

²⁸ Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 5 (see previous note).

²⁹ They collaborated through venues like the Seminar on the State at Columbia University. For a sympathetic history see Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

³⁰ Duncan Bell, “What is Liberalism,” *Political Theory* 42 (2014): 682–715; John Gunnell, *The Descent of Political Theory: The Genealogy of an American Vocation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 126–45.

democracy.³¹ At the same time, émigré critics like Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin assailed liberalism for succumbing to relativism.³² The defense of liberalism against totalitarianism was undertaken by a range of thinkers: in Europe, by Isaiah Berlin, Raymond Aron, and Karl Popper; in America, Sidney Hook, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr.

By the 1960s, New Left critics had repudiated this establishment for betraying the progressive agenda of interwar liberals such as John Dewey.³³ Today, Cold War liberalism is primarily regarded as a negative “liberalism of fear,”³⁴ lacking both the systematic rigor and the egalitarian social priorities of Rawlsian liberalism. Nonetheless, as Jan Werner-Müller insists,

³¹ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1947 [1942]).

³² On the émigrés see Gunnell, *Descent of Political Theory*, 175–98 (see note 30 above).

³³ On the interwar search for a liberal-progressive synthesis, see Marc Stears, *Demanding Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 85–99. For a manifesto of 1960s radicalism, see Tom Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2005 [1962]). On the applicability of Hartzian categories to political developments in the 1960s, see Abbott, “Still Louis Hartz after All These Years,” 96–104 (see note 6 above). Abbott argues that 1960s progressivism can, in fact, be taken as an example of Hartz’s call for a more enlightened liberal society.

³⁴ See Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21–37. For an insightful attempt to broaden Shklar’s legacy beyond the liberalism of fear, see Katrina Forrester, “Hope and Memory in the Thought of Judith Shklar,” *Modern Intellectual History* 8 (2011): 591–620.

Cold War liberals did retain core commitments: a conception of the limits of political knowledge and a conception of political action attuned to those limits; a devotion to the anti-Marxist war of ideas, combined with a value pluralism that sometimes produced existential angst; a Weberian ethics of responsibility that entrusted liberal society to elite management; and finally, a visceral sense of the psychological value of security in a free society.³⁵ For Werner-Müller, Cold War liberalism thus entailed more a set of attitudes and dispositions than a comprehensive legal or institutional theory.³⁶

Louis Hartz took major cues from these intellectual currents and can be fruitfully read alongside them. Hartz was never, however, a typical doyen of post-war intellectual life. He evinced neither modernization theory's preoccupation with exporting American ideals, nor pluralism's preoccupation with forging institutional stability within an existing liberal consensus. Consider, by contrast, a far more establishment figure: Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. An advisor, speechwriter, and later court historian to President Kennedy, Schlesinger's political activism began young. In 1947 he co-founded, with Eleanor Roosevelt, John Kenneth Galbraith, Reinhold Niebuhr, and others, Americans for Democratic Action, a liberal anti-communist

³⁵ Werner-Müller, "Fear and Freedom," 45–64 (see note 17 above). On totalitarianism as a novel political form, see Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965 [1956]). On the liberal confrontation with totalitarianism, see Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment* (see note 29 above); and David Ciepley, *Liberalism in the Shadow of Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

³⁶ Werner-Müller, "Fear and Freedom," 59 (see note 17 above).

advocacy group. In his most philosophic work, *The Vital Center*, Schlesinger called for a “new and distinct political generation” to translate New Deal hope into Cold War victory.³⁷ Facing totalitarian threats, America must “rediscover the great tradition of liberalism,” a “reasonable responsibility about politics” and “moderate pessimism about man,” seen from Jacksonians to New Dealers, Hawthorne to Niebuhr.³⁸ “I am certain,” Schlesinger said, “that history has equipped modern American liberalism with the ideas and the knowledge to construct a society where men will be both free and happy.” But “whether we have the moral vigor to do the job depends on ourselves.”³⁹

To reinforce liberalism’s ideological position, Schlesinger advocated a revitalized anti-communist Left that could overcome both an impotent progressivism and a bankrupt conservatism. Schlesinger envisioned a space where individuals could make a firm, masculine decision for liberalism, his eroticized language reflecting a climate where the “Red menace” was often attributed to failures of masculine vigor.⁴⁰ Schlesinger offered no assurance, however, that his fellow liberals were vigorous enough to command the center. Hence, he appealed to the broader arc of American history. Hope lay in the great tradition of American liberalism that had

³⁷ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (New Brunswick, NJ.: Transaction Publishers: 1998 [1949]), xix.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 165.

³⁹ *Ibid*, xxii.

⁴⁰ See K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

demonstrated vigor before, as when Andrew Jackson confronted the national bank.⁴¹

Schlesinger's liberal faith was in large part a faith in his fathers.

What happens, though, if American history is no longer a beacon of hope? For Louis Hartz, the present moment required more than a muscular attempt to secure liberal ideology, because the problem remained internal to that ideology. Hartz saw the Cold War crisis exposing the epistemological deficits of national mythologies. "Not only have we been told that our history provides us with an 'American proposition' applicable to all countries East and West," Hartz observed, "but we have also been told that it is we, not the Russians, who are the most 'revolutionary' nation on earth. Nothing is farther from the truth and we may as well face the fact."⁴² The proper question was "not whether our history has given us something to 'export' but whether it has given us the right thing. And this question has to be answered in the negative."⁴³

Hartz's problem-space was particularly influenced by Karl Mannheim, a Weimar sociologist whose 1936 work *Ideology and Utopia* aroused substantial interest among American social scientists. Mannheim wrote of "total ideology," overarching belief-systems entrenched in particular social orders.⁴⁴ Hartz did not naively present America as conflict-free; he

⁴¹ An argument developed most expansively in Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1945).

⁴² Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 305–06 (see note 1 above).

⁴³ *Ibid*, 305.

⁴⁴ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936). On Mannheim and the American academy see Gunnell, *Descent of Political Theory*, 158–64 (see note 30 above).

acknowledged its inevitable political battles.⁴⁵ But with Mannheim urging analysts to look beyond particular contests to deeper ideological wholes, Hartz probed the underlying sources of liberal unity. He identified an “instinct of friendship” beneath the “heroic surface of America’s political conflict.”⁴⁶

Hartz’s emphasis on ideology thus cut against prevailing tendencies in mid-century, behavioralist political science.⁴⁷ In celebrating the free play of pressure groups, pluralists viewed their empirical methods as transcending Europe’s tired ideological struggles.⁴⁸ They seconded Daniel Boorstin’s insistence that the “genius” of American politics lay precisely in its escape from ideology.⁴⁹ Hartz took the pluralist ideal to be a “reflection of the relative conditions of America’s liberal life” rather than a model of political behavior writ large,⁵⁰ echoing other critics of mid-century political science, such as C. Wright Mills, Theodore Lowi, Bernard Crick, and Sheldon Wolin.⁵¹ Hartz worried, however, that underneath the pluralist façade lay an American

⁴⁵ See, for example, Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 89 (see note 1 above).

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 140.

⁴⁷ On behavioralism, see Gunnell, *Descent of Political Theory*, 221–50 (see note 30 above).

⁴⁸ See, for example, David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process* (New York: Knopf, 1965 [1951]); Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1963 [1961]).

⁴⁹ Boorstin, *Genius of American Politics* (see note 5 above).

⁵⁰ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 250–51 (see note 1 above).

⁵¹ See C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); Bernard Crick, *The American Science of Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1959] 1964); Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States* (New York:

general will that was violently seeking conformity.⁵² In a neo-Tocquevillian mood, Hartz highlighted the dangers of atomistic individualism and state coercion, never suggesting that America had become totalitarian, but worrying that the pressures imposed by Americanism could lead to the oppressive social compulsions that Tocqueville feared.⁵³

These epistemological burdens, these concerns with the persistence of American blindness in a dangerous world, are what compelled Hartz's journey into the recesses of American history, to which I now turn.

Unearthing Liberal Consensus: Hartzian Historiography

Hartz was, by many accounts, an imposing presence in Harvard's Department of Government. His heroes, according to former student Benjamin Barber, were French thinkers like Constant, Montesquieu, and especially Tocqueville.⁵⁴ Hartz's scholarly career can thus be seen working

Norton, [1969] 1979); Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," *American Political Science Review* 63 (1969): 1062–82.

⁵² Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 58–59 (see note 1 above).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 11, 56–57, 225–27.

⁵⁴ See Benjamin R. Barber, "Louis Hartz," *Political Theory* 14 (1986): 355–58. On the Hartz-Montesquieu link see Hulliung, "Louis Hartz, His Day and Ours," 20–23 (see note 9 above). Hartz's views on European thinkers are outlined in course lecture notes, edited by a former student; see Louis Hartz, *The Necessity of Choice*, ed. Paul Roazen (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1990).

through Tocqueville's claim that "peoples always feel [the effects of] their origins."⁵⁵ In *Liberal Tradition*, Hartz presented the feudal factor as "the mother factor of modern life."⁵⁶ He complained, however, that most historians failed to analyze America by reference to European feudalism. *Liberal Tradition* invited historians to "make that journey to Europe and back," while interrogating the circumstances preventing past historians from making this journey.⁵⁷ Hartz lamented that Tocqueville, the "greatest foreign critic America ever had," never inspired an American historiography built around his distinctive comparative insights.⁵⁸ Hartz reserved his strongest criticisms for those Progressive historians, such as Charles Beard, J. Allen Smith, and Vernon Parrington, who fixated on social conflict between masses and elites, capitalists and agrarians. Hartz found their paradigm interpretively shallow.⁵⁹ He insisted that judicial review, reverence for natural law, and constitutional constraints on popular power had all persisted in America through the absence of European-style class conflict.⁶⁰ Understanding America required some understanding of European societies that *did* contend with feudalism and social revolution. Failing to grasp this insight, Progressive historians succumbed to cycles of interpretive

⁵⁵Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 28.

⁵⁶ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 24 (see note 1 above).

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 4–5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 31.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 12–13, 27–29, 63, 248–55.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 9–10, 55, 85–86, 103.

negligence that rendered them an “erudite reflection of the limited social perspectives of the average American himself.”⁶¹

In Hartz’s analysis the feudal factor intersected with an ideological factor. Hartz referred to a liberal idea cloaked in “irrational Lockianism” (his spelling), and argued that the spirit of Locke was “implanted” in America.⁶² Hartz focused less on how Locke came to America than on why Locke has never left. For an American society “which begins with Locke, and thus transforms him, stays with Locke, by virtue of an absolute and irrational attachment it develops for him.”⁶³ What explained this absolute attachment to Locke? Hartz suggested that America’s earliest social conditions rendered Locke’s fundamental norm of “atomistic social freedom”

⁶¹ Ibid, 29.

⁶² Ibid, 10–11, 20, 122.

⁶³ Ibid, 6. Hartz’s argument for Lockean supremacy was, of course, vehemently challenged by revisionist historiographers. See Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (see note 6 above). Even before Pocock’s “republican” reframing, Locke’s legacy was debated in important works by Leo Strauss and C.B. Macpherson. See C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011 [1962]), 194–257; Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 202–50. For recent recoveries of a Lockean sympathy in early American thought see Joshua Foa Dienstag, “Serving God and Mammon: The Lockean Sympathy in Early American Political Thought,” *American Political Science Review* 90 (1996): 497–511. Dienstag usefully situates Hartz within post-war debates over Locke’s legacy at 498–501.

closer to “sober description of fact.”⁶⁴ Atomistic freedom became the “master assumption of American political thought,” as “instinctive to the American mind” as “the concept of the polis was instinctive to Platonic Athens or the concept of the church to the mind of the middle ages.”⁶⁵

Hartz insisted that Americans tended to overlook Locke’s roots in Enlightenment rationalism. Locke was himself consumed by a nationalist Americanism that often “does not know that Locke himself is involved.”⁶⁶ In a nation missing liberal parties and liberal intellectuals, Locke allowed liberalism to remain “a stranger in the land of its greatest realization and fulfillment.”⁶⁷ In this way, Hartz argued, the American liberal tradition achieved a “Hegelian-like revolution in historic perspective” that shattered the “time categories of Europe” and negated previous antagonisms.⁶⁸ Hartz stressed that the European rivalry between radicalism and conservatism, between Bentham and Burke, made little sense in America. These European categories were “twisted entirely out of shape by the liberal flow of American history.”⁶⁹

Fixated on the sweep of “irrational Lockianism,” Hartz’s narrative glosses over religion, race, and gender.⁷⁰ Scholars criticize his caricature of Progressivism⁷¹ and his neglect of state

⁶⁴ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 60–62 (see note 1 above).

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 62.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 10–11.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 50.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 48–50.

⁷⁰ Kloppenburg, “In Retrospect,” 460–78 (see note 8 above).

theory.⁷² Even sympathetic interpreters acknowledge Hartz's tendency to "clumsily" juxtapose positivism and historicism.⁷³ Historical errors have not, however, kept political theorists from grappling with works like Weber's *Protestant Ethic* or Arendt's *The Human Condition*. As John Gunnell argues, Hartz does construct something like a Weberian ideal-type: an abstraction from accepted facts that still captures the "underlying essence of the phenomenon in question."⁷⁴

For Gunnell, Hartz's distinctive contribution lay in his "therapeutically oriented" genealogy of American life.⁷⁵ This genealogy required Hartz to flatten historical details, to

⁷¹ Recent scholarship emphasizes the ambitious, forward-looking orientations of Progressive reformers, quite against Hartz's depiction of an effete and nostalgic movement. See Marc Stears, *Demanding Democracy*, especially 21–55 (see note 33 above); Marc Stears, "Change We Already Believe In? The Liberal Tradition and the American Left," in *American Liberal Tradition Reconsidered*, ed. Hulliung, 184–204 (see note 9 above); James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Kloppenberg, "Requiescat in Pacem," 103–06 (see note 10 above).

⁷² Desmond King and Marc Stears, "Capitalism, Democracy, and the Missing State in Louis Hartz's America," in *American Liberal Tradition Reconsidered*, ed. Hulliung, 125–83 (see note 9 above).

⁷³ Hulliung, "Louis Hartz, His Day and Ours," 31–32 (see note 9 above).

⁷⁴ John Gunnell, "Louis Hartz and the Liberal Metaphor: A Half-Century Later," *Studies in American Political Development* 19 (2005): 196–205, at 204.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

construct a metaphorical liberal tradition that could be thrown back in history and attached to specific figures like Locke and Horatio Alger. Gunnell sees Hartz excavating the space between America's metaphorical liberal tradition, and the very *real* tradition of European liberalism. However, Gunnell laments that Hartz's critics, and sometimes Hartz himself, "reified the metaphor and treated it as a claim about an actual tradition."⁷⁶

While sympathizing with Gunnell's reading, I stress that Hartz's account is never *wholly* metaphorical. Hartz does situate liberalism in the concrete workings of particular actors. Consider Hartz's first book manuscript, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania 1776-1860*. A seminal study of antebellum political economy, this work focuses entirely on a single state during a bounded time period; it traces in minute detail the historical evolution of a complex set of regulatory policies; and it draws upon exhaustive empirical evidence, both qualitative and quantitative. At issue was the practice of state governments issuing special charters to business corporations. Charters were favored by big industrialists seeking state protection, but opposed by a vibrant anti-charter movement, composed of both laborers and small entrepreneurs who employed democratic ideals to attack corporate privileges. Hartz vividly demonstrated how the anti-charter movement was supplanted by an anti-state movement that sought to rationalize the business corporation against robust government oversight. Triumphant after the Civil War, this movement deployed many of the individualistic, Lockean discourses of the earlier anti-charter activists. In so doing, Hartz argued, it appealed

⁷⁶ Ibid, 198–99. On Hartz's effort to "divine the mythological structure" of American liberalism, see also Edmond Fong, "Reconstructing the 'Problem' of Race," *Political Research Quarterly* 61 (2008): 660–70, at 666.

back, with “messianic vigor,” to an original period of laissez-faire regulation—one Hartz insisted had never actually existed.⁷⁷ The study thus illuminates how an underlying constellation of liberal discourses (in the Hartzian sense) can be deployed by different actors, to different political ends, while remaining entrenched.

Indeed, throughout his corpus, Hartz emphasized how liberal discourses inform American class consciousness, an interest evident in his earliest published article, one on antebellum labor organizer Seth Luther.⁷⁸ In *Liberal Tradition*, Hartz employed a class analysis bearing affinities to authors such as Marx and Gramsci, who emphasized the problematic revolutionary potential of American workers. However, Hartz criticized Marx for fixating on the objective movement of economic forces.⁷⁹ Rather, Hartz stressed that socialism arose primarily out of the liberal revolt against feudalism.⁸⁰ As a non-feudal society, America averted both social revolution and conservative counter-reaction, and so lacked a true socialist threat.

For Hartz, the nineteenth-century contest between populists and Whig elites thus resembled “two boxers, swinging wildly, knocking each other down with accidental punches.”⁸¹ Their eventual synthesis in democratic capitalism was implicit from the outset, Hartz argued, a

⁷⁷ Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania 1776-1860* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968 [1948]), 320.

⁷⁸ Louis Hartz, “Seth Luther: The Story of a Working-Class Rebel,” *New England Quarterly* 13 (1940): 401–18.

⁷⁹ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 6 (see note 1 above).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

synthesis that culminated in Horatio Alger's success ethic.⁸² Whigs affixed Algerism with the "grand and glorious label of 'Americanism' " and proceeded to hurl it at democrats who succumbed because Algerism unleashed capitalist impulses already burning within them.⁸³

One set of ideas, however, did threaten the liberal consensus: the reactionary ideas advanced by Southern intellectuals like George Fitzhugh and John Calhoun. Had they succeeded, "the distinctive meaning of American history would have been cancelled out at a single stroke."⁸⁴ But lacking a true feudal tradition, Southern intellectuals were unable to effectively critique liberalism through the categories of European conservatism. The North's triumph in the Civil War then removed any final impediment to liberal dominance, which persisted through the Progressive era. Hartz conceded to the radical nature of certain New Deal reforms, but argued that Roosevelt never felt compelled to explain why departures from Locke never went so far as a fully socialist or Marxist alternative.⁸⁵

On balance, then, Hartz depicted the American liberal tradition as an entrenched, blob-like Americanism confounding all in its path. He argued that America's "liberal absolutism," based in the "sober faith that its norms are self-evident," was so self-assured that it could remain

⁸² Ibid, 89, 95–96.

⁸³ Ibid, at 205–06; also 111–12, 134–35, 219. Nineteenth-century social conflicts remained, of course, quite trenchant; see Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005).

⁸⁴ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 145–77 (see note 1 above).

⁸⁵ Ibid, 260–63.

inarticulate, and produce the “death by atrophy of the philosophic impulse.”⁸⁶ Surveying the intellectual and political landscape of the early 1950s, Hartz saw the consequences of liberal hegemony looking ever graver. No purely domestic crisis had ever uprooted this Americanism, Hartz insisted, but the “age of purely domestic crisis apparently is over.”⁸⁷ Amid tensions abroad and McCarthyism at home, Hartz’s prophetic vision came to the fore.

Seeking Transcendence: Hartz’s Cold War Prophecy

Hartz identified the Cold War as a decisive moment in the broader sweep of American history. By elevating America to the forefront of a global ideological competition for human loyalties, the Cold War brought “into the plainest view America’s psychological pattern.”⁸⁸ Whereas previous “hot wars” smothered ideological currents in the fog of battle, Hartz argued, the Cold War let them bubble up, placing unprecedented demands on America’s ability to project its image abroad. Hartz lamented, however, that the American liberal creed was not easily intelligible to other peoples, especially those Asian societies at the fulcrum of the conflict.⁸⁹ Moreover, Americans struggled to grasp the deeper social struggles informing communism’s

⁸⁶ Ibid, 58, 285. As Thomas Dumm argues, Hartz thus offers an extended lament on the conditions “under which a polity might be able to grow without maturing”; See his *United States* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 15.

⁸⁷ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 283.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 305.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 305–06.

global appeal, and this difficulty estranged Americans from even their social democratic allies in Western Europe.⁹⁰

Instead of acknowledging their blinders, many Americans turned inward with greater fury. Hartz saw Red Scare tendencies as the purest form of the “inward passion of ‘Americanism.’ ”⁹¹ For Hartz, Joseph McCarthy and A. Mitchell Palmer were only symptoms of a broader malady, what Michael Rogin later called the “countersubversive” impulse in American life; impulses which emerged from a “rigid insistence on difference” and fear of the unknown.⁹² The Cold War risked exacerbating counter-subversive tendencies, Hartz worried, because the “judgment of others by our norms brings, by automatic reflex, the passionate and fearful intensification of those norms” at home.⁹³ The alien became unintelligible, and eccentricity became sin.⁹⁴ For Hartz, the Red Scare was not simply a domestic thorn, but an international problem of the first order.⁹⁵

Hartz held out hope, however, that blindness could be counteracted through new forms of national enlightenment. While encounters with alien things drove Americans inward, those

⁹⁰ Ibid, 285, 306.

⁹¹ Ibid, 293–306, at 303.

⁹² Michael P. Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie: and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 236–40, at 237. Rogin considered Hartz to be “in a class by himself” among post-war historians; see footnote 9, at 351–52.

⁹³ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 302 (see note 1 above).

⁹⁴ Ibid, 12, 285.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 285.

encounters might also provoke that “spark of philosophy, that grain of relative insight” that militates against provincialism.⁹⁶ Hartz recognized that the new internationalism could no longer be a messianic project. Rather, it had to become an enlivening, self-aware search for new perspectives.

In a prophetic mode, Hartz depicted a redemptive struggle, “evil eliciting the challenge of a conscious good.”⁹⁷ This battle between enlightenment and blindness had entered its decisive hour; “the race between the two is a fateful one indeed.”⁹⁸ Must America be “saddled forever with the peculiar limitations of its own perspective,” compounded by the “massive problems of diplomacy and freedom any great nation faces?”⁹⁹ Hartz saw this “final problem” reaching a tipping point.¹⁰⁰ Yet the path ahead held out a “new level of consciousness, a transcending of

⁹⁶ Ibid, 287.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 14. Despite this moralizing language, Hartzian prophecy abstained from the apocalyptic worldview of authors who prophesized the Cold War conflict in starkly theological terms. See, for example, Hal Lindsey’s best-selling book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1970). Moreover, by side-stepping the existential significance of nuclear weapons, Hartz deviated from realist intellectuals, like Hans Morgenthau, who framed the threat of nuclear catastrophe in secular apocalyptic terms. On Morgenthau and Cold War apocalyptic thinking, see Alison McQueen, “Salutary Fear: Hans Morgenthau and the Politics of Existential Crises,” *American Political Thought* 6 (2017): 78–105.

⁹⁸ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 287 (see note 1 above).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 14.

irrational Lockianism, in which an understanding of self and an understanding of others go hand in hand.”¹⁰¹ Citizens could not merely repeat propositions like the Declaration of Independence, which, as Hartz reminded readers, the editors of *Fortune* magazine had labeled the “American Proposition.”¹⁰² Rather Hartz compelled Americans to look abroad in a confessional mood, acknowledging the limitations of their historical experience in order to transcend the perspectives that such propositions contained.¹⁰³

In this vein, Hartz staked out a central role for political philosophers trained in the broader traditions of the European Enlightenment, a tradition that he thought contained counter-resources for pushing against irrationality and conformity.¹⁰⁴ The impulse to transcend conformism could be found, Hartz insisted, within the individualist nature of the Lockean doctrine itself.¹⁰⁵ Hartz conceded that American politics had thus far evolved without the counsel of intellectuals schooled in European liberal traditions. But the Cold War made these intellectuals, whom Hartz referred to as “liberal society analysts,” indispensable to national

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 308.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 305.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 305. Hartz may well overstate the provincialism of the Declaration and other American propositions. Danielle Allen has forcefully argued that the Declaration offers a profound mediation on political equality whose resonances stretch across time and place. See her *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2014).

¹⁰⁴ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

judgment.¹⁰⁶ This phrase implies a certain social scientific, value-neutral orientation. Yet Hartz could not stay neutral in the ideological conflict of his time.

It would be an all too easy defense of “neutralism” to say that Western Europe, having originated both liberalism and socialism, confronts them twisted alike in America and Russia by laws of “combined development.” The fact is, Russian development has turned its back on the Western concept of personality while American development, what ever its provincialism, rests still on that concept... In any case, given the totalitarian nature of Russian socialism, the hope for a free world surely lies in the power for transcending itself inherent in American liberalism.¹⁰⁷

Ironically, Hartz tasked American liberalism with safeguarding the European heritage from which it sprang. For “if America is the bizarre fulfillment of liberalism, do not people everywhere rely upon it for retention of what is best in that tradition.”¹⁰⁸ Hartz conceded that “there is nothing in an analysis of American history which gives us a final answer” to the question of whether transcendence would succeed.¹⁰⁹ If America always had the luxury of youthful beginnings, transcendence would bring something like a coming of age. Once new enlightenment was attained, there could be no going back; “as for a child who is leaving adolescence, there is no going home again for America.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 31-32.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 308–09.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 308.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 32.

Looking Abroad: Hartz's Comparative Vocation

Hartz's Cold War prophecy thus reflected both the urgency and irony of a geopolitical moment that was propelling America toward greater engagement abroad. As Hartz's contemporary Reinhold Niebuhr argued, the Cold War crisis had granted America unprecedented global power just as, ironically, it was shattering the "infant innocence" of an America which had long been "rocking in the cradle of its continental security."¹¹¹

In Hartz one hears further echoes of Lionel Trilling's work *The Liberal Imagination*, which also called for a transcendent enlarging of the liberal consciousness. For Trilling, transcendence required a literary tradition that was active and engaged in self-criticism.¹¹² American literature was deficient on this score, because it operated within a dominant liberal climate that, in Trilling's famous quip, had rendered conservatism into little more than "irritable mental gestures."¹¹³ American liberalism must be enlivened, Trilling argued, through contact with unfamiliar foreign ideas of the sort found in European literature. Trilling's literary critic, like Hartz's liberal society analyst, was compelled to make the journey to Europe and back, and to infuse liberalism with new possibilities.

¹¹¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 74. On Niebuhr's ethos, see Cherniss, "A Tempered Liberalism." (see note 17 above)

¹¹² Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), 292–303.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, ix.

Importantly, Hartz never indulged reactionary critics of mass society like José Ortega y Gasset and Jacob Burckhardt, nor suggested that liberalism must be saved from democracy.¹¹⁴ Rather, Hartzian transcendence required a democratic impulse to collectively reconstitute national ideals, resonating with earlier transcendental thinkers like Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman—thinkers who envisioned new forms of awakening based on moral and aesthetic possibility (new “democratic vistas,” in Whitman’s term).¹¹⁵

Hartz’s American prophecy thus culminated in an urgent defense of the comparative vocation. Hartz wrote as comparative politics had achieved new prominence within political science, aided by the foreign policy establishment.¹¹⁶ Hartz aspired, however, to a more pedagogically radical practice of *comparative political theory*. Unlike later communitarians such as Robert Bellah and Michael Walzer, whose social criticism sought to recover a community’s internal values and “civil religion,” Hartz focused on how the community could be drawn outside of itself.¹¹⁷

This aspiration found its mature expression in Hartz’s 1964 work *The Founding of New Societies*. Here, Hartz developed his fragment theory of development, which analyzed the ways European ideas had been implanted, and thus transformed, in various colonial and post-colonial

¹¹⁴ On this point see Mark Hulliung, “Louis Hartz, His Day and Ours,” 15–17 (see note 9 above).

¹¹⁵ Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010 [1871]).

¹¹⁶ On the Cold War backdrop to comparative political science see Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 115–55 (see note 27 above).

¹¹⁷ Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96 (1967): 1–21; Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

contexts. Hartz saw European civilization dissolving into separate fragments: the United States, English Canada, and Dutch South Africa each carried on its liberal fragment; Australia and British South Africa each its radical fragment; and Latin America and French Canada each its feudalist one.¹¹⁸ Hartz argued that each fragment had become insulated from the broader set of European antagonisms, thus losing the stimulus toward change that the European whole provided.¹¹⁹

To be sure, Hartz's fragment method remained highly Eurocentric, charting deviations from European patterns. Still, the normative considerations driving Hartz's comparative method did occasion more extensive engagement with non-Western traditions. Hartz lamented Americans' general ignorance of Asian societies, while criticizing Eurocentric scholars for failing to apply a comparative method within Europe and beyond. He insisted that European hegemony had produced its own set of inarticulate phenomena.¹²⁰ As if to escape that hegemony, Hartz spent his final years pursuing a grand synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophy. Hartz's privately published *Synthesis of World History* sought a unifying framework that could account for different cultural forms (Islam, Confucianism, Christianity, Buddhism, Marxism,

¹¹⁸ Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1964). Hartz's contributions are flanked by a team of scholars he assembled for their regional expertise. For another attempt at comparative history, see C. Vann Woodward, ed., *The Comparative Approach to American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 [1968]).

¹¹⁹ Hartz, *Founding*, 3.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24–27.

natural law) in terms of their psychological tendency towards action or passivity.¹²¹ Though the work was weighed down by Hartz's deteriorating mental condition, it reveals an ambitious search for synthesis between Western and non-Western traditions.

Hence, Hartz would have been heartened, I think, by the recent comparative turn in political theory. Inspired by a Gadamerian hermeneutics of vivid encounters between self and other, Fred Dallmayr's work advocates a dialogical process in which familiar assumptions are tested against unfamiliar perspectives.¹²² Melissa Williams and Mark Warren likewise insist that comparative political theory, at its best, can make explicit the embedded ideas of one's own culture and history, enhancing reflexive judgment.¹²³ More ambitiously, the process of rendering unfamiliar ideas "intelligible to us in a form that is recognizably valid for them" holds out the prospect of an intercultural public sphere.¹²⁴

In response, Leigh Jenco insists that when non-Western traditions are seen as merely enhancing Western vocabularies, they remain subaltern, absent from the worldview of the

¹²¹ Louis Hartz, *A Synthesis of World History* (Zurich: Humanity, 1984). For the most charitable attempt to reconstruct Hartz's argument in this book, see Patrick Riley, "Louis Hartz: The Final Years, the Unknown Work," *Political Theory* 16 (1988): 377–99.

¹²² Dallmayr, "Beyond Monologue," 251 (see note 21 above)

¹²³ Williams and Warren, "A Democratic Case for Comparative Political Theory," 35–39 (see note 21 above).

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 36.

theorist herself.¹²⁵ As Jenco cautions, “perceived cultural others” cannot merely stand as “incitements to self-reflection,” but rather must be internalized as “comprehensible, potentially compelling, and internally reflective communities of argument.”¹²⁶ From this critical perspective, Hartz may be accused of subordinating non-European societies to the European whole against which they are to be compared and of configuring Europe as *the* original source of intellectual energy.¹²⁷

Nonetheless, the prophetic forcefulness of Hartz’s turn to comparative pluralism should not be understated. By the early 1960s, Hartz could still insist that the “world impact of the present time...brings with it a moral liberation, an enlargement of consciousness, which for its own sake would be well worth the struggle.”¹²⁸ The nationalist forces drawing America back to its insular life as a liberal fragment would not “prevent men from seeing what they see outside it.

¹²⁵ Leigh Jenco, “Histories of Thought and Comparative Political Theory: The Curious Thesis of ‘Chinese Origins for Western Knowledge,’ 1860–1895” *Political Theory* 42 (2014): 658–81, at 673.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 675.

¹²⁷ On the dangers of reifying the East-West dichotomy, see Loubna El Amine, “Beyond East and West: Reorienting Political Theory through the Prism of Modernity,” *Perspectives on Politics* 14 (2016): 102–20.

¹²⁸ Hartz, *Founding*, 20–23, at 23 (see note 118 above). Even as geopolitical realities evolved between 1955 and 1964, Hartz’s mature corpus thus displayed a degree of normative consistency, as he continued to appeal for that “spark of philosophy” achieved through external contact at 65, 120–21.

The man who has left the Platonic cave is never the same.”¹²⁹ Hartz often lamented that America was prone to either “withdraw from ‘alien’ things or to transform them; it cannot live in comfort constantly by their side.”¹³⁰ Hartz’s comparative pluralism aspired to a vision of American coexistence that was neither isolationist nor messianic. Even if Hartz’s methods are found lacking, his struggle against provincialism underscores the urgency of the comparative frame.

Conclusion: Hartz’s Legacy

Louis Hartz’s lasting contribution to American political thought cannot be captured by critical readings that focus only on his historiographical errors. As I have demonstrated, Hartz articulates an American prophecy within which the nation’s tragic history is redeemed by a search for transcendence; a prophecy where blind provinciality is potentially overcome through international involvement; one in which resources drawn from an Enlightenment tradition broadly conceived are tasked with enlivening a particular national experience; and one wherein the vocation of the comparative political theorist is vigorously upheld.

Hartz was a prophetic thinker, I have argued, because he partook in a secular discourse of national redemption from collective sin. He diagnosed forms of patriotic myopia, an Americanism afflicting diverse social forces: from small capitalists bedazzled by the Algerist success ethic, to Eastern Whigs clinging to faux aristocratic pretensions, to Progressive historians fetishizing class conflict without grasping their own complicity in the perpetuation of national

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 22.

¹³⁰ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 286 (see note 1 above).

mythologies. Against Americanism, Hartz affirmed the counter-resources of a more enlightened liberalism; specifically, he enjoined liberal society analysts, that is, academic scholars and public intellectuals familiar with European ideas, to bring comparative insights to bear on American life.

As George Shulman argues, prophets make fateful decisions on behalf of the whole, and in so doing, redeem the “community they address, and whose fate they commit to sharing.”¹³¹ The prophet is thus a founder of a certain sort. Hartz claimed that America was born without a legislator in the classical sense.¹³² Did he envision the liberal society analyst as just such a legislator? Hartz never implied as much, but he did distinguish such a role from that of Progressives who

always had an American hero available to match any American villain.... Which meant that in their demonology the nation never really sinned: only its inferior self did, its particular will, to use the language of Rousseau. The analyst of American liberalism is not in so happy a spot, for concentrating on unities as well as conflict, he is likely to discover on occasion a national villain, such as the tyrannical force of Lockian sentiment, whose treatment requires a new experience for the whole country rather than the insurgence of a part of it.¹³³

Hartz’s contribution emerges in this appeal to a reconstituted whole. Hartz thus resembles Sheldon Wolin’s epic theorist, one who exposes systematic collective mistakes by constructing a

¹³¹ Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 6 (see note 14 above).

¹³² Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 46 (see note 1 above).

¹³³ *Ibid*, 31–32.

“symbolic picture of an ordered whole,” and demonstrating how that whole might be fundamentally transformed.¹³⁴

However, because Hartz never abandoned liberalism entirely, the question remains: do Enlightenment values provide true counter-resources to a specific American blindness, or must the values themselves be transcended? For critics, Hartz’s inability to ever escape a liberal framework remains his biggest failing. J.G.A. Pocock is especially damning:

The heirs of Hartz can be as critical of liberal values as he was himself; since it became the function of the intelligentsia to express alienation, the liberal intellectuals have become liberalism’s most effective critics. They are, however, wholly committed to maintaining the primacy of that which they would criticize—much as Marxist historians must affirm the triumph of the bourgeoisie, since without it Marxism would lose its *raison d’être*. To attack liberalism is one thing; to challenge its historical reality is unforgiveable.¹³⁵

As if anticipating this objection, Hartz offered a spirited defense of his methods:

So one cannot say of the liberal society analysis that by concentrating on national unities it rules out the meaning of domestic conflict. Actually it discovers that meaning, which is obscured by the very Progressive analysis that presumably concentrates on conflict. You

¹³⁴ Wolin, “Political Theory as a Vocation,” 1078–82 (see note 51 above).

¹³⁵ Pocock, “Between Gog and Magog,” 338–39 (see note 6 above).

do not get closer to the significance of an earthquake by ignoring the terrain on which it takes place.¹³⁶

Hartz's reply carries weight. Nonetheless, as this interchange underscores, Hartz's work remained rather elitist, more consumed with methodological disputes than with social struggles. Hartz displayed little of the fire-and-brimstone passion of those theologically infused prophets, like Martin Luther King Jr., who mobilized large numbers of citizens to effect social change.¹³⁷ A gifted teacher, Hartz generally confined his charisma to the lecture hall.¹³⁸ His writing displays a sardonic, sometimes esoteric tone that poses difficulties for non-specialists.

Yet Hartz's deficiencies clearly go beyond style. Insofar as American prophecy compels one to confront racial injustice, as Shulman insists, then Hartz's failure to do so calls into question his status as a worthy prophet.¹³⁹ According to one former student, Hartz quietly regretted *Liberal Tradition's* treatment of race, and Hartz's later works more fully engage the

¹³⁶ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 20 (see note 1 above).

¹³⁷ On King's prophetic appeal see Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 97–129 (see note 14 above). On the civil rights movement as a prophetic calling, see David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

¹³⁸ On Hartz's teaching see Barber, "Louis Hartz," 355–58 (see note 54 above); Paul Roazan, "Introduction," in *The Necessity of Choice*, 1–20 (see note 54 above)

¹³⁹ Shulman, *American Prophecy*, xiii (see note 14 above).

subject.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, Hartz's critique of creedal thinking offers a rejoinder to those, like Gunnar Myrdal, who responded to racial injustice by simply invoking an idealized American creed.¹⁴¹ Nonetheless, Hartz clearly missed the opportunity to fully expose how liberal blindness about race has perpetuated racial injustice.

Hartz's failure to effect an awakening to race, of the sort undertaken by a writer like Ralph Ellison, also weakened his own efforts in pursuit of comparative insights.¹⁴² Writing as independence movements were cresting on the world stage, Hartz overlooked the growing internationalism of civil rights activists who forged solidarity with postcolonial activists abroad.¹⁴³ Moreover, as Aziz Rana argues, the imagery of a nation born equal only obscures

¹⁴⁰ Paul Roazan, "Introduction," in *The Necessity of Choice*, 14 (see note 54 above). Hartz insisted, for example, that feudal "fragments" in Latin America could treat slaves humanely without violating their aristocratic ethos, while in the American liberal fragment, racial hierarchy had to be justified on liberal terms, which led to the dehumanization of slaves as a form of property. See Hartz, *Founding*, 50–60 (see note 118 above). Hartz's critics insist that this analysis remains "wholly inadequate." See Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz," 554 (see note 8 above).

¹⁴¹ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962 [1944]).

¹⁴² On Ellison see Jack Turner, "Awakening to Race: Ralph Ellison and Democratic Individuality," *Political Theory* 36 (2008): 655–82.

¹⁴³ On the internationalist dimension of civil rights struggles see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University

American's imperial tendencies as a settler empire bent on policing subject populations, such as Native Americans.¹⁴⁴ From this postcolonial perspective, Hartz's fragment theory of development reinforces a worldview where non-Europeans are always measured against the European Enlightenment, which functions as a kind of primal father. Hartz thus underscores the *positional* superiority of Western scholars who can posit a "whole series of possible relationships with the Orient," in Edward Said's words, without jeopardizing their privileged status.¹⁴⁵ Hartz's essentializing of "alien cultures" risks dissolving into the "clash of civilizations" narrative popularized by his Harvard colleague Samuel Huntington.¹⁴⁶

Hartz's determinist tendencies are likewise troubling. Myths are inherently non-falsifiable, as Carol Nackenoff reminds us, and so Hartz "loses a good deal of the contingent in American politics."¹⁴⁷ Nackenoff rightly questions whether a Hartzian analysis of class, based on the storybook appeal of an Algerist success ethic, still applies—if it ever did—in a post-

Press, 2000); Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: the United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁴⁴ Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom*, 1–12, 105–14 (see note 25 above).

¹⁴⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 7.

¹⁴⁶ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 5 (see note 1 above). Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

¹⁴⁷ Nackenoff, "Locke, Alger, and Atomistic Individualism Fifty Years Later," 208–15, at 215 (see note 8 above).

industrial climate of wage stagnation and cultural cleavages.¹⁴⁸ To be sure, Hartz acknowledged contingency, as when Southern intellectuals effected “the great imaginative moment” when “America almost got out of itself.”¹⁴⁹ But how can individual acts of imaginative thinking compensate for the path-dependence that Hartz associates with the non-feudal past? Moreover, how exactly does a nation overcome its master orientations and transcend the Declaration of Independence, in affective terms, without undergoing severe institutional upheaval of the sort Hartz never theorized? If America truly is the static and infantile society Hartz depicts, how can it achieve any meaningful social change and collective responsibility?

Hartz placed extraordinary weight on the transformative effects of international engagement. But why will such engagement expand American horizons rather than merely reinforce existing parochialisms? If genuine contact with persons, places, and traditions abroad requires significant cultural capital, then how accessible is Hartz’s solution to ordinary citizens? Might internationalism only reinforce American liberal hegemony, through the penetration of

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 208–14. On Hartz’s relevance amid recent conservative ascendancy, see Richard J. Ellis, “The Liberal Tradition in an Age of Conservative Power and Partisan Polarization,” in *American Liberal Tradition Reconsidered*, ed. Hulliung, 207–36 (see note 9 above). On cultural cleavages in American politics, see Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

¹⁴⁹ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 176 (see note 1 above).

new markets and the exercise of soft power; might scholarly work on globalization be modernization theory repackaged?¹⁵⁰

These questions haunt Hartz's corpus. One point bears emphasis, however: Hartz never naively assumed that Americans would successfully find enlightenment abroad. He conceded that the question of "whether a nation can compensate for the uniformity of its domestic life by contact with alien cultures outside it" lacks historical precedent.¹⁵¹ Hartz would thus resist the triumphalist impulses placing America at the vanguard of grand processes of modernization or globalization. If modernization theory remains a "very American effort to persuade the developing countries to base their revolutions on Locke rather than Marx," as Arthur Schlesinger argued, then Hartz provides good reasons to doubt its potential success.¹⁵² Hartz recognized that Americans "cannot out of their own experience prescribe" for the rest of the world.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ On the extent to which theories of globalization are heirs to modernization theory, see Latham, *Right Kind of Revolution*, 188–93 (see note 27 above); Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 259–69 (see note 27 above). On the dilemmas of cross-cultural contact in a globalized world, see Roxanne L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 174–88; Pratap Mehta, "Cosmopolitanism and the Circle of Reason," *Political Theory* 28 (2000): 619–39.

¹⁵¹ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 14 (see note 1 above).

¹⁵² Arthur M. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 589.

¹⁵³ Hartz, *Founding*, 46 (see note 118 above).

Hartz proves especially incisive, then, as a prophetic witness to the conditions underlying American foreign policy blunders—insights especially welcome in a post-9/11 context where such blunders continue to abound. Some liberals, echoing Schlesinger, advocate a muscular coalition to counter transnational terrorism; they propose liberalism as a “fighting faith.”¹⁵⁴ Radical critics of American liberalism, by contrast, see disturbing patterns of “civic war” and “inverted totalitarianism” at home;¹⁵⁵ an “American nightmare” forged at the intersection of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism;¹⁵⁶ and a war on terror merely continuing Cold War-era patterns of nativism and xenophobia.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Peter Beinart, “An Argument for a New Liberalism: A Fighting Faith,” *New Republic*, December 2, 2004; Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 2003); Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003). For a critique of the contemporary liberal interventionism of authors like Michael Ignatieff, see Jeanne Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–28, 201–31.

¹⁵⁵ Peter A. Meyers, *Civic War and the Corruption of the Citizen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹⁵⁶ Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare,” *Political Theory* 34 (2006): 690–714.

¹⁵⁷ On the war on terror as a continuation of the Cold War see Meyers, *Civic War* (see note 155 above).

Amid intensifying pressures to forge national unity against threatening outsiders, exclusionary forms of American jeremiad persist.¹⁵⁸ Hartz would lament President Trump's efforts to impose travel bans and wall off the nation from the rest of the world. But Hartz would equally lament the messianic impulses behind earlier interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. Disillusioned by Vietnam, Hartz's 1968 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the "Nature of Revolution" proves instructive. While resisting any slip into moral relativism, Hartz warned against imposing American ideals abroad. Americans must "disentangle our faith in the norm of freedom from the peculiar historical experience in which it has been cast in the United States."¹⁵⁹

From a Hartzian perspective, political theorists in the post-9/11 world must therefore resist the temptation to idealize America's founding mission, without abandoning their prophetic gaze. They must prophesize on the crucial blind spots of America's historical inheritance while searching for transcendent new experiences for the whole. Hartz encourages political theorists to accept this vocation resolutely, with all the burdens it entails.

Hartz's own life illustrates that these burdens are still considerable. Leaving Harvard in 1974 after suffering a mental breakdown, Hartz went abroad, where he was eventually found dead, in Turkey, with a suitcase full of travelers' checks, in 1986. By then Hartz had already lost

¹⁵⁸ Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 246–55 (see note 14 above).

¹⁵⁹ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Hearings: The Nature of Revolution*. 90th Congress, 2nd Session (Feb. 26, 1968), 133; cited in *Necessity of Choice*, 21–22 (see note 54 above).

touch with most Harvard colleagues.¹⁶⁰ Perhaps, as John Patrick Diggins suggests, Hartz's lifelong quarrel with American history was more than any American could bear.¹⁶¹ When the iron curtain collapsed because, some thought, a president had finally commanded the Soviets to "tear down this wall," *Liberal Tradition* was already collecting dust on bookshelves.¹⁶² "Can a people 'born equal' ever understand peoples elsewhere that have to become so? Can it ever understand itself?"¹⁶³ Hartz's work illustrates why this question has transformative implications for a liberal society; it also underscores why the search for an answer requires the deepest faith.

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¹⁶⁰ Many colleagues and former students continued to revere Hartz even after his death. See Kloppenber, "Requiescat in Pacem," 90–91 (see note 10 above).

¹⁶¹ John Patrick Diggins, "Knowledge and Sorrow: Louis Hartz's Quarrel with American History," *Political Theory* 16 (1988): 355–76, at 374.

¹⁶² Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin," June 12, 1987, at <https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/speeches/1987/061287d.htm>.

¹⁶³ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 309 (see note 1 above).