

# THE FAR RIGHT AS A WORLD-PICTURE: A WITTGENSTEINIAN APPROACH TO BRAZILIAN BOLSONARISM

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to explain why Bolsonaroism has thrived in Brazil since 2015. As I examine in the first section, the literature on the contemporary far right lacks theoretical articulation of the anti-intellectual, cultural, and economic aspects of these political movements. The second section develops a new approach based on Wittgenstein's philosophy of certainties. I argue that Bolsonaroism and the far right in general can be better described as a world-picture, meaning a practical, implicit, collective, holistic, and somewhat flexible interpretive framework of the world. The concept of an adaptable world-picture clarifies the continuities between fascism, military dictatorship, and Bolsonaroism, as well as the novelty of the last phase of Brazilian reactionism, which has incorporated neoliberal values. Ultimately, the world-picture approach offers practical insights for interventions against the far right in the public sphere, as I show through some everyday examples.

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**Keywords:** Far right; Bolsonaroism; Wittgenstein; World-pictures; Hinges

## LA EXTREMA DERECHA COMO IMAGEN DEL MUNDO: UNA ABORDAJE WITTGENSTEINIANA AL BOLSONARISMO BRASILEÑO

### RESUMEN

El objetivo del artículo es explicar por qué el bolsonarismo ha prosperado en Brasil desde 2015. Como se examina en la primera sección, la literatura sobre la extrema derecha contemporánea presenta un vacío a la hora de articular teóricamente los aspectos antiintelectuales, culturales y económicos de estos movimientos políticos. En la segunda sección, se desarrolla un nuevo enfoque basado en la filosofía de la certeza de Wittgenstein. Se argumenta que el bolsonarismo y la extrema derecha en general pueden describirse mejor como una imagen del mundo, es decir, una estructura práctica, implícita, colectiva, holística y relativamente flexible del mundo. La conceptualización permite comprender las continuidades entre el fascismo, la dictadura militar y el bolsonarismo, así como la novedad de la última fase del reaccionarismo brasileño, que ha incorporado valores neoliberales. Finalmente, el enfoque de la imagen del mundo ofrece avances para las intervenciones contra la extrema derecha en la esfera pública, como muestro mediante algunos ejemplos cotidianos.

**Palabras clave:** Extrema derecha; Bolsonarismo; Wittgenstein; Imágenes del mundo; Goznes.

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## INTRODUCTION

When social problems seem complicated, people may seek to reduce them to the simplest formulas. Formulas that can work as quickly as the “fire days”<sup>1</sup> coordinated by Brazilian farmers and encouraged by then-president Jair Bolsonaro (Menegassi, 2021). People might swallow pills with ready-made answers, like the unproven “preventive” drugs promoted by Bolsonaro’s government and prescribed by countless physicians, opposing social distancing measures and contributing to hundreds of thousands of deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic (Agência Senado, 2021). People are tempted to empty their lungs with either outbursts of hatred or conspiracist whispers. Error is just simpler than truth.

On the one hand, it may seem that, due to the psychological relief offered by simplification and political rhetoric, there is no intellectual reception of modernity in the far right. A few half-truths are enough to relieve the insecurity of a general incomprehension and inculcate the pride of having definitively solved a social issue. On the other hand, a relevant intellectual reception of modernity can be found within far-right movements. The reaction against modern culture (science, moral universalism, disruptive art) is not random, but their common denominator (Marcuse, 1972, p. 141). This anti-modern position manifests itself not only in the revival of religious and metaphysical discourses but also in the profusion of social media profiles, best-selling books, streaming platforms, and other cultural products that share stories of individual freedom and success. As contradictory as these cultural tendencies may appear, they share a common goal: liberating capital accumulation from the yoke of those who oppose productivity-focused values, that is, from the perceived threats of communist, woke, or Marxist culture. In terms of efficiency, technology, money, and the freedom to use these tools, ‘reactionism’ has many ‘progressive’ aspects (Adorno, 2003, p. 342). How can we explain these coterminous anti-intellectual, cultural, and systemic aspects of the far right? How can we deal with the far-right’s monstrosity, which seems as shapeless as it is enduring?

The present article concentrates on Bolsonarism: a far-right political phenomenon in Brazil that emerged during Jair Bolsonaro’s election campaign in 2018, which elected him president and has dominated the right-wing political field ever since, even after his electoral defeat in 2022. Brazil is not just one of the world’s major democracies, but also one where the far right has historically achieved more social and political power since the rise of fascist movements in the 1930s, through the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1986 up to the present. However, the country’s lived experiences are seldom considered by theorists outside Latin America. If there is something new about Bolsonarism in comparison with analogous movements in the past, what would that be? Might it offer insights to unravel the causes and, consequently, ways to resist far-right expansion around the globe?

The article’s purpose is to explain why Bolsonarism has thrived since 2015. The literature on the subject (and on the contemporary far right in general) has a gap in theoretically articulating the anti-intellectual, cultural and systemic aspects of these political movements, as I examine in the first section. I organize the literature discussion

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1 All direct translations from Portuguese are my own.

into five approaches: political representation, social groups, psychological, intellectual, and cultural. Broadly speaking, the first strand, exemplified by the works of Przeworski (2019) and Nobre (2023), focuses on the loss of legitimacy by liberal democratic institutions, which strengthens populist leaders. The second strand, such as the readings of Fraser (2019) and Nunes (2022), defines the new far-right movements as strategic alliances among specific social groups. The third one, recently put forward by Dubet (2024) and Dunker (2018), analyzes the phenomenon through the emotions and passions it raises. The fourth, undertaken by studies of Brown (2019) and Castro Rocha (2021), observes right-wing extremism through their philosophers or ideologues. Finally, the fifth strand, represented by Stanley (2018) and Starling (2022), expands the research field to the cultural background that fosters the rise of this kind of political extremism.

The second section develops an overlooked approach. I argue that Bolsonarism (and the new far right in general) can be better described as a “world-picture” (Wittgenstein, 1969), meaning a practical, implicit, collective, holistic, and somewhat flexible structure of the world. My argument is that the far right propagates an old picture of society, but one that has undergone recent modifications to incorporate neoliberal values, such as entrepreneurship, freedom from the state, and self-realization in markets. It grows as a symptom of a broad social crisis and expresses a material suffering, rather than a theoretical and reflected view or discourse. Nonetheless, world-pictures can be rationally transformed if intelligently tackled. To develop this approach, I counter previous theorizations by advancing a conceptual distinction between ‘worldviews’ and ‘world-pictures’.

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While explaining these categories, I compare some central elements of the far-right world-picture, such as crisis, enemy, freedom, and values in the present and past Brazilian far right. The assertion of an adaptable world-picture makes clear the continuities between integralism, military dictatorship, and Bolsonarism. Yet, understanding the specificity of the last phase of Brazilian reactionism also demands a materialistic worldview. Ultimately, the world-picture approach offers insights into interventions against the far right in the public sphere.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are multiple ways to view the contemporary far-right phenomenon. This article reviews the main ones found in the literature, which can be divided into five approaches: (1.1) political representation; (1.2) social groups; (1.3) psychological; (1.4) intellectual; and (1.5) cultural. They serve as groundwork for another perspective: (2) the world-picture approach. The researchers mentioned below made valuable contributions to understanding the phenomenon. However, I argue that they are somewhat partial and overlook crucial elements, which must be brought together for an accurate view of far-right political movements, including characteristics from the Global South.

### 1.1. *The political representation approach*

Many political scientists explain the deterioration of contemporary democracy through the concept of political representation, independently of specific ideologies. This approach is exemplified in Adam Przeworski’s work (2019, p. 5), where he measures populist dangers

with a minimalist criterion to define democracy: citizens' ability to remove governments through elections. What he perceives is a gradual and often imperceptible "backsliding" or "stealth" erosion of democracy through legal and constitutional alterations that, either alone or abstractly considered, could be compatible with such regimes, but ultimately end up destroying them (Przeworski, 2019, pp. 15, 177-178, 183). Unlike other scholars with similar approach (e.g., Urbinati, 2019), Przeworski (2019, pp. 22, 33-34, 103-113, 137) acknowledges that democratic backsliding have deeper economic and social roots: the stagnation of low incomes, the decline of labor share in productivity, the relaxation of control over finances and, consequently, the erosion of the belief in material progress – all of which create conditions conducive to fear and radicalization.

Nevertheless, Przeworski's concerns (2019, pp. 83, 162) are not with the legitimation crisis that followed neoliberal policies around the globe. For him, these would be just "signs" of the problem. He worries about the peaceful alternation of power and regulation of conflicts in "consolidated democracies". He mistakenly believes that right-wing populism does not undermine electoral procedures and fails to see militarism as relevant in the political scene, "even in Latin America" (Przeworski, 2019, pp. 134, 140, 172). According to Przeworski (2019, pp. 189, 203), "stealth" masks only the long-term danger, while the electoral menace of radical right populism has been already confined. His thesis neglects the threats posed to elections and the militaristic background of populists like Bolsonaro. His view has been contradicted by coup d'état attempts in Brazil (Prazeres, 2023), Germany (Bennhold; Solomon, 2022), and South Korea (Kim, 2024), demonstrating its occurrence even in the Global North.

While adopting the political representation approach, Marcos Nobre draws different conclusions. As many scholars (*cf.* Paxton, 2021; Lynch & Cassimiro, 2022; Traverso, 2023), he recognizes the fascist motifs adopted by the contemporary far right, summarized in the Bolsonarist expression 'the dictatorship's democracy is the true democracy' (Nobre, 2020, p. 26). Nobre (2023, pp. 115-22, 188-9) describes Bolsonarism as the end of democratic conservatism following the June 2013 Protests, the "Car Wash" scandal, and the emergence of digitally-based organizations, which culminated in a new form of political representation: participatory, personalized, and non-institutional. His investigation centers on the unique structures of Brazilian political parties. These parties, he argues (2023, pp. 207, 229), were insulated from society and failed to channel the growing anti-establishment sentiments in a democratic way. Consequently, these sentiments were exploited in a fascist manner, through the rejection of all democratic institutions (Nobre, 2023, pp. 122, 130-131, 140-145, 179, 212).

Nonetheless, Nobre acknowledges that the issues of political representation were neither the sole nor the main factors driving anti-establishment impulses. He cites "an economic crisis with no parallel since 1929," "well-established tactics of the global far right," and a "subjectivation of the domination" (Nobre, 2023, pp. 157, 190, 208, 225), although he refrains from theorizing about these causes. Some critics add the role of traditional elites and the overlap between allegedly 'anti-establishment' and anti-left impulses as causes of Bolsonarism (Lima & Chaloub, 2024). All these additional factors invite approaches that go beyond political representation.

## 1.2. *The social groups approach*

By this approach I mean theories that take the far right as a contradictory and contingent set of interests and values. For Nancy Fraser, reactionary populism is a symptom of the “widespread unraveling of neoliberal hegemony” (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018, p. 194). She characterizes the far right as an “interregnum” phenomenon of a crumbling neoliberal common sense, where neither a hegemonic bloc with broad legitimacy is established, nor a counter-hegemonic project is defined (Fraser, 2022, p. 137). According to her, the current far right establishes a “chaotic, unstable and fragile” neoliberalism (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018, p. 213; Fraser, 2019, pp. 15-17). Reactionary populist leaders like Bolsonaro are called showmen or figureheads of the financial capital (Fraser, 2022, pp. 135-136). Fraser argues that the breakdown of the former hegemony does not imply the end of neoliberal policies, but in fact leads to a temporary and unstable “crypto-neoliberal” alliance (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018, p. 220; Fraser, 2019, p. 20).

In dialogue with this diagnosis, Rahel Jaeggi expresses skepticism about the claim that neoliberalism is at its end (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 195-196). She points out that most far-right movements combine economically neoliberal positions with sexism, nationalism, and racism. She further observes that reactionary populist leaders make no secret of their plans to eliminate social protection (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018, p. 217). That’s why Fraser should better explain how “those who are most dependent on a functioning system of health insurance and social welfare choose politicians who are openly trying to destroy it!” (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 198-199). Even if we go back to Fraser’s writings, we find descriptions of reactionary neoliberalism as a long-standing rival to progressive neoliberalism: the combination of the same economic policies with an exclusionary vision of moral recognition (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 90, 202; 2019, p. 12). The persistence of the far-right phenomenon suggests something more than a “morbid symptom”. Thus, it is necessary to recognize that neoliberalism is also a legitimizing discourse for cultural reactionism.

In this direction, Rodrigo Nunes discusses the discursive and communicative patterns that made possible the convergence of military, neopentecostal, and neoliberal interests in the aftermath of the June 2013 Protests in Brazil. Nunes (2022, pp. 26-31) argues that concepts like punitivism, anti-intellectualism, and entrepreneurship acquire distinct meanings for different social groups. Much like other scholars under the same approach (*e.g.*, Rocha *et al.*, 2021, pp. 45-6), he attributes “elective affinities” and “delicate balances” to Bolsonarism.

The social groups approach is in line with the recent historiographical research that has rejected that far-right recruitment and support stem from a specific social class (Paxton, 2004, pp. 50, 210-211; Trindade, 2016, p. 86; Mudde, 2019, pp. 74-75). On the other hand, this framework downplays the schematic and enduring nature that empowers far-right discourses. In Nunes’s (2022, p. 38) own words, such a schema “depends less on any actual content than on the feeling of belonging to the same side in a struggle. It doesn’t matter whether you believe everything that is said about the enemy, as long as one believes that the enemy exists and needs to be defeated”. In sum, the social groups approach fails to fully grasp Bolsonarism and the far right for what they really are: mass

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movements, instead of a casual convergence of interests and values. This limitation has led some scholars to explore psychological approaches to better understand far-right phenomena.

### **1.3. The psychological approach**

In the place of a contingent set of interests and values, the psychological approach concentrates on emotions that far-right movements exploit in the population. François Dubet (2024, p. 7) analyses the “sad passions” that accuse and hate indiscriminately: rich and poor, powerful and weak, unemployed and refugees. He explains such a spirit of the times through the transformation of the “inequalities system”. The class-based, “big” inequalities have become multiplied, individualized, and fragmented into “small” inequalities. Despite decreasing non-economic inequalities in recent decades, social cleavages now extend across protected and precarious workers; male and female; urban, suburban and rural; national and foreigner, etc. (Dubet, 2024, pp. 10-12). The citizens’ indignation against inequalities maintains its motivating force, but injustice is experienced differently. Economic financialization and globalization have fragmented the class structure that once incorporated small, non-classist inequalities (Dubet, 2024, pp. 25-26). Whereas macromobilities are inhibited by declining economic growth, micromobilities as well as the threat of downward mobility create great social instability (Dubet, 2024, p. 47). The welfare state has also favored segmented social protection policies (Dubet, 2024, p. 39). Thus, the idea of justice shifts from abolition of classes toward meritocracy, equal opportunities, and individual equality (Dubet, 2024, p. 64). In summary, the experience of inequalities moves from classes to individuals.

The individualization of experiences of inequality creates an omnipresent feeling of contempt, victimization, and misrecognition, considered individually shameful. Consequently, solutions are privatized. Experiences of multiple inequalities isolate people from collective struggles (Dubet, 2024, pp. 69-81). According to Dubet (2024, pp. 83-117), this explains the loss of power of social movements and political parties, the takeover of the public sphere by anger against the weak, the suspicion against aid beneficiaries, and the power of populist figures.

However, this diagnosis has a shortcoming. Dubet (2024, pp. 98-99, 102) maintains that populist movements are anchored in the modern idea of social contract and the picture of a homogeneous people under a sovereign and protector state. This presupposition may be plausible for countries in the Global North, particularly for France, but it is shortsighted for analogous populist phenomena where there is neither robust social protection nor an immigrant crisis, like in Brazil. Bolsonaroist discourses and public demonstrations have never hidden their aim to jeopardize the social contract and install a reactionary dictatorship (*cf.* Lago, 2020; Rocha *et al.*, 2021, pp. 45-46; Wink, 2021, pp. 267-268).

Given his psychoanalytic background, Christian Dunker interprets Brazilian right-wing populism as a psychic suffering that links actual distress with symbolic recognition and imaginary narratives. Far-right narratives suggest outside forces have disrupted harmony and provoked a management issue – something he calls “condominium form of life” (Dunker,

2018, pp. 37, 52). For Dunker (2015, pp. 46-48, 71-75), the Brazilian condominium derives from a stronghold model, with walls that hide propriety and prevent enemy intrusions. While drawing from modern planning, it abandons universality and public spaces for private management and exclusivity. Dunker (2015, pp. 54, 61-62) explains that the condominium form of life neither offers a small community, nor a mass, but a “psychological group” that promotes self-essentialization, boundary enforcement, and competition. Unlike mass structures based on identity totalizations, such as churches and the army, the condominium becomes increasingly exclusive and segregated (Dunker, 2017, pp. 296-299).

What seems valuable in this description is that far-right attitudes can manifest not only as striking emotions, but also as manipulative indifference. Some people need not hate their enemies because they “deal” with them through managerial measures (Adorno, 2003, p. 487). Examples include Brazilian physicians that voluntarily increased COVID-19 contamination and Walter Braga Netto: a discreet general, known for a bureaucratic profile, but one of Bolsonaro’s most loyal allies, who organized the assassination of public authorities and the coup d’etat attempt during the election campaign in 2022 (Victor, 2024). The critique of sad or fear-driven (*cf.* Nussbaum, 2018) emotions neglects this vast area of arbitrary relations that take place in a well-known but unremarkable gray field.

The ‘condominium’ should express an analogy between psychological and social processes that go far beyond housing and reach shopping centers, favelas, and prisons, as a whole “form of life” (Dunker, 2015, p. 63). Despite acknowledging it as a “narrative”, Dunker (2015, pp. 35, 55) does not connect it with right-wing narratives he would like to change. The fact that the far right has narratives of its own invites an intellectual approach.

#### **1.4. The intellectual approach**

An opposite approach investigates far-right theoretical harbingers. Wendy Brown (2019, pp. 41, 96) concentrates on the neoliberal common sense created, according to her, by Friedrich Hayek’s vision of society. She understands that the connection between the neoliberal precursors and reactionary mass movements is, to some extent, incidental (Brown, 2019, p. 9). Moreover, she observes that the effects of neoliberal reforms have been the opposite of those theoretically anticipated. Instead of being technocratic, the state has been dominated by big business. Instead of diminishing the role of government, citizens have become vulnerable to demagoguery against global competition and in favor of national sovereignty. Instead of integrating peacefully and spontaneously, conservative values have been instrumentalized to coerce minorities (Brown, 2019, pp. 84-94, 114-119). Further, she recognizes that not all neoliberal views associate economic freedom directly with conservative values, even if they strengthen each other in the fight against democratic citizenship and social equality (Brown, 2019, pp. 66, 91, 120).

Regardless of all these setbacks, Brown (2019, pp. 161-188) reads the new far-right political movements as a form of neoliberalism that has become “nihilistic” – that is, a value instrumentalizable for other ends. Her interpretation ignores the idealistic commitment to the “salvation” of the Nation, Christian or human society (*cf.* Teitelbaum, 2020, p.

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249). In this aspect, the contemporary far right is close to fascism, which has also been defined by the goal of radical regeneration of mythical past values (Griffin, 1991, pp. 32-35). By fighting an enemy and following an authoritarian leader, the members of far-right political movements feel they are in a higher mission and absolved from personal responsibility. The far right does not reject strong values. It perverts them with an anti-universalist interpretation.

João Cezar de Castro Rocha (2021, p. 108) acutely perceived that the far-right intellectual element is first and foremost a “system of beliefs”. Such a system was organized and propagated by Olavo de Carvalho, the most influential Brazilian far-right ideologue from the late 1990s onwards. Until now, it has been focused on an almighty enemy like the ‘cultural hegemony of the left’, which allegedly dominated all culture and penetrated all institutions, homes, hearts, and minds. Castro Rocha’s discourse analysis (2021, pp. 166, 179) shows how Brazilian extremism always comes from the already given conclusion that there is an imminent communist threat, for generations present and hidden. Bolsonaro supporters are, in contrast, the ‘true’ patriots and can take part in ‘high culture’, against all university, journalistic, and artistic ‘subculture’ (Castro Rocha, 2021, pp. 79, 158). Redundancy is an important trait, because it prohibits the space for reflection that accompanies the apprehension of something. Every piece of information needs to be incorporated into ‘anti-communism’ (Castro Rocha, 2021, pp. 175-176, 191). Another rhetorical technique is the “mischaracterizing hyperbole”, which makes the analysis of any object or statement impossible, due to the loss of proportion (Castro Rocha, 2021, pp. 80-84). Ultimately, Bolsonaro’s public demonstrations are never about approving policies or laws. They seek only to persecute some enemy, close down Congress and Supreme Court, and implement a dictatorship (Castro Rocha, 2021, pp. 180, 210).

While Castro Rocha correctly highlights this system of beliefs centered around political rhetoric that blocks rational arguments, he leaves aside the functionality of such rhetoric for the capitalist economy. Similar to other works within the intellectual approach (*e.g.*, Teitelbaum, 2020, p. 160), he fails to relate this system of beliefs to the capitalist imperatives and neoliberal agenda. The cultural approach, examined next, seeks to understand the far right as a multidimensional form of domination.

### **1.5. The cultural approach**

After challenging the intellectual approach, I turn to those theories that try to explain the far right by concentrating on a wider cultural background, linked to a masculine, white, religious, and ethnic supremacism. Jason Stanley (2018, pp. 8-10) offers an excellent manual to identify the tactics used by past and present far right, with the intention of distinguishing them from democratic politics, exposing their emptiness, and disarming them. This approach is useful to make people aware of the propaganda mechanisms exploited by ultranationalist leaders. Stanley gives a wide description of far-right constituent elements, encompassing mythic past, propaganda, anti-intellectualism, destruction of factual truth, social Darwinism, victimization of dominant groups, sexual anxiety, economic liberalism, etc.

Though Stanley (2018, p. 8) calls all virulent nationalism (whether ethnic, religious, or cultural) ‘fascist’, this can be historically and politically misleading. His constant comparisons and references to Nazi ideology (*e.g.*, Stanley, 2018, pp. 19-20, 30-33, 43-46) lead to the error of associating authoritarianism immediately with totalitarianism. The contemporary far right allows a high degree of pragmatism and philosophical weakness. It does not constitute a totalitarian ideology, but rather “a collage of different philosophical and political ideas, a beehive of contradictions” (Eco, 1995, p. 7). The effective strategy of these movements is not to propose a racial monolithic ideology, like in Nazism, but to turn politics into an everyday and propagandistic language, through opportunistic dualisms that immunize it against error and reflection (*cf.* Stanley, 2018, pp. 46, 55-56, 178).

Heloisa Starling (2022, pp. 68-72) describes Bolsonarism as a language that goes back to the first reactions against human rights declarations, social equality, and democracy. The reaction has a proper solution for modern problems, which works as its strategy and principle: the destruction of modern society (Starling, 2022, p. 73). Because reactionism’s goal includes the destruction of democratic institutions, she distinguishes it from liberalism or conservatism. Such language does not depend on content, nor submits itself to theoretical responses. As a historian, she is well aware that the language of destruction has reached all social strata, constituting a mass movement.

The problem is that Starling (2022, p. 83) subscribes to an empirically flawed theory that reactionism grows where there is “an ever-increasing number of people who, because of their numbers, or their indifference, or a mixture of both, have no community relations, do not integrate or share common purposes”. As she puts it: “it is just an agglomeration of voracious, violent, selfish men and women” (Starling, 2022, p. 84). Contradictorily, she sees the movement’s social basis in entrepreneurs concentrated in agribusiness, the financial elites, neo-Pentecostal churches, and the military (Starling, 2022, p. 82). Thus, the real issue is not atomization or disaggregation, but the power and partiality of some social groups. Fascist ‘mass man’ theory has been falsified by recent historiography (Paxton, 2004, pp. 209-210).

Scholars within the cultural strand tend to conflate the far right with totalitarianism or atomization. Because of the deficits in existing theories, I propose a leap, arguing that the far right can be better approached through Wittgenstein’s concept of world-picture. This breakthrough combines the knowledge offered by the literature with a new approach. My approach underlines that far-right movements mobilize not just reflective and theoretical worldviews, but also unconscious, emotional, and inarticulate structures – something it shares with the social groups, psychological, and cultural perspectives. On the other hand, I consider the massive and flexible character of these movements, which sprawl beyond specific cultural and temporal contexts – something that aligns more closely with the political representation and the psychological strands. Ultimately, my solution does not lose sight of the fact that the far right explores a linguistic structure that can be rationally transformed – something that converges with the social groups and the intellectual views. In the following section, I argue that the concept of world-picture can describe the far right more precisely.

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## 2. THE FAR RIGHT AS A WORLD-PICTURE

To disentangle the multilayered phenomenon of the far right, I take Wittgenstein's cue when addressing belief systems (OC<sup>2</sup> 102, 410). Not all his philosophical commitments are fruitful in this investigation, considering that he did not claim any "explanations, only descriptions" (PI<sup>3</sup> 109) nor any transformative action (PI 124). Even so, I take comfort in previous essays that argue for the complementary role of Wittgenstein for political philosophy (Pleasants, 2002; Gakis, 2021; Deegan, 2025).

A world-picture (*Weltbild*) is (2.1) practical, (2.2) implicit, (2.3) collective, and (2.4) inalienable, and it contrasts with "worldview" (*Weltanschauung*). As I just mentioned, the Wittgensteinian concept of world-picture provides a threefold illumination. First, it shows that the far right's monstrous force is embedded in common forms of socialization and, more precisely, in their blockage of rational arguments about society. Hindrances to factual truth and correctness in political themes stem either from rhetorical, theoretical, or economic sources. The concept of world-picture integrates these anti-intellectual, cultural, and systemic layers of the far right, which buttress each other. Second, it makes room for the similarities and dissimilarities between integralism, military dictatorship, and Bolsonaroism. When it comes to class domination, the last phase of the Brazilian far right is neither based on social protection nor technocracy. Third, this conceptual pair guides transformation pathways for world-pictures, which follow procedures of justification different from those for worldviews. Justification practices must be expanded to encompass the connections between opposing world-pictures. That requires unpacking reasons that emerge in everyday language: crisis, enemy, freedom, values, and the like.

### 2.1. Practical

Wittgenstein (OC 103, 167) explains that a world-picture is necessarily practical because it guides the behavior of those who possess it. A world-picture is the rule of action that prevails at the bottom of language use (OC 204). In a Wittgensteinian example (OC 476): "Children do not learn that books exist, that armchairs exist, etc. etc. – they learn to fetch books, sit in armchairs, etc. etc." A world-picture is not necessarily about subjective beliefs or psychology (OC 194, 415, 459, 494). The beginning of grounding "is not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting" (OC 110). A world-picture concerns behavior that "is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there-like our life" (OC 559). No kind of thinking can be offered outside this practical background of language.

From a psychological point of view, it seems easy to attribute paranoia to far-right supporters, since they see an enemy everywhere (*cf.* Adorno, 2003, pp. 273-276; Dunker, 2021, p. 200; Dubet, 2024, p. 89). However, the psychological approach overlooks the fact that the boundaries between inner, social, and outer worlds are grounded in a world-picture. The far-right's enemy is not paranoia, but rather a practical collective rule. It cannot be explained by clinical concepts, because racism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc., are considered normal in far-right regimes (Paxton, 2004, p. 51). A world-picture is

2 *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein, 1969), henceforth OC.

3 *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 1958), henceforth PI.

more fundamental than the distinction between what can be affirmed from the outside (objective world), what is acceptable for others (social world), and what expresses the inside (subjective world).

To delve deeper into the collapse of these boundaries, I introduce the picture of crisis in the discourse of the most important Bolsonarist agitator.<sup>4</sup> Olavo de Carvalho (1998, p. 199) sees modern society as a “garden of afflictions” on the verge of total dissolution: anguish, despair, and many psychopathologies. He finds the cause of the modernity crisis in the materialism of its two dominant ideologies, liberalism and communism, and in the erasure “since the Renaissance at least... of all reference to a transcendent order...” (Carvalho, 1994/2014, p. 32; *cf.* 1998, pp. 37, 50, 117). Critique of materialism is a topos in all historical fascism (Adorno, 2019, pp. 47-48; Griffin, 1991, pp. 32-35), including its Brazilian variant: integralism (Trindade, 2016, pp. 76, 94; Gonçalves & Caldeira, 2020, p. 18; Wink, 2021, p. 107). Corruption of age-old values by modern materialism guides Carvalho’s first books until his last interviews (Teitelbaum, 2020, p. 227).

The specificity of Brazilian fascism is that it has always sought to associate itself with Christian spiritualism: political domination with the restoration of the ‘Judeo-Christian civilization’ (Trindade, 2016, pp. 65-8, 89; Cassimiro, 2018, pp. 151-3; Gonçalves & Caldeira, 2020, p. 18; Wink, 2021, pp. 7, 18, 129). This spiritualist branch of fascism was accentuated after the Axis defeat in the Second World War, when the integralist leader Plínio Salgado kept the movement alive by proclaiming himself an evangelist. Nationalist cries of ‘Anauê!’ were then replaced by the slogan ‘God, land, and family’. Christians had to be saved from subversives, such as journalists, Marxist professors, and manipulated students, who were plotting to seize power (Gonçalves & Caldeira, 2020, pp. 75-78; Wink, 2021, p. 188).<sup>5</sup>

In the same vein, Carvalho (1999/96, p. 100) blames intellectuals, artists, journalists, in short, all modern culture for the West having become negative, individualistic, destructive, relativistic, and sexually depraved. To make such a diagnosis, he subordinates the capitalist economy, the state, and international institutions to culture: “[...] politics, law, and economics, if detached from the living background of the social fabric, are only abstractions in the pejorative sense” (Carvalho, 1998, p. 194). Everything that happens in culture is reproduced “with millimeter precision in the economy” (Carvalho, 2013,

4 The importance of Olavo de Carvalho for the emergence of Bolsonarism is well established in the literature. For decades, his books have been inspiring neointegralists (Patschiki, 2012, p. 269; Gonçalves & Caldeira, 2020, pp. 181-182) and Christian ultra-conservatives (Wink, 2021, pp. 227-32). He was one of the first public figures to shift to online media in the early 2000s. Bolsonaro’s family started to attract more attention from conservative voters in 2012 after they became close to him and adopted Carvalho’s strategies on issues like children’s education, women, and sexual minorities (Rocha *et al.*, 2021, p. 71-77). After the far-right electoral victory in 2018, Bolsonaro offered him the Ministry of Education. Despite declining the offer, Carvalho directly appointed the Ministers of Education, Foreign Affairs, and Culture (Goés *et al.*, 2020). He became a reference to some of the military officials that joined the government and has powerful followers in Congress. Bound to him until his death in 2022, the ex-President’s sons constitute the hard core of Brazilian reactionary populism. “Maybe Olavo is not exactly Bolsonaro’s guru, but he is certainly the guru of Bolsonarism” (Carvalho & Bugalho, 2020, p. 116).

5 Another peculiarity of integralism in comparison to European fascism is its close relation to monarchist movements (Trindade, 2016, p. 71; Gonçalves & Caldeira, 2020, p. 150-152; Wink, 2021, p. 16). This characteristic also remained in Carvalho’s works (1998, p. 132).

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p. 261). All economic, political, and cultural changes could be explained as byproducts of “left-wing hegemony” or “cultural Marxism”, so understood as that “form of consent that is based on the force of habit, specifically acquired mental automatisms that long repetition renders unconscious and places beyond the reach of discussion and debate” (Carvalho, 1994/2014, p. 50). That is the yardstick to distinguish the far right from conservative worldviews. Although the “moral crisis” theme has a broader tradition in Brazil, conservatives explain it with an assessment of institutional patrimonialism (*cf.* Barbosa, 1991/13; Da Matta, 2015). Conservatives rely on theories and evidence, whereas far-right ideologues do so on a feeling of decadence explained by an internal enemy (Griffin, 1991, pp. 32-35; Cassimiro, 2018, p. 150).<sup>6</sup>

Until the end of the 20th century, Carvalho’s attitude towards capitalism was on par with the fundamental ambiguity that constitutes fascism and integralism. Even though they all adopt anti-capitalist rhetoric, they never question the imperative of profit accumulation that defines this economic system (Paxton, 2004, pp. 10-11, 53, 563; Trindade, 2016, pp. 64, 73-74; Gonçalves & Caldeira, 2020, pp. 39, 138). At the beginning of the 1990s, Carvalho (1994/2014, pp. 20, 34; 1998, pp. 121, 181) used to write that not communism, but rather neoliberalism was globally triumphant. He accused liberalism of legitimizing social Darwinism and US imperialism (Carvalho, 1994/2014, p. 39; 1998, p. 192). In the integralist logic, liberalism is one cause behind communism (Trindade, 2016, p. 72). In Carvalho’s logic (1998, p. 181), neoliberalism is one cause behind the “socialism of inner life”. His first political texts (1998, pp. 138, 151, 155-8, 192) had a strong stance against the US, a country he identified with capitalism, globalism, and freemasonry.

In alignment with integralism, to save society in crisis, it was necessary to rid capitalism of liberalism and submit it to a State ideology (Trindade, 2016, p. 93). The state should be submitted to religion against individualism, meritocracy, and plutocracy (Carvalho, 1998, pp. 147, 173). Social protection had to be commanded by religious elites (Carvalho, 1998, pp. 166, 174-175, 194). He writes that he wishes “the best of socialism, which is the defense of the small against the big”, provided it was isolated from popular movements (Carvalho, 1999/96, p. 140). Both the market and the state would have corrupting effects on communities formed by religion, family, and territorial loyalties (Carvalho, 1998, pp. 176-181, 194-199; 1999/96, pp. 197-198). In sum, following fascism and integralism, the only problem with the state was that it was not in the hands of ‘the right people’ (*cf.* Adorno, 2019, pp. 400-401; Trindade, 2016, p. 95).

Nonetheless, the “garden of afflictions” has been renovated to explicitly defend capitalism and counter the welfare state. After having acquired a place in the Brazilian mainstream press, which was looking for opinion makers to spread neoliberal ideas (Patschiki, 2012, pp. 35-43), Carvalho (2013, pp. 168-170) announced he had reconciled St. Thomas with L. Von Mises and supported profit accumulation “free from any supposedly corrective state intervention”. Wealth could be freely accumulated without any social threats (Carvalho,

<sup>6</sup> To further illustrate the point, Carvalho denounces the crimes and genocides caused by literature, theater, and cinema (2013, p. 330; 2014, p. 159-164); the change in Christian morals as a project of drug-addicted pedophiles (2013, p. 341; 2014, p. 196); the KGB power behind Brazilian journalism (2013, pp. 270-271; 2014, p. 138); the creation of the major Brazilian parties as a Leninist strategy (2013, p. 208); and the association of the Workers Party with drug trafficking, terrorism, and Gestapo (2013, pp. 189, 206, 383; 2014, pp. 151-157).

2013, pp. 65, 173). With the election of Brazil's first center-left president in 2002, the left would have started to be made up not only by intellectuals but promoted by bureaucracy and international organizations (Carvalho, 2014, pp. 146, 184-190). "With the end of the dictatorship, the only difference in the entire cultural, artistic, scholastic, and journalistic sphere [...] was the passage from the tacit hegemony of the left to explicit domination" (Carvalho, 2014, p. 163).

According to Carvalho (2008; 2011), the neoliberal's mistake would have been to defend markets as self-regulating powers superior to religion, family, and land. It would be acceptable as a formal rule within Christian culture. Instead of a fair society, he talks only about fair acts, which he equates with the "free market" (Carvalho, 2013, p. 163). This new political attitude was reflected in a strong pro-US stance (Carvalho, 2014, p. 136; 2015, pp. 298-299; Teitelbaum, 2020, p. 158). International finance and multinationals would represent a globalist and socialist dictatorship. Behind modern materialism were no longer liberalism, US imperialism, or freemasonry, but China and Muslims (Carvalho, 2014, p. 193; 2015, p. 301; Teitelbaum, 2020, pp. 163-164, 230). As a result, the modern alliance of liberalism and communism against age-old religious communities, denounced in his first books, became the alliance of communism and orientalism against Christian individualism.

Remarkably, what disappeared in the meantime was not the agreement with the system of private accumulation, which was already granted in fascism and integralism, but the anti-capitalist rhetoric. As historicized by Rocha, Solano and Medeiros (2021, pp. 45-46), the "new" right in Brazil became "shameless" through the importation of neoliberal theories after years of embarrassment with the military dictatorship. The novelty in the Bolsonaroist picture of crisis lies in the association of modern malaise and hostile domination with institutions of economic intervention and social protection. The far right consists not only of unconscious factors, but also of economically functional and traditional attitudes. Whereas right-wing radicalism uses psychological mechanisms, they are not its foundation, which is indistinguishable from economic and cultural grounds. This rather practical ground unveils a world-picture.

The picture of a crisis caused by an internal enemy merges objective, normative, and expressive claims and prevents them from benefiting from public reasoning and specialized knowledge. It is a small step from the belief that there is a 'leftist' persecution to one that they must be persecuted. Instead of elaborating a theory of modernity crisis or political domination, Carvalho explores conspiracy rhetoric to combat an internal enemy. His tactics are consciously stated: "The only effective debate with leftists is one that does not consent to being trapped in the formal rules of a confrontation of arguments..." (Carvalho, 2013, p. 193). Despite being one of the main promoters of neoliberal thought in Brazil, his reception eschewed rational arguments in favor of protecting traditional beliefs against the pressures of the public debate (Rocha *et al.*, 2021, pp. 40-41) – which he called "the original sin of modernity" (Carvalho, 1999, p. 39). With elastic concepts, he delegitimizes not only the left, but anyone who discusses objective issues (Castro Rocha, 2021, pp. 80-90; Calil, 2021, p. 72; Wink, 2021, pp. 201-211). The outcome is the twofold loss of references in the far right. In a world-picture founded on the idea of an internal enemy, people simultaneously lose the social world – through dualistic and opportunistic

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divisions – and the objective world – through unawareness of money and bureaucratic concentration tendencies that operate for everybody.

Recalling a Wittgensteinian metaphor (PI 309), the far-right picture of crisis wants people to act like flies in a bottle: that they see only the other flies, not the glass that holds them. There is still some truth in this picture, however. People feel their share in society is being dragged into small struggles for scarce resources (Dubet, 2024), despite their affliction not being caused by other people, but by anonymous accumulation imperatives.

## 2.2. *Implicit*

A world-picture is implicit because it cannot be presented in a finite number of propositions and justifications. It is not logically possible to make all our beliefs explicit. The propositions describing a world-picture “are not all equally subject to testing” (OC 162). Once again, a Wittgensteinian example (OC 510): “It is just like directly taking hold of something, as I take hold of my towel without having doubts”. In ordinary language, this is called ‘trust’ in people, abilities, or regularities (OC 150, 337, 509, 600, 603-4, 672). Trust consists of behaviors, often instinctive (OC 475), even if they give rise to thoughts. “That is to say: somewhere I must begin with not-doubting; and that is not, so to speak, hasty but excusable: it is part of judging” (OC 150). In this sense, a world-picture is “the scaffolding of our thoughts” that owes little or nothing to conscious efforts (OC 211).

What is striking about Bolsonarism is the constant opposition against an enemy that, to those who do not share the same world-picture, looks like a specter: communists. “Army, Navy, and Air Force. Please save us once again from communism”, one could read in a protest sign in the early manifestations of the new right in Brazil, notably written in English. Interviewed, the protester kindly clarified: “We don’t want an authoritarian government” (Watts, 2015). This enemy has had a long history in Brazil, dating back to the 1920s (Motta, 2020, pp. 16-24). Although not exclusive to the far right, anti-communism was always its main motivation in Brazil (Trindade, 2016, pp. 69, 101; Motta, 2020, pp. 30-32; Rocha, 2021, p. 39; Machado *et al.*, 2023). The integralist propaganda about communist infiltration ‘into the homes of good families’ has flourished since the 1930s, and the dissemination of cultural Marxism in schools and universities became a theme in the 1970s (Gonçalves & Caldeira, 2020, pp. 44, 160; Motta, 2020, p. 80). Not surprisingly, the motivation remained the same after communism lost adherence in society and concrete politics.

Carvalho continues a decade-old tradition. The communist enemy infiltrates “the discrete terrain of common sense”, affecting clothing, food, words, and feelings (Carvalho, 1994/2014, p. 55). Any social change is considered a cunning infiltration by the enemy and contrary to the people, who would only yearn for ‘order’ (Patschiki, 2012, p. 121; Castro Rocha, 2021, p. 191; Wink, 2021, pp. 266-267). Bolsonaro’s political campaigns always promised to defend the country against communism (Machado, 2018; Murakawa *et al.*, 2022). During his administration, political opponents were illegally surveilled by the government (Fernandes, 2024). After the 2022 defeat, Bolsonaro and allies planned to murder the victorious candidates and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Federal Court

(G1, 2025). For the Brazilian far right, communism was never a specter or pretext, but the certainty of an imminent threat, always present and hidden.

If someone needs an ever-present enemy, it must be a secret and implicit one. Bolsonarism operates at the level of the truthful revelation of who personifies the national enemy. In modernity, the ‘enemy’ lost its determination by a concrete territory or ethnicity (‘the barbarians’) and by an abstract theology (‘the heretics’), to become an empty formula (Koselleck, 2006, pp. 278-279). The more this concept was emptied of any theoretical content, the more it became the receptacle for any kind of unconscious hostilities: sexuality, gender, ethnicity, skin color, political opponents, etc. As described by Adorno (2003, pp. 276, 284, 302), the relationship with existing differences is then determined by a “chosen enemy”, which serves as the “key to everything”.<sup>7</sup> Lynch and Cassimiro (2022, p. 73) call it the “specular character” of reactionism, which plastically adapts to the momentary enemy.

Here the psychological approach gains its plausibility. Extremist behavior cannot be explained as if it were a mere pretense or a gross dissimulation, because the joy of having reached the ‘truth’ is authentic (Reich, 1974, p. 52). One does wrong, therefore, in attributing reactionism to ignorance, stupidity, or intellectual immaturity, as it affects a considerable portion of the so-called enlightened population and hinders their reflection and learning. Far-right pronouncements do not aim to enter into an argument but to distance people from discussing material problems and to focus on social frustrations and moral uncertainties (Löwenthal, 2017, p. 99; Adorno, 1972, p. 429). Because of its emptiness and implicitness, the enemy is pervasive. First, it can be attacked at different levels and aimed at different audiences: the foreigner, the criminal, the anti-Christian, the ugly, and the sexually depraved. The identification of enemies predisposes citizens to accept all misinformation that confirms stereotypes (Löwenthal, 2017, p. 67; Adorno, 2003, pp. 343, 403). Second, the enemy can be blamed by everyone who suffers some form of social pressure. The dichotomy between friend and foe can be projected onto excluded groups, which works as a strong device for internalizing reactionism among the population. The creation of ‘two categories’ within each social group has historically facilitated the persecution of minorities (Adorno, 2003, pp. 275-276, 290-292; Paxton, 2004, p. 103). Third, one who is itching to oppress others always sees oneself as the victim of an oppressor who forces one into desperate self-defense (Löwenthal, 2017, p. 49; Adorno, Horkheimer, 1985, pp. 151-154). Thus, the far right cannot be countered by just any kind of opposite argument. Trust in the other must be rebuilt beforehand (Adorno, 2003, p. 282).

When it comes to rebuilding trust amid political conflicts, avoiding adversaries is very difficult (and even undesirable) – as I take the far right as an adversary here. If we want to draw world-pictures anew, what matters is trying not to eliminate the adversary, not to erase its otherness, instead to destroy its clichés. To avoid encouraging dualisms and

7 One of the most important findings of research into the “authoritarian personality” was that someone who is hostile towards one group of minorities is very likely to be hostile towards a wide variety of other groups, without any rational basis for this generalization (Adorno, 2003, p. 160; cf. Mudde, 2019, pp. 44-45; Przeworski, 2019, pp. 128-129). Even from a historical perspective, associating fascism with exacerbated anti-semitism or racism is incorrect. The mobilization has always been against an enemy provided by each national culture (Griffin, 1991, p. 48; Paxton, 2004, pp. 9-10, 20 n. 85, 37, 174).

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denying voice to anyone, the focus needs to shift to the discourse patterns of world-pictures. It is often said that opposites complement each other; that everybody needs an enemy to justify political positions. It would be better to say that only adversaries complement each other, because extremism always finds new enemies to persecute. Behind every revelation another enemy lurks in. While democratic movements oppose an adversary as a means to an end, the enemy for the far right is an end in itself (Löwenthal, 2017, pp. 53, 75).

### **2.3. Collective**

A world-picture is intersubjective because it is constituted by practices of a group, community, or the human species (OC 298, 440). Wittgenstein (1974, p. 88) also calls it “grammar” and defines it as “all the conditions necessary for understanding (meaning).” In situations like understanding a new language or culture we do not just learn rules, sentences, and issues, but a whole world-picture (OC 140-142). Therefore, a world-picture must not be curtailed to a set of pre-linguistic actions or facts (Iczkovits, 2012, pp. 118-20; Kober, 2018, p. 470). The normal case is the partial and gradual learning of practical rules, which increasingly builds a belief system (OC 144, 167).

Virulent nationalism (whether racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural) characterizes fascism, military dictatorships, and Bolsonarism alike. The psychological approach explains this collective aspect as an internal compensation between independent and free individuals and their impotence before a hostile world. Individuals would masochistically submit to a leader and seek to sadistically dominate others to escape their weakness and fear. The leader would help individuals imaginarily aggrandize themselves amid their economic and social decline (Adorno, 1972, pp. 418-419; 2003, p. 355).

However, the psychological interpretation belittles the far-right picture of freedom, which resides in a religious and conservative individual. “Freedom comes from the heart and depends on inspiring symbols deeply rooted in the culture of millennia”, writes Carvalho (2013, p. 66). “God in the heart” later became one of Bolsonaro’s campaign slogans (Gaspar, 2022). Such a picture of freedom goes back to Catholic integrism and integralism (Lynch & Cassimiro, 2022, pp. 64-65, 73-74; Gonçalves & Caldeira, 2020, pp. 39, 138) as well as traditionalism (Sedgwick, 2004, p. 248; Teitelbaum, 2020, p. 227). All these worldviews claimed a hierarchical, natural, and authentic order that has been shaken by modernity.

In turn, the social groups approach suggests that far-right discourses target religious, military, and economic elites. Indeed, elitism and contempt for the weak are typical of any authoritarian ideology. So was the case of the Brazilian military dictatorship, which did not try to raise the masses during its more than twenty years in power but conversely to demobilize them through propaganda of a peaceful people and technocratic elites. The regime’s violence was masked via depoliticization and depersonalization (Fico, 2024, pp. 49-55, 94-99, 166-77). Only with the election of Bolsonaro, did integralist doctrines associated with personal leadership become influential again (Caldeira, 2025, pp. 6, 37-39). “I really am the Constitution,” Bolsonaro declared, thus justifying his participation in an act for military intervention in other powers, preaching “Now it’s the people in power” (Schuquel, 2020).

Fascist and contemporary far rights preach a sort of elitism composed of the masses instead of specific groups (Löwenthal, 2017, pp. 115-116; Sedgwick, 2004, p. 108). Umberto Eco has called it “popular elitism” (1995, p. 14). Because the people are hierarchically structured, the leader despises his subordinates and each of them despises those below. Such a structure can be expanded to all strata: capitalist production, public administration, racial relations, and the patriarchal family. For the Brazilian lower classes, the opposition between the ‘good citizen’ (*cidadão de bem*) and the ‘thug’, which is determined by private and subjective traits such as love of family, work ethic, and religious faith, entitles their moral participation in society’s repressive functions (Rocha *et al.*, 2021, p. 125; Souza, 2024, p. 213). For the Brazilian middle classes, the acceptance of exploitative wages for domestic workers reinforced their sense of social superiority (*cf.* Carvalho, 1998, p. 177; Sorosini, 2013). For a man, humiliating women may be the only proof of his superiority while facing poorly paid jobs. For a woman, having a black maid may be the only proof of her superiority while dealing with care obligations (Lago, 2022, pp. 42-43). As mentioned earlier, Bolsonarism invites people to feel like members of a moral elite, a joy shared with past fascists and integralists (*cf.* Trindade, 2016, p. 63; Gonçalves & Caldeira, 2020, p. 187).

The masses’ ability to bring about freedom and spiritual regeneration through hitherto lost values is emphasized by integralism and Bolsonarism alike. What has changed in between? Above all, the state was the very utopian recovery of integral life through the overcoming of contradictions between liberalism and communism, and Christianity and nationalism. The integral state would be an identity between Christian values and the state (Cassimiro, 2018, pp. 144, 152, 157). “Integralism imposed on the militant a way of being, behaving, dressing, speaking, keeping quiet, walking, getting married, dying, beautifying, in other words, a very specific way of being integralist” (Gonçalves & Caldeira, 2020, p. 46). The foundation of a totalitarian state remained a guideline for neo-integralist movements (Caldeira, 2025, p. 25).

Once more, the transformation of the Brazilian far right can be tracked in Carvalho’s writings. In his earlier books, as analyzed above, he treated the state as the guardian of social hierarchy, which should subordinate all social organizations to religious authority. The nuance of Bolsonarism in comparison with past analogous movements is that the strength of the state came to be considered an obstacle to freedom:

The modern citizen would like to kick all his responsibilities to the state: he does not want to protect his home, but to be protected by the police; he does not want to educate himself to educate his children, but to hand them over to technicians who will turn them into politically correct robots... he does not want to grow up, have a conscience, be free and responsible: he wants a father-state to carry him around and against whom he can still throw tantrums, stomping his foot in defense of his ‘rights’ (Carvalho, 2013, p. 66).

Bolsonaro’s discourse follows this new pattern:

We have something very important to defend: we have principles, we have a tradition and we have freedom. We are against abortion, against gender ideology, against the legalization of drugs; we defend the family, private property, freedom of weapons [sic]... We can even live

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without oxygen, but never without freedom (Estado de Minas, 2022).

The national state is no longer seen as an end in itself, as with the fascist and integralist enlistment of masses in compulsory organizations, but only as a means of imposing religiously-infused individualistic values. The new right-wing agenda has converted the totally devoted citizen into an entrepreneur, whose interest is to turn political influence immediately into money, and vice versa, through social media, publicity, cryptocurrencies, etc. (Nunes, 2022, pp. 91-3). That seems to be the case with other far-right movements, such as in the United States (*cf.* Brown, 2019; Paxton, 2021) and France (*cf.* Traverso, 2023).

Most importantly, this new arrangement in an older world-picture accommodates an ultra-conservative freedom (the Christian authenticity) alongside an ultra-individualist one (the absence of state impediments). Such a compromise is based on the immunization of both cultural traditions and profit imperatives against experiences of negation, questioning, and learning. Insofar as freedom does not presuppose even legal procedures, it marries well with traditional hierarchies and force. It conveys the idea of renewal against a corrupt society and that all means are authorized against the enemy, thus dismissing obedience to public rules and rational justification. Aggressive rhetoric, curse words, acid humor, and shocking performances, especially if directed against minorities, become the proof of this freedom as authenticity (Rocha *et al.*, 2021, p. 7, 71-77; Calil, 2021, p. 71).

Like Bolsonaro, anyone can exclaim “freedom above everything!” (*cf.* Mendonça, 2022), regardless of having a specific interpretation of ‘freedom’ in mind. Having a world-picture that puts freedom on a very high level is not a problem. To show someone why we should use a word like ‘freedom’ in a non-authoritarian way, we need to explain what is illusory about it and propose a better way. Rather than restricting freedom to capital accumulation and christianity, freedom should indeed be above everything.

#### **2.4. Inalienable**

A world-picture is said to be inalienable because it is holistically structured and thereby cannot be wholly doubted or made conscious. Doubt itself only makes sense within a language game and, therefore, logically presupposes something that is beyond doubt (OC 24, 370, 519), which Wittgenstein calls “certainty” (OC 115). Take an example: is there an outer world? This radical doubt is constituted, in part, by the phrases ‘there is’ and ‘outer world’ and so by the distinction between external and internal, or physical and mental (OC 35-7). Certainty belongs here neither to sensory perception nor to the reality of objects, but to the use of the concepts (Iczkovits, 2012, pp. 120-124). If I agree that ‘there is no outer world’, the sentence is confusing because it undermines the very distinction that enables me to talk about existence or illusion (OC 56, 369). If I doubt that physical objects can be distinguished from mental ones, it seems I did not understand the statement (OC 81). The radical doubt is not true or false, but senseless insofar as it presupposes the meanings used to state the doubt.

When I claim to ‘know’ something, I must be ready to provide grounds that are more certain than the claim itself (OC 14, 243, 250, 504). That does not happen within the level of

certainty, which only defines propositions that involve truth (OC 307, 497). It is applied to justify knowledge, not the other way around. Thus, it is not true or false (OC 94, 205). Certainties and knowledge do not belong to the same logical category (OC 54, 308). In Wittgensteinian terms, a certainty is “the groundlessness of our believing” (OC 166), “a language game where doubt... does not enter” (OC 371), or “our frame of reference” (OC 411).

Nevertheless, as a “body of knowledge” (OC 288), a world-picture can house worldviews and theories, even though its task does not require reflection or well-crafted systematicity (OC 167, 236). It “[does] not form a homogeneous mass” (OC 213), but a mixture or “host of interdependent propositions” (OC 274) instead. It may appeal to rituals, signs, gestures, and attitudes, which underlie thinking and action (OC 381, 404). “The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life” (OC 105). A world-picture manifests in practices, institutions, and theories that overlap, support, and complement each other (OC 102, 167, 275, 281, 298). “What stands fast does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it” (OC 144). For its holistic structure, a world-picture is called a “form of life” (OC 358).

All far-right movements employ traditional values, although they give them a specific, anti-universal meaning. Christianity is converted into an endogamous and nationalist religion to oppose the secular state and the Pope’s humanist and ecological doctrine (Lago, 2019; Barbosa & Casarões, 2022). Corruption is attributed to left-wingers when they confront conservative leaders’ “small-scale corruption” as a “disguise to cover up infinitely greater crimes... the narco-guerrilla, international terrorism, continental revolution” (Carvalho, 1994/2014, pp. 133-134). After rising along with Bolsonaro, members of the Judiciary who had been active against patrimonialism were the first to be discredited and excluded from the government (G1, 2020). Not surprisingly, Bolsonaro’s government was rapidly reduced to two main forces: economic neoliberalism and bureaucratic rationality, that is, the Economy Minister Paulo Guedes and the military (Fausto, 2019). After losing influence and cabinet positions in Bolsonaro’s government, Carvalho could only grumble that communists were still in command of the country (Dias, 2021). Far-right forces expelled the so-called “ideological Ministers”. From a historical perspective, far-right governments typically exclude or eliminate the supporters of cultural control over capitalism as quickly as they gain power and begin establishing a political regime (Paxton, 2004, pp. 53, 146-147).

As many scholars have noticed, conservative values are ceaselessly desecrated by their far-right proclaimers (Neumann, 2009, p. 39; Löwenthal, 2017, p. 47; Adorno, 2003, p. 362; Paxton, 2004, p. 219; Brown, 2019, pp. 161-188). The far right builds such a holistic world-picture that their leaders and agitators never bother to justify their contradictions (Neumann, 2009, pp. 437-438; Eco, 1995, p. 7; Paxton, 2004, pp. 15-20).

Surprisingly, what sheds light on these belief systems without contradictions is the universalist perspective, which the far-right seeks to deactivate (Löwenthal, 2017, p. 47; Habermas, 1985, pp. 49-50; Dunker, 2017, pp. 296-298). The burden of having to justify traditions, administration, and economics through general criteria, which could be accepted by every other citizen, has to be curtailed as much as possible. The far-right’s destructive force is not directed against all values but against their universalist interpretation. This is

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why not only old-fashioned values, but also ideas such as ‘freedom’, ‘truth’, and ‘democracy’ are invoked. A world-picture is based on people’s values and interests, especially the most immediate ones, because it is related to a form of life. Philosophers, scientists, and opinion makers cannot wish to tell ‘the manipulated ones’ the nature of their true values and interests, as some intellectuals intend (*e.g.* Souza, 2024). The best they can do is to talk about the obstacles to their universal acceptance and realization.

So far, the concept of world-picture as practical, implicit, collective, and inalienable ground has not had much explanatory power for politics: the field of contingency *par excellence*. Wittgenstein does not doubt that we can “convert” people to, or “persuade” them of a new world-picture (OC 92, 262, 608-612, 669). The point is whether changes in world-pictures can be based on questioning, justification, and learning. Are they like silent beliefs? Are they independent of reasons through and through? Is any argument that concerns world-pictures ungrounded, leading to nonsense as some commentators sustain (*cf.* Fogelin, 1985, pp. 5-6; Moyal-Sharrock, 2005, pp. 84-90; Spica, 2012, pp. 90-3)? Well, Wittgenstein speaks repeatedly about “reasonable” (*vernünftig*) doubts and persons (OC 19, 108, 219-220, 252-254, 323-327, 334-336). He writes that certainties have a grounding (*Begründung*) “of a different kind” (OC 563). Although world-pictures are fundamental, implicit, and somewhat visceral, that does not make them rationally incommensurable (Pritchard, 2021, p. 1123).

A world-picture is first and foremost a picture. That means that it has no clear epistemic content. The isolated picture is “dead”, so to speak (PI 139-141, 291). In a famous Wittgensteinian example (PI 454): the arrow symbol does not point by itself, it depends on the application that a living being makes of it. Beyond that practical use, a world-picture can be expressed as a proposition, such as ‘I have a hand’, ‘the earth exists’, etc. – even if they cannot be expressed and justified as a whole since the notions of ‘having’, ‘existing’, and ‘being’ remain vague. There is no incompatibility, but rather complementarity between rules of action and descriptions. Therefore, a picture can and sometimes needs to be partially clarified and made intelligible (Kober, 2005, p. 234; Ohtani, 2018, p. 121-127).

World-pictures are also described as “hinges” (*Angeln*) (OC 341). “We just *can’t* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put” (OC 343). The metaphor conveys not only the fixed and implicit side of certainties, which are beyond any doubt, but also their indeterminate and mobile side. In a world-picture “some things stand unshakeably fast and some are more or less liable to shift” (OC 144). As an internal connection to language, the hinge is mobile. “[I]t is a hinge on which your dispute can turn” (OC 655). The metaphor indicates that certainty does not make argumentation and knowledge irrelevant, because it must be coherent with other certainties and knowledge (OC 142, 275). The very moment a certainty is introduced into language, it starts to admit some doubt, failure, and specifications. Language does not replace ingrained practices, but it develops, refines, and transforms behaviors based on certainty (Kober, 2005, p. 233; García-Valdecasas, 2022, pp. 42-43).

Given that a certainty can be partially modifiable and intelligible, to what extent can

it also be said ‘reasonable’? Now I can resume the main conceptual distinction. A world-picture is nothing more than a few firm and incomplete points of reference in inner, social, or outer worlds. Wittgenstein’s style, once called “sketches of landscapes” (PI, preface), illustrates this point: a bulk of remarks without clear connection between themselves that crisscross over a wide field of thought. On the contrary, a worldview is the intelligible representation of these firm beliefs contained in world-pictures. It makes our form of life conscious (OC 422). Although a worldview does not need propositions, but rather stories and images, it already provides an articulated vision, as in myths and theories (OC 95).

The relationship between world-pictures and worldviews can be clarified through the metaphor of the “river-bed”, where there is no clear distinction between the bottom and the sand washed away by the waters (OC 99). The same sentence can be used with different statuses. “The same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing” (OC 98). For example, the sentence ‘This is a hand’ can either be rated a constitutive rule, normatively prescribing how one should call the end part of the arm beyond the wrist in English – and here it articulates no truth, but simply translates an unjustified certainty that I have a hand; or it can be looked at as a piece of information, since it may descriptively say something new in a particular situation – and then it may be a true or false statement (OC 87, 319, 401, 412). There are situations in which arguments make sense interacting with a world-picture (OC 461, 467). There is no strict separation between it and worldviews (OC 52, 319, 653), but a grading off from the circumstances where it becomes meaningful to argue about descriptions and concepts that are merged in the whole picture (Kober, 2005, p. 229; 2018, pp. 454-455). Through language, worldviews can develop, refine and transform world-pictures (Iczkovits, 2012, pp. 138-140).

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The political relevance of the world-picture category is the impossibility of criticizing all our social practices and belief systems, only to question and clarify them partially and gradually. Much as some chunks always remain obscure and unjustifiable, they can serve as starting points for questioning the far-right world-picture. The same picture can be seen in a completely different way (PI 401). Adorno (1965, p. 434) has previously noted that firm convictions explored by far-right propaganda, such as not wanting to be treated as a ‘sucker’, can work as democratic “boomerangs”. Far-right fundamentalist worldviews are not to be confused with the majority of Brazilian citizens who have supported or still support Bolsonaro because they are partially convinced, politically resigned or misinformed by some of his discourses. Even within engaged groups, like gig workers, there are many ambiguities (Machado, 2024). To reach out to the majority, there is no point in resorting to theories, great ideals, or foreign cultures (whose abstract structure does not touch practical certainties), but rather to justifications of the everyday language. The limits to authoritarian subversion subsist in common opinions and attitudes (*cf.* OC 445). These can work like loose pebbles in the streams of mass communication. They allow the recapture of emancipatory elements inside prevailing world-pictures, as I showed in the pictures of crisis, enemy, freedom, and values.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

As far as I know, this is the first time that Wittgenstein's philosophy of certainties has been applied to understand the far right. To recapitulate: (1.1) the world-picture approach acknowledges the affinities between populism and fascism, rather than focusing solely on apparently new forms of political representation; (1.2) it takes seriously the discourses oriented to the masses in the place of an incidental coalition of social groups; (1.3) it does not turn directly to psychology when accounting for bureaucratic and economic imperatives; (1.4) it distinguishes practical, implicit, and holistic language uses from theoretical, conscious, and systematic worldviews; (1.5) it avoids slipping into totalitarianism or atomization while talking about cultural causes for democratic backsliding. The concept of world-picture encompasses far-right resistance to reasoning about society through rhetoric (anti-intellectual), entrenched values (cultural), and capitalist imperatives (systemic).

I also asked how new Bolsonarism was in comparison with analogous movements in the past. I concluded that its specificities are: (2.1) in contrast to integralism, a capitalist regime without systematic welfare or social protection; and (2.3) in contrast to military dictatorship, a political domination through mass mobilization. Even if there is no single definition of the far right in Brazil and elsewhere, this does not exclude "family resemblances" (PI 66-67) between its previous strategies and uprisings (*cf.* Eco, 1995). The miscellaneous and multilayered fact of right-wing radicalism justifies talking about a world-picture.

While avoiding mistakes of previous approaches, I contend that economic crises still trigger both political legitimation and rationality crises in modern societies. Moreover, legal institutions and party coalitions that restrain violent mass movements should not be underestimated. Yet, the world-picture approach does not theoretically explain capitalist crises or political struggles. Therefore, a major limitation of the proposal is that the addition of a materialistic worldview is needed to fully comprehend the far right.

Ultimately, I established some "road signs" (PI 85) for orientation amid the pictures of (2.1) crisis, (2.2) enemy, (2.3) freedom, and (2.4) traditional values. These fixed and mobile points can be rearranged to avoid far-right interpretations. Other pictures could be explored, such as the people and anti-globalism. If we want politics to turn, "the hinges must stay put" (OC 343). In any case, another limitation of this study is how contemporary means of communication may impair reversals in world-pictures. I have only shown that everyday language holds emancipatory senses that can transform practical certainties.

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