

RESEARCH

The future is not for negotiation. Anti-political Apocalypticism in Right-Wing Populism and beyond

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Abstract

This article examines the transformation of apocalyptic narratives in late-modern society, with a focus on the right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD). Building on Blühdorn's (2024) theory of *untenability*, the article argues that apocalypticism has evolved from a utopian-emancipatory narrative to an anti-political manifestation of disillusionment. Based on narrative interviews with AfD voters, the analysis reveals that past promises of emancipation are now seen as empty, leading to anti-political end-time narratives that reject democratic negotiation. This form of apocalypticism is a response to the broader sense of futurelessness in contemporary society, where the future is no longer experienced as a matter of collective political negotiation.

Keywords: Apocalypticism, Late-Modernity, Right-wing Populism, Future, Untenability, Qualitative Research

1. Introduction

Apocalypse has experienced a notable resurgence, particularly within contemporary political movements. Various social groups express their concerns and demands relating to current crises with eschatological fervour and almost religious intensity (see Gittinger 2024). Climate movements such as Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion and Last Generation utilise end-time imagery to emphasise the urgency of environmental collapse. However, it is not only progressive climate activism that brings the

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apocalypse into the political sphere. In the United States, for example, many people believe that we are living in the end times, particularly within certain religious and socio-structural groups (Diamant 2022). Apocalyptic beliefs are particularly prevalent among white evangelicals, and end-time expectations – particularly the belief in the Rapture – are widespread. These narratives have become politically consequential, popularised by Tim LaHaye’s Left Behind series (LaHaye and Jenkins 2001 [1995]) and widely circulated through film and the media. As Gorski (2020) argues, evangelical apocalypticism now plays a significant role in shaping attitudes towards democracy. Notably, this same demographic, in which apocalyptic beliefs are strongest, overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump in the 2024 election (Rotolo 2025).

Together, these examples demonstrate that the apocalypse is not just a literary or theological motif, but also a vibrant cultural genre and a powerful political force in contemporary society. Its social significance, beyond the narrower sense of theological eschatology, has long been recognised and appreciated (Goldstein 2024; Wojcik 1999). Considering the historical power and future inevitability of its metaphors, Keller (2021: xiii) argues that reappraising the apocalypse and its stories would raise awareness of contemporary crises. After all, as Keller emphasises, “*apocalypsis* does not signify ‘the end of the world’. Not time’s up, lights out. Close down the creation. On the contrary, it means not to close but to *dis/close*. To *open* what is otherwise shut.” (Keller 2021: xvi)

Hence, the concept of apocalypse has been widely recognised in social sciences (Berger et al. 2021; Betz and Bosančić 2021a; Nagel et al. 2008), and is no longer confined to the stereotypical vulgar semantics of *catastrophism*, *doom and gloom scenarios*, or *pessimism*, but is considered in serious theological and conceptual terms (Hall 2009). It provides a symbolic framework that has been passed down through history and has always been used to cope with profound disruption. It has been imbued with all kinds of meanings. However, the meaning or use of the apocalypse motif in interpreting collective crises is changeable. Its significance for political mobilisation, ideology or democracy remains undetermined. The apocalyptic nature of right-wing movements (Barkun 1990; Nagel 2021; Steinzor 2024) and contemporary populism (Brown 2017, 2023) has already been noted in various places. Conversely, apocalypticism is evident in the crisis communication strategies employed by climate and environmental movements. Notably, it is occasionally ascribed an emancipatory function, serving to galvanise individuals for progressive change (Grillmayr and Hentschel 2024).

Although apocalypticism is part of the interpretive repertoire of modern societies in general (Gerhards 1999), and of conservative and right-wing thought in particular (Roepert 2024; Schilk 2021), something has nonetheless developed and shifted. Rather than describing the nature and intellectual history of right-wing apocalypticism, this article seeks to contextualise contemporary apocalyptic narratives within

right-wing populism from the perspective of a different, formerly emancipatory form of apocalypticism. This approach places the narratives within the sociological framework of *untenability* as described by Blühdorn (2024). Historically, apocalyptic crisis narratives were associated with the prospect of liberation from nuclear threats and environmental destruction. Today, however, they appear as anti-emancipatory and anti-political interpretive frameworks, particularly in right-wing populism. Right-wing populism is used here as an example to examine how contemporary apocalypticism forecloses the future rather than being a transformative narrative and hinders democratic negotiation about the future.

In summary, this paper argues that the socio-historical shift in apocalyptic crisis interpretations reflects broader transformations in contemporary late modern society. To develop this argument, Section 1 discusses apocalypticism as a core element of modern crisis interpretation, characterised by the tension between opening up transformative future perspectives and closing them off with pessimistic narratives. Drawing on the work of Jacob Taubes and Carl Schmitt, the argument is made that this tension is dissolving in a worrying way: apocalypticism is increasingly symbolising a retreat from politics and democracy in their liberal and deliberative forms, instead aligning with an *anti-political* dynamic.

The theory of untenability (Blühdorn 2024) is an effective way of capturing this development in terms of social history and social theory: Section 2 traces the evolution of apocalyptic narratives from the eco-emancipatory movements of the 1970s and 1980s to today. Using the theoretical framework of *untenability*, it explains how past countercultural visions of emancipation and apocalypse have transformed into anti-political, libertarian-authoritarian countercultures. In the context of post-industrial society and the *second modernity*, apocalyptic narratives assumed an eco-emancipatory character, framing the future as a site of possible transformation and salvation. However, *late modern* society has exhausted its repertoire of emancipatory and liberatory apocalyptic narratives. These contradictions become particularly visible in the attempt to confront immense challenges – such as the climate crisis – through democratic and socially just means, while simultaneously striving to uphold the promises of prosperity, freedom, and emancipation. Such crisis-ridden tensions (Dörre 2022) expose the multiple forms of *untenability* that define the present, highlighting the growing gap between aspirations for societal transformation and the structural constraints of late modernity.

Sections 3 and 4 thus build on empirical material from a broader study on apocalyptic worldviews among AfD voters. This is because, firstly, as previously mentioned, apocalyptic motifs have long been prevalent in the political far-right. However, this article does not focus on right-wing populism in order to examine a specific political phenomenon in isolation. Instead, the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party serves as an empirical lens through which to analyse

broader socio-cultural developments. Populist parties and movements are widely understood not only as political actors, but also as manifestations of deeper social changes and shifts in political culture. In this sense, examining the apocalyptic narratives found within the AfD milieu allows us to trace how contemporary society interprets crisis and imagines – or fails to imagine – collective futures.

The argument is that contemporary apocalypticism within right-wing populism, examined through narrative interviews with AfD voters, can only be understood in relation to the earlier emancipatory nature of apocalyptic discourse. While today's narratives still draw on references to past emancipatory projects, they now express deep disillusionment with the promises they made and the untenability of those promises. In this shift, apocalypticism has lost its transformative power: what once served as a rhetorical means to secure the future now operates as an anti-political narrative that forecloses it. Here, *anti-political* describes a political form of apocalypticism that rejects negotiation, deliberation, and emancipatory transformation as meaningful ways to shape the future. It is a political worldview grounded in disillusionment with past promises of progress and opposed to liberal democratic politics.

While this material is illustrative rather than exhaustive, it suggests that, within parts of the political spectrum, a crisis-driven awareness of the untenability of both emancipatory promises and apocalyptic scenarios has given rise to new end-time visions. However, these narratives reject emancipatory or transformative potential, instead imagining a post-apocalyptic society following the *downfall of the downfall*.

2. Between opening and closing: Apocalypticism in modern interpretations of crisis

Apocalypticism is not a relic of biblical or theological tradition; it is a narrative genre found almost universally, providing meaning, solace and hope by thinking from the end. This is why it did not disappear in modernity, but instead became central to how modern societies interpret and reflect on their crises and contradictions (Keller 2021; Gerhards 1999). As Vondung (1988) demonstrated, apocalyptic thinking is much more than a metaphor for catastrophe; it adheres to a specific narrative structure centred on crisis, judgement, and redemption. This triadic structure distinguishes apocalyptic narratives from purely utopian or dystopian ones. While utopias envision ideal futures and dystopias warn of societal decline, apocalypticism fuses the imminence of collapse with the hope – or threat – of a decisive rupture and radical transformation. It carries a theological-eschatological legacy that continues to shape political and historical meaning-making in the present.

Gerhards (1999) examines how modernisation, characterised by rationalisation, social differentiation and technicisation, fosters a sense of societal fragmentation. Apocalyptic narratives respond to this by offering totalising worldviews. On

the one hand, apocalypticism is a “regulatory counter-programme” (Gerhards 1999: 139) against the complexity of modernity and the myriad experiences of contingency encountered within it. On the other hand, however, apocalyptic narratives are not static. Gerhards demonstrates how apocalyptic interpretations evolve in the modern era and how they adapt. Currently, apocalyptic narratives are appearing in an increasing number of contexts, such as in relation to the climate crisis, wars, technological upheavals caused by artificial intelligence, and the crisis of democracies. These developments raise fundamental questions about the extent to which “apocalyptic politics in the Anthropocene” (Harper and Specht 2022) will be emancipatory, democratic and inclusive, or cataclysmic, resolutely authoritarian, anti-liberal and anti-political. It would not do justice to the situation to simply classify apocalypticism as either progressive-transformative or regressive-authoritarian.

For this reason, Jacob Taubes’ reflections on political theology are instructive. Taubes, often referred to as the 20th century’s “Professor of the Apocalypse” (Müller 2022), deeply explored the intersections of politics, crisis, and eschatology, striving to reclaim the emancipatory potential of apocalyptic thought. The appearance of apocalyptic thought challenges democracy in a way that Taubes already grasped when he asked “whether [...] certain tensions in the symbolic canon between religious language and political rhetoric might not indicate a critical state in the spiritual and temporal structure of our society” (Taubes 1955: 57). Taubes did not merely assume structural parallels between theological and political concepts. Rather, he believed that the collective use of eschatological images to make sense of, and position oneself within, contemporary crises indicated a certain state of social disintegration. By analysing such interrelations, Taubes hoped to overcome it. This analytical perspective remains very important for contemporary apocalypse analyses. Nevertheless, Taubes remained convinced of the revolutionary power of apocalypticism: He considered “occidental eschatology”, as it can be found in a secular form in Marx, as a utopian force capable of redressing misery, injustice and exploitation. “Apocalypse is revolutionary because it beholds the turning point not in some indeterminate future but entirely proximate” (Taubes 2009 [1946]: 10).

Contrasting Taubes’s position with that of Carl Schmitt helps us to better understand the consequences of eschatological claims and theories for democratic political orders. It also clarifies Taubes’s approach to critically analysing such claims in the realm of politics. Although Taubes’ political theology recognises structural analogies between theological and political concepts in a similar manner to Schmitt’s, the two approaches diverge sharply in their aims. Schmitt famously argued that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological terms” (Schmitt 2020 [1922]: 36). However, while Schmitt employed this framework to critique liberal democracy and assert the necessity of power and sovereignty

in times of crisis, Taubes sought to expose the limitations and dangers of such power-centric approaches.

Schmitt's emphasis on the "exceptional state" ("Ausnahmезustand") and sovereign decision-making draws on eschatological ideas to legitimise political authority. His political theology examines the meta-juridical foundations of law through a "sociology of legal concepts" rooted in their theological origins (Collet and Herbst 2023: 14–16). Schmitt's eschatological framework, however, normatively opposes liberal pluralism, which he views as dangerously chaotic. While this interpretation oversimplifies Christian-Jewish eschatology by ignoring its temporal nuances (Ostovich 2007), it has nonetheless influenced contemporary right-wing intellectual discourse (Schilk 2021). His anti-pluralist and anti-liberal political theology of sovereignty is frequently invoked in political theory to describe threats to democracy (Karolewski et al. 2023).

In turn, Taubes not only warns against assertions of power that are anti-liberal and anti-democratic and justified by eschatology. More relevant to our context, however, is his recognition of the danger posed by nihilistic claims of doom.

"The apocalyptic principle contains within itself a power that destroys and a power that shapes. Depending on the situation and task, one of the two components comes to the fore, but neither may be absent. If the demonic, destructive element is missing, the frozen order, the respective positivity of the world, cannot be overcome. But if the 'new covenant' does not shine through in the destructive element, the revolution inevitably sinks into nothingness" (Taubes 2009 [1946]: 10).

Thus, apocalyptic claims can emerge from various sources and be motivated by different intentions. As soon as they come into contact with a political or democratic order, certain tensions are created. Some contemporary authors emphasise the 'formative' and transformative potential of apocalypticism today. Stümer (2024), for example, interprets modern apocalyptic expressions as a vision of emancipatory possibilities – a way to transcend collective powerlessness under late capitalist hegemony and envision alternative, more equitable societies. However, others, particularly in the context of the climate crisis and the Anthropocene, have demonstrated that apocalypticism frequently embodies a "post-political ontology" (Lövbrand et al. 2015), whereby apocalyptic rhetoric can stifle political or democratic debates about the future. In contemporary right-wing populism, apocalypticism takes a different form. It is characterised by an anti-liberal and fundamentally anti-political *ontology*: as will be demonstrated, right-wing populists regard the future as something that should not be subject to political – let alone democratic – negotiation.

The rejection of political negotiation, whether liberal or deliberative, as a means of addressing crises and shaping the future, reveals clear parallels between post-political apocalypticism, exemplified by the technocratic mantra *follow the science*, and the anti-political apocalypticism of right-wing populism. However, the argument here is not that contemporary society, shaken by multiple crises, some of which are on a planetary scale, universally aligns with Schmitt's crisis framework. Rather, it emphasises the absence of, and disillusionment with, the emancipatory and utopian dimensions that are central to Taubes's thinking.

Above all, this can be explained by the fact that the apocalyptic narratives found in right-wing populism, similar to those in climate protests, are not merely a reaction to current crises and challenges. Their anti-political nature, devoid of any emancipatory hope of renewal or improvement, has its roots in the history of apocalyptic crisis thinking since the *second modernity* of the 1970s, as defined by Blühdorn (2024). In this sense, contemporary late-modern apocalypses carry with them a sense of disappointment and disillusionment over the failure of the *true* renewal, emancipation or transformation that was once hoped for. The paper's main finding is that among voters of the right-wing populist AfD, the transformative potential of apocalypticism has eroded, giving way to a dominant anti-political *ontology*. The pressing question is: how did this shift occur, and what does it reveal about late modern society as a whole? The argument is that this development is less rooted in the immediate crises of the present and more in reflections on historical trajectories.

3. From formative to 'untenable' Apocalypse: Shapeshifting Apocalypse in Late Modernity

Contemporary society's engagement with apocalyptic imagery and the resurgence of eschatological themes appear deeply rooted in the state of polycrisis (Janzwood and Homer-Dixon 2022; Tooze 2022). In recent years, we have faced a web of overlapping, interconnected global crises that overwhelm the capacity of nation-states to respond effectively. This creates a pervasive sense of entrapment in an unmanageable global predicament, fuelling pessimism and fear about the future (Horn 2018) and amplifying perceptions of democracy's inadequacy. The complex and interconnected nature of these crises, coupled with the absence of obvious solutions, exacerbates this disillusionment.

These sentiments manifest in various ways, ranging from the apocalyptic fervour that fuels climate movements such as Last Generation and Extinction Rebellion (Cassegård and Thörn 2022; Skrimshire 2014), to narratives of "counter-dystopias" that depict a climate dictatorship (Neuper-Doppler 2021), and through anxieties surrounding the pandemic (Prisching 2021), conspiracy theories, and right-wing fears such as the "Great Replacement" (Roepert 2021). Together, these narratives reflect a

growing unease with democracy's perceived inability to navigate the complexities of late-modern crises.

While the term *polycrisis* holds some merit, it overlooks the broader historical context of late-modern societal development. As discussed in the previous section, apocalyptic interpretations are integral to the modern crisis discourse, and they thus play a significant role in post-war political movements. Apocalyptic themes have long been prevalent, seen in movements such as militant pro-life activism and abortion rights advocacy since the 1970s (Mason 2002), as well as in "conspiracy theories" (Barkun 2003). In the 21st century, climate change has further amplified these narratives, evolving from mere symbolic warnings (Jackson and Jensen 2022) to subjects of social science inquiry, examining their cultural and social roles (Alber 2021; Riesch 2021). In particular, within the sociology of knowledge, these interpretations are analysed as "apocalyptic crisis hermeneutics" (Nagel 2008).

Apocalyptic interpretations and narratives have a long history, but they have particular significance in the post-war period of Western democracies. Since the 1970s, these interpretations and narratives have grown in popularity, spreading beyond the intellectual and theological discourses of figures such as Schmitt and Taubes.

In addition to right-wing culturally pessimistic apocalypses (Roepert 2024), motifs of apocalypse also played a significant role in social movements opposing the civilian and military use of nuclear technology in the 1970s and 1980s. Ulrich Beck's (1992) analysis of the scientific and technological risks of industrial societies reflects the mood of the time and provides a discursive boost. His work is sometimes viewed as reflecting the chiliastic atmosphere of the 1980s, exacerbated by technological and environmental consequences (Doering-Manteuffel and Raphael 2012: 85). Before that, Günther Anders' now-famous study of the atomic bomb placed it at the centre of an anthropology from which he derived the title-giving admonition of an "apocalypse blindness" (Anders 2002 [1956]: 259–344). Radkau (2017: 131–170) illustrates how, during the Atomic Age of post-war German history, hopes for the future oscillated between fear and hope, and were initially discussed by leftists in utopian terms, later evolving into apocalyptic distress. The latter, of course, in the spirit of overarching emancipatory concerns. Jungk's book "Der Atomstaat" (Jungk 1977), an important work for the anti-nuclear movement in Germany and beyond, is a prime example of this. Combining sharp criticism of nuclear energy with social and political issues, it actually became a style-setter for the anti-nuclear movement by problematising the technological and authoritarian aspects of nuclear power.

The civil opposition to the use of nuclear technology in the 1970s and 1980s aimed not only to express passive oppression and fear of an impending apocalypse, but to emphasise the urgency of the core concerns of social movements. In Germany, protests against nuclear power – and later against environmental destruction – gave

rise to a new form of social movement, marked by decentralised grassroots democracy, countercultural emancipatory values, and participatory engagement. In her comparative study of Germany and Great Britain, Oberloskamp (2022) highlights that despite cultural and political-economic differences, the movements shared an emancipatory, open-minded, and hopeful momentum. Anti-nuclear activists mobilised apocalyptic fears and imagery not as a passive reaction to impending doom, but as a means of highlighting critical issues such as the democratisation and social negotiation of political decisions, the politicisation of blind faith in technology, and the collective search for alternative paths forward.

Apocalypticism played a pivotal role in the eco-emancipatory movements of the 1980s, serving as a utopian expression of the urgency of the cause. Blühdorn (2024) builds his theory of *untenability/unsustainability* on this foundation: Although belief in the apocalyptic threat remains prevalent today, it is now associated with a sense of political and social impotence. This is in contrast to the 1970s and 1980s, when movements were more confident in their organisational and political strength. Although climate and environmental concerns persist, they are no longer associated with emancipatory promises. These promises have increasingly become *untenable* and *unsustainable*. In the shadow of late-modern apocalypses, alternative visions of the future are emerging in the form of technocratic, illiberal and undemocratic social orders.

„For the numerically strong generation of those who have been socialised in and with the New Social Movements since the late sixties and who once launched this project, this double untenability means the traumatic demise of their self-understanding, their narratives of meaning and their world. But the demise of their own world does not mean that the planet is uninhabitable or that humanity is coming to an end. Rather, it opens up the prospect of a new modern society, a next society, that unfolds after the (narrative of the) demise of humanity.” (Blühdorn 2024: 18; own translation)

The following reconstruction of the experience suspected by Blühdorn will examine how voters of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party perceive that something from their past, particularly an emancipatory project, has become *untenable*. In response, they rebel by supporting a right-wing populist party and adopting a new apocalyptic narrative. They draw on past apocalyptic themes, but invert them. This paper will demonstrate how this apocalyptic thinking shapes the interpretation of events among AfD voters, revealing a newly emerging social order. The key elements within these interpretations that are fundamentally anti-emancipatory and anti-political will be highlighted.

4. Apocalypticism as a sociological Heuristic: Empirical Approach

This analysis aims to do more than simply reconstruct apocalyptic interpretations among Alternative for Germany (AfD) voters in order to identify a specific form of right-wing populist apocalypticism. Instead, it examines the current form of these interpretations and, above all, how they can be understood in light of biographical and historical experiences. By doing so, the analysis will contribute to a broader understanding of late-modern conceptions of the future and democracy, as well as their historical development. This line of enquiry necessitates a sociology-of-knowledge approach.

Therefore, apocalypticism is understood through the lens of a sociology of knowledge as a narrative form that is both historically inherited and socially embedded, through which people interpret crises, history and political change. It is not confined to intellectual discourse, but is firmly rooted in popular, everyday understandings. These narrative patterns can be observed, for example, in how voters of the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) construct meaning around contemporary upheavals. The focus is on non-intellectual manifestations of apocalypticism, which reveal a peculiar form lacking what Taubes once described as its 'formative power'. Rather than articulating visions of emancipation or collective transformation, these narratives reflect a sense of disillusionment, closure, and retreat from politics. From a sociological perspective, today's pervasive doomsday tone should therefore not be dismissed as mere social despair. Rather, it should be examined as a cultural interpretative practice in which the end of the world functions as a means of socio-critical reflection on late-modern society's unfulfilled promises and contradictions (cf. Stümer et al. 2024).

Notably, Nagel (2021) provides an empirical and sociological analysis of these contemporary crisis discourses, focusing on their apocalyptic underpinnings. He demonstrates the effectiveness of an independent genre of apocalyptic "crisis hermeneutics" (Nagel 2008) within modern society. Various movements and groups concerned with ecological, political and/or religious crises use apocalyptic imagery, motifs and narratives to interpret their position within present-day crises. Using a symbol-theoretical approach, Nagel analyses their pragmatics and semantics and argues that they are characterised by a common basic structure. While classical apocalypticism focused on consolation and encouragement, modern apocalypses tend to be activist in nature, involving the audience as participants in end-time events. They emphasise crises with short-term expectations coupled with dualistic intensification (*normals* vs. *elites*) (Nagel 2021: 187). With a certain gesture of revelation and proclamation, truths are asserted that are not known to everyone. Nagel observes that these practices lack a unifying goal of salvation, thus affirming what Vondung (2000) terms "cropped apocalypses." Overall, however, apocalyptic pragmatism tends to be

activist in orientation. Nagel's study of the prepper community is an example of this, as it frequently involves urging individuals to take action, often with calls for political mobilisation and, at times, even violence.

My own approach to contemporary apocalypticism differs from a symbol-theoretical-pragmatic framework, instead favouring a pragmatist sociology of knowledge (Bohnsack 2014; Strübing 2007). Rather than focusing solely on the context-dependent utilisation of apocalyptic symbols and narrative codes, I aim to understand the practical dimension and problem-solving attempts inherent in how AfD voters experience and interpret the social world. However, a pragmatist perspective delves deeper, as it not only seeks to reconstruct the form of utterances (the use of signs) but also focuses on the practical function of apocalyptic sign usage from the perspective of the AfD voters under scrutiny. The documentary method (Bohnsack 2003) is a suitable methodology for uncovering deeply ingrained practical knowledge formations, even through individual interviews (Nohl 2010).

In the subsequent discussion, I draw upon the findings of my own extensive sociological-empirical inquiry (Rhein 2023), which relied on 17 in-depth narrative interviews (Holstein and Gubrium 2021; Murray 2018) with AfD voters. These interviews had a total duration of approximately 40 hours. This material was supplemented by ethnographic field notes and a standardised questionnaire on socio-structural characteristics. Accessing the field was often difficult due to the interviewees' mistrust. Successful contact and interview requests typically required mediation through trusted intermediaries. The selection of interview partners was guided by the principle of "qualitative representation" at the level of social meaning structures (Kruse 2015: 241). The project aimed to reflect the social-structural heterogeneity of the field as accurately as possible. To this end, theoretical sampling (Morse and Clark 2019; Dimbath et al. 2018) was employed to develop a contrasting sample during the data collection process. Throughout this process, the difficulty of accessing a politically sensitive and mistrustful field became increasingly apparent. Finding participants was a time-consuming process, characterised by the difficulty of establishing mutual trust. This experience is central to the reflections presented in this paper, particularly given that the interviewees themselves addressed the sensitivity of the situation during the conversations.

The empirical data were meticulously analysed in the aforementioned study (Rhein 2023). The analysis and methodological approach were both based on the documentary method, particularly according to Nohl (2010), with the aim of praxeological type formation (Bohnsack 2017). For this paper, excerpts from these interviews are given a new interpretation. Additionally, new empirical material that was not used in the original study is incorporated in Section 4. The interviews were conducted in German and transcribed accordingly. The interview excerpts cited here were translated independently from the original German interview transcripts into

English while retaining as much semantic content as possible. It is important to note, however, that the interview excerpts presented here merely serve to exemplify the insights gleaned from the rigorous sociological and methodological analysis of the data.

5. Findings and Discussion

Apocalyptic *crisis hermeneutics* in contemporary right-wing populism take on a distinct form. This includes a focus on short-term crises, dualistic-Manichean exaggerations (such as normal vs abnormal, victims vs marginalised people, and the promising vs the futureless), and a revelatory gesture – an elitist avant-garde proclamation of truths intended as a form of activism to bring about redemption. However, the primary finding reveals that apocalyptic crisis hermeneutics are devoid of any utopian, emancipatory or political qualities. In this respect, it reverses what characterised the eco-emancipatory apocalypticism of the 1970s and '80s. The following analyses strive to demonstrate this.

The following new spotlight is cast on material from a study of the latent interpretive patterns of AfD voters, which were found to bear apocalyptic hallmarks. These include victim self-stylisation; the belief that one has seen through things and understands what is actually going on; expectations of catastrophe and doom; interpretations of decadence; and the belief that one belongs to a chosen elite gathered in the AfD party. These praxeological aspects of apocalyptic worldviews can be explored in more detail elsewhere (Rhein 2023). In the following, we will pick out aspects that illustrate the thesis of the change of apocalyptic crisis and meaning interpretations in late modernity. Three cases are examined in more detail to identify these aspects.

5.1 No negotiation about *eternal normality*

In view of the present crisis-ridden conditions, many interviewees claim a future for themselves that is not historical, nor one that can be brought about by the right political decisions or progress. Instead, they claim a meta-historical and thus apolitical future. Among the AfD voters studied, there are elements of a vision of the future that is no longer conceived as part of socio-political negotiations or struggles for assertion, but as a time of breakthrough, an alternative future to the expected decline. They interpret the present in apocalyptic terms, using images and scenarios of decadence and decline. In a sense, history has taken a wrong turn for them. Liberalisation and individualisation, globalisation and migration, emancipation and the climate movement are unmistakable signs that history has gone off the rails. Abnormality reigns, which they equate with a lack of future prospects.

In an interview, a married couple who both voted for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party repeatedly contrasted a *normal* way of living with an *abnormal* way, which

they strongly associated with *futurelessness*. For them, normality primarily means a heterosexual nuclear family that is primarily concerned with the succession of generations. This includes not leaving children in daycare centres but raising them at home instead.

Interviewee #1 (f): The kids are totally wound up when things haven't gone well with the kindergarten teacher or when they've had some other kind of stress. The mother's been under pressure all day, somewhere. The father comes home, and the house is a mess because there's no order anymore – well, it's just chaos. There's no direction. Sure, it can be chaotic sometimes – that happened to us too, of course. That's completely normal, and you just have to deal with it, that's obvious. But, uh, there should be some kind of regular, normal routine.

Interviewee #2 (m): Yeah, normal, that's what normal is. Normal defines itself by norm, and in a few years it'll be normal that only kids are dropped off at daycare and the others at home are the minority. And that is from our perspective – and I repeat, so we are not suspicious, neither of us, we're also not, both of us, particularly Christian, because they like to pin that on people, like, they kind of over-glorify that, family and children. We are far from that. So we had, uh, a low point professionally, and the church was the first to hold out its claws, and then I said, that's it, done, over, amen. Uh, I don't want anything more to do with that rabble. And I tell you quite honestly, I'm glad to this day that it's that way. Because even the church has abandoned the foundations of its existence. So, and there are many in the AfD – now we're coming back to it a bit, yeah – many in the AfD who also very sharply criticise the alienation of the church from traditional values, from classical child-rearing, from the family model, uh, sharply criticise. But it's like Honecker, yeah, who on the 40th anniversary still said: neither ox nor donkey will stop the course of socialism – even though the thing was already standing on a lake on an air mattress without air. How can one make such a misjudgment – even as a church?

In this interview excerpt, both speakers express a sense of a disintegration of social normality. Interviewee #1 evokes a chaotic domestic scene where everyday routines and structures have collapsed – “kids totally wound up”, overwhelmed parents, disorder at home – framing this not simply as familial stress, but as symptomatic of a broader societal loss of orientation. Her remark that “there’s no direction anywhere” encapsulates this perception of a vanishing normative order. Interviewee #2 expands on this theme by defining “normal” explicitly as a social norm under threat. His projection that soon “only children in daycare will be normal” and the rest will be a “minority” conveys a fear of demographic and cultural inversion. Crucially, the church – traditionally a guarantor of stability and transcendent moral order – is portrayed as having betrayed its foundational role. His language (“abandoned the

foundations of its existence”) marks a perceived rupture in the historical continuity of values, reinforcing the idea that even institutions once seen as pillars of normality are now complicit in its erosion – as such a classical “apocalyptic” motif. Both voices, however, tie this breakdown to broader political grievances, culminating in the assertion that only the AfD recognises and responds to this loss. The party is thus implicitly framed not just as a political alternative, but as a restorative force aiming to re-establish a lost moral and social order. In this sense, the interview illustrates how apocalyptic feelings of collapse are reinterpreted not as openings for change, but as calls for restoration, hierarchy, and the return of familiar structures.

Furthermore, they associate their worldview of universal collapse with a particular sense of time: their *normal* way of life represents the future, while departing from normality represents futurelessness:

Interviewee #1 (f): I can say that. They have no future, we have a future. The people who are in government today, none of them has a family. They're either gay or they don't have children. What kind of women are they? They don't have a HALT at home anywhere.

Interviewee #2 (m): You refer to Mrs. Roth¹ now, for example, don't you?

Interviewee #1 (f): Mrs. Roth, Mrs. Künast, Mrs. Merkel, Mrs. what-do-I-know. They are all, no/ We have a future. That's why we are not changing.

Interviewee #2 (m): We don't have a future either. We die soon, but we/

Interviewee #1 (f): Yes, with the family. We live for the fact that our children and their grandchildren, if you might be lucky enough to live to see that, uh, that THEY have a future. THAT'S/ THAT, I accuse them of having no future.

Interviewee #1 believes that because she embodies “normality,” with her family and children, the future belongs to her. This belief contrasts sharply with the politics and politicians she associates with abnormality. However, she does not feel the need to change herself to fit into this future of normality. Instead, she remains steadfast in her own normality, criticising politics for lacking a future while simultaneously believing in her own unalterable future, or the future her children will inherit. What the interviewee expresses here is an understanding of the future that is tied to assumptions of normality, which therefore need not (and cannot) be shaped politically, but are threatened by liberal politics and emancipation. This testifies to a deeply anti-political and meta-historical conception of the future, in which progress, change and

1 Claudia Roth is a famous German politician from the Alliance90/The Greens party and was Vice-President of the German Bundestag at the time of the interview.

adaptation no longer hold meaning, but rather breakthrough and eternal normality do.

Remarkably, within this widespread idea of an anti-political future of eternal normality among the AfD voters studied, biographical turning points do not necessarily have to be at the centre of the reasons for turning to the AfD. Rather, interviewee #1 remembers a past that she associates with freedom and self-determination and, looking back, she experiences emancipation and employment of women as an evil of coercion and lack of freedom:

Interviewee #1 (f): I'm just saying something like that, which is why, uh, the system no longer works. People fought to avoid having the role of the woman at home and the man at home, but that wasn't the case in the past either. My mother worked, his mother worked, they looked after their parents. They were in the fields, they worked around the clock, just like women do today, but it was different work. First of all, they didn't have all the resources, washing machines, dishwashers, things like that, they had a completely different work function. They did more than some people who sit in the office today and then come home and that's it. And they're highly regarded for it. And I ask myself today, they're being thrown into a spiral or into a tre(unv.) so that they're emancipated/we've always been (.) emancipated. [...] Since I was 18, we've been together. That's (...) It's completely different today somewhere, like like d/ like free/ or you just enjoyed it. One used to live freely, but because you WERE free, you were also able to work hard or create a lot [...] And today the pressure is off. Me, I had children and I could decide voluntarily whether I wanted to work. I could say voluntarily.

Interviewee #1 reflects on her parents' past – a time marked by hardship, yet also by a sense of freedom that seemed to require no formal emancipation. She is not criticising the concept of emancipation itself, but rather the idea that it is connected with unfreedom. However, she does not disavow emancipatory ideals wholesale; rather, she distances herself from specific contemporary forms or agents of emancipation (e.g. left-wing or liberal career women). She sees herself as a successor to a generation that has “always been emancipated” – a generation that experienced freedom and normality alongside almost perpetual emancipation. There has been no personal turning point at which she has encountered resistance in her life, but rather past experiences that she realises are “no longer normal” when she considers the present.

More important, however, is that emancipation to her is an unnatural intervention in a former state that she claims had already been emancipated. The project of *emancipation* has created a lack of freedom and false promises – and thus led to the downfall that is currently to be expected. She not only rejects the project of emancipation, but she also blames the apocalyptic state of the present on it, thus marking

an anti-emancipatory point of view. Apocalypticism here does not mean change, historical improvement, but rather the downfall with the chance that normality would ultimately prevail again in the end, as it did for her and her family.

5.2 From Peace Movement to the Closure of Future

Another case ties in well with this interpretation. Interviewee 3, however, is quite different from interviewees 1 and 2: she is a single mother of a child who needs special education. She is unemployed and has serious health problems. She links her motivation to vote for the AfD to her child's future and, in doing so, reveals the past she has experienced. Socialised in the 1980s peace movement, Interviewee #3 replies to the question of what led her to vote for the AfD in light of her experiences:

Interviewee #3: "Yes, as I said, it was always there somewhere because I was at the demonstrations way back, yes. First of all, we stood for peace, yes. Against Pershing and everything (laughs), many young people today don't even know what was going on then. We were constantly at demos, you know. And, um, yes, everywhere. But there was also peace and quiet. Millions of people could be together, well, let's say hundreds of thousands. They just drank, smoked weed, you know, it was peace. Yes. Nobody fought. Today you go to a demonstration, hey, wow, it's intense."

Interviewee #3 recounts her experience of taking part in peace demonstrations against the deployment of the Pershing II weapon system in Germany, a decision made by NATO in 1979. These demonstrations took place between 1983 and 1987, with the small south-west German town of Mutlangen becoming a symbol of civil resistance and the peace movement. As Interviewee #3 was raised in the region, it is likely that she attended the famous demonstrations herself. When asked how she came to join a right-wing populist party after participating in peace demonstrations, she replies:

Interviewee #3: "Exactly. But there's no one and nothing left. So for better or worse I'll have to find a new direction. Now I can again, now that my son is grown up, no more small children, that means I could do demos day and night, right? Or take part. Well, sure. But first you have to know what you want, right? What am I demonstrating for? Yes. And, I mean here in Germany it is/ it's burying in all the nooks and crannies, basically, um, burying down Germany completely, rebuild. That's how I see it right now. It's just like that."

She sees the past as something that has been completely cut off, leaving nothing behind. Today, they face new challenges. She immediately falls back on apocalyptic and destructive narratives.

More importantly, however, looking back at past demonstrations in which apocalyptic motifs evidently played a role (cf. Oberloskamp 2022), she perceives the present as polarised and violent – an interpretive pattern with which she interprets the present as a whole. She looks back nostalgically on her own politicisation in the past, but sees no way back. She hopes that her son will accept her legacy and become politicised in the same way, although she no longer imagines a civil society or eco-emancipatory politicisation but rather right-wing parties.

Interviewee #3: "And I hope that he will also become active in politics, for example. I used to go to peace demonstrations. Unfortunately they don't exist anymore and all that kind of stuff, right? Runway West ["Startbahn West"²], all the things that used to be, oh God. Peace demonstrations. It was a cool time, it was a great time with the people (laughs). You miss all that, boy. But, um, yes (...) as I said, I, um, actually only have the goal of doing better for my descendants, well. And that, if it comes to that, with my life or with, um, with all rigorousness needed, right? And there/ I would also go to any, um, I would also go to, what's it called, um, NPD³ or anything else for that."

Her future horizons have narrowed to her son's life. She fears that her health will prevent her from being around for much longer. Based on a wide range of personal experiences, she has come to the conclusion that society has come to an end, and she is therefore willing to go to extremes, even supporting a right-wing neo-Nazi party. Her prospects have narrowed over the years. There is no trace of her former activism, nor any belief that the future can be shaped. She would do anything to protect her son from danger and harm. This is a remarkable shift in her personal history.

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- 2 The protests against the Runway 18 West at Frankfurt Airport (1970s-1980s) were directed against the construction of an additional runway, which was feared to cause massive encroachment into the Kelsertbach Forest, increasing noise pollution and social consequences. In addition, there were concerns about possible military use by NATO, which favoured the involvement of the peace movement. The protests are considered formative for German protest history, as they brought together the environmental and peace movements and had a long-term influence on social discourse about civic participation, environmental protection and militarisation.
 - 3 The NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany) was a neo-Nazi party founded in 1964 that is considered to be a central player in the right-wing scene in post-war Germany. It represented nationalist, racist and anti-democratic positions. Since 2023, it has been operating under the name *Die Heimat* (The Homeland), but remains ideologically unchanged and continues to be part of the right-wing political landscape.

5.3 Apocalypse then and now

Interviewee #4 is a successful businessman. He says that he did not vote in any political elections for a long time before the AfD came along. It was only with the AfD that he saw a political option again that could do something against a downfall that he considers unstoppable:

Interviewee #4: 'We are facing the system question. This goes much, much deeper than everyone here suspects. They will see this when the liquidation of the ECB and the Eurozone is pending [...] If this system falls, that's the first Lego brick. And then it starts. And in the course of this, a certain elite layer will try to create chaos (.) and that arises when you unwind the euro in the euro area, yes. Or if you do a currency reform, then something really big is on the cards. It's no walk in the park. And there will be political forces that will exploit this to get themselves into power. They are definitely not conservatives.'

He regards the AfD, however, as a delaying force of conservative values – but only a delaying force, because he considers the great downfall to be a foregone conclusion. He is therefore completely immersed in an apocalyptic sense of doom, which is also what motivates his support for the AfD. Hoping for the end to be delayed is a typical apocalyptic motif.

However, the apocalyptic aspect plays a crucial role at another level here. In his past, Interviewee #4 studied in a left-wing university town and experienced the times of the New Left and the environmental movement. He attributes an excessive apocalyptic discourse to them and insinuates that they have been pursuing a political agenda for a long time:

Interviewee #4: In this world, relatively little was normal. Many dismissed them as left-wing weirdos (..) There was a cynical saying that in the alternative scene, women still knit their own menstrual pads. That was the, how should one say, the, certainly the worst (.) in terms of the mockery they spread. But that's how they presented themselves. They rejected everything RADICALLY. 'Nuclear power, no thanks' was already there back then. I remember this, this sun, on the cars, R4, T2, all rundown wrecks. They've been like that at that time. So that's nothing new. That means this is the third time that I've experienced it. That I'm being subjected to the end of the world for the third time. Greta in 12 years is the apocalypse. That the CO₂ would kill us, and that the planet would actually be on the verge of collapse. If we don't QUICKLY and RADICALLY throw EVERYTHING in the bin. It all seems so familiar. Only the protagonists are different. Even the apologists, yes, of this apocalypse. But they are essentially the same. They haven't changed. Maybe only their haircuts have changed, yes. But at their core, they are still the same.

Interviewee #4 identifies continuity between the New Left and the New Social Movements of the 1970s and '80s, and the present day. With scorn, he looks back on the eco-emancipatory character of these decades, in which apocalyptic discourses were embedded. According to his interpretation, the doomsday assertions of that time were a pretext for a 'radical', i.e. totalitarian, social transformation:

Interviewee #4: Someone actually just demanded that Lufthansa be fully nationalised so that flights can be legitimised and restrictions can be imposed on them. That's a totalitarian principle. That has nothing to do with freedom. (...) And the Greens are predestined for that. They are radical – they proved that back during the time of the RAF. The RAF people would all be with the Greens today. Or with Antifa. (...) And Antifa is nothing other than (.) the resurrection of the SA thugs (.) from the Third Reich. They operated the same way. 'And if you won't be my brother, I'll smash your skull in.'

The proposal to nationalise Lufthansa in order to restrict air travel is not seen as a climate policy measure, but is immediately framed as a "totalitarian principle". A sweeping historical analogy follows: The Greens are described as inherently "radical," their political heritage allegedly connected to the Red Army Faction (RAF) and today's Antifa movement – both of which, in his view, embody violent and authoritarian tendencies. This hyperbolic rhetoric does not merely criticise specific political actors or strategies – it casts any leftist or eco-emancipatory politics as historically tainted and ideologically dangerous. Emancipation is not portrayed here as a failed or naïve hope, but as a project that has always already been coercive, militant, and 'totalitarian'. In this worldview, calls for social transformation – especially those grounded in ecological or collectivist reasoning – do not point to the future, but to the return of authoritarian patterns. This passage therefore supports the article's claim that apocalyptic narratives within right-wing populism reflect not just a loss of faith in emancipation, but a deep-seated suspicion toward its very foundations.

Although Interviewee #4 rejects apocalypticism in the context of this eco-emancipatory project, he still draws on related interpretations in the present. However, his apocalypticism is elitist and anti-political. The downfall, or the totalitarian takeover, is essentially unavoidable. Because the threat comes from this direction, his entire worldview is also anti-political.

5.4 Discussion

The selective illumination of comprehensive empirical interview material of AfD voters has revealed not only apocalyptic worldviews, but also their anti-emancipatory character. They view the project of emancipation as a historical mistake. They claim that, before the social and women's movements, emancipation had already been fully realised and that everything that came afterwards meant a lack of freedom

because it disappointed and left no hope for the future. Therefore, they believe that different measures must be taken today. The apocalyptic tone with which emancipatory projects were articulated in past social movements is now being reinterpreted as a tactic for the totalitarian seizure of power.

At the same time, voters of the AfD party also employ apocalyptic crisis interpretations. They construct visions of the future that are both meta-historical and eternal; however, these visions are hollow. Any utopian or emancipatory content has either been erased or inverted and reimagined as a dystopian scenario, such as a totalitarian takeover.

This brief overview of the empirical material reveals that right-wing populism can be employed to illustrate a shift in modernity's apocalypticism. Its late-modern form has evolved into anti-political destructivism. Rather than bundling their dissatisfaction with the *untenability* of current social and political conditions into a common struggle for a better world, subjects in this form of anti-politics fall apart within it. This transforms the public sphere into an "arena of decidedly rampant self-assertion" (Honneth 2012:18). Even more than "post-politics" (Lövbrand et al. 2015), anti-politics refers to a political counter-movement against the policies of elites and the establishment. This movement began historically after the financial crisis but quickly took on the form of populism (Hochuli et al. 2022). The party at the centre of this article, the AfD, still has this anti-political aspect in its name: Being an *alternative* means rejecting established politics.

In this sense, the apocalypticism of right-wing populism can be described as *late-modern apocalypticism*. It is both libertarian and authoritarian, and is therefore part of contemporary late-modern culture (Amlinger and Nachtwey 2022). The right-wing populist apocalypse is a symbolic system in which expressive self-validation and elitist isolation are pursued simultaneously. Right-wing populist apocalyptic thinkers are so profoundly detached from a shared political community that their ideas about the future are fundamentally anti-political. They don't just reject a shared reality in the present; they deny the possibility of a democratic negotiation of future that encompasses all members of society. Amlinger and Nachtwey (2022: 288–97) aptly refer to these as "libertarian-authoritarian counter-communities". Their visions of the future are anti-political and anti-democratic because they exist outside of democratic negotiation. Yet, crucially, these future expressions are not forming a sectarian out-group; rather, they are present at the core of parliamentary democracy.

The AfD voters studied view certain aspects of their past, particularly an emancipation project, as having become *untenable*. In response to this perceived failure, they are rebelling by supporting a right-wing populist party and adopting a reconfigured narrative of the apocalypse. They reinterpret past apocalyptic themes, reversing their original meaning to reflect their current disillusionment.

6. Conclusion

“Apocalypticism is revolutionary”, hopes Jacob Taubes, “because it beholds the turning point not in some indeterminate future but entirely proximate” (Taubes 2009 [1946]: 10). However: “If the telos of the revolution collapses, so that the revolution is no longer the means but the sole creative principle, then the destructive desire becomes a creative desire. If the revolution points to nothing beyond itself, it will end in a movement, dynamic in nature but leading into the abyss [*into empty nothingness*]. A nihilistic revolution does not pursue any goal [telos], but takes its aim from the ‘movement’ itself and, in so doing, comes close to satanic practice.” (Taubes 2009 [1946]: 10–11).

The descent into nihilistic destructivism, as described by Taubes, is emblematic of the apocalyptic worldview that dominates right-wing populism today. However, as this article has demonstrated, right-wing populism in Germany is merely a stark illustration of a broader cultural shift: the apparent depletion of late-modern society’s ability to produce emancipatory and liberatory apocalyptic narratives. Apocalypticism has long provided a powerful framework through which to make sense of crises, offering not only an analysis of existential threats, but also a route to collective renewal and transformation. In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, apocalyptic narratives were integral to emancipatory movements, which aimed to create a better, fairer world. These movements sought to harness the urgency of apocalyptic rhetoric to inspire collective action and democratic solutions.

Today, however, and particularly within the realm of right-wing populism, apocalypticism follows a markedly different trajectory. While it still operates as a way of interpreting crises, it no longer necessarily points toward collective renewal or improvement. Instead, it often manifests as anti-utopian and anti-political, orientated toward reactionary ends. In this article, the term ‘anti-political’ refers to a perspective on crises that dismisses negotiation, deliberation, and emancipatory reform as effective political strategies for shaping the future. Rather than apolitical ignorance or post-political apathy, the narratives of Alternative for Germany (AfD) voters reveal a political worldview enriched by eschatological motifs in anti-liberal, anti-emancipatory terms. Such worldviews are shaped by deep disillusionment with past emancipatory projects, now viewed as ideologically dominated by *leftists* and consequently considered *abnormal*, *totalitarian* and *doomed*.

This shift from an emancipatory to an anti-political conception of the apocalypse shows how the ability of late-modern society to address crises collectively has diminished. The transition from apocalypticism as a hopeful call to action to one steeped in despair and division underscores a profound cultural exhaustion – a loss of the shared vision necessary to confront the pressing challenges of our time, from climate change to social inequality.

It must be emphasised that the findings presented here are limited in several ways. Firstly, the focus is on Germany, and more specifically, on the emergence of apocalyptic worldviews among right-wing populists. Clearly, more comprehensive studies that go beyond the geographical and partisan limitations of this research are needed. Nevertheless, examining contemporary culture through the lens of apocalyptic narratives and stories can provide valuable insights into societal dynamics. Keller (2021) suggests interpreting apocalyptic themes in the present day, offering a nuanced analysis of how these motifs are used and what they reveal about underlying societal conditions. By exploring the extent to which eschatological assertions, imbued with potent religious significance, permeate contemporary society, this approach sheds light on their implications for democracy. These assertions disrupt democratic discourse due to their absolutist nature, making them impervious to negotiation or rational argument: One simply cannot negotiate about the end times.

The present analysis finds an anti-political “ontology” (cf. Lövbrand et al. 2015) among AfD voters. However, it also considers whether these aspects extend beyond the right-wing political spectrum. It is possible that they merely represent a particularly clear and drastic example of late modernity’s untenability giving way to anti-political narratives of doom that can hardly be described as anything other than *apocalyptic*.

The core argument of this text can be succinctly summarised with the help of Hilgert’s (2021) suggestion that the function of (ecological) apocalypticism then, as now, is to repress social conflicts (cf. also Methmann and Rothe 2012). In the 1970s, apocalyptic scenarios of the ecology and peace movement found their way into party political discourse. This, he argues, led to the containment of the broader emancipatory demands of the original social movements. The focus on the fear of a nuclear or ecological meltdown, which was adopted by parties and political discourse, has made it possible to push central concerns of the New Social Movements and the New Left – such as the elimination of exploitative relationships, the reduction of inequality or anti-capitalism – to the background. Instead, the overarching narrative of a universal threat to humanity has come to the fore. Today, however, the resolute warning of an impending climate apocalypse serves to repress an awareness of the inability to control and the exhaustion of democracy and the political system.

More precisely, this means that the climate-damaging way of life and economic system, as well as the promises of democracy, emancipation, freedom and self-realisation, have all become “untenable” (Blühdorn 2024). Those who experienced the apocalypses of the countercultural emancipation movement of the 1970s and 1980s therefore tend to reinterpret the past. They interpret it as a wrong turn that history has taken. At the same time, some of them cling to the countercultural character of their apocalyptic worldviews, thereby saying goodbye to the “second modernity” and its “eco-emancipatory project” (Blühdorn 2024). By telling the once emancipatory

apocalypses and their unfulfilled promises of democratisation, ecologisation and peace as doomsday narratives, they turn away from the original ideals.

Any form of emancipatory social organisation is interpreted, even in retrospect, as an unnatural or even threatening intervention in the course of history. Right-wing populist apocalyptic thinkers thus abandon a central principle of democracy: the collective shaping of the future. Their apocalypticism is not only “cropped” (Vondung 2000) and notably emptied of utopian and emancipatory content. The future they envision is therefore not open to negotiation. The *society of untenability*, at least on the right of the political spectrum, reveals how untenable democracy itself has become for parts of that society.

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