# ANALYTICAL FASCISM: WHAT STARES BACK WHEN ONE STARES INTO THE DE-ENLIGHTENMENT

Mark R. Reiff
University of California at Davis
(mreiff57@gmail.com)

As much as I am disheartened by this, fascism seems to be playing the same countercultural role in the world today that the anti-war, student, and civil rights movements played in the
1960s and early 70s. By this I mean that those who embrace fascist values (more on what these
are in a moment) are now clamoring, more or less effectively, to push society to the right, just as
these older, liberalizing, movements strived to push it to the left. But while those seeking a fascist
way of life are clear about what they are against, it is less clear what they are for. Not in the sense
of how they want to remake society—this is usually clear enough. What is less clear is the
fundamental values that are driving their desire to create a different kind of order. And if we cannot
identify and come to understand the values that are driving many to the right, we cannot engage
with those making this rightward journey or otherwise adequately defend liberalism from attack.
Illuminating the values that underly fascism is accordingly an important first step for anyone
hoping to devise a strategy for combating the modern move away from liberalism and toward its
antithesis.

In part I of this paper, I will clarify some of the key terms I will be using, for many of these are indeterminate or have a technical meaning that differs significantly from their popular meaning, and it is important to specify how these terms are to be understood if we are to avoid talking past one another. In part II, I shall move on to examine the conventional explanations for what is driving people toward the right. I shall argue that these conventional explanations primarily serve the interests of those on the right, but they are nevertheless sufficiently comforting to those on the left

that they are often accepted there as well. And they are comforting, you see, because none of these explanations suggest that liberals are making any fundamental mistakes. Human nature is as liberals think it is, not something that is fundamentally disputed; facts are what liberals think they are, even if some people choose to ignore them; and everybody is pursuing basically the same conception of the good, even if some of them are deluded as to where we are now and how to get where we want to go. But I will argue that these conventional explanations are wrong. What is really going on, and what many liberals are missing, I contend, is that more and more people are coming to embrace illiberalism, in this case in the form of fascism, as a principled matter. That is, they are finding themselves attracted to a set of values that may seem perverse to liberal eyes, but which are just as coherent, consistent, and developed as the set of values that underly liberalism.

Part III, then, contains the bulk of my argument. There I shall describe, in the analytical style, what I think those values are. And I will do so with a frankness that some may find ugly and upsetting. But shying away from the disturbing nature of these values is not helpful—indeed, doing so is exactly, in my view, why liberalism today is so close to collapse. We cannot attack fascists simply by arguing that their policies are illiberal, as we mostly do, for that is precisely the point of these policies. And the unattractiveness of fascist values is obviously not as self-evident as many liberals seem to believe; otherwise, so many people would not be finding themselves drawn to them. As exhausting as this is, we have to explain again and again why illiberal values are morally repugnant, socially and physically destructive, and contrary to the common good.

Even in the realm of liberalism, of course, we often need to argue about how best to understand liberal values, and what these values require of us in specific situations. No framework for deciding questions of political morality generates automatic answers to the difficult moral questions that often present themselves in daily life. And so on many questions, one can go in very

different and sometimes contradictory ways while still placing oneself within the realm of liberalism. But if history has shown us anything, it has shown us that the world which liberalism provides the frame of reference for arguing about how best to move toward the light is far more inviting than the one in which fascism does, where we will ultimately lie exhausted, bloody, hungry, alone, and filled with envy, resentment, and regret.

Unfortunately, attacking illiberal values (other than by labeling them illiberal) and defending liberal ones is something that liberals rarely do. For as the Nazi legal theorist and critic of liberalism Carl Schmitt pointedly complained, a common characteristic of liberals is timidity—liberals often seem incapable of standing up for what they believe. And while Schmitt was wrong about many things, he was not wrong about this. Indeed, much later, a version of the same sentiment would become a popular quip when made by the conservative poet Robert Frost—"a liberal is someone who cannot take their own side in an argument." In any case, if there were a part IV to this paper, this is where I would argue against fascist values and for liberal ones. But for now, I don't have the room. Simply identifying what the fundamental values of fascism are will have to do.

## I. Some Preliminary Clarifications

Let me begin by noting that when I use the terms "liberal" or "liberalism," I am not referring only to those whose politics would be described as falling on the moderate left. I am using these terms in their more fundamental "children-of-the-enlightenment" sense. Liberals can accordingly be and indeed do fall on both the moderate left and the moderate right and everywhere

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See Stewart L. Udall, "Robert Frost's Last Adventure," *The New York Times (*June 11, 1972).

in between. But at a higher level of abstraction, they all embrace a similar series of fundamental presuppositions, and therefore they each can usefully be seen as part of the same family of theories within political morality. I have described the fundamental presuppositions of liberalism elsewhere in great detail,<sup>3</sup> and so will not summarize them here. Suffice it to say that they provide a framework within which a certain kind of moral argument can take place.

But this framework is very different from the one that applies on what liberals would call "the extremes." Indeed, those on the extremes, even though their substantive policies at "street' level may be radically different and indeed antagonistic to each other, all embrace a set of fundamental presuppositions that are sufficiently similar to each other and sufficiently different from those that liberals embrace to be seen as part of a single competing family of approaches to political morality. I refer to this competing family of political theories in my other work as "perfectionism," but because I am focusing only on those on the extreme right in this paper, I will not use that more general term here. Instead, I will refer to these people as fascists.

It should be clear from this that like my use of the term liberalism, when I refer to fascism, I am using the term in a very broad, generic sense, to refer to all forms of right-wing illiberalism. I recognize, of course, that many current scholars insist that only the views of the Italian Fascist party of the 1930s and closely analogous or self-proclaimed subsequent fascist movements should be referred to as fascist, while others groups on the extreme right should be described by some other label, such as populist, authoritarian, alt-Right, Trumpist, or the like. But in this paper, I will

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Mak R. Reiff, "The Attack on Liberalism," in *Law and Philosophy*, ed. Michael Freeman and Ross Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 173-210; Mark R. Reiff, "Neutrality and Excellence," in *Without Trimmings: The Legal, Moral, and Political Philosophy of Matthew Kramer*, ed. Mark McBride and Visa A.J. Kurki (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 271-296; Mark R. Reiff, "Trump and the End of Liberalism: Some Hard Truths About the Degradation of American Democracy," *The Critique* (January 15, 2017).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Leon Trotsky, Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It (New York: Pathfinder, 1996), p. 7.

reject this approach. For I do not want to use some less repellant term to describe present-day fascist-like or fascist-lite movements, even though (some of) these movements may not (yet) embrace all the values we might associate with open and forthright fascism. Using a less dramatic label would be falsely comforting, in my view, because it would suggest that liberalism does not face an existential threat from these movements, when I believe it does. Accordingly, I will use the term "fascism" to refer to all extremist movements on the right. In Europe, this would include the Fidesz party in Hungary, the AKP in Turkey, the Law and Justice party in Poland, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Brothers of Italy, the National Rally (previously the National Front) in France, the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, and various other so-called populist, nationalist, anti-immigrant parties that are exercising or at least seriously contending for power in both European and non-European democracies. In the US, in turn, I mean the term "fascism" to include the MAGA movement, those who embrace the world view of QAnon, and a large part of what today calls itself the Republican party, even where the views of these three groups do not necessarily intersect.<sup>5</sup>

I realize this claim is controversial, but I am by no means the first to use the word "fascism" in such a broad fashion. Indeed, the broad usage I employ is not uncommon among the general populace; it is only certain scholars who insist on a more restricted, condition-laden, technical usage.<sup>6</sup> But fascism is just a name. My use of the term is not an attempt to invoke some magic incantation, or to provoke some unjustified fear or rage. Rather, I am using the term here because we need some general way of referring to a family of political theories that are distinct enough

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See Peter Baker, "Biden Issues a Blistering Attack on Trump," *The New York Times* (February 28, 2023); Sarah D. Wire, "At Far-Right Roadshow, Trump Is God's 'Anointed One,' QAnon Is King, and 'Everything You Believe Is Right," *Los Angeles Times* (October 12, 2023); Tom Nichols, "Trump Crosses a Crucial Line," *The Atlantic* (November 16, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See, for example, the very restrictive definition employed in the work of the economic historian Adam Tooze.

from those within the liberal family of political theories to be recognized as part of a competing family, despite what may be some differences among them. Even if using the term "fascist" to describe this family of political theories and the movements they inspire were somehow inappropriate and we were to replace this term with one that carried less rhetorical baggage, however, nothing in the argument that follows would change. The only change would be a reduction in emotional power, and this, as I said, is important to maintain because a more antiseptic term is likely to understate the gravity of the circumstances in which liberalism currently finds itself.

Of course, the existing literature already contains much illuminating and highly detailed discussion about what fascist movements do, what leads to their ascension to power, how they behave, and what eventually tears them apart. These works are indeed informative, but they are primarily discussions of means and methods, not values: the capture and control of the press; the capture and control of education; the use of violence and the threat of violence, both domestically and internationally; the incitement of tribal rivalries, even and perhaps especially where historical tribal rivalries have receded or previously did not exist; the politicization and capture of the apparatus of the administrative state; the intolerance of even the slightest expression of dissent; the encouragement of a cult of personality. These means and methods are often summarized by the phrase "political ruthlessness," and the "liberal predicament" is then described as having to devise a way to fight against an enemy dedicated to political ruthlessness without engaging in political ruthlessness and thereby acting illiberally oneself. This is a difficult problem in its own right, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them,* (New York: Randon House, 2018); Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2018).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See Isaiah Berlin, "Fathers and Children: Turgenev and the Liberal Predicament," in *Russian Thinkers* (London: Penguin, 2d ed. 2008), pp. 299-352, 342-350.

there are many useful discussions of it. But once again, these discussions are about means and methods. Understanding means and methods does tell us something about values, of course, for values do encourage or at least permit the use of certain means and methods that would be rejected by those who embrace different values. But understanding means and methods is not enough. A more thorough and careful investigation of the underlying values at work here is necessary if we are going to understand what is driving these movements to adopt the means and methods that they do.

The same is true when we come to what is often called "retail politics"—the street level policies that fascist and fascist-like movements pursue. These are also obsessively documented in the literature, both for prior fascist movements and contemporary ones. <sup>10</sup> But just as we must be careful to distinguish between means and methods and values, we must also be careful to distinguish between policies and values. Policies are the social, legal, and political tools used to instantiate certain values—they are not values in themselves. For example, being opposed to affirmative action is a policy choice. It is possible to make such a policy choice and still be a liberal. This would be the case, for example, if one believes that respecting equality applies even to remedial programs and not just to other choices. <sup>11</sup> But it can also be a policy supported by one who rejects equality and embraces a social hierarchy in which white people have more value than Black people. And if one is arguing with someone who opposes affirmative action, it is essential to know into which category that person falls. For the argument one makes needs to be very different depending on which fundamental value is driving the particular policy position at hand.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Joshua L. Cherniss, *Liberalism in Dark Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> See e.g., Thomas J. Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2018); Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> See Carl Cohen and James P. Sterba, *Affirmative Action and Racial Preference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Unfortunately, serious discussion of the values that fascists embrace is almost totally absent from the literature. Or at least it is absent from the literature written in the style of Anglo-American analytical political philosophy. That style has come to dominate philosophy and political science departments within the English-speaking world and to a good extent beyond. Of course, there is much literature discussing the values of fascism outside the English-speaking world, and some of this has been translated into English. But this material is written in what is often derogatorily referred to by analytic political philosophers as the "continental style." Analytic political philosophers consider this type of philosophy to be vague, messy, overblown, disorganized, and either poorly argued or without any coherent arguments at all. As a result, this work is mostly ignored by analytic political philosophers. <sup>12</sup> But if one is trying to understand the march toward fascism taking place even in what had seemed to be the most committed bastions of liberal capitalism, there is much important material to be found in this work. Failing to pay attention to this work is like trying to assess the weather outside by looking at the sky through proverbial rose-colored glasses.

I will draw heavily on such work in making my argument about what fundamental values underlie fascism; but note that I will not simply be repeating what fascist intellectuals and public figures have said previously. Unlike liberalism, fascism rejects the methods of analytic political philosophy. It is therefore always an interpretative exercise when trying to describe fascist fundamental values in the way one would do using the analytic style. So my project here is not a piece of historical research; it is an attempt to describe the values of fascism in ways that few

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> See Mark R. Reiff, "Twenty-One Statements about Political Philosophy: An Introduction and Commentary on the State of the Profession" *Teaching Philosophy* 41:1 (2018): 65-115.

fascists have done themselves but nevertheless remains true to what fascist intellectuals and political figures are talking about, or rather why they are talking about what they are talking about.

Before I begin describing the values that fascists tend to embrace using the analytical approach, however, I want to admit that my project is to some extent a contradiction in terms. By this I mean that fascism is not analytic. It is anti-analytic. This means one cannot simply find the values it enshrines clearly stated in its literature. For it rejects the idea that a careful argument and precise definition of concepts and terms is a useful or even possible way to discuss the organization of human social cooperation. As Nietzsche might say, that kind of writing or thinking is clever, the characteristic quality of Jews (more on this common antisemitic trope in a moment), and in any event something to be rejected by fascists outright as a method of achieving social understanding. 13 As the adherents of non-liberal political philosophies have known for centuries, when it comes to motivating people to heed a call to action, emotion, not reason, is the more effective activating factor. 14 Organizing social cooperation is not a math problem, a fascist would say. It is a matter of understanding the ineffable nature of human life and its role and status within the wider universe. Providing insight into such matters requires writing that flows over you like a rogue wave, using images and narratives that knock you to the ground, leave you breathless, and require you to scramble to avoid being crushed by the sheer visceral weight of the material; it is not something more akin to sharing a recipe for baking cookies.

I recognize that many people will find much of what comes next offensive. I certainly do.

More importantly, I worry that I may be providing a road map for those who wish to better

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Isaiah Berlin, "Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 91-174, pp. 114-120.

articulate and promote fascist beliefs. Weighing against this worry, however, is my concern that in order to defeat the rise of fascism in contemporary society, we need to engage it at a higher level of abstraction—we have to attack the values that are driving fascists rather than simply accusing them of being illiberal. To debate the fundamental values at issue here, however, we first have to know what they are. Hence my view that on balance, even though what I am about to do has some potential negative consequences, the positive reasons for doing so make it both necessary and appropriate.

One final word about the style in which the rest of this paper is written. My approach is analytic, but not obsessively so. I do not intend to completely ignore the more holistic and impressionistic qualities of the fascist voice. Instead of separating out each idea and discussing it individually, as strict compliance with the analytical stye would require, I will weave many ideas into a more general discussion. My purpose is to paint a picture of the fundamental values that fascists embrace and organize these values in a way that makes them easier for those steeped in the analytic tradition to access and understand, much as the those scholars who identify themselves as "analytical Marxists" have tried to reconstruct Marxism in the analytic tradition. Those scholars have done so as a way of promoting Marxism to a more analytically attuned audience, while my intent is to make fascism more understandable in order to make it more amenable to attack. But in any case, my description of the underlying values of fascism will not be so atomistic that the connective tissue between these ideas and their unifying features are likely to be completely lost. And most importantly, I do not intend to wash the fervor out, for the fervor of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> See John Roemer (ed.), *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

those who embrace fascism is one of the important features that holds the values that I will describe together.

## II. Four Mistakes about What Is Behind the Rise of the Extreme Right

It is common for liberals today to make four mistakes when apprehending what is behind the current move to the far right. First, they think of those who are embracing fascism as mostly making mistakes about empirical questions—in other words, liberals seem to assume that those on or moving toward the extreme right are simply being deluded into thinking that the facts are other than they are. Those that we label racists, for example, are not for special privileges for white people, they are just against what they misperceive as the special privileges that non-whites seem to be enjoying in the present day, a violation of the liberal principle of equality. And of course, this may describe how some people actually feel. But as Robert Nozick points out, "a racist is not simply someone who believes there are or may be racial differences along dimensions of value—whether there are is an empirical question. A racist is someone who wants there to be racial differences along dimensions of values, and wants these differences to go in a certain direction." And engaging with the former kind of person therefore requires a very different approach than engaging with the latter.

Another example of the over-emphasis on empirical disagreements as to what is causing all the trouble here and not, as I contend, something deeper, is the belief that those we label as antiliberal are actually not anti-liberal in principle, they just believe, for example, that the liberal establishment are running (or at least protecting) a worldwide pedophile ring dedicated to the harvest of "a substance with special, energizing qualities that can only be found in the brains of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 325n (emphasis added).

children who have been sexually tortured in satanic rituals," which is then "harvested and distributed to top Democrats, Hollywood celebrities and bankers in the cabal." What decent person who thought this was true, liberal or not, or even merely worried that it might be true, would not be against those they believe are involved in this horrible conspiracy? As bizarre as these beliefs are (and they are bizarre but also far more common than most liberals are willing to admit), they are not threatening to anyone's fundamental values. But more importantly, many liberals falsely think that once those who harbor these beliefs have been shown how they radically misapprehend the world, they will realize how disastrously they have been misled and reject those pandering to them from the right.

But there are far less hallucinogenic misapprehensions (albeit equally unfounded) that I could also cite here. There is no wave of crime and murder raging through American cities.<sup>18</sup> George Soros is not funding caravans of migrants trying to come into the United States.<sup>19</sup> Illegal immigrants are not mostly criminals and rapists, bringing in drugs and disease;<sup>20</sup> they do not take more from the economy than they put in;<sup>21</sup> and they are not taking jobs aways from "legitimate" Americans.<sup>22</sup> Sharia law is not being imposed in some localities;<sup>23</sup> children are not being taught to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Conor Murphy, "The Adrenochrome Conspiracy Theory—Pushed By 'Sound of Freedom' Star—Explained," Forbes (July 15, 2023); Terry Gross, "The Rise of QAnon," interview with Will Sommer, author of *Trust the Plan: The Rise of QAnon and the Conspiracy That Unhinged America* (New York: Harper Publishing, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> See Justin Fox, "Are Republicans Right about America's Crime Wave" Let's Look at the Data," *The Washington Post* (November 2, 2022); Curt Wagner, "McCarthy Sees 'Crisis' in Chicago's Murder Rate," *Chicago Sun-Times* (December 30, 2016).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> See Joel Achenbach, "A Conspiracy Theory about George Soros and a Migrant Caravan Inspired Horror," *The Washington Post* (October 28, 2018).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> See Michelle Ye Hee Lee, "Donald Trump's False Comments Connecting Mexican Immigrants and Crime," *The Washington Post* (July 8, 2015).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> See Andrew Soergel, "'Undocumented' Immigrants Pay Billions in Taxes," *U.S. News & World Report* (March 1, 2016).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> See Julia Preston, "Immigrants Aren't Taking American Jobs, New Study Finds," *The New York Times* (September 21, 2016).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> See Zhaoyin Feng, "The US City Run by Muslim Americans," *BBC News* (November 16, 2021); Patrick Strickland, "Are 'Anti-Sharia' Bills Legalising Islamophobia?" *Aljazeera* (October 1, 2017).

be gay<sup>24</sup> or to hate themselves for what their ancestors did to certain groups of people,<sup>25</sup> and so on. Again, these misapprehensions of the world and of history are so dangerous because anyone would be motivated to move against those behind them if they were true. The people who believe these things are not illiberal, the thinking goes; again, they are simply misguided. Showing that these factual views are not true is accordingly all we need to do here to get people back on the righteous path.

Second, liberals widely believe that many of those moving to the right are simply pursuing what they understandably might see as their self-interest in the face of the "Great Replacement"—the demographic claim that due to differing birth and death rates in the population and immigration, whites will soon no longer be in the majority in many liberal capitalist countries and therefore will lose the power and privileges that the majority can generate for itself and become just another persecuted minority, to the extent this has not happened to most whites already. The demographic shift to which Great Replacement theory refers is actually happening; it is only the nefarious nature of the causal forces behind it that those moving to the right tend to get wrong. In any case, if this is actually the story that those moving to the right are telling themselves, their motivation here is almost understandable even if technically wrongheaded. This motivation, after all, is based in self-interest, which everybody can understand. If we are to address those now moving to the right in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> See Hannah Natanson and Moriah Balingit, "Teachers Who Mention Sexuality Are 'Grooming' Kids, Conservatives Say," *The Washington Post* (April 5, 2022); Laura Meckle, "Gender Identity Lessons, Banned in Some Schools, Are Rising in Others," *The Washington Post* (June 2, 2022); Joyce H. Hahn, "Proposition 8 and Education: Teaching Our Children to Be Gay?" *Review of Law and Social Justice* 19 (2010): 149-185.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> See Stephen Richter, "Critical Race Theory Doesn't Teach Kids to Hate White People. It Teaches Them the Truth They Deserve," *San Francisco Chronicle* (August 3, 2021). Marisa Iati, "What is critical race theory, and why do Republicans want to ban it in schools?" *The Washington Post* (May 29, 2021).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> See Mark R Reiff., "How Important is White Fear?" Aeon (June 28, 2021).

the face of the Great Replacement, the argument then goes, what is needed is sympathy and reassurance that their place in society is not about to be downgraded, not anything more than this.

For the reasons I have set forth at length elsewhere, however, I believe this explanation for what is going on is mostly wrong.<sup>27</sup> It is not fear of being "replaced" that is really driving people here, no matter what they might say. First, remember that the privileges that are perceived as being threatened here are mostly the privileges of white men, and white men have never been in the majority. Second, those who most often cite the Great Replacement as their motivation live in areas where this replacement is not happening, not even a little. Third, white people have maintained control of society for generations in large parts of the world where they are and have always been a well-outnumbered minority; why should the demographic shift feel so threatening? And so on. Those who find this motivation plausible can read my other work if they have doubts, but I do not want to waste more space on this idea here.

Third, liberals often ascribe the move to the right as being driven by despots who are inflaming one portion of a population against another purely as a means of personal advancement. And of course, this is indeed often an element of what is going on. Fascist leaders, because of the way they are identified as leaders, need big personalities, and big personalities imply big egos, and big egos need to be fed. The pursuit of absolute power is certainly one way to do this. The breakdown of what was a cosmopolitan society in Serbia can largely be explained by this, <sup>28</sup> as well as in many other cases. Taking those examples of the de-liberalization of society as lessons, some liberals make the mistake at putting the breakdown in the US at the feet of Trump. In effect,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> See Mark R Reiff., "How Important is White Fear?" *Aeon* (June 28, 2021).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> See Aleksandar Pavković, "The Origins of Contemporary Serb Nationalism: Yet Another Case of "trahison des clercs?" *The Slavonic and East European Review* 82 (2004), pp. 79-88 (reviewing *'Saviours of the Nation': Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism* by Jasna Dragović-Soso).

this represents the acceptance of Stalin's view, "no Man, no problem." It suggests that if we can just get rid of these despotic leaders, whether currently in government or in opposition, the movement toward the right will disappear. But while it may be true that a certain kind of leader is required for a lurch to the right (or to the left too), this is at best necessary, not sufficient. It is thus a mistake to take comfort in the Stalinesque solution that many liberals in the US are hoping for now, even in the face of the rise of numerous Trump-like figures waiting in the wings for their chance to take center stage. But once again, the despotic leader theory does not capture fully what is really going on. There is too long a tradition of fascist literature, the ideas therein are too developed and too omni-present in different times and social circumstances, and insatiable egos are too common on the ground to assign the egoistic explanation for fascism too much explanatory power.

Finally, there is perhaps the most common reflexive attitude among liberals toward those on the extreme is to view these people as simply irrational, crazy or perhaps even more extreme than this, as anti-rational.<sup>29</sup> They are seen as experiencing what might be referred to as "social anosognosia," an inability to perceive that they are indeed ill. Indeed, the explanation that fascists have simply lost their grip on reality is not only a common explanation on the street for why people turned to fascism the last time it burned a path around the globe, it also remains a popular explanation even among academics for how we should understand the rise on fascism in the early twentieth-century as a political phenomenon.<sup>30</sup> If we take this attitude, however, trying to reason

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Theodor W. Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, 1982), pp. 118-137, 121 ff; Bertrand Russell, "The Ancestry of Fascism" in *Let the People Think* (London: Spokesman Books, 2003), pp. 52-65; Talcott Parsons, "Rationalism Debunked," in *Fascism*, ed. Roger Griffin Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 277-278.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> See A. James Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 1-2.

with those moving to the right, at least after a certain point, is as pointless as trying to reason with a wild animal. There may be a practical threat here that is worth taking seriously, but nothing about the move toward the right threatens fundamental liberal values. Many of my readers may accordingly think that such attitudes, even if I have accurately depicted them in the descriptive sense, are simply dismissible because they either represent the ignorant ramblings of a narcissistic and possibly deranged adult-toddler or the self-interested strategy of certain oligarchs and those they have corrupted who profit from the denial of what they know to be the truth. Ignoring facts makes it less likely that what you want or at least expect will come to pass, so rational people will learn from their experience and reject the anti-factual approach to understanding history and managing our social world. People who can't or won't do this are simply beyond the possibility of engagement. There is no more point in trying to understand their thinking than there is in trying to understand the thought processes of the mentally ill. Their views are therefore best thought of as an incoherent collection of biases and prejudices that cannot be understood much less influenced by rational people.

This is certainly a common way of characterizing fascist leaders and fascist or fascist-like thinkers of the past. For example, almost all academic discussion about fascism for about three-quarters of a century simply assumed that fascism did not merely lack a reasoned basis as a political ideology, it was actually entirely devoid of cognitive content, and instead motivated entirely or at least predominantly by irrational hatreds and beliefs. While it might therefore be an appropriate subject for clinical study as to its psychopathetic causes and effects,<sup>31</sup> it was not appropriate for serious engagement by social and political philosophers who were responsible for organizing the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> See, e.g., William Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013).

world of ideas.<sup>32</sup> But the failure to take these views seriously as a political theory and instead simply toss them cavalierly into the dustbin of irrationality is a serious mistake. The rejection of fact-based reasoning does not render fascism or any other forms of illiberalism ineligible for understanding, nor does it mean that illiberal ideologies cannot be made the object of rational attack, influence, and control. Indeed, there is long tradition among highly-educated antienlightenment theorists of rejecting the proposition that mere facts are enough for justified belief or action.<sup>33</sup> Vico, Rousseau, Joseph de Maistre, Saint-Simon, and Auguste Comte all agreed that "man is weak and irrational, threatened by skepticism, and in need of religion and authority;" each concluded that "man needed to be freed from reason and philosophy, not freed by means of them."<sup>34</sup> Myths are more important motivators than facts or science. Indeed, the claim is that all political theories, both liberal and illiberal, must be based on ideology and not rationality because even the concept of what constitutes a fact is a political one. And I am afraid that as much as liberal do not want to admit it, this claim might be right.

# III. Fundamental Values I -- The fascist conception of the moral subject

Values are fundamental, in the sense I am using the term, if they are pre-supposed. By this I mean that fundamental values are those that establish the framework within which moral argument can take place. Before such a framework is in place, it is impossible to determine what counts as a moral argument and what does not. This is why they must be presupposed. But this does not mean that no arguments can be made for or against which values should be selected as fundamental. It merely means that no *moral* arguments can be made in favor of against such

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> See Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, pp. 1-17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> See generally Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 1-24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Mark Lilla, G. B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1993).

selections, for any such arguments would beg the question of which set of fundamental moral values is correct, and that is precisely the issue in dispute. Religious, aesthetic, cultural, emotional, and sometimes even scientific and historical arguments can be made in favor of one set of fundamental values or another. But I shall not make any of these arguments in this paper. Elsewhere, I have a set forth my views of the fundamental moral presuppositions of liberalism; my purpose here is simply to do the same for fascism and show how different these fundamental presuppositions are.

Note that even once we have identified the relevant set of fundamental values, whether for fascism or liberalism, this does not tell us everything we need to know about what morality requires under this particular moral framework. Fundamental values are very general—they are concepts rather than conceptions—and need further specification before they can be used to guide us in real life situations. And fundamental values can often be further refined and interpreted in various ways, some of which are inconsistent with one another. This means that those who embrace the same set of fundamental values may come to very different conclusions about what morality requires that we do. It is only at a higher level of abstraction that one can recognize that some seemingly inconsistent political ideologies actually start from the same place. It is therefore important to recognize whether a disagreement is an interpretative one or a fundamental one, for if we do not do so, we may end up talking past one another, which is mostly, I fear, what is going on today,

Let me also emphasize that under the approach I will adopt in this paper, neither any particular individual nor any particular group or political party has to embrace the fundamental values of fascism in their entirety to be categorized as fascist. In most circumstances that apply today, that of a quasi-liberal quasi-fascist world, total commitment to fascism is rarely achieved,

and even the aspiration for a total fascist state is rarely openly expressed in the officially liberal world given the controversial nature of such a move. But the fascist way of looking at social life can exist on a sliding scale, despite (as we shall see) what many fascists claim to be the necessity of total commitment. People can and indeed many people have throughout history embraced fascism (as they do with liberalism) in degrees. And regardless of their commitment, they can be more or less successful in pursuing that commitment. It is accordingly not a defense to being identified as a fascist in the sense I am using the term that one's embrace of fascism remains somewhat incomplete, tentative, or unsuccessful. For the term to be a useful form of categorization in a non-ideal world, it must include those who are merely on the road to fascism and not only those who have got there already. It is as much about what people want to become as about what they are.

# a. The fascists conception of the social

For those who may not be familiar with the work of John Rawls, the pre-eminent liberal political philosopher of the twentieth-century, note that he says (correctly in the view of almost all other liberal political philosophers) that liberalism begins with a conception of the person. The first is a capacity to have a sense of justice that guides them when engaging in social cooperation; the second is a capacity to form and pursue a conception of the personal good, an idea of what ends one, as an individual, should pursue. From this starting point, Rawls (and other liberal political philosophers) then build their particular conception of liberalism. And this means that liberalism is going to be about facilitating fair terms of social cooperation between individuals and ensuring that every

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> See John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001), sec. 7, pp. 18-24.

individual is able to pursue any reasonable conception of their personal good free from interference by others.

As a result of this, liberalism is often accused of being overly and in fact relentlessly individualistic. This, in turn, is then cited as a source of much evil. Indeed, those who advance this criticism of liberalism from the illiberal left attempt to rebrand liberalism as "possessive individualism."36 And the communitarian left,37 which is liberal in some ways but illiberal in others, actually describes liberalism even more derogatively as "asocial individualism." <sup>38</sup> Of course, the claim that liberalism reduces to nothing but individualism is also made by fascists and those on the right—the contemporary Russian Euraisianist and confidant of Vladimir Putin, Aleksander Dugin, for example, claims that "Liberalism is an ideology that prioritizes the liberation of the individual from all forms of collective identity."<sup>39</sup>And I myself have described liberalism as, among other things that are equally important, asserting that the individual is the fundamental social unit. But what I mean by this, and what most other liberal thinkers mean when describing the extent to which liberalism values individualism, is not that liberalism elevates individualism to the top of the moral mount. Despite Rawls's claim that liberal political morality begins with a conception of the person, liberalism in fact rejects blind individualism, the view that the needs and wants of the individual are to be placed above all else, and instead embraces what other liberal theorists call "creative and cooperative individualism." 40 In other words, while

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> See, e.g., C. B. Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Miachael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2d ed. 1998); Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (London: Blackwell, 2d ed. 1996).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> See generally Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 19 (1990): 6-23; Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (London: Blackwell, 2d ed. 1996).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Aleksander Dugin, "The Great Reboot and the Great Awakening," *Ria Novosti* (February 15, 2021) (<a href="https://ria.ru/20210215/perezagruzka-1597564983.html?fbclid=IwAR1m-HzHPOcoA8YUVjiUX0LofQ6RzTZINFq9KTMEuOVkZ2ZaqPKAgBRlo">https://ria.ru/20210215/perezagruzka-1597564983.html?fbclid=IwAR1m-HzHPOcoA8YUVjiUX0LofQ6RzTZINFq9KTMEuOVkZ2ZaqPKAgBRlo</a>).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> See Joseph H. Carens, *Democracy and Possessive Individualism: The Intellectual Legacy of C. B. Macpherson* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 1-2.

liberalism takes the individual as the fundamental social unit, it also values the community because communities are necessary for individuals to prosper and thrive. It is just that individuals are *prior* to communities; communities take their identities and from the individuals that make them up, not the other way around. Individuals and not communities are accordingly the place where moral and causal responsibility start and stop. Communities are valuable, but individuals may not be sacrificed for the good of the community, as the Kantian categorical imperative tells us, and there is no place for the assessment of collective moral responsibility, and no basis for the imposition of collective punishment. Both of which, in contrast, are commonly applied in fascist states.

For unlike liberalism, fascism does not begin with a conception of the person. It begins with what I will call a conception of "the people." One way of looking at this is to say that under fascism the individual is not an autonomous moral end in itself, but rather a component of a larger organic fundamental unit, and it is only this larger unit and other similarly composed but competing fundamental units that can harbor and pursue moral ends. In any event, the point I want to emphasize here is the stark difference in the starting positions of liberal and fascism: under fascism there is no distinction between a person and the carefully defined society to which he belongs. And one must not underestimate the ramifications of this difference in starting positions between liberalism and fascism. For it is this choice of opening conception that gives us the subject matter of political morality—without this, no exploration of morality can take place because we cannot know what the moral subject is. Of course, even once we have identified our moral subject, we still need to know much more before moral discussion can take place: we need to know the moral criteria by which that subject is to be evaluated. So noting the difference in starting positions

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> See Reiff, *The Attack on Liberalism*, "pp. 183-185.

between liberalism and fascism in only the beginning. Setting out the fundamental framework for morally evaluating persons, societies, actions, and beliefs requires the application of further important criteria. Setting out this fundamental moral criteria is accordingly what I shall do next.

#### b. The social hierarchy of men

Because it does not start with a conception of the person, the natural building blocks for the fascist framework for political morality are categories of people. One of the basic elements of fascist political morality, for example, is the belief that men have intrinsic value, while women have only instrumental value. I shall say more about this later, but for now, I want to focus on the larger belief into which this distinction between men and women folds. The idea is that everyone exists within a finely grained social hierarchy, establishing the relational value or status of each individual and group of individuals to another within the larger whole. Every man is of higher status than any woman, some kinds of men are of higher status than other kinds, and some men within each kind are of higher status than others of that kind. This social hierarchy may be rigid and express, like the caste system that was in place on the Indian subcontinent for generations and still is shaping Indian politics today. Or, some social mobility may be possible within certain larger rigid bands, much like the unofficial caste system that has been in effect even under liberalism (mostly based on wealth) for generations, although liberalism is at least officially dedicated to eliminating rather than enforcing the privileges of social status and until recently, these was indeed some improvement in the rate and degree of social mobility within most liberal societies. 42 In any event, the social hierarchy in a fascist society is deemed to have been set by God, in the eyes of some, or, in the eyes of others, is a product of the natural distribution of talents and abilities. After

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> See Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste* (New York: Random House, 2020).

all, hierarchical relations are built into many aspects of even modern life—it is not only a central feature of most religious beliefs; it is also a natural and perhaps even necessary feature of families with young children, relations with the workplace are hierarchical, within the military, and so on. So it is easy to see why some people feel that such relations should define all aspects of our lives. Of course, liberals do not deny that there may be a natural appeal to hierarchical relations, but they believe that as creatures with minds, we can overcome our primal instincts and not simply pander to them whenever and wherever they arise.

On the other hand, fascists believe that it is both pointless and senseless to fight against the natural order of things. 43 Rather, they view their role as instantiating that natural order, and they therefore see status as the central organizing factor of social and political life. Exceptions are of course possible—some women, for example, have a greater share of natural talents and abilities than some men—fascists are not blind to this. Indeed, some women have become leaders of fascist parties in the respective European nations or otherwise become powerful figures in fascist or quasifascist movements. But this does not change these women's place in the social hierarchy or otherwise challenge the underlying assumptions regarding how natural talents and abilities are generally distributed. Women can become leaders in fascist movements, but the power structure in such movements is always overwhelmingly male and those females who are successful will generally have special credentials which allow them to be atypically successful. Again, I will say more about this later, but for now, what is important to note is that these are conceptual categories, not empirical ones. The distinctions between intrinsic and inherent value and relative social status within the fascist worldview are not subject to rebuttal by counter-example.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> See e.g., Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morality.

Of course, there are many other conceptual categories into which people can be sorted besides men and women. And these categories can be conveniently identified by other biological, racial, ethnic, religious, objective or quasi-objective markers. This, for example, is where racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, ethnic and religious nationalism, and so on come in to complement the sexism of the social hierarchy. Many liberals view these exclusionary categorizations of the elements in the social hierarchy as central to an illiberal worldview, and they certainly are important. But they are really second-order views in the framework of fascist political morality—if these exclusionary views were fundamental, then there could be only one kind of fascism, whereas in the real world we see this phenomenon among all races, religions, and so on. In other words, it is not true that only white Christians can be fascists. Instead, what is fundamental is the belief that there is a rigid, pre-existing social hierarchy that must be respected for society to exist. The details then depend on which particular fascist movement one has in mind.

Group rankings that are established by certain objective factors may of course be determined in advance, but rankings are necessary within each group as well as between groups. For if status is the essential guideline through which all social interaction must occur, everyone must be ranked. But how are the rankings within each group to be determined? Because we have by definition run out of broad, intersectional factors at this point, it is difficult to rank these in advance. But criteria for this further ranking can be "revealed" over time, like economic preferences, through the accumulation of indicators of value, such as wealth, beauty, strength, and business, political, and social success. And note that all these measures of value are also objective or at least quasi-objective—that it, measurable by some outward-facing characteristic that is commensurable with other examples of this characteristic. The reason why subjective characteristics are not perceived as a source of value is that this implies an inner life that is unique

and incommensurable with the inner life of others, and this is contrary to the fascist worldview in which people are not thought of as individuals in this way.

Importantly, one common attribute of people that is usually not considered valuable within the fascist worldview, even though it can be (perhaps controversially) considered at least quasi-objective, is intelligence. <sup>44</sup> Intelligence, for the fascist, is more like salt—it has value, but only up to a point. One needs a little of it, but in amounts that are too generous it loses value and becomes a carrier of increasing disvalue. For the fascist, helpings of intelligence that are anything more than what is perceived as common are actually seen as a way of disguising a lack of true indicators of value, something used especially by Jews, the perennial outsider, to make their way in a hostile world.

What all this means, of course, is that fascists fundamentally disagree with the liberal idea that all people have equal moral worth. <sup>45</sup> For example, Julius Evola, a right-wing intellectual active in Italy from the 1920s to the 1970s and a favorite of the contemporary alt-right, <sup>46</sup> called the principle of equality "pure nonsense." <sup>47</sup> Alain de Benoist, one of the founders of the French New Right, characterized "egalitarian ideology" as *the* enemy of those on the right. <sup>48</sup> Lothrop Stoddard, the racist American historian and sociologist who rose to prominence in the 1920s and 30s, characterized the idea of "natural equality" as "one of the most pernicious delusions that has ever

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> There are some exceptions. See Jamelle Bouie, "Why an Unremarkable Racist Enjoyed the Backing of Billionaires," *The New York Times* (August 12, 2023) (discussing Carl Campbell Brigham, the eugenicist and professor of psychology at Princton University who created the SAT). Of course, where intelligence is valued, those minorities who are perceived as possessing more than their share of it (Jews, Asians) are then directly controlled if not expressly suppressed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> See Thomas J. Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> See Jason Horowitz, "Steve Bannon Cited Italian Thinker Who Inspired Fascists," *The New York Times* (February 10, 2017).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> See Franco Ferraresi, "Julius Evola, Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right," *European Journal of Sociology* 28 (1987): 107-151, p. 125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> See Alain de Benoist, View from the Right, Volume I: Heritage and Foundations (London: Arktos, 2017), p. 2.

inflicted mankind."<sup>49</sup> Madison Grant, the early twentieth-century American eugenicist, claimed that "the basic truth [is] that inequality and not equality is the law of nature."<sup>50</sup> I could go on, but I think the point is uncontroversial.

Indeed, given the weight of human experience, fascists contend that it is obvious that people are not equal. People exist on a multi-variegated scale, in the sense that in any pairwise comparison, one person is always "better" in the relevant hierarchical sense of "more worthy of moral concern and respect" than the other. But it is important to focus on this fundamental principle not simply as a rejection of the idea that all humans have equal moral worth, as a negative argument against equality, but as a positive argument for how social interactions should be organized. For that is the only way to understand how thoroughly this idea runs through fascist thinking. Indeed, as we shall see, in a fascist society, an essential element of almost every social interaction is the determination of where each participant falls in the social hierarchy, for this indicates the rules by which that interaction can take place.

It is also important to note that the possession of the correct objective signifiers of high social status is a necessary but not sufficient indicator of one's place in the social hierarchy. One must also possess the correct "spiritual" or "cultural" characteristics, as expressed by one's attitudes and views. While there has long been a debate in fascist circles between those who embrace what is sometimes called "nationalistic" or "biological" racism and those who embrace "cultural" or "spiritual" racism, <sup>51</sup> this debate has little practical significance. It could be thought that spiritual or cultural racism is more sophisticated than nationalistic or biological racism, for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Lothrop Stoddard, *The Revolt Against Civilization* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), p. 30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Madison Grant, *The Great Race, or The Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 79.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Paul Furlong, "Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola (London: Routledge, 2011), ch. 7.

the former would allow for such a thing as a Jewish Nazi or an Aryan Jew. But in practice this is not true. Spiritual and cultural criteria are only used to *exclude* those who bear the "correct" objective markers, not to include those who do not share these markers but have some spiritual affinity with those who do. This is why would-be immigrants who are religious conservatives, either brown-skinned Spanish-speaking Catholics or any kind of Muslims, are not welcomed by self-proclaimed "white" Christian societies despite their affinity for many of the same conservative values.

Again, there are exceptions—an *individual* with the correct ideological affinities but with contra-indicated objective features may be welcomed into the fascist community for a time as an object of entertainment, or a tool of the power elite, or some other kind of "useful idiot." And there are always some individuals who would otherwise be excluded from the ruling class who find the attraction of being accepted into the fascist fold despite their failure to meet the usual objective criteria impossible to resist. It is, in a perverse way, a kind of accomplishment for the lave to be invited into the home of the master. This both appeals to some people's compulsive desire to serve as a submissive to whomever they see as the most powerful, and their equally powerful desire to use the power that trickles down from being accepted into the dominant group to dominate those in their own group in turn. In any event, these people can always be excluded later, when their public usefulness diminishes. Milo Yiannopoulos, the openly gay right-wing provocateur who wrote for alt-right Breitbart News until he was banished for appearing to endorse pedophilia, would be one example. Enrique Tarrio, a dark-skinned Cuban American who as leader of the Proud

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> See, e.g., Rosie Gray, "The Mercers Wash Their Hands of Milo," *The Atlantic* (November 2, 2017); David Shariatmadari, "There's No Crisis of Free Speech. Milo's Campus Crusade Is Rank Hypocrisy," *The Guardian* (September 19, 2017).

boys was recently convicted of seditious conspiracy for his role in the January 6, 2001 US Capitol insurrection, would be another.<sup>53</sup>

Note that I shall deal with women who appear to be in or headed for leadership potions in European fascist parties or who seem to be playing a prominent role on the extreme right in US politics later, when I talk about the values of masculinity and femininity. Suffice it to say at this point that despite their sometimes significant political accomplishments, none of these women have gotten even close to obtaining full control of their respective states, as they would have to do to fulfill the image of a true fascist leader. I expect that being of the "wrong" gender will ultimately prevent this, but there are some unusual dynamics in play here with regard to gender that need to be considered. Gender is an objective characteristic (for fascists), but unlike other objective or quasi-objective characteristics, no male fascist advocates or even desires the elimination of the female gender, whereas the elimination of those possessing all other non-qualifying objective characteristics is the subject of many fascist fantasies. In contrast, the continued existence of women is necessary for the reproduction of men and the fulfillment of some powerful male drives, and women who have certain characteristics are also the carriers of an important element of instrumental value that is used for measuring male success. This means that "femaleness" has a special status among objective characteristics. Whether this is enough to take a woman to the head of a fascists state is unclear; I think not. But even if I am wrong about this, this would not challenge my conclusion with regard to any other objective or quasi-objective characteristic. In any event, it is clear that the ideological gloss that supplements objective markers can work both ways to some extent in certain cases, these are fringe, not central, cases. They reflect induvial exceptions, not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> See Marcela García, "The Proud Boys' Latino Connection, Explained," *Boston Globe* (June 10, 2022).

changes in how that class of individuals is viewed. On a fundamental and far more common level, it is the ability to exclude those who tick the right boxes but will not, in colloquial terms, "get with the program," that is important here.

For example, one of the most important moves by Sayyid Qutb, the founder of radical Sunni Islamic fundamentalism, was to claim that those who disagreed with his interpretation of Islam were not "true" Muslims, and that in the struggle to regain control of Muslim lands from what he and other fundamentalists viewed as secular governments that had sold themselves to the West, these false Muslims could be legitimately killed. This unleashed a tidal wave of violence by Muslims against Muslims in these countries that would have been unthinkable before. <sup>54</sup>

This same idea can also be seen in the coded and not so coded argument for "Great Replacement" theory, the idea that outsiders are being imported into the country to overwhelm the voting power of white people, an idea that is constantly being promoted in the US by contemporary figures like Tucker Carlson. <sup>55</sup> Carlson and those who think like him, for example, contend that only "true" Americans are entitled to a voice, regardless of their legal status. Those who deviate from either objective or ideological norms are not members of the community, no matter what liberals might try to claim, but rather beings of lesser moral worth.

#### c. A reverence for blood and soil

Tied up in all this as both a cause and an effect of their exclusionary worldview, fascists have an excessive reverence for blood and soil. Fascists believe that all people are naturally or perhaps supernaturally connected to both the land of their ancestors and the bloodline out of which

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> See e.g. Gilles Kepel, *The Roots of Radical Islam* (London: SAQI, 2005), pp. 34-69, 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> See, e.g., Judd Legum, "Republicans Have Invoked the 'Great Replacement' Theory Over and Over," *The Guardian* (May 17, 2022); Nicholas Confessore and Karen Yourish, "A Fringe Conspiracy Theory, Fostered Online, Is Refashioned by the G.O.P." *The New York Times* (May 15, 2022).

they arise. And not in the trivial liberal sense in which people sport associational ties to the history of their ancestors as well as their community. Fascists give an importance to blood and soil that is much greater than this. Perhaps this is because under the typical fascist theory of history, it is the first period of any historical cycle when greatness truly reigned. Perhaps this is because fascists believe there is some sort of superior genetic material in the blood of the ruling class which it passed down to what should be the ruling class of the future (Julius Evola, for example, was among those who thought this, assigning special importance to the bloodline of the transcendental beings that he believed came to earth and inter-married with humans long ago). Perhaps this is because of surviving pagan notions that the land gives birth to those meant to live upon it and is therefore to be thought of as their mother or father rather than something which might become the property of others. In any case, the maintenance of bloodline in the relevant community, and the continuous territorial possession of land historically associated with that community, is viewed as an essential part of what gives the requisite social hierarchy its stability. Indeed, thinking of a people as something separate from either their biological or territorial lineage is as ridiculous as thinking of a product as independent of its maker, separate from where and by whom it was created.<sup>56</sup> People who have no home in this sense are like ghosts on earth, wandering with no true connection to it, able to derive sustenance only by being parasitic and sucking nourishment from the connection enjoyed by others.

In large part, this is why fascist movements, everywhere outside of Israel, are antisemitic.<sup>57</sup> Jews are viewed as a wandering people.<sup>58</sup> Having no home of their own, they are naturally inclined

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> See, e.g., 7

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Of course, this is a gross simplification—anti-Semitism is much more complicated than this. But it is not an over-simplification. It does tie anti-Semitism to one of the fundamental values of fascism rather than simply moving immediately to the applied level and tying it to the perceived natural characteristics of the Jew.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, "The New Roots of Anti-Semitism," *Project Syndicate* (Nov 30, 2023).

(the reasoning goes) on the one hand to denigrate the value of homeland, yet simultaneously infiltrate and subvert the homelands of others.<sup>59</sup> The inconsistencies of the political characteristics commonly assigned to Jews—that they are simultaneously committed communists seeking to establish a single world government and of relentless capitalists whose voracious appetite for even more staggering amounts of money lead them to impose ever greater degrees of subjugation on the working population of every nation—are explained because they are both ways of solving the problem of being homeless in the larger sense. How to deal with a world that contains a people with no home of their own, if one views homeland as an essential element of continued existence is therefore a perennial problem, a problem sometimes referred to as "the Jewish question." Just as the only way for Jews to annihilate religious prejudice again them is to annihilate religion, <sup>60</sup> the only way for Jews to annihilate the status flowing from having a homeland is to annihilate the idea that a people draw their power and identity from their land and their pure European blood. And the same burden has to be overcome, the argument goes, from any other people (the Roma, the Kurds, and so on) that do not have an established homeland either.

Of course, the connection between a people and its land is often imagined, or at least much more tenuous than assumed. Most people today live on the land that was originally some other people's territory. And bloodlines have become inextricably intermixed. The long-standing, present connection of blood and soil is more a nationalist myth than a recitation of historic fact. But this does not matter. The founding myth is an act of affirmation for those particular people. The land is a gift from God to a specific people or, for the secular fascist, it is theirs by right

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> See, e.g., J. S. McClelland (ed.), *The French Right: From Maistre to Maurras*, (London: Jonathan Cape 1970), pp. 30-31 (by McClelland) and pp, 87-118 (by Edouard Drumont (1844-1917).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> See Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" in *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 211-241.

because of the sheer number and importance of the years of their possession of it. It is not a historic claim of clean legal title. It need not be based on a precise rendition of a historically accurate set of facts, and often is not based on facts at all. It is not something that is subject to moral evaluation in terms of justice as to who holds the best title. Even those who have been removed from the soil for a long time—perhaps generations or even millennia, can still claim a natural or supernatural connection to their mythic homeland, for such a deep connection cannot be broken and even if faded can always be rekindled.

To use Qutb's thought as an example again, he believed that the Muslim community had been extinct for centuries, "crushed under the weight of those false laws and customs which are not even remotely related to the Islamic teachings, and which, in spite of all this, calls itself the 'world of Islam.'" The entire modern world, whether it calls itself Muslim or non-Muslim, was in his view in a state of *jahiliyyah*, or ignorance of the Divine guidance. It was therefore necessary for a small "vanguard" to initiate a movement of Islamic revival, to lift this veil of ignorance and bring the wayward home to their community, which could then reassert its rightful place as the leader of the world.<sup>61</sup>

In any event, this idea—that communities are not derived from commonalities between individuals, but rather exist independently as organic social constructs, and individuals can and should be forced to conform to these conceptions or be branded as enemies of the community if they do not, is widespread in fascist thinking. Consider the ideas of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder of the fascist or "Falange" movement in Spain. Like Qtub, Antonio claimed that "the state was not the nation but that the nation existed previously . . . the Fatherland was not a being

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> See Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Beirut: Holy Koran Publishing House, 1980), pp. 9-22, 101-103.

but a value and therefore a spirit. . . For the Fatherland to exist, some sort of spiritual event had to have created it, as had been the Spanish case with the Visigothic King Reccared's conversion to Christianity in the sixth century." <sup>62</sup> In any event, the connection between a community and the land it claims can take the form of some heroic myth of discovery, as it does in the New World, in some momentous act of religious significance, or in something as mundane as a commonality of language, a common excuse for aggression by one fascist community against its neighbors (Nazi Germany into the Sudetenland, Russia into Ukraine, and so on). As long as there is something with which the myth-makers can work, a founding myth can be created, and a story of blood and soil created out of it. For this is something that is required for a fascist conception of society to exist.

# d. The obsessive pursuit of purity

Given the importance assigned to blood and soil and various objective, quasi-objective, natural and ideological pre-commitments, it should be no surprise that purity has intrinsic value for the fascist. One cannot value historical bloodlines and racial and ethnic categories without valuing purity. Purity is to be understood as contrary to pluralism, the miscegenation of peoples and the dilution through compromise of their values, qualities, and social vision. Indeed, to the fascist, it is liberalism's commitment to pluralism that makes social life a constant war of all against all, as Hobbes predicted. Purity, and not just authority, is therefore an essential feature of social peace. For "rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience," and unity in experience is an essential feature if any group of persons are to come together as a people. This is why, for example Trump, as Hitler did before him, rail against those who because of their place of birth or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> See Joan Maria Thomàs, *José Antonio Primo de Rivera: The Reality and Myth of a Spanish Fascist Leader* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), ch. 4, p. 278.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> See Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Mary Douglass, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 3.

their religion or ethnicity or that of their parents or grandparents can be accused of "poisoning the blood of our country." 65

But purity is also valuable for its own sake, not just because it is seen as having good consequences. Purity is a form of perfection; and perfection represents an attainment of the ideal. A fascist society of a perfectionist society, as opposed to a society that is simply "good enough," which is what liberalism supposedly strives for. In any event, authority is the tool by which fascists attempt to achieve order, but purity is the fundamental value that is being pursued. The cleansing of the social body is as necessary as the cleaning of the biological body if the fascist self-conception of a people is to be maintained. Hence the attraction of eugenics to the fascist mind, and the mistake, in my view, of those pleading for their rights to argue that they were "born this way," as those in the LGBT+ community often do, and therefore do not deserve to be treated as festering moral pustules rather than receive the same moral respect as other individuals are entitled to. The born this way defense may work within liberalism, but within fascism, it is simply an admission of moral defect, and thereby of moral guilt and a self-destructive call for extermination.

I shall say more about the aversion that fascists typically exhibit toward LGBT+ people later, but I do want to discuss the relationship between this aversion and the obsession with the purity of the people, the moral whole and subject, a little further here. In the fascist worldview, sexual orientation and gender identity are viewed as objective or at least quasi objective factors in determining the composition of the people. But unlike other such factors, these non-conforming characteristics cannot be eliminated, only suppressed. They therefore pose a danger greater than that posed by other forms of impurities. For biological reproduction means there will always be

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> See Isaac Arnsdorf and Marisa Iati, "Trump Makes Demonizing Immigrants a Core Message with 'Blood' Refrain," *The Washington Post* (December 22, 2023).

new LGBT+ people created even within a committed fascist community, and this threatens to dilute the purity of that community in two ways. Not only does this threaten to dilute the achievable purity of any fascist community by creating non-conforming people within the relevant society itself; it also threatens that purity by calling into question the conformity of the parents and institutions that help raise and educate what turn out to be non-conforming adults. After all, under fascist ideology, if children become non-conforming, it is not only because of their genes but also because of how they were raised by their parents and the institutions charged with assisting in the education of children and their preparation for adult life. Fascist societies believe in eugenics but generally reject biological determinism; otherwise ideology could not play the important role it does within fascist society. And because having the correct genes is necessary but not sufficient for full membership in a fascist society, there is an oft-expressed fear that children can be groomed for and seduced into non-conforming lifestyles. Hence the corresponding claim that repressive measures against certain ways of life are there to protect children, a common refrain used to excuse all sorts of illiberal attitudes. But what really drives homophobia and transphobia, I think, is that it assuages the paranoia that even the most conforming adults could have their membership credentials called into question if they have created or even appear to have aided and abetted the creation of non-conforming individuals. We might call this "the Frankenstein effect," the tendency of people to forget that Frankenstein was the doctor not the monster. In other words, the threat here arises not only if one views homosexuality and transsexuality as encoded in genes, which suggests that the genes of those who contributed genes as not as pure as they may have appeared themselves. But it also calls into question that actual purity of belief and action of those associated with these non-conforming individuals themselves. In any event, it is the fear of having their own purity

questioned as much as the social impurity caused by the existence of such non-conforming people that is driving this particular hatred and making it even more virulent.

But as I said, fascists believe not just in biological and cultural purity, but in political purity too. This is a necessary corollary of conceiving of "the people" not just by its objective identifiers but by their cultural, spiritual, and ideological uniformity. And while fascists more or less concede that objective purity is not feasible, in the sense of having people of only one objective kind living in a particular place, <sup>66</sup> ideological purity is conceivably achievable. It is achievable through the imposition of the proper social hierarchy. The impure are assigned lesser value, their numbers are limited, their crimes are punished most severely, even if these may be imagined—in short, they are controlled like pests. And the marginalized who are willing to trumpet the ideology of the ruling class, even if that ideology is to put them down, are celebrated, at least for a time, just like voluntary slaves, until their atypical allegiances are no longer instrumentally useful. <sup>67</sup> Indeed, it is this obsessive-compulsive focus on purity that explains why fascists sects eventually destroy themselves. Over time, the criteria for membership in the relevant community becomes ever more finely specified, and more and more people are excluded. <sup>68</sup> Eventually, so many people are excluded that the fascist state can no longer retain its grip on power.

For the liberal, then, the fascist obsession with purity functions as a kind of failsafe, for it eventually leads all fascist movements to self-destruct. But a great deal of destruction can take place in the name of purity before this failsafe finale is activated and has an effect. On the other

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> See, e.g., Anonymous, "Critique of *The Manifesto of Race* Elaborated within the Higher Council of Demography and Race (1941-42), in *Italian Fascism*, ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2000), pp. 173-179, 177.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> See, e.g. Tayo Bero, "Why Are Black Rappers Aligning Themselves with the Right?" *The Guardian* (August 10, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> See Reiff, "The Attack on Liberalism," pp. 205-207.

hand, *impurity*, which under liberalism takes the form of respect for pluralism, is what makes liberal society forever amenable to the rise of fascism in its midst. For there could not be movement from liberalism towards illiberalism if many of those who considered themselves liberals did not feel some attraction to the values espoused by fascists all along. In other words, the lack of reverence for purity within liberalism is what allows a reverence for fascist values to simmer. And this is a necessity for a movement from liberal values to fascist ones to take place.

# e. Property rights in the fascist world

It should be obvious that when a social order is organized according to the status of its participants, rights have a very different meaning than they do under liberalism. This includes not only rights prohibiting unfair and discriminatory treatment, which mostly do not exist under fascism, but property rights too. Property rights do exist in a fascist state, and the state is formally committed to protecting them. But regardless of what is true in theory, these rights are typically not enforceable in practice against those of greater social status, even if people may have enforceable property rights against those of their own or lesser status. This obviously has a large impact on the management of the economy in a fascist state, but this impact has not been much discussed. The primary focus (perhaps for understandable reasons) has been on the role of other rights, and how liberalism and fascism differ with regard to the recognition of such rights and, in their absence, how people can be (mis)treated. But what I will focus on here is the role of the right to private property in the fascist state, and the implications of the fascist version of this right on the relationship between fascism and capitalism.

There is not a great deal of thoughtful work written about the relationship between fascism and capitalism, but there is a lot of glib propaganda on this subject. For example, on the left, it is widely believed that no matter what else fascism is, it is even more committed to capitalism than

liberalism is. <sup>69</sup> Indeed, on the far left, it is claimed that liberal capitalism naturally and inevitably evolves into fascism, which no doubt sounds like good news to many of those on the far right, so they are happy to second that view. But this view is wrong, no matter where it comes from, and its prevalence has led to many misunderstandings about the relationship between fascism and capitalism. For if one cannot defend one's property from attacks by those of greater status under the fascist worldview, then the right to private property has a very different meaning under fascism than it does under liberalism. Indeed, while fascists often make a great deal of their opposition to socialism and communism, their attitude toward private property is much the same. Under socialism, property is owned by the state and supposed to be used to best advance the common good. Under fascism, property is ostensibly in private hands, but as I shall explain in a moment, the people and the state and the leader are one under fascism, so the fact that capital is largely under private hands in a fascist state has very different ramifications in such circumstances than it would under liberalism. In the fascist state, capital is subject to being directed by the leader to whatever purposes he desires, including international armed aggression and frivolous or idiosyncratic domestic projects, regardless of where the market would suggest that funds be applied. In other words, unchecked free market operations often do not serve fascist objectives. Market operations must therefore be subservient to the direction of the leader, allow the implementation of policies that ideologically popular but economically inefficient or outright economically destructive, be available to reward certain individuals and punish others, and otherwise mimic and reaffirm the social status of the participants in the economy. 70 This is how

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> See James Livingston, "Neoliberal Minority Rule," *Project Syndicate* (November 1, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> See, e.g., Arnd Bauerkämper, "Fascism and Capitalism," *Moving the Social: Journal of Social History & the History of Social Movements* 67 (2022): 75-97.

the economy is subject to (mis)management in a fascist society, despite its supposed commitment to capitalism and free market operations.

Of course, some people may and do acquire large amounts of capital under fascism. Indeed, this is often used as a method of social control of the elite. But the view that this leaves the elite with great power in a fascist society is an illusion, one that the economic elite often are afflicted with themselves as liberalism gives way to fascism. These people might be "masters of the universe" in a liberal capitalist society, but they are mistaken if they believe that their wealth will allow them to control the fascist political elite even more than the liberal political elite. 71 And this is true regardless of whether they owe their accumulation of wealth to those in the fascist state or their wealth was pre-existing. For in either case, that wealth is subject to being confiscated in a moment should the ostensible owners of these assets displease the powers that be. These assets remain in the private hands where they currently reside only as long as those hands put themselves under the command of the state, which means the leader. Others hold assets only at the pleasure of the leader, and these assets are subject to being redistributed to others who are more subservient to the leader and compliant with his wishes at any time. And many of those who hold assets do some in name only, as a way of disguising the true beneficial owners of the economic fruits of society, something that we can see illustrated most clearly by Putin in Russia, who officially owns almost nothing but in fact is one of the wealthiest men in the world.<sup>72</sup>

What we have in the fascist state is therefore not capitalism, but something that would be more accurately described as "antisocial socialism," where wealth is redistributed not according

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> See, e.g., Jim Heintz, "Under Putin, the Uber-Wealthy Russians Known as 'Oligarchs' Are Still Rich but Far Less Powerful," *AP* (December 6, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> See Forbes staff, "As Biden Mulls Sanctions, Three Theories On How Putin Makes His Millions," *Forbes* (January 27, 2022); Don Lee and David Pierson, "Palaces, Super-Yachts, Swiss Accounts. How Rich is Putin and Can Sanctions Hurt Him?" *Los Angeles Times* (March 6, 2022).

to need but accordingly to the ostensible wealth-holder's degree of instrumental subservience to the political elite. And while this may seem to be the opposite of how the economy is directed under communism, it is not. As we shall see in the next section, the good of the people and the good of the leader are indistinguishable under fascism. The dedication of beneficial ownership to the political elite is thus no different than the application of capital under communism, given the how the common good is to be understood.

This also explains why corruption is so often both rampant and endemic under fascist regimes. Corruption simply does not pose the same kind of wrong that it does under liberalism when property rights themselves are only mostly in name only and offer no real protection to their ostensible holders against those above them in status. Indeed, under the fascist conception of the social, corruption is an efficient and legitimate way of distributing goods according to social status. Moreover, given that bribery can be reconceived as a payment of tribute, it is not so much against the rules as in accordance with them if every dispute is supposed to be resolved according to the relative social status of the parties. Corruption is so hard to weed out of fascist regimes because it is in fact an application of the way society is organized under fascism, not a contradiction to it. Indeed, allowing property rights to be effectively used to defeat an effort by a dominant party to direct the actions or use of capital by a subservient one would represent a threat to the whole system. Eliminating corruption would create circumstances in which the fascist system can become clogged and may even cease to work.

## IV. Fundamental Values II -- The fascist conception of the political

Liberalism does not have a pre-moral conception of the social. Rather, its conception of the social is driven by its conception of the person. This is why the liberal conception of the social is subject to so many possible variations—there are many versions that that would fit with the liberal

conception of the person and therefore are subject to moral argument. But this is not the case with the fascist view of political morality.

a. The unity of the state, the leader, and the people

This idea is as much a part of the bedrock of fascism as the belief that the Holy Trinity are not separate and independent figures, but rather different expressions of the same, single, deity is a part of the bedrock of Christianity. Fascists simply reject the idea that society is to be thought of as a collection of individuals whose wills conflict and compete and therefore must be harmonized so we all can get along. For example, consider the work of Othmar Spann, who Karl Polanyi called one of the first thinkers to produce a truly "comprehensive philosophic system" of fascism. <sup>73</sup> Spann's thought was highly influential during the rise of fascism in Austria in the 1920s and 30s, and to a significant extent in Germany too. <sup>74</sup> Spann noted that for the liberal,

society [is] regarded as the summation of independent individuals; as comparable to a concourse of atoms, to a heap of stones, in which every atom or stone remains independent, self-determined as it were, leading to a separate existence; and in which the association of the parts has produced no more than superficial and purely mechanical community. In that case, individuals form the real and primary being of society and the State . . . society and the State are thought of exclusively in terms of the individual . . . the individual is the main thing, not the community. [But] these premises are false. The individual is not mentally self-governing; and society is not a mere summation, is not purely an agglomeration, of such individuals. [Rather, the truth is that a] mental or spiritual associative tie between individual exists as an independent entity; that it is super-individual or primary, whereas the individual is derivative or secondary.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Karl Polanyi, "The Essence of Fascism" [1935], in *Economy and Society: Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), pp. 81-107, 83.

Thesis, Rice University, 1969) (https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/19015/6919293.PDF?sequence=1).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Othmar Spann, *Types of Economic Theory* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1930), pp. 59-60.

In other words, ordinary individuals are not competing independent biological organisms who are important in themselves, but more like cells in a single, large, biological super-organism. <sup>76</sup> Indeed, for the fascist, the very idea of being "an individual" makes no sense. All members of "the people" are defined by their possession of a certain set of characteristics and their adherence to a specific set of views. All members of a fascist community are therefore identical in all relevant respects. Those who attempt to distinguish themselves from the community are making themselves distinct from it, and those who put themselves outside the community are by definition making themselves enemies of it, regardless of whether the degree of distinction may be severe or slight.

Indeed, one can be excluded from the people not only by outright betrayals of the requisite ideological core commitments, but for the smallest infractions as well. Hence Trump's frequent use of the sobriquet "enemy of the people" for those who defy him in both large and small ways. Hence Trump's denigration of those within the party who defy him even on seemingly unimportant points as "Republicans in Name Only." Hence the calls for RINOs to be cast out for defying the will of the people. While dissent and disagreement are part of the acknowledged reality of the liberal world, the fascist world makes no such concession. For the fascist, the people, the state, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> See Othmar Spann, *The True State: Lectures on the Demolition & Reconstruction of Society,* (Zvolin, Slovakia: Taxiarch Press, 2020), 9-53, 178; *José Antonio Primo de Rivera*, ed. Hugh Thomas (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 25-26, 44, 133; Alfredo Rocco, "The Political Doctrine of Fascism (1925), in *Italian Fascism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), pp.103-124. Alexander Raven Thomson, *Civilization as Divine Superman* (London: Sanctuary Press, 2019), pp. 18-21; Julius Evola, *Men among the Ruins,* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002), pp. 148-155; Alain de Benoist, *The Problem of Democracy* (London: Arktos, 2011), p. 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> See Michael M. Grynbaum, "Trump Calls the News Media the 'Enemy of the American People," *The New York Times* (February 17, 2017); Jeanna Smialek, "Powell Highlights Fed's Limits. Trump Labels Him an 'Enemy," *The New York Times* (August 23, 2019); David Smith, "'Enemy of the People': Trump's War on the Media Is a Page from Nixon's Playbook," *The Guardian* (September 7, 2019).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> See Ed Kilgore, "'RINO' Just Means 'Disloyal to Trump' Now," New York Magazine (March 24, 2022).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> See Greg Sargent, "Ugly New Attacks on Republicans Who Defied Trump Hint at a Dark GOP Future," *Washington Post* (February 16, 2021).

the leaders are *conceptually* one. The liberal idea that there can be dissent issuing from within is simply incoherent.

Note that this rejection of the idea of even the possibility of slight disagreements being permissible between members of the community is actually indicative of a wider rejection of proportionality as a moral value. Instead of the employing the retaliatory strategy of tit for tat, as liberals typically do, for example, fascists embrace the retaliatory strategy I call "the Chicago Way." This strategy recommends that punishment for a wrong be so overwhelming that no one will even think of committing that wrong again. Even relatively modest deviations from doctrine therefore warrant the imposition of the most serious consequences. After all, tit for tat is the approach of a player who wants to establish cooperation in a conflict situation. But this is purely a liberal goal—fascists seek domination, not cooperation. The strong man does not apologize, even for blatant mistakes, and he does not show mercy to his enemies—he obliterates them for the slightest indiscretion. Hence the Russian scorched earth policy in Grozny, Syria, and Ukraine. See

In any event, liberals typically think this view of there being a conceptual unity between the leader, the people, and the state, and its implication of authoritarian rule as implying strong anti-democratic sentiments. And clearly, many fascists are expressly anti-democratic.<sup>83</sup> But to think of anti-democratic notions as necessarily built into fascism is a mistake, resulting from a misunderstanding of both democracy and fascism, a misunderstanding that ultimately comes down

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> See Mark R. Reiff, *Punishment, Compensation, and Law: A Theory of Enforceability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 68-70.

<sup>81</sup> See Robert Axelrod, The Evolution of Cooperation (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> See, e.g., Andrew E. Kramer, Ivan Nechepurenko, Anton Troianovski, and Katie Rogers, "Putin Says Nations that Threaten Russia's Security Will 'Regret Their Deeds." *The New York Times* (April 21, 2021) (Putin announces that Russia's response will be "asymmetric, fast and tough" if it is forced to defend its interests).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> See, e.g., Carl Schmitt, *Dictatorship* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2014); Alfredo Rocco, "The *Political* Manifesto (1918)," in *Italian Fascisms*, pp. 249-268, 252 ("the ideology of democracy is, by definition, an ideology of defeat").

to semantics, not substance. What I mean by this is it comes down to distinction between what anti-democratic fascists see as a "sovereign" dictatorship—a dictatorship of the political trinity, the unity of the leader, the state, and the people—and a "parliamentary" dictatorship, what liberals would call a representative democracy. <sup>84</sup> Fascists are against the latter but for the former. Indeed, the esteemed Italian "philosopher of fascism" Giovanni Gentile actually claimed that fascism was "the greatest expression of democracy ever invented." Mussolini himself, on the stage with Hitler in Berlin in 1937 declared Itay and Germany "the greatest and most genuine democracies." Liberals see such claims as ludicrous, of course, but there is a sense in which they are true. Democracy is a method for deciding how a people should govern themselves and organize their society. It is indeed designed to give effect to "the will of the people." But there is nothing in democracy that tells us who "the people" are.

The key to understanding the relationship between fascism and democracy is accordingly seeing how different the fascist and liberal conceptions of "the people" are. <sup>87</sup> For liberals, this is thought of as a non-technical term, as including everyone (at least) who is legally entitled to vote. But to the fascist, to be part of a natural, organic unity that conceives of itself as a people, one must share the correct objective and ideological attributes. Those who do not are, by definition, outsiders, whom we might tolerate as guests if they respect their place and we feel generous. But outsiders are not part of the body of "the people" and therefore have no right to be part of the democratic order. If they do not respect their place, they lose whatever grace they may enjoy as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> See Carlos Pérez-Crespo, "An Apocalyptic Speech Outlining a Theory of Dictatorship: Carl Schmitt Inspired by Juan Donoso Cortés," *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 26(1):21-40, 28-30.

<sup>85</sup> See Giovanni Gentile, *The Origin and Doctrine of Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> See Jenny Uglow, "Fascism's Poster Girl," The New York Review of Books (March 23, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> See Mark R. Reiff, "Why Some People Think Fascism Is the Greatest Expression of Democracy Ever Invented," *The Conversation* (November 7, 2022).

second-class citizens and become an outright enemy, whose existence is intolerable and whose activities if not presence must be suppressed.<sup>88</sup> But no matter what, they should have no right to vote. The fact that in a liberal society they do is what prompts people like Tucker Carlson to claim in horror that "our democracy is no longer functioning."<sup>89</sup>

It is also important to understand that this unity is not viewed an end to be achieved—it is not, as in liberal-speak "a consensus that arises from the give and take of social and political interaction." Rather than an aspirational end, it is an assumption, an assumption of there being a unified communal will, which provides the point from other aspects of political morality begin. This is how Trump (according to those around him) can believe "I am the state," and see what is good for him as by definition good for the country. <sup>90</sup> This is how Trump can claim that the many criminal indictments against him are really attacks on upon "you," meaning his people, the real Americans. <sup>91</sup> For as the leader, his will is by definition the will of the people. And anything that gets in the way is as much an obstacle to democracy as a terrorist or a traitor.

Indeed, given the unity between the leader, the people, and the state, even the presence of mediating bodies between the people and their leader is intolerable. As Mussolini famously claimed, "everything is in the state, and nothing human or spiritual exists, much less has value, outside the state." The mediating forces of representative democracy merely create obstacles to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> See, e.g., Gregor, "Julius Evola, Fascism, and Neofascism," p. 105.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Tucker Carlson, "Our Democracy Is No Longer Functioning Properly, Here's Proof," Fox News (February 2, 2022).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> See Maggie Haberman, "Another Trump Mystery: Why Did He Resist Returning the Government's Documents?" *The New York Times* (August 18, 2022).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> See Nick Corasaniti and Trip Gabriel, "Trump Tells Supporters His Criminal Indictments Are About 'You," *The New York Times* (August 8, 2023); Charles M. Blow, "When Trump Says 'People,' He Means 'His People," *The New York Times* (September 27, 2023); Marc Fisher, "Trump as Jesus? Why He Casts Himself as a Martyr, and Why Fans Go Along." *The Washington Post* (November 6, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> See Benito Mussolini, *The Doctrine of Fascism* (written with Giovanni Gentile) (1932), in *Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and the Resistance in Italy, 1919 to Present*, ed. Stanislao G. Pugliese (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 85-91, 88. See also José Antonio Primo de Rivera, "The Basic Elements of the Liberal State," in *José Antonio* 

the expression of the will of the people. 93 It is therefore the checks and balances of representative government that liberals mistakenly value so much that are undemocratic. For these checks and balances mostly just stand in the way of the leader putting the will of the people into motion.

One of the most open and articulate expressions of this idea comes from Muammar Gaddafi. Perhaps this is the result of the trickle-down of Gentile's thought to the Libyan officer class in Italy's former colony; perhaps it is original. But in any case, in the collection of his political thought, Gaddafi says:

Parliament is a misrepresentation of the people, and parliamentary systems are a false solution to the problem of democracy. A parliament is originally founded to represent the people, but this in itself is undemocratic as democracy means the authority of the people and not an authority acting on their behalf. The mere existence of a parliament means the absence of the people. True democracy exists only through the direct participation of the people, and not through the activity of their representatives. Parliaments have been a legal barrier between the people and the exercise of authority, excluding the masses from meaningful politics and monopolizing sovereignty in their place. People are left with only a facade of democracy, manifested in long queues to cast their election ballots.<sup>94</sup>

In other words, to be democratic, a state does not need a legislature, other than perhaps to celebrate the proclamations of the leader. All it needs is a leader.

But how is that leader to be selected? Not by elections, surely. These are spectacles, meant to trumpet the leader's embodiment of the will of the people to the world. But the leader is an extraordinary figure, larger than life. Such leaders cannot be "selected;" their identity becomes "manifest" through a more natural process, like that associated with the recognition of a religious

Primo de Rivera: Selected Writings (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 44-45; Giuseppe Mazzini, "To the Italians: The Program of the 'Roma del Popolo,' (1871)," in The Duties of Man and other Essays (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1907), pp. 221-247, 222, 224, 228. For general discussion see A. James Gregor, The Ideology of Fascism (New York: The Free Press, 1969).

<sup>93</sup> See Benoist, The Problem of Democracy, p.58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Muammar Gaddafi, *The Green Book* (Center for Political Innovation, 2020), p. 36.

<sup>95</sup> See Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1943), p. 81.

miracle or prophet. <sup>96</sup> The charisma of the candidate, the intensity of the feeling expressed by his supporters, the size of his rallies, the loyalty he commands, his consistent ability to demonstrate that he is not bound by the norms that govern ordinary men, his decisiveness—these are the hallmarks of he who embodies the will of the people. This is how Trump can ask, without any disingenuity, "how could Biden have won the election when Biden did not attract big crowds during the election campaign?" And even if Biden did attract some crowds, why should a mild preference for one candidate among 52 percent of the electorate prevail over the intense preference for another among the remaining 48? Is not the latter really more representative of the will of the people? This latter remark sounds like Trump, but it is actually Gaddafi again. <sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, it demonstrates how the criteria of manifestation can make Trump and his supporters believe he "obviously" won re-election, and that any contrary result could only be product of corruption and fraud, a failure of democracy, not a fair expression of the will of the people, as narrowly conceived.

One of the things this means is that in a fascist state, everyone is of one mind about everything of importance. Accordingly, everyone intuitively knows what the leader wants them to do. It is therefore each person's responsibility, citizen or official, to "work towards the leader," without needing specific orders. 99 Those who make mistakes will soon learn of it. But those who get it right will be rewarded many times over. Indeed, this is exactly what those involved in the January 6 insurrection were thinking when they tried to prevent the confirmation of Biden's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> See generally Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> See Amanda Holpuch, "Trump Ends NPR Interview After Challenges to False Fraud Claim," *The New York Times* (January 12, 2022).

<sup>98</sup> See Muammar al-Qaddafi, *The Green Book*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> See Ian Kershaw, "Working Towards the Führer.' Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship," *Contemporary European History* 2 (1993): 103-118.

election. <sup>100</sup> And this is what Trump has repeatedly confirmed by announcing that if re-elected, he would pardon them for any of the so-called "crimes" for which they were convicted. <sup>101</sup> This can also be seen in Trump's plans to capture the apparatus of the federal government to settle scores and enforce his will on all those who hesitated to support him if he is re-elected. <sup>102</sup>

Another important ramification of viewing the state, the people, and the leader as the equivalent of a single organism is that it leads fascists to believe in collective responsibility. If the political trinity is the fundamental social unit of concern and each individual only a cell within it, then every member of the collective would naturally be thought of as jointly and severally responsible for the moral wrongs committed by any one of them. That is, everyone who is a member of the collective is morally responsible for everything that any member of the collective does, regardless of whether they participated in that wrong in any way. This view has its most important ramifications not as a formula for self-assessment, however, but as grounds for blaming outsiders and their communities for the perceived injuries inflicted on any member of the home community. In other words, it justifies the imposition of collective punishment and attack against entire groups in response to the perceived wrongs any one of their group members may have committed, even if there is no such conspiratorial commonality from the point of view of those who would be sanctioned. 103

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> See Dan Barry, Mike McIntire and Matthew Rosenberg, "'Our President Wants Us Here': The Mob That Stormed the Capitol," *The New York Times* (January 9, 2021); Olivia Rubin, Alexander Mallin, and Alex Hosenball, "'Because President Trump Said To': Over a Dozen Capitol Rioters Say They Were Following Trump's Guidance," *ABC News* (February 9, 2021).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> See Mariana Alfaro, "Trump Vows Pardons, Government Apology to Capitol Rioters if Elected," *The Washington Post* (September 1, 2022); John Wagner, "Trump Expresses Solidarity with Jan. 6 Rioters Who Stormed the Capitol," *The Washington Post* (December 2, 2022).

See, e.g., Isaac Arnsdorf, Josh Dawsey, and Devlin Barrett, "Trump and Allies Plot Revenge, Justice Department Control in a Second Term," *The Washington Post* (November 5, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> See Mark R. Reiff, "Collective Responsibility," *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, ed. Mark Bevir (Sage 2010); Mark R. Reiff, "Terrorism, Retribution, and Collective Responsibility," *Social Theory and Practice* 34 (2008): 209-242.

Note that there is a potential conflict between secular fascists, who see the political trinity as the ultimate authority, and religious fascists. This would be over how the Holy Trinity, or its non-Christian equivalent, and the political trinity, relate. In these cases, religious fascists view the political trinity and its anointed leader as subservient to religious doctrine and its anointed explicator. Catholic "integralists" for example, view the bible in theory and the Catholic Church in practice as not only the ultimate religious authority, but the ultimate political authority as well. 104 This view has its roots in the reactionary Catholic authoritarianism of Joseph de Maistre, Juan Donoso Cortés, Carl Schmitt, Othmar Spann, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, and so on, and while it may seem superficially more presentable than the views of these figures, it is no less radical. Integralists do not see the Church as the day-to-day leader of the government, but rather as the spiritual guide and the ultimate authority on controversial issues, much like whichever Ayatollah is recognized as the Supreme Leader in Iran, <sup>105</sup> although for obvious reasons Catholic integralists would not openly accept such an analogy. Indeed, the modern advocates of this view are careful to speak reassuringly that their view is simply that government has a duty to pursue "the common good."106 What could be more reasonable than that? But the common good is to be understood as that set forth in an ultra-conservative version of Church doctrine, and therefore their idea of common is as exclusionary as any other political conception of "the people." Their anti-liberalism is also open and loud, and if one takes their insistence on the sublimation of democracy to their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> See generally Alberto Spektorwoski, "Joseph de Maistre, Donoso Cortes, and Argentina's Catholic Right: The Integralist Rebellion against Modernity," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9 (2008): 455-474; Micah Schwartzman and Jocelyn Wilson, "The Unreasonableness of Catholic Integralism," *Virginia Public Law and Legal Theory* Research Paper No. 2019-43 (August 13, 2019).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> Note also that a similar attitude toward the authority of the Church can be found in the Slavic ethno-nationalism of the Russian Patriarch Krill and his support of Vladmir Putin's aggression in Ukraine. See Jack Jenkins, "How One Priest Turned Putin's Invasion into a Holy War," *Rolling Stone* (March 19, 2022).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> See Adrian Vermeule, "Beyond Originalism," *The Atlantic* (March 31, 2020).

ultra-conservative interpretation of the bible regarding the rights and roles of woman, sexual identity, interfaith marriage, and so on, their views are as fascist as any other. <sup>107</sup> Indeed, despite their assurances that Jews have nothing to worry about from a Catholic integralist government, the reasons why are never made clear.

In any event, regardless of whether Church doctrine is taken to be superior to the will of the political trinity, one thing that is not superior to the will of the people as expressed through their leader, is the law. Indeed, the authority to act contrary to the rule of law is viewed as an essential component of fascism. As Juan Donoso Cortés, the 19th century Spanish Catholic authoritarian whose work was extremely influential on Carl Schmitt, explains, liberals think that

everything should be based in legality ... [while] I myself ... believe that laws are done for societies, and not societies for laws.... When legality can save society, [it should be welcomed,] when it is not enough, then ... dictatorship." <sup>108</sup>

Schmitt then later explains that the leader is he "he who decides on the exception;" that is, he who decides when the rule of law is to be suspended. 109 But whether one thinks of this as a departure from the rule of law, as liberals and even some fascists do, or as an illustration of how fascism brings a truer form of democracy to the fore by ensuring that the will of the people always prevails, even against the law, hardly matters. In either case, it is the present, living, political trinity, perhaps supported by the religious authority of the prevailing religion, that is viewed as the repository of authority above all else.

### b. Creation and destruction as equal ultimate ends

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> See, e.g., Garrett Epps, "Common-Good Conservatism Is an Idea as Dangerous as They Come," *The Atlantic* (April 3, 2020).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> See Alberto Spektorowski, "Maistre, Donoso Cortés, and the Legacy of Catholic Authoritarianism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002): 283-302, 295 (quoting Donoso Cortés). For the full essay from which this quote is taken, see Donoso Cortes, "Discourse on Dictatorship," in *Readings in Political Theory*, ed. R. A. Herrera (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), pp. 51-66.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 5.

What, then, is the function of this fascist political trinity? Well, it is not something as mundane as mere self-preservation. Nor is to provide conditions in which every individual is free to pursue their own idiosyncratic but reasonable conception of the good, as it is in liberalism. On the day-to-day level, it is to put the plans of the leader—that is, the trinity—into motion. But the overall purpose of fascism is to create greatness, be it great architecture, great nations, great wealth, great power, or whatever. And greatness is demonstrated by moving mountains, not by building tiny homes. As Nietzsche is commonly thought to have claimed, the purpose of social cooperation is not to maximize the overall productivity or well-being of society, but to throw up a few great men. 110 The monuments, both metaphorical and literal that these great men leave behind, is the true sign of a society's success. Size is incredibly important, and not just in the Freudian sense. Impact is a measure of greatness: the antidote to existential angst, the fear that one does not exist, or may not be remembered. But note that impact is value neutral. Impact may accordingly be good or bad in the liberal sense; what is important in the fascist sense is that it is big. If attempts at creation are frustrated, or are merely seen as just too difficult, then the appropriate response is not to retreat and surrender to passivity, but to cause significant and even widespread social and physical destruction.

In other words, for the fascist, destruction is conceived of not as the opposite of creation, but as a form of it. 111 Liberals, in contrast, typically place creation above all forms of destruction,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For an indication of Nietzsche's influence on Fascist thought, see, e.g., Alexander Raven Thomson, *Civilization as Divine Superman* (London: Sanctuary Press, 2019), pp. 14-15; Joan Maria Thomàs, *José Antonio Primo de Rivera: The Reality and Myth of a Spanish Fascist Leader* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), ch. 4, pp. 271-72 (discussing the thinking of Ortega y Gasset).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)" and "The Economic Problem of Masochism (1924)" in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis, The Penguin Freud Library, Volume 11* (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 269-338; 409-426.

which they would view at best as an unfortunate necessity, not as something morally equivalent to creation. This is true even though they sometimes appear to attach real value to destruction, as in Joseph Schumpeter's prideful characterization of capitalism as a system of "creative destruction." Even if one sympathizes with the spirit of Schumpeter's characterization, however, it is clear that it is not the destruction that he is celebrating, but rather the creation which is the cause of it; this is what makes the destruction unproblematic for the liberal. But for fascists, destruction is viewed as a universal way of clearing the decks for great acts of creation to begin. Creation may sometimes cause destruction, but destruction is also a cause of creation, not merely an effect. It is therefore valuable in itself.

For example, many non-traditional Protestants see a great war arising in the Middle East as an absolutely necessary precursor to the culmination of history and the fulfillment of God's plan. Traditional protestants, or rather those who take biblical predictions seriously, view such a war as ushering in the tribulations, a long period of cataclysmic destruction, pestilence, and natural disaster without precedent in human history, which is then followed by the rapture, when all good Christians will be resurrected and taken up to heaven on the wings of angels. But non-traditionalists reverse this order. In other words, instead of the rapture coming after the tribulations, non-traditionalists claim the rapture will occur *before* the tribulations. Obviously, for people who hold such views, there is a sense in which the destruction of society, whatever its form, is not to

See Joseph Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), pp. 81-86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> See Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism* (New York: Random House, 2000), pp. 137-140; Garry Wills, "Where Evangelicals Came From," *The New York Review of Books* (April 20, 2017). For more on dispensationalism and related fundamentalist views, see Michael Luo, "Doomsday: The Latest Word if Not the Last," *The New York Times* (October 16, 2005); Karen Armstrong, "Bush's Fondness for Fundamentalism Is Courting Disaster at Home and Abroad," *The Guardian* (July 30, 2006); Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

be feared but rather to be welcomed, for it not only confirms their religious beliefs, it also means that their rapture cannot be far behind.

Even among those who do not see religious affirmation and the potential for personal resurrection in the destruction of the existing order, there is a long tradition of fascist thinking that sees such destruction not as an end but as the beginning of a new cycle of human social circumstances. This view, for example, is found in Julius Evola's notion of historical regression—the idea that there are four cycles or stages of civilization, which instead of representing progress and evolution, represent regress and involution. 114 According to Evola, what we are engaged in now is sliding, not climbing, 115 for "no idea is as absurd as the idea of progress." There simply "is no future, in the positive sense of the word, for modern civilization as a whole. 116 Indeed, we are already in the fourth and final age, "The Age of Darkness," and only though a cataclysmic dissolution of our existing liberal social structures can we hope to return to the first and brightest age, "The Golden Age," at which point the cycle of social and political life can begin again. 117 And lest one thinks such ideas may be dismissed as the mere idiosyncratic outpourings of Evola, note that a similar notion of the cyclical nature of history can be found in Oswald Spengler's *Decline* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> See Ferraresi, pp. 112-113.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> See also H. T. Hansen, "A Short Introduction to Julius Evola," in Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1995), pp. ix-xxii, p. xiii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World* pp. xxx, 363. For an eerily similar claim, see Giovanni Papini, "A Nationalist Programme, (1904) in *Italian Fascisms: from Pareto to Gentile* (New York, Haper & Row, 1975), pp. 99-119, 109.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> See Ferraresi, pp. 112-113; Evola, *Revolt against the Modern World*, pp. xxviii, xxxi-xxxii, 54-59, 177—187, 367-369. Note that Evola claims a similar conception of history as regression can be also found in Vico. See Julius Evola, "The Culture of the Right," in *A Handbook for Right-Wing Youth* (London: Arktos, 2017), pp. 54-58, 56.

of the West, <sup>118</sup> and in Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Machiavelli, and Vico. <sup>119</sup> But whether expressed in a philosophical theory of history or simply as a present intuitive worldview, for fascists, the past was always better, and is to envied by those unfortunate enough to be living in the present. "When the best are dead, the dead are best," Hitler is insightfully portrayed by David Edgar to have said to Albert Speer when Hitler was asked why he would not surrender even though defeat was inevitable. <sup>120</sup>

The same idea also underlies the supposedly Nietzschean idea of "positive nihilism," which Alain de Benoist proclaims can have "no other sense than this: one can build only in a space which has been previously razed to the ground." Of course, Nietzsche realized that the urge to destroy is sometimes nothing more than this—that is, not motivated or accompanied by an intent much less a plan to rebuild and re-create. 122 But modern fascists continue to see destruction as a valued end in itself. Indeed, this point is argued for at length in *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy,* a work by two amateur far-right historians. 123 This book, in turn, was much admired and then promoted by Steve Bannon, one of Trump's earliest advisors. Bannon not only made a film about it, he also stated himself that he was absolutely certain that another great war is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> See Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West, Volumes I* and *II* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926, 1928); Gregory Swer, "The Revolt against Reason: Oswald Spengler and Violence as Cultural Preservative," *The Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 3 (2019): 123-148, esp. 123-124, 129, 135.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> See Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 85. See also Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, pp. 32-36, 240, for extensive references to those who embrace what he calls the "palingenetic" myth of rebirth or regeneration after a period of decadence and decline.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> See David Edgar, *Albert Speer* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2000), pp. 141-147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> See Ferraresi, p. 175 (quoting from Alain de Benoist, *The View from the Right*).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 325: "The desire for *destruction*, for change and for becoming can be the expression of an overflowing energy pregnant with the future ... but it can also be the hatred of the ill-constituted, deprived, and underprivileged one who destroys and *must* destroy because what exists, indeed all existence, all being, outrages and provokes him."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> See William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy—What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997).

necessary for civilization to be reset.<sup>124</sup> Even Trump, in one of his more candid moments, seemed to ascribe to this view: "when the economy crashes, when the country goes to total hell, and everything is a disaster, then you'll have riots to go back to where we used to be, when we were great." Which explain much about his approach to social disruption. And despite having gotten a taste of just what kind of pain the chaos of social destruction can bring, this "accelerationist" view that the destruction of the existing social and political order is to be preferred to a continuation of the quasi-liberal status quo, is gaining traction among all groups on the alt-right. It is now clearly the main strategy of the Congressional members on the hard right. As one experienced Washington reporter puts it,

Washington is in the grip of an ultraconservative minority that sees the federal government as a threat to the republic, a dangerous monolith to be broken apart with little regard for the consequences. They have styled themselves as a wrecking crew aimed at the nation's institutions on a variety of fronts. 127

They are willing—indeed, eager—to force the US government into a historical default. They want to impeach the president, regardless of the lack of any reason to do so, and even remove their own Speaker if he does not accede to their every demand. They have refused to allow their own party to debate a military spending bill or approve routine military promotions despite the threat this poses to US military readiness. And so on.

In any event, one of the most indelible acts of bigness one can create is to "infect the future." This is what great acts of destruction, whether physical, social, or moral, do. Almost one

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> See Micah L. Sifry, "Steve Bannon Wants to Start World War III," *The Nation* (February 8, 2017).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> See Stephanie Boland, "This 2014 Donald Trump Interview Hints at a New Kind of Special Relationship," *New Statesman* (November 17, 2016).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> See Brian Hughes and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Uniting for Total Collapse: The January 6 Boost to Accelerationism," *CTC Sentinel* 14 (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, April/May 2021): 12-21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Carl Hulse, "The Wrecking-Ball Caucus: How the Far Right Brought Washington to Its Knees," *The New York Times* (September 23, 2023).

hundred years ago, the Nazis thrived for just 8 years, but one cannot live in Germany today and not notice the striking absence of pre-1945 architecture in many cities, the thousands of brass commemorative plaques for victims of the Holocaust in every German city. The dangerousness of Nazi ideology is expressly recognized in law—the promotion of fascism is expressly prohibited as is the display or possession of Nazi symbols and paraphernalia in the hope that this will help repress the celebration of fascism and the fetishization of its values and its symbols and activities. But the fact that there is felt need for such continued repression of these ideas is itself evidence of the pull that the past has on the present. And even so, these efforts have been only partially successful; otherwise the AfD would not be so politically competitive. The point is that fascist rule, unlike liberal rule, is *unerasable*—it infects the future no matter what one might do to try to suppress it in the present once a transformation or re-transformation to liberalism has occurred. And that alone is the kind of accomplishment that fascists can long for no matter how short or doomed their exercise of real power may be.

### c. Violence as a virtue

Not surprisingly, given the intrinsic value that fascists assign to destruction in general and destruction of the liberal order in particular, fascists view violence as a virtue, not a vice. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a fascist society that is characterized by non-violence, either internal or external. Violence is too central to the conception of the role and reason for existence of the state as purification machine for a fascist society to hold together long without the glue that it provides to prevent internally destructive social divisions.

But there are also other reasons why fascists hold violence in such high regard. First, it is the natural result of the way that fascist communities define themselves. According to Carl

Schmitt, one builds and maintains a community by identifying and vilifying its enemies. <sup>128</sup> And in this kind of environment, the threat of violence and even war always hangs in the air, a threat that at some point must be realized in order to maintain its effective ness o as a tool of social o influence and control. <sup>129</sup> We can find many examples of this both internal and external, from the rhetoric used in the run-up to World Wars I and II, <sup>130</sup> to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, to the repeated Russian aggression toward Ukraine, and, most alarmingly now, in the rhetoric used by Trump and many of his supporters today. <sup>131</sup> Indeed, millions of Americans, not just a tiny number of Oath Keepers and Proud Boys, now believe the use of force is justified to prevent Trump's prosecution and to return him to the White House. <sup>132</sup>

Second, given the elevation of machismo as a personal characteristic (more on this in a moment), violence is not to be feared, it is to be admired. Indeed, fascists are quite enamored with what we might call the warrior spirit. 133

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 26.

See Bernard E. Harcourt, "How Trump Fuels the Fascist Right," *The New York Review of Books* (November 29, 2018).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> See, e.g. Corradini, Enrico "The Principles of Nationalism (1910)," in *Italian Fascisms*, ed. Andrian Lyttelton (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp.146-148, 147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> See, e.g., Ryan Cooper, "A Political Movement, Defining Itself by What It Hates," *The New York Times* (April 6, 2018) (reviewing Mike Welding, *Alt-Right: From 4chan to the White House* (London: Pluto Press, 2018)); Michael Tackett, "Painting Socialists as Villains, Trump Refreshes a Blueprint," *The New York Times* (February 6, 2019); Joel Achenbach, "Science Is Revealing Why American Politics Are So Intensely Polarized," *The Washington Post* (January 20, 2024).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> See Hannah Knowles and Meryl Kornfield, "Loyalty, Long Lines, 'Civil War' Talk: A Raging Movement Propels Trump," *The Washington Post* (January 21, 2024); Robert A. Pape, "Tromp Supporters; Violent Rhetoric Escalates," *Boston Globe* (June 14, 2023); Benjamin Newman, et al., "The Trump Effect: An Experimental Investigation of the Emboldening Effect of Racially Inflammatory Elite Communication," *British Journal of Political Science* 51 (2020): 1138-1159; Nathan P. Kalmoe, "Fueling the Fire: Violent Metaphors, Trait Aggression, and Support for Political Violence," *Political Communication* 31 (2014): 545-563.

<sup>133</sup> See, e.g., Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 161. Benito Mussolini, *Mussolini Revealed in His Political Speeches*, ed. Barone Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1923), p. 168; Timothy Snyder, "Ivan Ilyin, Putin's Philosopher of Russian Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, (March 16, 2018) ("Christianity actually meant the call of the right-seeing philosopher to apply decisive violence in the name of love"); Juan Donoso Cortes. "Religion, Liberty, and Intelligence," in *Readings in Political Theory*, ed. R. A. Herrera (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), pp. 15-18, 15 ("Man, to be great, to live

Third, fascists are obsessed with purity. I shall say more about this obsession too in a moment, but even without explaining that obsession more completely, one should be able to see that purity, especially purity of racial, spiritual, and ideological thought, is an aspiration that could only be made real through the use of violence. <sup>134</sup> Or, as the members of the German AfD and other extremists call it, the forced "re-migration" of immigrants, even those with legal citizenship. <sup>135</sup>

In any event, because of all these factors, violence is seen as both noble and intoxicating. <sup>136</sup> "Whatever value human life has does not come from reason; it emerges from a state of war between those inspired by great mythical images to join battle," says Schmitt. <sup>137</sup> "War," says Evola, "offers man the opportunity to awaken the hero that sleeps within him," and "the moment the individual succeeds in living as a hero, even if it is the final moment of his earthly life, weighs infinitely more on the scale of values than a protracted existence consuming monotonously among the trivialities of cities." <sup>138</sup> Maistre goes even further: "The whole earth, perpetually steeped in blood, is nothing but a vast altar upon which all that is living must be sacrificed without end, without measure, without pause, until the consummation of things, until evil is extinct, until the death of death." <sup>139</sup> Indeed, Maistre goes on the extoll the virtues of "the Executioner," the man who kills other men,

in posterity, has to be notable in war, religion, or intelligence"); Enrico Corradini, "The Cult of the Warrior Morality (1913)," in *Italian Fascisms*, pp. 155-158.

<sup>134</sup> See, e.g., Hedwig Wachenheim, "Hitler's Transfers of Population In Eastern Europe," *Foreign Affairs* 20 (1942): 707-720.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> See Ashifa Kassam, "Scholz urges unity against far right after mass deportation 'masterplan' revealed," *The Guardian* (January 11, 2024).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> See Niraj Chokshi, "Assaults Increased When Cities Hosted Trump Rallies, Study Finds," *The New York Times* (March 16, 2018); Christopher N. Morrison, et al., "Assaults on Days of Campaign Rallies During the 2016 US Presidential Election," *Epidemiology* (March 12, 2018); Ed Pilkington, "'He's My Guy': Donald Trump Praises Gianforte for Assault on Guardian Reporter," *The Guardian* (October 19, 2018).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Carl Schmitt, The Crisis in Parliamentary Democracy, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1988), p. 71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> Julius Evola, "The Forms of Warlike Heroism," in *Metaphysics of War: Battle, Victory and Death in the World of Tradition* (London: Arktos, 2011 [1935]), pp. 21-27, 21. See also Julius Evola, "What It Means to Belong to the Right," in *A Handbook for Right-Wing Youth* (London: Arktos, 2017), pp. 49-53, 50 ("belonging to the Right means upholding the values of Tradition as spiritual, aristocratic, and warrior values).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> Berlin, "Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism," p. 111 (quoting Maistre).

because (he says) without him society could not possibly exist. <sup>140</sup> He thinks of war not as an evil to be avoided, but rather as something that satisfies men's natural desire to be destructive, an exercise that leaves them feeling "exalted and fulfilled." <sup>141</sup>

Trump's former adviser Steve Bannon admires these ideas so much he made a movie about them. 142 Trump appears to embrace these ideas too. "When the economy crashes, when the country goes to total hell, and everything is a disaster, then you'll have riots to go back to where we used to be, when we were great," he says. 143 Violence, on other words, is viewed a ss social force. It is political as well as personal. It is to be directed at norms and institutions, and not used merely for personal retribution. Which is why four in ten Trump voters now believe that political violence is justified in order to prevent the "corruption" of the country by liberals. 144

## V. Fundamental Values III -- The goals of social interaction

a. The Relationship between Domination and Subservience

For the fascist, domination of another is the best way to assert one's higher place in the social order. But that does not mean that domination has greater value than subservience. Subservience to the state, subservience to one's betters, subservience by women to men, subservience by people of lesser moral worth to those of greater —each of these is of great value in a fascist society. Much like how these roles express themselves in some sexual practices, one

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> Ibid. at pp. 116-117.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," p. 21 (describing Maistre's views).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> See Micah L. Sifry, "Steve Bannon Wants To Start World War III: His 2009 film, Generation Zero, shows a hellishly bleak vision of our past, present, and future, driven by a magical belief in historical determinism," *The Nation* (February 8, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> See Aaron Blake, "'I love bad markets': Trump Often Sees the Bright Side of Economic Crashes," *The Washington Post* (September 3, 2019).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> See David Smith, "Nearly One in Four Americans Believe Political Violence Justified to 'Save' US," *The Guardian* (October 25, 2023).

relation is not "better" than the other in the sense of having greater value even though those who are dominant enjoy a higher place in the social order.

Liberals often find this baffling, for it is hard for liberals to view subservience as a valuable way of being. Accordingly, liberals often re-characterize subservience as an excessive or unreasonable degree of passivity. But this is a mistake. Passivity may be evidence of subservience, but when thinking of the value of subservience, subjugation of the will is what is meant. There are consequentialist reasons to think of subjugation of the will as valuable, even for those who are submissive—one can relax if one does not need to exercise agency; it is comforting to know one's role in the social order even if one is not at the top, and perhaps even if one is at the bottom; outcomes are reasonably predictable if one knows what the social order is and therefore one can have settled expectations about what the future holds; and so on. But there are deontological reasons to see subjugation of the will as valuable too. What use could the life of a worker-bee be if he was not to play a role in the success of the whole? So in this sense, both domination and subservience do have value, even though their value may be incommensurable. Recognizing that there is a dominant and a submissive in every social interaction is a way of recognizing the natural order of things. Bucking this, in contrast, creates a tension against the forces of nature, the stress of which degrades the emotional and social life of everyone.

In analytical terms, this means that fascists reject the idea of republican liberty, the claim that freedom consists in not being subject to the arbitrary will of another. <sup>145</sup> Or perhaps the better way to put this is that they see the absence of liberty in republican terms to those lower on the social order as what gives society as a whole stability and value. Indeed, Ivan Illyin, the early

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> See Reiff, In the Name of Liberty.

twentieth-century White Russian Eurasiainist whose work is so influential on the men who run Russia today, emphasized exactly this when he said "the fact of the matter is that fascism is a redemptive excess of patriotic arbitrariness." <sup>146</sup> There is simply no way for any two people to relate (other than by conflict), fascist believe, if they are in other than a dominant and submissive relationship. Accordingly, what fascists endorse is a comprehensive conception of positive liberty, a rigid prescription of how everyone should behave in every aspect of their lives in order to realize their full potential, "to be the best that they can be" in some pre-defined homogenized sense, regardless of their personal wants or desires. 147 This is then combined with the view that it is government's job to ensure that everyone abides by these detailed rules, which effectively means that fascists believe that people may and indeed sometimes must be compelled to be "free." It is in this sense that even some contemporary continental philosophers who are critics of fascism claim that fascists do indeed embrace a conception of freedom 148—this conception is simply what analytic philosophers would call a conception of positive liberty. And being a conception of conception of positive liberty, this conception of freedom is not subject to the limiting principles of neutrality of tolerance, and therefore is not moderated as it is within liberalism. <sup>149</sup> In other words, for the fascist, authority is the source of liberty. Negotiation and compromise are for women; they are sign of weakness, not of strength. There are only two possible results in any human interaction: conquest or capitulation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> See Timothy Snyder, "Ivan Ilyin, Putin's Philosopher of Russian Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, (March 16, 2018) (quoting Ilyin).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> See Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002,) pp. 166-217, 167.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> See, e.g., Alberto Toscano, "Fascists, Freedom, and the Anto-State State," *Historical Materialism* 29 (2021): 3-21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> See Reiff, "Neutrality and Excellence."

The view that domination and subservience are the primary characteristics of all human relationships also helps explain why fascists are so attracted to acts of cruelty. What better confirmation can there be of one's superior place on the social hierarchy than the expression of cruelty toward those below? And what greater show of submission can there be than the willing acceptance of the cruelty of those above? There is a connection between domination of subservience that is expressed as sadomasochism in not only sexual but also in political and social relationships. Indeed, "Trumpism is driven by cruelty and domination even as its rhetoric claims grievance and victimization." This is why even when fascist policies hurt their own supporters, this is not a problem as long as those policies hurt perceived outsiders more. In these cases, "victory for us is to see you suffer." President Trump and his supporters find community by rejoicing in the suffering of those they hate and fear. 152

Attached to this valuation of domination and submissiveness is the elevation of decisiveness above the content of the decisions made. But I am not just opposing decisiveness to waffling here. Anyone can make the "correct" decision, the one backed by the most reliable evidence and argument. It takes someone special to knowingly choose against the tide of reason. This is an act that signifies one is above the regular criteria that influence common men. Indecisiveness, then, in both these contexts, is seen as a typical liberal attribute. Liberals are so afraid of making the wrong decision that they will delay and delay until there is no possibility that they could be accused of not giving the matter thorough study. Instead of taking decisive action, liberals just want to form a committee to study the matter and engage in endless discussion of what

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> Mark Danner, "'Be Ready to Fight'" *The New York Review of Books* (February 11, 2021). See also Thomas B. Edsall, "Dream of Domination," *The New York Times* (May 3, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> See Philip C. Winslow, *Victory for Us Is to See You Suffer: In the West Bank with the Palestinians and the Israelis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> Adam Serwer, "The Cruelty Is the Point," *The Atlantic* (October 2, 2018).

to do; fascists want to do something.<sup>153</sup> And being unaccustomed to action, it might be added, liberals are unfamiliar with it. This is why liberals are so often befuddled by the tactic of unreasonably refusing to comply with applicable norms. Their first response is usually to simply describe the violation without explaining why it is a violation, as if its outrageousness speaks for itself, and double down on their demand for compliance instead of actually doing something to answer the "make me" challenge. So when they finally do act, they often do the wrong thing or, if they do the right thing, they do it in the wrong way or too late to make any difference.

But this works the other way too. One method that fascists use to undermine liberalism is to prevent or obstruct decisions by liberal authorities —they want to establish that only with the unity exemplified by the fascist political trinity can things get done. The consequences of such things hardly matter; what matter is the sense this provides of a ship moving in the water, not simply sitting still and being buffeted by outside forces while its fuel and stores slowly leaks away.

## b. Masculinity and Femininity

One might think that in a fascist society, the relationship between masculinity and femininity would simply mirror the relationship between domination and subservience. But this is not correct. Acts of machismo often are acts of domination, and even when they are not, they are still indicative of the intrinsic value of the relevant actor in the fascist worldview. But femininity does not map onto subservience in the same way that domination maps into masculinity. Indeed, while subservience has intrinsic value in the fascist worldview, femininity does not. And while

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 59, 63; Juan Donoso Cortés, "Letter of October 24, 1851 '*Las Clases Discutidoras*'" *The Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 3 (2019): 96-104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> See, e.g., AFP, "Bolsonaro Beams as Putin Praises His 'Masculinity," *The Moscow Times* (November 19, 2020).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> See Becca Rothfeld, "How to be a Man" Josh Hawley Has the (Incoherent) Answers," *Washington Post* (May 18, 2023) (reviewing *Manhood: The Masculine Virtues American Needs* (Wash. DC: Regnery, 2023).

women have instrumental value as a type, even this is not necessarily true as a token. For fascists recognize that women are not by nature subservient—this must be imposed upon them. <sup>156</sup> Women are accordingly to be viewed with suspicion, and as a potential source of evil. Indeed, when men fail, fascists often look for a women to blame. <sup>157</sup> In any event, fascist leaders almost all express deep contempt for women, viewing them more or less as shiny objects to be possessed or as a tool for the reproduction of men with the appropriate bloodline, and not as people—that is, as beings who are ends in themselves. <sup>158</sup> One of the greatest insults that those on the far right can think of to hurl at their targets, from the early nineteenth century anti-Enlightenment reactionary philosopher Loise Gabriel Amboise de Bonald, to the post-World War II American fascist lawyer, activist, and political philosopher Francis Parker Yockey, to the contemporary neo-conservative Harvard University professor Harvey Mansfield, to the Canadian pop psychologist and University of Toronto professor Jordan Peterson and beyond, is to accuse them of being "feminized." <sup>159</sup> Indeed, according to Yockey,

Liberalism is an escape from hardness into softness, from masculinity into femininity, from History to herd-grazing, from reality to herbivorous dreams, from Destiny into Happiness. . .

Feminism itself— what is it but a means of feminizing man? If it makes women man-like, it does so only by transforming man first into a creature whose only

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>156</sup> See, e.g., Moira Donegan, "Mike Johnson, the New Speaker of the House, Is a Gender Extremist," *The Guardian* (November 8, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Monica Hesse, "How Gisele Fetterman Became the Right Wing's Favorite Super Villain," *Washington Post* (March 2, 2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> See, e.g., Andrew Marantz, *Anti-Social* (New York: Viking, 2019); Jennifer Szalai, "In 'Antisocial,' How the Alt-Right Went Viral," *The New York Times* (October 8, 2019).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>159</sup> See, e.g., Harvey C. Mansfield, *Manliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Harvey C. Mansfield, "Why a Women Can't Be More Like a Man," *Wall Street Journal* (November 3, 1997); Louise Gabriel Amboise de Bonald, "On the Agricultural Family, the Industrial Family, and the Right of Primogeniture," in *Critics of the Enlightenment: Reading in the French Counter-Revolutionary Tradition*, ed. and trans. Christopher Olaf Blum (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), pp. 107-129, 107; Nellie Bowles, "Jordan Peterson, Custodian of the Patriarchy," *The New York Times* (May 18, 2018); Adam Gopnik, "The Ultra-Nationalist Éric Zemmour Makes a Bizarre Bid for the French Presidency," *The New Yorker* (December 3, 2021).

concern is with his personal economics and his relation to "society," i.e., a woman. "Society" is the element of woman, it is static and formal, its contests are purely personal, and are free from the possibility of heroism and violence. Conversation, not action; formality, not deeds. . .

This ridiculous performance but illustrates the eternal fact that History is masculine, that its stern demands cannot be evaded, that the fundamental realities cannot be renounced, even, by the most elaborate make-believe. Liberalistic tampering with sexual polarity only wreaks havoc on the souls of individuals, confusing and distorting them, but the man-woman and the woman-man it creates are both subject to the higher Destiny of History. <sup>160</sup>

How do we reconcile this contempt for women, however, with the fact that there are now fascist parties that are led by women? Marine le Pen, for example, succeeded her father as leader of the far-right National Front (now National Rally) in France. In Italy, two of Mussolini's granddaughters, Allessandra Mussolini and Rachele Mussolini, have been successful far-right politicians and vocal defenders of her grandfather's legacy. All And Georgia Meloni became Prime Minister of Italy in 2022 after her far right "Brothers of Italy" party secured the largest share of any party with 26 percent of the vote. In Germany, Alice Weidel is co-chairwoman of the AfD, the far-right party the Alternative for Germany. Wiedel is also a lesbian. With the exception of Meloni, however, none of these women have actually become national leaders holding state executive power. Moreover, they either had special credentials inherited through their fascist bloodline, or still may be regarded as window dressing despite their seeming positions of power. And of course, with the exception of Meloni, they have all failed to thrust their parties into power. Meloni, in turn, has been successful because she is participating in a fragmented parliamentary system where a relatively small share of the vote brings a disproportional amount of power. Note

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Francis Parker Yockey, *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics* (Wentzville, MO: Invictus Books, 2011 [1948]), pp. 209-210.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> See David Broder, Mussolini's Grandchildren: Fascism in Contemporary Italy (London: Pluto Press, 2023).
 <sup>162</sup> See Paul Kirby "Giorgia Meloni: Italy's Far-Right Wins Election and Vows to Govern for All," BBC News (September 22, 2022).

also that with each of these women, even Meloni, their femininity is hypersexualized (while a lesbian, Weidel's sexuality appeals to common male fantasy; the Mussolini granddaughters were both models at one time; and all of these women appeal to standard conceptions of feminine beauty). While difficult to test this, they may indeed have carried the fascist mantle forward but may not have ultimately been successful because they are women not men, and thus have been unable to attract the enthusiasm that male fascist leader would be expected to attract. On the other, the fact that they are women may make them more appealing to those unwilling to make a full commitment to fascism precisely because as women they are seen by some as less threatening. This may have been the secret of Meloni's success. In any case, I see no reason to see these cases as a challenge to my description of the fascist attitude toward masculinity and femininity. Again, they are exceptions with special circumstances that prove the general rule—their limited success does not challenge my claim as to the overall fascist valuation of masculinity and femininity.

This is also why fascists exhibit such hostility toward LGBT+ people. The visibility of gay people breaks the masculine-feminine binary, which is deeply discomforting to fascists because the their worldview requires that masculinity and femininity be seen as rigid designators whose borders cannot be softened. The existence of trans people is even more threatening—trans people threaten to turn masculinity into femininity (the fact that the existence of trans men could be seen as re-affirming the inherently superior nature of masculinity is simply overlooked). Trans people therefore threaten to eat the fiber of society from within. That is, unless transness is viewed instrumentally, as a tool for making the binary unbreachable. This, for example, is the case in Iran,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> See, e.g., Alain de Benoist, "On Identity," *Telos* 9 (Summer 2004):9-64, 20: "The whole history of modernity can be regarded as the continuous deployment of the ideology of the same," including "the increasing indistinction concerning male and female social behavior."

where "there are no gay people," according to its then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. <sup>164</sup> What there are is trans people, and by supporting their transitions, then at least in a simplistic sense (by ignoring the difference between gender identity and sexual preference), the Islamofascist government keeps the binary intact. <sup>165</sup>

The larger point to note here is the overall importance of binary relations throughout the system that fascists embrace for framing questions of political morality. For the fascist, we live in a binary world. People are either friends of enemies, masculine or feminine, dominant or submissive, a member of the community or an outsider. Only if the world is filled exclusively of binary relations can fascist social mathematics work and the requisite rigid social hierarchy and purity of identity and spirit exist. If everything is viewed, as in liberalism, as dispersed along a gradient scale, there is no order to social relations—everything is messy. And this defeats the whole fascist project, which is to ensure that all members of the community are identical in all important ways, and all matters of public policy can be expressed as choices to follow the one true path or not. In the fascist worldview, there are only bright lines; fuzziness is a sign of decadence and decay.

## VI. Fundamental Values IV -- The fascist theory of history

#### a. Truth as Narrative

There is one final important idea I want to discuss before I end my discussion of the underlying values of fascism. Liberals often think that fascists do not value truth. But they do.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>164</sup> See Helene Cooper, "Facing Scorn, President of Iran Is Defiant to His Critics," *The New York Times* (September 24, 2007).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> See Robert Tait, "Sex Change Funding Undermines No Gays Claim," *The Guardian* (September 25, 2007); Nazila Fathi, "Despite Denials, Gays Insist They Exist, if Quietly, in Iran," *The New York Times* (September 30, 2007). "Why Iran Is a Hub for Sex-Reassignment Surgery," *The Economist* (April 4, 2009); David Graham, "Iran's Solution to 'Gay Problem'? State-Funded Sex Change Surgery," *The Toronto Star* (November 13, 2010).

They just have a very different conception of what "truth" is. As a result, when liberal and fascists argue about what is true and what is not, they are often just talking past one another.

To see this, note that from the liberal point of view, any connection between empirical facts and what fascist claim to be "the truth" is purely coincidental, not causal. Trump, for example, made 30,573 false or misleading claims as president, an astounding number, coming at an exponentially increasing rate once he took office, with many of them being repeated and repeated hundreds of times even after their lack of accuracy was pointed out by numerous respected outlets of the mainstream media. Even if we ignore Trump's own false and misleading remarks, the 2020 Republican National Convention also delivered "a whirlwind of lies great and small." And Trump's post-election speech, claiming victory and insisting that the relevant authorities should stop counting votes in states where was ahead, was filled with blatant yet dangerous lies. Even now, the lies and misleading statements from Trump and his would-be successors and supporters continue to flow at an undiminished rate.

Liberals are typically outraged at the blatancy of these lies and misleading statements and that they continue to be repeated even after their falsity has been made clear. Despite the lack of effect that "correcting the record" seems to have, however, liberals will not recognize that this approach is not working. Instead, they simply redouble their efforts to demonstrate that these false statements are indeed false. But doubling down is not going to be any more effective for liberals than it was when these claims were initially made—fascists are simply not going to give empirical facts the weight in their pure and practical reasoning that liberals believe these facts rationally deserve.

Liberals find this deeply baffling. Not only to the extent that the alt-right illiberal right reconstructs reality using an ideological rather than a scientific approach to understanding the

world, leading them to produce and embrace what can justly be called "fake news." But also because those on the alt-right seem completely unmoved even when irrefutable evidence of their error is put before them, and therefore continue to believe that ideologically inconvenient but factually well-supported news is itself fake. For liberals, truth is derived first and foremost from social-scientific empirical evidence. Only when the empirical evidence does not convincingly support one view over another are plausible conjectures and moral arguments about relative priorities and corresponding default positions in the face of empirical uncertainty appropriate in the search for truth, according to liberals. This is what liberals mean when they speak of truth as "the inference to the best explanation." The "best" explanation in this case is best in the sense of complying with the available evidence and the most reasonable projection of what the evidence is likely to eventually show in areas of current empirical uncertainty. How could anyone else rationally think otherwise?

Fascists, however, do think otherwise. Rather than being derived first and foremost from empirical evidence, a true statement for the fascist is one that captures the "essence" of something. More than that, it is a statement that captures the essence of something in its most perfect state, and what state is most perfect can only be understood from a particular ideological point of view. Indeed, "without faith I do not know what truth means," says Juan Donoso Cortés. "The world of empirical existence cannot be theologically justified," Ivan Illyin claims. <sup>166</sup> "Believe! Obey! Fight!" exhorts the Italian fascist party, <sup>167</sup> affirming that for the fascist, the rule of thumb is "I'll see it when I believe it," not its more familiar empirically grounded skeptical liberal counterpart,

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>166</sup> See Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2018), p. 21 (quoting Illyin).
 <sup>167</sup> See Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922-1943* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

"I'll believe it when I see it." In other words, ideology supervenes on scientific and social-scientific truth under the fascist worldview, so the narrative they embrace as true need not have any correspondence with the underlying empirical facts.

If we see truth as a self-affirming narrative that captures the essence of a people, we can see why Trump's absurd story of being the most persecuted man in American history continues to have such appeal to a portion of the populace. <sup>168</sup> Think of this narrative as a scenario put out on the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) network. The story of someone who is both the underdog and a superman is an attractive story; it has great narrative appeal (whether this is despite or because of its unnerving echoes of *Mein Kampf* I will not say). How can we not want a person like that to come out on top. For if he does, it answers all the doubts that we have about ourselves and lets the supposedly downtrodden believe that a superman lies within. Again, given the unity of the leader, the people, and the state, as Trump is continuously reminding people, he and they are one. All the attacks on him are really just attacks on "you."

Unfortunately, this narrative currently faces no liberal counter-narrative. The attempted negation of the narrative that Trump deploys is all there is. But the failure to build a compelling counter-narrative—one that shows Trump to be the pathetic, bumbling, petty, corrupt little failure of a man that he is and thereby chips away at the appealing nature of the narrative that Trump has constructed—is surely providing Trump with a boost that he otherwise would not have. And unless we can get busy building such a counter-narrative soon, the light of liberalism throughout the world may get dimmer still.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> See, e.g., Mark Danner, "The Grievance Artist," *The New York Review of Books* (November 2, 2023).

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