Analytical Fascism

What Stares Back When One Stares Into the De-enlightenment

By Mark R. Reiff

Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

illiberalism Studies Program

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Introduction

As I write this, I am staring into the great red barrel of the wave that is Donald Trump's decisive victory in the 2024 US presidential election. Not only did Trump win the electoral college vote, he won the popular vote as well (he lost the popular vote in 2016, but still won in the electoral college, which was enough to make him president). His coat tails even proved long enough this time for the Republicans to win both the House and the Senate.[1] While this essay is about more than just the stunning political resurrection that Trump's victory represents, this event does provide a telling context to the broader argument I intend to make. For Trump now has both an undeniable mandate and the irresistible ability to put his extreme right-wing political agenda into motion in what was supposedly the most-secure liberal bastion in the world.[2]

To anyone who considers themselves a liberal, wherever they may reside, this is a stunning and devastating result. As much as I am disheartened by this, it seems clear that fascism is now playing the same countercultural role in the world today that the antiwar, student, and civil rights movements played in the 1960s and early 1970s.[3] 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 those 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.[4] 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 moral values (and yes, these are moral values) that underlie 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 the first Part of this essay, I will clarify some of the key terms I will be using, for many of them 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 the next Part of this essay, 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 as a source of comfort for those on the left, for 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, though they may seem perverse to liberal eyes, are just as coherent, consistent, and developed as the set of values that underlie liberalism.

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1 See Catie Edmondson, "Republicans Win Control of House, Cementing a G.O.P. Trifecta Under Trump," *The New York Times* (November 13, 2024).
2 See Joan E. Greve, "How a Republican Trifecta Makes Way for Trump's Rightwing Agenda," *The Guardian* (November 13, 2024).
3 See, e.g., Anthony Faiola and Catarina Fernandes Martins, "Cool to be Far Right? Young Europeans Are Stirring a Political Youthquake." *The Washington Post* (March 8, 2024).
4 See Paul Dans and Steven Groves (eds.), "2025: Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise, *The Heritage Foundation* (2023).

The remaining Parts of the essay contain my central argument. Here I describe, in the analytical style, what I think fascist 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. As liberals, whether we are on the moderate left or the moderate right, cannot attack fascists simply by arguing that their policies are illiberal, as we mostly do. That is precisely the point of these policies. The unattractiveness of fascist values is obviously not as self-evident as many liberals believe; otherwise, so many people would not find themselves drawn to these values. 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. For if we fail to engage with the debate between liberalism and illiberalism more directly, history has shown that we are likely to find ourselves bloodied, hungry, alone, and filled with envy, resentment, anger, and regret.

Unfortunately, attacking illiberal values (other than by labeling them illiberal) and defending liberal ones is something that liberals rarely do. As the Nazi legal theorist and critic of liberalism Carl Schmitt pointedly noted, a common characteristic of liberalism is timidity—liberals often seem incapable of standing up for what they believe.[5] And while Schmitt was wrong about many things, he was not wrong about this. Indeed, much later, a version of the same sentiment expressed by the conservative poet Robert Frost would become a popular quip —"a liberal is someone who cannot take their own side in an argument."[6] A bit of an overstatement, perhaps, but liberals do seem incapable of doing this with the kind of gusto and eloquence necessary to justify their views and defend them from vigorous attack.

Fascists, in contrast, rely on rhetoric extensively, and a resurgence of interest in fascism is most likely to occur when someone particularly skilled in the use of rhetoric appears on the scene. Yet even then, liberals tend to eschew vivid, emotional, and metaphorical language, especially when this includes references to popular culture, in a misguided attempt to take the "high road," even though such language may be necessary to accurately convey the gravity of what is at stake, the outrageousness of what is being suggested by the other side, and the compelling nature of liberal solutions. Liberals shy away from such rhetoric because they see it as a substitute for reasoned argument.[7] And it can be. But it can also be a complement to this, a way of energizing one's audience and giving appropriate weight to the choices with which they are being presented.[8] Thinking that liberal political philosophy and public policy must be drained of rhetoric and any appeal to emotion—as many liberals and especially many liberal academics now do—is as foolish as thinking that dressing like a bohemian makes one an artist, another unfortunate belief of those who think their work has substance simply because it is presented in a certain style.

This view, however, is seriously mistaken. I have explained why elsewhere,[9] so I will not say much about this here. I will merely point out that *all* argument is rhetoric; one could not speak in any other way. One can simply argue effectively or ineffectively. As Nietzsche said, "There is no such thing as unrhetorical, 'natural' language" for "Tropes are not something that can be added or subtracted from language at will."[10] When one is attacked with rhetoric, rhetoric of at least equivalent force is required in response. The response should demonstrate that the attack is baseless, outrageous, or at least misguided in *both* form and content. Which means that liberals should cease embracing the dry, boring, unemotional language of the technocrat and start speaking with both urgency and color. Given my view on this, I hope my more conventional liberal readers will forgive me for practicing what I preach and sometimes using appeals to emotion and colloquial or metaphorical language when presenting my argument here.

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5 See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political,* trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
6 See Stewart L. Udall, "Robert Frost's Last Adventure," *The New York Times* (June 11, 1972).
7 See, e.g., Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism," *The New York Review of Books* (June 22, 1995), p. 2 ("freedom of speech means freedom from rhetoric").
8 See, e.g., Stanley Fish, "Rhetoric," in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literature and Legal Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 471-502, 494.
9 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, pp. 87-89.
10 Quoted in Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 105-106.

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. In this sense, liberals can fall either on the moderate left or the moderate right of the political spectrum or anywhere in between. They can be for or against abortion; for or against greater redistribution of income; for or against greater government regulation of the market; for or against free trade with other nation-states; for or against stricter limits on immigration; and on either side of any number of other hotly contested social, domestic, and foreign policy issues of the day. They can take opposing positions on what should be done in these and other cases, you see, yet still be adherents of one of the family of political theories that fall within liberalism, because the fundamental presuppositions on which all liberals agree are general concepts, not detailed conceptions. As such, they do not generate specific recommendations for either action or belief without further specification of how the concept should be understood.[1] Progressives, social democrats, libertarians (on either the right or the left), Christian democrats (in the European sense), and even traditional conservatives can accordingly all embrace political theories that fall within the "liberal" family in the sense in which I am using the term.[2]

I have described the fundamental presuppositions of liberalism elsewhere in great detail,[3] and so will only summarize them briefly here. I take the fundamental principles of liberalism to include at least the following: a commitment to toleration, neutrality, equality, and freedom (or "liberty," the word philosophers often use to refer to freedom); a commitment to the separation of religious and political authority; the belief that all members of a political community should have an opportunity to participate in political decision-making under conditions of full information; and the view that the purpose of public discourse and debate is to persuade others of the rightness of one's position by resorting to arguments that one's opponents could not reasonably reject, that the rule of law applies even to the rich and powerful, that empirical evidence rather than emotion and premoral ideology should have primacy in forming our reasons for action and belief, that punishment should be informed by the principle of proportionality, and finally, that the individual, not the community, is the fundamental social unit, the point for where a search for moral responsibility must go and the ultimate focus of our moral concern must lie. One could argue, I suppose, about whether each of these ideas is as fundamental as the others. If one begins with a general enough idea of one or two of the principles I have listed, it might be possible to derive all the others from these. Indeed, this is exactly what some theorists try to do using the principles of toleration and/or neutrality. But I think it is fair to say that any conception of liberalism that is worth taking seriously must identify each of the items on this longer list of ideas as playing a significant role in the shaping of society, regardless of whether they could be reduced to an even smaller set of fundamental principles by generalizing the conception of some other fundamental principle even more. Taken together, these fundamental principles provide "the argumentative framework" for liberalism—that is, a description of what counts as a moral argument and what does not. Only once such a framework is accepted by both sides can a moral argument within liberalism take place.

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1 For further discussion of the difference between a concept and a conception, see Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 70-72.

2 See, e.g., Charles J. Sykes, "As a Conservative, I Despair at Republicans' Support for Trump. His Vision Is Not Conservatism," *Guardian* (July 22, 2018).

3 See, e.g., Mark R. Reiff, "The Liberal Conception of Free Speech and Its Limits," *Jurisprudence* (2024): 1-39 (https://doi.org/10.1080/20403313.2024.2355054); 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); Mark R. Reiff, "The Attack on Liberalism," in *Law and Philosophy,* ed. Michael Freeman and Ross Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 173-210

But this framework is very different from the one that applies on what liberals would call "the extremes." Indeed, even though their substantive policies may be radically different and indeed antagonistic to each other at street level, at a higher level of abstraction, those on the extremes 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." Because I am focusing only on political views on the extreme right in this essay, however, I will not defend the claim that the extreme right and the extreme left both embrace the same fundamental presuppositions. Rather than identify the people of whom I speak by the more general term "perfectionists," or even the more pointed but still emotionally neutral term "right-wing perfectionists," I will refer to these people as "fascists."

It should nevertheless be understood 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 since the end of World War II, many commentators have argued that fascist thought has no ideological substance, and that categorizing a person or political movement as "fascist" simply means it bears some superficial similarity to the paradigmatic self-proclaimed fascism of Benito Mussolini.[4] Other than citing Mussolini's fascism as the inspiration of all subsequent political movements on the extreme right, the term was otherwise considered devoid of content and functioned solely as a meaningless term of abuse.[5] While some scholars have since attempted to give some ideological content to the generic use of term,[6] none of these attempts have gained traction. Many political philosophers and commentators accordingly continue to believe that if one wants to use a more meaningful label, a group on the extreme right should be described by some other self-proclaimed or undeniable attribute, such as "populist," "authoritarian," "totalitarian," "alt-right," "Trumpist," or the like.

In this piece, however, I reject this more conventional academic approach. And not only because most of what follows here is dedicated to showing that fascism does have ideological substance and setting that substance out. I do this because 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 that we might associate with open and forthright fascism. Using a less dramatic label would be falsely comforting, for it would suggest that liberalism does not face an existential threat from these movements, whereas 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 Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, the Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany, the Brothers of Italy, the National Rally (previously the National Front) party in France, the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands, along with 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 when the views of these three groups do not completely intersect.[7]

I realize this claim is controversial, but I am by no means the first to use the word "fascism" in such a broad fashion.[8] 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.[9] But fascism is merely 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 from those within the liberal family of political theories to be recognized as part of a competing family, despite what may be some differences

4 See, e.g., Leon Trotsky, *Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It* (New York: Pathfinder, 1996), p. 7; Walter Laqeuer, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.13ff.
5 A. James Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 2-3.
6 See, e.g. Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 26-27 (the ideology of fascism is ultra-nationalism).
7 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).
8 See, e.g., Ishaan Tharoor, "As U.S. Election Nears, 'Fascism' Is in the Spotlight Again," *The Washington Post* (November 4, 2024); Ben Makuch, "Is Trump Actually a Fascist – and Why Does the Answer Matter?" *The Guardian* (November 4, 2024); Michael S. Schmidt, "As Election Nears, Kelly Warns Trump Would Rule Like a Dictator," *The New York Times* (October 22, 2024); Harold James, "Fascism in Our Time," *Project Syndicate* (October 28, 2024).
9 See, for example, the very restrictive definition employed in the work of the economic historian Adam Tooze.

among the members of this family. Even if using the term "fascist" to describe this family of political theories and the movements they inspire were inappropriate, however, and we were to replace this term with one that carried less rhetorical baggage, nothing in the argument that follows would change. The result would be merely a reduction in emotional power, and as I have already mentioned, this is important to maintain because a more antiseptic term is likely to understate the gravity of the circumstances in which liberalism currently finds itself.

What, then, is the difference between traditional conservatives, whom I describe above as right-wing liberals, and those who identify as MAGA conservatives, whom, for purposes of this essay, I classify as fascists? In many ways, this is what the heart of this essay is about, so the bulk of my answer to this question will reside in the upcoming sections discussing the differing sets of fundamental presuppositions or values on which liberals and fascists rely. But I will note here that traditional conservatism has a long and distinguished intellectual place within liberalism. Indeed, once the initial reaction to the Enlightenment died down and most people began to accept liberalism's fundamental aspirations and beliefs, conservatives typically embraced the presuppositions of liberal life and argued for their views within the moral framework established by liberalism's general presuppositions. They merely interpreted these presuppositions in different ways than left-leaning liberals, and therefore arrived at different conclusions about what morality required society to do.

For example, tradition has not surprisingly always played an important role in true conservativism—the fact that something has been done a certain way for a long time is seen as at least a *pro tanto* reason to continue doing it that way, for this connects people to their past, reaffirms their sense of identity and role in history, and helps maintain and reinforce norms that encourage selfless or at least responsible behavior. Of course, these norms can also be oppressive and destructive. Given our overall commitment to liberalism, we may accordingly have reason to embrace new norms despite the respect for existing norms that tradition engenders. But this is only sometimes true. Even when it is, it is also true that change pulls on the existing social fabric, so there is reason to adopt changes slowly and carefully when these are required to be sure that unintended effects do not overwhelm the good that change is supposed to bring about and trigger change-defeating countermeasures. The conservative attitude is therefore not always, and perhaps not often, inappropriate, and in fact may lead to deeper and more lasting social progress than a more abrupt and radical approach even when change is required. So while left liberals often see an insistence on a slow and steady approach as just a coded way of blocking social progress, and sometimes it is exactly that, this is not always the case.

On the other hand, most self-proclaimed conservatives today, whether they openly identity as MAGA conservatives or not, do not seek to maintain existing traditions. Instead, they reach back into a romanticized version of the ancient past, the antebellum South, or the 1930s or 1950s, and argue we should resurrect a historical period whose defining traditions have already been roundly rejected and replaced with something else. These people are accordingly not conservatives within the liberal tradition. Traditional conservatism is a living, presentist view—it is about valuing certain things as they now are or were in the recent past and wanting to protect and maintain rather than abandon them. As one of the most revered traditional conservatives, Michael Oakeshott, said "To be conservative, then, is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss."[10] When conservatives originally opposed the move toward the Enlightenment, the morality of forsaking established traditions and pursuing a new way into the future was the defining issue of its time. To oppose the Enlightenment now, however, is something very different. It elevates the dead over the living; it is an effort to idolize a time that has long passed. And not just any time—self-proclaimed conservatives today selectively pick and choose from among the myriad "traditions" that history has to offer and seek to reinstate only those that match some ideologically predetermined perfectionist collage-like vision of society, one that never actually existed outside of ideological fantasy. This is not a conservative attitude. It is revolutionary, no matter what it may call itself, for it is as radical as any other revolutionary movement. A traditional conservative does not cherry-pick the traditions they want to honor from across the span of history, and certainly does not invent them, for this is not what respecting tradition means. Those who disrespect tradition in this way may nevertheless call themselves conservatives, but this is simply because of the marketing power of the label. Indeed, illiberal thinkers have hidden themselves within

10 See Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, new and expanded ed. 1962), pp. 407-437, 408. See also John Kekes, *A Case for Conservatism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

the ranks of right-liberalism since the family of liberalism began, coming out and making themselves known as authoritarians or fascists or ethno-nationalists or religious fundamentalists or whatever only when they felt the tide was running their way. So claiming that many so-called conservatives today are not traditional conservatives and therefore not within the family of liberalism is just an extension of this idea. For the analytical philosopher, self-proclaimed labels are not definitive. Only after we delve into the actual beliefs of people, parties, and politicians can we see clearly where along the liberalism-fascism axis each person or entity actually falls.

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.[11] These works are indeed informative, but they are discussions primarily of means and methods, not values. These include: 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; and so on. These means and methods are often summarized by the phrase "political ruthlessness,"[12] 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 there are many useful discussions of it.[13] But once again, these discussions focus on 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. Understanding means and methods, however, 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 it comes 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.[14] 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.[15] 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 an opponent of 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.

Unfortunately, serious discussion of the values that fascists embrace is almost totally absent from the literature. At least it is absent from 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, outside of the English-speaking world, there is much literature discussing the values of fascism, and some of this has been translated into English. But this material is written in what analytical political philosophers often refer to derogatorily as the "continental style." They consider this type of philosophy vague, messy, overblown, disorganized, and either poorly argued or without any coherent arguments at all. In light of this, analytical political philosophers mostly ignore work written in the continental style.[16] 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

11 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).
12 See Isaiah Berlin, "Fathers and Children: Turgenev and the Liberal Predicament," in *Russian Thinkers* (London: Penguin, 2d ed. 2008), pp. 299-352, 342-350.
13 See, e.g., Joshua L. Cherniss, *Liberalism in Dark Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).
14 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).
15 See Carl Cohen and James P. Sterba, *Affirmative Action and Racial Preference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
16 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.

liberal capitalism, there is much important material to be found in this work. Failing to pay attention to this is like trying to assess the weather by looking at a wall instead of through a window.

In contrast, I will draw heavily on work written in the continental style to make my argument about what fundamental values underlie fascism. But I will not simply repeat what fascist intellectuals and public figures have said previously. My project is neither a piece of historical research, nor a report on contemporary fascist movements and their methods. It is an attempt to describe the values of fascism in ways that few fascists have done themselves, by adopting the methods of analytical political philosophy and interpretating fascist thinking into a form that analytical political philosophers can better understand. Restating a theory using the terms commonly found in another theoretical language is always an interpretative exercise. Even though some liberties may have to be taken, however, it should still be possible to capture the essence of what fascist intellectuals and political figures are saying, or rather why they are saying what they are saying, even though we are doing so using the analytical style.

But I freely admit that by attempting to do so, my project is to some extent a contradiction in terms. For fascism is not analytical. It is anti-analytical. This means one cannot simply find the values that it enshrines stated clearly in its literature. Fascists reject the idea that the analytical method—that is, the use of careful argument and precise definitions 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 anti-Semitic trope in a moment), and in any event something to be rejected by fascists outright as a method of achieving social understanding.[17] As the adherents of non-liberal political philosophies have known for centuries, when it comes to motivating people to engage in political action, emotion, not reason, is the more effective mobilizing factor.[18] Organizing social cooperation is not a math problem, a fascist would say. Rather, 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 articulate and promote fascist beliefs. For as Adorno once said, "There was never a truly, fully developed theory in fascism."[19] And this has not changed since he said it. Weighing against this worry, however, is my concern that if we are 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. But to attack the fundamental values that fascists embrace, we 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 essay is written. My approach is analytical, 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 analytical tradition to access and understand, much as those scholars who identify themselves as "analytical Marxists" have tried to do when reconstructing Marxism in the analytical tradition.[20] Those scholars have done so as a way of promoting Marxism to a more analytically attuned audience, whereas my intent is to make fascism more understandable to such an audience 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 those who embrace fascism is one of the important features that holds the values that I will describe together.

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17 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality,* ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 21.
18 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.
19 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aspects of the New Right Extremism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), p. 28.
20 See John Roemer (ed.), *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Four Mistakes About What Is Behind the Rise of the Extreme Right

Of course, liberals are not oblivious to the fact that large segments of the population in most liberal capitalist democracies are moving further and further toward the right. Coming to a view about why this is happening is accordingly something about which liberals have been pondering for some time. Indeed, in trying to understand this phenomenon, liberals have tended to settle on four explanations. Sometimes, they rely on just one or two of these explanations. But usually, all four explanations are presented in combination. In any event, all are given with roughly equal frequency and are therefore treated as having roughly equal explanatory power. And there is clearly some truth behind each of them—otherwise, they would not have become part of the "conventional wisdom" when it comes to understanding why so many liberal societies seem to be abandoning liberalism for ideas previously associated with the far right.

In my view, however, each of these explanations is wrong. Or at least mostly wrong in the sense that, taken individually or together, they do not fully or even sufficiently explain the phenomenon at hand, even if they do have some explanatory power. So the reliance on these explanations (or on any one of them) is ultimately going to be more misleading than helpful. For what they mostly do is disguise the seriousness of what is actually going on, lulling liberals into a false sense of security that the threat they face today is not as serious as it is. Each of these conventional explanations do this, you see, by leaving liberals feeling morally superior to those moving away from liberalism. They leave liberals thinking that the values of liberalism remain morally unassailable and unchallenged. But this view is false. As we shall see, it is simply not true that the only thing that needs to be done to prevent the current social order from being undermined is to point out that the policies and attitudes championed by the far right are illiberal whenever and wherever these happen to arise.

The view that it's all driven by empirical mistakes

The first mistake liberals often make is think that those moving away from liberalism are doing so because they are making errors about empirical questions. In other words, liberals assume that those moving toward the extreme right have simply been 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 they are not for overturning our democracy, they just erroneously believe that anti-Trump forces have subverted our democracy in 2020 and installed as president someone who did not actually win. If we were to correct these factual misapprehensions, the thinking goes, those who are so viciously urging objectionable policies based thereon would stop doing so, regain their composure, and revert to a conventional liberal outlook. For were these misapprehensions actually true, there would be nothing wrong with the policy positions that those on the right advance under liberalism's accepted set of values.

Let's begin with an extreme example of an empirical claim that is behind some of the resurgence of what seem to be anti-liberal beliefs, but which can be recognized as not being anti-liberal at all once the thinking behind these beliefs is understood. This is the empirical claim that the liberal establishment is running (or at least protecting) a worldwide pedophile ring dedicated to harvesting of "a substance with special, energizing qualities that can only be found in the brains of children who have been sexually tortured in satanic rituals," a substance that is then "harvested and distributed to top Democrats,

Hollywood celebrities and bankers in the cabal."[1] 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 whom they believe are involved in this horrible conspiracy? As bizarre as this belief is (and it is bizarre but also far more common than most liberals are willing to admit), it is not threatening to anyone's fundamental values. More importantly, given its outrageousness (and that of similarly bizarre beliefs), many liberals falsely think that it should be easy to show people the error of their ways. And 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. At least, they will do so if they are rational. If they are irrational, there is nothing that can be done to shift their views in any event.

This sounds simple, but it turns out that even among rational people, bizarre beliefs can be rather hard to dislodge, no matter how far they run counter to reality. More importantly, however, there are also many less hallucinogenic misapprehensions (albeit equally unfounded) at work today that are also hard to dislodge. For example, there is no wave of crime and murder raging through American cities.[2] George Soros is not funding caravans of migrants trying to come into the United States.[3] Illegal immigrants are not mostly criminals and rapists, bringing in drugs and disease.[4] They do not take more from the economy than they put in;[5] and they are not taking jobs away from "legitimate" Americans in general, or Black Americans in particular.[6] Sharia law is not being imposed in some localities.[7] Children are not being taught to be gay,[8] or to hate themselves for what their ancestors did to certain groups of people.[9] Again, these misapprehensions of the current state of the world and its history are dangerous because many people would be justifiably motivated to move against those behind these alleged events if they were true. And move against them in ways that ordinarily would seem morally unacceptable. After all, the whole idea of falsely portraying the world as steeped in one crisis or another is to encourage the belief that such circumstances warrant removing the constraints ordinarily imposed by the liberal conception of morality. Only if we do that, the crisis mentality suggests, will we be able to use the means and methods necessary to vanquish the enemy with the speed and finality required to preserve our normal moral way of life.

Indeed, (falsely) portraying the world as in a constant state of crisis is especially important when trying to soften liberal-minded people up to a more fascist mindset. It is a way of establishing what the Carl Schmitt called "the state of exception,"[10] a state that justifies, even under liberalism (at least according to Schmitt and, on this point, many liberals as well), setting aside the moral limits on means and methods that usually apply.[11] So people who advocate these things are not illiberal, the thinking goes, they are simply acting as any liberal would do in an emergency. Once again, though not necessarily an easy task, showing that the alleged emergency and the state of exception it justifies is not real is all we need to do to get people back on the righteous path. No rethinking or even defense of the underlying values of liberalism is required.

The problem is that this rather self-affirming belief leads liberals to expend large amounts of time and energy "correcting the record." When many people continue to advance the same lies and misstatements

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1 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).

2 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).

3 See Joel Achenbach, "A Conspiracy Theory about George Soros and a Migrant Caravan Inspired Horror," *The Washington Post* (October 28, 2018).

4 See Michelle Ye Hee Lee, "Donald Trump's False Comments Connecting Mexican Immigrants and Crime," *The Washington Post* (July 8, 2015).

5 See Andrew Soergel, "'Undocumented' Immigrants Pay Billions in Taxes," *U.S. News & World Report* (March 1, 2016); Jason L. Riley, "No, Immigrants Aren't Stealing Jobs from Black Americans," *Wall Street Journal* (May 16, 2023); Abha Bhattarai, "Trump Says Immigrants Are Taking 'Black Jobs.' Economists Disagree." *The Washington Post* (June 28, 2024).

6 See Julia Preston, "Immigrants Aren't Taking American Jobs, New Study Finds," *The New York Times* (September 21, 2016).

7 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).

8 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.

9 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).

10 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. v.

11 See George Schwab: *The Challenge of the Exception: An Introduction to the Political Ideas of Carl Schmitt between 1921 and 1936* (New York: Greenwood Press, 2d ed. 1989).

even though they have already been "outed" as such, liberals then tend to simply redouble their efforts to demonstrate that these lies and false statements are indeed false.[12] But doubling down is not going to be any more effective than it was when these false claims were first made. It is just exhausting. Fascists simply do not give empirical facts the weight in their pure and practical reasoning that liberals rationally believe these facts deserve. If fascist claims are not supported by empirical evidence, this just means that liberals have nefariously rigged things to make it appear this way.
Indeed, 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.[13]

Someone who wants certain claims to be true and is already prepared to behave as if they *are* true without evidence is going to be hard to convince that they are misapprehending the state of the world. And even if they were to be convinced of this, their views are unlikely to change; these views will just become free-floating beliefs looking for a new justification on which to land.[14] In any case, engaging with this kind of person requires a very different approach than engaging with someone who has no ideological stake in where the fact of the matter lies. The fascist is in the former category, and for such people, their beliefs are either true, or the truth is being covered up by liberals in the deep state, the academy, and mainstream newsrooms. There is no third possibility.

Liberals continue to find this deeply baffling. Not only the extent to which those on the alt-right reconstruct reality using an ideological rather than a scientific approach to understanding the world, leading them to produce and embrace what can appropriately be called "fake news," but also the extent to which those on the alt-right seem completely unmoved even when irrefutable evidence of their error is put before them. Instead, they continue to believe that ideologically inconvenient but factually well-supported news is itself fake. In other words, despite the lack of effect the "correcting the record" approach seems to have, liberals cannot seem to accept that it is not working. This is itself evidence that the moral frameworks employed in organizing one's attitude toward the world by liberals and fascists differ dramatically on a fundamental level. Only then could the two sides be talking so completely past one another.

What this reveals is not that fascists make a surprisingly large number of outrageously inexplicable empirical mistakes, but that liberals and fascists have a different fundamental conception of what "truth" is. For liberals, truth is derived first and foremost from social-scientific empirical evidence. Only when 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. Indeed, this is what liberals mean when they speak of truth as "the inference to the best explanation." The "best" explanation in the sense being one that fits the available evidence and the most reasonable projection of what future evidence is likely to show in areas of current empirical uncertainty. How could anyone 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. Which state is most perfect, in turn, can be understood only 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.[15] "Believe! Obey! Fight!" exhorts the Italian fascist party,[16] 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, "I'll believe it when I see it." In other words, adopting an ideological point of view is a prerequisite for perceiving the nature and meaning of scientific or social-scientific facts. The narrative that fascists embrace as true accordingly

12 See, e.g., Aaron Blake, "A Legal Setback for Donald Trump Jr. on False Claims — As He Spreads More of Them," *The Washington Post* (September 2, 2021).
13 Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 325n (emphasis added).
14 See Craig A. Anderson, Mark R. Lepper, and Lee Ross, "Perseverance of Social Theories: The Role of Explanation in the Persistence of Discredited Information," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 39 (1980): 1037-1049.
15 See Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2018), p. 21 (quoting Illyin).
16 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).

need not have any correspondence with the underlying empirical facts, for there is no such thing as objective truth; all truths are conceptual. They are *a priori* fact-insensitive principles, constructed from the self-affirming narrative that is most conducive to the relevant fascist worldview.[17]

These *a priori* fact-insensitive principles can come from a variety of sources. Kant thought that they could be derived through the rules of logic and rationality, as did many other philosophers both before and since. In a slightly different version of the same thing, the neoliberal economist and right-wing libertarian Ludwig von Mises argued that economists, not philosophers, were in the best position to apply principles of logic and rationality.[18] Hence the myth of *homo economicus*, or man as a relentless pursuer of economic utility, a "utility monster." The myth of the unified, prosperous, strong, and morally exceptional nation is also popular among fascists, representing another driving force behind many fact-insensitive beliefs.[19]

Such myths are usually drawn from a religious source, from what Carl Schmitt called "political theology."[20] Schmitt saw authoritarian Catholicism as the source of the comprehensive conception of the good the government was meant to pursue and protect,[21] as did many right-wing Catholic thinkers both before and since.[22] Other faiths have been used to provide support for the conflation of the religious and the political too. Many protestant evangelicals see the biblical and the political as inseparable; hence their enthusiastic support for Donald Trump given his advancement of what they see as the evangelical agenda.[23] Both Shiite and Sunni Islamic fundamentalism also unite the religious and the political,[24] as does Hindutva (Hindu fundamentalism), the movement that is currently reversing India's long commitment to secular liberal democracy.[25] Indeed, all religions have an authoritarian illiberal version,[26] which should not be surprising given that religion typically presents a perfectionist vision and is typically structured as a hierarchical, non-democratic institution, a structure that is particularly appealing to fascists.

Nevertheless, the comprehensive code of conduct that particular fascist groups embrace can come from secular ideology too—nationalism, racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism being the primary candidates. Wherever these fact-insensitive principles come from, however, they can only be accepted or rejected, not argued for. This is why they have mythic status. Only trusted sources can propagate such myths, and as a practical matter this usually means that "truth" can be spoken only by one's own already established "tribal" leaders, as crafted by the tribe's intellectuals, theorists, publicists, and philosophers.[27] This is why, for example, Trump was holding campaign style rallies, as many fascist leaders often do, early on after his assumption of office, when he had just won the White House and his campaign for reelection had not even officially begun.[28] Those who criticize these myth generators are then attacked as personally biased, and the corrections to the record that they assert, no matter how well-founded, are labelled "fake news." Whether something is true is measured circularly by asking whether it is something that "right-thinking" people happen to believe.[29] In effect, all myths of the sort

17 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), p. 13 ("in these extreme right-wing movements, propaganda actually constitutes the substance of politics").
18 See Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1998), pp. 32-36.
19 See Alberto Toscano, *Late Fascism* (London: Verso, 2023), p. 53.
20 See, e.g., Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
21 See Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form,* trans. G. L. Ulman (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).
22 See, e.g., Joseph de Maistre, *Essay on the Generative Principle of Political Constitutions* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1847), p. 171 ("On the one hand, the religious principle presides at all political creations; and on the other, every thing disappears, as soon as this is withdrawn"). Louise Gabriel Amboise de Bonald, "On Jacques-Benigne Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux (1815), in *Critics of the Enlightenment: Reading in the French Counter-Revolutionary Tradition,* ed. and trans. Christopher Olaf Blum (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), pp. 43-69, 51, 59.
23 See, e.g., Adam Gabbatt, "'Unparalleled Privilege': Why White Evangelicals See Trump as Their Savior," *The Guardian* (January 11, 2020); Thomas Lecaque, "The Apocalyptic Myth that Helps Explain Evangelical Support for Trump," *The Washington Post* (November 26, 2019).
24 See Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Beirut: Holy Koran Publishing House, 1980) (Sunni); Ayatollah R. Khomeini, *Islamic Government* (New York, 1979) (Shiite).
25 See, e.g., Gino Battaglia, "Neo-Hindu Fundamentalism Challenging the Secular and Pluralistic Indian State," *Religions* 8 (2017): 216-236; Hartosh Singh Bal, "The Transformation of India Is Nearly Complete," *The New York Times* (November 11, 2019); Karan Deep Singh and Suhasini Raj, "'Muslims Are Foreigners': Inside India's Campaign to Decide Who Is a Citizen," *The New York Times* (April 4, 2020).
26 For an interesting, recent discussion of this in traditional Protestantism, see Georg Diez, "Martin Luther and Me," *Boston Review* (December 28, 2017). See also Sheldon S. Wolin, "Politics and Religion: Luther's Simplistic Imperative," *American Political Science Review* 50 (1956): 24-42.
27 See, e.g., Brad Plumer, "A Climate Science Report that Changes Minds? Don't Bet on It," *The New York Times* (November 4, 2017).
28 See Charles Homans, "The Post-Campaign Campaign of Donald Trump, *The New York Times Magazine* (April 9, 2018).
29 See, e.g., Michael Gerson, "How Trump Broke Conservatism," *The Washington Post* (October 23, 2017); Paul Krugman, "Conspiracies, Corruption and Climate," *The New York Times* (September 11, 2017); John Cassidy, "The Best Response to Trump's 'Fake News' Gibes: Keep Reporting," *The New Yorker* (December 12, 2017).

in which we are interested are protected by the myth that any criticisms of them are simply self-serving falsehoods promulgated by those who would crush those the myth emboldens. Accordingly, as Sorel noted, "a myth cannot be refuted."[30] It can be dislodged only by more a compelling counter-myth.[31]

Unfortunately, liberals are not very good at constructing such counter-myths. At least this is the case now. Indeed, most of the time, liberals seem to be hardly trying. Attempts to negate the narrative that Trump and other fascists deploy are all there is. But there was a time that liberals did build a compelling counter-myth to encapsulate their views. Think of the narrative built by Martin Luther King, Jr., to bring the civil rights movement to the fore. Despite our inability to fully satisfy the aspirations that King expressed, King helped us to see them as a goal, and no doubt would have taken us further toward instantiating them had he not been assassinated by the white supremacist James Earl Ray in 1968. Now, I realize that King was an exceptional person with exceptional rhetorical skill and moral vision, and such people tend to be very thin on the ground in every historical period. But it is hard to believe that in the more than half a century since King's assassination, no one with equivalent skill and vision has arisen from within the liberal community. The infrastructure of liberal society must now be such that when people with the potential to match King's eloquence and vision first emerge, their voices are quickly quashed by liberal institutions that have become overly timid due to the liberal fear of confrontation. But if we do not get over this fear and get busy building a liberal counter-narrative soon, the light of liberalism throughout the world may be doomed to get dimmer still.

The "enthralled by megalomaniacal charismatic despots" explanation

The second mistake that liberals make in assessing why so many whites are now moving to the illiberal right is to think of this move as being driven simply by megalomaniacal but charismatic despots who are inflaming one portion of a population against another purely as a means of obtaining and maintaining if not increasing personal power. Of course, this is indeed often an element of what is going on. Fascist leaders, because of the way they are identified as leaders (I shall say more about this later), 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 be explained largely by this,[32] but there are many other examples I could cite as well. Taking those examples of the de-liberalization of society as lessons, some liberals make the mistake of putting the breakdown of democracy in the US largely at the feet of Trump. If it was not for him and what many people find so attractive about the "refreshing" outrageousness of his character and personality, the current move to the right would not be happening, at least not to the same degree. And like Trump, those leading moves to the right in other liberal capitalist countries also have outsized personalities, like Orban, Bolsonaro, Farage, and so on.

But this is not true everywhere. Salazar in Portugal is widely cited as an example of a dictator who did not possess much personal charisma or interest in speechmaking, although he was thought to be exceptionally handsome and therefore appealing in that sense, and he was certainly convinced of his own greatness. But he was also thought to be genuinely dedicated to Portugal's progress and independence as a nation, and not intent on just personal advancement.[33] More importantly, thinking that the current move toward fascism is being driven by exceptionally charismatic megalomaniacs who are primarily motivated not by ideology but by their own desire for personal power and advancement means that the most obvious solution to their nefarious influence is the one that Stalin supposedly

30 Sorel, *Reflections on Violence,* p. 29. See also ibid. p. 30 ("people who are living in this world of myths are secure from all refutation").
31 See, for example, the discussion of this phenomenon in Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. See also Michael G. Salter, *Carl Schmitt: Law as Politics, Ideology and Strategic Myth* (London: Routledge, 2012). For an example of an attempt to construct a counter-myth, see the work of Christian Picciolini, a former leader of a white supremacist group and white power rock band who went on the found a group called "Life after Hate," which tries to demystify the white power movement and help those who have been seduced by it back out. See Christian Picciolini, *White American Youth: My Descent into America's Most Violent Hate Movement—And How I Got Out* (New York: Hachette Books, 2017).
32 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).
33 See generally Ton Gallagher, *Salazar: The Dictator Who Refused to Die* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2020); Marcel de Corte, Pierre Gaxotte, and Gustave Thibon, *Salazar and His Work* (Waterloo, Cananda: Arouca Press, 2021), p. 19 ("there is something profoundly mysterious in Salazar; in this statesman who speaks little and of whom little is spoken").

proposed: "Death solves all problems—no man, no problem."[34] It suggests that if we can just get rid of these would-be despots, whether currently in government or in opposition, either by conclusively defeating them at the ballot box or putting them in prison for what are usually a lifelong series of crimes, the move toward the right will wither and die.

But while it may be true that a certain kind of person is required for a lurch to the right (or to the left) to start, this is at best necessary, not sufficient. And after the movement toward the right has started, it is not even necessary. The current success of the physically attractive but less charismatic second-generation of French and Italian alt-right leaders demonstrates this. It is thus a mistake to take comfort in the idea that many liberals in the US are embracing now—even in the face of the rise of numerous Trump-like figures waiting in the wings for their chance to take center stage—that once Trump is gone, the struggle with illiberalism will have been won. The success that J. D. Vance has had in channeling his inner Trump despite being personally rather unappealing belies this. Accordingly, the charismatic despotic leader theory does not really capture what is going on. There is too long a tradition of continuing struggle in fascist literature, the ideas therein are too developed and too omni-present in different times and social circumstances, and those willing to advance them even for unselfish reasons too numerous on the ground, to assign the charismatic despot explanation too much explanatory power for the rise of fascism.

These people are just crazy

The third explanation most cited by liberals for why so many whites are moving toward the extreme right is that these people are simply irrational, crazy, or perhaps even anti-rational.[35] They are simply 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 its way around the globe, it also remains a popular explanation among academics for how we should understand the rise of fascism in the early twentieth-century as a political phenomenon.[36] If we take this attitude, then trying to reason 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 indeed be an actual threat that is worth taking seriously, but nothing about the move toward the right threatens fundamental liberal values. These crazy attitudes, no matter how motivating, are accordingly dismissible because they represent either the ignorant ramblings of a narcissistic and possibly deranged adult-toddler, or the self-interested strategy of certain oligarchs and those they have corrupted and who profit from the denial of what they know to be the truth. True, 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. But people who cannot or will not 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 not only lacked a reasoned basis as a political ideology, it was entirely devoid of cognitive content and motivated exclusively 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,[37] it was not appropriate for serious engagement by social and political philosophers who were responsible for organizing the world of ideas.[38] But the failure to take these views seriously as

34 Although widely attributed to Stalin, there is no direct evidence that he actually said it. Instead, the statement is put into Stalin's mouth in the 1987 novel *Children of the Arbat* by Anatoly Rybakov (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988). But Stalin did supposedly say something very much like this when speaking about the execution of military experts in Tsaritsyn is 1918, although I have been unable to find a source for this. Whether he said it or not, however, the sentiment is consistent with his character and has been repeatedly cited as an effective strategy for dealing with dissent.

35 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, 121ff; 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.

36 See A. James Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 1-2.

37 See, e.g., William Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013).

38 See Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals,* pp. 1-17.

a political theory and instead 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 a long tradition among highly-educated anti-Enlightenment theorists of rejecting the proposition that mere facts are enough for justified belief or action.[39] Vico, Rousseau, Joseph de Maistre, Henri de 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."[40] Myths are more important motivators than facts or science. The claim is that all political theories, both liberal and illiberal, must be based on ideology and not rationality, for even the concept of what constitutes a fact is a political one. And I am afraid that as much as liberals do not want to admit it, this claim might be right. So understanding what fundamental values are in fact behind the move to the illiberal right is essential, not pointless.

The "demographic shift" explanation

The fourth conventional explanation for why white people across the liberal democratic world are moving away from liberalism, and the one that is, in many ways, the most dangerously mistaken, is that white people fear the consequences of the upcoming demographic shift. The thought here is that because of immigration, both legal and illegal, and differing fertility rates among the relevant groups, white people of specific ethnic and religious backgrounds will soon no longer make up the electoral majority in the regions where they currently dominate.[41] Losing their majority status, in turn, is understood as meaning that the days of white privilege and political dominance in liberal democratic societies are now numbered. One could see this shift as a positive one, resulting, as it does, in the greater diversification of society, and from the liberal point of view, greater diversity is a source of strength and resilience and certainly nothing to be alarmed about. Indeed, the shifting composition of a pluralistic society is exactly the kind of change that liberalism was designed to manage—under liberalism, remember, everyone has equal rights and is protected from the tyranny of the majority, whatever that majority might be. But an alarming number of whites are not prepared to allow a commitment to liberalism to stand in the way of resisting the threat that the demographic shift seems to pose to their self-interest. They are accordingly embracing nationalist, racist, homophobic, Islamophobic, and misogynistic politicians and political parties, the explanation goes, not because they embrace such fundamental anti-liberal views themselves, but in an effort to retain the social, political, economic and cultural dominance that white people have long enjoyed, a dominance that is technically contrary to the aspirations of liberalism, but which many white people see as in their self-interest and which until now has been effectively allowed to exist in liberal societies despite being contrary to liberalism's express aspirations.[42]

This view of what is driving whites to the illiberal right has lots of adherents.[43] It has been offered not only by those on the far right, but also by those on the moderate (that is, liberal) right and left as well, and probably in roughly equal numbers.[44] The demographic shift explanation appears in serious books, respected media outlets, and the reports of non-partisan think-tanks, not just in outlets of the far-right fringe, although it appears there too.[45] Those on the moderate right and on the left as well frown on the fact that people seem to be allowing their perceived self-interest to interfere with basic liberal values. Those on the far right see this shift toward anti-liberal values as morally commendable, as a way of defending whites against erosion of what they see as their deserved political, social and economic position atop the social order. But everyone agrees that the upcoming demographic shift

39 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.
40 Mark Lilla, *G. B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1993).
41 See, e.g., Eric Kaufman, *White Shift* (New York: Abrams Press, 2019); William H. Fey, "The US Will Become 'Minority White' in 2045, Census Projects," *Brookings* (March 14, 2018); Anthony Browne, "The Last Days of a White World," *The Guardian* (September 3, 2000).
42 See, e.g., Richard Alba, *The Great Demographic Illusion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), pp. 1-2.
43 See Hui Bai and Christopher M. Federico, "White and Minority Demographic Shifts, Intergroup Threat, and Right-Wing Extremism," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 94 (2021): 104114, 1-26.
44 See Aaron Zitner and Dante Chinni, "Demographic Shift Poised to Test Trump's 2020 Strategy," *The Wall Street Journal* (January 3, 2020); Brian Resnick, "White Fear of Demographic Change Is a Powerful Psychological Force," *Vox* (January 28, 2017).
45 See, e.g., Isaac Chotiner, "A Political Scientist Defends White Identity Politics," *The New Yorker* (April 30, 2019); Yoni Appelbaum, "How America Ends: A tectonic demographic shift is under way. Can the country hold together?" *The Atlantic* (December 2019); Michael Oreskes, "Can Demographics Shift an Election?" *The New York Times* (August 31, 2012); Stef W. Kight, "The Demographic Shifts Disrupting the Political World," *Axios* (February 2, 2020); Robert Griffin, William H. Frey, and Ruy Teixeira, "States of Change: How Demographic Change is Transforming the Republican and Democratic Parties," *Center for American Progress* (June 2019).

has real explanatory power.[46] The demographic shift makes the white move to the right seem not only predictable, but almost reasonable. After all, who has not been tempted to let perceptions of one's self-interest overcome the better angels of their nature?

But the demographic shift explanation is both unconvincing and dangerous. It is unconvincing because it is built on a series of what are in fact highly implausible assumptions, each of which I shall detail in a moment. It is dangerous because it disguises the fact that what is really going on is a battle not with what philosophers call *akrasia*, or weakness of the moral will—the struggle to live up to our moral ideals when doing so seems contrary to our self-interest; rather, the battle is over what moral values society should embrace. It is a battle over whether society should remain committed to liberalism, even if imperfectly so, or whether it should reject the aspirations of liberalism entirely and embrace illiberalism despite or even because of all the consequences that flow from this. For if the move to the right is largely or entirely a principled move, it is going to continue and even accelerate regardless of how the self-interest argument plays out. To resist this move, then, liberals need to make a positive case for their values—such as toleration, neutrality, equality, proportionality and freedom from arbitrary infringements of liberty—on the merits. If they do not and instead proceed as if this case for embracing liberal values is self-evident, then illiberal values such as nationalism, white supremacy, ethnocentrism, male superiority, religious fundamentalism, homophobia and the liberty to take advantage of the weak will surely take their place.

The demographic shift and "great replacement" theory

To see this, let's start by looking at the striking similarities between the demographic shift explanation and what the alt-right calls "The Great Replacement."[47] This latter claim is that there is a worldwide conspiracy afoot, led by "the Jews," to import minorities into various white liberal capitalist states and thereby unseat white Christians from their "rightful" dominant position. In contrast, the demographic shift explanation does not claim that what is happening is the result of an imagined Jewish conspiracy. It claims instead that what is going on is the product of an "invisible hand"—that is, it is the unintended consequence of the uncoordinated acts of multiple independent forces.[48] But both the demographic shift explanation and the Great Replacement theory rely on the same demographic trends as evidence.[49] The demographic shift to which the 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 the common liberal view. But even if there is no nefarious invisible hand behind the shift, its effect will be much the same. The causal story hardly matters. Indeed, while the demographic shift explanation does not claim that white Christians *should* be moving to the right, as the Great Replacement theory does, the demographic shift version might be even more pernicious. It makes the demographic shift seem less insidious, but no less efficacious. It allows some prominent people on the right (like the former Fox News host Tucker Carlson[50]) to use the demographic shift explanation as a way of making the Great Replacement theory more palatable. One can simply emphasize the effects of the shift and omit the anti-Semitic claim about what is behind it. And if this is what is driving people toward the right, their motivation is almost understandable, even if technically a little morally disappointing. The demographic shift explanation is therefore also rather comforting to liberals. It means that liberals need not worry that there is a principled, ideologically committed embrace of anti-liberal values going on. The dominance of liberalism as an ideology remains unchallenged.

Why the demographic shift explanation does not hold up

But this comforting conclusion is but a fallacy. Just look at the number of implausible assumptions built into the idea. First, losing majority status does not actually threaten white self-interest. The thinking here, I suppose, is that there is only so much wealth and income, good jobs and housing, power and opportunity, to go around. Once the non-white population achieves majority status, they will have decisive political power, and they will use this to eliminate discriminatory practices that have benefited

46 See Anthony Edo, Yvonne Giesing, Jonathan Öztunc, and Panu Poutvaara, "Immigration and Electoral Support for the Far-Left and the Far-Right," *European Economic Review* 115 (June 2019): 99-143.
47 See Thomas Chatterton Williams, "The French Origins of 'You Will Not Replace Us,'" *The New Yorker* (November 27, 2017).
48 See Robert Nozick, "Invisible-Hand Explanations," *The American Economic Review* 84 (1994): 314-318.
49 See Mark R Reiff., "How Important is White Fear?" *Aeon* (June 28, 2021).
50 See Martin Pengelly, "Lachlan Murdoch Backs Tucker Carlson in 'White Replacement' Furore," *The Guardian* (April 13, 2021).

whites for generations. Perhaps they will even introduce antiwhite discriminatory practices of their own, for this is what whites did when they had decisive political power.[51]

No minority population that has become a majority in a liberal community, however, has ever introduced the kind of blatant discriminatory practices used by whites to consolidate their power.[52] There is no evidence that more subtle forms of antiwhite discrimination are on the rise either.[53] There is, I recognize, anecdotal and even well-regarded survey evidence showing that a majority of white people see instantiating racial equality as a zero-sum game.[54] They think that, even if antiwhite discriminatory practices are not introduced, the numerical rise of other groups will result in the reduction of pro-white discriminatory practices and thereby threaten white self-interest. But this is not true either. Reducing racially discriminatory conduct does indeed help those who are the direct object of such discrimination more than it helps whites. But the evidence shows that reducing discriminatory attitudes and conduct helps white people too.[55] It raises poor whites' income, rate of employment, standard of living, access to education, access to public services, and access to credit—by a lot.[56] Accordingly, poor whites have nothing to lose in terms of the measurable advantages of life and much to gain even if the demographic shift does indeed dilute white voting power. Yet poor whites are moving to the right faster and in greater numbers than anybody else.

Of course, it is true that some of these people are feeling "left behind" by liberalism. They feel left behind because (they think) globalization has deprived them of access to good manufacturing jobs, immigration has deprived them of access to all sorts of jobs and social opportunities and services, inflation has made everything more expensive for them, and they see liberals as either having caused these conditions or as not having done enough to counteract them or both.[57] And many liberals agree.[58] Indeed, in the wake of their 2024 election defeat, many liberals are gravitating to the explanation that they lost so resoundingly because they failed to pay enough attention to the economic needs of the white working class.[59]

But this is a mistake. Actually, none of these aspects of the economic reality of the white working class were caused by liberalism—globalization was a neoliberal economic program pushed primarily by political neoconservatives, not liberals.[60] The unemployment rate today is lower than it has been in decades, so illegal immigrants are not taking job opportunities away from US citizens.[61] Inflation was not caused by liberals but by the pandemic and corporate greed, it was experienced everywhere all over the world, in states run by left and right governments alike, it was less severe in the US than it was in similarly situated nations elsewhere, it is now solidly under control without the kind of recession that everyone was expecting, the growth in wages under Biden outpaced inflation so there was no decline in buying power in any event, and the consensus of economists is that inflation would go much higher if Trump's economic plans are put into effect.[62]

Regardless of who is responsible for perceived economic troubles of the white working class, however, this "left behind" explanation of the big red wave in 2024 makes no sense. To put it simply, "it's not the economy, stupid." For even if we assume the disaffected are correct about the causes and effects

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51 See Maureen A. Craig and Jennifer A. Richeson, "Information about the US Racial Demographic Shift Triggers Concerns about Anti-White Discrimination among the Prospective White 'Minority,'" *Plos One* (September 27, 2017).
52 See, e.g., Michela Zonta, "Racial Disparities in Home Appreciation," *Center for American Progress* (July 2019).
53 See Keith Payne, "The Truth about Anti-White Discrimination," *Scientific American* (July 18, 2019).
54 See Kim Parker, Rich Morin, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz, "Views of Demographic Changes," *Pew Research Centner* (March 21, 2019).
55 See Heather C. McGhee, "The Way Out of America's Zero-Sum Thinking on Race and Wealth," *The New York Times* (February 13, 2021).
56 See Michelle Goldberg, "The Book That Should Change How Progressives Talk About Race," *The New York Times* (February 19, 2021); Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us* (New York: Random House, 2021).
57 See Nicholas Kristof, "Maybe Now Democrats Will Address Working-Class Pain," *The New York Times* (November 9, 2024).
58 See Abha Bhattarai and Jeff Stein, "Americans Deliver Message to Democratic Party: The Economy Isn't Working," *The Washington Post* (November 9, 2024).
59 See, e.g., Ben Davis, "None of the Conventional Explanations for Trump's Victory Stand Up to Scrutiny," *The Guardian* (November 9, 2024).
60 See J. Bradford DeLong, "Globalization and Neoliberalism," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 15 (1999).
61 See Daniel Costa and Heidi Shierholz, "Immigrants are not hurting U.S.-born workers," *Economic Policy Institute* (February 20, 2024).
62 See, e.g., Heather Long and Aden Barton, "Trump's Economy vs. Biden's — in 17 Charts: Biden has delivered an impressive recovery, but many voters remember lower prices under Trump." *The Washington Post* (November 3, 2024); Steven Greenhouse, "Trump Is Falsely Blaming Harris for High Prices. His Plans Will Cause Huge Inflation, *The Guardian* (October 9, 2024); Paul Krugman, "What Happened to Inflation?" *New York Times* (August 20, 2024); Paul Kiernan and Anthony DeBarros, "Economists Say Inflation Would Be Worse Under Trump Than Biden," *The Wall Street Journal* (July 11, 2024); Phillip Inman, "Greedflation: Corporate Profiteering 'Significantly' Boosted Global Prices, Study Shows," *The Guardian* (December 7, 2023).

of what they perceive as their current economic reality, these people are far better off than many of those who remain firmly committed to liberalism.[63] For example, more jobs were created for Blacks and Latinos in the United States than were created for white people from 2008 to the 2016 election, after which Trump first gained power. But minority populations and women still suffered more and for much longer than white men as a result of the Great Recession. As of April 2019, Black unemployment was still twice as high as white unemployment, Latino unemployment was about 150 percent of white unemployment, and things were even worse in some states, including some where white people voted heavily for Trump.[64] Even those who were working suffered more: Overall, 8.6 percent of white workers were paid poverty-level wages in 2017; the figures were 19.2 percent for Hispanic workers, 14.3 percent for Black workers, and 10.9 percent for Asians and Pacific Islanders.[65] At every income level, Black workers are paid substantially less than white men, and Black women less still. Latino workers are doing only slightly better than their Black colleagues, and things for them have actually been getting worse.[66] While everyone suffered as a result of the economic ramifications of the coronavirus pandemic, minorities and women suffered much more—the gap between these groups and white men grew even bigger during the pandemic. The claim that the suffering of whites and especially of white men is somehow not only equal but actually greater than everyone else, and that they now need special help that liberals are not providing and will not provide if liberals succeed in the great replacement, is simply not supported by the facts.

The claim that the suffering of the white working class has been and is being ignored by liberals is also nonsense. Obamacare brought an historic improvement in the lives of millions of unemployed and working Americans, including large numbers of poor whites, and the Democrats and the Obama administration tried time and again to enact other programs that would have helped the unemployed, along with the working and the middle class, no matter what their identity. It was Republican obstructionism, not indifference by Obama and Biden (most recently) and the Democrats, that left the economy, the unemployed, and the working and middle class suffering more than they need have done. Voting for Trump was not an act of rebellion against those who had abandoned them, it was a reward for those who had manned the barricades against the interests of everyone but the rich.

Besides, many of the most vocal and vicious of those moving to the right are not even among the "left behind." Indeed, only 12 percent of the most radicalized group, those who participated in the Capital insurrection, were from counties where the population is less than 60 percent white.[67] The largest number of insurrectionists (almost 30 percent) came from counties that were between 80 and 89 percent white.[68] The most radicalized are accordingly not those who might conceivably feel the demographic shift closing in on them, but rather those who actually have the least to worry about, even if their paranoid assessment of the likely effects of the demographic shift were reasonable let alone true. Nor does the composition of this group suggest that their self-interest is being otherwise threatened by a reduction in the benefits of white privilege. Only nine percent of the insurrectionists were unemployed; thirteen percent were business owners; and 27 percent were employed in white-collar jobs.[69] Hardly the profile of those who might think they are suffering because too many opportunities are now being given to non-whites. Which suggests that people turning to the far right are not actually doing so to protect their economic or political self-interest, for this is happening most dramatically among those whose white privilege is so firmly ensconced that they have little or no reason to worry.

An error theory

Now I recognize that the demographic shift explanation could be rephrased as what philosophers call "an error theory."[70] That is, consistent with what I previously noted as one of the conventional explanations

63 See Reiff, "Trump and the End of Liberalism" for an extended discussion of this.
64 See Valerie Wilson, "Black Unemployment Is At Least Twice as High as White Unemployment at the National Level and in 14 States and the District of Columbia," *Economic Policy Institute* (April 4, 2019).
65 See David Cooper, "Workers of Color Are Far More Likely to be Paid Poverty-Level Wages than White Workers," *Working Economic Blog* (Economic Policy Institute, June 21, 2018).
66 See Elise Gould, "Stark Black–White Divide in Wages is Widening Further," Working Economics Blog (Economic Policy Institute, February 27, 2019); Elise Gould, "State of Working America Wages 2018," *Economic Policy Institute* (February 27, 2019); Eileen Patten, "Racial, Gender Wage Gaps Persist in U.S. Despite Some Progress," *Pew Research Center* (July 1, 2016) (http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/01/racial-gender-wage-gaps-persist-in-u-s-despite-some-progress/).
67 See Robert A. Pape and Kevin Ruby, "The Face of American Insurrection" Chicago Project on Security and Threats (January 28, 2021), pp. 22 and 34.
68 Ibid. at p. 24.
69 Ibid. at pp. 9, 10.
70 See, e.g., J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), pp. 48-49.

for the move to the right, people have made a series of empirical mistakes. They think they are playing a zero-sum game, and even though they are wrong about this, a mistaken belief can nonetheless provide a powerful reason for people to conduct themselves in certain ways. This still would not explain why homophobia and misogyny are rising in certain segments of the population too,[71] for it is hard to see how this could be connected to a fear of the demographic shift. Indeed, many new immigrants are devout Catholics or Muslims or otherwise harbor illiberal attitudes themselves toward homosexuality and women. But let us ignore this inconsistency, since this is what the proponents of the demographic shift explanation do. The problem is that, even as an error theory, the demographic shift explanation is implausible. It is true that people often cite the demographic shift when asked why they are moving to the right. But what else do we expect them to say? They are bound to rely on the demographic shift explanation precisely because it seems to be an understandable, even if morally disappointing, reaction to the perceived growing challenge to one's share of the social, cultural, political, and economic pie.[72] Most people are not prepared to admit that they think racial and religious purity are values they want to maximize and defend, even if they are left objectively worse-off in economic terms by doing so. Because even though they think that there is nothing wrong with this, they know that many people think differently, and they want to protect themselves from criticism.

Even if some whites are motivated primarily by what they erroneously perceive as their economic self-interest, it is still hard to see how this works as an explanation of their move to the right. Despite claiming that he would "protect" and "fight for" workers (by which he clearly meant *white* workers), Trump's administration systematically did the opposite between 2016 and 2020 in 50 significant ways.[73] This left the white working class substantially worse off economically at the end of Trump's first term than it was at the start, even if we count their increased ability to reclaim some of their unjust privileges with regard to the rest of the working class.[74] In Trump's upcoming second term, his economic policies are almost certain to hurt workers even more.[75]

Of course, convincing his supporters that they have been or will be hurt by his policies is no easy task. To do so requires making factual claims about what actions have what effects, and the role of facts in pure and practical reasoning (what counts as a reason for belief and what counts as a reason for action) is one of the things in dispute between liberals and fascists. (I shall detail this more extensively in the final section of this essay, when I discuss further the different meanings that each assign to the value that they both call "truth.") But regardless of how these false beliefs get embedded in the working-class mind, once they are there, they are going to be hard to dislodge for reasons we have already discussed. At least as long as liberals are in power. Although poor whites may be willing to believe propaganda that falsely assigns blame to liberal policies while liberals are in power and fascists are in opposition, it is going to be much harder to make poor whites believe they are doing better during a period of illiberal rule when it is clear to them that they are not. The nefarious liberal invisible hand working tirelessly in the background even after liberalism is defeated is going to be much harder to blame when the illiberal hand is visibly in charge.

If self-interest were the driving force, why reject even segmented liberalism?

We might also wonder why, if the demographic shift were behind the move from liberalism to fascism among whites because they saw it as necessary to protect their self-interest *vis-à-vis* other groups, we would expect support for liberalism between different sub-groupings of whites to still prevail. After all, almost everyone who embraces some idea of white supremacy see many of those within the white majority as competitors too. Those from disfavored religious dominations, those with regional identities, and so on would seem to want to retain liberalism within the overall white grouping for fear they will be discriminated against if they do not. But this is not what we see. What we see is a rejection

71 See, e.g., Julie Moreau, "Dozens of Anti-LGBTQ State Bills Already Proposed in 2020, Advocates Warn," *NBC News* (January 23, 2020); Peter Beinhart, "The New Authoritarians Are Waging War on Women," *The Atlantic* (January/February 2019).

72 See, e.g., Robert A. Pape, "What an Analysis of 377 Americans Arrested or Charged in the Capitol Insurrection Tells Us," *The Washington Post* (April 6, 2021); Alan Feuer, "Fears of White People Losing Out Permeate Capitol Rioters' Towns, Study Finds," *The New York Times* (April 6, 2021); Robert A. Pape, "Understanding American Domestic Terrorism," *Chicago Project on Security and Threats* (April 6, 2021) (https://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/americas_insurrectionists_online_2021_04_06.pdf?mtime=1617807009).

73 See Celine McNicholas, Lynn Rhinehart, and Margaret Poydock, "50 Reasons the Trump Administration Is Bad for Workers," *Economic Policy Institute* (September 16, 2020).

74 See, e.g., Dan Kaufman, "Will Trump's Broken Promises to Working-Class Voters Cost Him the Election?" *The New Yorker* (October 31, 2020); Trip Gabriel, "Republicans Won Blue-Collar Votes. They're Not Offering Much in Return." *The New York Times* (March 4, 2021).

75 See, e.g., Joseph Stiglitz, "Trump Would Make the US Economy Weaker, Less Competitive and Less Equal," *The Guardian* (September 5, 2024).

of liberalism altogether and a de-emphasis on the role of relative merit and desert in deciding social ordering and conflict throughout society, and not simply a move to build a wall behind which a kind of segmented privileged white liberalism can take place. Assigning great importance to the numerical shifts here accordingly requires that we not be bothered by the various inconsistencies this assumption produces, inconsistencies that cannot be explained except by various intellectual contortions that make simplistic numerical comparisons far less explanatory than they seem. For racism and other illiberal attitudes are not present simply when they are in the economic interest of whites. They are often present when they do not seem to be in the economic interest of those harboring them. In other words, the move to the right is primarily or at least substantially principled, not self-interested.

Indeed, there should be nothing confounding about thinking that people can sacrifice themselves for principle. Liberals have long believed this; why should they doubt that fascists could believe this too? Why does the move to the right have to be explained in terms of self-interest rather than principle? If history is to be our guide, principle is what moves between liberalism and illiberalism are all about, even when these require self-sacrifice, as they often do. George Orwell made this very point in his 1940 review of *Mein Kampf:*

> Hitler has grasped the falsity of the hedonistic attitude toward life. Nearly all western thought since the last war, certainly all progressive thought, has assumed tacitly that human beings desire nothing beyond ease, security, and avoidance of pain . . . Hitler, because in his own joyless mind he feels it with exceptional strength, knows that human beings *don't* only want comfort, safety, short working-hours, hygiene, birth-control and, in general, common sense; they also, at least intermittently, want struggle and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags and loyalty-parades. However they may be as economic theories, Fascism and Nazism are psychologically far sounder than any hedonistic conception of life. The same is probably true of Stalin's militarized version of Socialism. All three of the great dictators have enhanced their power by imposing intolerable burdens on their peoples. Whereas Socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people 'I offer you a good time,' Hitler has said to them 'I offer you struggle, danger and death,' and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet.[76]

Note that Orwell's description of what Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin were offering their people fits what Trump and various Trump-like figures are offering their supporters too, at least if we give their supporters some credit and not think of them as unfathomably gullible, as they would have to be if they did not realize that promises made to them of riches beyond belief are hyperbolic and, in any event, contrary to the widely expected and then actual economic results of the promised policies once these were put into effect. Take Brexit, for example. The Brexit campaign was successful not because the people who supported it were especially gullible and believed that it would make huge economic benefits come their way. It was successful because the majority of voters did not care whether Brexit would make them economically better off or not. Brexit would make them *British* again, and possibly, even better than that, *English,* and not European, and that was something for which they were willing to pay. It was principle, not self-interest in the ordinary sense, driving them to the right.[77] While people can and do find something so important that they undertake sacrifices to in order to obtain or defend it, it is also possible that things work the other way around: People may "choose particular ends for the sake of expressing devotion, rather than expressing devotion for the sake of attaining particular ends."[78] That, after all, explains a great deal of the tremendous appeal of religion, which cannot be explained simply as belief in the promise of ever-lasting life, which, of course, not all religions (for example, Judaism) offer anyway. Principles are obviously important to people, sometimes even more important to them than their self-interest, and it is a mistake for liberals to forget this in the current context when trying to make sense of the movement to the illiberal right.

76 George Orwell, "Review of *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: Volume 2: My Country Right of Left 1940-1943,* ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), pp. 12-14.
77 See Kaufmann, *White Shift,* pp 192-209.
78 See Paul Katsafanas, *The Philosophy of Devotion: Nihilism, Fanaticism, and the Longing for Invulnerable Ideals* (Manuscript, March 3, 2021), for an excellent discussion and defense of this proposition.

Why would a small change in numbers be so significant to so many now?

Note also that the demographic shift explanation implies that white people were psychologically content to embrace *de jure* liberalism as long as their numbers ensured that this would not mean losing their *de facto* dominance. In other words, the post-Second World War move toward liberalism was costless as it did not seriously threaten white privilege. Any hypocrisy at the bottom of liberalism could remain invisible, at least to introspection. But when not confronting their hypocrisy became untenable, many whites found the strains of their commitment to liberalism and the cognitive dissonance this required too burdensome to maintain.

But the commitment to liberalism in even the most liberal societies has always been imperfect. Illiberal attitudes and practices were always able to survive among the privileged class and sometimes even flourish within a liberal moral framework as long as they were not too obvious and vulgar. It is hard to see how a simple slip from a modest majority to a dominating plurality could be taken to mean that liberal societies would suddenly overcome their imperfections and thereby trigger panic among a large portion of white people. White privilege has, after all, mostly meant white male privilege, and white men have never been more than a plurality, making up only 34 percent of the electorate in 2024.[79] And mostly not even that. Why should white men fear a change in numbers now, when they felt perfectly comfortable neutralizing their numerical inferiority through law and custom for centuries? Even where democracy is not already rigged in favor of white people, non-whites are, as a practical matter, still overwhelmingly underrepresented in all positions of power.[80] Most politicians are still white men,[81] and even existing majority-minority cities and states are typically ruled by whites.[82] Why should a modest rise in numbers of those effectively cut out of power through gerrymandering, voter suppression and various structural quirks that also work to favor white people in many liberal democracies suddenly be so terrifying?[83]

The numerical argument assumes a kind of unity that does not exist

Accepting the demographic shift explanation also requires us to embrace the idea that, as long as white people remain the majority, most whites will not have a paranoid reaction because they know they can count on their fellow whites to protect them. Really? White people have never been a monolithic or unified polity; they have been at each other's throats for centuries. Think Protestants versus Catholics, Northerners versus Southerners, Easterners versus Westerners, Democrats versus Republicans, town versus country, neighbor versus neighbor, and so on. The fact that most white men are illiberal does not mean that as long as white men are in the majority there is nothing to worry about for those who want to maintain white privilege. After all, even though Donald Trump won the white vote by an impressive margin in the 2020 US presidential election, a sizeable minority of white men (about 40 percent) demonstrated their commitment to liberalism by voting against Trump.[84] Even if white men were to form a majority of the population this would not guarantee that those wanting to maintain white privilege would prevail. It is not a change in the overall percentages of whites to non-whites that is threatening to white privilege. It is the moral power and persuasiveness of liberalism itself.

Remember also that whiteness has always been an indeterminate and unstable categorization. Indeed, part of the reason why "whiteness" has survived as a method of designation for the power elite for so long is its flexibility. It has allowed white people to deal with changes in numbers for centuries simply by expanding the notion of who is white. At one time, Italians and Irish were seen as not fully white;

79 See Emily Guskin, Chris Alcantara, and Janice Kai Chen, "Exit Polls from the 2024 Presidential Election," *The Washington Post* (November 6, 2024).
80 See, e.g., Damien Cave, "In a Proudly Diverse Australia, White People Still Run Almost Everything," *The New York Times* (April 18, 2018); Dudley L. Poston Jr. and Rogelio Saenz, "U.S. Whites Will Soon Be the Minority in Number, but Not Power," *The Baltimore Sun* (August 8, 2017).
81 See Alexa Lardieri, "Despite Diverse Demographics, Most Politicians Are Still White Men," *U.S. News & World Report* (October 24, 2017).
82 See William H. Fey, "Melting Pot Cities and Suburbs: Racial and Ethnic Change in Metro America in the 2000s," *Brookings* (May 2011); Nadra Kareem Nittle, "Which 4 States Have the Most People of Color?" *Thought&Co.* (March 21, 2021).
83 See Philip Bump, "In about 20 Years, Half the Population Will Live in Eight States," *The Washington Post* (July 12, 2018); Philip Bump. "The Electorate Keeps Getting Less White. The Results Aren't Getting Much More Democratic." *The Washington Post* (April 30, 2021).
84 See David Weigel, Scott Clement, Emily Guskin, Kevin Uhrmacher, Ann Gerhart, Claudia Deane, Alauna Safarpour and Jocelyn Kiley, "Exit Poll Results and Analysis for the 2020 Presidential Election," *The Washington Post* (December 14, 2020).

now they are.[85] Many Latino people already see themselves as and aspire to be recognized as white.[86] Because they do, welcoming such people into white society is a much more painless and effective way of ensuring a continuing white majority than overturning liberalism. It is just not credible to think that the upcoming numerical tipping point could be viewed as an insurmountable obstacle, driving many who had previously thought of themselves as liberal toward the illiberal right, when this supposed obstacle has been so easy to get around in the past.

Finally, believing that white people see the emergence of a non-white majority as especially threatening also requires believing that non-whites are monolithic too. But this is not credible either. Non-whites have also been battling each other for centuries, often with the encouragement of whites but sometimes entirely as an expression of their own felt rivalries. Why would we think that white people suddenly find the rise of non-white majorities threatening when they have been so successful in splitting non-whites into warring factions for hundreds if not thousands of years?

What is really going on

The answer to this is that no matter how strongly we (as liberals) might wish that it were otherwise, the fundamental moral commitments of many of those in supposedly liberal societies are changing. People's allegiance to liberal values is fading; not because they are trying to protect their self-interest and putting this above satisfying what they continue to recognize as the demands of morality; they do not recognize these demands anymore. Not because they are making empirical mistakes about what is happening or what would happen under certain upcoming conditions, for these mistakes are a product of their changing values, not the source of them. Not because half the world has gone crazy, for the very idea of what is crazy depends on your point of view, and this point of view is changing from a liberal one to a fascist one. And not because switching to fascism offers a path to sustained power for those few who are egomaniacal enough to put their own interest above that of humanity. These people are coming to the fore because they represent the values of the many, no matter what their personal motivation for seeking power might be. Liberalism is fading because some people are becoming convinced that certain other types of people are not entitled to be treated with equal concern and respect. They think that society should be as hierarchical in assigning moral value to people as it is hierarchical in assigning income, wealth, power and everything else. They see others as "beings of lesser moral worth." They find authoritarian rule, not democracy, most comforting, even when they have little influence over that authority themselves. And they would feel this way regardless of whether a demographic shift was coming or any of the other conventional explanations for this disturbing political development applied.

Indeed, this is the only way to explain why support for illiberal attitudes is increasing among non-whites, other minorities, and even women, despite the fact that the rise of illiberalism *does* clearly threaten *their* self-interest.[87] Many liberals seem intent on explaining this away by claiming that *everyone*, even recent immigrants, are worried about immigration, globalization, and inflation, even though there is no reason to blame Biden and certainly not Harris for the first two and little reason to blame either of them for the last.[88] Given Trump's constant and often vicious disparagement of minorities and women,[89] it must be clear to them that Trump's intent is to oppress them, even if they might benefit in some ways as a side effect of some of his other policies, which is doubtful. The moves of these people to the right must accordingly be driven at least significantly by principle. Obviously, an increasing number of minorities and women are willing to support a self-professed champion of white Christian men. In any event, whether we look at the movement toward illiberalism as a wide, muti-racial, multi-ethnic,

85 See Brent Staples, "How Italians Became 'White,'" *The New York Times* (October 12, 2019); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (London: Routledge, 2008).
86 See Melissa Hellmann, "'Leaning into the Whiteness': Journalist Paola Ramos on Why Some Latinos Have Turned to the Far Right," *The Guardian* (November 1, 2024); Ian Haney López, "Trump Exploited Status Anxiety within the Latino Community," *The Washington Post* (November 6, 2020).
87 See Chris Alcantara, Leslie Shapiro, Emily Guskin, Scott Clement, and Brittany Renee Mayes, "How Independents, Latino Voters and Catholics Shifted from 2016 and Swung States for Biden and Trump," *The Washington Post* (November 12, 2020); Musa al-Gharbi, "The Trump vote is rising among Blacks and Hispanics, Despite the Conventional Wisdom," *Think* (November 2, 2020); Giselle Donnelly and James Kirchick, "The Increase in LGBTQ Support for Trump Has a Silver Lining," *The Washington Post* (November 30, 2020); Scott Clement, Emily Guskin, Dan Keating and Júlia Ledur, "What the 2024 Election Tells Us about Trump's Voters," *Washington Post* (November 8, 2024).
88 See, e.g., Heather Long, "Voters Sent a Sharp Message on the Economy. Now Comes the Mess." *The Washington Post* (November 8, 2024).
89 See Steven Ross Johnson and Elliott Davis Jr., "How Key Demographic Groups Voted in the 2024 Election," *U.S. News and World Report* (November 6, 2024); Cyrus Moulton, "How Did Trump Win the Election? New Interactive Tool Takes Deep Dive into Voter Demographics," *Northeastern Global News* (November 5, 2024) (https://news.northeastern.edu/2024/11/05/voter-demographics-interactive-tool/).

multi-gendered phenomenon, or as purely a white one, it seems clear that those who remain committed to liberalism are now engaged in an existential struggle over which set of fundamental moral principles will form the framework for guiding the organization and activities of contemporary society. Identifying the principles or fundamental moral values that are competing with those of liberalism and thus behind this shift away from liberalism by substantial segments of the population, is accordingly the first and most critical step in constructing an effective defense against the barbarians at the gate.

The Fascist Conception of Political Morality

Values are fundamental, in the sense I am using the term, if they are presupposed. By this I mean that values are fundamental if they are among 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 an argument cannot be made for or against which values should be selected as fundamental. It merely means that no *moral* arguments can be made in favor or against such selections, for any such arguments would beg the question of which set of fundamental moral values is correct, which is the very 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 as I have already said, I shall not make any of these arguments in this essay. My purpose here is simply to show what the fundamental moral values or moral "presuppositions" of fascism are.

Note, however, 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 each respective 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. These general statements need to be further refined and interpreted in various ways before they are specific enough to be applied. And some of these possible refinements and interpretations may be 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 end up talking past one another, which is mostly, I fear, what is happening today.

Let me also emphasize that under the approach I will adopt in this essay, 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. What I will be presenting should not be understood as a list of necessary and sufficient conditions. Indeed, 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 expressed in the officially liberal world given the controversial nature of such a move.[1] Instead, 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. Throughout history, many people can and indeed have embraced fascism in degrees, just as they have with liberalism. 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 fascist, in the sense I am using the term, that one's embrace of fascism remains incomplete, tentative, or unsuccessful. For the term to be a useful form of categorization in a nonideal 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.

1 See generally Federico Finchelstein, *The Wannabe Fascists: A Guide to Understanding the Greatest Threat to Democracy* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2024).

The fascist conception of the moral subject

We begin our analysis of the fundamental values of fascist political morality by identifying what is sometimes called the moral subject; that is, the point from which the relevant conception of political morality begins. For those who may not be familiar with the work of John Rawls, the preeminent liberal political philosopher of the twentieth century, he says (correctly in the view of almost all other liberal political philosophers) that liberalism begins with a conception of the person.[2] Under that conception, people are said to possess "two moral powers." 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 respective conceptions of liberalism. So, even though the details of these conceptions may differ, they are all going to be about facilitating fair terms of social cooperation between individuals and ensuring that every individual is able to pursue any reasonable conception of their personal good free from interference by others.

As a result, liberalism is often accused of being overly and in fact relentlessly individualistic. This, in turn, is cited as a source of much evil. Indeed, those who advance this criticism from the illiberal left characterize liberalism as "possessive individualism."[3] The communitarian left,[4] which is liberal in some ways but illiberal in others, goes even further and derogatively describes liberalism as "asocial individualism."[5] And of course, the claim that liberalism can be reduced to nothing but individualism is also made by fascists and their sympathizers on the right—for example, Alexander Dugin, the contemporary Russian Eurasianist and confidant of Vladimir Putin, claims that "Liberalism is an ideology that prioritizes the liberation of the individual from all forms of collective identity."[6]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. Instead, liberalism embraces what other liberal theorists call "creative and cooperative individualism."[7] In other words, while liberalism takes the individual as the fundamental social unit, it also values the community, for communities are necessary for individuals to prosper and thrive. It is just that individuals are *prior* to communities; communities take their identities from the individuals that make them up, not the other way around.[8] Individuals are the place where moral and causal responsibility both start and stop, not communities. Communities are valuable, but as the Kantian categorical imperative tells us: Individuals may not be sacrificed for the good of the community; there is no place for the assessment of collective moral responsibility; and there is no basis for the imposition of collective punishment. In contrast, all these moral practices are commonly applied in fascist states.

Most importantly for our purposes, moreover, fascism, unlike liberalism, does not begin with a conception of the person. It starts with a very different moral subject. It begins with 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 fundamental organic unit. It is only this larger unit and other similarly composed but competing fundamental organic units that can harbor and pursue moral ends. And the importance of this difference in starting positions between liberal and fascism should not be underestimated, for the choice between "the person" and "the people" is what gives us the subject matter of political morality—without this, no exploration of morality can take place. Under fascism, there is no distinction between a person and the carefully defined society to which he belongs. Being an individual, in the sense of having a distinctive, personal, conception of the good and plan of life that one is not only free to pursue but also one that one can count on attracting the social cooperation of others to realize is possible only under liberalism.

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2 See John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001), sec. 7, pp. 18-24.

3 See, e.g., C. B. Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

4 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).

5 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).

6 Aleksander Dugin, "The Great Reboot and the Great Awakening," *Ria Novosti* (February 15, 2021) (https://ria.ru/20210215/perezagruzka-1597564983.html?fbclid=IwAR1m-HzHPOcoA8YUVjiUXoLo_fQ6_RzTZINFq9KTMEuOVkZ2ZaqPKAgBRlo).

7 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.

8 See Reiff, *The Attack on Liberalism,"* pp. 183-185.

Of course, even once we have identified our moral subject, we still need to know more before moral discussion can take place: we need to know the moral criteria by which that subject is to be evaluated. Noting the difference in starting positions 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 these fundamental moral criteria is accordingly what I shall do next.

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 as part of a fine-grained social hierarchy, establishing the relative value or status of each individual and group of individuals to one another within the larger whole. Every man is of higher status than any woman, some kinds of men have higher status than other kinds, and some men within each kind have higher status than others of that kind. This social hierarchy may be rigid, overt, and well-defined, like the caste system that was in place on the Indian subcontinent for generations and still shapes Indian politics today. Or, some social mobility may be possible within certain larger, somewhat blurry, rigid bands, much like the unofficial caste system that has been in effect 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 indeed, until recently, these has been some improvement over time in the rate and degree of social mobility within most liberal societies.[9] In any event, the social hierarchy in a fascist society is deemed to have been set by God, in the eyes of some, or it may be a product of the natural distribution of talents and abilities, in the eyes of others. After 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 within the workplace, 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—even within races, there is often an attempt to categorize people according to certain characteristics that are thought objectionable when applied to the group as a whole (think of the greater status often assigned by Black people to those with lighter skin,[10] or the higher (or lower) status assigned by women to other women who exceed traditional beauty standards (or fall distinctively short).[11] But liberals believe that as creatures with minds, we can overcome our primal instincts to rank everyone according to some convention, and not simply pander to these instincts whenever they arise.

On the other hand, fascists believe that it is both pointless and senseless to fight against what they see as the natural order of things.[12] Rather, they view their role as instantiating that natural order, and therefore see status as the central organizing factor of social and political life. Exceptions are 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 their respective European nations or otherwise become powerful figures in fascist or quasi-fascist movements. Examples here include Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni, Alice Weidel, and Mussolini's granddaughters, Alessandra and Rachele. But I will talk about these women later. For now, the only point I want to make is that the existence of prominent fascist women does not change 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 of fascist movements, but the power structure in such movements will remain overwhelmingly male. Women who rise above their class will generally have special credentials that 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 of caste and class within the fascist worldview cannot be refuted by individual counterexamples.

9 See Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste* (New York: Random House, 2020).
10 See Margaret Hunter, "The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality," *Sociology Compass* 1 (2007): 237-254.
11 See Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (New York: Morrow, 1991).
12 See e.g., Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*.

There are consequentialist, self-interested, reasons for implementing a social hierarchy as well. As US President Lyndon Johnson said, "If you can convince the lowest white man he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice you're picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he'll empty his pockets for you."[13] In other words, if you want to control and exploit the masses, divide them up and give most of them someone to look down upon. Dealing with the rest will be much easier. Indeed, this was a major impetus for turning poor whites against poor Blacks just after Reconstruction, when it looked like poor whites would recognize they had more in common with poor Blacks than with whites and might therefore form a poor people's political alliance.[14] Machiavelli, after all, pointed out that it was important to keep most men from being anything more than poor, "for this will be an antidote to two great enemies of active obedience—ambition and boredom—and the ruled will feel in constant need of great men to lead them."[15] To keep most whites poor (and some very rich), it was essential under the circumstances to give them the feeling that they occupied a higher social status than Blacks. Equally, it was essential to give white men higher social status than women (as a way of emasculating Black men, Black women are often attributed higher social status that Black men). So I do not deny that some of those who embrace the fascist idea of social hierarchy embrace it because they see it as serving their individual best interests, as protecting their wealth and social position from attack. But the existence of such people does not mean that there are no deontological reasons to embrace a system of social hierarchy as a means of organizing society as well. Indeed, there must be, for in a society governed by a rigid social ordering, many (and probably most) people—even those in the dominant group—suffer financially and in other ways if they are looked down upon by the elite within their group even if they now get to look down on those in groups that are of lower status. Indeed, this would have to be true for the concept of a social hierarchy to have such enduring appeal.

There are, of course, many other categories into which people can be sorted besides men and women. But these categories can also be conveniently identified by relatively obvious biological, racial, ethnic, religious, or otherwise 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 such exclusionary categorizations of the proper order in the social hierarchy as central to an illiberal worldview, and these categorizations certainly are important. But they are actually 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. 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, preexisting social hierarchy that must be respected for society to exist. The details then depend on which particular fascist movement one has in mind.

Note that the use of objective and quasi-objective factors to determine group rankings allows most individuals to be assigned to groups *in advance*. But rankings are necessary *within* groups as well as between them. If status provides the essential matrix within which all social interactions must occur, everyone must be ranked against everybody else. Once we have sorted everybody into groups, however, we will have run out of the broad, easily identifiable, readily apparent factors needed to make such rankings. Ranking people *within* groups in advance will therefore be more difficult to do. Criteria for this further ranking must be "revealed" over time, like economic preferences are revealed, through the accumulation of post-birth indicators of value, such as wealth, beauty, and strength, as well as business, political, and social success. These conditional measures of value are also objective, or at least quasi-objective—that is, measurable by some outward-facing characteristic that is commensurable with other examples of this characteristic. The "prosperity gospel"—the view that God materially rewards those who are faithful to him—is one particularly crass example of this.[16] But all fascist and fascist-leaning conceptions of the social hierarchy, including those that are not religiously based, incorporate some version of the idea that those with the "correct" objective or quasi-objective characteristics and values will be handsomely rewarded. The reason why subjective characteristics are not perceived as a source

13 See Bill Moyers, *Moyers on America: A Journalist and His Times* (New York: The New Press, 2004) (quoting LBJ in "Second Thoughts").

14 See Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at the Conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March" (March 25, 1965) (http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_address_at_the_conclusion_of_selma_march/); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

15 Isaiah Berlin, "The Originality of Machiavelli," in Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current* (Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 25-79, 61. See Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2012), p. 92 "It should be the object of every well-governed common-wealth to make the State rich and keep individual citizens poor." See also p. 299-300.

16 For an exhaustive discussion of the American version of this, see Kate Fowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

of value, in contrast, 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.[17] 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 perceived as anything more than commonplace are actually seen as 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 is that fascists fundamentally disagree with the liberal idea that all people have equal moral worth.[18] 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,[19] called the principle of equality "pure nonsense."[20] Alain de Benoist, one of the founders of the French New Right, characterized "egalitarian ideology" as *the* enemy of those on the right.[21] Lothrop Stoddard, the racist American historian and sociologist who rose to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s, characterized the idea of "natural equality" as "one of the most pernicious delusions that has ever inflicted mankind."[22] Madison Grant, the early twentieth-century American eugenicist, claimed that "the basic truth [is] that inequality and not equality is the law of nature."[23] I could go on, but I think the point is uncontroversial.

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 not to focus on this fundamental principle simply as a rejection of the idea that all humans have equal moral worth, as a negative argument against equality. One must recognize that it is also 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. 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.

The role of ideological factors in social ranking

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. Note that 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.[24] But this debate has little practical significance. While spiritual or cultural racism could be thought of as more sophisticated than nationalistic or biological racism, for the former would allow for a Jewish Nazi or an Aryan Jew, 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 contra-indicated objective features may be welcomed into a fascist community for a time as an object of entertainment,

17 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.
18 See Thomas J. Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018).
19 See Jason Horowitz, "Steve Bannon Cited Italian Thinker Who Inspired Fascists," *The New York Times* (February 10, 2017).
20 See Franco Ferraresi, "Julius Evola, Tradition, Reaction, and the Radical Right," *European Journal of Sociology* 28 (1987): 107-151, p. 125.
21 See Alain de Benoist, *View from the Right, Volume I: Heritage and Foundations* (London: Arktos, 2017), p. 2.
22 Lothrop Stoddard, *The Revolt Against Civilization* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), p. 30.
23 Madison Grant, *The Great Race, or The Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 79.
24 See, e.g., Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (London: Routledge, 2011), ch. 7.

as a tool of the power elite, or as some other kind of "useful idiot." There are correspondingly 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 slave to be invited to dine at the table of the master. This appeals both to some people's compulsive desire to be submissive to whomever they see as the most powerful, as well as 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, is one example of this.[25] Enrique Tarrio, the dark-skinned Cuban American who, as leader of the Proud Boys, was recently convicted of seditious conspiracy for his role in the January 6, 2021, US Capitol insurrection, is another.[26]

I will deal with women who hold or appear to be headed for leadership potions in European fascist parties, as well as those who seem to be playing a prominent role on the extreme right in US politics, later in this essay, when I talk about the values of masculinity and femininity. At this point, I will merely note that despite the sometimes significant political accomplishments of these women, none have gained 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 and 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. The continued existence of women is instead seen as necessary for the reproduction of men and the fulfillment of some powerful male drives. Women who have certain physical characteristics are also carriers of an important element of instrumental value the possession of which 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 fascist 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. The ideological gloss that supplements objective markers can work both ways in certain cases, but these are fringe, not central, cases. They reflect individual exceptions, not changes in how that class of individuals is viewed. And given that classes or categories of people and not individuals are the moral subject, the fact that there are a few surprising individual exceptions to the rules of social hierarchy categorization is irrelevant to an understanding of the overall fascist social structure. 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 an example of how individual exclusion and not individual inclusion is far more socially significant in fascist society, remember that 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. In the struggle to regain control of Muslim lands from what he and other fundamentalists viewed as secular governments that had sold out to the West, these "false" Muslims could legitimately be killed. This idea, in turn, unleashed a tidal wave of violence by Muslims against Muslims in these countries that had been unthinkable before.[27]

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 to overwhelm the voting power of white people, an idea that I have already noted as being frequently promoted in the US today by figures like Tucker Carlson.[28] Carlson and those who think like him, for example, contend that only "true" Americans are entitled to a voice, regardless of the legal status of other Americans who do not meet the criteria for being among "the people." 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.

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25 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).
26 See Marcela García, "The Proud Boys' Latino Connection, Explained," *Boston Globe* (June 10, 2022).
27 See e.g. Gilles Kepel, *The Roots of Radical Islam* (London: SAQI, 2005), pp. 34-69, 46.
28 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).

A group identity drawn from blood and soil

Tied up in all this as both a cause and an effect of their exclusionary worldview, fascists hold an excessive reverence for blood and soil, for they see this as the source of their identity as "a people." Indeed, fascists believe that all people are naturally or perhaps supernaturally connected to both the land of their ancestors and to the bloodline out of which they arose. And not in the trivial liberal sense in which people sport associational ties to their ancestors and their history as well as to 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 is 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 intermarried with humans long ago.[29] Perhaps this elevation of blood and soil to essential values 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, the view goes, is as ridiculous as thinking of a product as independent of its maker, separate from where and by whom it was created. 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 anti-Semitic.[30] Jews are viewed as a wandering people.[31] Having no home of their own, they are naturally inclined (the reasoning goes) on the one hand to denigrate the value of homeland, yet simultaneously infiltrate and subvert the homelands of others.[32] The inconsistencies of the political characteristics commonly assigned to Jews—that they are simultaneously committed communists seeking to establish a single world government and relentless capitalists whose voracious appetite for even more staggering amounts of money leads them to impose ever greater degrees of subjugation on the working population of every nation—are explained because these are both ways of solving the problem of being homeless in the larger sense. Even when those on the far right are in some sense supportive of Jews, this is always transactional. Tolerance and perhaps even quasi-acceptance is exchanged for political support or money,[33] or temporary political support is given because Israel is viewed as the site of the Great War against the armies of Gog, the great evil, the war that is prologue to the rapture.[34] Neither support nor tolerance is given because of any objection to the fascist view that Jews are people of lesser moral worth.

How to deal with a world that contains a people with no home of their own, if one views a dedicated homeland as an essential element of continued existence, is therefore a perennial political problem, a problem that is exacerbated rather than addressed by liberalism. For such homelessness is said to lead to various kinds of continuing tension and strife. With regard to one set of homeless people, this problem even has a special name: "the Jewish question."[35]For example, the only way for Jews to annihilate the widespread religious prejudice again them, the claim goes, is for them to support a form of political morality like liberalism that (supposedly) denigrates or at least disempowers religion. And

29 See, e.g., Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1995). See also Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 11-12, 129-130.

30 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.

31 See Slavoj Žižek, "The New Roots of Anti-Semitism," *Project Syndicate* (Nov 30, 2023).

32 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).

33 See, e.g., Chris Cameron and Michael Gold, "Trump Says That if He Loses, 'the Jewish People Would Have a Lot to Do' With It," *The New York Times* (September 19, 2024).

34 See Ezekiel 38: "On the day that there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; the fish on the sea, and the birds of the air, and the animals of the field, and all creeping things that creep on the ground, and all human beings that are on the face of the earth, shall quake in my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground. I will summon the sword against Gog in all my mountains, says the Lord God; the swords of all will be against their comrades. With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him; and I will pour down torrential rains and hailstones, fire and sulfur upon him and his troops and the many peoples who are with him. So shall I display my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of the many nations. Then they shall know that I am the lord."

35 See Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" in *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 211-241.

the only way for Jews to overcome the lack of status they enjoy as a result of not having a homeland, the claim continues, is to embrace the liberal idea that a people do not naturally draw special powers and rights from their connection to a particular piece of land, while hypocritically making this very argument themselves is support of their return to Isreal as kind of liberal remedy to centuries of persecution, for under liberalism, actions may be done as remedies even if these would be indisputably immoral if committed for other reasons. And the same problems arise with regard to and are similarly exacerbated by liberalism for other groups (the Roma, the Kurds, and so on) that also lack an accepted, established homeland.[36]

Of course, the connection between a people and their land is often imagined, or at least much more tenuous than assumed. Most people today live on land that was originally some other people's territory. And because territorial boundaries have become more permeable and the movement of peoples so widespread, miscegenation has increased and bloodlines have become inextricably intermixed. The long-standing, present connection of blood and soil between a particular self-conceived people and a territory 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 these particular people. The land is a gift from God to these people or, for the secular fascist, it is theirs by right 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 either; it is simply presupposed. 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.[37]

These ideas—that communities are not derived from commonalities between individuals, but rather exist independently as organic social constructs, and that individuals can and should be forced to conform to these conceptions or be branded as enemies of the community if they do not, are widespread in fascist thinking. Consider the ideas of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder of the fascist "Falangist" movement in Spain. Like Qtub, Primo de Rivera claimed that "the state was not the nation but that the nation existed previously… the Fatherland was not a being 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."[38]

Like a King's conversion or some other momentous act of religious significance, 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, 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 mythmakers can work, a founding myth can be created, a story of blood and soil. And with this as its base, a conception of a fascist society can be born and no matter what happens, continue to exist.

The obsessive pursuit of purity

Given the importance assigned to blood and soil and various objective, quasi-objective, natural, and ideological precommitments, 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

36 Note the disturbing similarity here between the view that liberalism has caused a people to be dispossessed or disempowered in their own homeland and the view that America is already under the control of ZOG—the Zionist Occupation Government—put together by Satan and the Jews, which must be destroyed before America can reclaim her place as a Christian nation. See Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (New York: Randon House, 2001), p. 363.

37 See Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Beirut: Holy Koran Publishing House, 1980), pp. 9-22, 101-103.

38 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.

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.[39] Of course, as a practical matter, many liberals' commitment to pluralism was historically imperfect, and is even to this day. Hence the construction of what I earlier called "segmented liberalism" in many self-proclaimed liberal societies. But, as I also noted, liberalism and fascism exist as opposite ends of a sliding scale, with the current resting point moving back and forth through history. I will not attempt a comprehensive summary of all the swings back and forth since the Enlightenment, but in general, it started very close to the fascist end of the scale, moved a little further toward liberalism after the women's suffrage movement, moved back during the 1930s, moved back again toward fuller implementation of liberal aspirations after the Axis powers were defeated and then further still in Allied nations in light of the successes of the civil rights movement. Ultimately, it managed to move quite far along toward liberalism, with the peak probably around 1989, when after the euphoria triggered by the fall of communism, the current movement toward the right began to push things back toward the tipping point midway between the two aspirational ends, where it currently resides.

Purity and perfectionism

In any event, whereas a less than full commitment to liberal values is often accepted within aspiring liberal societies, purity is a fundamental value for fascist ones. First, for consequentialist reasons. Purity is an essential feature of social peace, for "rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience"[40] and such unity is necessary if any group of persons are to come together as a people. This, for example, is why Trump, like Hitler before him, rails against those who because of their place of birth their religion, or ethnicity, or that of their parents or grandparents, can be accused of "poisoning the blood of our country."[41]

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 is a perfectionist society, as opposed to a society that is simply "good enough," which is the end toward which liberalism supposedly strives. In any event, authority is not only the tool that fascists use to enforce status relations, it is also the tool by which fascist societies pursue purity. The cleansing of the social body is as necessary as the cleaning of the biological body if the fascist self-conception of the 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 by arguing that they were "born this way," as those in the LGBT+ community often do. The "born this way" argument is meant to show that those who harbor same-sex attraction do not deserve to be treated as festering moral pustules but are rather entitled to the same moral respect as other individuals who experience conventional types of sexual attraction are entitled to, and this argument does work within liberalism given its commitment to equality, liberty, and against arbitrary treatment of reasonable conceptions of the good in a pluralistic society. But within fascism, this argument 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+ persons 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 biological reproduction means there will always be new LGBT+ individuals created within even a fully committed fascist community. And this poses a danger to society greater than that posed by the existence of other forms of impurities. For this kind of impurity cannot be eliminated from society, even by eliminating large swaths of LGBT+ persons. This characteristic can only be suppressed. This kind of impurity not only threatens to dilute the achievable purity of any fascist community by creating nonconforming persons within the relevant society itself; it also threatens purity by calling into question the conformity of the parents and institutions that help raise and educate what turn out to be nonconforming adults. After all, under fascist ideology, if children become nonconforming, it is not only

39 See Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).
40 Mary Douglass, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 3.
41 See Isaac Arnsdorf and Marisa Iati, "Trump Makes Demonizing Immigrants a Core Message with 'Blood' Refrain," *The Washington Post* (December 22, 2023); Martin Pengelly, "Trump Aides Plot Deportation Effort Inspired by UK Rwanda Plan – Report," *The Guardian* (May 17, 2024); Philip Bump, "The Incomprehensible, Unattainable Scale of Trump's Deportation Plan," *The Washington Post* (May 15, 2024).

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. While fascist societies believe in eugenics, they generally reject biological determinism; otherwise, ideology could not play the important role it does within fascist society. Because having the correct genes is necessary but not sufficient for full membership in a fascist society, there is also an oft-expressed fear that children can be groomed for and seduced into nonconforming lifestyles. Hence the corresponding claim that repressive measures targeting certain ways of life are there to *protect* children, a common refrain used to excuse all sorts of illiberal attitudes.

But what really drives fascist 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 biologically created or have aided and abetted the rearing of nonconforming individuals. 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 the biological parents are not as pure as they may have appeared, and thereby subjects them to elimination from the fascist community. It also calls into question the purity of belief and action of those associated with raising these nonconforming individuals, and therefore subjects an even wider group of those who view themselves as pure conformists. It is the fear of having their own purity questioned, just as much as the social impurity caused by the ineliminable existence of such nonconforming people, that is driving this particular hatred and making it even more virulent.[42]

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 its cultural, spiritual, and ideological uniformity. And while fascists more or less concede that objective purity is not possible, in the sense of having people of only one objective kind living in a particular place, given that people are currently so intermixed demographically,[43] 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 places them at a lower rank on the social scale, are celebrated, at least for a time, just like voluntary slaves, until their atypical allegiances are no longer instrumentally useful.[44] Indeed, it is this obsessive-compulsive focus on purity that explains why fascist sects eventually destroy themselves. Over time, the criteria for membership in the relevant community become ever more finely specified, and more and more people are excluded.[45] Eventually, so many people are excluded that the fascist state can no longer retain its grip on power.

The fascist obsession with purity accordingly functions as a kind of fail-safe from the liberal point of view, for it eventually leads all fascist movements to self-destruct. This is perhaps most obvious on the far left, where political groups are always splitting up over what appear to be rather trivial disagreements. Marxist movements, for example, have historically been plagued by factionalism, often splitting over trivial matters, shedding members, and directing as much of their energy toward internal purification as toward external expansion and success. But similar implosive forces can be found on the far right as well. Islamic fundamentalism, for example, began as a movement claiming to speak on behalf of the entire Muslim political community, but is now divided between Sunni and Shiite factions and, to some extent, between Arab and non-Arab factions as well.[46] American neoconservatism also eventually began to splinter and divide, with various former champions accusing one another of betraying the core values of the movement.[47] Without the built-in constraints for dealing with the disagreements over values and policy that are bound to arise as illiberal movements develop, mature, and encounter new and more complex problems, constraints that only liberalism can provide, the movement has more and more difficulty maintaining its internal cohesion. Even without pressure from external enemies,

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42 See, e.g., Lauren Aratani, "Planet Fitness Outlets Receive Bomb Threats after Far Right Derides Gym Policy," *The Guardian* (April 13, 2024); Raphael Rashid, "A Small Group in South Korea Has a Big Homophobic Agenda," *The New York Times* (April 28, 2024); Lydia Polgreen, "The Strange Report Fueling the War on Trans Kids," *The New York Times* (August 13, 2024) ("The wish — whether expressed by a parent, a teacher, a therapist or a suitor — is a wish for a child not to be queer").

43 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.

44 See, e.g. Tayo Bero, "Why Are Black Rappers Aligning Themselves with the Right?" *The Guardian* (August 10, 2023).

45 See Reiff, "The Attack on Liberalism," pp. 205-207.

46 See, e.g., Edward Wong, "Sectarian Divide: On Web, a Sunni-Shiite Split on Hezbollah," *New York Times* (July 22, 2006), at p. A8. For a history of the sectarian struggle between Sunni and Shiite fundamentalism, see Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: Norton, 2006).

47 See, e.g., Fancis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neo-conservative Legacy (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

such a movement will inevitably begin to devour itself as it pursues greater purity and perfection. Unfortunately, however, a great deal of general destruction and collateral damage can take place in the name of purity before this fail-safe has its inevitable disarticulating effect.

On the other hand, it is *impurity*, which under liberalism takes the form of respect for pluralism, that makes liberal society forever amenable to the rise of fascism in its midst. For there could not be movement from liberalism to illiberalism if at least some of those who considered themselves liberals did not feel some attraction to the values espoused by fascists all along. It is the lack of reverence for purity within liberalism that allows a reverence for fascist values there to survive and simmer. Fascism is thus not the only ideology that has the seeds of its own destruction contained within it. Liberalism has the conditions which allow a movement from liberal values to fascist ones effectively baked into it from the start.

The Fascist Conception of Individual Rights

Rights and economics

It should be obvious that when the 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 to free speech and rights prohibiting unfair and discriminatory treatment, which mostly do not exist under fascism, but also property, tort (that is, compensation for wrongful injury), and contract rights (I will refer to these rights collectively hereinafter as "economic rights"). Economic rights do exist in a fascist state, and the state is formally committed to protecting them. If one gets hit by a speeding truck while in a crosswalk, for example, one generally has a right to compensation, even in a fascist state. Regardless of what is true in theory, however, economic rights are typically not enforceable in practice against those of greater social status, or the state, even if people may have enforceable economic rights against private parties of their own or lesser status.

This obviously has a big impact on economic activity, efficiency and productivity in a fascist state. But the relationship between the fascist conception of economic rights and fascist economic ideology is rarely noted. The primary focus for liberal scholars has been on how liberalism and fascism differ with regard to the recognition of civil and social rights, and how in their absence, individuals can be (mis) treated. To the extent that comparisons of liberalism and fascism discuss economic issues at all, they concentrate on the more general question of whether fascism has an embedded economic ideology, and if so, what this might be.

Does capitalism lead to fascism?

Many scholars see fascism as combining elements of both capitalism and socialism (in the Marxist sense), and as thereby representing a "third way" of economic organization. Private ownership of property is maintained, but the state takes an active interest in industrial policy and intervenes whenever necessary to increase productivity, guide industrialization toward the common good (as defined by the government), and spur economic growth. This intervention, of course, can be quite extreme—at one point in the lead up to World War II, "the Fascist government [in Italy] controlled a proportionately larger share of Italy's industrial base that any other nation in Europe other than the Soviet Union."[1] Socialist elements of fascist economic policy (remember the Nazis were supposedly National *Socialists*) also include pandering to the working class in order to secure their support for the authoritarian leader.[2] That, after all, is what is behind Trump's promise to "Make America Great Again," not a well-intentioned desire to help white people who are struggling.[3] So fascist economic policy seems to be more of a haphazard combination of the elements of capitalism and socialism, and not a principled one.

Which is why Marxists typically do not see the tendency of fascist governments to seize *de facto* or sometimes even legal control of the industrial base and provide various special benefits to workers as making fascism an expression of socialism, even in part. On the contrary, they feel that when economic inequality and exploitation increases in a capitalist state, as it inevitably does, a move from liberalism

1 A. James Gregor, *The Search for Neofascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 6 (quoting Rosario Romeo, *Breve storia della grande industria in Italia* (Rocca San Casciano: Casa Editrice Licinio Capelli, 3rd ed. 1967), p. 173).
2 See Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 10.
3 See, e.g., Julie Zauzmer Weil, "Trump Proposes Ending Taxes on Overtime Pay. Economists Are Skeptical." *The Washington Post* (September 13, 2024).

to fascism is the only way for the rich to protect and their wealth and their ability to increase it, despite some necessary giveaways to the poor.[4] Accordingly, Marxists see fascism not as a third way between capitalism and socialism, but as a last gasp, as a way for capitalists and the über rich to shield themselves from the pressures being exerted on them in a mature capitalist society by the working class.

Even some liberals embrace this view.[5] They say "it is very difficult to imagine the appearance of fascism in any environment where capitalism is absent. The historical examples of fascism are invariably connected to the development of capitalist accumulation and productive relations."[6] When we recognize that the most immediate predecessor of fascism in many of the states currently moving toward the right is not liberal capitalism, but neoliberalism, this is even more apparent.[7] For neoliberalism is not a *liberal* political theory—despite it misleading name, it is not even a *liberal* economic theory.[8] Its impact is mostly to cause large amounts of economic pian and suffering by justifying harsh austerity measures and much deregulation, which mostly causes job losses for the poor and middle class and exposes them to a greater risk of exploitation. Take, for example, the US, where neoliberal economic policies are often blamed for giving rise to the MAGA movement by allowing factories to be closed down and manufacturing jobs exported overseas. In Russia, for example, and in other parts of Europe as well as in South America, the harshness of the dismantling and privatizing state enterprises without the creation of social welfare programs to protect those who lose their jobs and their pensions is what has typically led to the rise of fascism, not the so-called coddling of liberal capitalism. Indeed, there is no evidence that *liberal* capitalism leads to fascism, even if *illiberal* neoliberal capitalism does and is itself a common but not inevitable follow-on to liberal capitalism. In any event, most states which have become Marxist were previously liberal (of a sort) capitalist states too. So if one were going to rely purely on the prevalence of historical coincidence, the relationship between capitalism and socialism would seem to be just as strong as the relationship between capitalism and fascism. Remember, Marx thought that capitalism would eventually decay into socialism, perhaps after a period of fascism, and this is quite different than thinking socialism is "caused" by either of its predecessors.

There is also the problem that it is hard to see the socialistic moves of any fascist state as being motivated by economic ideology, regardless of how they are promoted. Rather, these moves seem to be mostly motivated by whims and prejudices, the need to settle old scores and maintain dominance over those who resist the state's power, and other non-economic goals. For example, the Holocaust "consumed unbelievable amounts of resources and energy, 'producing' only masses of useless dead bodies."[9] It is hard to see this as driven merely by some misguided economic policy. In light of all this, I think it is fair to say that among liberals, the prevailing view is that fascism has no economic ideology of its own. It does not represent a coherent "third way," despite the fact that it is sometimes advertised as such. Instead, fascism simply tends to steer an erratic course between capitalism and socialism, veering back and forth from one to the other, the precise direction depending on what is politically expedient at the time.

Indeed, one of the most prominent economists of this century, Thomas Piketty, who describes himself as a "participatory socialist," uses the words "fascist" and "fascism" only once in his 1,000-plus page book *Capitalism and Ideology*. And when he does so, he uses these words merely as descriptors of the Italian government under Mussolini, not as part of an argument that connects capitalism to fascism in any ideological sense.[10] Mussolini himself explicitly rejected the idea that fascism contained *any* embedded economic ideology: "Fascism, now and always, believes in holiness and in heroism; that is to say, in actions influenced by no economic motive, direct or indirect.[11] Finally, while Nazism is supposedly a combination of nationalism and socialism, private ownership of the means of production under the Nazi regime was largely maintained, even encouraged.[12] So it is easy to see why many people, on both the right and the left, think that the claim that fascism has no particular economic ideology should be treated as relatively uncontroversial.

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4 See Michał Herer, "On Fascism and Capitalism," *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry* 11 (2020): 48-58, 56; Alberto Toscano, *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism and the Politics of Crisis* (London: Verso, 2023), pp. 25ff.
5 See Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 20.
6 Harry Harootunian, "The Future of Fascism," *Radical Philosophy* 136 (March/April 2006), pp. 23-33, 24.
7 See James Livingston, "Neoliberal Minority Rule," *Project Syndicate* (November 1, 2023).
8 See Mark R. Reiff, "Two Theories of Economic Liberalism," *The Adam Smith Review* 10 (London: Routledge, 2017): 189- 214.
9 Ibid. at 56.
10 See Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 468.
11 David Baker, "The Political Economy of Fascism: Myth or Reality, or Myth and Reality?" *New Political Economy* 11 (2006): 227-250, 229 (quoting Benito Mussolini, *Fascism: Doctrine and Institutions* (Ardita, 1935)).
12 See Christoph Buchheim and Jonas Scherner, "The Role of Private Property in the Nazi Economy: The Case of Industry," *The Journal of Economic History* 66 (2006): 390-416; Baker, "The Political Economy of Fascism."

In at least one way, however, this view is surprising. It is surprising because the political theory that is commonly thought to be the arch enemy of fascism—that is, communism—does have a very clear economic ideology. And this economic ideology is not something that is free-floating, simply based on historical coincidence and unconnected to the communist conception of economic rights. On the contrary, it is based expressly on a rejection of the right to private property and the insistence that disputes between individuals be decided according to the collective good rather than some sort of conception of individual right that puts compensation for personal injury above collective goals.[13] One might accordingly expect liberal scholars to take the fascist conception of individual economic rights and its relationship to fascist economic ideology a little more seriously. In the event, they do not. But I shall in in what comes next.

Economic rights in the fascist world

Note that while the claim that fascism has no economic ideology has an air of a critique about it, implying that this makes fascism somehow less worthy of respect as a political theory, liberalism is much the same. Fascist governments may veer back and forth between left- and right-wing economic policies, and sometimes pursue both at the same time, despite their inconsistency, but liberal governments do this too. Under liberalism, these changes in direction are supposedly determined by free and fair democratic elections, whereas in fascism these are imposed by fiat from the leader and his minions. But this is merely an explanation of the differing mechanics of the two political systems, and not a very illuminating one if our goal is to ascertain whether there is some intrinsic connection between fascism and the economic ideologies of capitalism or socialism.

As a result, we might think that there is no reason to expect to find an economic ideology embedded in fascism. After all, nothing in liberalism requires that one adopt any particular economic ideology. Although the most common combination is liberal capitalism, liberal socialism is possible too. Indeed, John Rawls, the most prominent liberal theorist in recent history, thought that liberal *socialism* was as likely to allow us to instantiate the aspirations of liberalism as liberal capitalism, if not more so. [14] If anything, the difference between liberalism and fascism with regard to the economic ideology that each naturally promotes is not the direction in which their respective economic policies lean; it is the *extent* to which they may go in one direction or the other. In liberalism, individual economic rights provide guardrails outside of which a liberal government may not swerve. In fascism, there are no such guardrails and therefore the state may drive the economy off a cliff, and often does, even if unintentionally. Therefore, the pursuit of fascist goals hardly seems like a capitalist project, but rather one which employs a concept of the common good that is not at all economically minded.

Indeed, fascist governments often take actions that are counterproductive economically. This is because like any kind of government, they must keep "the people" in line. An extreme authoritarian approach on the part of the government and the fear that such an approach invokes will take the suppression of dissent among the people only so far, and for so long. Eventually, the people must enjoy some actual economic gains, or they will become restive, take to the streets, spawn pockets of armed resistance, and eventually produce a popular uprising that can cause the government to collapse. Market operations must accordingly be subservient to the directives of the leader and allow the implementation of policies that are ideologically popular but economically inefficient or idiosyncratic and outright economically destructive. Wealth and income must be redistributable at the whim of the leader in order to reward certain individuals and punish others, and to otherwise mimic and reaffirm the social status of the participants in the economy.[15] Because of this, the economy is subject to (mis)management in a fascist society, despite any supposed commitments to capitalism and free markets.

But fascist states are perfectly capable of improving the economic position of their people in the short term, and very often do. First, by seizing the goods, land, labor, and other valuable resources of those within its borders who are not among "the people," and redistributing these to those that are. And second, by engaging in armed aggression with neighboring states and seizing the goods, land, labor, and valuable resources of foreigners, using these to fill the coffers of the state, and redistributing some as spoils to the elite, from whom bits and pieces will trickle down to the people more generally too. Wars also provide a great excuse for large amounts of government borrowing and spending, and this

13 See generally Inga Markovits, "Pursuing One's Rights under Socialism," *Stanford Law Review* 38 (1986): 689-761.
14 See John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 138.
15 See, e.g., Arnd Bauerkämper, "Fascism and Capitalism," *Moving the Social: Journal of Social History & the History of Social Movements* 67 (2022): 75-97.

functions as a Keynesian stimulus on the economy, reducing unemployment and ratcheting up a certain kind of economic activity as long as the required borrowing and increasing debt can be maintained. After all, the industrial ramp-up spawned by preparing for and engaging in war is often credited with bringing the Great Depression to a close not only for the Allied powers, but for the Axis powers too.[16]

Even though the seizure of others' wealth, goods, and resources can boost an economy in the short term, however, this cannot work forever. If not immediately successful, war eventually brings destruction of the aggressor's infrastructure at a faster pace than it can be replaced, thereby shrinking the economy. In addition, endless war and the casualties this produces reduce the availability of labor that could be used for other purposes and speeds the political dissatisfaction and internal resistance that can lead the government to collapse. The question, then, is whether fascist governments could grow their economies in some other way and thereby effectively compete with liberal capitalist governments in their ability to deliver a higher standard of living to their constituents.

Can fascism be economically sustainable?

In my view, the answer is no, at least in the long term. The reason lies in the way that liberal and fascist governments differ with regard to their conception of economic rights and the necessary impact of this on economic performance and ideology. The problem is that fascist states assign lexical inferiority to these rights *vis à vis* status as a regulator of social conflict.[17] This, in turn, has unavoidable cumulative effects—no matter how hard fascist states may try to grow their economies artificially through aggression and stimulus, rather than organically through technological advancement and increased productivity, this gravitational pull cannot be escaped. Eventually, it will pull the economy into a black hole of financial ruin.

To understand what produces this gravitational effect, let us begin with Ronald Coase's famous essay *The Problem of Social Cost*.[18] In this essay, Coase pointed out that in a market with no transaction costs and perfect competition, the initial assignment of property rights does not matter. Regardless of whether a train has the right to run so close to the farmer's field that the sparks from the train's wheels ignites the farmer's corps, forcing him to plants his crops further away from the tracks rather than up to the edges of his land, or the farmer has the right to plant his crops up to the edge of the tracks, forcing the railroad to run its cars so slow that they generate no sparks, or run no trains at all, the most economically efficient outcome will occur. The farmer and the railroad company will simply bargain with each other until they reach an agreement about how often and how fast the trains will run and how close to the tracks crops may be planted. This agreement, in turn, will result in the most economically efficient outcome depending on the relative costs of the precautions that each side must take.

Of course, in the real world, the assumption of no transaction costs is indefensible, as is the assumption of perfect competition. There are always costs that must be incurred to consummate any transaction, often very substantial costs, and competition is never perfect, and most of the time not even close. Given these realities, the initial assignment of rights matters very much if we are trying to produce the most economically efficient outcome. Under capitalism, a great deal of thought usually goes into this initial assignment, as well as the later refinement of the rights awarded. This is admittedly not always the case, but there is at least an effort to do so, both at common law and through legislative revision. While this effort is not always successful, it often is—otherwise, the argument by "Law and Economics" scholars that the law is and should be designed to produce economic efficient outcomes would not have so frequently been taken as compelling and seemed to many to have such explanatory power.[19] The same is true of the argument that whenever there are market failures, the law should endeavor to put these failures right and simulate what would have occurred under conditions of perfect competition. In other words, under liberalism, the pursuit of economic efficiency as an economic ideology is at least possible, often attempted, and at least sometimes successful. When it is not, this is either because some other ideology was being deliberately pursued (such as the encouragement of just outcomes), or because technical mistakes were made in gauging what rules would be most likely to mimic the economically efficient outcomes of a hypothetical "no transaction costs/perfectly competitive" world.

16 See A. James Gregor, *The Search for Neofascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 5.
17 On rights as regulators of social conflict, see generally Mark R. Rieff, *Punishment, Compensation, and Law: A Theory of Enforceability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
18 See R. H. Coase, "The Problem of Social Cost," in *The Firm, the Market and the Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 95-156.
19 See, e.g., Richard A. Posner, *The Economics of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981, 1983); Jules L. Coleman, *Markets, Morals, and the Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

But under fascism, this cannot be the case. Because economic rights are lexically inferior to status orderings, and therefore can be breached at the whim of the government and those it favors, it is much more difficult to ensure economically efficient outcomes. And even if we assume that this difficulty and the efficiency losses resulting therefrom are slight (and I believe they are huge), a fascist capitalist economy will always be less efficient than a liberal one and will therefore eventually fall further and further behind its capitalist competitors in terms of economic growth.

Adding to this competitive handicap for fascist economies, there is another feature of the initial assignment and subsequent enforcement of rights that Coase noted that is relevant here too. This is that regardless of the irrelevance of the initial assignment of rights to the efficiency of outcomes in a liberal society, the initial assignment does have real distributional effects. In other words, the initial assignment of rights may not affect whether trains will run and how close crops will be planted to the tracks, but it will determine who has to pay whom to arrive at the most efficient outcome. So it does determine who ends up richer, the railroad or the farmer. But greater wealth, power, and so on confers greater status, so in a fascist society, not only will the initial assignment of rights tend to benefit the government, but those with greater status will tend to win rights disputes even when a liberal respect for rights would suggest they should lose. So distributional inequalities will rise faster and tend to be more extreme in a fascist society than a liberal one, and our current experience suggests that these are going to be pretty extreme in liberal societies even so.

This puts fascism at a long-term economic disadvantage. It causes economic problems because even a small difference between the economic effects of making rights lexically inferior to status in a fascist society will have large ramifications on what is called "the Palma ratio." This ratio is described by its author (very uninformatively, I am afraid) as measuring "distance from distributional challenges."[20] But meaningfully characterizing what it represents is not as important as understanding that it measures economic inequality in a different and more illuminating way than other econometric measures, such as the Gini coefficient, an equally difficult-to-explain but nevertheless widely used mathematical measure of inequality.[21] In any event, one of the insights the Palma Ratio delivers is that over time, inequality tends to exponentially increase at the tail end. That is, the higher it gets, the faster it gets higher. I have discussed the reasons for this effect elsewhere;[22] the point I want to emphasize here is that this means that economic inequality will arise and become more quickly accentuated under fascism than it will under liberalism. In a fascist society, wealth will quickly and inevitably become more and more heavily concentrated in the top ten percent, then the top .01, and then the top .001 percent, until the predatory elites have no one left to predate on except themselves. So even if fascism has no official economic ideology, it has a *de facto* ideology, and the ideology is what the American political theorist Michael Herrington called "anti-social socialism." Instead of taking money from the rich and giving it to the poor, a fascist economy, given the lexical inferiority it assigns to economic rights *vis à vis* social status relations, will take ever more money from the poor and give it to the rich even as the rich become richer and richer. Just as a socialist government seeks equality, a fascist government effectively entrenches not only social inequality but economic inequality as well. And it will do this even faster and more dramatically than a liberal government.

This, of course, is what has been going on in the US and many other supposedly liberal capitalist states since the 1980s, indicating that the current move toward the right has been going on for quite some time. These states have remained liberal overall, but especially economically, they have been sliding toward fascism for decades now, or jumping back and forth between fascism and liberalism but with each liberal period being less and less effective in reversing the economic and not just social damage done in the previous more fascist-orientated period.[23] Of course, some people may and do acquire large amounts of capital under fascism. Indeed, permitting the accumulation and retention of great wealth and even granting valuable concessions to selected individuals is often used as a method of social control of the elite, just as granting enough tidbits to the working class is a way of keeping them in line. But the view that this leaves those who become wealthy in a fascist society with great power 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 they can

20 José Gabriel Palma. "Behind the Seven Veils of Inequality. What If It's All about the Struggle within Just One Half of the Population over Just One Half of the National Income?" *Development and Change* (2019). 1-81.
21 See Mark R. Reiff, "Can Liberal Capitalism Survive?" *The GCAS Review* 1 (2021): 1-46.
22 Ibid. See also Mark R. Reiff, "Hope in an Illiberal Age?" *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 27:1 (2024): 116-124.
23 See Reiff, *Exploitation and Economic Justice in the Liberal Capitalist State.*

control the liberal political elite.[24] This is true regardless of whether they owe their accumulation of wealth to the leader of the fascist state, or their wealth was pre-existing. For in either case, this wealth is subject to being confiscated without warning should the ostensible owners of these assets displease the powers that be. And if these people go too far, they may find themselves "accidentally" falling out a window, like certain troublesome oligarchs in Putin's Russia.[25] Indeed, the only person who may "own" assets in a fascist state in the way that all people do in a liberal state, assets that are protected by enforceable economic rights, is the leader himself, like Putin, who officially owns almost nothing but in fact is one of the wealthiest men in the world.[26]

Fascism and corruption

This also explains why corruption is so often both rampant and endemic under fascist regimes. When economic rights exist mostly in name only and offer no real protection to their ostensible holders against those above them in status, corruption simply does not pose the same kind of wrong that it does under liberalism. It is more of an application of the way society is organized under fascism, not a contradiction of this. For under the fascist conception of political morality, corruption is an efficient and legitimate way of distributing goods according to social status. Bribery is reconceived as a payment of tribute.[27] Corruption is then impossible to weed out. Indeed, allowing economic rights to be effectively used to defeat an effort by a dominant party to direct the actions or use of capital by a should-be subservient one would represent a threat to the whole system. And because corruption undermines economic performance, this provides yet another reason why fascism does not embrace true capitalism as its economic ideology, but instead embraces the kind of purely formal capitalism that is better understood as "anti-social socialism."

24 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); Richard J. Evans, *Hitler's People: The Faces of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024) (noting that Hitler would have gone nowhere if it weren't for conservative elites who invited him into power).

25 See Isabel van Brugen, "Full List of Russians to Fall Out of Windows Since Putin Invaded Ukraine," *Newsweek* (February 16, 2023).

26 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).

27 See, e.g., Dharna Noor, "Trump Attends Houston Lunch to Ask Oil Bosses for More Campaign Cash," *The Guardian* (May 23, 2024); Josh Dawsey, "Trump Makes Sweeping Promises to Donors on Audacious Fundraising Tour," *The Washington Post* (May 28, 2024); Carol D. Leonnig and Aaron C. Davis, "House Democrats Ask Trump If He Illegally Accepted $10 million from Egypt," *The Washington Post* (September 3, 2024); Toluse Olorunnipa, David A. Fahrenthold and Jonathan O'Connell, "Trump Has Awarded Next Year's G-7 Summit of World Leaders to His Miami-Area Resort, the White House Said," *Washington Post* (October 17, 2019) ("That decision is without precedent in modern American history: The president used his public office to direct a huge contract to himself"); Peter Wehner, "The Full Spectrum Corruption of Donald Trump," *The New York Times* (August 25, 2018); Paul Krugman, "Trump and the Aristocracy of Fraud," *The New York Times* (October 4, 2018); David Leonhardt and Ian Prasad Philbrick, "Trump's Corruption: The Definitive List," *The New York Times* (October 28, 2018).

The Fascist Conception of the State

Liberalism does not have a premoral conception of the state. Rather, its conception of the state is driven by its conception of the moral subject—the state is there to provide a mechanism through which social cooperation can work for the benefit of all, meaning all individual persons. This is why the liberal conception of the state is subject to so many possible variations. The overall category of these conceptions is commonly called democracy, but there are many versions of democracy that work with the liberal conception of the person and provide a satisfactory infrastructure for the state. There are even some that would not.

But the fascist conception of the state and of its relation to the people and their leader is not nearly so flexible. While there are a number of options for instantiating liberal democracy, for fascism, there is just one. And it begins with the idea that the state, the leader, and the people are a single social unit. Whereas liberalism envisions a pluralistic society, where compromises must be made to establish a way that competing groups and individuals can live together, the fascist conception of the proper form of government is not meant to create an infrastructure for reaching accommodations between competing groups with conflicting interests. It is meant to signify the real, organic solidarity of the fascist community. And from this idea many aspects of the nature of fascist government flow.

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 they can all 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.[1] Spann's thought was highly influential during the rise of fascism in Austria in the 1920s and 1930s, and to a significant extent in Germany too.[2] 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.[3]

1 Karl Polanyi, "The Essence of Fascism" [1935], in *Economy and Society: Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018), pp. 81-107, 83.
2 See John J. Haag, *Othmar Spann and the Politics of "Totality": Corporatism in Theory and Practice* (Ph.D. Thesis, Rice University, 1969) (https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/19015/6919293.PDF?sequence=1).
3 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.[4] 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 for an outright betrayal of the requisite ideological core commitments, but also for the smallest of infractions. Hence Trump's frequent use of the sobriquet "enemy of the people" for those who defy him in both large and small ways.[5] Hence Trump's denigration of those within the Republican Party who defy him even on seemingly unimportant points as "Republicans in Name Only" (RINOs)[6] Hence the calls for RINOs to be cast out for defying the will of the people.[7] 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 the leader are *conceptually* one. The liberal idea that there can be dissent issuing from within is simply incoherent. All dissent poses an existential threat to the community. It must not merely be suppressed, the dissenters must also be branded traitors and treated like a cancerous tumor. Hence the speed and seemingly disproportional (to liberal eyes) amount of force and violence deployed to maintain the integrity of the fascist political community. One does not cure cancer by arguing with it; one excises it from the body of the people as quickly, publicly, and definitively as possible.

Note that this rejection of the idea of even slight disagreement being permissible between members of the fascist 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, fascists embrace the retaliatory strategy I call "the Chicago Way,"[8] after a bit of dialogue from *The Untouchables,* the 1987 film depicting the efforts of a team of government agents led by Eliot Ness to bring down the gangster Al Capone, in which the strategy is neatly expressed.[9] In any event, 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.[10] 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 Russia's scorched earth policy in Chechnya, Syria, and Ukraine.[11]

Liberals typically think that seeing a conceptual unity between the leader, the people, and the state, as well as the strong authoritarian rule this implies, means that fascists necessarily harbor strong antidemocratic sentiments. And clearly, many fascists are expressly antidemocratic.[12] But thinking that antidemocratic notions as built into fascism is a mistake, resulting from a misunderstanding of both democracy and fascism, one that ultimately comes down to semantics, not substance. What I mean

4 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.

5 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).

6 See Ed Kilgore, "'RINO' Just Means 'Disloyal to Trump' Now," *New York Magazine* (March 24, 2022).

7 See Greg Sargent, "Ugly New Attacks on Republicans Who Defied Trump Hint at a Dark GOP Future," *Washington Post* (February 16, 2021).

8 See Mark R. Reiff, *Punishment, Compensation, and Law: A Theory of Enforceability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 68-70.

9 Frustrated by what he perceives as Ness's naiveté, Sean Connery, who is playing veteran Chicago police officer Jimmy Malone, tells Kevin Costner, who is playing Ness, "You want to get Capone, here's how you get him: He pulls a knife, you pull a gun; he sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue. That's the Chicago way. That's how you get Capone." The script is by David Mamet. See David Mamet, *The Untouchables* (1985, 1986), p. 28.

10 See Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

11 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).

12 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").

by this is it comes down to a distinction between what antidemocratic 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.[13] 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."[14] Mussolini himself, on the stage with Hitler in Berlin in 1937 declared Italy and Germany "the greatest and most genuine democracies."[15] 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 designed to give effect to "the will of the people." But there is nothing in the concept of democracy that tells us who "the people" are. And depending on how one answers this question, one can arrive at some very different modes of political organization.

The key to understanding the relationship between fascism and democracy is therefore seeing how different the fascist and liberal conceptions of "the people" are.[16] For liberals, "the people" is thought of as a nontechnical term, as including everyone (at least) who is legally entitled to vote. But for the fascist, if one is to be part of the 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 forfeit whatever grace they may enjoy as second-class citizens and become an outright enemy, whose existence is intolerable and whose activities if not presence must be suppressed.[17] But no matter what, they should have no right to vote. The fact that in a liberal society they do vote is what prompts people like Tucker Carlson to claim in horror that "our democracy is no longer functioning."[18]

It is also important to understand that this unity is not viewed as 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.[19] This is how Trump can claim that the many criminal indictments against him are really attacks on upon "you," meaning "the people," the "true" Americans.[20] This is how Trump can plan to fire so many career government employees and replace them with litmus-tested loyalists in his second term.[21] For as the leader, his will is by definition the will of the people. Anything that gets in his way is accordingly as much an obstacle to democracy as a terrorist or a traitor.

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."[22] The mediating forces of representative democracy merely create obstacles to the expression of the will of the people.[23] It is rather the checks and balances of representative government that liberals mistakenly value so

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13 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.
14 See Giovanni Gentile, *The Origin and Doctrine of Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
15 See Jenny Uglow, "Fascism's Poster Girl," *The New York Review of Books* (March 23, 2023).
16 See Mark R. Reiff, "Why Some People Think Fascism Is the Greatest Expression of Democracy Ever Invented," *The Conversation* (November 7, 2022).
17 See, e.g., Gregor, "Julius Evola, Fascism, and Neofascism," p. 105.
18 Tucker Carlson, "Our Democracy Is No Longer Functioning Properly, Here's Proof," *Fox News* (February 2, 2022).
19 See Maggie Haberman, "Another Trump Mystery: Why Did He Resist Returning the Government's Documents?" *The New York Times* (August 18, 2022).
20 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).
21 See, e.g., Joe Davidson, "Trump's Second-Term Agenda Plans a Purge of the Federal Workforce," *The Guardian* (July 26, 2024); Julian Borger, "Trump Win Could See Mass Purge of State Department, US Diplomats Fear," *The Guardian* (June 13, 2024).
22 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 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).
23 See Benoist, *The Problem of Democracy,* p.58.

much that are undemocratic. For these checks and balances 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, perhaps surprisingly, from Muammar Gaddafi, someone not known as an intellectual. Perhaps this is the result of the trickle-down of Giovanni Gentile's thought to the Libyan officer class in Italy's former colony; perhaps it is original. 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.[24]

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. The leader is an extraordinary figure, larger than life. Such leaders cannot be "selected."[25] Their identity becomes "manifest" through a more natural process, like that associated with the recognition of a religious miracle or prophet.[26] 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?"[27] 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 more representative of the will of the people? This latter remark sounds like Trump, but it is actually Gaddafi again.[28] Nevertheless, it demonstrates how the criteria of manifestation can make Trump and his supporters believe that he "obviously" won reelection, 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. It also explains why, more recently, he was so bizarrely intent on deflating the well-documented size of Harris's crowds in the run-up to the 2024 election and inflating his own.[29]

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 specific orders.[30] 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 election.[31] And this is the kind of thinking that Trump entertains and wants to encourage too, which is why he has repeatedly assured his supporters that

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24 Muammar Gaddafi, *The Green Book* (Center for Political Innovation, 2020), p. 36.
25 See Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1943), p. 81.
26 See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); McKay Coppins, "The Most Revealing Moment of a Trump Rally: A close reading of the prayers delivered before the former president speaks," *The Atlantic* (July 29, 2024).
27 See Amanda Holpuch, "Trump Ends NPR Interview After Challenges to False Fraud Claim," *The New York Times* (January 12, 2022). See also Philip Bump, "Trump's Argument of Electoral Inevitability Adds an Ally: God," *The Washington Post* (August 28, 2024).
28 See Muammar al-Qaddafi, *The Green Book*.
29 See Malika Khurana, Kalina Borkiewicz, Elena Shao, Bora Erden, Ashley Wu, and Bedel Saget, "Trump Claims Harris's Rallies Are Smaller. We Counted." *The New York Times* (September 7, 2024); Michelle Goldberg, "Trump's Big Lie About Harris's Crowds," *The New York Times* (August 12, 2024); Bora Erden, Malika Khurana, Ashley Wu, Kalina Borkiewicz and Kellen Browning, "Despite Trump's Claims, Footage Shows Large Crowd at Harris's Detroit Rally," *The Nerw York Times* (August 12, 2024).
30 See Ian Kershaw, "'Working Towards the Führer.' Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship," *Contemporary European History* 2 (1993): 103-118.
31 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).

if re-elected (which he has now been), he would pardon them for any of the so-called "crimes" for which they were convicted.[32] This can also be seen in Trump's plans to weaponize the apparatus of the federal government if he is re-elected and settle scores and enforce his will on all those who hesitated to support him.[33]

Another important ramification of viewing the state, the people, and the leader as the equivalent of a single moral organism is that it leads fascists to believe in collective responsibility. If the political trinity is the fundamental social unit 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.[34]

Secular versus religious fascism

Note that there is a potential conflict between secular fascists, who see the political trinity as the ultimate authority, and religious fascists, as to who is the ultimate authority in an authoritarian government. 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.[35] 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 integralism may seem superficially more presentable than the views expressed by 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,[36] although for obvious reasons Catholic integralists would not openly accept such an analogy. Indeed, the modern advocates of integralism are generally careful to speak reassuringly that their view is simply that government has a duty to pursue "the common good."[37] What could be more reasonable than that? While their private, candid, comments are more alarming,[38] this hardly matters. For in any case, 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 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 ultra-conservative interpretation of the bible regarding the rights and roles of women, sexual identity, interfaith marriage, and so on, their views are as fascist as any other.[39] Despite their assurances that Jews have nothing to worry about from a Catholic integralist government, for example, the reasons why are never made clear, and it does seem that everyone other than white Catholic men have much to worry about indeed.

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

32 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); Marianne LeVine, Isaac Arnsdorf, and Clara Ence Morse, "Trump Escalates Solidarity with Jan. 6 Rioters as Hs Own Trials Close In," *The Washington Post* (March 23, 2024).

33 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).

34 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.

35 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).

36 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).

37 See Adrian Vermeule, "Beyond Originalism," *The Atlantic* (March 31, 2020).

38 See, e.g., Elizabeth Dias and Lisa Lerer, "Alito's 'Godliness' Comment Echoes a Broader Christian Movement," *The New York Times* (June 11, 2024).

39 See, e.g., Garrett Epps, "Common-Good Conservatism Is an Idea as Dangerous as They Come," *The Atlantic* (April 3, 2020).

law. The authority to act contrary to the rule of law is in fact viewed as an essential component of fascism. As Juan Donoso Cortés, the 19th century Spanish Catholic authoritarian whose work greatly influenced 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."[40]

Later, Schmitt himself 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.[41] But it hardly matters 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. 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.

40 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.
41 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology,* trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 5.

The Moral Ends of Society

Creation and destruction as equal ultimate ends

What, then, is the function of this fascist political trinity? Well, it is not something as mundane as mere self-preservation. Nor is it 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.[1] The monuments, both metaphorical and literal, that these great men leave behind are 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 be 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.[2] Liberals, in contrast, typically place creation above all forms of destruction, which they would view as an unfortunate necessity at best, 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."[3] For even if one sympathizes with the spirit of Schumpeter's characterization, it is clear that it is not the destruction that he is celebrating, but rather the creation that is the cause of it. This is what makes 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.[4] 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 a 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 Tribulation, a long period of cataclysmic destruction, pestilence, and natural disaster without precedent in human history, to be 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 Tribulation, non-traditionalists claim the Rapture will occur *before* the

1 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).

2 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.

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

4 See, e.g., Ben Makuch, "'Collapse is how we win': US Far Right Aims to Make Gains on Election Division," *The Guardian* (November 5, 2024).

Tribulation.[5] Obviously, for people who hold such a view, there is a sense in which the destruction of society, whatever its form, is not to be feared but rather to be welcomed, for it not only confirms their religious beliefs, it also means that the 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 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 progress and evolution, represents regress and involution.[6] According to Evola, what we are engaged in now is sliding, not climbing,[7] 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."[8] Indeed, we are already in the fourth and final age, "The Age of Darkness," and only through 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.[9] 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 of the West,*[10] and in Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Machiavelli, and Vico.[11] But whether this is expressed as a philosophical theory of history or simply as an intuitive worldview, the past, for fascists, was always better, and is to be 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 the English playwright David Edgar as having said to Albert Speer when Hitler is asked why he would not surrender even though defeat was inevitable.[12]

But is this idea not inconsistent with the idea that what fascists seek, rather than a return to the past, is a great rebirth and revitalization of the present, the instantiation of a "fascist modernity." The primary advocate of this view is Roger Griffin, who acknowledges that the quoted phrase seems to be contradiction in terms, but nevertheless argues forcefully for a strong connection between fascism and what art history and cultural studies scholars call "modernism." The modernism being referred to here, however, is not modernism in the sense of something new and not previously experienced or even envisioned. As used here, the term "modernist" is supposed to signify seeing the future as a return to the past, a concept that gives the word a rather confusing, ironic meaning. The newness of the future is only new when compared to the level of well-being in the present, for the last period of the current era, given the cyclical nature of history, is always miserable, while the first period of the "new" era, like the first period of all new eras before this, will be wonderful. Understood in this sense, Griffin and I probably do not disagree. But taken in any other sense, the term "fascist modernity" implies that believers look to the future for experiences that are new and indeed thrilling in their newness in terms of their form of social organization, ranking, and sense of justice. And this is not, with respect to Griffin, what fascist scholars are envisioning.

On the contrary, what Griffin is trying to capture is more clearly expressed by 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."[13] Of course, Nietzsche realized that the urge to destroy is sometimes nothing more than this—that is, not motivated

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5 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).

6 See Ferraresi, pp. 112-113.

7 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.

8 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.

9 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.

10 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.

11 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.

12 See David Edgar, *Albert Speer* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2000), pp. 141-147.

13 See Ferraresi, p. 175 (quoting from Alain de Benoist, *The View from the Right).*

or accompanied by an intent much less a plan to rebuild and re-create.[14] But modern fascists continue to see destruction as a valued end in itself. The point is argued for at length in *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy,* a work by two amateur far-right historians.[15] This book, in turn, is much admired and promoted by Steve Bannon, one of Trump's earliest advisors. Bannon not only made a film about it, he himself stated that he was absolutely certain that another great war was necessary for civilization to be reset.[16] 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."[17] Which explains 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 those on the alt-right.[18] It is now clearly the main strategy of certain members of Congress. 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.[19]

They are willing—indeed, eager—to force the US government into a historical default. They want to impeach any president who is not their own leader, regardless of the lack of any reason to do so. They are even prepared to remove their own House speaker if he does not accede to their every demand, and 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 a century ago, the Nazis were in power for only twelve years, but one cannot go to Germany today without noticing the striking absence of pre-1945 architecture, and 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 a felt need for such continued repression of these ideas is itself evidence of the pull that the past has on the present. Even so, these efforts have been only partially successful; otherwise, the AfD would not be so politically competitive despite some of the startling (even to other far-right parties) claims made by its leading members.[20] The point is that fascist rule, unlike liberal rule, is *unerasable*—it infects the future no matter what one might do to try to correct its ramifications 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.

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 committed to nonviolence, either internal or external. Violence is too central to the conception of the role and reason for existence of the state—it is, after all, a machine for the purification and glorification of society. And it is hard to imagine that a fascist government

14 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."

15 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).

16 See Micah L. Sifry, "Steve Bannon Wants to Start World War III," *The Nation* (February 8, 2017).

17 See Stephanie Boland, "This 2014 Donald Trump Interview Hints at a New Kind of Special Relationship," *New Statesman* (November 17, 2016).

18 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.

19 Carl Hulse, "The Wrecking-Ball Caucus: How the Far Right Brought Washington to Its Knees," *The New York Times* (September 23, 2023).

20 See e.g., Jon Henley, Jennifer Rankin, and Lisa O'Carroll, "EU's Far-Right Parties Expel Germany's AfD from Their Group," *The Guardian* (May 23, 2024).

could hold power long without using violence to directly suppress internal threats and, less directly, to drown potential internal factionalization in the patriotic glue that foreign military adventurism tends to provide.

There are other reasons why fascists hold violence in such high regard too. 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.[21] In this kind of environment, the threat of violence and even war always hangs in the air, a threat that must eventually be actualized in order to maintain its effectiveness as a tool of social influence and control.[22] We can find many examples of this, both internal and external, in the rhetoric used in the run-up to both world wars,[23] in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait,[24] in Russia's repeated aggression against Ukraine,[25] and, most alarmingly now, in the rhetoric used by Trump and many of his supporters today.[26] Indeed, millions of Americans, not just a tiny number of Oath Keepers and Proud Boys, believe the use of force is justified to prevent Trump's continued "persecution" by various state and federal authorities, and more blatantly, to return him to the White House if a "fraudulent" vote count were to make this necessary.[27]

Second, given the importance of machismo as a personal characteristic (more on this below), violence is not to be feared, it is to be admired. Indeed, fascists are quite enamored with what we might call the warrior spirit.[28] And even if one is not violent, one can still be an arrogant, difficult, dominant "alpha" male, for this makes one of higher status than other, "beta" or even worse, "feminine," men.[29] No doubt, this is one reason why violence against women has been increasing alongside the rise of the far right, especially in places like Brazil, where the far right's commitment to machismo as an ideological value is especially strong.[30] But this phenomenon can also be seen in the US, where violence against Black, native American, and trans women has been surging along with the dehumanization of such people by Trump and other figures on the right.[31]

Third, the fascist obsession with purity also drives violence, for it should be plain that given the existing miscegenation of peoples and ideas, purity of racial, spiritual, and ideological thought is an aspiration that can be made real only through the use of violence.[32] The Holocaust, of course, is one of the most frightening examples of this idea in motion, but it is important to remember that such a "final solution" was advocated not only by those within Nazi Germany. There are so many like-minded people, in fact, that I will mention just one here: the Franch novelist Ferdinand Céline, who "urged on the German authorities in their plans to exterminate French Jewry" during the German occupation.[33] Disturbingly, despite his rabid anti-Semitism, Céline remains an esteemed figure in France today.

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21 See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political,* trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 26.

22 See Bernard E. Harcourt, "How Trump Fuels the Fascist Right," *The New York Review of Books* (November 29, 2018); Ajit Niranjan, Adam Sich, Ken Macfarlane, and Temujin Doran, "'The Greens Are Our Enemy': What Is Fuelling the Far Right in Germany?" *The Guardian* (April 30, 2024).

23 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.

24 See Gary W. Brown, "The Power of Saddam Hussien's War Rhetoric," in Sinja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2d ed. 1995), pp. 51-58; A. H. H. Abidi, "Origins and Dimensions of the Iraqi Claim Over Kuwait," *India International Centre Quarterly*, 18 (1991): 129-143; Glenn Frankel, "Imperialist Legacy Lines in The Sand: Gulf Borders Drawn by British Cause Decades of Resentment," *The Washington Post* (August 30, 1990).

25 See Steven Lee Myers and Stuart A. Thompson, "Truth Is Another Front in Putin's War," *The New York Times* (March 22, 2022).

26 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).

27 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.

28 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 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.

29 See Ben Terris, "The Deeply Silly, Extremely Serious Rise of 'Alpha Male' Nick Adams," *The Washington Post* (April 9, 2024).

30 See Tiago Rogero, "Violence against Women in Brazil Reaches Highest Levels on Record," *The Guardian* (July 18, 2024).

31 See Kimberly A. Hamlin, "Femicide is up. American history says that's not surprising." *The Washington Post* (February 3, 2023).

32 See, e.g., Hedwig Wachenheim, "Hitler's Transfers of Population in Eastern Europe," *Foreign Affairs* 20 (1942): 707-720.

33 See John Banville, "War by Louis-Ferdinand Céline Review – Disturbing, Compelling, Incomplete," *The Guardian* (June 17, 2024); Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Trifles for a Massacre* (Omnia Veritas Ltd, 2016).

Of course, Jews have been a favorite target for fascists looking to re-establish the "purity" of their communities throughout history. But today, the targets of fascist communities are often broader. And instead of genocide, the call is for the more palatably phrased forced "remigration" of immigrants, even those with legal citizenship.[34] Lest one is inclined to dismiss such ideas as simply the crazed patter of the openly fascist, moreover, remember that this idea is also popular with Trump and his supporters.[35] Indeed, even ostensibly liberal governments sometimes become so enamored with this fascist value that they try implement similar programs too—hence, the plan developed nearly 100 years ago by Herbert Hoover and his administration to send Mexican-Americans back to Mexico in order to protect the blood of "real" Americans from dilution;[36] the earlier plan of the American Colonization Society to send freed slaves "back to Africa," a plan that resulted in the creation of Liberia; President Lincoln's subsequent plan to send Blacks to the Caribbean; and so on. Which is why four in 10 Trump voters now believe that political violence is justified to prevent the "corruption" of the country by liberals.[37]

In any event, because of all these factors, violence is seen as both noble and intoxicating.[38] "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.[39] "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."[40] 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."[41] Indeed, Maistre extolls the virtues of what he calls "The Executioner," the man who kills other men, because (he says), without such men, society could not exist.[42] 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."[43]

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34 See Ashifa Kassam, "Scholz urges unity against far right after mass deportation 'masterplan' revealed," *The Guardian* (January 11, 2024).

35 See Isaac Arnsdorf, Nick Miroff and Josh Dawsey, "Trump and Allies Plotting Militarized Mass Deportations, Detention Camps," *The Washington Post* (February 21, 2024).

36 See Diane Bernard, "The President Who Deported 1 million Mexican Americans Nearly a Century Ago," *The Washington Post* (February 21, 2024).

37 See David Smith, "Nearly One in Four Americans Believe Political Violence Justified to 'Save' US," *The Guardian* (October 25, 2023).

38 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).

39 Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis in Parliamentary Democracy*, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1988), p. 71.

40 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).

41 Berlin, "Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism," p. 111 (quoting Maistre).

42 Ibid. at pp. 116-117.

43 Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," p. 21 (describing Maistre's views).

The Rules of Social Interaction

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 relation is not "better" than the other in the sense of having greater value, notwithstanding the fact that those who are dominant enjoy a higher place in the social order. One cannot exist without the other.

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; the subjugation of the will of the wife to the will of her husband frees her to "follow her bliss" if that is to be found in running a household and raising children, and imposes a corresponding duty on the husband to provide for her, an idea that is behind what is sometimes called the "tradwife" movement today;[1] and so on. There are deontological reasons to see subjugation of the will as valuable as well. What use could the life of a worker-bee have if it was not to play a role in the success of the whole? In this sense, both domination and subservience have value, even though the degree of their respective 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.[2] 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 in the fascist view. Indeed, Ivan Ilyin, the early twentieth-century White Russian Eurasianist whose work Putin finds so influential, emphasized exactly this when he said, "The fact of the matter is that fascism is a redemptive excess of patriotic arbitrariness."[3] There is simply no way for two people to relate (outside of through outright conflict), fascists believe, other than for one to adopt a dominant and the other a submissive role. These roles then fit into 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 predefined homogenized sense, regardless of their personal wants or desires.[4] Combined with the view that it is government's job to ensure that everyone abides by these detailed rules of social interaction, this effectively means that in a fascist state, people may and indeed sometimes must submit—they may be forced to be "free."

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1 See Sophie Elmhirst, "The Rise and Fall of the Trad Wife," *The New Yorker* (March 29, 2024); Jesscia Grose, "'Tradwife' Content Isn't Really for Women. It's for Men Who Want Submissive Wives." *The New York Tomes* (May 15, 2024).
2 See Reiff, *In the Name of Liberty: The Argument for Universal Unionization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
3 See Timothy Snyder, "Ivan Ilyin, Putin's Philosopher of Russian Fascism," *The New York Review of Books,* (March 16, 2018) (quoting Ilyin). For more on Ilyin generally, see Hanuš Nykl, "Fascist of Ideologue of the White Movement Utopia?" *Studies in East European Thought* (April 4, 2024) (https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-024-09631-8).
4 See Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002,) pp. 166-217, 167.

It is in this sense that even some contemporary continental critics of fascism claim that fascists do embrace a conception of freedom.[5] This conception is simply what analytical philosophers would call a conception of positive liberty. But under fascism, this conception of positive liberty is not subject to the limiting principles of neutrality of tolerance, and therefore is not moderated as it is within liberalism.[6] For the fascist, authority and power are the sources of liberty. Negotiation and compromise are for women; they are a sign of weakness, not of strength. There are only two possible results in any human interaction: conquest or capitulation.

The attraction of acts of cruelty

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? What greater show of subservience can there be than the willing acceptance of cruelty from those above? There is a connection between domination and 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."[7] This is why, even when fascist policies hurt their own supporters, this is not a problem as long as those perceived as outsiders are hurt more. In these cases, "victory for us is to see you suffer."[8] Trump and his supporters, like all fascists, find community by rejoicing in the suffering of those they hate and fear.[9]

Attached to this reverence for domination and subservience is the elevation of decisiveness as a value above the content of the decisions made. But I am not just suggesting that decisiveness be thought of as the opposite of 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 and engage in endless discussion of what to do; fascists want to do something *now*.[10] 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 the outrageousness of baseless obstinacy 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 can work as a weapon for fascists too. Indeed, one method that fascists use to undermine liberalism is to prevent or obstruct the ability of liberal authorities to make decisions, even when the content of a particular decision might meet fascist goals. Fascists think it is more important to establish that only with the unity exemplified by the unified political trinity can things get done. The point of obstructionist behavior is not to make a substantive point about what policy should be adopted, but to illustrate that liberalism is deficient because such obstructionist behavior is possible within a liberal regime. Eliminate liberalism, and even the most controversial and wide-ranging projects will finally be able to commence and get finished expeditiously. The unity that fascism embodies gives it the ability to act no matter what impediments are thrown up before it, legal or illegal. That is its advantage when it comes to social planning and construction. What the fascists seek to convey is a sense that only a fascist ship can move society through the seas of liberal resistance. In contrast, by its very nature, the liberal ship will simply sit still and be buffeted about by outside forces while its fuel and stores slowly leak away.

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5 See, e.g., Alberto Toscano, "Fascists, Freedom, and the Anto-State State," *Historical Materialism* 29 (2021): 3-21.
6 See Reiff, "Neutrality and Excellence."
7 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).
8 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).
9 Adam Serwer, "The Cruelty Is the Point," *The Atlantic* (October 2, 2018). See also Daniel Trilling, "The Cruel Spectacle of British Asylum Policy," *The New York Times* (May 2, 2024).
10 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.

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 indicators of the intrinsic value of the relevant actor under the fascist worldview.[11] Femininity, however, 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.[12] And while 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.[13] Hence the idea that women are like other primary social goods, to use the liberal term for the relevant category, and that they must be fairly distributed to all men, regardless of the preferences of "the goods" (that is, the women) themselves. In other words, men are entitled to access to and even the possession of women; hence much of the violence against them by and misogynistic attitude of the so-called "incel" community.[14]

Even outside of the incel community, however, women are viewed with suspicion, and as a potential source of evil. Indeed, when a man fails, fascists often look for a woman to blame.[15] Many on the right are even blaming the almost successful first assassination attempt on Trump on the fact that there were women agents in his protection detail.[16] 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,[17] not as people—that is, as beings who are ends in themselves.[18] 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, from the contemporary neoconservative 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."[19] 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 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.[20]

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11 See, e.g., AFP, "Bolsonaro Beams as Putin Praises His 'Masculinity,'" *The Moscow Times* (November 19, 2020).
12 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).
13 See, e.g., Moira Donegan, "Mike Johnson, the New Speaker of the House, Is a Gender Extremist," *The Guardian* (November 8, 2023).
14 See Renée Graham, "No Man Is Entitled to a Woman's Companionship," *The Bostin Globe* ((April 16, 2024); Zack Beauchamp, "Our Incel Problem," *Vox* (April 23, 2019).
15 Monica Hesse, "How Gisele Fetterman Became the Right Wing's Favorite Super Villain," *Washington Post* (March 2, 2023).
16 Catie Edmondson, "After Trump Assassination Attempt, Right Points Finger at Female Agents," *The New York Times* (July 16, 2024).
17 See, e.g., Margaret Talbot, "J. D. Vance and the Right's Call to Have More Babies," *The New Yorker* (August 5, 2024) (on pronatalism).
18 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).
19 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); Eric Zemmour, *Le Premier Sexe* (Paris: DENOIL, 2006).
20 Francis Parker Yockey, *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics* (Wentzville, MO: Invictus Books, 2011 [1948]), pp. 209-210.

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 their grandfather's legacy.[21] Giorgia Meloni became prime minister of Italy in 2022 after the far-right Brothers of Italy, which she leads, secured the largest share of any party with 26 percent of the vote.[22] And the openly lesbian Alice Weidel is co-chairwoman of the far-right party the Alternative for Germany (AfD). 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 may be regarded as window dressing despite their seeming positions of power. Meloni has been so successful, in turn, because she is participating in a fragmented parliamentary system where a relatively small share of the vote brings a disproportional amount of power. Note also that with each of these women, including 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 managed to carry the fascist mantle forward for now, but may still ultimately be unsuccessful as leaders, for they may ultimately be unable to attract the intense enthusiasm that a male fascist leader would be expected to attract. On the other hand, the fact that they are women may make them more appealing to those unwilling to make a full commitment to fascism precisely, for as women, they appear less threatening than men. Indeed, this may have been the secret of Meloni's success. Or perhaps, just like Trump is seem as the champion of the Christian right while being one of the most un-Christian-like leaders in American history, Meloni is viewed as a champion for masculinity and misogyny despite being a woman.[23] 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. The success of these individuals are exceptions with special circumstances that prove the general rule—they do not challenge my claim as to the kind and extent of value fascists attach to masculinity and femininity.

The fascist insistence of seeing the world as exclusively derived into binary relations is yet another reason 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 their worldview requires that masculinity and femininity be seen as rigid designators whose borders cannot be softened.[24] 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 thereby 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, where "there are no gay people," according to its then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.[25] 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.[26]

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 or enemies, masculine or feminine, dominant or submissive, a member of the community or an outsider. Only if the world is filled exclusively with 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.

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21 See David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren: Fascism in Contemporary Italy* (London: Pluto Press, 2023).
22 See Paul Kirby "Giorgia Meloni: Italy's Far-Right Wins Election and Vows to Govern for All," *BBC News* (September 22, 2022).
23 See David Broder, "The Far Right Wants to Take Over Europe, and She's Leading the Way," *The New York Times* (April 22, 2024).
24 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."
25 See Helene Cooper, "Facing Scorn, President of Iran Is Defiant to His Critics," *The New York Times* (September 24, 2007).
26 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).

Final comments

Taken together, all these values are what makes fascism attractive to many people. Not for instrumental reasons—the thought that they will do better personally in a fascist society than in a liberal one—although this idea is sometimes in operation too. It is attractive because there is some sort of natural affinity for the fascist values that I have described. This is why versions of fascism have been so prominent throughout world history, with liberalism emerging only late in the game, and then only as an intellectual rather than an instinctive solution to the problems of social cooperation. The values of fascism just seem *right* to many people, just as the values of liberalism seem right to many others. They seem right because they reflect what many people see as the unvarnished realities of social life, rather than a utopian formula that strains against our natural inclinations. Simply denying that our natural inclinations lean in a fascist direction is a formula for failing to be taken seriously by those contemplating a move to the right. If we are to take the struggle between fascism and liberalism as the existential one it has now become, we must once again activate the liberalizing instincts that drove people toward the Enlightenment, deny the primacy of our animalistic instincts, and attempt to instill the sense of justice that in a liberal world takes their place. How to do this is the most important project before us at the moment, and having identified the fundamental values of fascism, it is a project that we are now in a position to undertake.

This is then where the substantive argument against fascist values and for liberal ones finally comes in. Unfortunately, a thorough discussion of the possible approaches here is beyond what I can take on in a single essay, even a long one. Some of what liberals must do should be obvious, of course, now that we have identified what it is liberals have to attack. But other strategies that are essential for effectively defending liberalism and beating back the current fascist attack are more subtle and complex. I have, in fact, already set forth some of these elsewhere. For example, in several books and numerous papers, I have emphasized the necessity of reclaiming the argument from liberty from the right, so that those opposed to liberalism can no longer claim that whatever the argument from equality may require, liberty trumps equality and prevents us from taking action to correct injustice.[27] I have also set forth a new, comprehensive theory of justice designed to address economic inequality and exploitation, limit excessive executive compensation, raise the minimum wage to a living wage and indeed raise all wages that do not currently reflect the true value of the labor being performed.[28] On a more applied level, I have explained how maintaining a free market requires us to prevent profiteering in pharmaceuticals and other key commodities.[29] I have proposed a new, libertarian justification for providing reparations to all previously oppressed peoples, including not only Black and indigenous people, but also members of other racial and religious minorities, women, and the descendants of exploited workers.[30] I have explained why it is absolutely necessary that we start enforcing the antitrust and securities laws and hold corporate executives personally to account for the financial crimes of the institutions and line officers for whom they were responsible.[31] I have provided a justification for universal unionization in both the private and the public sector, for this is a necessary element of the basic structure of society if we are to provide a reasonable chance that our reliance on the firm as the economic engine of society will not condemn our economy as being primarily unjust.[32] I have explained why and how we should give the control of unemployment the same priority that we currently devote to the control of inflation.[33] I have submitted a plan for making higher education free at the point of entry for everyone without requiring taxpayer support,[34] pointed out the necessity of de-corporatizing the academy to make it once again a laboratory for the development of liberal ideas instead of just conservative ones,[35] and shown how the liberal principles of neutrality and toleration not only support but also limit free speech and allow us to

27 See, e.g., Mark R. Reiff, *In the Name of Liberty: The Argument for Universal Unionization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

28 See Mark R. Reiff, *Exploitation and Economic Justice in the Liberal Capitalist State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) (2013).

29 See Mark R. Reiff, "The Just Price, Exploitation, and Prescription Drugs: Why Free Marketeers Should Object to Profiteering by the Pharmaceutical Industry," *Review of Social Economy* 77 (2019):108-142.

30 See Mark R. Reiff, "The Libertarian Argument for Reparations," *Journal of Social Philosophy* (2024) 1-30 (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/josp.12555); Mark R. Reiff, "Left Libertarianism for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Social and Political Philosophy* 2:2 (2023): 191-211.

31 See Mark R. Reiff, "Punishment in the Executive Suite: Moral Responsibility, Causal Responsibility, and Financial Crime," in *Just Financial Markets? Finance in a Just Society*, ed. Lisa Herzog (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 125-153; Mark R. Reiff, "Can Liberal Capitalism Survive?" *The GCAS Review* 1 (2021): 1-46.

32 See Reiff, *In the Name of Liberty*.

33 Mark R. Reiff, *On Unemployment, Volume I: A Micro-Theory of Economic Justice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Mark R. Reiff, On Unemployment, Volume II: Achieving Economic Justice after the Great Recession (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

34 See Mark R. Reiff, "How to Pay for Public Education," *Theory and Research in Education* 12:1 (2014): 4-52.

35 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.

enact reasonable regulation of hate speech and mis- and disinformation.[36] There are other measures we must take as well, but describing what these measures are will have to wait.

I shall make one final comment addressed, as it is, to the future. Most of this piece was written in 2024, in the months preceding the presidential election. My final revisions were made a little more than a week after the election. The one bright spot to be found within Trump's decisive victory is that we appear to have avoided the violence that would have surely followed a Trump loss.[37] But the lack of violence from Trump supporters should not be taken as a sign the social, political, and economic disruption that is likely to follow will not be gut-wrenching. Having regained the White House and secured a Republican majority in both the Senate and the House, Trump will have the ability to not only roll back centuries of the entrenchment of liberalism into our social, political, and economic structure, but also to institute outright *de facto* if not *de jure* fascism in the United States. What is unclear is the extent to which the courts will allow him to do so. But I have only slim hopes here. The federal and many state judiciaries are already heavily Trumpist, and they will only get more so now. Accordingly, no checks are likely to be imposed by the relevant high courts. Will Congress now support or even initiate the soul-crushing anti-liberal legislative program described in the 2025 project? I do not know, but I fear the worst. Things may change with the next Congressional election, but two years is quite enough time to do a huge amount of potentially irreparable damage from the liberal point of view.

By the time most of the readers of this essay encounter it, of course, the ramifications of this undeniably momentous event will have become clear. In any event, it should be plain that a more vigorous defense of liberal values and a more pointed attack on fascist ones is now required and will be for the foreseeable future. Fascism is certainly not going away anytime soon. For fascists are like ill-fed wolves, roaming about the social landscape, as their frequent use of the image of the wolf to identify themselves makes clear. Liberals who are unable or unwilling to act like wolves themselves in defense of liberal values, or who become passive in the face of this existential threat and retreat into their internal lives and withdraw from active participation in the political community, are not going to keep the fascists from the door. To do that, we are going to have engage, not just in the practical struggle against the rise of fascism, but in the intellectual struggle too. A marriage of theory and practice is required. And without such praxis, I fear that the upcoming struggle for the soul of society, no matter how calm the present seems to be, is a struggle that we as liberals will remain in great danger of losing.

36 See Mark R. Reiff, "The Liberal Conception of Free Speech and Its Limits," *Jurisprudence* (2024): 1-39 (https://doi.org/10.1080/20403313.2024.2355054); 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.

37 See, e.g., Peter Stone, "Trump and Allies Plant Seeds for 'Chaos and Discord' If He Loses, Experts Warn," *The Guardian* (September 3, 2024); Paul Mozur, Adam Satariano, Aaron Krolik, and Steven Lee Myers, "On Telegram, a Violent Preview of What May Unfold on Election Day and After," *Thew New York Times* (November 4, 2024).

While it is clear what those attracted to fascism today 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. Compounding this difficulty, too many liberals are stubbornly sticking to some conventional beliefs: that human nature is as liberals think it is, not something that is fundamentally disputed; that facts are what liberals think they are, even if some people choose to ignore them; and that 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 this move to the right is not being driven simply by mistakes; it is a principled move, backed by a coherent, consistent, and historically well-sourced value system, even if this value system is perverse. Fascism has its own conception of the moral subject; of the need for a rigid social hierarchy of men; of the nature of individual rights; and of the importance of purity in blood, soil, and ideology. It believes in the unity of the people, the leader, and the state; it embraces very different and (to liberals) often disturbing moral ends; and it employs starkly different rules of social interaction. And it believes, in the end, that this all leads to the greatest expression of democracy ever invented.

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Analytical Fascism: What Stares Back When One Stares Into the De-enlightenment

By Mark R. Reiff