

Fascism as a Social Kind

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The concept of democracy is not tied to a particular time and place. Even if democracy originated at some point, perhaps 5th and 4th Century BC in Athens, the concept of democracy describes a structure that is realized in different places under very different material conditions. We can understand democracy as a voting system, one that reflects majority rule. We can also understand democracy as a culture, one that values liberty and equality (on some suitable interpretation). Both democracy as a voting system and democracy as an ideology (that is, a culture) have wide generality. Democracy has drawn popular support in countries with widely different histories and social conditions. Its appeal to a population does not depend solely on historically quite specific social structures existing – or if it does, these would be very general ones, shared by otherwise distant societies.

What about concepts like liberalism, socialism, communism, and capitalism? These are more specific than the concept of democracy; their origin times are more recent. In the case of these concepts, one must be attentive to the possibility that their elucidation reflects social structures local to their origins. The aim of Léopold Sédar Senghor's essay, "The African Road to Socialism: Attempt at a Definition", is to formulate a concept of socialism that is applicable to the countries in Africa.¹ The obstacle to this project, he argues, is that many of the tools and concepts of socialist thinking involve assumptions that are local to a European historical context. Take, for example, Marx's concept of dialectical materialism. Senghor argues that dialectical materialism cannot serve as an instrument for "fully interpreting" African societies, because its applicability assumes that all societies have structures that African societies lack (for example, Senghor argues that many African societies are classless). Senghor, however, is not pessimistic about the concept of socialism. He holds that there is *some* concept of socialism that is important to characterize, and has the kind of generality that makes it also applicable to African countries. But because of the problems of historically contingent assumptions, he also recognizes that the original concept may have to be altered.

¹ Léopold Sédar Senghor, "The African Road to Socialism: Attempt at a definition", in On African Socialism (New York, Praeger 1961): 67-1003.

What about *fascism*? Is it completely historically located? Senghor writes, about the concept of dialectical materialism, that it is “born of history and geography; it was born in the 19th Century and Western Europe.” According to Senghor it is no longer applicable, and is no longer used by those “seeking to penetrate realities no longer of the nineteenth but of the twentieth century.” Regardless of whether Senghor is correct about dialectical materialism, we can ask if his description applies to the concept of fascism. If it does, it should no longer be used to penetrate twenty first century realities, because the assumptions about society that make it useful as an interpretive tool in social theory would no longer remain true. Fascism would then only be useful as an interpretive tool historically.

A second possibility is that fascism is akin to Senghor’s understanding of socialism – it is a concept of too much use to ignore completely, but it must be modified over time – *fascism* no, but *modern fascism* yes. In speaking of modern fascism, we abstract from certain features of historical movements, while defending the preservation of the term because of the overlap in central ones. Such a project requires some account of what is conceptually central about fascism, which justifies continued use of the term.

Finally, it could be that fascism is a concept like democracy – with an ahistorical core that can be brought out and described as a pattern that can take root in countries that otherwise differ quite radically in their social structures and problems.

The view that Senghor held of dialectical materialism is a widespread assumption, usually tacit, about the concept of fascism. Fascism is often treated as a completely historically located concept, of little use in the present day. This view has the consequence of justifying treating contemporary charges of “fascism” as absurd; at the very least, wildly implausible and exaggerated. Such a reaction is only justifiable given the assumption that fascism is an historically located concept. If fascist ideology has very wide appeal in different countries at different times, then one needs special justification to think one’s own country is immune. Someone who dismisses the possibility of fascism without special reasons of this sort is treating fascism as an historically located concept.

In this essay, I will argue that fascism is a social kind, one with wide interpretive applicability across societies that otherwise differ quite drastically from one another. If I am right, fascism is not one of Senghor's "completely historically located" concepts. I aim to rescue the concept of fascism from the discipline of history and make a case for its centrality in political and social philosophy. Such a rescue would in fact constitute a return; some of the greatest theorists of fascism, such as Theodore Adorno and Hannah Arendt, were philosophers.

To argue that fascism has significance and centrality for political philosophy, it is not necessary to show that it is a universal possibility throughout history (and this is not the thesis of this paper). Political Philosophy should highlight structures that are important enough influences in the present day.

One way of understanding liberal democracy is as a voting system – say, majority vote. Another way of understanding liberal democracy is as a set of institutions – say, including public schools. Perhaps the most important conception of liberal democracy for democratic political philosophy understands liberal democracy as a *culture*, defined by values and practices that embody these values. Analogously, I am proposing considering fascism as a culture, a particular kind of anti-democratic one. Thus, my interest is not in fascist economic systems, nor a particular political structure. It is in the kind of anti-democratic political culture that fascism is, one that I will argue has shown itself to be an attractive anti-democratic option today. If fascism in this sense is sufficiently general as an ideological structure, it too is worthy of study, even for the student of democracy. If democratic political philosophy only studies the different forms democratic political culture can take, political philosophers will prove useless as sources of insight into its vulnerabilities.

If fascism is an important social kind, it must have *predictive* usefulness – for example, it must allow us to extrapolate usefully from past practices to future outcomes. Only then can one argue that it should be included in philosophical discussions about the kinds of cultures that can emerge in otherwise very different circumstances. In contrast, if fascism is an historically located concept, however, then we do not need to be worried about confronting it. Fascism cannot

reoccur, and political philosophers in recent decades have been right to ignore it. If I am right, the view that fascism is an historically located concept is not just false, it is *dangerously* false. If fascism describes a dangerous ideology with general appeal, representing it as an artifact of particular past historical circumstances masks a real danger. By not studying fascism philosophically, philosophy lends credence to the view that fascism is not a risk. This essay is a case for revisiting thinking in political philosophy, to reopen the case that philosophers should study fascism.

What is the case that fascism is not an historically loaded concept? In recent years, across the world, a certain form of politics has emerged that embraces hyper-nationalism, xenophobia and other kinds of virulent racism to draw support for a leader with authoritarian tendencies. The leader is taken as the representative of the nation, which is conceived as having a uniform ethnic or religious core. Patriarchal traditions are represented as under threat by liberalism and homosexuality. The media, the cultural producers, and the teachers are denounced as corrupt liars with a masked leftist agenda. The country is portrayed as having undergone international humiliation as a consequence of the embrace of liberalism, e.g. human rights laws or international treaties. Liberal elites are said to have weakened the immigration laws, threatening to allow immigrants from minority religions or despised minority groups to pour in and ruin the country. Marxism, Socialism and Gender Ideology, supposedly spread in universities and schools, are mortal threats to the nation. The military is treated as a holy institution, whose ideals should be emulated and its leaders given political power. When in power, the movement tries to create a one-party state, demanding loyalty to that party over the multi-party nature of democratic state. The arrival of this political culture is heralded by a noticeable decrease in the political importance of truth.

The kind of politics I have just described has increased in salience and power. India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has drawn on Hindu nationalism to become India's majority party with such tactics; they are now trying to change the citizenship laws to privilege Hindu identity in ways that are being compared to the National Socialist Nuremberg Laws. Other contemporary examples include Hungary, Poland, Russia, India, Israel, Brazil, Italy, and the United States. Political parties with this character have also achieved varying degrees of electoral success in

France, Germany, and elsewhere. The ideology was clearly a force behind Brexit in the UK, which appealed to hysteria about immigration. Under very different social and historical conditions we see a common ideology surface and gain a broad swath of support, suggesting that otherwise very different material conditions can lead to receptivity to its messages. Most people writing and discussing the political situation currently not only agree but even seem to presuppose that there is a basically uniform ideological structure that is achieving surprising support in countries that otherwise differ along many dimensions. There is, in short, agreement about a common phenomenon. But analysts have struggled to come up with similar agreement about vocabulary. Is this widespread ideology “right wing authoritarianism”? Nationalism? Right wing populism? White Supremacy? The proper term we need is *fascism*. If so, then fascism is not an historically located concept.

If “fascism” is not the right word to use, what is? One of the attractions of the ideology to its supporters is that it promises to provide a strong leader whose decisions will not be filtered through the mechanisms of democracy, discussion and deliberation, but imposed by strength and will and even cruelty. In other words, this ideology involves an element of *authoritarianism*. But authoritarianism does not do much to explain the structure of its ideology, or its appeal. China is an authoritarian state. Yet its leaders seem to have a very different ideology than the ones promulgated in the countries I listed. China’s leaders do not, for example, raise panic about immigrants coming into the country causing a wave of rape and gang violence. Perhaps China is not a good example; after all, nationalism is clearly a powerful force, the economy is based on private property, and the opening of concentration camps for ethnic minorities also is suggestive of fascism. But we can easily imagine authoritarian ideologies completely different than the rhetoric associated with the far-right nationalist movements we see gaining currency across the world. Even the rhetoric and ideology of Cuba’s authoritarian leaders is and has been recognizably different – their leaders praise the ideal of equality. One can multiply examples to show that authoritarianism is not the key to identifying the shared ideology between the contemporary movements I have listed above, or even the feature most responsible for gathering supporters. There are different kinds of authoritarianism.

A good example of the mistake made by focusing on authoritarianism as the general concept is in Arendt's Origins of Totalitarianism. Arendt treats fascism and Stalinism on a par, with race and class swapped out for one another. Much of the book is in fact about fascism – such as the entirety of Part II. And yet there are remarkable omissions in the book, considered as a treatment of fascism. Wilhem Reich gives a central role to what he calls the “authoritarian family”, in which the patriarchal father provides a narrative structure for the authoritarian leader”

...the political and economic position of the father is reflected in his patriarchal relationship to the remainder of the family....The authoritarian position of the father reflects his political role and discloses the relation of the family to the authoritarian state. Within the family the father holds the same position that his boss holds toward him in the production process. And he reproduces his subservient attitude toward authority in his children, particularly his sons. Lower middle-class man's passive and servile attitude toward the fuehrer-figure issues from these conditions.²

Adorno, Else-Frenkel Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford Arendt, in The Authoritarian Personality also give a central role to the traditional patriarchal family as a source and basis of fascism. Arendt does not discuss patriarchy. And yet fascism without patriarchy is scarcely conceivable. As Robyn Marasco has explained, Adorno's F-scale and other psychoanalytic and psychological treatments of the tendency towards fascism highlighted the role of the patriarchal family in delineating the attractions of fascism; Marasco demonstrates that this focus was a “continuation of a critique of fascism” of the Institute for Social Research in the 1930s and 40s, rather than a deviation (Marasco focuses particularly on the contributions of Else-Frenkel Brunswik, who continued research at Berkeley into the psychological roots of ethnocentric tendencies in children).³ The original (and preferred) title of The Authoritarian Personality was The Fascist Character and the Measurement of Fascist Trends – making it vivid that its focus was specifically fascism (after all, it's called the “F-scale”, not the “A-scale”). What we need to describe current social and political reality is a *narrower* concept that explains the attractions of the particular form of anti-democratic nationalist rhetoric that is proving

² Wilhelm Reich, The Mass Psychology of Fascism (New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux 1970), p. 53.

³ Robyn Marasco, “There's a Fascist in the Family: Critical Theory and Anti-Authoritarianism,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, **117.4** (2018)

successful in so many countries today. Such a study, as the initial stages of critical theory on fascism demonstrate, will highlight, rather than diminish, the conceptual centrality of patriarchy.

Arendt's failure to see patriarchy as a central element of fascism is a symptom of the deeper error in her analogy. There is a much larger ideological gap between fascism and communism than Arendt's analysis allows. *Pace* Arendt, communist authoritarianism is not simply the same ideology as fascist authoritarianism, with class replacing race. Fascist ideology *essentially* involves a repudiation of universal norms of reason and justice; these are, in fascism, mere masks for power. There is, in fascism, no universal reason or universal principles of social justice. In contrast, communist ideology is a recognizable descendant of rationalist doctrines. The fascist ideologue rejects reasons; he is a "man of action"; the human faculty at the heart of fascist rhetoric is *will*. In contrast, the human faculty at the heart of communist rhetoric is *reason* (however misapplied). These are radically different visions of what ought to be the guiding force in action – even corresponding, in Plato, to different parts of the soul.⁴

Perhaps we should add a modifier to authoritarianism, and if so, will "right-wing authoritarianism" do the explanatory task we want? Authoritarianism is of course central to the ideological formation we are discussing. A traditional monarchy is a right-wing authoritarian structure. But the ideology of monarchy and the ideologies we want to describe, for example with India's BJP, are distinct. Monarchy involves a dynastic ideology, and a dynasty need not, and often was not, based on ethno-nationalism. Right-wing authoritarianism is not a specific enough name for what we are witnessing as the ideology of leaders like Trump, Bolsonaro, Orban, Putin, Modi, and others. Right wing authoritarianism does not essentially need to be based on extreme nationalism. Some version of nationalism is at the very core of the rhetoric and the ideology of Putin, Trump, Bolsonaro, Modi, and the other leaders who fall within the general category of political movements many analysts are trying to describe.

Why, then, is the concept of *nationalism* not the right description for the common social and political ideology underlying the current wave in the countries I have listed? Nationalism is not

⁴ Thanks to David Samuels for essential discussion here.

the concept we need, because nationalist rhetoric is central to political movements that we would never think of as a version of the same ideology we find in the speeches of Victor Orban, Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Marine Le Pen, and other political leaders who seem to share a common ideology.

Most obviously, *anti-colonial movements* regularly appeal to the rhetoric of nationalism, seeking to preserve the country's resources, cultural traditions, and language from the colonial threat. In Fanon's "On Violence", it is the nationalist political parties that set the agenda during wars for liberation.⁵ Fanon's concept of nationalism bears similarities to forms of European nationalism. In "What a People is, and What is Love of Fatherland", the 8th Address in Fichte's Addresses to the German Nation, Fichte writes:

...love of fatherland must govern the state by putting before it a higher purpose than the ordinary one of maintaining internal peace, property, personal freedom, life and the well-being of all. For this higher purpose alone, and with no other end in view, does the state assemble an armed force.⁶

Fichte argues that "the spirit of calm civic love for the constitution and laws" cannot "compel the objector, to jeopardize everything, even his own life"; only the "blazing love of fatherland that embraces the nation as the vesture of the eternal" can compel such action (Ibid., p. 107). Similarly, in Carl Schmitt, it is the friend-enemy distinction that grounds "the ever present possibility of combat."⁷ In "On Violence", Fanon gives a similar analysis of the connection between nationalism and violence. Furthermore, in both Fichte's time, and for Fanon, the nationalist parties are a force for "the elimination of regionalism and tribalism."⁸

In another sense, Fanon's sense of "nationalism" and the toxic notions of nationalism that emerged eventually from German romanticism are far apart. Fanon's sense of nationalism is set in the colonial context, which is strictly divided by wealth; "[t]he colonist's sector is a sector built

⁵ Frantz Fanon, "On Violence", Chapter 1 of The Wretched of the Earth (Grove Press, New York 2004).

⁶ Fichte, Addresses to the German Nation, p.

⁷ Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 32.

⁸ Fanon, "On Violence", p. 51.

to last, all stone and steel. It's a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers." In contrast, "[t]he colonized's sector...is a famished sector."⁹ Nationalism is an ideology that unifies the colonized and leads them to action against those who seek to exploit and dominate them economically and culturally. Nationalism, in Fanon's sense, is a reaction to economic and cultural domination by those who manifestly do not share that national identity. This is a very different sense of nationalism than we find in, for example, Hannah Arendt's Origins of Totalitarianism. The concept of race-based nationalism Arendt describes cross-cuts and is in fact fundamentally opposed to class based distinctions.

Drawing a distinction between nationalism before the formation of a state ("pre-independence", in the terms of anti-colonial theory), and nationalism after the formation of a state, helps to distinguish the kind of nationalism that undergirds anti-colonial movements, and the kind of nationalism that lies at the basis of fascist ideology (Fanon is clear that nationalist ideology drastically changes between these periods). But here too distinctions need to be drawn. Historically, there have even been prominent Marxists have advocated nationalism as a potentially positive force even after independence.

Of course, according to the standard Marxist line about nationalism, it is a form of false consciousness meant to suppress the lower classes, by leading them to connect to their bourgeoisie overlords via a common national origin and set of traditions. Isaiah Berlin writes

For [Marxists and radical socialists] national sentiment itself was a form of false consciousness, an ideology generated, consciously or not, by the economic domination of a particular class, the bourgeoisie, in alliance with what was left of the old aristocracy, used as a weapon in the retention and promotion of the class control of society, which, in its turn, rested on the exploitation of the labor power of the proletariat. In the fullness of time the workers, whom the process of production itself would inevitably organize into a disciplined force of ever-increasing size, political awareness and power, would over their capitalist oppressors...¹⁰

⁹ Fanon, "On Violence", p. 4.

¹⁰ Isaiah Berlin, "Nationalism", in The Proper Study of Mankind, p. 587.

In this essay, “Nationalism”, Isaiah Berlin marvels about how few of the most significant intellectuals in the 19th century thinkers took nationalism seriously as a lasting force.

“Nationalism”, writes Berlin, “was looked on by observers of a more liberal type as a passing phase due to the exacerbation of national consciousness held down and forcibly repressed by despotic rulers aided by subservient churches.” But there are 19th century political philosophers who correctly predicted that nationalism of some variety would be a serious and long-standing ideological formation.

First, there were late 19th century intellectuals in Europe, indeed even *Marxist* intellectuals, who regarded nationalism as a potent and lasting world historical force, indeed a force for the good, even after colonial powers have withdrawn. In Nationalism, Marxism & Modern Central Europe, Timothy Snyder’s biography of the socialist Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, Snyder demonstrates that there was a struggle between German socialists about Polish nationalism. Representing what we now think of as the typical Marxist view of nationalism, Rosa Luxemburg denounced Polish independence as the aim of Polish nationalists who stood in the way of socialist ideals, and regarded Polish independence as a “trojan horse for the petty bourgeoisie.”¹¹ In contrast, Kelles-Krauz regarded the push to suppress the movement for Polish independence as based on “the sophistic theory of historical necessity of the superiority of the civilization of the conquerer” – rightly detecting pro-German bias in the minimization of Polish demands for national independence.

More dramatically, Kelles-Krauz saw nationalism and socialism as allied. According to Snyder, Kelles-Krauz predicted the end of multi-national empires, and argued in any case that “socialism could only be justified in practical and moral terms within the democratic nation-state.” (Ibid., p. 191). However, Kelles-Krauz was clear to distinguish his positive vision of nationalism from one based on “blood, geography, or language.” Such a form of nationalism – conducive to socialism, not based on “blood and soil” – is not appreciably fascist in nature. Kelles-Krauz rightly predicted the rise of nationalism, but was, obviously, far too sanguine about the kinds of nationalism that were to emerge, and their consistency with his overall political vision.

¹¹ Timothy Snyder, Nationalism, Marxism & Modern Central Europe: A Biography of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz 1872-1905 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 136.

Secondly, and more relevantly for our purposes, there were in fact 19th century political philosophers who predicted the relative intransigence of nationalist ideology, as well as the attendant problematic consequences. The notion of nationalism we find in their works is much closer to the kind of nationalism associated with fascism. Martin Delany, publishing in 1852, regards the race-based white nationalism of the United States as enough of a permanent feature of the United States that he sees emigration as the only solution for Black Americans.¹² More generally, Black political philosophers theorizing about US race-based nationalism have not minimized US white nationalism as a passing phase, even in the 19th century, making their work especially incisive on this issue, especially since US white nationalism is the variety of nationalism that underlies fascism of the German variety.

In Black Reconstruction, Du Bois famously provides a Marxist analysis of the function of white supremacy in ending Reconstruction. According to Du Bois, “the overthrow of Reconstruction was in essence a revolution inspired by property, and not a race war.”¹³ By pitting poor whites against poor Blacks, the “dictatorship of capital” “neutralized the labor vote in the South.”¹⁴ On Du Bois’s analysis, white nationalism in the South was against the class interests of poor whites, and functioned in the way that the classical Marxist analysis predicts. But Du Bois does not share the classical Marxists’ optimism that this version of nationalism is a mere passing phase. Racial capitalism is a good lens through which one can more easily see that fascism is not some passing phase. It allows one to see vividly that the Marxist analysis of nationalism identifies an important social category, considerably narrower than nationalism per se. And it allows one to adopt these insights of Marx, stripped of the utopian picture of the future. Du Bois recognizes that “the psychological wages of whiteness” must also be measured in any cost-benefit analysis of whether a population (in this case, poor whites) will join a revolution that eliminates it.

¹² Martin Robison Delany, The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States (1852)

¹³ W.E.B. Du Bois, Black Reconstruction (New York, Simon and Shuster 1992), p. 622.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Writing in the 1930s, Du Bois of course recognized the clear commonalities between European fascism and US white nationalism:

America thus stepped forward in the first blossoming of the modern age and added to the Art of Beauty, gift of the Renaissance, and to Freedom of Belief, gift of Martin Luther and Leo X, a vision of democratic self-government: the domination of Political life by the intelligent decision of free and self-sustaining men...And then some unjust God leaned, laughing, over the ramparts of heaven and dropped a black man in the midst. It transformed the world. It turned democracy back to Roman Imperialism and Fascism; it restored caste and oligarchy; it replaced freedom with slavery and withdrew the name of humanity from the vast majority of human beings.¹⁵

Du Bois' analysis of fascism overlaps with that of Hannah Arendt, in Origins of Totalitarianism, who describes the Nazis as using "racism and antisemitism" as "major political weapons for the destruction of civilization and the setting up of a new body politic."¹⁶ Part II identifies the marriage of "race thinking" found in German romantics such as Fichte with social Darwinism as the origin source of the toxic racism at the heart of National Socialism. Chapter six of Origins focuses on Count Arthur de Gobineau's 1853 work. Gobineau:

...proposed a 'race of princes,' the Aryans, who he said were in danger of being submerged by the lower non-Aryan classes through democracy. The concept of race made it possible to organize the 'innate personalities' of German romanticism, to define them as members of a natural aristocracy destined to rule over all others.¹⁷

And obviously the United States had its own race theorists. As Khalil Muhammad writes:

Still others combined personal observation with the imprimatur of science, as did Josiah C. Nott, an Alabama physician, a student of Morton's and the leading American ethnologist in the 1840s and 1850s. As a medical doctor, Nott was one of many clinical researchers at the cutting edge of racial research throughout the nineteenth century. Much of his "expertise" came from observing patients in his medical practice, from which he "verified" polygenesis, the early nineteenth century religious theory that God had made

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

¹⁶ Hannah Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism, p. 205.

¹⁷ Hannah Arendt, p. 173, "Race Thinking Before Racism", Chapter 6 of The Origins of Totalitarianism.

blacks as a separate and distinct species of humans far beneath whites among His creations. Nott believed that blacks were closer to primates than whites.¹⁸

(It bears mentioning, when reflecting on the relative permanence of this ideology, that one of the grandest buildings on the University of Alabama campus today is Josiah C. Nott Hall.)

Gobineau's ideology clearly echoes through Alexander Stephens's "Cornerstone Speech of March, 1861:

Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea [of equality]; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.

As Arendt notes, Gobineau took "a side in the American slave issue...conveniently building his whole system on the basic conflict between black and white."¹⁹

In Black Earth: Holocaust as History and Warning, Timothy Snyder writes:

Hitler saw America as a coming world power, and the core American population ("the racially pure and uncorrupted German") as a "world class people" that was "younger and healthier than the Germans" who had remained in Europe.

There is ample evidence of Hitler's admiration for American racial ideology. In Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of a Nazi Race Law, James Whitman exhibits the close overlap between US racism and Nazi racial ideology. In both cases, as per the Marxist analysis, it functioned to erase class distinctions between members of the chosen racial group:

John C. Calhoun – a man who was the subject of a laudatory Nazi biography in 1935 – described the basic strategy in 1821. Race slavery, he said, was necessary, because it is

¹⁸ Khalil Muhammad, The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 22-3.

¹⁹ Arendt, *Ibid.*

‘the best guarantee to equality among the whites. It produces an unvarying level among them. It not only [does] not excite but [does] not even admit of inequalities, by which one white man could domineer over another.

Nazi politics too was a politics of a kind of egalitarianism in the Calhoun style – egalitarianism for those persons the Nazis deemed to be members of the Volk, at the expense of those who were not. When they examined America’s monstrous race law in the early 1930s, Nazi lawyers were not examining something whose political foundations were all that different from their own.²⁰

In his book, Whitman documents the effects of American racial law on Nazi law, providing evidence that the Nazis saw, in US racial ideology, a model for their own:

From Mein Kampf onward, Nazi jurists and policy makers took a sustained interest in American race law. Especially during the early 1930s, the era of the making of the Nuremberg Laws, Nazis engaged in detailed study of American immigration law, American second-class citizenship law, and American anti-miscegenation and mongrelization law. Some of them saw attractions in the system of Jim Crow segregation. In particular, the Prussian Memorandum, the 1933 text that laid out the basic statement of the radical Nazi legal program, specifically invoked Jim Crow – though it proposed a more “limited” version for Nazi Germany. Certain aspects of American race law struck Nazi observers as appealing: in particular, the exceptional American practice of harshly criminalizing interracial marriage lay in the background of the Blood Law. Other aspects, like the one-drop rule, struck them as excessively severe.²¹

Ideologies are not merely sets of beliefs. Ideologies are practices, including legal practices. Whitman’s work shows that Nazi racial ideology is centrally structured by American racial ideology. It is this kind of racial ideology that I think demarcates a natural social kind at the basis of fascist nationalism, in the sense I want to explicate (Italian fascism of course differs from German fascism in this regard, a fact that has traditionally split the literature).

In 1995, Toni Morrison gave an address at Howard University entitled “Racism and Fascism”, warning of the deep rootedness in the United States of “forces interested in fascist solutions to national problems”. It begins:

²⁰ James Whitman, Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 135

... Let us be reminded that before there is a final solution, there must be a first solution, a second one, even a third. The move toward a final solution is not a jump. It takes one step, then another, then another. Something, perhaps, like this:

- (1) Construct an internal enemy, as both focus and diversion.
- (2) Isolate and demonize that enemy by unleashing and protecting the utterance of overt and coded name-calling and verbal abuse. Employ ad hominem attacks as legitimate charges against that enemy.
- (3) Enlist and create sources and distributors of information who are willing to reinforce the demonizing process because it is profitable, because it grants power and because it works.
- (4) Palisade all artforms; monitor, discredit or expel those that challenge or destabilize Processes of demonization and deification.
- (5) Subvert and malign all representatives of and sympathizers with this constructed enemy.
- (6) Solicit, from among the enemy, collaborators who agree with and can sanitize the dispossession process.
- (7) Pathologize the enemy in scholarly and popular mediums; recycle, for example, Scientific racism and the myths of racial superiority in order to naturalize the pathology.
- (8) Criminalize the enemy. Then prepare, budget for and rationalize the building of holding arenas for enemy- especially its males and absolutely its children.
- (9) Reward mindlessness and apathy with monumentalized entertainments and with little pleasures, tiny seductions, a few minutes on television, a few lines in the press, a little pseudo-success, the illusion of power and influence, a little fun, a little style, a little consequence.
- (10) Maintain, at all costs, silence.

W.E.B. Du Bois saw this kind of racial ideology as the core of the fascist ideology that resulted in what he calls “The Collapse of Europe.” Both Nazism and slavery were based on an ideology of “white masters of the world”, and Du Bois concurs with Césaire’s analysis in Discourse on Colonialism, when he writes that “[t]here was no Nazi atrocity – concentration camps, wholesale maiming and murder, defilement of women or ghastly blasphemy of childhood – which the Christian civilization of Europe had not long been practicing against colored folk in all parts of the world in the name of and for the defense of a Superior Race born to rule the world.”²²

It may be thought, on this basis, that the topic of fascism, or at least what is dangerous about German fascism and other fascisms of its ilk, is *white supremacy*. However, this is not correct. During the war, the Japanese had a racial ideology mirroring the Germans, a fact that Du Bois

²² W.E.B. Du Bois, The World and Africa and Color and Democracy in The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 15.

overlooked in his discussion of the Japanese occupation of China, precisely because he only could view colonialism through a racial window. Today, we have fascist ideology dividing non-white populations in several countries. For example, the Hindutva movement in India reflects the kind of fascist nationalism we see German and US history, typified by an ethic of group purity, and ensuing hysteria about intermarriage and sexual mixing. In an article in *Indian Express* in August 2014, the Indian historian Charu Gupta calls attention to “an aggressive, systematic campaign,” including “awareness rallies,” organized by RSS and some factions of the dominant Hindu nationalist party BJP, about the supposed “love jihad” movement, which according to the BJP, compelled Hindu women to convert to Islam by marriage and deception. Gupta adds that these campaigns are based on divisive principles that are sustained by “constant and repetitive references to the aggressive and libidinal energies of the Muslim male, creating a common ‘enemy other.’” She decries the loss of “Hindu logical faculties” in the face of a “politics of cultural virginity and a myth of innocence” that are “combined with a perceived ‘illegitimacy’ of the act, leading to rants of violation, invasion, seduction and rape.”²³ White supremacy is one form fascism manifests, but fascism is not reducible to white supremacy.

Fascist ideology has an ethic of purity, and there is always an enemy other who threatens in sexual ways, by diluting the greatness of the People with the threat of intermarriage, or, worse, rape. But recall Arendt’s description of the “two chief weapons” of Nazism, racism *and* antisemitism. Fascism requires a group to play the role that Jews played for National Socialism – to be the group threatening “human civilization” and “all of culture”, as Goebbels puts it in his 1935 speech, “Communism with its Mask Off.” This group plans to dominate by plotting to bring supposedly inferior races in via immigration – they push for gender and racial equality, liberalism, and social justice in order to weaken the nation (for example, by encouraging immigration of foreign populations). Their art is degenerate and decadent, and they live in large metropolitan cities, which are, as Hitler describes Vienna in the second chapter of Mein Kampf, filled with foreigners, different languages (and, of course, Jews). These are the elite, the enemy

²³ For more detail on the “Hindu love jihad”, Gupta’s “Allegories of ‘Love Jihad’ and Ghar Vāpasī: Interlocking the Socio- Religious with the Political,” *Archiv Orientalní* 84 (2016): 291–316.

of the people – who advance with their doctrines of racial and gender equality its destruction. Fascist nationalism is anti-globalist in a very real sense – all globalizing ideologies are attempts at enforcing what to the fascist is a mythical equality, which will result in loss of civilization.

The “anti-globalist” nature of fascist ideology – its assault on universal reason – undergirds its relationship with the truth, the subject of Frederico Finchelstein’s book, A Brief History of Fascist Lies.²⁴ Finchelstein begins the book by reminding his readers that lying is endemic to all political systems – but argues that fascist lies are a distinctive species:

Fascist lying in politics is not typical at all. This difference is not a matter of degree, even if the degree is significant. Lying is a feature of fascism in a way that is not true of those other political traditions. Lying is incidental to, say, liberalism, in a way that it is not to fascism. And, in fact, when it comes to fascist deceptions, they share few things with others forms of politics in history. They are situated beyond the more traditional forms of political duplicity. They consider their lies to be at the service of simple absolute truths, which, are, in fact, bigger lies.

Consider the distinction between the lies the Bush administration engaged in to lay the basis of the invasion of Iraq. These lies had the function of deceiving their audience. In a press briefing with Donald Rumsfeld from February 4, 2003, in the White House, Secretary Rumsfeld replied, when asked by a reporter about an explicit denial by Saddam Hussein of any relationship with Al Qaeda, “And Abraham Lincoln was short.” When pressed to respond directly to Saddam Hussein’s denial of any relationship with Al Qaeda, Secretary Rumsfeld replied, “How does one respond to that? It’s just a continuous pattern. This is a case of the local liar coming up again and people repeating what he said and forgetting to say that he never, almost never, rarely tells the truth.” Here, Rumsfeld does not explicitly semantically express something clearly false – his intent is to deceive. In contrast, fascist lying involves *blatant* patterns of untruth, set out not for conveying information, but to reinforce hierarchies. Fascist lying – if it is even a form of lying – is a mechanism to create us-them distinctions.²⁵ It is not an attempt to deceive.

²⁴ Frederico Finchelstein, A Brief History of Fascist Lies (University of California Press, 2020).

²⁵ Jessica Keiser (ref.) argues that *bald-faced lying* is not a species of lying; if she is correct, fascist lying is not a species of lying either, since fascist lies are a kind of bald-faced lie.

The origin lie of fascism is the myth of hierarchy, that one group is superior to others in its cultural traditions, achievements, and history.²⁶ The decline of this great culture is placed upon mixing it with other cultures, which “degrade” it, is in Gobineau’s work. Here is Joseph Goebbels, again from his speech “Communism with the mask off”, delivered to the Annual Congress of the Nazi Party on September 13, 1935:

Bolshevism is explicitly determined on bringing about a revolution among all the nations. In its own essence it has an aggressive and international tendency. But National Socialism confines itself to Germany and is not a product for export, either in its abstract or practical characteristics. Bolshevism denies religion as a principle, fundamentally and entirely. It recognizes religion only as an “opium for the people.” For the help and support of religious belief, however, National Socialism absolutely places in the foreground of its program a belief in God and that transcendental idealism which has been destined by Nature to bring to expression the racial soul of a nation. National Socialism would give the lead in a new concept and shaping of European civilization. But the Bolsheviki carry on a campaign, directed by the Jews, with the international underworld, against culture as such. Bolshevism is not merely anti-bourgeois; it is against human civilization itself.

In its final consequences it signifies the destruction of all the commercial, social, political and cultural achievements of Western Europe, in favor of a deracinated and nomadic international cabal which has found its representation in Judaism. This grandiose attempt to overthrow the civilized world is so much more dangerous in its effects because the Communist International, which is a past master in the art of misrepresentation, has been able to find its protectors and pioneers among a great part of these intellectual circles in Europe whose physical and spiritual destruction much be the first result of a Bolsheviki world revolution.

In this speech, Nazis are the defenders of “the commercial, social, political and cultural achievements of Western Europe,” religion, and indeed “human civilization itself” from the threat of “a deracinated and nomadic international cabal which has found its representation in Judaism.” Later in the speech, Goebbels addresses the tactics of these enemies of civilization: “Murder of individuals, murder of hostages and mass murder are the favorite means applied by Bolshevism to get rid of all opposition to its propaganda.” What follows this is a lurid list of atrocities attributed to Jewish Bolsheviki.

Goebbels’ speech is shot through with lies. But considering simply the *content* of these lies misses the effect of the speech. Goebbels tells his audience, “Bolsheviki carry on a campaign,

²⁶ Jason Stanley, How Fascism Works, Chapter 5.

directed by the Jews, with the international underworld, against culture as such. Bolshevism is not merely anti-bourgeois; it is against human civilization itself.” Terms like “culture” and “human civilization” are used as contrast words for the aims and goals of the Jewish Bolsheviks. On the side of Bolshevism and Jews is “the international underworld” – whatever that is. On the side of National Socialism are all the achievements of Europe, and indeed “human civilization itself”. Goebbels’s narrative presupposes that culture, and even human civilization, are Aryan. The contrastive use of terms in Goebbels’s narrative is part of the systematic dehumanization of Jews.

Conversations occur with narrative structures in their backgrounds. Goebbels’ speech urges a narrative structure in which culture and human civilization are Aryan, and are diametrically opposing values to the value system of Jews. The obviously false content of the speech is not its main communicative point. Its main communicative point lies in the narrative structure it conveys.

As Tamsin Shaw has made clear in a recent essay on US Attorney General William Barr, we find such friend-enemy distinctions clearly in the ideology and speeches of members of the Trump administration.²⁷ In a speech delivered at the University of Notre Dame on October 11, 2019, Barr said:

Modern secularists dismiss this idea of morality as other-worldly superstition imposed by a kill-joy clergy. In fact, Judeo-Christian moral standards are the ultimate utilitarian rules for human conduct. They reflect the rules that are best for man, not in the by and by, but in the here and now. They are like God’s instruction manual for the best running of man and human society. By the same token, violations of these moral laws have bad, real-world consequences for man and society. We may not pay the price immediately, but over time the harm is real. Religion helps promote moral discipline within society. Because man is fallen, we don’t automatically conform ourselves to moral rules even when we know they are good for us. But religion helps teach, train, and habituate people to want what is good. It does not do this primarily by formal laws – that is, through coercion. It does this through moral education and by informing society’s informal rules – its customs and traditions which reflect the wisdom and experience of the ages.

In other words, religion helps frame moral culture within society that instills and reinforces moral discipline. I think we all recognize that over the past 50 years religion

²⁷ Tamsin Shaw, “William Barr: The Carl Schmitt of our Time”, New York Review of Books, Jan 15, 2020.

has been under increasing attack. On the one hand, we have seen the steady erosion of our traditional Judeo-Christian moral system and a comprehensive effort to drive it from the public square. On the other hand, we see the growing ascendancy of secularism and the doctrine of moral relativism.

By any honest assessment, the consequences of this moral upheaval have been grim. Virtually every measure of social pathology has gained ground.... I will not dwell on all the bitter results of the new secular age. Suffice it to say that the campaign to destroy the traditional moral order has brought with it immense suffering, wreckage, and misery. And yet, the forces of secularism, ignoring these tragic results, press on with even greater militancy.

Barr presents the Trump administration as the only hope against increased militant secularism, out to destroy the very fabric of moral order itself. In Barr's speech, opponents of the Trump administration are opponents of civilization itself. One day later, President Donald Trump gave a speech at the Value Voters Summit, in which he also echoed Goebbels:

You are the warriors on the frontiers defending American freedom. We meet tonight at a crucial moment in our nation's history. Our shared values are under assault like never before. Extreme left-wing radicals, both inside and outside government, are determined to shred our Constitution and eradicate the beliefs we all cherish. Far-left socialists are trying to tear down the traditions and customs that made America the greatest nation on Earth. They reject the principles of our Founding Fathers — principles enshrined into the Declaration of Independence, which proclaims that our rights come from our creator.

But despite the delusions of the radical left, all of us here today know that our rights come from God almighty, and they can never be taken away.

Together, we will protect those God-given rights for our children, our children's children, and generations of Americans to come. On every front, the ultra-left is waging war on the values shared by everyone in this room. They are trying to silence and punish the speech of Christians and religious believers of all faiths. You know it better than anyone. They are trying to use the courts to rewrite the laws, undermine democracy, and force through an agenda they can't pass at the ballot box.

In this speech, Trump presents his opponents as "the radical left" out to destroy the moral fabric of civilization. And he presents himself as the only solution.

A successful narrative structure that seeks to implement a pure friend-enemy distinction is often self-reinforcing, leading people who are guided by it to take evidence against it as further

evidence supporting it. If you are under the influence of a narrative involving a mysterious global communist elite that controls the media, you might take an article in the media providing evidence that the source from which you have borrowed this narrative structure is fraudulent to be itself more evidence for the narrative. In his book The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust, Jeffrey Herf writes that “Nazis focused [in their propaganda] on the supposed Jewish domination of German professional life, despite the conflicting reality.” Despite the antisemitic myth that Jews controlled the press, Jews accounted for only 5.1% of editors and writers – nor was there any sense to be made of domination in the arts, e.g. Jews accounted for only 2.4 percent of visual artists. “The Jews’ small numbers, economic vulnerability, and lack of political influence were mere surface phenomena. The truth was that a small number of unseen conspirators hidden in the wings controlled international events” – and arranged for the surface appearances to be misleading – according to Hitler, “Jews were masters in the art of deception.”

The narrative structure of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion is that there is a secretive global elite, who are Jewish. Their loyalty is just to other Jews and not to the nations in which they find themselves; they control the media, the culture industry, the universities, and the banks. They use the language of liberalism and social justice hypocritically in the media they control - to urge for looser and looser immigration laws, for example, or equality for racial minorities, and sexual minorities, all with one single-minded goal: to destroy tradition – first, the dominant position of the nation’s traditional race, by intermarriage or, worse, rape, and, secondly, the traditional family. Their ultimate end goal is communism, including seizure of all private property.

If audience members have this narrative structure in their background, one can exploit that fact in various kinds of indirect political messages. One could *dog whistle* antisemitism, by making salient enough of its structure that there is no need to mention Jews to anyone who has assimilated the narrative. Such a person would understand, by virtue of presupposing the narrative, that Jews were meant.

One could also repeat the narrative, replacing Jews by some other group, perhaps Muslims. It’s not far off to describe Islamophobia in the United States in terms of a narrative structure

involving Muslim Americans as a fifth-column whose loyalty is really to other Muslims, and not to fellow citizens. Part of this narrative, echoing the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, is that Muslims and their liberal allies urge lax immigration laws in the name of social justice, but their *real* purpose is to undermine Christianity. According to this narrative, the left – the socialists and their ilk - have appropriated the cause of Muslim equality, and, using their control of the media and universities, are advancing social justice messages that are really attacks on Judeo-Christian tradition. The narrative structure of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion is familiar to many – that there is a shadowy group that controls the media, and uses appeals to universal principles of justice as a means to displace dominant groups and seize power, and that ultimately the goal is to destroy the dominant group – e.g. white Christians, and replace it with communism, socialism, or even Shariah Law. It is easily deployable against other targets.

Goebbels' speech is typical of much of Nazi propaganda in presenting civilization as an Aryan product, and Nazis its only defenders against a deadly outside threat. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler declares that

... all that we admire on this earth – science, art, technical skill and invention – is the creative product of only a small number of nations ... All this culture depends on them for its very existence ... If we divide the human race into three categories – founders, maintainers, and destroyers of culture – the Aryan stock alone can be considered as representing the first category.

In a similar vein, the French fascist Guillaume Faye, author of the 2001 book Why we Fight: Manifesto of the European Resistance, insists that “[t]he contribution European civilization (including its American prodigal) has made to the history of humanity surpasses, in every domain, that of every other people.” And one can find gentler versions of this idea being promoted by European far-right politicians who have long since gained respectability.

Consider the concept of “European Enlightenment,” which has no singular philosophical meaning. As a taxonomical category, it could include philosophers as fundamentally opposed different as Hume and Kant. Some of its figures, not least Kant, were the chief proponents of concepts that fascists roundly reject (namely, universal human dignity).

Nonetheless, European far-right politicians have subtly adopted talk of the Enlightenment as a way to smuggle in more bald-faced claims of European superiority. For example, Antwerp Mayor Bart De Wever, an outspoken Flemish nationalist, recently started [referring](#) to the Enlightenment as “the software” of “the grand narrative of European culture.” Borrowing from British philosopher Roger Scruton, he argues that “the European Enlightenment” and nationalism are complementary, rather than opposed. In De Wever, one finds significant overlaps with Faye. For example, both condemn liberalism and socialism as leading to “open borders,” “safe spaces,” “laws that protect feelings,” and the dissolution of parental authority.

Nazi propaganda has some of the most extreme examples of friend-enemy narratives, with no ambiguity. There is no complexity in the characters in Goebbels’ speech – the Judeo-Bolsheviks that are the sworn enemy of “human civilization” are completely dehumanized. Jeffrey Herf writes, “[f]rom the foundation of the Nazi Party to Hitler’s rantings in a Berlin bunker in 1945, the key themes in the regime’s antisemitic story line were righteous indignation about victimization at the hands of a powerful and evil foe, promises of retaliation, and projection of aggressive genocidal intent onto others.” The purity of the friend-enemy distinctions drawn in Nazi propaganda reflects the centrality of the friend-enemy distinction to its ideology. The intended effect of this propaganda is to create fear of the enemy, and promote the desire for revenge against them.

In the Hindutva movement in India, an extremist version of Hindu nationalism, as well as the Buddhist majority’s campaign against the Rohingya in Myanmar, we find fascist ideology without the presence of white supremacy. Hindu ultra-nationalists harken back to a “pure” Hindu state, that was invaded 1000 years ago by Muslims, who have damaged the pure and virtuous Hindu culture, as well as killed, over this time, many millions of Hindus. The Rohingya in Myanmar are also represented as invaders, and characterized as an out-group in similar ways as we find in other instances of fascist ultra-nationalism. Fascist techniques of othering and out-grouping can of course even be employed by groups originally targeted by them – as we see in the case of Israel.

At the core of fascist ultra-nationalism is the thought that one group deserves greater status, due to a past history of military and cultural achievement and domination, with mixture with other cultures represented as the destruction of its possibility. In National Socialism, this kind of ultra-nationalism had a foundation in social Darwinism – the “Aryan race” had supposedly proven their superiority over other groups in its past cultural and military achievements, and the threat of race-mixing was a way to destroy Aryans, and with them, the very possibility of culture and civilization. But there are other ways to undergird a hierarchy of value besides appealing to a supposed past victory in military and cultural struggle. Appeals to God’s plan, or other aspect of religious ideology, can do the work that social Darwinism did in Hitler’s ideology. And many religions involve a structure of authority that resembles the role of a leader in fascist ideology; such ideological commonalities explain the pattern of history, where conservative religious movements ally with ultra-nationalist fascist movements, as we see now in countries like India and Poland.²⁸ We can therefore speak of religious versions of essentially fascist ideology, even though such ideologies are not based in pseudo-scientific appeals to social Darwinism.

Just as certain religions involve authoritarian structures reflective of fascist structures, we can see other structures having structures that also allow such easy analogies. National Socialism clearly recognized that workplaces were generally organized hierarchically, with an all-powerful CEO or plant leader. In the domain of private enterprise (as well as the military) National Socialism recognized a familiar authoritarian structure that its politics could propagandistically exploit. As with the “pro-business wing” of the American Republican Party, the National Socialists connected government control of business with loss of freedom.

The social Darwinist idea at the core of fascist ideology is that life is a competition for power. In fascist ideology, those that emerge victorious deserve the spoils; those that lose have lesser value, and deserve less. Social Darwinism is in fact surprisingly close to an ideology that might seem very distant from fascism – namely a certain version of economic libertarianism, according

²⁸ This includes the United States of course, where Father Coughlin and Gerald Burton Winrod, Coughlin’s fundamentalist Protestant counterpart, founder of fascist organization Defenders of the Christian Faith, were at the heart of 1930s American fascism (see Chapter 3, “The Religious Right”, of Bradley Hart’s Hitler’s American Friends: The Third Reich’s Supporters in the United States (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2018).

to which the division of society's resources should be left up to pure free market competition. This is why we see fascist movements sharing ideals with this kind of libertarianism - hard-work, private enterprise, and self-sufficiency. The social Darwinism at the center of National Socialism is, in the end, a version of libertarianism. To have a life worthy of value, in National Socialist ideology, is to have risen above others by hard work and merit, to have survived a competition for resources. Those who do not compete successfully do not deserve the goods and resources of society. Since value is measured, according to this ideology, by productivity, the method of denouncing out-groups is via a charge of laziness. In an ideology that measures worth by productivity, propaganda that represents members of an out-group as lazy is a way to justify placing them lower on a hierarchy of worth.

This aspect of fascist ideology explains the National Socialist attitude towards the disabled, described as "Lebensunwertes Leben" – life unworthy of life. Disabled citizens were regarded as lacking in value, because value in National Socialist ideology arose from the value of one's contributions to society through work. In Nazi ideology, those who depended on the state for their survival lacked value of any kind. National Socialist propaganda represented disabled German citizens as dependent on the state, and hence not worthy of life. A fascist political sphere is incompatible with equal respect for certain categories of disabled citizens - those who are perceived as not being self-sufficient (of course, none of us could *actually* be self-sufficient; this is a kind of libertarian myth). Fascist governments have exhibited some of humanity's worst cruelty towards disabled populations. Nazi Germany's 1933 Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases mandated the sterilization of disabled citizens; this was subsequently followed by the secret T4 program, which carried out gassings of disabled German citizens, and eventually, in 1939, orders to physicians to kill them. Open contempt for disabled citizens is a very worrying political sign, and yet it seems to follow from a broadly shared ideology – that only those who "win" society's resources in open competition with others deserve to have them.

We often think of fascism as anti-individualistic. Yet in Hitler's speeches, he strongly extolls the value of the individual, and the ideal of meritocracy. There is no understanding of fascist hierarchies of worth except via a grasp of the relation of fascist ideology to this peculiar form of individualism. A particular social Darwinist conception of individual worth, established via

struggle in work, structures fascist hierarchies. It is this social Darwinist conception of individual worth that explains the centrality, in fascist politics, of the charge of laziness. Groups are ordered, in fascist ideology, by their capacity to achieve, to rise above others, in labor and war. When one group is systematically worse at work, they have, according to this ideology, lesser value. Fascism prizes individuality, because individual struggle in competition is what, according to the fascist, lends a life value and worth. The struggle for private property is at the basis of fascism's ideological opposition to socialism, as well as, historically, its imperialist tendencies. Hitler decries liberal democracy, because it embodies a contrary value-system, one that grants worth independently of victory in a natural struggle. Perhaps we can gain partial understanding of fascist praise of individuality by contrasting it with other world-views that prize human freedom.

Democracy has liberty as one of its two ideals. And yet Hitler denounces democracy as *incompatible* with individuality, since it does not allow individual citizens to rise above others in competitive struggle, a struggle he clearly regards as constitutive of freedom. In Hitler's second book, he is vividly clear about the contradiction he sees between individuality and democracy:

Once a Folk installs the majority as the rulers of its life, that is to say, once it introduces present day democracy in the western conception, it will not only damage the importance of the concept of personality, but block the effectiveness of the personality value. Through a formal construction of its life, it prevents the rise and the work of individual creative persons. For this is the double curse of the democratic parliamentary system prevailing today: not only is it itself incapable of bringing about really creative achievements, but it also prevents the emergence and thereby the work of those men who somehow threateningly rise above the level of the average.

Is there a paradox in the fact that fascism, a mode of thought that prizes authority, holds up a version of libertarianism as an ideal, a philosophy that is supposedly based on individual freedom? There are different versions of libertarianism, corresponding to different conceptions of freedom. Economic libertarianism is a version of libertarianism that understands freedom in a very specific way – freedom is defined by unconstrained free markets. For economic libertarianism, freedom is being thrown on markets that are not constrained in any way by regulations. If one ends up being weaker in the struggle, at least one's losses are one's own responsibility. Anarchy, by contrast, is a political philosophy that has freedom from arbitrary

constraints at its basis, but does not understand this freedom in economic, market-based terms. There are very distinct notions of freedom at the basis of anarchy and economic libertarianism, ones that should be kept sharply distinct. There clearly is obvious and historically documented tension between anarchy and fascism. There is no such obvious tension between economic libertarianism and fascism.

Anarchy is a social and political philosophy that is anti-state, and devoted to individual freedom. Fascist ideology too rejects the state as detrimental to the individual. But anarchy and fascism are based on very different notions of individual freedom. Historically, anarchists are generally not part of fascist movements. The anarchists in the 1890s did not become associated with subsequent fascist movements. International anarchist regiments fought the Spanish Fascists in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s. In the 1930s, when far-right nationalism threatened, anarchists were targeted by far-right politicians. Fascist and ultra-nationalist movements clearly take anarchist as enemies, surely something to do with underlying incompatible ideological differences. In contrast, fascist movement often contain former or current economic libertarians. These historical facts speak strongly to differing conceptions of freedom among these two strands of anti-state politics.

The notion of freedom at the basis of the philosophy of anarchy has nothing whatever to do with competition in free markets. Anarchists recognize that businesses set up to flourish in free markets have norms that violate their core conception of freedom—anarchy allows no bosses. The other, the notion of freedom at the basis of economic libertarianism, is more susceptible to being coopted into a value system that supports fascist ideology.²⁹

The notion of freedom at the basis of economic libertarianism is that freedom is the freedom to compete in unregulated free markets. Unlike anarchy, the problem the economic libertarian has with state control is that the state interferes with competition, not that it imposes hierarchy. This is a version of social Darwinism, which is at the center of fascist movements. At the level of its

²⁹ I am grateful to Lizabeth Dijkstra, a graduate student at the New School, for raising the contrast between anarchy and economic libertarianism as a way to dissolve the sense of paradox here.

conception of individual worth, there is little tension between economic libertarianism and fascism. Ayn Rand also celebrates the individual “winners” of struggle in competitive markets, and mocks and derides their losers. In such a philosophy, it is the “winners” who produce value, and should be lauded and given power. This “productionist” sentiment is also central to fascist ideology. Where fascism splits off from economic libertarianism is in its embrace of social Darwinism for *groups* such as nations or races. In fascist ideology, it is ultimately the past heroic struggles of groups, as represented by their great individual members, which gives members of these groups greater value than members of supposedly “lesser” groups.³⁰

In a speech to the Dusseldorf Industrial Club on January 27, 1932, after declaring that “German business life must be constructed on a basis of private property,” Adolph Hitler argues that “the economic sphere, from the start” rejects democracy, instead placing responsibility on individual leaders.³¹ Hitler praises the meritocratic nature of private enterprise, where great individual leaders rise to positions of hierarchical authority over others – a theme that is constant in his writings. Hitler repeatedly lambasts democracy as antithetical to meritocracy.

Hitler sees, in private enterprise, two principles that cohere with his own fascist ideology. First, the principle of meritocracy, where “the great man” is rewarded for excellence by a position of leadership over others; the strong will rule over the weak. Secondly, he sees in private enterprise National Socialism’s all-important leadership principle. Private workplaces are arranged hierarchically, with a command structure involving a CEO who issues orders (typically, the CEO is answerable to a board, but this is a detail that can be ignored in fascist politics). In other words, private workplaces are organized as authoritarian structures – even more so in the imagination of the mass of voters.

In his speech to the Dusseldorf Industrial Club, Hitler emphasizes the absurdity of having an anti-democratic economic sphere, and a democratic political one:

³⁰ Thanks to Brian Leiter for discussion here.

³¹ In Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations 1932-1945, The Chronicle of a Dictatorship, Volume I: The Years 1932 to 1934 (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1990): 88-114.

I am, however, incapable of regarding two basic ideas as being the possible foundation for the life of a people for any length of time. If it is correct to assume that human achievements are different, then it must also be correct that the value of man in respect to the creation of human achievements is different. But then it is absurd to attempt to apply this only in respect to a certain sphere, in the sphere of economy and its leadership, but not in the sphere of leadership in the life-struggle as a whole, namely in the sphere of politics. Rather it is only logical that, if I acknowledge the unequivocal recognition of particular achievements in the sphere of economy as the prerequisite for any higher culture, then politically I must similarly grant priority to the particular achievement and thus to the authority of the individual. If, on the other hand, it is asserted – by none other than the economic sphere – that no particular abilities are required in the political sector, but that absolute uniformity reigns here in respect to achievement, then one day this same theory will be transferred from politics to the economy. Political democracy, however, is analogous to Communism in the economic sector ... In summary, I see two principles starkly opposed: the principle of democracy which, wherever its practical results are evident, is the principle of destruction. And the principle of the authority of the individual, which I would like to call the principle of achievement...³²

Hitler here points out that the economic sphere operates on meritocratic principles that reward with ultimate authority those who survive a struggle for dominance; a strong leader takes control and runs their business in an authoritarian manner. Hitler warns the assembled industrialists that a democratic political sphere and an authoritarian economic sphere is an unstable mix. He reminds them that the solution in Weimar Germany has been for the state to encroach upon the economic realm, in the form of democratically imposed state regulations. Hitler presents authoritarianism as attractive to industrialists, since it eliminates such democratic controls over private enterprise. And throughout, Hitler emphasizes that industrialists should support the Nazi movement, since business already operates according to “the leader principle”; the Führer Principle. In private enterprise, when a CEO gives the orders, the employees must comply; there is no room for democratic governance. Just so, in politics, Hitler urges, the leader should be akin to the CEO of a company.

Olivia Goldhill is a journalist for *Quartz*. She has written about both the philosophical foundations of the recent U.S. “Alt-Right”, and their implications. In an article in June of 2017 entitled “The Neo-Fascist Philosophy that underpins both the alt-right and Silicon Valley technophiles”, Goldhill writes of a philosophical movement called “Dark Enlightenment”:

³² Ibid., pp. 94-5.

What are the tenets of Dark Enlightenment theory? There are a few consistent themes, circling around technology, warfare, feudalism, corporate power, and racism. “It’s an acceleration of capitalism to a fascist point,” says Benjamin Noys, a critical theory professor at the University of Chichester, and author of *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*.

Those who have studied Dark Enlightenment describe an almost cult-like vision of a dystopian future. “It is a worship of corporate power to the extent that corporate power becomes the only power in the world,” says David Golumbia, a new media professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. “It becomes militarized, and states break down. For some reason that’s difficult to understand, they seem to think that these highly weaponized feudal enclaves would be more free than the society we currently have.”³³

Peter Thiel is the German-American billionaire co-founder of Paypal. Thiel is a far-right libertarian who lent his strong support to Donald Trump in the 2016 US Presidential election. According to Goldhill, “Thiel gave a lecture at Stanford with distinct Dark Enlightenment themes. ‘A startup is basically structured as a monarchy,’ he said at the time. ‘We don’t call it that, of course. That would seem weirdly outdated, and anything that’s not democracy makes people uncomfortable.’”

Fascism has a conception of freedom; freedom is gained through competitive struggle. In fascist politics, hierarchy is justified by appeal to supposed victory in such struggle. The CEO deserves to give orders to others, because they have emerged victorious in free market struggle, and therefore deserves their place as the boss. Fascism, unlike libertarianism, is based on group hierarchies of worth. In fascist politics, group hierarchies are justified by the assumption that some groups are inherently more hard working, and other groups inherently lazier. It is, in fascist ideology, work that makes you free. This ideology is weaponized to justify hierarchies due to past injustice. Those whose birth position places them in a disadvantaged status are denounced as the undeserving “lazy” poor.

I will conclude with what many may regard as an elephant in the room in the attempt to establish fascism as a concept with wide historical applicability. In the 1930s, fascist movements were

³³ Olivia Goldhill, “The Neo-Fascist Philosophy that underpins both the alt-right and Silicon Valley technophiles”, *Quartz*, June 18, 2017.

strongly associated with colonial domination. In The World and Africa, Du Bois remarked upon a “deep envy of the power of Britain”, and in particular its African colonies, leading to “a German demand for ‘a place in the sun,’ a right to extract from colonial and semicolonial areas a share of the wealth which was going to Britain.”³⁴ It was, as has now been well-documented by historians such as Timothy Snyder, Germany’s complete loss of its colonies in Southwest Africa that obsessed Hitler, and, more broadly, many German people.³⁵ Fascist propaganda fed off this yearning for colonies, mobilizing its audience to seek replacements. Writers have relentlessly documented the centrality of colonialism to fascist ideology. And yet, one must ask – where is the colonialism today? Present day far right demagogues are not seeking to reinvigorate colonial empires; with the occasional exception, they are seeking largely to withdraw from the world, rather than dominate it. They seek to erect walls, rather than to overrun them.

Despite this crucial difference, it would be a serious error to overlook the role of colonialism in contemporary fascist ideology. First, it is, more than anything, the sense of *loss* of empire that energizes fascist movements. Orban ascended to power by bemoaning the loss of Greater Hungary in Trianon. The sense that the European Union had defeated the British Empire and “occupied” the UK underlies Brexit. Erdogan in Turkey harkens back to the Ottoman days. The sense that the twilight of the American Empire is nigh was central to the rise of Donald Trump. Empire, and its loss, is central to the politics we are seeing today.

In other ways, too, empire explains the support of leaders who practice this sort of politics. As Aimé Césaire has iconically described, colonial wars alter the culture of the invading country in ways that pave the way for fascism.³⁶ It is difficult to read Discourse on Colonialism today, without thinking of the ways in which the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan have similarly paved the way for Islamophobia in the United States today.

³⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, The World and Africa, p. 4

³⁵ “The complete loss of the African colonies during and after the war created the possibility for a vague and malleable nostalgia about racial mastery. Popular novels about Africa with titles such as *Master, Come Back!* could only make sense after such a complete break.”, Timothy Snyder, Black Earth: Holocaust as History and Warning, p. 17.

³⁶ Aimé Césaire Discourse on Colonialism (New York, Monthly Review Press, 2000).

Finally, if we look at some of the countries that have proven susceptible to this kind of politics, we can see that many involve what we can think of as an internally colonized population, e.g. Black people, or Muslims, whose equality as citizens threatens the status of the dominant group. This threatened loss of status to minority groups is akin to loss of empire, to recognizing former vassal states as political equals.

My aim in this essay has been to argue for several conclusions. First, and most centrally, fascism is not an historically located concept. It is rather an ideology that we can find in many otherwise distinct circumstances and locations, arising under different historical conditions. It is a permanent temptation in societies, not a passing historical phase. Secondly, fascism is not reducible to authoritarianism, or white supremacy, or nationalism, or neo-liberalism, or patriarchy, or colonialism. It should be treated as a more fundamental concept, with these as manifestations. My arguments have been, of necessity, tentative. But if the conclusions to which they point are correct, then we cannot expect to capture fascism as an ideological construct without treating it as an independent subject matter in political philosophy. Fascism is a social kind.