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Research Report

**Do We Know What Fascists Hate? A Qualitative Evaluation of How
Theorists Understand “Enemies” in Contemporary Fascist Regimes**

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Abstract

The definition of “fascism” is in an unfortunate limbo for political theorists. For as long as critical discussion of fascism as a generic term has been in the public sphere, activists, journalists, and political theorists have decried its use as a pejorative, arguing that its purpose is usually to “give a dog a bad name” and that contemporary leftists are particularly susceptible to use the term against political opponents as an excuse to stop listening to such groups. The urge to throw out the term in light of its ever-apparent misuse is therefore tempting to many scholars. However, contemporary activists prove through their self-identification as fascists that “fascism” must be more than a term which modern leftists have been unduly resurrecting for wins in petty political debates. In a first step to attempting to discern a meaning of fascism from political theory, this research aims to put theorists in conversation with one another to find consensus in one central pillar of fascism – their identification, rhetorical opposition, and violent treatment of the “enemy” group. This paper finds that fascism can be identified as a progression through three phases of enemy creation and treatment: first, it opposes transcendental materialism found in enlightenment politics; Second, it develops a new kind of nationalism as a tool for mass mobilization, defined by a natural/historical law which demands purity in the national community and antagonizes the contaminating “antinationalists.” Third, a secondary, more active “state” is created outside the liberal democratic state through vigilante violence against the enemy class, which both actually disposes of that enemy class and legitimates the sovereignty of the fascist party. This progression of enemy creation, while intriguing, is found in application to contemporary fascists to be incredibly dependent on the health of liberalism, and thus hard to apply to petite fascists popping up today without greater cultural analysis.

Introduction

It is incredibly confusing to be an anti-fascist political theorist right now, almost eighty years out of the second World War. New petite “fascists” seem to be popping up everywhere, in places nobody expected. One prime example is the self-proclaimed “theocratic fascist [and] bestselling children’s author” Matt Walsh, known primarily for his anti-transgender rhetoric that he spouts on X (formerly Twitter) to an audience of almost 3 million followers as of 2024 (Walsh 2013). His speech has, on the surface, very little to do with the nationalist, authoritarian, draped-in-swastikas fascism people picture when they hear the term. While he is proudly American and, at the moment, obsessed with the upcoming 2024 United States presidential election, he does not mobilize his audience with any profoundly nationalist rhetoric. Outside of removing healthcare options for transgender people and advocating for government ownership of whether people can legally and socially change their gender, his political ideas find themselves expressed through an incredibly anti-authoritarian lens of stopping the “brainwashing” of children in schools, therapists’ offices, and the child welfare system (Walsh 2022, 134). His discussion of Nazism seems to start and end with a distinction between it and conservatism, which he identifies with (Walsh 2021). Yet, this is what he calls himself. A fascist.

For as long as critical discussion of fascism as a generic term has been in the public sphere, activists, journalists, and political theorists have decried its use as a pejorative. Eugen Weber argues in his 1964 book *Varieties of Fascism* that its purpose is usually to “give a dog a bad name” (9; Payne 1980, 4); that it is so loosely used that anyone who holds authority is seemingly “someone’s fascist,” to use the words of Robert Paxton (2004, 8). More recent journalists and scholars have become incredibly incensed by what they believe to be a left-wing overuse of the term, with Jonah Goldberg’s *Liberal Fascism* (2009) positing that “modern liberals and leftists act as if they know exactly what fascism is,” and use it as a weapon against anyone they don’t wish to listen to or take seriously (3-4). Our sacred Western world is simply too democratic, too safe, too free of concentration camps or ethnic persecution to have the term “fascism” cheapened by applying it in our political discourse (Daniels 2021).

The urge to throw out the term in light of its ever-apparent misuse is therefore tempting to many scholars (Allardyce 1979; Turner 1972). However, contemporary activists such as Matt Walsh prove through their self-identification as fascists that the term must be more than simply pejorative, more than a term which modern leftists have been unduly resurrecting for wins in petty political debates. Can we say with any certainty what Walsh might mean when he calls himself a “fascist,” with an understanding of the term rooted in political theory?

To answer that question, one must first find such an understanding – a task which political theorists have been “finishing” over and over again for the entirety of the post-war period to vastly differing conclusions. While a full run-down of the agreements, disagreements and outright holes in political theory concerning fascism is beyond the scope of this paper, I aim to put political theorists across post-war eras in a brief conversation with one another to find

places of agreement in one central pillar of fascism— their identification, rhetorical opposition, and violent treatment of the “enemy” group.

This paper will argue that fascism should be considered as less of an ideology and more as a playbook if it is to be considered generic; though, ideological styles will be addressed. I will find that one can discern fascism’s enemy as primarily three things, all of which are steps in a developmental order from fascist inception to action. First, fascism establishes itself as being opposed to inhuman and materialist “transcendence,” unifying its inherent anti-liberalism and anti-Marxism. Second, it develops a new kind of nationalism as a tool for mass mobilization; this nationalism is defined by a natural/historical law which demands purity in the national community and antagonizes the contaminating “antinationals.” Third, a secondary, more active “state” is created outside the liberal democratic state through vigilante violence against the enemy class, which both actually disposes of that enemy class and legitimates the sovereignty of the fascist party.

This progression of enemy creation, while intriguing, is found in application to contemporary fascists to be incredibly dependent on the health of liberalism, and thus hard to apply to petite fascists popping up today without greater cultural analysis. This presents an overall failure in even the most prominent agreements of the disparate theories of fascism: if political theorists’ work is to be useful to at least an educated portion of the population, then we must take efforts to find greater and more specific consensuses than the three which I have laid out below.

Evading mistaken identities: Fascism the playbook, not the ideology

Goldberg (2009) notes in his aforementioned book that fascism is “an academic version of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle: the more closely you study the subject, the less clearly defined it becomes” (3). Fascism can often get lost in the details. Many books concerning fascism which fall into the realm of political theory only happen to do so because they hold a short chapter titled “generic fascism,” usually to end long historical accounts of what they theorize to be the more noteworthy fascist regimes of the past. This approach of keeping historical record before creating a philosophy is one in which the most foundational theories of fascism have been pioneered; Ernst Nolte’s *Three Faces of Fascism* (1963) comes to mind in this case, where he chooses the “best known and most successful” Italian Fascism and National Socialism for his study, allowing them to “speak for themselves” through his 400 pages of raw history (22). Despite my admiration for the innovators, the historicism present in many of these early theories seems to have set a very strict precedent on how one can consider fascism’s evolution in the post-war era. In essence, the details of the past can limit many in the idea that if a regime doesn’t adopt the *particular* racial policy of the Nazis or the *particular* nationalism of the Italian Fascists, then such a regime is not truly fascist (Sternhell 1995, 5). It therefore becomes easy to argue that fascism can no longer be identified in contemporary politics, a misfortune which Henry Ashby Turner (1972) puts thusly:

It would be indeed unfortunate if, in our vigilance against a rebirth of the familiar forms of what has been thought of as fascism, we should be led to overlook the emergence of new varieties of utopian anti-modernism quite different in appearance from earlier ones. (564)

This issue is reproduced twofold when one only considers fascism as an ideology, looking not even at the actions of the aforementioned regimes but merely their platforms or intellectual culture; though, these accounts tend to appear as if they are more freed from historical superficiality. Ideological theories can often take a quite strict form – Jason Stanley’s recent *How Fascism Works* (2018) spends a great deal of time outlining the necessity of the patriarchy and anti-sexual-diversity to even contemporary fascism. However, they can also take a very loose form – Roger Griffin’s *The Nature of Fascism* (1991) is fully focused on ideological fascism, where he purports to have created a Weberian “ideal type” of fascism in calling it “palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism” (26). As they stand alone, these definitions can only be useful handbooks for the anti-fascist rhetorician, not the anti-fascist who wishes to anticipate the culture in which these ideological rhetorics could more probably arise. This is not to mention that anti-intellectualism and irrationality are, in the early stages, often the rebellious point of fascist regimes (Paxton 2004, 18; Stanley 2018, 42-43).

Instead, I agree with the Paxtonian approach – he decries the encyclopedic approach of the historicists and the “ideal type” ideological scholars such as Roger Griffin, instead opting to “watch fascism in action” (Paxton 2004, 21); he sees it in five stages which progress from one another as a sort of playbook or physical movement (Paxton 2004, 14). Though my analysis of fascist enemy treatment only has three developmental levels, I use this approach because it creates the opportunity to focus on abstracting fascism from its exemplifying regimes to *just* the correct degree. The content of ideology and policy are accounted for (as it is an oversimplification to see fascism as just a crowd-building playbook; Paxton 1998, 7), but instead of being turned into quasi-aesthetic markers of a consistent doctrine which contemporary fascisms must match to be worthy of the term, fascism’s externalities are considered as the end result of a larger evolutionary process (Delogu 2022, 45). None of what fascism explicitly identifies with is necessarily intrinsic to it, but rather only in service of fascism’s movement as a whole; as nationalism, for example, is not fascism’s ‘active ingredient’ *per se*, “but the projection of unity and identity as mythic responses to capitalist modernization” that can be achieved through nationalism (Woodley 2010, 19).

Given the rather wide agreement that, even if fascism does not exist today, fascism has always been revolutionary (Griffin 1991, 29; Sternhell 1995, 17), and therefore larger than pure rhetoric or static policy, it is puzzling why Paxton’s methodology was not reached for sooner or by more people. It is crucial to the early identification of fascism that one knows where it finds its first footing in modern culture, turning only then to fascism’s later modes of expression. I therefore begin my analysis in the next section by focusing on that initial, metapolitical enemy of fascism – the concurrent failure of modern political theories.

The enemy is our inhuman modernity – fascism’s opposition to the transcendental materialism of the Enlightenment era

It may puzzle people to see the words “anticommunism, antiliberalism, anticonservatism” at the top of Payne’s (1980) typological description of fascism (7), only to read further and see him write that fascism is not the game of political nihilists (183). As a direct successor of the destruction brought about by the first World War (Paxton 2004, 28; Nolte 1963, 5), it is easy to think that fascism was merely successful because it appealed to those who were failed materially and emotionally by all sides of current politics (Paxton 2004, 31-32) – men drawn away from their families and country lives and into the apocalyptic conditions of war. From such a disempowered state, the masses are easily moved from the existing Marxism, Conservatism, and Liberalism by a new politics of “cultural mystique” (Payne 1980, 15). Fascism, which had yet to fail them due to its youth and which promised them world domination as their birthright, must have become successful at this time because of the mere happenstance failure of the other political schools of thought. It is opposed to established -isms of the time simply because it needed to rhetorically suggest exceptionalism to gain the masses to it as a novelty (Griffin 1991, 47). I hear youthful Marxist socialists adopt this logic, believing themselves similarly exceptional, arguing that they could crush fascism by simply appealing to the masses first and with better policy during the next world crisis.

This would not be altogether incorrect, but it would be an oversimplification. The clearest and most significant area of agreement among scholars of fascism, even across eras, has to do with the culture in which fascist nebulae became stars – the failure of both liberal capitalist society and the revolutionary leftism of the inter-war period. This is not mere happenstance for fascism, as it targets the common essence of enlightenment doctrines: transcendental materialism, a complex transformation of human life and its relation to political structures. Scholars often discuss this topic in various ways (much to the confusion of the amateur scholar). I borrow the term “transcendence” from Nolte’s (1963) heavily philosophical definition of fascism as a metapolitical “resistance to transcendence” which aims to reverse societal atomization, but writers such as Hannah Arendt (1951) use the historical events of imperialism and the first world war to structurally discuss the destruction of the nation-state and its effects on the atomization of society as fascism’s catalyst. More often, scholars say fascism’s issue was with crises of modernity, industrialization, and weak liberalism (Paxton 2004, 79-81). To generalize, these accounts concern the creation of new political projects, beginning after the French Revolution, through which man is promised a fulfilled human identity, only to be denied that identity in these projects’ failures. Fascism then uses these identity-less masses of people in creating the movement’s revolutionary base.

Nolte and fascism as anti-Marxist and anti-liberal

Nolte’s overarching argument in *Three Faces of Fascism (Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche; 1963)* is only truly understandable through this core lens of transcendental materialism.

His historical account builds to a conclusion stating the “most fundamental” aspect of the fascist phenomenon – “resistance to transcendence” (429). By “transcendence” he means two things. The first is practical transcendence, defined as “the social process [...] which continually widens human relationships” abstracting them and disengaging “the individual from traditional ties and [increasing] the power of the group until it finally assails even the primordial forces of nature and history.” Theoretical transcendence, on the other hand, is “the reaching out of the mind beyond what exists and what can exist towards an absolute whole [...] applied to all that goes beyond” and disengages men from the “confines of the everyday world” (433). Simplified, Nolte calls practical transcendence the “abstraction of life,” while theoretical transcendence is the “abstraction of thought” (434).

Neither of these definitions paint a clear picture of how exactly the facts of fascism in his prior chapters should be understood as resistant to Noltean transcendence, especially when his elaborations of Marxist, Nietzschean, and Weberian philosophy seem to have little explicit relation to his discussion of the regimes at hand. Moreover, Martin Kitchen (1974) argues that Nolte’s transcendences are essentially contradictory. Fascist rhetoric may have appealed to the rural areas in speaking to their less industrial ways of life (Paxton 2004, 12; Stanley 2018, 146; Turner 1972, 556), but fascist regimes were quite practically transcendent in their nature as a “development dictatorship” seeking industrial development in preparation for imperialist war (Kitchen 1974, 141).

This so-called contradiction, while very important to more deeply understanding Nolte’s methodology, does not limit us from drawing a conclusion about the more unified aspect of fascism Nolte puts forward – the resistance to the “abstraction” common to both transcendences, which Zeev Sternhell (1995) terms fascist “antimaterialism” (8). Both theoretical and practical transcendence present the society experiencing it with an escape from the “world” or the “forces of nature and history.” History, nature, and one’s status as within the bounds of this world cease to be ends in themselves in modern enlightenment politics. Instead, it proposes transcendental materialism, where new theoretical and material realities are created for the end of eventually fulfilling human society through political projects – liberalism, for example, asserts the theoretically transcendental reality of natural rights, only to be expressed through the material creation of the democratic citizen. Nolte’s understanding of Marxism as practically transcendental in the creation of the fulfilled proletariat speaks most greatly to this meaning of abstraction.

Nolte focuses on Marx’s historical materialism. The bourgeoisie “[agglomerates] the population, centralizes means of production, and concentrates property” through its revolution of the tools of production (Marx and Engels 1848, 17). This, in turn, creates the incomplete proletariat, who lives in a world alienated from his “universality” (Nolte 1963, 436). This alienation is solved by a violent revolution allowing the now-agglomerated proletariat to acquire the means of production and attain an “abstracted” or practically transcendent existence through rightful participation in “the whole” (Nolte 1963, 435). He would “feel the sum total of social

production to be his own work [...] and which in any case he could see in its entirety” (Nolte 1963, 439), finally finding fulfillment.

It may seem to be a criticism when Marx and Engels say that the bourgeoisie's reduction of all human relations to wage labor “has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation” (1848, 15-16). However, the creation of the proletarian human being through practical transcendence is what rids society of the need for theoretically transcendent things such as religion (Nolte 1963, 440), as his forced belonging in no other group than his class by bourgeois exploitation is what compels him to “face with sober senses his real conditions of life” and seek universality through class revolution (Marx and Engels 1848, 16). The created material reality of the proletariat comes to replace all other human identity, and the fulfillment of class freedom comes to replace all other human goals.

Bourgeois society, which Nolte later identifies with liberal society (1963, 451), is, in only this respect of relying on practical transcendence to develop humanity, one and the same as the society that Marxism requires. In purposefully targeting such transcendence, fascism inevitably targets both Marxism and liberalism. Therefore, National Socialism, for example, does not contradict itself when understanding the Jewish people as being agents of both the financial aristocracy and of emancipatory politics, as what they mean by “the Jew” is the historical process itself, which unifies both (Nolte 1963, 405).

But that is only the first level on which Nolte’s account is illuminating. The second is that it also exposes the reason why fascism mimics Marxist revolutionary methods, discussed by Nolte in his initial definition of fascism as:

Anti-Marxism which seeks to destroy the enemy by the [evolution] of a radically opposed and yet related ideology and by the use of almost identical and yet typically modified methods, always, however, within the unyielding framework of national self-assertion and autonomy. (1963, 20-21)

As stated, Marxism abandons theoretical transcendence in favor of further practical transcendence – the abstraction of man from all relationships except those of his material class – to unify the masses for use in times of violent revolution. The existence and power of the proletariat as a group is dependent on the absence of non-political identities, which obscure from view the necessity of unity with his fellow proletariats. Liberal individualism and pluralism feed into these non-political identities; the visions of society as a social contract, freeing man from nature through his primary belonging in an equal and individualistic society, was the last element of obscurity between the citizen and his understanding that true freedom would come from belonging *entirely, body-and-soul* with the proletariat.

Fascism had a “horror of the so-called bourgeois, or, as Nietzsche called them, modern values: universalism, individualism, progress, natural rights, and equality” (Sternhell 1995). Fascism was also a movement of the masses, similar to Marxism, in that it wanted to mobilize the whole of the population in its ambitious revolutionary project (Paxton 2004, 43; Arendt 1951, 308). As such, if fascism wished to combat the theoretical transcendence of the dominant

liberalism, it would need to utilize mass politics in a sort of emulation of Marxism – to create an identity which promises the unification of the political citizen with the world he exists in, for which all other identities are neutralized. This is the more philosophical reasoning behind scholars such as Paxton arguing that fascist citizens, unlike those under authoritarian regimes, remain committed as their government “reduce[s] the private sphere to nothing” (2004, 217). Why should one find privacy in a society which “engages and excites” them away from their petty individualism and towards the centuries-long project of history?

Thus, an analysis of fascism from Nolte’s perspective (one re-used by each scholar if they utter or paraphrase the words “fascism is anti-modernization” or “alternative modernization”) offers more than a simple unification of what seems to otherwise characterize fascism as simply opportunistic: the opposition to both liberal and Marxist politics. What it also offers is the basis for fascism’s tendency towards a politics of the masses. Learning from Marxism, it finds that social unity, capable of mobilizing citizens under one banner, is essential to begin a revolution and create a new kind of politics.

But that raises the question, *why did prospective fascists refuse Marxism? What, to fascists, is dysfunctional about all transcendental materialism?* The answer requires a dissection of how exactly Marxism and liberalism failed the “mass man” of the inter-war period.

Why fascism targets transcendental materialism – the inhumanity of the modern citizen

The era of imperialism (which Arendt argues is from 1884-1914; 1951, 123) presented a real problem for the historical process Marxism requires for completion. Though a full reconstruction of Arendt’s argument is beyond the scope of this paper, its core commentary on the integrity in the nation-state and the liberal international system is useful for witnessing the breakdown of transcendental materialism.

After the French Revolution, no class wished to replace the aristocracy as the ruling class, and thus the modern nation-state was born; an entity which stood above class to draw collective power from the citizenship. In the realm of the heretofore politically ambivalent bourgeoisie, an “economic crisis” was occurring – the limits of the nation were simply too small for the endless expansion that the capitalists required, and their now-idle wealth was gazing upon new investments beyond the borders. What was necessary was imperialism, which, for its lack of religious or civilization-spreading goals, was distinct from colonialism (Arendt 1951, 127). Thus began the “political emancipation of the bourgeoisie,” an era of politics in which the bourgeois class, faced with the possibility of having to give up constant expansion, had to impose the law of constant economic growth “upon its home governments and to proclaim expansion to be an ultimate political goal of foreign policy” (Arendt 1951, 126).

The nation-state, the representation of political self-determination that early liberalism spearheaded, was therefore made to suffer as the private interests of bourgeois business superseded the public interest when it came to using government power. “Expansion for expansion’s sake” eroded the truth of democracy at home as the nation’s capital was stretched

across the globe, as “the nation-state is least suited for unlimited growth because the genuine consent at its base cannot be stretched indefinitely” (Arendt 1951, 126).

While Marx and Engels thought that the bourgeoisie’s international operations would “[draw] all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization” and expand the power of the collective proletariat (1848, 16), this did not actually occur. What had instead occurred was a refocusing of national politics on competition with other nations in the same manner as businessmen would compete with each other domestically,

When, in the era of imperialism, businessmen became politicians and were acclaimed as statesmen, while statesmen were taken seriously only if they talked the language of successful businessmen and "thought in continents," these private practices and devices were gradually transformed into rules and principles for the conduct of public affairs. The significant fact about this process of revaluation [...] is that it began with the application of bourgeois convictions to foreign affairs and only slowly was extended to domestic politics. (Arendt 1951, 138)

This competition was initially kept from being a decimation of the surrounding nations by what little political control nation-states retained over actors who desired “expansion for expansion’s sake,” but disintegrated as the extension of power-hungry ideals took over all politics until continental relations became “victory for one and death for the others” (Arendt 1951, 126). This externally undermined the stability of Europe’s nation-state system, but the “internal disintegration” began after WWI. Along with massive populations of refugees being left without nations to protect their supposedly “natural” rights, “whole nations” were seized by unemployment, removing entire populations from the class system (Arendt 1951, 267).

Arendt argues that democratic freedoms “may be based on the equality of all citizens before the law; yet they acquire their meaning and function organically only where the citizens belong to and are represented by groups or form a social and political hierarchy” (1951, 312). Within the borders of the nation, class was the main hierarchical organization of citizens; the breakdown of class and thus the breakdown of the party system which represented those classes (Arendt 1951, 314) eroded the truth of those freedoms as mediating group interests. But societal degradation took one step further, as out of these swaths of classless people emerged the mass man.

The characteristics of the “European mass man” are not at all like the Marxist proletariat. One would expect a mass of people, befallen with existential injustice of the failure of liberal democracy, would find their plights in common with one another and thus find a new “class” or group identity through which they could restore unity with their society – as the proletarian does when he is rid of all his outside commitments. But instead, a revolutionary class centralized on materialist identity had failed to materialize (Sternhell 1995, 54-55) – in its place were men who “[judged] themselves in terms of individual failure,” bitter individuals who felt expendable, lacked self-preservation, and no longer had any concern for the everyday troubles of their life (Arendt 1951, 315). The “structureless mass of furious individuals” instead became concerned with the projects of future millennia (Arendt 1951, 316). The problem that Marxism had failed to

anticipate was that practical transcendence had atomized man so successfully that it had even removed him from the very class which would have been his only identity in a Marxist utopia.

The new realities – the aforementioned “abstractions” of human life – created by enlightenment doctrines utilizing transcendental materialism had failed spectacularly. “Natural” rights and the legitimacy of rule by consent were found not to be natural at all, as liberalism was espoused in its theoretical transcendence, but enforced by the nation-state and easily dissolved when undermined by bourgeois intrusion in politics. The intensification of bourgeois activity was not able to produce a motivated, unified proletarian class, as Marxism proposed, but instead produced the “mass man.” In being shown that the “fulfillment of human society” has either irreversibly failed or will never organically manifest, this atomized individual is no longer “human” in the metapolitical sense – robbed of any sort of unity between political life and his own.

The basic project of fascism – passionate, powerful, perpetual humanity

It is in the above failures of the historical process – theoretical and practical transcendence – that fascism finds its initial footing. As attempts to “[assail] even the primordial forces of nature and history” both liberalism and Marxism offer transcendental abstractions of human life in favor of a greater fulfillment through political projects. For liberalism, it was the establishment of democracy, individualism, natural rights, and equality; these ideas initially justified the creation of the nation-state as protective of diverse interests utilizing the social contract, but the breakdown of the class system by bourgeois interests into an atomized society had robbed these values of their salience to the now-existent mass man. For Marxism, their transcendence was in the material identity of the proletariat, created by the failure of liberalism, which was destined to benefit from the creation of the mass man into mobilizing him for his class interests; however, the mass man, instead of being a motivated class, identified with nothing as their class relations had ceased to exist in a destabilized Europe.

But the mass politics that came as a result of this historical process would, as Marxists theorized, prove beneficial for instigating a revolution in the realm of post-enlightenment politics. Fascism, being revolutionary, thus seeks to retain the benefits of liberalism and Marxism for gathering people under the representative nation-state and creating a playbook of revolution under a single identity. Just as Marxism is a revision of liberal capitalism, fascism is a revision of Marxism (Sternhell 1995). It establishes what Roger Eatwell (1996) identifies as the fascist “Third Way,” being hostile to both doctrines, but drawing on both; “it syncretically seeks to draw on what is seen as the best of capitalism (the naturalness of private property, its dynamism) and socialism (its concern for the community and welfare)” (314).

What fascism offers in its revision is what it sees as the anti-abstraction of the human condition. As Sternhell outlines in his account of Georges Sorel’s revision of Marxism (which then became the intellectual basis of much of fascism), “since it appeared that the masses could not be activated by reason [...] one had artificially to create a process of rebellion of a new type, suitably adapted to the new social conditions” (1995, 55). What these new social conditions

required – elaborated further in the next section – was emotional, passionate, and re-invigorating to the directionless masses (Woodley 2010, 31): nationalistic, natural, or historical myths aimed at establishing a pre-existing or biological common identity of the mass citizens (Weber 1964, 33). What’s most important about this aspect is that it does not stabilize the atomized agitations of society, the crisis in which fascism becomes the last recourse (Weber 1964, 36). On the contrary, it revises Marxism into a more agitated form purely to realize revolution.

This characterization of the basis of the fascist enemy in the perils of modern transcendence and alienation establishes two key points. (1) Fascism is not *pure* opportunism, nor is it nihilistically destructive of modernism. Instead, it rejects the transcendental materialism of prior political philosophies, taking issue with its “abstraction,” the creation of political identities only to be fulfilled by particular political organization such as democracy or proletariat rule. (2) Fascism, despite being against these philosophies, owes its existence and preliminary success to both. The creation of motionless mass politics and inhuman societies may be approached with pessimism or despair, but fascists do not truly wish to revert to pre-enlightenment politics else they lose the very preconditions which granted them such a welcoming base in the first place (thus justifying the inclusion of “anti-conservatism” in Payne’s fascist Matrix; Payne 1980, 7; Woodley 2010, 24). It is in that sense that “fascism is not 'resistance to transcendence' (pace Nolte, 1965) but the result of succumbing to a perverted and peculiarly modern form of it” (Griffin 1991, 188), an opposition to the alienating philosophy of the movements while borrowing their society- and power-building playbooks.

This section of the paper has been given so much attention because fascism’s conflict with modern politics is perhaps the only near-universally consistent point among theories of fascism. The next section will be less philosophically complex, for the foundation here of fascism as anti-transcendental materialism begins the search for a new fascist identity which could be sold to identity-less masses.

The enemy is unnatural and undemocratic – developing subservience to natural law and accelerationism

If taking control of history and nature for transcendental purposes is inhuman, then fascism had to re-instill in the masses an idea of human nature, novel to suit the modern age, yet applicable to a post-democratic, post-positivist, and post-industrial public. This quality must not be a future result of a political project, as natural rights and proletarianism are in liberalism and Marxism, respectively; rather, it must have always existed. As Payne (1980) writes,

Fascists hoped to recover the true sense of the natural and of human nature [...] on a higher and firmer plane than the reductionist culture of modern materialism and prudential egotism had yet achieved. (11)

Given that fascism’s opposition to the enlightenment concerned the effects of its philosophy – its depression of the masses, making them individuals who are inactive in every way, even self-serving – fascism’s new ideology could not produce these same effects. It had to create an

eternal revolution, a continuous effort towards a new world, as achieving the eventual end of their revolution would mean re-instilling political stability in the world; as Paxton (2004) and Griffin (1991) argue, this political stability allows for the resurgence of the private sphere (1991, 40; 2004, 148), subjecting citizens to the same emptiness of private interests and petty individualism which had ejected them from political action in the first place. As such, the new ideology could not be a stabilizing force or else it threatens the body-and-soul unity between man and politics that Marxism and Liberalism had failed to achieve. Moreover, it must operationalize the “overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions” felt by the mass man (Paxton 2004, 219), creating a picture of the world and of themselves which can be felt, seen, and acted upon. There are select few ideologies which could achieve this communal unity without the disempowering comfort which is antithetical to the eternal revolution fascism requires, and thus fascism employs no singular ideology, but an ideological style which this section will outline.

As fascism borrowed from the form of enlightenment culture in its initial formation, so too did fascism borrow from its ways of asserting the character of the “natural” world. Attraction to positivism, scientism, and rationalism, while being rejected in fascist philosophy and in general by pre-fascist nations, were adopted stylistically by fascist rhetoricians especially in regards to race science and eugenicism (Payne 1980, 39-40; Arendt 1951, 347). The economic sphere also provided a new “natural” stage by which one could triumph or fall into subservience. Laissez-faire liberal economics had allowed for essentially the full control of entire continents with the advent of imperialism, as above, proving that one could dominate the world through economic power (Paxton 2004, 142).

These are red herrings. Scientific rhetoric and economic power are merely tools used by fascism in an effort separate from their function in modern politics – rather, fascism has a more encompassing goal in mind. Fascism uses a novel conception of history to view themselves as history-creators, a law of movement to which all is subservient. Made tangible, this takes the form of what Griffin (1991) calls “palingenetic myths” (32-33), which, when combined with an idea of the ‘native’ nation as salvation against corruption, become the exclusive, totalitarian, and natural law-based fascism. Science, the economy, and everything else are made to serve this worldview at the cost of liberal individualism.

Making History and Palingenesis into identity - new natural laws

As revolutionaries of a faceless mass, fascist myth had to provide both collective identity and justification for continuous revolution in their new rhetoric, for which a basic reimagining of history was necessary. Weber’s (1964) construction of fascism’s differentiation from conservative ideologies like traditional nationalism is particularly useful here.

But history, when it becomes the only concrete absolute capable of providing both definition and justification [of collective, national, or racial evolution and change], is no longer referred to (as in Nationalism) in an attempt to be true to it, but envisaged as a continuous creation, [it becomes fascist]. (34)

This, according to Weber, is what not only allows for violence to find its home in fascist action as it does in other political organizations, but sees it as the absolute means to the absolute end – violence is the “highest or, at any rate, most obvious form of the social energy and the will to power which *create* history” (1964, 34).

The fascists’ issue with Liberalism and Marxism presented above was one of alienated humanity – both doctrines’ histories are made to serve a project of identity fulfillment, but if they are to fail, this fulfillment never comes to pass. Similar to conservatism, if a return to a point in history through emulation isn’t possible, this alienation is reproduced. But if fascism can create or appropriate an identity of the masses which is fully adherent to history “as a continuous creation,” where the citizen is fully involved in his identity regardless of his place in history, they can escape this alienation and find revolutionary justification for anything standing in the way of historical destiny. This was noted by Arendt (1951) in her understanding of the Nazis’ concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the precursor to the later concept of the destined-for-domination “Aryan” race, where “its establishment did not have to wait for some future time and did not depend upon objective conditions: it could be realized immediately in the fictitious world of the movement” (361). In the fascists’ continuous history is continuous identity, and in that identity is an inherent righteousness to express violent, unifying, creative social energy. It is merely *what* history is creating and *who* history is naming the protagonist that differs in the organization of different fascisms.

The “fictitious world” is the tangible operationalization of the continuous history (Arendt 1951, 191), where before it was merely a feeling of ruin and immanence in a decadent society. Griffin has defined this as the *palingenetic myth*, a decidedly revolutionary idea in which

The perceived corruption, anarchy, oppressiveness, iniquities or decadence of the present, rather than being seen as immutable and thus to be endured indefinitely with stoic courage or bleak pessimism, are perceived as having reached their peak and interpreted as the sure sign that one era is nearing its end and a new order is about to emerge. (35)

The myth is a message of hope to the masses, that this encapsulating suffering is almost over (Griffin 1991, 193); moreover, a kind of hero will emerge to facilitate this upheaval, often violently (Griffin 1991, 35). The above definition needs to be somewhat vague in order to encapsulate the reality that fascism, in its reliance on the feelings of the masses, seeks out “in each national culture those themes that are best capable of mobilizing a mass movement of regeneration, unification, and purity” (Paxton 2004, 40). This is combined with what Griffin calls *ultra-nationalism*, which, contrary to its name, is not nationalism as Weber referenced above, but rather

tends to be associated with a concept of the nation as a 'higher' racial, historical, spiritual or organic reality which embraces all the members of the ethical community who belong to it. Such a community is regarded by its protagonists as a natural order which can be contaminated by [...] any number of 'alien' forces allegedly unleashed by 'modern' society. (1991, 37)

Though Marxism contains its own palingenetic myth in the revolt of the proletariat, it is in these “higher” racial and historical realities that fascism can blend the progress of history with the more immediate identities of the masses. Functionally, this produced a kind of politics felt “sensually,” where unity of the group is not felt in the practically transcendental sense of a sobering acknowledgement of one’s situation as a result of materialist society, but rather in the basic warmth of realizing one’s belonging to a victorious family (Paxton 2004, 17).

But Griffin’s characterization of nationalism is not fully complete, as it fails to convey why these ‘higher’ identities come to be conceptualized as intertwined with the nation. Borrowing from Arendt, Daniel Woodley (2010) points out the necessity of the recent post-WWI refugee crisis to the “higher” identity of the nation’s new masses. The incredible numbers of stateless people “without rights in their adoptive countries” presented a threat to the sovereignty of states over nationality and expulsion, as well as proof that the natural rights of man were in fact products of national will (Woodley 176). Developing in this context, fascist nationalism, by insisting on the primordial, exclusive essence of the nation, and by subsuming the individual within a fictive ethnic category from which all rights are derived, [...] reveals the contradiction implicit in the doctrine of national sovereignty between the natural ‘rights of man’ (the inalienable rights belonging to individuals by virtue of their equal status as humans), and the positive rights of citizens (the legal rights conferred on individuals by virtue of their equal ‘native’ status). [...] The rights of humans are always defined in a positive sense as the rights of native citizens, which are imperilled where the integrity of nationhood is placed in question. (2010, 176-177)

Unlike in liberalism, the nation only becomes fully protective of the basic rights of its citizens when it is defined on this higher plane of race or otherwise born status; a status which must continually be enforced at the cost of individualism and pluralism (Woodley 2010, 177). In this sense, it provides the perfect vehicle for unity between historical progress and identity so long as there are perceived efforts to undermine its integrity to which it can be hostile – the nation itself is a project of eternal maintenance which can only be complete if all outside the nation are completely annihilated.

Fascist history is, in sum, the creation and eternal maintenance of a “correct” world order after a period of decadent corruption (the *what* of history) by a slumbering and self-protective nation of heroes united by an immutable quality (the *who*). This conception of history as a continuous creation forms the basic idea of a new natural law, termed by Arendt as the “law of movement,” to which all laws become subservient under fascist rule (1951, 463). Its goal is to “make it possible for the forces of nature or history to race freely through mankind, unhindered by any spontaneous human action” (Arendt 1951, 465). To argue that any value lies above this, to say that any societal story of a different, possibly more pluralist configuration would be beneficial would contribute to this “spontaneous human action” – permitting disunity within a conception of history where “unity alone can save” (Weber 1964, 36). As such, anyone standing in the way of this momentum is like anyone else breaking sacred law: criminal, unenlightened, and worthy of execution.

Fascism can find in this distinction between their natural movement towards destiny and their enemy's unnatural movement against them a more concrete idea of "the" enemy, most stereotypically placing it as a question of race. As above, suspicion of democracy's welcoming of immigrants, new ideologies, and innate abnormalities had shaped much of Nazism's biologically-phrased approach to how other races threatened the *Volk* (Paxton 2004, 37); and how the project of history was to utilize economic and military power to "express their people's renewed unity and vitality at home and on the world stage" (Paxton 2004, 142). History was, to a Nazi, the creation of situations in which Darwinian "survival of the fittest" produced the *obvious* answer that they were the fittest – the terroristic removal of internal threats to unified national power (disabled people, socialists, hidden Jewish people, etc.) and the attack on those whom they believed were keeping them from external imperialist power, the conspiratorially-created international Jew (Woodley 2010, 120).

Understood as a whole, the alienation problem caused by enlightenment politics is remedied, both tangibly and emotionally, by understanding the born nation as the protagonists pushing history forward, towards the endless annihilation of the forces threatening national integrity, past the false protections of individualism and pluralism. Any and all movement to dominate the antinationals, whether that is on the small scale of vigilante violence or on the larger scale of total extermination, is therefore felt as a national victory even in the midst of greater failures, such as being on the losing end of a war (Arendt 1951, 422). Where victory for the proletariat could only come after the completion of class revolution, facilitating the movement of history through one's unified nation is a continuous project offering continuous victory.

Representative government is racial - the perversion of democratic equality

Something worth a brief note is the specific effect of this all-encompassing law on the flow of power through formerly liberal state institutions, such as democracy. As all becomes subservient to this natural progression of history, the 'higher' nation's feelings towards representative government change to fit this new world as well. One would think, given how fascism is frequently grouped in with tyranny and despotism, that nothing in fascism is particularly democratic. But as fascism identifies the masses with a new kind of nationalism which ensures their inalienable rights through totalitarian "protection" of the nation's essential qualities, it provides a perverted version of the equal right to self-government, a sort of "true democracy" (Stanley 2018, 31).

Weber (1964) discusses the fascist institution of the leader and "elitist democracy" (38), where the fascist leader becomes "the emanation of his people" (35). The push of history does not conceptualize any kind of individualism among the winning nation, and thus the leader rules not by mediating conflicting interests as a past parliamentarian would, but through a kind of mystical *charisma*, a "status as the incarnation of the people's will and the bearer of the people's destiny" (Paxton 2004, 126; Payne 1980, 97). The comparisons to religious leadership are not lost here, where this primordial knowledge of the people's will and the interests of the "eternal

nation” place him as a sort of prophet of historical destiny. This creates a feedback loop in the actions of the leader and the will of the people, where “without him they would lack external representation and remain an amorphous horde; without the masses the leader is a nonentity” (Arendt 1951, 325). Fascism achieves, through this sensual connection of embodied masses, more than liberal democracy ever could – direct democracy (Weber 1964, 38). This is why the fascist leader must rise to power democratically, and only dismiss the old incarnation of democracy after his election.

What also emerged in parallel to new conceptions of democracy was a new equality – a “higher, deeper, more intimate and definable equality which arises between leader and led from [...] the absolute certainty that both sides carry out their duties for the common good” (Weber 1964, 40). In being part of an elite national group, unified in their pursuits entirely by the political institution of the leader, men of different classes did not have to view each other as competition, but as correctly-placed necessary parts to the pursuit of history.

Anyone of the now-defined enemy class – that is, anyone outside the born nation – who makes his way into power is not only in violation of natural law in seizing power from those responsible for history, but this power is also illegitimate in their conception of representative politics. This is especially true when it comes to international intervention in the politics of the home nation, as the treaties after WWI did. Democratic anxieties of the dangers of free individualism and immigration on the integrity of democracy, which existed prior to the institution of fascism (Paxton 2004, 35), are thus twisted in the fascist conception of the nation. Challenging the power of the established leader, who charismatically represents all in the born nation, is taken as proof that one is not of that nation, forcing anyone who dissents to also relinquish their right to representation, lacking valid citizenship.

In combination...

The fascist’s enemy now emerges in a slightly better picture than the mere fog that was “modernization.” In creating an absolute and perpetual goal for the new nation united by born identity, it finds all that stands against this goal in violation of natural law. A specificity emerges from the necessity of nationalism and anti-individualism in fascism, in that immigrants or refugees, international business enterprises, subcultures, and religions which cannot unify with the fascists’ new historical destiny become the most obvious primary enemies.

But this identity is still incredibly wide. Fascism’s unification of a national identity is almost entirely emotional, and its consent to political party action entirely sensual. The specifics of who is excluded from the project of history which this ‘higher’ identity is attached to can be entirely false or conspiratorial – “if one had been asked around 1900 to identify the European nation where the menace of anti-Semitism seemed most acute, who would have chosen Germany?” (Paxton 1980, 76) – so long as it satisfactorily produces movement towards greater integrity of the homogenous nation. When successful against these initially identified enemies, fascism can evolve it or choose a new group, for “if it is the law of history that in a class struggle certain classes “wither away,” it would mean the end of human history itself if rudimentary new

classes did not form, so that they in turn could "wither away" under the hands of totalitarian rulers" (Arendt 1951, 464). Where before, the enemy was the entire sociopolitical oeuvre, now it's anyone's guess; but an educated guesser should first protect the multi-faceted "newcomer," whether it be the new immigrant or the native but anomalous citizen.

The enemy's body is our proof – solidifying the enemy and the new state through violence

The above ideology, where all is made subservient to the maintenance of history's winning nation, presents two sides of the same coin. On one hand, liberalism and its institutions must fall in order to preserve the unity of the national identity from the corrupting perils of pluralism, and on the other, the enemies within the nation presented immediate threats which needed violent disposal. Violence, therefore, matched this dual nature with its own simple dual purpose. In "criminalizing" the non-national internal enemies under the new natural law developed above, fascism uses violence, on one hand, to dispose of such enemies and create a purer nation, and on the other, upset the monopoly over legal violence which liberal governments hold (Woodley 2010, 130). The former aspect of purity has already been discussed above as an empowering eternal maintenance of a national historical project, but a brief note on the latter is worth elaboration.

Another problem with an equivalence between fascism and tyranny is the aspect of "lawlessness" – because fascism uses widespread government violence when it finds its way into power, such violence is understood to be outside of law. This, according to Arendt, cannot be further from the truth. The law of movement, as seen above, is as valid a law within the fascist nation as any liberal constitution. Fascism merely distorts the legal process, making

Guilt and innocence [into] senseless notions; "guilty" is he who stands in the way of the natural or historical process which has passed judgment over "inferior races," over individuals "unfit to live," over "dying classes and decadent peoples." (Arendt 1951, 465)

The condemnation of the enemy into oblivion (Weber 1964, 37), is "not really murder but [...] a death sentence pronounced by some higher tribunal" (Arendt 1951, 465). Being fully adherent to the law of movement in the fact that it comprises the basis of fascist identity, those of the fascist nation perceive violence in its name to be lawful.

Liberal pluralism, which permits "enemies of the nation" to remain in the nation-state and does not recognize the law of movement, thus uses its prerogative over violence by rule of law ineptly. As such, when fascists engage in vigilante violence before their rise from party to government, it sent a coded message to all who felt in alliance with the fascist nation "that only the fascists were tough enough to save the nation from antinational terrorists" (Paxton 2004, 84). Fascist violence thus symbolizes a first step in supplanting the sovereignty of the liberal state over law and order with its own second state being developed on the party level. It demonstrates to the people visually and viscerally who the "antinationalists" are, and presents the fascists as a more active political organization than liberalism could ever be. This is directly in line with the

fascist tendency described by scholars as the dual state (Paxton 2004, 121), a reproduction of liberal institutions within the party organization to “give the impression that all elements of society are embodied in their ranks” (Arendt 1951, 371).

A concise summary

I hope that my treatment of political theory concerning fascism has summarized and synthesized enough to make fascism somewhat understandable as a movement, despite my abstraction of many of these philosophers' ideas from their texts' grounding in history. Combining all I have walked through above, fascism's evolving relationship to its enemy can be defined as such:

(1) Fascism is a movement only made conceivable by the particular failures of Liberalism and Marxism in detaching projects of human fulfillment from the individual. Fascism opposes these ideas for such detachment, but benefits from the materialist gains made by such movements in producing mass politics, methods of designing “natural” hierarchies through economic power, and creating a basis for revolutionary violence.

(2) It mobilizes directionless masses utilizing a new kind of national identity which is involved in a continuous historical movement (ensuring the success of the “naturally dominant” race, keeping the cultural purity of the nation, etc.), installing a leader to emotionally and spiritually embody the masses in a perversion of representative politics. Enemies are ejected from this new nation, and those enemies in power are viewed as illegitimate and criminal for obstructing national destiny from “outside” the sovereign nation.

(3) Fascism then uses vigilante violence against the enemy to prove its sovereignty and physical dominance over the slow and uncommitted liberal democracy, while also indulging in its therapeutic quality as a win felt among all inhabitants of the winning identity.

Can we see the fascists of today? A case study of the Patriot Front

To answer the question this discussion began with, and to evaluate the usefulness of the above summary, this paper concludes with a case study of contemporary fascists. The Patriot Front is a self-identified fascist group operating out of the United States (ADL 2024), who the Anti-Defamation League defines as a heavily patriotic, nationalist white supremacist organization with ties to the openly antisemitic and also openly fascist Vanguard America. The latter group was suspected of being responsible for the killing of a counter-protester in 2017's Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia (Hatewatch 2017), causing the Patriot Front to split from it and form a new entity (SPLC n.d). Their most recent appearance was on the streets of Nashville shortly after the Fourth of July, holding augmented American flags displaying *fasces* (the original fascist symbol) and chanting “deportation saves the nation” and “Sieg heil” (Yan 2024).

In reading their manifesto (Patriot Front n.d), this paper will analyze their rhetoric for the essences of fascism identified above. To state a limitation, I recognize that I seem as though I am

committing this analysis to the same problem mentioned in the second section, where I utilize the above summary to judge a static point of a fascist group – a manifesto – rather than viewing such group “in motion” through its organizational development. A more robust analysis with greater investigative merit would trace these new fascists from their earliest statements to their most recent activity. However, such a broad analysis is beyond the scope of this short paper, especially in its creation of new questions – such as whether outside interpretation of inner-community discussions are correct given the overwhelming amount of slang in contemporary alt-right communities (Al Jazeera 2017), or whether violent activity is truly attributable to these groups even after they disown violent actors (Moyer and Bever 2017). As such, this analysis focuses on something made for outside interpretation, understanding its limits.

Fascism as anti-enlightenment politics

This manifesto is rich with what has been identified above as the feeling of alienation caused by modern political-economic organizations. To the Patriot Front, America “stands at the crossroads of an era” where civilization is “truly and utterly detached from nature.” Under the header “AMERICA IS DEAD, LONG LIVE AMERICA” lies their more specific views.

They first recognize that America is beholden to economic forces rather than cultural or modern. America has become “little more than an economic zone in which the dollar is used” where “culture no longer exists due to internationalized migration. A powerful morality no longer exists due to the steady erosion of the history of the nation.” As such, the people of America have found “artificial” identities:

Instead of identifying with a natural classification such as family, community, nation, or race, one will identify with a corporate brand, a materialistic political viewpoint, or a commercialized facet of culture. This very dangerous progression has these artificial identities provide the most assured way to strip the nation of liberty. Tyranny seeks to extend from the body, to the mind, and ultimately the spirit. To destroy the nature of man governed by the family, community, and nation, and give it to the boss, the politician, and the celebrity.

They emphatically denounce the world in which man defines the laws of nature, calling it “nightmarish” and recognizing that this force of modernity has created masses, “the thousand muttering tones of our people.”

This is incredibly evocative of the pain of the mass man as produced by modern materialism, a being whose main experience of the world is a detached, isolated existence (Arendt 1951, 217). They view the state, governed by a false mastery over the forces of nature and history, as in the middle of devouring itself. From this, they argue, they can save America.

Fascism as progress-minded national purity

How they define America is where one can observe the most congruence with fascism as a national project of continuing history’s destiny. The origin of their white supremacy comes from an identification of white men as a conquering class proven through the establishment of

America in colonial history – “yet against the harsh life on the frontier and the common enemy in the strange and unexplored reaches of America yet to be touched by civilization, they found a common cause and a common identity as Americans.” Their mission, therefore, is to return to the “traditions and virtues of our forefathers” and reignite their spirits as generational fighters for their descendants’ peace. “To be an American is to realize this identity and take up the national struggle upon one’s shoulders,” and to validate the American tradition of “revolution.”

Today, Americans are “on the threshold of becoming a conquered people” by those who have claimed American citizenship while not being of the American blood-identity. “Collective liberty” can only be brought about by the unity of state and the nation, and membership in such nation is only afforded to those of “the founding stock of our people” – “where one state exists over many nations, tyranny reigns. Where one nation exists under many states, chaos rules. Where one nation exists alongside one state, sovereign liberty prospers.” Thus, one may exist as an individual, but this must never be an existence against the group.

To the Patriot Front as to the essence of fascism described in the second phase, identity as Americans is intertwined with a tradition of revolution against invaders into national sovereignty, or in other words, their history is a continuous project of revolution. Being in a time of crisis, they purpose collective action at the cost of individualism and through the vehicle of nation-state unity. Combined with their idea of a pure nation as the only protection of true liberty from the forces which atomize us, this manifesto presents an almost perfect reconstruction of what political theorists understood about fascist identity above.

Fascism as a demonstrative capacity for state-building

In this case, one finds very little, possibly due to the fact that this manifesto seems to be written provocatively, where the specificities of how a new state will be formed would bore someone into clicking away. Furthermore, the usefulness of fascist violence in creating a second state was not seen in slogans, but, as the subtitle of this section suggests, is an active demonstration. What seems to be most evocative of this phase is their assurance to the reader that “we will readily take up the mantle of every untended duty and responsibility of the State. We will surpass its role in fulfilling the needs of the nation it has incrementally left behind.” The suggestion of a full takeover of the state does suggest it holds the same fascist aspirations to state totalitarianism. However, this phase’s otherwise lack of presence in the manifesto suggests that state-building is not of primary concern.

Concluding the anti-fascists’ new problem: fascism as endemic to liberal democracy

It *seems* from the above analysis that fascism does in fact still exist and is somewhat consistent with a picture of fascism that can be illuminated through study of political theory. But this summary of fascism as beginning its enemy-building and concurrent self-definition in the ruins of liberalism and Marxism, if it is taken in application as proving the continued existence of fascism, assumes that the same crisis of liberal materialism is reoccurring in the present day. Whether or not that is the case is beyond the scope of this paper, but that uncertainty is what is

keeping this paper from concluding that a survey of political theory concerning fascism will produce any certainty on what fascism truly is.

Moreover, this uncertainty is an existential crisis for the believers in liberal democracy. If fascism were to be eternally endemic to liberal democracy, then is there a modification of liberalism in which societies built on it can be immunized from fascism? Patrick Deneen in his book *Why Liberalism Failed* (2018) thinks not, for his takeaway is that, in succeeding as a political ecosystem (4-5), it “generates endemic pathologies more rapidly and pervasively than it is able to produce Band-aids and veils to cover them” (179). The same alienation from familial and cultural ties is described by Deneen as a process happening today, where, he argues, liberalism forces us to view social bonds not governed by consent as “unfree” (Deneen 2018, 188-191). Similarly, Stanley (2018) articulates that the liberal tendency to allow free expression of ideas has allowed the conspiratorial myths of fascists to permeate political discussion (66-70). Though we can combat fascist constructions of nations as they come, though we can find ways to placate the masses that do not lead them towards helplessly revolutionary perspectives on basic natural law, these second- and third-stage solutions do not satisfy the anti-fascist who wishes to completely eradicate this political virus from liberal democracy.

I find no steadfast solution in the political theory presented above. In sum, while a seemingly tangible progression of how fascism finds and treats its enemy can be discerned from political theory concerning fascism as it is manifested across eras, it fails in application. It suggests, through aesthetic comparison, that fascism can still exist today, but the lack of clarity on whether we are existing in a similar crisis of transcendental materialism in modern politics is halting any hope of truly contradiction-free application. In future studies, greater analysis and comparison of political theory to manifestations of fascism in historical and contemporary contexts, as well as further inquiry into the current health of liberalism, can help clear this fog more adeptly than this paper has done at present.

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