

# The Unquiet Dead

Anarchism, Fascism,  
and Mythology

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1. Fascist Ideology in Germany and Further



“In Nazi Germany, questioning the validity of racism and antisemitism... was like questioning the existence of the world.”

— Hannah Arendt

The emotional background of fascism is one of failed dreams. For Germany, long a feudal collection of principalities struggling towards cultural and political unity, these dreams were winning the First World War and, after its defeat, redemption through the Weimar Republic. Unification being a social process rather than a matter of political decree, Germany found the Weimar Republic a disappointment. As George Mosse observes,

Experiences rarely, if ever, turn out as anticipated, and this is especially true if the anticipation has gone on for a long time. For many German thinkers the anticipation of unity had grown to almost messianic dimensions, and the confrontation with Bismarck's bloodless *Realpolitik* was a tremendous disappointment. At first, the new Reich was greeted with great enthusiasm. But the kind of enthusiasm it received is more properly reserved for religious experiences, not political ones, and the business of government is hardly designed to produce a continuing state of ecstasy.

Modernity and its corresponding alienation played just as large a role in the turn towards fascism as these failed political solutions. "...[M]any turned from rational solutions to their problems and instead delved into their own emotional depths. The longing for self-identification, the individual's desire to fulfill his capacities, ironically heightened by the process of alienation, was accompanied by the contradictory urge to belong to something greater than oneself, a striving that inevitably circumscribed the individual's independence." These existential problems were very real, but the Volkische<sup>a</sup> tendency they generated represented a flight from them rather than a tangible solution to them. "An ideology that was only vaguely relevant to the real problems facing the German people ultimately became normative for the solutions to those problems" —that is, the broadening of their long-nurtured dream of racial and cultural superiority. They at last found the unity they sought in hatred. This pattern repeats itself today, as right-wing populist rhetoric calls for the expulsion of immigrants rather than labor rights for all; it is the nature, I say advisedly, of the beast.

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a "Populist", roughly. I preserve the German to distinguish this particular movement from other populist movements.

The Volkische ideology is essentialist. It is reminiscent of Lamarckian biology, a pseudo-science which argues that biological shifts not only occur in response to environments, but that habits, lifeways, can be physically as well as culturally inherited. The Volkische believers elevated this theory to a moral precept: for an individual to be “rooted” in their landscape meant that they were correctly connected to and expressing the cosmic life force of their Volk in their lifestyle, actions, and way of thinking. This viewpoint continues to hold currency in many other cultural contexts, including among many who neither view themselves as racist nor hold the social power necessary to actually be racist. In the manifestation most difficult to dismiss, many indigenous people express a sense of connection to the land, of an inherent need to practice the lifeways that have been frequently denied to them by occupiers. These expressions—frequently part of a resistance culture I honor—are sometimes flavored by essentialism, though one not typically based in the sort of power that makes oppression on its basis possible. I find this tendency neither possible to fully support nor to condemn, and explore its particularities in later sections. However, those whose race has been endowed with social power have very often weaponized it for destructive purposes. This is the most successful possible outcome for all essentialist projects in a world woven through by power dynamics. That fact makes essentialism itself the enemy, not only racism.

While he was not formally connected to the Volkische movement, Richard Walther Darré popularized the phrase “blood and soil” as a means of summing up the push for natural renewal via the Volkische mindset.<sup>b</sup> I also find this a useful shorthand for Volkische thinking as the basis for National Socialism: the German people, defined not by citizenship, nor by residence in Germany, but by *blood*, were connected to the *land*; they deserved all of their land, or even more of it, for “living space”, and would accomplish that goal by both “purifying” their blood and spilling that of others. It is both the importance of blood as a means of legitimizing residency and belonging, and its relationship to the land that I find essentialist.

Here I will mainly discuss the evolution of German fascist ideology from the Volkische movement, with a short detour into fascist Italy’s race-thinking to highlight commonalities and difference in fascist ideology. I will discuss Italian fascism in more specific detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>b</sup> While Darré initially found favor within National Socialist administration, he was “gradually marginalized from power. His schemes were not only utopian, but conflicted with the massive industrialization demanded by the Nazi war machine.”

## context

The German soil was made ready for fascism by economic downturn and the failure of the Left to fully seize its opportunities. By the end of World War I, the Empire was replaced by the Weimar Republic and hundreds of thousands of civilians had starved. Both the economy and general morale were at incredible lows. Many Germans, especially those returning home from war, felt betrayed by the new government that ended the war. Their heroic war, a war that should have proven the superiority of the Volk, had ended badly—they needed someone to blame, and they needed another chance to prove themselves. Meanwhile, as the economy worsened and the middle and upper classes turned right, the working class turned left. A revolutionary wave was sweeping Europe in response to the Russian revolution, and Germany was deeply affected. A myth spread that German revolutionary forces had attacked the German army from the rear. Now known as the “Stab them in the back” legend, this myth has been debunked, but was a substantial source of paranoia and antagonism at the time. The real story of the Left’s defeat is more typically depressing.

Huge strikes broke out in 1918, and Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Leibknecht formed the Spartacus League out of the Social Democrat Party in response to this energy. In November of 1918, several military ships mutinied. When their crews were arrested, thousands of protestors came out in solidarity with them. After these protestors were fired upon by the military, the protest turned into a large-scale revolt; several cities were taken by mutinied soldiers and striking workers. A Soviet Republic was established in Munich, led by socialists and anarchists. As the revolt continued to spread and the leaders of component countries of the Empire began abdicating, the revolution was co-opted by the Social Democrats, who began making decisions contrary to revolutionary goals. The Spartacus League and the KPD at large resisted this in the January Revolt of 1919, but were crushed by the Free Corps, “troops who had refused to demobilize after the war and who became attracted to Volkish ideals.” Originally the Kaiser’s tool for attacking revolutionaries, these troops were now deployed by the SPD against their former comrades. Around a thousand supporters of the Soviet Republic were killed. Rosa Luxemburg’s body was dumped in a river; Karl Leibknecht was delivered to a morgue. Other revolts and strikes followed, but the end was in sight.

The German Revolution ended in April 1919 when the Weimar Republic was officially established. Although many of the revolutionaries were inspired by Communist, socialist, and anarchist ideas, the SPD instead formed a democratic republic, at least officially in an attempt to avoid civil war between the German Right and Left. This concession proved to be of dubious value; a large part of the bourgeoisie entered the Weimar Republic unwilling to participate in democracy. They believed the political parties only served to divide the Volk; as, by this point, the Volk was the primary ideal for the German Right. As we shall see throughout this text, fascist reaction nearly always takes place upon the failure of the revolutionary Left to fully realize their ideals.

The reconstituted conservative party of the 1920s, the DNVP, quickly became the dominant party in the Reichstag. Volkische ideology and anti-Semitism were central. “By the 1920s the Jew had become a principal figure in Volkish ideology and in much of conservative thought both inside and outside the DNVP, and was absolutely essential to the endurance of the ideology.” By the 1920s, kids were playing Aryans and Jews as, in other times and places, they play cops and robbers, or cowboys and Indians.

## **I. The Volk: blood and soil**

*Volk* is the German word for “people”; it came to represent the true, common German, who lived in a rural environment and embodied the virtues of the land. It refers not simply to a collection of bodies, but to the essential spirit of a people—what makes Germans German. The Volkische movement that existed during the seventy years before the Nazi party took power in Germany prepared the way for it, created the social and philosophical conditions necessary for National Socialism to find such general acceptance—and, later, for the justification of its most vicious policies. This philosophy, one of going back to the land, of restoring the natural correspondence between the German people and their surroundings—and, later, of ridding the land of its parasitic modernist invaders—is deeply essentialist. It is based in romanticism and nostalgia, and in the myth of eternal return and rebirth so important to fascism. Without its felt justification in nature, however, it would have few of its teeth.

The philosophy began innocently enough with Johann von Herder, an early German Romantic philosopher who wrote in the late 18th century. He theorized that each culture shaped the character of its Volk; a multiculturalist, he did not think any Volk was superior to any other. He further theorized

the existence of “the people,” a central Enlightenment concept, as opposed to the old framework of the masses vs. the aristocracy, and affirmed the importance of national identity. At first, his ideas led to a mere affirmation and celebration of German culture; for instance, the Brothers Grimm were inspired by his writing to collect their “essentially German” folktales. Later, more mystic romantics drew from his ideas to try to solve social problems; they believed one could alleviate the individual’s sense of modern alienation by accessing a sense of shared, cosmic life energy that flowed from nature, through the Volk, into the individual. George Mosse explains:

The human soul could be in rapport with nature since it too was endowed with a soul. Every individual could therefore find an inner correspondence with nature, a correspondence which he shared with his Volk. In this way the individual linked himself with every other member of the Volk in a common feeling of belonging, in a shared emotional experience. Yet, after all, the Volk did not have universal dimensions, but was linked to a particular national unit. Not all of nature, therefore, but only its regional manifestations gave the Volk its character, potential, and unity. Nature was defined as landscape: those features of the environment peculiar and familiar to the members of one Volk and alien to all others. ...The landscape thus became a vital part of the definition of the Volk through which it retained continuous contact with the life spirit of the transcendent cosmos. In this respect the desired reality was charged with both emotional value and rural aspirations, reflecting quite explicitly the Volkish desire to escape from and to negate the validity of the century’s increasingly industrial and urban values.

When one holds a religious faith in what one believes to be the natural order, nature is the primary source of revealed truth. Science is sometimes used to justify this faith by defining the natural order; however, as periodic revolutions in the sciences have shown us, each scientific theory and justification is quite limited, replaced in time by a better theory... with its own faults and limits. This fuzziness does not tend to make us generally skeptical of science; rather, it allows believers in nature to disregard science when it is not convenient to them, and rely instead on “what everyone knows”: that is, a common sense defined by the values of the class—or race—in power. This was the case for the Volk.

Adherents to the Volkische philosophy idealized the simple life of the countryside, and argued that German society would be best improved by a return to rural values and practices. “Man was seen not as a vanquisher



of nature, nor was he credited with the ability to penetrate the meaning of nature by applying the tools of reason; instead he was glorified as living in accordance with nature, at one with its mystical forces.” This line of thought is echoed today by various back-to-the-land movements, fascist or otherwise: cities and modernity are seen as social and environmental problems, and people of all sorts of political affiliations desire to escape them. The Volkische philosophy did not idealize “nature” in the sense of *wilderness*, but a domesticated, agricultural nature: the countryside. “In taming nature, Volkish thinkers rehabilitated it as a landscape filled with flora, fauna, villages, and small rustic peasant farms, entities which had lived within nature so long that they had become an integral part of the countryside.” One thinks of the American conservative nostalgia for the family farm as much as or more than the American liberal and libertarian homesteading movement here, but I would argue the same impulse motivates them all: the fear of modernity as it is represented by cities and their dangerous, decadent, racially and sexually diverse environments... and a recognition of the alienation generated by capitalism and a lack of control over one’s own life.<sup>c</sup>

Many Volkische participants started land projects, some of which still exist in Germany today, with varied politics. Others formed youth movements designed to reinductate rural values of strength, independence, and relationship to nature in German children; these youth movements were later immensely useful to the rise of National Socialism, as children who grew up in them became fascist adults, or as the movements themselves became explicitly fascist. Most Germans did not actively participate in the Volkische movement, but, as a cultural backdrop, it was a vital force for affecting their worldviews. Most dangerously, it created and/or reinforced an Other: the Jew.

The “restless” class of people—the industrial proletarian, the migratory worker, the open homosexual, the young urban intellectual—these were all seen as rootless, inauthentic representations of modernity. “Above all, there was the Jew, who by his very nature was restless. Although the Jew belonged to a Volk, it occupied no specific territory and was consequently doomed to rootlessness.” (This also serves as a basis for the intense Nazi persecution of Roma people, more commonly known by the racist term “Gypsies.”) In analyzing one of many popular anti-Semitic novels of the time, Mosse observes: “In this framework the Jew was identified with modern industrial

c It is of note that white-owned single-family homes in the suburbs were encouraged in the U.S. after WWI by the federal government in a policy intended to limit the spread of Bolshevism. Hoover, then the secretary of commerce, thought that racial mixing in diverse cities would contaminate native-born Americans with Communist ideas.

society, which uprooted the peasant, deprived him of his land, caused his death, and thereby destroyed the most genuine part of the Volk.” Some Jewish people did indeed serve as moneylenders, intermediaries between poor peasants and capitalist forces; this was one of the few economic roles historically permitted to Jews.<sup>d</sup> This meant that “to the debt-ridden peasant, the Jew represented the most easily identifiable and immediately present element of the greedy power of modern capitalist civilization.” Therefore, Jews were not only seen as invaders, but their perceived rootlessness was believed to be the source for predatory behavior that threatened the “rightful” inhabitants of the land.

Essentialism was also a factor within Jewish movements. Some German Jewish Zionists wore yellow stars long before it was required by Nazi law, as a demonstration of their Jewish identity and pride, and as a reproach to assimilationist Jews. Six years before the decree forcing Jews to wear the star, a Zionist newspaper proclaimed, “Wear it with Pride, the Yellow Star!” Similar terrible ironies abound between Zionism and the Nazi state. For example, at the time of Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem, marriage between Jews and non-Jews was not recognized in Israel—as it was not by the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which prohibited marriage between Jewish and Gentile Germans as a form of bestiality. This is, of course, not the same; but it is troubling. By Hannah Arendt’s evaluation, underdog-claims of superiority fed the paranoia and hatred of their oppressors, and created an essentialist basis for their ideology. “Politically, it is not important whether God or nature is thought to be the origin of a people; in both cases, however exalted the claim for one’s own people, peoples are transformed into animal species so that a Russian appears as different from a German as a wolf is from a fox. A ‘divine people’ lives in a world in which it is the born persecutor of all other weaker species, or the born victim of all other stronger species. Only the rules of the animal kingdom can possibly apply to its political destiny.”<sup>e</sup>

The historic Jewish claim to *divine* chosenness seemed like a threat to the Volkische claim to *natural* chosenness; it threatened their fragile identity. “The hatred of the racists against the Jews sprang from a superstitious apprehension that it actually might be the Jews, and not themselves, whom God had chosen... There was an element of feeble-minded resentment against a people who, it was feared, had received a rationally incomprehensible guarantee that they would emerge eventually, and in spite of appearances, as

<sup>d</sup> Indeed, Jews forced into this position as moneylenders and points of exchange became vital to society, as Islam and Christianity both prohibited the collection of interest.

<sup>e</sup> This evaluation, of course, is marked by a Western rationalist understanding of “the animal kingdom”, itself deeply worth disputing.

the final victors in world history.” This fear was enhanced by Nietzsche’s unhelpful proclamations about the revolutionary character of the Jewish people, to which we shall return in section 7.

German Gentile peasants, united with nature, associated with healthy masculinity and comfort with using force, were seen as the temples of Volkische power. However, the largely middle-class writers and thinkers of the movement seldom imagined becoming peasants themselves. Instead, Volkische ideologues imagined the rehabilitation of the bourgeoisie and workers into the patriarchal merchant families and artisans of the legendary past. These roles were quickly disappearing, and their constituents blamed modernity. Increasingly, they came to represent that modernity in terms of the Jew.

We have a tendency to think of Nazi anti-Semitism as psychopathic, inexplicable; we picture the most notorious Nazis frothing at the mouths with hatred, conducting horrifying experiments—madmen. Psychopathy was certainly part of anti-Semitism, but its appeal became much broader as Volkische thinkers generalized the image of the Jew as the dehumanized monster, the enemy of the people. Volkische writers described them as an inherently unstable, parasitic people, as they are landless, forever foreign. Within this mindset, Jews are inherently incompatible with the German landscape, or with anywhere except Israel. In their occupancy of Germany, they seek to steal land from the peasants. They are shallowly materialistic, always wanting the *best* instead of what is eternally good and eternally denied them—peace and rootedness. They are the capitalist snake coiled around the peasant tree. In the Volkische imagination, Jews became both the epitome of and the symbol for hated and feared modernity.

Lagarde, another early contributor to the Volkische ideology, framed a spiritual angle on the primacy of Germans and the consequential “abhorrence of the Jew... which accused the Jew of possessing a sterile religion and a consequently materialistic nature, of entertaining an international conspiracy, and of being incompatible aliens on German soil... [this] led to the prophecy of a mortal struggle between Germans and Jews.” As the idea of national unity had never been fully assimilated into German culture, it seemed quite possible that Jews—perceived as a state within the German state—could overthrow it, or were in the process of doing so culturally. In modern America this kind of conspiracy thinking is still prevalent on the Right: then and there as now and here, the perceived threat to the German people was not limited to the Jew, but encompasses the lumpenproletariat, the Jew, dissidents, migrants—and

cities, progress, modernity, internationalism. All of this maps well onto the current American white supremacist belief structure: the lumpen is the urban youth of color; the peasants are rural whites; and Jews are journalists, college professors and stock traders, making money while shaping our society to their own ends. The new myth that small towns in the U.S. Midwest are now run by Sharia law after a large influx of Muslim immigrants is even more transparent in its conspiratorial racism.

In fact, if the interaction between class and ethnicity in our society could be reduced to a simple conspiracy theory, it would operate the other way. The strength of Volkische ideology lay not in logic, but in its widespread appeal to the rich and middle-class. At first a fringe intellectual philosophy, it spread by way of, for example, Wagner's circle of artists and intellectuals, who transmitted these ideas to schoolteachers, who influenced the minds of the young. Novels were written extolling the virtues of the Volk and the sins of the enemy; Volkische plays were performed in great masses, a unifying group experience of reliving moments of Germanic power: a public cult. (This continued to happen well into the Nazi era, within the form of various theatrical depictions of Nazi unity.) Racist theories gave a visual, concrete direction to the "whole man"—a perfect Aryan, at peace with his environment. This racism, along with theosophy, sun worship, the Nordic beauty cult and strategically deployed gay yearning, the desire for class peace, and the influences of youth culture all eventually went into the makeup of the early members of the National Socialist Party.

All of this has to do with the new idea of class mobility, and a vague sense that democracy might be desirable, and other factors at play in the European transition from the feudal state into enclosure. The economic situation was bad during the years of Volkische formation, and some intellectuals were concerned that Communism might become the most popular response. For these types, Eugene Diederichs made Volkism respectable under the banner "New Romanticism", an alternative to positivism and materialism. This appealed to those who opposed capitalism and Left radicalism alike, always a large racist constituency; Communism and related tendencies were thus marginalized as a "Jewish" sort of politics, their critique distorted for reactionary use. The popularization of anthropology and social Darwinism also made it possible for these ideas to become intellectually respectable. On the modern political level of the party, Pan-Germans, who called for the unification of all Germanic-language peoples, constituted the strongest and most respectable of the Volkish groups. "Through it, Volkish ideas found firm footing within the establishment itself; and thus this organization must

be ranked with the Youth movement and the educational system as the chief transmitters of the German ideology from the prewar to the postwar world.” The literate, aristocratic bourgeoisie came to form the largest bloc within the Volkische ideology, which is amusing in light of their idealization of the peasant life; those in power always prefer to believe the lives of those who work for them are idyllic, but seldom find it wise to ask them.

The concept of *Volke* is based around a faith in natural essence that is a necessary part of fascism: people must be defined in order to be controlled, separated, placed, and Othered. There must be something definitively *good*, natural, right about our side; the enemy must be to blame for all the problems in the world. Racism sometimes takes a cultural rather than a physical approach to its Othering, but I think it is not a stretch to say it is all essentialist. Without this basic agreement that people’s differences are based in more than their experiences and actions, fascism and racism both crumble at their base. And, importantly, essentialism is a group phenomenon. Lagarde “thought that the individual could be genuine only in a circumscribed form, that his uniqueness was derived from the peculiar character of the larger unit, the Volk.” The individuality of the people is based in the facelessness of the member. This kind of terror erases the former ethical code, and is able to justify itself purely through reference to its notion of nature. Hannah Arendt: “Guilt and innocence become 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.’...Terror is lawfulness, if law is the law of the movement of some suprahuman force, Nature or History.”

This assignment of criminal guilt to groups of racialized subjects at the forefront of capitalist development is familiar from many different reactionary atmospheres: one thinks of the current backlash in the U.S. against Latino workers, who are depicted as “stealing jobs” from white workers. Without a developed anti-capitalist perspective, and within a culture of generalized racism, it is easy for the nearest target to take all the blame. The Volkish mythology of blood and soil gave this instance of the general phenomenon an intense power. When white Americans feel a sense of entitlement, it is based in a culture of white supremacy and a sense of “we were here first”—but the “here first” sentiment can only go back so far, as most are uneasily aware, and there is a theoretical basis of general equality and freedom in U.S. society with which even an enthusiastic racist must negotiate. Hopefully, this crack in U.S. racist ideology can be widened. For those thinking within the Volkische framework, non-Jewish Germans were fundamentally, *essentially*

here first; and the laws of nature meant that they both inevitably would—and, in a dialectical contradiction common to fascism, must desperately strive to—maintain dominance, evicting the perceived outsiders by force as necessary. This survival thinking displaced other, gentler values.

Not all Volks were anti-Semitic; many were humanists, and some had deep respect for German Jews, whom they saw as constituting a Volk of their own, or as assimilated into German society. Egidy, for example, was a non-racist Volkische thinker... but his ideas around youth education were hijacked for use in explicitly racist schools, much as identity politics have been hijacked by the alt-right in the U.S. today. Langbehn, a Volkische racist who believed himself a messianic prophet, proved more influential than Egidy. He declared that “race is a pervasive and decisive force”, was intensely anti-Semitic, and advocated racial subjugation, even slavery. Kant also played a part: “Volkish theorists found a theory of race in the writings of Kant which was based primarily on geographic factors and held that geographically determined racial characteristics were accompanied by an ‘inner life force.’” Philology and anthropology also contributed to racial grouping and characterizing. Before racism as a group commitment could take hold in Germany, the rational and scientific affirmation of race as a physical reality was necessary.

### **racism as a manifestation of essentialism within fascism**

“Every society... needs a certain proportion of citizens who have to be detested.”  
—Benito Mussolini

“With race theories you can prove or disprove anything you want.”  
—Max Weber

While various forms of bigotry have existed since antiquity, mid-19th century European societies legitimized race-thinking as the only practical, realistic way to understand the world. At the time, scientific racism was only seen as possibly problematic by the most liberal observers, and then only when people attempted to divine inner racial characteristics from external ones. European and British scientists, in the context of their renewed attempts to discover and classify every living thing on the planet (a project previously begun by Aristotle), sought to similarly classify human beings by our variance in surface characteristics. Modern scientists now agree, although there are certainly racist detractors, that those characteristics vary more than they concur within “ethnicities.” It is also true that most people of a supposedly single ethnic heritage possess genes that originate from many parts of the

globe. Race, scientists have concluded, is a social construct with no basis in biology. Therefore, while science bears a heavy legacy of blame for aiding in the manufacturing and legitimizing of race, our war against the construct in its destructive forms must be a social one... though it is worth keeping an eye on the scientists now theorizing epigenetics and toying with gene manipulation through CRISPR.

While the Nazi history of anti-Semitism and other sorts of racialized hatred is well-known, the Italian legacy demonstrates that hatred is not necessary to an essentialist fascist enterprise. Mussolini was not, apparently, personally racist or anti-Semitic and only adopted that rhetoric as a practical maneuver, complying with Nazi Germany's racial policies as the two became allies. Aaron Gillette argues that Mussolini's central goal was Italian improvement and unification: he found it helpful to identify an Other, an enemy without, to diminish atomization within. Max Weber says that "the concept of race exists only in the context of communal identity." Insofar as Mussolini wanted to create a racial unity in Italy, it was of the race of the fascist man, rather than of the Aryan; Nietzsche, not the anti-Semites, was his reference point, as he said he wanted to shift Italy "from a race of slaves to a race of masters." This kind of "differentialist" racism, even when it is not based in an emotionally-felt bigotry, contributes heavily to the mythic idea of people of color (including those Jews whom we would now perceive as white) as a contamination, a plague, germs to be eradicated—hence the fear among these sorts of racists of "miscegenation." It also helps to create the emotional distance needed to take inhumane measures against the Other. "How can one feel sympathy with a virus?"

Lack of personal hatred aside, Mussolini's administration created the 1938 Manifesto of Racial Politics; statements spreading paranoia around non-white birthrates, black riots in the U.S., and other talking points of racist propaganda; and established legal measures prohibiting Jewish people from a wide range of roles and activities... although they did not, in practice, apply to most Jews; war veterans, their families, and members of the fascist party themselves were exempted. While this may seem shocking, "[t]here can hardly have been a Jewish family without at least one member in the Fascist Party, for this happened at a time when Jews, like other Italians, had been flocking for almost twenty years into the fascist movement, since positions in the Civil Service were open only to members." Italian scientific racism also served as "ethical" justification for the immensely bloody Italian occupation of Ethiopia. Elsewhere, just as tactically, Mussolini distanced himself somewhat from racism without entirely disclaiming it:



...there are thousands of Negroes who fight as soldiers under the Italian flag, and who have always fought magnificently for us and themselves. This can be said too of the Arabs... We Fascists acknowledge the existence of races, their differences and their hierarchy, but we do not propose to present ourselves to the world as the embodiment of the White race set against other races, we do not intend to make ourselves the preachers of segregation and of racial hatreds when we see that our fiercest critics are not the Negroes of Harlem—who could profitably use their time to take care of their colleagues who are daily and Christianly lynched in the United States—but are mostly genuine Whites in Europe and America.

Observe how sly and self-serving this equivocation is! One is reminded of the short-lived talks between the Nation of Islam and the American Nazi Party over their mutual interest in separatism. It does not seem, thankfully, that Mussolini's rhetoric met with any such reciprocal interest.

The process of racial theorizing in Italy was heavily influenced by Nazi race theory, Gillette argues—but in reaction *against* it rather than in compliance with it. Nazi and pre-Nazi racial theorists claimed that people of Nordic descent (particularly Germans) best exemplified the virtues of their Aryan ancestors, and used Italy as an example of degenerate Aryan descendants. Italians did not much appreciate this; Mussolini himself was subject to an anthropometrical examination while a youthful vagabond in Switzerland, and resented it intensely. Italians “considered the arrogant German anti-Italian rhetoric to be a consequence of a deep-seated inferiority complex, brought about by their ‘parvenu status, lack of culture, and dislike by other peoples.’” Of course, Italy was suffering from its own inferiority complex over its lack of success as a nation-state, which contributed heavily to its impulse towards racialized unity: was racial contamination and weakness the reason it had not succeeded? Some racial theorists claimed that Italy must have been contaminated by racial mixing during Roman imperial days, while others denied that the proud Italian blood could possibly be surmounted by foreign blood.

All of this led to a, at best, dialectical approach to Italian racial theory, one that simultaneously attempted to disprove the German approach and assert its own version, but also tried, in later years, to stay compatible enough with German policy for the countries to remain allies. Italian theorists variously claimed that Italians were the true Aryans and Germans the degenerates; asserted the importance of the inherited culture of their Roman past; and discussed the effect of the physical environment in shaping national character



(cold climates produce cold people, but Italy's warm climate produces hot-blooded people, etc.) Italian racism was also marked by intense debates between advocates of different branches; spiritual or philosophical racism, biological racism, and Julius Evola's mystical racism all fought for theoretical supremacy, resulting in a fairly incoherent paralysis within the discourse. Because of the German academic emphasis on the sciences, biological racism was far more popular there, which made genocide more plausible in Germany than in Italy. The Italian Church also resisted biological racism while wholly complying with philosophical racism. It had a vested interest in asserting that Jews, Muslims, and "pagans" were inferior to Christians—but also in maintaining the possibility of their conversion, a salvation not possible if evil lay in biology rather than the soul.

Gillette indicts the scientific community for its role in creating and perpetuating racism during this period. Its attempts to classify humanity as it had done the rest of the natural world; its advancement of Lamarckian evolution, which seemed to justify biological racism; the extrapolation of Darwinism to social Darwinism; its ideas of biological purity—all of these gave racism a supposedly rational and inarguable basis without which it might not have led to so many murderous events. While scientists who believed themselves to be objective cannot be spared from this criticism, Gillette also points out that "...biologists and other academics found that giving their personal convictions a pseudo-scientific gloss was immensely empowering" for their careers.

However, the responsibility borne by scientists does not lift any blame from philosophers; without the writings of people like Comte Arthur de Gobineau, "the father of European racism," the convictions of those biologists would perhaps not have formed. Gobineau, a French aristocrat "appalled by the political legacy of the French Revolution" was one of the first to argue that miscegenation caused the downfall of European civilization. His "Essay on the Inequality of the Races," written seventy years before fascism formed, is absolutely foundational to the creation of modern race concepts, essentialist differentiation of humans, and the justification of murderous action on that basis. He wrote it in a reactionary attempt to combat the universalizing ideas of the Enlightenment, and was a close friend of Wagner, "the primary source for the German composer's racist worldview." The longer one studies fascism, the more all the points converge. Lombroso's phrenology, used by the police to identify political radicals as well as social criminals, was also popular at the time, and influenced U.S. eugenics laws... which, in turn, served as templates for many of Hitler's genocidal endeavors.

Arendt assigns some amount of blame to Hobbes' philosophy, popular with the colonizers of the time. She says that, rather than *explaining* a pre-existing phenomenon, the advance of Leviathan *depends* upon Hobbes' reduction of human nature into a brutal war of all against all, restrained only by government and class. Within Hobbes' world—not just a theoretical world, but one he has helped to create as one of the realities we sometimes dwell within—commodity alienation and violence over predicates are interrelated with fascism and biopower and modern citizens must be content with all of it. The war of all against all, Arendt points out, “affords the best possible theoretical foundation for those naturalistic ideologies which hold nations to be tribes, separated from each other by nature, without any connection whatever, unconscious of the solidarity of mankind and having in common only the instinct for self-preservation which man shares with the animal world.” Essentialism justifies everything. “Imperialism would have necessitated the invention of racism as the only possible ‘explanation’ and excuse for its deeds, even if no race-thinking had ever existed in the civilized world.”

The incoherence of racism is matched only by its social power. It is striking how anti-Semitic caricatures of Jews as weak, incapable, and parasitic—while simultaneously in struggle for world domination and a serious threat to all Aryans—are projections of German and Italian desires and inferiority complexes. By destroying these exterior representation of their own felt inadequacy, these fascists hoped to purify themselves internally as well as externally. We must refuse pity for those who fall into this basic psychological trap when it results in the deaths of millions; understanding need not result in compassion.

The opposite tendency is not one I can support whole-heartedly either. By Griffin's analysis, “[m]eanwhile, all over the world groups of populations are retrenching into their ethnic or cultural identity, many in a spirit of radical intolerance for the equivalent identity of others.” Here he makes an equivalency that is false in all societies with a long-standing power inequality between various ethnicities and cultures—it is not the same for an American white person to get interested in their Nordic ancestry as it is for an American black person to explore their ethnic and cultural past, and it is certainly not the same for each of them to feel hostility towards the other. To reduce it in this way is to practice an intentional, racist ignorance of the historical context. However, as someone interested in abolishing the social construct of race, it is hard for me to feel excited about even the most positive manifestations of the tendency to affirm it. Arendt's examination of Benjamin Disraeli, the British Jewish statesman and imperialist, concludes:

Disraeli's discovery [of race doctrines] is one more proof of how well they serve to combat feelings of social inferiority. For if race doctrines finally served much more sinister and immediately political purpose, it is still true that much of their plausibility and persuasiveness lay in the fact that they helped anybody feel himself an aristocrat who had been selected by birth on the strength of "racial" qualifications... His [Disraeli's] superstitious belief in blood and race—into which he mixed old romantic folk credulities about a powerful supranational connection between gold and blood—carried no suspicion of possible massacres, whether in Africa, Asia, or Europe proper... This willingness to believe [in his race theories] on the part of bourgeois society gave Disraeli, the only Jew of the nineteenth century, his share of genuine popularity. In the end, it was not his fault that the same trend that accounted for his singular great good fortune finally led to the great catastrophe of his people.

Her tone on this last note is not wholly lacking in irony.

There is something willful in the ignorance of racism—something bound-up with power, and the purposes of those with power. In her analysis of the Boer colonization of South Africa and enslavement of the peoples indigenous to the region, Arendt asserts that the Boers were actually unable to perceive those indigenous people as humans, because their way of life was so profoundly different from that of white Europe. "They were, as it were, 'natural' human beings, who lacked the specifically human character, the specifically human reality, so that when European men massacred them they somehow were not aware that they had committed murder." The perception of the oppressor that these Africans were closer to nature than they were somehow never gave those people a higher status... although the oppressor is simultaneously able to condemn others, such as Jews, as *unnatural*. Essentialism is an all-purpose tool for the oppressor.

## misogyny

Misogyny, another common manifestation of essentialism, is thickly woven into both German and Italian fascism. From a fascist perspective, modernity is decadence, is weakness, is society, is femininity. To resist it is to embrace virility, a strict enforcement of gender roles, and to valorize women's role as childbearers, a role fascists endowed with a natural connection to the land and biology and transmission of history. Feminists and other "modern women" were seen as absolute enemies, particularly in Germany. Fascist misogyny also led to the gendered mystification of the essential German connection to the land, the gendering of Jews as feminine and Aryans as masculine, and the reification of immanent masculinity as a self-fulfilling force for transcending social reality.

Insofar as women are seen as property in patriarchal societies—and regarded suspiciously by men as the enemy who sleeps beside you—German male fears about German women having sex with Jewish men, thus "contaminating" themselves and the race, were a huge factor in the production of anti-Semitism. (As was also the case in the first several hundred years of black-white interaction in the U.S., the reverse was not considered a serious transgression, because of patriarchy operating on multiple levels.) "The image of the pure, blond, spiritual, feminine German woman succumbing to the love of a Jew became a nightmare to the prophets of the race. A flier distributed at the University of Frankfurt in the early 1920s... declared it a sin, an unnatural act, for an Aryan girl to let herself become enamored of a Jew. It was a transgression tantamount to Eve's succumbing to the sophistry of the serpent."

Almost unfortunately, people are just people. Women were victims of fascism, on many levels: they were murdered in the Shoah,<sup>f</sup> by fascist squads in Italy, and by Mussolini's "adventure" in Ethiopia; they were oppressed by the fascist imposition of strictly gendered roles, denied the ability to pursue self-determination and their own interests; and so on. Women were wildly active in the anti-fascist resistance movements, in assisting Jewish escape, and

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<sup>f</sup> As Giorgio Agamben describes in his text *Remnants of Auschwitz*, the term "Holocaust" was traditionally used by Christians to refer to a burnt sacrifice of Jews they made to God. "Not only does the term imply an unacceptable equation between crematoria and altars; it also continues a semantic heredity that is from its inception anti-Semitic." Following him, I use the word *Shoah*—"Disaster"—throughout this text. I use it to refer not only to the murder, displacement, torture, incarceration, and other genocidal acts performed by Nazis against Jews, but also to the experiences of Roma, queer people, anti-fascists, and others during this era of German concentration camps.

performing many subtle, quotidian gestures of resistance.<sup>g</sup> And, of course, women were also participants in the creation and continuance of fascism, even if they did so in pursuit of other goals. Male misogyny rarely exists for long without the collaboration of some women, who would have been better served (if not immediately or personally) to instead show defiance and solidarity with others who are oppressed.

Homophobia is also a common manifestation of misogyny, and it took some interesting forms during this era, particularly in pre-fascist Germany. Every war needs its vanguard: in Germany, this force was called the *Bund*,<sup>h</sup> meaning Party. It was created by young men returning home from the defeat of WWI. Some of them perhaps felt guilty for having failed their Volk; more were looking for some identity to fill the void of fighting for a state that had ceased to exist. The Bundens, George Mosse reports, were sometimes formed explicitly on a homoerotic basis—that is, at surface platonic, but as a way to sublimate sexual energy into something “more noble”. “Within such a scheme, the homosexually inclined came to be regarded as the most socially creative individual. Because the normal [sic] male directs his total sexual energy and affection toward his family... *Eros* here is essentially captured, circumscribed, and dissipated. This does not hold true for a homosexual, who is able to direct his surplus energy toward cosmic concerns, and, above all, toward cementing the ties of the true Bund.” Unfortunately, these homosocial and homosexual experiences did nothing to produce compassion in the hearts of those who murdered thousands of queers in the coming Shoah. Their homosexual experiences and emotions had to remain unarticulated as such to remain accessible to them; and, as we know, the closeted are often the greatest homophobes. Implicit Volkische homosexuality thus became the emotional basis for explicit Nazi homophobia.<sup>i</sup>

Men’s enjoyment of each other was seen as a higher form of interaction than that found in mixed-sex company. The Bund was explicitly anti-feminist; by now Jews were gendered female and Aryans male in the popular imagination. Sex and alcohol were excluded from the Bund; physical purity was emphasized, and male beauty celebrated. Nordic body culture began here and spread throughout society, with entire magazines dedicated to the celebration of the naked German male body. This formation served as an alternative to both

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g See Ingrid Strobl’s book *Partisanas* for an extremely intense account of the militant participation of various women in the anti-fascist struggles of the era.

h Distinct, of course, from the Bund that was an anti-fascist Jewish group in Russian Poland.

i The chapter “Homosexuality and Fascism” in Judith Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* explores both this phenomenon and its upsetting inverse in greater depth.

Marxism and capitalist class society, based neither exclusively on collectivity or individualism, but instead on leadership, Volk, and community. However, the Bunde were intentionally elitist and would not recruit or convert; they did not prove a durable political force, but served as a greenhouse for one.

Ernst Röhm oversaw the murder of many Jews and leftist radicals in the streets as the commander of the SA during Hitler's rise to power; in 1933, his troops forced government officials to surrender power to the Nazis. It was well-known that Röhm, and many of his Storm Trooper leaders, were homosexuals; Hitler excused this as natural to a warrior society. However, Hitler came to see this warrior society as a double-edged sword; he did away with Röhm and other SA leadership in the "Night of the Long Knives" the next year, and shortly afterwards declared homosexuality incompatible with Nazi values.<sup>1</sup> Notoriously, the current neo-fascist band Death in June has argued that the Nazi Party would have been an ethical and stable form of government had the Night of Long Knives not occurred; that Röhm and others in his clique would have steered the Party in a better direction. This is a horrifying read, one that attempts to justify a kinder, gentler fascism... though the band claims that they are not fascist, and points to their gay member Douglas Pearce and collaborations with Jewish artists as evidence. Nevertheless, their heavy use of Nazi imagery and Pearce's blatantly racist statements show their allegiances. The lineage of mystified fascism, supported and enforced by a few people who are its destined enemies, may have begun with Röhm, but it continues today.

Early fascists made other strange essentialist assertions, some of which combined race and gender. The racial theorist Cesare Sereno claimed that genetic material stored by women and transmitted to their offspring contained the "psychic experiences and biological adaptations of the past", while men contribute an externally directed and energetic component. This, he felt, justified the claim that Italians had remained racially pure throughout their history, no matter what invasions they suffered. And, "to preserve this essential ability, a civilization has to avoid the feminization of male culture, and retain a gendered division of labor in society." Another Italian racial theorist, Giulio Cogni, claimed that "Men were the intellect of the race; women were the life-givers. But women embodied the nation in a way men never could. In fact, it was through a man's carnal connection with women that he was able to achieve a mystical union with his race." Thus epitomized as the race itself,

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<sup>1</sup> Mussolini, a notable homophobe with concerns about the homosexual appeal of his own charismatic underlings and the military force that backed them, apparently spoke critically to Hitler about Röhm, influencing his decision.

women were forcibly made one with their role as childbearers and caregivers in a way that morality alone could not achieve. The Nazi propagandist Gregor Strausser asserted: “For a man, military service is the most valuable form of participation in the state—for the woman it is motherhood! There are African tribes where mothers who die in labor are buried with the same honors as warriors who have fallen in battle!” While this appeal to the alleged traditions of “African tribes” may seem strange coming from the mouth of a Nazi, it is entirely consistent with the imperialist racist tendency to appropriate what one wants and kill the rest without remorse.

A biological racist, Serano attempted to bridge the gap between his pseudo-scientific views and what seemed socially necessary by arguing that becoming Christian somehow physically cleansed Jews: “in his veins would begin to flow Aryan blood.” These are the sorts of metaphysical leaps necessitated by such strange amalgamations of philosophical and pseudo-scientific arguments. Evola, for example, claimed that history went through gendered cycles: “The noble stages were masculine. Thus... Evola claimed that these stages harmonized with the hierarchical, heroic, warlike, decisive, and classical values that characterized men. The later, degenerate phases were feminine. Societies in these phases indulged in a lust of promiscuity, communism, natural rights, and general equality that were characterized by women.” He preferred the masculine cycles, of course; Evola saw Jews (of all genders) and women (of all races) as the most serious threats to the fascist revival.

It is tempting to agree with him. It would be useful if being a member of an oppressed group seen as threatening to those in power meant that group had internal validity, historical unity, and shared values of struggle—but this is also essentialism, however optimistic. Many essentialist feminists have argued along similar lines as Evola, just with more affection for “promiscuity, communism, natural rights, and general equality”—an affection I share myself. Nevertheless, liking something does not make it so, and the only conditions we live in are ones we generate from ourselves and impose upon each other. History and narrative carry real and deadly weight—but they can, just possibly, be refused.

## fascist activism: going to the people

Volkische activists started many land projects as a lifestyle choice and a political gesture against modernity and urban life. They represented the search for the middle way between capitalism and Marxism, and a return to the soil as the central source of spiritual sustenance. Certain slogans were common between them—“Free The Land” and “Free The Money” (from immigrants and Jews, that is)—but the projects showed some interesting political variance. “Eden” was probably the most successful: a semi-socialist land project at first, it became Volkische and racist within 20 years of its founding. (It was integrated into the Nazi system, then later into the GDR, and still survives today.) “Mittgart” was a more radically Volkische proposal, an Aryan land project that would be a generator of racial energy. It would have a senate of wise old men who dealt with the outside world, no money or trade, a court of honor for settling grievances, children trained by Volkische means until they were 16, and polygamy. This last point, however, became too controversial for the plan to be adopted. Utopic German settlements were also begun in Africa, Paraguay, and Mexico.

The youth movement was even more successful. It was officially founded in 1901 as a hiking association for schoolboys; by 1911, there were 15,000 members. Its motto was “Youth among itself”—resolutely free of adults and dedicated to the Volkische ideology. They sought to liberate youth from the strictures of modernity through teaching them to identify with nature, in hopes of subverting the existing order. Another motto: “To maintain oneself in spite of all the powers that be.” Physical and emotional toughness, and deeds above all else were idealized. At its most militant end lay the *Artamanen*, German youth knights who sought to take back the land from immigrants and industry. The Bund partly grew out of the youth groups, generated by their intensive gender segregation, idealization of masculine beauty and physical prowess, and the charismatic men who led them.

The same creeping ideology spread throughout the schools. At first there were Volkische teachers, then there came Volkische schools; the lessons taught there paved the way for the eventual social reaction to the crisis of German defeat in WWI. Volkische schools became the rule in Germany, not the exception; their very history tests encouraged them to discard Christian perspectives and rely on “love of the homeland” instead. The schools adapted the British public school system (already meant to emphasize nationalism, physical education, and sports) to include freedom for youth and the access to the land necessary to have a whole, vital experience of the Volk. The schools taught their students to believe in German nature and show their dedication



to the welfare of the Volk. As time went on, discrimination against Jews became institutionalized in the schools, with explicitly anti-Semitic officials. By the end, there were no anti-racist faculty in the colleges; at best, teachers remained silent and did not directly participate in anti-Semitic activity.

While the youth movement prepared the ground for the Nazis, they did not care much for each other at first. The youth, especially the Bund, disdained Hitler for his vulgar tastes, fanaticism, and proletarianization of the party. They were critical of Nazis appealing for the votes of the masses and participating in party politics. Nazis, for their part, “criticize[d] the effecteness of the Youth Movement and its ineffectiveness at promoting the revolution.” By Mosse’s analysis:

The Nazis also used the appeal of the ‘third way,’ the opposition to bourgeois society, but they combined this with the building of a mass political party. Moreover the ‘German revolution’ which they advocated did not become the captive of vague ‘experiences’ and mystical ecstasies. Instead it was made concrete and brought down to earth—for in their hands the ‘German revolution’ became an ‘anti-Jewish revolution.’ The social aims of the Youth Movement were modified by directing the revolution against the ‘enemy within’ rather than against the existing class structure. Contrary to the hopes of the Youth Movement, the success of the ‘German revolution’ increased in direct proportion to its diversion into an anti-Jewish revolution.

Still the youth movement and the land projects generalized Volkische core beliefs. The use of such projects for fascists is summarized well in this passage from the sometime-national secretary of the Italian Fascist Party, Achille Starace. He wrote it to direct the mission of a bureau he oversaw that was designed to regulate Italian free time, to make it fall into accordance with the aims of the state:

Go to the people, to educate them, to raise them, to improve them physically and morally; to encourage them to love their land, their village, their family, their home; to impart the desire to know the true face of the Fatherland by travelling along its roads and pausing with fresh eyes to admire its infinite beauties... Finally, to help them affectionately in every step of their lives, guaranteeing individuals and their families that moral and economic well-being to which the Italian people, renewed by Fascism, have for the first time been granted the right thanks to a new and full understanding of their duties.

Here are two classic elements of fascist rhetoric: blood and soil, and the push for individual-nation-state concordance. If the Italian landscape shapes the Italian people, and the true form of Italian governance and culture is fascism, then it is a noble and sacred duty to align the three—and any divergence is a necessarily bad and malformed thing that ought to be corrected. This is essentialism turned openly political: a self-justifying, self-perpetuating, and fascist line of thought based in assertions about nature. Italian essentialism was always troubled, however, by debate over true Italian ethnicity, resentment about German framing around Italy, and the lack of total conviction in their anti-Semitism. Violence was a necessary emulsifier for this ideological brew.

### violence as an end in itself

We had to have a hot bath of black blood, after so many other tepid baths of maternal milk softened by fraternal tears. We had to have a fine flow of blood... After all we are too numerous. And war takes away a quantity of men who were living because they were born. Among the thousands and thousands of carcasses interlaced in death, all alike in their shrouds, how many are there who would merit, I don't say a tear, but a memory?

—Giovanni Papini in *L'Avanti*, April 6th, 1916

“The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.”

—Thomas Jefferson

When outside observers deplore the violence associated with fascism, they often mention its incivility, its shocking brutality, and its “needlessness.” One could gain the impression that they would be heartily in support of a clean, bloodless fascism, so long as its violent acts were rationally demonstrated as necessary. In point of fact, for early fascist movements violence was not simply a messy means to an end but *an end unto itself*. This could not be the case for establishment fascism, which eventually needs to normalize society, which cannot exist in a state of emergency forever without fraying—violence has to be left safely in the past, or put out of sight in the camps. But before the rupture can be healed, it has to first occur, and occur on all levels: the social, emotional, and physical.

The Italian Futurists were perhaps most responsible for the aestheticization of violence, if not for its physical enactment; voyeurs of war, they applauded most acts that broke the social peace. “Futurism disregarded the theories of left and right and created the criteria of authenticity and decadence, future and past, speed and slowness.” Warfare was held to be beautiful, authentic, fast, and present. In warfare, genuine camaraderie could be generated, their leader Marinetti held, in fighting against “the sluggish and overbearing hegemony of mediocrity” towards “the Paradise of the Impossible.” The Futurists rejoiced in the outbreak of World War I: “the grandiose metaphors of... war as a mystical, orgiastic experience of the Darwinian/Nietzschean principle of Life As Struggle, of war as a cleansing process beneficial and vital for a healthy organism... finally appeared to have become reality.” Not only did they think the actual death of millions would be beneficial to the world, the “hygiene” of Social Darwinism in action, they thought the violence itself would be redemptively meaningless. “Although the futurists and the vorticists did not view war and violence as constituting modernity in themselves, they approved of modern war as it was liable to be nihilistic... The redemptive power of destruction and the living force of conflict knew no limits for the futurists. In this, the myth of “modern war” and “heroic technology” provided fuel for the nihilistic temperament of futurism.” This line of thought was theoretically derived from the writings of George Sorel, though he himself found Futurism foolish.

Sorel was a French revolutionary syndicalist, heavily influenced by the writing of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, an early anarchist. Sorel believed that the General Strike—a projected time in which all workers would refuse work on capitalist terms, seize the means of production, and enact an anarchist society—was the vital and redemptive myth of his time. He saw violence as a necessary element of the General Strike, and so theorized how a bloodbath might be avoided via the ethics developed between workers. Nevertheless, he saw violence not only as a regrettable means to an end, but as a means of attaining transcendent and revolutionary emotion. “Sorel’s ‘violence’ was not... an appeal to terrorist bloodshed. It was rather a metaphysical principle which found expression in any form of struggle or action. He saw it as a creative force that could be active in artists, inventors, and warriors imbued with individuality and originality and, therefore, a revolutionary mentality.” This formulation made his writing ideal for adoption by those influenced by Nietzschean depictions of the Superman—that is, most Futurist and pre-fascist thinkers. “By depicting the economic myth of the general strike in terms of the emotions which accompany adventures in battle, Sorel can maintain that the four attributes of creativity, mystery, struggle, and direct experience

impart to the souls of the workers a sense of the sublime, analogous to the poetic spirit of those periods in history which have experienced a return to barbarism. This feeling of the sublime cannot be analyzed or broken down; separating it into its component parts denatures it. That is why the quality of mystery constitutes perhaps the most important aspect of the general strike.”

Unfortunately for all of us, this mysterious and mystical formulation meant that Sorel’s ideas on violence were easily lifted free of their containing idea of the General Strike and transported into fascist realms. Mussolini said that everything he was he owed to Sorel: “He is an accomplished master who, with his sharp theories on revolutionary formations, contributed to the molding of the discipline, the collective energy, the massed power of the fascist cohorts.” Marinetti adored him; Sorel’s ideas are the source for Futurism’s ecstatic glorification of violence as an end in itself. While Sorel wavered between returning this appreciation and expressing uncertainty towards the fascist project, perhaps the best evaluation of the compatibility of his ideas with fascism is made within his own theoretical framework. Sorel counterposed the idea of revolutionary violence to the brutality of the State it resisted: “working-class violence must be relatively free from vengeance, jealousy, hatred, and tyrannical bloodletting.” Stanley observes that Camus, who was also influenced by Sorel, expressed this necessity in *The Rebel* by forming a distinction between “rebellion, an act of refusal of existing repression, from revolution, which attacks the existing order with both a plan for the future organization and a worked-out theory of historical destiny—usually rooted in the ideology of progress.” Fascism fails these tests: it was both brutal—Sorel’s test—and “revolutionary”, by Camus’ standard. The state it enacted in Italy was one based in a sense of both historical destiny and progress (while explaining itself as profoundly anti-progressive.) However sublime the sensation of violence might have felt to its enactors, its outcomes were not noticeably less banal and ugly.

Moreover, Sorel and Mussolini shared, along with many other revolutionists on both the Left and the Right, the conviction that a revolutionary few had the destiny—indeed, the ethical imperative—of shaping the future of the world by manipulating or “educating” the masses. Sorel places the revolutionary subject/actor in the role of master in Nietzsche’s master/slave dichotomy; he saw consumers as slaves with weak morality, producer-revolutionaries as masters with heroic qualities ... in an exact demonstration of the sort of valorization of the poor that Nietzsche intended to attack! As I will discuss in a later section, any take on the master/slave formulation is unlikely to be compatible with anti-authoritarian perspectives, and lends

itself better to fascism or statist communism than to freedom. While any are free to act on their own or as a small group by the lights of autonomy, autonomy itself is destroyed once such elites begin to see their mission as one of control over the revolutionary subject. Too, the revolutionary subject often disappoints. People are not their predicates, and often those predicates overlap or contradict; what producer is not also a consumer? The situation is more complicated than that of the parasitic bourgeoisie clinging to the back of the proletariat, or the Third World in virtuous revolt against the American Empire.

Importantly, the Volkische conception of the peasant also had to do with an essentialist assertion that the peasant was at home within violence: a ready participant, not a passive observer nor a victim. Volkische authors dwelled upon the peasants who defended themselves during the Thirty Years' War; "the peasants had discovered their aggressive, warlike instincts and broke through the superimposed layer of civilization." Later National Socialists, wishing to bring forth the Nietzschean Superman, saw in this perceived rupture hope for the German people through the enactment of violence: violence as an internal ends as well as an eternal means to accomplishing the purification of the German land and heightening of the German soul. Arendt also points to the idealization of the violence of the mob in the ideology of anti-Semitic French intellectuals who participated in the Dreyfus affair; they "saw in the mob a living expression of virile and primitive 'strength.'" The Futurists, as well, admired the "noble savage", contemptuous of history"... a fetishization of the 'primitive' Other.

While I find the common assertion that violence is inherently misogynist to be a repulsively sexist reduction itself, I do think the exaltation of virility, particularly when represented in unison with violence, is misogynist. It is no accident that D'Annunzio, the Italian proto-fascist Superman, praised his imagined ancestors for the beautiful women they raped as well as for the glorious battles they fought. Futurism gained its edginess by advocating not only the burning of libraries and art museums, but also scorn for women. It is always so among white men who feel disenfranchised—when striking out in frustration at some handy scapegoat, white femmes and people of color are the nearest targets. We can see it now in the United States: in the men's rights activist scene, in the various online explosions of misogynist hatred, in the murder of women by angry male virgins, in the rhetoric of the alt right. This attitude is the result of a willful misidentification of enemy combined with a sense of betrayed entitlement; it is a hallmark of the abuser as well as of the fascist.

Furthermore, the assertion that violence without context purifies the soul and uplifts its enactor is based in a rejection of the less violent aspects of life—and an assertion that there *are* such non-violent enterprises. In reacting against the home, against femininity, against the “decadence” (a term that cannot but evoke homosexuality, given the popular view of the fall of Rome) that afflicts modern civilization, in assigning blame for alienation and atomization to a vague “culture” rather than to the workings of capitalist, state, and colonial power, this analysis makes invisible the violent exercises of power in all of those realms. It is a case of mistaking a sense of empowerment for real power, and it ignores the often ugly consequences for both the enactors of violence and their victims.

For Sorel, the virtue of conflict lay in the conflict itself—conflict was utopia. “History, according to Sorel, was the history of violence; it is impossible, he believed, to understand history without understanding the role of violence: the positive value of violence, which was characterized by such terms as ‘pure’, ‘idealistic’, ‘just’ and ‘purified’.” It may be valid to view history as the history of violence, but morally elevating it in this way ignores and obscures how violence is practically administered. While many in struggle of all kinds have found violence inherent to their project, the Sorelian mentality mistakes an awful reality for an end goal. In doing so, it turns its utopia into something uglier than what it was meant to oppose.

## II. Religion, myth, and intellectual opportunism

The most important aspect of Sorel’s valorization of the General Strike is its mythic nature, not its desirability as a tactic. As Ohana puts it, Sorel’s general strike “has no achievable purposes, it has no concrete plan of action and it is not formulated in terms of political action. The general strike is a myth, a series of ideas. It is of little importance if the general strike was partly successful or only a product of the popular fantasy. The importance lies in the infusion of fighting spirit into the proletarian masses and the capitalistic owners. ‘I understand that the myth of the general strike astounds many cautious people because of its interminable nature.’ Actually, this feature of the general strike underlines its mythical, not its practical nature.”

Myth drives people to do what they would otherwise never do, and as the Volkische movement slowly transitioned away from Christianity, it needed replacement myths to avoid becoming simply an alternative lifestyle choice. In the meantime, the movement readily capitalized on Christian anti-Semitism

and “new Chosen People” mentality. Mosse says there was a tendency to “substitute the image of the Volk for the person and function of Christ.” Volks revived the Wotan cult, the sun cult, and had a general adoration of “primitivism.” (Later, of course, Nazi Germany became obsessed with crypto-Hindu mysticism, as a way of affirming their “Aryan roots.”) Novels were used to resurrect and reinvent “the glorious past” of the German people; its modern degeneracy symbolized the death of the Christian God. (Some writers extrapolated Germans’ ancient destiny to rule from Tacitus’ description of the Goth invasion of Rome—amazing, as Mussolini later justified the Italian destiny to rule on the basis of the Roman Empire.) An influential writer proclaimed that a revolution and defeat of the racial enemy would be a cosmically inspired breakthrough by Aryans. Mosse describes this particularly vivid image: “Many Germans came to see themselves as knights riding bravely between death and the devil.” In short, God was in the Germans, the devil in the Jews: the conflict took on the tone of an epic moral battle between good and evil.

For those inclined neither towards Leftist labor myth nor Christianity, several philosophers were available to justify their political drift.

## **Heidegger**

Martin Heidegger may not have been an anti-Semite as a matter of personal belief, but he was certainly a Nazi, at least for the year of 1933. In that time, he glorified the Nazi party and Hitler as Nietzschean Supermen, and schemed with the party to become Rektor of a university, where he promoted party interests. He dismissed all Jewish faculty from the university; reorganized the university governance according to the “Führer” principle; and, variously, hurt or helped “exceptional” Jews who still remained in academia. His wife was a Nazi long before he was, and was an open anti-Semite. During this year of his strongest collaboration, Hannah Arendt, his former lover, asked Heidegger about the rumors that he was a vicious Nazi, and he denied everything. As a prominent intellectual, his support of the party was certainly influential to German opinion—as would have been his denunciation, had he made one.

Heidegger saw the Nazi revolution as “a collective breakout from Plato’s cave”: an end to the distractions of the modern world and a return to the ecstatic practice of Being that had been lost since the high days of Greece. He “rhapsodized over the spirit and power of the Volk, rooted in soil and blood, their granite will like the mountains of the German countryside”, their hearts nourished by German sunshine... He... declared that in the new

Reich the university would take on the task of bringing into reality a new, selfless, hard race of young men and women reflecting the strengths and the will of the new Reich and its chancellor, Hitler, who “alone,” he said, “is the present and future German reality and its law.””

Heidegger aspired to the role of chief philosopher of the National Socialist revolution; his retreat to his home, which took place only once it was clear that he had fallen into disfavor, and eventual renunciation of the party, were entirely opportunistic. He covered his initial retreat by saying he needed to be among the Volk rather than living the rarified intellectual life of Berlin, but later claimed he had in fact seen the horrors of Nazism completely and wanted to turn away from the party. It is less necessary to identify Heidegger’s crimes than his ethical failings, however: why did he not acknowledge and denounce the events unfolding around him? Why did he not, at the very least, show solidarity to the particular Jews he had known and cared for, such as Arendt?

Heidegger is an excellent example of how one can be fascist without being particularly racist. Arendt famously described the banality of evil Eichmann embodied; perhaps even more banal than a functionary like Eichmann is a conceited academic taking up a cause for personal gain with great excitement while choosing to ignore its implications. For him, to love the Volk was to kill the Jew, even if he refused to acknowledge it. Arendt avoided this sort of trap by refusing to love any *people*, instead loving particular people... and was roundly denounced by Zionists for it later. Nor did she ever trust other intellectuals after the Shoah, and perhaps in particular after Heidegger’s betrayal, though she did much to rehabilitate his reputation. “In an interview on German television in the 1960s, Arendt recalled that, while she lived in an intellectual milieu, she also knew ordinary working people, and that it was the intellectuals who were most enthusiastic about cooperating with the regime: ‘I never forget that,’ she said, ‘and when I left Germany I was dominated by the idea: Never again! I shall never again get involved in any kind of intellectual business. I want nothing to do with that lot.’” Nevertheless, she went on to continue to live and work in that milieu, however it disrespected her, out of her need to explore the truth. Heidegger stands as a contrast to her choices, choosing to trust intellectualism over taking an ethical stand. However he valued the Volk, he seems to have primarily loved himself.



## Jünger

If Heidegger represents the urge to return to the authentic past within semi-Nazi intellectuals of the time, Ernst Jünger served as the mythic bridge that allowed the Nazis to ideologically journey towards techno-dystopian efficiency and modernity. Jünger, who served in WWI, wrote a bestselling book in Germany between the wars; through this book, he “became the spokesman of the generation of the trenches that had sacrificed all and felt that they had received nothing in return.” This disenfranchised veteran class is always a strong constituency of reactionary movements.

Jünger wanted a male community based on warfare experiences. “The war, which produced the new communal masculine relationship, was not seen by Jünger as an experience of the past, a trauma or something unrepeatable, but as an ever-valid model and a creative phenomenon: ‘Battle is not only destruction but also the masculine form of creation.’” This is a clear example of the ways in which essentialism is bad for everyone, including men—as women can participate in all acts of destruction, and do so when sexism does not prevent them from such participation, so men can take part in actual acts of creation, rather than sublimating them into warfare. But for Jünger, war experience became central to everything. “From Jünger’s point of view, to write articles, poems or stories as if the language itself had not inhaled poisoned air or been pierced by barbed wire was romantic evasion or bourgeois illusion at a time when the very foundations of bourgeois culture had been undermined. Language had become a part of the violent structure of the world.” One is reminded of Adorn, who said: “There can be no poetry after Auschwitz.”

Jünger, an unrepentant elitist, did not care much for the Nazis because they were populists, used the populist tool of race, and were, by his lights, too liberal. However, he allowed himself to be used by them. Jünger’s focus on authenticity allowed for a separation of technology from civilization in proto-Nazi rhetoric, which led to the eventual elevation of technology—mysterious otherwise, if one considers the (at least cosmetically) agrarian roots of Volkische ideology. “According to Adorno, the jargon of ‘authenticity’ associated technology with spontaneity, experimentation, feelings, blood, will and instinct while civilization was associated with abstraction, intellect, reason and conceptualization.” Hitler himself never agreed with the Volkische hostility to technology. Goebbels, his minister of propaganda, said in a 1939 speech at a motor show in Berlin: “While bourgeois reaction was alien to and filled with incomprehension, if not hostility to technology, and while modern

skeptics believed the deepest roots of the collapse of European culture lay in it, National Socialism understood how to take the soulless framework of technology and fill it with the rhythm and hot impulses of our time.”

Nietzsche’s work was also useful in this separation of technology from the hated modernity; from Sorel to Mussolini and the German conservative revolutionaries, the technological vision was linked to the will to power. A 1930 essay, “National Socialism and Technology: The Spirituality of the National Socialist Movement” argued that racism itself was the necessary element in separating technology from the enemy and making it a part of the Nazi project. “The aim of Nazism was declared to be the liberation of technology from ‘the rule of money’ and Jewish materialism. Technology was thus not the material foundation of Nazism but an ‘independent factor’ in a new post-materialist culture.” Henry Ford’s factory model was praised as “productive capital” and contrasted with “Jewish capital;” later, the Nazi “Bureau for Work-Aesthetics” transformed blue-collar technological workers into a means of suppressing class warfare.

Jünger and Heidegger shared a conception of modern freedom as freedom-to-work. The Nazis claimed that there was a direct connection between the metaphysical significance given to work by thinkers such as Jünger and Heidegger and the performance of work on behalf of Germany. Here one must ask the question: was the inscription on the gates of Auschwitz – *Arbeit macht frei* (Work liberates) – a cynical exploitation of Jünger’s thought... or its logical conclusion?

## **Hitler, Eichmann, and Nazi workplace culture**

The revolt against the Jews rather than against social injustices or economic and political forces was an element in the Volkish thinking which Adolf Hitler was to exploit to the fullest. As a sham revolution, it promised much; above all, it precluded a genuine social upheaval. Thus the Jews were crucial foils. In this context the Volkish movement was bound to become popular: smash the Jewish conspiracy and the Volk will bloom forth unhindered. In fact, the elimination of all Jews would be accepted as a deed of liberation. Hitler plumbed all possibilities, and with devoted, pliable, and acquiescent accomplices even carried out the “anti-Jewish revolution” beyond the belief of those who accepted his promises in *Mein Kampf* at face value.

—George Mosse

The National Socialist Party was a product of that “idealism of deeds” which Volkish thought had always advocated. Later Volkische philosophy had become one of inner revolution and outer expansion—and Hitler seized the moment to urge such expansion. The anti-Semitism that had become integral to the Volkische project was also integral to Hitler’s psychological makeup: his anti-Semitism was based in his personal fears, his opposition to the urban life with which Volkism had identified Jews, and his hatred of the “debased elite.” But Hitler quite deliberately deployed anti-Semitism as a tactical point of unity, transforming the Volkische tendency, with its Bunden and youth groups and land projects, into a politicized fighting force. “Above all... [the Bund] failed to unite. As we know, Hitler did not make the same mistake. By instituting a social program, making skillful use of propaganda, and training a dynamic leadership, Hitler solved the problem for the Nazis.” It took “... the genius of Adolf Hitler to wed the Volkish flight from reality to political discipline and efficient political organization.”

This moment of political transformation illustrates the typical makeup of fascist social structure. There is a mass of sympathizers around a core of fanatics, which makes the fanatics feel that they are not fringe radicals, but a brave vanguard backed by an immense force. The sympathizers, meanwhile, translate the fanatic ideas to the mainstream, and appear fairly reasonable, thus acclimating the outside world to fascism such that the interior subculture gradually becomes the exterior world. There is, then, a double enforcement of membership—a sense of normalcy imposed from without, so that one’s crimes seem valid, and of complicity and violence within, making it feel impossible to leave without becoming a betrayer (or possibly a victim yourself.) Meanwhile, the cynicism of elite fanatics towards reality as it currently exists moves the whole world towards realizing the elite’s preferred fiction.

The National Socialist Party was originally quite anti-bourgeois, but as it became clear that most proletarians were going to stay leftist, Hitler consciously “opted for legitimacy, for the bourgeoisie and against the pernicious forces of the Jewish hydra.” On a practical level, building affinity with the powerful gave him funding sources. A racially-divided dual platform was developed as a solution for Nazis, the bourgeois, and the majority of Gentile Germans: the elimination of the bourgeois class—of Jews; the importance of family values—for Aryans, and so on. Many Germans desired a revolution, but not a corresponding shift in social and economic relationships. By stressing a spiritual transformation of the Volk, and making the only victims of the revolution Jews and other undesirables, Hitler strategically utilized the “revolutionary longings and grievances” of Germans to gain power without

destroying capitalism. Hitler's charisma is frequently blamed for his success, but it was far more tactical than magical. "Society is always prone to accept a person offhand for what he pretends to be, so that a crackpot posing as a genius always has a certain chance to be believed... The hair-raising arbitrariness of such fanaticism holds great fascination for society because for the duration of the social gathering it is freed from the chaos of opinions that it constantly generates," Arendt tells us.

While Hitler held his anti-Semitism close, Eichmann, one of the less important of his underlings, did not particularly hate Jews. In fact, Eichmann was converted to Zionism by reading Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat*. After that, he "thought of hardly anything but a 'political solution'... and how to 'get some firm ground under the feet of the Jews.'" To facilitate this emigration, he instituted a process that has since become familiar: "At one end you put in a Jew who still has some property... and he goes through the building from counter to counter, from office to office, and comes out the other end without any money, without any rights, with only a passport on which it says: 'You must leave the country within a fortnight. Otherwise you will go to a concentration camp.'"<sup>k</sup> In Eichmann, the slow bureaucratic horror of biopolitical management matured. He was not opposed to doing things in the interests of (a few) Jews; for example, Jews from Palestine treated with Nazi Germany to "'pick young Jewish pioneers' from among the Jews in the concentration camps;" they then illegally brought them to British-governed Palestine. Eichmann enthusiastically and politely worked with them towards this common goal. For neither party, it seems, was this project incompatible with the existence of the concentration camps.

As Arendt famously pointed out, Eichmann was normal—it is normal to be evil, and, in fact, understanding that proved destabilizing for those who examined him. It is this normalcy that is the true horror.<sup>1</sup> Eichmann's only peculiarity, if you can call it that, is a belief that he was right to do only what he was told. Before his trial, Eichmann "proposed to 'hang myself in public as a warning example for all anti-Semites on this earth.' By this he did not mean to say that he regretted anything: 'Repentance is for little children.'" Eichmann saw himself as a perfect idealist, a law-abiding citizen: "[he], like everybody else, had of course his personal feelings and emotions, but he would never permit them to interfere with his actions, if they came into conflict with his 'idea'." Eichmann was the perfect ideologue and the perfect

<sup>k</sup> This is Arendt's representation of the views of Jewish community leaders whom Eichmann invited to see this process, of which he was proud.

<sup>1</sup> Agamben makes a similar observation about the games of football that sometimes occurred between inmates and guards in the camps.

functionary, Arendt says, because he lacked empathy. “The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was safeguarded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such.” While this may have been a function of his particular banality, it was facilitated and maintained by Nazi workplace ethics.

Nazis had ‘language rules’ for talking about their genocide, which served the double purpose of keeping the camps somewhat secret and “the maintenance of order and sanity” within their ranks. “The net effect of this language system was not to keep these people ignorant of what they were doing, but to prevent them from equating it with their old, ‘normal’ knowledge of murder and lies.” Similarly, some Gentile Germans became (or claimed to have become, when guilt was being measured out after the end of the war) “inner emigrants:” those who secretly disbelieved in the Nazi program, and lived as strangers among their own people... but only in terms of their private, inner lives. At most they withdrew slightly from public life; some took the opposite tack, pretending to be “more Nazi than the Nazis” to preserve their own safety. This sort of doublethink goes along with the above doubletalk—at what point is pretense not simply reality? “[I]dentification with the movement and total conformism seems to have destroyed the very capacity for experience, even if it be as extreme as torture or the fear of death.” Until the spell was broken—at which point everyone *knew* that the Nazi project was insane and evil—everyone *knew*, and could not learn otherwise, that it was the correct course of action.

Hitler’s fascism channeled bourgeois dissatisfaction; it was mystical, unrealistic, and positive. “Fascism was far from being purely nihilistic [meaning *destructive*]: indeed, the discovery of a positive ideology was what enabled some fascists to succeed while their more negative confreres failed.” Its mysticism was no barrier; rather, it greased the wheels of material interest by creating a collaborative, homogenizing fiction. “The success of totalitarian propaganda, however, does not rest so much on its demagoguery as on the knowledge that interest as a collective force can be felt only where stable social bodies provide the necessary transmission belts between the individual and the group; no effective propaganda based on mere interest can be carried on among masses whose chief characteristic is that they belong to no social or political body, and who therefore present a veritable chaos of individual interests.”

Arendt describes the “lying world of consistency” established by Nazi ideology: something *better*, more comforting than reality itself, that both justified horrors and cushioned adherents from them. This fiction, this myth, generated a world of terror. For example, Hitler created a narrative of “a class struggle caused by the Jewish businessman who exploits his workers, while at the same time his brother in the factory courtyard incites them to strike.” This picture simultaneously defangs class struggle as a worthy enterprise and directs class resentment from the poor and fear from the bourgeoisie against the fictional machinations of the Jews. In this way, Arendt says, “The assumption of a Jewish world conspiracy was transformed by totalitarian propaganda from an objective, arguable matter into the chief element of the Nazi reality; the point was that the Nazis *acted* as though the world were dominated by the Jews and needed a conspiracy to defend itself.” Similarly, the entirely fictional “Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” which continue to inspire racist conspiracy theories today, at once generated and mirrored the real aims of the Nazis. Arendt observes that the Nazi slogan “Right is what is good for the German people” is remarkably similar to the Protocols’ “Everything that benefits the Jewish people is morally right and sacred.” Fiction affects its author most of all. This was obvious in Eichmann’s trial: “Eichmann needed only to recall the past in order to feel assured that he was not lying and that he was not deceiving himself, for he and the world he lived in had once been in perfect harmony.”

The self-creating prophecy of the Nazis was incredibly material:

The official SS newspaper, the *Schwarze Korps*, stated explicitly in 1938 that if the world was not yet convinced that the Jews were the scum of the earth, it soon would be when unidentifiable beggars, without nationality, without money, and without passports crossed their frontiers. And it is true that this kind of factual propaganda worked better than Goebbels’ rhetoric, not only because it established the Jews as scum of the earth, but also because the incredible plight of an ever-growing group of innocent people was like a practical demonstration of the totalitarian movements’ cynical claims that no such thing as inalienable human rights existed and that the affirmations of the democracies to the contrary were mere prejudice, hypocrisy, and cowardice in the face of the cruel majesty of a new world.

First, the stateless are deprived of home and of government protection; then, once they are actually rendered superfluous, they can be killed with impunity. This was one of the points of concentration camps; had Nazis simply rounded up all the Jews and shot them in the millions, civilized people might have protested. "...before they [the Nazis] set the gas chambers into motion they had carefully tested the ground and found out to their satisfaction that no country would claim these people. The point is that a condition of complete rightlessness was created before the right to live was challenged."

This process of dehumanization also took place on the ground level. The camps began as bullying fantasies brought to life, Arendt says, which at first simply employed pre-existing sadists; then they were systematized, and used to make humans into the SS. One guard reported, "Usually I keep on hitting until I ejaculate. I have a wife and three children in Breslau. I used to be perfectly normal. That's what they made of me. Now when they give me a pass out of here, I don't go home. I don't dare look my wife in the face." In this way, differences are destroyed on both levels—not to say that the damage done to the guards is at all comparable to the suffering of their victims, but to say the Nazi goal was the systematic destruction of difference on all fronts: the conversion of people into mechanical sadists beating dehumanized flesh. This is not so different from Achille Mbembe's analysis of the libidinal nature of slavery in his theory of necropolitics, explored at length in a later chapter. Necropolitics was not invented in the Shoah, but certainly bloomed full and heavy in the camps. Arendt may not have realized its lack of originality, but her analysis otherwise stands: "If we take totalitarian aspirations seriously and refuse to be misled by the common-sense assertion that they are utopian and unrealizable, it develops that the society of the dying established in the camps is the only form of society in which it is possible to dominate man entirely. Those who aspire to total domination must liquidate all spontaneity, such as the mere existence of individuality will always engender, and track it down in its most private forms, regardless of how unpolitical and harmless these may seem."

The urge for consistency destroys difference and human dignity.

This is an incredibly important aspect of fascism, which claims, after all, to realistically cope with difference—Jews are subhuman, and must be exterminated; Mexicans are criminals and rapists, and cannot be allowed across our borders. This aspect of fascism is memorably presented in Madeline L'Engle's fictional work, *A Wrinkle in Time*:

“But that's exactly what we have on Camazotz. Complete equality. Everybody exactly alike.”

For a moment her brain reeled with confusion. Then came a moment of blazing truth. “No!” she cried triumphantly. “Like and equal are not the same thing at all!”

...But Charles Wallace continued as though there had been no interruption. “In Camazotz all are equal. In Camazotz everybody is the same as everybody else,” but he gave her no argument, provided no answer, and she held on to her moment of revelation.

*Like and equal are two entirely different things.*

If you are skeptical of the value of a young adult novel to the anti-fascist project, consider: when we are programmed as children to hate and fear the Other, whatever form that Other might take, it is sometimes only the critical tools provided by the liberatory mythologies of our youth that allow us to counter these arguments as adults. This is a very real challenge. Using a tone of prophetic science, Hitler got people to think of his project as one extending over millennia, which meant that the immediate atrocities were justified; those who murdered Jews were made to believe that what they were doing was a grand, historic task. Himmler said, “To have stuck it out and, apart from exceptions caused by the human condition, to have remained decent, that is what has made us hard. This is a page of glory in our history which has never been written and is never to be written.” Their work was deliberately framed as unrelated to everyday cruelty, to which of course all civilized Germans were opposed. The gas chambers were glossed as “mercy killing”; in fact, some Germans were angry that the gas was being wasted on the Jews, when it ought to be preserved for Gentile Germans in case of Allied victory. To counter this ideology, a completely different worldview is necessary, something beyond pointing out the speciousness of its claims. And, when the fascist project has gone beyond the theoretical phase and into its next, murderous era, Arendt offers us a practical way to oppose such mystical doublethink: “Hitler... spoke of ‘dying classes’ that ought to be eliminated without much ado.’ ...The only valid argument under such conditions is promptly to rescue the person whose death is predicted.”



## failed explanations

Wilhelm Reich, in his popular early study *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, shows both an oppositional understanding of fascism, and his own neuroses and unexamined tendencies towards essentialist ways of thinking. While few Leftists would dispute that modern sexuality is malformed by patriarchy, and that this malformation contributes to many negative social forms and interactions in unspoken ways, it is a large stretch to argue, as Reich does, that it is the primary root of fascist tendencies. Moreover, Reich's essentialist understanding of gendered societies—and, in particular, his pathologizing of transgressive sexualities—irredeemably poisons his arguments from their start. His analysis seems to be more a diagnosis of his own sexual and mental difficulties than a realistic analysis of the motives behind fascism. He is not wrong that fascists were (and are) neurotics obsessed with “curing” the external factors they found responsible for the sorry state of the world—he just also shares this condition. His belief that sexual liberation will solve most of humanity's problems has not borne fruit, and must be uprooted.

Reich opposes the mysticism of racial purity: “such views are unequivocally mystical: nature ‘wills’ and ‘regulates.’ They are the logical continuation of biological metaphysics.” This racism justifies imperialism; it was Hitler's view that humanity is divided into three kinds of races: those who establish culture, those who develop culture, and those who destroy culture. These mystical views do not stay strictly theoretical. “*By forming ideologies, people change themselves; the process of ideology formation has a material core.*” The fascists theorized a war of political (the Jewish materialism of Marx) and racial pollution versus mysticism and the purity of German blood and land. As Hitler put it: “Race is the outer world of the soul.” By Reich's analysis, such essentialist mysticism is necessary to the fascist drive, and must be undone by humanistic science.

Despite this basis of understanding, Reich falls into his own mysticism, that of the orgone (the orgasmic energy he believed is unconsciously transmitted between sexual participants) and sex-economy; and, most relevantly, that of matriarchal nature. He sees matriarchy as the organization of the sex-economically-natural society, and patriarchy as the authoritarian and catastrophically chaotic society built upon the perverted sex impulse. From a position that opposes all gendered power and does not take a conveniently reductionist view of history, this is not useful. Furthermore, he does not problematize pagan mysticism as he does Christian and crypto-mysticism: “The mysticism of the sex-affirming matriarchal primitive [sic] is not due to sexual suppression as is the mysticism of the patriarchal individual. It is in

part immediate orgiastic experience and in part animistic interpretation of natural processes.” He observes: “Fascist ideology (in contrast to Christian ideology) separates human orgiastic longing from the structure created by the authoritarian patriarchy and assigns it to various races: ‘Nordic’ is equivalent to *bright, heavenly, exalted, pure, asexual*; ‘Asiatic’ to *instinctual, demonical, ecstatic, sexual, orgiastic*.” While we concur about the evolution of patriarchy and the governance of sexuality as an economic measure, and Reich correctly disassociates the construct of sexuality from raced imaginings (made one in many racist ideologies), he still gives credit to the mythology around “natural” forces in human society as a historical narrative of this shift, opposing patriarchal civilization to “barbaric” matriarchy’s sensuality. To critique mysticism, he uncritically relies upon another mystical standpoint: he offers no explanation to back his claims that matriarchal societies are healthier, do not produce raced or gendered violence, and are natural; he does not even cite evidence (though it exists) that they do/have existed. This tendency to uncritically exalt matriarchy as a natural form of organization continues within certain nature-reifying, essentialist efforts of today, examined in section 4 of this text.

Reich saw the formation of “healthy” sexuality as the most necessary development for the eradication of fascism. He opposes this healthy sexuality to that formed under Christianity, which is capitalized upon to reinforce fascist mysticism (honor, love of land and nation, sexual morality, duty.) Reich believed that Christian sexual suppression in the adolescent makes them vulnerable to mysticism, which in turn opens them to fascism. Mysticism’s purpose is to divert attention from daily misery with the belief in the afterlife, thus rendering materialism irrelevant and otherwise ludicrous struggles reasonable. “Both patriarchal family attitudes and mystical attitudes are the basic mass-psychological elements of fascist and imperialist nationalism.” The mother fixation created by Christian morality translates directly into the homeland feeling.

These tendencies work best, Reich says, on sexually repressed, “unpolitical” people (code for “the masses”) who are not passively apolitical but actively so, as a defense against social responsibility. They are easily swayed by mysticism... and deviant sex, which seems to momentarily resolve their inner conflicts. Religious people, unable to express their sexuality in healthy ways, become oversexed and perverted. “Happiness in this world is not only unattainable for him, but it does not even seem desirable to him.” Hence, true Christians have no room for materialism; instead, they form a dedication to impossible, otherworldly goals that work against their personal interests.

Religion, politics, and mystical nationalism become the arousing agent, rather than ordinary sexual possibilities. Masochism, Reich says, comes from the desire to enjoy pleasure without feeling guilt; if one is punished and then forced to feel pleasure, it is guilt-free. “Here lies the root of *the ideology of passive suffering* which is part of all patriarchal religions.” The conscious longing is for a delivery from sin, the unconscious longing is for a delivery from sexual tension. “The religious individual negates his sexuality by mystifying the excitation... Religious feeling is subjectively genuine and has a physiological basis. The negation of the sexual nature of these excitations results, characterologically, in insincerity... The structure of the patriarchal individual... is molded by sexual suppression.” All of this begins when children are made to feel guilty and sinful for masturbating, and referred to God for forgiveness. Reich also analyzes the Virgin Mary cult: “While the Jesus cult mobilizes the passive homosexual forces against genitility, the Virgin Mary cult utilizes forces from the heterosexual sphere itself: ‘Do no harm to a girl and remember that your mother, too, was once a girl.’” Conceiving of all women as your mother, combined with the incest taboo, redirects the sexual energy of the man (straight, Reich tellingly fails to note—he has something more particular to say about gay men) into mystical energy.

Reich says that mysticism must be fought materially, ideologically and culturally, but primarily on a sexual basis, since sexuality carries such emotional weight; that’s why the church chose that ground to fight on. Opposing this Christian programming is the political project Reich sees for therapists, to show people the contradiction in their thoughts; the “task is that of *making conscious the conflict and the suffering* in the suppressed mass individual.” The youth should be targeted with this approach, it is they who matter... and, in a prelude to the sexual revolution, “youth is no longer on a mass basis accessible to a sex-negating ideology.” German fascism also worked to win the youth base:

To do this, it had at its disposal no other means than the creation and the nurturing of submissiveness to authority the basic prerequisite of which is an ascetic, sex-negative upbringing. The natural sexual strivings for the other sex, strivings which from infancy on urge for gratification, were replaced partly by homosexual and sadistic strivings, partly by asceticism. There was, for instance, the “spirit of comradeship in the work service camps, and the cultivation of the so-called “spirit of discipline and self-sacrifice.” These measures served the purpose of mobilizing sadistic brutality to be utilized in the imperialistic war. *Sadism derives from unsatisfied orgiastic longing.*

This analysis stands in brutal contrast to the experience described by the concentration camp guard, above, who felt he had a healthy sex life until it was deformed by the redirection of his sexual energy into violence. Reich argues the reverse. In this theorizing of sexual deviance, Reich's contradictory and personally complicated relationship to sexuality is laid bare. He claims that patriarchy's governance of sexuality as something filthy and perverse has in fact made it filthy and perverse. Nor is his opposition to deviant sexualities limited to sadomasochistic impulses; he also opposes homosexuality. He uses this analysis to reinforce a view of sexual deviancy as an unnatural development of civilization; it is to our advantage as homosexuals today that the gay tendencies of the Bund I previously described were not known to him, to be further theorized in these directions. (The Bund themselves might be pleased by the Platonic comparison, but horrified at their implication in modernity—surely the fault of the essentially feminine Jew, not the virile Aryan!) These arguments flow directly from his belief in some essentially healthy, natural way to perform sexuality—some way, that is, that is no longer a performance but authentic reality—to which society can and must return. That belief is not only something I find fundamentally untrue, but serves to justify his hatred of those he finds unnatural.

Reich asserts:

The adolescent develops a passive homosexual attitude. From the point of view of the dynamics of instinct, passive homosexuality is the most effective force against natural masculine sexuality, for it replaces activity and aggression by passive and masochistic attitudes, by the attitudes, in other words, which determine the structural basis of patriarchal authoritarian mysticism... the mass psychology of the followers [of a religion]: moral—and often definitely physical—masochism and physical submission. Religion derives its power from the suppression of genital sexuality, which, secondarily, produces passive and masochistic homosexuality.

He later claims, meaning it as an insult, that in the fully developed patriarchy of Greek democracy, “the men's rule of the Platonic age is definitely homosexual.” In this negative depiction of the “passive homosexual” as the perfect citizen—emasculated, unable to assert his rights or connect fully to others—Reich's contradictions, assumptions, and essentialism are at their worst. Sadly, he is not alone in these endeavors; Adorno, who always had too much to say, famously asserted that “homosexuality and totalitarianism belong together.”

Women are not excluded from Reich's homophobic, essentialist analysis.

Courtesans are women who rebel against the yoke of compulsive marriage and insist on their right to sexual self-determination. This demand, however, is in conflict with their early education which made them incapable of full sexual experience. Therefore, the courtesan engages in all kinds of adventures in order to escape her homosexuality, or she continues to be torn between the two strivings. The male counterpart is the homosexuality of the men who escape from compulsive marriage to the courtesan or homosexual boys and thus try to restore their capacity for sexual experience.

No doubt Reich would feel confirmed in this analysis by the increasingly complex queer relationships of today, which, for those of us involved in them, feel not pathological but liberating. The sexual revolution Reich called for was, however, a temporary opening rather than an entirely revolutionary and healing rupture. James Baldwin writes, reflecting on the impact Reich's work on sexual liberation and the orgone had on the time:

In retrospect, the discovery of the orgasm—or, rather, of the orgone box—seems the least mad of the formulas that came to hand. It seemed to me ... that people turned from the idea of the world being made better through politics to the idea of the world being made better through psychic and sexual health like sinners coming down the aisle at a revival meeting. And I doubted that their conversion was any more to be trusted than that. The converts, indeed, moved in a certain euphoric aura of well-being. Which would not last... There are no formulas for the improvement of the private, or any other, life—certainly not the formula of more and better orgasms. (Who decides?) The people I had been raised among had orgasms all the time, and still chopped each other with razors on Saturday nights.

We have also witnessed moments of revolutionary queer struggle since Reich wrote, defying his depiction of the homosexual as the perfectly governed, passive subject. (And we could, though it would be a newly essentialist claim, profane his argument, reading it backwards to argue for the “passive homosexual” as the revolutionary subject in the war against “natural masculine sexuality”—tops down, bottoms up!) Obviously, sexual repression has something to do with fascism, and you could argue that the people most likely to be fascist today are the most sexually repressed... but one cannot argue the inverse. As a generalization, Reich's analysis quickly

becomes repulsive. I think Reich is right in saying that unhealthy psychological structures are fundamental to fascist thinking, but it is a terrible reduction to say it is all because of repressed sexuality. Fascism should not be reduced to a pathology any more than it should be reduced to a coincidence of historical factors. If one must attempt the project, I suggest the key element of fascist psychology was instead one of self-hating insecurity, either within themselves, against their subculture, or against their society in general. The Italian fascist intellectual Giovanni Papini said, for example:

...nothing great can be made with shit. Italy of 1860 had been shit dragged kicking and screaming towards unification by a daring minority, and shit it remained throughout fifty years of unification, urged on by the occasional outbursts of zeal from small minorities either in favor of an imperial mission in Africa or of a liberating transformation in its domestic politics. We are a country of botched attempts: everything is tried and nothing comes off.

Wilhelm Reich rails against his detractors similarly in his epic polemic “Listen, Little Man.” For the crime of refusing to believe that orgasmic energy could cure cancer, he accuses his opponents of a petty small-mindedness that is as outwardly destructive as it is inwardly; he does not shy away from comparing them to fascists. Yet, in his own life, Reich seems to have expressed the same small-minded, repressed tendencies: for all his talk of the socially redemptive power of sexual liberation, he pressured three of his partners to have unwanted abortions. The origin of his neuroses and fixation on painful sexuality is not obscure; Reich had an Oedipal relationship with his mother, and a brutal and sadistic father, who made frequent unwanted advances to other women. Reich began having sexual experiences at the age of four, and first had sexual intercourse when he was 11. When he was 13, he discovered his mother having sex with one of his tutors. When he told his father, he reacted so abusively that Reich’s mother eventually committed suicide, for which Reich blamed himself. When Reich was 17, his father died, possibly intentionally out of guilt for his wife’s death; Reich also felt responsible for that death.

This is a terribly unfortunate history. Most people are motivated to pursue particular studies for personal reasons, and should not be faulted for that; analysts are deluding themselves if they claim to speak with any sort of objectivity. However, Reich’s extrapolation of his own sexual and emotional trauma onto society tragically served to obscure the real gold in his analysis: the naming of *character armor*. We are all little men, Reich averred; each of us

has a little Hitler inside our hearts. We are damaged by the world, and unable to fulfill our desires, and so we become neurotic, abusive, fascist. We can see a nesting series of these insecurities everywhere in what we have discussed: German insecurity contributed to Italian insecurity, both of which gave rise to fascism. Reich's analysis of the sexually dysfunctional basis of fascism betrays his own sexual insecurities, which gave rise to bad behavior in his personal life, the loss of his professional reputation, and a long series of failed experiments with insane machines and discredited therapeutic techniques. Also, all parties under discussion had a Messiah complex: all thought they could save humanity from whatever they perceived as the greatest ill. "In his last decades, he [Reich] became persuaded that he was called to bear the burdens for a sexually starved and sadistic human race and that he could point the way toward a new humanity if only his healing message could be heard." The same could be said for fascist idealists.

While I don't see sexuality as a primary resource for fascism, I think an interesting analysis of the fascist relationship to sexuality could be made. Foucault, a man much more at home in his "perversions"<sup>m</sup> than Reich, had this to say:

While it is true that the analytics of sexuality and the symbolics of blood were grounded at first in two very distinct regimes of power, in actual fact the passage from one to the other did not come about (any more than did these powers themselves) without overlappings, interactions, and echoes. In different ways, the preoccupation with blood and the law has for nearly two centuries haunted the administration of sexuality. Two of these interferences are noteworthy, the one for its historical importance, the other for the problems it poses. Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, the thematics of blood was sometimes called on to lend its entire historical weight toward revitalizing the type of political power that was exercised through the devices of sexuality. Racism took shape at this point (racism in its modern, 'biologizing', statist form): it was then that a whole politics of settlement, family, marriage, education, social hierarchization, and property, accompanied by a long series of permanent interventions at the level of the body, conduct, health, and everyday life, received their color and their justification from the mythical concern with protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race. Nazism was doubtless the most cunning and the most naive (and the former because of the latter) combination of

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m By Reich's lights, Foucault was a prime candidate for fascism, as a homosexual and sexual masochist. Foucault's life and politics alone gives Reich's argument the lie.

the fantasies of blood and the paroxysms of a disciplinary power. A eugenic ordering of society, with all that implied in the way of extension and intensification of micro-powers, in the guise of an unrestricted state control, was accompanied by the oneiric exaltation of a superior blood; the latter implied both the systematic genocide of others and the risk of exposing oneself to a total sacrifice. It is an irony of history that the Hitlerite politics of sex remained an insignificant practice while the blood myth was transformed into the greatest blood bath in recent memory.

Reich fails to suggest anything half so compelling. His failure, in the end, is to seduce.

### **the apocalypse has always been with us**

Arendt argues that the impulse towards joining fascist movements was inspired by the contradictions and misery of capitalism and the modern nation-state—that these will almost *inevitably* give birth to fascism, if there is no coherent alternative proposal.

If we compare this generation with the nineteenth-century ideologists, with whose theories they sometimes seem to have so much in common, their chief distinction is their greater authenticity and passion. They had been more deeply touched by misery, they were more concerned with the perplexities and more deadly hurt by hypocrisy than all the apostles of good will and brotherhood had been. And they could no longer escape into exotic lands, could no longer afford to be dragon-slayers amongst strange and exciting people. There was no escape from the daily routine of misery, meekness, frustration, and resentment embellished by a fake culture of educated talk; no conformity to the customs of fairy-tale lands could possibly save them from the rising nausea that this combination continually inspired. This inability to escape into the wide world, this feeling of being caught again and again in the trappings of society... added a constant strain and the yearning for violence to the older passion for anonymity and losing oneself.

Arendt is often described as a self-hating Jew, a victim-blamer, for her analysis of the role some Jewish community and religious leaders played in their cooperation with the Nazis. I find her, rather, to be making an argument about the role authority figures often play for any oppressed group in their negotiation with the world. By Arendt's analysis, "...if the Jewish people had



really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people.” Furthermore, she sees the “moral collapse of respectable Jewish society” as rooted in these leaders’ tacit agreement to the creation of privileged categories—that, by allowing a few Jews to be taken away in the name of saving the many, they implicitly accepted the idea that some Jews deserved to die more than others. This served to undermine the possibility of solidarity among those who were privileged today but doomed to die tomorrow, and promoted the idea of survival at any ethical cost.

I think the acceptance and enforcement of essential categories, not to mention the dictates of any sort of leaders, will always undermine the survival efforts of oppressed people, and serve the intentions of the oppressor. I believe we should resist any efforts made to form us into a mass—that is, an undifferentiated group of people, whose only important attribute is that we are not the Other, not the enemy—and recognize and celebrate our differences without letting them solidify into a new means of control. And, if we find ourselves becoming a homogenous group of any sort, we should force ourselves to become uncomfortable, to refuse the familiar. Many of us organizing against racism in the US in recent years have watched in horror as well-intentioned “white allies” drift more and more into the abyss of white identity—there is something destructive about recognizing the definitions of race enough to actually segregate yourself, no matter your intentions. Valorization of the gay elite, and of a certain kind of relationship to the land, deserve a special callout for their current popularity in modern U.S. radical Left circles. While I do not think either is necessarily fascist, their manifestations in pre-Nazi Germany show us that they are not necessarily practices of freedom either.

Arendt also points out that essentialism engenders a false sense of security—if we “know” certain basic truths about how people of a category will always behave, we trust in the predictability of stories someone else wrote about how the world will operate. The Shoah changed that. “The tragic fallacy of all these prophecies, originating in a world that was still safe, was to suppose that there was such a thing as one human nature established for all time, to identify this human nature with history, and thus to declare that the idea of total domination was not only inhuman but also unrealistic. Meanwhile we have learned that the power of man is so great that he really can be what he wishes to be.”

We must also resist the urge to measure our deserved power or authority by our losses. While Jewish history is full of pogroms, expulsions, and role enforcement, there had always been, according to Arendt, the belief that “the people of Israel shall live; individual Jews, whole Jewish families might die in pogroms, whole communities might be wiped out, but the people would survive.” The Shoah shook that belief to its core, creating a far-compounded trauma of a different magnitude than the longstanding trauma experienced by Jews across centuries. That is tremendous. However: Harry Mulisch, the great Dutch writer (whose mother was a Jew, but whose family largely escaped the gas chamber because of his father’s collaboration with the Nazis), mused: “Would the death of the Jews have been less of an evil if they were a people without a culture, such as the Gypsies [sic] who were also exterminated?” He concluded that it would not have been, but it’s a hell of a question to pose if one considers the possible perspectives of Roma. Today, marginalized communities in the United States are often treated as if they have no particular culture “worth saving”; people talk of “getting back to the land” as if urban relationships to the land are meaningless; “exemplary immigrants”, people of Asian and Indian descent, are exoticized and ignored in turn. We must refuse these divisions. And, importantly for our current situation, Arendt traces the origin of the police state to their management of stateless peoples:

The nation-state, incapable of providing a law for those who had lost the protection of a national government, transferred the whole matter to the police. This was the first time the police in Western Europe had received authority to act on its own, to rule directly over people; in one sphere of public life it was no longer an instrument to carry out and enforce the law, but had become a ruling authority independent of government and ministries. Its strength and its emancipation from law and government grew in direct proportion to the influx of refugees. The greater the ratio of stateless and potentially stateless to the population at large... the greater the danger of a gradual transformation into a police state... That the Nazis eventually met with so disgracefully little resistance from the police in the countries they occupied, and that they were able to organize terror as much as they did with the assistance of these local police forces, was due at least in part to the powerful position which the police had achieved over the years in their unrestricted and arbitrary domination of stateless [people] and refugees.

The call for resistance on all of these fronts is not only ethically but practically vital. There were in fact many who refused to cooperate with the Nazis; whether or not they survived, they give the lie to the idea that resistance would have been impossible.<sup>n</sup> It is also worth recalling that the government will almost always side with the fascists in the end; in 1920s Germany, as in Italy, the anarchists and Communists faced police repression, while fascist efforts were either ignored or directly supported by the police and military. As an SA slogan held: “Possession of the streets is the key to power in the State.” And, even if you cannot win or hold the streets, breaking consensus is a meaningful gesture. Discussing widespread, socially supported resistance to the Nazi program in Denmark,<sup>o</sup> Arendt states: “It is the only case we know of in which the Nazis met with open native resistance, and the result seems to have been that those exposed to it changed their minds. They had met resistance based on principle, and their ‘toughness’ had melted like butter in the sun, they had even been able to show a few timid beginnings of genuine courage. That idea of ‘toughness,’ except, perhaps, for a few half-demented brutes, was nothing but a myth of self-deception, concealing a ruthless desire for conformity at any price...”

Even if the odds are dramatically stacked against the success of resistance, it challenges the notion of universal agreement with fascist principles in a way that can have a significant impact. It was the lack of such resistance and Nazi belief in group consensus that made the “Final Solution” possible; “[a]s Eichmann told it, the most potent factor in the soothing of his own conscience was the simple fact he could see no one, no one at all, who actually was against the Final Solution.” Those who did show their opposition seem to have made a powerful impression on those around them. Even for the intended victims, resistance was the most tactically viable solution; those interned primarily as “belligerents”, or who were never captured at all because they fought back, were far more likely to survive. Under totalitarian regimes, terror increases in inverse proportion to the amount of resistance it actually faces.

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n The most resistance to the rise of the Nazis within Germany came from the Right, but most of these believed that a German civil war would be a great disaster(!), and so held back

o We know of many more examples, though Arendt may have not; but Danish resistance was remarkably widespread, and supported at least in part by the government.

Finally, we must preserve our ability to remember and mourn our dead, and fight for a world in which both their choices and ours are real ones. Attacking these elements of human experience was an innovation of the fascists. “His death merely set a seal on the fact that he had never really existed... Totalitarian terror achieved its most terrible triumph when it succeeded... in making the decisions of conscience absolutely questionable and equivocal. When a man is faced with the alternative of betraying and thus murdering his friends or of sending his wife and children, for whom he is in every sense responsible, to their deaths; when even suicide would mean the immediate murder of his own family—how is he to decide? Who could solve the moral dilemma of the Greek mother who was allowed by the Nazis to choose which of her three children should be killed?”

When our enemies give us such choices, our only possible response is communal defiance.



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“But that’s exactly what we have on Camazotz. Complete equality. Everybody exactly alike.”

For a moment her brain reeled with confusion. Then came a moment of blazing truth. “No!” she cried triumphantly. “Like and equal are not the same thing at all!”

...But Charles Wallace continued as though there had been no interruption. “In Camazotz all are equal. In Camazotz everybody is the same as everybody else,” but he gave her no argument, provided no answer, and she held on to her moment of revelation.

*Like and equal are two entirely different things.*

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