

The future of fascism

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Since the collapse of actually existing socialism and the abrupt ending of the Cold War that had polarized the world along the lines of contending theories of modernization, there has been a steady attempt to recover historical intensities that had been displaced by the reduction of political differences to a dyadic struggle between ‘totalitarianism’ and the ‘free world’. Almost as if the flood gates had been lifted, the suppressed experiences of a prior age have been unleashed into the new time announced by the post-Cold War, reminding the present that the past had not really disappeared so much as been shelved in our midst, a little like a purloined letter we have faced without recognizing it in its place. One of the more important casualties of this silencing and banishment was the fate of fascism, as both a powerful ideological force in the 1930s and a political movement that swept rapidly over whole continents. This is not to suggest that throughout the years of the Cold War the subject was ignored, but its understanding was mediated by its association with the category of totalitarianism. With the ending of the Cold War, fascism was released from its singular association with totalitarianism and the way was reopened to focus on its relationship to capitalist modernization, if not to induce occasional pangs of nostalgia for the 1920s and 1930s.

The turn to reassessing the status of fascism has been prompted less by a desire to perform a historiographical finger exercise than the need to find an optic capable of grasping the contemporary situation, in which the familiar signs of fascism have begun to show themselves with greater regularity. The appearance of three books,* within a year or so of each other, demonstrates a desire to ‘work through a past’ in order to avoid both the risk of caricature and the forgetting of objective social conditions that identify the continuing persistence of fascist spectres. Paxton and Wolin both agree with Michael Mann’s declared aim ‘to take fascism seriously’, as if to compensate for a weakened memory that more often than not inhibited the effort to work through the traces of this shelved history. These

books seek to show that even though fascism had its epochal moment, its history is not nearly completed in light of the contemporary conjuncture and the turn of events since 9/11. Lurking behind this renewed interest, then, is the fearful conviction that a political catastrophe threatens to repeat itself in a different register and that the past of fascism might yet prefigure our future and take reprisals on it, since it has not yet been sufficiently worked through.

Forgetting fascism

Let me begin by recalling Hannah Arendt’s epochal study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), issued not long after the inauguration of the Cold War. It initiated the long-standing tendency to reduce fascism and communism to their shared, minimal dimensions by referring to both as expressions of totalizing political forms – different sides of the same coin – committed to state violence on a genocidal scale. Coupling Stalin and Hitler became a favourite reflex of the Cold War, drawing upon the experience of Germany and Italy to dramatize fascism’s urge to realize total reorganization and Soviet Russia to personify the communist analogue. Both shared a genocidal impulse driven by the necessity of realizing a totalizing political ambition. But what Arendt dropped from her new equation was the role played by vitalism in the 1930s and its relationship to fascism. This is still important because vitalism (excoriated by Georg Lukács in his underappreciated *The Destruction of Reason*, 1952), signified, in its full fury, the end of civilization and culture altogether, and was joined at the hip with the desire of totalitarianism to perpetuate the loss of freedom in self-estrangement and unreality. In fact, in the 1930s, vitalism and totalitarianism were seen as opposing forces, with the former standing for the preconscious, changeless and ahistorical, while the latter signified post-consciousness and the post-historical. Furthermore, to link socialism, even the Stalinist inflection of a distorted Marxism, to cultural nihilism and a frenzied Spenglerian civilizational dance of death worked

* Michael Mann, *Fascists*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004; Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Norton, Boston MA, 2003; Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004.

more to reinforce the ideological alignments of the Cold War than to account for the clash of historical differences before the war. It also overlooked the fact that the Soviet Union had just come out of a genocidal war that had taken the lives of 20 to 30 million of its inhabitants.

The alternative Arendt chose was to return to the scene of the prewar conjuncture and rescue a discredited liberal democracy, which had already failed to save capitalism from itself. Her reconfiguration made the West's Cold War struggle with a generic totalitarianism appear as a continuation of a World War II effort to dispose of one local version of authoritarianism before embarking upon another, in an emerging world-historical conflict. Hence, in the scholarly literature, this powerful intervention licensed the widespread practice, especially among historians and political scientists, of envisaging fascism as a variant of Marxism, an offshoot or outgrowth, sharing common properties and often similar political, economic and social emblems, ideas and goals. This particular tactic encouraged the incorporation of fascism into Marxism, and both Nazism and Soviet Communism into totalitarianism, in order to sharpen and clarify the polar positions of the Cold War contest.

The effect of this twinning was both to remove fascism from contemporary considerations by sweeping it under the carpet of communism and to constrain its future recurrence by confining it to its moment – what Ernst Nolte called the ‘epoch of fascism’ – thereby signalling that it had moved into the past. Once this specific configuration of fascism had played out its productivity on the historical stage, the process of forgetfulness rapidly set in, since there seemed to be no good reason to fear its return. During the Cold War, social theory, in the form of programmatic development and modernization theory, facilitated the effacement of fascism from the screen of contemporary consciousness by substituting the category of modernity for capitalist accumulation, and, thereby, removing the crucial relationship between capitalist crises and the variety of attempts to resolve them or evade their baneful effects on political society. In this new narrative, capitalism's fateful aptitude for producing unevenness was misrecognized as ‘underdevelopment’ and a sign of temporal delay (a colossal case of misidentity) and was suppressed in favour of the promise of convergence and the realization of even development. It was in this context that democracy was identified with market capitalism, as a natural relationship, when before the war they were considered incompatible.

If fascism was banished from the Cold War present, resulting in a dismissal of its concept as a reliable analytic and descriptive instrument, its unsurprising return after the collapse of the Berlin Wall has reintroduced all of those repressed memories residing in the political and cultural unconscious that acted as placeholders of what officially had been delegated to forgetfulness and imprisoned in a historiography based on the passing of its epoch. Even before the Cold War ended, however, some voices were willing to confront the spectres of fascism as a living reminder of what had once happened in the past and could surely recur in the present. In the 1970s Primo Levi consistently declared that every age could expect the return of fascism in new and different registers – what in *The Drowned and the Saved* he described as the continuation of the ‘Silent Nazi Diaspora’.¹ He was persuaded that even if fascism would not always and overtly take the form of violence and coercion associated with its prior historical experience, polluting judicial processes and poisoning educational practices, it could encourage nostalgia for a world in which order supposedly prevailed, in innumerable ways. But he also recognized that such insurmountable nostalgia easily leads back to precisely those devices employed to maintain the illusory fear of disorder, and those disciplines devoted to maintaining order,² which Deleuze and Guattari, in another instance, associated with ‘microfascism’.

Years before, in 1959, Levi's contemporary Theodor Adorno returned to the terrain of fascism to recall for his present that the ‘past that one would like to evade is still very much alive’. ‘That fascism lives on,’ he asserted, ‘that the oft invoked working through of the past has to this day been unsuccessful and has degenerated into its own caricature and cold forgetting to the fact that the objective conditions of society that engendered fascism continue to exist.’ But Adorno quickly warned that fascism cannot be derived from subjective dispositions. ‘The economic order, and to a great extent also the economic organization modelled upon it, now as then renders the majority of people dependent upon conditions beyond their control and thus maintains things in a state of political immaturity.’ Acutely aware of the failures of liberal democracy during the inter-war period and its contemporary pitfalls, recognizing also that democracy and capitalism had been once recognizably incompatible, Adorno was convinced that it had not yet been ‘naturalized to the point where people truly experience it as their own and see themselves as subjects of a political process’. It was simply one among a number of items on a menu offering political choice. People were not identified with democracy; nor

was it a sign of their political maturity. Instead, it was nothing more than an instrument of special interests to which people 'submit to given conditions' that force them to 'negate precisely the autonomous subjectivity to which the idea of democracy appeals'.³

Adorno's untimely reflections on the failure of democracy and the importance of 'objective' conditions to any understanding of fascism echoed the prescient and penetrating observations made a generation earlier by Karl Polanyi, who, as early as 1935, had already pronounced on fascism's desire to erect a society founded not on the 'conscious relationships of persons', but rather the conviction to 'transform' and structure' them in such ways as to extinguish the development towards 'socialism'.⁴ What Polanyi had unveiled in this overlooked analysis of fascism made on location, so to speak, was the continental historical experience that democracy inevitably led to socialism and how this outcome necessitated the elimination of the former before its transubstantiation into the latter. Fascist anti-individualism derived from a rationale founded on the belief that capitalism and democracy were incompatible, as was the utopia of unregulated market capitalism that he dissected later in *The Great Transformation* (1944). Fascism was thus committed not merely to destroying democracy but also to establishing a new social order rid of the possibility of its return. For both Mussolini and Hitler, the principle of democratic equality in politics and the principle of private ownership of the means of production in economic life had created the contemporary crisis and underscored the widespread belief that democracy's moment had passed.

Polanyi later detected the link yoking liberalism to fascism, inasmuch as fascism saw its task as preventing interference in the price system and diminishing the sum total of goods produced, as promoted by both communism and democracy. 'Fascism', hence, 'is condoned as the safeguard of liberal economics through the elimination of a democratic political sphere and the subsequent reorganization of economic life' – market capitalism – on the template of different branches of industry to become the 'whole of society'. As a result, fascism appeared everywhere under the banner of solving the crisis of capitalism by calling into question the utility of all forms of political representation (sharing with modernism a comparable distrust of claims to artistic and cultural representation) and demanding, in many instances, a moratorium on all forms of political representation. To this end it promised the installation of an arrangement that would reflect the template of economic life – capitalism – by

superimposing on it the figure of a natural, organic community. In this way, fascism pledged its energies to expunging the social from society and ridding economic life of all the impurities that had created conflict and impaired its full development. But the principal condition of this communitarian condition, which Slavoj Žižek has called '*Gemeinschaft* capitalism', required the extinguishing of all traces of subjective autonomy underlying the claims of individualism and its replacement by the 'restoration' of a natural order that had been lost to history and the 'now' of the times signalled as the appointed moment of repetition of an everyday lived by the folk. Proto-fascist theorists like Ludwig Klages had called for a decontamination of life, which meant eradicating the 'Body-Soul' of consciousness, 'Mind', as 'an inimical irruption ... a disease'. The Austrian philosopher Othmar Spann pointed to the self-estranged condition of contemporary society and the objectification of social relationships that Marxists upheld as a 'spectral world', where the 'spectres' are real. Spann reasoned that social relationships are not self-estranged because there is no place for the individual and autonomy. Capitalism was not only the truth of social reality, it was eternal – an endless present or permanent temporal fusion of past and future in the now.⁵

In fact, it was precisely this sensitivity to the demands of the present, the domination of the new, and the vestiges of the past still lingering in material evidence and nostalgia that disclose fascism's encounter with time and its political dimension. Too often, proponents of modernity have dramatized the difference between fascist modernity and a modernist version on the basis of the role played by the past in the present. Hence, fascist modernity, rooted in recalling the archaic, was invariably seen as retrograde, uneven and incomplete, compared to some idealized, modernist vision of the modern that had already expelled the past from its precincts. Yet fascist conceptions of temporality were no more rooted in the past, which often was refigured in the present for tactical reasons, than any other conception of modernity that claimed release from the burdens of its past. The politics of time built into modernity concerns the way in which modern societies deal with the question of the past in the present and how they choose to acknowledge or displace its force. The perceived indeterminacy of an empirical present and an absent past that is constantly being summoned and mixing with the new constitutes not so much a resistance to modernity as the principal condition of what it means to become modern. Contemporaneity and the appeal to the timelessness held

by memory invariably reveal a structure of deferral and desire that repetition seeks to resolve while managing only to stimulate even greater anxiety about the future. With Spann, moreover, even the state was relegated to a recessive position, conforming to medieval organic conceptions, reserving the totality to society as a whole; whereas for Klages, vitalism or the will-to-power and unconscious life, now emptied of the last residues of consciousness, authorized unimaginable destruction. This move opened the way to Carl Schmitt's conception of a state absorbed in identifying and destroying its enemies – the killing of non-nationals who at the same time were non-natural and the formation of a version of human community based on the principle of a 'fixed sequence of devouring' combined with an absence of consciousness and a capacity to recall the memory of the archaic community.

What is important about this prewar interlude and its forms of figuring a 'new' conception of life is the kinship between fascism and capitalism and the desire of the former to save the latter at all cost, even at risk of totalizing the arrangements of authority to remove self-determination altogether. This episode of fascism reminds us that we are still in the epoch of capitalism, regardless of how advanced, late or post- it is, and that we have not yet exorcised the fascism that remains inscribed in it, like a ghost in the machine. But the machine, as Deleuze and Guattari recognized, is no 'metaphor'. 'Only because the causes continue to exist', Adorno cautioned, 'does the captivating spell of the past remain to this day unbroken.'⁶

Actually existing fascisms

Among the three new efforts at 'working through the past' under consideration here, only the historian Robert Paxton acknowledges as a possible explanation the primacy of the relationship between capitalism and the formation of a fascist solution. But while he recognizes that the pairing made 'practicable bedfellows' (208), he also backtracks as if worried that too much emphasis on this relationship will throw him into the Marxist camp. Like Mann, he places great emphasis on fascism's political ambitions and the assault on liberalism, democracy and socialism, which bring him back to the capitalist crisis. Wolin, on the other hand, remains committed to following the history of an idea, in order to explain the intellectual genealogy of fascism from anti-Enlightenment counter-revolutionary thinking through Nietzsche and his followers, especially in France, to its postmodern avatar in our time. His concluding defence of a (neo)liberal credo squarely puts him in a camp championing capitalism, which he

has already exempted as an explanatory issue in the historical formation of fascisms by the prior decision to bracket objective conditions.

The decision to dismiss the relationship between capitalist accumulation and fascism is based on a Cold War conceit that had feared privileging the determination of economic agency. Instead, there was an impulse to emphasize the application of political will and leadership. This conforms to the Cold War attempts of modernization theorists to privilege the role played by political rationality in the formation of new nation-states. But what is overlooked is the way in which the primacy of political will affirms the necessity of removing social and political detriments to the proper functioning of capitalism. Despite the anti-bourgeois clamour of fascists and their exposure of materialism (but not exploitation), capitalism (especially the sacred trinity formula of landed private property, labour and capital-profit) retained its hold within the attempt to reconfigure society behind the promise of eliminating both democracy and a corrosive individualism grounded in interest. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine the appearance of fascism in any environment where capitalism is absent. The historical examples of fascism are invariably connected to the development of capitalist accumulation and productive relations. It is far more plausible to identify the surfacing of some form of a 'fascist minimum' everywhere capitalism had sought to install a beachhead in the interwar period, including the colonies. But Paxton and Mann seek to displace this bonding by redescribing the relationship as one between modernity and fascism – a tactic more in keeping with our own intellectual tastes (and a hegemonic Weberianism) than the historical temporality it shaped. In this narrative, modernity and its fascist moment reflect failed political rationalization. This is the argument made to explain Japan's encounter with fascism, not forgetting the examples of corporative states found throughout Eastern Europe.

To establish the relationship between capitalist modernization and the occurrence of fascism requires neither endless attempts to tease out the causal connection between big business, especially those which personified capitalism, and specific regimes (the labour of historiography), nor a limiting of the terms of understanding to movements, organizations and parties.⁷ Yet Paxton's 'anatomy' is founded on just such an approach that seeks to narrativize fascism by plotting its successive stages from inception and movement through the final acquisition of political power. Mann openly declares his intention to provide a 'sociology of movements', which manages to substitute classification

for analysis. Nonetheless, by appealing to modernity, rather than capital accumulation, both Paxton and Mann, and to a lesser extent Wolin, inadvertently raise the unstated but banished spectre of capitalism, since the spectacle of modernity, apart from its identification with a representation of Enlightenment rationality, signalled the shift to new productive forces and relationships and the expansion of the world market. Although fascism was on record for having hurled virulent denunciations at bourgeois individualism, decadent culture, monopoly capital and even private property (one need only scan Ezra Pound's radio broadcasts from Mussolini's Italy), at the same time as it was declaring war against democracy and its drift towards



socialism, much of this rhetorical sound and fury looped back to attempts to save capitalism from itself. Even in its broad-based assault on the capitalism of its day, fascism selected targets like money and finance rather than exploitation, production and the commodity form. According to Mark Neocleous, this attack on finance, banking and money capital constituted fascism's capitulation to capitalist production. More importantly, it represented a confusion of the effects of capitalism with its logic, a response often shared by Marxists during the interwar years.⁸

The aspect of capitalist modernity that undoubtedly led to both the dismissal of a relationship between capitalism and fascism and the desire to forget the significance of fascism by placing it in a completed history (attested to by the mountain of detailed histories) has been the inattention to capital's logic and the socially structuring role played by the commodity form and relations. It is, I believe, this perception that explains Adorno's observation concerning the return of fascism, as well as Deleuze and Guattari's appeal

to Oedipalization and colonization of the unconscious as the ultimate sources of fascism (or imperialism), as Foucault implied in his Preface to *Anti-Oedipus*. Foucault proposed that fascism was the 'last' 'major enemy, the strategic adversary':

Not only historical fascisms, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini, which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively – but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to have power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.⁹

In other words, Jean-Luc Nancy's 'our history'. It is the relationship to the commodity form that is missing

in most accounts of fascism and that offers a plausible explanation for its capacity to return punctually, as well as its own suppression of history for the mystery of myth and origin (like the nation-form itself) and its predilection for repetition. In the interwar period, some fascists even saw the social objectification of humans, their self-estrangement, as a natural, original condition. While Paxton and Mann show sensitivity to fascism's fascination with power as a

framework for their comparative perspectives, authorizing their respective programmes to anatomize and classify, their checklist approach recuperates an older strategy that never rises above description.

Robert Paxton's purpose in *The Anatomy of Fascism* is to present fascism 'in its diversity and complexity'. Drawing upon a vast monographic literature, he is more concerned with how it worked rather than with fascist words, in contrast to Mann who empowers thought and ideas with practical action. Specifically, Paxton focuses on the role of conservative allies and accomplices and the machinery of fascist political systems and the ways they structured the social formation. Acknowledging that fascism was invented for an 'era of mass politics', inaugurated by accelerated capitalist modernization and urban industrialization, Paxton proposes that fascists were thus less preoccupied with economics than politics, which 'trumped' economic considerations, even though the primary aim of war necessitated revising the relationship. The main target of fascism was liberalism, with its' 'hands

off government' policies, distrust of the masses and refusal to employ force. But these 'generalizations' must always be mediated by attention to the diversity of national cases. To this end Paxton turns to constructing a template that promises to embrace what he calls a 'fascist maximum' (as against reduction to 'essence'), which at the same time aims to provide a comparative perspective. Yet even though this model recruits its properties principally from the German and Italian experiences, its exceptionalism invariably leads to the conclusion that the fascist-like scenes in Japan or Brazil fell short of meeting the five-stage developmental trajectory spelling out the prescribed preconditions.

If Paxton is persuaded that it is no longer possible to identify fascism by 'checking the colour of shirts' and the demands of nominalism, insisting instead on normative definitions, understanding fascism still depends on checking his list, which, he believes, will permit recognizing the formation of the movement and give an idea of its narrative, both vertically and horizontally. The five stages are: (1) the origins of the movement, (2) 'rooting in the political system, (3) seizure of power, (4) exercising power, and (5) the uncertainty over choosing strategies of radicalization or standing still.

Paxton distances his approach from previous efforts that have quibbled over defining terms, supplying encyclopedic coverage and imagining ideal types. While his dismissals of earlier approaches are laudable, his own perspective is dogged by an ambiguous account of the role played by capitalism and its propensity for generating crises, the failure of liberalism, and the timeliness of the fascist offer to save capitalism from itself. What drives this insurmountable ambivalence is the fear of according privilege to a single determining cause and the 'inevitability' of its outcome. If, as he acknowledges, fascism 'thrived upon the crisis of liberalism' (which, after all, was precipitated by capitalism), he moves quickly to reject any theory of crises that might explain the revival of the figure of fascism – such as the one proposed by Polanyi. One need not be a Marxist, he avers, to see the crisis of the liberal state as a reflection of 'a stressful transition to industrialization'. But the spectacle of late development inadvertently calls attention to the status of capitalist accumulation and its propensity for producing crises everywhere in the form of a structurally determined unevenness, rather than merely attesting to the signs of arrest and delay. German fascism was hardly an expression of the consequences of 'late development'. As if he had

finally recognized the circularity of his logic, Paxton reminds readers that 'fascism is never an inevitable outcome'. Confident that the authority of historical knowledge will not only lead us to actually existing fascisms, Paxton also discovers in it the optic that will permit us to recognize its future coming.

However, without offering some conception of repetition or a principle capable of explaining the revival of fascism, it's hard to see the point of elaborate anatomies and classifications. Too often the impulse for such strategies derives from identifying a repetition of empirical content in historical fascism and overstating its general utility. On his part, Paxton recommends understanding the 'revival of an updated fascism' as the instance of a 'functional equivalent' and not as an exact replication. Yet he never makes the argument for either how the 'functional equivalent' manages to break away from the 'ideal typologies' he has dismissed or how it conforms to a logic of contingency. While Paxton rejects the possible recurrence of 'classical fascism', he leaves open the way for its second coming in the realization of one or two of the earlier stages of his template. But this recognition still relies on the *content* of a 'fascist maximum', rather than its form, and its uncanny resemblance to precisely those historical examples whose revival he has discounted with admonitions against 'inevitability'. Between Paxton's desire to make room for a return and his overheated fears of historical determinism, it is not at all clear that his conception of a 'fascist maximum' and its devaluation of the complex relationship between culture and politics (which he has overlooked in his eagerness to privilege 'action' over ideas, 'hard' history over soft) have moved discussion beyond the claims that have held fascism hostage to its epoch.

Mann's is the more ambitious attempt to compose a comparative tableau of fascisms. His sociology of movements (to be followed by a volume on comparative genocides) revisits the familiar historical cases like Germany, Italy and Spain. But he also adds variants from Eastern Europe, like Romania and Hungary. What is missing from his inventory, as it is from Paxton and most comparative studies seeking to make a case for a shared 'fascist minimum', are examples recruited from outside Europe – such as Japan, China (under Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT in the 1930s) and Brazil, along with those fascist flirtations found throughout the shadowed periphery of colonies and semi-colonies in those years, regions often subordinated to the industrial core but which nevertheless had already been drawn into the widening circumference of capitalism.

Mann insists on seeing fascism as plural and diverse, experienced by a number of societies that are able to satisfy his checklist. His purpose is not only to identify a set of minimal requirements commonly shared, but to entertain the possibility of fascism's repetition in a different register in our present. This impulse is shared by both Paxton and Wolin, and all agree that ethnic cleansing in Bosnia marked the return of the ghostly revenant of fascism. But no such response was forthcoming with the earlier genocides in Cambodia and Rwanda or indeed the Turkish massacres of Armenians, which literally inaugurated the century's vocation for combining capitalist modernization, ethnic cleansing and the mass murder of whole populations. Nor is there even a hint of acknowledgment of Aimé Césaire's prescient 1950 observation that fascist violence in the European wars, what he described as the 'highest heap of corpses in history', originated in the colonies.

Mann's injunction to 'take fascism seriously' because it might return means only that it might come back again in Europe. For writers of Césaire's generation and after, who always took it seriously, fascism was always returning because it had never gone away. It had become a fixture of everyday life. In Mann's view the reappearance of fascism in recent times has occurred in Islamic regions, adulterated and mixed with other forms of religious and authoritarian traditions. These are 'political religions', or, as he puts it, forms of 'sacred fascism' but reassuringly fall short of his checklist and the pay-off of his 'package' (374).

Paradoxically, Mann's comparative sociological perspective seems cemented in the 'fascist epoch'. From this point of view, fascism was prompted by a world historical moment, announcing the emergence of the masses in industrializing urban society, committed to class warfare in those societies wrestling with liberal democratic politics, confronting capitalist global crisis. In short, fascism materialized with capitalist modernity and entered the scene with the offer to resolve the 'worldly problem' in which nation, state and war were seen as agents of progress. But if Mann is willing to attribute to capitalism and its special talent for generating crises the role of agent, this observation commands less attention than the configuration of fascism it occasioned and its appetite for figuring forms of political power. By the same measure, Mann seems bent more on discounting a number of received accounts of fascism, in order to clear the way for the presentation of a classification system. The classification merely revises those interpretations with which he is more congenial. While quick to distance his perspective

from Marxian and idealist accounts (especially Roger Griffin's preoccupation with 'paleogenetic myths of rebirth'), Mann adopts a view proposed by Roger Eatwell that envisages fascism as having constituted a 'radical Third Way'. This is precisely the description fascists often themselves gave as they struggled to shoehorn their programmes between liberal democracy and socialism; and probably not too distant from the contemporary neoliberal 'Third Way' advocated by Giddens/Blair. Hence, fascisms were characterized by nationalism, holism (collectivity), radicalism and, of course, the 'Third Way, or, as the Japanese sociologist and theorist of fascism Takata Yasuma put it in the late 1920s, the 'third View of History' superseding both idealist and materialistic narratives of modern society.

In Mann's reckoning, Eatwell's conception of a 'Third Way' unveils itself as an 'alternative vision of modernity' that prefigures more recent clamour for modernities that might offer alternatives to a dominant Western modernity by making its case on an irreducible culturalism fixed by geography. Mann seeks to broaden this description by adding to fascism a 'pursuit of transcendence' and the mission of cleansing the nation-state, of both class and unwanted minorities, through the instrument of paramilitarism. Transcendence authorizes violence in the name of radically revolutionary solutions and clearly takes precedence in Mann's classification system. Other categories include nationalism (the desire for rebirth) and statism (manifest in implementing authoritarian corporate structures). The importance of class in this structure is diminished since Mann asserts that people often have multiple social identities exceeding singular affiliation. The problem with Mann's discounting of class for transcendent cleansing is that it still invokes the spectre of capitalism and its role in generating social conflict.

At the heart of Mann's comparative sociology are two unexceptionable observations. The first relates to which states successfully weathered the challenge of crises and which resorted to repressive measures to maintain order and move on to accomplish total integration and mass mobilization. Here, Mann reworks the thesis advanced some years ago by Barrington Moore (*Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 1966) by proposing that fascism did not derive from a crisis of liberalism, since liberal regimes apparently succeeded in avoiding its solutions. Fascism appeared in those societies characterized by dual states, half-liberal and half-authoritarian. In other words, fascism appeared in those societies where capitalist development had

lagged or been delayed. There is a temporally based argument implicit in Moore's thesis. For Mann, the temporal factor is replaced by an uneven geographical fix that locates fascism in the European periphery of the northwest, in central, east and southern Europe. But it hardly improves Moore's early interpretation (which had the virtue of including Japan and China) to relocate its temporal delay in an identifiable geographical space.

The second observation emphasizes that these fascisms favoured an extreme form of nation-ism grounded in the claims of an organic and natural community and a powerful state committed to employing violence as the only 'transcendent' solution to ending social (class) conflict plaguing modern (capitalist) society. In this view, fascism appears more as a contender in a

competition among theories of socialization promoting the promise of greater social solidarity and stabilization. It is this socializing function that prompts Mann and others to see fascism as an 'alternative modernity'. Thus, 'fascism was a product of a sudden, half-baked attempt at liberalization amidst social crises.' Its claim to exercising power was based on a demonstrated propensity for 'knocking both their heads together' and then assimilating class and other interest groups in corporatist organizations.

If, for Mann, an ideological crisis complaining of cultural malaise and generating the desire to defend 'moral absolutes' exacerbated the general social crises, Richard Wolin makes this contention over value – morality and ethics – the subject of his assault on the failure of philosophy and its sponsorship of a narrative of 'unreason'. Wolin's account of a genealogy whose trajectory drifted to fascism and post-modernism (a conflation that itself marks the triumph of unreason) inflicts upon the reader once more the familiar gesture of emotional and moral *gravitas* that has characterized neoliberal thinking, and the self-delegation of responsibility by 'right thinking' people ('anti-totalitarians') who are seriously committed to saving us from the misspent passions of our youth (the curse of the 1960s, again) in order to right the world before it is too late. We know that the burden of this task is weighty because we are told so at every opportunity. For Wolin, the overwhelming desire to show how philosophy joined fascism to post-modernism stems from recognizing the uncanny return of the ghosts of fascism in nation-states (genocide) and an exhausted postmodern reflex whose easy cynicism sanctions it. What has sealed this odd and proleptic kinship is a shared rejection of reason. The argument draws urgency from the 'troubling prospect ... that an anti-democratic orientation popular during the 1930s was making an eerie comeback – this time under the auspices of the academic left'. Convinced that the postmodernist 'juggernaut', today's



successor to the fascism of the 1930s, and its premature 'farewell to reason' has ended, Wolin happily announces that the so-called 'revolution of 1989' was motored by a discourse on human rights which effectively worked to 'undermine totalitarianism' and revalidate the 'values of Western humanists', reviled by the cultural Left (academics, the real target of Wolin's book) as an instrument of American imperialism. In other words, the defence and deliverance of the West (or Mann's northwest) came from those geographical regions on the periphery scarred by uneven development and a legacy of authoritarianism. Wolin throws the scourge of identity politics into his cassoulet for additional flavouring. Here, his complaint soars and sours into aimless denunciation because, he claims, the practice of identity politics promoted an antipolitical stance or simple apoliticality (probably true), which, where guarantees securing identity didn't exist, led to genocidal orgies (wildly irrelevant).

It is a stretch to link an insubstantial academic fashion to genocidal behaviour in Bosnia, Rwanda and Algeria, just as it was cheap opportunism for others before him to have blamed Sartrean philosophy for the Cambodian horror. Even worse, Wolin, like others who have draped themselves in the garb of *gravitas*, is concerned with 'formal guarantees of procedural democracy' for 'toleration' and 'mutual recognition'. But he has nothing to say about the demand of substantive democracy and its insistence on genuine equality; only pious appeals to abstract values enunciating human rights designed to maintain the status quo. The human rights he parades as instances of Western humanism are nothing more than the embodiment of 'freedoms' insuring the interests of private property owners, corporations, financial capital and, of course, unnecessary consumption; freedoms guaranteed by market and trade and a vocation called 'the rule of law'. In this regard, his much admired revolution of 1989 was 'before the letter', so to speak: it was as much driven by the lure and seductions of neoliberalism as by a return to the lost values of Western humanism.

Wolin's project is to show how Enlightenment reason went astray but need not have made the fateful detour. The culprits in this hijacking are principally French intellectuals of the postwar period (who already gave us Cambodia), even though he begins the story with the counter-Enlightenment and the subsequently epic role played by Friedrich Nietzsche, an international intellectual terrorist, if there ever was one, on Wolin's assessment, who prefigured fascism and postmodern political discourse and its devalorization of coalition-building consensus.

Wolin's principal narrative theme derives from the historiographical conviction (most recently popularized by Simon Schama) that the French Revolution spilled over into political excess and uncontrolled state violence, war, terror and dictatorship to persuade 'anti-philosophers' to conclude that philosophy itself had undermined the order of things. Antoine de Rivarol (apparently a source for Edmund Burke) is complimented for his 'clairvoyance' for having seen revolutionary France descend into social catastrophe. Rivarol and the party of anti-philosophers were clear about their contempt and distrust for the masses clamouring for rights, and certain in their belief that 'when people cease to esteem (the monarch), they cease to obey.' Disgust for the political principles of Enlightenment reflected fear for the loss of monarchical sovereignty. The formation of this counter-Enlightenment programme forecast fascism's later disavowal of the regime of reason of the nineteenth: science, democracy, socialism and individualism. And the subsequent fascist effort to rid society of Enlightenment rationality (but never technology) supplied an alternative modernity capable of overcoming the nineteenth-century dedication to the rule of reason. Nietzsche was central to expanding this anti-philosophic tradition, with Heidegger running a close second, who supplied the principal philosophic tropes to the French intellectual world after World II, notably Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze, with a share of the blame being distributed to Bataille and Blanchot.

Wolin is hoping to show that what Germany had lost on the battlefield it regained in the Latin Quarter of Paris, and that the cynicism about reason and democracy propelling anti-Enlightenment thinking and fascism was transmuted into a 'left' postmodernism. Through intellectual alchemy, the fascism theorized by Nietzsche and Heidegger became a philosophical critique deployed to undermine humanism and democracy. As an archaeologist, Wolin has hit upon the under-appreciated kinship between counter-Enlightenment reaction, rearticulated by fascism, and the 'postmodernism credo', with its faith in anti-humanism and anti-democracy. In short, he has discovered fascism with a new face. In a Leo-Straussian bellow, ventriloquized first by Allen Bloom, Wolin wants to warn the 'Left' against forgetting the 'imperatives of morality and international law' at its own peril. 'By romanticizing the lifestyles and mores of Non-Western peoples', it is claimed, 'it [the Left] suspends critical judgment, destroys its own credibility and guarantees political irrelevance.' For whom, Wolin never says.

Where Wolin's vaunted defence of 'toleration' and 'mutual self-recognition' fit in this recipe is difficult to say. Romanticizing the 'non-West' (note the negativity) becomes the contemporary successor of the romance with fascism. As for the romance with fascism he has promised to elucidate, it has been mercifully liberated from history (and capitalism), from its enabling and entailing conditions, to become the embodiment of a seductive Enlightenment unreason and the forerunner of our own postmodern condition and its contempt for democratic and humanistic values. This melodramatic merger of Right and Left at some vanishing point takes place on an imaginary plane, free from history, and embraces 'the liberal ideal of an independent civil society, legally secured agreement against arbitrary governmental encroachment', Wolin names 'America'. But could this utopia be Bush's America? Or does it resemble more the historic fascisms Wolin has so assiduously avoided considering in his 'intellectual romance'? Wolin's 'critique' – one encomium describes it as 'straight thinking' – prevents him from recognizing that postmodernism is not the enemy of liberalism but one of its primary intellectual and cultural supports. His blindness is overtaken by a kind of petty-bourgeois *ressentiment* or 'strutting' (observed by Marx in his critique of Max Stirner) as we learn that 'the postmodernists bask in the freedoms of political liberalism – to whose institutions they are indebted for their brilliant careers – while biting the hand that feeds them.'

By trying to evade the question of the role played by capitalism and its propensity for generating periodic crises of accumulation, all three writers have trouble confronting contemporary recurrences of fascism and addressing the subject that prompted their quest. All three rely on grasping the past as the principal condition for recognizing its repetition. Only Paxton comes close to acknowledging the importance of capitalist dysfunctionality in the interwar period, and then backs off. But Paxton does not exclude the possibility of fascism returning after its epoch and not necessarily in the same historical form. Exploring the consequences of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, radical nationalist exclusionary movements in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Wall, violence against immigrants in numerous European states, the decided turn to the right in Italy and Austria, and right-wing agitation in France and the Netherlands, he is convinced that a fascism of the future need not look like the classic model. It is Paxton's belief that new fascisms will constitute inflections of the older example and that understanding the anatomy of historical fascism, especially the various

stages leading to movement and seizure of power and how it worked, will enable the present to recognize it. Mann constructs a vast system of classification that identifies and describes the role of capitalism manifest in geographic unevenness, only to conclude that fascists were more interested in the exercise of social power. In the end, he is reassured that the aberrant manifestations of fascism today fall short of satisfying his checklist – a move Paxton is reluctant to make even though he places great stock in the utility of historical knowledge. Wolin ignores the question of capitalism altogether, as he does history itself. Instead, he resorts to construing a fantasy narrative that brackets the conditions attending historical fascism in order to demonstrate philosophy's complicity with postmodernism as the basis of a case for fascism's return.

Fascist futures

Without confronting the repetition inscribed in the history of capitalism's relationship to liberalism and thus engaging the conditions inviting the solution offered by fascism, any effort to consider the return of fascism in the present or future will inevitably be constrained by appeals to functional analogues corresponding to checklists, classifications and intellectual affiliations. However, if we are willing to examine this relationship as it has been rearticulated in contemporary neoliberalism, it is possible to begin to see both a way out of this historicist impasse and how the return of fascism might work in a new temporal register, without resorting to analogues that attest only to history repeating itself. Despite the rhetoric of democratization that has dominated contemporary neoliberal discourse, the economic and political 'management' of crisis has, in Samir Amin's words, 'reinforced the danger of anti-democratic regression'.¹⁰

Amin gave an early warning of what has become the subject of David Harvey's recent *A Short History of Neoliberalism*:¹¹ namely, that liberalism, everywhere, engenders and enhances the risk of fascism. What is at issue here is the aptitude of contemporary neoliberalism to promote and embark upon a programme (since the late 1970s and early 1980s) that has sought to recuperate the excesses of a prior liberalism and remove those safeguards and social goods employed after World War II to diminish the margin of unevenness that had plunged prewar capitalist societies into crisis and war. Instead, neoliberalism has pursued a trajectory designed to dismantle every form of regulation once adopted to curb market interference in those aspects of social and collective life that had been once

considered too important to leave to the caprice of the ‘invisible hand’. Moreover, this has been made possible by active complicity of a strong state form, which it has publicly disavowed, even as it has formed a powerful partnership with the political classes. What once had been taken out of the market has thus today been restored to it, to give substance to a fantasy utopia it is supposed to represent. Yet even before Amin and Harvey, Polanyi had already seen, in 1944, in the baneful excesses of marketization the necessity of liberalism to enlist the coercive powers of the state in order to realize its utopian aspiration of an unfettered and self-regulating market as the basis of reorganizing social and economic life, despite its familiar rejection of interference. Polanyi asked contemporaries to understand that even though antifascism had scored a momentous victory, the rejection of liberal utopian fantasies merely set the stage for a new round of economic expansion. What was forgotten was that there can be no escaping the risk of repetition and the regression to fascism ‘without breaking categorically with the logic of neoliberal globalization’.¹²

The failure of economic liberalism in the 1920s, which fascism sought to radicalize, could be attributed to incompleteness, which became the strategy for explaining unevenness. Polanyi, on the other hand, saw in liberalism the operation of some sort of dialectic working to impede Enlightenment reason. In its crudest version this operation reduces to attacking political democracy as the source of interventionism.¹³ What this shows is the repetition driving liberalism, which, in its new neoliberal avatar, is even more determined to overcome the ‘defects’ of incompleteness by resorting to ever-greater measures to satisfy the appetite of a self-regulating market, which *promotes* unevenness. What fascists and socialists both foresaw as the excesses of capitalism and the necessity for correction, neoliberalism repeats today in order to realize the completion of its utopian trajectory. Where neoliberalism seeks to improve upon the liberal past is in its utilization of a strong state, even at risk of contradiction. The consequences for substantive democracy are immense: they recall the earlier fascist assault on popular democracy and the political intervention it provoked, ‘haunting the history of market economy’.¹⁴

The fascist response to the impasse of liberal capitalism aimed to reform the market economy at the price of undermining democratic institutions. In this regard, liberal opposition to any form of planning opened the way to fascism’s momentary victory. But the lesson neoliberalism has learnt from this earlier

episode is that the achievement of freedom without some mediating force was an impossibility. The neo-liberal recognition of the need to rely on state coercion and intervention when necessary to implement its programme was thus accompanied by a redefinition of freedom itself, as we have learned today: the figuration of a new fiction whose content required alteration once power and compulsion were employed to secure a new freedom of enterprise and private ownership, even as it has insisted on maintaining the older illusion. This is the regime of ‘procedural democracy’ whose content was defined three years after Polanyi wrote his great book, in the credo of the Mont Pelerin Society, whose most distinguished signatories were Friedrich von Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Milton Friedman and Karl Popper. Its founding statement expressed anxiety for a decline of belief in private property and the competitive market and worried that ‘without the diffused power and initiative associated with these institutions, it is difficult to imagine a society in which freedom may be effectively preserved’.¹⁵ For Polanyi, the liberal idea of freedom had already ‘degenerated into a mere advocacy of free enterprise’. It was replaced by ‘a freedom for those whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing’.¹⁶

Notes

1. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal, Vintage, New York, 1989, p. 20.
2. Primo Levi, *L'assymetrie de la vie*, trans. Nathalie Bauer, Robeert Laffont, Paris, 2004, p. 70.
3. Theodor Adorno, ‘The Meaning of Working through the Past’, in *Critical Models*, trans. Henry Pickford, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998, pp. 89, 98, 93.
4. Karl Polanyi, ‘The Essence of Fascism’, in J. Lewis, K. Polanyi and D.K. Kitchen eds, *Christianity and the Social Revolution*, Gollancz, London 1935, pp. 390–91.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 392, 376, 375.
6. Adorno, ‘The Meaning of Working through the Past’, p. 103.
7. Mark Neocleous, *Fascism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, pp. 4, 43.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–4.
9. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley et al., Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 1983, p. xii.
10. Samir Amin, *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*, Zed Books, London, 2000, pp. 102–3.
11. David Harvey, *A Short History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005. A review of Harvey’s book is forthcoming in *RP* 137.
12. Amin, *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*, p. 102.
13. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press, Boston MA, 1957, p. 145.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
15. Quoted in Harvey, *A Short History of Neoliberalism*, p. 21.
16. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, p. 257.