

# The Unquiet Dead

Anarchism, Fascism,  
and Mythology



Like fascism and anarchism, elitism and populism are tragically interrelated. Either, I think, are tactical gestures, justified by social and emotional drifts; the tendency towards either pole seems to me to be primarily a function of the power dynamics we have inherited from our hierarchial, scarcity-oriented societies. Pluralistic democracy, which masquerades as the center, is its own tactic, and the form of power we are most used to living under; but its relative stability does not make it inevitable. In this section, we will explore the theoretical justifications and some of the material impacts of each as they have been used by fascists, anarchists, conservatives and Leftists.

Fascist movements come into being through a dialectical alignment of populism and elitism. They deploy an essentialist myth of the nobility of “the people”—which is never *all* of the people, but, rather, the model of the citizen that seems most desirable to fascist constituents. The fascist leader delivers a bitter critique of the real economic problems afoot, one more realistic than those given by the pluralistic center, and with a louder voice than the whole Left possesses... and argues that they must be resolved by identifying and destroying an Other. An elite class develops, both the controllers of “the people” and their admired heroes; this class, however, always stands the chance of being destroyed by populist rage intentionally deployed by the leader when a purge is necessary. Until then, their occasional dissent is precariously tolerated because heterogeneity makes a stronger society; people working for their ideals, however terrible, are more creative than those drudging away under endless bureaucracy.

Elitism is fundamentally incompatible with egalitarianism, implying that some deserve a right to power over other people. Populism, meanwhile, often caters to an essentialist notion of “the people”, tending to suppress difference. Elements of both elitism and populism, however, are both tactically employed by anarchists, even to disrupt the dynamics of populism and elitism that facilitate fascist momentum and power, as well as the false calm of alleged pluralism. This use must always remain contingent and critiqued; we must not mistake the way for the destination. This is most true of the false consensus of democracy, a tempting shortcut that becomes a session of riddles in the dark.

We will begin by considering the uses of Friedrich Nietzsche's writings by both anarchists and fascists as a way to think about the advantages and disadvantages of the elitist tactic. His work is self-contradictory, and no less the uses to which it has been put. I will explore his readings and motivations in depth, and consider whether a man whose work is poisoned by essentialism is *essentially* useless to movements for liberation... or if his development of anti-essentialist theoretical frameworks may redeem him from his material guilt in dooming those he believed were chosen.

## Part I. Nietzsche and elitism: a tragic prophecy

The future of the Nietzsche text is not closed. But if, within the still-open contours of an era, the only politics calling itself—proclaiming itself—Nietzschean will have been a Nazi one, then it is necessarily significant and must be questioned in all of its consequences.

—Jacques Derrida

The struggle against the Jews has always been a symptom of the worst characters, those more envious and more cowardly. He who participates in it now must have much of the disposition of the mob.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Of all Friedrich Nietzsche's students, anarchists, fascists, and Jews of various politics have been perhaps the most dedicated to his words. Nietzsche himself was none of these things; indeed, he seemed to hold anarchism in some contempt and hated both the nationalism and the anti-Semitism that would become the heart of German fascism. Despite this, anarchists, particularly individualists, have been taking his words to heart since he wrote them. And, while he famously broke with Wagner's proto-fascist milieu over their nationalism and anti-Semitism, this did not prevent the Nazis from claiming him as their own. They were aided in this enterprise by Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, his unscrupulous sister, who not only delivered his private documents to Hitler but suppressed the parts of his writing that were most sympathetic to Jews, editing his work into its most palatable form for the fascist appetite. Mussolini and many other fascists, then and now, cite him as a major influence. Meanwhile, intellectual Jews in and around Germany quoted Nietzsche in their letters about survival during the mounting anti-Semitic tensions: "What doesn't kill me makes me stronger." Horribly, Goebbels used the same phrase in a speech he gave celebrating the tenth anniversary of the National Socialist rise to power.

My purpose is to identify how people were able to politically theorize their fascist, anarchist, or Leftist positionalities from Nietzsche's work. I will lead with a lengthy consideration of Nietzsche's personal political convictions and actions, as in this case the person is integral to the argument; I will also briefly explore how Jews—the central topic of these debates, who have so often suffered their bloody consequences—have related to him and his work, then and now. I find that, while Nietzsche's intentions may well have been born from the finest of impulses, his net impact has been harmful, poisoned at its base by his reliance upon essentialism. This is the basic difficulty of

the ally. Still, his innovation of *joyous nihilism* and a genealogical approach to history are major contributions; and, as nothing is pure, they are not wholly condemned by association.

### *Nietzsche and anti-Semitism*

“I want all anti-Semites shot.”

—Friedrich Nietzsche in one of his last recorded statements, usually taken as a sign of his madness

The question of Nietzsche as an anti-Semite is a complex one. It seems that Nietzsche was “casually anti-Semitic” before he made friends with Paul Rée, who was Jewish, in 1873; this caused him to rethink his position and eventually to break with Richard Wagner, the well-known proto-fascist and composer. From that point forward, the anti-Semitic intellectuals around Nietzsche served as his chief opponents, and often appear as characters in his work. In 1876, Nietzsche wrote that “Wagnerites were leading ‘the Jews to the slaughterhouse’ as scapegoats for Germany’s misfortunes”; continuing the Abrahamic animal metaphors, Nietzsche called Christian anti-Semites “little, good-natured, absurd sheep with horns” who possessed “little herd animal virtues.”<sup>a</sup>

Unfortunately, anti-racist intention has never kept people from being materially racist. Nietzsche wrote, for example, “We would as little choose early Christians as Polish Jews to associate with us: not that one would need to have even a single objection to them... Both of them simply do not smell good.” While this was meant as an insult to the mythological holiness of early Christians, it was hardly a decent thing to say about Jews; and, far from incidental, is par for the course of Nietzsche’s well-intentioned but tone-deaf attacks upon anti-Semites. More fundamentally, it is quite easy to read Nietzsche as arguing for a racial basis for superiority and inferiority. He discusses the ebbs and flows of migrants, ancient and modern, as racial forces that shape culture; he read Lamarck, Malthus, and Herbert Spencer, all of whom contributed to the rise of Social Darwinism. His work is not only inflected by essentialism—it is founded upon it.

Nietzsche’s work “The becoming-pure of a race,” his study and valorization

a From Nietzsche’s letters and *Will to Power*, quoted by Santaniello in Golomb. Nietzsche added in the letter: “I draw conclusions and know already that my ‘Will to Power’ will be suppressed first in Germany.” He did not foresee how his work would be used to justify fascism, could not intuit the frothy mix of populism and elitism that would fill the hole of Nazi philosophy.

of ancient Greece, is most troubling—while he acknowledges that there is no original racial “purity,” that all ethnic groups are the result of intermixing, he suggests that they may “become pure,” and that the Greeks did so in counterpoint, even in resistance, to Semitic influence. His five points on this subject, as summarized by Cancik:

1. The races are not originally pure but, at best, become pure in the course of history.
2. The crossing of races simultaneously means the crossing of cultures: crossing leads to “disharmony” in bodily form, in custom and in morality.
3. The process of purification occurs through “adapting, imbibing, [and] excreting” foreign elements.
4. The result of purification is a stronger and more beautiful organism.
5. The Greeks are “the model of a race and culture that had become pure.”

Jacob Golomb has tried to defend Nietzsche from the most obvious reading of this framework:

The fact is that Nietzsche was very far from delineating a racial typology. In this respect it is revealing that his own historical examples of societies that approximated “the essential characteristic of a good and healthy aristocracy” were the ancient Greek *polis*... ..He also refers in this context to the historical examples of ancient Rome and of the Italian Renaissance—namely to cultural patterns that never made racial supremacy the cornerstone of their non-nationalist ideals or never regarded the genetic features of particular persons as an *a priori* mark of creativity or superiority.

This is a revisionist argument. Race wasn’t fully constructed in the days of ancient Greece and Rome, nor was genetic inheritance much understood—so, yes, those societies did not racially theorize in the way that European and American society of the last several centuries have done. They were, however, predominantly white societies which depended upon slavery (though of people whom we would today perceive to be of all races) and misogyny—which is certainly founded in a perception of essential difference. Nietzsche’s very reliance on Greece and Rome as a basis for his idea of the “good life” is not only boring, but constitutes complicity in the creation, transmission, and violence of the construct of white European patriarchy. The fact that Nietzsche is far from alone in this does not excuse him.

David Ohana assesses: “Like the Germans in Nietzsche’s time, the Greeks had been in danger of being inundated by foreign cultures, losing their authenticity and disappearing into history. The victory of the Greek culture over the foreign cultures serve Nietzsche as an analogy for his age in that it provided an example of man overcoming his alienation through his own efforts.” Little wonder Nazis were able to interpret these examples to their own ends, founded as they are in premises of borders, nations, and cultural/racial integrity; in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler described Aryan culture as a “synthesis of the Greek culture with German technology,” a legacy of this approach. Golomb, however, defends Nietzsche against accusations of essentialism by saying that if he were essentialist, he would depict the victors of history as the deserving; Nietzsche instead says that morality and superiority are something created and have to be freely constructed. This is a real point, and perhaps Nietzsche’s most valuable contribution. However, it does not match the damage he did by reifying races as real things, in perhaps well-meaning but incredibly damaging ways; by separating the world into the few superior and many inferior, thus leaving himself open to misinterpretation by those who would like to be superior; and his use of victim-blaming racial “metaphor” to do all this.

At times, Nietzsche seems to be against the idea of mixing races, finding it an outcome of “epoch[es] of dissolution, which mixes up the races”; mixes are sterile, and can persist only if “supplied with fresh blood.” At best, he operates within a sort of clinical breeding model, arguing for the intermarriage of Jews and Germans for the betterment of both ethnicities. It is easy to see how his ideas could become a justification for eugenics, as we know they did. It is, at the least, a deeply irresponsible argument—if he cared for the fate of the Jews, he should not have affirmed the notion that the Jews were a distinct race that Germans should fear. This kind of racialized historical narrative founded in essentialism stands out to me as Nietzsche’s biggest fault. Steven Aschheim tells us:

The philosopher had, after all, endowed the Jews with a world-historical stain, the stain that his entire philosophy sought to uncover, diagnose and overcome. It was *On the Genealogy of Morals* that held the “priestly people” responsible for nothing less than beginning “the slave revolt in morality: that revolt which has a history of two thousand years behind it and which we no longer see because it has been victorious.” And as Nietzsche put it in *The Antichrist*, the Jews, with their desire to survive at any price, were nothing less than “the most catastrophic people of world history. Their sin was inconceivably heinous for they had radically falsified



all nature, all naturalness, all reality, of the whole inner-world as well as the outer . . . out of themselves they created a counterconcept to natural conditions: they turned religion, cult, morality, history, psychology, one after the other, into an incurable contradiction to their natural values. . . by their aftereffect they have made mankind so thoroughly false that even today the Christian can feel anti-Jewish without realizing that he himself is the ultimate Jewish consequence.”

Nietzsche here was foregrounding his attack on Christianity’s “slave morality” by critiquing its ancestry in ancient Judaism. It was not clear at the time (nor is it universally agreed today) that race, religion, and culture are separate considerations; even Marx, who was Jewish, argues in “On the Jewish Question” that Jews must abolish Judaism, as well as their historic role as bankers (by Marx’s description) in order to work towards their own and general freedom. Nietzsche, for his part, does not make the distinction between culture, race, and religion, or between ancient and modern Jews at all clear in his critique. By these lights, the Nazi use of Nietzsche to justify their systemic murder of Jews is entirely intuitive—“natural.”

Weaver Santaniello writes to defend Nietzsche’s good name. She asserts he was writing strictly against “priestly Judea,” meaning both the ancient priests themselves and those who relied upon them to mediate their experience of God, to interpret all matters along the lines of good and evil. Nietzsche was against the idea of the Messiah, and against waiting for him; he proposed creating a generation of those who chose to save themselves, the *ubermensch*, as a sort of mythological replacement, a way to fill the Messiah-shaped hole in the hearts of Jews and Christians. Santaniello claims that Nietzsche was in fact arguing against racist essentialism. “In the texts [of the *Genealogy*], Nietzsche severs the Germanic bloodline *from* Aryan humanity (“between the old Germanic tribes and us Germans there exists hardly a conceptual relationship, let alone one of blood”), proclaims mixed races instead... and exalts the Jews over Germans.” Moreover, Santaniello claims Nietzsche was intentionally needling his anti-Semitic Christian opponents by describing Jesus, Peter, Paul and Mary as Jews. If this characterization of his intentions on both levels is accurate, it is an ironic insult that he has been portrayed since his death as an anti-Semite.

Santaniello tells us that *The Antichrist*, another Nietzsche text which is often read as anti-Semitic, was written in explicit and angry response to Renan’s *The Life of Jesus*, a text that sought to portray Jesus as the world’s break from Judaism and his death as the justification for anti-Semitism. Nietzsche argued

instead that *ressentiment* began with the death upon the cross, and reached its heights when the disciples misunderstood Christ's message that sin, guilt and punishment have been abolished and that the kingdom of heaven is within. Anti-Semites, he said, are those most likely to embody *ressentiment*. He ranted against "the antisemites who today roll their eyes in a Christian-Aryan bourgeois manner," and called anti-Semites "moral masturbators" and "hangmen" who represent the "will to power of the weakest": "They are all men of *ressentiment*, physiologically unfortunate and work-eaten... inexhaustible and insatiable in outbursts against the fortunate and happy."

These fierce words presented a problem for many of his readers. Aschheim says: "Volkische anti-Semites interested in annexing Nietzsche had to contend with the knowledge that he was no nationalist, indeed was perhaps the most pronounced critic of his contemporary Germans, and above all the most outspoken opponent of the anti-Semitic 'swindle.' Turning around the very basis of his notion of *ressentiment* he even branded the herd, mass movement of anti-Semitism as itself a kind of slave revolt."<sup>b</sup>

On the one hand, Nietzsche argued for the expulsion of anti-Semites from society in support of the Jewish desire for a home in Europe. On the other, Nietzsche also saw Jews as embodiments of *ressentiment*, co-generating their oppression by their refusal to assimilate, by their belief that they are both God's chosen *and* the most oppressed people on earth. He says:

Psychologically considered, the Jewish people are a people endowed with the toughest vital energy, who, placed in impossible circumstances, voluntarily act out of the most profound prudence of self-preservation, take sides with all the instincts of decadence—*not* as mastered by them, but because they divined a power in these instincts with which one could prevail against "the world." The Jews are the antithesis of all decadents: they have had to *represent* decadents to the point of illusion; with a *non plus ultra* of historic genius they have known how to place themselves at the head of all movements of decadence (as the Christianity of *Paul*), in order to create something out of them which is stronger than any *Yes-saying* part of life.

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b Remember—in Nietzsche's worldview, "slave revolts" are negative happenstances, a system of terminology I find fundamentally distasteful; I do not care for the idea that the slaves are to blame for their chains, and it is not as if actual slavery was not afoot as he was writing. He should have known better. However, in his schema, "slaves" are those who bear slave morality, revolting against those who are superior to them in spirit; they are more likely to be resentful people who are *legally* free, if emotionally bound.

By Gilman's analysis, Nietzsche is here inverting and attacking the anti-Semitic analysis of his peers. "If the anti-Semites need to see the Jew as the essence of decay, Nietzsche, placing himself in the role of the opposition *per se*, must see in the imposed isolation of the Jew a source of strength. Nietzsche is thus not a philo-Semite but rather an anti-anti-Semite." Like so many would-be allies, Nietzsche identified personally with the constructed Other. This is a trap. There is a sort of subtle, magical empathy that can build solidarity while respecting difference; far more common on the part of the ally, sadly, is a conflation of experiences in the service of personal identity that becomes a violent betrayal. Here, for example, Nietzsche sees the Jews "taking sides with all the instincts of decadence" as a powerful nihilist innovation, a rejection of the world and the beginning of its destruction... which Nietzsche appreciates. The fascist project, meanwhile, is to restore nature to culture and move out of decadence, and Nietzsche concurs with this aim as well; he feels that civilization causes man to oppress himself with internalized state values, for want of external enemies. You cannot have your cake and eat it too: should we return the world to a (itself mythical) natural state of pure war, or should we destroy the social relations with which we are oppressing ourselves? Nietzsche's project, by asserting an identification with and therefore caricature of the Jewish experience, falsely positioned Jews as the vanguard of the nihilist project that fascists saw as their first opponent in their war for the world. Yovel:

These two human types, apparently so opposed to each other – the anti-Semite and the Jewish priest – are actually genealogical cousins: they share the same deep-psychological pattern of *ressentiment* which Nietzsche's philosophy diagnoses at the basis [sic] of human meanness and degeneration. ...Rhetorically... the anti-Semite learns [from Nietzsche's work] that, at bottom, he has the same psychology as his worst enemies in their worst period, and this is supposed to shock the anti-Semite into disgust – perhaps at himself. However, by using anti-Semitic images ostensibly against themselves Nietzsche is playing with fire.

By ironically juxtaposing the men of *ressentiment*, anti-Semites and ancient Judaic priests alike, Nietzsche hoped to show the necessity of rejecting slave morality—but, in an horribly ironic twist, his aim was easily missed by those actually possessed of *ressentiment*, who chose to see only their own perspectives, taking the anti-Semitic parts and ignoring the rest.

Nietzsche defines *ressentiment* so:

The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge. While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is “outside”, what is “different”, what is “not itself”; and this No is its creative deed.

It is not clear to me why Nietzsche did not simply call for “the true reaction of deeds”—the revolutionary’s response to situations that could otherwise produce *ressentiment*. If not this, then what would the opposite of *ressentiment* be? Is the idea of human strike—to simply abandon the sort of care and creative commitment that makes one’s labor more than minimally productive—beyond him?<sup>c</sup> This is a major inadequacy of his argument. But I, too, have found *ressentiment* (which I think of as the sense of resentment borne out of a simultaneous faith in one’s innate superiority and inferior treatment within the world) emotionally foundational to fascism... although, as Nietzsche observes above, it can be a powerful source of temporary strength for oppressed groups or people surviving difficult situations.<sup>d</sup> Still, Aschheim’s presentation of Nietzsche’s attitude tempts me to see him not as an anti-Semite, nor as a fascist—but rather as a predecessor of that tired modern character: the would-be ally who doesn’t *get it*, yet feels utterly empowered to speak anyway. Of the vast number of people who fall within this category, Nietzsche may have the most blood on his hands. “Nazism, wrote Heinrich Römer in 1940, was indebted to Nietzsche’s pivotal insight that Israel had de-naturalized natural values. The clear implication was that National Socialism had to be regarded as the countermovement leading to renaturalization.” This affirms my notion that fascism is an expression of offended essentialism re-asserting itself—this time, in reaction to “unnatural” Jews and modernity. While Nietzsche was not the originator of that discourse, and engaged in it with only oppositional intentions, he was complicit in their destruction on that basis.

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c While human strike was not theorized as such until fairly recently, Herman Melville’s story “Bartleby, The Scrivener”, a touchstone for potentiality nerds and human strike aficionados, was published in the 1850s.

d Jean Amery’s Auschwitz memoir *At The Mind’s Limits* is a lovesong to the importance of resentment, to refusing to forgive, to not becoming healthy and whole, and I do not see how anyone could gainsay him.

His positive proposals were not better. In *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche proposed the racial/cultural assimilation of Jews into Germany, so that their “superior” characteristics could be bred into the German people. Cancik:

[Nietzsche] thought, one could—‘with great care’ and ‘with selectivity’ cross an intelligent Jewish woman with an ‘aristocratic officer from the Mark’ (i.e., a Prussian aristocratic officer). In this manner, one could ‘breed in’ some intellect to the ‘already strongly molded character of the new Teutonic’. The valuable elements of Judaism, which Nietzsche was able to praise generously in this context, would be absorbed and assimilated in the new Europe; whatever disturbed would be ‘excreted’.

In this manner, the new European race would be purified and a new caste ruling over Europe cultivated. The ‘Greek model’ that Nietzsche had developed in his classical studies was proving its value for planning the racial, cultural and political future of Europe. The programmatic anti-Semitism was to be surpassed through Nietzsche’s tasteful solution of the problem, precisely that solution acceptable to an intellectual aristocracy.

While Golomb claims that many Jews were “grateful to Nietzsche for his naïve advocacy of the mating of Prussian nobility and Jewish intelligentsia,” to a modern reader it seems a rather explicit call for a eugenics program, however well-intentioned. This coldly-phrased breeding proposal highlights Nietzsche’s reliance on the conflation of racial and cultural forces; paints assimilation as the only desirable goal; still advances Germans towards a long-term goal of racial purity; and, backhandedly, helped to terrify true anti-Semites into reaction—all at once!

As to the last, Nietzsche was generally unafraid to catastrophize the political fate of Jews, saying: “Among the spectacles to which the coming century invites us is the decision as to the destiny of the Jews of Europe. That their die is cast, that they have crossed their Rubicon, is now palpably obvious: all that is left for them is to either become the masters of Europe or to lose Europe.” This is the most irresponsible kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, even if it came out of deep personal concern for Jews. Read most sympathetically, it is a cruel irony that these sorts of statements were used by his opponents to justify their infamy. Santaniello argues that it is yet more than that:

...my position is contrary to those positions which assume that the Nazis “liked” Nietzsche, that they learned from him and/or that

they “misunderstood” him. I rather hold that the Nazis understood Nietzsche extremely well and that is precisely why they sought to destroy him—and sever a vital part of Jewish history. The Nazis did not “like” Nietzsche, they were repulsed and enraged by him precisely *because* he upheld the Jews and dared to defy many intellectual forerunners of the Third Reich: namely, Richard and Cosima Wagner, Renan, Dühring, Lagarde, Chamberlain, Gobineau, Stocker, Förster and Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. The Nazis’ use of Nietzsche was not based on any “misinterpretation” or “selective appropriation,” it was based on a twisted sense of spite and was an act of retaliation.... The Nazis may have fooled the world, but they did not fool the Jews. According to Steven Aschheim, German Jewish leaders looked to Nietzsche and Nietzschean folk wisdom for consolation while suffering under the Nazi regime, often quoting Nietzsche’s famous phrase: “What does not destroy me makes me stronger.”

Did this recursively tragic reliance on one of Nietzsche’s quotable phrases facilitate the cooperation of German Jewish leaders with the Nazi state, accepting the death of some as the price that must be paid for the safety of many? I do not wish to blame these victims, but their terrible dilemma is known, documented, mourned. Their gamble did not pay off.

### *Nietzsche and Jews*

You have committed one of the greatest stupidities—for yourself and for me! Your association with an anti-Semitic chief expresses a foreignness to my whole way of life which fills me again and again with ire or melancholy... It is a matter of honor with me to be absolutely clear and unequivocal in relation to anti-Semitism, namely, opposed to it, as I am in my writings.

—Friedrich Nietzsche to his sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche

There is something insulting about being understood.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Eugen Dühring was a “heroic materialist,” and a particularly vicious anti-Semitic intellectual. Engels wrote an essay against him; Dühring’s very existence convinced Herzl of Zionism—European Jews must escape to Israel if dealing with people like him was the alternative. Nietzsche hated him. According to Santaniello, Dühring is Nietzsche’s opponent in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, as well as in the second and third essay of the *Genealogy*. Nietzsche

developed the idea of the *ubermensch* specifically to contrast with the “masses of barbarian forces” he felt were represented by Dühring’s ignorance, which he termed “the new terrorism.” Indeed, many of Dühring’s followers later became superiors in the SS, and his 1881 work *The Jewish Question as a Problem of Race, Morals and Culture* presented an almost complete Nazi program of Jewish genocide. Dühring is exemplary of the kind of men Nietzsche stood against in his lifetime, both in theory and in practice. It is horribly remarkable, then, that these men—vicious opponents in their day—would be married to the same task in their death, and Nietzsche forever tainted by his enemy’s ideology. But, in the lives of Jews, was Nietzsche substantially different than his enemy?

By Sander Gilman’s assessment, Nietzsche periodized Jewish history into epochs, and had a different opinion of each. “Nietzsche perceived three moments in the natural history of the Jew: the Jew as the prophet of the Old Testament, serving the angry and holy *Jehovah*; the Jew as the archetypal wandering Christian (Saul/Paul), weak and destructive; and the Jew as contemporary, the antithesis of all decadence, self-sufficient and incorruptible.” Leaving aside for a moment the relative characteristics Nietzsche imposed upon each, Gilman continues:

...all three of these images serve as stereotypes of difference which are, in the last analysis, negative in that they reduce the perception of a group of single individuals to the generalities of a class. The search for the source and structure of these images of Otherness forces the reader of Nietzsche to the foundation of Nietzsche’s own sense of self, for it is in terms of his sense of Otherness that the boundaries of his own self were drawn.

This is a great insight. Even insofar as Nietzsche wrote in defense of Jews, in passionate identification with their Othered status, so did he reaffirm the essentialism that murdered them. It is this essentialism I see and condemn at the heart of Nietzsche’s anti-Semitism. To say that because a people are a thing they have always been and will carry on being a thing is to make the following essentialist errors: to see “a people” as a single, united force, that can be described with broad generalizations; to imagine that their so-defined character has had the same impact on all “peoples” they have encountered throughout world history; and to imagine that cultural and racial characteristics are tied to and influence each other.

Berel Lang attempts to apologize for Nietzsche's position:

...the inequality that Nietzsche identifies among individuals is not innate or fixed for them either as individuals or as members of a group. This does not mean that their constitution by nature is irrelevant, but that what is decisive is what the individual or the group strives for and achieves—a function of decision and action, not of 'hard-wiring.' As individuals create themselves, so do groups—nations, peoples, or what count for Nietzsche as 'races.'<sup>e</sup>

I am somewhat sympathetic to this framing, if it is an accurate interpretation of Nietzsche's ideas, as it explains the seeming-similarities among members of a culture or community without attributing them to literal race or biology—and, in this case, is done in a positive manner. I would feel far less sympathetic if it were done negatively to members of an oppressed group, which is perhaps hypocritical of me... but power is real. On the whole, it is still reminiscent of Lamarckian pseudoscience: the idea that small biological changes are made in people by their life experiences and passed to their descendants in ways beyond the cultural or material—i.e., if your parents lived in poverty, its effects will show in your body, even if you received adequate nutrition while growing up, were not abused, did not get a larger dose of stress hormones than usual in utero, and so on. This is a contested argument, as it is nearly impossible to isolate cases for study in this way from their surrounding circumstances—and because biological arguments have been so often used by power for political purposes. This sort of thing will rarely end well, especially when attempted by those outside the group in question. This case was no exception; Nietzsche also said things like this: "Life itself recognizes no solidarity, no 'equal rights', between the healthy and the degenerate parts of an organism: one must excise the latter—or the whole will perish." He presents this "fact" as grounded in uncontested science—that is, a way of thinking about evolution and adaptation that has been recently undermined by feminist biologists who point to collaborative, symbiotic forms of evolutionary change, who speculate that competition and survival of the fittest may be only footnotes to these more common biological processes.<sup>f</sup> Moreover, this sentence appears in *The Will to Power*, published after his own mental and physical health became compromised... which gave his fascist sister the rights to his estate and papers. Appeals to nature to justify exercises of power in the social realm are not advised.

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e Footnote 2, Brinker in Wistrich 124, also helpfully elucidates Nietzsche's idea of race.

f See Lynn Margulis's large body of work on this subject; Donna Haraway; many others.



These sorts of errors are obvious in Nietzsche's epitomization of Paul as "the most typical Jew" of his era: "Paul is the characteristic product of the Jewish spirit of *ressentiment*, typical of slave-morality in general," as Brinker summarizes Nietzsche's position, and the Christianity he developed is not only his fault but the fault of his people. But things similarly went awry with Nietzsche's most "positive" portrayal of Jews. In *The Antichrist*, he portrays ancient Jews conducting a religious "slave-rebellion": as Brinker puts it, "Protected by their lack of faith and by the ghetto walls, the Jews were sending a paralyzing new faith to the Gentiles to avenge the wrong done to them by their conquerors. ...the Jews were incapable of a simple belief in God." Thus Jews were always sneaky, underhanded, and treacherous in Nietzsche's eyes, however positively he may have interpreted those traits. As for Diasporic Jews, according to Yovel, Nietzsche admires them "because they have demonstrated the power of affirming life in the face of suffering and drawn force from it. Moreover, Diaspora Jews have the merit of having rejected Christ and served as a constant critic and counterbalance to Christianity." Elsewhere, Yovel considers that Jews replaced Wagner in Nietzsche's internal cosmology as those who would "serve as catalyst in Europe's revival from decadence". He quotes Nietzsche:

In the darkest times of the Middle Ages... it was Jewish free-thinkers, scholars, and physicians who clung to the banner of enlightenment and spiritual independence in the face of the harshest personal pressures... We owe it to their exertions, not least of all, that a more natural, more rational, and certainly unmythical explanation of the world was eventually able to triumph again.

And, in Nietzsche's present:

The Jews, however, are beyond any doubt the strongest, toughest and purest race now living in Europe; they know how to prevail even under the worst conditions (even better than under favorable conditions), by means of virtues that today one would like to mark as vices – thanks above all to a resolute faith that need not be ashamed of "modern ideas."

Nietzsche here celebrates Jewish virtues he claims were developed through their exclusion and/or self-imposed isolation, yet simultaneously calls upon them to assimilate, to lose their religion, to continue to advance modern ideas and cosmopolitan virtues. This was the double-bind for European Jews in this particular historic moment—caught between the need to preserve their communities in the face of anti-Semitic repression, and the urge some felt

to assimilate. Assimilation was driven by the need to escape such repression and the need to break away from their traditionally religious communities. Nietzsche's affirmation of this predicament fell upon listening ears. He praised Jewish wit, intelligence, shrewdness, money, patience, ability to withstand suffering, self-possession, and heroism—and, in a time of intense anti-Semitism, few took offense at the stereotypical or backhanded nature of some of these compliments.

This happened in several directions. Many “marginal” German Jews, who wanted neither to assimilate into Christian culture nor take up politics, but felt no longer at home within the ghetto, found strength and direction from Nietzsche's philosophy: Freud, Kafka, Benjamin, and many other luminaries were among them. Golomb quotes Franz Werfel on the predicament of Jews of that time and place:

[Socialism and nationalism] are political *ersatz* religions. ...What way of escape do they [his fellow Jews] have? The way of liberalism? Who would not be ashamed of its superficial and false cheapness? The way of nationalism? Self-deceit and self-destruction! One becomes a Hebrew nationalist in order to not have to be a Jew any longer! The way of orthodoxy? There is no retreat from life into fossilization, even if it be the holiest fossilization. The way to Christ?...There is no way out!

For such Jews, coming to terms with their ethnicity and the ever-shifting place it afforded them in German society often meant rejecting religious tradition as well as Christian society; Nietzsche's atheist, humanist dedication to the arts and the improvement of culture was the third path.

Most, Golomb says, moved on to other causes and ideologies after consuming Nietzsche in their youth; only those who remained unallied to any particular identity continued to remain dedicated to his writing. This same phenomenon continues among college intellectuals of all ethnicities today; a fling with Nietzsche might be their most common denominator. But Jews of the time were already dealing with crushing anti-Semitism, and their turn towards Nietzsche was therefore far more necessary and passionate than that of any lonely undergrad. Many, Golomb says, “describe their first encounter with Nietzsche's writings as a revelation: an “emotional shock”, a “shaking” experience which they endured “breathlessly or as an “invasion.” Jakob Wasserman lauded Nietzsche as “one who “stressed again and again” that “without the devotion and infallible enthusiasm of the modern Jew, art would have been but sorrowfully understood and received in the last fifty years,”

and refers to him as one of the few “to whom *Antisemiterei*, as he called it, was a horror and an abomination; nay, more – an indignity.”

The relationship with Nietzsche held by Jews who were, as Golomb says, passing through the “twilight of the idols,” both supported them in their move towards atheism and perhaps helped to generate that move. Nietzsche also helped to inspire a sense of the Jewish humanist mission in Europe, one of “the transfiguration of values” that would improve European culture at large, which in turn helped to generate the Jewish Renaissance. All of these elements—Nietzsche’s commitment to opposing anti-Semitism, his positive vision of modern Jews, and his philosophy of self-actualization and *amor fati*—gave German Jews the psychological tools to move closer to acceptance, peace, and joy... before, that is, those efforts were horribly shattered by fascism.

Zionists also found great strength in Nietzsche, although he hoped instead for Jewish assimilation into Europe. According to Mendes-Flohr, his diagnoses of the “spiritual maladies of bourgeois civilization appealed to many Zionists, for it offered them insights into what they regarded as being the spiritual corruption and desiccation attendant in two thousand years of exile, in which Israel was denied the normal conditions of healthy, life-affirming existence in tune with the creative forces of the people.” This is not the *first* example that comes to mind of Nietzsche being used to affirm nationalist and traditionalist politics, but it is an instructive one. Martin Buber, Nietzsche’s foremost apostle among the Zionists, speaks on what Nietzsche gave to the Jewish Renaissance: “...a vital feeling of all that is strong and beautiful... it is of utmost importance for us that our people regain this vital perception and feeling. For only full human beings can be full Jews, who are capable of and worthy of achieving for themselves a homeland.” For him, Nietzsche was virtually a prophet. Mendes-Flohr: “In his own writings, Buber did not tire of indicating that Nietzsche was the *Wegbereiter*—the forerunner—who by creating “new life values and a new feel for existence (*Weltgefühl*) forged the most promising path for the Jewish renaissance.”

Today, questions around nationalism, self-determination, autonomous organizing, and the disruption and reestablishment of hierarchies of power arise again and again among people fighting oppression. What is called for now is something like the sort of dialectical tension Nietzsche saw as necessary to his project of solidarity with Jews while maintaining a critique of religion—but let us hope our failure this time, whatever form it takes, is less critical than his. Nietzsche’s failure demonstrates that we must hold several

points in balance: an appreciation and respect for the historical experiences of oppressed groups along raced, gendered, and classed lines; a commitment to underlining the socially constructed and entirely *unnatural* character of race and gender; and our own critiques. To my eyes, this was Nietzsche's key failure: instead of fighting for a more complex understanding, Nietzsche was seduced by his mystical relationship to ideas of cyclical history, thereby betraying his own most promising ideas.

Yovel, who bases this analysis on *Daybreak*, sums up Nietzsche's position:

As a result of their hard and long schooling and invigorating experience, the Jews reached the modern era as the strongest and most stable people in Europe, and could have dominated it, though they did not wish to do so. However, once they decided to mingle with the other European nations, then because of their greater existential power they would naturally, without intending to, reach a dominant position, in the sense of determining the norms and the new values in Europe. If however the Jews continued their seclusion, Nietzsche grimly predicted they would "lose Europe" (that is, emigrate or be expelled) as their ancestors had left or been driven from Egypt. Nietzsche advocates the first alternative. The Jews must pour their gifts and power into a new Europe that will be free of the Christian heritage: *the forebearers of Christ must work today in the service of the modern anti-Christ (i.e., Nietzsche-Dionysus), and thereby pay their debt to Europe for what their priestly ancestors had done to it.*

Nietzsche's error here was one of noticing historical ironies, loving the twists and curves of fate. In following those logics, he fell victim to such a twist himself. Jews owed Europe nothing, but still paid for it. Had Nietzsche not pronounced that Jews must either surely dominate Europe or be driven from it, the Nazis would almost certainly still have attempted their project... but they would not have done so with a copy of Nietzsche's works in their hand. Friedrich Nietzsche helped to create the horror he sought to avoid.

## Nietzsche and the Left

Is there any idea at all behind this bovine nationalism? What value can there be now, when everything points to wider and more common interests, in encouraging this boorish self-conceit? And this is a state of affairs in which spiritual dependency and disnationalization meet the eye and in which the value and meaning of contemporary culture lies in mutual blending and fertilization!

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

State is the name of the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly it tells lies too; and this lie crawls out of its mouth: “I, the state, am the people.” That is a lie!.. ...every people speaks its tongue of good and evil...but the state tells lies in all the tongues of good and evil... ...Only where the state ends, there begins the human being who is not superfluous: there begins the song of necessity, the unique and inimitable tune.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Nietzsche saw nationalism as the ultimate formation of slave morality—the stupid, reactionary defense of identity that comes in rebellion against more liberatory, internationalist ideals—and had a clear critique of the state. This makes his legacy particularly promising for anarchists, who, these days, find sympathy on the Left for their opposition to capitalism, racism, sexism, and many other -isms... but are left in the cold when it comes to describing the fundamental complicity of the state with these forces. Although Nietzsche’s counter-proposal—the governance of those who have reached spiritual heights through their practices over the masses who refuse to think for themselves—is hardly an anarchist one, his critique itself stands up well to an anarchist gaze.

Nietzsche saw even the openings created for oppressed people within state power as a source of their suffering, an critique that continues to feel both necessary and uncomfortable in light of the daily suffering of those *not* fully embraced by power. His assessment of the Jewish situation proceeds from that evaluation:

The whole problem of the Jews exists only in nation-states, for here their energy and higher intelligence, their accumulated capital of spirit and will, gathered from generation to generation through a long

schooling in suffering, must become so preponderant as to arouse mass envy and hatred. In almost all contemporary nations, therefore – in direct proportion to the degree to which they act up nationalistically – the literary obscenity is spreading of leading the Jews to slaughter as scapegoats of every conceivable public and internal misfortune. As soon as it is no longer a matter of preserving nations, but of producing the strongest possible European mixed race, the Jews are just as useful and desirable an ingredient as any other national remnant.

By Yovel's analysis, Nietzsche's beliefs went even farther than that—he found Jews to be the best candidates for becoming the *Übermensch*, Nietzsche's own chosen people. This was based not in ethnic superiority, but in the superiority of their accumulated culture of trauma, oppression, and resistance and survival under and against those terms. His objection to ancient Judaism was for its creation of the “slave morality” that foregrounds Christianity, fundamental to the Western state of his time; Yovel wryly notes, “Whereas the anti-Semites accuse the Jews of having killed Jesus, Nietzsche accuses them of having begotten Jesus.”

Among the wider Left, Bataille, Camus, Foucault, and Derrida all worked to defend and cleanse Nietzsche's name from its association with fascism, as well as to use his work for their own ends. In the interests of space, I will ignore most of these, and only examine Foucault's most open acknowledgment of his influence; then I will consider several of the egoist anarchists (who would, of course, have rejected any sort of implied affiliation with the Left.)

### *Nietzsche and Foucault*

...knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.

—Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault sources his “genealogical” approach in Nietzsche's use of the term. In his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, Foucault contrasts genealogy to the “pursuit of the origin,” which is “an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities; because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to ‘that which was already there,’ the image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature, and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity.” The genealogist, by contrast to

this essentialist approach, finds that “there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.” Rather, “[w]hat is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.” If it’s turtles all the way down, they are at least very different turtles. By knowing forms as falsehoods, and rejecting them in favor of our impure, “derisive and ironic” beginnings, Nietzsche gave us the freedom to pursue greatness on our own terms. Foucault suggests we therefore pursue a “genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge [that] will never confuse itself with a quest for their ‘origins,’ will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once unmasked, as the face of the other.”

This is a revolutionary distinction—one of the many variant pieces in conversation that (de)compose anti-essentialist analysis and reasoning. Foucault has challenged the discourse and the academy as a whole by illustrating the basic failure in its approach, and turned to Nietzsche instead for a different tool. It is rather lovely to see these two men, themselves aficionados of the understanding of ancient Greece that is the backbone of the Western academy, together bite the hand that feeds them. However, they must be overthrown in their turn. Angela Mitropoulos has critiqued Foucault’s understanding of genealogy as a deconstructive tool rather than a means of enforcing female subjugation and property rights, as well as his reinforcement of the false dichotomy between family and political life in ancient Greece; she, and many other feminist scholars, understand the family to function primarily as a site of labor and oppression.

While I support Mitropoulos’ critique, I will continue to explore Foucault’s use of the term for a moment. He says that *Herkunft*, one of the three terms Nietzsche used that have been translated as “genealogy”, is often understood as “a consideration of race or social type”; but this, he thinks, is wrong. He says instead that “the traits it attempts to identify are not the exclusive generic characteristics of an individual, a sentiment, or an idea, which permit us to qualify them as “Greek” or “English”; rather, it seeks the subtle, singular, and subindividual marks that might possibly intersect in them to form a network that is difficult to unravel.” While still unfortunately biological in tone, from my perspective, Foucault contrasts this sharply to the Nazi understanding of Nietzsche’s use of the term: “...the Germans imagined that they had finally

accounted for their complexity by saying they possessed a double soul; they were fooled by a simple computation, or rather, they were simply trying to master the racial disorder from which they had formed themselves.” In contrast, “[g]enealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people.” Furthermore, though disassociated from race and ethnicity—which are in fact social constructs rather than biological inheritances—“[g]enealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body.” As an intervention into an academy that had erased bodies except for the purposes of experimentation, subjugation, and (privately) libidinal excitation, this suggestion of a study of the impact of history on bodies is central to understanding Foucault’s project at large, and the project of many who are related, however metaphorically, horizontally, or rhizomatically, to him.

Foucault founds this entire analysis of resisting essentialism when doing history and opposing those who enforce it within Nietzsche; he cites all of Nietzsche’s major works in this essay. He quotes, for example, *The Gay Science*: “I can’t stand these lustful eunuchs of history, all the seductions of an ascetic ideal; I can’t stand these blanched tombs producing life or those tired and indifferent beings who dress up in the part of wisdom and adopt an objective point of view.” Foucault sees these sorts of objections not as a simple anti-intellectualist aside, but as a profound critique of the way the academy has done violence to its consumers, participants, and those subjected to its gaze. This interpretation might be Nietzsche’s best chance of redemption—if, that is, he were interested in any such Christian notion.

Saidiya Hartman describes prohibitions on speaking about slave ancestry in Salaga, Ghana:

It was said that tracing genealogy destroyed a state. Those who defied the law risked the punishment of death. Everyone who had ever mentioned the law to me had explained that it was intended to protect those of slave origin. In practice it prevented the enslaved from speaking of a life before servitude and it abolished their ancestry. The slave existed in the world, but without either a history or an inheritance.

*Tracing genealogy destroyed a state*—speaking of difference and oppression in your background, describing a life before servitude, is a dangerous and radical act. All of our tools are double-edged; we should not discard this one because it may cut us, but use it wisely in pursuit of liberation.



Indeed, with the help of a religion which has humoured and flattered the sublimest desires of the herding-animal, things have reached such a point that we always find a more visible expression of this morality even in political and social arrangements: the DEMOCRATIC movement is the inheritance of the Christian movement. That its TEMPO, however, is much too slow and sleepy for the more impatient ones, for those who are sick and distracted by the herding-instinct, is indicated by the increasingly furious howling, and always less disguised teeth-gnashing of the anarchist dogs, who are now roving through the highways of European culture.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

For us — fascism — is a poisonous mushroom planted quite well in the rotten heart of society, that is enough for us.

—Renzo Novatore, “Towards the Creative Nothing”

Max Stirner was an almost-contemporary of Nietzsche’s, writing just before him; a member of the Young Hegelians, he is, famously, one of Marx and Engels’ opponents (‘Saint Max’) in *The German Ideology*, and argued against Proudhon. He is often called the father of individualist anarchism, though his work has also been a source of inspiration for American Randian libertarians, and is considered important to existentialism. While Nietzsche never directly mentioned him in his writing, there is widespread speculation that Nietzsche was greatly inspired by Stirner’s work *The Ego and His Own*; many of their ideas are deeply similar.<sup>g</sup>

While many fascists, including Mussolini, read and admired Stirner in the period before they articulated themselves as fascists, Stirner has been used within fascist rhetoric far less than Nietzsche. Therefore I introduce Stirner here as a way to more clearly examine what is at the basis of elitist theory, without the taint of straightforward fascist or statist adoption: the belief that the individual (or they and their closest companions) have a self-defined right (the only kind of right, in this framework) to govern themselves completely, with no regard for the will of others. I will briefly explore Stirner’s framework with the help of the American anarchist and social ecologist John Clark.

<sup>g</sup> “[Stirner’s] *Unmensch* might be seen to be in some ways a prototype for the *Übermensch* of [Nietzsche].” (Clark 14) The Wikipedia page “Relationship Between Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Stirner” is a clearinghouse of speculation on the subject more generally.

Stirner believed that everyone is an egoist—there are only self-aware or unaware egoists. “Purely altruist” actions are merely those performed by people unaware of their own self-benefiting motivation in performing altruistic acts. The ego, which Stirner called “the creative nothing”, is a self- and other-creating force, an almost-solipsism, with great potential for action in the world if it knows itself to be ultimately powerful. He attacked the role of the state and the church in dominating individuals by clouding their self-knowledge of their wills with laws, customs, and morality. Rather than rewriting the terms of the social contract, he called instead for a war of “all against all”, which Clark evaluates as a sort of unfettered capitalist logic, a “ruthless will to power .... power over things, persons, and above all, oneself”—something like the ethical basis of U.S. Randian libertarianism. (Rather horribly for his anti-capitalist adherents, Stirner was the German translator for Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*.)

This, as Clark correctly points out, ignores the social nature of the development of the ego; none of us exist in a vacuum, and there is little reason to think of an individual body as such rather than as an organ of a larger social body. Were one’s hand to become self-conscious, it might well attempt to make war on one’s foot in the search for supremacy, but there would likely be little advantage to the body as a whole; it might even bleed to death in the process. Stirner betrays a lack of ecological understanding.

The ethics of any situation cannot be traditionally evaluated within Stirner’s framework, as all ethics are either evolved from one’s own ego—what one finds pleasing, what advances one’s will—or are the imposition of the wills of others. There is no real altruism; it is only an indirect way of giving oneself pleasure or advantage, perhaps clouded by ethical imperatives cast from outside the ego. For Stirner, as for Nietzsche, the thing to attack is the dream of collectivity, of the social contract, of the rules of engagement that have been transmitted to us all by culture. Then unfettered, the ego is free (in the negative sense: free from bondage) to pursue positive freedom—its own enjoyment.

We can see these arguments within Nietzsche’s work: “One speaks of ‘equal rights’ .... as long as one has not gained the superiority one wants.” This may be true in the arena of social democracy, but I do not believe it is strictly true of all human interaction. Brinker:

...Nietzsche continually stressed that it was the political implications of the idea of equality, as found in democracy and socialism, that he

found catastrophic. To his mind these abominable ‘modern ideas’ like all feelings of ‘neighborly love’ or social and class solidarity were nothing but remote echoes of slave morality.

However, this interpretation of human behavior is an underpinning of Nietzsche’s common utility to fascists and Leftists, Golomb observes: “...there is little question that for Nietzsche, a hierarchy of value distinguishes between individuals .... the otherwise contradictory fascist and socialist readings of Nietzsche disclose a notable likeness on this one point; in common they depict a superior human being of the future.” This is also Stirner’s hope, but he is even more essentialist about it: whereas within Nietzsche an individual could always strive to overcome themselves, Stirner “suggests that people are born poets, musicians, philosophers, or incompetents, and that their abilities or lack thereof will be manifested regardless of environmental influences.” As for what we ought to do with those abilities, rather than the communist “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs,” Stirner calls for something more like *from each according to their power, to each according to their competency to appropriate it.*

This philosophy is well enough for those who are born into or achieve aristocratic heights of power; but what about the rest of us? Are those people who do not achieve remarkable self-actualization doomed to be ruled by others—and will that rule be necessarily superior because of the superior people conducting it? (Nietzsche “began to favor political and militaristic restraints to discipline the herd.”) What is to ensure that superior people will take control—isn’t it as likely that they will refuse political power, seeing it as a burden or trap? Stirner evades these questions by only envisioning the future lives of the liberated ego, which he imagines as a “union of egos,” a chosen “unfreeness” of those using each other to work towards accumulating as much as possible. This is not an attractive prospect to me; nor is it one, Clark points out, that is likely to be most advantageous for any individual egoist, who could do better exploiting the sheeple within a traditional state. Stirner does not worry much about the governed, though perhaps he believes everyone will join the free association of egos; he suggests vaguely that inequality will disappear in a liberated society. Considering all this, I feel that his philosophy is perhaps most useful as a sort of self-help effort towards personal liberation... though I suspect it will always appeal best to the resentful among us, those who feel themselves to be pearls cast before swine.<sup>h</sup> It speaks to a sort of basic insecurity, a belief that one cannot trust in

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<sup>h</sup> Jesus, whom Nietzsche saw as exemplary, advised us to not cast our pearls before swine in his Sermon on the Mount.

the kindness of others, and that such impulses towards kindness in oneself are necessarily suspect.<sup>i</sup>

However, there is a certain anti-essentialist current within Stirner that I must celebrate: the idea that we must question, and therefore undermine, the *naturalness* of all of our basic beliefs about ourselves and each other. This was lacking in much early anarchist thought; people were often unintentionally reformist in their practice or theory, i.e. seeking the equality of women while not questioning what women *are*. Unfortunately, Stirner did not apply his own ideas nearly far enough. Most horribly, he periodizes human history with the use of a racial metaphor:

The history of the world, whose shaping properly belongs altogether to the Caucasian race, seems till now to have run through two Caucasian ages, in the first of which we had to work out and work off our innate negroidity; this was followed in the second by *Mongoloidity* (Chineseness), which must likewise be terribly made an end of. *Negroidity* represents *antiquity*, the time of dependence on *things...*; *Mongoloidity* the time of dependence on thoughts, the *Christian* time.

As Foucault said, those who seek conflict with a biopolitically governed society but do not have an analysis of biopolitics are destined to be racist. Stirner's faulty analysis, Clark observes, makes this sort of thing inevitable: "A view of anarchism which seeks to eliminate coercion and the state, but overlooks the other ways in which people dominate people, is a very incomplete and quite contradictory type of anarchism." Stirner still argues for a return to nature: no longer as a sheep, but now as a predator. Centralizing one's own desires, when those very desires are shaped by a coercive society, is no more a solution than is any other strategy.

Sadly, I must depart from Clark when he argues "...the social anarchist will find that the egoist reproduces in everyday life what all anarchists condemn as evil in social institutions." He is not wrong; but social anarchists are no less guilty of the same. Our practice does not follow our theory; when it comes to those whom I have theoretical disagreements with, sometimes that seems to be for the best.

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i Clark talks through what he calls "one of the most pathetic passages" of *The Ego and His Own* on this subject, ostensibly on the problem of romantic love. Men's rights activists of the present day might sense a kinship with Stirner's sadness here.

Renzo Novatore was an Italian anarchist, poet, illegalist, and anti-fascist closely allied with the early Futurist movement, and remains one of the most well-known individualist anarchists today. He fought alongside the *Arditi del Popolo*, an anti-fascist militia I described at length in section 2; while part of an anarchist robbery gang, he was killed in an ambush by the police. Novatore drew great inspiration from Nietzsche, as well as from others influenced by Nietzsche; his most notable work is the poetic “Towards the Creative Nothing” (named for Stirner’s conception of the ego) in which he advocated Nietzsche’s condemnation of Christianity, democracy, and socialism. He often quotes Nietzsche directly, and uncritically relies upon his metaphors. Sadly, while he made many valuable contributions to advancing the anarchist terms of engagement, Novatore’s work is also threaded through with essentialist fibers.

Novatore founds his rejection of society upon and through nihilism. “I am an individualist because I am an anarchist; and I am an anarchist because I am a nihilist. ...I call myself a nihilist because I know that nihilism means *negation*. Negation of every society, of every cult, or every rule and of every religion.” But, he goes on, he rejects both “Nirvana”—the attainment of peace through the renunciation of care—and “Schopenhauer’s desperate and powerless pessimism.” “Mine,” he says, “is an enthusiastic and dionysian pessimism, like a flame that sets my vital exuberance ablaze.”

Nietzsche understood alienation to be a widespread social experience under capitalism and the nation-state, following Schopenhauer. While Nietzsche was not a member of the nihilist movement in Russia, he said in a March 1888 letter after the assassination of Czar Alexander II: “If I were in St. Petersburg, I would be a nihilist.” Action for its own sake is a concerning commonality between right and left nihilism; but the nihilist rejection of the world as it is, without the need for an immediate construction of some “better world,” is an important turn away from the sort of utopianism that has justified so many terrible acts. There is nothing quite like the despair one feels after the revolution “comes” and yet does not come, the many failed orgasms of history. Ohana tells us, “The character of the nihilism of 1917 was quite different from that of the nihilism of the 1860s. The Russian nihilists of the nineteenth century preferred science to faith, materialism to idealism... realism to romanticism. After the revolution, however, manifestations of mechanization, robotization, primitivism, vagabondism and suicide became very common.” It is the nihilist whom Nietzsche saw as the true *Übermensch*

for their liberation from religion and the world as it is. Ohana continues: “In Nietzsche’s view, man’s alienation from himself caused a flight in two opposite directions: the rational and the religious are really only two sides of the same coin, the same alienation in a different guise. The historical or “weary” nihilism, as an inevitable stage in the development of Western culture, destroyed the decadent man and cleared the way for the rise of a man of a new variety: the Overman... a person who, first and foremost, cast his eyes on a world without redemption and without a God.”

Joy in negation, of knowing oneself to be completely in charge of one’s destiny—that is, to have control over how you choose to interact with your circumstances, rather than to withdraw from caring about them—has been Nietzsche’s major contribution to anarchism. By Clark’s conception in his work around Stirner, it is a “positive freedom” *towards*; I see it as also a “negative freedom” *from*. Müller-Lauter terms it an “*active nihilism*” that would destroy anything that would invoke the authorities. For those at war with society, the Church, the state and capitalism—the primary enemies of early anarchists and fellow travelers—this metaphor served as an alternative source of emotional and mythological strength in the face of certain defeat. It has also formed a useful challenge to the strains of anarchism that have focused on establishing new utopias or on renegotiating the social contract; it has broken the paralysis and/or potential domination that can come from an intensive focus on community consensus, and challenged the premise that humanity can “return” to an idyllic state of nature, or that such a state of nature ever existed. As such, individualism has served as an important pole in the dialectical, interpenetrating anarchist engagement.

Novatore’s passionate critique of democracy as a levelling force in human society—a new form of oppression—is based deeply in Nietzsche, who was “hostile to democratic rule but also to the state.” It has found resonance with those dissatisfied with the half-measures offered within our current forms of civic democracy, more or less socialist. Novatore: “With democratic civilization, Christ has triumphed. ...If the triumph has not yet been completed, socialism will complete it.” Presciently, he describes socialism as no more than the reconsolidation of power, a “dangerous and impractical bridge between the tyrant and the slave.” This continues to be the anarchist critique... though the term “slave” is, happily, retired from casual usage these days. Clark gives Stirner respect for his recognition of the dangers of socialism: “Apologists for democracy and liberalism in particular have always held that even if one’s will is not carried out, the mere fact that one has a part in the decision-making process is a guarantee of freedom. It is to Stirner’s

credit that he saw through this fallacy, and apprehended that all exercise of sovereign power consists of either actual or potential tyranny.” Law is violence, either actualized or promised, for Stirner, Novatore, and anarchists as a whole.

As we saw with Stirner, egoism can fundamentally challenge essentialism because it asks one to question the basis of all one’s beliefs, customs, and practices, thus underlining their constructedness. The wisdom of egoists—ideally—is received neither from God nor from society, but from their own experiences and thoughts. However, this is not an entirely happy story. Possibly the most controversial statement in Novatore’s essay is his condemnation of a primary anarchist virtue: “I don’t want and I don’t grant solidarity, because I am convinced that it is a new chain, and because I believe with Ibsen that the one who is most alone is the strongest one.” In this, he stands *with* Nietzsche, but *against* most anarchists. Most anarchists would also disagree with Novatore’s elevation of strength itself. In glorifying some above others, and asserting it is for reasons beyond personal preference, Novatore—as Nietzsche before him—contradicts the equally long-standing anarchist pursuit of equality.

The links in Novatore’s mind between the strong, self-actualized individual; an essential division between those who have freed themselves and those who have not; and the categories to which he assumes these belong is given its most disgusting evidence in this aside: “Woman: the most brutal of enslaved beasts. The greatest victim shuffling on earth. And, after man, the most responsible for her problems. I’d be curious to know what goes through her mind when I kiss her.” While I find misogyny and racism to be somewhat optional variants of essentialist manifestation—sometimes you get just one, or the other, or odder versions of either—their presence is always clearly indicative of a deeper issue. (I was distressed to find that the anarchist Biófilo Panclasta—similarly, an illegalist individualist who was deeply inspired by Nietzsche—says things just as misogynist in “Trina Jiménez”, republished in *Seven Years Buried Alive*.) However, in a different essay Novatore writes under a female pen name, and demands a life free from the social expectation of marriage, children, and domestic labor; (s)he calls for the right to sexual pleasure and personal liberation for women. We all contradict ourselves, sometimes for the better.

Novatore also tends towards glorifying violence for its own sake. I find the decontextualized celebration of violence to be a problematic current for those engaged in liberatory struggle—too similar to the fascist celebration of violence as an elevating and purifying experience—although a certain

celebration of warfare is perhaps necessary to any conflictual mythology. Novatore affirms, “There is no rest for my rebel spirit except in war, just as there is no greater happiness for my vagabond, negating mind than the uninhibited affirmation of my capacity to life and to rejoice.” And he engaged in actual armed conflict with the fascists around him, rather than simply glorifying violence in a vacuum. He understood fascism as a manifestation of *ressentiment*: “Fascism is nothing but the convulsive and cruel pang of a plebeian society, emasculated and vulgar, that agonizes tragically drowned in the quagmire of its flaws and of its own lies.” Further, he condemns it as just another way to organize the masses, unblessed by the freedom of the elite individual: “...Fascism is impotent because it is brute force. It is matter without spirit; it is night without dawn. Fascism is the other face of socialism. Both of them are bodies without minds.”

### Nietzsche and the fascists

Without myth, every culture loses the healthy power of its creativity: only a horizon defined by myth completes and unifies a whole cultural movement.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

What attracts them is the sight of the zeal that surrounds a cause—as it were, the sight of the burning fuse, and not the cause itself.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

Apart from the fact that Nietzsche was not a socialist, not a nationalist, and opposed to racial thinking, he could have been a leading National Socialist thinker.

—Ernst Krieck, a leading National Socialist thinker

I am terrified by the thought of the sort of people who may one day invoke my authority.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, letter to Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche

Nietzsche provided an important mythology, as well as philosophical legitimacy, for the National Socialists who took him up after his death. Ohana describes the “*anti-rationalist* rebellion that led to contempt for [Leftist] intellectuals... since these [fascist] intellectuals did not consider reason a justification for politics, they replaced it with myth.”<sup>1</sup> While Nietzsche sought to undermine

j Ohana has an agenda here. He published a trilogy called *The Nihilist-Totalitarian Syndrome* in which he argues that the two are intimately linked, and seems to suggest a return



traditional values, morality, and social hierarchies—which appealed to those futurists and technophiles among the proto-Nazis—he also borrowed and built upon the idea of eternal return, which spoke to their beliefs around the past superiority of “their people” and the inevitability of their rise. Moreover, the new myths to which Nietzsche contributed—the Jewish Enlightenment, the coming *Übermensch*, aesthetics as a replacement for religion—grew fear in the hearts of proto-Nazis, inspiring what Nietzsche would call their “slave-revolt”; unwilling to participate in the social revolution afoot, they turned to reaction. It was a self-feeding cycle.

Nietzsche has long been useful as a source or justification for what Günter Berghaus terms “war mythology”; even before fascism broke out, 150,000 copies of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* were distributed to German soldiers during World War 1. For many, especially those approaching fascist warfare from the Left, Nietzsche was best taken in combination with Georges Sorel. Sorel saw war as “a fundamental motive of human action, whilst pacifism was regarded as a form of cowardice”; as Nietzsche framed it, life is struggle. And, while Sorel’s model of revolution was a general strike, he believed the masses needed leaders, exemplary figures that would set the pace. Especially in Italy, during a time varying between mediocre Socialist government and intense Leftist uprisings that fell short of revolution, this became an appealing suggestion. Mussolini, a fan of both writers, used their mythology intentionally. He appropriated Nietzsche’s directive to “live dangerously” and spread it throughout among the young fascist movement—an outcome, we can be assured, Nietzsche would have repudiated.

Marinetti, the prominent Italian Futurist and sometimes fascist, said: “Nietzsche was for us everything. He represented liberation from moralism and mediocrity, the capacity for renewal and rescue from entanglements, for doubting everything that had been accumulated up to now: all this was connected with the name Nietzsche.” D’Annunzio, the Italian warrior-poet whom I have discussed at length in section 2, brought Nietzsche’s work into Italy. He served not only as a conduit, but also as a filter, one that simplified and popularized Nietzsche’s ideas, particularly his concept of the *Übermensch*. In a strike against one of the fundamental myths of the Left, D’Annunzio was even able to use Nietzsche’s ideas to attack “the political principles of the French Revolution... for eliminating natural differences between human beings.” Both Marinetti and D’Annunzio served as cultural tillers who, while they had ambiguous and contentious relationships to Mussolini, prepared the ground for his fascist ideas to grow. Sorel and Nietzsche proved the correct fertilizers to achieved the questionably desirable result of elitist revolt.

to traditional morality and republican values of citizenship as an alleviative.

Sznajder says of D'Annunzio's adaptations of Nietzsche's thought: "The 'overman' was still needed, perhaps more than ever, not as a lone hero of superior morality but rather as a leader of the enrolled masses, trying to instill them with his own values, which were symbolically entangled with those of the nation or empire." This is how Nietzsche, hero of the ungovernable individual, became Nietzsche, justification for totalitarian fascism. Mussolini wrote in 1932: "Against individualism, the Fascist conception is for the State... which is the conscience and universal will of man in his historical existence... [and which] interprets, develops and gives strength to the whole life of the people..." While this contradicted everything Nietzsche said against the state and nationalism, and for the primacy of the individual, Mussolini deliberately extrapolated from Nietzsche's work in this way. He said reading Nietzsche "cured" him of his Marxism, much to the detriment of us all; his mistress/biographer recalls that, as he began to form the *fasci*, "it is then that on his lips begins to appear frequently and insistently the word 'aristocracy.'" No mystery whence he derived *that* term. Mussolini glorified ancient Rome, and believed with Nietzsche that the "slave revolt" of Christianity had destroyed it; he saw the rise of fascism in Italy as the eternally-predicated return of this highest form of civilization... though this did not stop him from cynically collaborating with the Church as he consolidated his power later.

On the German side of things, Berel Lang cites Nazi philosopher Alfred Bäumler's openly described "deliberate effort required to force the interpretation of Nietzsche through this very transposition from the will to power in the individual to the authority of power on behalf of the state." Unlike Mussolini, Hitler never bothered to read Nietzsche; but others were completing this alchemical trick for his benefit. Lang rightly raises the question of whether fascists actually relied upon Nietzsche's ideas—or whether they simply invoked his aura to legitimize *their* ideas. To my eye, their use of his concept of will to power was inevitable, given his rhetoric of the new aristocracy—given the political contingencies of the time, those striving for social power were always going to determine that *they* were this so-called aristocracy, and use this status to legitimize their claim to power. And, while Nietzsche was against the *state* per se, he was for the governance of the weak by the strong—so is it really such a leap? After all, Nietzsche says, "a good and healthy aristocracy... accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, *for its sake*, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments... ..Egoism belongs to the nature of a noble soul—I mean that unshakable faith that to a being such as 'we are' other beings must be subordinate by nature and have to sacrifice themselves."

Golomb argues that it is all a mistake, that Nietzsche has been misinterpreted when it comes to will to power: most fundamentally, that the Nazis mixed up Nietzsche's *Macht* (will to power) with *Kraft* (physical strength/force) and *Gewalt* (violence). He says,

Nietzsche identifies the use and exploitation of others with violence (*Gewalt*), contrasting this external manifestation of gross force with power that is directed toward an internal expression of overcoming. Internalized power must also be free of masochistic violence, since it seeks not the elimination of individual drives but rather their creative sublimation... Although the qualitative power of the individual or society is no guarantee of its material success and victory, it nonetheless ensures a spiritual and cultural superiority. For this reason Nietzsche is careful to distinguish between the history of power (spiritual and intellectual progress) and the history of force (physical and material domination). It is precisely those who have been in the weaker position relative to the history of force who are responsible for cultural advances relative to power: it is the more unfettered, uncertain, and morally weaker individuals upon whom *spiritual progress* depends.

Golomb also describes Nietzsche's concepts of negative and positive power, assigning Nazis firmly to the pole of negative power. He concludes:

Nietzsche draws an ideal picture of an entire culture driven by powerful individuals—generous, independent, unprejudiced, endowed with the ability to perform a creative sublimation of instincts. Such persons have “the ability to accept contradictions”, possess dynamic vitality and self-control, are devoid of bad conscience, have adopted the attitude of *amor fati*, and exhibit self-acceptance. These are the genuinely “free spirits” with the attitude of “*la gaya scienza*,” people who embody intellectual tolerance and existential integrity. They are noble and courageous, rejecting the desire for expansion or domination as ultimate goals in themselves. This picture could not be more opposed to that of the Nazi Aryan “Reich,” which sought to suppress such positive power patterns and deliberately wiped out so many of its living models.

I must say, it is difficult to imagine that even the Nazis wanted to suppress all positive power patterns, to create a grey totalitarian society of perfect conformity—but perhaps Golomb is right, and it was all a misunderstanding of terms. However, all of the above examples have only to do with

distinguishing Nietzsche's concept of will to power from how it was used materially by fascist forces—Nietzsche's basic premise, that there are morally superior *individuals* and spiritually weak *masses*, continues to be upheld; those qualities are just assigned to different characteristics or peoples depending on one's political preferences. Nietzsche had no interest in consensus, in whole horizontal communities of people figuring out their needs together: that is, the anarcho-communist proposal. He wanted to identify the enlightened, strong, superior, and kind (although he seems to have had a good deal of admiration for cruelty, as well), and make them our new philosopher-kings. This is the elitist proposal in its raw form, unflavored by either an anarchist rejection of authority or fascist goals of totalitarianism.

Unfortunately, while evil, weak, and stupid people in power have done a great deal of harm, replacing them while maintaining the hierarchical power structure in which they previously resided has seldom done the trick. Furthermore, this idea appeals intimately to the very men of *ressentiment* of whom Nietzsche is most critical: they cannot help but believe that they are the superior ones, those destined to be *Übermensch*, by the same logic employed by a parent who tells their child that the bullies must simply be jealous.

I will give the last word on this subject to Yovel:

Finally, Nietzsche attracted abusers because of what I call his political impotence—the vacuum he left in political theory. I know this is not the common view today, but I think Nietzsche's protests against politics are borne out by a marked lacuna in his thinking—the lack of a positive philosophy of the “multitude”. Politics is not about the happy few, but about those ordinary people, the modern mass or “herd” which Nietzsche did not care about and did not make the topic of any positive philosophical reflection. This invites abuse, because when ordinary people are supposed to act in *extraordinary* (“Dionysian”) ways, or when a patrician message intended for a minority is generalized—that is, vulgarized—into a mass political movement, the result is not only intellectually grotesque but a political profanation and possible catastrophe, quite opposed to Nietzsche's aspirations, yet an outcome he should have seen.

## against slavery, against masters

I am writing for a race of men who do not yet exist, for the rulers of the earth.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

*Aryan influence* has corrupted all the world.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

I cannot see how any philosophy or political platform premised on a race of rulers could go well for the majority of humanity. It seemed promising in Germany because the past and present alternatives had proved so frustrating; as Germans tried to organize themselves into a nation, the difficulty of organizing the masses led to an identification with the elite on the right. Ohana:

In their contempt for mass-culture, Jünger and Heidegger [writers very influential to the Nazis] were influenced by Nietzsche's analysis of the moral dialectic of the master and slave. Mass-culture... ...was identified with the bourgeois world which aimed at comfort, mediocrity, and security. ...Jünger and Heidegger believed that the technological era could reach fulfillment only under the leadership of an elite which would reject the shallow optimism of the masses. Both of them awaited the Nietzschean Overman who would complete the nihilistic process.

The same evaluation could be made of pre-fascist Italy—between the struggles of *risorgimento* and Leftist failure, governance by the Overman seemed far more appealing. But, as those examples show us, the process of trying to prove yourself as the elite necessarily means the identification and persecution of an Other. Furthermore, this is an utterly dark prospect for most people—who would actually like to be governed by even the wisest few? (Perhaps many would like that, actually, but to sleep at night I have to believe that is a socially constructed desire that might be better resolved in bed than in the halls of government.) And what process ensures the rise of the so-called cream to the top? Nothing in history serves to assure us that this rise is inevitable, or even really possible. At least the anarchist version of elitism is an elitism of the individual, a refusal to sign the social contract for oneself, rather than an attempt to gather power over others. Sadly, as we saw earlier, many anarchists have failed to rebel against every part of society.

Furthermore, I think we ought to stop relying on the mythology of ancient Greece and Rome, by which I mean the ideas of the gods as essential

forces; the great philosophers of that time and place; and the mythology of marketplace democracy that whitewashes its foundation in colonization, misogyny, and slavery. None of these forces are useful to any of us, except perhaps those of us who would like to be on top. If Nietzsche was able to so clearly see how the mythic structures of Christianity underlie our society, why did he choose to name his ideal forms and forces after another set of gods? As for the democracy Nietzsche hated, from when and where did he think it theoretically derived? European-Americans were not inspired by the Iroquois when they founded the United States, except in the most backhanded way. Like imperialists before them, U.S. settlers were more likely to kill those they colonized than to learn from them.

Ohana describes nihilism so: “Denying history the right to guide politics means revitalizing the present moment through a philosophy of dynamism and a politics of violence; this leads to the rejection of history, contempt for culture-preserving intellectuals, and the desire to destroy universities, museums, and libraries.” This is an unfair conflation of nihilism with Futurism, really—that last line is directly out of “The Futurist Manifesto.” But I must say that I feel a bit of what he characterizes as the nihilist urge to destroy history—that is, the Greek culture, myths, and idea of democracy that Nietzsche alternately relied upon and revised. Nietzsche was not alone in this project: dozens of revolutionaries on the Left have relied upon ancient Greece as “a paradigm for a regenerated future”, as have the theorists of democracy and virtually the entire Western academy.

Ancient Greece was no worse than anywhere, probably, but so much of Western civilization has been theorized from the history/mythology that people have compiled and revised about it that it is increasingly difficult to view it with fresh eyes; it has too many layers of congealed blood clinging to it. I would like that project to end. European and Mediterranean mythic structures cannot possibly reflect our (and let us always trouble this “our”) experiences as a globalized world, though I do not propose we simply try instead for pan-cultural representation. I have personally benefited from the slowly-increasing diversity in the universities and libraries, but it is not alone what I call for—rather, I think we should stop whitewashing and elevating *any* particular moment of the dominant culture’s past, especially those predicated on what “we” have repudiated.

However, Nietzsche’s philosophy was anti-essentialist in many moments. He argued that we must overcome our alienation from civilization, to overcome ourselves, to deliberately create ourselves as art: “The search for authenticity

is the wish to express one's *indeterminancy* [emphasis mine] by the spontaneous choice of one of many possible ways of life. The individual is akin to the artist who freely shapes his self as a work of art. *To become what we are is not to live according to our so-called "innate nature", but rather to create ourselves freely.*" This version of Nietzsche emphasizes the individual's ability to create their own fate, challenging notions of historical destiny. As such, it was and is useful for those who are coded by society as worthless.

He also championed an aesthetic approach to life, "attacking naturalism as the dominant artistic tendency of his time." By thus valorizing artificial construction, he underlines the human possibility of self-definition, rather than essentialist or materialist reduction. Simon explains that "A 'love with perceiving eyes' (*Zarathbrusta*) would be a love that really 'perceives' another human being, recognizes in *another* a human being, even when it is unable to understand this other person from its own point of view. It no longer wishes to reduce this person to its own concepts, to notions about this person that it cannot "understand" from its own perspective. '*Comprendre c'est egaler*'—this does the other person an injustice." Nietzsche acknowledges the difference that makes solidarity possible. Simon:

...Nietzsche speaks of 'good and bad days.' 'It is difficult to be understood. One should be deeply grateful merely for a good will towards the *subtlety* of an interpretation.' 'On good days' one can 'grant one's friends a great deal of leeway for misunderstandings.' This leeway is for the viewpoints of the *others*: for a way of understanding that simply cannot be understood from one's own vantage point. One demands on such days to have absolutely no more 'interpretations'; one understands 'without having to mediate with an interpretation,' i.e., 'aesthetically.' By contrast, 'resentment' holds sway on bad days. Everything has 'its' time.

Nietzsche calls understanding without a 'mediating' interpretation, without a 'translation' into one's own language, 'the latest' and 'scarcely possible' form of inner experience."<sup>7</sup> That this is scarcely possible means that it is currently possible only 'on good days'—not at all times and not whenever one wishes. 'Good' and 'bad' are terms still used to describe the various conditions that one and the same person is in. The rift runs thorough one's own identity. It is only on 'bad days' that one searches for the certitude found in one's 'self'-'identity', hoping to drive away this internal opposition. One searches for safety in a worldly knowledge gained thorough one's 'participation' in a 'divine', 'undivided' view of everything. Nietzsche's own evaluation of Judaism vacillates depending on his own condition.

This is a good explanation of both the drive towards essentialism and the attitude necessary to oppose it. It tells us that we ought to view Nietzsche and his relationship to essentialism dialectically—that is, we should treat him *inessentially*. Each era of his major works represents a nearly total reversal of his previous views; while they can be examined together dialectically, a marriage of his ideas that purports to demonstrate their contradiction and call for divorce would be disingenuous. He had good days; he had bad days. And, after all, Nietzsche has yet to be fully recuperated, and that is promising. Ohana despairingly remarks:

If Nietzsche had limited himself to religious criticism such as that of Kierkegaard, of economic analysis such as that of Marx, or psychological exposure such as that of Freud, his philosophy would have been a specific critique of the world, and would have dialectically served part of reality after having been internalized by people. But Nietzsche's thought was so radical in its critiques that it embraced every aspect of reality; it involved an absolute refusal to accept any consolation for the human condition...

Nietzsche believed that traditional morality, dictated by those with economic, political and social power, was flipped by the Judeo-Christian tradition in its exaltation of the wretched. This he termed a slave-rebellion; much of his work is dedicated to criticizing the attitude of resentment foundational to this new morality, and exploring what he conceived of as “master morality.” The idea of siding with or emulating the masters rather than the slaves in any given situation sickens me. I believe his metaphor is no sad accident, but fundamentally indicative of Nietzsche's actual faults—as well as making his work conducive to adoption by fascists and other racists. I would like to counterpose the sad dichotomy he established, the predicament in which he left/established for the Jews, with Marie Yellow Horse Brave Heart's work on historical trauma.

Yellow Horse Brave Heart worked within Lakota communities as a social worker, clinical researcher, and Lakota tribe member. She developed her theories around historical trauma within that context, and found similarities with Lakota experiences and those of the descendants of Holocaust survivors. She identifies the following features of historical trauma response:

a) transposition... ..where one lives simultaneously in the past and the present with the ancestral suffering as the main organizing principle in



one's life, b) identification with the dead... ..so that one feels psychically (emotionally and psychologically) dead and feels unworthy of living, and c) maintaining loyalty to and identification with the suffering of deceased ancestors, re-enacting affliction within one's own life... ..Additionally, there is survivor guilt, an ensuing fixation to trauma, reparatory fantasies, and attempts to undo the tragedy of the past.

Those who suffer from historical trauma are much more likely to experience heart disease, alcoholism, depression, suicide, and a host of other physical ailments. To my eyes, this seems to be related to, but independent from, the material conditions associated with displacement... nor is it a strictly epigenetic phenomenon, a trendy analysis I find problematic; it is a social, cultural, and family horror. Yellow Horse Brave Heart attributes this suffering to a lack of grief facilitation—"[a different study] asserted that the Lakota suffer from impaired grief, a consequence of massive cumulative trauma throughout history."

She shares many samples of personal testimony from study participants who report horrifying experiences in their own lives. I will repeat one general reflection:

We look at ourselves and our nation and we look at where we were traumatized... Our development is arrested and we are stuck. [The trauma] continues to be perpetrated. I mean that it happens over and over again in lots of different ways... individually, personally, emotionally, and to us as a group, so we just continue to be victimized... I think that is why a lot of our people have become apathetic and cold because this thing is so overwhelming and hopefully someone will look at all the layers of the [trauma] that we have to deal with... it's overwhelming to me at times.

Would Nietzsche, I wonder, consider these Lakota survivors bearers of "slave morality"? Would he accuse them for their own plight? Would he valorize the most "exceptional" of these survivors, those who were able to succeed on the terms of the dominant, oppressive society that occupies their land, murdered their ancestors, tortured their parents, and afflicts them so deeply today? Perhaps he would only consider those survivors who become abusers in their own right to be men and women of *ressentiment*; I have often thought that word fit abuser mentality well. But, leaving the injustice of victim-blaming aside, none of these exercises in assigning blame amidst the survivors are *useful* to their healing, nor to the accountability of those who persecuted them.

Yellow Horse Brave Heart's work to find sources of generational healing for Lakota people is not only practically useful in the short term for aiding people in their recovery, but offers a different framing for understanding how cultures and peoples are shaped by the long-term impacts of suffering. It assigns blame squarely on the individuals, societies, and cultures who began the harm, without discounting the personal responsibility held by those who have acted it out against their loved ones. The techniques of survival the Lakota she worked with have developed include loyalty, service to others, hard work, and generosity—and these techniques are not devalued because they came from surviving trauma.

While everyone is responsible for refusing to harm others, no matter their own background and experiences; while discovering and expanding one's own will to power at no expense to others may be quite profitable in the pursuit of self-actualization; while renouncing religion, democracy, and the world's other attempts to ensnare one into contracts to which you do not wish to consent is a valuable exercise—I find Nietzsche's separation of the world into masters and slaves unacceptable. I am interested in pursuing the kinds of healing Yellow Horse Brave Heart and the Lakota she worked with have elaborated; the sorts of justice being worked out in Rwandan communities after devastating mass murder; and the solidarity necessary for the survival of all of us, including those of us without an ancestral home or the desire for one. If I must live in the world Nietzsche imagined, I call for a revolt towards freedom: one without definitions, hierarchies, or borders.

## II. Populism: “..a tragicomedy of illusions and failures.”

Populists are often—though not always—fighting for democratic principles; their methods simply do not resemble those of pluralist democracy. Populists see themselves as saving the people from their oppressors, rather than engaging in the low-intensity constant conflict of pluralism that often amounts to simply maintaining the status quo. Successful populist movements frequently move down a totalitarian path that tends to erase their popular roots. For the nation to perfectly reflect the desires and needs of its citizens, the citizens must be molded to fit the image of the nation—achieving this perfect correspondence requires change at both ends. In many situations, this creates the elite—the *Übermensch*, the Fascist Man, the martyred heroes, or the vanguard—who “best” embody the political and social values of the movement, thus betraying the populist values that gave birth to it; and, in its turn, this justifies the suppression of dissent and diversity.

Still, the calmest solution is not necessarily the best. While most modern democracies see pluralism as their primary objective, this does little to eliminate the resentments and desires that foster both elitism and populism. Pluralism provides stability and is less prone to troubling excesses... but promotes indifference and alienation where populism can stifle dissent and minority rights. On an experiential level, populist movements offer a sense of meaningful engagement for their participants... but that participation requires enthusiasm, the search for power, and the confidence to use that power, all of which come and go intangibly and tend to reproduce the elite when present. Despite these problems, in times of crisis even citizens of pluralist democracies often generate populist movements in an attempt to save or liberate themselves.

I found Kirk Hawkins’ book *Venezuela’s Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective* a compelling starting point for this discussion. Hawkins argues that populism is a worldview created by economic and social pressures, that it reproduces itself in a mutual relationship with its own rhetoric, and that it finds its outlet just as easily on the Left as the Right. Hawkins asserts that both causal beliefs (how the world *does* operate) and normative beliefs (how the world *should* operate) are important to populism. However, populism is not a set of principles, but “a deeper aspect of culture that expresses basic, interrelated beliefs about history, that nature of the self, and the metaphysical. It is a worldview and is expressed as a discourse. “That worldview is fundamentally Manichaeic: it affirms and reinscribes the historical struggle between Good (Rousseau’s will of the people) and Evil (the conspiring minority) via its

analysis of the “recent” subversion of the political system. This worldview is an entirely different beast than pluralistic discourse, which pragmatically encourages a balance of perspectives and the virtues of an institutionalized democratic order; for populists, even those who hold democracy as a value, the institutional order is too corrupt to function and must be overthrown or dramatically reformed before democracy or equality could function. From this perspective, pluralism is at best a hindrance and at worst a mire; the swamp must be drained.

The equation necessary for a large-scale populist movement to form, Hawkins says, is as follows: a clearly discernible evil (the abuses of those in power); that directly affects the people (daily survival is difficult and/or repression is intense); and a charismatic leader behind which opposition can gather. Whereas pluralistic democracies function by maintaining things as they are, providing just enough options for the majority of people to keep their discontent from rising to a boil, populism speaks instead to that very discontent. This is its advantage, when conditions are correct. Hawkins sees populism as primarily defined by its discourse, rather than its specific ideological platform, material/historical positioning, or structure. This explains its big-tent tendency, its ability to welcome all those with whom it shares a common enemy; the *content* of any particular populist struggle is less relevant than its *condition*, and its structure evolves necessarily from its worldview. “Worldview” is our understanding of how the universe works and who the real actors in it are; “discourse”, the expression of worldview, subconsciously expresses fundamental assumptions, and/or, according to postmodernists, shapes and constitutes them. However, the two act to mutually reproduce each other; discourse leads to the development of worldview as surely as worldview generates discourse. Worldview and discourse shape beliefs, but are less elaborated and practically specific than ideology. In example: Chavismo, Hawkins says, is an ideology, born of a populist discourse, which flows from a Marxist national liberation worldview.

People are prone to adopting Manichaeic worldviews during times of crisis. Manichaeic thinking is moralizing and dualistic: we are in the final crisis; no fence-sitting is permitted; the past weighs heavily upon the present; the injustices upon and strengths of the people are eternal truths continually enacted. “Good” is equivalent to the will of the people; this discourse therefore tends to flatten dissent, or regard it with suspicion, because there must be only one people with a united will for this moral framework to function. Thus, the Manichaeic outlook is anti-pluralistic and repressive because it tends to seek equality through sameness, or the suppression of

difference. Ironically, it is therefore prone to takeovers by minority groups who feel they represent or presume they know the will of the people. (“The people” is a term deployed internationally in populist discourse; within a white U.S. context, it might be “the Heartland”—“the place in the common imagination embodying the positive aspects of everyday life.”) Populism does not play within the political rules of its society or act with respect for its opponents; science is also often seen as not-authoritative by populists. And, finally, Manichean worldview calls for or expects an apocalyptic revolutionary rupture, though conservative populists are often unwilling to use such terms because of their association with Marxism, and leftist populists are sometimes troubled by its religious parallels.

Charismatic linkage between populist leaders and the rest of the movement is not necessary to populist movements, but is very common within it; it is an important facilitator of power. The relationship is an exceptional one, in which people support a leader primarily because of their perceived extraordinary skill and personality. Leaders call for radical change, and often seem quasi-divine to their followers; this combination generates popular support for them without any necessary direct exchange or clear benefit to the supporters. If the leader makes promises, they continue to matter to the supporters as an expression of the leader’s character even if they are not fulfilled. Popular movements that fail to manifest such a leader may fail and wilt away; by Hawkins’ assessment, “[w]e are surrounded by constant examples of ephemeral populist movements that fail to leave any lasting imprint and may never really get off the ground” for lack of such charismatic leaders. While members of Leftist populist movements may feel uncomfortable with how this dynamic defies their ideals of horizontal power, it is addictive.

Hawkins tells us that “Political worldviews and discourses such as populism represent a different level of ideas than an ideology; they are mostly empty boxes that can hold different types of programmatic content.” When ideology takes over, populism itself can be evacuated from the political tendency it originally generated, as it was in Nazi Germany. The Volkische discourse that began by centering the common people of the countryside, by posing the simple German peasant life in contrast to “Semitic” industrialization and decadent modernity, transformed into the image of the *Übermensch* backed by tanks and factories in his struggle against international imperialist forces. While there were always elitist strands within Volkische ideology, it was its adoption of a charismatic dictator and shift into Nazi governance that caused both the exemplification of the elite German man and a positive emphasis on modernity left these influences of popular German Romanticism largely

in the dust. The eventual mechanization of the Nazi state might well have been a nightmare for the earliest progenitors of their ideology, though that does not cleanse their hands of it.

When all is (relatively) well, populists have little to do; one observer finds that “in a situation in which most of the population is still integrated into the existing social order, the political possibilities of a displaced and mobilized elite group will be limited. The only realistic possibility to originate a large mass movement would be to induce the disintegration of the existing social order and cause the release of large sectors.”<sup>k</sup> However, capitalism reliably produces precarity and crisis; moments of peace are seldom prolonged or widely shared. Carl Boggs observes that “movements typically flourish where there are mounting crises of legitimacy, where the old systems of social and authority relations are challenged by broad cultural ferment or social upheaval.” Within these moments of crisis, in which the old solutions no longer seem to offer solutions for the needs of the people, there is opportunity—but it is easily fumbled. To be successful by any measure, social movements must overcome unfavorable balances of sociopolitical conditions, create broad social alliances, and have coherent and responsive strategies for action to survive beyond the immediate moment of tension. Within pluralistic democracies, they must resist not only direct repression, which inflicts fear upon the entire movement by targeting its extremities, but also the buying out of their leaders and the institutionalization of their conflict, its recuperation. To be successful in their goals, social movements must instead cause the conflict to spill out of the bourgeois political sphere, to resist the attempts of the government to contain rebellion by drawing the conflict back into the state’s own political arena, whilst surviving attacks meant to terrify it, to make its daily environment inhospitable.<sup>l</sup>

Sometimes, this is successful for moments, and those successes continue to echo beyond their own recuperation; despite the state’s containment mechanisms, social conditions in the 1960s led to the development of broad-based movements in Europe and the Americas that were directly rooted in the crisis of capitalism, and continue to operate today both inside and outside

k He notes that this was the situation for the Montenero guerrillas in 1970s Argentina, following their betrayal by Perón. (Germani 30)

l One can think of the repression faced by the Black Panthers, which took the forms of murder, imprisonment, COINTELPRO, and the deliberate introduction of drugs by the government... but also the institutionalization of their free breakfast program, the rehabilitation and claiming of intellectuals associated with the Panthers, and the channeling black radicalism into “safer” routes. All parts of this formula were important for destroying the Party, which was already-always contending with the inhospitable context of daily survival under white supremacy.

of “acceptable bounds.” Boggs argued that those movements were “unlikely to disappear due to the persistent and increasing social decay endemic to late capitalism.... The capitalist crises have produced similar “populist movements on both the right and the left.” And, indeed, precarity produces anxiety, fear, and resentment, emotions perhaps more easily channeled by the forces of reaction or revolution than by progressives. The early Italian fascists were often described simply as “*spostat*”—displaced people.

Respecting the pluralism of compromise is seldom a sticking point for those in the majority unless it is economically beneficial to them, even when their politics are supposedly founded in such tolerance. One could cynically track the correspondence of the success of almost any civil rights movement to the economic benefit its approval brings to those in power. Despite this, we are used to supporting the underdog story of those fighting for their civil rights against such power. Is the Left still the party of the oppressed once it has gained institutional power, or is it inevitably corrupted by that power? Anarchists argue that even (or especially) the Leftist state cannot possibly be trusted. The Russian example showcases this point.

### The Narodniks

The Narodniks could be most dismissively described as a bunch of disillusioned rich kids in 19th century Russia who felt guilty about the suffering of the peasants for their benefit. Members of the radical intelligentsia, their thinking was heavily influenced by the West, but pointedly Slavophile, with an exaltation of the land and the simple people. They followed their politics by going “back to the land” to reach out to and support the peasants... but were disillusioned by what they found there. While peasants did live a form of communism, as the Narodniks imagined, their primary struggle was for simple existence; more disappointingly, many of them harbored interests in getting ahead on a personal level, rather than exalting the commune the way their admirers did. *Narodnichestvo*, then, persisted as a romantic populism, but necessarily as an impersonal one that still saw the “people” (*Narod*) as an undifferentiated mass; the details proved too sticky. It is their failures that make this movement interesting for us. While the Narodniks existed simultaneously with the proto-fascist populism of the German Volkische ideologues, the internal and self-critical gaze of Narodniks tended to destroy ideology rather than affirm it, and the ideologues who remained were exposed, if unashamed, rather than affirmed by popular opinion. The history of this movement is useful for those who would like to critically interrogate their own movements for signs of ideology and relevance.

The social placement of the Narodniks is familiar from both the Volkische situation and the modern Left. Unlike the Chávistas, the Narodniks mainly came from the upper classes; in uplifting the peasantry, a people far removed from their own social class, the Narodniks were in fact fighting to abolish themselves. As the military governor of Moscow wrote about the earlier Decembrist Revolt, “I can understand the French bourgeois bringing about the Revolution to get rights, but how am I to comprehend the Russian nobleman making a revolution to lose them?” But, while the Decembrists pushed for a Westernization of Russia, many other Russian intellectuals had their eyes on a “specifically Russian future.” In reaction to the Revolt, conservative Slavophile writers exalted the peasant commune as a specifically Russian construct—inspiring the Narodniks, the next generation of revolutionists. In a “dialectical twist”... this idea of the commune was appropriated by socialists.

A variety of other intellectuals engaged with and inflected the movement before the socialist takeover. Alexander Herzen, a Russian exile whose writing synthesized Western and Slavophile ideas, was quite influential. From afar, he called for “the servants of the people” to appear: “[The people] are waiting not for books but for apostles—men who combine faith, will, conviction, and energy; men who will never divorce themselves from them; men who do not necessarily spring from them, but who act within them and with them, with a dedicated and steady faith. The man who feels himself to be so near the people that he has been virtually freed by them from the atmosphere of artificial civilization; the man who has achieved the unity and intensity of which we are speaking—he will be able to speak to the people and must do so.” The apostles Herzen evokes here feel very similar to the *Bund* of Germany, an elite group dedicated to the soul of their land—but their directionality, importantly, is different. Herzen commands such a man to speak to the people, whereas the attention of the Volk ideologues was directed outward. Both groups treated the people as a sort of bath that washes one clean of modernity, but the Narodniks actually *spoke* to the bath. Their resulting disillusionment from this recognition of difference sent them on a divergent path.

One of the first apostles to respond to Herzen’s call was a priest’s son, Nicolas Chernyshevsky.<sup>m</sup> He was a “unflinchingly radical” fanatic who opposed talk of love and even democratic government on the grounds of its irrelevance to the people. He also refused to romanticize the people, praising one writer who depicted peasants unfavorably: “Only a few clear-

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<sup>m</sup> A character somewhat reminiscent of Nikolai Levin in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*.



sighted persons like Uspensky who love the people fiercely could muster the resolution to lay before us these traits without mitigation.” Despite his refusal of idealization, he wanted to build a communist society that bypassed the fresh evils of Western capitalist transition (enclosure, the expropriation of the peasant and their reduction to bare life, industrialization) by virtue of its basis in the peasant commune. As an essentially Slavic institution, the commune would keep Russia ethnically/culturally pure while allowing for modernization towards a completely communist society. On the subject of ethnic purity, there is a tension here worth considering in the fact that Russia’s long history of anti-Semitic pogroms *continued* under state Communism... a political philosophy portrayed by anti-Semites in other places and times as a quintessentially *Jewish* form of politics. As for the Narodniks, some refused to condemn the pogroms of the 1880s, adopting a stance of “realism” in their absolute support of the peasantry as the revolutionary subject... no matter how ugly.

The Narodnik Nicolas Mikhailovsky, however, spoke out against the pogroms. He was foremost an individualist, arguing for the idea that a heterogenous society is a more advanced one from the perspective of any individual in it. The less specialized a society, the more developed a life any individual in it leads. He looked towards “the future socialist society in which men would live equal and unfragmented lives like the peasants, but would include within themselves all the areas of human experience that had been developed one-sidedly in fragmented societies.” Another prominent intellectual, Peter Lavrov, believed that the people would make the revolution themselves, but must be guided by the intellectuals. “He was acutely aware that the intellectual’s ‘critical consciousness’ often went along with anarchic individualism, egocentricity, and neurosis...” Another, Peter Tkachev, pointed out that the progress of the elite had only come at the cost of value extracted from the masses, and so their class status was ethically invalid. He felt that a proper balance of needs and resources in society must be achieved by reducing artificial, sophisticated needs—a fairly moralistic and totalitarian asceticism.

Lavrov agreed with Tkachev’s critique, if not his proposed solution. Canovan writes: “...Lavrov pointed out that the precious development of civilization, which had made possible education and self-development for a privileged few, had been bought with the labor and suffering of all the rest, the mass of the people. The cultivated classes must therefore realize that they owed a vast moral debt to the people.” And so they did, at least many of the young ones, and turned that realization into action on the advice of Bakunin: “In such a situation, what can be done by our intellectual proletariat, our honorable,

sincere Russian youth, devoted to socialism to the bitter end? They must, without a doubt, go to the people.”

The biggest wave of them went in the summer of 1874, thousands of them, many just adolescents. They took up manual labor, became Orthodox Christian—anything to become one with the people, so they could speak with them about their revolutionary ideas. Unfortunately for their expectations, the people turned out to be largely disinterested or “wrong-minded” about the ideas the youth were preaching; the whole thing was a bit of a wash, and almost eight hundred of them were arrested. This experience convinced them that the Russian peasantry was not ready for immediate socialist revolution, but experiencing repression made them more committed than ever. In the face of this dilemma, the young radicals separated along two paths: some formed underground terrorist groups that made targeted strikes against the government, and some resolved to renew their dedication to the people, meeting them where they stood. The former had its high points of activity, and was certainly more attractive to the youth, but was disdained by many as elitist (and too reminiscent of Nechaev, who had recently been tried for the murder of a fellow revolutionary.) The latter tendency was termed *narodnichestvo*, roughly translated as “populism.” The intellectuals who pursued this path chose to consciously sacrifice their socialism in exchange for populism. These Narodniks began from a position of self-critique: the youth had gone to the peasants to teach when they should have gone to learn. Their project took many forms; one, Engel’gardt, started a school to train members of the intelligentsia to run ideal agrarian communes as a way to marry intellectual and manual labor... but most of the attendees gradually drifted away because they couldn’t handle the work. Another, Stefanovich, rather outrageously took advantage of the peasantry’s loyalty to the Tsar to start a peasants’ insurrection against the nobles with a forged document that claimed the nobles had turned on the Tsar.

In 1876, some of the young populists started a party called *Zemlya i Volya* (Land and Liberty), calling for equal land distribution, freedom for subject peoples, and local self-government. They “went to the people” in a more organized way than before. However, these Narodniks felt rushed by their perception of how Western influence was slowly corrupting peasant life, destroying the very kind of communism that they hoped to generalize. (Ironically, this was largely a product of the emancipation of the serfs, who were beginning to demand more individual freedom and ability to own private property.) Under this press of time, the group experienced a personal version of the general problem: “Intellectually it remained committed to education and agitation

among the peasants and the growing industrial proletariat of the big cities; emotionally most of its members became obsessed with terror.” In the midst of this debate, a nihilist named Vera Zasulich spurred the issue by shooting the governor of St. Petersburg, who had ordered another revolutionary flogged. Her act was widely praised; “direct action appeared to be vindicated.” In 1879, *Zemlya i Volya* split in two: *Cherny Peredel* (Black Repartition) became the populist wing, and *Narodnaya Volya* (The People’s Will) the elite direct action wing. In 1881, the latter assassinated Tsar Alexander II... but this did not assist their goal of a popular insurrection, instead strengthening the court reactionaries.

Many radicals became disillusioned with populism after this failure. They turned towards Marxism, away from the peasants and towards the (barely existent in Russia, due to its lack of industrialization) proletariat, including the leader of *Cherny Peredel*. He distrusted the “propaganda by the deed” element of the preceding movement, and came to believe that the peasantry would never constitute a revolutionary force. Instead, he saw industrial modernization’s creation of the proletariat, Marx’s revolutionary subject, as the only path towards communism. Some populists, on the other hand, objected to this Marxist historical determination as a form of collaboration with the enemies of the people. They did not wish to see peasants become proletarians, and believed the peasant commune was a more direct path towards a communist society. As Slavophiles, they were more invested in their own culture’s movements towards communism than the specific trajectory advocated by outside Marxists.<sup>n</sup>

Although populist activity decreased at this point, their writing continued. A group called the Legal Populists wrote against modernization because of the terrible effects of development on rural populations, and Russia’s inability to compete in the global market—an analysis similar to that of many Latin American populists now. Instead, they continued to call for the support of rural peasant culture by the rest of Russian society, and for the creation of a prosperous socialist society upon its basis. In 1902, spontaneous peasant revolts inspired a new wave of revolutionary populism, and the creation of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Still, the self-identified revolutionaries did not trust the peasants to properly divide up the land a mass uprising would liberate, and the peasants, existing still in a state of intense poverty, did not trust the revolutionaries to advise them. A huge gap remained between the peasants and their partisans.

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n Many activists and revolutionaries have argued for a culturally specific adaptation of Marxism, or an outright rejection of its philosophies as irredeemably Eurocentric. See Russell Means’ previously mentioned “For America to Live, Europe Must Die”, Fanon, and others.

The Narodiks are an example of what Canovan terms the populism of the intelligentsia, as, she says, is Franz Fanon. Characteristics of the genre include looking back to the traditions of the past as well as forward to a developed society; a focus on the countryside rather than on towns, and a desire to avoid repeating mistakes of more advanced societies; an emphasis upon building a unique road to socialism through indigenous political traditions; and the idealization of “the people” while stressing the role of the intellectual elite. The people are glorified, but must also be improved... through the force of revolutionary violence, according to Fanon. There is a general tendency to attribute collectivity as a natural trait of the people, despite evidence to the contrary. The main problem is the relationship of the mass to the elites when the intelligentsia calling for such populism is part of that elite—”the relationship between the progressive minority and the reactionary populace.”

None of the Narodniki efforts seemed to matter much, but what they wanted happened anyway... at first. In 1917, amidst general revolt, the peasants spontaneously rose, took back the land, and reinstated the village commune, the *soviet*. In this, they vindicated the arguments the Narodniks had been making for decades—however, Lenin claimed this victory for the Bolsheviks by simply approving what the peasants had done. Canovan says, “Although the [populist] Socialist Revolutionaries were utterly defeated by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, it could be argued that the Revolution [of 1917] vindicated populism and refuted Marxism, and that Lenin succeeded largely because he was prepared to adopt a good deal of populist doctrine for purely Machiavellian purposes.” Marxists came out on top because they were the organized minority. This victory rather vindicates the beliefs of *Narodnaya Volya*, though they did not win either—that it is, in fact, individual decisions and actions that make history, not huge social forces like the diffuse peasant-populist sentiment. Populists also had, perhaps, too many scruples about wielding power to win their power struggle with the vanguard Left. Their insistence on democracy and group decision-making proved their undoing, if also, retrospectively, a point for admiration. Canovan: “There can be no doubt... that Marxism-Leninism acts as a stiffening agent, providing a legitimation for overriding popular wishes that populism itself cannot provide.” Lenin justified his tactical approach in the terms of the cultural war already in progress. Canovan again:

[It] has been customary for Marxists to dismiss populism as the typically reactionary and self-deluding ideology of the peasantry, in contrast to the scientific and progressive viewpoint of the proletariat. According to Lenin, the populists’ attachment to the peasant commune, their

hostility to Westernization, and their belief that expropriation of the peasantry could be avoided were all indicators that populism was a ‘petite-bourgeois’ ideology, the typical backward-looking view of small proprietors whom history was leaving behind.

Lenin ridiculed the Narodniks in particular for attempting to sidestep the “necessary stage” of capitalism en route to communism. Modernity and progress in the form of Leninist Communism had won the game; the populists—and the peasants—had lost. As the USSR began consolidating itself, it began silencing, imprisoning, or murdering those on the Left who opposed them. This utter betrayal of the Russian Left is most famously exemplified by the vicious suppression of the 1921 Kronstadt uprising, in which 2-4,000 workers (largely anarchists) in rebellion against the demands of the state were executed or imprisoned by Lenin’s order.

However self-serving Lenin’s justification of his co-optation was, his main point may have been factually correct: it is unlikely that the Narodniks could have really seen their dreams come to life. While Russian peasants did need land and liberty, and practiced the *soviet*, it does not seem that they were particularly interested in a broader socialism. Generally speaking, they remained deeply religious and did not believe in the emancipation of women. This made for a mismatch between the people and their self-appointed Narodnik advocates. Much like *Operaismo* or “workerism” today, *narodnichestvo* was an ideology of intellectuals oriented towards the peasants, rather than being a peasant-originated movement. Canovan describes one view of Russian populism “as a symptom of the neurotic alienation of the Russian intelligentsia”; as they were neither *in* the West nor *of* Russia once they had received their educations, the intelligentsia were acting to resolve this psychological conflict by pushing for a Russian synthesis of Western ideas. While this point rings true, their political efforts should not be reduced to a mere psychological complex. The Narodniks were able to critically examine their history, the forces of Westernization pushing in, and make a nuanced objection, even a counter-proposal. People in many exploited regions today do much the same.

A few other points of interest here: the divergence between them and the proto-fascist Volk, despite the land-based cultural essentialism both avowed, and the reasons for that divergence (a culture of self-critique rather than of self-importance, I think); their internal divide between pursuing “true” populism and trying to create a revolutionary situation by means of direct action, a divide visible in most radical circles at various points; the co-optation of the movement by the organized minority; and the similarity of that time

and place to many regions today trying to resist a Westernizing, modernizing influence. The solidification of these revolutionary tendencies into totalitarian states is hardly desirable, but I am fascinated with the possibilities that exist just before that calcification. What different steps could've pushed the social rupture Russia was experiencing beyond the healing point, prevented its capture by statist Communism, and expanded it into a truly free society? How may revolutionaries escape becoming the Left?

Contrariwise, what causes disenfranchised people to move to the right instead of the left in their populist sentiment? What does it mean for radicals and revolutionists when the underdogs of society are socially conservative? Juan and Eva Perón's fascistic, popular rule in Argentina is our counterpoint.

### The Peróns

I am here among the working classes representing General Perón's wonderful heart; I am here to receive the concerns and the hopes of the working people and place them in the wonderful hands of General Perón, I am here to bring you the love that the General feels for you.

—Eva Perón

Gino Germani describes the typical Latin American populist movement before the 1980s as a "vaguely radical but non-ideological organization led by disaffected members of the higher classes, often with a charismatic personality at their head, but based upon the urban masses, particularly those newly enfranchised or previously left out of politics." This was, he believes, a consequence of the conjunction of disaffected elites and disposable masses; while these movements enjoyed the support of the working class and/or peasantry, they did not result from the autonomous organizing power of either. Germani found these movements to be largely conservative; he argues that the lower classes are likely to choose populism over socialism "where rapid social change has produced a new proletariat who have not yet had time to acquire a distinctive working-class consciousness." This is why internal migrants, fresh off the farm, tend to be so prominent in populist movements. While Latin America as a whole has seen many different waves of populist movement on the Left and Right since Germani wrote, we can most easily explore his claims about Perónism and evaluate the defenses made by its partisans.

In 1914, 80% of the farmland in Argentina was owned by only 8% of the families who lived there. Additionally, only 40% of the farmers who

worked the land owned it, in contrast to 63% in the United States at that time. Tenant farming fostered economic disparity and class resentments; one historian compared it to the post- Civil War U.S. Southern economy. Early Argentinian history was also marked by a kind of “private-mindedness”; the early cattlemen who built wealth in the Argentine countryside did not want to pay for the country’s infrastructure. This individualism was perhaps a factor in the failure of Leftist efforts in Argentina, as it was for Populists in the United States two decades earlier. Too, 30% of Argentinians at this time were immigrants, a huge percentage of the small country’s otherwise largely *mestizo* population. The World Wars, from which Argentina abstained, served to weaken its economy. Everything was ripe for social conflict, and the oligarchy, afraid of the anarchists and socialists trying to bring that conflict, refused them any concessions. This set the stage for the Right to take power.

The military seized control of the country in a 1943 coup, convinced that Argentina needed an economic intervention, but unsure of how to perform it. Juan Perón came to power from that coup. Perón had been stationed in Italy in 1941, and observed Mussolini’s political methods with admiration, learning the importance of mobilizing a mass following. He had himself appointed Minister of Labor and built friendly relationships with labor unions. When Perón was arrested in 1945 by the liberal opposition, a general strike and convergence of the *descamisados* (“shirtless”) secured his freedom; he was then freely elected with 55% of the vote. He proclaimed himself the servant of the people, instituted a huge social security program, and, most importantly, married Eva Perón, still affectionately remembered in Argentina as “Evita.” She was a working-class woman who raised herself socially by tactically deploying her beauty and charm; in her, the *descamisados* saw one of their own. When they successfully got Perón out of prison, a mutual emotional relationship between Eva and the *descamisados* was consummated—in marrying her, Perón married the land, as in some ancient myth. Like d’Annunzio in occupied Fiume, Perón regularly addressed the *descamisados* from a balcony, one of the kingly ritual exchanges of adulation that seems necessary to maintaining the myth of mutuality in popular fascism. And, like a fantastical queen become social worker, Eva Perón received endless delegations of workers through the Ministry of Labor and the poor through her own charity organization, and advocated for them.

She was enthroned in Argentine mythology. Navarro: “According to Evita, her daily contact with human misery during these audiences spurred her desire to assist all those who needed her help and intensified her commitment to them.” Despite this beneficent imagery, Eva Perón was also a willing and



vital accomplice in her husband's dictatorship, providing the charismatic linkage he could not. Calling herself "the bridge of love" between Perón and the *descamisados*, her activism on their behalf and her image as one of them facilitated her intentional propagandizing for Perón and his regime. And, while her image as a nontraditionally powerful woman is deserved, she not only demonstrated that power in the most traditional way—working for her husband's success above all else—but actively organized other women to do the same. While a small number of women had begun organizing themselves from the Left—female "communist, socialist, and anarchist militants" participated in the Argentine political process in the 1920s and 30s—Evita subverted this politicization in the same way her husband did among the labor movement. She founded the *Partido Peronista Femenino*, and in her founding speech said that foundation of the party was "the strictest fidelity to the doctrine, the work and the personality of General Perón... For a woman to be a Peronist means above all loyalty to Perón and blind trust in Perón." While it seems odd that someone of such a conservative orientation would grant his wife such power (or at least not oppose her as she took it up for herself), in fact, Eva was the only person Juan Perón *could* trust. Because her power derived wholly through him, she could act as an extension of his power without causing him fear that she might turn on him. She was exceptionally good in her role, and her husband was greatly weakened by her 1952 death.

At odds with the Church that previously supported him over his moves towards secularization, and in the midst of economic troubles, Juan Perón was deposed in 1955. However, his popularity in the Argentine imagination lived on, and inspired action on both the left and the right; in a rather bizarre twist, he was brought back into power in 1973, although he died less than a year later. In one of his final acts, Perón put through a plan of governance designed to alleviate some of the concerns of workers; it stated in part: "This Act of Commitment is not a circumstantial price and salary agreement. It is the definition of an irreversible political action to increase worker participation in the national income within the framework of a new concept of worker compensation and relations among the social sectors—a starting point for the process of national reconstruction and liberation." Even at the end, Perón was attempting to continue the narrative of himself as the servant of the Argentine people, still through the lens of worker's advocacy.

While European immigration brought class consciousness to the Argentine proletariat, it was the Peróns who organized it, and they did so from the right. By Wynia's assessment, "Juan Perón adroitly exploited fear of working-class



radicalization, offering to take care of the nation's proletariat if others would give him the authority he needed to accomplish the task. ...the government would become the patron rather than the oppressor of a compliant working class that had discarded its revolutionary ambitions in exchange for a host of new economic and political privileges." This is reminiscent of the deal Mussolini made with the king of Italy upon his March on Rome, a deal which made Mussolini a minister—grant Mussolini power, the king seems to have thought, and gain a bulldog that would prevent the Left from seizing or overthrowing the government. The evidence of his mistake did not prevent the elite of Argentina from repeating it, though their consent was given after the fact, if at all. This phenomenon at large was termed "Bonapartism" by Marx; José Enrique Miguens, who seems to be a rather anti-Marxist historian, defines it so: "the 'bourgeoisie', threatened by the advancement of the 'proletariat' and feeling itself weak and incapable of managing the situation, decides to don a mask and give full power to anyone who defends it, with apparent concessions to the 'proletariat' as a means of appeasement." While his use of scare quotes indicates Miguens' disdain for these terms, it is a fairly accurate assessment of the phenomenon.

As for Perón in particular, his intervention came at the exact moment that labor unions turned away from fighting specific battles and towards a more radical opposition to capitalism itself—at the time they became truly dangerous. Wynia assesses Perón's successful co-optation of the labor movement as "one of the greatest robberies anyone had ever seen." While I do not wish to assign blame for their co-optation wholly upon the labor movement, it is interesting how much the economic interests of particular parties influences their willingness to elect and support dictators. Wynia bitingly observes of Perónist union leaders, "Theirs was the narrowest of visions but that was no embarrassment to them, and the more ideologues on the left attacked them for selling out the proletariat, the more stubborn they became in defending themselves. Their success in denying Marxists and anarchists access to the working class has never been complete, but it is remarkable nevertheless and remains a source of great pride to regulars in the labor hierarchy."

Despite this betrayal by union leaders, which should come as no surprise to anyone who has observed labor for long, I think it is less accurate to say that Perón stole labor from the Left than to say that people who are fighting out of personal interest rather than political commitment may surprise those of any political orientation who cynically seek to organize them. Not only the *descamisados*, but the "lumpen" of any country, are not in waiting for education or organization from any saviors or dictators, though they may

sometimes choose them; the Peróns were the most powerful advocates for labor available at the time, though their net material impact seems to have been negligible. By Wynia's evaluation, "it was really a mock battle that he fought with the oligarchy. He had set out to prevent a class struggle rather than to advance one... What he took from the oligarchy was its government, not its property. It was good populist theater, not revolutionary politics, and ten years later, when Perón fled, the oligarchy was still there, bruised and vengeful, but not seriously damaged by Perónism."

Was Perón's fascist? Frederick Turner, who seems along with Miguens to be rather an apologist for Perón's regime, argues no—but his argument is quite revealing. Turner says,

...Perón *did* make too many decisions personally. Having surrounded himself with admirers, he did not benefit from the critical response of insiders that might have improved the quality of those decisions and therefore also their public acceptability in the long run. In this sense, but only in this sense, Perón was like Mussolini and Hitler, two other charismatic leaders to whom he is frequently likened. Perón was not in fact the "fascist" that his enemies have so long and so consistently claimed him to be.

Having made this rather specious caveat, Turner goes on to defend Perón not with evidence, aside from his lack of evident anti-Semitism and disinterest in making war, but primarily with a compelling (if disingenuous) argument that *all Leftists do as Perón did*:

It was easy for the Marxist guerillas whom he allowed to fight for his return in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and then ruthlessly ousted from his movement once he regained control of the nation, to see Perón as a fascist traitor in the mold of Mussolini, one who would abandon the international socialism that he had professed to lead a nationalistic, self-service revolution. Yet, Marxist stereotypes aside, Perón was simply reverting to type, persecuting left-wing critics of his own national "revolution" in his third presidency as he had during his first two terms in office, having used some of his enemies to fight his battles and to gain himself office just as Marxist-Leninists had done earlier during the long course of the Bolshevik Revolution.

While this seems to me completely aside from the question of Perón's fascism—it is fallacious to say that because something shares characteristics

with its opposite it cannot be what it is—I find it a fascinating argument in light of the experience the Narodniks had with Lenin. One could reasonably argue that, when anyone takes power, regardless of their political orientation, they are likely to sell out the radical fringe of their base because of the pluralistic realities of governance. I would like to take a step further: *leaders of any kind cannot be trusted*. Aside from the question of power corrupting, no one person can possibly represent everyone's interests at once. Direct democracy, with its tangled and complex circles of power, seems actually more realistic a dream than trusting in representative democracy, let alone dictatorship, to fight for your interests. Perón did not serve labor, or the oligarchy, or the dreams of the Monteneros Turner speaks of here, although he treated with all of them at times. This realization came at a price: “The Monteneros, in their zeal to fashion an innovative kind of liberation, one that was supposed to join Perónist nationalism with their version of mass revolution, never accepted such realities of power and interest until they had been destroyed by their illusions.” This destruction was literal: many of them were executed.

But, again, it is not clear that Perón or his movement were altogether fascist. One of Turner's opponents, Gino Germani, labels the Perónist movement as *fascistic* instead. He argues that, despite its fascist trappings, Perón's movement had a different constituency and historical function than fascism. “Fascist movements are fundamentally attempts by middle classes, who feel themselves threatened by working-class movements, to push their social inferiors back out of the political area. National populism of the type led by Perón is, on the contrary, a way of mobilizing the lower classes and bringing them into politics for the first time.” Perón's actors were military, rather than middle-class; in his overview of the rise of European fascism, Germani finds that a middle- and upper-class coalition against the working class was at least as vital a structural factor as social displacement by class restructuring and/or collective traumatic events. Similarly, Donald Trump's rise to popularity has benefited from the Great Recession of the mid 2000s, and the traumatic events of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks, but his is not a case of true Bonapartism, as Perón was not either. Much of the upper class seems more troubled by Trump than anything else; it remains to be seen whether they are willing to make an alliance with his supporters. With luck, this lack of a cross-class coalition will outweigh the advantage he holds as the current avatar of white supremacy in American politics... although he seems to have weighed this obstacle in choosing his Cabinet.

In any case, populism is but a tactic of fascism, not its defining characteristic, as it is not for liberatory struggles either. Germani acknowledges that Italian

and Nazi fascism were populist in their early days, but says this disappeared rapidly once they gained power, and that elitism came to the front of fascist movement instead. It is this elitist tendency that fosters a consciously cynical, Machiavellian attitude toward manipulation of the people, even if it is preceded by a genuine sense of unity with the people. Fascist or no, the popular demagogue turned dictator has been a problem since the time of Aristotle, who described it as a case of “the populace making a rod for their own backs.” Germani offers us two possible analyses around how Perón and his like tend to rise to power:

1: “[P]opular support for dictators is a fundamentally rational strategy adopted by the people in situations where their interests are strongly opposed to those of the elite, and no other means of redressing their grievances is available.” That is, bread and circuses make living under tyranny worthwhile. In this view, one framed cynically rather than hopefully by class war, only the strongest, most ambitious people will survive to become demagogues. It is often a rational choice on an individual level, if not a class level, to support a demagogue in return for patronage. So, a society can best avoid such leaders through the pluralistic strategy of being or seeming some degree of equal and democratic, rather than blatantly existing as a system that only serves the rich, or white, or men, or all three. However, even under these circumstances, demagogues are likely to occur in economic crises, which may be inevitable.

2: “[P]opular support for dictators is basically irrational and proceeds from the cravings for authority, status, and excitement characteristic of uprooted and frightened masses.” This is the mass theory analysis, which has been more influential of late. According to this mode of understanding, when demagogues play upon the pre-existing fears and hatreds of masses, we can expect extreme authoritarian politics and witch-hunting. To avoid this, political power must in fact be kept away from the masses, but the *illusion* of participation must be given—pluralism becomes the cushion between elites and masses.

Each of these perspectives seem valid to me, though the latter implies a cynicism about human nature that I would rather direct at society. Which analysis one prefers likely speaks to whether one is more of a cloud-oriented neoliberal or an old guard elitist conservative. The question of how to *avoid* such popular dictators is more interesting to me. Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous French commentator upon early American politics, supported

pluralistic democratic politics as a way of preventing the evils of a democratic society. However, it has become obvious to everyone that official politics are no longer the primary driving force in society; it remains to be seen whether the spectacle and identity production apparatus of popular media will adequately fill the gap.

I am most intrigued by the possibility of realizing another of Tocqueville's fears: tyranny of the masses—or, more kindly, popular direct democracy. It has been realized in moments—such as during the Spanish Civil War, in which Spanish anarchists fought a popular struggle against the state, one more formal and successful than any attempted by anarchists since; and during the Paris Commune, birthplace (within dominant white Western culture) of the republican/libertarian ideals of “equality, liberty, fraternity.” The Spanish anarchists had to turn their efforts towards fighting Franco and his fascists before they saw their dreams realized, and were eventually murdered and suppressed; the Communards were largely murdered or imprisoned after the barricades fell. Still, for the duration of their struggle, these people lived what seem to me to be lives of beautiful democracy, equality, and joy in difference, resisting the pull towards leadership or the enforcement of sameness. There are many examples of such lives, communities, and practices within other traditions, which deserve legitimacy, recognition—and privacy, illegibility.

### **so many ways to fail**

There are a few easily extractable lessons from the examples we have investigated. For one, populist movements are easily manipulated by those playing upon the economic interests and practical concerns that generated the movement in the first place; they are likely to install anyone who claims they will help them. For another, there is frequently dissonance between romantic Leftist ideals of the revolutionary subject and their actual personal or class interests, as illustrated by the difficulties experienced by the Narodniks in relating to the peasantry and by the willingness of the *descamisados* to elect Perón. While in Rousseau's time it was clear that the state was more brutal than the masses, the situation is muddier now, though we surely cannot trust to state power to protect us from each other. Witch-hunting and eugenics are just the easiest examples of the opposite situation—barbarity perpetrated by the elites against the masses, against which the state claims it will protect us. Still, populism is probably at its most useful when in conflict; it may be impossible to install populist government that does not generate a totalitarian environment.

When someone powerful invokes “the people”, they are trying to start something terrible. When people are united by common cause or rhetoric, things tend to get ugly as differences manifest themselves, unless they are allowed for. This can begin within small cliques, but spread across classes as they react to real problems in terrible ways. Hannah Arendt reminds us: “Hitler’s early party, almost exclusively composed of misfits, failures, and adventurers, indeed represented the ‘armed bohemians’ who were only the reverse side of bourgeois society.” But, by the end, the masses were weaponized as well. “The temporary alliance between the elite and the mob rested largely upon this genuine delight with which the former watched the latter destroy respectability.” It is in this way that fascism becomes an alliance of the mob and the elite against the bourgeoisie.

However, the lesson I am most interested by is a bit thornier; it is offered by Gino Germani. He says that mobilization on the right is *necessarily* preceded by radicalization from the Left, a phenomenon I had previously taken as simply a troublingly common coincidence. “The examples given above—Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile—best fit the mold of what I call “functional substitutes of fascism,” insofar as while they all show significant differences with the classic ideal type, they have in common what is at least one of its basic aims, namely, *the forced demobilization of the recently mobilized working class.*” [Emphasis mine.] That is, revolutionary mobilization that does not lead to actual revolution tends to open a vacuum often filled by reactionary countermobilization—which has the intention, or at least serves the purpose, of actually demobilizing the working class. This occurs even when its purposes are not transparently fascist: Germani notes that “[t]he countermobilization of the Argentine middle class against the primary mobilization of the lower class was believed to be, and in a certain sense really was, ideologically democratic. However... it also partly served antidemocratic, elitist interests.” This is different in terms of intention, if not wholly different in terms of effect, to the kinds of countermobilization practiced by fascist totalitarian regimes. Of these, Germani says:

The essential aim of a strictly controlled mobilization from above was to generate an active consensus in those groups whose demobilization had been violently imposed. That is, the aim was to transform the lower classes from a Marxist antinational, anticapitalist ideology to a nationalist one, with some kind of participation aimed at increasing productivity and obedience, with a rigid or militaristic hierarchical subordination to the upper classes and under the total control of the state. Certainly, in some cases fascism took authoritarian rather than totalitarian forms; that

is, it was more concerned with the neutralization of the rebellious lower strata, trying to achieve their reconversion from citizen to subjects. This was the case in Spain, for instance...

By this analysis, it is the threat to society posed by anti-capitalist, anti-state, rebellious populations that causes a conservative response, one that moves beyond a pole within pluralism and becomes truly reactionary. In the U.S., “family values”, men’s right’s activism and the persecution of abortion providers came in reaction to feminist struggle. Obama’s presidency and the Affordable Health Care Act provoked the formation of a more intensely conservative congressional consensus than we have seen in some time. The Black Lives Matter movement, itself a response to the intolerable social conditions of white supremacy and the prison industrial complex, but specifically aroused by societal indifference towards the frequent police shootings of black people, has met with widespread backlash and a growth in explicit racism. As in 1920s-30s Spain, when people do not simply brood in discontent but take up active political agency for themselves, the forces of reaction must act with greater dehumanizing force to subdue them. From Trump’s wall to his proposed Muslim registry, from violent attacks upon people of color in real life to Twitter rants about “cucks”, reaction advances; we must fight at every turn to prevent its ultimate conclusion.

In using this analysis, we must be careful where we assign blame—the cycle of violence is a cycle that happens within an abuser, rather than between an abuser and their victim. To respond to injustice is not to deserve further injustice. No, the fault here for those in rebellion is only the fault of *not going far enough*, of issuing a challenge and then proving unable to live into it. We have previously explored the reasons for this failure, and they are not quite the fault of those in struggle either—they are structural, created by historic power relations, and virtually impossible to overcome. Still, just before each moment we have considered in which fascism or its relatives came into power, there was an opening: a breath of possibility, a time when fundamental change seemed possible. It is the reverberations of those possibilities that continue to inspire and transform us from afar.

### III. problems of popular democracy: which people are the people?

I tell you unless something is done to alleviate such things [voter intimidation and fraud] there will be more anarchists, aye, red-handed anarchists, in this country. I do not wonder that there are anarchists in this country; the wonder is that there are not more of them.

—a Dallas laborer in the 1880s

The United States is, theoretically, a popular pluralistic democracy—something that seems close to common populist demands. Why is no one happy with it?

*Direct democracy* is the term now used to refer to self-government by the people in face-to-face assemblies. This used to be known simply as democracy; it was the U.S. attempt to extend this governing model to a much larger state via representative democracy, with checks and balances against the will of the people (as the Founding Fathers were not generally democratic in outlook) that confused the issue, creating non-directly democratic “democracy.” Hence the tension, now and then—Americans expected popular sovereignty, but did not get it. Some U.S. states have adopted populist devices intended to repopularize the government, such as referendums or recalls, but these are prone to manipulation by special interests. Town hall meetings in New England have a similar air of public participation in decision-making, but no formal decisions are made there, except on the smallest level. The Iroquois Confederacy, while it was governed by a council of representatives, may have more accurately reflected local consensus than American government does now. The only direct democracy afoot in the U.S. today is practiced by small groups without much power.

American political scientists tend to see direct popular self-government as impossible. They see the masses as ignorant, irrational, and authoritarian—so it is good that they are generally apathetic and do not participate. Democracy, they believe, is best managed by the elite; the masses must participate just enough to keep rulers from ignoring their interests. This attitude comes from an empiricist view of politics, the elitist placement of political scientists, and fearful liberals guarding against the possibility of lynch mobs. However, it ought to be noted that McCarthy was not a populist demagogue, but a consciously used tool, discarded only when he attacked the political establishment... and that black men are executed on Death Row more often than they are hung by mobs, these days. When the government lynches people, it does so with impunity.



Let us think through some pros and cons of popular direct democracy:

*tyranny of the majority*

A ‘Herrenvolk democracy’ is a society in which an increase in rights for the majority group have gone along with the decline in those rights for the minority group; e.g., the American South and apartheid-era South Africa.) This is, basically, when the majority votes to screw over the minority. This is used as an argument for the current U.S. government structure: the battling of interest groups prevents any from rising to the top. However, there is a populist assumption that one can distinguish between special interests and “ordinary citizens” that tends to obscure those with normative power: if the needs of a person with a disability are regarded as a special interest, able-bodied people’s needs and desires will always be always preferred. The Founding Fathers, unsurprisingly, lacked a deep critique of oppressive power relations.

Sometimes “the people” have evil and wrong opinions. Canovan cites, for example, the popular support behind George Wallace and Enoch Powell, both cynically racist populists:

“Populism” of this sort is an appeal to the people which deliberately opens up the embarrassing gap between “the people” and their supposedly democratic and representative elite by stressing popular values that conflict with those of the elite: typically, it involves a clash between reactionary, authoritarian, racist, or chauvinist views at the grass roots, and the progressive, liberal, tolerant cosmopolitanism characteristic of the elite.

This evokes the problem of the legitimacy of power in white supremacist societies based on popular sovereignty and respect for majority decisions. Elites see themselves as the vanguard of enlightenment, but they frequently face the ethical conflict of having anti-elitist politics, slowing them down. Populism, meanwhile, tends to glorify the folk wisdom of the common man; we can think of the Narodniks, going along to the pogrom in an attempt to be consistent with their politics.

Switzerland has been somewhat more successful as a pluralistic society that practices a form of direct democracy in several cantons by ensuring there is no concentration of any one group in a place, and having a cultural tendency toward amicable agreement rather than majority rule. Opposition is valued, and a space for dissent is made when compromises are not possible. Canovan

terms this *consociational democracy*: a democratic political system that manages to function harmoniously despite deep communal differences.

*oversimplification/overdramatization of political issues*

Opponents of popular democracy argue that we need technicians and experts to make complex decisions, and that no group of average people are qualified to make the kinds of political decisions necessary to run things on a large level. They also point out the tendency towards high emotion in populist politics. Both of these elements, they argue, would lead to a less competent government. Under our current, representative democracy, the ills of popular apathy and low voter turnout actually facilitate the process—candidates are elected and issues decided by self-selected competent, invested, and responsible voters, because everyone else stays home.

Canovan finds this thinking intrinsic to scientific culture. “The whole liberal-scientific-progressive package, in fact—in spite of its close historical links with movements for democratic reform—had an inescapably elitist and antipopulist slant. In the nature of things, if we are all progressing toward truth, some of us must be in front.” We can see this in the politics of Silicon Valley, ranging from the guilty gentrification of San Francisco, to the proposal of distributing computers for all, to Tim Draper’s proposal to break California into six parts so that the richest do not have to contend with the poor.

Rousseau dealt with this problem by rejecting progress and enlightenment in favor of populist values. He even defended the burning of the library of Alexandria. He denounced culture, set it in opposition to morality and freedom. Canovan summarizes his “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality”:

Painting a seductive picture of the “natural man,” ignorant, solitary, completely uncivilized, but nevertheless equal, free and happy, Rousseau described the sad process of degeneration whereby, as a result of man’s “perfectibility,” he had been progressively entangled in society and enslaved by the more and more hierarchical system that civilization engendered... Man is best when he is closest to nature in societies that are simple, unrefined, and egalitarian. He is worst where he has progressed furthest along the road to civilization and inequality.

This suggests a Volkische fear of modernity and the elite. But even Rousseau did not actually trust the masses. In *The Social Contract*, he argues for popular sovereignty... but only under the watchful eye of a godlike lawgiver, guiding the blind multitude.

*politician's populism*

This is the kind of populism we are most accustomed to seeing in the U.S.: populist rhetoric deployed tactically by politicians to appeal to the people vs. the elites. This constitutes a political gesture against the existing parties. These politics are coalitional, 'antipolitical'; they claim that no real divisions exist among the people, at least not conflictual ones, so all divisions must be imposed by external, dark forces. This populist version of solidarity and unity is useful to politicians without being true—it asserts a trajectory of unity based on deliberate ignorance of real divisions... or, at its darkest, the extermination of those differences. When countries are under military threat, one party or leader may actually be able to nearly represent them, as in the moment of national unity the U.S. experienced after 9/11. It is common "... for a political leader to make use of populist rhetoric and, by playing upon the resonances of popular unity and distrust of faction, to ride to power on a fragile and temporary mood of popular harmony." This works well for political outsiders. President Carter used populist rhetoric and his outsider status to get elected; his outsidership then worked against him once in office. Trump has been riding on the same current, as his his xenophobic base fears both immigrants and the establishment, and is facing the same setbacks; and, as his attempts to fulfill campaign promises falter, his base may rebel against electoral politics altogether. If their needs go unaddressed and their hatreds swell undiminished, they may turn towards more dangerous and radical means of achieving their goals.

At its best, this is a cynical tactic that appeals to emotions it never plans to realize. At its worst, of course, this tendency leads to fascism. The total loyalty of the Nazis was founded in alienation and atomization; they "derived [their] sense of having a place in the world only from belonging to a movement." While U.S. movements that have been successful enough to register in the national consciousness may not fit all of the criteria for full fascism, many have lacked only a compelling mythology that appeals to enough people, or a sufficiently charismatic leader. It is vital that we provide other, less terrible options for resolving the economic distress and personal alienation that sets people in search of new belonging.

Is democracy, in fact, actually desirable? A recent text from the anarchist publisher CrimethInc. argues otherwise: "Democracy," it points out, "is not the same as self-determination." The authors argue that, rather than trying to reform a process that seems to carry the above problems with it as inevitabilities, we ought to return to the values at their core: egalitarianism, inclusivity, and self-determination. Democracy, by asserting there are citizens

with legitimate decision-making power, presupposes the Other. Rousseau argued that slavery is not incompatible with democracy, and slavery's cousin *prison* seems to have been found compatible enough. CrimethInc. asserts, "This is the essence of government: decisions made in one space determine what can take place in all other spaces. The result is alienation—the friction between what is decided and what is lived." The anarchist proposal is to do away with the state, the hierarchies and power systems that generate it, and the artificial scarcity and mechanisms of fear that enforce it. While some anarchists feel that the concept of direct democracy is useful in this pursuit, the lessons of the last two decades of radical struggle suggest that it is insufficient. If, as I argue about Nietzsche, we should rely less upon ancient Greek worldviews, what does that mean about our models of governance?

### popular desperation

It was never my intention to single out American conservatives in my analysis. I grew up in the Heartland, with right-wing neighbors as far as the eye could see, and I feel no particular sympathy with many aspects of liberal perspectives. I often feel annoyed at liberal scapegoating of Midwestern conservatives, of the town versus country attacks of "ignorant rednecks," and at the classism of "trailer trash." I hate the arguments that imply that if "they" were just as enlightened as "us," racism and similar evils would fade away. I find some down-to-earth conservative values appealing, even as I reject the authoritarian, nationalist and xenophobic implications of conservative ideology. I think that blaming conservatives' "backwardness" only serves to obscure the racist, colonialist, exploitative agenda that liberals enthusiastically support with their money and politics. In short, I wish to keep it complicated.

Still, I could not but recognize various similarities between conservative action and rhetoric of the explicitly racist past and the slightly masked efforts of today—and find them horrifying. Let us compare the examples of Prohibition and the War on Drugs. In both cases, there is a primarily U.S. citizen consumer base; the substances are illegal, but flow easily into the market. The illegality serves mainly to enrich the middlemen in the process, as well as the corrupt police and politicians who strategically overlook the trafficking. Some citizens demand the enforcement of the laws under the banners of family values, opposing social ills, and fighting corruption, so politicians play a careful game of appearing to be hard on crime while never taking action that might actually end the trafficking. Low-level dealers and users serve as the sacrificial lamb, while those who benefit from the trafficking mostly go untouched.

Eventually, of course, Prohibition was overturned; similarly, marijuana has been decriminalized or legalized in many states. In both cases, this occurred not because of compassion or enlightenment about the nature of addiction, racist enforcement, or the woes of poverty, despite the accompanying propaganda, but in fact because legalization was in the best economic interests of the state. On a larger scale, drugs continue to serve as a convenient means of controlling the flows of poor people: from the underground workforce of the streets, to the prison, and back again. The class war implications of addicting mostly poor people to a substance are obvious, whether or not you believe (as many do) that the U.S. government deliberately introduced crack into impoverished communities of color.

Even more importantly, perhaps, drugs are used as a reason for managing and policing the borders and the countries beyond them. Here is the most startlingly vivid parallel with Prohibition, in terms of class control through racism: the rhetoric around immigration in relation to the War on Drugs. In his review of the 1920s Klan, Leonard Moore quotes the *Richmond Evening Item* from 1922 as an example of Klan-esque thinking on the matter:

The police have clues that are leading them straight to the dens of the worst outscourings of Europe... They have the best chance in ten years to rid the country of its most desperate and dangerous criminals. It will be the biggest service to this country since the "Red" raids two years ago... The great bulk of bootlegging is done by foreigners, so there should be no problem with the proposed law in Congress to kick out foreigners caught bootlegging. The foreign bootlegger is not just a criminal. He is an unpatriotic criminal because he is violating the Constitution. Putting him in jail is just a waste. Shipping him to his foreign land is wiser, more economical, and patriotic.

This is, of course, exactly how the modern American Right talks today about immigration. Nowadays there's much more reliance on the concept of the "illegal" immigrant, but I find it clarifying to see that the same xenophobic sentiment held when documentation was not framed as the central issue. Too, the immigrants being discussed here were mainly European—then not-white in a way that Mexicans and some people from South America are now not-white to the white American eye, something that has much less to do with skin color than with perceived differences in culture, language—otherness. The talk of "real America" (an essentially white, Protestant, rural or small-town image) is also identical. The threat is the same, that which must be protected is the same—the 1920s Klan were much more open about

their racism, but then, so was the entire white social climate. While there is certainly interrelatedness between organized white supremacy today and more legitimized organizations, I find this type of unintentional mirroring even more telling.

The Klan was able to nearly take over the Indiana Republican Party in 1924; nearly all Republicans elected that year ran with the Klan's support, and some were actual members. The modern GOP fears the power of the alt-right subculture so much that even former Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly, a survivor of its attacks, warns against it. The anti-establishment ethic of many conservative populists (which rings so hollow when one considers their avid support of patriarchy, racism, and other pillars of the establishment) may actually be a threat to certain people in power. Still, the rearrangement of a particular electoral party is very far from an attack on the actual establishment. Here is where populism loses its power, as any social movement that treats with government politics does.

The 1920s were a time of great social upheaval—industrialization, modernization, the automobile and the rise of youth culture, the Red Scare, one great war over and another to come. Social upheaval always provides an opening for the government and the people alike, a chance to deepen control or strike out against it. It is useless to speculate about what could have happened, what possibilities for human liberation went unexplored. It is clear, however, what did happen: power became more centralized in the hands of the rich; the rural working class, the farmer, was dispossessed of their lands and resources—turned further into the proletariat, with only their labor to offer; that independent economic opportunities were snuffed out, and factory work offered in its stead. When the Depression (an inevitable part of the cycle of capitalism) struck, the proletariat was reduced even further and forced to depend on welfare. FDR's programs may have saved lives, but they also created an entire new bureaucracy for managing life—a huge shift towards biopolitical governance. Almost a hundred years later, it's easy to see how much more dependent on government and big business we are as a result of these times. There's no going back now—globalization, the extension of factory-style specialization to a world-wide scale, makes it virtually impossible to rely only on your immediate community for survival. People at the time could sense that doom coming.. and fought against it fiercely. The 1920s Klan, as horrifying and fundamentally damned by its racial politics as it was, was also a clear expression of that uncertainty, fear, and opposition.

Although people of color living through these times have generally recognized what was coming, white Americans have condemned them mainly in retrospect. When populist movements contain an element of xenophobic racism, we should immediately know them for a prelude to fascism. It is not only our ethical duty to oppose racism in its immediate particulars, but also important for our survival to recognize it—and the economic forces that precede and enforce it—as part and parcel of fascist tendency, whether it uses elitist or populist tactical forms.

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