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How Fascism Works

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We've just witnessed in the country that gave rise to national socialism an ultranationalist, far-right party, Alternative für Deutschland, come into the parliament. And not just come into the parliament, but they are now the third largest party in Germany. They campaigned on restoring German national pride, on restricting immigration, on raising fears about Islam. This should give us pause, because the social meaning of their victory is much more powerful than, I think, what has happened in a number of other countries. It's not their victory—I mean, they finished third—but they did much better than they were predicted to do in the polls, almost double their predictions in the polls, which is characteristic of these movements.

That, I think, is the latest epicycle in a rollback of liberal democracy that we've seen across the world. You can ask your parents about what 2004 and 2005 were like. They will tell you that there were hopes for democracy. Democracy was spreading with the color revolutions in Eastern Europe; five, six years later, the Arab Spring. It seemed that liberal democracy was some kind of unstoppable force. That moment, in hindsight, was a little optimistic. What we have now is ultranationalist, far-right movements that have come to power in Russia, Hungary, Poland, India, Turkey, Iran—there are theocracies across the world that fit the structure that I'm going to argue fascism does—and now the United States.

Historians always inveigh against generalizing about phenomena, and philosophers typically ignore historians. I will use individual cases as examples to fit into a scheme, but I think something different is needed than what the historian does. What the historian does is she takes particular countries or areas about which she has expertise and tells us the story of what happened with fascist or ultranationalist movements in those countries and invites us to generalize and make analogies. I think that is not what the time calls for. The time calls for a scheme, a generalization, an abstraction which we can then take to reach a social and political reality and see if our social and political reality matches that.

And while it's going to result in missing out details, missing out salient and important differences between regions, it's nevertheless going to give us, I think, a rough sense. Because I think that there are these constellations of positions that come together as family resemblances. You might find yourself agreeing with some elements of one

position and then suddenly you find yourself in a group that agrees with all of them. I think that fascism is one such grouping. People will say, "Well, fascism is a movement that is so specific." For example, it's Giovanni Gentile in Italy, a wacky idealist philosopher, influenced by Hegel, who comes up with a particularly intricate view. That's not how I'm going to take fascism. That becomes a philosophical gloss on a certain structure. And it's that structure that I think it's vital for all of us to have in mind.

My interest here will be for the most part in the ultranationalist ideology that is the basis of fascist movements. The dangers, in my mind, from fascism come from this part of it. There are dangers that come also from the completely authoritarian leader part, where the leader is the voice of the people, as Trump has declared himself to be—"I am your voice"—in his RNC acceptance speech. But if we just have the ultranationalist movement that seals itself off from those who are not in the nation, that itself is responsible for much of the ills of fascism, because that itself seals off our capacity for empathy. It justifies harshly inhumane treatment of our fellow human beings, from mass imprisonment or mass expulsions to, in extreme cases, mass extermination.

The danger of fascism is present even if the mythic nation fails to be realized in a single powerful figure who is taken to be its personification. So I'm going to take fascism to be this *Weltanschauung*, as the Germans call it, this ideology, that is opposed to that of liberal democracy, whether or not it takes the form of a nation with an authoritarian leader, or a would-be authoritarian leader like Vladimir Putin of Russia or Erdoğan of Turkey, both leaders well on their way to leading classic fascist configurations.

Ultimately they lean towards the idea that genuine freedom is being told what to do by the leader. Hitler calls that genuine German democracy, when the leader tells you what to do. And he gives a good argument for it, actually. He says liberalism requires a sense of responsibility. But in a democracy who is responsible? Nobody is responsible because everyone votes. Under true German democracy one person is responsible, the leader. So there is a real liberal responsibility.

It's tempting to think that left and right can be used as opposite poles of measurement along some kind of linear political spectrum, with fascism on the right and communism on the left. This temptation should be

resisted. The words “left” and “right” are highly contingent social constructs that lack the kind of conceptual coherence that this fiction suggests. To take one example, both Soviet Union under Stalin and Cuba under Fidel Castro instituted harshly repressive measures against homosexuals, and yet anti-gay politics is a stereotypical feature of the contemporary political right and not the contemporary political left.

Furthermore, though we think of the Soviet Union as communist, Stalin introduced a decidedly nationalistic element into Soviet politics, which is a mark of the right-wing structure. There are present-day examples of nationalist movements, on the other hand, so those are communist movements with what we think of from our perspective as right-wing elements. There are present-day examples of nationalist movements with a modicum of stereotypical leftist elements, a vision of a social welfare state, say, but restricted to Europeans, exclusionary of our Muslim thorough citizens, or Middle Eastern immigrants. Though typically, it must be said, this is a model of a social welfare system that’s meant to encourage motherhood and encourage women to stay at home, the patriarchal family being an essential part of fascist ideology. Nevertheless, social welfare systems would be considered to be characteristic elements of the political left, from our perspective.

Criticisms of elites arise from both the left and the right, so you find both Bernie Sanders supporters in the 2016 election and Donald Trump supporters harshly criticizing the elites. There are libertarians who strongly oppose any kind of redistribution of resources and from this perspective seem to be on the right, and yet who equally strongly reject the kind of law-and-order politics that come with fascist movements as well as the militarism characteristic of fascism. So this simplistic fiction of the linear political spectrum, with fascism on the right and communism on the left, simply fails to do justice to the complexity of social and political reality.

The words “left” and “right” allow considerable mixing and matching of positions. I discovered this once in a debate in the Yale Political Union, a wonderful institution, where there’s the party of the right, the conservatives, the party of the left, liberals. And I found that when I would quote Noam Chomsky and say it was Noam Chomsky, the party of the left would cheer and the party of the right and the conservatives would boo. But if I would just quote Noam Chomsky without saying it was Noam Chomsky, the party of the right would cheer and the party of the left would boo. So right and left are positions that are highly contingent social constructions.

These caveats aside, fascism is a position considerably harder, if not impossible, to reach from configurations we would now think of as on the left. A strong rejection of female equality is, I would say, an essential feature of fascism, but a denial of full gender equality is flatly inconsistent with contemporary understandings of leftist

politics. More generally, fascism is the denial of equality. Fascism denies equality as a myth. And yet some version of equality is a goal that unifies otherwise very different leftist movements. Furthermore, if we look at the world today, fascism is a position that’s emerging exclusively from elements of what are now considered the political right, for example, in Poland, France, Turkey, Germany, and the United States.

Many of the classic books about fascism, most notably Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, do not theorize about fascism in isolation. They are, rather, attempts to give an account of totalitarianism with both certain versions of communism, like Stalinism, and national socialism and European fascist movements. They theorize the different species of totalitarianism. This is the open versus the closed society motif. To be clear, extreme repression, mass expulsion, imprisonment, and mass extermination have been justified by fascist and communist regimes alike, though by no means all fascist states and by no means all communist states have gone to those extremes. Nevertheless, especially right now, I think it is an error to discuss these movements together, under one umbrella.

My first reason is a practical one. When you discuss these movements together, you’re suggesting that communism is right now a serious threat in the countries that face threats from fascist movements, for example, Hungary, Poland, the United States, and Russia. Fascism thrives only when there is a sense, often manufactured, of the threat of communist takeover. As Joseph Goebbels, who was to become Nazi propaganda minister, writes when ruminating about how to encourage National Socialist sentiment, “The middle class sees in Bolshevism not so much the subverter of national will and folkish instinct but mainly the thief of its property, the uncomfortable disturber of peace and quiet. It also sees our National Socialist will for freedom from this point of view. We are its last consolation and last hope if Bolshevism is around the corner. The less Bolshevism threatens, the less the ordinary burgher cares about us, the more serenely he smiles at our desperate struggle.”

Over heightened and exaggerated fears of encroaching communism were essential to the success of the National Socialists in Germany in the late 1920s and 1930s. In his classic study of the fall of the ordinary German town of Thalburg to the National Socialist Party, called *Thalburg: The Nazi Seizure of Power in a Single German town, 1930 to 1935* historian William Sheridan Allen writes, “To most Thalburgers, the NSDAP was first and foremost an anti-Marxist party. When a Thalburger thought of Marxism, he was not likely to think of the Communists, who in 1928 had received only 28 of the 5,372 votes in the town.” So the Communists were no threat at all in Thalburg. The “Marxist party” in Thalburg was the social democratic party, in other words, the liberal party, like the Democrats in the United States, the SPD, the socialists. The socialists

were the dominant political force in Thalburg. In the 1928 elections they received almost 45% of the town's votes, more than the next three parties combined. It's by representing ordinary center-left politics as threatening communism that fascists come to power. That is textbook.

When I talk about communism, we're talking about Pol Pot and we're talking about Stalin. We're talking about murderous movements that slaughtered people. These are not fears here.

But is it the case that historically communist regimes in the true sense of communist have used fascism as an enemy? Sure. And certainly in Germany as well, where there was a communist movement that rose alongside. What we're seeing is a repeat of history. When you have one kind of extremist politics, you have the other. I certainly wouldn't paint the Antifa movement as—the Antifa movement is normal, what we're seeing. In the 1920s in Thalburg, when the ultranationalists tried to do a play about German folk identity, the students from the university came and tried to shut the play down. This is not new, what we're seeing. This is a repetition of history.

How does history regard those students? History doesn't condemn those students. In Thalburg there were battles with bricks on the streets between the ultranationalists and the students who were trying to shut the ultranationalists down. Should the students have not tried to shut the ultranationalists down? I don't know. Those are difficult questions about strategy. But the fact is, when ultranationalist movements are out there, there are fights. That's true today. It's always been true. Victor Klemperer, in *The Language of the Third Reich*, talks about a nurse who says, "You can always tell the Communists from the fascists in the hospital ward. The fascists have lumps on their head and the communists have stilettos in their hearts." One reason not to fight fascists, they're going to win. They have more guns. The anti-fascist movement is not in a position, if there is some kind of authoritarian takeover, to fight it.

So the only way is to win the middle.

But there are strategic questions when you fight ultranationalism. The painting of the universities as some kind of—I mean, we really have to distinguish liberalism. I'm a liberal Democrat, so I'm going to defend something called liberalism. There are plenty of right-wing people who are liberals. When you look at American politics, the Republican Party is much further to the right than any of your parties. Stephen Harper still would have been a Democrat.

Now, it's true that in the universities gender equality—there are movements for equality, there is a liberal commitment to equality. And when you start to tar universities, that commitment as a liberal, communist commitment, then we get into worrisome historical and theoretical trends.

In Poland the takeover of the government by a theocratic, fascist Law and Justice Party exploited the

strategy of fanning fear of nonexistent communists. Poland has suffered so much from the version of East European communism that you're not going to find communists in Poland. Yet you still find these conspiracy theorists about communists that motivated the takeover of the country in 2015 by Law and Justice from a party that had been expanding the GDP of Poland dramatically.

In recent U.S. politics we see clear echoes of this. President Obama was regularly called a socialist, a Marxist, a communist. How many communists give trillions to banks? And most recently, we find university professors tarred as cultural Marxists. Departments of women's studies, critical race studies were told about the dangers of cultural Marxism. It's that attempt to spread fear of communism that spurs fascist movements. If I were to discuss fascism and communism together, it would suggest that communism is a significant risk in countries like the U.S., and it is not. So that first reason is practical.

My second reason is theoretical. The ideologies of fascism and communism are very distinct. The most obvious is that communism, like liberal democracy, has equality as an ideal. For the fascist, in contrast, equality is a counter-ideal. Equality is what you are arguing against: equality is a myth, it's the enemy. The Marxists try to tell us we're equal when we're not. Communist propaganda praises equality. Fascist propaganda attacks it, as we will see, as inconsistent with nature. To take a less obvious example, fascism theorizes a mythic past, one in which the nation state was ethnically or religiously pure, there was no degeneracy, women played traditional gender roles, etc. In contrast, communism has at its center a mythic future, a workers' paradise where equality has been realized. These are very different structural configurations. You don't find medieval studies and runology thriving in communist regimes.

That difference in the ideologies of fascism and communism shape the way in which they can be used to justify oppression. Communism characteristically, when it's used to oppress, as in Cambodia, is used to send people to re-education camps or labor camps to learn to be equalized, with the goal of a mythic utopian future in which equality is realized used to justify their brutality against dissident intellectuals and other members of the supposed elite. Fascist regimes justify oppressive processes by dehumanizing or otherwise devaluing some targeted group as a threat to the purity, cultural or ethnic, of the true nation that supposedly existed in the mythic past. The results can be the same, but the justifications are, importantly, different. You have to know what kind of justification you are encountering.

I'm not using fascism as a word that means there is no justification. I'm using it as a description of the politics Hitler describes. But there are many fascist movements that did not come with mass extermination. National socialism is an extreme version, but fascist movements—Italy was not an ethnically—Italy was harkening back to

Rome. When you're talking about fascist movements, there are many countries. Poland today, Hungary. These are not countries that have engaged in genocide. Italy didn't have competent enough trucks to engage in genocide. So I am talking about those movements.

But what I am going to say is that when you talk about going back to a past, that past never existed. Germany? Mussolini talked about Rome. Rome was filled with immigrants. There are these contradictions in the mythic past. That's the notion of a mythic past. You elegantly and ably describe the self-image of these movements, though I think when you look at Goebbels and Hitler and what they say, they're sort of driven by a sort of vision—I mean, it's complex in the case of Hitler. It wasn't economic revival, it was economic domination and imperialism.

But there really hasn't been an illiberal successful state like that in contemporary times. That's the real worry. When you start illiberal politics, you can see a hankering for meaning, a fear for the global economy. That's why when we defend liberal democracy, what we need is a vision of liberal democracy that does not simply throw us to the wolves. If you throw people to the wolves, then they're going to be fearful of difference, they're going to seek meaning from other sources, from some past vision of themselves. My colleague Kim Snyder recently said, none of these European countries ever had a nation state. It's all a myth. Each case is a myth. So it's always that mythic past.

My focus is on what I think is the greater threat for the countries we live in, which are the ultranationalist movements on the political right that I'm calling fascism. This is not to minimize the danger of governments that justify their authoritarian politics in other ways. I have ruined many a dinner party by arguments about who was worse, Hitler or Stalin. And as your elder I can inform you, this is not a route to take. They both were really bad. Though it must be said that Stalin was a nationalist—this is the Stalin-Trotsky debate—who rejected the importation of the revolution because it was a national movement, so there are elements of fascism in Stalin.

There are times and places in which communist authoritarianism should be of concern. In the United States and in many countries communist authoritarianism has never been a significant concern. Rather, "communist" is a label used to demonize those arguing for equality. Even religious leaders such as Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. were called communists. The word "communist" is used in the United States to tar movements seeking equality. That's another practical reason. So there are theoretical reasons and practical reasons for focusing just on one movement.

Why give lectures describing the structure of fascism? Why is it important for us to know how this structure works? Here are some reasons.

First, politics involves what we might think of as a marriage-of-convenience problem. One's commitment to a

specific issue might lead one to join with others in a marriage of convenience. Maybe they're white nationalists, maybe you're into Christian nationalism. So these marriages of convenience can land people in alliances. And what ends up happening is you end up in an essentially fascist structure. Without an understanding of fascism, one might not be aware when one is aiding and abetting fascist movements in such a partnership. I suppose one of history's classic examples is when corporatists, when those who own factories, oligarchs in Russia, for example, or corporations in Portugal and in Germany aided the fascist movements because they had the joint goal of smashing labor unions, only to find out later that maybe this wasn't going to result in allowing their gay friends to live normal lives.

Fear of fascism is often used to justify accommodating ever more anti-democratic measures. Let's placate the fascists, so let's have harsher immigration policies. But we have to know when that's happening. Even sliding part of the way towards fascism is something to be avoided. But to avoid it, one must know what we are sliding towards.

Thirdly, and most importantly, without a clear understanding of fascism, we will not be aware of indicators of susceptibility in our own political environment. The U.S. has always had fascist elements in its politics, and these fascist elements deeply influenced Adolph Hitler. At the heart of fascism is the notion of what Hitler calls in *Mein Kampf* "the national state." In describing the restrictive immigration policies adopted by the U.S. in the early 1920s, Hitler in *Mein Kampf* writes, "I know that this is unwelcome to hear. But anything crazier and less thought out than our present laws of state citizenship is hardly possible to conceive. But there is at least one state in which feeble attempts to achieve a better arrangement are apparent. I of course do not mean our pattern German republic, but the United States of America, where they are trying partially, at any rate, to include common sense in their councils. They refuse to allow immigration of elements which are bad from the health point of view and absolutely forbid naturalization of certain defined races and thus are making a modest start in the direction of something not unlike the conception of the national state." That's from *Mein Kampf*. And there are many more passages in which Hitler praises the U.S.'s incredibly restrictive, ethnically based immigration policies from 1924 on.

The current president of the United States, Donald Trump, rode to electoral victory with a campaign of frank and open nostalgia about these very immigration policies. This is but one of the elements of fascism that laces through present day U.S. politics. Many of you are familiar with German pastor Martin Niemöller's speech "First they came," given as a critique of German cowardice before Nazi purges. However, insufficient attention is given to the targeted categories it mentions, and the targeted categories help you think about fascism.

In the most well-known version of the speech it is, “First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.”

National socialism is a particular version of fascism that places Jews at the center of a conspiratorial web to advance equality in the service of destroying the traditional nation. But fascism does not require Jews to play that role. It only requires somebody to play this role. Socialists will do, Muslims will do, non-whites will do. However, fascism of any variety partially targets trade unionists, that is, members of labor unions. In the opening pages of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler writes, “The free trades union lowered over the political horizon and over each man’s life like a threatening storm cloud. It was one of the most terrible instruments of intimidation against security and national independence, the solidity of the state and individual freedom. It was, above all, that which turned the idea of democracy into a repellent and derisory phrase, brought shame to liberty, and mocked at brotherhood in the words ‘If you won’t join us, we will crack your skull.’”

The relationship between fascism and work is complex. Think for a moment about the inscriptions on the gates of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, “*Arbeit Macht Frei*,” “Work makes you free.” The fascist sees in the manual laborer an image of the nation, especially in domains such as mining and manufacturing. The hardy, masculine domain of work is crucial for fascist symbology, as it were, and mythology. In the miner, in the manufacturer, in the physical manual laborer the fascist finds a powerful symbol of masculinity.

When Hitler denounces the German trade union movement as a tool used for socialist takeover, he is correctly identifying a powerful source of resistance to fascism. Fascism thrives when it’s contrasted with a perversion of capitalist liberal democracy now often called neoliberalism. Fascism thrives when, as Hannah Arendt says, individuals are atomized and they don’t have groups in which they can belong and identify. If capitalist liberal democracy is just individual agents, each seeking their way in the global economy, how is that any vision of value? If what the alternative to a fascist movement is each of us just sinking or swimming, that’s not a very attractive vision of life. That vision of life is invariably going to lose against a movement that promises value and meaning in the form of collective identity.

Labor unions, however flawed, have always been sources where people can get together in a community. They can form a community around joint goals of lobbying against their boss. But that creates community, it creates value, it creates a joint sense of purpose. My 6-year-old son tried to organize a labor union in his class.

His teacher was, like, “Oh, great, we can put them to work now.” And why not organize? It’s a movement, it’s exciting, you get together, you join together with your friends, you have meetings at night where you can organize. It gives you a sense of purpose. For fascism to succeed, it needs to destroy all competing senses of purpose so all that’s left is your ethnic identity, your national identity, your religious identity, whatever principle the fascist movement is going to take as the unifying force to give you value. Then you can reshape and refigure labor unions as movements meant for the glory of the nation.

But labor unions in and of themselves, as anyone who has been involved in organizing knows, are enormous sources of resistance, they are enormous sources of community, they are enormous sources of value and purpose—value and purpose in the service of material goals, making your life better. The weekend. Who doesn’t like the weekend? At its healthiest, liberal democratic politics are people meeting at night, gathering and fomenting plans to get more time off. Trade unions, labor unions at their best protect us from insecurity. Insecurity breeds fear. And fear is the best friend of the fascists. Isolation and fear are the fascist’s closest allies. This is why the trade unions are on Pastor Niemöller’s list.

When you smash labor unions, when you send people into the global market, where there is no one to protect them, there are no rules to protect them, then the immigrant laborer becomes a threat, right, because, Oh, no, there are no restrictions. It’s sink or swim. It’s just us versus them. Anyone coming into the country is competing for my job. I have no protections. So fascist politics works by smashing labor unions and then leaving the people atomized, and then unifying them under the nation, be it a religious nation, be it an ethnic nation, be it a cultural nation.

If you look at the U.S. today, where I come from, a harsh anti-union ideology has dominated U.S. politics for quite some time. Scott Walker came to power in the U.S. state of Wisconsin by promising to smash the power of labor unions in that state. And that traditionally Democratic state, that had voted for Democratic presidential candidates for decades, went for Donald Trump in 2016. Michigan, another labor state, also went for Trump. The sources of value have been broken down in the U.S.—the alternative ways to get value other than ethnic, cultural, or religious identity—and that feeds into the fascist notion of a nation.

In the U.S. today only a small percentage of workers belong to labor unions. I believe it’s only 11%. Without labor unions, as problematic as they can be in practice, each of us is an isolated, insecure atom. There is no cooperation, there are no meetings, there is no organizing against the boss. Furthermore, without labor unions, as Elizabeth Anderson has recently brilliantly demonstrated in her book on private government, we get used to a model

of the world, we get used to living in a world, a corporation, that is very much like a fascist autocracy. If we don't have a labor union through which we can bargain with the CEO, with the bosses, then each of us simply has to do what we're told. That trains us, as it were, for fascist government.

Another element of contemporary politics with strong fascist resonance is the highly salient attacks on the liberal media, which is transformed into denunciations of its supposed fakery and lying. The emergence of this kind of attack on these institutions must also be considered a historical marker of vulnerability in our societies. Here's a quote: "For imperfectly educated, superficial readers, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* is the essence of respectability. It never uses rough expressions, deprecates brute force, and always writes in favor of fighting with intellectual weapons. This appeals, curiously enough, to the least intellectual people. But it is just for our semi-intellectual classes that the Jew writes in his so-called intelligentsia press. The tone of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Berliner Tageblatt* is intended to appeal to them, and it is they who are influenced by these papers. While they most carefully avoid all coarseness of language, they use other vessels for pouring the poison into the hearts of their readers. In a medley of charming expressions they lull their readers into believing that pure knowledge and moral truth are the driving force of their actions, whereas really it is a cunning contrivance for stealing a weapon which their opponents might use against the press."

If one replaced the anti-Semitism in this passage with references to the liberal or the cosmopolitan and the name of prominent German newspapers with *The New York Times* and CNN, this passage from *Mein Kampf* would not raise a single eyebrow if it occurred in a speech by any number of contemporary U.S. politicians on the right.

When we hear in our politics cries for men of action, not words, when we hear politicians saying, "He's not ready," "He's not just simply a talker, he's going to go and do things and make things happen," this contrast between action and intellect is a classically fascist contrast. The intellectual is the enemy. The man of action will come and rescue us from the intellectual, from all the talking. The man of action will come and do. This is classically fascist, and there are strong echoes of this in the politics of many of our countries. You find people saying, "I want someone who will come and bash some heads and not just sit around talking and compromising."

Why are they attacking universities? Think about that. Where can you actually talk like we're talking? You can't in a business. In a business you can be fired for voting the wrong way and putting a bumper sticker on your car. So where can you actually have debates between people with different views? University. What do you do? You attack the university for being against free speech. Jeff Sessions just gave a talk at Georgetown University saying universities should be places of free speech. Jeff Sessions

is no friend of free speech. So what is going on? Something else is going on. I encourage us not to be distracted on either side of where you take this strategic question.

It is standard fare in authoritarian countries to start packing the universities with nationalists, which is what they're asking in the U.S. How about we have some people in the universities who stand up for traditional values, etc. Forget their credentialing inside a discipline.

I spoke at a southern university once in the past couple years—I will not say which—and I quoted Du Bois, who was presupposing in the quote I gave that the Civil War was about slavery. And I looked up and a row of white students were recording me with their phones. I said, "You know I can't be fired for saying the Civil War is about slavery at Yale." What's happening inside universities is more complex. And as you know, being a student, there are plenty of nonliberal students and they videotape you as a professor and they...

I believe in gravity. What if you came to me and said, "Prove to me you believe in gravity. Jump off the roof." That seems to me dumb. I'm not going to do that. If somebody is, like, "Prove to me you believe in freedom of speech. Get somebody who demeans, who hates the liberal democracy, because liberalism—get someone who threatens people as a speaker to prove your commitment." That seems to me just a completely ridiculous way to judge people's commitments.

It's not like liberal democracy is an easy road. What you're talking about since Book VIII of Plato's *The Republic* is the objection to democracy. We're going to get into this in subsequent lectures, so I don't want to show my hand now. But in Book VIII of Plato's *The Republic* he says that system leads straightforwardly to tyranny. Basically, his point is because it allows for freedom of speech. Because if you have freedom of speech, then a demagogue can come, so fear and resentment, set the people against each other, and seize power.

Rousseau faces this straight on in *The Social Contract*. Rousseau says—because you have to remember, people bought Plato's argument, essentially. There were just monarchies. People regarded liberal democracy as ridiculous for centuries and centuries and centuries. Rousseau says, They say this system is absurd. They say a magician with words from Paris or London could bewitch the masses. But they have only considered ill-formed states. What Rousseau means by that is states in which people are set against each other, states in which different groups hate each other and are filled with resentment. So if you live in a state like that, liberal democracy is hard. But if you live in a state of wondrous equality, then you can do it.

If somebody is going to impose a way of life on me, I'm a liberal Democrat, so if people are calling for some kind of thing that's going to constrain my freedom, that's

problematic. Here's the paradox of democracy that Plato recognized so long ago that you brought us to. Liberal democracy seems to allow people who want to impose their way of life on you to argue for it, because that's freedom of speech. Plato's like, That ain't going to work. That's always been a central issue in liberal democracy. How do we deal with people who are, like, I'm not just saying from my perspective your way of life is wrong. I'm going to argue that we should outlaw your way of life. What do we do? You guys in Canada took one choice. The U.S. is perhaps the only liberal democracy in the world that allows full freedom of expression and sort of like anti-democratic movements can fully... So it's not really clear. It's also not clear how... That's my long, rambling response.

Another aspect. U.S. right-wing politics has dominated by the topics of abortion and homosexuality, and recently transgender rights. All of these are regarded as deformations of the traditional family by certain political parties. The traditional family also has a privileged place in fascist ideology. For the National Socialists the traditional family is part of the natural order that was threatened by abortion and homosexuality. The Nazi government was obsessed by these issues. In 1936, Heinrich Himmler ordered the creation of the Reich Central Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion, a powerful office tasked with collecting records on gay Germans in order ultimately to imprison them in concentration camps.

Within the academy, in the U.S. today at least, and Jordan Peterson in Canada, too, there is a small but influential group of academics calling for serious research into racial and gender differences in cognitive ability. This is nothing other than a call for a continuation of the unbroken American tradition of university research that seeks to provide a naturalistic grounding for American racial and gender hierarchy. In the case of black Americans, it is a call to allow for continued research into scientific excuses for the brutal treatment and exclusion of Americans of African descent. Though the pseudoscience of genetic racial differences has always been a permanent feature of the U.S. academic scene, the recent upsurge in denunciations of equality made by academics, like, "Objectivity requires us to consider everything; therefore, we have to continue research into these topics," that have yielded no fruit but exploitation. This resembles the core Nazi ideological doctrine that the liberal ideal of equality is inconsistent with natural law. If you look at some of Jordan Peterson's lectures, it's what he says. He says equality is a myth.

Each of these elements of fascist ideology can receive its justification independently of the others. I've given you many different elements here, and for each of them you can imagine someone saying, "I hate labor unions but people are equal," you could imagine someone saying, "People aren't equal, but labor unions are a cool way to,

like, deal with certain problems that come from what I see as inequality." But when you see all of these same elements grouped together, when we see the very same people denouncing politicians who do nothing but talk, talk, talk, attacking immigration as threatening the purity of the country, foaming at the mouth at the threat of socialism, raising outrage over threats to the traditional family, denouncing homosexuals as degenerates, attacking the universities as bastions of liberalism and cultural Marxism, and seeking to cripple traditional labor unions, history strongly suggests that we are encountering a common and indeed familiar ideological structure.

Many of us are not familiar with this ideological structure. We see the parts, but the parts together are what I urge us to attend to. Each of the parts may be problematic on its own terms, but when you put them together, there should be a warning sign. My hope is to explain this structure, to analyze the parts, to get you to see how they fit together, how fascist politics involves each one of them playing off the other.

More directly and more personally, I want to eliminate the excuse of ignorance. We must leave a record for future generations if we fall, if liberal democracy falls. Liberal democracy has always been a fragile flower. I was on FaceTime with my kids when I arrived in Canada, saying, "I'm in the land of freedom now." But there's never been an epic in human history where the majority of people have lived under liberal democracy. Yet, when you live in a stable liberal democracy, you think its freedoms and its ideals are somehow human ideals. That is not true. Fascism denounces equality as a bad thing. So we need to leave a record, because our children and grandchildren, if they get to exist, need to know that we knowingly pursued this path, if we do.

But I would be ungenerous and negligent if I did not acknowledge that millions of people living in my country and yours and other countries around the world, confronted with the synergisms that drive fascism are aware of and chilled by much that chills me as well. I hope the clarity I seek to bring to the analysis of how fascism actually works advances understanding of our fraught times, offers solace and, at best, helps inform individual and collective action and individual moral choices.

At the core of liberal democracy is human rights. That's what we get from Christianity. The Christian faith doesn't allow us to say, "These people are not worthy of conversion and those people are." The idea behind Christianity is that we are all potentially saved. I think it's a glorious—Christianity has some of the best ideas in human history. Christianity says we're all capable of being saved. That idea becomes the idea of human rights, where all humans—regarding the Constitution of the United States, its rights are human rights.

When I talk about liberal democracy, I'm talking about humans, not nation state members. Yes, even if it sort of

excludes people who are not here—those people, asylum. The rights of humans include asylum in conditions of war.

The right of every person to human dignity was affirmed in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was a bald statement, a powerful iteration and expansion of the liberal democratic understanding of personhood to include literally the entire world community. It bound all nations and cultures to a shared commitment to valuing the dignity and equality of every person and rang with the aspirations of millions in a shattered world confronting the devastation of colonialism, genocide, racism, global war, and, yes, fascism. Nonetheless, Article 14 soberly affirmed the right of every person to seek asylum. The right of asylum acknowledged that categories of human beings may once again have to flee the nation states under whose flag they once lived. Refugees are on the road everywhere. Their plight reinforces fascist propaganda that the nation is under siege and that aliens are a threat and danger both within and outside our borders.

The suffering of strangers can solidify the structure of fascism, but it can also trigger empathy once another lens is clicked firmly into place. Recognizing the critical historical moment we are navigating, another version of the legacy we might leave is that there is sufficient courage and humility to recognize the humanity of all. It's hard for me to do. It's hard for all of us. But it must be done. Thank you.

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