

Reclaiming the Differences: Three Neglected Marxian Theories of Fascism in Lukács, Marcuse, and Bloch

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Introduction: Beyond the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Arguably the most influential Western Marxist text on fascism is the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in exile, during the darkest period of the Second World War in 1944. This classic text, lauded on its republication in 1997 as “one of the most celebrated and often cited works of modern social philosophy” and already then cited over 13,000 times, has long been canonized within syllabi in continental philosophy, critical theory, and cultural studies. Influenced by Friedrich Pollock’s (1941) framing of Nazism as a form of administrative “state capitalism”, Adorno and Horkheimer’s text presents fascism as the fullest realization of an instrumental reason that ends by objectifying human beings as well as the natural world, and which perverts Immanuel Kant’s universalist categorical imperative into a directive for heartless domination.

Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: 1)

Animated by a laudable desire to liberate human beings from avoidable forms of mythological illusion and oppression, the critical dynamic set loose by enlightenment reasoning would end by undermining its own normative bases, levelling the ground for totalitarian government, now assisted by the most modern technologies of control:

Enlightenment expels difference from theory. It considers ‘human actions and desires exactly as if I were dealing with lines, planes, and bodies.’ The totalitarian order has put this into effect in utter seriousness. Freed from supervision

by one's own class, which had obliged the nineteenth-century businessman to maintain Kantian respect and reciprocal love, fascism, which by its iron discipline relieves its peoples of the burden of moral feelings. (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: 67).

There are however arguably deep problems with this kind of analysis of fascism, which has not been universally accepted, notably in scholarly literature in fascism studies, or studies of the Shoah (cf. Kershaw 2003: 26–30; Bauer 2002: 68–80). Firstly, the idea of a dialectic of enlightenment relativizes differences between National Socialism, the other fascist regimes, and liberal and socialist systems, all of which it allegedly describes (Abromeit 2012: 410–432). In this way, secondly, Adorno and Horkheimer's analyses oddly anticipate key apologetic motifs of intellectuals who had associated themselves with Nazism. Having looked to Nazism as a radical escape from "liberalism", "modernity", or even "Western metaphysics" and "critical reason", Heidegger, Schmitt, Jünger and others after 1945 argued that really-existing Hitlerism remained too in thrall to the modern forces it should have more radically overcome (Morat 2012; Olick 2005: 297–320; Payk 2012). Thirdly, the analysis decontextualizes these regimes by blinding us to differentia of class, wealth, status, rank, political party, race or gender, as well as wholly side-lining any recourse to political economics: even governors and the governed are united in one fate-bound totality, lurching towards the abyss (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: 26–27). Fourthly, and arguably most troublingly, the vast expansion of the etiological *durée* assigned by the *Dialectic* to a history of instrumental reason looking back to Homeric epic serves to obscure more proximal ideological streams informing fascist propaganda and mobilization. Strikingly, Adorno and Horkheimer cite nearly no avowedly Nazi or fascist texts, and thereby pass over entirely their frequent, open avowals of 'undialectical' hostility to the enlightenment and modern scientific culture.

With the present resurgence of far-right political mobilization globally, the question of how best to understand fascism, and today's right-wing, anti-liberal movements, has assumed a new pertinence. It is unclear that assigning the resurgence of forms of ethnonationalistic authoritarianism internationally after 2008 and the Global Financial Crisis, after decades on the political margins, to anything like an allegedly inevitable trans-epochal decline (pace Agamben 1998), the hypertrophy of the dark side of enlightenment rationality (Smith 2019), or the operation of levelling culture industries (Gordon 2018) -

approaches which are, to varying degrees, influenced by the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* - is the most discerning, informative, or politically efficacious approach. On the contrary, whether we consider the lurid fantasies of QAnon, the fetid in-group chatter on far-right online fora, the open avowal of National Socialist teachings by groups on the American far right, or the brazen undermining of constitutional checks on executive power which Trump, and comparable populist leaders, have enacted when in power, what is instead clear is the way that contemporary ethnonationalist movements both foster and profit from the relativization and discrediting of science, the polemical attack on the humanities and social sciences (positioned as effete, “politically correct”, captured by “cultural Marxism”, etc.), the brutal ridiculing of informed civic public discussion, and the increasingly unchecked regression into the most extreme forms of superstition and conspiratorial paranoia amongst their “bases”.¹ Therefore, rather than an implementation of rationality, the ideology and practice of the far-right is committed to its destruction.

The success of critical-theoretical and post-structuralist narratives which have positioned fascism, alongside forms of socialist “total states”, as a kind of inevitable outcome of forms of modern rationalization or “technology” (Pollock 1941, 1990; Heidegger 2008) serves to side-line alternative critical theoretical accounts of fascism hailing from other sources within Marxism which might arguably provide better lenses with which to look at today’s rise of far-right authoritarianisms. This article reconsiders three such Marxist theoretical analyses of fascist ideology which contest the fundamental orientation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as well as of the subsequent, convergent post-structuralist theorizing influenced by Heidegger and Nietzsche. Whilst other contemporaries, from Franz Neumann to Bertolt Brecht could have been considered, we highlight these analyses both because of the recognized influence of these thinkers within Marxism. Further, they each present converging critiques of fascism as not too rationalist, but ideologically irrationalist; not as the culmination *in extremis* of a monologic modernity, but the attempt to fabricate alternative modernities by selectively appropriating deeply anti-liberal and anti-

1. Moreover, a criticism of fascism which positions it as the more or less inevitable outcome of an epochal dialectic set within instrumental reason itself can tell us nothing about why fascism nevertheless only emerged at a particular moment in European history and why forms of ethnonationalism have waxed so strongly only in the last decade, after 60 years after 1945 in which they were almost everywhere marginalized. Why now? To answer this question, many other factors must inform any adequate analysis.

modern tropes; and not inevitable or normative in any way, but as one possible product of specific socioeconomic and political conditions. The first of these accounts (Part 1) is Herbert Marcuse's 1933 critique of what he terms the "heroic-folkish realism" of Nazi thought in figures such as Krieck, Klages, Köllreutter, van den Bruck, Schmitt, and others in "The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian Theory of the State". With Gyorgy Lukács's 1952 *The Destruction of Reason* (Part 2), in contrast, we find both an analysis which traces fascist ideology back to a lineage of irrationalist thought hailing from the early 19th century and which provides a Marxist materialist account of the conditions of its emergence and popularization. Finally, Bloch's analysis in *The Heritage of our Times* of the defining features of fascist ideology's attack on the "Ratio" (Part 3) is coupled with an analysis of the socioeconomic conditions that explain why particular "non-synchronous" strata of populations are susceptible to far-right mobilization. We propose that this analysis surpasses that of Lukács, and we will suggest in the conclusion that Bloch's analysis is especially prescient for understanding the renewed popularity today of far-right forms of ethnonationalist authoritarianism.

1. Herbert Marcuse on "heroic-folkish realism"

Herbert Marcuse is best known today for his post-war writings, led by *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man*. The collection *Negations* (1968), however contains important articles published by Marcuse during the period of his direct affiliation with the Frankfurt School in the 1930s, in its leading outlet, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. In these articles, Marcuse propounds a Marxian version of ideology critique. This at once recognizes the way that enlightenment appeals to freedom, reason, equality and universality have since the French revolution been placed in the service of continuing forms of material immiseration and inequality under capitalism, whilst upholding these ideas as containing explosive critical, emancipatory potential. For the young Marcuse, the French Enlightenment is to be placed within a tradition looking back to classical antiquity. This tradition's spokesmen aimed "to save the category of happiness and to comprehend it under the category of truth" (Marcuse 1968: 130). Indeed, philosophical appeals to reason, truth, and universality are aligned by Marcuse with the ongoing struggle for human freedom. These ideals, he contends, point beyond their distortion in the realm of "affirmative culture" (high art and theory), which at once insulate them from the concrete living and working conditions of ordinary men and women, and

console the latter by promising some wholly “spiritual” redemption which would leave these conditions unaffected. “That man is a rational being, that this being requires freedom, and that happiness is his highest good”, Marcuse writes:

are all universal propositions whose progressive impetus derives precisely from their universality. Universality gives them an almost revolutionary character, for they claim that everyone, not simply this or that particular person, should be rational, free, and happy. (Marcuse 1968: 112)

The first of these essays, from 1933, bears the title “The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State”, and it stands out from its successors in *Negations* because of its critical focus on National Socialism and fascism. Marcuse opens by announcing that the “total-authoritarian state” which has been established under Hitler in Germany reflects a new worldview, deeply opposed to that of enlightenment idealism: that of “heroic-folkish realism”. Nazi philosopher Ernst Kriek’s *Nationalpolitische Erziehung* (1933) explains its basic orientation:

Blood rises up against formal understanding, race against the rational pursuit of ends, honor against profit, bonds against the caprice that is called ‘freedom’, organic totality against individualistic dissolution, valour against bourgeois security, politics against the primacy of the economy, state against society, folk against the individual and the mass. (1)²

Marcuse situates the sources of this new *Weltanschauung*, not deep in the Western history of rationalization, but in “all the currents that have been deluging ‘liberalist’ political and social theory since World War I” (1). National Socialist ideology emerges from a struggle within the intellectual realm, “far from the political arena”: in “the philosophical controversy with the rationalism, individualism, and materialism of the nineteenth century” (1). Marcuse observes that, long before Hitler’s ascent, “in almost all branches of the social sciences and humanities, from economics to philosophy” (1), a critical attack had been undertaken “against the hypertrophic rationalization and technification of life, against the ‘bourgeois’ of the nineteenth century with his petty joys and petty aims, against the shopkeeper and merchant spirit and the destructive ‘anaemia’ of existence” (1–2). Set against all this was a new vision of

the heroic man, bound to the forces of blood and soil – the man who travels through heaven and hell, who does not reason why, but goes into action to

2. All bracketed references in this section will be to Marcuse (1968).

do and die, sacrificing himself not for any purpose but in humble obedience to the dark forces that nourish him. This image expanded to the vision of the charismatic leader whose leadership does not need to be justified on the basis of his aims, but whose mere appearance is already his 'proof', to be accepted as an undeserved gift of grace. (2)

Variants of this worldview were present in the Stefan George circle³, and in the works of many of the figures who also feature in Lukács's *Destruction of Reason*, as we will see presently: Möller van der Bruck, Werner Sombart, Max Scheler, Carl Schmitt, and Ernst Jünger. Marcuse positions it as looking back as far as Wilhelm Dilthey's *Lebensphilosophie* and the rebellious "pathos" of Nietzsche, a genealogy which we will see Lukács extends back farther, to the first generation of German idealists after Kant (2). Heroic-folkish realism brings together intellectual currents which Marcuse groups under the headers of 19th-century "philosophy of life", "irrationalistic naturalism", and "universalism", in an unusual usage we will explain presently (2-4). What Marcuse terms the "historical locus" of the "unification" of these ideas into a political theory vindicating the total-authoritarian state was, however, their concerted opposition to "liberalism", which, Marcuse notes, becomes in this literature an unscientific catch-all term to "indiscriminately bring together everything against which [these ideologies] fight" (4). Just as Lukács had situated fascism squarely as a deeply anti-enlightenment phenomenon, Marcuse stresses that "if we ask the spokesman of the new *Weltanschauung* what they are fighting":

we hear in reply of the 'ideas of 1789', of wishy-washy humanism and pacifism, Western intellectualism, egotistical individualism, sacrifice of the nation and state to conflicts of interest between particular social groups, abstract, conformist egalitarianism, the party system, the hypertrophy of the economy, and destructive technicism and materialism. These are the most concrete utterances – for the concept 'liberal' often serves only for purposes of defamation ... (4)

Marcuse's convergent tasks in "The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State" are, firstly, to critically understand the distinct claims of the new ideology and its different aspects and developments and, secondly, to unearth the social function of these ideas in the political struggles of the period, in relationship to the

3. A literary group centred around the poet Stefan George, of which Ludwig Klages was a member, which espoused Nietzschean anti-enlightenment and anti-democratic sentiments and championed the formation of a new German spiritual aristocracy. The circles work became influential in the National Socialist Party.

evolution of liberal societies into forms of monopoly capitalism by the first decades of the 20th century.

Anticipating Lukács's more developed theorization of this category, Marcuse contends that the understanding of fascist ideology begins from recognizing what he calls its fundamental "irrationalism". This involves at the epistemological level a scornful denial of critical or autonomous reason – as against forms of strategic, technological, administrative and instrumental rationality, including racial pseudo-sciences, placed in service of the diktat the rulers and the "movement". In place of scientific inquiry, downgraded as "materialistic" and "rootless" in its pursuit of value-free universal laws to explain natural and social phenomena, fascist thought instead makes competing appeals to intuitive or unmediated forms of accessing putative deeper, "primal" truths, beyond the reach of scientific inquiry—"nature", 'blood and soil', 'folkhood', 'existential facts', 'totality' and so forth" (10). These irrational givens are positioned as at once unquestionable "natural" facts, and as ultimately unsurpassable an unquestionable norms, "which places reason under the heteronomy of the irrational" (10). Critical reflection hence gives way to a *sacrificio intellectus*:

'Reality does not admit of knowledge, only of acknowledgement' [*Das Ende der humanistischen Illusion*]: in this 'classical' formulation irrationalist theory arrives at the extreme antipode to all rational thought and at the same time reveals its deepest intentions. (10)

In order to contribute to comprehension of what Marcus calls this ideological configuration's "real social function", he stresses its three "constitutive components" (13). He terms the first "universalism", by which he means the fascist theorists' subordination of individuals, their wants, need, and capacities, to the socio-political Whole. As in organic life, Ernst Kriek argues in *Nationalpolitische Erziehung*, so in political existence:

the whole is primally given in its organic segmentation: the members serve the whole, which is superordinate to them, but they serve it according to the unique character that appertains to them as members... and, at the same time, it is in this uniqueness that their personal destiny and the meaning of their personality are fulfilled to the extent that they participate in the whole. (Kriek: 13)

Secondly, as in this passage from Kriek, the social whole is conceived by fascism as an "organic-natural" reality, "released from its economic and social content", and "withdrawn from the range of all human planning and decision" (15):

In ever new formulations, heroic-folkish realism emphasizes the natural properties of the totality represented by the folk. The folk is 'subject to blood', it arises from the 'soil', it furnishes the homeland with indestructible force and permanence, it is united by characteristics of 'race', the preservation of whose purity is the condition of the folk's 'health'. (15)⁴

The result is to falsely present as already achieved a utopian social totality in which the particular interests of individuals and groups have been harmonized, "a real folk community which elevates itself above the interests and conflicts of status groups and classes" [Köllreuter, *Allgemeine staatslehre*] (15). Thereby, the actual divisions between classes in highly polarized societies are conjured away, and their material causes blamed on enemies of the People:

The naturalistic myth begins by apostrophizing the natural as 'eternal' and 'divinely willed'. This holds especially for the totality of the folk, whose naturalness is one of the myth's primary claims. The particular destinies of individuals, their strivings and needs, their misery and their happiness – all this is void and perishable, for only the folk is permanent. (16)

Fascist organicism or naturalism hence serves to refigure contestable social and political relations as dehistoricized and incontestable, subject now only to the laws of an inscrutable destiny or providence:

The folk is nature itself as the substructure of history, as eternal substance, the eternally constant in the continual flux of economic and social relations. In contrast with the folk, the latter are accidental, ephemeral, and 'insignificant'. This dehistoricization marks all aspects of organicist theory ... (16)

Faced with the realities of a highly monopolized economic system, soon to be placed on a permanent war footing, Nazi organicism hence verges into "a radical devaluation of the material sphere of existence, of the 'external riches' of life" (18). In the place of these "materialist" comforts, "the 'heroism' of 'poverty' and 'service' of sacrifice and discipline" (18) are celebrated, as the militarization of social and international relations increasingly turns all citizens into warriors who can be called upon by the Leaders at any time to kill and die for the *Volk*.

The third feature of fascist irrationalism is embodied in the existentialism of Carl Schmitt, Alfred Baeumler, Ernst Forsthoff, Martin Heidegger, and others. It involves the attempt to elevate the absence of any rational, legitimizing grounds for decision-making into its own

4. This feature of fascist thought valorizes the peasant as closer to the soil, "the creative, original source", of the kind that we find in some of Martin Heidegger's work (2003, 2008; cf. Knowles 2018: 49–57, 164–166).

kind of suprarational vindication for the exercise of unchecked domination (21). As Marcuse cites Baeumler here, alongside passages from Heidegger (23–26; cf. Kellner 1984: 99–100), in this existentialism, sheer action itself, its event or performance, is refigured as heroic and authentic, in contrast to weak attempts which would need to lean on appeals to reasoned justifications:

Action does not mean ‘deciding in favor of’ ... for that presupposes that one knows in favor of what one is deciding; rather, action means ‘setting off in a direction’, ‘taking sides’, by virtue of a mandate of destiny, by virtue of ‘one’s own right’.... It is really secondary to decide in favor of something that I have come to know. (Baeumler: 23)

For Schmitt, famously, the political sovereign is He who can decide, in a situation of existential crisis, on who is friend and who is enemy, and call down whatever measures are needed to eliminate the latter, even to the point of “physical killing” – as in the jurist’s infamous endorsement ([1934] 2003) of Hitler’s action in *The Night of Long Knives*. All boundaries between state and civil society, public power and private right, are swept away in the resulting “existentialization and totalization” of “the political” (25), as is all capacity to criticize the decrees of the Leaders:

At the level on which political existentialism moves, there can be absolutely no question whether the state in its ‘total’ form is right in making such demands, whether the system of domination that it defends with all available means guarantees anything like the possibility of more than illusory fulfilment for most men. The existentiality of the political structure is removed from such ‘rationalistic’ questions ... (25)

At this irrationalist terminus, Marcuse contends, existentialist philosophy furnishes “a philosophical foundation for the ideal of man projected by heroic realism” (22), a theoretical vindication of the total state (24), and, in the direct political engagements of Heidegger and Schmitt – which Marcuse’s article is amongst the first to consider – “the Fall of the Titans of German philosophy” into the most abject complicity with Nazi tyranny (30, 29; cf. Jay 1996: 122–123).

2. Gyorgy Lukács on fascism as irrationalism

Marcuse’s “*The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian Theory of the State*” hence ends by underscoring a troubling convergence between interwar existentialist philosophy, including Heidegger’s thought, and German Nazism. Gyorgy Lukács’s 1952 work, *The*

Destruction of Reason, develops the case for this convergence at far greater length, and with detailed recourse to many more thinkers, looking farther back in German history, than Marcuse. Whilst Marcuse's text was written in the fateful year of 1933, moreover, *Destruction* is a post-war, post-Holocaust, work. Lukács calls it a "*discite moniti*" or warning "addressed to the thinking people of all nations" (10, 90).⁵ The atrocities committed by Hitler's Germany, Lukács maintains, were so great that "each individual and each nation should try and learn something for their own good" from their confrontation (91). This responsibility is especially pressing for philosophers, "whose duty it should be to supervise the existence and evolution of reason in proportion to their concrete share in social developments." Yet, in 1952, Lukács expressed the concern that philosophers "have neglected this duty both within and outside Germany" (91), failing to understand that "no philosophy is 'innocent' or merely academic" (90), and that "the possibility of a fascist, aggressively reactionary philosophy is objectively contained in every philosophical stirring of irrationalism" (10, 11; see Koves 1997: 34–35).

Lukács's assessment of Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the "dialectic of enlightenment" which would supposedly adequately explain the genesis and features of fascist barbarisms is well known. Far from carrying forward the progressive or Marxian legacy as he understood it, he charges the Frankfurt School thinkers with having taken up residence in the "Grand Hotel Abyss" (Lukács 1971: 67). As he had described in his own 1933 article on fascism bearing this title, the "hotel" is the uncanny residence of intellectuals who feel a mandarin scorn for the mass cultures of modern societies, but whose disgust for the mundane, material realities of liberal-capitalist life prevents their criticisms from addressing the economic determinants of these realities. Instead, they compete in diagnosing an abyssal modern "crisis" which is at once invisible and all-pervasive, and could only be overcome by a spiritual transformation with deeply uncertain economic and socio-political bearings. From the perspective of the ruling groups, the resulting *angst* represents a satisficing ideological compromise formation, redirecting many in the critical intelligentsia who might otherwise ally themselves with socialist forces into more or less harmless forms of elitist cultural critique and quietism (Lukács 2021).

In *Destruction of Reason*, Lukács's position hence profoundly opposes that of Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

5. All page references in this section refer to Lukács (1980).

Far from an inevitable outcome of Western rationalism, Lukács follows Marcuse in positing that fascism represented an irrationalist revolt against a humanistic legacy which had culminated in forms of moral universalism, socialism, and Marxism. Again, this revolt does not look back to Homeric Greece, but a legacy of German philosophical thought hailing from Schelling's and Schopenhauer's responses to Kantian critical philosophy, then developed in increasingly radical directions by Friedrich Nietzsche, the vitalistic "life philosophies" of the imperialistic period, and the interwar existentialist theories of figures like Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger – figures tellingly largely absent from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The expressed intention of spokespeople of this philosophical irrationalism, far from being to continue the universalist, rationalist ambitions of the French or German Enlightenments and "the ideas of 1789" (liberty, equality, fraternity), was to radically overcome these shallow modern ideas, and the institutions they had brought in their wake.

Although Lukács never gives a single definitive account of the minimal features of irrationalism, the following inventory captures the shared features of these philosophies, in contrast to those belonging to the enlightenment and then Marxist lineages:

- i *a radical critique of reason* and the sciences for being not simply limited (as in Kant), but unable to fathom the deepest truths of reality, coupled to forms of subjective idealism with relativistic implications (variants of the claim that, since individuals, cultures, races, or "peoples" know the world only through their particular categories, there can be no culture-transcendent, universal truths);
- ii *a valorization of intuition* (or analogues, like "moods") as the extra-rational means to disclose the deepest truths (or "Things in themselves") unavailable to reason and science, leading invariably into a prioritization of art, the figure of the artistic "genius" and "great thinker", over the sciences and even philosophy;
- iii *an aristocratic epistemology* supporting the notion that only a few "geniuses" of intuition, insight, ability or *elan* can fathom the deepest truths, coupled with a deep scorn for ordinary people ("the herd", "the mob", "the masses", etc.), and the modern political forms which enfranchise them (liberalism, democracy, socialisms) (Ringer 1969; Löwy 1979: 22–67);
- iv *a rejection of intellectual, socioeconomic, ethical, political, or indeed rational-scientific progress and universalism* as vulgar "bourgeois" myths, as well as forms of cultural, historical, and even eschatological pessimism;

v a positing of ontological, extra- or suprarational grounding principles explaining the experienced natural and historical worlds, unavailable to the sciences (i) and ordinary inquirers (iii), from will (Schopenhauer), the will to power (Nietzsche), “life” (vitalism), to “race” and “blood” (Gobineau, Gompłowicz, Chamberlain); a “deepening” which serves to devalorize, obscure, or mystify “shallow”, “materialistic” attempts to scientifically understand social and historical realities, and validate the appeal to secularized religious claims and forms of mythology.

The overlap between Marcuse’s 1933 diagnoses of fascist “heroic-folkish realism” and Lukács’s conception of the invariant features of the irrationalist philosophies which he sees as making National Socialism’s ascent possible in Germany is clear. We stress that the latter’s genealogy of the ideological roots of National Socialism goes much farther than his predecessor’s, looking ultimately back to the generation of philosophers responding to Kant. Yet, like Marcuse’s critique of fascism as irrationalism, Lukács’s *Destruction of Reason* has largely been passed over, both in the Soviet East (where its conception of philosophical history was frowned upon as unorthodox), and in the liberal-capitalist nations (Google Scholar for instance suggests just 693 citations, as of the writing of this piece in 2022).⁶

To the extent that critics have engaged with the key claims of Lukács’s book, passing beyond a striking refutation *ex silentio*, they gravitate towards charging that Lukács allegedly tried unfeasibly to blame certain philosophies for the horrors of National Socialism. As Ernst Traverso (2022: loc. 463–474) writes:

6. Despite the gravity of its subject matter, and Lukács’s significance, few commentaries on the text exist, with the notable exception of Rockmore (1992). Instead, an ongoing refutation *ex silentio* has largely prevailed, with some stormy polemical exceptions (Kolokowski 2005: 1015; Adorno 2007: 166). In his recent Preface to the reissued Verso edition of Lukács’s book, Enzo Traverso finishes his own highly critical assessment of the work by remarking that *Destruction of Reason* nevertheless should be considered “among the greatest intellectual achievements of the past century” (Traverso 2022: 813–814). Yet Traverso himself situates the text within Lukács’s Stalinist period which only ended in 1956, although he notes that it was started as early as the 1930s (cf. Koves 1997). Somehow ignoring that Stalin is unmentioned in the entire book, Traverso (2022: loc. 163) even accuses *Destruction of Reason* of furnishing “apologetic assessments” of Stalinism, suggesting (2022: loc. 109) that a reading of the text today requires less a consideration of the intellectual sources of Hitlerism, Lukács’s subject, but “[c]onfronting Stalinism instead of simply rejecting it with ethical and political arguments; reassessing its historical reasons without forgetting or forgiving its crimes.”

Defining Nietzsche and Paul de Lagarde as ‘ancestors’ of Hitler arouses a certain scepticism. According to Lukács, it does not matter whether Dilthey and Simmel were ‘witting forerunners of fascism’ or not, simply because, regardless of their intentions, their works do not escape ‘the objective dialectics of the development itself’. But this means reducing dialectic to teleology and intellectual history to a form of deterministic causality.

We note that if one were to grant this inference about Lukács, we would also have to increase our scepticism, one hundredfold, towards the more widely discussed epochal narratives of texts like *Dialectic of Enlightenment* or Heidegger’s “history of Beyng”. The issue here is that Lukács’s position is only dimly reflected in Traverso’s commentary, as it is in Adorno’s similarly brisk dismissal of the text (Adorno 2007: 166). In fact, the opening chapter of *Destruction of Reason* is devoted to a historical, economic, social and political analysis of Germany between 1789 and 1933; a choice reflecting Lukács’s materialist position that ideas have, at best, a relative autonomy from the socioeconomic realities informing them, which notably also moves his analysis in a materialist direction, beyond anything we find in Marcuse.

Destruction of Reason is far from situating philosophy as the *primum mobile* behind fascism, since philosophy itself as he sees it is not autonomous or self-causing (Snedeker 1985/86: 439). Lukács contends instead that the rise of “irrationalism” in Germany is one necessary condition, in the intellectual-ideological domain, for the later ascent of fascist demagoguery and terrorism. The book examines not how philosophy somehow could “cause” a mass movement, but how “philosophical formulations, as an intellectual mirroring of Germany’s concrete development towards Hitler, helped to speed up the process” (4). As such a specific condition, irrationalism is a product of the particular national conditions of Germany, the deracination of the intelligentsia, and the apologetic needs of the bourgeois and feudal remnants in their growing struggle against popular mobilization after 1789 and 1848. Its particular uptake within Germany, as against other European nations, reflected the unusually weak position of the bourgeois class, which after the revolutions of 1848 saw them shift from supporting the workers’ movements, into an uneasy anti-socialistic alliance with remnants of the Junker class (Snedeker 1985/86: 442–443). Then there is the lateness of German unification, from above, under Bismarck, together with the extraordinary rapidity with which the new nation industrialized and urbanized, becoming an imperial technological superpower whose cities, led by Berlin, were also at the vanguard of cultural and artistic experimentation (Eksteins 2002: 70–94).

“When, where and how such a – seemingly innocent – possibility [as irrationalist philosophy] turns into a dreadful fascist reality is not decided philosophically, in the philosophical realm”, Lukács underscores (32–33). The circulation of these imperialist-era ideologemes, as they developed in Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and then Weimar vitalists and racialist theorists, remained relatively small. To intellectual elites, they provided “comfort” in a period in which the progress of the sciences and modernization saw them increasingly marginalized, coupling a *faux* freedom (independent of real-world engagement or change) and a sense of “spiritual” superiority over the mass society which was shunning them (22–23; Ringer 1969; Löwy 1979: 22–67). Intellectuals would, as a matter of record, be amongst the quickest classes to “coordinate” under the new regime in 1933 (Eksteins 2002: 305–310; Fest 1970: 262). Nevertheless, Lukács argues, the influence of irrationalism percolated outwards, and

via universities, public lectures, the press, etc., these ideologies also spread to the broadest masses – needless to say in a coarsened form, but that strengthened rather than weakened their reactionary content, their ultimate irrationalism and pessimism ... (84)

In the case of interwar Germany, the peculiar political-economic conditions for the popular receptivity to irrationalist ideas still required the shock of the Great war, ignominious defeat in 1918, a punitive imperialist treaty, a failed social revolution, a stymied and unpopular parliamentary system, as well as the Great Depression and mass unemployment. To “transfer to the streets” the motifs of imperialist vitalism and racial theory, infused with the irrationalism cradled by Schelling and Schopenhauer and most militantly and artfully expressed in Nietzsche, Hitler, Rosenberg, et al. had to “strip them of everything ‘private’ and ‘spiritually high-flying’ and convert what was left into a determined and uncouth form of popular corruption” (85). With that said, Lukács underscores that only a “radically irrationalist worldview” could have supported fascism’s ability of “converting... anti-capitalist mass drifts... into the naked absolute dominance of monopoly capitalism” and, in Hitler’s case, a program of exterminatory imperialism (79–80).

National Socialist ideology itself was a demagogic “mish-mash” which developed out of the five recurrent features of irrationalism, tailored to speak to the despair, anguish, and desire for revenge of the Germans after World War I and Versailles. Its *bricolage* drew ideas and motifs from 19th-century vitalism in the celebration of dynamism, force, life, *kultur* versus the lifeless, mechanical (“Jewish” and/or

"Latin") *kivilization* allegedly uniting socialism with liberalism (Goebbels 1938), interpreted through the lens of racialist theory positing "Aryan", "Germanic", or "Nordic" supremacy, and the brutalization of the Front generation, with the celebration of industrialized war, the sacrificial heroism and *Frontsgemeinschaft* of the soldiers facing death (Eksteins 2002: 305–318). In Nazism, the irrationalist hostility to democratization and modernization was radicalized into a militant mass movement which set out brutally to crush liberal institutions and the socialist resistance. Epistemological aristocratism prepared educated elites to blink at the anti-democratic contempt of the movement leaders' rabble-rousing, avowed so clearly by the *Führer* in *Mein Kampf*. It found its political vulgarization in the faith of the *Volks-genosse* (fellow community members, compatriots), up to and including leading philosophers, that the providential "genius" and indomitable Will of Hitler and his henchmen would always find a way, even though this way and its rationale could not be discerned by the masses, let alone by strangers to the *Volk* (5). The philosophical critiques of reason in Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Spengler and dozens of other, lesser names, paved the way to the wholesale embrace of irrationalist myths, repackaged *via* demagogic baiting into an imperialist program to conquer a pan-European *Grossraum* in which Germans would expel or enslave other races through exterminatory violence, beyond and despite what Goebbels, Himmler, and other Nazis scornfully called "humanitarian sentimentality". Nazism racism, certainly, proposed itself in some propaganda, and in the aspirations of some of its intellectuals, as "scientific". But Lukács is reaffirmed by recent scholarship highlighting how, for Hitler, Rosenberg, and others, it was also conceived of as a mobilizing myth whose epistemic basis, according to leading "racial scientists" such as Hans Günther or L. F. Clauss, lay in the healthy, relativistic intuition of the racially superior Germanic people (Varshizky 2019, 2021). As Ernst Kriek explained, "'biological philosophy' ... signifies something intrinsically different from laying philosophical foundations with the existing specialist science of 'biology'", and Alfred Rosenberg rejoined that "soul ... means race as seen from within" (728; Varshizky 2012; Snedeker, 1985/86: 444).

This configuration is for Lukács nothing more than a direct, brutal, and conscious attack on the universalistic principles of the enlightenment, critical reasoning, as well as the forms of liberal, democratic, and socialist polity which they had promoted. As Goebbels would proclaim in 1938, relative to the Enlightenment's "equality of everything that bears a human form", the "authoritarian nationalism" of the

fascists represented something “essentially new”. “In it”, he underscored, “the French Revolution is superseded”, and the hated “ideas of 1789” destroyed (Goebbels 1938).

3. Bloch, fascism, irrationalism, and its non-synchronous bases

In both Lukács’s *Destruction of Reason* and Marcuse’s “Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State” we have now recovered assessments of fascism and its key ideological antecedents that deeply oppose those presented in Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and authors influenced by it. Unlike Adorno and Horkheimer, both Marcuse and Lukács extensively cite ideologists and theorists directly involved in these movements. These citations underscore the fascist thinkers’ undialectical, total opposition to what they perceive the Enlightenment to have propounded. Unlike Adorno and Horkheimer, these accounts highlight that, whereas of course fascist governments in power availed themselves of forms of administrative, strategic and technological rationality, they did so in the service of profoundly irrationalist ends, aiming to overthrow the egalitarian legacy of the Enlightenment in the name of wilful collective self-assertion. Whereas both thinkers identify a relativization of the claims of the sciences and shunning of “merely” materialist accounts of the economic dimensions of political life as defining marks of irrationalism, Lukács goes much farther than Marcuse in the direction of recovering a contextualist, materialist understanding of the social conditions which promoted irrationalist philosophizing, and its widespread dissemination. It is Lukács who pays more attention to the question of why, amongst the different monopoly capitalist societies of the 20th century, it was specifically Germany which first fostered the radical irrationalism of Marcuse’s “heroic-folkish realism”, then succumbed to National Socialism. It is a matter of what Lukács terms (1980: 717–718) the “German misery”: the ideological alchemy, appealing to damaged ethnic or national pride, of revalorizing forms of economic and cultural backwardness as signs of a more profound, imperilled spiritual condition.

The place of uneven development as a causal factor in explaining the ideological forms, and also the popular appeal of fascist mass movements, is the subject which our third thinker, Ernst Bloch in his 1935 work *The Heritage of Our Times*, elevates to the centre of the analyses of fascism in ways which arguably take his analyses of fascism beyond those of both Marcuse and Lukács (cf. Zipes 2019: 51–60). Like both of these thinkers, with whom he was a contemporary,

Bloch was under no illusion about the role philosophical and cultural irrationalism, and the attack on the “ratio”, played in the rise of fascism. For him as for Marcuse and Lukács, the Third Reich was not the direct product of rationality triumphant, or of its cunning, but of a reactionary embrace of the “Irratio”:

Age-old regions of utopia are thus being occupied by St Vitus’s dancers, the Germanic Romanticism of blood has gone down well with the petit bourgeois, has bugled up a whole army of *vehme* murderers and ‘Guardians of the Crown’... Their sinking... abandons even more the thin layer of reason of the ‘modern age’, brushes in falling very old modes of drive, ways of life and superstructures, and thereby provokes ‘Irratio’. So roughly and so full of warlike eroticism, so usefully as well for the darkest forms of imperialism, one of these young Nazis exclaimed: ‘You do not die for a program you have understood, you die for a program you love.’ (59; emphasis added)⁷

Like these two other Marxists, and unlike later critical theorists within the Western Marxist and post-structuralist lineages, Bloch also traced the ideological sources for the National Socialist’s irrationalist “intoxication” to differing forms of “romantic anti-capitalism” in the 19th century (62). Bloch would always distinguish between what he terms (1996: 274) the “salvation-line which leads from Hegel to Marx” and the “disaster-line [which] leads from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche and the consequences”. In the second half of *Heritage of Our Times*, in fact, Bloch traces his own genealogy of “the decay of bourgeois philosophy” which has made a mockery of older humanistic ideals of education (255). All the way-stations on this journey of decline into the irrationalism of proto-Nazi thinkers like Ludwig Klages and Oswald Spengler do not concern us here. Bloch sees this descent leading from the relativistic scepticism about objective truth of broadly liberal thinkers like Karl Mannheim to Spengler’s relativistic “morphologies” of different, incommensurable cultures. Like both Lukács and Marcuse, Bloch also sees the basic orientation of the phenomenological tradition, with its aim to go *beneath* conceptual mediation as leaving it powerless to arrest the slide, with “the retreat of the world-happy ego to the introverted one” in the face of Germany’s war experience and the subsequent socioeconomic shocks, into Heidegger’s elevation of anxiety before death – an experience deeply conversant with the Front generation heroized by the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) – to the precondition for “authentic existence” in genuine “community, of the *Volk*” (273, 279–82; cf. Losurdo 2001).

7. All unmarked page numbers in this section refer to Bloch (1990).

The terminus of Bloch's analyses of these thinkers is in his analysis of what he terms the "clever intoxication" of Klages.⁸ In a way oddly reminiscent of the epochal pessimism of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Klages sees the human development of consciousness and reason as a 10,000 year disaster (303). In a vulgarization of Nietzschean motifs, Socrates and Jesus mark "racially hostile" interventions on behalf of "international rationality" against the instincts (307). What needs to be recovered, then, is:

[t]he ego-death of heroic intoxication [which] passes through the warrior-death of the body, the ego-death of the magical Eros [which passes] through 'voluptuous-blissful ecstasy', in which the soul liberates its image like that of its visionary contents from the veneer of the millennia ... (306)

We can see that the details of Bloch's genealogy of fascist irrationalism converge with, but differ, from those of Marcuse and Lukács. The first principal difference between Bloch's account of fascist irrationalism comes in Bloch's emphasis on locating the *ratio* in the *irratio*, the true within the false. This constitutes a foundational aspect of Bloch's reconception of dialectical materialism and, notably, a salient part of his criticism of Lukács's view on expressionism in particular (143, 242–47; Bloch 2007: 16–28). In terms of reception, if Lukács's analysis of fascism has widely fallen to the wayside, in the English-speaking academy, Bloch's has often been misrepresented as itself giving way to post-Nietzschean irrationalism (cf. Rabinbach 1997). Bloch anticipates such misunderstandings.⁹ As he makes clear from the outset, even though he engages with the irrational, it is in the name of an expanded Marxism: "this book is a scuffle, moreover, in the midst of the ... enemy, in order to rob him if need be" (2). For Bloch as for Marcuse and Lukács, the Left's widespread failure to understand and take seriously Nazi ideology and its intellectual sources was, already in the 1930s, a grave strategic error. Going beyond his contemporaries, he argued for the need "to knock these forces out of the hands of reaction" – ideologies of "'life', 'soul', 'unconscious', 'nation',

8. Ludwig Klages was a member of the Stefan George Circle, Nietzschean philosopher, and proponent of *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life). He saw this philosophy as antithetical to Hegelian philosophy and its central tenets of reason and intellect.

9. Bloch emphasizes in the preface to *The Heritage of Our Times* that, however much space he devotes to irrationalist ideas, this does not constitute support for said ideas: "[o]ne more word to hinder misunderstanding, which likes to make itself comfortable. Even if this work speaks not only from above, even if it also considers all kinds of evil or glittering confusion, it still does not extend its so-called little finger to the devil." (4)

'totality', 'Reich' and similar anti-mechanisms", rather than leaving them uncontested in proponents of radical political reaction (2, 3; cf. Kellner n.d.). When irrationalist claims are viewed directly, Bloch stresses, they are to be uncovered as the "intoxicating deceit of fascism [which] serves only big business" (2) and distracts the declining social strata from the real socio-political causes of their growing anxieties about economic security. If viewed *indirectly*, however, one may find within this irrational "intoxication" a utopian trace which allows us to understand why it is that far right movements can manage, under conditions of socioeconomic instability, to capture large, impassioned mass bases (Rabinbach 1997: 6-7):

For capital, of course, it is ultimately extrinsic whether parliaments or generals 'rule', whether the Republic or the Third Reich provides the backdrop of true power. There is no doubt that from the contemporaneous-material viewpoint there is nothing in National 'Socialism' but 'anti-capitalist' demagoguery of total mendacity and insubstantiality. ... But the *seducibility* through these very illusions, the *material* of this seducibility still lies in a different region; here class contents of non-contemporaneous impoverishment are in mere service and predominant abuse by big business. (142-143)

Above all, and secondly, Bloch couples his intellectual analyses of Klages, Spengler, and other reactionary ideologues with nuanced analyses on the different classes' receptions of Nazi irrationalism. And it is this analysis which, we would argue, takes his position in *Heritage of Our Time* beyond not simply Marcuse's focus on ideas, but also Lukács's analysis of the material conditions for the popular successes of Nazi irrationalism. And, Bloch does so in ways which also potentially speak to today's political struggles. For Bloch, as for Lukács, in order to understand the rise of fascism, we need to acknowledge the decline of the German middle classes, brought about by the monopolistic development of capitalism in the imperialistic age (Geoghegan 1996): "the declining bourgeoisie, precisely because it is declining, contribute[s] elements towards the construction of the new world ..." (1). The previously cited passage already reveals the crux of Bloch's distinct account of the appeal of National Socialism in the Germany of the 1920s and '30s: the conception of the "non-contemporaneous" or "nonsynchronous". For Bloch, in terms of their ideas, worldview, experiences and material conditions, "[n]ot all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally" (Bloch 1997: 22). Especially in nations, like Germany, subject to rapid urbanization and industrialization at the turn of the 20th century, remnants of the past are kept alive in the present and may weigh "like a nightmare on the brain of

the living" (Marx, n.d.). Moreover, different classes become the carriers of different forms of historical consciousness: "[o]ne has one's times according to where one stands corporeally, above all in terms of classes" (Bloch 1997: 22). Classes left behind by rapid social and technological changes become "stuck in the past": "[t]imes older than the present continue to effect older strata; here it is easy to return or dream one's way back to older times" (Bloch 1997: 22).

Therefore, in such societies as the Germany of the Weimar Republic, we find entire strata of people who do not so easily fit into the latest modes of production and distribution, and who experience the Now not as a wonderful experiment in human creativity, but as a painful break from an idealized, simpler and more secure past. For such groups, like the German middle classes in Weimar, or workers whose farms and factories are unceremoniously shut down in the name of "inevitable progress", the promise of a New Life comes to be conceived on the basis of their Past, their heritage, and, in the case of Germany's peasant population, their continuing experiences of rural existence.

For Bloch, the interwar Left failed to understand the non-synchronous power of Hitler's movement, with its "idealistic" appeals to what Marcuse dubs "heroic-folkish realism" - "the folkish doctrine of family, caste, and nature" (53). As Bloch writes, in 1930s Germany, "the workers are no longer alone with themselves and their bosses. Many earlier forces, from quite a different Below, are beginning to slip between" (Bloch 1997: 22). In other words, the growing influence of the irrationalism we find *in extremis* in figures like Ludwig Klages, and which we've seen Lukács and Marcuse convergently analyse, represents for Bloch the ideological expression of non-synchronous elements of the German population, under conditions of uneven modernization in Weimar. If fascism succeeded, contra someone like Daniel Goldhagen (1996), it was not primarily because the German people were all incurably anti-Semitic. It was also because Nazi irrationalism spoke so powerfully to the sense of socioeconomic displacement and existential anxiety in the face of the New felt by many Germans, especially amongst the declining middle classes caught, as in pincers, between organized labour and increasingly cartelized forms of industry (Rabinbach 1997: 6-7, 11). As their economic condition became threatened with immiseration, they became potentially susceptible to the revolutionary appeal of the Marxist Left. However, given their memories and worldview, as well as the success of the far right in painting "materialistic" Marxism as "of a piece" with the "materialist" realities of big capital, they did not leap to the Left (53). Instead, it was

amongst this strata, as well as amongst threatened rural populations, that old ideas such as economic exploitation being wholly traceable to Jewish usury flourished. Likewise, Nazi claims that they belonged to a “Nordic race”, and appeals to “the power and honour of the land” (Bloch 1997: 26) – despite lacking “every connection with the way of life of the workers” (53) – assuaged these people for their own feelings of powerlessness. It was amongst the urban middle classes, indeed, that Bloch contends that the Nazi conjurings with deeply irrationalist longings to return from industrial capitalism to primitive ‘*participation mystique*’ resonated most irresistibly:

The *desire* of the white-collar worker not to be proletarian intensifies to orgiastic pleasure in subordination, in magic civil service under a duke. The ignorance of the white-collar worker as he searches for past levels of consciousness, transcendence in the past, increases to an orgiastic hatred of reason, to a ‘chthonism’. ... The reason: the middle class (in distinction to the proletariat) does not directly take part in production at all, but enters it only in intermediary activities, at such a distance from social causality that with increasing ease an alogical space can form in which primal drives and romanticisms, wishes and mythicisms come to the fore. (Bloch 1997: 26)

In short, for Bloch, the fascist irrationalism whose contours Lukács and Marcuse had analysed is tied to a form of Marxist analysis of the class bases of the reception of these ideas which goes beyond Lukács’s comparable attempt to diagnose the “German malaise” preceding and enabling Nazism’s success. Irrationalist ideas are not produced or selected for, nor do they seduce large numbers, under all social conditions. Nor can they be simply dismissed as archaic idiocies, from a secure position of assumed invulnerability, by intellectuals or progressive political movements. For Bloch, they are bound to succeed so long as societies’ developments are uneven, and the ascent of new forms and relations of production and lived experience come at the price of the exclusion and disenfranchisement of other strata. These form “storm corners of possible reaction”, and we have arguably been seeing over the last decades how neoliberal, globalized capitalism has continued to form such “storm corner”, and how political agents on the far right in different nations are continually able to exploit them for political capital (55).

Conclusion: The heritage of Marxian critiques of fascist irrationalism

This article has sought to recover from comparative neglect the critiques of fascist irrationalism which can be found in three significant

Marxists, Herbert Marcuse, Gyorgy Lukács, and Ernst Bloch. We have established that in these thinkers, National Socialism was understood in ways deeply opposed to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* and kindred accounts of fascism as the putatively inevitable triumph of modern, technological or administrative rationality. Each of these figures' accounts of fascism avoids what John Abromeit (2012: 426) has called the synchronic and diachronic "de-differentiation" in Adorno and Horkheimer's assessment of fascism – which collapses its distinctions from other forms of "State capitalism", liberal and socialist, and traces its origins back millennia, to pre-Socratic Greece. For each, the ideological sources of fascism, in contrast to these other regime-types, arose in 19th-century irrationalist reactions against modernization, industrialization, and the advent of mercantile capitalist societies: amongst the educated elites, in irrationalist philosophical motifs set down in Schelling, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche; in the more popular register, in forms of eugenics and racist teachings which proliferated in the imperialist period across Europe, then populist demagoguery. She who would talk of fascism, for these thinkers, need not talk of the cunning of a civilizational dialectic whose bases lie in something as basic to any collective action, Left or Right, as means-end reasoning. She who would oppose fascism, or contemporary forms of far right ethnonationalist authoritarianism, hence need despair neither of critical reason and its modern developments, nor of collective alternatives to the decline into the *Irratio* which seems once more to be upon us in this "post-truth" era of the regenerated Far Right.

There are extensive debates about whether contemporary political movements like Trumpism, or contemporary forms of authoritarianism, can be best understood as "fascist". Massive economic, social, and political changes have attended the interceding seven decades, between 1945's "zero hour" for European fascism (outside of Franco's Spain), and the period following the Global Financial Crisis (2008–9) which has seen the well-documented, international rise in the political stakes of far right parties and movements, as well as the online proliferation of forms of right-wing (or "Alt-Right") provocation and proselytizing. Scholars and activists need to be careful before simply "applying" insights from interwar, and immediately post-war, anti-fascist critiques to today's political struggles. With that said, given the evident commonalities between today's ethnonationalist, populist, authoritarian, anti-immigrant, anti-cosmopolitan, anti-liberal, and anti-socialist movements (such as Trumpism in the US) – as well as the common intellectual heritages adduced by Rightist

“thought leaders” such as Steve Bannon, Alain de Benoist, Richard Spencer, or Aleksandr Dugin (Beiner 2018; Sharpe 2020; Teitelbaum 2020) – to wholly ignore such theoretical sources would also seem to us to be reckless and potentially perilous.

We saw above how for both Marcuse and Lukács, one marker of fascist ideology was its denigration of the structuring socioeconomic conditions of political life: in theory, as “materialist” and “soulless”; in practice, as the raw materials to be reshaped by the world-forming “will” of heroized Leaders enjoying mythologized connections with their Peoples. Whereas Marcuse does not extensively consider the political-economic and class bases of fascist mobilization in Germany (part 1) – no more than Adorno and Horkheimer, and many forms of post-structuralist analyses – this becomes a grounding consideration in Lukács’s *Destruction of Reason’s* analysis of the “malaise” attending Germany’s rapid, uneven, and chaotic economic, political, and cultural modernization preceding 1933 (Part 2). Moreover, we saw in Part 3 how Bloch’s account of the non-synchronism of different classes coupled his analysis of fascist irrationalism to a socio-theoretical explanation of why the threatened German middle classes and rural populations felt powerfully drawn precisely to this “witch’s kitchen”. In this perspective, political irrationalism becomes at once an index of societies whose “progress” callously leaves too many people behind, and the opium of non-synchronous groups within them:

... the middle class cannot hold out *ideologically* within ‘rationalization’ and sacrifices *ratio* that much sooner, the more it has appeared to the middle class only in hostile form, doubly hostile. That is, it appears as a mere late capitalist rationalization and as a subversion of traditional intrinsic values – equally late capitalist, but understood as ‘Marxist-Jewish’. The superman, the blond beast, the biographical cry for the great man, the witches’ kitchen, of a time long past – all these signs of flight from relativism and nihilism, which had become the stuff of educated discussions in the salons of the educated upper classes, became genuine political land in the catastrophe of the middle class. (Bloch 1997: 27)

Does not Bloch’s analysis tellingly apply to the American middle classes today, outside of the coastal metropolises, including the old labour aristocracies associated with the secondary industries which “globalization” saw rapidly offshored, leaving ghost towns and mass unemployment in its wake? (Cf. Léger 2022). The objective contradictions of neoliberalism have overturned the previously advantageous position of this class and increased alienation through the offshoring of manufacturing, rising costs of living, declines in real wages (outside of managerial and financial elites), loss of access to quality education

and services, and the increasing commodification of everyday life. Surely, the Left should not be surprised, Bloch's analysis suggests, when the resulting pent-up anger has activated not alliances with the inner city progressive forces – let alone with social movements like Black Lives Matter, defending other, structurally disadvantaged members of American society – but a popularizing of far right ideologues which appeal to imaginary, idealized pasts, from a (deunionized) monocultural 1950s, via reinstated “Judaean-Christian values”, into lurid fantasies of colonialist-era prerogatives over peoples of colour, and walled ethnostates (Cf. Hendricks 2021). To combat today's rising tide of ethnonationalist irrationalism, the analyses presented here suggest, a democratic-socialist Left instead needs to reach out to economically declining and imperilled groups. Whilst continuing to oppose all forms of intergroup and inter-racial prejudice, and to decry the sometimes-exotic irrationalism and inhumanity of many far right claims, it needs also to provide viable socioeconomic and political alternatives which can restore the dignity and security of all those immiserated by the inhumanities of neoliberal capitalism, to prevent the non-synchronous appeal of irrationalist fantasies of lost “greatness” drawing millions in with their false, hate-filled promises.

The analyses of fascism as based ideologically in “heroic-folkish” irrationalism which Herbert Marcuse, Gyorgy Lukács, and Ernst Bloch provide us hence deserve reconsideration today, both as comparatively neglected, vital chapters in intellectual history, and as sources of orientation in present struggles against Far-Right, authoritarian ethnonationalisms. Developing more discerning theoretical understandings of fascism, its socioeconomic preconditions, and the sources of its ideological appeal, is of course in no way sufficient to prevent the scourge of these political movements. It is however a necessary task if the latter are to be opposed – a long and multi-dimensional struggle to which we hope to have contributed theoretically here.

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