Responding To Fascist Organizing

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The great economist and early anti-statist thinker Bastiat famously pointed out the way our attention is often drawn to the most immediate, losing sight of the wider array of consequences and causations. Such myopia is how modern statism flourishes, obscuring the threat of the policeman's pistol and the swing of his truncheon, so that a proposed tax for instance is sliced away from all context and rendered into a seemingly inert, docile thing.

Through centuries of hard fought progress the public has increasingly grown adverse to violence and explicit acts of domination. It is impossible to understate the accomplishment this represents. And yet our rulers have compensated not by lessening their brutality but by obscuring it. Every sociopath intuitively knows to exploit the limits of human attention through complicated misdirection. What is seen is a politician standing before an adoring crowd, what may go unseen is the brutality their policy depends upon, the threat they implicitly make.

A society might appear peaceful and idyllic, with acts of brutality not only invisible but entirely absent, and yet "that peace" be the result of the threat of incredible violence. If the citizens of a totalitarian regime do not resist, do not incur repression, but simply hang their heads in submission, it would be wrong to say no violence or aggression is present. And yet a particularly bureaucratic soul might look around and dismiss the claims of the oppressed, might demand that they lay their bodies on the line to make visible the implicit threat of the state, and even then dispute that there is *not enough data.* Might request that their bodies be stacked ever higher to "prove" the systematic nature of the threat. And god forbid the threat be delayed, the promise be made years out of violence to come. When the implicit but very clear threat is, "We will murder you and your entire family. Not today. But soon. Once our power has finished growing. Resist now and die then."

Such violent "peace" is not exclusively the product of the state. It sneaks into human affairs on all levels. It shapes and twists our society, our economy. The gangster in the streets whose theft is tolerated, even made invisible, uncommented upon, because the threat is perceived as so overwhelming. The "Move along, n—-r" that contains mutually understood volumes of collective threat, the word resonating and cutting with centuries of lynchings and beatings behind it, but its meaning deniable in an instant. "How do you knoooow I meant that as a threat?" and a flash of white teeth at the interlocutor. Such implicit violence becomes fractional, fungible. Not every use of a racial epithet contains it in full, but they often trade off the watered down possibility of violence. What is 1/200th of a threat of lynching, or a beating? Violence suffuses our world,

it flows unseen through complex circuits, accumulates in silent but vast reservoirs, rearranging and curtailing what is possible.

When fascists or white nationalists talk of "voluntary" ethnic cleansing we all know what they mean. The word "voluntary" is a laughable tissue, the confident sneer of a bully who knows how to play within the shortsighted rules, but wants almost all observers to note his audacity, and to — in letting it pass — demonstrate their own weakness. A detailed threat is delivered by mail and deniable reference to it made in person. The game is simple. One oily fascist wears his suits in front of the cameras while a broader ecosystem of fascists delivers the violence. People of color are murdered for sport, anti-racist activists are assassinated, prison nazis sand off people's skin and dump their bodies in public. Shaggy sings, "it wasn't me."

They know it's a game, their with-a-wink pretenses of distance, "nazism was about a particular historical context", "I have my critiques of Hitler", "oh I don't hang with those specific guys" are never meant to stand firmly, they're more about poking fun at the self-constraint of formal systems and dissolve under even a moment's scrutiny.

When neonazis march through a town their action is precisely that: an action. A demonstration of force. A threat. A two part declaration: "We will exterminate you. Here are the tools we will use, the strength we have amassed for the task." Its character is hardly invisible to those targeted.

And yet, true to form, most liberals are seemingly incapable of recognizing the act for what it is, of looking beyond their noses to any semblance of context. In the liberal's mind a march of goosestepping nazis carrying weapons through a black neighborhood is just a parade of people with bad opinions.

Similarly when a representative of a neonazi group sets up a table at a metal show or steps before the cameras the oh-so-astute public notices that they're not murdering anyone at the moment. Just recruiting people to murder in the future. Like the army recruiter that likewise preys on disaffected youth the public largely cannot see such recruitment as inextricable from a larger mechanism of violence. The very point of such individual acts of recruitment is to add up into an unstoppable army when it finally decides to initiate force en masse.

Yet just as the state's necessarily simplistic legal system discretizes every single action, stripping away vital context, so too have the public's moral analytic capacities atrophied to only recognize the most immediate, the most apparent. There's utility to such constraint in certain arenas, we would never want to give the state the capacity to determine what discourse is permissible, or to prosecute nazis for their beliefs (despite conservative hysteria by all accounts the vast majority of antifascist activists are anarchists who have consistently opposed state legislation and the "antifa bolts" famously stand for opposition to Bolshevism as well as fascism). The reality is that every individual is capable of greater perception and intelligence than the state, of directly seeing realities the state is structurally incapable of parsing. When a trusted friend tells you someone raped them you'll likely cancel your date with him, even if your friend's testimony alone wouldn't and shouldn't be sufficient to convict in a court of law. As autonomous individuals we can and should take actions that based on our more intimate and direct knowledge — knowledge it would be impossible to systematize or make objective in some legal system. It will always be possible to construct threats of violence sufficiently obscured as to be rendered invisible or plausibly deniable to some observers but crystal clear to the recipient(s). This is one of the innate failings of codified justice systems, abstracted to some level of collectivity, and part of the reason ethics enshrines individual agency above legality.

If the first step on the road to fascism is blinding ourselves to its violence, the second step is denying our agency to respond.

Let us be absolutely clear though that formal "fascism" and the broader white nationalist ecosystem around it constitutes but one type of authoritarianism. While its aspirations are grave and its spectre is on the rise, there are many other flavors of authoritarianism alive in our world, currently wielding far more power. These authoritarianisms are presenting killing far far more people than some scrawny white nationalist pricks hanging out in /pol/ and occasionally shooting up protesters, and these other authoritarianisms absolutely must be countered.

But. Nevertheless the history of the last century overwhelmingly shows that fascism constitutes a relatively unique threat that must be diligently resisted, lest certain dynamics particular to it otherwise spiral into runaway growth. The threat it poses to ethics, modernity and to civilization is always present (despite its occasional opportunistic adoption of those mantles), it can be countered, but to do so requires us to get serious. To understand its function and its motivation.

There are broadly two common sources of authoritarianism:

The first is a kind of inane and "edgy" consequentialism that, upon realizing ends can justify means, leaps to grab onto the most stupid and violent of means. If you want to bake a blueberry pie then obviously you should ban independent press and gulag all the kulaks. While these authoritarians sometimes start with relatable aims, their misstep is to view "power" as a universal currency and without externalities. At some point they internalize the assumption that if you want to get ___ done you should obtain power, whereupon you will just be able to do it. They fail to grasp that some ends are impossible to accomplish through social control and coercion, and that such means have tendencies of their own. This authoritarianism is the blind tantrum of a child demanding that their parents make water less wet. Its watchwords are "There should be a law." Obviously it's the dominant form of authoritarianism found in liberals and socialists.

The second kind of authoritarianism views power not as a means but as an ends. In practice these are typically people for whom the unfortunate homo sapiens preoccupation with social standing has festered into a blistering wound. In this virulent pathology power is near enough to the sole ends in life and everything else is a delusion that risks rendering you instrumental in someone else's power. This ideological sociopathy is utterly uninterested in reality. To paraphrase Scott Alexander, there are no philosopher Trumps. Fascism has from the start demonstrated a well documented postmodern mutability, happily contorting its stated beliefs or tenets into all kinds of incoherencies and absurdities. This sort of authoritarian intuitively understands discourse as just another arena of positioning and ideology as just another shell game. Every statement is reduced into terms of affect, allegiance, and the disruption of any process that might be bent by the pressures of objectivity. Karl Rove's "We make our own reality" hangs among a pantheon of other Orwellian admissions by this sort of authoritarian. This form of authoritarianism is widespread among conservatives, who often admit to seeing liberal democracy or even religion as useful lies when pressed. And individuals with such nihilistic perspectives can be found in literally any social space — certainly inclusive of social justice movements — usually acting as predators and climbing social ladders. But its most consistent and large-scale ideological expression lies in fascism.

There are of course in practice many other niche mutations and subspecies of authoritarianism. One increasingly prominent example are reactionaries who seek to disable and impede technological capacity — ideologically committed to a world of immediatism or a return to some 'essential human nature', they seek impose a material state of affairs where possibility is dramatically

curtailed. If you bomb everyone back to the stone age then you no longer need active jailers to prevent creativity and connection, the muddy ruined landscape itself provides the constraint. In such case the kernel of authoritarianism lies in the ideological fixation, the hunger for a certain simplicity, that is then achieved through the suppression of others' options. But like other niche expressions such an authoritarianism is thankfully still quite rare.

What's important to note is that every species of authoritarianism demands a different response.

The authoritarianism of a liberal or socialist, being instrumental and arising from profound ignorance, lacks a self-awareness and can be effectively challenged in debate. That is not of course necessarily to say that the authoritarian liberal or socialist will themselves retreat from their ridiculous policies upon evidence, but that they lack the conscious duplicity to really prepare for counter-evidence. Bring to light the vicious physical brutality hidden in their cigarette tax or the clear ludicrousness of a transitional dictatorship that will "wither away" to create a free society and the sincere liberal or socialist is left spinning in circles, trying to find places of retreat on the fly, the ineptitude of their proffered means apparent to all direct observers, and defanged of serious recruiting capacity.

Nothing could be less the case with a nazi. An actual fascist is well aware that some proposed policy may not have much of a leg to stand on. They are *prepared* for objective reality to line up against them. They know at heart that their race statistics are often false, misrepresented, or actually evidence for the reverse of their claims and insinuations. Not only does this *not matter* to them, they strategize from the beginning with it in mind. A fascist cares only about the landscape of power and how they can shift it to make them "win". I want to be clear here: the problem isn't merely that they're arguing in conscious bad faith, fascists have no monopoly on that — nor even do authoritarians — the problem is what this arises from: a hunger for social power, and how fundamental it is to their position. Fascist recruitment doesn't function in terms of persuasion, it functions in terms of promises of power.

Authoritarian personalities flock to movements that promise them comfortably easy solutions, but more self-aware authoritarians flock to movements that promise them power.

The primary recruitment tool of the fascist is the *appearance* of power.

This is why fascists — and those other self-aware authoritarians in their general orbit including Stalinists and Maoists — focus so strongly on aesthetics and rituals that reinforce perceptions of broad popularity, community, strength-by-association and general social standing. Those movements that only whine, offering victimization narratives and promises of power without any tangible content to them, rarely recruit any lasting base of self-aware authoritarians (although a few will surreptitiously set up shop to prey upon the few true believers and deadenders). Appearance of strength and legitimacy is everything, without it fascist movements dry up. No self-aware authoritarian wants to back a loser cause.

This is why refusing fascists the legitimization of a platform and violently countering their rallies has worked so well historically. The authoritarian base that fascists recruit from, don't share the instincts of proponents of liberty, they aren't attracted to underdogs with no hope, they aren't compelled to self-sacrifice in defense of the weak, they're attracted to supermen on the rise. When a nazi gets up on a stage to call for genocide his arguments don't matter, it's the potency of the act, the very fact that he was able to get on that stage and say such things in the first place, that recruits.

Fascists make a mockery of debate intentionally, in the authoritarian mind it's inherently just positioning and only fools take ideas seriously. From such a perspective the fascist that discards the existing norms, that dances around in a flagrantly bad faith way, demonstrates a kind of strength in honesty. The only honesty, in their mind, being that truth and ideas don't matter. Power matters, power through deception and manipulation — the capacity to get someone to put you on a stage, in a position of respect, despite your flagrant dishonesty — and power through physical strength — the capacity to march in the open, in great numbers, with weapons, with muscles, trappings of masculinity, displays of wealth, etc. Widespread mockery *can* hurt fascists by demonstrating their unpopularity, but so long as they have other sorts of power to fall back on the fascist can simply tell himself "this is the real power, this is the only thing that actually matters, what those people have is fake and hollow, that they will be overthrown."

Regardless of whether or not you agree with it or consider it ethical, people punch fascists because it frequently works.

When you hurt a proponent of liberty we flock to each other's aid, when you hurt an authoritarian other authoritarians are instinctively disgusted by his weakness and most scuttle further away. Sure, a tiny embittered core remains, some fools without the self-awareness of their own authoritarianism and other authoritarians now too invested to escape, and some misguided defenders of underdogs might come to their aid, but the compounding growth of the movement is derailed: few authoritarian personalities feel much inclined to join a bunch of powerless whiners.

There are, of course, complexities. Many authoritarian communists, for instance — despite similar totalitarian aspirations as explicit fascists — vary in degrees of self-awareness among their base about their hunger for power. Movements like Stalinism and Maoism depend on broad bases of leftist fools who swallow the simplistic doublethink necessary to see Assad or Bob Avakian as noble oppressed underdogs. Still, when anarchists have fought them in the streets, as for example in Athens or Minneapolis, there has appeared to result a shrink in their base, or at least a blunting of their power. Certain currents in today's alt-right follow a comparable dynamic, mixing self-aware authoritarians alongside psuedo-libertarian fools who swallow the doublethink necessary to see people organizing for racial genocide as allies and feminist media reviewers as dire enemies.

It will certainly be the case that the tactics and strategies employed with such success against boneheads in the 80s that drove them off the streets and largely dissolved their ranks will transfer in their entirety to the fight against garbage-tier memelords like Richard Spencer, but it also does not appear that antifascist groups are copying them over fullcloth. There have been many eras and contexts of resistance to fascism, with many differences between them. The awkward dance of someone like Spencer as opposed to an outright prison nazi is to try to look like a hardass to cement his base while playing the victim for liberals to milk them of prestige and legitimacy. This is not an easy dance, and is prone to derailment from multiple fronts.

We are in a new landscape, and people oppose fascism from all sorts of angles and perspectives, it is up to us to find effective means of countering them. To flood the market of antifascist resistance, as it were, with diverse innovations and let the best rise on their own. But we should also not neglect the lessons of the past and insights of antifascists in communities throughout time and around the world. When an army is being built, when it is rolling toward you, is not the time to debate it, or to snicker in complacency at its lies and contradictions. When a force openly plans to exterminate you, we cannot afford the naivety of waiting for it with open arms — as Gandhi advised people do of the Third Reich — hoping you will last long enough to dis-

solve it from the inside. When generals talk of plans to invade and suppress free speech, when politicians propose legislation to bar freedom of movement, you do not waste time worrying if your resistance will in the process undermine the free speech or freedom of movement of those generals and politicians. You resist.

Anarchists and libertarians come in many stripes, consequentialist and not.

Personally — as a consequentialist seeking to maximize the liberty of all — my perspective is straightforward: while there are externalities to some acts to stay mindful of, and we have social norms and detentes of significant value, one cannot afford to take a reactive stance, to merely wait while fascists mobilize — drunk on their own perception of power — and hope for the best. There are dangers, slippery slopes, and corruptive human instincts to watch out for in our resistance, but such demand vigilance not total abstention or a bureaucratic shortsightedness.

On the other hand those who closely heed to pacifism or non-aggression in good faith must still ask themselves when an act or threat of violence despite being obscured or 'unseen' is still a pressing one, what proportionality and prioritization looks like, what preparations are called for before the seen "moment" of aggression, and generally what can still be done to counter fascist organizing efforts on all fronts. Even if you oppose punching a nazi leader, there's still much that can be done. If nazis march through a town in a demonstration of force, show up with your own guns ready to fire back. When nazis organize online, systematically disrupt and expose their efforts. Yes, today's alt-right is a mealymouthed lot, mixing self-aware authoritarianism with whiny pretenses of libertarianism, and much can be accomplished peeling off the small swamp of useful fools they depend upon, forcing into the light the audacity of their pretense to the accomplishments of liberty while fetishizing nationality and borders — a claim of collective ownership as absurd as any Soviet gosplan proclamation and inherently murderous and totalitarian in implementation. But we must recognize that claims to the legacy and aspirations of liberty are rarely made with any sincerity. The core of these people are not mistaken about means, their authoritarianism is not the idiotic quick-solution authoritarianism of most liberals and socialists; their draw is power itself. The boneheads and trolls slathering at the thought of genocide and apartheid are open enemies of discourse and rationality itself. They believe they can bypass debate, derail it, make a mockery of it, use it to hide the circuits of their violence, the shell game of their aggression. They believe that physical force is the only thing that matters. We cannot afford to ignore that language.

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