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| National Socialism and Fascism |
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| To appreciate that the various forms of fascism, particularly German National Socialism under Adolf Hitler’s *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP, National Socialist German Workers' Party commonly known as the Nazi Party; 1920–1945) and Italian Fascism under Benito Mussolini’s *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF, National Fascist Party; 1922–1943), are embedded within modernism, one must first recognize that the reality and horror of the Holocaust has distorted our understanding of Nazism in three significant ways. First, until at least the early 1990’s the crude anti-Semitism of National Socialists like Julius Streicher (1885–1946) and Johann van Leers (1902–1965) prevented scholars from taking seriously the notion that National Socialism is an ideology that intellectuals helped define. Secondly, because anti-Semitism did not obviously manifest itself among Italian modernists and fascists, it discouraged comparison. Thirdly, starting in the 1950s many surviving National Socialists, who were formerly passionate SS-intellectuals like Sigrid Hunke (1913–1999) (Poewe 2011) or like the Head of the Press Division of Ribbentrop’s Foreign Office Paul Karl Schmidt (1911–1997) (Plöger 2009), among many others, re-invented themselves. |
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Thirdly, starting in the 1950s many surviving National Socialists, who were formerly passionate SS-intellectuals like Sigrid Hunke (1913–1999) (Poewe 2011) or like the Head of the Press Division of Ribbentrop’s Foreign Office Paul Karl Schmidt (1911–1997) (Plöger 2009), among many others, re-invented themselves. They now were anti-Hitlerites, condemned the Holocaust, masqueraded as human rights activists and wrote best-selling books that continued to espouse National Socialist dreams whether in the guise of new sagas describing bonds between medieval Germanic knights and Arabic Islam or revising World War II crimes as heroic episodes. Paul Karl Schmidt, later known as Paul Carell, who argued, using the pseudonym P. C. Holm, that Egyptian Pharaohs created the foundation of Occidental culture, was also an advisor to Axel Springer (1912–1985), one of the most famous German journalists and founder-owner of the Axel Springer Publishing firm. Their activities and motivations remained unnoticed until recently. Modernity and Destiny Myths To discuss National Socialism and Fascism as embedded in modernism, one can do no better than to start with Roger Griffin’s (2007) findings based on the method of synoptic historical interpretation whereby he examined large numbers of secondary sources to establish two ideal types and so uncover their deeper structural kinship. The virtue of the quest for a synoptic historical interpretation is that it provides an overarching analytical framework using generic concepts that help locate facts that would otherwise remain distributed in uncountable specific histories and memoirs, making comparison unmanageable. The two ideal types are captured by Griffin’s notion of ‘maximalist definitions of modernism’ and ‘generic fascism’ (339, 349). Maximalist modernism refers to the fact that modernist poetics and literary tropes pertaining to decadence and renewal become palingenetic (rebirth) myths. The obsession with myths, epics and sagas is correct, but Nazi modernist poets and writers constructed destiny myths. Either way, Griffin is right to argue that these myths provide simultaneously an internally coherent worldview and an ideological rationale for political programs and radical actions in the real world, convincing even the reluctant that their perceived religiously reactionary modernity will be rushed into dying to make room for the grandeur of the new synthesis already at hand (Griffin 339).  In Nazism specifically these myths and sagas point back to ‘being’ by which is usually meant a primal, mythical or primitive community culture that seeks ‘planetary domination’ of its own specific type or race (Faye 2009: 290). In order to do so, it must jettison Judeo-Christian modernity and create an alternative modernity that is authentically Germanic, Nordic, Indo-Germanic or, as more recently envisioned by an SS mentee, is based on medieval bonds between Germanic knights and those from the world of Arabic Islam (Poewe 2011). As Roger Eatwell points out, fascists see the world as divided into nations, ‘though the nation should not necessarily be equated with existing states or ethnic groupings’ (1996, 313).  Nazism and fascism generally, as Eatwell contends (1996, 313–314), fuse to the point of oneness radical politics and fanatical religion, worker and soldier, spirituality and cathartic violence, metaphysics and science, weapons of destruction and female seclusion, banal killing grounds and havens of birth (*Lebensborn*). This radicalism of oneness – Karl Löwith’s ‘pure call’, Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss’ ‘decisive call of destiny’, Carl Schmitt’s ‘decisionism’ ­­– ‘rejects all discussion and all agreement because it relies solely and exclusively on itself’ (Faye 2009, 9, 19). And the ‘itself’ is the ‘communal destiny of people united by blood’ (ibid: 19). Fascism and ‘Organic’ Modernity According to Griffin’s framework, maximalist modernism transcends the division in fascist studies between those who regard fascism as *one form* of political and cultural modernity and those who see it as a ‘reaction *against* modernity’ (348). Fascism becomes part of a higher synthesis of modernism within which (Italian) Fascism and (German) Nazism are simultaneously specific *forms* as well as particularly radical *reactions* against the stubborn continued existence of modernity that defied both the malaise following, and the caesura of, Europe’s bloody First World War.  To Griffin then ‘the hallmark of fascism … is that it operated as a political form of modernism in the maximalist, primordialist sense, both as movement (a – revitalization movement’) and regime (a ‘modernist state’), based explicitly on an organic conceptions of nation’ (348). To drive home the point that fascism is a genuine ideology (Eatwell 1996, 303), two concepts in Griffin’s one sentence definition deserve a closer look, namely ‘organic’ and ‘primordial’. The organic notion was particularly popular in Nazi literature. It was found in the early writing of Hans Naumann (1921) as well as the later work of Martin Heidegger (Faye 2009). The basic Nazi slogans, namely, *Volk*, *Führer*, *Volksgemeinschaft* (‘community of one people’) and *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* (‘community of one destiny’) are crude reductions of Hans Naumann’s ‘anthropological’ theory about primitive (in the sense of primordial) community culture. He contrasts the latter with popular or mass culture and with high culture or civilization. Organic holism refers to the natural growth of such a primordial community culture without external enhancements – no fertilizers or pesticides if one thinks of plants. As said earlier, for Nazis to move forward they must first go back to a time of pre-modernity, pre-history or pre-civilization. And pre-civilization has two meanings. First, since civilization refers to having ‘covered over’ basic human existence (Adamson 1990, 366), it is a form (*Art)* of modernity that is foreign and imposed; to return to pre-civilization means removing the enemy of race-specific growth. But secondly, pre-civilization also refers to the sense that Nazis have of themselves as being the source of civilization, so that Nazism is simultaneously a primordial, Manichaean, and elitist form of bio-cultural nationalism. ‘Great’ or Charismatic Personalities Naumann’s notion of primitive community culture, recoded first as *Reich* then as nation, followed by Indo-Germanic, after the war by ‘Europe as Nation’ or *Nation Europa*, was important because it preserved, while continuously growing, an eternal cultural treasure left behind by ancient great leaders and past elites. In Naumann’s thinking, this cultural treasure becomes a source of sacred power when brilliant personalities tap into it to move their people forward. In other words, great personalities, conscience and intellect are the product of elites at the same time that they produce them. What is important, therefore, is not democracy but a tone setting ‘aristocracy’ led by its style-specific ‘charismatic personality’ so that between them leadership issues are settled. And this is similar in Italian Fascism (Adamson 1990, 366). More fascinating, this eternal return of elites and charismatic leaders from and to the one primordial community culture excludes Judeo-Christianity without having to say so explicitly. Rather, the community is its own religion and, simultaneously, a religious political force. Race Theories and Monistic Thinking Thus the lewd anti-Semitic and anti-Christian propaganda of Johann von Leers, once welcomed as slogans, largely disappeared after 1938 – although von Leers carried on after the war. Instead, emphasis shifted to Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss’s (1892–1974) racial psychology, Stengel von Rutkowski’s (1908–1992) bio-cultural approach, Hans F. K Günther’s (1891–1968) raceology and the imagined ‘hard science’ approach to race hygiene and human heredity studies of the Baur-Fischer-Lenz texts published by the J. F. Lehmann firm starting in 1922.  Rutkowski, one of the SS-*Ahnenerbe* intellectuals, called his perspective ‘culture-biological’ (1943a, 11). Arguing that races are ‘not constant’, he pinpointed his difference with Clauss as follows: ‘Race is exactly not a once and for all firm ‘Gestalt’, as the phenomenologist and psychologist Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss claims, but is a carefully bred (*herausgezüchtete*) community of characteristic hereditary disposition’ (Rutkowski 35). According to Rutkowski, race, *Volk*, space and idea or Geist were united in that race is the biological substance of Volk; space is the natural environment of Volk; and Geist is the Volk’s artistic, historical-cultural and traditional expression. According to him, the Nazi issue was ‘this revision of the humanities’ into a Haeckelian solely biological-monistic world picture (Rutkowski 98). Thus monism here means ‘seeing unity (*Einheit*) and being (*Wesen*) as simply serving life’ in opposition to seeing a ‘multiplicity of forms serving the constitution of a state’. In Rutkowski’s thinking, democrats ask about ‘the milieu, citizenship, and votes’ instead of ‘predisposition or nature, völkisch or racial being, and inner entitlement or authorization’ (1943b, 12).  That Hitler’s view of religion and race was also based on Ernst Haeckel’s monism is brought out by Voegelin (1990, 124–129). Likewise, this monistic or unifying tendency also underpins Italian and Romanian fascism so that medical, cultural, political and national merge into an overarching radical biocultural perspective, and indeed, a radical biopolitics embracing a totalitarian state and ethnic supremacy (Turda 2009).  Fascism, and specifically Nazism, as Eatwell (1996), Griffin (2007) and Faye (2009) note, is first and foremost primordial ‘being’ bred to high achievement within a homogenous community of destiny. SS-intellectuals understood this to mean that the *Third Way* that they actively sought to construct is, following Haeckel and Spengler, monistic. After the war, surviving SS-intellectuals recoded it into being Unitarian (Poewe 2011). Consequently, race was simultaneously myth and science, biology and cultural expression. Herman Wirth’s *Die Ura Linda Chronik* (1934) was as history of Nordic antiquity a forgery but as mythology, it was Himmler’s Nordic bible that served, moreover, as a blueprint for routine ‘scientific’ (*wissenschaftlich*) research involving biology, race, eugenics, weather, geography, art, language, Gemanic pre-history and the humanities generally and of the social sciences *Volkskunde* (especially, research of sagas), psychology and anthropology (Longerich 2008). *Aufbruch* and Futurism Part of the destructive power unleashed when Nazis and other Fascist movements put their constructions to practical use lay with their recognition, as Griffin’s (2007, 9–11) work shows, that a mere break with historical modernity would simply continue the process of countervailing modernism, making Nazism or Fascism but one of many countercultural sub-currents. Instead, the Nazi idea was that of *Aufbruch*, meaning uprooting the shattered world of yesterday (Griffin 9). *Aufbruch*, not only as mood but also as will, announces the intention to *uproot* *and destroy* the existing (foreign) historical lineage of modernity altogether and replace it with another. To the SS*-*intellectuals of Himmler’s think tank *Ahnenerbe* (Ancestral Heritage), it meant replacing the entire Judeo-Christian tradition ­– that in their view engendered and nourished the decadent modernity ­–with an alternativeone rooted in an assumed distinct primordial monistic tradition and heeding their destiny to be creators or ‘founders’ of all ‘human culture’ (ibid: 316).  Because Fascism works with specific national cultures, it is not difficult to note differences within the similarities. Thus while Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) recognized and solicited ideas from intellectuals and writers organized in cultural groups and around journals, like *La Voce* in Italy, Himmler (1900–1945) and Rosenberg (1893–1946) established numerous think tanks to do the same. And while Italy worked with the Roman archetype and Nazism hearkened back to what was alternately called Germanic or Nordic tradition, both espoused elements of Futurism, intending to destroy Judeo-Christianity in order to replace it with an alternative modernity. What we hear here are the words of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): ‘negating *and destroying* are conditions of saying Yes’ (qtd in Griffin 2007, 60). Radical fascists ran with it. |
| Further reading:  (Adamson)  (Eatwell)  (Faye)  (Griffin)  (Günther)  (Longerich)  (Plöger)  (K. O. Poewe)  (K. Poewe)  (S. v. Rutkowski)  (S. v. Rutkowski)  (Turda)  (Voegelin) |