

How Fascism Works: A Reply To Peter Ludlow

How Fascism Works is devoted to explaining fascist politics. The book is devoted, that is, to a description of a specific ideology and set of tactics to gain power. It is composed of ten chapters. Each chapter is devoted to a distinct aspect of fascist ideology and propaganda. I understand fascist ideology as a *spectrum concept*. An ideology can be *more or less* fascist, depending upon how many of these ten distinct characteristics it embraces. For example, a traditional caste based system is one that rests on a hierarchy of value. Such a system overlaps in one of ten ways with fascism. However, fascist hierarchies of value are based on *social Darwinism* – the topic of the concluding chapter. In *fascist* ideology, the chosen group is worth more not because of religious tradition, but because they have proven to be superior in a struggle between different ethnic groups. Fascism is a spectrum concept. Many world views or ideologies that are not particularly fascist overlap in one or more respects with fascism.

The point that fascism is a spectrum concept is worth belaboring, since critiques, for example due to [Oliver Traldi](#) and [Peter Ludlow](#), that take my book to be unfair to conservatives must of necessity gloss over it. Let's consider another species of totalitarian ideology – communism. Communism is an ideology that suppresses freedom and has enabled horrendous crimes. Fidel Castro was a communist. In communism, there is universal health care provided by the government. Bernie Sanders is also in favor of universal health care provided by the government. But Bernie Sanders is not Fidel Castro. Bernie Sanders is not a communist. Communism, too, is a spectrum concept.

In the analysis in How Fascism Works, fascism has ten distinct aspects. Nevertheless, I think many of these aspects are related. As I argue in my book, they are related in that they place ultimate value on loyalty to an ethnic group. As a consequence, fascists are inclined to feel justified in employing political tactics that favor winning in the struggle, rather than reasoned debate (I believe that a movement can be very high on the fascist spectrum if the representative of the ethnic national identity is, for example, a political party, rather than a single person). Of course, not only fascist ideology justifies employing political tactics that favor winning in the struggle over reasoned debate. What distinguishes fascist ideology is its *particular* justification for the employment of illiberal tactics. The book is largely a description of this justification, which is (roughly) that primacy of loyalty to an ethnic national identity is based on group social Darwinism. Life is a struggle for supremacy between groups, and that national group has supposedly proven itself as superior in struggle over time, over other national groups – having distinguished itself for example in the past by a great military empire, or by unrivaled civilization building achievements.

So, fascism is a spectrum. But let's be clear: fascism is by definition right wing – for example, hostile to liberal democracy, patriarchal, and keen on military triumphalism. The fact that there is conceptual overlap between it and other views right wing and conservative ideologies is not a fault of my presentation but of the ideologies themselves. By contrast, if I was writing a book about totalitarianism, my analysis would obviously encompass such leaders as Hitler and Zedong, Mussolini and Stalin -- it would cross the right-left spectrum. But this is a book about fascism and I cannot change its most basic features -- that it is politically far-right. My project was to analyze these very features, not to redefine what we mean by fascism altogether.

With this background, it's easy now to address the charge that the book conflates fascist ideology with less extreme conservative ideologies, and fascist politics with less extreme conservative politics. Since there are several different varieties of less extreme conservative politics, which differ from country to country, for the sake of concreteness, let's take two in particular: social conservatism, and economic libertarianism. Neither of these political views counts as high on the fascism spectrum according to the analysis in the book.

Let's begin with social conservatism. Chapter 4 of the book is called "Unreality". It is a central chapter in the book, as it describes the character of politics that views loyalty as having precedence politically over reason. A characteristic feature of this kind of politics is conspiracy theories that destabilize our grip on reality, leaving us only with loyalty to an ethnic national group, and the party or leader representing it (of course, as Hannah Arendt explains in Part III of Origins of Totalitarianism, communist politics has the same characteristic feature, with loyalty to ethnic national groups replaced by class loyalty). It is true that social conservatism asks us to place value on traditions that are associated with particular groups. But this is far from asking us to change the character of our politics. There are persuasive reason-based arguments for the value of tradition. A politics that calls for placing value on traditions does not aim to destroy our sense of reality by flooding the public information space – often quite intentionally - with paranoid conspiracy theories. A politics that places value on tradition does not seek to replace appeals to reason with fear and disgust at foreigners (the fear and disgust being justified, in fascist ideology, for example by a belief that the presence of "inferior" groups will result in the polluting of the supposedly superior group by interbreeding).

In the United States, it's easy to make the point that social conservative politics is inconsistent with fascism. The core of social conservatism in the United States is the Christian faith. Arguably, it is to the Christian faith that we owe the concept of the moral equality of human beings, the concept of equal dignity of human life. Chapter 5 of How Fascism Works is called "Hierarchy." In fascist ideology, one group, defined by ethnicity or national identity, has greater moral worth than all other groups. Such greater moral worth is undergirded by what Hitler called the "aristocratic principle in nature", that sets certain ethnic groups over others, not just in their skills and abilities, but also in their moral worth.

Fascist ideology is based on social Darwinism – and not just social Darwinism of the individual. A position at the top of a hierarchy of moral worth has supposedly been earned by a group's demonstration of its superiority over time in national or ethnic struggles. Groups who are "inferior" in these struggles have lesser worth, and can be treated with disdain or even killed. There are many ways of understanding the Christian faith. But social Darwinism is completely inimical to most of them. Of course, Christians have fallen prey to fascist thinking, and we need to understand how this is so. Perhaps some ways of understanding the Christian faith enable one to view those who fail to embrace the religion as akin to losers in a social Darwinist struggle. But anyone who understands their commitment to Christianity as bringing with it a commitment to the equal dignity of all humans must repudiate fascist ideology.

The aim of my book was to crystalize fascist ideology in a way that enabled Christian conservatives to see where they might unintentionally be aligning themselves with those who

have ideologies their faith repudiates. There are many clear distinctions between social conservatism and fascism, more of which we will return to at the end of this essay. But perhaps most centrally, fascist ideology employs social Darwinism as a method to establish a hierarchy of worth between ethnic groups. Mainstream Christian social conservatives should be *strongly ideologically opposed* to fascism, if my analysis is correct.

What about economic libertarianism? This is a doctrine that in the United States is an alternative branch of conservative politics. Economic libertarianism is, I argue, a close relative if not a version of social Darwinism. However, free market libertarianism is a philosophy of the *individual*. Fascist ideology, by contrast, transposes social Darwinism to *ethnic groups*. Free market libertarians reject such group thinking. As I write in How Fascism Works (chapter 10), “fascism involves a commitment to *group* hierarchies of worth that is flatly incompatible with true economic libertarianism, which does not generalize beyond the individual.” Free market libertarians should be *strongly ideologically opposed* to fascism, if my analysis is correct.

In party politics, it is tempting to strategically ally oneself with others whose ideologies overlap with one’s own in various respects. I wrote my book to warn conservatives of the dangers of such alliances when fascism threatens. I write in the introduction (emphasis added):

Fascist politics includes many distinct strategies: the mythic past, propaganda, anti-intellectualism, unreality, hierarchy, victimhood, law and order, sexual anxiety, appeals to the heartland, and a dismantling of public welfare and unity. *Though a defense of certain elements is legitimate and sometimes warranted*, there are times in history when they come together in one party or political movement. These are dangerous moments. In the United States today, Republican politicians employ these strategies with more and more frequency. Their increasing tendency to engage in this politics should give honest conservatives pause.

One could obscure the clear inconsistency between fascist ideology, on my analysis, and social conservatism, by focusing on my discussion of two overlapping aspects –patriarchy and a rhetoric of “rural heartland values”. It is true that these are two somewhat overlapping aspects of social conservatism and fascist ideology. But my book divides fascist ideology into *ten* distinct aspects. Most chapters in the book are devoted to aspects of fascist ideology clearly inconsistent with social conservatism. The only way to read the book as a critique of mainstream social conservatism is to omit large swaths of it.

Mainstream conservative views are on a spectrum, with fascism as its extreme. My goal in writing in this book, given the situation many countries in the world face today, was to explain how ordinary conservatives, even those with legitimate concerns, could find themselves in political alliances that have a fascist cast. My goal, that is, was to make the transition into fascism *explicable*. If we pretend that only those born as evil monsters could be drawn into supporting fascist ideology, as Ludlow’s critique suggests, we do a great disservice both to history and to the defense of liberal democracy. Perfectly ordinary citizens can be drawn to supporting harshly anti-democratic ideologies. It is this that requires an explanation. To act as if ordinary conservatives have not been drawn to supporting Jair Bolsonaro by the overlaps between his harsh rhetoric and ordinary conservative ideology is to obscure rather than illuminate.

A second worry Peter Ludlow has is that my book evinces a “general hostility to free speech.” At the end of his discussion of this supposed hostility, Ludlow wonders why I am “not explicit about what [I want] to happen here.” He writes:

Does he want Charlie Hebdo to be censored? Or just “deplatformed?” He leaves it to us to connect the dots, but whatever the mechanism, he’s clearly calling for radical restrictions on free speech. To defend us from totalitarianism. The irony is obvious.

According to Ludlow’s reading, though I am “not explicit about what he wants to happen here”, I am “clearly calling for radical restrictions on free speech.” There is some tension, on Ludlow’s reading, between my lack of explicitness on the topic of free speech and my “clear call”, which should perhaps have led to a reconsideration of his hypothesis about my views. Be that as it may, let me be clear here about my views on free speech. I am against restrictions on free speech. I have not written a paper arguing for this view, for two reasons. First, I endorse a familiar reason - no one can plausibly be entrusted with the power to enforce such restrictions. Secondly, I have written a *book* on this topic, in which I argue that free speech is the characteristic expression of the central liberty of liberal democracy, and as such cannot easily or consistently be curtailed.

Despite the fact that I am opposed to free speech restrictions, I nevertheless think it is utterly vital to be attendant to the ways in which speech can be dangerous, and even dangerously anti-democratic. It is fully consistent to be opposed to free speech restrictions, and clear-eyed about the dangers of propaganda (see the work of Noam Chomsky, for example). The problem of maintaining a stable liberal democracy, which requires free speech, given the problem of propaganda, does not have an easy solution (and anyone who thinks it does doesn’t understand the problem). This problem is the subject matter of my 2015 academic book [How Propaganda Works](#), where I argue that it is the central problem of traditional democratic political philosophy. And in that work, I provide a tentative solution; sketching it will allow us to see why Ludlow’s concluding complaints, about my insensitivity to the enabling conditions of fascism, are unwarranted.

In [How Propaganda Works](#), I argue in detail that anti-democratic propaganda (centrally including fascist propaganda) will be effective under conditions of substantial material inequality. In other words, that work is devoted to arguing that it is material inequality that makes fascist propaganda effective. A precis of that work is [here](#); its first sentence is “The overarching goal of [How Propaganda Works](#) is to provide an argument that democracy requires material equality.” The argument I laboriously provide in that work is that in conditions of large material inequality, fascist politics will be effective and will lead to the end of liberal democracy.

Virtually all of the reviews of that book discuss this point. For example, in [her excellent review](#) of the book in *Ethics*, at the end of the first paragraph, Renee Jorgensen Bollinger aptly summarizes the argument of book as follows:

Stanley’s discussion focuses exclusively on the problem propaganda poses for liberal democracies, namely “whether the most central expression of its value, liberty (realized as the freedom of speech), makes liberal democracy fundamentally unstable.” (29) The book doesn’t ultimately answer this question, except to say that the combination of material inequality and free speech is unstable.

In How Propaganda Works, I argue that free speech is the most central realization of democracy's fundamental value, and as such should not be curtailed. The book's argument is that the way to make fascist (racist, xenophobic, sexist) propaganda less of a threat in a democracy is by removing the sources of its effectiveness, which are large material inequalities between citizens. It is these large material inequalities, the book argues, that lead to festering resentments that are exploited and misdirected in fascist politics.

So much for my position. As for Ludlow's view in the passage cited above - I am not clear what Ludlow means by a "radical restriction" on free speech, and it is certainly not something I endorse. But it's important to bear in mind that many countries have restrictions on hate speech. Canada has legal restrictions on hate speech. Having visited Canada several times, I am reluctant to classify it as a totalitarian state.

How Fascism Works is clearly based on How Propaganda Works. It is for this reason that I conclude the book with a summary of the conclusions of my academic work - that substantial economic inequality is what enables fascist politics. In the final paragraph of the book (right before the epilogue), after describing an ideal liberal cultural attitude, I conclude by explaining the obstacles to its realization:

But this engaging vision of the self moving through time and cultures is deeply problematic under conditions of stark economic inequality. It requires profound experiences with differences of all sorts. It may require an education that is generous, wise, committed to secular science and poetic truth. When in the United States it can take an entire family income to pay for a year at a good university for one child, we must ask, who of us ends up becoming members of such a successful and broad-minded citizenry? When universities are as expensive as they are in the United States, their generous liberal visions are easy targets for fascist demagoguery. Under conditions of stark economic inequality, when the benefits of liberal education, and the exposure to diverse cultures and norms, are available only to the wealthy few, liberal tolerance can be smoothly represented as elite privilege. Stark economic inequality creates conditions richly conducive to fascist demagoguery. It is fantasy to think that liberal democratic norms can flourish under such conditions.

In short, my solution to the problem of propaganda in democracy, which is at the core of my recent work, is to address stark economic inequalities. This is why I conclude the final chapter How Fascism Works with this paragraph.

Peter Ludlow reads me as diminishing the importance of economic inequality to enabling fascism:

This naturally raises a question: What leads to this particular moment of global desperation? Stanley seems to think the crisis is manufactured by fascism itself ("corruption" is nothing but a slogan, it seems) rather than decades of neoliberal economics and foreign policy - policy driven not just by conservatives but by Democrats like Hillary Clinton in her role as Secretary of State. When we witness a rapacious foreign policy that bankrupts and destabilizes nations around the world, we set off a chain

reaction of debt, and poverty, and migration, and more debt and more despair, and soon the problem is not contained in the subjects of the neoliberal empire, but within the empire's homeland itself. And when corruption is institutionalized (for example in the aftermath of the *Citizens United* US Supreme Court decision), people rightly turn on those corrupt institutions.

Perhaps the way that fascism comes about is first, by us failing to provide equitable economic conditions, and by us failing to fight corruption, and by us failing to safeguard and protect democratic institutions.

With the overview I have provided, it is hopefully clear that these accusations result from a failure to understand my position. In Ludlow's case, his lack of clarity about my solution to the problem of free speech in a democracy is connected to his failure to understand my views about the enabling conditions of fascism. In the very final paragraph of How Fascism Works, I state that liberal democracy is a *fantasy* in conditions of inequitable economic conditions. The academic work upon which How Fascism Works provides the detailed argument that inequitable economic conditions lead to fascism. My "solution" to the problem of free speech in a democracy, reiterated as the final paragraph of the final chapter of How Fascism Works, is a clear call to address stark economic inequality.

What about Ludlow's other charges in these paragraphs? Specifically, does How Fascism Works ignore the role of institutionalized corruption in enabling for example Trump's rise? Let's use Ludlow's specific example – *the aftermath of the Citizens United Supreme Court decision*. Does How Fascism Works ignore the corrupting influence of the Citizens United Supreme Court Decision in enabling Trump's rise, and similar examples of institutional corruption?

In Chapter 4, I discuss these issues at length. I begin p. 72 by asking the question of what enabled Trump's rise:

In the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Donald Trump repeatedly and openly lied, and openly flouted long- sacrosanct liberal norms. The U.S. mainstream media dutifully reported his many lies. His opponent, Hillary Clinton, followed liberal norms of equal respect; her one violation of these norms, which occurred when she called some of the supporters of her opponent "deplorables," was endlessly thrown back in her face. And yet again and again, Americans found Trump to be the more authentic candidate. By giving voice to shocking sentiments that were presumed to be unsuitable for public discourse, Trump was taken to be *speaking his mind*. This is how, by exhibiting classic demagogic behavior, a politician can come to be seen as the more authentic candidate, even when he is manifestly dishonest.

The possibility of this kind of politics arises under certain conditions in a democracy...

And what are the conditions that made Trump's fascist political tactics effective? Here is how I continue the analysis in Chapter 4 of How Fascism Works (emphasis mine):

Two factors have eroded the protections that representative democracy is supposed to provide. First, candidates must raise huge sums to run for office (*ever more so since the 2010 Citizens United decision by the U.S. Supreme Court*). As a result, they represent the interests of their large donors. However, because it is a democracy, they must also try to make the case that they represent the common interest. They must pretend that the best interests of the multinational corporations that fund their campaigns are also the common interest.

Second, some voters do not share democratic values, and politicians must appeal to them as well. When large inequalities exist, the problem is aggravated. Some voters are simply more attracted to a system that favors their own particular religion, race, gender, or birth position. The resentment that flows from unmet expectations can be redirected against minority groups seen as not sharing dominant traditions; goods that go to them are represented by demagogic politicians, in a zero-sum way, as taking goods away from majority groups. Some voters see such groups, rather than the behavior of economic elites, as responsible for their unmet expectations.

The rest of the chapter is devoted to explaining how conditions of economic inequality and widespread institutional corruption due to the role of money in politics make fascist political methods effective.

Here is what I argue in Chapter 4: what the result of the large influx of money into politics occasioned was the corruption of democratic institutions. Such corruption has made political candidates beholden to large corporations and wealthy individuals. As a result, when these candidates appeal to democratic ideals, such as the common interest, they often do so hypocritically. In such a context, an explicitly anti-democratic demagogue will seem like an “authentic” politician ([research by Oliver Hahl, Minjae Kim, and Ezra Zuckerman Sivan](#) has provided evidence for this hypothesis about the corrupting effects of big money on enabling fascist demagoguery). Nor was this a particularly “hidden” part of the book; it was taken from [Democracy and the Demagogue](#), my first New York Times editorial on the rise of Trump, published in October 2015 (in which I also use the effects of the Citizen’s United court decision). All of my work on this topic is sensitive to the ways in which political corruption and neo-liberalism enable fascism, including [How Fascism Works](#).

Nevertheless, I do not think that the grip of fascism can be *reduced* to its appeal in moments of economic crisis. I think one cannot explain the success of fascist propaganda without also centrally including the appeal of racism, xenophobia, ultra-nationalism, and patriarchy (which, I argue, are in any case not easily separable). The 2016 Russian propaganda campaign in the United States focused in large part on exacerbating pre-existing racial divisions, for example via fake Facebook pages like “Blacktivist”. As I document in [How Fascism Works](#) (e.g. pp. 134ff.), Russian disinformation campaigns were also heavily involved in exacerbating xenophobia about immigrants in Europe. Here, too, patriarchy is involved, as such propaganda calls on men to “protect their women” from foreigners.

Political corruption makes a country susceptible to fascist propaganda, by devaluing the vocabulary of democracy. But so too do strong ultra-nationalism and xenophobia. Poland’s embrace of the Law and Justice party cannot be explained solely on the grounds of “economic

crisis”. Nor can Polish marches of 60,000 people through Warsaw [chanting “Pure Blood”](#) and calling for a white Europe be explained entirely in terms of the failures of neo-liberal policy.

This brings us to the topic of ultra-nationalism. [How Fascism Works](#) begins with a chapter entitled “The Mythic Past”. The past is mythologized in a variety of different kinds of politics. It is a familiar point that *all* nationalism involves myth about the past – what Benedict Anderson called “Imagined Communities” in his famous book of that name. But fascism involves a very specific *kind* of myth about the past. Fascism is based on nationalism – but it’s a specific *kind* of nationalism. The specific form of nationalism that undergirds fascism must receive special treatment; no treatment of fascism can be complete without it. This is why I begin the book with this topic, and return to the topic of varieties of nationalism throughout the book.

All nationalism involves myths about previous national unity. In ordinary, non-pernicious nationalism (“equality based nationalism”, in the sense of Chapter 6), the identity of the nation is formed by a myth of a common culture, language, and set of traditions (it is still often a myth that there was even this kind of unity). In fascist ideology, however, the myth takes a specific form, and is used for a specific strategic radical purpose. Chapter 1 of my book is entitled “The Mythic Past”, but perhaps a better title would have been “The Fascist Mythic Past”, as it is devoted to exploring the specific content and function of mythologies about the “nation” that are characteristically exploited in fascist politics.

In fascist ideology, the past is mined for patriarchal symbols of the greatness of the nation, where the men of the nation served in a glorious military, and had great feats of conquest. As I begin the chapter:

In all fascist mythic pasts, an extreme version of the patriarchal family reigns supreme, even just a few generations ago. Further back in time, the mythic past was a time of glory of the nation, with wars of conquest led by patriotic generals, its armies filled with its countrymen, able-bodied, loyal warriors whose wives were at home raising the next generation. In the present, these myths become the basis of the nation’s identity under fascist politics.

In other words, fascist nationalism takes a very specific form – the past is mined not for a uniform set of traditions and cultures. It is rather mined for a sense of past glory – which is why fascist leaders always appeal to a sense of loss not merely about traditions, but about *empire* – and why fascist politics is particularly dangerous in times of *loss* or *decline* of empire (see HFW, pp. 91-2).

As I make vivid in Chapter 1, the goal of fascist national mythmaking is not to create nostalgia for loss of ordinary traditions and cultures. It is to create nostalgia for “the central tenets of fascist ideology — authoritarianism, hierarchy, purity, and struggle.” I quote Mussolini and Alfred Rosenberg in support of these points, arguing that both these figures “clearly and explicitly appreciated this point about the strategic use of a mythological past.” The goal is to not to create nostalgia for a particular way of celebrating some holidays; these are just the ordinary myths involved in all nationalist politics. It is rather to create nostalgia about a past during which the nation was great in *fascist ways* – when its men served in armies led by generals in great wars of conquest. After providing evidence with quotes from Mussolini and Rosenberg, I summarize

this introduction to fascist ultra-nationalism by emphasizing that what is called for is not to remain rooted in our traditional ways, but rather a radical change to the present: as I write, “The fascist mythic past exists to aid in *changing the present*.”

Ludlow provides a detailed interpretation of the passage I cite from Mussolini. He quotes the surrounding context, which concerns the Italian military, and makes it clear that Mussolini is appealing to past greatness of the Roman army in wars of conquest. These are the elements of the history of Rome that Mussolini draws on in his speeches – not ordinary nationalism. And it is difficult for me to see any tension whatsoever between Ludlow’s interpretation of the passage from Mussolini and my use of it. Ludlow’s reading of the Mussolini passage is exactly how I employ it. So his reading could hardly be used to critique mine – it just *is* my reading. The difficulty, rather, is with Ludlow’s misreading of the chapter.

Ludlow’s critique of my interpretation of Mussolini is embedded in a context that reveals his misunderstanding of the chapter. He begins:

Let’s begin with Chapter 1, which concerns fascism’s appeal to a “The Mythic Past.” It’s hard to think of a conservative American politician who hasn’t played this tune. Ronald Reagan was a master at it – painting Norman Rockwellesque pictures of earlier, simpler, better times. But that kind of nostalgia is nearly definitional for conservatism – conservatives are about conserving the status quo and maybe even being regressive, after all. Why would they *not* use such myths about the past? The question for us is whether this is really a strategy that fascists use.

However, the point of Chapter 1 is to isolate and describe the distinctive structure and function of the *fascist* mythic past, thereby distinguishing it from *ordinary nationalist myth*. It is therefore just not true that most conservative American politicians have “played the tune” I describe in this chapter (I return to this topic in chapter 6, where I draw a clear distinction between “equality driven nationalism”, which extolls a set of traditions and a common heritage, and domination driven nationalism, of the sort one finds at the heart of fascist politics).

In the first chapter, I argue that the fascist mythic past has a particular structure, one that distinguishes it sharply from ordinary nationalist myth. In ordinary nationalist myth, there were a group of ethnically related people who shared a language, a religion, and a set of coherent traditions. These people were not necessarily great, and did not necessarily or even typically have a great empire (or any empire at all). In the fascist mythic past, by contrast, the nation was *great*, and had an *empire*. Fascist politics fosters aggrieved nostalgia for loss of empire. The fascist mythic past of the nation is not there to keep respect for traditions, but rather “to harness the emotion of nostalgia to the central tenets of fascist ideology – authoritarianism, hierarchy, purity, and struggle.” And it is radically *not* conservative, since it is, as I write, “strategic”, to aid in “changing the present.”

What accounts for this misreading? Ludlow takes me to task for failing to distinguish between ordinary nationalist mythologizing about the past, and fascist myth. But here, Ludlow is illicitly importing his own misreading of How Fascism Works. If one takes me, mistakenly, to be conflating conservatism with fascism, then one would object to the use of the quotations I provide in the first chapter – these do not exemplify innocent conservative nostalgia, but rather something else – fascist myth. But this is my *point* in the chapter - to emphasize the particular

nature of fascist nationalism – including its radically non-conservative nature. It is used strategically to change the present, to create nostalgia for fascist ideals, rather than retain our current ways of life.

The topic of the relation between the kind of nationalism that is democratically acceptable and the kind of nationalism that underlies fascist movements is one I return to in Chapter 6 of the book. I argue there that there are versions of nationalism that are democratically acceptable – these are generally the ones that are appealed to in conservative politics (I also give as examples of acceptable nationalism the ones used in many nationalist anti-Colonial movement, and the original version of Zionism). In Chapter 6, I distinguish these versions of nationalism from the kinds of nationalist appeals that occur in fascist politics – while warning of the dangers of one bleeding into the other.

All nationalism involves myth. The distinction between acceptable versions of nationalism and the kind of problematic nationalism that underlies fascism is a topic that runs through the entire book. Fascist nationalism is strategic; it omits large parts of the past, focusing just on past military glory and conquest, ethnic purity, and other fascist values, such as discipline. According to the analysis in How Fascism Works, then, fascist politics is *radical*. It is not conservative. To take my book to be a description of conservatives is unfair to conservatives, and unfair to the structure and content of my arguments.

I want to end by making a concession to a powerful critique Ludlow makes:

it is not the *valence* (left vs right) of totalitarianism that provides the clue to how it arose and how it works. It was rather the strategies for consolidating power under one individual. This takes us to the heart of the problem with Stanley's book: he mistakes patriarchy, nostalgia for a mythological past, etc. as being the causes of fascism, when they're at best unreliable clues to the valence of a totalitarian movement.

Ludlow is quite right that totalitarian movements have different “valences”, and that my book concerns only one “valence” (I prefer to think of these as different *species* of totalitarianism). I have vigorously defended myself against Ludlow's charge that I have given only “unreliable clues” to the valence of fascist totalitarianism (there is more to be said, of course, about the link between fascism and patriarchy – here too I stand my ground against Ludlow's criticisms). But Ludlow is absolutely correct that my book concerns only a specific species, of totalitarianism. In Origins of Totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt takes a different approach – she focuses not on fascism per se, but on totalitarianism in general, under which she includes *both* fascism and communism. This is a different theoretical choice than the one I have made.

Communist ideology places loyalty to class over loyalty to an ethnic group, which justifies a similar kind of contempt for one's political opponent as one finds in fascism, albeit on very different grounds. There are other kinds of totalitarian ideologies that provide justification for aggrieved victimization, and marshal fear and disgust as political weapons to consolidate power. My book concerns a very specific totalitarian ideology, a very particular *kind* of justification for illiberalism. In making this theoretical choice, I risked signaling that other kinds of totalitarian ideologies are lesser concerns. And this is a moral cost, since I think these other kinds of

totalitarian ideologies are also deeply problematic – and also exist in a kind of mutual reinforcement pattern with fascist ideology.

However, my sense when I wrote the book was that the greatest concern was describing the pattern of justification – the “valence”, to use Ludlow’s terminology – of one kind of totalitarianism, namely fascism. This was due to particular historical circumstances; in particular, the rise of far-right movements across the world, including in my own country. I was eager to describe this species of totalitarianism in detail, not to alienate conservatives, but rather to warn them of a way some could be tempted into adopting a species of totalitarianism antithetical to their core principles, because of superficial similarities. I agree that there should be another book addressed to progressives, warning them about the temptations of other species of totalitarianism that have superficial similarities with progressive ideology. But this would be a very different book.

I have defended myself vigorously against Ludlow’s charge that my book is an attack on conservatism. However, there are surely costs to isolating one species of totalitarianism, and neglecting others. I am open to hearing what these costs are, and sensitive to the possibility that I might have erred in not addressing them explicitly.