

Michael Mann. *Fascists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. x + 428 pp.
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Fascism has always constituted a puzzle for historians and social scientists. Various interpretations (among a multitude) have seen fascism as a modernizing strategy, a revolt against modernity; as the tool of a specific class (usually the capitalist or middle class); and as totalitarianism. The (alleged) "new consensus" analyzes fascism, broadly speaking, as an ideology in its own right based upon transcendent/holistic ultranationalism.[1] Even though the relevant historiography presents a host of different and often incommensurate images of fascism, the theories can, broadly speaking, be divided into materialistic and ideological categories. Michael Mann claims to offer a new theory, based upon a synthesis of the materialist and ideological schools within the historiography of fascism, but with the ambition of understanding fascists themselves, that is, the fascist constituency, in its motivations and methods. In support of his theory, Mann processes an impressive amount of secondary literature on the major fascist movements in Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania and Spain, with a focus on which citizens of each country became fascists.

Mann's succinctly defines fascism as "the pursuit of a transcendent and cleansing nationstatism through paramilitarism" (p. 13). It is meant as a generic and to some extent epochal term, since according to Mann, it can accommodate a range of phenomena across Europe in the interwar period, including Nazism, Italian fascism, the Austrian Heimwehr (partially) and Dollfuss's Fatherland Front, the Hungarian Arrow Cross, the Romanian Iron Guard and the Spanish Falange. On the face of it, this juxtaposition of groups raises the obvious problem of reconciling paramilitarism and statism within the same concept, since normally, one of the central defining features of the state is the monopoly of violence. Not so, says Mann; this characteristic has not always defined the state, and we must therefore analytically separate military and political power relations, even in the modern state (p. 69). Either way, Mann's view on fascist paramilitarism is not one of military power *per se*, but suggests an alleged popular rising from below that claims for itself the role of elitist vanguard of the nation. Paramilitarism is therefore more than "mere" vio-

lence; it is a key organizational feature of fascism *and*, at the same time, a symbol of the nation.

However, this dilemma brings up the question of the nature of fascist statism; if the (fascist) state, whose power Mann says fascists worshiped, did not possess the (external and/or internal) monopoly of violence, just what kind of state was it? According to Mann, fascists can be characterized as seeing the state as their goal in the sense that it is envisioned as facilitating social, political and moral development; moreover, as the representative of the organic nation, the state is intended to resolve economic and political antagonisms. It is unclear to me whether this conclusion means that fascism was totalitarian; Mann acknowledges the weak, polycratic states of fascist regimes, but maintains that fascism was totalitarian in its transformational aims. However, party and paramilitants undercut these aims (p. 14). Apparently, then, such basic fascist institutions were not committed to fascism; if they were, then why did they work against these transformational aims? Mann suggests that the answer to this question lies in the contradiction between the movement and the state's bureaucracy (the old elites).

Perhaps, however, there is a problem with making the state a central concept in a definition of fascism. As far as National Socialism is concerned, the ideal of the state, at least in ideological terms, was not as an entity in itself, but as a symbol of the nation.[2]. Statism is thus probably a more useful term in the Italian case. However, in practical terms, to fascists, the state was an obvious and (not least) an available instrument for achieving their cleansing and transcendent goals. When they needed to, however, they were willing to compromise with other agencies. An obvious example of this tendency is the agreement Mussolini's regime made with the Catholic Church in 1929, ceding a degree of control over the Italian educational system. Granted, the regime was driven more by opportunism than ideology, but such activity does suggest that to fascists, the state was

not as sacred as Mann makes it out to be. In my opinion, the harmonious, organic nation is a more appropriate concept. The other elements included in Mann's definition, however, are less problematic.

To continue, Mann corroborates (or bases?) his definition of fascism in his identification of three central fascist constituencies: one that favors paramilitarism, a second that favors transcendence and a third that favors nation-statism: To the constituencies that favor paramilitarism belong the generations of young men. According to Mann, fascism in this mood made youth and idealism appear especially modern and moral; these ideals were to be transmitted through secondary and higher education and encourage notions of moral progress and militarism. Such fascism made its appeal to young men by employing bragging, semi-disciplined violence, while in peacetime encouraging militarism to evolve, or mutate, into paramilitarism. Fascism that appealed to constituencies favoring transcendence, in comparison, drew from no particular class base but did draw upon some economic factors—it appealed to people who worked in sectors outside of the front line struggle between capital and labor. Members of this constituency saw society from a vantage point that allowed them to view class struggle with distaste and endorse a movement that claimed to transcend that struggle. Finally, constituencies that favored nation-statism tended to be of heterogeneous background, including people with military experience and those with high educations, those who worked in the public or service sectors as well as individuals who came from particular regional and religious backgrounds. But one principle unified them: all members of this constituency worked at the heart of the state. They were typically soldiers, veterans, civil servants, teachers and public sector manual workers (p. 28). The evidence brought to bear in support of this division unquestionably provides the most rewarding section of the book; in areas where controversy exists, Mann generally ex-

hibits sound judgment. Despite differences between the different fascist movements, Mann finds that no specific *classes* decidedly dominated them. Instead, they were dominated by the above-mentioned *sectors* in society. Mann largely manages to document this taxonomy, even though a great deal of overlap can be found between the constituencies, as well as significant differences between the different movements.

This is Mann's definition; his book then applies this theory to a historical narrative. Mann considers fascism a phenomenon of modernity; it was a product (although not a necessary consequence) of the rise of the strong nation-state, specifically in its "organic" permutation. Until World War I, however, state power was limited; it was not seen as a tool to achieve many social objectives. World War I changed perceptions of the state, since total war militarized the nation-state and provided a model of how state intervention and planning could be used to achieve economic development. Consequently, a state with a strong infrastructure emerged. At the end of the war it seemed the future belonged to the liberal democratic nation-state. However, this vision soon gave way to a wave of authoritarian (including fascist) regimes that divided Europe into liberal-democratic north-west and authoritarian central-east-south blocs. Despite the appearance of the authoritarian part of Europe as a solid unit, important differences persisted in space as well as time. Its authoritarian states ranged on a spectrum from mildly authoritarian to semi-reactionary authoritarian and corporatist regimes to fascist ones. However, fascism was not simply authoritarianism writ large, since fascism added the component of a bottom-up mass movement and thereby to some extent reversed the authoritarian flow of power. Mann wishes to explain this authoritarian wave in terms of a general European crisis, which he breaks up into different parts: economic, military and political-ideological, a typology he devel-

oped earlier in *The Sources of Social Power* (1986).

Mann does not subscribe to the classic economic explanation of fascism: namely, that capitalists felt their profit threatened by the rising proletariat. He does argue that propertied classes felt a threat to their property and thus turned to authoritarian and repressive solutions of one kind or another. However, class theory cannot explain fascism's most salient features, namely its populism and radicalism. The economic piece of Mann's puzzle is thus the claim that relative economic backwardness favored authoritarianism. Since backwardness restricts mass mobilization, however, it cannot explain fascism. Thus, in Mann's view, it is instead late industrialization that caused rapid development, leading to widespread dislocation. Such disruption, read against the background of the integrated global economy, made extreme nation-statism a tempting solution. The problem with this explanation, as Mann recognizes, is that Germany was not a late developer, while the Nordic countries, which remained democracies, were. Another problem Mann fails to address is Czechoslovakia, which—even though it was subject to much of the same economic dislocation—remained democratic. Generally speaking, even though Mann's analysis of the economic crisis partly enables him to explain the authoritarian surge, it offers comparatively fewer clues to an explanation of fascism. The Great Depression cannot be seen as an independent explanatory factor, since it affected all of Europe, while only half of the continent took the authoritarian or fascist roads.

The second part of the European crisis, according to Mann, was military and primarily a consequence of World War I. First, the war discredited defeated regimes, even though this delegitimation did not, apart from Italy, lead directly to fascism. Instead it might have contributed to the immediate postwar rightist surge and thereby undermined prospects for democracy. However,

authoritarianism and fascism also emerged among the victors. Mann therefore points to the dislocation emanating from the war. Defeated countries lost territory and resources, but some victors suffered as well, not from loss but rather from the fruits of victory: the need to incorporate new territories, a maneuver that in some cases caused considerable strain to existing political structures. Such dislocation was considerable in all of central, eastern and southern Europe (apart from the Iberian peninsula). It is questionable, however, whether such dislocation should be termed military; even though it was caused by the war, this dislocation resulted from *political* crises. The third, and only truly military, component of Mann's military crisis was the rise of paramilitarism. World War I allowed the realization of the ideal of the nation in arms, and to some observers, the trenches enhanced soldier camaraderie, a sentiment that a rightist minority attempted to maintain after the war and which gave rise to popular support for the citizen paramilitary. This development was the core of the first wave of fascism. Still, countries that did not turn to fascism were subjected to the same experiences, without giving rise to the same degree of paramilitarism. Hence, Mann's military crisis is also an insufficiently adequate explanation of the phenomenon he seeks to explain.

Mann turns next to the political component of the European crisis. As far as the "two Europes" are concerned, political differences between the later democratic and authoritarian blocs preceded World War I--not in the area of the franchise, but rather with regard to the workings of their political systems. In democracies, sovereign parliaments were solidly entrenched and indeed sovereign; a system of competitive political parties operated to absorb changing sentiments. Here, fascism came too late. In the authoritarian part of Europe, however, where parliaments existed, they were not sovereign, but power was divided between parliament, the executive, the military and/or the monarch. The states were dual. Further-

more, these later authoritarian entities were still trying to build nation-states, but with the difficulty that each state contained different nationalities but no experienced institutions to forge necessary compromises between them. The redrawing of the European map after Versailles only compounded such difficulties, since it created fertile ground for revisionist claims. All in all, to traditional elites, the world was getting riskier, and they turned largely to repression; that is, varying degrees of authoritarianism. In doing so they opened the door to fascism, not realizing it could be more dangerous than the red menace. This explanation might point to an "agent theory" of fascism, but that is not the case even though Mann claims that "[i]n Italy, Germany ... and Austria, fascism dominated and rose to power unassisted" (p. 30). Later, however, he claims that the Italian fascists did not gain power unaided (p. 119). A similar inconsistency applies to the Nazi *Machtergreifung*, it was apparently simultaneously a coup and not a coup. Mann writes: "There was *no Nazi Coup*. The last legitimate governments of the Weimar Republic acquiesced in their own downfall. Leading civil servants, judges and the leaders of the "bourgeois" and Catholic parties were especially complicit, though less in *the Nazi coup* than in ditching democracy" (p. 200, emphasis added). The connection between fascism, the general post-World War I crisis and the different authoritarianisms is thus that only where the traditional elites were weak or divided could fascism achieve substantial strength. Indeed, even though fascism was related to the authoritarian forces, it offered radically different resolutions to the four crises of modernity: a solution to the class struggle and economic crises of capitalism; a transformation of mass citizen warfare into aggressive nationalism and paramilitarism; an organic and populist version of rule by the people; and, finally a bridge between reason and emotion. Fascism was thus an alternative version of modernity, an alternative whose consequences Mann promises to treat in a forthcoming book on genocide.

As mentioned, Mann's ambition is to offer a synthesis of the materialist and the ideological interpretations of fascism. The overall result, as we have seen, is that he uses the methodology of the materialist school and ends up with an interpretation of fascism that largely resembles the ideological ones already formulated. In other words, in his conquest of historiographical terrain, he reaches territory that has already been captured. Nonetheless, the route he takes to get there is novel, and the traveler reaches the destination having accumulated a great deal of useful baggage. And that is a laudable achievement.

Mann bases his book on secondary sources; primary sources are largely absent from the otherwise commendable bibliography. I would not recommend this book for undergraduates, but postgraduates and scholars would benefit from reading it. It is a valuable addition to the historiography on fascism and particularly fascists.

Notes

[1]. For a useful overview of the different interpretations of fascism see Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), pp. 441-486.

[2]. Reinhart Koselleck et al., "Staat und Souveränität," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 6, ed. Koselleck, Otto Brunner and Werner Conze (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), p. 94.

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