

while noting the special position of Catholicism as guardian of the faith most Irishmen professed, his constitution for an independent Ireland also recognized Protestant churches and Jewish congregations. Accepting Catholic teaching as a guide for social and educational policy defined integralist Catholicism and made the church a unifying force after a bitter split over the treaty. But it never meant handing prelates the keys to Ireland's government.

Independence was a principle to de Valera. He likened Ireland to a servant in a great house who gave up its comforts and luxuries to have his freedom in a humble cottage with frugal fare. Since being free meant having no master, to acknowledge one even formally was servile. De Valera's ground for resisting to the treaty persistently shaped his policy. Ending even the appearance of dependence became a central goal. With that secured after the Civil War, compromises could be had.

British Prime Minister David Lloyd George likened negotiating with de Valera to picking up mercury with a fork. De Valera deftly severed even symbolic ties with Britain during the 1930s while avoiding confrontation. Economic pressure from Britain thereafter enabled him to blame austerity—the frugal fare of the cottage—on the former imperial master. Since Irish voters always wanted someone to stand against, de Valera shrewdly directed their animus toward the British. Unlike so many other Irish nationalists, however, he never succumbed to Anglophobia or the cultural cringe behind it. Besides asserting independence, de Valera used neutrality to keep Ireland out of other people's quarrels.

Controversy persists over de Valera's foreign policy, with its dogged refusal to take sides openly against Nazi Germany. His notorious decision to offer condolences at the German embassy on Hitler's death in 1945 sparked outrage. De Valera's belief that "I acted correctly, and I feel certain wisely" captures the self-righteousness Fanning notes

throughout his career. The incident also hid a more complex reality. While de Valera sought to convince all sides he would oppose by force any power interfering with Irish neutrality, he also secretly worked to ensure Britain would not be defeated. Cracking down on the IRA curtailed a threat to both countries. Lord Cranborne, a member of Churchill's cabinet, acknowledged in 1945 the extensive measures that tilted neutrality toward the Allies. Public departure from neutrality would have outraged de Valera's principles while opening Ireland to attack. Private cooperation was a different matter.

With the Emergency, as the Irish called World War II, and its aftermath over, politics turned to questions of how independence would be used. De Valera's ascendancy lasted into the 1960s, but his vision of an "Irish-speaking pastoral idyll" failed to resonate. Never comfortable with "bread and butter" issues of wages, prices, and inflation, he urged crisis austerity and "the choice of the humble cottage" that Irishmen by then wanted to escape. Stability increasingly seemed like stagnation. Fanning notes a cruel symbolism in the fact that de Valera's eyesight deteriorated, leaving him only his peripheral vision.

Ireland's turn after de Valera from self-absorbed backwater to Celtic tiger raises paradoxes of its own. A premodern society rooted in Catholic faith and small communities became perhaps the most postmodern nation on earth. Revelations of sexual abuse tore the veil off the old Ireland. The recent banking and real estate crash hit hard, denting public confidence in the new Ireland. Besides making difficult a fair assessment of "the Long Fellow," as Irishmen know de Valera, these changes raise wider questions for the country he created. And William Butler Yeats's line from 1916, "all changed, changed utterly," echoes even more resoundingly a century later. ■

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## In Search of Fascism

by ALLEN MENDENHALL

*Fascism: The Career of a Concept, Paul E. Gottfried, Northern Illinois University Press, 256 pages*

The term "fascism" is employed with such regular enthusiasm by everyone from political activists to celebrities and academics that our pundits could be forgiven for assuming that fascists lurk behind every corner and at every level of government. MSNBC host Keith Olbermann accused the Bush administration of fascism. Thomas Sowell has called President Obama a fascist. A quick online search yields accusations that Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are fascists. The term "Islamofascism" circulates widely, and groups as dissimilar as campus Social Justice Warriors and the leaders of the National Rifle Association have been dubbed fascist.

It's clear why fanatics or dogmatists would label their opponents with the f-word: rhetorical play scores political points. But is there ever any truth behind the label?

Paul Gottfried enters the semantic fray with a clarifying and elucidating new book, *Fascism: The Career of a Concept*. His study is not based on new archival finds. It's not narrative history. It's instead a comparative study of different treatments of fascism in which Gottfried discloses his preferred methodologies and favorite historians. Despite the prevalence of allegations of fascism, Gottfried submits that the only indisputable example of fascism in practice is Mussolini's interwar Italy.

"This study will examine the semantic twists and turns undergone by the word *fascism* since the 1930s," Gottfried explains. "Like other terms that have changed their meaning, such

as *conservatism* and *liberalism*,” he continues, “*fascism* has been applied so arbitrarily that it may be difficult to deduce what it means without knowing the mindset of the speaker.”

The term fascism, as it has gained currency in our radio-television lexicon, lacks a clear referent. Its use reveals more about the speaker than about the signified phenomenon: the context in which the term is used can determine the speaker’s place on the left-right spectrum. “Fascism” has become a pejorative and disparaging marker for views a speaker dislikes; it’s a name that relegates the named

*Fascism is not necessarily a creature of the counterrevolutionary right. Gottfried describes it as a leftist collectivist ideology.*

to pariah status, provoking censorship and shaping basic notions about political figures and policies. “Fascism now stands,” Gottfried says, “for a host of iniquities that progressives, multiculturalists, and libertarians all oppose, even if they offer no single, coherent account of what they’re condemning.”

Gottfried is frustrated by the vagaries and false analogies resulting from the use of “fascism” as rhetorical weaponry. He criticizes “intellectuals and publicists” who are nominally antifascist yet “feel no obligation to provide a historically and conceptually delimited definition of their object of hate.”

Tracing the evolution of the meanings and representations of this political ideology in the works of numerous researchers, Gottfried’s study can seem, at times, like an amalgam of book reviews or bibliographical essays—or like several synopses strung together with his own comparative evaluations. Academics more than casual readers will appreciate these efforts to summarize the field, although anyone wishing to acquire a

surface-level knowledge of this deep subject will come away edified.

So what exactly is fascism? This question, Gottfried insists, “has sometimes divided scholars and has been asked repeatedly ever since Mussolini’s followers marched on Rome in October 1922.” Gottfried presents several adjectives, mostly gleaned from the work of others, to describe fascism: reactionary, counterrevolutionary, collectivist, authoritarian, corporatist, nationalist, modernizing, and protectionist. These words combine to form a unified sense of what fascism is, although we may never settle on a fixed definition be-

cause fascism has been linked to movements with various distinct characteristics. For instance, some fascists were Christian (e.g., the Austrian clerics or the Spanish Falange) and some were anti-Christian (e.g., the Nazis). There may be some truth to the “current equation of fascism with what is reactionary, atavistic, and ethnically exclusive,” Gottfried acknowledges, but that is only part of the story.

“The initial momentum for locating fascism on the counterrevolutionary Right,” writes Gottfried, “came from Marxists, who focused on the struggle between fascists and the revolutionary Left and the willingness of owners of forces of production to side with the fascists when faced by revolutionary threats.”

Fascism is not necessarily a creature of the counterrevolutionary right, however. Gottfried maps an alternative tradition that describes fascism as a leftist collectivist ideology. Fascism promoted welfare policies and thrived on revolutionary fervor. In the United States in the 1920s and ’30s, the progressives more than self-identified members of the right celebrated and admired European fascism. FDR praised and imitated Mussolini. Such details seem to

substantiate the claim that fascism was intrinsically leftist, at least in the eyes of U.S. citizens who were contemporaries of interwar fascism. But, Gottfried notes, “Fascism drew its strength from the attempt to oppose the Left while taking over some of its defining characteristics.”

Gottfried’s book may not be intended as an antidote for the less rigorous and nakedly polemical *Liberal Fascism*. Unlike the author of that work, Jonah Goldberg, who seemed genuinely surprised by his discovery of what was in fact a well-documented connection between fascism and the left, Gottfried is characteristically measured and careful as he compares research rather than selectively and pugnaciously repurposing it. Gottfried is taken seriously by those who reject his own paleoconservatism—including those on the left who find his views unpalatable or downright offensive—because he doesn’t smear opponents or resort to knee-jerk, grandiose claims to shock or surprise.

Gottfried concludes that fascism is right-wing after all, not left-wing, even if its concrete manifestations have been more militant than traditional conservatism. Like traditional conservatives, fascists did not believe that government programs could alter human nature, and they saw little value in the human-rights mantras extolling the individual’s capacity for self-government.

Today the managerial state carries out leftist projects on behalf of equality and diversity, but that was not true for interwar European governments. Fascism was a product of the 20th century in which conservative adoration for aristocratic hierarchy seemed anachronistic and pragmatically useless as a political stratagem. Without an established aristocracy in their way, fascists constructed an artificial hierarchy to control the populace: a mythical and symbolic hierarchy attracted to the aesthetics of high modernism. The interwar fascists colored brute force with nationalist iconography

and aestheticized violence as a cathartic and regenerative force against decadence.

Probably all treatments of “fascism” as a cohesive, homogeneous philosophy held together by likeminded adherents are wrong, incomplete, careless, or dishonest. Gottfried believes that the term “fascism” has undergone unwarranted manipulation since the German historian Ernst Nolte conflated fascism and Nazism in a manner that enabled less astute critics on “the multicultural Left” to justify “their attack on their opponents as Nazis and not simply generic fascists.”

The failure or refusal to distinguish between totalizing, exterminatory Nazism and other, less extreme forms of fascism may signal the intentional propagation of a political agenda. Gottfried cautions against such politicization of history. “History,” he warns, “is of immediate practical interest to political partisans, and this affinity has allowed a contentious activity to be sometimes grossly abused.”

The popular embrace of incorrect or highly contested notions of fascism has generated media sensationalism about an ever-imminent fascist threat that must be eradicated. The media trope of looming fascism has provoked demands for the kinds of censorship and authoritarianism that, ironically, characterize the very fascism that supposedly needs to be eliminated. Gottfried’s study is too particular, nuanced, and multifaceted to be reduced to simple correctives for these mass-media trends. It is, however, a model for the type of work that can earn the right a hearing from more attentive audiences. Critiques of fascism from the right must follow Gottfried’s lead, not Goldberg’s, to attain credibility. ■

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## Stephen Mast, RIP

by ALAN PELL CRAWFORD

Some years back, when I had taken one of my sons to London, a portly gentleman looking something like a tweedy Dr. John showed up every morning at the door of our Ebury Street flat. He knew where we were staying because he had generously arranged the lodgings himself. He said that’s where Bertie Wooster lived. Then, day after day, he proceeded to show us around his adopted city with patience and enthusiasm, regaling us with stories about his adventures in exotic lands, some of which were probably true. On the bus to Stonehenge and Bath, this Londoner out of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, kept us entertained by surreptitiously sketching caricatures of our fatuous tour guide.

I should add that he had his left foot in an unwieldy contraption that was necessary, he explained, to ease his gout. For a full week, he hobbled around town like that, never letting this encumbrance cramp his considerable style. My son, who was in middle school at the time, thought this International Man of Mystery must be with the CIA. Probably a “hitman.”

This was S.J. Mast, a friend from my Washington days in the late 1970s. It was the first time I’d seen him since he had flown off to the Middle East shortly after the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, saying he wanted to aid the resistance. To that end, he seems to have run a bar in Peshawar, a kind of Rick’s for the Mujahideen.

It would be the last time I would see him, too. One night in mid-March this year I was telling a young writer friend about Mast, and the next morning—eager to find out what he might be up to these days—I looked him up online. That’s when I discovered that he had died in London, succumbing to cancer, on the day after Christmas. He was 61, and with his passing, Anglo-American conservatism lost something special.

Look Mast up on Amazon, and you’ll find a useful tract, *The Muslim and the Microphone: Miscommunications in the*

*War on Terror*, and a novel, *The Test of the Magi*, as Johannes Bergmann. But if you Google him, you’ll enjoy affectionate recollections and a few marvelous pictures of a man whose contributions to civilized society were considerably greater than those of most political writers whose words are looked at by hundreds of thousands and promptly forgotten.

I’ve heard that when Mast was a Hillsdale undergrad, he would chauffeur Russell Kirk from Mecosta and back, a two-and-a-half-hour drive. Kirk’s Christian humanism left its mark on Mast, as Mast’s own distillation of the same mellow spirits had on many younger conservatives who were fortunate enough to know him. Well read in the classics of the East as well as West, he would talk about them long into the boozy night—and not just talk but listen. Older people always found him endearing; young ones looked to him as a kind of sage. I remember most his merry tales, the humor of which seemed to bubble up from a tolerant astonishment at the foibles of all fallen creatures. His interest in people of all religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds was broad and deep. He had great respect for the Islamic peoples—and great affection.

For all his old-world affectations—and I loved his affectations—Mast was as American as you can get. He was probably the most truly democratic and least snobbish man ever to carry a walking stick. When I first met him, he had just returned from a semester or so at St. Andrews, and he was forever promising to “give me a shout” or chuckling over the latest political “con-TROV-ersy.” But after living in the Middle East, North Africa, London, and God only knows where else all those years, he became just what he had always set out to be, which was a citizen of the world—a *self-made* citizen of the world, at that. Re-inventing yourself on that scale, after all, is something only an American can pull off. And maybe only *this* American. ■

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