

Funereal Ethics: An Antidote to Ur-Fascism

By

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“Don't you see that your own words contradict you? For what could be more contradictory than to claim that someone who does not exist is not only miserable but is anything at all?”—Cicero

Abstract

This paper examines death as an ethical category within theological and philosophical discourse. Drawing on John 12:25, where Jesus asserts that “he that loveth his life shall lose it,” I argue that life is framed as negation rather than affirmation. Jesus critiques attachment to worldly pleasures as illusory, a view echoed in Plato’s *Phædo*, where Socrates advocates detachment from bodily desires and lifelong preparation for death. Both figures employ “death talk” not as morbidity but as an ethical orientation: to be fully human is to recognize mortality and live accordingly. I term this orientation *funereal ethics*, an imperative that redirects action away from solipsistic self-preservation toward communal responsibility. To make this claim, I analyze Umberto Eco, Huey P. Newton, Victor Anderson, and Frank B. Wilderson III, tracing how their work conceptualizes fascism, both political and existential, as a site for rethinking death and ethics.

The recent rise of far-right, jingoistic leaders has sparked alarm across the global body politic: Le Pen in France, Meloni in Italy, Orbán in Hungary, Farage in Britain, and Trump in the United States exemplify a growing movement of partisan chauvinism and diplomatic irreverence that can be broadly construed as Fascism.

This essay proceeds on three fronts across two sections. Section I begins with a demystification of Fascism, examining the ideology through the lens of three theorists who lived under the shadow of varied Fascist regimes—Slavoj Žižek, Hannah Arendt, and George L. Jackson. The second front interrogates Umberto Eco’s concept of “Ur-Fascism” (1995), questioning his claim that Fascism’s praise of heroism is inherently linked to death. Instead, I propose that an embrace of death might serve as a rejoinder to Fascism in both leadership and laity. Section II turns to the Afro-pessimist tradition of “social death,” placing it in dialogue with Victor Anderson’s call to move “beyond” Black ontology. Here, I explore how Black death, Black struggle, and the end of humanity converge as a potential site of redemption—an opening for what I term a *funereal ethics*.

I bear witness to death, to its indiscretion, its impartiality, its immanence. It is always already here, as I live and as I breathe. On July 26, 2021, a month after graduating high school, Melvin Moses, one of my former students, was gunned down in front of the elementary school he attended. He was nineteen. On December 27, 2021, Joseph P. Green, my childhood pastor of

Emanuel Worship Center in Petersburg, Virginia, died from complications related to COVID-19. He was eighty-eight. On August 5, 2022, Kendal Goode, my barber of over fifteen years, was killed in a car crash in Portsmouth, Virginia. He was fifty years old. On August 25, 2022, my first cousin Lisa Washington died of complications related to ALS. She was forty-four. On December 21, 2022, Jesse Hogg, one of my former students, at seventeen years of age, was murdered by one of his former classmates in Portsmouth, Virginia. On January 22, 2023, Vivian Spicely Walker, my grandmother, aged ninety-six, died. On February 7, 2023, Tyana Perry, one of my former students, was killed in a car crash in Portsmouth, Virginia. She was nineteen. On March 23, 2023, Javon Johnson, a bassist with whom I played saxophone in a church band for nearly two decades, was killed in a car crash, at thirty-four. On April 21, 2023, Blu, my precious dog, whom I raised from a puppy, after a yearlong bout with cancer, died at the age of ten. On May 5, 2023, Melvin Taylor, my uncle, at the age of eighty, died. On October 3, 2023, Michael Harper, a deacon of the Church, close to my heart, whom I had known for a quarter of a century, suddenly died. He was sixty-six. On December 28, 2023, my beloved aunt Linda Dunn died from complications related to diabetes. She was seventy-four. I bear witness to death, to its cruelty, to its finality, to its philosophy, and to its ministry. For, we *all* are *already dead*.

In the Gospels, Jesus teaches this very concept. John 12:25 reads, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal,” presents life as a death category, a negation. Jesus is making life death by suggesting that if one loves their life, they will lose it. Surely, Jesus is not suggesting that if one loves their life that they will die immediately and that their soul will be required of them. Rather, he is most reasonably saying that if one is loving one’s life, the pleasures of one’s life, as though one is never going to die, as though one is going to live forever, the fallacious nature of that mode of thought is tantamount to not living at all. In the verse, Jesus goes on to say that if you hate your life in this world, you will keep it as eternal life. This is another death category pronounced by Jesus, that is, hating life, a negation. Socrates makes a similar utterance in Plato’s *The Phædo*, his swansong, in a dialogue with Simmias as recounted by Phædo:

Socrates: Do you think that it is right for a philosopher to concern himself with the so-called pleasures connected with food and drink?

Simmias: Certainly not, Socrates.

Socrates: What about sexual pleasures?

Simmias: No, not at all.

Socrates: And what about the other attentions that we pay to our bodies? Do you think that a philosopher attaches any importance to them? I mean things like providing himself with smart clothes and shoes and other bodily ornaments; do you think that he values them or despises them—in so far as there is no real necessity for him to go in for that sort of thing?

Simmias: I think the true philosopher despises them.

Socrates: Then it is your opinion in general that a man of this kind is not concerned with the body, but keeps his attention directed as much as he can away from it and toward the soul?

Simmias: Yes, it is.

Socrates: So it is clear first of all in the case of physical pleasures that the philosopher frees his soul from association with the body, so far as is possible, to a greater extent than other men?

Simmiias: It seems so.

Socrates: And most people think, do they not, Simmiias, that a man who finds no pleasure and takes no part in these things does not deserve to live, and that anyone who thinks nothing of physical pleasures has one foot in the grave (Plato, Lines 64d-65a).

There is nothing morbid about this death talk. To be fully human is to already be dead. That is the lesson that we learn from both Jesus and Socrates. Hate your life because you are already dead. This is what I call *funereal ethics*, and it is an ought of how the human should live, realizing that there is nothing else but death for the self, thus predicating action away from self, and into community. Socrates goes so far as to say that “the right way to philosophy [is] of [one’s] own accord preparing [oneself] for dying and death..., looking forward to death” (Plato, Line 64a) all one’s life, making it “absurd to be troubled when the thing comes for which [one] [has] so long been preparing and looking forward” (Plato, Line 64a). Thus, with this pronouncement, both Socrates and Jesus, speaking in death categories, attempt to wrest the human subject from the confines of solipsism and sensitize them to the world of community.

Funereal ethics is a call for the end of politics itself in that, as Hannah Arendt (1970) notes in *On Violence* (as inspired by Fanon) that “[d]eath, whether faced in actual dying or in the inner awareness of one’s own mortality, is perhaps the most antipolitical experience there is [,] [signifying] that we shall disappear from the world of appearances and shall leave the company of our fellow-men, which are the conditions of all politics” (p. 67). For, once theology has assuaged the anxiety of guilt and condemnation and philosophy the anxiety of fate and death, (Tillich 1952, p. 206-7) all that remains is community, what exists outside our personal and insular sphere of self. This is the essence of what I term *funereal ethics*. The end of politics that I propose is a beginning of a new politics, one that serves the literal *polis*, that is, the community of the citizenry of world societies.

I: Immortality, the Fascist Pipedream

A. Demystification of Fascism

The following paper is a response to Fascism, politically construed as the foremost arbiter of death, through the construction of its antithesis, community, *vis-à-vis* a funereal ethics. This introductory word expresses my comfort with and acceptance of death being part and parcel of the human condition. As a hero, the Fascist, be he a political leader or a member of the body politic, a little fascist, believes that he will live forever. This is the source of his insecurity, the font of his monarchical outbursts/demands, and this is the need for a funereal ethics.

Fascism is denoted as being “a political philosophy, movement, or regime (such as that of the Fascisti) that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition” (Merriam-Webster). Slavoj Žižek, Marxian-Lacanian scholar, born in Titoist (Soviet-separatist) Yugoslavian Slovenia under constant threat of Stalinist repression, has his own definition of Fascism. On how Fascist ideology possesses the color of Marx’s supplemental concept of surplus (as in surplus-value), in that it “implies a certain renunciation of ‘pathological’, empirical use-value,” Žižek notes:

...remember Mussolini's famous answer to the question 'How do the Fascists justify their claim to rule Italy? What is their programme?' 'Our programme is very simple: we want to rule Italy!' The ideological power of Fascism lies precisely in the feature which was perceived by liberal or leftist critics as its greatest weakness: in the utterly void, formal character of its appeal, in the fact that it demands obedience and sacrifice for their own sake. For Fascist ideology, the point is not the instrumental value of the sacrifice, it is the very form of sacrifice itself, 'the spirit of sacrifice', which is the cure against the liberal-decadent disease. It is also clear why Fascism was so terrified by psychoanalysis: psychoanalysis enables us to locate an obscene enjoyment at work in this act of formal sacrifice (Žižek 1989, p. 90).

In this Lacanian/Marxist analysis of Fascism, Žižek is suggesting that Fascism is a supplementarity that is devoid of ideology because its ideological quotient is tethered to a demand for others to accept it without question. Žižek (1989) posits that rightist ideology (read Fascism) is a project of othering that has been under the gaze of an Other in the form of the "liberal-decadent disease" (p. 90). Lacan's big Other, that hegemonic entity placing many expectations on a person driving them to hysteria, is a potentate specter, which Žižek compares to the G-d of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament. This G-d's insatiable desire engenders in his subject a *che vuoi*, an unfulfillable longing to reach the demands of the Other thus becoming othered (brought to a place of certain erasure) in the process. Žižek (1989) calls this a paradox, locating a corollary in this fascistic procedure of identification with the othered, responding to the Other, with Hitler. In Hitler's public appearances, "people specifically identified themselves with what were hysterical outbursts of impotent rage—that is, they 'recognized' themselves in this hysterical *acting out*" (p. 117). This acting out, born of flaccid incapacity, for Žižek (1989), is the weakness innate in the Fascist, comparable to "the hysterical woman in the act of such a theatrical outburst," (p. 117) when it becomes "clear that she is doing this to offer herself to the Other as the object of its desire," (p. 117) there is a "kind of masculine, paternal identification: she is enacting fragile femininity, but on the symbolic level she is in fact identified with the paternal gaze, to which she wants to appear likeable" (p. 118). This castrated behavior, in which the woman (read Fascist) embodies a constitutive lack comparative to the masculine Other, is a substratum of Fascist ideology—it exudes violence because of a deep insecurity of a dearth of power. In her analysis of violence, totalitarianism, and power,

Hannah Arendt, who came of age in Germany during the rise of Hitler's Fascism, demonstrates that this is why it is incorrect to think of nonviolence as the absence of power. She writes:

To sum up: politically speaking, it is insufficient to say that power and violence are not the same. Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance (Arendt 1970, p. 56).

In this way, violence and nonviolence are not opposites but one in the same. The only time violence is necessary is where power is flailing, where the powerful sense that their end is near, because if one really had absolute power there would be no cause for violent outbursts.

Imprisoned Black American political theorist George L. Jackson (1972) agrees with this view, and provides a more nuanced discussion of this impotent quality of the Fascist, explaining that “[f]ascism is always a response to a threat to the establishment” (p. 151). Jackson, who was a. a political prisoner and General and Field Marshal of the Black Panther Party, writes in 1971 from San Quentin Prison. He had been sentenced to a 1 year to life prison term for allegedly stealing seventy dollars from a gas station and daily experienced the brunt of the cruel Fascistic American prison industrial complex. (The 1 year to life sentence, also known as indefinite imprisonment, was a mainstay in punishing Black men in America and was prevented from further institution in 1987 under the United Nations Convention Against Torture [United Nations Treaty Collection 1984].) Performing an analysis of Fascism, in which, Jackson maintains that Fascism has three faces that are reflected in the notion of being power insecure.

Expressing these faces as an economic arrangement, namely monopoly capitalism, a combination of “surplus capital and super-nationalism,” (p. 150) Jackson, who was assassinated in prison by the State not long after penning these words, formulates the following: **The First Face.** A repudiation of the former ideology, “after the deep disillusionment and unrest caused by the Italian participation in the war,” (Jackson 1972, p. 142) that is, the Great War. This early face of fascism “was not merely anti-communist but fundamentally a general indictment of decadence, bourgeois decadence,” (Jackson 1972, p. 142) “absorbed by some socialists,” (Jackson 1972, p. 142) and “included an amalgam of expressionists, anarcho-syndicalists, futurists, Hegelian idealists, theoretical syndicalists, nationalists and, in the case of the Spanish Falange, intellectual anarchists” (Jackson 1972, p. 142). **The Second Face.** An “antithesis to socialism,” (Jackson 1972, p. 150) in order to “diffuse the working-class movement,” (Jackson 1972, p. 150) Mussolini and his Black Shirts began to “[kill] and [suppress] his opposition for the interests of an alarmed industrial-traditionalist elite,” “[pumping] bullets into the old left and new life into capitalism,” where “people...exist solely for the state (the ruling class)” (Jackson 1972, p. 150). **The Third Face.** Fascism, born out of weakness, is now “in power and secure,” (Jackson 1972, p. 151) by 1929, able to branch out its reach and spread its doctrine, and “allowed to make war again in Africa, in Europe” (Jackson 1972, p. 151). To Jackson, if not for the old left, deeply tied to corporatist interests, there would not have been the capacity for the emergence of the new right, or the Fascist regime, both right and left beholden to the market morality of capitalism. These three philosophers provide powerful insights and critiques of Fascism. Yet, while Žižek’s psychoanalysis of Fascism as an ideology is formative, Arendt’s analysis of the violence of Fascism is causative, and Jackson’s economic vision of Fascism is summative, none of these thinkers arrives at an apt discourse on what I deem the most significant aspect of Fascism, its emphasis on heroism. Rather, this aspect of Fascism is discussed by, perhaps the most important critic of Fascism of the past thirty years, Umberto Eco.

B. Umberto Eco, Ur-Fascism, and the Anti-Heroism of Huey P. Newton

Eco, a philosopher born in Italy under the fascist regime of Mussolini, discloses an understanding of fascism he calls *Ur-Fascism*, that is, eternal fascism, a fascism that is an intractable political instantiation. Ur-Fascism has structures evident in political moments throughout history, observable in Franco and Salazar, in the Balkan fascism of the Ustashes, “[a]dd to the Italian fascism a radical anti-capitalism (which never much fascinated Mussolini) and you have Ezra Pound,” (Eco 1995, p. 5) “[a]dd a cult of Celtic mythology and the Grail mysticism (completely alien to official fascism and you have one of the most respected fascist

gurus, Julius Evola” (Eco 1995, p. 5). In his essay “Ur-Fascism” (1995), Eco offers an extensive analysis of Ur-Fascism, fascism as eternal, formulating the fourteen features, that

The discerning reader will notice that many of these features of Ur-Fascism were discussed by Žižek, Arendt, and Jackson in our earlier discussion of Fascism. However, for my purposes here in constructing an anti-heroist response to Fascism, Eco’s eleventh feature of Ur-Fascism, **Heroism is Normalized and Praised**, is most important to the thesis of this paper. How might we understand how heroism is a man that prevents one from responding through community to Fascism as neurotic ideology, as violence, as monopoly capitalism, and as eternal political dogma? Moreover, what if Eco was wrong, and that heroism being linked to the cult of death is not just a pathway towards Fascism but a deliverance from it?

To formulate my thesis, I turn to Huey P. Newton and his essay “Black Capitalism: Re-Analyzed I” (1971). In the work, Newton, Co-Founder and Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party, engages the concept of *the hero* by comparing him to the capitalist, disconnected and aloof, self-seeking and self-adorned in his importance, not necessarily morally bereft, but distanced from the plight of the greater masses of people, the huddled masses yearning to breathe freely, yearning for justice. He writes:

One of the primary characteristics of a revolutionary cultist is that he despises everyone who has not reached his level of consciousness, or the level of consciousness that he thinks he has reached, instead of acting to bring the people to that level. In that way the revolutionary cultist becomes divided from the people; he defects from the community. Instead of serving the people as a vanguard, he becomes a hero. Heroes engage in very courageous actions sometimes and they often make great sacrifices, including the supreme sacrifice, but they are still isolated from the people (Newton 1972, p. 102).

Newton, in his analysis of the petit bourgeois Black capitalist who, gallant in his pursuits, builds his wealth on the degradation of poor Black people, desires to break free of the individualist heroism that is claustrophobic and insular and wants to rather adopt a modality of being in the world that is connected to the sufferings of others. The reason for Newton’s suspicion surrounding the Black capitalist was that in the summer of 1971, the Black radical mobilized a boycott of Mayfair Supermarket in Oakland, California, in response to a Black businessman Bill Boyette (Newton 1972, p. 109). In “Black Capitalism: Re-Analyzed II” (1971), an addendum of sorts to his first examination of the Black capitalist, Newton mounts a materialist analysis of the Black petit bourgeois abandonment of the Black working class. According to Newton, Boyette, who was President of the California-State Package Store and Tavern Owners Association (Cal-Pak), gave contracts to white truck drivers instead of Black truckers, leading Newton (1972) to wonder, “Why should the Black community nourish a Black profiteer who has no concern for his brother?” (p. 110). Consequently, Newton (1972), organizing through the Black Panther Party, called for a boycott of Mayfair Supermarkets, where Cal-Pak products were sold (p. 111). This boycott was resolved in January of 1972, with the end result being the formation of “a non-profit social vehicle for the Black community” that made “disbursements to various significant organizations in the Black community on a regular and continuing basis” to “benefit...the survival programs of the Black Panther Party” (Jackson 1972, p. 109).

What Newton works against here is wholly Western and American and frontiersman-like, what Emerson, who an early expositor of American heroism, would term “...treating

successively higher states of the soul” (Emerson [1838] 1964, p. 340). According to Emerson, considered by some the first American philosopher, one of the “leading traits of the Heroic character” is defined by a “concentration and exaltation of the Individual, setting himself in opposition to external evils and dangers, and regarding them as measures of his own greatness. It was said that the hero scorns the frivolous and sordid life of men around him, and delights in exhibiting by great action or passion the superior endowments of his own nature” (Emerson [1838] 1964, p. 340). Pressing towards the mark of the higher calling of communalism against individualism, Newton (1972) writes of the virtues of an anti-heroism in his “Black Capitalism” essays, as the first works he pens upon being released from prison where he faced certain death, citing that “[t]he idea of Black individualism is sheer madness, impotence personified” (p. 110).

Newton’s account of the alienation he felt while being freed from his imprisonment in 1970, after serving thirty-three months of a cruel 1 year to 15 years sentence in San Luis Obispo Men’s Penal Colony on a voluntary manslaughter charge for the killing of Officer John Frey during a racially profiling traffic stop in Oakland in 1967 is instructive here. In *Revolutionary Suicide* (1973), his autobiography, Newton tells how in the process of being released from prison, after the first trial for reasons Judge Monroe Friedman’s failure to provide the jury with the option to convict him of involuntary manslaughter (providing only voluntary manslaughter and murder and options for conviction) and after the second trial for reasons of insufficient evidence against him, he was moved from San Luis Obispo back to Alameda County Jail to await processing out of the California penal system. He had been jailed in Alameda before from 1964 for twenty-two months for stabbing Odell Lee, a young man at a party whom Newton believed was a threat to his life.

At Alameda, as he had often been before, Newton was placed in solitary confinement near what was called “little death row.” The revolutionary recounts his inner thoughts about revisiting solitary confinement at Alameda in this way:

Little Death Row was a depressing experience. When I had been there before, I was facing the gas chamber, too, and felt more a part of it. We were all in the same thing, McPherson, myself, and another guy who is now on Big Death Row. Back then, I had accepted Little Death Row as a thing to be dealt with. But now I would be on the streets in a few hours while the others might never walk out. Knowing I could do little for them left me feeling like an outsider, and also privileged, and I never like to feel privileged (Newton 1973, p. 309).

Continuing in this description in the wake of his being freed, Newton (1973) would go on to say that he felt guilty over his good fortune while so many others there would have to go without freedom for a protracted period of time until the peradventure of a pending revolution (p. 312). Later, in 1971, he amplifies the sense of alienation and guilt he felt upon his release from prison in his dialogue with Erikson catalogued in *In Search of Common Ground* (1973):

I felt alienated for the first time since being in prison, very alone and very sad. The first time, they were all going to death and I was going to jail, but now they were going to death and I was being released. I wanted to apologize to them for being released, even though I had to go through a second trial too, because why should I have been released while they were going to the death chamber? Why should the people have demanded my release and not theirs? Because of my

identification with those men, I wasn't really released from prison: until every one of them is out of the death cells, I'll still be there (Newton and Erikson 1973, p. 66).

Newton was the leader and co-founder of the Black Panthers, and he also felt a sense of leadership that extended far beyond the environs of Oakland, California, and into the sinkhole of iniquity that is the prison industrial complex. As a leader, as a human being, he commiserated with the suffering of the least among him, those Black men on death row, who were being executed while he was being released from prison. Instead of being a little fascist, identifying with the deadness of these imprisoned men, Newton made common cause with them as an oppressed community, (Newton and Erikson 1973, p. 40) understanding that the death penalty disproportionately affects the poor of African descent (United Nations 2017).

It is this connection with those who are dead, though living, that is the core of a funereal ethics, that as long as there are people facing imminent death, though I am freed "I'll still be there" with them. This view is the *Summum Bonum* of what Newton called revolutionary intercommunalism, that is, given the rising tide of rapidly increasing and insurmountable contingencies of technological, autocratic advancements, all that remains is the shared community of oppressed peoples the world over (Newton and Erikson 1973, p. 31). Though alive, identifying with the sufferings (deathness) of others, engenders a sense of one's own connection to death through community. This is the construction of community through death. In this way, heroism being linked to the cult of death has its opposite—an anti-heroism linked to death that through identification with the coeval and inevitable death of others life can be forged through concerted communalism.

Though the most influential political theorist in the Black Panther Party, conscious of the significance of protecting the Black communities of Oakland, California and across America, an ethic of the funereal was not the purview of Huey Newton, until he was on little death row. Only then, behind bars, faced with his impending death, did the internationalist politics of the shared communality of colonized nations under the awesome U.S. federal technological aegis emerge as a point of ultimate concern for him. The term "ultimate concern" I borrow from Paul Tillich in Volume I of his three-volume *Systematic Theology*. Personally, I was fourteen years old when my father died. Since then, the ultimate concern of my life has been developing a philosophy of community that allays the horrific finitude of death, that acknowledges community as an infinitude of humanism. For Tillich (1952), the ultimate concern of humankind differs from what he called preliminary concern, that is, the concerns of the secular realm, "the aesthetic value of an artistic creation, about scientific value of a physical theory or a historical conjecture, about the best methods of medical healing or social reconstruction, about the solution of political and international conflicts" (p. 12). Rather, ultimate concern is both concrete and universal. Its existential-critical component has inured in it an intuitive-descriptive element that allows it an absolute concreteness and an absolute universality that, phenomenologically, reveals its true character through the process of revelation (Tillich 1952, pp. 106-7).

This section was an attempt to pronounce funereal ethics, an onto-theo-logical position (Cf. Spanos 1993), a revelatory response to Fascism, that Fascism, though death-seeking and substantiated by death, would not have the final word on death. Instead, that those who are oppressed by the violent ideology of necro-economic technological monopolistic governance are conjoined by their shared dynamic deadness to construct community, through which they may find life, was the aim of the first part of this essay. The second part of this paper will examine the

Afro-pessimist tradition to export its conceptions of nonbeing as potential site and source of antifascist free moral agency. In it, I will attempt to show how we are all of us already dead, as dead as the Black body is in perpetuity. This deathness can be liberating. As it was for Newton, and Jesus before him in John 12:25, (“Whoever loves his life his life will lose it, but whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal”), so can it be for the body politic.

II: Afro-pessimism: Studies in Black Ontology

In his major work *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (1995), theologian and ethicist Victor Anderson seeks a new way of defining what it means to be Black in America. In his thesis, he forsakes all categorically racial and Black apologetical descriptions of Blackness and seeks to abscond the traditionalism of ontological mores conducive to elucidating what it means to be Black in the world. Observing that for decades Blackness as an ethos of being has oft been substantiated by its perceived epic and intrinsic struggle against whiteness and white supremacy, he stipulates in a logic of *reductio ad absurdum* that this creates an ontology that is strictly limiting and myopic in its scope and scale:

Existentially, the new [B]lack being remains bound by whiteness. Politically, it remains unfulfilled because [B]lackness is ontologically defined as the experience of suffering and survival (Anderson 1995, p. 93).

For Anderson, Blackness as an identity should not seek to be apologist after that thinking of “race men” like David Walker, W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Marcus Garvey, nor should it be heroic in the way of Apollo, but should be Nietzschean in its grotesquery, afforded every convolution and complication assigned to all other realms of humanity on the planet. Then only can a new Black *being* spring forth, one that is not monumental or monolithic but pluralistic and heterogonous, in a redemptive and generative way. Anderson rejects all methods of ascribing a categorical disposition of Black identity, because, for Anderson, if Blackness is defined by its struggle against white supremacy, i.e., whiteness itself (whiteness as property, whiteness as metaphor for power, *etc.*), then Blackness needs whiteness to exist, a conjecture that is not likely most reasonably evidential.

Converse to Anderson’s view is the school of thought called Afro-pessimism. To be in the school of Afro-pessimism, one must link suffering as synonymous with Blackness, to posit that suffering equals Black, that it is *a priori* Black, that the “[e]radication of the generative mechanisms of Black suffering would mean the end of the world...” (Wilderson 2011) It, Afro-pessimism, suggests that without struggle there can be no Blackness, and without Blackness there can be no struggle, that “[a]ffirmation of [B]lackness proves to be impossible without simultaneously affirming the violence that structures [B]lack subjectivity itself” (Stephens 2013). However, contrary to this view, posited by social critic R.L. Stephens in “Wanderings of the Slave: Black Life and Social Death” (2013), struggle exists outside of Blackness, and Blackness exists outside of struggle. To suggest otherwise delimits the range and scope of the humanity that is Blackness. Black people are so much more than struggle, in their illeity, their external, observable self, and in their phenomenology. Just as the trace, or the presence, of the signifier has no precedent (Cf. Derrida [1967] 2016), so too Blackness has no antecedent. It is phenomenal without being ontological. It is by acculturation that the

hypostatic nature of Blackness is given its subjectivity. To give Blackness an overdetermined plenary weight such as the Afro-pessimist is to make Blackness in its subjectivizing quality a transcendentalism. Anti-transcendental subjectivity of Blackness is what Anderson describes in his discourse on the origins of the term “genius.” Anderson (1995) elucidates how the term *genius* protruded from ideals of European sentiment, which emerged from an obsession of the 18th century with the literary genre of the heroic epic, in which the “...dominant imperialist ethos and ideology of the age of Europe” (p. 121) could have its being:

The aesthetic preoccupation of European intellectuals with genius pervades the expressive culture of the times, whether in music, literature, art, philosophy, or theology. The idea of genius has a long career in the West. The idea is based on the Greek word *genea*, which means birth, descent, or race. Its cognates are *genealogia*, which is the tracing of one’s pedigree or descent; *genesis* pertains to the origin or to one’s birth; *genna* is the generic term for offspring, and *genos* is most philosophically expropriated in metaphysics. It signifies the generality of race, descent, kind, and the general from the species (Anderson 1995, pp. 121-2).

That the concept of genius was never meant to pertain to anyone who was non-European but was created by Europeans to describe European victory as whiteness, and to explain how “[t]he idea of Europe was now justified under the cult of genius in art, music, literature, religion, philosophy, politics, and law” (Anderson 1995, p. 123) is revelatory. This is because the genius, that especial quality that emanates from the etymological foundations of Europe, finding its English “...cognates in Latin,” “...*genea* (begotten, production), *genera* (bring forth life), *generosus* (of noble birth),” (Anderson 1995, p. 122) being indexical of the “...originality, individuality, invention, inspiration, creativity in art, music, philosophy, and politics over tradition,...discovery, talent, and taste,” (p.122) was a virtue that was specifically never apportioned or meant for Black people.

Therefore, when Anderson (1995) introduces the concept of the “cult of [B]lack heroic genius,” (p. 13) he is bespeaking a noumenality and phenomenality of Black culture that clings to ideals of genius as a modality of existential abstraction of certain Black people over and against others (Cf. Du Bois’ “The Talented Tenth,” 1903), thereby depositing in them a sense of self that is above critique and reproach:

I use the word *cult* here to designate dispositions of devotion, loyalty, and admiration for racial categories and the essentialized principles that determine [B]lack identity. And the racial genius refers to the exceptional, sometimes essentialized cultural qualities, that positively represent the racial group in the action of at least one of the group’s members. Insofar as the one member’s actions are said to represent the genius of the group (whether that member is a Sojourner Truth, a Marian Anderson, a Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Malcolm X, a Michael Jordan, or a Jessye Norman) that member also exhibits the heroic qualities of the race (Anderson 1995, p. 13).

These notions of pernicious Black racial genius, that Black people are by their very nature especial—magic—are part and parcel of what prevents Black people from judging aright their leadership, for holding those in positions of power accountable. This is a bidirectional

phenomenon, because those in positions of power, clinging to modes of elitist genius, often lash out at criticism from Black people because they durst criticize them while being Black, a similar epistemological commitment that Huey Newton raises in his critique of the hero in both “Black Capitalism-Re-analyzed I” and “Black Capitalism Re-Analyzed II” that we examined in § 1 of this paper. According to Anderson (1995), with probability, the most harmful consequence of Black people espousing modes of the European genius is, with “...its essentially heroic, epochal, and culture-advancing qualities,” it “...has likewise determined how African Americans represent themselves as the mirror of European genius: ontological [B]lackness signifies the [B]lackness that whiteness created” (p. 13). What a galling indictment of culture as a radically transformative force, created by the victim to ontologically prepare them for their own victimization. Therefore, Anderson suggests that we should move beyond Platonic ontological modes of Blackness, of race in general, to free us of the undue burden of being blindly loyal to those who would do us harm.

The alternative, Afro-pessimist view would stipulate an implacable metaphysics, and would in its way suggest a Black superiority, which does not exist. Black people do not have a monopoly or primacy on suffering. Moreover, this framework fails to provide a meaningful or productive lens through which to interpret suffering or to understand the complexities of the Black experience in the United States. Its sensational and overdetermined character does not afford space for a metered and interrogative analysis of race or experience. The Afro-pessimist assumes that Blackness and suffering are tautological, even when it appears empirically to be otherwise, that to be Black in society at large requisites death, that Black people’s “...absence from the spatiotemporal structure of the narrative” (Wilderson 2016) is required. They believe that it, Black suffering, is ontological in the sense that it is existential, and that it is existential in all its concrescence, that it is an experience that is color-coded and ineluctably Black.

For example, Frank B. Wilderson, III, the scholar responsible for coining the term Afro-pessimism, believes that the Black person is still a slave, because to be a slave is to be in the ontological position of social death, and to be Black is tantamount to living in a state of social death, in perpetuity. He bases his definition of social death on the concept originated by Orlando Patterson in his book *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (1982). In the preface to the 2018 printing of *Slavery and Social Death*, Harvard University Press included the following statement by Patterson addressing the school of Afro-pessimism:

The invocation of social death by these public intellectuals is not something from which I recoil. To the contrary, in both my scholarship and in my public intellectual work, I have long argued for the persistence of the effects of slavery in American culture and society. Typical of my position is the following statement, written some twenty years ago: “The Thirteenth Amendment abolished individual ownership of one person by another but did not remove the culture and institutional system of slavery. Indeed...in many respects these were compensatorily reinforced, making life more precarious and frighteningly oppressive for Afro-Americans...Interest in the influence of slavery on the present life and cultural creations of African Americans, and Americans generally, is not confined to this circle of Afropessimists (Patterson 2018, pp. 16-7).

Wilderson defines Afro-pessimism and social death as follows:

Afro-Pessimism is premised on an iconoclastic claim: that Blackness is coterminous with Slaveness. Blackness *is* social death, which is to say that there was never a prior meta-moment of plenitude, never a moment of equilibrium, never a moment of social life. Blackness, as a paradigmatic position (rather than as an ensemble of identities, cultural practices, or anthropological accoutrement), cannot be disimbricated from slavery (Wilderson 2016).

In a 2015 interview conducted by KPFA journalist C.S. Soong in Berkeley, California, Wilderson made the following statement concerning Blackness as a category of social death. In his essay “Blacks and the Master/Slave Relation” (2015):

One is gratuitous violence, which means that the body of the slave is open to the violence of all others. Whether he or she receives that violence or not, he or she exists in a state of structural or open vulnerability (Wilderson 2017, p. 18).

For Wilderson (2017) and the Afro-pessimists, “[s]ocial death is aporetic with respect to narrative writ large (and, by extension, to redemption, writ large),” (p. 18) and this vulnerability is imbrued irremissibly onto the existence of the Black person as a conspicuous sign of insuperable ontological insufficiency. Yet, if we are in the moment that Derrida suggests, where the transcendental signified is the logocentric universe (following the architectonic role of religion in the Middle Ages [theocentricity] and science in the Age of Enlightenment [anthropocentricity]), and if it is evidentiary that the present-past and future-present are done away with, that there is a great oneness from signifier to signified, then suffering would have to exist before Blackness to give it its significative *ousia* [*étant*]. And that makes no logical sense. This moment is not of the transcendental signified but of the traumatic signified where the trauma precedes the signified not because of racial category but because of the supplementarity of the signification itself. The Black body is Ur-Slavery, Ur-Death, and site of Ur-Violence. “[T]he violence which both elaborates and saturates Black ‘life’ is totalizing, so much so as to make narrative inaccessible to Blacks,” (Wilderson 2016), thus makes death a permanent status of Black people.

Black people suffer in the world for no other reason principally than the fictive social construct of race. Therefore, there are certain ways in which Black people suffer that is contingent upon being Black in the world. To wit, Black people suffer in ways that no other group of people can say that they suffer. And so, through the prism of specificity of race matters *vis-à-vis* Black people, it can be reasonably construed that Black people would most naturally be equipped to meliorate the issues affecting Black people. Though Schopenhauer (1913), perhaps the most noted of all pessimists, would likely suggest that we refer to one another as fellow sufferers, (p. 29) this distinction is inaccurate as much as it is unacceptable because our human suffering is not the same as our cultural suffering. It may be certain that in our humanity we “...[pay] the penalty of existence in [our] own peculiar way” (p. 28) through “...sufferings, ...worries, ...misery,” (p. 28) and that this is not “...anything unusual or irregular,” (p. 28). Still, our human suffering, while accessible in its universality, is not as deeply understood as our cultural suffering, which is often predicated by participants in other cultures. This can be observed in the systematic racist oppression and terrorism visited upon Black people by white people: 246 years of chattel slavery; 100 years of Jim Crow segregation and white supremacist, mass lynching terrorism (with over 4,000 Black Americans being summarily executed by white

Americans from 1877 to 1950); over seventy years of mass incarceration, housing discrimination, chemical and biological degradation via crack cocaine and other drugs funnelled into disproportionately poor Black neighborhoods; police brutality; and sexual assault; and inequity of quality within our school systems. That is over 400 years of turmoil unlike inflicted on any other group since the dawn of modernity with the Age of Sail.

It is here in this slight epistemic space that I tend to agree with the Afro-pessimist. Black people suffer in the world for no other reason principally than the fictive social construct of race. Therefore, there are certain ways in which Black people suffer that is contingent upon being Black in the world. This Black suffering takes various forms of nonbeing, or death.

III. Toward a Funereal Ethics

What if we took the central ethos of the Afro-pessimist tradition, that Black people are in a perpetual state of death, a sociogeny associable with their enslavement as unending social subversion, and paired it with the Johannine gospel proclamation of Jesus, who pronounced death categories for us all (loving life → losing life)? Could this be a gateway to unlearning Fascistic modes of being through nonbeing? What if hating life to gain life is, in fact, too insular, and rather, the goal should be to love life *to lose* it, and from embodying one's life as unalive, there is offered territory for building community? What if we saw G-d as being as much G-d in death as we do in life, that there is no shadow of turning in G-d when we die as when we live? If we did, perhaps our conception of death as defeat will lose its footing.

Perhaps, then, the Fascistic (capitalist and imperialist) desire to live forever becomes untenable in that new epistemic reality where we are neither heroic nor grotesque but leave the human foundations of conquest and competition behind in search of a redemptive deadness that predicates a mortality and that instantiates *Gemeinschaft*. Newton's belief was that the technological advancements of the U.S. global empire are so rapacious that all we have to lean on is community, for we are but sheep for the slaughter. Is that not what I argue for here? A funereal ethics is that program of ethology that binds the body politic together under undue socioeconomic and sociopolitical sufferings with the understanding that we all are experiencing various forms of death (poverty, sickness, loneliness), the grav(e)ity of which should prevent us from striving towards becoming what Marx (1867) called "small masters" (pp. 227-8). Funereal ethics, then, is an applied ethics that advocates community formation as an act of self-defense.

For, to be a small master is to be a little fascist, that is, of a class consciousness (or lack thereof) that believes that one's property will live forever. It is tantamount to the fanaticism that Tillich (1952) describes in *The Courage to Be* as being an ersatz faith, animated by fear, substantiated by visions of an afterlife complete with pearly gates (p. 166). This dearth of a faith that has not truly wrestled with death as ever-imminent is devoid in the Christian, according to Tillich (1952, p. 85). The little fascist similarly sees his life (his property, his juvenescence) as unending because capitalism has promised an eschatology of immortality to him. Thus, the little fascist, like the fanatical Christian, praises the G-d that prevents death (loss of currency [propertied relevance and commodified existence]), because he fears death, which for him is counted as loss, a defeated, weak, and effete category of nothingness. An ethic of the funereal considers power in death, to abstract the being from the fraught legacy of the human since modernity (from 1500), a category of personhood trapped in cyclical modes of domination, competition, and exploitation. Funereal ethics celebrates death as an occasion to be wholly other

than human, out of which a new being can emerge that is constituted by the liberation of communalism, or community formation.

A brief word of caution about communalism, however, is needed before we are able to conclude the matter: the little fascist is born in the home. In *The German Ideology* ([1846] 1976), according to Marx and Engels, the original class divisions occurred in the family (p. 34). “Fraternité,” recounts Marx in his analysis of the class struggles in France, 1848-1850, “the brotherhood of antagonistic classes, one of which exploits the other, this fraternity which in February was proclaimed and inscribed in large letters on the facades of Paris, on every prison and every barracks—this fraternity found its true, unadulterated and prosaic expression in civil war, civil war in its most terrible aspect, the war of labor against capital” ([1850] 1969, p. 26). Siblinghood notwithstanding, it was Rousseau who offered that the original monarchs were babies, who unlike other animals are defenseless at birth, having no other way of surviving except by making slaves of others (Nussbaum 2018, p. 43). “Incapable of shared work or reciprocity, they [babies] can get things only by commands and threats, and by exploiting the worshipful love given them by others” (Nussbaum 2018, p. 43), Martha Nussbaum writes, citing Rousseau’s *Emile: or On Education* (1762). According to Nussbaum (2018), this is the reason that Rousseau abandoned his children, because of a deep antagonism he felt towards their monarchical behavior (p. 43).

In *Emile*, of babies and Monarchianism, Rousseau writes the following: “Thus, from their weakness, which is in the first place the source of the feeling of their dependence, is subsequently born the idea of empire and domination” (Rousseau [1762] 1979, p. 66). Recall our earlier discussion in §1 of Žižek’s premising the ideology of the Fascist as having the character of powerlessness. To Marx and Engels ([1846] 1976), the originary, natural class divisions of family, father lording over mother, children serving their parents in filial piety, out of which was born the slave system (p. 34), presaged the antagonisms of class distinctions in normative Western liberal society, bourgeoisie (wealth capitalist class) against proletariat (working class) and lumpenproletariat (uneducated and illiterate working poor), petit bourgeoisie (managerial, highly educated middle class) in their allegiance to bourgeoisie against proletariat, and peasants against proletariat instigated by the bourgeoisie (Engels [1850] 2001, p. 12). These antagonisms are based off the infantilized monarchicalism extant in the family as it exists in the capitalist system: full of competition, neighbor and species alienation, and fealty to money as a humanizing force (recall our earlier discussion about celebrating death as an end to the human to bring about a new way of being).

A funereal ethics must resist conflating the familial with the communal (or intercommunal). The family equates value with liquidity, as does the family’s coeval other, the capitalist system in a bidirectional phenomenon of intensified (antagonistic) and reified (materialistic) class divisions. Any member of the family that does not meet the requisite qualification of a moneyed existence is viewed askance, intelligence questioned, skillset minimized, fully-embodied autonomy reduced as factotums slaving in an Amazon fulfillment center, underpaid, undervalued, and unappreciated. Only the communicable experience of the boss (the capitalist) holds meaning, the bourgeoisie/petit bourgeoisie holds meaning, the father/mother holds meaning. The Fascist needs the class divisions of the family to concretize exploitation and alienation inside and outside of the home, a celebration of his/her superior marketized selfhood. The communalist does not need the antagonism of the familial order to build a funereal ethics, only an appreciation of his/her own inhumanness, inhuman meaning, of course, “to be buried.”

IV. Conclusion

In this paper, I attempted to demonstrate the need of a funereal ethics as an antidote to Fascism. I began by examining various conceptions of Fascism as recounted by three philosophers who experienced Fascistic regimes of power—Hannah Arendt, George L. Jackson, and Slavoj Žižek—to establish a baseline understanding of Fascism. Thereafter, I opted for Umberto Eco's concept of Ur-Fascism, though found his underestimation of the power of embracing death relative to his conception of Heroism as lacking. To this end, I adopted Huey P. Newton's anti-heroist analysis of the Black petit bourgeoisie as being an animating factor for the need of developing a funereal ethic. Finally, after an examination of the Afro-pessimist tradition against Victor Anderson's anti-foundationalist ontological disposition, I pondered if death can be a potential vantage from which community might be forged as an act of self-defense.

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