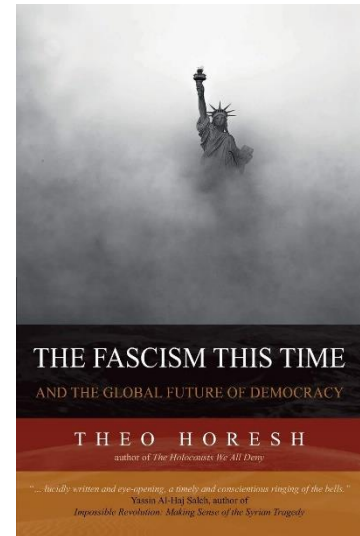


**“Fascism = Symptom, Solution = ?”**  
**The Fascism this Time:**  
**And the Global Future of Democracy**  
By Theo Horesh (2020)



This book is a very insightful and readable survey, out of the UK, of the threat to democracy posed by the fascism of Donald Trump and his imitators internationally. Horesh takes the Left to task, not just the Right. Compared to Hitler and Mussolini, Trumpist fascism may be “slovenly, discordant, and buffoonish” but fascism nevertheless. It’s the “assault on democratic institutions coupled with a cult of personality” (p 24) and “always a distraction from reality” (p 27). That is, “they are populist in that they blame the elites, but their economic agenda tends to vanish upon attaining power” (p 28).

In the end Horesh sees a precarious hope that liberals, socialists, and cosmopolitans will join together politically to support an agenda that will make a lot more sense than fascist rhetoric. Such an agenda must not only respond to the grave dangers of fascism but also to “the breakup of the democratic-led world order” and inequality and oligarchy (p 193).

Horesh takes liberals to task for spiritual escapism and moralizing instead of righteous anger while conservatives withdraw into religion, family, and faith in authority, projecting “their failures onto liberals and minorities” (p 203). He points out that the big problems today are global and that “embracing global citizenship also reminds the world that nationalism is small minded” (p 213). He sees hope for the development of a new moral order, following the example set by the world after WW II with the end of colonialism and the rejection of genocide.

Yet to-date, strenuous efforts toward a new moral order have floundered under a morass of political correctness: “Commentators mocked liberals for the shallow and arbitrary nature of their new codes, and the criticisms rang so true that liberals themselves often shared in the frustrations” (p 215). “The problem was that the late twentieth century brought us face-to-face with so many contradictions at once” - “evangelists were worried about the rights of fetuses, environmentalists about other species, economists about world hunger”, etc. (p 216). And “when conservatives dismissed the liberal tendency to express offense over minor episodes of political

correctness, they found a ready audience among liberals who had themselves been smacked down by overzealous moralists” (p 217).

“We got activism instead of reason, politics instead of morality, because the cultivation of the moral imagination had ceased when education in the humanities ended”. Inadvertently, Trumpism “highlighted the moral underpinnings of a commonly shared culture” (p 218) – features that many on the Left and the Right had overlooked. Personally, as a US democratic socialist, I’ve gained a new respect for “principled conservatives” – those who openly reject Trumpist fascism. Thus the schism over the ethical violations of political correctness and cancel culture now spreads over the entire political spectrum, a hopeful sign of a potential new point of unity.

Thus while “the multitude retreat into the smaller worlds of fascism, fundamentalism, nationalism, and romanticism” all the existential problems of the world “press us closer and closer together” (p 229). The real issue then becomes “our inability to make sense of the world itself when our very survival depends upon it” (p 230). Here is precisely where science comes in, and where, Horesh, a non-scientist, comes up short. For example, evolutionary and complexity science has a lot to say about the rise and fall of species and ecosystems, even human civilizations. A new food supply can lead to a population explosion of a species, then a collapse when this supply is exhausted, or perhaps a rapid transition to a new stable point.

In this case, the new human “food” has been fossil fuels, so our real task is to figure out how to scale back to a more sustainable technological / resource ecosystem without a catastrophic collapse. In other words, our “free lunch” of fossil fuels is becoming much more costly to us, both economically and ecologically. Moreover the COVID-19 pandemic and Ukraine War have demonstrated the fragility of our current world economy, with “peak oil” lurking in the background, driving civilization toward global stagnation and eventually some form of collapse or rapid transition. Already “the shit is beginning to hit the fan”, so to speak. Instead of hand wringing over fascism or identity politics, or conjuring piles of money for techno mirages coming to the rescue, we need to get down to the unforgiving business of survival as things go wrong, faster and faster. That’s how we’ll find our common humanity – no more wishful thinking, or finger pointing, or nihilism. It will be facing the grim reaper.