

Italian Fascism: An Interpretation

By James B. Whisker

When the Grand Council of Fascism on July 25, 1943, removed Benito Mussolini from his position as head of government, fascism ended in Italy. Its ending was as surprising as its beginning, when, on October 28, 1922, some 300,000 Blackshirts under Mussolini's command seized the Italian state. The events between those dates can be chronicled. The explanation of what had transpired is much more elusive. Fascism was touted by Mussolini as a unique combination of thought and action, yet fascism was still seeking an ideology after the Second World War was over.

The roots of fascism are many and complex.[1] The fascist leadership, notably Mussolini, admitted the multi-faceted influences of liberalism, marxism, syndicalism, *risorgimento*, socialism, catholicism and nationalism on their ideology.[2] Their speeches and writings were replete with quotations from Schopenhauer, Hegel,[3] Sorel, Saint-Simon, Pareto, Mosca, Mazzini and a hundred other writers. They admitted fascism was a unique blending of all of these and much more, yet they were never able to wholly explain it to their own satisfactions.

Italian fascism was the first application of what would become a generic ideology encompassing, or allegedly encompassing, movements of the political right in every nation of Western Europe, the United States, the British Commonwealth nations and even Japan.[4] It was believed by Italian leaders to be highly exportable, yet it carried strong Italian nationalistic overtones. It was essentially non-racist, yet in Italy it preached the gospel of the coming Italian race of "overmen."

Italian fascism had at least four principal phases. Until 1925, it was political action seeking an ideology. Mussolini had himself been variously a socialist, a pacifist, an internationalist, a war hawk, an anarchist, a statist, and, most of all, a pragmatist.[5] When he sought an ideology he found none to satisfy him. When he came to power after the 1922 March on Rome he found himself in charge of the state but without a guiding and inspirational system of thought. The first phase lasted until the first fascist state was founded in 1925.

From 1925 until 1938 the first fascist state operated. Its primary theoretician was Alfredo Rocco.[6] As he conceived it, the state was to be a strong, modern nation-state, accepting both the ideas of capitalism in the socio-economic sphere and a syndicalist state which brought about a forced union of labor and capital. Rocco encouraged the tendency of the fascist-sponsored capitalism to form monopolies and cartels because he believed that this increased productivity and thus encouraged the growth of state powers. The new elites of modern society -- labor unions, industrialists, party bureaucracy and civil servants -- were to be placed under the authoritarian control of the state. Indeed, the state became the single value to which all other values, including the fascist party itself, were to be subordinated.

Rocco conceived of creating direct channels of communication between the masses and the party hierarchy. He demanded that a hierarchical arrangement of capitalism be created, one in which the masses would be supportive of the regime because the regime would guarantee them full employment and higher wages. The party would provide the mechanism for mass communication with the leaders of the state. The combination of workers, industrialists and the omnipresent party representatives would ensure full and peaceful cooperation which would benefit all while strengthening the power of the Italian state.

In this second period of fascism, the Italian electorate still played a major role. The 400 candidates for the legislature had to be approved by the voters. The workers played a larger role in the selection of their representatives and the people at large had some role in the nomination of the 400 candidates for the legislature.[7]

In the third phase of fascism, Mussolini had come under the spell of Adolf Hitler and his national

socialist state. He was increasingly influenced by the anti-Semitic wing of the fascist party led by Farinacci and Preziosi. From 1938 until he was relieved of command by the Grand Fascist Council in 1943 Mussolini became the victim of his own propaganda efforts. He dreamed of wars of conquest, wars that were far and away beyond the industrial capacity of the state to sustain. He involved the state in wars of colonial conquest, perhaps the last of the great imperialistic wars of Europe.[8]

In 1938 a change was made in the Italian government which separated the people from the decision-making process entirely. The list of parliamentary candidates was no longer offered to the masses for their approval. Mussolini merely emulated Hitler by creating the totalitarian state while removing basic democracy.[9]

During the final years of the second phase of fascism[10] Alfredo Rocco had fallen into disfavor as had the quadrumvir Balbo,[11] the party leader Starace, the syndicalist thinker Rossoni and former party secretary Giuriati. Mario Palmieri[12] had a brief career as party theoretician and Mussolini[13] had attempted himself to create a theory of fascism. Generally, the third period of fascism had produced neither the prescriptions for an ideology Rocco had offered earlier nor the descriptions of fascist procedures that marked the attempts to explain fascist doctrine in the later stages of the second fascist period.

After Mussolini's fall from power and his heroic rescue by German paratroopers, a proto-fascist state with Mussolini nominally at its head was created under the watchful protection of nazi troops. Precious little time remained to develop a theory. Mussolini was wholly preoccupied with staying alive and with dealing with his protectors. Valuable time was spent in dealing with the traitors within the party who had fired the Duce in 1943. A show trial and subsequent executions of these traitors took place. Mussolini's son-in-law Count Ciano was among those executed.

Giovanni Gentile had been among those competing with Rocco for Mussolini's favor in earlier periods of fascism. He had held positions of minor consequence in the fascist state, culminating in his ministership of education. Now, with the Italian fascist state crumbling around him, and without a direct charge from Mussolini, Gentile created the last Italian fascist theory.[14] Properly enough, it was more philosophical than the earlier attempts at creating an ideology were.

Gentile's theory had its descriptive moments, but, in the large, he offered a wholly philosophical oversight into pure fascism. It had little in the way of a call to arms. It was not the usual *post facto* justification for what had transpired. It was a highly exportable theory of the state set against a fascist state background.

Each man is unique because of his own individual experiences. He forms other associations which become unique because of the collective group experiences; these group experiences, in turn, bear on the individual. The highest association an individual can form is with all his fellows in the state mechanism. The state is the ultimate association and it has its own collective experiences which mark it different from all other states which have existed, do exist or can exist. The state, like all other human associations, profits from both its own collective experiences as a state and the individual experiences of its component parts, that is, both the individuals and the subservient associations which are merged into the organic state. The state, the individual and all human associations thus have life, conscience, and will to achieve. The uniqueness of the state experiences then bend back upon each and every citizen who fully cooperates within the state to enrich these lives and add to their individual memories and experiences.

The state is thus given a real, organic life. It is necessarily supreme. All that is, within the state, is brought to fulfillment in the state. Nothing that is, within the state, can be permitted to exist beyond the reaches of the state. Nothing that is, within the state, can be permitted to go against the state. The state is the culmination of all human endeavors. It is the final resting place of all that man has created. The state knows, sees, participates in, profits by all that man does. Man is because the state is. Man lives because he has the state wherein to live. Without the state man is nothing, can become

nothing.

It is thus the natural destiny of man to be linked with the state. The corporate state gives man the schema wherewith to associate himself with other men. The corporate state provides the forum for discussion of problems. It is the conduit with which man communicates with the natural leaders of the state. It is also the pipeline which the state uses in communicating with individual men or corporations or groups of men who are employed in industries. Without the corporate framework man could not associate with the state. He would be separated from the state and from his fellow men. He would be isolated and devoured by the nameless and uncontrolled masses who would be without form, substance or discipline.

By the time Gentile had completed his *Genesis and Structure of Society*, fascism was dead as an ideology. The proto-fascist states such as Spain, Argentina and Portugal were, at best, minimally interested in having a philosophy of fascism articulated for the use of the leaders. The final stage of fascism is, thus, largely an artificial construct of political scientists and historians. Mussolini apparently was even unaware of Gentile's work and Gentile could hardly have been expected to have been especially interested in the German occupation government nominally headed by Mussolini.

Fascism operated as a reasonably efficient statist system with admitted strong totalitarian overtones until it became interested in wars of colonial conquest. It had come to power because of the decaying social, economic and political conditions of post-World War I Italy. It had brought order out of chaos. Indeed, order was its strong selling point when, after a series of crippling strikes sponsored by the socialists, it had managed when the liberal democratic state could not manage. Fascism bragged of its accomplishments in areas such as making trains run on time and draining swamps. With agencies not unlike those found in the American New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt, it tried to use state power to combat the economic catastrophes of the great depression.[15]

The great irony of fascism is that it taught that the highest form of the state is found in the nation at war. No matter how great the state may be in normal times it takes on even greater dimensions, greater self-fulfillment, greater attributes as a result of a national war. Of these national wars, the most significant in the life of the nation was the war of imperialistic conquest. A state for fascism grows or it dies. A vibrant and dynamic state is constantly seeking new areas of conquest. It seeks to grow at the expense of those states which are dying, hence contracting, and it grows at the expense of those states which have never matured and become great nations. Wars are the duty of the truly modern, organic state.[16]

Where fascism had grown, even flourished, in peacetime, it faltered in war. While it is true that the Italian state had grave problems in trying to support the war machinery when engaged against the Western Allies, it is equally true that Italy had grave problems even against backward, non-industrial powers before the beginnings of the Second World War. Only with the greatest difficulties had Italy defeated Ethiopia and Albania. Its ill-fated expeditions against Greece were saved from defeat only by the ultimate, but reluctant, involvement of the German war machine. Of course, later, Hitler was pulled into North Africa in an attempt to aid the failing Italian armies of his ally, Mussolini.

The interest of Mussolini in re-establishing the Roman Empire, or at least a portion of it, illustrates the point made above that, after a decade and a half of propaganda directed at the masses, Mussolini and much of his sub-leaders had become themselves victims of fascist propaganda. Had he not sought colonial expansion, Mussolini might have ruled indefinitely. European leaders made little attempt to discredit Italian fascism. As late as the mid-1930s, most European leaders seemed to have supported the fascist state as merely an expression of rightist political reaction to socialism and bolshevism. The Communist International did not really begin to see fascism as a competing ideology until its Sixth Congress in 1928.[17] Still, it was to the Comintern mostly a reactionary state which defended big business while offering nationalistic slogans to the workers. When it failed to control the workers by propaganda it was, as a typical reactionary capitalist political form,

willing to use force, murder, terrorism and coercion to work its will.

Fascism shared with bolshevism a common Marxian heritage.[18] Both were formally rooted in socialist tradition, both scientific and utopian.[19] Several modern analysts have suggested that Mussolini was at heart a Marxist. It was largely an academic dispute on how Marx was to be read and interpreted that kept Marxists and fascists apart ideologically. It was a question of whose Marxism one accepted as true belief that separated fascism from bolshevism. Fascism accepted, in the large, the unorthodox renderings of Marxism as transmuted by Georges Sorel whereas Lenin accepted his own and other Russian interpretations of Marxism.

Sorel[20] added to Marxism a belief in myth. Social phenomena were to be studied through an image of irrational force, and not pragmatically as Marx had stated. Sorel had found Marx to be impractical in terms of solving the problems of the workers. Rather than concluding that a broad and sweeping revolution to destroy the old capitalist state and create a new communist state was necessary. Sorel concluded that rational and planned activity was useless in the face of irrational nature. He had fathomed natural and irrational forces that could be understood and assailed only by mythical means. The dissatisfaction of the proletariat was essentially irrational and emotional. The solution to the problems had then to be irrational and mythical, harnessing irrational and mythical nature. Once fathomed by the working class, or at least by their leaders, this irrational nature could unleash such mythical forces as the world had never seen before. The emotional needs and drive of the workers could only be directed by myth.

For Sorel the force which accompanies a drive by a people is always and necessarily accompanied by violence. Irrational power, the consequence of working with irrational nature, is especially violent. One then must accept violence as a fact of life, a necessary condition of mankind moving and changing and achieving. It is in effect the price one must pay for progress. But unless the violence is understood it can be as destructive to the mover as to the intended object of the violence.

Marx had offered rational explanations for reality as Sorel saw it. But rational explanations imply the existence of rational problems. Indeed, the problems of the proletariat were natural, hence, for Sorel, irrational, hence, mythical. Thus Marxism had failed and would continue to fail as an explanation of reality because it sought only rational reasons, rational means and rational explanations. Sorel's philosophy was essentially a philosophy of myth, irrational and natural. It would succeed because it was irrational and offered man a belief and not a logic.

Political solutions, in the normal sense of politics, were worse than useless; they were misleading. Offer instead, Sorel taught, new beliefs, new myths to men. Ask them to believe, not to reason and the solution to the proletarian dilemmas were at hand.[21]

The proletarian problem was, first, a professional, not a political, problem. The frustrations of the proletariat were professional in nature. Professional problems implied professional remedies, including strikes and trade unionism. Action must be violent professional activity to be most effective. One must have or develop faith in the natural, irrational but professional capabilities of the proletarian class. One must follow the basic worker impulses to action. These impulses will be mythical visions of the better world, but not blueprints designed to lay out in specific terms the design of the new city. The road to the new city would clearly be dotted with incidents of physical violence. One must be prepared for such violence or its occurrences will shock and delay.

As with every problem there is a solution. Cooperation within a state sponsored framework will provide an answer. This came about through an unusual, Italian conception of Hegel's dialectic.[22] In the writings of Italian Hegelians, the conflicting and mutually exclusive thesis and anti-thesis do not disappear completely as they do in Hegel's pure dialectic. Rather, in the synthesis, formed by the clash of thesis with antithesis, the individual elements of both thesis and antithesis are still evident. While the synthesis may indeed be a higher and better idea than its progenitors, the thesis and the antithesis, it still shows separately each of its sires. Thus, in Italian Hegelian philosophy it is possible to see labor and management, that is, proletariat and bourgeoisie, existing together,

although diametrically opposed to one another, in the synthesis.[23]

The practical application of this doctrine is seen in syndicalism.[24] Within the syndicate one finds both labor and management. They are joined there by the fascist representative, that is, the representative of the omnipresent state mechanism. In the co-joining of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie one has a new synthesis, the others being respectively the thesis and the antithesis. The new synthesis is the syndicate and it has recognizably within it the heretofore diametrically opposed classes of the workers and management. Hegel's law of "negation of the negation"[25] wherein the worst or most negative elements of each of the dialectically opposed thesis and antithesis cross one another out is at work. The most negative, the most mutually exclusive, the most hostile elements of management and labor are negated. Under the beneficent eye of the fascist representatives this frozen dialectic, this syndicate, operates to the good of state, labor and management.

With the introduction of the syndicate would also be created what French utopian writer Saint-Simon[26] called a national-industrious class, what Sorel called a producer class. Within the group were all those who were productively engaged in bettering the state. It was, in turn, opposed by those indolent souls who contributed nothing to the well-being of the state, what Saint Simon called the anti-national class.

Sorel did not trust the workers and the industrialists to come up with such a cooperative arrangement on their own. Indeed, even after the syndical arrangement was fixed one might reasonably expect neither would wholeheartedly support it or work within it. This then was the reason for the fascist party. It would be given the coercive power by Mussolini not only to control the syndicalist structure but to force creation of it in the beginning. Without the use of force, violence if necessary, syndicalism could neither be created nor maintained.

One can see in the willingness to use state coercive power to achieve an end the, general will philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his *Social Contract*[27] he had spoken of a general will, that is, of a set of values which had to be created and then authoritatively allocated for the masses, even if they did not consent to such allocation. There was a general will, that which represented the greatest good for the masses, a distillate remaining from the individual wills of all men after their own petty desires had crossed one another out. This was really a political program that carried with it quality of moral necessity. It had to be enacted, once recognized, for the good of all men in the state. Where men could not or did not recognize what was in their own best interests the state was obliged, in order to justify its existence, to step in and guarantee that the provisions of the general will be carried into execution.

The fascist state then could justify its actions both in creating syndicalism and in enforcing compliance with its requirements under good, liberal Rousseauist philosophy. Creating a general will and carrying it into execution is correct liberal philosophy.

The general will of course could be expressed in natural, irrational terms in order to make that compatible with Sorel. The fascist party was able to sustain its claim to legitimacy by assuming a guardianship over the contents of the general will. The myth, in turn, was legitimate because it was recognized, sustained and articulated by the fascist party. The myth became whatever the fascist party saw it being at any given time. It was ultimately enforced by legitimized violence and the power of the totalitarian state mechanism.

In fascism there was a reciprocity established with the producer class. Production, full employment, wages, prices, distribution and the like were guaranteed by the state. In turn, both management and labor gave up the right to have strikes, lockouts, and disorders which would interrupt the production processes. Since they could not legally act independently, they would only act together, not as capital and labor, but as the producer class. Outside fascism such a class was not held to be possible. [28]

Since only fascism could provide the essential union of workers and management into the producer class, it was logical that the state should have a monopoly of power. Power and coercion go hand in

glove for Sorel. Fascist theoreticians had no reason to change this when they were required to articulate an ideology of fascism. No rival power was to be permitted. The state's monopoly on power and coercion effectively translated to a monopoly for the fascist party since no other party was permitted. This exclusiveness is also based on an obvious logic. The fascist party had conceived the fascist state. One could not think of a "corporate state" or a "syndicalist state" without thinking of the fascist party. Fascism was inseparable from corporativism or syndicalism. If one removed the one concept, he necessarily removed the others. The fascist party, not the state, was the guardian of the fascist ideals, especially including syndicalism and the corporate organization of the state. The orthodoxy of syndicalist ideas was safeguarded in the fascist party. Hence, the highest value in the fascist state was syndicalism-corporativism. All force must be available to ensure its purity and its continued existence. The fascist party then is able to exercise in the name of ideological orthodoxy the state's power.

The fascist party had a special mission to the world as well as to the Italian people in keeping the ideology orthodox. Initially, fascism was conceived as an Italian movement, the natural byproduct and the logical culmination of the emerging Italian nationalism and its cultural *risorgimento*.^[29] Little thought was given to its potential exportability. By the middle of the 1930s Mussolini had come to the conclusion that fascism represented the new dynamic driving force that would conquer the world and take the place of the faded liberalism of the nineteenth century.

Giuseppe Mazzini,^[30] philosopher, revolutionary, soldier-of-fortune, patriot and nationalist leader of the nineteenth century had sought in vain a set of Italian principles wherewith Italy could re-establish her intellectual leadership and philosophical pre-eminence in Europe. One or two great ideas, ideas that would motivate mankind to abandon the false premises of French liberalism, that was all Mazzini wanted. His own search for ideas or revolutionary zeal failed. Nonetheless, he was quite convinced that the rebirth of Italian philosophy and culture, the *risorgimento*, would indeed be ultimately productive to the extent the Italy would once again be the birthplace of some new idea wherewith the world would become enticed away from liberalism.

When the nineteenth century ended without producing such an awe-inspiring idea many Italian patriots were heartbroken, but the dream was not vacated. After Italy's catastrophic betrayal at Versailles, after so many promises made and broken by England and France, after her dreams of territorial acquisitions had been betrayed, after so much loss of life, the dream seemed lost forever. But with the post-war rise of fascism some few fascist supporters saw the fulfillment of Mazzini's dream. Fascism was to be the single inspiration point for the Italian nationalistic dream of cultural and spiritual leadership. All that remained was to export the idea, the idea that was to supplant liberalism, to others civilized nations.

By the time of the great depression, other fascist movements had arisen in Europe. Even in Southern and Eastern Europe fascist movements and parties had been founded.^[31] The rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany was the culmination of Mazzini's idea. Germany, a mighty culture producing nation had seemingly accepted an Italian idea. England was on the brink of discovering fascism with Oswald Mosley^[32] a mighty leader at the helm.

It soon appeared that the fascisms that grew up in the remainder of Europe bore only little similarity to that of Italy, excepting notably Mosley's British party. Germany's Nazism was based not on Italian ideals but on German myths, on racism grounded in a Nordic-Aryan race. The movements in Eastern Europe remained mystical-religious movements for the most part, excepting anti-Semitic ideals accepted especially in Poland^[33] and Romania.^[34] These movements were decidedly anti-foreign and extremely nationalistic. They had little interest in the syndicalist-corporativist state that lay at the heart of Italian fascism. They shared common features more of national socialism than of Italian fascism, although each was based in the nationalist sentiments and frustrations of the particular nationality involved.

Fascist movements in general had certain distinguishing features.^[35] They opposed parliamentary governments as being impotent to handle such worldwide crises as the great depression of 1929.

They distrusted the *laissez-faire* economic system of capitalism as associated with the French liberal philosophy of the nineteenth century, for the system had collapsed in 1929. They preferred authoritarian governments which they felt alone were powerful enough to deal with crises without failing. They looked for collective social security against the social atomism of the liberal society. Liberal value systems grounded in utilitarian and value-relativism had failed to provide basic morality for society.

In seeking collectivist alternatives to the socially disintegrating systems of liberal philosophy, fascist movements rushed toward the deification of the state. They reacted collectively to problems of society and the state. Fascism was thus able to attract followers by offering class solidarity against individual isolationism. The groups found, discovered or fabricated common ethnic heritages and found the enemy within to be those who did not share these characteristics. The community was sewn together with the fabric of tradition, custom, language, religion and culture. Those not possessing these group characteristics were different, hence evil, the cause of the problems of state.

The fascist movements exhibited essentially lower-middle class values. They viewed the upper strata of society as being run by those who shared other, often foreign, values. They found that the values that the upper classes created were foreign, non-traditional, liberal-value relative, and removed from their kind. Where foreigners made up a goodly portion of the upper strata, or where natives were socialized to foreign, internationalistic or non-traditional value systems, the lower and lower-middle class groups were treated as merely tributary classes in their own nation.

Fascist movements as nationalistically oriented parties were most distrustful of international communism. The short-lived Bela Kun regime in Hungary had, through its excesses, put real fear in the hearts of many. Fascism often became a convenient stopover point for militant anti-communists. Communism was often associated with Judaism because many of the communist leaders were Jews. Thus, traditional Christian anti-Semitism was combined in fascism with political anti-Semitism in anti-communist crusades.

Fascism often offered elitist movements which spun off the ordinary fascist parties and which were dedicated strongly or exclusively to fundamentalist religion. Such movements lost virtually all ties with the real world of politics and spent their time and effort on frequently quite bizarre religious practices. The tie here is most clear in Roumania and in Hungary, but such elitist fascist religious organizations were known to exist on the fringes of most fascist movements.

Many fascist movements looked fondly backwards to a former period of alleged accomplishment. The members had liked simpler times with less demanding schedules and ideals. Fascism often became a kind of telescope through which one could look behind him and enjoy the blessings of medieval society. The prospects of a highly industrialized society frightened many fascists, especially in Central Europe. Fascism there often offered a lower class rejection of the fragmentation of society brought about by modernization of industry. A kind of emotional revivalism was presented against archaic medieval backgrounds, with primitive displays of symbolisms being offered almost as a rejection of anything modern.

Against this varied background Italian fascism stood out as a nearly unique movement. It had no special longing for the past, for its leaders pointed the way to modernity as the desired road to be traveled. Italy's future greatness was indeed predicated upon past greatness, but the future offered a mission quite different than that performed by Rome. The only similarity was to be found in the fact that in both the case of Rome and in the case of fascism, Italy was predestined to lead other nations.

While it would have been more than possible for Italy to have spent much time and effort on the past, it had no inordinate preoccupation with past glories. To be certain, the symbol of the *fascis* had Roman roots, but the doctrine that stood behind Mussolini's fascism was thoroughly modern. Mussolini gloried in past cultural and artistic accomplishments, with Italy's role as creator of art types, but he sought futuristic fascist art as the way of the future.

Anti-Semitism was virtually unknown in fascist Italy, at least before the Second World War. Italy as a nation before fascism was one of the least anti-Semitic nations of Europe. It had little racial prejudice of any type. In the third phase of fascism there was some anti-Semitic literature associated with the regime, but that was never incorporated into the ideology in the way racism became a part of Nazism or many of the East European fascist movements. While there was ample reason why anti-foreign sentiments might have developed, given Italy's long occupation by a variety of foreign powers and her late achievement of nationhood, this did not become an important integral part of the ideology.

Religion did become an important consideration in Italian fascism, but, again, in a way unlike other fascisms. The Roman Catholic church was dominant in Italy. Mussolini reached an important accord with the papacy, ending a struggle that had gone on since Italian reunification. After that the conservative papacy, seeing in fascism a bulwark against communism, transferred its loyalty from aristocratic conservatism to fascism. Mussolini had no plans for a fascist religion as did many of Nazi Germany's leaders. He was generally content to accept the recognition of the papacy and had no good reason to break the generally quiet accord.

Fascist found in several papal encyclicals apparent justification and support for fascist doctrines. The denunciation of liberalism in *Rerum Novarum* (1891) seemed to justify subsequent fascist doctrine. Pope Leo XIII[36] and Pope Pius XI[37] had both denounced communism,[38] and, generally, socialism, while praising the interventionist state and capitalism. They had called, especially Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), for control over the unions and moral responsibility in the application of economic laws and principles. The call by Pius XI for worker-employer confederations seemed to justify the corporate state. The call for rebuilding society along the lines of harmonizing social-producers classes again seemed directed at the syndicalist organization of fascism. Superfluous income could be redirected by the state. The intervention on behalf of the very poor according to principles of charity but by the state and not just by individuals again seemed tailor made for fascism's practices. With socialism proscribed by papal decree fascism offered one viable alternative for the proletariat to the liberal state which had failed it.

The great enemy of Italian fascism was liberalism. There would, of course, have been no fascism without liberalism, but nonetheless fascism found in liberalism the antithesis of the needs of the working class. It was nineteenth century *laissez-faire* liberalism that was objected to, not the contemporary interventionist liberalism. Since liberalism had originated in France there was a certain measure of Italian national pride involved in the out of hand rejection. Still, there were other, far graver errors associated with liberalism that caused the fascist state to regard it so bitterly. Virtually every evil modern society was associated with it.

Liberalism offered no place for the individual who wished to join with his fellow men in fraternal association. Liberalism was atomistic, meaning that it isolated men from one another, forbidding cooperation and association. Liberalism placed man higher than the state so that the state ultimately was subordinate to the individual. It denied the organic nature and structure of the state.

Liberalism supported democracy. It was thought that a liberal democracy was inherently the most unstable form of government that man could create. The Italian flirtation with democracy had been short and it had been a very unfortunate experience. The majority of Italians were not enfranchised; among those who were there existed, for the formative years, a papal prohibition on political participation owing to the fact that the papacy was most displeased at the seizure of papal lands and other properties during the unification. Democracy had been blamed for all the failures of the infant republic. It had never served the agrarian interests of the Southern rural poor. It had become the seat of state capitalism, serving large industry and corporate monopoly. It had failed to accomplish tangible results in the first world war, even after the machinations of secret diplomacy. And it had collapsed during the workers strikes in the immediate post-war period, opening the door for the march on Rome and the institution of fascism.

Liberal democracy was seen as an anachronism, an unfortunate vestige of a past epoch. It was

impotent to deal with crises of the modern world. It was made up of many political parties, none of which could serve the worker, each of which could argue endlessly over trivial matters without ever reconciling even the pettiest matters. It functioned satisfactorily so long as there was nothing to be done and so long as the state was not involved in crisis. Once crisis came the leaders crawled away and the parliament failed. Such was the political legacy of liberalism.

Liberalism not only fragmented society into isolated individuals, it encouraged the fragmentation of industry into bourgeoisie and proletariat. Rather than seeking closer cooperation between classes in society it acted as a separating agent. The Marxian analysis of the two classes is nothing more than natural observation of the consequences of liberalism. Marx had thought it necessary to wholly reconstruct society after the liberal state. That was because he was a victim of liberal ideology. Outside a liberal state a reconstruction of society was possible without undergoing a Marxian revolution. Thus, Marx was himself entrapped by the same liberal society he chose to try to overthrow. Marxism was a product of liberalism, as was any doctrine which taught the class struggle as culminating in revolution.

Liberalism was universalist whereas fascism was nationalistic. The various worldwide movements such as the League of Nations were the stepchild of liberalism as were pacifist movements. The spirit of nationalism would be freed only when the liberal state was destroyed.

Liberalism encouraged monopoly and international cartels. While fascism was monopolistic itself, it found the same practice in liberalism to be quite objectionable. The laissez-faire economy of liberalism produced only monopoly while bringing about none of the benefits consequent to fascist monopolies.

The romantic spirit that was part and parcel of liberalism had its counterpart in fascism. Indeed, the romanticism of such writers as Rousseau found much in the way of fulfillment in fascism. Still, fascism criticized the romantic spirit as being too rational, not mythical enough.

Perhaps the most objectionable feature of liberalism, in fascist terms, was its value relativism. While fascism entertained some elements of value relativism, it preached, by and large, value absolutism. In many areas of ethics this meant a return to Roman Catholic teachings. In other areas the state merely granted values authoritatively by virtue of its supremacy. In any case the pragmatic or utilitarian values of especially English liberalism were rejected. An idea in the fascist state was absolute today, yesterday and tomorrow. Truth was not an event that happened to an idea; it was a necessary part of that idea. There is a paradox here, for fascism was the value of the twentieth century -having superseded liberalism, the value of the nineteenth century. Hence, the value of ideologies came to them in their own epoch and not in another epoch, certainly a relativist concept.

Fascism sought to create an idea that would be as lasting and as influential in its own time as liberalism was in its time. First and foremost it wished to achieve the quality Mazzini had posited of any system: it must necessarily represent the unity of thought and action. Action without some sort of doctrine was useless; and, conversely, doctrine alone without consequent action was useless. The thought need not be too specific. A general idea, some sort of dream of the future, some picture of the new and better world had to precede action. After the action commenced, a goodly portion of the thought could be made up along the way. Better to begin action before the ideology is completed than miss the opportunity for action.

Mussolini expanded that idea of creating while practicing to include the individual and the nation. The nation need not exist before nationalist fascism begins to forge the state. Indeed, he thought of the state as most generally preceding the creating of a nation. The state could, on its anvil, forge the people of that state into precisely what it wished them to become.

The contrast with Nazism is obvious. Only with satisfactory materials could a nation be built, according to Nazi ideology. Inferior races could never be forged into anything worthwhile, no matter how great the effort. The national spirit in Nazism exists within the people, albeit latently. Nazism can only reawaken that spirit; it could not create it. Only Nordics could ever realize the

Nazi racist dream.[39]

In fascism there is no suggestion of either recruitment of suitable subjects or of the exclusion of unsuitable ones. The fascist state could take people as they were given to it and then make them over according to the desires of the power elite. While there might still be within the population those who dreamed the Roman dream and could identify with the Roman spirit of the past, it was far more important what they should become rather than what they were at the time of fascist ascension to power.

Since nothing eluded the fascist state its power must necessarily extend to the creation of a superior race. It was the ideology, the doctrine of fascism, that would make of the race a people fit to control a substantial share of the earth. The vitality of the race would be shown by its works and deeds rather than by its genetic purity and its physical characteristics. A manufactured nation would enjoy power and prestige; one that had not been properly articulated could not enjoy the fruits of expansionism. If the state has done its job properly its race will show an aggressive foreign policy. Its art, drama, music and literature will show an ideologically motivated vitality that can be appreciated only if observed.

The people inhabiting a given geographical area are a nation after they have been motivated and inspired by the ideological fascist state. Their nationhood is then not a natural but an artificial construct, one superimposed on them from above by a charismatic leader and his fascist party. Thus the state is fully empowered to educate its people, to offer them propaganda, to indoctrinate them fully, and to persuade them by force if necessary. It is charged with maintaining ideological purity and with spreading that orthodoxy. This is the civilizing mission of the state.

The state must provide enriching experiences for its members. Inasmuch as each individual is unique he must be fulfilled by offering him opportunities to develop his unique nature. The state must make him subservient to the state, its party and its leaders, but it must also enrich his life. While in the final analysis the individual lives to serve the state, it is equally important that the fully socialized citizen be given as many opportunities as he can utilize. Without individualizing experiences as offered by the state there would be no meaningful way for the individual to be differentiated from all other persons in the state. The uniqueness of the fascist state is to no small extent dependent upon the gathering in of the unique and individualizing experiences of its various members.

By offering him help in self-fulfillment, the state has helped to create the individual. By indoctrinating him with the ideology with which to approach outside phenomena, it has made him in its own image. For the fascist, the state has the obligation, while performing its social, political, and economic functions, to create the individual person. It must teach him the values established authoritatively by the state. It must strengthen the virtues of man. It must provide him with a world view. It must teach him to reject such alien values as move him from the state. He and every other individual must be inside the state, not against it nor outside it. He and all other persons make up the living body of the organic state.

The state is properly viewed as a real organic being.[40] It is not only like any other organic being; it is a living organism. It has a life all its own. It undergoes various experiences, including happiness, sorrow, joy, melancholy, ecstasy and the like. It is born out of the ideas of men and their courage in culminating the act of creation. It matures to adulthood. It can become ill and it can die. All other beings living within the state help to comprise it. Some parts die and others are born to replenish the needs of the state. The state can show courage, especially in an aggressive foreign policy; it can also show cowardice in the face of its enemies. Since the state is primary its life is far and away more important than the lives of the individuals who are its component parts. Like individuals it can create art, drama, poetry, music and literature as a national characteristic.

There is a spirit, a motivating factor, placed in the state much like the soul is for man. One can really speak of the "Italian national spirit" as being something actual, real and existing. Take away

the spirit and the body public dies. Give the state a healthy spirit and its accomplishments can be almost without limits.

The organic analogy offered by fascism is very important because it tells something of the individual's role in the state. Ideally, the individual cannot consider himself independent of his fascist state. He is completely immersed in his state. It would be unthinkable, inconceivable to be outside the state. When an individual posits his existence, he is positing the existence of his state simultaneously. The fascist state offers the only possible existence for him. The individual without the state would not exist. The individual and his fascist state are inseparable.

Fascist ideology articulates the reason for the individual's being. It is his source of legitimacy. It is his home, his patria, his source of thoughts and ideas. An anti-state thought is impossible.

When his state accomplishes something he is proud. When his state suffers so does each individual. Creations of the state give the individual national pride which is itself inseparable from pride in self. The state's ideology is his own. He accepts no other state or ideology. The fascist party is legitimate because it is interconnected with the state. It guards the ideology and offers an orthodoxy which makes the individual orthodox.

The party is supreme and allows no competition. As the bearer of the ideological orthodoxy[41] it has an historical mission. It cannot tolerate public factionalism or party disputes. It cannot legitimately allow power to pass out of its hands, say, to the army or the bureaucracy. The fascist party is the sole agent of secular redemption; it is the guardian of the future and the protector of the past. It thus has an unquestioned right to an absolute monopoly of power. The party monopoly of power is not a part of fascist ideology, but it is the most important inference from it.

Since the fascist state remained Roman Catholic and did not attempt to eradicate organized religion it did not create a rival religion. To be certain, as a carryover from the days of the reunification there was some anti-clericalism, but its effect was negligible on the ideology. Therefore, the fascist party's role as the agent of secular redemption and secular salvation was not nearly so important as it was in Nazism. The emphasis on a perfect society was less than that of Nazism. It wished to produce the good society, but disdained the possibilities of the perfect society. The inordinate emphasis on the perfect society was one of the fallacies of communism. There was no teleology in fascism as there was in Nazism and communism.

Fascism did propound a theory of a nearly infallible leader. The cult of the personality was as well developed in Italy as it was in Germany. The word *Duce* was roughly the equivalent of *Führer*. It was this charismatic figure who had created the fascist movement and who was destined to lead it to the final victory. He was the choice of the deity, the man of destiny. Through his personal intervention history had been changed and given a new direction. His movement was one of the great accomplishments of mankind. In Italy this rhetoric failed to find deep roots, for *Il Duce* was fired by his own Grand Fascist Council when his movement collapsed along with the Italian army on the field of battle.

As long as the leader remained in power he spoke with a single voice of authority for his nation. Fascism never conceived of an oligarchy or a democracy governing. It is rather pointless to speculate about what the death of Mussolini might have brought, provided fascism lived after him, for every fascist movement has risen and fallen with its single leader. Surely another leader would have risen to the position of *Il Duce*. Fascism required that the party be led by a single individual who could, by sheer force of will, decide all disputes and right all wrongs. Only a single individual was considered to be the rightful spokesperson for an entire nation; no combination of individuals could accomplish this. Where fascist movements have not come to power they usually die with their charismatic leader. Where a fascist movement might outlive its leader because he has brought the movement to power is just a matter of guesswork.

Fascism, as noted above, accepted the idea of violence as a political tool; indeed, it was one of the most useful tools available to those seeking political power and those already possessed of political

power. We also noted that fascism rejected the idea of the class struggle that would culminate in revolution. The doctrine of violence and the idea of revolution require additional qualification and explanation.

Mussolini rejected the notion of the warfare between opposing classes. Following Gaetano Mosca, [42] he did not reject the possibility of warfare between segments of classes, as between, say, socialist workers and fascist workers, or between socialist workers and reactionary strikebreakers hired by industrial management. These portions of classes were less guided by ideological considerations than by a natural, irrational, and generally incomprehensible determinism. Most frequently portions of classes would clash because they were seeking identical goals through identical means than because they were conscious of differences between them.

The determinism of Marxism was found in the class struggle whereas Mosca[43] and Mussolini found it to be unrelated to any social struggle. Whatever struggles there may be in society were determined beyond the powers of man to change or alter. Men became the pawns of deterministic fate. In the long run, the politicized portions of all classes struggled with one another in a predetermined manner for control over the rest of the men in that state. Hence, fascists could expect, as one political element or fragment of the classes in Italy, to have to meet socialists, anarchists and communists, these being other politicized fragments of the various classes, in open combat. Violence was thus fully justified, indeed, determined, long ago and by powers beyond the pale of men to control.

This leads us to the ideas of Roberto Michels.[44] Michels formulated a hypothesis known as the Iron Law of Oligarchy.[45] He believed that there would necessarily and inevitably be competition among elites for political control of all states. Political leadership is then recognizable only in small groups, fragments of society, never in larger organizations. Leadership is always in the hands of the few who compete with other small groups for control. Stated simply, society requires organization; organization requires leadership; and leadership is inevitably oligarchic. To Mussolini, this meant that Mosca's politicized fragments of society were nothing more than oligarchic groups who were competing for power. The socialists, the anarchists, the communists and the fascists were all oligarchies. The competition was necessarily accompanied by violence. The most prepared and the most violent would win. The fascists had to be ever vigilant because no victory was final. The competing fragments of society were always waiting in the wings, ready to rotate power to themselves. Hence, another of Michels laws comes into play. Because of the threat to the oligarchy in power from other potential rivals the ruling elite becomes obsessed with the maintenance of power rather than the application of programs.

If the proposition that action and thought should always go together was to have meaning the fascist party had to both maintain power and develop programs. Without power, programs were useless. Without doctrine, the maintenance of power was nothing but an exercise in futility. Mussolini theorized that the threat of an opposition party ready to seize power would stimulate fascism to increasingly superior acts on behalf of the state and its people. Without the agitation of a bit of sand inside its shell the oyster does not produce a pearl and its value is naught.

Violence is necessarily produced by an irrational act, but, then, fascism was an irrational ideology. It was not an ideology of violence, but it was a doctrine that found violence useful. The violence was to be directed at its enemies. Both fascists and their enemies were predetermined to use violence or fail.

The revolution, since it involved only competing elites, was superimposed on society from above. Fascism rejected completely the Marxist doctrine of whole class struggles as we saw above following Mosca. Thus the idea of a mass revolution, a popular revolution involving the masses of men rising up spontaneously from below, this was unthinkable in fascism. All revolutions were elitist and involved only small fragments of all classes. By many standards, these titanic struggles could not be called revolutions since they presume the seizure of the state by the few, classically called *coups d'etat*. The bulk of the fighting would be done in the underworld of society, much like

two giant sea monsters fighting in the depths who only occasionally surface enough to show us that a struggle is going on.

Fascism never claimed that it would necessarily win all such struggles the way communism claimed inevitable and final victory. The determining features of nature offer only determined struggle, not determined outcome. No fascist victory was necessarily final. While fascist states could cause by their own efforts final victory, they could as well by errors of omission and commission cause the battle to be lost.

Since no victory was final, violence would never disappear in the state. Violence was the means to come to power and it was the means of most successfully maintaining power. Violence was seen to harden the individual. Life after fascism was not to be the proverbial bed of roses. Fascism promised neither a milenium nor utopia.

The heart and soul of fascism was the corporative state. Its great concern was the syndicalist organization of industry through the worker-management cooperatives. This was and remains its most exportable element. Mosley recognized this in Great Britain. Few other fascists have seen this fact. The racist fascism of contemporary fascism is more kindred to Nazism than to fascism, and even it has generally lacked the basic understanding of Nordic *volk* and Aryan racism.

Notes

1. For a good general treatment of the roots of fascist thought see, J.L. Radel, *Roots of Totalitarianism*, New York, 1975. See also, John H. Hallowell, *Main Currents in Modern Political Thought*, New York, 1950, pp. 521-617; S.J. Woolf (ed.) *European Fascism*, New York, 1968, especially Hugh Trevor-Roper's "Phenomenon of Fascism"; also Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism*, Princeton, 1964, and M. Halperin, *Mussolini and Italian Fascism*, Princeton, 1964.
2. More than any other ideology, fascism openly acknowledged its roots. Mussolini's speeches are flavored with quotations from intellectual giants of the nineteenth century. Such quotations are not footnoted, but no real effort was made to conceal the sources either.
3. Hegel's influence on Italian philosophy is often understated. Few if any Italian writers openly expressed their indebtedness to Hegel, but Gentile was especially influenced by Hegelian concepts.
4. See the Report to the Grand Council of Fascism included herein.
5. See Radel, op. cit., pp. 78ff.
6. See Alfredo Rocco, "The Political Doctrine of Fascism" in *International Conciliation*, Issue No. 223, Oct. 1926.
7. See the flow chart provided in Radel, op. cit., p. 92.
8. See S.J. Woolf, "Italy" in Woolf (ed.), op. cit., p. 60.
9. See flow chart in Radel, op. cit., p. 93.
10. See Woolf, op. cit., p. 58.
11. There were four *quadrivirs*, leaders, along with Mussolini, of the March on Rome. They were elected for life to the Grand Fascist Council.
12. Mario Palmieri, *The Philosophy of Fascism*, Chicago, 1936.
13. See Benito Mussolini, "The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism" in *International Conciliation*, Issue No. 306, Jan. 1935; see also his *Fascism: Doctrine and Institutions*, Rome, 1935.
14. On Gentile we have his own *Genesis and Structure of Society* (trans. H.S. Harris, Urbana, 1960), and Harris' book, *The Social Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile*, Urbana, 1960.
15. These are the facts of fascist accomplishment admitted even by its severest critics.
16. This is a constant theme of Mussolini's speeches from the early 1930s on.
17. See Hallowell, op. cit., pp. 592-93, Sabine, op. cit., pp. 863-64 and Woolf, op. cit., p. 41.
18. See especially Radel, op. cit., pp. 66f.

19. The influence of "pre-scientific" thinkers is greater than one might imagine for we are victims of Marx's criticism of them as being unscientific. Many were quite influential in regard to the development of European doctrines including fascism. Note Desjacques, Babeuf, Blanqui, Proudhon, Saint-Simon, Fourier and others.
20. Georges Sorel (1847-1922) authored *Le Proces du Socrate*, 1889; *La ruine du monde antique*, 1890; *L'avenir socialiste des syndicats*, 1900; *Saggi di critica del marxismo*, 1903; *L'illusion du progress*, 1909; and *Reflections on Violence*, (trans. T.E. Huhne, New York, 1914), this latter being of greatest concern to us.
21. See J.P. Mayer, *Political Thought in France from Sieyes to Sorel*, London, 1943, and Hallowell, op. cit., pp. 458-63.
22. The "Italian" conception of Hegel really begins with Benedetto Croce (1866-1952). Croce was a major philosopher of international reputation. Mussolini would have liked to have had Croce write a theory of fascism, but Croce refused to have anything to do with the fascist state. Nonetheless, Mussolini allowed Croce to continue his liberal-democratic writing without interference. Unlike many other Italian intellectuals, Croce was neither harrassed nor forced to emigrate. See Croce's obviously Hegelian philosophy in his *Philosophy of the Spirit*, 1917, or in his *Aesthetics*, 1902.
23. See Croce's *Philosophy of the Spirit and his History: Its Theory and Practice*, (trans. Ainstre; New York, 1921).
24. See William N. Loucks, *Comparative Economic Systems*, New York, 1952, and H.A. Steiner, *Government in Fascist Italy*, London, 1938, for good explanations of the corporate state.
25. See Sabine, op. cit., pp. 638-47; see the explanation of the dialectic in G.R.G. Mure, *An Introduction to Hegel*, Oxford, 1940; or W.T. Stace *The Philosophy of Hegel*, London, 1924, especially IV, part 2.
26. See Radel, op. cit., pp. 47ff. Claude Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) wrote *Reorganization of Europe*, 1814; *The Industrial System*, 1821; *Catechism of Industrials*, 1824; and *The New Christianity*, 1825.
27. See Rousseau's *Social Contract*, especially Book II, parts i and iv.
28. See the Fascist Labor Charter, included in this book.
29. See Derek Beales. *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy*, London, 1971, and A. Gramsci, *Il Risorgimento*, Turin, 1949.
30. Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) is covered well in Radel, op. cit., pp. 38ff. Radel attributes the fascist idea of the unity of thought and action to Mazzini. He attaches great importance to Mazzini as a necessary forerunner of fascist doctrine.
31. See Woolf, op. cit., for a good general treatment of various European fascisms. The essays in his book include treatments of Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Roumania, Poland, Finland, Norway, Great Britain, France, Spain and Portugal. See also Hans Rogger and Eugen Weber (eds.) *The European Right: A Historical Profile*, Berkeley, 1964.
32. See Colin Cross, *The Fascists in Britain*, London, 1961. Mosley's principal work is *The Greater Britain*, London, 1932.
33. See S. Andreski's "Poland" in Woolf, op. cit., pp. 167-83.
34. See Z. Barbu's "Rumania" in Ibid., pp. 146-66.
35. See H.R. Trevor-Roper, "The Phenomenon of Fascism" in Ibid., pp. 18-38. See also Christopher Seton-Watson, "Fascism in Contemporary Europe" in Ibid., pp. 337-353. See also Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism*, Princeton, 1964, and Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche*, Munich, 1963.
36. Leo XIII, "The Condition of Labor," usually cited by its Latin title, "*Rerum Novarum*" issued 15 May 1891. A convenient English language source is Gerald C. Treacy and William J. Gibbons (ed.) *Seven Great Encyclicals*, Paulist fathers, 1963.
37. Pius XI, "Reconstruction of the Social Order" more commonly known by its Latin title, "*Quadregismo Anno*", issued 15 May 1931, included in Treacy and Gibbons, op. cit.

38. Atheistic communism was again rejected by the Church in stronger language in an encyclical issue by Pius XI, "On Atheistic Communism" known by the Latin title, "*Divini Redemptoris*", issued 19 March 1937, included in Treacy and Gibbons, op. cit.
 39. This is one of the principal topics of Alfred Rosenberg, *Myth of the Twentieth Century*, Munich, 1935. See also the English language commentary on Rosenberg, A.R. Chandler, *Rosenberg's Nazi Myth*, Ithaca, New York, 1945.
 40. There is an obvious comparison with Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), *Leviathan*, wherein Hobbes writes on the third type of body, the body politic, the highest and most complex body, the state. Hobbes developed a substantial analogy between a human body and the state.
 41. It is important to understand that within all ideological party doctrines the role of the party as the carrier of legitimacy is vital to the existence of the party. This was true in Nazism. It is emphasized to the extreme by all branches of the communist party.
 42. Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941) wrote *Sulla teorica dei governi e sul governo parlamentare*, 1884; *Elements of Political Science*, 1896, which was revised several times and is known in English as *The Ruling Class*, New York, 1939, and *Storia delle dottrine politiche*, 1932.
 43. See James H. Meisel, *Pareto and Mosca*, Englewood Cliffs, 1965, and his *Myth of the Ruling Class*, Ann Arbor, 1962. See also a discussion of Pareto and Mosca and their respective relations to fascism in Radel, op. cit., pp. 66ff.
 44. Roberto Michels wrote *Political Parties*, 1915, which developed the Iron Law of Oligarchy, his thesis being that leadership is always oligarchical and that such oligarchies cannot be prevented by any device, including constitutional limitations.
 45. See Chester C. Maxey, "Iron Law of Oligarchy" in Joseph Dunner (ed.) *The Dictionary of Political Science*, New York, 1964, p. 270.
-

About the Author

James B. Whisker has for years been a professor of political science at West Virginia University (Morgantown).

He holds M.A. degrees in history and philosophy from Niagara University, a certificate in Soviet Studies from the Soviet and East European Institute, and a Ph.D. in government and politics from the University of Maryland.

Dr. Whisker is the author of several books. Noteworthy are his studies of German National Socialist history and philosophy, as well as his translation of Alfred Rosenberg's *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, and of Hermann Goering's *Germany Reborn*. His introduction to *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* is one of the few general summaries of Rosenberg's philosophy available. Whisker has also written two full books on Rosenberg's thought.

From *The Journal of Historical Review*, Spring 1983 (Vol. 4, No.1), pages 5-27.