Utopian Aspirations in Fascist Ideology: English and French Literary Perspectives 1914-1945

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that utopian aspirations are a fruitful way to understand fascism and examines the utopian ideals held by a number of fascist writers. The intention of this thesis is not to define fascism. Rather, it is to suggest that looking at fascism’s goals and aspirations might reveal under-examined elements of fascism. This thesis shows that a useful way to analyse the ideology of fascism is through an examination of its ideals and goals, and by considering the nature of a hypothetical fascist utopia.

The most common ways of examining fascism and attempting to isolate its core ideological features have been by considering it culturally, looking at the metaphysical and philosophical claims fascists made about themselves, or by studying fascist regimes, looking at the external features of fascist movements, parties and governments. In existing studies there is an unspoken middle ground, where fascism could be examined by considering practical issues in the abstract and by postulating what a fascist utopia would be like.

This thesis begins by looking at the ways historians have interpreted fascism, and shows that utopian ideals have been under-examined. The thesis then goes on to demonstrate the usefulness of such an examination by considering the fascist aspirations of four fascist writers. I use as case studies four individuals who were not politicians but were nonetheless political through their literary works. I have also chosen them for the fact that they did not live directly under fascist rule, at least for the majority of their careers. The four case studies are Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, representing the Anglophone, and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle and Robert Brasillach from France. All were sympathetic to various aspects of fascism and various fascist leaders, and advocated fascism through their literary and journalistic work.

This thesis explores the ideology of fascism by looking at the thoughts and aspirations of a group of intellectuals, and by looking at their concepts of ideal states or utopias. By examining the objectives of fascism separate from the manifestation of fascism and the activities of fascist regimes, and by treating fascism as a utopian ideology with specific aspirational goals, this thesis highlights nuances in the ideology of fascism and suggests avenues of future research.
DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Ashley James Thomas and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Ashley James Thomas
24 February 2010
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Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, Christopher Robert James Thomas (1950-2003), who tragically passed away during its writing. I hope that he would be proud.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Fascism is the *Rashomon* of political science. All experts believe they have the true definition, yet cannot agree on one. Like an optical illusion, fascism’s form and content seem to shift with the focus of the observer, leading to disagreement and frustration amongst those attempting to understand this hard-toDEFINE ideology. While debate is necessary and healthy for the study of history, the example of the debate about fascism is one of many competing theories and methodologies, none of which seems to satisfy a majority of scholars. It remains an important debate, however, both historically and morally, as it is the duty of a civilised to examine its past, especially the ugly episodes, and try to understand it. With the benefit of hindsight we can too easily fall into the trap of not considering fascism in context. It is often difficult and uncomfortable to accept the fact that, at the time, fascism was popular, its leaders adored, and its ideology celebrated as revolutionary. It is within this context that this thesis argues that we can gain a deep understanding of fascism by considering what it offered to achieve and what it promised life would be like – in other words, by examining the utopian nature of fascism.

Within recent memory there have been historians who have denied the existence of any form of theoretical fascism independent from the specific regimes, parties, movements or people said to be fascist. They have argued that any attempt to generalise these unique and distinct historical phenomena into an ideology is futile
at best, dangerous at worst. However, most historians (although not all) now accept
that there is such a thing as “generic fascism”, that is, fascism in its abstract form. In
the same way we talk about liberalism or communism or democracy as political
abstracts, so too can we talk about fascism as an ideology distinct from its real world
practical manifestation. The fact that there was debate (and in certain cases, still is
debate) about whether fascism as an ideal type or as a political “ism” actually exists,
or whether it is a peculiar historical event that cannot be generalised about, indicates
the volatile and shifting nature of its study. This thesis accepts the idea that fascism is
a distinct political ideology, and argues that our understanding of fascism can be
amplified by examining the ideas of fascists.

This thesis argues that there is benefit from looking at the ideas and opinions
of fascist writers in order to understand how they saw the world and what they
thought the world should be like, and that the best way of understanding that is by
considering or constructing their unique and individual versions of a utopian society.
By looking at the thoughts of four writers who lived and worked, for most of their
lives, outside of the influence of fascist governments, we will see fascist ideas
separated from fascist actions. We will observe these thinkers working almost
completely in the abstract, or considering foreign examples from the comforts of safe
and stable democracies. Such an examination will yield different observations from an
examination of official fascist doctrines, or the works of intellectuals within, or fleeing,
fascist regimes. In many ways, one could argue that the writers examined in this
thesis are naïve, or imagining fantasy worlds that were far from the realities of actual
fascist dictatorships. While that criticism is valid, the rationale underpinning this
thesis is that the writers’ distance from and lack of actual experience with the fascist
regimes that they admired (in varying degrees) gave them the advantage of being able
to consider fascism as an idea or an ideology. This in turn gives us the advantage of
considering the opinions of intellectuals who came to fascism by choice.

Fascism Studies

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, fascism studies stand at an
impasse in spite of the fact of the general acceptance of the existence of generic
fascism. The current state of the historiography of fascism is dominated by two
general approaches of investigation that have become the most accepted ways of
understanding the problems of defining fascism and attempting to formulate a
concept of “generic fascism”.\footnote{Throughout, I shall use the lower-case form “fascism” to refer to generic fascism and the upper-case form “Fascism” to refer to the Italian variation.} The two models—which can loosely be termed the
cultural model and the regime model—are the products of almost a century’s worth
of discussion and analysis of fascism and fascist thought.\footnote{There is no general agreement on the names of the two models, which I shall refer throughout as the regime model and the cultural model for the sake of consistency.} On the one hand is a broad
group of historians who employ the regime model, a methodology that has its origins
in an approach used by what has come to known as the totalitarian school of
interpretation, exemplified by Carl Friedrich and Hannah Arendt. It is a model that
places the spotlight of investigation onto the actions and structures of the fascist
regimes— their patterns of behaviour, style of rule, and outward appearance. On the
other hand are those historians who make use of the cultural model, which attempts
to analyse fascist ideas on their own terms and to understand how fascists saw the world. As we are dealing with over eighty years of historiography, these categories are necessarily broad, with some historians falling squarely into neither tradition and often straddling both.

All of the traditional approaches have their merits, and their flaws. The regime model poses many important questions and offers valuable explanations about the relationship between power-élites, classes and competing interests. It considers the organisational structures of fascist bureaucracies and the economic policies put into place. The regime model believes that understanding the ways a regime manipulates, abuses, and placates the population is valuable and needs to be investigated. However, the weakness of the regime model is its reliance on the few countries where fascism came to power. Some scholars cast their net wide. Eugen Weber’s *Varieties of Fascism* (1964)\(^3\) looked not only at Germany and Italy but also minor fascist regimes in Eastern Europe, Asia and South America. Others take a more narrow approach. Robert Paxton’s *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004)\(^4\) concluded that Germany and Italy are the only authentic fascist regimes. By examining only those movements that established fascist regimes, or those movements that came close to doing so, historians who subscribe to the regime model limit their scope of inquiry greatly. A cursory study of the early days of even the most successful fascist movements and parties reveals that compromise and concession are necessary steps in their seizure of power. Once in control of the political aspects of the nation, the fascist parties must

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of necessity accommodate and work with other existing power élites in the form of big business, the churches, the military and, when necessary, the monarchy. In Nazi Germany, for example, all other elements of the ideology are subverted to one ideological obsession, racial purity, so that the very classification of it as fascist is in doubt in some quarters. How far one can rely on what one sees in these regimes as representing the true qualities of fascism is uncertain. By limiting the available sample of cases to study only those regimes that existed in reality, and due to the fact that those cases are corrupted from being ideal examples of fascism by necessities of politics and the obsessions of its leaders, the regime model compromises its claim to methodological rigour.

Similarly, the cultural model has offered much to the study of fascism. Taking as its major subject the outlook and attitude of fascists (leaders, intellectuals and fellow travelers), the cultural model investigates such varied issues as national identity and its representation through nationalism; expansionism and imperialism; the regeneration of the nation and the individual through self-actualisation and fascist activities; the regeneration of the nation’s soul and its citizens; and the place of radicalism and revolution as essential components of the fascist experience. A common avenue of research for cultural modelers is also the idea of fascism as a political religion, with its related concepts of faith and commitment. The fertile ground these scholars mine is the writing of fascist intellectuals and the rhetoric of fascist politicians. Such sources are valuable, and much of this thesis also relies on the theoretical writings of intellectuals. Those writings should not be used exclusively to understand the
abstract components of fascism, but also to understand their larger vision of society and the world. The writings of these sources also dealt with serious practical issues of policy, and their philosophy had concrete real-world applications.

The cultural model’s weakness is not that it focuses on the abstract, but that it does so to the exclusion of the concrete. In emphasising the spiritual and psychological aspects of the fascists and fascist movements, parties and regimes, it excludes the organisational systems that form their structures. By examining cultural attitudes and social goals and biases, the cultural model downplays the examination of larger structural issues. It is interested in myths and feelings rather than the practical realities of how the society is constructed. By focusing on the spiritual framework, the cultural model neglects to some extent the issues of economic and social policy, organisational composition and arrangement, and other mundane topics that are necessary to understand how people would live and work in a fascist system.

**Synthesising Two Models to find the Fascist Utopia**

Political ideology exists in the abstract as well as the concrete. In fact, political ideology, as an elaboration of a world-view, is more suited to being considered conceptually. By elaborating a world-view and set of principles, all political ideologies imply a utopian vision in which all the values of that ideology are accepted and implemented. The premise on which my thesis rests is that fascism, as an ideology, can be understood by considering and isolating the elements that would constitute a fascist utopia. I propose that the best way of achieving this is by building on the work that has already been done and synthesising the cultural model’s focus on ideology
with the regime model’s interest in policy. In the real world, there is almost always a
gap between intention and outcome. Ideas, especially ideas about culture, society
and tradition, are rarely directly translated into policy without modification. The
cultural model’s emphasis on ideas in their theoretical form and the regime model’s
interest in policy in actual form leads to a rupture in understanding. The subjects of
the two models are very different, and thus it is no wonder that the conclusions
reached using those models are often in conflict. An obvious difference in
interpretation comes from the issue of modernity in fascism – regime model historians
often identify fascism as conservative and traditional, drawing on its practices of
institutionalized prejudice and suppression of civil liberties. Cultural model historians,
drawing on the rhetoric of rebirth and utopianism, characterize fascism as futurist and
forward-looking. The issue is more complicated than this simplistic example,
however, as there are divisions within the camps as well – a regime model historian
who looks at the fascist embrace of technology may very well dispute any description
of fascism as backward-looking, while a cultural historian examining the rhetoric of
agrarianism and traditional values may see fascism as idolizing the past.

The purpose of my thesis, therefore, is to examine fascism using features of
both methodologies in a way that synthesises the best elements of the regime model
and the cultural model currently in use, with a view to explaining ways of avoiding
some of the flaws and weaknesses that make those models unacceptable to certain
scholars. The reader may notice the analogy of this study to fascism’s own endeavour
to create a “third way” between simple polar opposites by incorporating elements
from other ideologies, for example, the way fascism borrows from both socialism and
capitalism in its economics or from liberalism and authoritarianism in its meritocratic
elitism. Thus my methodology adopts the same technique as the cultural model of
looking towards the ideas of fascists more than the actions of fascists. My approach
also follows the regime model’s focus on the political, economic and social structures
of fascism. Where my thesis departs from both models is that it takes the theoretical
writings of fascism (the content that is examined by the cultural model) in order to
understand the political system of fascism (the subject of the regime model). By doing
this, my goal is to avoid those criticisms leveled against both models, which I have
outlined above in brief and which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.
Through looking at an ideal regime and not an actual regime, my approach is not
limited to the handful of examples where fascism came to power—an ideal regime, as
we shall see in the next three chapters, can be extrapolated from the writings of non-
political figures such as writers and artists. The available sample number for an
analysis of fascism is therefore greatly expanded and diversified. Also, as my interest
here is an ideal state and not the state that was eventually created, my argument is
not obstructed by the issue of having to explain which parts of the regime’s actions
and policies are based on its ideology and which arise out of the obligation to
compromise or accommodate existing or developing powers within the nation, as well
as external pressures.

The approach I use in this thesis also attempts to avoid the claim made against
the cultural model that it over-emphasises myth and the spiritual dimension of
fascism. I maintain the cultural model’s recognition that the culture and philosophy of fascism is an important element to understanding fascism, but I balance this with an examination of practical issues as well. Thus, by combining what I consider to be the best aspects of the cultural model and the regime model, my synthetic model analyses the ideas, beliefs and, most importantly, the aspirations of fascism to create a well-rounded depiction of what an ideal fascist society would look like and how the ideal fascist within that society would interpret the world and his or her place in it.

In order to synthesise the existing models, I propose to examine both the world-view of fascists and their particular vision of an ideal regime. Using my case studies of the four writers, I will show how fascist utopias provide us with a ‘third way’ of understanding fascism. A fascist utopia, as I use the term here, refers to the intentions of fascists and the ideal regimes or societies they wanted to establish, as distinct from looking at the actions of fascists or the actual regimes that were established in Europe. In other words, a ‘third way’ of understanding fascism, as I propose in this thesis, is to examine not only the actions, but also the aspirations of fascists. To do this, I look at what fascism as an ideology (that is, fascism in the form of the ideas and writings of its intellectuals) wanted to create. I consider what an ideal regime would have been like in the eyes of the intellectuals who were theorising about it, rather than looking at the actual regimes that took power. By avoiding the examination of actual outcomes and focusing on the planned or wished-for outcomes, the distortions of the real world can be circumvented and an ideal or utopian fascist world can be posited. This is an important exercise to undertake as it reveals a
different dimension of fascism, one that is more utopian and aspirational than traditional studies present. While there is a place for all examinations of fascism, there have been a disproportionately low number that consider fascism’s goals and desires as an ideology rather than a political or military power.

Moreover, by looking at the beliefs, desires and attitudes of the four writers I have chosen to study in detail in the areas outlined above, we can begin to shape an idea of how they wished the world to change, what they saw as the inadequacies of the modern world, and what they envisioned the ideal (fascist) world to be. Thus this thesis serves two functions—it is an application of both analytical models to a specific group of individuals, looking at ideal types and aspirations, and drawing out ideas about fascism from that. It also serves as a more traditional analysis of the political ideas of a number of important intellectuals who wrote about contemporary issues and sought to understand their time and society. Together, the two parts present the suggestion and application of a more synthetic way of thinking about fascism by looking at unorthodox (and therefore under-examined) sources in this field.

Four Case Studies

The four men examined in my thesis, Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957), Ezra Pound (1885-1972), Robert Brasillach (1909-1945) and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle (1893-1945), have been chosen for a number of reasons, and are not meant to be exhaustive. By looking at these four individuals and their thoughts about fascism, I illustrate recurring themes and ideas that reveal new insights into the nature of fascism. The writers may be classified as fascist for a number of reasons – each, at some point in his
career, expressed open admiration for the existing fascist regimes in Italy or Germany. Some of them were active participants in fascist movements within their own countries. All of them commented extensively and with admiration on fascism as an ideology.

The first two are from the Anglo-sphere, the last two from France. The case studies come from countries that were not fascist in their own right. Lewis, although Canadian by nationality, grew up and lived in England for most of his life. Pound was an American who migrated to England before the Great War and remained in England and Europe for many years. Brasillach and Drieu were Parisians and major figures of that city’s literary scene. Writers under the yoke of an authoritarian government (be it German, Italian, Spanish or any other) perhaps may not be expected to have been as candid and forthright in their publications as those who live in a liberal democratic society. Thus I sought writers who did not feel oppressed by their own governments, and whom we can therefore expect to be more open and unfettered in describing their views. Not having experienced the negative impact of living under the fascist regimes that they admired, their opinions are not influenced by any personal or emotional connection to fascism. Their writings are not reactive to the fear of punishment or the pursuit of reward—their work is written from conviction and belief in the ideas.

In addition, I have specifically chosen the four men from the literary world, as my intention is to deal with ideas that were uncomplicated by the machinations of everyday party politics. This is because works written with the intent of manipulation
and electioneering may not accurately represent the ideas of the writer. In such cases, communication and the expression of ideas can be secondary to persuasion and manipulation. This is not to argue that all speeches and political propaganda is cynically about winning votes and support. My intention is to avoid the ambiguity that such pieces attract.

Other writers and thinkers and political leaders in both France and England may seem like suitable candidates for a discussion of this sort. However I have chosen to eliminate those whose careers rested on the success of a political party or group. Thus while Jacques Doriot in France, Léon Degrelle in Belgium or Oswald Mosley in England may seem the most obvious fascists, the obligations of politics can distort their actual beliefs and distort the theory behind the rhetoric. A few of the case studies that I have chosen did, indeed, have passing relationships with certain parties, for example Pound offered his services to the Italian Fascist Party and Drieu was a speech writer for Doriot’s Parti Populaire Française, but this was temporary, and did not detract from their primary occupations as men of ideas.

W.B. Yeats, for example, is an interesting possible candidate, however Yeats’ relationship with quasi-religious groups such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and mysticism in general obscure and overshadow his political thought. D.H. Lawrence shared many of the right wing and fascist ideas of the authors I eventually chose, but is more famously known for his fictional work. His political journalism is much more limited than that of the other writers, and this limitation on sources would necessitate a textual analysis of his fiction, which, as I explain below, is a method that I
have wanted to avoid. Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton were politically active and shared many fascist ideas, and although their emphasis on race and anti-Semitism make them interesting in some respects, it restricts the discussion of larger political and social matters. Louis-Ferdinand Céline is similar to Belloc and Chesterton in that while he may have had many fascist beliefs, his anti-Semitism was the dominant political idea in his work, influencing all aspects of his politics. There is little rational and thoughtful political argument in Céline’s work, while there is much vitriolic cant. Thus while on the surface there may be other equally interesting candidates, I have decided to eliminate from consideration the figures mentioned above for examination for their over-emphasis on the issue of race or the unsuitability of their writings for analysis given the parameters of this thesis.

Two writers who figure prominently via their influence over the English-speaking writers are T.E. Hulme and T.S. Eliot. Both are writers whose political opinions can be called ultra-conservative, and a number of their ideas coincide with those of many fascists. Hulme and Eliot are largely responsible for reintroducing the ideas of classicism and original sin (its political and social implications, rather than its religious significance) back into the political discourse amongst English and American thinkers. In this way, they helped shape the way writers like Lewis and Pound viewed culture and what constituted civilized society, which in turn influenced their political beliefs. Hulme and Eliot, therefore, play a role in the formation and popularizing of certain ideas and concepts that would be incorporated into a fascist world-view, and I
draw upon them for comparison and context, and to show what makes fascist ideas distinctive.

One figure who is examined here and had very strong political beliefs but who nevertheless claimed to be apolitical was Wyndham Lewis. In the opening editorial of his journal *The Enemy* (1927), Lewis wrote: “If I am asked, ‘What are your Politics?’, I can truly answer I have none.”\(^5\) Lewis even considered naming the journal *No Politics*.\(^6\) Lewis’s statement that he has “no politics” does not mean that he was not interested in political philosophy or theory. Lewis was a polymath genius, creating art in many different media. His influence was felt in painting, art theory, fiction, editing, journalism, philosophy and political analysis. When it came to describing his own political position, Lewis wrote that he was “partly communist and partly fascist, with a distinct streak of monarchism in my marxism, but at bottom, with a healthy passion for order”. This statement appeared in *The Diabolical Principle* in 1931, a seemingly perverse and ironic (and probably tongue in cheek) description of his politics that may nonetheless serve as a definition of fascism itself.\(^7\) It clearly demonstrates the complexity (or perhaps the absurdity) of Lewis’s thought, but also of his character. He was as interested in satirizing the world of political ideology as he was in ideology itself. His description of his position—ironic and self-contradictory—serves as much to deconstruct the very concept of ideology as it does to position Lewis on a political spectrum.

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Lewis is one of the most interesting, and forgotten, figures of the modernist movement. A novelist, painter, critic, editor and poet, he was as famous in his time for being an awful and unpleasant man as he was for his work. His antagonism through satires and criticism of the Bloomsbury Group, whom he resented for their hedonistic, pacifist ideals and their success (he even insisted that the members of his Vorticist group wear business suits to differentiate them from the bohemian style of Bloomsbury), led him to be one of the most ostracized figures in literary society. A paranoid, aggressive man, like his friend Ezra Pound, Lewis had many intense and volatile relationships with most of the major cultural figures of the time. Richard Aldington, a member of the Imagiste poetry movement that Ezra Pound invented and that was eventually rolled into the Vorticist movement, wrote to another member of the group, the American Amy Lowell, that “I think they are all crazed, Lewis, Ezra, Ford: they all certainly have the signs of incipient madness!”

Aldington’s diagnosis of madness in Pound was not unique, for he was interned in an asylum for twelve years after the Second World War.

Whereas Lewis held contradictory views towards fascism, Ezra Pound’s fascination with fascism derived from his beliefs in the supremacy of art and the cultural and intellectual superiority of the artist in society. His belief in an artistic élite that is naturally more able to lead through its insight and intuition found a political

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9 This internment was a direct result of Pound’s pro-fascist activities. After being arrested and tried for treason, Pound agreed to a plea bargain in which he plead insanity. Although this would certainly lead to a period of institutionalisation, it was determined to be a better alternative than to face a possible sentence of execution if he were found to be guilty of treason.
correlation in the ideology of fascism. Ezra Pound is perhaps the most tragic of the figures who found in fascism a philosophy that addressed his concerns and needs. Pound’s open championing of the Mussolini regime, his violently anti-Semitic writings and his vocal support for fascism both during and after World War Two made him the most obvious test case for fascism in a modernist writer. His is, as Marjorie Perloff observes, “the case of the admittedly Great Poet, whose “ideas” were just as admittedly pernicious and, in his own time, treasonable. ... [And it is] high time to recognise that the technical brilliance of the great Modernists... often went hand in hand with a proto-Fascism”. 10 Pound’s ideas, as we shall see, share all the characteristics that we usually identify as being essential to calling a system fascist. While Pound was anti-Semitic (despite his claims later in life that it was a “suburban prejudice”, and that no-one named Ezra could be anti-Semitic at heart11) and was a prolific writer on economic conditions (which shall be examined below), he was principally attracted to Italian Fascism for its mythological implications.

Another who was attracted to the myths of fascism was Robert Brasillach. That Brasillach was a fascist is in no doubt—he proclaimed himself to be one innumerable times. The interest lies in the form that his fascism took. As we have seen, fascism’s definition is a difficult concept. Part of the controversy arises from the fact that many of its intellectual followers did not find it necessary to define the term. Some, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle and Thierry Maulnier for example, considered

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dissections of the idea of fascism and failed to arrive at succinct definitions. Others, like Brasillach, acknowledged that fascism was mercurial, an organic concept that mutated and grew in different ways according to its environment. William Tucker writes in a biography of Brasillach that he, “perhaps more than any other writer who called himself a fascist, was aware of the imprecision of the term. It is significant, in this context, that he never attempted to formulate a definition of fascism.” The fact that even fascists themselves had difficulty articulating their ideology in full prefigures the historical debate that has lasted the better part of a century, as we shall see in Chapter Two.

Brasillach was an editor and journalist, a literary critic of immense influence, and a poet and novelist of subtlety and beauty. He was not a physically violent man, hardly impressive in stature: “he bore no resemblance to our stereotypical image of a black-shirted fascist tough guy. He looked harmless, a slightly chubby bookworm.” Brasillach was shot after the Second World War for his journalistic activities, which were judged to be of such pro-Nazi sentiment and to have had such an impact that they constituted collaboration with the enemy. Some scholars, such as David Carroll, have argued that Brasillach’s reputation has been exaggerated beyond his talents, that the controversial nature of his execution and the subsequent martyrdom, created a myth around Brasillach: “Had he lived, it seems safe to say, he would have remained just one intellectual collaborator among many – more talented than most, but not the

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genius some have claimed.” Nevertheless, as editor of Je Suis Partout, the most notorious of the collaborationist newspapers during the Occupation and the most openly pro-fascist before that, his impact on the French intellectual climate was great and according to Tucker, “his writings provide insights into the appeal of fascism which transcend his particular time and place.”

Part of the mystique that surrounds Robert Brasillach comes from the fact that he was not what one would normally imagine to be a fascist. Indeed much of the scholarly attention that he has attracted could be due to the fact that some scholars and academics may have some sympathy for a fellow critic and scholar. As Robert Soucy has said when writing about Brasillach (although it could apply to all four under consideration), “not all fascists were brutal, pathological SS men. These existed, but there were other types as well: academics, novelists, poets, literary critics, and philosophers who were attracted to fascism by the “spiritual” revolution it promised.”

Fascism had different features apart from the brutal street violence and mechanized murder for which it has become infamous; the fact is that many artists, poets and intellectuals found themselves caught up in the fascist excitement. “Sensitive and intelligent men”, as Soucy calls them, important literary figures, even members of the Académie Française, devoted themselves to right-wing politics and collaborated to varying degrees with the occupying Nazi forces. Amongst these

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17 Ibid.
figures, Brasillach emerges as “the best and clearest illustration of his generation’s form of French Fascism.”

While not the subtlest of the fascist intellectuals (Thierry Maulnier or Pierre Drieu la Rochelle are more insightful in their discussions of politics and philosophy), Brasillach was perhaps the most visible and the most widely influential during that time. His meteoric rise in the journalistic world during the thirties was contemporaneous with the strengthening of right-wing politics in Europe.

Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, like Wyndham Lewis, was a veteran of the Great War, and it was this experience that shaped his entire outlook on life, art and politics. Being French in the interwar period had become an embarrassment for Pierre Drieu La Rochelle: “It is truly not amusing to be a Frenchman; since I was born in this country, I have not had a happy moment. I have heard of nothing but defeats. As a child I was told only of Sedan and Fashoda, when it was not of Waterloo or Rosbach. What a soaking I received.”

He believed that France under the Third Republic had sunk deep into decadence, caused by “democracy, liberalism, and Marxism, and the hedonistic, materialistic, egalitarian values which accompanied them.” Even the English compared favourably with the French. Although the English were liberal and parliamentary, they had retained a degree of anti-egalitarianism through a solid class system and respect for the monarchy. Drieu wrote in 1934 of the differences he saw between the soldiers of the British army and the French army:

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There was the British empire face to face with the French empire. A side-splitting confrontation. On one side, thirty warriors; on the other thirty militiamen. On the one side, a savage civilization that had preserved something of its primitive basis and had still adapted to modern life; on the other, thirty ... what? We were like leftovers. A civilization that was no longer at all savage, of peasants who had fallen into a petit bourgeois brine.²¹

From such musings, Drieu came to see himself as a fascist, and sought to define for the French their own, native, form of the ideology. His story is one of high ambition and disappointment, of elation and depression, as he tried to understand France and Europe in the modern world.

The Sources

The examples of the work of these men that I have chosen are those that the authors decided were worthy of publication. Very few of the sources that I use remained unpublished in the lifetime of their authors. I include the various pieces of journalism that each wrote, from Brasillach’s articles and editorials in *Je Suis Partout*, to the various self-published and short-lived magazines/pamphlets that Wyndham Lewis produced. These essays, articles and editorials can be seen as the writers’ communication to the world of their political beliefs, an attempt at a dialogue with society. Indeed, many readers responded to these pieces, and the replies written by the authors further serve to hone their ideas and theories. The period of the inter-war years was the highpoint of the popularity of the “little magazine”, the small, often irregularly published literary journals in which much of the avant-garde work of the period was published. In this thesis, we shall draw on, for example, Lewis’s self-

²¹ Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *La Comédie de Charleroi*, p.150.
published and solo-written *BLAST*, in which he included all his passions, from art, to politics to poetry. We shall also use *The Criterion*, edited by T.S. Eliot and a more traditional journal, although it published some of the most challenging and innovative literary work and commentary on current affairs of the period.

Similarly in the French sources we will encounter journals and newspapers that published some of the most original and modern work of the time. The newspaper *Je Suis Partout*, for example, will be discussed as the vehicle through which many of the young fascists of the 1930s and the 1940s published. Originally linked with the Action Française movement, it became more fascist and sympathetic to Nazism as the decade went on, and under the protection of the occupying German forces during the Second World War increased its readership five-fold.

I also selectively use the fictional works of the intellectuals I have chosen to study. One must use fiction and poetry cautiously, however, and I have restricted myself to those works that clearly or self-admittedly contain ideas that the authors personally held. Therefore the autobiographical novels of Drieu la Rochelle are used as indicators of his thought, as are certain sections in Brasillach’s fiction. Indeed Brasillach cannibalised his own non-fiction work for his fiction, and barely modified passages from his journalism are repeated in his novels. Pound’s *Cantos* are likewise employed where the ideas are supported by statements elsewhere. There are important ideas contained in the private diaries and letters of the authors, however, I have limited the use of these as the published, public opinion is produced with the expectation that it will be seen as representative. The one major exception to this
rule is the *Secret Journal* of Drieu la Rochelle, which was written in the final days of the German occupation of Paris and in the weeks before Drieu’s suicide. In this environment, Drieu had no outlet for publication, and his thoughts expressed in this journal are extremely political and useful.

From a reading of these writers’ works, which includes their essays and journalism, their novels and plays, certain themes emerge. While not unanimous in their opinions, or in the degree of importance they placed on certain issues, there are areas of interest that are common to all and that I argue go some way to suggest a fascist attitude or ideal. There are many facets that make up a society, thousands of individual policy and structural issues that go into creating a fully realised nation. This thesis must, therefore, be selective in what it chooses to examine and what it leaves out. Many important issues could be included in this examination, but have been left out for various reasons. The major reason for any particular issue’s under-representation in this study is that it was not a major concern of the authors under discussion. For example, the issue of gender and women does not receive the same amount of attention as, say, race, although such matters will come up in relation to the common obsession amongst fascists with masculinity, male camaraderie and virility as the basis for social renewal. The authors that I have chosen to study looked at the large themes of society and politics, and it is these that I have chosen to focus on. Their attitudes, beliefs and world-views do, obviously, have implications for many other issues that are not discussed. For example, the authors rarely wrote about the specifics of what family life should be like under their fascist ideal state, but such
specifics can be inferred from the social values that they do comment on and proclaim.

Outline

The following chapters will consider the historiography of fascism, the way the writers reacted to the changes in the world in the aftermath of the Great War, and finally how they imagined a fascist society. Chapter Two will place this thesis in a scholarly context by examining the debate over the nature of fascism throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. It will analyse the development of the historiography of fascist theory from its inception, through the Cold War and the subsequent revisionist periods. It will show how the regime model and the cultural model came out of distinct strains of thought about the appropriate areas of fascism to study and the interpretation of those areas, each competing to be the dominant model, and it will examine the development of theories of understanding fascism. Such an analysis of the development of various theories of fascism will show more clearly how the two dominant modes of approach that have arisen in parallel over many decades have attempted to communicate with each other, but have ultimately failed to do so.

Chapter Three will consider how the four writers responded and reacted to the turbulent interwar years. It will consider, through the example of these four intellectuals, the West’s disillusionment with liberal democracy and the attraction of fascism. This chapter is concerned with the ideas that the writers had about the role of history and custom in the modern world. It therefore deals with the issue of how
conservative the ideas of fascism are, how the intellectuals thought about the past and what part the past should play in the modern world. This chapter examines the authors’ beliefs about the purpose and nature of civilization, especially the role of the artist or intellectual in modernity. It explores the various reforms to the political system that the writers advocated, and their reactions to the modern liberal democratic nation-state. This chapter also deals with the fascist criticism of popular voting, democratic institutions and freedoms. Chapter Four highlights the issues that these writers thought were important and what they admired and disliked about the world they lived in. It will show that they were not uncritical towards Italy and Germany, but rather used them as inspirations for the further development of their own fascist ideas.

Chapter Four is concerned with the authors’ critiques of specific aspects of the social and political system. It analyses the writers’ concepts of nationality, Europeanism and class division, as well as the issue of anti-Semitism and its role in the philosophies of the writers. It also looks at both the theoretical questions related to the Marxist or socialist interpretation of society and history and how this related to or impacted on the thought of the writers, as well as the practical concern in Western Europe of the power and influence of the Communist Party and the Soviet Empire. This chapter also returns to the fascist attitude towards the modern world and whether or not the ideas of fascist intellectuals are revolutionary. It discusses the writers’ position on political revolution and violence. The objective of this chapter is to show that the writers gave consideration to political systems and organization.
Whereas the previous chapter dealt with abstract issues, this chapter deals with practical issues.

The aim of considering all these issues is to try to understand the fundamental beliefs about society and human nature that the fascists shared. When this is combined with their goals and aspirations for an ideal society, we can better understand the nature of fascist ideology. By thinking about the nature of a fascist utopia, not only in the sense of its structures and organization, but also its world-view and attitudes, we separate the ideology from the practice. While studying the actual fascist regimes and movements that took power during the twentieth century is valuable and provides insight into how and when fascism came about, by studying the ideology we can understand why fascism was so popular, and what it was attempting to achieve.
CHAPTER TWO

Interpreting Fascism: an Evolving Historiography

This chapter examines the historiography of fascism, especially how it relates to methodological questions about what should be the focus of examination and interpretation when attempting to understand the definition of fascism or its ideological content. It does so in order to place this thesis in a historical and historiographical context, showing how this thesis relates to the work that has been done previously. It also provides a theoretical background to the issues and controversies that have shaped the debate about fascism. This background is essential to understand the following chapters’ analysis of the ideas of my case studies. Without understanding how fascism has been interpreted and what methodologies have been used when trying to define fascism in the past, the full implications of my study of the aspirational ideas of fascist thinkers and their conceptions of a fascist utopia will not be apparent.

The study of fascism has been a major preoccupation for historians and political scientists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and there have been tens of thousands of books and articles written on the subject. It is one of the most controversial areas of modern history, and there have been many heated debates and arguments about its nature and its definition. Fascism is also an emotionally charged subject, and we must always keep in mind that even when we are talking abstractly, the consequences of those abstract ideas and theories were often bloody and tragic. For obvious reasons, this chapter cannot examine all aspects of the study of fascism, nor can it address every theory about its origins or attempt at a definition. Rather, this chapter will identify the most popular methodological trends and group them into two broadly defined groups that share a similar (if not always identical) concern or approach to interpreting fascism. By identifying and examining the common parameters that scholars use when examining fascism, we will see that there has been an area that has been under-addressed, an area that can provide a new perspective
on fascism. That area is the utopian content of fascist ideology, and by using a methodology that focuses on utopian ideals, that is, on the aspirational qualities of fascism, we can further our understanding of the nature of fascism.

**The Historiography of Fascist Studies**

As we have seen, the current state of fascism studies is loosely polarised between what can be termed the regime model and the cultural model. The polarisation is not simply that of methodology but also the very aims of the methodology, meaning that the two schools not only look at different aspects of fascism, but that they are looking for different aspects of fascism – they are so different in their methods because their objectives are different. This thesis seeks to overcome these polarisations by suggesting combining the best elements of those two models so that they are less limited in their scope of inquiry, and in a way which will reveal how fascists envisage the ideal state. Using elements of both models and traditions shows more of the ideological content of fascism. It does so by examining the ideological assumptions and aspirations of the fascists themselves. In many ways, I hope to reconcile the differences that exist between the two models and overcome the differences between the two schools. At the same time as it is synthesising the best of the two existing models, this approach, as will be evident from the treatment of the case studies in this thesis, will hopefully further unearth a fresh perspective on fascism that may elaborate on our understanding of what fascism as an ideology stands for and what fascists believe. The underlying assumptions are that there is indeed a discernable ideology of fascism with specific qualities, and that the purpose of fascist studies is to reveal what those specific qualities are. The regime and cultural models both have these assumptions in common. There is common agreement on the question, but there is disagreement on the best way to attempt to answer that question. This chapter will provide a short synoptic statement of the broad historical traditions that can be loosely grouped into the two models, and what strengths and weaknesses each have. The chapter will also trace the historiography of how scholars have interpreted fascism, following the trends and shifting areas of focus. We shall see how the regime model was for a long time the dominant method of analysis, and how it was used by both Marxist and liberal commentators in the interwar years to try
to understand the new movements and regimes of those years. In the post-war years, totalitarian theories, which compared the fascist regimes with the Soviet Union, focused on the methods of control and oppression used by both to maintain power over their people. We shall examine some of the controversies in the historiography of fascism, such as the movement in the 1960s to study fascism within the confines of a national history and not as a pan-European or world movement, which emphasised the uniqueness of each nation’s history and therefore underplayed the generic nature of fascist ideology. The debate over the revolutionary nature of fascism will be discussed, for it is important in bringing to wide attention the utopian nature of many fascists. We shall see how in the 1970s and 1980s, historians began to take a more comparative approach when discussing fascism, which led to many identifying common features across national examples, in search of a generic fascism. We shall trace the rise to prominence of the study of fascism through intellectual and cultural historical methods, from the early work of Ernst Nolte through George Mosse to the current work of Griffin. Finally we shall look at the current state of fascist studies in the twentieth century, from Griffin’s assertion that the cultural model has become the dominant mode of analysis, to the restatement of traditional regime model concerns by Paxton. We shall see how both models are still widely in use, in conjunction with other methodologies that incorporate sociology and political religion. The lacuna within the historiography that is the underuse of utopianism or the consideration of the idealism of fascism will become apparent. The importance of the necessity of treating fascists as idealists with revolutionary utopian goals will be established.

It is important to track the historiography of fascism in order to understand how and why the two dominant styles of analysis developed, and how my own methods are placed within this tradition. To do this, this chapter will examine of the regime model and its place in the history of the study of fascism. We will trace the development of theories of understanding fascism. This will take us from early Communist interpretations, which connect fascism to capitalism, through to the Cold War, when a totalitarian model saw fascism as fundamentally similar to Communism. Out of this grew an interest in fascism as an element of national history, which tended to treat fascism as a phenomenon, not as an ideology. Fascism was interpreted as a
period in a modernization process, or as a collection of mobilising passions. We shall see how the regime model developed out of this tradition. Following that, the development of the cultural model will be outlined, and the connections and tensions between the two will be discussed.

The First Response: Marxist-Soviet and Liberal Interpretations

The first outside attempts to place fascism into a theoretical model during its lifetime came from Marxist theorists, mainly in Soviet Russia. For these Marxist interpreters, fascism was seen as an agent of capitalism, a desperate attempt by the existing order to create a bulwark against the oncoming and inevitable revolution of the proletariat. The Resolution of the Third Enlarged Executive of the Communist International Plenum on Fascism declared in 1923 that “fascism is a characteristic phenomenon of decay, a reflection of the progressive dissolution of capitalist economy and of the disintegration of the bourgeois State.”¹ When the bourgeois state is threatened by the possibility of a proletarian revolution, it calls upon the forces of fascism to assure its defence and future existence:

The old, allegedly non-political apparatus of the bourgeois State no longer guarantees the bourgeoisie adequate security. They have set about creating special class-struggle troops against the proletariat. Fascism provides those troops. Although fascism by its origin and its exponents also includes revolutionary tendencies which might turn against capitalism and its State, it is nevertheless becoming a dangerous counter-revolutionary force.

Thus as early as a year after the March on Rome (1922), the Communists were defining fascism as a reactionary revolution. It employed revolutionary tactics in support of the status quo, thus ensuring its counter-revolutionary nature in the eyes of the Communists.

To reconcile this analysis with the Marxist concept of history, fascism had to be understood as a reactionary movement without any revolutionary features. Griffin has observed that Marxism would have been compelled to review its entire

understanding of the development of societies if it were to acknowledge the revolutionary character of fascism. By 1928, Communist theorists of fascism were accepting that fascism, while it may have superficial similarities to a revolution, was actually a tool of finance capital and the establishment. Palmiro Togliatti, a prominent Italian Communist, recognised that fascism did more than simply “supply the troops” for a bourgeois counter-revolution, but was, due to its significant bases of public support across classes, a fulcrum where many anti-proletariat forces could meet:

Fascism proves itself conclusively to be not only an instrument of reaction and repression, but also a centre of political unity for all the dominant classes: finance capital, large industry, the landowners. It identifies itself with Italian capitalism in the present period of its evolution. The Fascist Party thus tends to lose the character of an autonomous movement of certain intermediate social strata that it had to begin with, and becomes, along with its organisation, intimately fused with the economic and political system of the dominant classes.

This assumption fundamentally misread fascism’s own revolutionary agenda, as well as its complex and occasionally hostile relationship with both existing élites and capitalism. However into the 1930s, the official Communist Party definition of fascism retained the belief that it was an apparatus of capitalism:

Fascism is the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital. Fascism tries to secure a mass basis for monopolist capital among the petty bourgeoisie, appealing to the peasantry, artisans, office employees and civil servants who have been thrown out of their normal course of life, and particularly to the declassed elements in the big cities, also trying to penetrate into the working class.

Another Marxist analysis of fascism identified it as a modern counterpart to the liberal authoritarianism of Louis-Napoleon’s Second Empire in France. Put forward by August

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Thalheimer, a founding member of the Communist Party of Germany, this analysis was not the official Comintern approach, but rather a theory advanced by an expelled member of the Party who nonetheless remained a committed Marxist. This theory insisted that there was a correlation between the system that followed after Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte seized power in 1852, and the fascism that Mussolini was propagating during the period following his own rise to power in Italy in 1922.\(^6\) Leon Trotsky also used Marx’s concept of Bonapartism to analyse Fascism. Trotsky, writing in 1932, saw Bonapartism as a step towards fascism, not fascism itself. Nonetheless, although at this stage exiled from the Party and the Soviet Union, Trotsky agreed with the Communist International that capitalism and fascism were intimately linked:

> Fascism in power, like Bonapartism, can only be the government of finance capital. In this social sense, it is indistinguishable not only from Bonapartism but even from parliamentary democracy.\(^7\)

Fascism, therefore, was seen as an extension of Bonapartism and capitalism, which placed it firmly within a reactionary, backward-looking context.

At the same time, liberals were seeing fascism as a threat to freedom and parliamentary democracy. However, as fascism had grown and flourished in cultures that were traditionally the home of liberalism and the Enlightenment, liberals had a vested interest in distinguishing fascism from the national histories that they shared. In 2003 Aristotle Kallis wrote,

> The liberal critique of fascism differed from its Marxist equivalent in one fundamental aspect: while Marxists perceived fascism as the culmination of a historical process which inculpated both liberalism and social democracy, liberals had every reason to defend the liberal system of the past as a positive (if perhaps somewhat flawed) experiment.\(^8\)

From a liberal interpretation, fascism had to be separated from the cultures that liberalism wished to defend. While Marxists could argue that fascism was a product of

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the corruption and ultimate unworkability of liberalism, democracy and capitalism, liberals were forced by their allegiance to the democratic system to distance themselves from fascism. Before the Second World War, the mutual distrust and fear that Communists and liberals had of fascism helped bring these two opposing systems together to fight against a common enemy. In the Cold War that developed after the war, the former allies demonised each other through identifying the other side with fascism. In the western democratic world, this was done by emphasising the common totalitarian aspects of fascism and communism.

**Totalitarian Theory: Linking Fascism with Communism**

The horrors that were perpetrated by certain fascist groups, in particular the nightmarish degree of evil that resulted in the Holocaust, caused fascism to be excluded as a respectable or serious political ideology in the post-war period. This was, perhaps, a necessary part of the course of recovery and rebuilding, but it also required a certain amount of intentional historical amnesia. As part of the healing process, liberalism had to be definitively excised from any theorising of fascism, and fascism itself had to be removed from the continuity of many nations’ histories. Fascism was interpreted as an historical aberration, a dark period that was not consistent with the general growth of a nation. This was the famous “parenthesis” interpretation of fascism, which saw it as coming between two periods of normal historical progress. In order to accept this explanation, however, another had to be constructed that relieved the average population from responsibility for the war, the Nazi regime and in particular the Holocaust. Hence emphasis was directed towards the Party and the leader and they assumed the bulk of the blame. Fascism was rationalized away as the work of a small group of extremists who had hijacked the national apparatus for their own ends. The ordinary people of a nation were recast as victims of the fascists as much as any other group. This enabled formerly fascist nations to downplay the fascist period from their histories. However it gave rise to a distorted picture of fascism as a force that was intent on the destruction of the modern world. It was a nihilistic, devastating energy, and thus it could not be anything like a legitimate third-way alternative to existing political philosophies.
The Cold War highlighted the increased importance of ideological conflict. The immediate post-World War II period was a world where the destructive potential of war between the only remaining superpowers increased. In a period where nuclear weapons became more and more likely to be used, the value of other forms of influence, besides overwhelming military strength, became even more apparent. The Cold War was as much a war of propaganda, of competing ideologies as anything else. Out of this intellectual climate arose the totalitarian regime model, which analysed the structure and actions of the regime, and not the ideology that informed it, and thus drew obvious comparisons of the regimes of the Stalinist Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and to a lesser extent Fascist Italy.

Some historians have warned against conflating the coming to prominence of the totalitarian interpretation with its formulation. Ian Kershaw has remarked that “it is mistaken to regard the totalitarianism concept as simply a product of the Cold War, though that was indeed the period of its full flourishing.” The political advantage of this conceptual framework for the time of the Cold War was that it linked the enemy of the past with the enemy of the present. By discussing fascism in terms that were also applicable to Stalinism, the horrors of the Holocaust, and any residual hatred and fear, was transferred to the Russians. This is not to suggest that there was an intentional effort to deceive the world on the nature of fascism, but rather, as with all intellectual history, the political climate of the 1950s influenced the work of the thinkers who were working in that period.

The connection of Nazism with Stalinism was an intentional rejection of the claims of the Left, especially the Communists of the interwar period, that Nazism in particular, and fascism in general, was capitalist reactions to prevent or postpone the proletarian revolution. Rather, totalitarianism theorists emphasised the similarities of the Nazi and Soviet regimes. As Jane Caplan wrote, “totalitarianism theory does not necessarily deny the existence of major differences between communist and fascist

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9 Such as the so-called “soft power” of economic and cultural coercion, rather than the “hard power” of military threats, that Joseph S. Nye has recently explored. See his *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004) and *The paradox of American power : why the world’s only superpower can’t go it alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

political systems, but concludes that in the final analysis these differences are less significant than either what the systems have in common, or what distinguishes them from liberal democracy.\textsuperscript{11} This is a similar rhetorical strategy to that which the interwar Communists used; while the Communists conflated their two enemies (fascism and western democracy) into a capitalist conspiracy, western democracies similarly conflated their two enemies (fascism and communism) into a totalitarian threat.

The major theorist of totalitarianism in the 1950s was Hannah Arendt. The regime model, like many academic theories, developed through the work of scholars over years, and Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism has echoes in the studies of modern historians who use the regime theory. Arendt, a scholar of the history of anti-Semitism, provided much of the analytical framework for the totalitarian model in her magisterial work \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}.\textsuperscript{12} Arendt drew a distinction between Fascism, which she did not see as totalitarian, and Nazism and Stalinism, which were totalitarian. Arendt wrote, “Mussolini did not attempt to establish a full-fledged totalitarian regime and contented himself with dictatorship and one-party rule”.\textsuperscript{13} This was not a position that all who shared the totalitarian method endorsed. Carl J. Friedrich noted in a review that he had

always stressed the kinship of Italian Fascism and German National Socialism, in conduct as well as ideology—in opposition to Hannah Arendt, who inclined to an idealypical restriction of the notion of totalitarianism to Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia on the ground that “the essence of totalitarianism is total terror”; this has always seemed to me like restricting the concept of absolute monarchy to Louis XIV and Peter the Great.\textsuperscript{14}

Ian Kershaw, who has traced the historiography of the totalitarian method through modern times, has observed that Arendt’s “emphasis on the radicalising, dynamic, and structure-destroying inbuilt characteristics of Nazism has been amply borne out of

\textsuperscript{12} Hannah Arendt, \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism} (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951).
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, p.308.
\textsuperscript{14} Carl J. Friedrich, “Fascism versus Totalitarianism: Ernst Nolte’s Views Reexamined”, \textit{Central European History} 4(3) (September, 1971), pp.271-284, at p.272.
later research.” However the crux of her argument, that “the raison d’être of the true totalitarian regime was its capacity for the annihilation of its unintegrated superfluous populations,” failed to offer “a clear theory or satisfactory concept of totalitarian systems,” according to modern critics. While Arendt’s work was justly recognised for its study of the genocidal and xenophobic tendencies of totalitarianism, other scholars added to her work by looking at other characteristics of those regimes. Arendt’s focus on one facet of the fascist style of rule, however, is indicative of the narrow view of many regime model historians, who define fascism according to a small set of conditions.

The classic definition of totalitarianism came from Carl J. Friedrich, who was able to distil its essential elements down to six qualities that all totalitarian systems share. Friedrich’s thesis set the standard for totalitarian studies, however the main weakness of his theory, according to Kershaw, is that it is “above all a static model, allowing little room for change and development in the inner dynamics of a system, and it rests on the exaggerated assumption of the essentially monolithic nature of ‘totalitarian regimes’. The inflexible nature of its typology has restricted Friedrich’s definition’s usage in historiography, and although it was highly influential, it has largely passed out of vogue.

Almost three decades later in 1979, Gilbert Allardyce saw the reasoning of Arendt, Friedrich and other (mainly American) political scientists who worked with the totalitarian context as flawed:

During the Cold War, scholars transformed this propaganda image of a monolithic and murderous fascism into the concept of “totalitarianism,” an ideological construct developed from the comparative study of the Stalinist and

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Nazi regimes and extended on the barest of evidence to Communists and “fascists” across the globe.\textsuperscript{20}

However some commentators find the idea that the concept of totalitarianism was at least partially the “product of the ‘ideological requirements’ of the Cold War period” as “unpersuasive”. A. James Gregor notes the realization that fascism and communism shared certain features in common predates the Cold War by at least two decades, as we have already seen above and which we will see in greater depth below:

The fact is that the concept ‘totalitarianism’ i.e., the suggestion that fascist and revolutionary ‘Marxist’ political movements shared similarities, dates from at least 1922, and is hardly the consequence of Cold War ideological bias. The similarities were recognized throughout the ‘thirties and ‘forties by such notables as Trotsky, Erich Fromm, as well as by Fascists themselves. Certainly the conception of totalitarianism was not the \textit{product} of the Cold War period. Its \textit{popularity} might well have been. But that information helps us very little in assessing its cognitive merits.\textsuperscript{21}

We will see in the upcoming chapters that focus on the case studies that many fascists recognised that there was a lot to admire in the Bolshevist project, and that despite their superficial hostility the two ideologies had certain similarities.

Karl Dietrich Bracher, who used totalitarianism to analyse Nazism, most successfully employed totalitarianism theory in the study of a single regime.\textsuperscript{22} For Bracher, the important elements of totalitarianism were “the total claim to rule, the leadership principle, the exclusive ideology, and the fiction of identity of rulers and ruled.”\textsuperscript{23} Kershaw highly valued Bracher’s work as keeping the study of totalitarianism alive: Bracher has “consistently argued the case of totalitarianism within the framework of understanding different models of political domination and was more

\textsuperscript{23} Kershaw, \textit{The Nazi Dictatorship}, p.25.
than any other historian instrumental in the retention and even revival of the totalitarianism concept in its application to Nazism.”

The concept of totalitarianism is a useful one when used to examine the workings of a fascist regime, and reveals many interesting facets of the total domination of public and private life that fascism often achieved. Totalitarian theory is less useful when considering the cultural values of fascism, however, as the reasons for total involvement in the lives of the people of a nation invariably has more to do with practical issues of control and less to do with a theoretical desire for totalitarianism. That said, as we shall see when discussing the case studies, there are philosophical reasons for the importance of identification with the state and total commitment to one’s nation and community that can support totalitarian actions.

In the broader study of generic fascism, Gregor has seen the concept of totalitarianism surviving in theory, even when writers are not aware that they are in fact using the concept. The concept of totalitarianism “has been contested, reassessed and reformulated, but it has endured. Its use, almost invariably, has been “pretheoretical”.” For Gregor, totalitarianism has come to be used to refer to the unique twentieth century ideologies that emerged, and is wide enough to cover fascism, Nazism and Stalinism:

The use of the concept “totalitarianism” entails the identification of a class of political phenomena, unique to the twentieth century, involving very different systems that, nonetheless, feature a discriminable set of observable properties. Those properties include charismatic leadership, unitary parties, antidemocratic formal ideologies, messianic goals, and orchestrated participation, as well as disciplined control of the economy and of public information.

Gregor seeks to emphasise, however, the broad range of variants that can be collected under the umbrella word of “totalitarianism”. It is essential, he warns, to recognise the differences as much as the similarities: “Under the genus ‘totalitarian’ there are an indeterminate number of species and subspecies. Fascism is one. It is as different from National Socialism as National Socialism is from Bolshevism. What it

26 Ibid.
shares with National Socialism, it shares with Bolshevism. They are all variants of the same genus.” They may all fall under the genus of “totalitarianism”, but one must not conflate the concepts of fascism, Nazism and Stalinism, however easy or politically expedient it may be, because to do so would lose some of the benefits of examining the ideologies at all. While it is important to recognise the similarities between fascism and other totalitarian ideologies, it is also important to distinguish it when appropriate, and also to see the similarities that fascism has to other ideological traditions. We shall see when discussing the case studies that fascists can come from a variety of backgrounds and that fascism draws upon elements of many ideologies, including conservatism, socialism and even liberalism.

The totalitarian approach to interpreting fascism, although perhaps influenced by the politics of the day, did at least seriously study fascism as an ideology. In particular, although it focused almost exclusively on fascism as a regime and therefore on the style of rule, it provided a rigorous analysis of the structural features of fascist regimes, and how they put into practice their principles. Kallis noted that one of the consequences of the totalitarian approach’s early prominence in fascist studies is that from the beginning, scholars accepted “a distinction between fascism as intellectual movement and fascism as political regime.” There is merit in this division of theory and practice, however for many decades the bias in fascist studies in favour of studying parties and regimes to the neglect of ideas led to an imbalance in research. This has resulted in the dominant model of analysis of fascism becoming the regime model, which de-emphasises the importance of ideology.

**Fascism within National Histories**

As the years passed and the immediacy of the impact of the Second World War lessened, theorists began to reassess the place of fascism in the histories of their respective nations. According to Kallis, “the moral need to censure fascism as an unequivocally pernicious phenomenon and to present it (as liberal historiography had endeavoured to do) as a parenthesis in national and European history gave way to

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27 Ibid.
more dispassionate readings of the events." In particular, the place of Nazism in the broader history of the German people received attention. Fritz Fischer, in a number of works, ranging from *War of Illusions* (1975) to *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich: Elements of Continuity in German History* (1986), argued that the imperialist and expansionist aspects of the Third Reich were an expression of national aspirations that dated from the formation of the unified German nation. The explicit thesis was that Nazism was not an aberration in German history, but its logical progression. For fascist studies in general, it implied that fascism could and should be studied not as criminal or pathological extremism, but rather within the context of a nation’s political, intellectual and cultural history. The position was further reinforced by the work of A.J.P. Taylor, whose *Origins of the Second World War* (1961) portrayed Hitler as an ordinary politician working within familiar conservative and nationalist tropes. While enormously controversial in its day, Taylor’s argument did much to demystify the role of the *Führer*, thus removing much of the pseudo-religious aura of fascism that made it inscrutable to outside eyes.

The repercussions of this were, therefore, the search for other explanations for the fascist anomaly, with one answer being that it was not an anomaly at all. Scholars began to explore the intellectual foundations of fascism, and its origins were traced back through national histories to “a dissident current of late-nineteenth-century European thought [that] became particularly relevant and radical in the exceptional circumstances of the interwar crisis.” Studies such as Alastair Hamilton’s *The Appeal of Fascism: A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism, 1919-1945* (1971) treated fascism not as a regime nor as an aberration, but rather as part of a much larger, anti-Enlightenment philosophic movement that was represented through much of Europe and had the support of many prominent intellectuals.

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29 Ibid.
is an influential one for the conception of my thesis in that it gave as serious consideration to the ideas of (mainly literary) intellectuals as political theory. Hamilton’s attitude prefigured much of the argument of this thesis, that there is value in taking into account the ideas of relatively non-influential intellectuals in order to understand the attractions of fascism. More recently, John Carey in his *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992) covered much of the same ground as Hamilton, although with less emphasis on fascism specifically. Most of the work done in this area was author-centric, however, consisting of studies of the politics of particular authors, as we will see when we come to this thesis’s case studies in the next chapter.

**Fascism as a Revolutionary Movement**

During the same period of the late sixties and early seventies, the work of Ralf Dahrendorf examined the changes that the Nazis had instituted and came to the conclusion that there was a revolutionary element to the Nazi programme. This contention was revolutionary in itself, as the concept of revolution had been largely the domain of Marxist historians, and used solely in the sense of a change for the better. As Kallis points out, the idea not only drew criticism from the Marxist corner, but also from liberals:

> It was also a particularly dubious claim to make in the context of the postwar liberal moral inclination to depict fascism as a wholly malignant phenomenon. Even if the use of the term ‘revolution’ was less ideology laden in liberal than in Marxist historiography, it still conjured up images of a more positive social reality than the post-fascist world was willing to discuss or admit. Until the 1960s, fascism, in west and east alike, was largely depicted as a reactionary force.

The very suggestion that fascism should be examined for its revolutionary nature, and not seen simply as an ultra-conservative reaction to external forces, generated much debate about whether fascism was “revolutionary”, “reactionary” or “counter-

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revolutionary”. Although Kallis argues that this debate was largely “unfruitful”, it was at least the beginning of a major reassessment of the very nature of fascism. As we shall see in Chapter Four, this was a debate that took place amongst various fascists themselves as well, and often came down to the sense in which “revolutionary” was employed. We shall see in Chapter Four how the French authors especially embraced the concept of a metaphysical revolution, calling for a radical rebirth of the soul of the nation.

By the mid-1960s, scholars began to question the assumptions that were being made about fascism and to reconsider the way fascism was studied. The first issue of the *Journal of Contemporary History* in 1966 devoted itself to an in-depth re-evaluation of fascism, and the articles from that inaugural volume are still relevant today. Griffin points out, however, that “as the ten essays collected between the covers of the fledgling periodical demonstrate, they were conspicuously lacking a shared methodological and conceptual framework.” Despite the lack of consensus, the period, and the issue of the *Journal of Contemporary History*, revealed that scholars had at last started to put behind them an infantile insistence that fascism was the (pseudo-)ideology of nihilistic irrationalism, a movement fuelled by pathological barbarism, or a regime whose sole function was to impose a reign of totalitarian oppression.

The sixties were a challenging time in the historiography of fascism, although Griffin acknowledges that “as befits an adolescent phase, fascist studies displayed raw energy and enthusiasm in abundance, while being highly unfocused and ill-disciplined.” Whether or not fascist studies has “grown up” is a question for debate. It is certainly more focused and disciplined, although one might argue the pendulum has swung too far and it is now too focused and too disciplined, emphasising one model of analysis over the other and becoming too narrow in approach and scope. This dissertation

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid, p21-22.
moves back towards the centre, taking a broad approach to the scope of what is examined and employing focused methodology.

**Distinguishing Variants of Fascism**

During the 1970s, the focus of fascist studies shifted to the examination of various movements and regimes, rather than the comparative study of fascism as a generic concept. As some historians have noted, the crowded topography of fascist parties, movements, organizations, regimes, and individuals made it difficult to distinguish common characteristics, and thus the focal point of research swung towards analysing in depth those variants. Kallis identifies two repercussions of this trend:

First, disproportionate emphasis on Germany and Italy had produced theories of fascism which were derived from either of these two regimes and thus were inappropriate for dealing convincingly with regional variations or even with fundamental differences between Nazism and Italian Fascism themselves. Second, the generic models of fascism that came to attention in the 1960s rested on rather basic generalisations about the nature of fascism, lacking in theoretical elaboration and failing to impart a coherent set of overall definitions and criteria for comparison.\(^{42}\)

As a consequence, the focus of fascist studies turned more to the relationship between social and economic conditions within a country that made it possible for fascist movements to rise and gain support. As for Germany and Italy, the subject of research became the structure of the fascist regimes, their decision-making processes and the social and cultural conditions of the citizens of those regimes. This is a tendency that remains strong today, and is an extremely valuable tool for understanding the nature of German Nazism and Italian Fascism. Recent works such as Macgregor Knox’s *To the Threshold of Power*\(^{43}\) and Richard Evans’s comprehensive trilogy on Nazi Germany\(^{44}\) provide invaluable analyses of the workings of those regimes. When used in conjunction with more philosophical works, they will lead to a

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fuller understanding of the nature of fascism; used in isolation, however, they provide only an understanding of Germany and Italy.

In the late 1970s, the work of Martin Broszat\textsuperscript{45} and Hans Mommsen\textsuperscript{46}, in particular, broke new ground with a new model of analysis that was termed structuralism, as it “challenge[d] the persistent conventional assumptions about Hitler’s role in the Nazi system and about the alleged ideological coherence of Nazi policies, as well as about the overall functioning of the regime.”\textsuperscript{47} Such an approach was severely criticised by the “intentionalists”, in particular by Klaus Hildebrand, who argued in favour of a consistent system of ideas that sustained the Nazis for over a decade.\textsuperscript{48} Although some critics have seen the structuralist/intentionalist debate as an oversimplification of complex issues into an artificial dialectic that caused the “entrenchment of views behind clearly recognisable labels [that] did not leave enough room for individual nuances,”\textsuperscript{49} it was indicative of the general movement towards detailed studies of singular regimes, rather than grand comparisons and the search for general theories. Whatever the relative merits of the structuralist and intentionalist positions, the subject of research tended to focus on the specifics of one country.\textsuperscript{50} While nothing in the cultural theory prevents a study from being written based around a particular national culture or tradition, these studies tended towards the regime model in their outlook towards understanding the nature of fascism.

**Fascism: a modernising force or an anti-modern regression?**

During the 1970s, some historians, in some ways echoing the attempts of the Communist theorists in the interwar years, attempted to discover a common thread that ran through all fascist movements and groups—a feature that could be said to describe fascism in general. One of the most heated debates revolved around the issue of whether fascism was modern or anti-modern. The dispute raised questions


about the nature of the revolutionary or reactionary character of fascism, as well as the practical effect that fascism had on the countries where it took hold. The collective opinion of many in the field assumed that fascism was an anti-modern movement that sought to cancel much of the progress of the Enlightenment and return the world to a pre-modern state. Henry Ashby Turner Jr, who made the case for fascism’s anti-modernism in an important article in *World Politics* in 1972, “Fascism and Modernization”, represented this attitude most clearly.

Turner’s article stimulated a spirited response from Gregor, who argued that fascism was, in fact, modernising. Gregor’s article, titled “Fascism and Modernization: Some Addenda”, sought to clarify some aspects of Turner’s argument that he found misleading. Gregor can be seen to be agreeing with Allardyce’s observation that “as with many attempts to comprehend one concept in terms of another, this one tends toward vagueness on both fronts.” To begin with, Gregor attempted to make clear what the subject of the analysis was:

> In order to obtain purchase on a vague and somewhat fugitive notion—fascism—we are asked to invoke what appear to be the equally vague and mercurial notions associated with modernization.

‘Modernization’, Gregor explained, was just as bewildering a term as ‘fascism’, although in the sense that Turner was using it, it was perfectly applicable to fascism, especially Italian Fascism. Gregor stated “Turner himself conceives of modernization as being a complex process ‘involving industrialization, urbanization, secularization, and rationalization’.” Gregor, one of the most prolific, although controversial, interpreters of Italian Fascism, had concluded that Fascism, especially in its early days before its March on Rome, could not realistically be described as a reactionary, anti-revolutionary or anti-modern movement. As Gregor describes it, Fascism was dedicated to transformation of the Italian economy and society:

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54 Gregor’s involvement with groups that support biological racism, as well as his often antagonistic reviews of others’ work, has led to his position as a maverick, controversial scholar.
By the time of Mussolini’s accession to power, Fascism had given clear evidence of its commitment to industrialization and modernization of the economy. Not only were the Futurists, Nationalists, and National Syndicalists agreed that the maximization of production was the first order of business, but all were advocates of urban development, the rationalization of financial institutions, the reorganization of the bureaucracy on the basis of technical competence, the abolition of “traditional” and nonfunctional agencies, the expansion of road, rail, waterways, and telephonic communications systems, the modernization and secular control of the educational system, and the reduction of illiteracy.\(^{56}\)

Given these practical economic and social objectives, Gregor insisted that Fascism could not be seen as “utopian anti-modernism”, either in intention or action. In all respects, Fascism was a modernizing movement.\(^{57}\)

Gregor considered the rhetorical appeals of Fascism to the grandeur of ancient Rome to be exactly that, rhetorical flourishes: “Mussolini’s appeal to ancient glories, his effort to paramilitarize Italian society, and his advocacy of martial virtues do not an ‘anti-modern utopian’ make.”\(^{58}\) Precipitating a thesis that he would elucidate in a book shortly after this article appeared, Gregor maintained that “Italian Fascism was an exemplar of the class of contemporary mass-mobilizing and modernizing dictatorships operating under single-party auspices.”\(^{59}\) Klaus Hildebrand, working from the German perspective, saw fascism as “a special form of rule in societies which find themselves in a critical phase of the process of social transformation to industrial society and at the same time objectively or in the eyes of the ruling strata are threatened by the possibility of a communist upheaval.”\(^{60}\) Hence, fascism was seen as a choice made by certain societies to promote stability during a period of modernisation and volatility.

This highlights an inconsistency between fascism and Nazism. Having established the modernizing nature of Fascism, Gregor and other historians who

\(^{56}\) Ibid, p.376.
\(^{57}\) Ibid, p.378.
\(^{58}\) Ibid, p.379.
\(^{59}\) Ibid, p.379.
recognised that fascism contained a revolutionary dimension were faced with a contradiction. There was a discrepancy between the stated objectives and styles of Fascism with that of Nazism. Nazism, it could be argued, was indeed anti-modern and idealised a pre-Enlightenment lifestyle. If Fascism was modern and Nazism anti-modern, which of the two represented the true nature of fascism? In its theoretical form, fascism could not be both modern and anti-modern, therefore it seemed inconsistent that both Fascism and Nazism could be accurately described as fascist. One response to this problem, that of A.F.K. Organski in 1967, was to argue that Nazism was not fascism at all.\(^{61}\) Thus, in Allardyce’s phrase, “with a stroke of the pen” Organski eliminated the problem. For Organski, Allardyce observed,

> fascism was a developmental stage in the modernization process, an élite dictatorship that advanced and industrialized a nation’s economy. His model was the reign of Mussolini; the odd man out was Hitler. “Hitler,” he wrote, “was an authoritarian dictator, a nationalist, an aggressor, a repressor, and a madman, but he was not a fascist, for Germany was fully industrialized when Hitler came to power.”\(^{62}\)

While a neat and tidy way out of the problem, this solution was counterintuitive. To other historians, there was another explanation—as the economic and social situations of Italy and Germany were not the same, the form that fascism took in those countries was not the same either. Fascism’s practice differed in relation to the national conditions of the nations in which it was appearing. Alan Cassels, for example, resolved the problem of the difference between Italian Fascism and German Nazism in 1974 thus:

> On the basis of this Nazi-Fascist contrast, I have postulated a general schema: that fascism where it appeared in less advanced regions tended to look ahead to a stepped-up modernization of the community ... while in already modernized nations fascism preferred to look back to a legendary past.\(^{63}\)

Allardyce has conceded that this solution apparently resolves the problem by dismissing the modernisation question as one of rhetoric: that anti-modernism and

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modernism was about an expression of cultural values, rather than a reference to their actual programme:

The conclusion, apparently, is that the Nazis were antimodernist in mind but not in practice. Their goal in the future was to “demodernize” Europe; their means was to industrialize Germany. Here one may ask, if antimodernists modernize, are they antimodernists? Never mind. It is sufficient to recognize that National Socialism is as troublesome to interpret with modernization as it is without it.64

Gregor, for his part, regarded Nazism as an anomaly within fascist studies, a unique regime that was overly influenced by Hitler and was thus a distorted version of fascism unlike the general form and unlike any other variant. Fascism, as Gregor defined it, was “a developmental dictatorship appropriate to partially developed or undeveloped... national communities”65. As far as Nazism was concerned, Gregor admitted it was the exception, and while he did not go as far as Organski in denying Nazism the label of fascism, he acknowledged that it did not fall into the regular pattern of other fascisms. Italian Fascism, for Gregor, was the original standard of fascism, and German variation deviated to such an extent that it no longer fell within the same category of ideology. The fact that this debate about which was the genuine or base standard version of fascism (Italian or Nazi) was occurring revealed that many historians were conceding that there was a standard ideology from which there could be deviations, in other words, that there was an theoretical ideology.

Is There Such a Thing as “Generic” Fascism?

The discussion of whether Nazism was a form of fascism highlighted the issue of whether or not there was an abstract concept of fascism that could be used as a heuristic tool when examining historical regimes and movements. In other words, was there, or was there use for, the idea of a “generic fascism” that could serve as a definition or ideological minimum. At the end of the 1980s, Tim Mason asked the

question, “Whatever Happened to Fascism?”. It was not that the eighties had been bereft of scholarly focus on the politics of the interwar years, but rather that, apart from the work of a handful of historians, little attention had been given to the comparative study of fascism with the intention of discerning a generic definition. It was Mason’s position that “fascism was a continental phenomenon and that Nazism was part of something much larger”, and that there were profitable rewards to be gained from a study of the various forms of fascism. Although “we can do without much of the original contents of the concept of fascism,” Mason wrote, “we cannot do without comparison”. His lamentation was perhaps premature, for within the next few years, the concept of generic fascism was reinvigorated. Mason recognised that the “original contents”, that is, the elements of fascism that had been focused on by post-war historians, would need to be replaced with a new model, which was indeed the direction fascist studies took. The end (for the time being) of the use of the totalitarian model may have had something to do with the end of the Cold War and the discrediting of much of the Soviet mission. Comparison between fascism and communism, and the general concept of totalitarianism, as a way of interpreting fascism and Nazism was supplanted with a new paradigm.

The renewed interest in generic fascism was propelled largely by the work of two British scholars, Griffin and Roger Eatwell. Griffin’s complex and methodologically sophisticated classification of fascism, based on a broad and deep reading of the literature, looked at the ideology of fascism as well as its style of rule. He investigated fascism as a third alternative to liberalism and socialism, and emphasised the “palingenetic” nature of fascism—that is, the obsession of fascism with rebirth and regeneration at the national as well as the personal level.

Roger Eatwell agreed with Griffin “on the need to view fascism as a true revolutionary phenomenon and a coherent system of ideas and values, which should not be confined to one historical period or place (interwar Europe) and whose relevance to contemporary political discourses of the extreme right had to be carefully

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66 Tim Mason, “Whatever Happened to Fascism?” in Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (eds), Reevaluating the Third Reich (Holmes and Meier, New York, 1993); originally in Radical History Review 49 (1991), pp.89-98.
Together, Griffin and Eatwell did much to bolster the notion that fascism was a serious system of thought that required serious study. In addition, Eatwell insisted that “it is useful to distinguish between fascism as a regime, a movement, and an ideology.” Given that it was the opinion of many historians that only the practical manifestations and structures of fascism were worthy of study, Eatwell attempted to change that attitude. His objective was to combat “the widespread misconception that there was no serious basis to fascism as an ideology (even that it was an ‘anti-ideology’, or a form of violent nihilism)”.

The difficulties of the task were not unapparent to Eatwell, who recognised that:

There is also a problem of circularity which plagues both concept and theory building. Which comes first: the definition or the selection of cases on which to build—a particularly important problem with fascism, as the term has largely been used by opponents rather than as a form of self-reference (the Nazis rarely called themselves ‘fascist’). Partly linked to this, is the conceptual problem of the core-radial distinction: what is necessary and what is contingent?

This was the question that would inform much of the debate on generic fascism throughout the 1990s and into the twentieth-first century. Few however, doubted any longer the usefulness of the argument. The cultural model had its origins in the study of fascism as an ideological force, rather than a style of rule. Like the regime model, the cultural model developed after many years of evolution, and had arisen parallel with the regime model, with its first description provided not long after the totalitarian approach had achieved widespread acceptance. It had one of its first expositions in the work of Ernst Nolte, whose challenging reading of fascism as a metaphysical philosophy opened the possibilities of our interpretation of fascism, as well as, by including the Action Française in his study, broadened the scope of which movements and parties were consider “fascist”.

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69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
Metaphysical Fascism

While historians in the 1950s and 1960s were examining the practice and philosophy of fascism in terms of its relationship with the Soviet Union, another scholar sought to examine the ideas of the German Nazis, the Italian Fascists and the French Action Française in order to define fascism.\(^\text{71}\) Nolte’s *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* (1963), translated into English as *Three Faces of Fascism* (1965), was one of the first attempts to study fascism from a philosophical approach. As the German title more clearly implies, Nolte was interested in fascism as an epochal phenomenon. His concern was to discover the underlying connections between the three movements, rather than present three isolated studies.

Nolte developed from this comparative approach a description of fascism as “anti-Marxism which seeks to destroy the enemy by the evolvement of a radically opposed yet related ideology and by the use of almost identical and yet typically modified methods, always, however, within the unyielding framework of national self-assertion and autonomy.”\(^\text{72}\) At a deeper level, Nolte insisted that fascism was a metapolitical “resistance to transcendence”, by which he meant that fascism was a reaction against the attempts to achieve a degree of spiritual unity.\(^\text{73}\) This “resistance to transcendence” was both a resistance to practical transcendence and theoretical transcendence. He defined practical transcendence as the social process which “disengages the individual from traditional ties and increases the power of the group”, and theoretical transcendence as “the reaching out of the mind beyond what exists and what can exist toward an absolute whole”. In other words, the transcendence that fascism resisted was the sort of practical transformation that utopian communists sought and the spiritual transformation of religion. The metapolitical nature of fascism was, therefore, a decidedly anti-utopianism. Nolte addresses this in more practical terms when he defines fascism in terms of negations rather than a positive program, as we will see below. This thesis shall challenge Nolte’s assertions of the

\(^{71}\) Note: “Action Française” shall be used to refer to the movement; “Action Française” shall be used to refer to the movement’s newspaper.


\(^{73}\) Ibid, p.537ff.
anti-utopian, or non-utopian, attitude of fascism by showing through case studies that fascists were often utopian or idealistic in their thought. Historiographically, we shall see that scholars who fall within the cultural tradition that Nolte helped establish, such as Griffin and Sternhell, explicitly acknowledge the revolutionary and utopian nature of fascism. Nolte’s approach was more theoretical when compared to the totalitarianist approach of looking at the style of rule, and led Allardyce to remark that “what Arendt did to turn fascism into political philosophy, Nolte did to turn it into metaphysics.” The success of Nolte’s attempt to turn the study of fascism into a philosophic enterprise has been met with luke-warm appreciation over the years. Kershaw, for one, noted in 2000 that “Nolte’s self-proclaimed ‘phenomenological method’ seems to amount in practice to little more than taking the self-depiction of a phenomenon seriously—in this case the writings of fascist leaders…. Nolte gives little serious consideration to the social foundations of fascism, since he finds socio-economic explanations of fascism inadequate.” It was Nolte who first popularised the concept of the “fascist minimum”, a core set of beliefs that were the necessary factors for a movement, regime or person to be fascist. Nolte, through his examination of the three movements he identified as the major fascist groups of the twentieth century, isolated six points that constituted the fascist minimum: anti-marxism; anti-liberalism; anti-conservatism; the Führerprinzip; militarisation of the party; and the goal of totalitarianism. The accuracy of the content of Nolte’s understanding of the fascist minimum would come into question over the years, and it would be further refined throughout the following four decades, yet Nolte’s significant contribution was to promote the line of thinking that saw fascism as containing a definite and definable ideological substance. Eventually the fascist minimum as expressed by Nolte would be built upon and expanded to counter some of the defects of his limited definition. For example, the fascist negations that Nolte identifies are commonly accepted to be correct in a general sense, yet when examining the beliefs of certain fascists and fascist organizations, we begin to see the complexities involved—some fascists were more liberal than others, especially in the arena of

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social issues, while others could be described as being conservative on some issues. Yet other fascists arrived at fascism via dissident communism or socialism and saw themselves as men of the left. This we shall see more explicitly when we begin looking at the ideas of Lewis, Pound, Brasillach and Drieu. Some of them held ideas that are close to liberalism, while others were admirers of certain aspects of communism or socialism. The difficulty of defining fascism becomes very apparent when dealing with such distinctions and variations.

Another criticism of Nolte’s formulation is that expressed by Stanley Payne, who recognised the importance of the fascist negations as starting points, but argued that Nolte’s theory “does not describe the positive content of fascist philosophy and values and makes no concrete reference to economic goals.”

This criticism has importance to our discussion of fascist utopian ideas. Besides a reference to the goal of totalitarianism (which is debatable, and seems to ignore the distinction between general fascist authoritarianism and the totalitarianism of Stalinism and Nazism), Nolte does not identify the aspirations of fascism. Fascism, once its revolutionary nature is accepted, is a utopian philosophy that seeks to remake the world towards an ideal. Nolte’s theory does not address this. The other two features of his definition—the adoption of the *Führerprizip* and the militarisation of the party and/or the state—are styles of behaviour, methods rather than goals. Totalitarianism itself can be seen as simply a method towards an end. The entry of the influence of the state into all areas of public and private life, which we can take as the essence of totalitarianism, is lacking in purpose in and of itself unless it is to further an ideological ambition or achieve some objective. Nolte, then, with three negations and three styles, assists the quest for the definition of fascism by identifying what it opposes and how it acts, but he fails to provide an actual definition of what constitutes the positive ideological content of fascism, and what constitutes an ideal fascist utopia.

Kallis has recently detected a further contradiction in Nolte’s formulation. Kallis subscribes to a regime-based typology of fascism that seeks to define fascism.

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through reference to the Nazi and Italian Fascist regimes. He disputes the usefulness of Nolte’s addition of the Action Française into his study. Nolte, Kallis argues,

...provided an insightful account of the ideological similarities between the Italian and German regimes, only to obfuscate his paradigm by including Action Française in his analysis. The ideological affinities notwithstanding, the weaknesses of his generic definition are obvious. If ‘fascism’ is a broad ideological phenomenon, then why are other case-studies excluded (Austria, Britain, etc.)? If, on the other hand, ‘fascism’ is both ideology and action, movement and regime, then why is Action Française comparable to the Italian and German regimes?78

Kallis is correct in asking why does Nolte not look at other manifestations of fascist ideology in other countries if his intention is to discuss the ideological content of fascism. However, Nolte does not argue that the three subjects of his study are the sole examples of fascism in the world. Rather Nolte has attempted to provide a sampling of three examples of fascism, not a comprehensive survey of all fascists.

Of the three, Nolte saw the Action Française as a more refined and coherent exposition of fascism, precisely because the Action Française was not in power, and therefore unsullied with the compromises of political reality. Italian Fascism, on the one hand, was an “often wavering, continuingly evolving doctrine”, and was “not on the same plane” as the French example, which, on the other hand, was “precise [and] self-contained”. Nolte wrote, “The Action Française is to [Italian] fascism—however much both are simultaneously practice and theory—what philosophy is to life: just as life is more colourful, rich, and complex, so it is also less equipped with, and more needful of, direction.”79 Nonetheless, Nolte recognised that Italian Fascism did have an ideological foundation, and that some of that foundation lay in Mussolini’s socialist background:

It is correct that Mussolini’s thinking was mercurial, fragmentary, and often liable to fluctuation. But if we proceed, as today we must, from his Marxist youth, we cannot fail to perceive a continuous and highly significant thread, and we are forced to admit that never has the path of any outstanding European politician been more closely and

79 Ernst Nolte, Three Faces of Fascism, p.193.
variously affiliated with the intellectual evolution of his time.\textsuperscript{80}

Nolte insisted that Mussolini’s “command of contemporary philosophy and political literature was at least as great as that of any other contemporary European political leader,”\textsuperscript{81} which is far from being the buffoon Mussolini is occasionally made out to be.\textsuperscript{82}

Nolte’s assessment of the significance of the French fascist movement, according to R.J.B. Bosworth,

carried other very important messages. Even if the inter-war period constituted an ‘era of fascism’, and both the First World War and the Russian Revolution were crucial factors in the precipitation of the new movement, the origins of the ideology of fascism could be traced back before 1914.\textsuperscript{83}

Thus Nolte prefigured the work of Sternhell, who would argue more than a decade later that fascism’s origins lay in the pre-1914 French combination of revolutionary syndicalism and integral nationalism.\textsuperscript{84}

The Ideological Content of Fascism

At the same time Nolte was writing in Germany in the 1960s, Eugen Weber in the United States was looking at fascist movements and regimes in a broader (although less detailed) context. Weber’s \textit{Varieties of Fascism} (1964), a small book whose influence far exceeded its length and its author’s intention, examined fascism in a number of countries and concluded that fascism was an “opportunistic activism inspired by dissatisfaction with the existing order, but unwilling or unable to proclaim a precise doctrine of its own.”\textsuperscript{85} While not attempting to provide a concrete definition of fascism, Weber drew attention to a number of ideological characteristics that were shared across the varieties of fascism, such as its relationship with socialism, its use of violence, the symbiotic connection between the leader and the crowd, the tension

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, p.42-3.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, p.200.
\textsuperscript{82} For example, in Denis Mack Smith, \textit{Mussolini} (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981).
\textsuperscript{84} Zeev Sternhell (with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri), \textit{The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
between elitism and democracy, and above all fascism’s conjunction of the left and the right.

Thus by the mid-1960s, fascism was starting to be seen as an ideology and not just an historical phenomenon. As Griffin has noted, the importance of the contributions of Nolte and Weber is that they “made a convincing case for approaching fascism as an ideologically driven, or at least myth-driven, movement of essentially revolutionary (and hence anti-conservative) nationalism with a number of variants in inter-war Europe, only two of which actually formed regimes, namely the highly contrasting Fascism and Nazism.” These two pioneers began, or at least recognised the importance of, the analysis of fascism as a system of thought with a discernable ideology that took a particular form when in power. While their work was not always accepted—Nolte’s thesis was metaphysically complex and difficult, and Weber’s insistence on the fascism of smaller movements seemed less important to some when compared to Nazism—it did inspire others to build upon their theories. In the period directly after the appearance of Nolte’s and Weber’s works, a “flurry of attempts” to interpret fascism emerged. The study of fascist movements became a densely populated field, and the emphasis began to shift to analysis of the unique features of specific manifestations of fascism.

Gregor, fresh from arguing that fascism was, in fact, a modernising force, published in 1979 a monograph on Italian Fascism that described it as a form of mass-mobilising “developmental dictatorship”. In it, Gregor “acknowledged fascism’s intellectual debts to socialist thought and questioned its conventional identification with the right.” Gregor conducted a thorough analysis of the left-wing roots of

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Italian Fascism, and contended that, far from being a cynically pragmatic regime without any underlying philosophic system, fascism “possessed a highly coherent, autonomous and cogent ideological profile.” In another study of the same year, Gregor depicted Benito Mussolini as a dissident socialist who had renounced the mainstream Marxist dogma with its emphasis on internationalism, in favour of a form of socialism that emphasised the nation and national issues. As a part of this socialist nationalism, Gregor argued that fascism retained the commitment to mass participation and revolution that are features of the revolutionary Left. Kallis has criticised the content of Gregor’s conclusions, but noted that Gregor was representative of a trend that was gaining prominence in the historiography of Italian Fascism:

Perhaps Gregor overstated both his arguments – Mussolini’s intellectual consistency and Fascism’s ideological coherence…. His work, however, was emblematic of a much wider tendency, especially inside Italy, to re-examine Fascism in more positive terms and in antithesis to Nazism.

The other main proponent of this style of analysis was Renzo De Felice, the author of a magisterial biography of Mussolini. De Felice, along with Gregor, interpreted Italian Fascism as fundamentally different from Nazism. He argued that Nazism was reactionary, while Fascism arose from radical and revolutionary origins and maintained those features for much of its history.

De Felice identified at least four elements of Italian Fascism that were concretely traceable to the Left, and that distinguished Fascism from German Nazism:

First, practically the entire founding group of the fascist movement came from the so-called subversive Left…. Second, despite Mussolini’s tactical accommodations with the traditional élites, the separate Left tendencies continued oppositional activities for the duration of the regime’s twenty years…. Third, the fascist labor syndicates… never became domesticated extensions of the state…. Fourth, Italian communists, fully cognizant of both the inner contradictions

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91 Ibid, p.15.
of fascism and the potential of these Left tendencies, thought and acted as if Italian fascism were fundamentally different from German Nazism.95

Another important contribution of De Felice to the study of generic fascism (which he however denied existed), is his distinction between “fascism as movement” and “fascism as regime”. “Fascism as movement” represented the spiritual aspirations of fascism, and embodied its revolutionary elements; “fascism as regime” was what resulted when fascism came into power and was forced into making concessions to established élites and confronted the practical problems of putting its ideology into practice, thus coming to embody most of fascism’s reactionary features.

De Felice’s revisionism, although controversial for taking what some perceived as a sympathetic view of fascism, was consistent with the general reassessment of methodology in Fascist and Nazi historiography. Kallis draws parallels between De Felice’s work and the work of historians in Germany:

De Felice, like Hildebrand and Bracher in Germany, advocated with characteristic passion the need to return to a history from above, dismissing the methodological fecundity of social history. His work was the apotheosis of neo-positivism, an unconditional commitment to accumulating new archival sources, quoting extensively from documents and speeches, writing a history of what actually happened through evidence. He was often accused (not unfairly) of a headstrong over-reliance on the sources, taking words at face value without either paying sufficient attention to the context in which they had been enunciated, or interpreting them in a critical way.96

The recognition of the relative uniqueness of and dissimilarities between Fascism and Nazism reinforced the trend towards examining fascist regimes and movements in isolation. As Allardyce remarked in 1979, “the study of fascism thus became again the study of fascisms, and scholars thought once more in terms of two models rather than one.”97 As we shall see, Allardyce used this atomisation of studies to argue that a concept of generic fascism was untenable. Allardyce would argue that in looking at various so-called fascist movements, parties, and regimes throughout Europe and around the world, that there was a difficulty “in finding the common “fascist”

substance that connects them with the Italian or German versions.” In his opinion, the comparative study of fascisms was ineffective in its stated goal of determining the essential elements that a generic fascism was supposed to contain: “it must be admitted that this method has not convincingly revealed the universal fascist fundamentals that supposedly underlay the nationalist superstructures of the various movements.” Despite Allardyce’s denial of any advantages of discussing generic fascism, scholars continued to attempt a universal definition.

**Analyses and Interpretations of Fascism: Understanding Fascism through Comparison**

As the studies of fascist movements and regimes continued, it soon became apparent that there was a need for a comprehensive volume that represented the state of fascist studies. In 1976, Walter Laqueur edited *Fascism: A Reader’s Guide: Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography*, that collected much of the cutting edge scholarship of the time. Including essays from such prominent scholars in the field of fascist and Nazi studies as Juan J. Linz, Adrian Lyttleton, William Carr, Hans Mommsen, Karl Dietrich Bracher, Stanley G. Payne, Zeev Sternhell, Alan S. Milward, Francis L. Carsten, and Eugen Weber, not to mention the volume’s editor, Walter Laqueur, the book was an extremely influential anthology, the contents of which are still relevant almost thirty years after their first appearance. Gregor, who one might argue deserved a place amongst such luminaries himself, reviewed the book for the *American Political Science Review*, and recognised immediately its importance as the most up to date and authoritative compilation of essays:

> The essays dissipate so many simplisms, so many stupidities, and so many factual and analytical errors, that one can only

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98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
urge those interested in the general phenomenon we
identified as “fascism” to undertake a careful perusal of the book.  

Laqueur’s collection quickly assumed the status as the authoritative summary of the research and ideas surrounding fascism. One novel aspect of the anthology was the inclusion of separate studies of fascism in hitherto marginalized geographical areas, not just Eastern Europe, but also in central and southern America, as well as a section titled “Fascism and the Third World”.

Although the concept of generic fascism had been consistently under attack almost since the coining of the term, Fascism: A Reader’s Guide was proof that, according to Griffin, “by the end of the 1970’s the comparative fascist studies industry had built up such a global momentum of productivity that it was not to be closed down by a few dissenting voices.” The loudest of those dissenting voices was Allardyce, who had edited his own collection, The Place of Fascism in European History in 1971, which had, by the juxtaposition of articles that starkly contradicted each other, served as an example of the argument he was to make in 1979.

Although scholars of fascism were not perturbed by the cries of futility made by those who denied that the search for a fascist minimum was anything but Quixotic, one of the criticisms of these naysayers caused concern to the academic community. As Griffin, puts it, “what was still conspicuous by its absence from this landmark in fascist studies was a succinct, or at least precise, definition which could be widely adopted as the basis of a working consensus for work on particular fascisms. Instead, individual contributors applied their own implicit definition.” As Griffin admits, there was one exception to this. Juan Linz provided a typological definition:

We define fascism as a hypernationalist, often pan-nationalist, anti-parliamentary, anti-liberal, anti-communist,
populist and therefore anti-proletarian, partly anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois, anti-clerical, or at least, non-clerical movement, with the aim of national social integration through a single party and corporative representation not always equally emphasised.\footnote{Juan J. Linz, “Some Notes Toward a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective”, p.12.}

Linz hoped that this definition is broad enough to cover all the fascist movements that he goes on to discuss, however he does grant that the individual groups under discussion would not place the same degree of emphasis on the same factors—depending on national and local circumstances, such as pre-existing prejudices, rate of industrialization and modernization, recent experiences with democratic institutions, and conditions after the Great War, amongst others. For Linz, fascism was an ideological “new-comer”, and for this reason fascism was forced to define itself in terms of negatives, distancing itself from the other occupants of a crowded political sphere, not only on the right but across the spectrum.

Sternhell was the author of the other extremely influential essay in Laqueur’s book. His “Fascist Ideology” begins by conceding that “there are … not many concepts in contemporary political terminology so notoriously blurred and imprecise in outline” as fascism, and despite the serious work that had been done since the end of the war to isolate and define the concept of fascism “it is still no easy matter to pinpoint fascism precisely, and … there still exists no definition of fascism acceptable to all, or recognised as universally valid.”\footnote{Zeev Sternhell, “Fascist Ideology”, p.315.} Sternhell adopted an understanding of fascism that is in contrast to that of most of his fellow contributors. “This paper deals with fascism”, Sternhell wrote. He continued,

\begin{quote}
It is confined to fascism and deliberately omits nazism for reasons of space and division of labour between contributors, as well as for reasons of substance. A discussion of nazism would have widened its scope far beyond what can reasonably be contained within the framework of this volume, for nazism cannot, as I see it, be treated as a mere variant of fascism: its emphasis on biological determinism rules out all efforts to deal with it as such.\footnote{Ibid. p.317.}
\end{quote}
Sternhell then goes on to discuss a paradigm of fascism that was based on Italian Fascism and French fascism. Similarly to Gregor, Sternhell examined in detail the varied sources of fascism, especially its roots in a combination of integral nationalism and radical syndicalism. This was the beginning of an argument that Sternhell would elaborate over the next decade, which interpreted fascism as an anti-materialist revision of Marxism, thus placing fascism within a line of left wing thought.  

Sternhell did not deny fascism’s right-wing nature, but rather asserted that fascism has roots in both ends of the political spectrum. Fascism was neither right nor left, as the title of his 1986 book would declare.  

Before the end of the decade, Allardyce launched a salvo against the comparativists who were trying to determine a definition of generic fascism. Almost contemporaneously, another two important anthologies would be published, one under the editorship of George Mosse, International Fascism (1979), the other a massive volume that collected over fifty essays, Who Were the Fascists? (1980).  

George L. Mosse, an acknowledged expert on the intellectual and cultural origins of Nazism, provided his own formulation for fascism in the introduction to the volume he edited, International Fascism: New Thoughts and New Approaches (1979). The proposed outline of fascism was as a search for a third way, between socialism and liberalism. He described fascism as an ideological ‘scavenger’ that took what it considered to be the best aspects of all systems in order to synthesise them into a new political system that was uniquely designed to cope with the problems of the modern world: “Like a scavenger, fascism scooped up scraps of romanticism, liberalism, the new technology and even socialism, to say nothing of a wide variety of other movements lingering from the 19th into the 20th century.”  

He described Italian Fascism as a “peculiar mixture of left- and right-wing doctrine” that was able to draw from both of them, in that it “combined emphasis upon industrial growth and

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modern technology with the nationalist mystique. Mosse also prefigured Sternhell’s assertion that Nazism and fascism were fundamentally different when he “appreciated the differences between Fascism and National Socialism in so far as racism and anti-Semitism was of minor, if any, importance to the former and the very essence of the latter.”

In a later chapter we shall see that anti-Semitism played a part in the fascisms of the writers under discussion. While all four of Lewis, Pound, Brasillach and Drieu had some form of anti-Semitism in their view of the world, it ranged from minimal in the case of Drieu, to eliminationist in the work of Brasillach. The reasons for their anti-Semitic ideas and policies will also be addressed.

Mosse presciently wrote about issues that would come into the forefront of fascism studies a decade later. He emphasised the regenerative myth of fascism that spoke of a ‘reborn’ society that would produce a ‘new man’, a feature that Griffin would develop in the 1990s. The new man that would be reborn through fascism would achieve “self-fulfilment while sheltering within the collectivity, having the best of both worlds”. Mosse agreed with Sternhell and De Felice that the best way to understand fascism was by listening to fascists themselves. One had to see fascism “as it saw itself and as its followers saw it, to attempt to understand the movement on its own terms”. Mosse is, therefore, one of the elaborators of a tradition that would come to be called the cultural model. Griffin, for one, has been explicit in his admiration for and debt to George Mosse. This thesis’s own use of the work of four fascist writers is candid embrace of Mosse’s advice, and in Chapters Three and Four, we shall be listening to the fascists as they describe their desires and fears, and, as Mosse suggested, attempting to understand them on their own terms.

A year after Mosse’s book, another seminal anthology was published, the work of over fifty scholars who analysed in depth the variants of fascism, not only in the

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117 Gregor, “The Search for Fascism” Society 37(6) (September 2000) p.82.
118 George L. Mosse, “Towards a General Theory of Fascism”.
119 George L. Mosse, The Fascist Revolution, p.36.
120 Ibid, p.x.
major European countries, but also in less prominent nations, as well as detailed examinations of generic fascism. Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism\(^{122}\) was unique in that it did not assume the fascist nature of the movements under examination, but rather “discussed the relations of these movements/ regimes with conservative, Catholic, traditional authoritarian and radical leftist ideological strands.”\(^{123}\) In this way, the unsaid implication was that fascism could take a myriad of forms in a variety of countries. As far as our discussion of generic fascism is concerned, the essay by Payne, “The Concept of Fascism”, is of particular importance.\(^{124}\) In this essay Payne suggests a model of examining fascism that Griffin considers a “methodological breakthrough”, by concluding that fascism was a form of mass-movement revolution.\(^{125}\) By recognising the revolutionary nature of fascism, Payne was identifying that fascism was to some degree, without using the term, utopian. Its revolutionary nature and its revolutionary program of reform meant that there was an aspirational, and not simply reactive or conservative, element to fascism.

Payne’s model was influenced by Mosse and Linz, who, in fact, had suggested the line of research to Payne in the first place. Essentially, Payne was proposing a typology of fascism that was broken down into three sections—Negations, Ideology and Goals, and Style and Organization—and he asserted that the model was an ‘ideal type’, and that therefore different elements of the typology would be more or less significant depending on the particular history of the movement or regime. The fact that fascism obviously took on different shapes in different places served not as a disincentive for research into generic fascism, but rather as a challenge to develop, adapt and elaborate his typology.\(^{126}\)


\(^{125}\) Griffin, International Fascism, p.10.

\(^{126}\) Ibid, p. 11.
As the study of fascism entered the 1980s, a number of Allardyce’s criticisms seemed to strike at the confidence of scholars interested in generic fascism. The more work that was being done, the less likely it seemed that a usable model would be formulated that could account for the national peculiarities of fascist movements. Certain historians, especially in Germany and Italy, began to doubt that fascist studies had any relevance outside the national histories of those two countries. Even those who agreed on the worthiness of the quest disagreed on which countries would be used to determine the definition. Some, such as Sternhell and De Felice, doubted that focus on Germany and Italy as the premier examples of fascism was fruitful (although for different reasons). Others, like Mosse, Payne and Linz, did. Still others thought that the study of movements and regimes should be expanded outside the normal confines of (western) Europe, to take into account apparent manifestations of fascism in Africa, Asia and South America. While debate continued about which fascists or possible fascists to study continued, one scholar declared that he had discerned general agreement amongst historians. The consensus Griffin perceived was not of subject, however, but of method.

The Cultural Content of Fascism and Griffin’s Definition

Griffin notes that in the mid-1980s “the hunt for the legendary ‘fascist minimum’ had by then gone out of fashion, and was no longer considered a respectable outlet for excess intellectual exuberance.” This was partially due to the criticisms of Allardyce, whose influential paper we have seen reassessed the value of pursuing a definition of “generic fascism”. As the 1980s progressed, the work of Sternhell and the so-called “Sternhell controversy”, coupled with the debate revolving around the Historikerstreit in Germany, reinvigorated fascist studies. By the early to

130 A political controversy in West Germany in the late 1980s over the interpretation of the Holocaust. The controversy covered many issues, but largely dealt with the place of Nazism and the Holocaust within German national history. Much of the debate revolved around the question of whether Germany had followed a special path, or Sonderweg, that led to Nazism or whether Nazism was an historical aberration. This led to the sub-issue of whether the Holocaust was caused by a small group within the Nazi leadership (the intentionalist interpretation) or whether blame should be apportioned more widely to include ground level perpetrators and mid-level bureaucrats (the functionalist
mid-1990s, Griffin felt comfortable to identify what he considered a consensus. In the 1990s, the shift in trend within the fascist studies community was away from interpretations that sought to find one concept to explain fascism, and towards comprehensive theories of generic fascism that sought to define the world-view that led to fascism. These new theories were “characteristically eclectic, combining elements of all those notions that previously had been popular, in the apparent conviction that taken severally those notions would afford a more plausible rendering of the fascist phenomenon than any of them would singly.”

Griffin was at the forefront of the work combining different methodologies and approaches to dealing with fascism. This is not to say that the regime model had fallen into disfavour in the 1990s; the two models developed and are used in parallel, and the regime model, with its analysis of political structure, military ambitions and actions and effect on the private and personal lives of citizens, has never been unpopular. The regime model has consistently been used as the presumptive and intrinsic methodology for most studies of fascism, being able to provide lists of qualities and activities that constitute fascism. On the other hand, the cultural definition of fascism has, by its nature, been more esoteric and abstract, although Griffin has attempted to provide a short classification of its essential philosophical characteristics.

Griffin has provided what may be the most concise definition of fascism yet. As Griffin himself wrote, “my definition of fascism can be formulated in three words: ‘palingenetic populist ultra-nationalism’.” For Griffin, the essential elements of fascism are its emphasis on national rebirth and regeneration, its appeal to the people as the basis of the energy of the nation, and the primacy of the nation in community identity, with the nation idealised to the point of perfection and the subsequent militancy and imperialism/expansionism that follows. Griffin has highlighted what he considers the “idiosyncratic features” of his definition:

it specifically recognizes that every definition of fascism is an ‘ideal type’; it defines fascism exclusively in terms of its mobilizing ‘mythic core’ which has been abstracted from interpretation). Such questions struck at the core of the German national identity and elicited emotional responses on all sides of the debate.

131 Gregor, “Fascism at the end of the twentieth century”, pp.56-63.
primary source evidence relating to the ideology of Italian Fascism and other putative fascisms; this core myth is treated as the matrix of each individual fascism’s ‘surface’ ideology, programme, policies, organizational and institutional structures, and style, all of which are assumed to vary considerably from movement to movement because of the unique contemporary situation and historical conditions in which they arise; it presents the mythic core as a fusion of ultra-nationalism with the longing for renewal and rebirth (palingenesis).

The most devastating criticism of Griffin comes from Gregor, who essentially deconstructs Griffin’s definition to display its inadequacies. Griffin proposes a definition of fascism that will supposedly serve to delineate the boundaries of fascism, identifying its fundamental features and how it is different from other ideologies. Fascism, Griffin says, is “a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism.” By “genus of political ideology”, Gregor is right to infer that Griffin is saying that “there is a special class of political phenomena that can be characterized by an operational definition sufficiently specific to isolate them among political phenomena in general.” This is the essence of the debate between the regime model and the cultural model: which model is sufficiently rigorous in its scholarly analysis of fascism to provide us with an “operational definition sufficiently specific” that we can distinguish it from other forms of political action and ideology. Those who employ a method that falls within the general regime model tend to focus on political action and social issues; those whose methods can be characterised as using the cultural model tend to focus on culture and idea. Both hope to use their methods to understand or define the ideology of fascism. Both can produce excellent and insightful analyses of fascism and the period. There is, however, an additional layer of interpretation that has been largely overlooked, and that is an interpretation of fascism that considers its utopian content and uses the desires, aspirations and ideals to project forward to what a fascist utopia would be like. Elements of this can be located in Payne’s inclusion of an analysis of the goals of fascism, as mentioned above.

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134 Gregor, “Fascism at the end of the twentieth century”, pp.56-63.
The logical method of evaluating Griffin’s definition is to consider its constituent parts. It is important to assess Griffin’s work for his influence on the field is great, and his definition has been given widespread consideration. Within this thesis, an appraisal of Griffin’s definition reveals some of the limitations of reliance on the cultural model alone. We shall see in the following pages how Griffin’s definition, while useful and accurate, is incomplete without a consideration of the structural questions that a regime model definition addresses. Gregor unpacks the tight wording of Griffin’s definition thus:

When dealing with generic fascism, we are told that we are dealing with a political ideology that has a “mythic core” that has an unspecified number of “permutations,” all of which are palingenetic as well as populist and ultranationalist.

The first deficiency that Gregor identifies is that Griffin’s definition is limited to “the mythic core” of fascism. He tells us what “the mythic core” is composed of (palingenetic populist ultranationalism), but one must ask if there is not more to defining a political ideology than identifying its underlying myth. The world-view of an ideology is essential to understanding it, but is it sufficient? There is a distinction between ideology and myth, and Griffin himself notes that he is identifying the mythic core of the ideology of fascism. However the myths that inform an ideology do not constitute the ideology itself. They are a component of the ideology, but without other factors, it is not enough to be considered an ideology. Griffin wrote, “Ideology is a set of beliefs, values and goals considered in terms of their implications for the maintenance of the socio-political status quo, for its improvement or for its overthrow and replacement by an alternative order.”

This definition of ideology is useful in that it acknowledges the aspirational nature of ideological thought. Ideology is not simply the beliefs, values and myths of a system of thought, but it also includes the goals of the thinker and the implications, practical and theoretical, of the beliefs and values on reshaping the world into the ideology’s utopia. This second half of the definition of ideology is as important as the first – the ideology consists not only of the mythic core (the beliefs and values) but also its desired impact and effect. Where the cultural model, and Griffin in particular, often falls short is in its emphasis on

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discovering the content or nature of the fascist myth without forecasting it into the future to see the impact of the myth in practice. This leaves us with the metaphysics of fascism, but not an ideology. For a full understanding of fascism, we need to know the influence the mythic core has on policy decisions. It is not enough to know how a fascist feels, we need to know what he wants, beyond vague statements of values. We next turn to the elements of the mythic core that Griffin has identified.

First, Griffin states that fascism is “palingenetic”, which means that one of its fundamental concerns is the rebirth, reconstruction or regeneration of a society that is decadent. Griffin considers the classification of fascism as “palingenetic” his most original achievement, but it is essentially a re-statement of the thesis, elaborated by Gregor, De Felice and Sternhell, amongst others, in the 1960s and 1970s, that fascism was a revolutionary doctrine seeking to create a ‘new man’. Palingenesis is not limited to fascism, either, as the desire to reconstitute or overhaul society is a feature of all revolutionary ideologies—depending on the political situation of a nation, almost any movement could be seen as palingenetic—democratic movements in communist dictatorships similarly have a desire to regenerate and refresh their society. Palingenesis is a utopian desire, it is about creating a perfect replacement for a failing system. It is utopian, aspirational and revolutionary, but there is nothing particularly “fascist” about it. As Gregor says, “revolutions in general are made by those who consider their societies to be manifestly dysfunctional and, as an inescapable consequence, in decline and disintegration.”

Payne concurs, observing that “fascist ideology was certainly ‘palingenetic’; that is, it emphasized above all the rebirth of the national spirit, culture, and society. Yet leftist, moderate, conservative, and extreme right-wing nationalisms are also frequently “palingenetic,” for the rebirth and re-creation of the nation are goals fundamental to many different forms of nationalism.” That a quality is shared across a number of ideologies does not in itself cause a problem, however Griffin’s reliance on palingenesis as a distinguishing feature of fascism is undermined when we can find it elsewhere. We can acknowledge that fascism is palingenetic, that it has utopian ideals and a revolutionary

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136 Gregor, “Fascism at the end of the twentieth century”, pp.56-63.
program, but Griffin is not proposing anything new here. Utopianism, while an important part of fascism, is not its defining feature, so we need to therefore consider the rest of Griffin’s definition.

The next element of Griffin’s definition is fascism’s “populist” nature. Populism simply implies a reaching out to the masses by the movement for support, and following from that, the claim that the movement supports the common people’s interests. However, “populist appeals are common to all political movements and all political systems.” Only the most feudal and oligarchic regimes can be called anti-populist. Since the advent of mass communication, it has been almost impossible for any movement to claim any success without appealing to the masses for support. Therefore the remaining element of Griffin’s definition—the necessary factor, as it were—is “ultranationalism”. Nationalism is a term that can be defined in a variety of ways, however Griffin handily provides a definition of what he means by “ultranationalism”: a “form of nationalism incompatible with liberal democratic notions of basic equality in civil rights and political autonomy of other nation-states or nationalities.” Griffin is saying that ultranationalism is “normal nationalism” plus a disdain for the rights of the people in another nation, and a lack of recognition in others of the same national rights that they recognise themselves as having. “Normal nationalism” presumably is the usual type of concerns for national identity, sovereignty, integrity of borders, which are common to all nation-states, regardless of their ideological stand. Such “ultranationalism”, too, is applicable, to many other ideologies besides fascism. The actions of European parliamentary democracies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with their imperial ambitions, can be seen as one nation accepting certain rights for itself while denying them to another nation. Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe, or Chinese attitudes towards Tibet or Taiwan could also be said to fall into this category. We will see in Chapters Three and Four that all of the four writers being used as case studies are nationalist, although one (Drieu) extends his concept of nationalism into a form of pan-Europeanism.

138 Gregor, “Fascism at the end of the twentieth century”, pp.56-63.
Gregor recognises the fact that other ideologies can be identified as “ultranationalist” by Griffin’s definition. He goes on to argue that not all acknowledged fascist regimes are always ultranationalist:

There are perfectly plausible arguments, for example, that National Socialism was not nationalistic, much less ultranationalistic. Nazi Germany violated democratic notions of civil rights and the political autonomy of other nation-states not because it was “ultranationalistic” but because it was racist, and if anything, ultraracist. The ultimate foundations of the National Socialist state were not national; they were racial.\textsuperscript{140}

If race, rather than nation, was the crucial element of Nazi foreign policy, than Gregor is correct in at least raising doubts about whether Germany could be labelled ultranationalist. Gregor has also considered the nationalism of the communists and asks the question, “if we are prepared to couple National Socialist Germany with Fascist Italy because of their presumed “ultranationalism” - irrespective of their manifest differences - what are we to do with Maoist and post-Maoist China? Years ago, Chalmers Johnson argued that “popular communism without a basis in nationalism does not exist.”\textsuperscript{141} Thus we are left with Griffin’s definition of fascism as “palingenetic populist ultranationalism” being initially satisfying, but on closer examination, unsatisfactory. While certainly covering fascism, it is broad enough to cover other ideologies as well, and therefore fails as a usable definition. It does not meet the standard that Gregor proposed, that of providing an “operational definition sufficiently specific”.

Griffin may have been able to complete his definition if he embraced some of the subject matter of the regime model historians and considered specifics of political action, structure and organisation in his definition. One way of doing this is by employing the method that I employ, that is, by considering the utopian ideals of fascist thought. While focusing, as Griffin does, on the philosophic and cultural ideas of fascism, his definition would be more complete if he extended them out to put forward an indication of what form a fascist society would take. From his definition alone, we could perhaps recognise a fascist, but not a fascist society.

\textsuperscript{140} Gregor, “Fascism at the end of the twentieth century”, pp.56-63.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
Griffin Identifies a “Consensus” of the Primacy of Culture

Griffin has identified what he considers to be the dominance of the cultural model in fascist studies in the last decade. The dominance, or in his terms the “consensus”, that Griffin has identified is largely methodological, and concerns the way the group of historians’ attempts to arrive at definitions. Essentially, as Griffin phrases it, there is a “primacy of culture”, that is, the most common path to understanding is through ideology and ideas, rather than through the examination of regimes and movements. Griffin has argued that “without any formal association between them, several academics concerned with the theory of generic fascism have published analyses over the last few years which are broadly congruent with my approach.” This is the beginning of what Griffin hopes will become a consensus amongst historians on what fascism is. In his formulation, the consensus takes the following form:

Taken as a loosely constituted ‘school of thought’, we seem to converge on following axiomatic assumptions: fascism is a genus of modern, revolutionary, ‘mass’ politics which, while extremely heterogeneous in its social support and in the specific ideology promoted by is many permutations, draws its internal cohesion and driving force from a core myth that a period of perceived national decline and decadence is giving way to one of rebirth and renewal in a post-liberal new order.\textsuperscript{142}

The historians that Griffin has identified as forming the basis of this consensus, Eatwell and Payne, have not always agreed with Griffin’s analysis. Griffin dismisses their protests as simply a reaction to the newness of the consensus:

It underlines just how embryonic the new consensus is that both Payne and Eatwell have shown more zeal in emphasizing the differences between the scholars who represent it than what unites them. Roger Eatwell has written a review article criticizing shortcomings in the definitions offered by Sternhell, Payne and myself, while Payne, though he cites my work approvingly, also finds fault with the single-sentence version of my ideal type, despite the palpable affinity between our approaches.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{142} Griffin, \textit{International Fascism}, p.13-14.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, p.15.
Despite Payne’s and Eatwell’s objections, Griffin was intent in establishing himself at the centre of a faction within fascist studies that includes these other historians. Griffin’s efforts are not without merit—there can indeed be perceived an advancement towards a degree of general agreement within the historical community on a broad definition of fascism. The specific content of the definition is still, however, in dispute. Griffin is sure that there is at least a consensus in the methods of studying fascism:

Some academics are convinced (myself included) that they can discern signs that an emergent consensus, or at least a growing convergence of approaches, between the more theoretically oriented political scientists and the more empirically inclined historians, is enabling ever more scholars to read fascism’s runes, making the repeated jeremiads about its intrinsic resistance to definition, so common only a decade ago, now seem strangely archaic.\textsuperscript{144}

Griffin’s statement of the existence of the consensus, in the introductory chapter of his \textit{International Fascism}, caused a considerable backlash, and he felt it necessary to later clarify his remarks. He explained, “Being as yet unrecognised, the consensus which I posited in 1998 was virtual rather than actual, its postulation programmatic rather than empirical.”\textsuperscript{145} That said, however, Griffin also noted that the “consensus definition” was becoming the generally accepted definition, and he noted that,

Serious scholars are likely to be underwhelmed by the fact that in 2000 Microsoft’s \textit{Encarta Reference Suite} adopted a version of the ‘consensus’ definition of fascism to replace Robert Soucy’s more traditional theory (used for the 1999 edition) which denied it any genuine revolutionary dimension.\textsuperscript{146}

Griffin also drew comfort from the comment by Walter Laqueur, who wrote in 1996, that “it would be difficult to improve on the definition of fascism as a form of palingenetic ultra-nationalism.”\textsuperscript{147}

One of Griffin’s acknowledged motives for writing the “Primacy of Culture” essay is to attempt to create a consensus, as well as discover it: “this article has been

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, p.23.  
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid, p.24.  
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, p.25-26.  
less a neutral evaluation of the contention that a new consensus is emerging in fascist studies than a bid to lend a hand in the manufacture of that consensus.” To that end, he tries to find examples of the consensus beyond those who are self-descriptively within it. For example, Griffin notes that there is still some hesitation of scholars to use openly the consensus definition in their research, despite the fact that some are already employing much of the methodology without acknowledging, or perhaps realizing, it. He identifies, for instance, Alexander De Grand as denying the value of generic fascism, yet using it implicitly, demonstrating that the cultural model has integrated itself into the standard vocabulary of general fascist studies.

Griffin also attempts to bring Sternhell within his circle. Reconsidering the arguments from the Allardyce debate, Griffin quotes Sternhell as support for the position that there is no significant difference between the ideological integrity of fascism and other systems of political thought:

> Are the difficulties significantly less than those posed by democracy or socialism? Are they not rather intrinsic to every effort to conceptualise without which there can be no historical knowledge? ... Certainly there is not a single historical reality which corresponds to a ‘model’ or an ‘ideal type’ (in the Weberian sense of the term) of democracy, socialism or communism.

Griffin goes on to grant that there is no ideal type of fascism in history, either. And it therefore falls to the analyst to discern the features that are common to the various manifestations of fascism and come to define the ideology. This is essentially what this thesis will do, in a very limited sense, in the next two chapters; Chapters Three and Four will look for commonalities and divergences within the ideological beliefs of four fascist writers to identify key political beliefs that may define fascism.

Griffin criticised Sternhell’s position, however. He sees in Sternhell a tendency to stand by long-held beliefs in the face of contrary evidence, engaging in self-justifying polemics and sophistry to maintain a veneer of intellectual consistency:

149 Ibid, p.28.
Just to take one example, he devotes a single paragraph to recapitulating his summary verdict first made a quarter of a century earlier that nazism is excluded from membership of the family of fascisms on the grounds that biological determinism is not a definitional constituent of fascism. Apart from being an illogical argument (for example, corporatism is not a definitional part of Sternhell’s ideal type either, but this does not preclude Italian fascism from being fascist, in his judgment), it means that he perpetuates his state of denial regarding the extensive match of nazism’s Weltanschauung with the salient features of fascist ideology which he himself set out in a groundbreaking essay first published in 1976.  

This recalls the earlier debate about the place of Nazism in the fascist spectrum. Sternhell, like Gregor, maintains that Nazism is sufficiently different to distinguish it from fascism, however Griffin points out that all fascist systems have had their idiosyncrasies, and that unique features do not disqualify them from being called fascist. In addition, Griffin has identified a development in Sternhell’s ideas, a division in the way that Sternhell approaches fascism:

His ideal type of fascism has now split like an amoeba to cover two distinct phenomena: there is ‘fascism A’, a political ideology born of the new left/right synthesis which first emerged in France but was only given direct expression as a movement/regime in Italian fascism; then there is ‘fascism B’, which embraces a number of anti-democratic, anti-Marxist movements and regimes which do not actually contain this synthesis (nor does he argue that they do), and whose definitional minimum remains unspecified.

This distinction is very similar to that proposed by Renzo De Felice, between “fascism as movement” and “fascism as regime”, and is important to this thesis as it clearly draws a line between the ideological type of fascism that remained in its theoretical state, and the practical type of fascism that was practised to different degrees by various parties and governments. This thesis, with its analysis of the writings of a disparate group of writers and thinkers who lived outside fascist influence or chose to support fascism when the time came, is more interested in the first type of fascism, what Griffin calls “fascism A”. The distinction is important to Sternhell, as it supports his contention that fascism as an ideology is a synthesis of left

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151 Griffin, “The Primacy of Culture”, p.31. Griffin is referring here to Sternhell’s contribution to the Laqueur collection, “Fascist Ideology”.
152 Griffin, “The Primacy of Culture”, p.32.
and ring wing beliefs, while as a regime it can appear to be almost absolutely right-wing. This only reinforces the tensions that exist between the regime model of fascism, which is burdened with the inherent distortions and concessions of party politics, and the cultural model, that seeks a pure definition based on ideology distinct from practice. Despite the fact that Sternhell occasionally adopts a regime model interpretation, Griffin insists that “he still remains an obdurately eccentric member of [the consensus] in his public pronouncements.” It is for this reason that Sternhell comes closest in my estimation to providing the most fully-rounded study of fascism, employing elements of both the regime model and the cultural model and not falling neatly into either category.

Griffin has noticed the consensus approach seeping into the regime model interpretations of other historians: “from the partisan perspective of a member of the consensus what stands out about the ‘system’ or ‘regime’ concepts of fascism implicit in the most recent comparative studies of De Grand, Gregor, Sternhell, Paxton and Kallis is that, in contrast to the older ones constructed in the context of ‘totalitarianism’, they all introduce ideological criteria for the identification of a concrete manifestation of fascism which correspond to the new consensus (indeed Kallis does so explicitly).” The importance of ideology in discussing fascism has definitely been recognized since the 1950. This recognition is the product of the cumulative effect of decades of work by Nolte, Sternhell, Mosse, Gregor and others, who have been arguing for years that a true understanding of fascism must come from a study of its ideology. Although elements of the cultural model of fascism are becoming visible in the work of historians employing the regime model, there does still remain a divide between these approaches that needs reconciliation.

In response to Griffin’s “Primacy of Culture” article, De Grand wrote, “while I have no problem in accepting part of his consensus definition, I am not sure that it

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153 Ibid, p.33.  
154 Ibid, p.36.
gets us very far.” He highlights some of the deficiencies of Griffin’s cultural model, as well as the content of the consensus. De Grand wrote,

> Where then does the ‘new consensus’ come up short? Unfortunately, it tells us little or nothing of how the nazi and fascist regimes functioned. Why were they structured as they were and what does this mean for a definition of fascism? Why was the ‘new state’ fatally compromised in Italy?156

These are questions of practice that do not interest those working solely from within the cultural model, but they are questions that are essential for a full and complete understanding of fascism. “Ideology and culture,” De Grand insists, “must constantly be seen in relation to the actual functioning of the fascist movements and, especially, regimes.”157 Here we come up against the brick wall that is inherent in this debate: the regime modellers want to know how ideology influenced the practice of fascism, which to them is fascism. For the culture-modellers, the ideology is fascism, and the regime is often a corrupted, flawed manifestation of it. There is a way to reconcile these two opposing positions, by looking at the practical implications of ideology on a theoretical, hypothetical regime. By looking at the type of world that the fascists wanted, rather than the one they actually created, we can combine the best elements of the cultural model and the regime model. From the cultural model, we can take its focus on ideas and theory, its examination of worldviews and existential questions of human nature. From the regime model, we can take its emphasis on political and social structures, its interest in policy matters and the practical ways that fascism impacts on the lives of people. By applying both of these methods to a theoretical fascist utopia, we avoid the flaws of both—the former’s disconnection from the realities of life, and the latter’s reliance on a limited sample that is corrupted by the realities of life. Essentially, what this combined approach, using elements of both models and focusing on utopian ideals, attempts to do is to examine an idealised and projected fascist society in its pure form, isolated from the contingences that distort

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156 Ibid, p.264.
157 Ibid.
De Grand does accept that many of the issues that the ideologists focus on are important to understanding fascism, for example the pre-WWI social, political and intellectual environment:

I agree that fascism grew out of concerns about the direction of mass society that grew stronger after 1900. Already before the war the Italian Nationalists doubted that liberal parliamentary regimes could hold society together. The First World War only made these fears more immediate and widespread. Mass society seemed ungovernable by old methods.\(^{158}\)

However, in the final analysis, De Grand defends the position of the regime modellers as being based on realities, not ideas:

The various definitions of fascism given by Stanley Payne and Robert Paxton attempt in one way or another to accommodate the idea of fascism as a coalition movement in which different models were spun off a few core principles. In short, Paxton and Payne offer explanations that are historical, not something conjured up without regard for concrete realities. In the final analysis, if it is wrong to base an entire theory on two regimes, it is equally wrong to ignore them in favour of movements that often remained completely marginal.\(^{159}\)

Referring to the work of cultural modellers as “conjurations” from thin air reveals a fundamental disdain, or at least disrespect, that some historians often have for intellectual or cultural historians on the grounds that their subjects or research are more esoteric than usual historical processes. It is therefore apparent that there is a need for a theoretical model, a methodology, for studying fascism that accommodates both the interests of those who work in terms of ideology and myth, as well as those who are concerned with practical issues of organizational structure and functioning.

Even though Griffin labels him as a member of the consensus, Eatwell admits that the definition that Griffin proposes has “the advantage of not being locked into a specific time period, thus avoiding the error of seeing fascism as essentially an inter-

\(^{158}\) Ibid.
\(^{159}\) Ibid, p.266.
war phenomenon.” However, despite this, he sees “a variety of problems” with the definition as it stands, and believes that “in many ways [it] is operationally less helpful than Payne’s.”¹⁶⁰ The first problem that Eatwell identifies is that Griffin places too much emphasis on myth, which has the effect of “playing down the rational side to fascism’s ideology”.¹⁶¹ Fascism was a particularly modern ideology that embraced science and technology. While myth was an important aspect of national identity, there was also a high degree of rationalism. For Eatwell, this demonstrates an undue amount of influence of “Benedict Anderson’s view of nationalism as a mythical ‘imagined community’”; [Griffin] has difficulty coming to terms with some of the new writings from political philosophers, who have begun to take nationalism more seriously as an ideology.”¹⁶²

Eatwell’s second problem has to do with Griffin’s use of “palingenesis”, which he believes creates “a confusion between ideology and propaganda.”¹⁶³ The use of the imagery of rebirth is an effective rhetorical tool, especially for a nation that has faced national humiliation, or has been lagging behind other modernised nations. What is propaganda and what is sincere ideological conviction is blurred. A similar blurring arises with Eatwell’s third problem, that of “populism”, which he feels is as elusive in definition as ‘fascism’ itself (we have seen above Gregor’s critique of Griffin’s use of populism). Eatwell’s final concern, which may indicate a half-way point towards De Grand’s criticism, is that Griffin’s “one-sentence definition says nothing about economics, a point which is underlined by the absence of a significant economic dimension throughout Griffin’s work.”¹⁶⁴ De Grand wanted to know how ideology affects practice, while Eatwell wants to know how ideology affects policy.

As I have already pointed out, Griffin’s consensus is flawed in its definition, and only partially accepted by the academic community, despite his assertions to the contrary. What Griffin’s work has accomplished, however, is to show the limitations

¹⁶¹ Ibid.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid.
of the cultural model, while also making a strong case against the regime model. It has, effectively, shown the need for a third model, somewhere in between, which we shall shortly propose.

**The Evolutionary Processes of Fascism**

Paxton, doyen of Vichy studies, has preferred to analyse fascism as an evolutionary process, rather than as an intellectual movement. He is the ultimate and most recent exponent of the regime model, for he argued that the fascists’ actions are the most important avenue of inquiry when seeking to understand fascism. In his article “The Five Stages of Fascism”, and the book that grew out of it, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004), Paxton traced fascism’s development from an idea, to a movement, to a party, then finally to two stages of regime, one in ascension and one in decline.¹⁶⁵

Paxton put little stock in the work of intellectual historians, arguing that fascism’s heredity can be followed in many directions:

If we choose to trace a conservative pedigree, we may reach all the way back to Joseph de Maistre, whose dark vision of violence and conspiracy in human affairs and conviction that only authority could repress human destructive instincts offer a prophetic glimpse, according to Isaiah Berlin, of twentieth-century totalitarianisms of the Left and the Right. If we prefer to trace a lineage within the Left, drawing on the Enlightenment’s own perception that individual liberty can undermine community, some have gone back as far as Rousseau.¹⁶⁶

To Paxton, this pursuit of intellectual genealogy is a hindrance to understanding its actual form in the twentieth century. In the hands of other analysts, it is demonstrative of fascism’s complex position within the history of political thought, and its inability to be pigeonholed or simplified to the left/right dichotomy. When it comes to defining fascism, Paxton detects five obstacles. These are problems of 1) timing, 2) mimicry, 3) disparity between variations, 4) disparity between action and


theory, and 5) the word’s adoption as a term of abuse. For the purpose of this discussion, the fourth obstacle is the most relevant.

Paxton’s argument against the position of examining both manifestation and ideology forms his fourth point of difficulty, that is, the problem of the “ambiguous relationship between doctrine and action in fascism.” Griffin has observed that Paxton’s arguments are based on a reluctance to focus primarily (or at all) on culture and ideology, a reluctance that he admits is probably shared by many historians:

Paxton articulates reservations presumably shared by most historiographically inclined colleagues when he argues that exclusively ideological definitions of fascism of the sort offered by me, Payne, Eatwell and (the old) Sternhell are inadequate. It is thus more fruitful to search for one which uses all the social sciences, and not just intellectual-cultural history by focusing on how fascism manifests itself in history as a concrete phenomenon, an approach only adumbrated by the ‘new’ Sternhell. Griffin, although not proposing a version of it himself, appreciates that there is perhaps a third approach, a middle ground in which ideological models and regime models can be synthesised. Griffin admits that many historians are scared off by the cultural model’s emphasis on intellectuals, and that therefore the regime model proposed by Paxton is seen as an improvement on the consensus definition: “Paxton’s approach must seem far less objectionable than ‘the new consensus’ to anyone predisposed to approach fascism primarily as a regime and not an ideology, which was a system of coercive state power or as a form of totalitarianism.” Indeed, we see elements of Paxton’s approach in the long tradition of sociological, demographic and psychological studies of fascism, and in particular Nazism. From Who were the Fascists? of 1980 (discussed above), to the recent work of Michael Mann, we see the influence of the regime model on works that employ others aspects of the social sciences. Mann, for instance, frames his discussion of fascism in the language of

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167 Ibid, p.4.
168 Griffin, “The Primacy of Culture”, p. 34.
169 Ibid.
sociology and considers the influence of social emotions, such as national fear, on the rise and impact of fascism.

Paxton’s position is actually a regression to the time when fascism was treated purely phenomenologically, rather than ideologically. Despite his claim that “it is a time-honored convention to take for granted that fascism is an “ism” like the others and so treat it as essentially a body of thought,”¹⁷¹ this position is almost solely a product of a small group of scholars who have, over the last half century, attempted to cause a reassessment of fascism. Paxton’s position, although he presents it as a novelty, was and still is common. Paxton wrote, “Fascism is a political practice appropriate to the mass politics of the twentieth century. Moreover, it bears a different relationship to thought than do the nineteenth-century ‘isms.’ Unlike them, fascism does not rest on formal philosophical positions with claims to universal validity.”¹⁷² Paxton’s arguments deny that fascism is a coherent intellectual system, and he prefers to describe fascism as a “practice” rather than a system of thought. He subscribes to an opinion that is reminiscent of those arguments that were in vogue during the Second World War, which portrayed fascism as an anti-intellectual, anti-ideological expression of rage and ennui. In Paxton’s depiction of fascism, it is an irrational collection of actions motivated by visceral responses to the pressures of the time. Fascists, he says, “despise thought and reason, abandon intellectual positions casually, and cast aside many intellectual fellow-travellers. They subordinate thought and reason not to faith, as did the traditional Right, but to the promptings of the blood and the historic destiny of the group.”¹⁷³ Such dismissive comments do an injustice to the work of many intellectuals. Although today we may find their politics morally repugnant, it is difficult to dismiss the intellectualism and intelligence behind such thinkers as Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, and Giovanni Gentile, not to mention the four writers who feature in this thesis. Perhaps Paxton would be better served had he distinguished between fascist intellectuals and fascist ideologues, who were often not much more than party propagandists and to whom his above description is appropriate.

¹⁷¹ Paxton, “The five stages of fascism”, p.4.
¹⁷² Ibid.
¹⁷³ Ibid.
Despite his antipathy towards the cultural model, Paxton does believe that there is merit in looking at fascism as a generic trend with identifiable features that are applicable across national boundaries. Paxton wrote, “We must be able to examine this phenomenon as a system. It is not enough to treat each national case individually, as if each one constitutes a category in itself. If we cannot examine fascism synthetically, we risk being unable to understand this century, or the next.”

According to Paxton, fascism’s importance arises from its uniqueness and the way that it was able to insert itself into the political landscape of Europe: “fascism is the most original political novelty of the twentieth century, no less. It successfully gathered, against all expectations, in certain modern nations that had seemed firmly planted on a path to gradually expanding democracy, a popular following around hard, violent, anti-liberal and antisocialist nationalist dictatorships.”

Paxton has respect for the attempt to find a definition of fascism, although he believes that in the past, historians have gone about the search in the wrong way:

Though many ... interpretations and definitions were to be proposed over the years ... none of them has obtained universal assent as a completely satisfactory account of a phenomenon that seemed to come from nowhere, took on multiple and varied forms, exalted hatred and violence in the name of national prowess, and yet managed to appeal to prestigious and well-educated statesmen, entrepreneurs, professionals, artists, and intellectuals.

Paxton has doubts about the efficacy of looking at the ideology of fascism. He writes about how fascism is unlike other political theories given that it came about much later. In Linz’s term, fascism is a latecomer, and this explains why much of its ideology is defined in terms of negatives – anti-communist, anti-liberal, and so on. Paxton sees fascism’s latecomer status as a great hindrance when it comes to examining its ideas, as it lacks a definitive early exposition. The lack of a long tradition does make it harder to find definitive texts that explicate the philosophical foundations of fascism, but this does not mean that the exercise of examining fascism

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175 Ibid.
in order to understand its ideas is not worthwhile. In fact, the lack of canonical texts is even more reason that fascism in its varieties should be studied. This thesis, for example, tries to project an ideal fascist society drawn from the aspirations and critiques of the world from four men living through the high period of fascist influence.

**Political Religions: The Return of Totalitarian Theory**

The twenty-first century has seen a resurgence in the use of totalitarian theory, which, as discussed earlier, was one of the first methodologies that employed the regime model. The modern use of it, however, has incorporated elements of the cultural model, in particular the concept of political religion. The scholarly work being published in the journal *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* has embraced the intellectual traditions of the cultural model, analysing fascism (among other ideologies) through not only its actions but also its beliefs and values.

The concept of “political religion” must be distinguished from “politicised religion”. The latter is the use of religion for political reasons, or the conflation of religious authority with political power. Clerical fascism would fall into this category. “Political religion” is a concept in which a political ideology has such a deep influence on individuals and society to be like a religion. Emilio Gentile defined political religion as

> A type of religion which sacralises an ideology, a movement or a political regime through the deification of a secular entity transfigured into myth, considering it the primary and indisputable source of the meaning and the ultimate aim of human existence on earth.\(^{178}\)

Gentile uses this concept in his analysis of Italy, and it has been picked up Michael Burleigh who uses it with reference to Nazi Germany.\(^{179}\) It is used in tandem with the concept of totalitarianism, and can be seen as the cultural element while totalitarianism is the regime model element. It is still a relatively new way of

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\(^{179}\) Michael Burleigh, “National Socialism as a Political Religion”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* v.1 no. 1 (2000), pp.1-26
analysing ideologies in general and fascism in particular, and is often dismissed by those who assume it implies a theological dimension to an ideology. Political religion should not be confused with religion, and applies to more than treating a political ideology with religious pageantry. As Gentile explains,

The concept of political religion does not refer solely to the institution of a system of beliefs, rites or symbols; it also relates to other fundamental aspects of the totalitarian experiment, that is, to the conquest of society, the homogenisation of the society formed by the governed, an anthropological revolution, the production of a new type of human being, and even to the ambitious expansion and construction of a new supranational civilisation.\textsuperscript{180}

For Gentile, political religion and totalitarianism are the two “constitutive elements” of his interpretation of fascism. The concept is gaining prominence, especially through the increased influence of \textit{Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions}, where more scholars are being exposed to its ideas. The combined interest in totalitarianism (a common regime model subject) and political religion (with its cultural concerns) is a promising development within fascist studies and may indicate a movement amongst scholars to cast their interpretative nets more widely.

\textbf{Beyond The Problem of Competing Methodologies?}

There are, therefore, a number of competing theories about the interpretation of fascism that have evolved over time. Although we can loosely group the historians and political scientists we have discussed into two general models, there is resistance amongst the academic community to agree to a single methodology. This is not a bad thing, and demonstrates the depth and breadth of the scholarship that has been produced and will continue to be written. Even Griffin’s attempt to identify a “consensus” amongst historians was disputed, including by those historians whom he believed shared commonalities with his work. At the other end of the spectrum, we have seen that traditional regime studies are still being produced with useful and valuable results. This thesis attempts to provide an example of a conceptual fusion by using elements of both general schools of methodology. In the next chapter, we shall be examining the ideas of writers who had no, or very little, impact on actual political

\textsuperscript{180} Gentile, “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion”, p.329
practice, but we shall use their writings and ideas to elaborate some ideas about what they imagined a fascist world, or a fascist utopia, to be like.
CHAPTER THREE

The Fascist Critique of the Modern World

The previous chapter showed that there is an underexamined area of fascism, and that it involves the content of fascist aspirations and its vision of perfect world. This chapter examines the ideas, hopes, fears and dreams of four writers in order to extrapolate some of those fascist aspirations. In order to better understand the utopian nature of fascism, this chapter will examine four writers living and working in Europe during the peak period of fascism, who, although not Italian or German, have been identified, either by themselves explicitly, or by association in their work, to be fascist. These individuals, as we have seen in the introduction, are Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, Robert Brasillach and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle. This chapter will consider their attitudes and thoughts about society and culture, topics that we have just seen are the primary interest of historians who loosely employ a cultural model or fall into Griffin’s “consensus”. This chapter will also look at the more practical political issues to do with liberal democracy and political structure that is the usual area of research for historians using a version of the regime model. By considering a number of political and social issues, we see how the four writers conceived of their own individual ideas of fascist utopia and how they chimed more generally with fascist concepts.

This chapter essentially considers the responses of four individuals to the problems of the modern world. It looks at how four intellectuals, irreparably changed and challenged by the effects and the experience of the First World War, responded and found themselves attracted to fascism and fascist ideas. We will see that the Anglophone and the French writers raise similar issues in their critiques of their societies, however we will notice that their responses lead to very different endpoints. While all the writers start with a general criticism of their own countries and especially the nature and practice of democracy within those countries, their responses are not identical, and they reveal different areas of focus. In the first half of this chapter, we
will see how the Anglophone writers, living in England where there is perhaps a greater emphasis on class division and an increasingly large and vocal industrial working class, respond to the challenges of their age by moving towards a rejection of democratic egalitarianism and an embrace of elitism. In the second half of this chapter, we see how the French writers, perhaps due to the fact that their countryside has been the battleground on which the rest of Europe fought its war, respond with an emphasis on national regeneration. Both groups start with critiques of the problems faced by their cultures and arrive at different solutions. The differences in solutions to similar problems reveal one of the intrinsic difficulties in studying the embrace of fascism by western intellectuals: each individual thinker responds in a unique and original fashion. There is no complete program that all embrace; rather, each thinker reveals, through their own interests, prejudices and national problems, an essential component of the fascist doctrine and the fascist utopia.

To see how they constructed ideal notions of a fascist utopia, this chapter will catalogue the criticisms that these four authors had of the modern world, in particular Lewis’s problems with British democracy, Brasillach and Drieu’s frustrations with the French Third Republic, and Pound’s general critique of western civilization. We shall examine Wyndham Lewis’s hatred of democracy, or rather, we will see how the fascist complaint with democracy was with the way it was practiced in the modern world. We will explore the origins of Lewis’s anti-democratic ideas in the work of T.E. Hulme, who developed a secular political concept of the idea of Original Sin. This idea argued that due to the innate and essential weaknesses of mankind, order and authority are necessities in a political system to keep a society from chaos and decadence. We will see the influence of these ideas on Pound through his love of order and desire for strict hierarchies within society. This chapter will show how these fascists valued organisation, order and authority, in contrast to the romantic ideals of individual liberty and freedom. Politically, this led to a rejection of liberal optimism about human nature, and an embrace of the idea of the fallibility of human nature. When it comes to using this as the basis of understanding how an ideal society would be constructed, it will be seen how the combination of respect for order and tradition and the belief in the fallibility of human nature leads to authoritarianism.
Pound found an expression of his ideas in the person of Mussolini, and this chapter examines how the identification with the nation’s leader is an important part of fascist ideology. Where Pound worshipped Mussolini, we shall see how Lewis used an analysis of Hitler to advance his own political ideas. Coincident with the importance of the leader and the recognition of hierarchies is the embrace of elitism, and how fascism valued the place of artists and intellectuals.

Through discussing Brasillach and Drieu la Rochelle, we shall encounter the concept of revolutionary conservatism. Looking at the examples of the riots of 6 February 1934, we shall consider the importance of mythology in the construction of a fascist nation’s identity. The concept of national tradition and culture will arise again when the fascists struggle with the dilemma of how to see the relationship between one’s native country and foreign examples of fascism. Specifically, we shall see how they attempted to apply Italian and/or German fascism to France or England while maintaining their Frenchness or Englishness. The possibility of whether they were capable of disengaging the peculiarly German or Italian characteristics of Mussolini’s Fascism and Hitler’s Nazism to create a generic fascism that they could apply to their own country will be examined. This is an issue that scholars of fascism have wrestled with as well, as we have seen in the preceding examination. All four writers stress the importance of distancing their own variety of fascism from Germany and Italy’s examples. As the concept of national identity is a fundamental aspect of the fascist ideology, it is necessary that there be variables that differ between each nation to embrace their uniqueness.

Drieu’s critique of the French Third Republic will reveal his emphasis on the need for vitality and youthfulness in a nation’s character. Drieu’s frustration with the Third Republic combined with his patriotism and nationalism will reveal the contradiction faced by many fascists of the period who desired strong authoritarian leadership on the one hand but found that the only way this could be implemented was through national subjugation to an outside power (usually Nazi Germany). Drieu resolved this contradiction by developing a concept of fascism that went beyond nationalism, into a super-nationalist pan-Europeanist fascist utopia.
Thus by considering the judgments that Lewis, Pound, Brasillach and Drieu made about their world of the early twentieth century and considering the cultural and intellectual conditions that informed their attitudes, we will slowly develop a group of key utopian ideas that, while not always key to fascist politics in practice, were essential philosophical foundations and assumptions that the fascists had about the way the world worked and how it should be changed.

**Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound’s Critiques of Liberal Democracy and Embrace of Elitism**

Wyndham Lewis will be remembered, when he is remembered at all, as a spiteful man who was jealous of others’ success, a fascist and an anti-Semite. The nature of Lewis’s fascism and anti-Semitism must be understood against the background of a wider misanthropy. Lewis indeed hated democracy. He also hated communism, chaos, disorder, women, Jews, his fellow artists and writers and even his wife. Lewis was a man who simply hated. Yet he was also a careful, original artist who was in the vanguard of painting and literature; his novel *Tarr* (1918) was recognized at the time of its publication as a classic example of modernism. Lewis’s complex attitude towards the world has been called

... a struggle between a calculated misanthropy and an instinctively co-operative conscience. This conflict is evident in many writers, but Lewis, rather originally, sought to resolve it in favour of open and universal hatred... anti-Semitism [was] simply one hate amongst very many.¹

When it comes to politics, Lewis was evidently a fascist. A look at a bibliography of his work shows books with titles such as *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), *Hitler* (1931), *Left Wings Over Europe* (1936), *The Jews: Are They Human?* (1939) and *The Hitler Cult* (1939). The titles alone indicate a preoccupation with right-wing politics and the Nazis. Lewis was not a Nazi, however, nor did he agree with Hitler. Lewis was a fascist

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in its most theoretical sense, and found by the late 1930s that his early admiration of Hitler was misplaced.

Lewis knew what he disliked – the modern world, or rather, modern England – and therefore much of his political thought and writing is in opposition, an attack on a democracy, rather than a defence of a substantive position. Lewis wrote in *The Art of Being Ruled* that “when two principles are opposed, and one of these is that of English liberalism, in most cases I should find myself on the other side, I expect”.2 As was noted above, Lewis is characterised, much like fascism itself, by what he was against.

Before the First World War, like many modernists, Lewis was sympathetic to anarchist ideals of freedom and autonomy, however his experiences during the war as a bombardier radically changed his views. The world he lived in was drastically changed and he found it was now dominated by the lower classes, and that the previously acceptable upper classes were lowering their standards as well. During the war and after, Lewis was associated with the journals *The Egoist* and the *New Age*, and a collection of individualistic artists that included T.S. Eliot, Pound, T.E. Hulme and Joyce. It was in this circle that many life-long friendships would begin, and many of the theories that would become fully fleshed-out in the 1920s and 1930s had their origin.

Central to the intellectual foundations that produced modernism is Thomas Ernest Hulme, who could be said, through his ideas related to Original Sin, to have turned misanthropy into a political ideology. Hulme’s influence on early modernism is immense, not only in terms of the artistic movement but also the radical reactionary politics that often went hand in hand with it. His political writings fall within the pre-fascist line of thinking that developed in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century that created the intellectual and cultural environment where fascism developed. His philosophic writings inspired not only Eliot and Pound, but Lewis too. His early death in the trenches of France during the Great War left him as a tragic and almost mythic example of the individual genius’s struggle against the modern world. Lewis’s friendship with Hulme may give his judgment about the

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influence of Hulme on the intellectual, cultural and artistic community of the time more weight than others’. Hulme, with his forceful personality, made impressions on the major figures of the next 20 years (including Lewis, Pound, Eliot, Richard Aldington, Amy Lowell) in a very short period of time. The influence that he had on the ideas of Lewis and Eliot changed and inspired their own assumptions about the world and society. Hulme’s impact on the thought of these two men had a great deal of bearing on how they identified the faults of modernity and what changes they would prescribe to remedy those faults. Without an understanding of their worldview, it is not possible to understand why they thought like they did and the logic of their thoughts when trying to define a better way of living.

One of the themes of Lewis’s thought that he inherited from Hulme was the importance of community and camaraderie. Hulme and Lewis were not without their differences, however. Once, the tall, handsome Hulme became a threat to a relationship that Lewis was having with a woman and Lewis charged over to Hulme’s home and took him by the throat. Hulme overpowered Lewis, dragged him downstairs to Soho Square and held him upside down over the railings. Nonetheless, the two were comrades in the art wars in the London artistic scene, part of the vanguard of new young artists challenging the status quo and the authority of the Bloomsbury critics. Indeed, the idea of rival camps was a common one, as we shall see especially in relation to Brasillach. Lewis was obsessed with the notion of “us-ness”, a way to define and exclude. His studio, The Rebel Art Centre, his magazine Blast, his parties and lunches, were ways to distinguish himself and his colleagues from their enemies. This is representative of the fascist attitude towards society and culture—not only the Manichean view of “us and them”, but the antagonism and revolutionary impulse that leads them to work against the existing system and start afresh, rather than with the existing and attempt reform.

Lewis believed that Hulme’s greatest achievement was the reintroduction of the idea of Original Sin. Lewis praised Hulme’s vitality and his argumentativeness, but was less complimentary about Hulme’s intelligence. “His mind was sensitive and

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1 Letter from Wyndham Lewis to Kate Lechmere [the woman in question], December 5, 1912; Wyndham Lewis, Blasting & Bombardiering (London: Calder & Boyars, 1967 [1937]), p.105.
original, which is a better thing obviously than the routine equipment of the teaching profession: but he was a journalist with a flair for philosophy and art, not a philosopher. Of both these subjects he was profoundly ignorant, according to technician-standards."\(^4\) Lewis recounts an anecdote about Hulme being over his head in a discussion with a philosophy professor, trying his hardest to maintain an argument but clearly flailing. This is not to diminish Lewis’s respect for Hulme: for Lewis, Hulme was “one of the most promising intelligences produced by England since the Shaw-Wells-Bennett vintage”.\(^5\) But Lewis recognised that Hulme, like many intellectuals, was a dilettante: a clever, energetic amateur, but an amateur nonetheless. Hulme, according to Lewis, was a poor writer, an uninspiring lecturer and a highly influencable intellect, with only one significant idea. Hulme is linked to the concept of Original Sin so intrinsically that Lewis suggested that Hulme should be given the nickname “Hulme of Original Sin”. In his discussion of Hulme, Lewis places him in direct opposition to the late-Victorian/Edwardian romantic socialists:

A famous French writer, called Jean-Jacques Rousseau – the ‘father of European Socialism’— taught that Man was essentially good. Mr. Wells, Mr. Shaw, and most people in fact in England, believe that. Christian theology teaches the opposite. For it, Man is essentially bad. But, in theology, there is a reason for Man being bad. He is bad because he ‘fell’. The doctrine of Original Sin is the doctrine, of course, of ‘the Fall’. You may believe that Man is bad without being a theologian. And then of course you mean something by the term ‘bad’. How much Hulme’s terminology was theological I do not know. I should not have supposed it was very theological.\(^6\)

Lewis acknowledges that Hulme’s appropriation of the idea of Original Sin is unlikely to have much to do with religion, but has a lot to do with the expanding conflict between humanism and authority. An acceptance of the doctrine of Original Sin, leads, in Lewis’s view, to a conception of society that requires a certain amount of discipline and control, for if “you regard man as the perfectly fixed and ‘static’ – corrupt, evil, untidy, incomplete – animal, as I do, as Mr. Hulme did, it is pretty evident

\(^4\) Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting & Bombardiering*, p.100.  
\(^6\) Ibid, p.102.
that a kindly, tolerant, and humanitarian attitude is the last thing expected of us.” A friend of Hulme’s and the editor of the *New Age*, the Fabian socialist Alfred Orage, noticed in an article published in 1915 that despite Hulme’s assertion of the doctrine of Original Sin, it was never counter-balanced by any concept of redemption or salvation. It is in this regard that Eliot, for example, eventually differentiates himself from Hulme. Eliot finds the concept of deliverance through immersion in the Church. Others, such as the fascists Lewis and Pound, find it through other institutions of authority, such as a leader or a party, taking the form of a fascist or authoritarian state. One either believes in the theory of Original Sin (or human weakness or fallibility), or one believes in innate decency. Lewis identifies H.G. Wells and Earl Baldwin as examples of those who believe in progress, democracy and the intrinsic goodness of mankind. On the other end of the spectrum are those who are concerned about the evil in human nature, about the need for authority to guide one through the darkness; as Lewis wrote, “When Mussolini talks about the iron disciplines of the Roman soul—or Maurras says ‘Je suis Romain, je suis humain’—he is declaring himself a believer in ‘authority’. He is basing himself upon the past, instead of upon the future…. He is denying that the average man, left to himself, has a divine spark, which will eventually enable him to become a god.” Hulme himself writes that, “a man is essentially bad, he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline—ethical and political. Order is not merely negative, but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary.” These are sentiments that were echoed by Pound.

Ezra Pound also believed in the value of order and structure, although he was an eclectic and idiosyncratic thinker, and could be said to have a confused and inconsistent philosophy. *The Cantos*, a work written over many decades, can be seen as the evolution of Pound’s thought, and this evolution can be seen as a quest for order. However a work of art rarely holds up to the criteria of a philosophical tract. What is consistent in Pound’s thought is his anti-Semitism, his glorification of order

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10 T.E. Hulme, *Speculations*. 
and strength, his disdain for the masses, the pre-eminence of art and the artist, the intellect and the intellectual; in other words, his fascism.

The Great War was a watershed experience for Pound, as it was for Lewis and, we shall see, Drieu, and the effect of the war on his interpretation of the world would lead him to accept many of the same assumptions of those of the Nazis and other fascist movements. Like many intellectuals of the period, Pound’s political sensibilities changed significantly during the post-war period because of personal experiences. He recorded the battlefront deaths of his close friends, Gaudier-Brzeska and Hulme, in *Canto XVI*.

Pound devoted himself to examining the causes of war and how it is to be prevented. At this time, during the war and in its immediate aftermath, Pound was writing for the *New Age* weekly newspaper, and thus came under the influence of the same editor, Orage, who influenced Hulme. Orage, too, was concerned with the causes of the war, and had a particular interest in the economics behind it. Gaudier had been a close and dear friend of Pound’s, as the hagiographic short volume he produced in Gaudier’s memory reflects. Tim Redman observes that “the combination of his friend’s death and Orage’s persistent efforts to understand why certain groups benefited from the war while other groups suffered disproportionately acted gradually to change Pound’s idea of the duty of an artist to society.”

Pound’s research led him to the conclusion that war was largely the result of the machinations of the arms manufacturers: “I can still hear the pleasant voice of a hale, hearty chap who was selling torpedo-boats to Russia back in 1912 or ‘13. ‘Peace? Nao, not while yew hav’ two billions of money invested in the making of war machinery’.” Pound blamed the loss of his friends and the devastation on the financiers and businessmen who had so much invested in the industry of war. Eventually he would assimilate this with Nazi propaganda, which was easily absorbed by the already anti-Semitic Pound, and blame Jews as war mongers and parasites.

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12 Ezra Pound, “Paris Letter”, *The Dial* 72 (1921), p.188.
Just as he was with Lewis and Eliot, Hulme was a highly influential to the development of the political attitudes of Pound. In Hulme, Pound met a man cut from the same cloth, a natural leader and organiser, a man of learning and of action. Pound’s biographer notes that “although he is himself a forceful personality, [Pound] has encountered personalities more forceful than his own, of whom the first was Hulme.”\footnote{Charles Norman, \textit{Ezra Pound: a Biography} (London: Macdonald, 1969), p.178.} At the point in Pound’s career where he was associating with Hulme, that is, the early years of the war when he was still developing his larger, more encompassing theories about Western civilization, Pound was still concerned largely with the artist’s position in society. However, Hulme’s philosophy undoubtedly left an impression on Pound, for the echo of Hulme’s obsession with a reactionary revolution can be heard in Pound’s encouragement to “make it new”. C. David Heymann, the author of a “political profile” of Pound, comments on Hulme’s thinking: “He saw the changes of his own time—in philosophy (from rationalism to anti-rationalism); in art (from representationalism to abstraction); in poetry (from rhetoric to precise statement); in politics (from woolly-minded liberalism to hard-edged conservatism)—as constituting a single change, ‘the destruction of oppressive forces, the installation of a new and improved order’.”\footnote{C. David Heymann, \textit{Ezra Pound: The Last Rower, A Political Profile} (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), p.18, quoting Hulme.} Order being the most important word, for Hulme believed that “nothing is bad in itself except disorder; all that is put in order in a hierarchy is good”. The quest for order is a defining feature of Pound’s political maturity.

Moving from a highly individualistic anarchism to a right wing conservatism that led to fascism, Pound’s politics sprung from a search for order and a desire for meaning in the world. Pound is unusual among the modernists under discussion in that his fascism arose more out of an active quest for a theory than the negative or passive dissatisfaction or antipathy that Lewis and Eliot felt towards democracy, liberalism and communism. While Pound was against these theories in varying degrees, more than the others he came to fascism because he was looking for it, unlike Lewis, who arrived there out of dissatisfaction with modern democratic institutions.
Democracy as a Form of Subjugation

Liberal democracy was flawed in Lewis’s eyes. His change in attitude towards the human condition led him to distrust populism and the common man. His theory saw the rule over the many by the few, an emphasis in society on masculine values of strength and action. He saw “fascism as the essence of the political, as politics unencumbered by the moralising concerns of liberal western democracies.”\(^{15}\) He was, however, not conservative; he was interested in progress, in society, technology and the arts. He himself rejected the idea of conservatism in a letter to his American editor:

I am often today called a *reactionary*. I am not that at all. But I at times have accepted the conservative viewpoint, for conservative action seemed to me all that people were capable of, and that more could be got out of them by indulging their conservatism than by whipping them up into novel efforts.\(^{16}\)

At the same time as being disgusted by the masses, he was also sympathetic to their position. He was repulsed by their exploitation and saw that it was the place of the few, the artists and intellectuals who had the acumen and genius to run society, to protect the interest of those below. Lewis admitted that he had “a tincture of intolerance here and there regarding the backward, slothful, obstructive majority — ‘homo stultus’”\(^{17}\). This is the same ambiguous attitude to the common people that many fascists shared. At once both for and contemptuous of ‘ordinary’ people, fascism reconciled this by being both a populist and elitist movement. Thus the repeated concern that many fascists, including Lewis, emphasise was that despite the authoritarian nature of the regime it was still, in its own way, democratic. This can be seen by Lewis’s characterisation of the leader of such a state as an ascetic, righteous man of the people who was willing to sacrifice all for his nation.\(^{18}\) Such a leader, be it

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\(^{17}\) Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment: a narrative of my career up-to-date* (London: Hutchinson, 1950), p.188.

\(^{18}\) In *Left wings over Europe; or, How to make a war about nothing* (London: Cape, 1936), and *Hitler* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931).
a president or king or dictator, cared for the nation in its totality, not just for a ruling élite. Everyone’s interests would be looked after, and no one, no matter where on the social spectrum they happened to be, would be forgotten.

Lewis rejected liberalism and conservatism, democracy and anarchism. His biographer, Jeffrey Meyers, says that “his antagonism to Anglo-Saxon democracy was based on a hatred of the common mass and of a civilization that put so many obstacles in the way of the artist.... He held an elitist attitude to political rule, believed in the aristocracy of art, and agreed with Shelley that ‘Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world’.”

Lewis described the sham nature of democracy in *The Art of Being Ruled*:

The working of the democratic electoral system is of course as follows. A person is trained up stringently to certain opinions; then he is given a vote, and called a ‘free’ and fully enfranchised person; then he votes (subject, of course, to new and stringent orders from the press, where occasionally his mentor commands him to vote contrary to what he has been taught) strictly in accordance with his training. His support for everything that he has been taught to support can be practically guaranteed. Hence, of course, the vote of the free citizen is a farce: education and suggestion, the imposition of the will of the ruler through the press and other publicity channels, cancelling it. So ‘democratic’ government is far more effective than subjugation by physical conquest.

Like Pound, Lewis saw democracy in the modern world as a form of control, not a true representation of the will of the people. The conversion to fascism often comes when the ideals such as democracy or socialism are corrupted by the way the real world implements them. Lewis would have preferred “pure” democracy had it been possible. Pound arrived at fascism after flirting with and finally being dissatisfied with the English forms of socialism in the offices of the *New Age*, much like Mussolini’s own experience in editing a socialist newspaper.

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Towards the end of the twenties and in the thirties, the audience for whom Lewis was writing changed. Lewis stopped writing for the intellectual readers of highbrow fiction familiar with Joyce and Woolf, and instead began to write to a more mainstream audience that had an appetite for politics. This career change from literary fiction to popular journalism necessitated for Lewis an act of controversy that would bring him into the eye of the wide and fickle readership. Hugh Kenner claimed, “Lewis’s reputation underwent in 1931 an occultation, from which it never recovered. His books stopped being reviewed at all.” Lewis’s reputation was damaged and he would forever be labeled with the tag fascist, but he hardly left the public eye during this interwar period. John Constable’s study of the writing and the reception of Hitler (1931) shows that Lewis was not only being reviewed in the major intellectual and literary journals, but that nearly all the newspapers and journals with a book review section discussed his work. The intellectual and literary community, although wary of his ideas (and him personally), did not withdraw completely from engaging with Lewis’s work. His writings, although marginal and controversial, remained part of the cultural conversation of 1930s London. His mistake or mis-step was to use a discussion of Hitler and the Third Reich as a vehicle to express his own political views. As we shall see, most of Lewis’s “analysis” of Hitler and Germany was little more than a hat stand onto which Lewis could hang many of his own political assessments. Essentially, Lewis took the Fuhrer and remade him into his own image. Lewis was unflinching and uncompromising in his critical appraisal of modern Britain, in which he sadly saw a potentially great nation failing. In the first issue of Blast, Lewis juxtaposes two images of England — one of England as it is (or rather as he sees it), degenerate, effeminate and decaying, the other of an “industrial island machine, pyramidal workshop,” an England that is arranged and ordered like a factory, hierarchical and organised. In Lewis’s opinion, England at the time was a place that was suffering under the strains of liberalism and, in its place, Lewis imagined an efficiently organised society. Over the following ten years, Lewis honed his theory until he finally found in Hitler someone whom he thought represented all

22 Wyndham Lewis, BLAST 1 (1914), pp.23-24.
the same ideas he did. Lewis’s book, *Hitler*, is notorious for being both an apologia for Hitler and a great misstatement of fact. The editor of *Time and Tide*, which serialised *Hitler*, found it necessary to preface the essays with the qualification “We do not find ourselves in agreement with Mr Wyndham Lewis’s attitude towards the German National Socialist Party and the political situation generally”. Many writers have commented on the notoriety of the *Hitler* book, and the sheer blindness to fact that it exhibits. In 1939 Lewis admitted in *The Hitler Cult* that he was “badly taken in, in 1930”23 and called his other political writings of the thirties “ill-judged, redundant, harmful of course to me personally, and of no value to anybody else.”24 Two camps see Lewis differently, first as a fascist who felt it necessary to write a book to defend Hitler’s view and actions and secondly as someone who was caught up in the propaganda. The first portrait paints Lewis as a subtle saboteur of British values, the second as a gullible political naïf who was misled. Neither is completely accurate.

Constable shows *Hitler* to be a thoroughly and thoughtfully planned dissertation of politics rather than the hastily collected pieces of journalism that many believed it to be (this possibly could be largely due to the fact that Lewis says it is such in the introduction of the book).25 Lewis used the opportunity of a political movement, whose beliefs were somewhat similar to his, to lay out his own philosophy. The book is full of falsehoods and misrepresentations, some due to Lewis’s own inflammatory style of writing, others due to Lewis’s need to misrepresent in order to put his own case forward. Jessica Burstein notes, “It’s difficult to think of anything less judicious than calling Hitler a “man of peace”. (Unless, that is, you publish a recantation of your position nine years later and call it *The Jews: Are They Human?*).”26 Lewis wrote that he believed that Hitler would “remain peacefully at home, fully occupied with the internal problems of the Dritte Reich. And as regards,
again, the vexed question of the “anti-Semitic” policy of his party, in that also I believe Hitler himself—once he had obtained power—would show increasing moderation and tolerance. In the *Dritte Reich*, as conceived by Hitler, that great Jewish man of science, Einstein, would I think be honoured as he deserves.”  

In 1937, in *Left Wings Over Europe*, Lewis referred to Hitler’s coming to power as “the most bloodless revolution on record”. Lewis distorted the facts about Hitler as the real image did not correlate with the ideal Hitler that Lewis was using to support his own political views.

Constable explains this deception on the part of Lewis, of passing the essays off as journalism rather than polemic, as a necessity of Lewis’s being able to get his message across. Lewis was forced to dress his own ideas up in another man’s clothes to make them more digestible to the public. He had to put it out as a piece of journalistic reporting rather than what it actually was, that is, a manifesto of his own politics:

*Hitler* is not an exposition, but a defence structured around possible objections to Hitlerism... Lewis listed five features of the movement that a British reader would be likely to find objectionable or ridiculous (its apparent violence, its anti-Semitism, its radicalism, its nationalism, and its economics) and then attempted to provide reasons why such judgments would be premature or unfounded.

Many critics and reviewers were able to pick up that Lewis was not strictly talking about Hitler and Germany, although few realised it was because he was putting his own theory forward. The reviewer in the leftwing/feminist weekly *Time and Tide* (which was also the journal the essays originally appeared before being published in book form) wrote:

Mr. Wyndham Lewis is an impressionist artist working in words instead of paint, and he is really no more concerned with facts and things as they appear to

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28 Wyndham Lewis, *Left wings over Europe; or, How to make a war about nothing* (London: Cape, 1936), p.163.
normal minds, than a vorticist is with the world as it looks to normal eyes... Wyndham Lewis’s Germany is not the Germany that any ordinary observer knows — but it is Wyndham Lewis’s.  

In *The Glasgow Herald* we read:

> The book is only saved from being mischievous by the fact that it is too silly to be taken seriously... it is a monument of pretentious inaccuracy. Mr. Lewis does not know German (as his frequent blunders in translation make amply clear) and certainly does not know the German National Socialists.

Cecil Melville in the *New Statesman* wrote:

> Arriving in Berlin one day, he must have pounced gleefully upon the Hitlerism phenomenon, happy to find in it a new peg upon which to hang many of the social-philosophic ideas he expounds... the materialisation in action of his own social philosophic ideas, the personification, in one typical German of one untypical Englishman’s demand that the Western World must draw together and stood aloof from the allurement and influence of what is inferior to it, and, being inferior, contaminating.

And from *The Granta*, the Cambridge journal,

> What makes this book worth analysing is not Nazi hysteria but Mr. Lewis’s doctrine, a more stable and considerable thing.

Stephen Spender, writing forty years later, also recognised that *Hitler* was more about Wyndham Lewis than it was about Hitler:

> Wyndham Lewis never supposed that he should become the mouthpiece of Hitler and the ideas put forward in *Mein Kampf*. He had in fact a rather supercilious attitude towards Hitler whom he patted (metaphorically) on the back for having expressed rather crudely certain ideas already in the mind of Wyndham Lewis.

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31 Ibid p.16.
32 Ibid p.18.
33 Ibid p.19.
After the atrocities of the Third Reich became fully known in Britain in the aftermath of the Second World War, Lewis fell into the habit of reminding people that Hitler was unpopular in Germany for the picture it painted of Hitler and that Goebbels ordered the German translations pulped and burned.\textsuperscript{35} This is only to emphasise the distance between the actuality of Nazism and the idea of it that Lewis had in 1930. Had Lewis known in 1930 what was to follow, he might have chosen to hang his theories on another hook. Hitler and Nazism was a framework that Lewis used to write about his own opinions. At the time Lewis thought that he had found kindred souls, a political movement with similar ideas to his, but Lewis should not be seen as a Hitler apologist in the vein that Pound was for Mussolini. Lewis was not blind to the differences that emerged between his politics and Hitler’s, and he courted ridicule by publishing a disavowal of the earlier book’s errors of fact and its support for Hitler.

\textit{Hitler represented many of Lewis’s views on politics. It emphasised his concern for the state of European civilisation, and his fear of decadence and decline. It also highlighted Lewis’s belief that the only form of government that was able to halt or reverse this trend was a fascist one, a government unfettered by the liberal concerns that only weakened it and willing to be new and revolutionary. An authoritarian government would not only be the most effective but also the one in which people realised their potential to their fullest capacities:}

\begin{itemize}
  \item The governments of the monarchical model, even in the time of Descartes, with their centralized power and regular administration, could give effect, with great exactitude, to all their wishes. They could realise the stipulated physical union, in fact, of theory and practice.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{itemize}

The fascist theory of corporatism, that recognised that everyone has their essential place within the society, their part of the pyramid that was necessary for them to occupy for the society to have any coherency, was inherent to Lewis’s understanding of the political system:


The majority of men should, and indeed must, be screwed down and locked up in their functions. They must be functional specialists... The only person who can be an ‘all-round’ man, _eclaire_, full of scepticism, wide general knowledge, and ‘lights’, is the ruler: and he must be that — that is his specialization.³⁷

Like the other authors under discussion, Lewis used fiction to illustrate his political philosophy. As Pound used his poetry, Brasillach his novels and criticism and Drieu his novels and short stories, Lewis expressed his critique of the modern world in his art. In particular, Lewis satirized liberal democratic theory in _The Childermass_.

_The Childermass_ has a reputation for one of the best opening sequences of a modernist novel. It describes in detail the poetic beauty of a range of mountains that line the horizon beyond the great city. Only later do we discover that the mountains are manufactured, a fabrication of the Bailiff’s to add garnish to the view. What is unusual is that the description is not given to us by a character, or described in a way to suggest that it is an opinion. The description is given to us straight from the author, the omniscient narrator writing in the third person voice. It is, or rather it _should_ be, a fact. As it turns out, we have been duped by the one voice in a novel that we are accustomed to trust without question. Characters may lie and deceive us, falsehoods may be uncovered, but it is rare that we are forced to reassess our confidence in something as basic and trivial as a description of a mountain range. This is a common technique in modernist fiction of the period, and it revealed through its undermining of traditional authority (the authorial voice) a general mistrust of the existing authorities in the modern world (the democratic system).

_The Childermass_ is a grand political novel that strips away many of the facades of society. The figure of the Bailiff, grotesque yet charismatic, “shows what it is like to experience the demands of a ruler who pretends to be a democrat, but is in fact a ruthless exploiter of all the means of persuasion available to him.”³⁸ Lewis believed that many of the so-called emancipations of the Enlightenment were superficial. Democracy was not true democracy; it was a dictatorship over the people in a covert,

³⁷ Ibid, p.100.
sinister form, based on lies and placations. Better the visible dictator, open to scrutiny, than an unknown one hiding behind the mask of popular rule. A system that recognized and embraced differences was preferable to one that attempted to deny them. When this was combined with Lewis’s feelings of superiority as an avant-garde artist, it led him to accept easily that natural élites existed and deserved a special place within the fascist utopia.

**Intellectual Élites Within Society**

For all our four fascist thinkers, one of the measures of a utopian society is the way that it cares for its artists, scientists and thinkers, for it is their achievements that will remain when the individual members of a society are long gone. All the writers under discussion did not hate democracy as a theory, but instead were critical of the way modern society purported to be democratic while actually being tyrannical, or allowing the tyranny of the capitalists, the Church or the common man. We shall see later the criticisms of Brasillach and Drieu had of the Third Republic, which they saw as corrupted and venal, and a tool of the mercantile middle class. Lewis and Pound were critical of the treatment of individuals within the modern capitalist democratic system. In contrast, Lewis was attracted, like Pound, to what he saw as the favourable treatment that artists and intellectuals were receiving under fascism, especially through Mussolini. He took as examples the cases of Gabriele D’Annunzio, Filippo Marinetti and Luigi Pirandello. It is characteristic of Lewis however that he failed to recognize any other view, ignoring the treatment that artists opposing the regime suffered, and even to recognize that those artists he took as typical were anything but — D’Annunzio, for example, had been a very real threat to Mussolini in the early days of the movement and was one of the likely candidates if there were ever a challenge to the leadership of the Fascist Party. D’Annunzio’s acclaim by the regime was as much out of a desire to keep D’Annunzio satisfied as a recognition of his artistic vision.

Lewis was certain of his own genius, and resented the world for not recognizing his importance to it. The neglect that was shown to creative minds was the chief crime of modernity. The critic Alan Munton recognized that “absurd as this ambition now appears, Lewis wished intellectuals to have a prominent and influential
place in society, and regarded his own critical writings as an active intervention in
culture and politics. It was, in the 1920s, an honourable delusion.” 39  It was a
delusion that Lewis shared with other intellectuals who were attracted to the idea of
élites in a structured and ordered society, such as Ezra Pound.

Pound was an artist who saw in fascism the practical embodiment of an élite of
artists and intellectuals. Fascism was the practical expression of an aesthetic
philosophy that was formed on the ideals of modernism. Society, especially
democracy, was ill suited to the modern human condition, that of intellectual laziness
and apathy. Pound looked for more from his fellow citizens:

I assert a simple dogma: Man should have some sense of
responsibility to the human congeries. As a matter of
observation, very few men have any such sense. No
social order can exist very long unless a few, at least a
few, men have such a sense. Democracy implies that
man must take the responsibility for choosing his rulers
and representatives, and for the maintenance of his own
‘rights’ against the possible and probable
encroachments of the government which he has
sanctioned to act for him in public matters. 40

Thus Pound, like Lewis, did not disapprove of democracy in theory but rather the
ability of citizens in the modern democracy to exercise their rights and responsibilities
properly. In an ideal world, where the people were educated, freethinking, and
creative, democracy would work, for “a good state is one which impinges least upon
the peripheries of its citizens.” 41  Pound, Lewis and other literary fascists were often
faced with this paradox of freedom—being artists and thinkers, they valued freedom
of expression, while at the same time recognising that free expression for everyone is
not always the best for a society. William Chace has written on Pound’s ambivalence:

He was sure of the artist’s ability to lead the way for
everyone else, and he was also sure that the artist, just
like everyone else, should leave others alone and should
himself be left alone. But how were the masses to be
led and yet left alone?  Was the artist a free man, or was

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39 Ibid, p.129.
40 Ezra Pound, *ABC of Economics* (1933), reprinted in *Selected Prose* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973),
p.204.
he responsible to society, obligated to lead? Pound was not ready, in these early years to set forth his answer to such thorny questions.\(^{42}\)

This idea of counter-balancing values finds itself supported by fascism, where élites and classes are institutionalised and those with talent are afforded greater privileges than others. Fascism supposedly cherished its artists, and to support this belief, Pound was given a pass for free rail travel within Italy because of his profession.\(^{43}\) Pound, finding that people such as himself were valued within the new Italy, saw it only from his own perspective. “The fascist revolution was FOR the preservation of certain liberties and FOR the maintenance of a certain level of culture,”\(^ {44}\) Pound wrote. He meant, in fact, that it was for the liberties that he valued, and for a level of culture that he treasured: “The enemies of mankind are those who petrify thought, that is KILL it, as the Marxists have tried to in our time, and as countless other fools and fanatics have tried in all times.”\(^ {45}\) Fascism could be seen as embracing the social elements of liberalism—the encouragement of free thought, intellectual and artistic ambition—while maintaining order and structure.

Pound’s idea of democracy, such as it was in Europe in the 1930s, did not truly represent the people; it was a form of despotism. Fascism, while recognising the necessity of strong leadership from above, also saw itself as a populist political system. As Pound said in his broadcast “Last Ditch of Democracy” in 1941, he believed that democracy in Europe was in its last stages:

It’s a DITCH all right. Democracy has been LICKED in France. The frogs were chucked into war AGAINST the Will of the people. Democracy has been licked to a frazzle in England where it never did get a look in ANY-HOW. But even pseudo-democracy is down when a people is chucked into war against its will, and the Brits.


\(^{43}\) E. Fuller Torrey, *The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secrets of St. Elizabeths* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), p.139. Torrey writes (in an endnote on p.307), that he bases this on the FBI files on Pound, but also notes that most biographers say that Pound received only a reduced fare. The discrepancy is moot, for the point is the same.


never VOTED Winston into the premiership. In fact 
WHEN DID they have an election?65

Italy was continuing the tradition of the American Revolution, of freedom and self-
determination, self-reliance and personal strength: “The heritage of Jefferson, Quincy 
Adams, old John Adams, Jackson, Van Buren is HERE, NOW in the Italian Peninsula at 
the beginning of the Fascist second decennio, not in Massachusetts or Delaware.”47

The spirits of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment (minus their republican 
elements) were to be found, Pound believed, in fascism. It was within fascism that the 
intellectual could be free because he had the support of a system that recognized his 
value within the structure of a society.

Drawing on the ideas of Hulme and his secular/political ideas of Original Sin, 
Pound saw democracy, relying as it does on the contribution of the common people, 
as intrinsically flawed. Pound did not have a high regard for mankind, asserting that 
“the great mass of mankind are mediocre, that is axiomatic.”48 It was the artist who 
represented the vanguard of a society, for it is there that the only truly original 
thinking was being done. “Artists are the antennae of the race, but the bullet-headed 
many will never learn to trust their great artists”49 he wrote in an essay on Henry 
James, going on to quote with approval the observation by Flaubert that if people 
listened to the artists, wars would be avoided. Society was blind and deaf to the 
plaintive cries of the artist, and preferred to marginalise writers, intellectuals and 
painters. Pound wrote, “But this rest – this rabble, this multitude – does not create 
the great artist. They are aimless and drifting without him. They dare not inspect 
their own souls.”50 The artist was not only necessary for the maintenance of 
civilization and culture, and the benefit of the high brow, but should also be necessary 
for the masses—it is through its art that a nation would know itself.

65 Pound, Ezra, “Last Ditch of Democracy”, broadcast to the United States on October 2, 1941, reprinted 
48 Ibid.
Art, literature and the advances in the sciences are what a society will be judged by in the future, and therefore the treatment of the creators of such important artefacts is a measure of civilization, as Pound believed:

The republic, the res publica means, or ought to mean “the public convenience.” When it does not, it is an evil, to be ameliorated or amended out of, or into decent, existence…. The capitalist imperialist state must be judged not only in comparison with unrealised utopias, but with past forms of the state; if it will not bear comparison with the feudal order; with the small city states, both republic and despotic; either as to its “social justice” or to its permanent products, art, science, literature, the onus of proof goes against it.51

Largely basing his opinions on his experiences as an impecunious and under-appreciated artist, Pound decided that democracy simply did not do enough for people like him: “Democracy has signally failed to provide for its best writers.”52 Apart from this, he found the way a democracy functioned, characterised by disagreement, indecision, inaction and pandering to the public, to be undesirable. “Democratic procedures are inefficient and anti-artistic”53 he wrote, finding fascism’s audacity and courage to be more elegant and capable. Indeed he wondered how a democratic nation functioned at all: “One might speculate as to how far any great constructive activity CAN occur save under a de facto one-party system.”54 For Pound, a fascist utopia was one that allowed its artists to flourish. His fascist utopia was one that protected people like himself and fostered their artistic abilities. In the modern world, an artist like Pound would be forced to compromise to bourgeois tastes and prostitute himself to the marketplace in order to survive.

At this stage in his intellectual development, before his full embrace of Social Credit in the late 1920s and his desire to reinvigorate all of society, Pound focussed on the arts and the treatment of artists. He still viewed artists as separate from the leaders of the society. Artistic élites and political élites were distinct, and he did not presume to claim that the artists were best suited to lead. Political élites such as

53 William Chace, *Political Identities*, p.64.
those that are institutionalised in a one-party, authoritarian system, were comparable to an artistic avant-garde: “Both the communist party in Russia and the fascist party in Italy are examples of aristocracy, active. They are the best, the pragmatical, the aware, the most thoughtful, the most wilful elements in their nations.”\(^{55}\) He saw important connections between art and politics, but their spheres of influence and importance were distinct. “The function of an ‘aristocracy’ [Pound means either an aristocracy of art or politics] is largely to criticise, select, castigate luxury, to reduce the baroque to an elegance. For this there is need of only a limited number of functionaries.”\(^ {56}\) Fascists were performing the same role in the political field as he and his coterie were performing in the arts. Pound was careful not to assume that since one can lead in one discipline, it follows that one can lead in another. Artists, then, were vital members of society, worthy of special treatment and veneration, but they were not necessarily suited for governing. At this point in his career, directly after the First World War, he was concerned with the welfare of the artistic community, and the state of civilization from a cultural angle. Eventually, during the Great Depression, he would turn his gaze wider and examine the ills of all society and how to better the world, drawing parallels between himself and his new hero, Benito Mussolini.

Pound saw in Mussolini’s carefully cultivated image of the great leader an analogy with his own self-image of the great artist. What Pound was doing with literature and poetry, Mussolini was doing with politics – redefining boundaries, taking accepted notions and turning them on their heads, forcing society to reassess what is possible and what is desirable. Alfred Kazin wrote in his 1986 essay for the *New York Review of Books* titled “The Fascination and Terror of Ezra Pound” that modernism’s dictum of “make it new” had its political counterpart in fascism. Both systems of thought were based on a view that saw art and politics respectively as the domain of a chosen few. Difficulty was something that served to sort the élites from the masses; modernism encouraged obscurantism and the idea that art was something to be

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understood by a few. Fascism has the same attitude to ruling and government. Kazin wrote:

Pound saw parallels between his avant-garde activity and that of Lenin and Mussolini in the political realm. Mussolini and Hitler described themselves as artists who performed on history. His own conviction, never shaken in extreme isolationism, was that he knew many things outside of art because he was an artist.\textsuperscript{57}

Pound identified with Mussolini on many levels – apart from the concept of the avant-garde artist, both Mussolini and Pound were obsessed with creating for themselves new personas, Pound as a wise all-knowing literary mandarin, Mussolini as the ancient Roman hero, a twentieth century Caesar. Mussolini was the political manifestation of Pound’s artistic persona, Mussolini was as much an artist as Pound was, and therein lies the reverence that Pound feels for Mussolini; “politics for Pound was thus, as it was for Carlyle, a kind of hero-worship”.\textsuperscript{58} Mussolini was not a traditional politician, he was a new breed of leader, and Pound declared that only by understanding this could one begin to understand the significance and greatness of Il Duce; “I don’t believe any estimate of Mussolini will be valid unless it starts from his passion for construction. Treat him as artifex and all the details fall into place. Take him as anything save the artist and you will get muddled with contradictions.”\textsuperscript{59} Similarly, Lenin was also an example of the artist-politician whom Pound admired, creating a synthesis between the creative and political energies, which Pound described as a “new medium, halfway between writing and action”.\textsuperscript{60} Pound even reassessed his opinion of Marinetti, who, with his Futurists, had been an object of ridicule among the Vorticists, and Gabriele D’Annunzio, the poet who had led a band of revolutionaries that took command of the Croatian town of Rijeka/Fiume because he believed it should have been part of territories given to Italy after the First World War. In light of his new political interests, such men became figures of envy.\textsuperscript{61} As Redman writes,

\textsuperscript{58} William Chace, \textit{Political Identities}, p.64.
\textsuperscript{59} Ezra Pound, \textit{Jefferson and/or Mussolini} (London: S Nott, 1935), p.34.
\textsuperscript{61} Ezra Pound, \textit{Jefferson and/or Mussolini}, p.107.
Pound’s admiration for D’Annunzio and Marinetti derived largely from his belief that they had progressed beyond mere intellectualism or aestheticism to a life of action, one in which they could put their ideas into effect. This is one of the most important features of fascism for Pound and many other fascists; fascism went beyond mere talk and rhetoric and encouraged action and results as a necessary part of the ideology. We shall see in the next chapter how the fascists glorified revolution and action for its own sake, independent of the results it achieved. Mussolini’s example of an intellectual who took action attracted Pound as much as, or perhaps more than, the example of D’Annunzio.

Pound’s admiration of and personal identification with Italy’s new leader Benito Mussolini and his vision of a new transformed Italy led him to move to the resort town of Rapallo in northern Italy in 1924. It should be noted that Pound was not alone in his esteem for Mussolini, and that he captured the respect of American industrialists and businessmen, and received praise in the early years from Winston Churchill and Neville Chamberlain. This is similar to Lewis’s admiration of Hitler, an admiration that Pound described as a “superior perception.” The difference, though, is that, while Lewis did support Hitler longer than most other early admirers, he eventually retracted his earlier statements in his book Hitler (1931) and in his later The Hitler Cult (1939). The reversal annoyed Pound, and he wrote to Lewis implying that Lewis had simply written the second book for the money. Pound’s enthusiasm for Mussolini in the 1920s was not unusual among the intellectuals of Europe and America, and Mussolini received praise from such diverse voices as George Bernard Shaw and the New Republic. However Pound did become unusual in his support of the Mussolini regime as, over the next two decades, the less savoury aspects of Italian politics became known. These included the news of the Matteotti murder (1925), the campaign in Ethiopia (1936) and the alliance between Germany and Italy (1936), especially the Italian adoption of German racial laws (1938). The anti-Semitism that Italy adopted as part of its association with Nazi Germany was uncharacteristic of the

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62 Tim Redman, Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.120.
64 Giacomo Matteotti was an Italian socialist politician who spoke openly against the corruption and violence of the Fascist Party. In June 1924 he was kidnapped and murdered by members of the Fascist Party.
Italian people, including the Italian Fascists. Pound’s own anti-Semitism enabled him to ignore the increasing persecution and repression that followed the Axis agreement between the Nazis and the Fascists in the late 1930s and the years of the war and he was able to focus on the vision of a new Italy that was put forward by the propaganda. Italy was, as Pound saw it, undergoing a revolutionary and utopian reconstruction of a “society free of the class hostilities that plagued both capitalism and communism.”

Mussolini became a personal hero to Pound: he began keeping a scrap book of newspaper clippings about him, wrote to Mussolini personally offering his own suggestions on policy matters, dated his letters by the Fascist calendar and included a quote from Mussolini on his letterhead, and even was involved in the planning of a film on the history of Fascism. Pound was granted an interview with his idol, and on 30 January 1933 met Mussolini in Rome. After complimenting Pound on his poetry, Mussolini’s good taste and refinement was obvious to Pound and reasserted Pound’s belief in Mussolini’s greatness. Pound, apparently eager to impress Mussolini, steered the conversation towards economic policy and offered Mussolini a page of pre-prepared questions. Mussolini avoided answering the queries, and ushered Pound from the room, saying that he would summon Pound back if he (Mussolini) wanted to continue the conversation. He did not, and further requests by Pound for a subsequent meeting were rejected. Pound’s apparent snubbing by his idol was not taken personally, and he continued to write in great admiration of Mussolini.

Pound became infamous, along with P.G. Wodehouse, William Joyce (Lord Haw Haw), Berlin Sally and Toyko Rose for his pro-Axis radio broadcasts, which he delivered from Rome. These broadcasts have been held as the best evidence of Pound’s fascism and were made under the patronage of the Italian Ministry of Propaganda beginning in January 1941, and continuing after December 1941 when the Americans entered the war. These post-December broadcasts constituted treason and at the end of the war Pound was arrested, although eventually found to be mentally unfit to stand trial.

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Pound considered that what he was doing in his broadcasts was commenting, as was his right and duty as an intellectual, on the flaws of liberal democracy and the inequities it fostered. Pound did not consider his broadcasts to be treasonous. He believed them to be the exact opposite, a form of patriotism, and that the only treason was being performed by those who blindly ignored the true causes of the war, and led American citizens to their deaths. Before each broadcast, an announcement, which Pound wrote himself, was made declaring the purpose of the speech:

The Italian radio, acting in accordance with the Fascist policy of intellectual freedom and free expression of opinion by those who are qualified to hold it, following the tradition of Italian hospitality, had offered Dr. Ezra Pound the use of the microphone twice a week. It is understood that he will not be asked to say anything whatsoever that goes against his duties as a citizen of the United States of America.67

Although Pound uses words like ‘freedom’ and ‘free expression’, it should be noted that they are minimised by the qualifier “by those who are qualified to hold it”. It is another example of the way that Pound and the other writers under discussion valued certain liberal ideals such as free speech and the unfettered exchange of ideas amongst a defined group of people, which would obviously include themselves. As K.K. Ruthven noted of Pound’s use of such phrases as “free expression of opinion” and “freedom of the press”, “the mot juste for the first kind of freedom would be ‘elitism’ and for the second kind ‘censorship’.”68 As Pound’s own defence attorney at his trial for treason described them, the broadcasts were mainly to do with the financial injustices of the world:

Pound’s main concern was with usury and other economic sins of Jewish bankers who were the powers behind the throne in England and had succeeded in duping the government of the United States. The broadcasts were in essence lectures in history and political and economic theory, highly critical of the course of the American government beginning with Alexander Hamilton, who Pound believed started the

country down the road to financial ruin. The American people were told that they did not understand what was going in Europe and if they did, the war would not have been necessary.69

Did Pound’s broadcasts constitute treason? Actions of other American intellectuals, including prominent left-wing intellectuals Dwight MacDonald and Clement Greenberg, amounted to a call for opposition to the Government’s policies, which, although they were made before the entry of America into the war, had a greater practical effect than Pound’s rantings, full of allusions and hyperbole, over the radio waves from Rapallo. Today, Pound’s broadcasts are considered laughable and an embarrassment to his great intellect. One critic describes Pound’s broadcasts as simply ineffective:

Pound undoubtedly favoured the enemy in time of war: he wanted a Fascist Europe, if not a fascist U.S. Treason, however, implies effective actions in support of the enemy. To my mind, his broadcasts were not treasonous simply because they were useless. One has to be familiar with the entire Pound pantheon, from Confucius to the Malatestas, to begin to follow them. Even then the speeches are often incomprehensible. Whom could they have influenced? … Pound was indeed crying “Fire!” in a crowded theater, but he was crying “Fire!” in Bulgarian.70

For all his noise, Pound failed dismally as a propagandist. For someone who looked at himself as an educator of the world, a trainer of thinkers and artists (he toyed with the idea of opening his own college of the arts, formalising the position of mentor to younger poets and artists that he had held unofficially for many years), he was surprisingly oblique in his teachings. The epitome of modernist difficulty, whose only rival for obscurity of reference and impenetrability of prose might be James Joyce, his work was complicated to the point of near impenetrability. Pound’s fondness for symbols, hidden or vague meanings, esoteric allusions and direct statement rather than rational analysis, makes it is easy to see the attraction of Fascism’s similar attributes for Pound. These are qualities that Brasillach and Drieu, for example, saw

within Nazism and of which they were critical. Pound, for all his intellectualism and seriousness, failed, like all the writers under discussion ultimately failed, to create a systematic political philosophy. Instead, we are left with a disjointed and unordered collection of vague utopian ideals that almost, but not quite, add up to a political ideology. With Pound especially, we see the important connection between a fascist’s associations with a charismatic leader and their acceptance of fascist ideology.

Pound’s principal attraction to Mussolini arose less out a respect for his economic policies and vision than for the image that Mussolini created for himself as the born leader and incarnation of a nation’s manifest destiny. Indeed, of all the things that Pound could have criticized the Mussolini regime for, it was only its economics that Pound took issue with: “Much as I admire the achievements of the Fascist Quindecennio in Italy, their tax system is still primitive and monetary knowledge rudimentary.”

Pound wrote many letters to Mussolini trying to persuade him of the benefits of Social Credit theory, and it was the main topic that Pound wished to discuss with Mussolini when they met. It was the myth more than the man that Pound was attracted to. Ronald Bush has said:

> Above all, Pound understood Mussolini as the creator of a Sorelian myth of the future strong enough to recreate Italian society. Mussolini’s promises dovetailed with Pound’s own political and economic idealism, and his attempt to refashion Italian society through the irrational energies of political myth answered to the ambitions of all Futurist art to revolutionize human consciousness.”

It was this progressive, anti-conservative view to the future that attracted Pound. Much of the Italian fascist program, however, was not native to Italy, but rather derived from the French syndicalists of a generation earlier, whose ideas were influential on both Brasillach and Drieu la Rochelle.

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Robert Brasillach and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle’s Loss of Faith in the Third Republic and their Hunger for Innovation

For its left wing opponents, fascism has often been characterised as a tool of the establishment, a way of keeping down the population and maintaining the status quo. For its conservative opponents, it is often seen as an extremist and revolutionary force, destructive of traditions and disrespectful of the past. It should be remembered, therefore, that fascism was popular not only among the disillusioned left but also, as we have seen above, amongst the disillusioned right, the most obvious source of fascist support. Fascism was a radical reactionary solution, a revolutionary conservatism – a return to the glories of the past by the violent sweeping away of the excesses of the present. When a society has decayed morally and intellectually, then that decadence must be cut out through violence and radical change, rather than the ineffectual machinations of a corrupt and self-perpetuating democratic system. It was in such an intellectual climate that Robert Brasillach believed he was working. The opponents of the Third Republic gathered around the Action Française and the other extreme right wing groups. Brasillach was by nature a retrospective personality, and his personal longing for his youth was reflected in his political longing for a previous era.

Brasillach’s nationalism can be seen as the expression of his desire for community writ large. He had always, since his school days, been a part of one group or another, and these groups often found their identities in opposition to an identified “other”. Moving from his university coterie to the Action Française and then on to the Je Suis Partout ‘gang’, as he liked to call them, he associated himself with other like-minded intellectuals who felt different or separated from the wider society. There was nothing more important to him than “that feeling of forming a pack, for better or worse, and which we will call, to shock the bourgeois, the gang spirit.” This was the essential nature of fascism for Brasillach. Literary critic David Carroll observes that for Brasillach and others, “the primary aesthetic experience of fascism is fairly basic,

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naïve, even simplistic: it is the experience of unity, the feeling of being at one with the entire nation.”

The most significant group life that Brasillach experienced was with the Je Suis Partout team. This mutually supporting group of young journalists were the fresh minds of the Action Française, and Je Suis Partout began as a more disrespectful and adolescent publication than its staid ancestor. Je Suis Partout became, after a change in ownership in the mid 1930s (the previous owners becoming more and more uncomfortable with the vehemently right wing and anti-Semitic stance of the paper), a team effort. Although Brasillach was eventually named the nominal editor of the weekly newspaper, he claimed in Notre Avant-Guerre that it was unique in the French press for being “the only soviet.” Given the paper’s anti-communist views, Brasillach’s choice of words are indicative of the kind of ironic and disrespectful tone Je Suis Partout took. Brasillach was by this time, in the mid-1930s, a solid member of the literary community, writing for many journals and newspapers.

Although Brasillach and the group of writers that orbited Je Suis Partout, which included Thierry Maulnier, Lucien Rebatet, Jean-Pierre Maxence, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre-Antoine Cousteau and Alphose de Chateaubriant amongst others, never formed a political party as such, there certainly came to exist a feeling of identity among the Jeune Droite, as it has come to be called. As writers, journalists and intellectuals, they did not see their roles as the leaders of any political movements, but rather as the thinkers behind movements, the ones that supplied the ideas to the nascent fascist parties of France. William Tucker refers to their objective as being “to win a reputation as the intellectual general staff of the extreme Right. In this effort they were successful.” From this ambition, Brasillach, who could well have stayed simply a literary critic and novelist, became a social and political commentator. By examining the ills that Brasillach diagnoses in the France of the twentieth century, we will see what it is that he values and what he does not. We can tell from his criticisms what

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75 David Carroll, “Literary Fascism”, p.713.
76 Robert Brasillach, Notre avant-guerre, p.214.
78 Ibid.
the areas of his concern are, and thus we can also tell what it is that he hopes to change. By looking at what he wants to change, and what he wants to keep, we can propose an ideal fascist society that embraces all the qualities that Brasillach admires.

**February 1934 as a Failed Foundation Myth for French Fascism**

One of the defining events of the extreme right in France, and Brasillach in particular, was the riots that occurred on 6 February 1934. This event provided French fascists with one of their defining myths, and as is well documented, mythology is an important part of fascist ideology. This day became the most important day in the French fascist mythology, a day of heroism and martyrdom, as well as a day of lost opportunity and squandered potentiality. The riots had their ostensible origins in the Stavisky Affair. The affair revolved around the Russian-immigrant businessman Stavisky, who was reputed to be an underworld figure of minor notoriety. Stavisky, through a web of corruption, bribes and blackmail, had evaded prosecution a number of times for a number of charges, including one charge of embezzlement that had been postponed nineteen times before finally being dropped. His connections to many high ranking politicians within the Third Republic, including the Premier’s brother, caused an outrage when the right-wing press eventually became aware of the scope of what Stavisky had committed. After Stavisky died in suspicious circumstances during a police raid, conspiracy theories spread. The appearance of a cover-up only inflamed the press more, and for days they called for the resignation of the government. The right-wing groups used this as a reason to march against the government. The protests brought together for the first time many of the right-wing leagues such as the Camelots du Roi (the militant wing of the Action Française) and the Croix de Feu, the fascist paramilitary organization headed by Colonel La Rocque, as well as student groups and bourgeois citizens who had grown tired of the continual corruption of the Third Republic. The public indignation culminated in the riots of the night of 6 February, which resulted in seventeen dead and many wounded and injured.

The day quickly took on mythic proportions. As Tucker observes, “on February 7, the German newspapers proclaimed in a chorus that the fascist dawn was breaking
over France. It was one of the briefest dawns in history.”

Rather than a fascist dawn, a middle of the road conservative dusk settled in after the Premier Édouard Daladier resigned, and the President invited Gaston Doumergue, a venerable and respected figure of the conservative establishment, to come out of retirement and lead a new interim government. Despite the less than revolutionary political results of the riots, the visceral experience caused Brasillach to proclaim the day a success, a banding together of a people ready to shrug off the burden of the existing system and to bring on a new age. Brasillach noted all this in retrospect. At the time of the riots, he was not on the streets, storming the Chamber of the Deputies, but at the theatre. Although he later attached great significance to the event, visiting the site of the riot each year to lay a wreath of flowers in remembrance of the dead, he was not part of the polemical journalistic storm that had inspired the uprising.

Among the fascists, there was cause for resentment towards their leaders. Neither Colonel de la Rocque nor Maurras was anywhere near the action: de la Rocque chose to direct his troops from hiding, while Maurras spent the evening writing poetry. Neither de la Rocque nor Maurras, nor any of the other prominent members of the far Right movement, stood up at the moment of crisis to take control. Maurras especially was seen to have missed the perfect opportunity to assert himself as the next leader of the nation. He had, for many years, proclaimed the importance of the violent coup, the rising up of the people in protest, the seizure of power from a corrupt and decadent government. But when the time came, he was nowhere to be found. This led to a feeling of disillusionment towards the elderly Maurras, especially among the young.

This disillusionment might be an explanation for the slow break that the younger members of the Right, especially those gathered around Brasillach and Je Suis Partout, were having from Maurras and the Action Française movement. While still respectful, for the most part, towards their elders, they realized, consciously or not, that Maurras was not the dynamic, charismatic leader that they desired and needed.

79 Ibid, p.91.
80 Ibid.
For Brasillach, it was the dawn of the spiritual revolution that would reshape France into a great fascist nation. He wrote in *Notre avant-guerre* in 1941 that,

> If the sixth of February was a failure as a conspiracy, it was an instinctive and magnificent revolt, a night of sacrifice, which remains in our memory with its odor, its cold wind, its pale running figures, its human groups occupying sidewalks, its unconquerable hope in a national Revolution, the exact date of birth of social nationalism in our country. No matter that, later, every part of blazing fire, of these deaths who were all pure, was exploited, by the right and the left. One cannot keep what was from having been.  

For the true believers in the fascist revolution, it was the beginning of a new period in history. In their opinion, it was nothing short of a battle for civilization. Lacking the sort of example that they desired within France, it is no surprise that the attention of young French fascists was turned to the startling changes happening in their eastern neighbour. Attention was drawn to the success of a party led by a failed artist that was reshaping the German people. Brasillach, along with a delegation of other journalists from all political persuasions, was present at the famous Nuremberg Rallies of 1937. Brasillach was there to report on the event for Henri Massis’s *Revue universelle*, where his essay “Cent heures chez Hitler” appeared in the October issue. Brasillach was impressed by the event, and he incorporated the article into a novel, *Les Sept Couleurs*, in 1939, and into his memoir, *Notre avant-guerre*, in 1941.

For the twenty-eight year old Brasillach, the Nazis represented the power and strength of the young generation, as opposed to the wheezing sagginess of the older sections of society. Seeing the energy of the Germans, he cannot help but feel ashamed of the lethargy of the French.

> Sometimes in this strange and irritating country, one feels on the point of exasperation. We will not build a shaky ideology on the reception that we have had here. But it is of France that we are thinking… It is a kind of regret that pursues us at every instant when we think of what democracy has made of France.  

German did not present him a perfect ideal type of the society that he desired, but it gave him many ideas that he would incorporate into his conception of fascism. He

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admired Nazism for the way it had revitalized Germany, and he wanted to take that model and do something similar for France.

Brasillach’s most substantial criticism was that the Nazi movement was top heavy with symbols and ceremony but lacked the foundations that are needed to give it historical weight. In the next chapter, we shall see how Thierry Maulnier (a colleague of Brasillach’s at Je suis partout, only more strongly affiliated with another journal, Combat) makes a similar observation about fascism in general. For Brasillach, there was something integral missing from the equation. “Is this not an effort which exceeds the limits of the nation? Tomorrow, will Hitlerism be nothing more than an historical curiosity?” As Peter Tame comments, “beneath the millennial rhetoric, [Nazism] was a precocious young ‘movement’ that was doomed to extinguish itself in a Romantic and esthetically attractive blaze of self-annihilation.” Brasillach was searching for a political revolution that would go on to create an ideal society – there needed to be more to the movement than pageantry and propaganda. Brasillach was utopian in his thinking and his desires for the future. Fundamentally, this new Germany fell short of what Brasillach was looking for. Although exciting and lively, there was something about Nazism that did not sit properly with Brasillach:

And this is what is so alarming. Faced with this serious, delicious décor of an erstwhile romanticism, faced with this immense flowering of flags, faced with these crosses from the orient, I asked ...if anything goes...I don’t know what the Germany of old was like. Today it is a great, strange country, further from us than India and China.

Nazi Germany, far from being an intoxicating drug that left Brasillach uncritically in love with Hitler, left him with impressions of strangeness, a feeling of displacement, and the thought that it might all collapse under its own weight at any time. Brasillach and the Jeune Droite approached the German example with their own ideological concerns in mind. It was not a matter of looking at Germany in isolation, rather they turned to Germany to see how it had addressed similar problems to the ones that

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83 Ibid, p.74.
84 Peter Tame, The Ideological Hero, p.98, see also Hannah Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism, p.463, for more on the self-destructive nature of fascism.
they were facing. The most lasting effect was not a love for Germany, but rather a realization of how decadent France had become.

For the young intellectuals of the *Jeune Droite*, Germany presented a curious problem. On the one hand, Nazi Germany was achieving many of the cultural and societal reforms that they had been calling for in France for a number of years. Hitler’s politics was substantially similar to their own, and they admired the way that he had rebuilt a seemingly corrupt and decadent Weimar society into an authoritarian and strong Third Reich. On the other hand, the traditional attitude of the Action Française was anti-German dating from the time of the Great War, and Charles Maurras and the old guard were aggressively opposed to Germany no matter how akin their political views were. Maurras was unwavering in his opinion that Germany, especially a rebuilt, nationalistic and militant Germany, was the greatest exterior threat to France’s security. In a review of Henri Massis’s *Débats* for *L’Action Française* on 13 December 1934, Brasillach agreed that German influences were a threat not only to France but also Western civilization at large. As the decade progressed, and France was caught up in the politics of the Popular Front, Brasillach moved towards a pro-German outlook. Although his preference was for the Mediterranean fascisms of Italy, Spain and Portugal, the undeniable pre-eminence of German National Socialism in the new European order and the impact it was having on international politics brought Brasillach around to a full-hearted admiration of Nazism. Brasillach began to recognise the significance that the fascist revolution in Germany had for the rest of Europe: “It is not only Germany, in fact, that we went to find over there but also our entire age, the unity of our age.” Brasillach began to realise that the German example might be applicable for the French people, if not exactly in policy but at least in spirit. He recognised that not everything about Nazism was appropriate for France, but it was the example of the attitude, the fascist spirit, that was important:

> One has the right not to like certain forms of the contemporary aesthetic in Germany—for my part, I admit to being extremely sensitive to the beauty and the power of the national festivities—but one cannot refuse

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to understand the vitality that it embodies, the continuity with the vitality of the past that it symbolizes. And that we can make ours not a useless copy of imitation but by a more developed knowledge of who we are.  

In the same way that Eliot acknowledged that Italian Fascism could not be transplanted in England because of their national differences, Brasillach knew that Nazism could not be transferred to France. What France was required to do, Brasillach argued, was to find its own version of the nationalist myths and ceremonies that Nazism had given to Germany. This aestheticizing of politics, and the fundamental aesthetic nature of fascism, was important in discovering the universal truths that were cross-national and yet at the same time tapped deep into a national subconscious and were unique to a nation:

These [aesthetic] elements are definitely Germanic, but they are beautiful because they are supported by universal ideas, the idea of the fatherland, of fidelity, of youth. One will never make me believe that these are foreign to my country and that it cannot also translate them into images of its own style. For there is no great doctrine, no great exaltation of a people, without these quasi-religious visions. The calamity of democracy is to have deprived the nation of images, images to love, images to respect, images to adore—the Revolution of the twentieth century has given them back to the nation.

One of the principal functions of fascism is to create a set of national images, a myth of national identity, that brings together the disparate elements of a society and combines them into a form that is recognizable as unique to that nation. Fascism is, in Carroll’s terms, a “fictionalising” of the people of a nation. This fictional form draws upon local and national legends and events, recent as well as past, to memorialise the qualities that nation identifies with, be it strength, courage, ingenuity. The past, in such an aestheticizing of the politics, is not as important as the myth that is created around it. The evocation of the 6 February 1934 riots is a perfect example of such

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mythologising of the past – an event that could be interpreted as a failure is recast as a national myth of heroic martyrdom.

A crucial part of forming such uniting national myths is the construction of the idea of a fusion of the people into a whole. Brasillach’s most common metaphors for the fascist nation were the body, the idea of millions of parts working together as a whole (he saw the nation as “gigantic reunions of men where the rhythmic movements of armies and crowds seem like the pulsations of one vast heart”), and a youth camp, with its bonds of fraternity and physicality: “A youth camp at night, the impression of forming one body with one’s entire nation, a totalitarian celebration: these are the elements of fascist poetry.” For Brasillach, the whole the most important aspect of fascism, more important than any questions of policy – it was the vital essence of the fascist spirit: “It is just that we want French unity, and the word ‘fascism’ means nothing else than the union in fasces of all the forces of the nation.”

This unity was based on the spirit of the gang that he had found in the Ecole Normale-Supérieure, in the offices of Je Suis Partout, and in the prisoner of war camp in which he had been interned directly after the French defeat at the hands of the Germans in 1940. He wrote of his newspaper colleagues, “We created a community, and we sometimes hoped, vaguely, that this community could be the model for a national and universal community later on.” It would be through this community that the nation would experience a totality of spirit, and from that wholeness, a fascist joy. This ecstasy is the result of being part of something larger than oneself, of working towards something of significance, and being in the company of compatriots who shared your values and supported you. He wrote, “The young fascist proud of his vigorous body, of his lucid mind, scornful of the gross goods of this world, the young fascist in his camp, amidst his comrades in peace who can become his comrades in war, the young fascist who sings, who marches, who works, who dreams, is above

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everything a joyous creature.”\textsuperscript{95} Fascism was, for many fascists, a euphoric abandonment of oneself into the collective, through which the individual began to understand himself, his society and his nation’s history.

As a youthful gang is directionless without something to rebel against, national unity often finds its identity and purpose through the exclusion of the “other”, which for the fascists throughout Europe often took its form in the shape of the Jews, as Brasillach wrote in 1942: “Unity is necessary but no unity with the Jew or his friend. No unity with those who still have a tender regard for democratic rottenness.”\textsuperscript{96} As we shall see, Brasillach did not hesitate to call for the violent removal of those elements of society that did not fall into the image that he was trying to make of France, a cleansed utopia that was removed of all the negative elements of society.

Although Brasillach came to appreciate the example of German National Socialism, his first loyalty was to France. It is an unusual position for a patriot, in one sense to support one’s country’s enemies, because the country one knew had crumbled under the weight of decadence, democracy and liberalism. The Third Republic was rotten and France needed to be rejuvenated, and it seemed that the most powerful force able to accomplish this was Germany, France’s traditional enemy. Brasillach did not support the defeat and occupation of his country, however he believed that the reason it was defeated and occupied was due to the internal turmoil caused by the democrats, communists and Jews. Nevertheless, he had faith in the possibility of a renewed, reborn France: “It is not about transporting the German way of life here, it’s about giving birth to a French national socialism, in the same way that Falangism is Spanish and fascism is Italian.”\textsuperscript{97}

Brasillach retained a degree of suspicion and scepticism towards the Germans. We have seen that his essay on the Nuremberg Rallies was not the propaganda piece that it is often characterised to be, that it carried criticism and reservations about the future of the Nazi movement. Part of this is attributable to the influence of the

\textsuperscript{95} Originally from Les Sept Couleurs, transplanted word for word into Notre avant-guerre (Paris: Plon, 1941), pp.282-283.
\textsuperscript{96} Robert Brasillach, Je Suis Partout (January 31, 1942).
Germanophobia of Maurras and the old guard of the Action Française, while some of it can be attributed to the racial and cultural differences that Brasillach experienced in Germany. Indeed, Tucker has said that Brasillach was unusual amongst the Jeune Droite in the distinct lack of blind enthusiasm he showed for the example of the Third Reich:

In fact, of all the young fascists who produced the newspaper *Je Suis Partout* in the middle and late 1930s, Brasillach was almost alone in expressing publicly certain reservations about Nazi Germany. Only two months before his departure for the Nuremberg Party Celebration of 1937, Brasillach wrote a blistering review of Alphonse de Chateaubriant’s new book, *La Gerbe des forces*. After a trip to Germany in 1936, Chateaubriant had come to believe that ‘the National-Socialists are the human apparition of a renewal of God’s work.’

In the review of *La Gerbe des forces* in *L’Action Française* on 8 July 1937, Brasillach censured Chateaubriant for “kneeling before” Nazism and its principles. A degree of caution was necessary when dealing with the Nazis, Brasillach knew. He had already expressed doubts about the longevity of the regime, and he had an uneasy foreboding about the military aspirations of Hitler. But on some levels, it was obvious that Nazism worked. It had turned Germany into a strong, authoritarian nation, proud of its native traditions and civilization, of the type, if not the exact type, that Brasillach hoped France would become. The example was inspiring – the emotional responses brought on by the aesthetic pageants of processions, marches, flags and rallies could be directed into beneficial political ends. Fascism was largely a fictionalisation of the nation and its peoples, and Hitler was a composer, writing an epic symphony on history. Brasillach, always the literary critic, did not shy away from calling the Führer an artist, “a German poet, this Hitler who invents *Walpurgis* nights and May festivals, who intermingles in his songs the romanticism of ancient monuments and the romanticism of forget-me-nots, the forest, the Venusberg... comrades fallen in Munich before the Feldherrenhalle.”

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politics not controlled by the decrepit old men of the Chamber of Deputies, but a new, inclusive, total politicising of the nation.

Indeed, Brassillach did find some of the ceremonies and the showiness of Nazism to be tacky and gauche, but he argued in *Je Suis Partout*\(^{100}\) that every country had its own distinctiveness, every nation had an individuality and uniqueness to its myths and culture and heritage. But there are also collective truths that crossed national boundaries, and France had but to find and express its own version of these truths through its national identity. Fascism for Brasillach was, in Tucker’s words, “a spirit of renewal and high adventure uniting men across class lines and across national boundaries. But to him it was more a mystique than a purely political concept.”\(^{101}\) Brasillach therefore saw that the Occupation of France was in France’s best interests, it would be a time of rebuilding and rejuvenation, a time for the exchange of ideas and the formation of a particularly French form of fascism. He did not advocate that France should be subordinated to Germany, or that German methods and values should replace French heritage. In a letter to his friend Maurice Bardèche written from prison on 14 January, 1945, he wrote that “We must not be more German than the Germans. If, today, someone says to me: we must die in order for Danzig to remain German, I say No.”\(^{102}\) At his trial, he stated his rationale for collaboration. It was not because he supported Germany, but because he thought it was in the best interests of France:

> I am not for collaboration because it would place us under the commands of Germany and under the German yoke, but for a French reason, a reason that is perhaps in error, but in which the underlying motive is not an error.\(^{103}\)

Brasillach remained committed to France even when advocating collaboration, for he believed that France in its current state was not what it could or should be. Drieu similarly lamented the condition that France was in, and saw the source of its fall in status in the deterioration of its self-sufficiency and independence. Drieu mourned the

\(^{100}\) Brasillach, *Je Suis Partout* (29 April, 1938).


corrosion of values—he worried that comfort and luxury had made the French soft and denied them their creativity and brilliance:

Man has genius only when he is twenty years old and if he is hungry. But the abundance of the grocery store kills his passions. Stuffed with canned goods, the mouth of man contains a bad chemistry which corrupts his words. No more religion, no more arts, no more languages. His desires killed, man no longer expresses anything.\textsuperscript{104}

This expressionless man was the cause of the sinking of French national prestige, and it was the major factor that led to the humiliating defeats of France in the Great War: “It was an army of the bourgeois and the bourgeoisified that the Germans beat in May, an army of the kind of men who, from the general to the lowest soldier, thought principally of grub, drink, and of doing the least possible.”\textsuperscript{105} The decline in standards of Frenchmen caused Drieu great distress and it was not until much later that he began to see some signs of vitality returning to his country.

The events of 6 February 1934, the rioting of the fascist leagues after the scandal of the Stavisky Affair, gave Drieu hope. He saw in that spontaneous expression of frustration and violence the chance for a rebirth of French society: “This people is not dead as we had believed deep down in ourselves; this people has risen from its bed of torpor.”\textsuperscript{106} Fascism represented the only escape from the torpor that Drieu found all around him. The fight against decadence, which was in essence a fight to save a civilization in decline and prevent the discarding of long-held traditional ways of society, was the most important political problem in Europe in the twentieth century. Drieu’s conversion to fascism was a direct result of his despair over the decadent nature of society:

\begin{quote}
I am a fascist because I have measured the progress of decadence in Europe. I saw in fascism the only means of containing and reducing that decadence, and moreover, scarcely believing in the political resources of England as in those of France, disapproving of the intrusion of foreign empires on our continent, such as those of the
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{105} Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, “Un Homme marche dans Paris”, \textit{La Gerbe} (12 September 1940).

United States and Russia, I saw no other recourse than that of the genius of Hitler and Hitlerism.\textsuperscript{107}

The essential element of fascism was the spiritual revolution, the rejuvenation of the spirit of the nation. Youth, as it was for Brasillach, was an important metaphor for Drieu and many fascists, for it was not old people that were the problem, but old-thinking people. The fascist utopia that Brasillach was imagining was one of youthful ideas and youthful energy, not necessarily youthful bodies. For Brasillach, the crucial mission was to create a youthful nation, a utopian society energized by hope and looking to the future.

\textbf{The Importance of Youth and Rejuvenation}

The attraction of youth is an integral part of the mystique of fascism, as the case of Brasillach shows. Drieu, as well, although a generation older than Brasillach, was obsessed with the notion of youth as essential to the renewal of the nation. His own personality reflected this, and many of the people who met him commented on his youthfulness even as he entered middle age. Jean-Paul Sartre described him as “a tall, sad looking fellow … with the faded look of a young man who did not know how to grow old.”\textsuperscript{108} In the opinion of Henri Massis, “Drieu all his life kept the countenance of and the demeanour of an adolescent; … Drieu never left the stage of adolescence.”\textsuperscript{109} In psychological terms, he might be said to have been stuck in a juvenile stage, not having completely matured.

It was frustrating to Drieu to accept that the France that he loved was now the weaker power in the struggle for Europe. Fascism, Drieu argued, was as native to France as the republican ideals that it clung to: “there is not one idea in fascism that has not been outlined by a French writer during the past fifty years”\textsuperscript{110} (a sentiment that, as we have seen in the previous chapter, was given scholarly support through the work of Zeev Sternhell many years later). And yet, as the quick defeat of the French army in 1940 had shown, France itself did not have the will or strength to implement

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\textsuperscript{108} Robert Soucy, \textit{Fascist Intellectual}, p.103, quoting Jean-Paul Sartre, “Drieu La Rochelle, ou la haine de soi”, \textit{Les Lettres françaises}, no.6 (April, 1943), p.3.
\end{flushright}
those ideas. Instead, it was necessary for an outside power, Germany, to change France. France’s resistance to the German efforts for reform, however, prevented any change more deep than the most superficial. “In order for Germany to save France,” Drieu noted, “it would have been necessary for France to have wanted to be saved. After three years, it was clear that France no longer wanted to be saved.”

In this sense he was very close to Brasillach. He felt that the blame did not fall entirely on France, however, as the Germans had failed to take full hold of the opportunity presented to them. At the beginning of the Occupation, the Germans were too faint-hearted, Drieu thought:

Hitlerian Germany tried, in the beginning, to avoid acts of political and social violence in the occupied countries. But only such violence could have given meaning to the military and diplomatic violations that its conquests necessarily entailed.... In 1940, France expected massacres and then great innovations. These first cold-blood acts of violence would have been easily accepted.

Fascism failed to take charge in France because it failed to be strong enough to destroy its foes. The Vichy government was half-hearted and ineffective, and was not fascist enough—it was composed of old conservatives and lacked a young, vital element: “The Revolution of 1789 (so obsolete today) was made with men of the Old Regime, but also with entirely new men—men truly young and new. Such men are lacking at Vichy.” Vichy was a great disappointment to Drieu, who wrote in his diary that Vichy was “a rough compromise between democracy and fascism. They grossly imitate fascism without taking from it its virtues and assuming almost all of its inconveniences. An authoritarianism without authority, an autocratism without autocrats, without manly impetus.” Thus Vichy and the Germans in Paris did not succeed in properly instituting fascism into France. Vichy proved to suffer from the same failing of parliamentary democracy, that of corruption and conciliation: “During

112 Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, “Notes sur Allemagne” (December, 1944), Défense de l’Occident, no.50-51 (February-March 1958), pp.138-40.
the war fascism was stifled by all the enemies it let live. It was not revolutionary enough, bloody enough (because it was not socialist enough). It died from having been too timid.”

As for the Nazis, any faith Drieu had in them as a revolutionary force for change had faded as the war continued:

The Germans are not at all revolutionary and have been completely left behind by events. Hitler no longer does anything but make war, he no longer has any political plans for Europe. I have known this for a year and a half.

Hitler had proven himself to be as materialistic as the communists and the capitalists in his desire for land and power. The spiritual regeneration of Europe had been put on hold.

Drieu was not alone in his malaise. He recounts meeting André Malraux, his friend and a leftist, on a street in Paris:

Saw Malraux in Paris. He no longer believes in anything, denies the Russian force, and thinks that the world has no meaning and is heading toward the most sordid solution, the American solution. But that’s because he has renounced being anything but a literary hack. Will he be great enough in this order to justify himself? But literature can no longer justify anyone. Advises me to do as he does. Sure.

Drieu’s dejection led, as we will see, to an apocalyptic flirtation with communism as a destructive and purifying force. Tucker has written about Drieu’s depression:

Pessimism could not be overcome by either Drieu or Barrès, although both approached politics as much for obsessional reasons as for any other reason. Nor were they ever capable of seeing themselves as anything but members of the bourgeoisie. This unshakable attachment to class origins was sufficient, in itself, to prevent a meaningful commitment to the Left.

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116 Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, Journal [March 5, 1943], quoted in David Carroll, French Literary Fascism, p.279 n11.
We will see how class played an important part in Drieu’s relationship with communism in the next chapter. At this point, it is important in understanding Drieu’s opinion about class to know that he was able to reconcile his admiration for communist methods with his aversion for the working class:

I am a petit-bourgeois and believe only in the petits-bourgeois. The kind of petit-bourgeois descended from the minor nobility, the bourgeois of the free professions, the peasant, the artisan. But who likes neither the state employee nor the salaried worker, nor the factory worker when they have forgotten their concrete origins. Nothing has ever been accomplished without us.  

The proletariat would only be a part of the revolution if it followed the lead of the bourgeois élite. Fascism had a use for the proletariat for mass support, but its leadership would be strictly bourgeois. Essential to that cooperation, however, was the feeling of connectedness between all parts of the society. As we saw above with Brasillach’s emphasis on the importance of national unity through the construction of national myths, bringing the nation together as one is an important feature of the fascist ideology. A fascist utopia would see all segments of the society, proletariat, bourgeoisie and élites, working together for a common purpose. It was not simply for practical reasons of organization, but also the spiritual well-being of the nation. Drieu felt that the nation could be more than a country; it could, and should, be a community. His conception of the importance of community arose out of his post-war experiences.

**Trying to Rebuild the National Community**

After the First World War, Drieu sought out the feeling of comradeship and community that he had had in the war. Indeed, of all his experiences during that time, the connection between the men in the trenches, and the understanding of mutual reliability during a time of suffering and physical danger, the possibilities for courage and honour, were the only positives that he took from it. In the years after, he made connections with a number of groups in which he tried to replicate that mood. His dalliance with the Dadaists in the 1920s proved to satisfy his needs only partially.

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Although he could not reconcile himself with the group’s Marxism, he was taken with their revolutionary zeal, their non-conformity to accepted standards and their willingness, indeed their desire, to shock and provoke. In 1926, he told an interviewer of his esteem for the surrealists, “this prodigious troop of young men and poets who, I firmly believe, are the most alive group in the world today.”\(^{120}\) Vitality and energy, the *method* of their actions rather than what they were doing, influenced Drieu. But it was not just the surrealists’ approach to life that inspired him, but also their concerns about the modern world. The surrealists’ objections to modernity were repeated in Drieu’s political work, he “continued to echo surrealist tirades against scientism, technology, and bourgeois conventionality and surrealist appeals for irrationality, animality, and vitality.”\(^{121}\) These early concerns would remain with Drieu throughout the rest of his life.

Parliamentary democracy was, for Drieu, “a miserable sham, unbelievably pathetic and abject, of a moral and intellectual baseness beyond words.”\(^{122}\) The Third Republic’s seemingly constant struggles with corruption and debilitating paralysis of parliamentary debate convinced Drieu that democracy was a weak form of government. In comparison with France, the Italy of Mussolini was vibrant and exciting, and “he praised what he described as Mussolini’s effort in Italy to create, in league with the petite bourgeoisie, a spiritualised, militaristic, antiparliamentarian capitalism which united the best elements of fascism and communism.”\(^{123}\) Back in France, Drieu found that few on the right were willing to go as far as the Italians. Conservatives in France who clung to parliamentary democracy rather than exploring the authoritarian alternatives of fascism were “no better than their liberal and socialist adversaries in this regard, for their common adherence to democracy was leading France to ruin.”\(^{124}\) He found that as a fascist he had enemies on both sides of the political spectrum—both the socialist left and the conservative right who had

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\(^{120}\) Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, quoted in Frédéric Lefevre, “Une Heure avec Drieu La Rochelle,” *Nouvelle littéraires* (2 January, 1926), p.2.


\(^{122}\) Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, quoted in Frédéric Lefevre, “Une Heure avec Drieu La Rochelle,” *Nouvelle littéraires* (2 January, 1926), p.2.

\(^{123}\) Robert Soucy, *Fascist Intellectual*, pp.63-64.

\(^{124}\) Ibid, p.65.
vested interests in the continuation of the parliamentary system. The conservatives’
relationships with big business created a conflict of interest: they would be unwilling
to bring about the kind of changes that Drieu advocated because of their reliance on
the support of the capitalists who controlled much of France’s wealth. Drieu’s
dissatisfaction with France, and his general pessimism about its ability to pull itself out
of its malaise, led to him considering a different form of fascism, one that went
beyond national borders to encompass Europe as a whole.

Unlike other fascists, Drieu saw beyond fascist nationalism to a broader
Europeanism. The problems of France were the same as those of other European
nations, and the threats they faced were common. For Drieu, none of the European
nations was sufficiently strong to withstand an assault on their own, and the only
potential way of saving European society was for the nations of Europe to unite and
act as one: “Europe’s countries are corpses dressed in glory, lying on catafalques
bristling with cannon. It is because they feel so weak spiritually that they make
themselves so strong materially.”125 Salvation could only come through unity and
spiritual renewal in the interwar years. Drieu supported the League of Nations, but
also argued for a more European-focused union that would deal exclusively with
European issues. This organization would be based in Geneva and would have the
military power to combat any threat, especially that in the East. It is interesting to
note that with the exception of the city (Geneva and not Brussels), Drieu advocated
something similar to the European Union or NATO. Drieu rose above the national
barriers of race and language and imagined a broader concept of Europeanism that
unites the various peoples of Europe. In order to protect their civilization, they must
organise together and act as one.

Drieu thought that France would have to discard its attachment to democratic
principles. This did not mean the abandonment of capitalism—indeed, as we shall
see, Drieu was actually in favour of capitalism, but not the capitalism of multinational
corporations with monopolies and the ability to crush competition. Rather, Drieu
looked back to an earlier form of capitalism of rigorous competition and individuality.

125 Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, “De la patrie vous faites un monstre, II”, Les Dernier Jours (1 March, 1927),
p.9.
As Robert Soucy, an insightful biographer of Drieu and scholar of the French right, describes it, much would need to be done to bring a unified Europe into existence:

To do this, the Third Republic would have to be overthrown and a capitalist dictatorship, advised by France’s most advanced thinkers, frankly established. No longer hamstrung by democracy, by an unsophisticated and nationalistic public opinion, such a regime would work toward the creation of a federated Europe. The major obstacle to Europeanism was the narrow-minded, chauvinistic nationalism of the masses, which was in control because democracy was in control. In this respect, the socialists for all their alleged internationalism were really nationalists, since their loyalty to electoral democracy made them dependent upon the nationalism of the masses. But nationalism was found on the right as well, the Action Française being as retrograde as its democratic adversaries in this sphere. The capitalist dictatorship Drieu had in mind would transcend the nationalism of both the left and the right.  

Thus Drieu criticised the nationalism of the traditional parliamentary parties. But this negative assessment of narrow-minded nationalism led to a critique of the nationalism of the fascist parties as well. The bellicose nationalism of the Germans, especially, jeopardized the establishment of a European federation by threatening to impose German hegemony over the continent. A federated Europe would be composed of nations of equal standing, rather than one nation dominating and dictating to the rest. Hitler’s ambitions for domination over all of Europe would turn the rest of Western civilization, Drieu predicted: “From the moment that Hitler made demands that denied seven million Czechs the possibility of living freely in a suitable territory, he suddenly and completely abandoned the sphere of justice and pitted all the peoples of Europe against him.”

Before that time, he had had confidence in Hitler to be the initiator of a pan-European fascist revolution. Tucker suggests that Drieu makes the mistake of seeing in Hitler a distorted reflection of his own beliefs, the same mistake we have seen that Wyndham Lewis made: “He saw in Hitler little more than an apostle of European unification and a reformer of the spirit through a

new form of ‘socialism’. As an intellectual fascist, Drieu had at best only a casual concern for the degree to which the realities of fascist regimes matched his own speculations.” Drieu was not unaware, however, of the disparity between the theory and the practice. In Socialisme fasciste he asks himself the question, “But am I finally committed, I the intellectual?”. To which he answers in the affirmative: “Indeed. Fascism as an inclination is one thing; but the particular and inevitably trite forms that fascism takes here and there, that is something else again.” Drieu’s interests leant more towards the ideal rather than the realistic – his thinking was literally utopian, in that the world he imagined did not yet exist.

Drieu had a vision of what fascist society, a fascist utopia, should be, and recognised that the fascist societies that had appeared in the 1920s and 1930s did not match his utopian vision. As the 1930s wore on, it became apparent that Hitler’s motivations were less about European fascism, and more about a new German empire. Drieu argued that the fascist energies that were being consolidated in countries across Europe would not permit themselves to be subjugated. As early as 1931, he had discerned that even a strong German presence across Europe would not ensure a permanent maintenance of influence:

You will never have hegemony over Europe. No one was ever able to have it.... Europe is made up of courageous peoples. Every attempt at hegemony, the day it is declared, immediately provokes a coalition. And if the impossible occurs, if you were to conquer, your victory would immediately provoke a terrible recurrence of all the various nationalisms. One cannot kill nationalism through the triumph of one of them. 

Fascism was, Drieu argued, “the only method capable of blocking and diverting the expansion of fascist countries.” Allan Stoekl has written about the contradictory position in which many French fascists found themselves in the late 1930s:

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Like many French fascists before and during the Second World War, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle was faced with something of a paradox: on the one hand he derived “inspiration” from the fascist movements of Italy, Germany, and Spain, and he hoped for their support in the event of a fascist uprising in France; on the other hand, he was forced to recognize, especially as the years of the Occupation dragged on, that the Germans, precisely because they were fascists, had no respect for the national or cultural independence of any other nation. A basic goal, then, of any French fascist had to be a national independence, not only from the Soviet Union or from American cultural imperialism, but from the mighty fascist empires already established.  

Somehow French fascists had to identify with and differentiate themselves from the other forms of fascism on the continent. In reverse of the communist position, which owed allegiance to an external, international organization, an essential element of fascism was that the national character and culture be preserved as much as possible and national sovereignty not challenged. We have seen in Chapter Two that one of the difficulties in defining fascism and identifying some form of a generic fascism is that fascism as an ideology emphasises national uniqueness and glorifies significant national characteristics. While this is a scholarly difficulty for historians, here we see that for fascists, such as Drieu and Brasillach, it caused considerable intellectual angst, as it seemed contradictory or inconsistent to support a foreign power in order to promote a nationalistic ideology.

Drieu hoped that the artificial distinctions between the left and the right could be reconciled. By eliminating the electoral demands of parliamentary democracy, the need to appeal to the masses and constantly campaign to remain in power, he hoped fascism would unite the country behind a single goal. The combination of the best aspects of each side would be the first step to remove the decadent elements of French society. As Soucy notes, “Drieu was captivated by the possibility of merging the extreme right and the extreme left into one movement, overcoming French decadence, and countering both the German and Russian threats to French national

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security by establishing a strong French fascist state." German and Russian aggression endangered the chances of a strong European union based on mutual recognition of the value of the national variants of European culture. To do this, Drieu knew that France needed to be toughened:

I wanted to make France strong again, a France that would free itself of Parliament and cliques and be strong enough to demand an alliance with England based on equality and justice. France and England would turn toward Germany and undertake negotiations based on mutual understanding and firmness, or we would give her colonies or throw her at Russia. We would have been free to intervene in the conflict at the right time.

In order to become stronger, France would need to become fascist. Fascism, not democracy, was the only protection against foreign hostility. It created the paradoxical requirement that "one can only struggle against fascism, against communism, by becoming fascist.... Build your own fascism and you will not be fascisized from outside." In addition he wrote in *Gilles*,

If you do not succeed in making Fascism the victor in your countries, you will bear the burden of the terrible consequences of your weakness, and you will be forced to defend these countries against the fascist powers, even at the risk of enabling the antifascist forces to win.

As Hitler’s ambitions in Europe became more clear and the British and the French response to Hitler at Munich was one of concession and compromise rather than strong insistence, Drieu was disappointed. “For a long time, England has humiliated us with her strength;” he wrote. “Now she humiliates us with her weakness.” These two countries did not fully comprehend the magnitude of the danger that they faced. Continuing in the same vein would lead to disaster and quite probably the destruction

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of nations. The choice was either to embrace strength through fascism, or continue in weakness with democracy:

The question is whether England and France prefer to remain democracies or prefer to remain England and France. If France and England remain faithful to democracy, they will go from concession to concession, from defeat to defeat, to a total destitution of their sovereignty and their dignity.\textsuperscript{138}

Drieu was torn: on the one hand, he supported the sort of government that Germany had, on the other he wanted to defend France. He resented the democrats that put him into this position. “We do not want to fight for democracy against its enemies,” he argued. “We want to fight against a democracy that has made us those enemies in the first place.”\textsuperscript{139} The choice should not be between France and Germany, but a choice of whether or not to fight against the Third Republic democracy that had betrayed France.

French conservatives, who would have been the most receptive to an authoritarian right wing dictatorship, sided with the parliamentary right. Indeed even Doriot’s \textit{Parti Populaire français (PPF)}, an ultra-nationalist party that was strongly opposed to the Popular Front, supported the Munich agreement, which led to Drieu’s eventual departure from the party. Although he nominally supported the party line, it was without passion and he privately blamed Doriot for compromising the fascist principles in which Drieu believed. Drieu wrote in a private letter to Doriot:

You have betrayed us. You never wanted to save France. You remained inactive, incredulous and in bad faith. You let those Frenchmen who wanted to escape from the destiny which has been that of France for the last hundred years, who were ready to tear themselves away from it with the slightest encouragement, be crushed beneath the same doubt and irony which has stifled them for over a century.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, p.177.
It should be remembered that Drieu “was the sole spokesman of the PPF openly to declare himself a fascist,”\textsuperscript{141} and that Doriot had originally condemned fascism. In 1936 Doriot had declared: “We are part of this Popular Front [...] it can play a considerable role in the fight against fascism, the economic crisis and war”.\textsuperscript{142} Given that even Doriot could not be relied upon to stand up to the Germans, Drieu began to have doubts about the chances of a native French fascism taking power. Looking back at the end of the war, Drieu wrote in his journal:

> After a few months, it was clear that France would not be fascist. Of [French] fascists, there were only a few dozen, former communists for the most part. We were drowned by an obsolete Action Française, by a wave of Catholics, nationalists, not counting the pacifists and other louts.... After a Munich that I supported without joy, with scorn, I withdrew from Doriot’s movement and retired into my library, awaiting the catastrophe. I had a lucid view of things in 1939 and 1940. I knew that in France a revolution made by Frenchmen was impossible. A revolution could only come from outside.\textsuperscript{143}

The Germans represented the future of Europe, and like the revolutionary wars of the 1790s in which France sought to carry its message of freedom to the other countries of Europe, the advance of Nazi ideas on the backs of their Panzers could be beneficial:

> Germany, in the present century, is one of the incarnations of the revolution just as France incarnated it in another century.... This revolution that Germany proposes to some and imposes on others is necessary for all, just like the French Revolution. The people who fought or who are fighting against Germany need this spiritual reform that it represents, no less than Germany.\textsuperscript{144}

In 1940, he suggested to the German ambassador to Paris, Otto Abetz, to “make sure that the German army does not appear to be an occupying army! It’s a revolutionary


army, an army of liberation, and like the great army of Napoleon which spread the message of revolution throughout Europe!"\textsuperscript{145} The role of the Nazis in France should not be to extend Germany’s borders or empire, but to facilitate the rebirth of France. If France could not find the internal impetus, the inspiration for reform and revolution would need to come from the outside.

For a dedicated Europeanist, the Nazi program of bellicose nationalism terrified Drieu. “What I saw in Berlin left me penetrated with a sort of dread and despair,”\textsuperscript{146} he wrote in 1934, after seeing the Germans at first hand, although he also admitted the perverse attraction they had for him: “There is a kind of virile and sensual pleasure in the air around me which isn’t sexual, but which is extremely intoxicating.”\textsuperscript{147} Nationalism had its place, but it should not be the sole aspiration of a nation: “Nationalism is the axis of fascist activity, but an axis is not a goal. What is important for fascism is social revolution.... Not only is nationalism but a pretext, it is also but a moment in the socialist evolution of fascism.... If Europe is not annihilated, there will be a Geneva of socializing fascisms.”\textsuperscript{148} Drieu’s fascist utopia resembled a sort of League of European Nations, brought together under a common acceptance of fascist principles, with each nation recognising the national heritage of each other while at the same time acknowledging their allegiance to a broader European or Western culture. Drieu also suggested that the misuse of the concept of nationalism by certain fascist movements for their own success could lead to a situation where it might be beneficial to abandon the entire concept of nationality. David Carroll has analysed Drieu’s thoughts on this:

He constantly attacked the national community and even proposed that the nation be destroyed in the name of fascism—as long as ‘Europe,’ a less determined, still to be formed, and therefore supposedly more fully spiritual community, would replace the nation and

\textsuperscript{146} Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, “Mesure de l’Allemagne”, \textit{La Nouvelle revue française}, no.246 (March, 1934), p.457.
\textsuperscript{147} Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, quoted in Bernard-Henri Lévy, \textit{Adventures on the Freedom Road}, p.155.
function in its place as a totalising spiritual model and force.¹⁴⁹

Thus, if nationalism stood in the way of the spiritual rebirth of the nation, then it may be necessary to fight to destroy the arbitrary barriers of national community and focus solely on the spirit of Europe. Drieu retained his attachment to his French identity, and advocated pursuing a French form of fascism before taking such drastic measures.

To take into account national diversity, Drieu emphasised that French fascism would be different from the fascisms of other nations. Nonetheless, one of the primary objectives of French fascism would be to strengthen France to the point where it would be able to defend itself from any hostile army. Germany and Russia posed the biggest threats to France, and thus “it was to France’s national interest to strengthen her ties with England. That England was democratic and Germany fascist was irrelevant: the Realpolitik of balance of power and national self-preservation was what counted, not ideological affinities.”¹⁵⁰ England, although it might represent something that Drieu hated, would not try to destroy France, as a conquering German or Russian army would. In the short term, an alliance with England would allow France to become fascist and strengthen herself to be able to fight. Drieu warned of the tendency of some Frenchmen to applaud the Nazis or the Bolsheviks:

It is all very nice to shout: “Long live the Soviets!” or “Bravo Hitler!” when you are tranquilly at home among Frenchmen, after a drink or two. It is much less nice when there are thousands of Stalinist orHitlerian mercenaries tramping their boots across your soil, singing their songs, swearing in their own language and looking at your women…. How do you expect Russians or Germans, trained by dictatorships, to conduct themselves any better than those Frenchmen who were believed to have been made tender by the utopian speeches delivered at the beginning of the Revolution? It cannot be anything but humiliating.¹⁵¹

In the suicide note/confessional diary that he composed in his last weeks, Drieu wrote about the progression of his thought with regard to how he moved from being in

¹⁵¹ Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Avec Doriot (Paris: Gallimard, 1937), pp.121-123.
favour of resisting the Germans to being one of the most cooperative collaborators. It demonstrates the logic of his mind as he justified his fascism. It shows Drieu’s evolution of thought about political issues. He begins his analysis of foreign policy with the state of France after the end of the Great War, when it became apparent that France was not as powerful as it once had been, and ends by deciding on the necessity of collaboration:

Collaboration between Germany and France could only be regarded as one aspect of a European situation. It was no longer a question of France but of all the other countries. So it was no longer a question of a particular alliance, but of an element in an entire system. 

Drieu, like most intellectuals who were fascists, was not a whole-hearted supporter of the concept of Führerprinzip, or the infallibility of the leader. Rather, he emphasised the role of élites in society and government, and stressed that a leader who did not seek the assistance and advice of his élites was insecure or foolish. Nevertheless, he understood that society both needed and produced natural leaders. The exhilaration Drieu had felt leading a bayonet charge in the First World War proved to him that under certain circumstances some men are born to lead and some born to follow, and it was “worth risking death at twenty and knowing nothing further about life to be able to discover that one was a leader and to experience the plenitude of exercising that gift.” That was the only occasion that Drieu felt that he was a leader, and he repeatedly avoided positions of influence—he did not pursue a political career of his own, he did not seek a leadership role in the PPF, he turned down a prominent position in the Vichy government. Drieu knew his limitations, knew that he was a writer, a singer of praises for the leader, but not a leader himself. He did not have the populist touch that a fascist leader requires. Indeed, as a writer, he saw himself as distinct from the rest of the movement: “An intellectual is someone who is not of the people.” And the intellectual had a privileged position in the state—Drieu insisted that inequality was a natural part of life: “the intellectual, the writer, the artist is not a

citizen like any other. He has duties and rights which are superior to those of others. He maintained that the intellectual élite of a nation had a duty to lead, that variation was an inherent aspect of existence, and that due to this dissimilarity between people, some were better suited to the role of leader: “There has never been equality in this world, but rather life derives from inequality. The intelligence of the strongest is the only known justice.” A meritocratic system of government, with the intellectual and the strong in authority was the basis of fascism, and a fundamental duty of fascism was “to take charge politically, morally and spiritually of the large modern crowds abandoned by the old authorities.” Drieu was not a believer in aristocracy—he did not believe in hereditary power, and he insisted that monarchists could never truly be fascists, as they believed in a right to rule based on bloodline rather than suitability. “A monarchist is never a true fascist,” Drieu wrote in 1934. “It is because a monarchist is never truly a modern man: he has nothing of the brutality, the barbaric simplicity of a modern man”. Thus Maurras and the militant ultra-conservatives of the Action Française did not qualify, in Drieu’s eyes, to be fascist— as Soucy describes it, “for all the violence of their polemics and their street brawls, they fell short of being fascists.” In contrast with fascism, “conservatism in general was overly rationalistic, stodgy, sterile. Fascism, on the contrary, gave irrationalism its full due. This was why it was more vital and dynamic than traditional conservatism.” A fascist political system would embrace innovation and revolution, as we shall see in more depth in the next chapter.

Therefore when it came to such an important political event in French history (indeed the most important) as the French Revolution, Drieu, like many fascists, was ambivalent. The concept of a republic of equals under a liberal constitution did not

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160 Ibid, p.73.
appeal to Drieu—however there was more to the Revolution than the ideals it professed to defend. In reality, the Jacobin authoritarianism of the Convention coupled with the anti-aristocratic and meritocratic ideas of the bourgeois élite was a forerunner of many fascistic ideas. As Tucker has written,

Drieu accepted the results of the French Revolution, if not its liberal principles, and found the republic to be the form of state best suited to France. ... [He] could cite not only the Jacobins, precursors of fascism to Drieu, but Calvin and Napoleon as well.  

The First Republic bore little resemblance to the Third Republic, despite the latter’s attempt to be its heir. The First Republic was a strong, determined expression of power; the Third Republic was for Drieu a weak manifestation of the decadence of the twentieth century. Drieu was not opposed to the Jacobin system of republicanism, with its willingness to pursue its enemies, fight for its principles and not shy away from violence. The Third Republic, on the other hand was “a system of government ... that bore little relation to the truly virile republicanism manifested by Jacobin authoritarians during the French Revolution.” Thus Drieu’s elitism was opposed to the egalitarian Rights of Man and more admiring of the Committee for Public Safety. His elitism was “anti-liberal as well as anti-democratic, contemptuous of élites who allowed themselves to be restricted by man-made laws and legal forms: the only law was the law of the strongest.”  

In contrast with Maurras and other ultra-conservatives who longed for a return to the days of the Sun King, Drieu favoured a France ruled by an élite of the best and the brightest, not simply descendents of nobles families. This élite, in Hamilton’s words, “far more than any particular social class, were responsible for the development of history and existed for the welfare of the nation and the edification of its citizens.” This élite would become a new nobility, it was “a kind of democracy” since it would rise to power based on intelligence, strength and skill, from “talent and genius from no matter what

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163 Ibid.
families.” Despite his veneration for Doriot prior to his disillusionment with and departure from the PPF, Drieu was not a disciple of the Führerprinzip that claimed that the leader was infallible and never to be questioned. Rather, Drieu accepted that ultimate authority would need to rest in the hands of one man for the smooth exercise of power, however a leader would be foolish not to take advantage of the élite of a nation. In contrast to the Hitlerian model of obsequious deputies vying for influence with the leader, Drieu imagined a leader who regularly consulted and relied upon the advice of ministers. Drieu detested the limitations of submissive people who follow a dictator. He wrote in his play, Le Chef, about “the terrible weakness in men who give themselves to another man. When there is a dictator it is because there is no élite, it is because the élite is no longer doing its duty.... If you had done your duty as leaders you would not need a tyrant. But you have not done anything against misery or boredom, so all that remained was the crowd, the female crowd. And it searched for a male.” A cabinet-like form of dictatorship would resist the temptation of relying solely on the ideas of one person, and would hopefully avoid the cult of personality that led to many fascist movements vanishing after the figurehead dies, is defeated, arrested or otherwise removed. Consequently, according to Soucy, Drieu “taught that the élite should be partners, not servants, of the leader and that their voices should carry great weight in the decisions and policies of the movement. Drieu’s élite was an élite of fellow leaders, not of sycophantic followers. The masses needed to be led, but the élite much less so.” Drieu’s utopian structure would be a fascism without a Führer: a rational, bureaucratic organization based on merit and ability, a dictatorship by committee.

French history proved that it was a national habit to identify power with a man rather than the office, as the example of Louis XIV or Napoleon demonstrated. The legend of Napoleon had been sufficient to allow his nephew to win the Presidency in 1848 and declare himself Emperor in 1852, and for those in the twentieth century, it encouraged potential fascists to seek out an individual to follow, rather than a

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movement or ideology. The myth of Napoleon, of one man recreating France and leading it to glory, was just that: a myth. “What people failed to realize,” Soucy writes, “was that Napoleon would never have achieved the glory he did without the enormous accomplishments of the Jacobin élite that had preceded him.”

It is a matter of putting the cart before the horse, confusing results and causes, Drieu claimed:

Fascism is not the result of dictatorship; it is dictatorship that is the result of fascism. Fascism did not emerge from the brain of Mussolini like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. What had occurred in Italy is the result of the whole movement, the whole effort, of a generation that sought and found what it was looking for in fascism and that as it followed it sought and found Mussolini.

Mussolini would not have been able to conceive of and implement fascism without the support and ideas of an élite, Drieu maintained. He cautioned the French not to forget this fact, and he alerted them to the dangers of conflating the leader with the ideology; it was an “an old, sclerotic fascism” which emphasised the cult of personality. A dictator is a product of fascism, a part of it, but not all of it. Drieu argued that a strong authoritarian ruler was essential, at certain times, and they would help implement fascism, but the dictator and the followers of the dictator should remember that they are part of something larger than themselves:

Each of the great nations of Europe has had, at the right time, its dictator. It could not have achieved its unification without resorting to an exceptional type of man…. We are undoubtedly in a period when dictators are indispensable, inevitable.

As a consequence, Drieu did not teach blind devotion—he insisted that it was a duty of the élite to stand up to the dictator, to provide alternatives and suggest different courses of action. It was only through this exchange of opinion that the best solution, and therefore the most fascist, would be reached. “I feel I am a non-conformist, a

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protestant,” Drieu declared. Tucker describes Drieu’s temperament as “that of an individualist who would have treasured his independence under any regime. It is doubtful that he could be identified as totalitarian, as the term is ordinarily used in political discourse.”

Authoritarian yet not totalitarian, he valued independence of thought, but also intellectual responsibility. We must remember that Drieu was a man who felt at home amongst the surrealists and the avant-garde of the artistic and literary world, a man who enjoyed the company of prostitutes and was a constant flirt—he was neither a prude nor a social conservative, nor did he envisage a state controlling the intellectual climate of a society. Nonetheless, Drieu was not naive and he knew that an authoritarian system would undoubtedly be forced to limit civil liberties, at least until the system is accepted. Drieu wrote, “I may work, I have undoubtedly already worked for the establishment of a fascist regime in France, but I will always retain my freedom before this regime. I will do so tomorrow as I did yesterday. My role as an intellectual will have associated me closely with the conception of some idea but it will separate me from the new regime as soon as it actually comes into being.”

At the end of the war, as Drieu was in hiding, he wrote in the journal that has come to be known as “Final Reckoning”, part confession, part justification, about the importance of the intellectual to become involved in politics:

I did not want to be an intellectual who prudently measures his words. I could have written in secret (I had thought of doing so), written in the free zone, abroad.

No, one must assume one’s responsibilities, join impure groups, acknowledge that political law which obliges us to accept contemptible or odious allies. We must dirty our feet, at least, but not our hands. And this is what I did. My feet are dirty, but my hands are clean.

As an intellectual, a member of what would be the élite if fascism ever came to power, he had a responsibility to use his intelligence and be creative. This may sound a lot like a liberal conception of individuality and personal creation, and indeed it is,
although its applicability is limited to the intellectual élite. We must remember that Drieu described himself as “communist and reactionary, liberal and authoritarian.” Such a paradoxical statement is reminiscent of Wyndham Lewis, who made similar oxymoronic comments. Like Lewis, Drieu actively desires such reconciliation of opposites, “I always wanted to bring together and mingle contradictory concerns: nation and Europe, socialism and aristocracy, freedom of thought and authority, mysticism and anti-clericalism.” He believed that “the contradiction between individual sentiments and general ideas is the very principle of all humanity. One is human to the extent that one infringes one’s dogmas.” This recalls the debate described in Chapter Two of the seemingly inconsistent nature of much of fascist thought: modern/traditional, reactionary/revolutionary, elitist/populist.

In the same way that Drieu was able to excise elements of communism and reconcile them with capitalism, he is also able to take a part of liberalism and merge it with authoritarianism. Fascism has always been described as anti-liberal, and yet it was only a certain type of liberalism that fascism opposed. In fact, fascism as it was envisaged by intellectuals could be seen as incorporating a variant of liberalism—that element of liberalism that valued creativity and intellectual endeavour, freedom of thought and ideas, and to an extent, freedom of speech. The kind of liberalism that intellectual fascists condemned was that strain of liberalism that encouraged anarchic, anti-social behaviour and decadent materialism. Drieu could be seen as a precursor to what has become known as liberal authoritarianism. Soucy writes of the different meanings that liberalism and individualism have in Drieu’s thought:

The “individualism” he denounced was the individualism of political and cultural liberalism, which he associated with the decadence of a hedonistic, materialistic, virility-denying creed. Fascist individualism was another matter, for it meant the enhancement of one’s physical and spiritual strength.... Fascist individualism was one

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thing, liberal individualism another. It was not a double standard but a fascist standard, since Marxism and anarchism were materialistic and decadent while fascism was spiritual and virile.\textsuperscript{179}

Did France have the men to form an élite? Was the potential for fascism to be found amongst the decay of the Third Republic? Following the riots of 6 February, 1934, Drieu thought so. The Leagues which had taken to the streets on that night had shown to Drieu and many others on the right, including Brasillach, that the revolutionary spirit, the fascist élan, was present in at least some of the French. In fact, the riots that occurred three days later, when the communists demonstrated and a similar scene was caused, led Drieu to have a new respect for the communists. Undeniably, the communists showed that they, too, were capable of possessing the zeal Drieu admired in fascists: “During the month of February, the 6\textsuperscript{th} and the 9\textsuperscript{th} I learned of all the men in this city who merit the name of men and who are worthy of friendship.”\textsuperscript{180} In this way, the split between the fascist ideology and the fascist spirit was established. Although Drieu did not forget that there were essential policy and structural elements in fascism, he began, like Brasillach, to emphasise the soul of fascism: “Fascism is not a doctrine, it is a method, it is the direction of the century.”\textsuperscript{181} In fact, in some passages it seems that Drieu, and other fascists, are more concerned with cultivating this spirit than actually accomplishing anything positive. When it came to political parties, he suggested that their ideas are the least important factor to be concerned with. Rather, he recommended, one should look to the way the parties conduct themselves:

I find the best political judgment is the most simple human judgment. It is a waste of time to judge a political party by its doctrines, by its program…. It is only necessary to ask: what is your human value? What is your potential for youth and energy? What is your force for creation?\textsuperscript{182}

\textsuperscript{179} Robert Soucy, \textit{Fascist Intellectual}, p.224.
\textsuperscript{180} Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, “Air de février 34” (March 1934), \textit{Défense de l’Occident}, no.50-51 (February-March 1958), pp.91-92, quoted in Robert Soucy, \textit{Fascist Intellectual}, p.225.
\textsuperscript{181} Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, \textit{Gilles} (Paris: Gallimard, 1939)
Fascist politics would be based on action, rather than the endless deliberation and compromise of parliamentary democracy. In his novel Gilles he has the main character, Drieu’s alter-ego, experience the fanaticism of 6 February and be caught up in the movement, violence and action. Gilles, the character, declares that the most important thing to do is act—purpose or aims are unimportant, the important thing is simply to do something:

Open an office immediately to recruit combat squads. No manifestoes, no program, no new party. With the first squad that is formed, do no matter what. Attack Daladier or defend him, but with acts that are totally concrete. Invade one after another the offices of a right-wing newspaper and a left-wing newspaper. Enter the homes of this fellow and beat them up. Break away, whatever the cost, from the old routine of parties, manifestos, meetings, articles, and speeches. 

In Socialisme fasciste, he claims that this action for the sake of action is essential to the success of fascism, comparing it to the philosophy of Nietzsche:

That constant summons, which springs from every line of The Will to Power, to an unfolding of the passions and to action at any price, is definitely and immediately echoed in the motive force behind Mussolinian and Hitlerian fascism: the belief in action of whatever kind, in the virtue of action. “First action, then thought” was indeed the first password of the Arditi and the “Baltikum” of 1919.

Tucker proposes that this accent on violence that Drieu displays reveals the lack of substance to his philosophy, that it is simply destructive. Tucker writes, “His [Drieu’s] political involvement and his thought suggest more than anything else a nihilist’s desire to destroy a world he disliked.” This statement is misleading, as Drieu did have, as we have seen, quite positive and concrete ideas about what an ideal fascist society should appear as. Tucker’s point, however, is that at times Drieu can seem to be overcome with an all-encompassing despair that alternates between hopelessness and sadism, and many of Drieu’s comments suggest a desire to lash out at the world.

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en masse: “We will not fight for this or for that, we will fight against everything. That is fascism.”\(^{186}\) As Soucy describes, “Drieu’s outbursts in behalf of more action and less talk were partly the result of his frustration at the immobility of both the right and the left.”\(^{187}\) Sometimes, as the month of February 1934 showed, both the left and the right were capable of passion; Drieu wrote that “It is obviously amongst the groups traditionally supposed to be naturally anti-fascist that we find the only men susceptible to fascism: among the young radicals and the young socialists and communists.”\(^{188}\) Drieu’s faith in the left was limited—certainly there was a faction among the communists who shared the revolutionary fervour of fascism, but it must be remembered that Drieu despised communist ideology, if not its methods. He was willing to try to convert the authoritarian left to fascism, the élite leadership of the communist party, but the majority of the proletariat retained his contempt: “There might have been a young, combative “élite” among the communists whom he was willing to join—or rather co-opt to fascism—but he made it clear that it was this élite only, not the bulk of the communist movement, that he respected.”\(^{189}\) Despite the admirable qualities of some of the left, Drieu declared that the right was the indispensable factor in the success of fascism:

> The French right furnishes not only the leaders but the philosophy that traditionally permits men in our country to sustain a war effort. In this philosophy it has embraced and assimilated not only the memory of the Old regime but that of the Jacobin and Napoleonic periods.... It is possible, at certain moments, for the left to display élan and value. But it is the right which most clearly possessed the moral and intellectual reflexes which cause this élan to last.\(^{190}\)

The élite would not come from the working class, but from the lower middle classes. As Soucy writes, Drieu “looked to an élite drawn mostly from the bourgeoisie to bring about a fascist revolution in France. This élite would be not a vanguard of the

proletariat but a vanguard of the petite bourgeoisie and the peasantry, a throwback to a more primitive artisan economy.”191 We have seen in the discussion of Drieu’s attitudes to communism, which we will explore in more detail in Chapter Five, he did not consider the proletariat to be the noble and hard-working group that the Marxists believed in. If there were to be a revolution, it would come from the petit bourgeoisie, not any other class.

**Replacing the Modern World With a Fascist Utopia**

This chapter has revealed that many fascists have an allegiance to the lower middle classes, as opposed to the hereditary aristocracy that is often defended by conservatives, or the revolutionary working class glorified by Marxists. We have seen how the fascists would have liked to have structured their ideal utopian fascist society, and it is largely based on a rejection of democracy and a recognition of the importance of hierarchical organisation.

However we have also seen that the foundation of much of their rejection of democracy comes from a dissatisfaction with its application in the modern world, while not ruling it out in principle. It may seem curious at first glance that many of the fascists support for democracy does not seem to follow in its theoretical sense. Most of them do not consider it an inherently flawed idea. Rather, it is the practice of democracy that causes it to be criticised. Fascism, as we saw in Chapter Two, highly prizes national unity and the people that make up the state. This populism creates a predicament for the fascists. On the one hand, the individual’s role in society is a fundamental tenet of the fascist system. On the other hand is the idea that mankind is inherently flawed and weak. This is shown in practice, as we have seen in this chapter, by the way that democracy had, in the eyes of the fascists, given way to a dictatorship of the masses. They believed that democracy required an intelligent, informed and moral electorate, something that the modern world lacked because of a moral degeneracy and lack of cultural sophistication. Without such a constituency, democracy and parliamentary politics had degenerated into a popularity contest and catered to the basest and most primitive desires of the population. For this reason,

the fascists advocated a more authoritarian system, where the uneducated masses would have their political engagement limited to a more symbolic place.

This system would be led by an authoritarian dictator. This leader would, however, not be a tyrant, but rather a benevolent dictator. In this chapter we have discovered a feature of fascism that may not have been highlighted if one were to restrict oneself to either the regime model or the cultural model. The synthesizing of interpretation of both models and the examination of fascist utopias reveals that in an ideal fascist society, certain liberal values would be highly respected with specific parameters for whom those values would apply. This may seem strange at first, since the histories of actual fascist regimes have shown that fascists who have taken power have regularly trampled over freedoms and rights. As we have seen in our examinations of the historiography, anti-liberalism has been regularly regarded as one of the essential features of fascism. This chapter has shown us that fascists themselves, when imagining an ideal fascist world, saw an important place for certain liberal values in specific contexts, and usually limited to élites. For this purpose, it is important to see that they have disconnected the idea of liberalism from democracy, and have imagined the seemingly paradoxical possibility of a liberal dictatorship. This chapter has shown that fascists highly prize such concepts as the freedom of speech, freedom of artistic and intellectual expression and freedom of religion, although this was limited to an élite intellectual and artistic class. The individual’s ability and desire for self-improvement is a part, we will see in more depth in the next chapter, of the fascist revolution of the soul.

A fascist utopia, therefore, would be a nation with a strong central authority. We have seen how some fascists argue that a single leader is not necessary, and even undesirable, and that dictatorial power can be held by a committee, and not always an individual. This undermines another of the established qualities that fascism is said to possess, that of the worship of the leader. We have seen that the idea of the nation is more important to the fascists than the worship of an individual, and that the idea of a committee comprising an educated élite would be, in some cases, preferable. This chapter has explained that the fascists saw an influential place for the artists and intellectuals within the fascist system. As fascism claims to reward ability over birth,
the intellectual classes are elevated under fascism to a position of influence. The strict hierarchical nature of fascism places the people with identified abilities into positions of influence (how to identify those people is never answered). The ideal fascist state would therefore be an authoritarian, hierarchical regime where position is based on ability and achievement.
CHAPTER FOUR

Race, Reds and Revolution:

Specific Issues in the Fascist Utopia

Using both the cultural model and the regime model as a guide to understanding fascism, it is necessary to consider not only broad cultural questions and questions about political structure and organization, but also specific issues. The previous chapter has given us an indication of some of the four authors’ beliefs. We have seen their ideas about culture and civilization, society and tradition. This chapter will consider their responses to specific political and social issues, considering what policies they would advocate and why, and how those policies relate to the ideology of fascism as it is generally understood.

In particular, this chapter will look at three broad areas of interest and concern to the fascist intellectuals we have been examining: class and race, communism and revolution. Continuing the analysis from the previous chapter, which considered the roles of élites and classes in maintaining culture and tradition, and the place that élites and classes had in the political system, this chapter shows the importance of the role that classes and élites have in the fascist utopias of the intellectuals. For most of the fascists, the intellectuals of a society were the vanguard of culture and the guardians of tradition. It would be the responsibility of that class to preserve civilization and the native culture of their country. The issue of race will also be examined, and it will be shown that although most of the fascist intellectuals were anti-Semitic (Drieu is the exception), their anti-Semitism was more cultural than racial (Pound is the exception on that issue). Indeed, we shall see that the issue of race actually reverts to being a part of the larger issue of national identity. The intellectuals who were racists and anti-Semites based these prejudices on ideas of unity and cultural resemblance more than racial identity. Their xenophobia arose out of a desire for national conformity rather than eliminationist tendencies. We shall see that one of the fascist intellectuals under review, Drieu, actually dismisses the entire notion of racial identity and
explicitly states that cultural and national identities are the only distinguishing features of identity in the modern world. Thus we get an idea of the place of race and anti-Semitism in their fascist utopias being more a question of conformity to cultural norms rather than racial origins.

This chapter will also show that these fascists prefigured the debate about the nature of the relationship between communism and fascism, which we saw in Chapter Two was so important in the historiography of fascism. While that debate occurred in the early days of the Cold War and thus emphasised the dictatorial and repressive aspects of the two regimes of Stalin and Hitler, the fascists we are examining also spent a great deal of time considering the similarities and differences. We shall see that some aspects of communism, especially its authoritarianism and pseudo-religious traits, were admired by these fascist intellectuals, in particular Drieu. It will be revealed that there was much about which they disagreed as well, especially economically.

Finally, this chapter will re-visit the role of revolution in fascist ideology. While in the previous chapter we looked at the fascists’ belief in the necessity of revolution for fascists to bring about a cultural and political rebirth of the nation, this chapter will consider other forms of revolution. The varieties of revolution that appealed to the fascist intellectuals beyond the political and cultural were, we shall see, connected with the fascist embrace of violence and war as a cleansing activity on a national and international level. It also took the form of the fascist revolution of the body, that glorified physicality, youth and vitality, as well as revolution of the soul that sought a spiritual reawakening on the personal level that was in some ways analogous to the spiritual awakening of the nation.

Class and Race

Ezra Pound’s anti-Semitism was more than a background prejudice, even if Pound later in life tried to dismiss it to Allen Ginsberg: “the worst mistake that I made was that stupid, suburban prejudice of anti-Semitism”1 Examples of Pound’s anti-

Semitism are legion. His Cantos are littered with derogatory references to and characterisations of the Jews, as Robert Casillo’s *The Genealogy of Demons* shows.\(^2\) What is interesting is not that he was a racist, but to what ends that racism was put. Leon Surette emphasises the difference between racism and what follows from it:

>>Racism is a moral failure common to all communities independently of political philosophy…. Racism is a regrettable human failing, but it is mass liquidation that distinguishes totalitarian movements, not racism.\(^3\)

Pound’s racism was concomitant with his paranoia of a Jewish conspiracy. Jews, Pound believed, were both responsible for usury and communism. Such beliefs were common, shared by many beyond fascists, and Pound’s connections were not unusual on that score.

Pound’s rabid anti-Semitism is nowhere more apparent than in his willingness to believe in the veracity of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.\(^4\) This document purported to be the minutes of a meeting of the world’s Jewish leaders and detailed the plan for world domination through the manipulation of money markets and gold, and the subversion of democracy to suit their nefarious ends. Despite being widely known to be a forgery by the Russian Czar’s secret police and being full of internal inconsistencies and factual errors, Pound was always willing to take it as evidence of a grand Jewish conspiracy. Major Douglas, who we have seen was the originator of the Social Credit school of economics of which Pound was a proponent, described the Protocols as a “Machiavellian scheme for the enslavement of the world”. Of the question of whether the Protocols were actually genuine or not, Douglas went on to say that “the authenticity of this document is a matter of little importance; what is interesting about it, is the fidelity with which the methods by which such enslavement might be brought about can be seen reflected in the facts of everyday experience.”\(^5\)

Such conspiratorial thinking is not new. Groups as various as Christians, Freemasons,

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\(^3\) Leon Surette, “Pound, Postmodernism, and Fascism”, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 59(2) (1989), p.342.


Rosicrucians, Catholics, the Mafia and the CIA have at one time or another been accused of controlling or attempting to control the world. Conspiracy theories are popular amongst those with a certainty in their own genius because they involve the theorist being able to discern a greater truth than any one else. It is a simple and self-congratulatory solution to the world’s problems – they believed that there must be an evil force leading towards doom, and only they have the acumen and insight to recognise it. Surette has examined the connection between the belief in secret histories and fascism. Although an anti-Semite, Pound did not subscribe to the wholesale conspiracy theories of the Nazis that linked Zionism, Communism and Masonry in an all-encompassing theory. The fact that he was not accepting of every aspect of Nazi propaganda suggests, however, that since he had the ability to discriminate between the tenable and untenable parts of Nazism, he believed the other aspects of fascism more fervently.

Pound’s contempt for Judaism carried over to Christianity, which he saw as tainted by its relationship with the Jewish tradition. The Old Testament of the Bible was “the black book” and he was often extremely critical about it:

> Nothing cd. be less civil, or more hostile to any degree of polite civilization than the tribal records of the Hebrews. There is not a trace of civilization from the first lines of Genesis up to the excised account of Holophernes. The revival of these barbarous texts in the time of Luther and Calvin has been an almost unmitigated curse to the Occident.

However Pound does not dismiss religion out of hand. His arrival at fascism is the result of a messianic quest for something to believe in, hence his idolising of Mussolini as a god-like superman. He valued order and authority, and may have ended up as a High Anglican like Eliot or a secular Catholic like Maurras if he had not become infatuated with Mussolini and Fascism. He wrote in his *Guide to Kulchur* “I repeat: I cd. be quite a ‘good catholic’ IF they wd. let me pick my own saints and theologians.”

This predilection opens up a new area of Pound’s thought, as William Chace has

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observed: “Our awareness of a religious impulse in Pound’s mind serves to counteract our suspicions that he can only curse the evil surrounding him and can praise nothing. True enough, much of his energy is consumed by political hatred.” However, while he might be negative much of the time, it should be remembered that his beliefs have their foundation in a desire to improve and will to create. As with many of the political and social issues under discussion, this was related to building an ideal society, a fascist utopia.

Robert Brasillach was not uncommon amongst Frenchmen in his anti-Semitism, although he thought that he was. He advocated what he called a rational anti-Semitism, as opposed to what he perceived as the irrational emotional anti-Semitism that he saw displayed by others. *Je Suis Partout* was clearly an anti-Semitic newspaper, and several members of the staff were fanatical in their anti-Jewishness. Alice Kaplan calls Brasillach “moderate in his tone and temperament compared to others on the paper—the rabid anti-Semite Lucien Rebatet or Pierre Antoine Cousteau, a specialist in Anglo-American conspiracy theory,” although the content of his beliefs are clear. The exception in the group of *Je Suis Partout* writers was Thierry Maulnier, who, in his own journal, *Combat*, argued that anti-Semitism often stemmed from a feeling of inferiority that anti-Semites felt in relation to Jews. Maulnier denied as “mystical nonsense” theories of Jewish conspiracy and world dominance. Brasillach, on the other hand, saw the Jew as a problem in French society, a source of many of the ills that were afflicting the country: “For so many questions today, look for the Jew and you will find the solution. The Jew is divisive, and yet here too the concern for unity must guide us.”

Under the guest-editorship of Lucien Rebatet, two special issues of *Je Suis Partout* were produced that dealt specifically with what they termed the “Jewish Question”, number 386, 15 April 1938 and number 430, 17 February 1939. Like many extremist works, these issues denied their fanaticism, claiming to be objective and

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rational. Brasillach himself always claimed to deal with the “Jewish Question” in a dispassionate and unprejudiced manner. In the 1938 issue, he proposed a new attitude that would go towards solving the problem:

We do not want to kill anyone; we do not want to organize any sort of pogrom whatsoever. But we do also think that the best way to prevent the always unforeseeable reactions of an anti-Semitism of instinct is to organize an anti-Semitism of reason....All peoples have been anti-Semitic: Romans, Arabs, European nations. All regimes have also been: theocracies, monarchies, republics, soviets. ... We would like this issue to serve to discern the motives of this instinctual reaction and to transform it into a rational decision.13

The issue of the “Jewish Question” concerns not only what to do with the Jews, but also how to deal with anti-Semites. In order to prevent a dangerous, perhaps violent, anti-Semitism, Brasillach proposed an anti-Semitism that he believed was based on rationality. Brasillach offered this remedy to the supposed Jewish problem:

To consider all Jews who are citizens of foreign countries foreigners and set up the most severe roadblocks to their naturalization—to consider the entirety of the Jews established for a long time in France as a minority under a statute that protects them at the same time as it protects us from them—to never forget services rendered, sacrifices, loyalty, and fidelity without personal reserve, if one is ever confronted with them—these are the only ways to assure, without violence, national peace and the absolute independence of the French soil.14

Thus Brasillach claims to be offering a rational solution that would prevent violence and curtail the more radical elements of the anti-Semitic movement. In ‘Les Français devant les Juifs’, Brasillach asserts that he and the Je Suis Partout staff are “not at all prejudiced and not racist... not xenophobic,” because they do not claim all Jews are evil and accept that some have produced works or ideas of merit.15 Violence is not the civilised solution, and Brasillach opposed the kind of impulsive brutality that

characterised the common street anti-Semitism of pogroms. However his reluctance to use unrestrained violent behaviour was borne not out of concern for Jews, but rather for French society as a whole. “Persecutions have always been the product of peoples who were anarchistic and insecure about their power”, he argued, and the French nation must strive to be above that sort of insecurity and disorder.

For Brasillach, anti-Semitism was less about racism and more a question of national identity. In his opinion, Jews were not truly French, and as outsiders they had to be treated with suspicion and their patriotism had to be questioned, especially during a time of war. He wrote that “we continue to treat the Jewish problem as we have always treated it, without any sentimentality. We are not barbarians and butchers. ... It is necessary to resolve the Jewish problem because the Jew is the foreigner, he is the enemy, he pushed us into war, and it is just that he pay.”

David Carroll has observed that Brasillach is vague about what he understands by the term “pay”, and he questions the truthfulness of Je Suis Partout’s claims to support a non-violent solution: “they propose a nationalism that is violently anti-Semitic but which claims not to propose or support violent solutions to the ‘Jewish question.’”

Public debate was centred around a piece of proposed legislation known as the Grammont Law or Loi Marchandeau in March 1939, which was intended to create a law that would prevent the use of hate language in the press, especially such language directed against Jews. This measure was designed to prevent the escalation of the feelings of anti-Semitism in the public that were being encouraged by the far right papers and journals. As Alice Kaplan notes, this law “brought out the cruellest strain of Brasillach’s sense of humor.” For an irreverent and prejudiced intellect like Brasillach’s, the prohibition against the use of certain words or phrases was a challenge, and he used this opportunity to produce one of the most sordid pieces of anti-Semitic journalism. Switching “la question singe” (the monkey question) for “la question juive” (the Jewish question), Brasillach wrote in a way that was legal by the

16 Robert Brasillach, Je Suis Partout, no. 514 (2 June 1941).
17 David Carroll, “Literary Fascism or the Aestheticizing of Politics”, p.708.
technical wording of the law, while the absolute antithesis of the spirit of the law.

Brasillach wrote:

What tribunal would dare to condemn us... if we denounced the extraordinary invasion of Paris and of France by monkeys? Doubtless you’ve remarked that in the old days, monkeys were restricted to certain regions, that is to certain zoos. Today you see them everywhere... we must acknowledge that there has developed in the public a rather strong anti-monkey complex. Are you going to the theater? The audience is full of monkeys, they’re hanging everywhere, in the balconies, on stage. On the bus, in the metro? Monkeys. And if I sit down innocently in the café? On my right, on my left, two or three monkeys take their places. ... Their cleverness in imitation the gestures of men means that sometimes we don’t recognize them right away. ... What we are calling anti-simietism (please read this carefully), is becoming a more serious necessity every day.\(^\text{19}\)

As Kaplan noted, the image that Brasillach used was not new, but he certainly took the propaganda to a level beyond that being practiced: “The theme of Jew as monkey is commonplace in Nazi anti-Semitic poster art, but the linguistic pun is Brasillach’s own contribution to the hideous genre. This was the writer at his most obnoxious: hyped up by his own brilliance, using his taste for wordplay with a schoolboy glee.”\(^\text{20}\) This could be extended to most of Brasillach’s political thought—the dilettantism of a clever, malicious youth.

During the Occupation, Brasillach’s attitude towards the Jews hardened, and he claimed that the forced emigration of the Jewish population of France was necessary. “The Archbishop of Toulouse protests against the measures taken against the stateless Jews in the unoccupied territory,” Brasillach wrote in 1942. “He speaks of the brutalities and separations that we are all ready to disapprove, because it is necessary to free oneself of Jews in block and not keep the little ones. Here humanity is in agreement with wisdom.”\(^\text{21}\) This statement, to “not keep the little ones” would come back to haunt Brasillach at his trial, as it was taken to be an endorsement to

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\(^{19}\) Ibid, pp.24-25.
\(^{20}\) Ibid, p.25.
send Jewish children to the extermination camps. Depending on whether Brasillach was ignorant regarding the eventual fates of those sent to the East or not, either the statement is incredibly naïve or incredibly hard-hearted, and probably criminal. Either Brasillach is supporting the deportation of children out of a desire to keep families together and he is completely ignorant of their eventual fates, or he is acknowledging that the effort to cleanse France would be in vain if a young Jewish population was left remaining to rise again after a generation or two. The first position seems unlikely for such an intelligent and informed writer, and one may conclude that the family argument he makes is a cover for more sinister motives. Brasillach did not shift from this position of keeping families together, even after the war when he was in custody and fighting for his life. In his “Lettre à un soldat de la classe 60,” in Ecrit à Fresnes, he wrote that he was against “the extent of the anti-Jewish measures” that were taken: “I am anti-Semitic, and I know through the study of history the horror of Jewish dictatorships, but it seems to me, and has always seemed to me, inadmissible that members of families have been separated from each other, children disregarded, deportations organized which could have been defended if they had as their goal, hidden from us, death, pure and simple. This is not the way to resolve the Jewish problem.”

Elsewhere, Brasillach praises Josef Goebbels for his “humane solution to the Jewish question.” One memoir, albeit published many years after the event, claims that in private, Brasillach made a comment that goes beyond his carefully worded written remarks. Heller quotes Brasillach as having said, “They should all be killed, even the little children”. This is in complete divergence with his claims that “we don’t want to kill anyone, we don’t want to organize any pogrom.”

When it came to racism, Drieu differed significantly from other fascists—he did not share the irrational craze of the anti-Semitism of Pound, nor the more social anti-Semitism of Brasillach. Drieu found the notion of racism and racialism to be preposterous. He found the claims of the Germans, especially, that race was the most important factor of a nation’s character, flawed. Drieu saw the history of races to be more complex and fluid than the way the Nazis (or for that matter, the French anti-

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22 David Carroll, “Literary Fascism or the Aestheticizing of Politics”, p.724 (n29).
Semites) saw it. Drieu thought that those who placed so much importance on race were confusing what made a nation a community. Drieu argued that place and culture, more than the genetics of race and blood, were of primary importance: “If they think they escape from the overwhelming belief in the determinism of place, they are deluding themselves. What they take away from place, they transfer to blood. They accomplish only a futile displacement within the limitations of the same determinism.” Such confusion leads to a mistaken identification with ancient races that no longer truly exist:

Celts, Germans, these are words to designate almost identical groups in which for already thousands of years primitive races were mixed together. Races, they already did not exist in those days, which is all the more reason for this to be true today.

Indeed, part of the cultural supremacy of Europe depended on the traffic of beliefs and technology that comes with the mixture of races:

If the identity between race and spiritual imagination determined the most specific ideas, there would be no more play or movement of ideas, and humanity would remain immobile, merely balanced between three or four monotone melodies.

For the Nazis specifically, he sought to deflate many of their concepts and to rebut their claims to the uniqueness or superiority of the Aryans. If truth be told, Drieu contended, they had no real claim to the title of Aryan in the first place:

First of all, you are not the same as the ancient Germans, enough of such nonsense. No more than we are Gauls or Latins, or than the Italians are Romans. Images drawn from poetry, given the aura of legendary figures by nostalgic petit bourgeois buried in the libraries of the nineteenth century. Gods soon exhausted. You are a group of people in the middle of Europe who have painfully formed a State and a Nation.

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However, although the reality of races might be nonsense to Drieu, there was something to be said for the myth of races. It is this aspect that Drieu attached himself to, and connected it to his arguments against decadence. In Drieu’s use of the word, “Jew” came to symbolise another aspect of decadent French society. Like the bourgeoisie which he separated into strong and weak, he distinguished Jews and Hebrews. Hebrews, the ancient race, were strong and proud and worthy of respect. “The Jew”, on the other hand, was decadent, avaricious and thoroughly modern. This distinction Drieu drew between Hebrews and Jews raises the question of whether a non-Jew could be “Jewish”, that is, having the qualities that Drieu identified as Jewish. The question is never answered explicitly, although it clearly demonstrates that Drieu did think of race itself as important as the cultural implications of race.

In Drieu’s mind, the question of race became one of culture, and he acknowledged that in that sense, race was important:

Blood, yes, I believe in it, because it is a myth. I love myths. A secular state of the soul can have a physiological effect; thus I bow to your idea of blood.... But the Hebrews became Jews. We are all in the process of becoming Jews. The Romans, at the end of the Empire, had intimately become Jews.... The Jew is a perfect example of the decadent. We are all in Europe in the process of becoming decadents. 

Soucy wrote that the ascension of the leftist Popular Front following the anticipation of a right-wing coup d’état surrounding the 6 February riots contributed to Drieu’s anti-Semitism.

With the rise to power in 1936 of Léon Blum’s Popular Front, Drieu began to move toward anti-Semitism. The fact that Blum and several members of his cabinet were Jewish made it expedient for the French extreme right to revive racial slurs that had proved powerful during the Dreyfus Affair.

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But, as Soucy goes on to say, the anti-Semitism of many on the right was less a matter of conviction and more one of expediency. The same could be said for Drieu. Before the war, Drieu had many relationships with Jews. Drieu had been married to a Jewish woman, and one of his best friends and a colleague in the PPF, Bertrand de Jouvenel, was Jewish. Bertrand de Jouvenel was Jewish.32 Renee Winegarten suggested that Drieu may have found rich Jews, and therefore Jews in general, to be a “a corrupting influence”, since they offered a life of luxury and decadence that was in contrast to the stark artistic asceticism that he aspired to.33 Thus Drieu’s anti-Semitism could be seen as part of his hatred of a society that had been plunged into decadence, the Jews being a part of it, and, given the times, the Jews became a symbol of that decadence. In Drieu’s utopian ideal, the goal is not to be rid of the Jews, but rather to be rid of the decadence. There is nothing to suggest in Drieu’s thought that there is anything intrinsically undesirable in Jews, but rather that they are often, and not always, the manifestation or embodiment of other problems. The image of the Jew was also intimately associated with communism, which we shall discuss next. This was not an uncommon association, as Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda proves. Just as Drieu’s assessment of Jews was unconventional, we will next see that his assessment of communism is equally nuanced.

Communism

Communism had a varied reception in Europe. For some it was the extension of the French Revolution and its principles of peace, egalitarianism and equality of opportunity. It was a utopian ideal of prosperity and happiness for everyone, not merely for those lucky to have been born into wealth. For others it represented a dangerous threat to the status quo, a menace to a long-standing way of life and a total subversion of a set of values and principles. The way the four writers under discussion saw communism informs our understanding of their fascist beliefs. By examining

32 Tony Judt considers Jouvenel’s to be a “paradoxical condition”—“half-Jewish, a friend of Blum’s and against the Munich compromise but a member in 1936 of the neo-Fascist Parti Populaire français and attracted by the theme and appeal of order and stability”: Tony Judt, Post Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944-1956 (Berkeley: University of California, 1992), p.21.
what they admire and what they disapprove of in communism we can predict what they would like to keep and what they would like to remove. Communism and socialism were topics that any early twentieth century intellectual would need to address, and the variety of responses to communism from the four writers under discussion reveals, as we have seen in the historiographical chapter of this thesis, that there is no clear cut distinction between the left and right in fascist thought. We will see in this chapter, as historians have since realized, that fascism drew from all aspects of the political spectrum, and that communist and socialist ideas made their way into fascist thinking, even while communist and socialist parties were demonized by fascists as the enemy.

In 1927, Pound was willing to acknowledge that communism did indeed appeal to him, writing that “both Fascio and the Russian revolution are interesting phenomena”34, and he contributed to many leftist journals. However in 1930, after an acrimonious personal falling out with the editor of the communist newspaper New Masses, his attraction to communism faded away.35 This is another instance, similar to those in the previous chapter, where personal relationships influenced Pound’s politics. His attraction to Fascism was as much about a personal attraction to Mussolini as it was about the policies, and in this case, his move from the left was greatly influenced by personal animosity towards leftist thinkers.

Despite his drift away from communism, Pound was still able to admire some of its founders, in particular Lenin, whom he praised in Jefferson and/or Mussolini. Lenin was another example of the leader as great man, an example of that quality of wilful artisan who built a society from nothing. Lenin, like Jefferson and Mussolini, recognised the triviality of all other activities when compared to the achievement of one man, with imagination and muscle, building a state. As Pound remarked, “The rest is political ‘machinery’, bureaucracy, flummydiddle”.36 Pound admired certain aspects of the communist movement, in particular the authoritarian and structural features—the characteristics that it shared with fascism. The ideal state model that

35 E. Fuller Torrey, The Roots of Treason, p.135.
he desired was authoritarian and highly structured, characteristics shared with the communist/socialist state. What Pound did not sympathise with is communism’s glorification of the lowest class, the rule of the masses: “Communism with its dictatorship of the proletariat is merely barbarous and Hebrew and it is on a level with primitive theocracies.” Pound shared this disdain for the poor and uneducated with Lewis and the French fascists. This raises serious questions about the consistency of Pound’s system of fascism. While on the one hand he promotes fascism as the only political ideology that allows and encourages self-actualization of both the individual and the nation, on the other hand Pound has clear disdain for the poor and the working class. Pound’s imagining of his fascist utopia is one of enlightened leaders and state-sponsored intellectual élites, as we saw in the previous chapter, but the place of the poor and the working class is unclear.

Brasillach and his associates at Je Suis Partout were contemptuous towards the Popular Front and left wing parties in general. The antagonism had been long lasting, but it had been exacerbated by the events of 6 February 1934, which they believed had had the possibility of being a right-wing putsch, but instead had been hijacked by the socialists and the communists, who used the fear of the right wing to win at the next election. While having nothing but scorn for the Popular Front and the Communist intellectuals who supported it, Brasillach had a grudging respect for certain aspects of the Russian Communist movement. What he admired in communism were specific characteristics that he had admired in all the political movements that he became attached to through his career. We have seen how the theatricality of fascism was a great attraction for him. He recognised, as Pound did, that Communism, too, had a degree of lyricism to it. He wrote:

> We have thought for some time that Fascism was a form of poetry, and the very poetic substance of the twentieth century (along with Communism no doubt).... I’m well aware that communism also has its equally exalting grandeur. Perhaps in a thousand years’ time,

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people will confuse the two twentieth-century Revolutions.\textsuperscript{38}

For Brasillach, fascism stood in contrast to communism in that each country was free to develop its own brand of nationalism, and then united with other fascist nations as a coalition of distinct national identities with a shared set of common values. The international aspirations of the Soviet Union to unite socialist parties and movements under one banner ignored and obliterated the uniqueness of a country’s culture in the desire to homogenise all of Europe. Brasillach went to pains to point out that there was indeed the possibility of a so-called White International in opposition to the Red International, a unity of ideals and a shared legacy in the writings of Maurras:

\begin{quote}
Wherever a young nationalist movement takes shape, whether it be in Belgium, in Switzerland, in Poland, it turns first of all to the revolutionary traditionalism of Maurras. Who would be so bold as to say that his ideas are foreign to Germany? And if the Soviet empire is one day overturned, would we not have to take into account that small group of young Russians who are in the process of elaborating... something that bears a strong resemblance to the royalist doctrine of the Action Française.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

While Brasillach was imagining a coalition, or at least a loose grouping, of nationalist movements that all drew on the same royalist ideas of Maurras, Drieu was incorporating elements of the left wing into his thought. It is important to recall that Drieu’s first major book of fascist theory was called \textit{Socialisme fasciste} (1934). Indeed, Drieu wrote that “it is so much more important to be a socialist when one is a fascist than to be anything else.”\textsuperscript{40} But, as Soucy notes, “it was a strange kind of socialism that he was referring to, if it was a socialism at all, denouncing Marxism as decadent and related only tangentially to past French utopian socialisms, at least to their humanitarian aspects.”\textsuperscript{41} Drieu’s anti-Marxist socialism was less concerned with

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{38}] Peter Tame, \textit{The Ideological Hero in the Novels of Robert Brasillach, Roger Vailland & André Malraux} (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p.450.
\item [\textsuperscript{39}] Robert Brasillach, \textit{Je Suis Partout}, November 7, 1936.
\end{itemize}
materialistic issues regarding the treatment of the poor and the living conditions of the working class than it was concerned with the spiritual aspects of society.

Drieu’s admiration for communism may seem contradictory if one does not understand what he means when he talks about “communism”. He defines it thus:

What is Russian communism? A government, that is all. “Dictatorship” is a weak word. It is always the same story: some strong men join together in some corner of the country, gradually form a gang, and then this gang seizes power and guards it from and against everybody.

This is what happened in Russia and in Italy. Tomorrow it will happen in France, in England, in Germany.

Must we not ally ourselves with these young forces which represent the new capitalist institutions whose instincts will renew and rejuvenate the State?\(^{42}\)

Thus when he speaks of “communism”, he does not mean the ideology of Marxism. When Drieu speaks of communism and socialism, he is speaking of an authoritarian and capitalist dictatorship, not a Marxist redistribution of wealth. For Drieu, capitalism was an essential element of Western culture and an important part of the fascist ideology. He foresaw cooperation between the great capitalists and the dictators:

A government that would truly be of the right, that is to say, a dictatorship of great servants of capitalism, has something chimerical about it. In any case, it would require genius. It would require our captains of industry to know how to gather around them, in order to counsel and magnify them, certain men of intelligence and heart who would give them the heart and the intelligence that they do not have, that they dare not have.

And yet perhaps only dictatorships of this sort can save the United States of Europe from anarchy and invasion, rather than dictatorships derived from the democracy of the middle classes.\(^{43}\)

\(^{42}\) Drieu, quoted in Frédéric Lefèvre, “Une Heure avec Drieu La Rochelle,” *Nouvelle littéraires* (2 January, 1926), p.6.

\(^{43}\) Drieu, quoted in Frédéric Lefèvre, “Une Heure avec Drieu La Rochelle,” *Nouvelle littéraires* (2 January, 1926), p.6.
In the above statement, Drieu mentioned anarchy as something to be avoided, but he also recognised the anarchic origins of capitalism:

What characterized capitalism in its first phase was anarchy. Anarchy in every sense. Anarchy in the relations between capitalists, in the conduct of their affairs, in their relations with other classes. Yet today all this has changed.\(^{44}\)

Changed, but not for the better. Anarchy in the above sense meant pure competition, the time of the artisan competing with another artisan, rather than the modern situation of multinational corporations capable of price-fixing and control of the market. Drieu lamented, “Capitalism is in the process of passing from the sphere of animal passions to the sphere of intellectual passions. Practically speaking, everyone has become a wage-earner.”\(^{45}\) The bourgeoisie, formerly composed of artisans and small businessmen, was being transformed from comprising individuals to being “white collar workers”: “the bourgeoisie have become slaves of capitalism like the proletariat.”\(^{46}\) Modern capitalism, the capitalism that Drieu objects to, has a levelling quality to it that makes it akin to Marxism:

Capitalism wishes to communise consumption, that is to say, it wants to render it egalitarian; standardization can mean nothing else. In order for the capitalist to accomplish his designs, everybody must buy and possess the same goods: the same auto, the same clothing, the same apartment, the same books.\(^{47}\)

This form of capitalism contributes to the decadence that Drieu wishes to destroy. It is a form of capitalism that discourages innovation and invites corruption and intellectual indolence. And communism is debased by the same materialistic concerns of capitalism. Of Lenin, Drieu commented, “He is bent upon sacrificing as much time as possible to the learned and debilitating religion of Europeans and Americans: Production.”\(^{48}\) Thus when Drieu exalts the communism of Russia, it is not Marxist economics or the encouragement of classlessness that he is commending. Those

\(^{44}\) Drieu, “La Métamorphose du capitalisme”, *La Revue européenne*, no.6 (May 1928), p.564
\(^{45}\) Ibid, p.566.
\(^{46}\) Ibid, p.568.
\(^{47}\) Ibid, p.568.
elements of socialism and communism had to be discarded, and the authoritarian component integrated with capitalism. Drieu saw the example of Italy as a paradigm of this integration: “The Italian petite bourgeoisie, led by Mussolini, has turned away from the anachronism that communism and socialism present for the West.” He stated further, “It has boldly allied itself with capitalism.” It is this lower middle class that exalts the virtues of hard work and individuality that Drieu admires, as we have seen in Chapter Three where Drieu praised the youthful vitality of the petit bourgeoisie. These are not the same bland white collar workers that Drieu criticized above and feared were taking over; rather, this lower middle class that Drieu admires are self-sufficient businessmen and artisans, small business owners who, through hard work and personal commitment contribute something personal and unique to society.

Drieu’s discussion of the bourgeoisie, an important subject of analysis in communist thought, reveals that he does not see it as a uniform group. Indeed, he sees it as being composed as a vibrant, individualistic petit bourgeoisie in contrast to a decadent, lazy middle class. Soucy, who has done an exhaustive study of Drieu’s fiction, concludes that “a recurring theme in his novels and essays was the contrast between the vigorous, combative, Darwinian bourgeois that was his ideal and the comfortable, protected, effete bourgeois.” Nevertheless, Drieu squarely identified himself as a member of the middle classes, noting that “I feel myself just as ill at ease in an exclusively proletarian meeting as in a salon of millionaires.” Thus his socialism was imbued with a bourgeois prejudice against the working class as well as the upper class. The ideal lower middle class, the petit bourgeoisie that Drieu admired was that section of society that was composed of men who worked hard for their position in life—neither proletarian worker-drones nor heirs to trust funds. He admired their drive for success and they represented the best aspect of capitalism, that of competition and individual achievement. Drieu’s brother observed “that one reason Drieu was drawn to Doriot’s Parti Populaire français in 1936 was because he believed that the bourgeoise who supported it were mainly small businessmen and artisans who

were self-made men, not *fils de papa*. Drieu was less sympathetic to the *Croix de feu* because he felt that it drew its supporters primarily from the upper bourgeoisie.\(^{52}\) Drieu’s affinity with the petit bourgeoisie was his motivation for not associating himself with the communists, whom we will see he admired for certain reasons. He could not empathise with the proletariat, and thus he could not become a communist.

Drieu wrote about the differences between the proletariat that he despised and the bourgeoisie that he revered:

> Those traits of working-class life that are supposedly the basis of a school for courage are not decisive if one looks at them closely. The worker has a more demanding economic life? The worker has a harder physical life? But how many bourgeois have an undemanding economic life, from the top to the bottom of the ladder? The comfort which the bourgeois has is always threatened by ruin. As for the hardness of the work, it varies radically from worker to worker depending on his trade. The machine tends more and more in a number of cases to turn the worker into a seated and inert figure like the bourgeois. For the bourgeois, however, sports restore his physical force.

> All these considerations can cause us to doubt the central idea of Marxism: that [the proletariat] is better prepared than others by their living conditions for that war which is revolution, and because of this is predisposed to victory.\(^{53}\)

Drieu did not give credit to the foundations of Marxist thought, although he did credit certain aspects of the Leninist technique. Once again, the style of the communists in power is what interests Drieu. The proletariat was not sufficiently sophisticated to bring about revolution, nor were they sufficiently pure. The proletariat’s decadence led to an inability to be able to lead the revolution. The Marxist reliance on the proletariat was doomed to disappointment as the proletariat lacked the direction and guidance that the bourgeoisie possessed.

> We will vanquish the socialists-communists because the workers have only slimy intellectuals or other workers for leaders, men who lack a hereditary sense of

\(^{52}\) Robert Soucy, *Fascist Intellectual*, p.121.

command. (It takes at least a generation above the stage of pure innocence, an uncle who owns a bistro or a father who is a schoolteacher, to acquire a sense of command.)

As we have seen in the discussion of Drieu’s elitism, Drieu did not have faith in the masses to be able to command a revolution. Only an élite, drawn from all segments of society, bourgeois as well as “the élite of the trade unionists, the élite of the engineers, and the élite of the employers”, would possess that spirit. While this might work in philosophy, Soucy notes that in practice, it would fail to gain a base of support: “his repeatedly expressed contempt for the masses … could only grate upon the Jacobin egalitarianism of large numbers of lower middle class Frenchmen.” In addition, Soucy doubts whether Drieu’s economic policies would be accepted by the middle class that he is championing: “Drieu’s paeans to free enterprise capitalism, rugged individualism, and heroic competition were also ill-suited to France’s petite bourgeoisie, a class that as whole was characterized by its love of economic protectionism, its avoidance of risk, and its distaste for competition.”

Drieu, however, is not in favour of anarchic, unregulated capitalism: he knows that that system had led to the current situation of monopoly capitalists and lack of competition. Drieu is relying on the sort of prejudices that Soucy describes as being one of the reasons why the middle class will accept his form of fascist socialist capitalism: “Fascism was born and grew among the petite bourgeoisie who were not influenced by capitalism but who, quite the contrary, were in reaction against it.”

There were aspects of the communist program that Drieu appreciated. In a display of the recognition that fascism was a combinatory philosophy that took from both ends of the political spectrum, Drieu noted that he felt himself to be “communist and reactionary, liberal and authoritarian” (this echoes Wyndham Lewis’s seemingly paradoxical self-description quoted in the Introduction that he was “partly communist

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56 Robert Soucy, Fascist Intellectual, p.166.
and partly fascist, with a distinct streak of monarchism in my marxism, but at bottom, with a healthy passion for order"). Both communism and capitalism were evolving, combining and developing into a new system for the modern world.\(^5\)

When Drieu says that he is communist, however, he does not mean communist economics—economically he is a capitalist. The communism he has in mind is, again, the style of politics, the authoritarian methods that it used. Drieu stated in an interview that:

Communism cannot be imposed upon the West without relying on an exterior violence coming from the East, just as the Christians could not have remade Europe without the Barbarians.

The socialists correspond to those already tired Christians who corrupted the empire and were corrupted by it.

The Western communists are like those armies of Coenobite Egyptians who assaulted Alexandria, driven by a furious disgust, false Barbarians, eaters of excrement.

The bourgeoisie must awaken itself and overcome its lassitude with a new élan.\(^6\)

And the only way to “overcome its lassitude” was to “borrow the arms of its adversaries: violence and tyranny.”\(^6\) Communism, with its rejection of democracy and incorporation of authoritarian dictatorship, was in a stronger position than the Western nations that stuck with parliaments, in the sense that it was not constrained in action by the democratic process. If Europe wanted to prevent itself from being crushed by the communists in the East: “It was precisely communism’s acceptance of dictatorship that gave it an advantage over capitalism and that had to be emulated if the West were to rebuff the threat from the East. To adopt “communism” in this sense was to defend capitalism, not to renounce it.”\(^6\) In Drieu’s novel Gilles, the main character describes his brief interest in communism:

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\(^6\) Drieu, quoted in Frédéric Lefèvre, “Une Heure avec Drieu La Rochelle,” Nouvelle littéraires (2 January, 1926), p.6.

\(^6\) Ibid.

Gilles had never thought for a single second that it was possible to believe in equality, in progress... What attracted him about communism? Once he had set aside the ridiculous pretentiousness and the odious hypocrisy of the doctrine, he occasionally glimpsed in the communist movement an unexpected chance to re-establish an aristocracy in the world on the basis of the most extreme, the most complete popular deception.  

Indeed, we see here that Drieu is already identifying that the communists have much in common with fascism as Drieu understands it. This recalls the debate that we considered in Chapter Two about the connections historians saw between fascism and communism, in particular their totalitarian tendencies. Indeed, and this may appear paradoxical given the hostility between the two ideologies, Drieu is suggesting that communism may in fact be in possession of the fascist spirit that he knew was essential for the new élite to demonstrate if they were to bring about a fascist revolution: "In 1918, I detected that Russian communism was a means of creating a new aristocracy, and I wasn’t mistaken. I seek in fascism, the European form of socialism, this new aristocracy."  

This was aristocracy of merit rather than privilege, an aristocracy of intellectuals and technocrats with the education and creativity to lead a nation. Many of the qualities that Drieu admired in fascists were also included in the Bolshevik tendency:

> What I like about fascism is a certain virile disposition. It has come about in Rome and Berlin ... as the result of a certain physical need in man. This need is satisfied when a man has the impression of having pushed his body as far as his ideas. It is a question of courage.

To be sure, courage is not ignored by communism either—in any case, by Russian communism which is frankly and consciously bellicose. It is less clearly conceived by European communists. In effect, they have inherited—in spite of their suspicion—many of the prejudices of the old world of the Left. For example, they are pacifists...

I see in this duality the secret cause of the failure of communism in Europe since the war. As for the

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63 Drieu, Gilles, p.367.
annihilation of the liberal world—Radical and Social Democrat—we must view it in terms of its total rejection of the virile virtues.  

It was Drieu’s natural inclination towards the bourgeoisie that prevented him from being convinced by the communist cause. Components of communism intrigued him, but on the whole, he could not commit himself to it. He wrote about the stage in his life, during the twenties, when he had considered becoming a member of the Communist Party, as at that time he admired their efforts to bring about a radical change in French society:

I thought of becoming a communist—a strange kind of communist, in order to push [France] to complete decadence, to the very end, to put everyone up against a wall to be shot, especially the masses. After that the good principles were reborn in me all afresh: aristocracy, venerable leaders, the dignity of a comrade’s obedience…. I was unable: my bourgeois blood, my old mistrust of the barbarian East, my hatred of non-philosophy.

And then all of a sudden there was fascism. Everything was possible again. Oh, how my heart swelled.

Fascism combined his revolutionary inclination with his bourgeois prejudice—it did not mire itself with excessive prominence on class conflict and materialism. In sum, fascism represented a revolutionary reactionarism, a radical conservatism. While having many reactionary or conservative characteristics such as respect for tradition and authority, the placing of high value on hard work and individual achievement, a suspicion of parliamentary democracy and liberal egalitarianism, it also was radical or revolutionary. It called for an overhaul of the existing system, it saw worth in violence and war, it encouraged personal liberation and self-fulfilment – a revolution of the state and the spirit.

Drieu eventually returned to his initial appreciation for the destructiveness of communism. In the choice between keeping with a traditional, liberal democratic society and having French society totally wiped clean by a Bolshevik wave of reform, he preferred to start over. His disillusionment with fascism brought him to an

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admiration for the Russians—in fact, he began to give credence to the Russian opinion that fascism was simply a shelter for big business capitalism, that Hitler and the Nazis denounced greedy capitalists publicly but protected them politically: “The Marxists have been right: fascism has been finally only a defence of the bourgeoisie. Now (and I have believed this for a year) my best wishes go to communism.” Drieu even went as far as comparing communism to Christianity in an effort to show that the Bolshevik was not that far removed from the fascist: “Christianity and communism have something in common, something to do with their first principles: they are two forms of realism. The communists believe in the reality of matter and the world. The Christian also believes in the reality of matter but, still more, in the reality of the soul and of God.” And he reminded himself that the Russians were not that different from the French: “The Russians are Europeans, but Europeans who live on another continent – like the Americans.” Yet this wavering of allegiance was only short-lived, for Drieu’s loyalty to the middle class was too strong to allow him to devote himself to the communists:

Nothing separates me any longer from communism, nothing has ever separated me from it except my atavistic, petit bourgeois tendency to shrink from it. But that is enormous and it engenders words and attitudes to which it is best to remain faithful, to which I can only remain faithful.

But at the same time he is laudatory of the authoritarianism of the communists. He toyed with the idea that communism, or rather the Soviet version of it, would have a cleansing effect on the world. A Soviet conquest of Europe may cut out the decadence that was eating away at it, and once Europe had been sanitised, then a fascist revolution may occur. As he wrote in his diary on 8 December, 1944:

What is profoundly necessary in integral socialism, in communism, is the return of humanity to total totalitarianism. It is too bad if it doesn’t work, but if it

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69 Ibid, p.49.
70 Drieu, quoted in Frédéric Grover, Drieu La Rochelle and the Fiction of Testimony (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1958), p.57.
does, humanity will depart, after a long sleep, for a new civilization. This is its only chance to remain a creative force. Otherwise it will fall into a still longer sleep. Humanity clearly needs to sleep. It has been awake for too long; ten centuries are a long time. But when I say humanity I mean Europe, simply out of prejudice. Other peoples have been sleeping for a long time: it is they who will take communism in hand. But what if they have been inoculated with the rot of Europe?

The advance of communism in Europe becomes more definite, inexorable, irresistible, every day. It seems to me that Stalin must go all the way, immediately. To start with because he is sixty-five, and then because he cannot run the risk of letting West Germany join up with the West, thereby constituting a formidable power (America + England + Germany + France). He is trying to tear France away from the West and get a foothold in America (via Bizerta?)

Despite the increasing obviousness of a German defeat and the possibility of a Soviet victory in western Europe, Drieu would not fully support them: “A residue of class instinct keeps me from it”. Drieu’s dedication to fascism and collaboration was something that he himself questioned. In 1944, he went as far as to make enquiries as to whether André Malraux’s Alsace-Lorraine Brigade in the French resistance movement would accept him. Soucy reports that Malraux was willing to allow Drieu to join, on one condition:

Malraux replied that Drieu was welcome to serve in his unit, provided that he adopt a pseudonym; otherwise “in a formation of Gaullist commandos, [you] would find [yourself] in an atmosphere of distrust. Not with myself nor with the three or four men in my immediate entourage but with the others”.

In Bernard-Henri Lévy’s words, “That was the extraordinary final offer or means of escape held out to this ultra-Nazi by a man who was soon to become one of the

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heroes of the resistance.” It says much about Malraux’s character that he was willing to assist a friend and colleague, despite Drieu’s collaboration and sympathy for the occupiers.

Drieu’s repeated praise for the communists concealed his disgust for the communist ideal of society. When Drieu speaks of socialism, it is not the socialism of the Leninists. It resembled more the liberal socialism of nineteenth century England in that it was in favour of the small businessman over the large corporation, and was in favour of a degree of protectionism to ensure that large capitalist interests did not establish monopolies or effective control over industries. Unlike liberals, however, Drieu respected the ruthless use of force, a common feature of both fascism and communism:

His “socialism” was more rhetorical than real, an anti-establishmentarianism which masked a basic economic traditionalism and praised communism not for its ends but for its means. A sharp dichotomy existed between Drieu’s admiration for the revolutionary and totalitarian methods of communism and his contempt for the materialistic and egalitarian aspects of the socialist tradition.

It might sound paradoxical, but Drieu admired the communists except for their communism. He was a non-Marxist socialist, more interested in spiritual reform than economic reform. The mystical was more important than the materialistic: “The difficulty is that to be a communist it is necessary to be a materialist and there is no way that I can arrive at that.” It was easy for Drieu to dismiss material concerns when his own life was comfortable. He had been married to two heiresses and inherited a fund from his mother. Instead, Drieu wished to take capitalism and combine it with socialist methods, he wished to combine bourgeois concerns with socialist methods, and the result would be fascism, or more specifically fascist socialism.

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74 Bernard-Henri Lévy, Adventures on the Freedom Road, p.162.
75 Robert Soucy, Fascist Intellectual, p.117.
77 Robert Soucy, Fascist Intellectual, p.140.
The day that capitalism begins to work within the framework of the state, it no longer works for individual ends; it works for collective ends and for limited ends.

Men who work in such a system are no longer driven by an appetite for prestige, in which there enters something of the spiritual.

Collective ends, limited ends, spiritual ends.  

Working for the “collective”, supposedly for the common good of the nation, was actually detrimental to the nation, for it robbed the system of the motive of personal ambition. This ambition was seen as greed or base materialism in a negative sense. Ambition was seen as the motive for personal achievement and prestige, which were admirable goals, and would lead on to a spiritual element of self-actualisation. Drieu emphasised that fascist socialism was not calling for the destruction of capitalism, but rather for its evolution:

[Fascist] socialism is inserted into the capitalist edifice; it does not overthrow it. In Russia they have torn down the fragile capitalist scaffolding that was still fastened to the edifice of a medieval tsarism; the destruction was not great. In Europe it is out of the question to tear down a skilful, complex edifice that has its roots and branches in all areas, in all classes. It is rather a matter of improving its construction, of impregnating it, of modulating it with a new rhythm.

That is indeed the fascist conception. Who does not recognize in it the same conception as that of reformist socialism?  

In addition, Drieu distrusted the apparent lack of patriotism of the French communists. Their loyalty to the nation was in question when they also had loyalties to the Communist Party and answered to the Kremlin. Drieu desired a form of socialism that was “neither a lackey of Moscow nor stuck in a parliamentary rut.”

Fascism would put national concerns first and would attempt to unite classes, rather than encourage class conflict: “our socialism will succeed better than the socialism of the socialists or the communists because it cannot be reproached for serving the

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foreigner or for wanting to cut the throats of the bourgeoisie.” Class conflict, a corner-stone of Marxist interpretations of the world, was ultimately self-defeating, Drieu knew, for it weakened the country and made it vulnerable to outside influence:

The governments that have succeeded one another since 1789 have had to work constantly at an equilibrium among the rich bourgeoisie, the middle and lower bourgeoisie, the peasantry, and the proletariat, among industry, commerce, agriculture, and the liberal professions. All those who have neglected or miscalculated this equilibrium have perished.

Instead of encouraging class warfare, fascism would encourage class conciliation and cooperation. More could be achieved from the strength of coordinated teamwork than through division and intra-national hostility. Part of Drieu’s attraction to the Parti Populaire Français was its emphasis on this union of the left and the right. This effort to recognise the bipartisan nature of fascism became, in the 1980s, the basis of what came to be called the Sternhell Controversy, an important part of the historiography of fascism, which we touched on in Chapter Two. In 1983, the Israeli historian Sternhell published *Ni droite, ni gauche*, a major new study of fascism in France. This book traced the intellectual roots of fascism back into the 1890s, finding a direct line between the ideas in the work of Georges Sorel and other syndicalists in pre-Great War Paris, and the fascism that was promulgated by fascist intellectuals in the 1930s. Despite the debate about Sternhell’s specific research into the early years of fascism, it is clear from the above that the fascists in the interwar years certainly saw a connection between what they believed and particular strands of left-wing or communist thought. Thus we have seen how the application of the method of

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81 Ibid, p.198.
83 The development of Sternhell’s ideas can be traced through his work: *La Droite révolutionnaire* (1978), which dealt with the failure of right-wing movements in France to take power;
*Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), which examined the intellectual origins of fascism in France;
*The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, which expands the argument of Neither Right Nor Left to a European level.
examining the political ideas and aspirations of fascists has confirmed that certain fascist writers perceived at the time a very close connection between the ideologies of fascism and communism.

Revolution

Lewis similarly expressed at times admiration for both the Soviet Union and Italy. In many ways he saw the two as allies in the fight against liberal democracy, simply approaching the attack from different angles. Like Pound, he favourably compared Italian Fascism to Soviet Communism: “All marxian doctrine, all étatisme or collectivism, conforms very nearly in practice to the fascist ideal.”85 In The Art of Being Ruled, he wrote that:

[Mussolini’s] government is doing for Italy – starting ostensibly from the other end – what the soviet has done for Russia. The militant liberalist elements are being heavily discouraged in a very systematic way. They are not being physically wiped out, as happened in Russia, but they are eliminated quite satisfactorily without recourse to murder on a large scale. What will shortly be reached will be a great socialist state such as Marx intended, rigidly centralized, working from top to bottom with the regularity and smoothness of a machine.86

Lewis had a very low opinion of the average citizen. He did not credit them with any desire to grow intellectually or creatively, to enjoy the pleasures of original thought or appreciate the work of others. In short, the masses did not desire to engage in any revolutionary activity, be it political, spiritual or intellectual. What the great majority of people really want is to be told what to do, to live comfortably and to be amused; bread and circuses, in other words. The Enlightenment project of emancipation, of instituting democracy and the rule of the people, was not only dangerous to the existence of civilization, but also the exact opposite of what the people actually desired. Lewis wrote in Left Wings Over Europe:

86 Ibid, p.370.
Do most people really ever desire ‘freedom’? Do they indeed desire the responsibility that is entailed by all freedom? The answer to which is an emphatic No! Freedom and irresponsibility are communitative terms, where the average man is concerned... Ninety per cent of men long at all times for a leader. They are on the look-out, whether they know it or not, for someone who will take all responsibility off their shoulders and tell them what to do.  

Farrel noted that in many places in The Hitler Cult, Lewis makes a similar observation to Adorno, who famously said that the fascist has a “twofold wish to submit to authority and to be the authority himself”. Chace asks the following question: Lewis’s rhetoric in The Art of Being Ruled (1926) would prompt any reader to ask: for what good reason should coercive state violence be prohibited, given Lewis’s description of people within mass democracy? If deep misgivings about the inherent qualities of human beings form one basic assumption of authoritarian rule, then the threat of violence is the necessary instrument of that rule. Absorbing both the Machiavellian distrust of political humankind and the Nietzschean separation of that humankind into ‘master’ and ‘herd’, Lewis argues that most people, all too willing to surrender their liberties, want only the security of being dominated. 

Chace asks for the reason why the state should avoid the use of coercive violence. The simple answer is: there is none. Chace wrote that “while Lewis himself did not encourage violence, his thinking and his style expressed affinities with violence, and part of his genius consisted in recognizing how violent action could quickly reveal the difference between a ‘live’ mind and a ‘dead’ mind.” Revolutionary violence plays an important part in the fascist way of life, although often such violence was metaphorical, with the writers relying on the vocabulary of war to express the clash between ideas. This may reveal a degree of morbidity or sado-masochism in fascism;

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87 Wyndham Lewis, Left wings over Europe; or, How to make a war about nothing (London: Cape, 1936), p.294.
90 Ibid, p.156.
Pound encouraged Hemingway to teach him to box, a lesson of which Lewis attended, apparently enjoying watching Pound being beaten by Hemingway; Hulme had been “sent down” from Cambridge for fighting in public, and it was only with the assistance of Bergson that he was readmitted.91 While this thesis shies away from implying a psychological basis for an embrace of the ideology of fascism, it cannot be denied that fascism attracted those with a propensity for violence. There is, again without delving too deeply into psycho-sexual theory, a very overtly virile, and some might say homosexual, element to fascism that seemed to attract those who enjoyed engaging in or watching martial sports and violence.

Lewis did not shy away from physical violence either. A veteran of the war, a provocateur in London, philosophically he did not see the need for mercy, especially when it came to the masses. Human beings were repulsive to him – he preferred the beauty of an idea, the purity of a thought, to the banality of the average person. And if the state was forced to resort to some degree of coercion to ensure the betterment of the society, then so be it. He had a very low opinion of the ruled classes, as the following from The Art of Being Ruled shows:

This division into rulers and ruled partakes of a sexual division; or rather, the contrast between the one class and the other is more like that between the sexes than anything else. The ruled are the females and the rulers the males, in this arrangement. A stupid, or slow-witted, not very ambitious, conventional, slothful person has necessarily a great many feminine characteristics. These involve him, too, in a great many childish ones. And the relation of the ruler to the ruled is always that of a man to a woman, or an adult to a child.92

Lewis did commend the Italian Fascists for being able to deal with the liberal elements of the community without turning to mass murder like the Russians, but it is also clear that he thought of the masses as feminine and child-like, requiring strong leadership and forceful discipline. As the world stood, Lewis believed that liberal democracy was

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92 Wyndham Lewis, The Art of Being Ruled, p.96.
not the best: “for anglo-saxon countries as they are constituted to-day some form of a modified form of fascism would be the best”.93

Charles Ferral compares Lewis’s brand of reactionary thought with that of other modernists, and comes to the conclusion that Lewis is different in one respect: he does not place the same level of value on the past as the others. Ferral says, before distinguishing Lewis as the exception, that “the reactionary modernists expressed their hostility towards what was variously called ‘liberalism’, ‘democracy’, ‘industrialism’ and ‘progress’ in terms of a nostalgia for the cultures of premodernity while at the same time feeling compelled, in Pound’s famous phrase, ‘to make it new’.”94

Perhaps because Lewis was the more creative intellect of the group, the more adept at fantasy and fiction, he does not look back to a glorified time and call upon ancient myths. Rather, he looks to the future, and attempts to construct something new. Lewis’s emphasis was on the revolutionary aspects of fascism and not its embrace or reverence of tradition. Ferral wrote that “Lewis does not express nostalgia for any kind of premodern culture. There is no equivalent in his writing of Yeats’s Celtic Ireland, Eliot’s period before the ‘disassociation of sensibility’, Pound’s ‘democratic aristocracy’ of Twelfth Century Provence, or Lawrence’s New Mexico.”95 This is supported by a comment that Lewis made in private correspondence with Julian Symons, who quotes the letter:

[Lewis] saw the society he lived in as undergoing drastic and revolutionary changes in the decades between the Wars. “My mind is ahistoric, I would welcome the clean sweep,” he wrote to me in 1937. “I could build something better, I am sure of that, than has been left by our fathers.” The “something better” he identified as a finer art, which would be achieved in a society revering works of art as the greatest products of civilisation. And

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93 Ibid, p.381.
95 Ibid, p.135.
he took it for granted that he was capable of producing such works.\textsuperscript{96}

Without an explicit tradition to align himself with, Lewis found himself on the frontiers of politics, toying with new ideas and new systems, more open to the revolutionary activities in Russia and Italy than others.

Symons compared Lewis’s position in the cultural environs of Western Europe with that of Dostoyevsky in Russia – an outcast, half-genius, half-madman, antagonising the establishment and running counter to all the accepted ideas of progressive liberal thought: Lewis’s “extreme individualism had by now been formulated into a philosophy radically critical of many shibboleths respected by the intellectual society of the period.”\textsuperscript{97} Symons finds Lewis’s anti-liberal attitude illustrated in a contemporary poem by W.H. Auden:

\begin{quote}
The few shall be taught who want to understand.
Most of the rest shall live upon the land;
Living in one place with a satisfied face
All of the women and most of the men
Shall work with their hands and not think again. \textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

This is a good description of Lewis’s fascist utopia: an agrarian life for most men and all women, and a life of study, learning and art for those men fortunate to be gifted with talent. The formation and maintenance of an intellectual class that would be the revolutionary vanguard of civilization is essential. Such a society is not a democracy. It is authoritarian, where most of the people work while the intelligentsia is free to think and create art in absolute freedom. This reveals the contradictory and internally inconsistent nature of some fascist beliefs, advocating a high level of freedom for some, and subjugation for the majority. Lewis’s political attitudes may be seen in the light of his psychological character – suffering from paranoia and a persecution complex, embittered by financial problems and the necessity to rely on patronage, Lewis would, from a purely self-interested point of view, want a society where he was

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid, p.5.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid, p.8.
free to write and paint, where he would not have to kowtow to a clique that rules the art world (especially Roger Fry and the Bloomsburies), and where those whom he disliked were out of the picture. Lewis then was a fascist in the purist sense. Not caught up in the propaganda of a fascist movement like Pound, he developed through his own disdain for people and a humanist desire for a better world the belief that the only structure that could impose the necessary order that was needed to save humanity from itself was an authoritarian regime. An essential element of that authoritarian regime would be a revolutionary intellectual class that, with the protection of the state, would be challenging received ideas and art forms. In practice, an authoritarian state that valued order above all would seem to be sowing the seeds of its own destruction if it allowed a revolutionary intellectual the sort of freedoms Lewis imagines, however the concept, in the abstract, was one that Lewis endorsed.

More curious than Lewis’s position is Pound’s attitude towards revolution. The man who was always urging artists to “Make it new”, said “I am not a revolutionarist, if by that term one means a man who believes a complete smash of the existing order is necessary before one can get improvement.”99 He did have, like Eliot and unlike Lewis, a very deferential attitude towards the past. In Time and Western Man, Lewis described Pound as “a man in love with the past”100, not intending this as a compliment. Yet at the same time, Pound recognised that the modern world was failing, and declared, “Quite simply, I want a new civilization.”101

Essentially, Pound was interested in revolutionary thought more than action, a new way of looking at the world. He was interested in the revolutionary spirit, which is to him fundamentally an artistic spirit:

> What drives, or what can drive a man interested almost exclusively in the arts, into social theory or into a study of the “gross material aspects” videlicet economic aspects of the present? What causes the ferocity and bad manners of revolutionaries? Why should a peace-

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100 Wyndham Lewis, Time and Western Man (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927), p.41.
101 Ezra Pound, editorial, Exile 3 (1928).
loving writer of Quaker descent be quite ready to shoot
certain persons whom he never laid eyes on?\textsuperscript{102}

He wanted civilization to be revamped, not necessarily society or the government.
One could imagine, therefore, that Pound could approve of a revolutionary change in
ideals or ideology without any great acts of traditional revolution in the manner of the
French or Russian revolutions. In his \textit{Cantos} on American history, Pound highlights the
fifteen year period before the Battle of Lexington, traditionally thought of as the
beginning of the Revolutionary War, as more important than the actual war. It is in
that period before people act revolutionarily, that is, the period where they think
revolutionarily, that is more important. The act of revolution is secondary to the
change in the way people think. It is partly for this reason that Pound says that “the
fascist revolution is infinitely more \textsc{interesting} than the Russian revolution because
it is not a revolution according to preconceived type”\textsuperscript{103}. The revolution in Italy, while
not a revolution in the same vein as the November Revolution in Moscow is to be
lauded for the fact that it was not a revolution by the book, planned out in Parisian
coffee-houses and library reading rooms. Italy stood as the prime example of the
revolution that Pound desired. He had become disillusioned by England, and saw Italy
as a force in the resurrection of a strong civilization. He said, in an interview for an
Italian news magazine, that

\begin{quote}
The thing that most interests me in the world is
civilization, the high peaks of culture. Italy has twice
civilized Europe. No other country has done that even
once. Each time a strong, live energy is unleashed in
Italy, a new renaissance comes forth. I have written
many times that after the war England was reduced to
the point of abandoning its corpses in the streets.
Intellectually France is tired, very tired, but at least it
summoned the strength to bury the corpses of its dead
ideas. I am fed up equally with English stupidity and
French imbecility….

Italy is the only country in the world…that can’t be
governed better than it already is. Italy is headed
toward power. Without a strong Italy, I don’t see the
possibility of a balanced Europe. I dream for you the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{102} Ezra Pound, “Murder by Capital”, \textit{The Criterion} 12 (July 1933), pp. 586-87; also in \textit{Selected Essays}.
return of an epoch which, mutatis mutandis, is a bit similar to the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{104} Pound’s admiration for Italy is apparent, although, as Redman observes, his vision is blurry when looking at Italy’s achievements: “having seen what good the fascists were doing, he is willing to overlook what evil transpired. This is pragmatism taken to extremes.”\textsuperscript{105} Like many fascists, Pound became energized by the prospects that were being offered for the future, and was thus willing to excuse present excesses and mistakes. In some ways, he was so fascinated by the utopian possibilities being offered that he ignored the reality. Like Lewis’s vision discussed above, Pound’s idea of fascist utopia being a haven for intellectual freedom worked better in theory. Pound was caught up in the whirlwind of promises and his utopian temperament and imagination allowed him to overlook the flaws of what was actually happening.

Brasillach, just like Lewis and Pound, found the examples of the emerging fascist dictators to be exciting. Their admiration may be explained psychologically as simply veneration of qualities that the average intellectual does not possess except on the page: qualities such as strength, courage and violence. These fascist intellectuals are common in their glorification of physical ability, a characteristic that many did not have themselves. His biographer noted the seeming incongruence between the two: “Although a novelist of great sensitivity and tenderness, he could, on occasion, manifest a marked penchant for violence in his journalism.”\textsuperscript{106} Brasillach saw fascism as much as a revolution of the spirit as a political revolution, and his reverence for such figures as Leon Degrelle and the Spanish Falangists demonstrates the emphasis that Brasillach placed on the image of the leader, much more than any specific policy aims. And as Tucker notes, Brasillach employed violent imagery and rhetoric in his journalism. This violence is a mixture of metaphor, but also a reflection of his opinion that the Third Republic needed to go through a violent period of revolution to purify it from its decadence and return France to its former glory.

Leon Degrelle was the leader of the Belgian Catholic political party called Rex. Young, handsome, energetic and right-wing, Degrelle exemplified the “fascist man” that Brasillach dreamed of. Brasillach covered the 1936 Belgian election closely, and *Je Suis Partout* devoted an entire special issue to the Rex movement in October 1936. In November, Degrelle invited Brasillach to Belgium to meet with him. Brasillach was so taken by Degrelle that he published in December of that year a book about Degrelle, *Léon Degrelle et l’avenir de ‘Rex’*, that described his campaign and political ideas. Degrelle was the leader of what Brasillach called “one of the most original movements of Young Europe, one of those that gave us the most hope when it burst forth like a fire on the horizon.” In many ways, Rex seemed like a youthful version of the Action Française, except that, in the words of Tucker, “instead of the sterile direction of an aged thinker, Rex was blessed with the leadership of a thirty-year-old possessed of what Brasillach termed the ‘confidence of a young barbarian.’” Degrelle shared many of the political attitudes of the Action Française and Maurras, yet he had the energy and charm to take it beyond the purely polemical. For Brasillach, Degrelle was what Maurras could have been if he had been forty years younger and driven to succeed in politics. Most importantly, Degrelle was the synthesis of poet and politician that Brasillach dreamed of for France. He was an idealist, a moralist, and the antithesis of the corrupt, stolid Third Republic politicians. Tucker suggests that this combination of artist and leader attracted Brasillach because he related to them more than the typical politician. As an artist and critic, Brasillach lived in a world of metaphor and symbol, where style was as important, if not more important, than substance. Thus Brasillach had a bond with the leaders of fascist movements, based on an aesthetic appreciation of the theatre and rhetoric they were creating. We have seen how Brasillach was impressed by the drama of the Nuremberg Rally and by Hitler and the Nazis’s abilities to create art from a political event. Similarly, Brasillach was attracted to Degrelle’s style of revolutionary activity and speech.

The image of Degrelle became the standard by which Brasillach compared all other fascist leaders, and it shaped his ideas about what a leader of a nation should be. Degrelle’s emphasis on companionship at a national level, his glorification of youth and physicality, became elements of Brasillach’s own conception of fascism. Tucker attributes Brasillach’s “personal contacts with Degrelle” with “Brasillach’s belief in fascism as a serious political cause.”¹⁰⁹ Such impressionability does not say much for Brasillach’s intellectual rigour, but it does serve to demonstrate the close relationship in fascism between emotion and personal feeling and ideas and ideology. The other most influential political event of the thirties on Brasillach besides the rise of Degrelle and the Rexist movement was the Spanish Civil War. Brasillach’s family heritage went back to Spain on his father’s side, and Spain was a frequent holiday destination for him and his friends. Because of the Civil War and the fascists involved, Brasillach was able to use his many trips to Spain in his writing, producing articles and books on the subject. He paid close attention to the events happening across the southern border, and he wrote in *Notre Avant-Guerre*, “We followed the beautiful events of the war with wonderment”.¹¹⁰ The Spanish Civil War involved many sub-groups and parties. Brasillach’s interest fell more towards the Falangists and the Carlists, rather than the troops of General Franco, because of their more revolutionary spirit. The Falange was another youth movement that represented a spiritual revolution rather than a purely material revolution. Writing in Thierry Maulnier’s *Combat*, Brasillach made clear that the Falange was seeking “a social revolution as well as a national revolution... with protection of the working class, concern for grandeur and respect for liberties.”¹¹¹ However, as Hillary Ann Footitt, who has studied in detail Brasillach’s relationship with the Spanish Civil War, describes, Brasillach’s “understanding of the philosophy and ideology of the Carlists and the Falange, in whom he showed by his share of writing in the *Histoire* that he was particularly interested, was at very best limited.... If indeed Brasillach linked the Carlists and the Falange it was because they shared in this eyes that element of the Civil War which he considered of primary importance – not a doctrine so much as a

¹¹¹ Robert Brasillach, *Combat* 10 (December 1936).
certain style of life.”¹¹² For Brasillach, conventional political reform was less important, or perhaps less interesting, than matters of the spirit and the soul of a nation. In *Je Suis Partout*, he wrote that what attracted him to Carlism was that “Carlism is not a doctrine of politicians: it is a doctrine of faith”.¹¹³ In the same way, the Falangists enthralled Brasillach by their unqualified devotion to their cause. Writing in his *Histoire de la Guerre d’Espagne*, Brasillach remarked that the Falange is the party of the young, the party of energy and vitality.

Brasillach found in the leader of the Falange a Spanish version of Degrelle. José Antonio Primo de Rivera was someone whom Brasillach came to revere almost as a hero. Primo de Rivera came from the same country as Brasillach’s ancestors and was from the same generation as the Frenchman. Brasillach saw in Primo de Rivera yet another prototype of the ‘fascist man’. Tucker wrote about the resemblance between Brasillach, Primo de Rivera and Degrelle:

> With his repudiation of all the Spanish political parties, his disdain for the state and its political apparatus, his appeals for “social justice,” combined with a traditionalist’s love of the past, José Antonio was destined to take his place with Degrelle and Codreanu as one of the deities in Brasillach’s fascist pantheon.¹¹⁴

Footitt noted that Primo de Rivera also had the fortune of dying young, at the age of 33 in 1936, thus leaving a legend about himself that was not adversely affected by the compromises and deals that one has to make once in power and working within a governmental system. Brasillach was attracted to the image of Primo de Rivera and the myth that he left behind him. Primo de Rivera represented the more exciting, vital elements of the Civil War, and it was these qualities that appealed to Brasillach and his associates. Footitt remarked upon their interest in the Spanish:

> When Brasillach and his friends contemplated the events in Spain, their sympathies lay not so much with General Franco as with the anarchosyndicalists of the Right who were represented by the Falange movement. To the

Brasillach circle Ramiro Ledesma Ramos, Onesimo Redolondo Ortega, and especially José Antonio Primo de Rivera embodied the real spirit of the national uprising. The *Je Suis Partout* group, then, opted not for the conservative revolutionaries but the hyperactivist and intellectual young men who were much closer to fascism than to conservatism.\(^{115}\)

Thus, once again we see in Brasillach’s political thought a preoccupation with a spirit of revolution and change, to the exclusion of specific policy opinions. Brasillach focused on what he called the ‘esprit’ of the Carlists and the Falangists, rather than any explicit doctrine. Brasillach is the perfect example of the fascist for whom the irrational, emotional and spiritual concerns out-weighed the particular policy ambitions of fascism. In the familiar terms of the regime model and the cultural model, fascism was a style of life, a way of living, and involved a wholesale regeneration of the soul and the essence of the nation – it was both action and metaphysics. It involved a revolution from within as well as an external revolution. Fascism’s revolutionary nature was as much about a personal revolutionary experience as it was a national one.

Essential to the fascist revolution of the spirit was a revolution of the body. The French, if they were to regain their spiritual strength, must also regain their physical strength. An extension of this was the requirement to be willing to use that strength. Drieu, like many fascists, glorified the values of war, if not war itself (Drieu had written that War is a function of man and [...] man cannot deny it or uproot himself from it without damaging himself\(^{116}\). As a man who had witnessed first hand the devastation of modern war, he longed for a return to a previous era where war was about courage, valour and physical prowess. Fascism satisfied this primitive, masculine urge for Drieu:

> What I like about fascism is a certain virile disposition. It has come about ... as the result of a certain physical need in man. This need is satisfied when man has the impression of having pushed his body as far as his ideas. It is a question of courage.

\(^{115}\) Ibid, p.203.

To be sure, courage is not ignored by communism, either—in any case, by Russian communism, which is frankly and consciously bellicose. It is less clearly conceived by European communists. In effect, they have inherited—in spite of their suspicion—many of the prejudices of the old world of the left. For example, they are pacifists.\footnote{117 Drieu, “Guerre et revolution”, \textit{La Nouvelle Revue Française}, no.248 (May 1934), p.887.}

Drieu continues in the same article to declare that the fascism is the most courageous of the political movements, and he expected fascists to use their inherent superior courage to win power in Europe and remake it as a fascist paradise.

I am attracted by the courage of the fascists—I am not concerned with their cowardice after victory: all victors automatically become cowards. But since they alone in Europe are entirely courageous, I would like to continue to hope that they will employ this courage to build socialism.\footnote{118 Ibid, p.888.}

Drieu’s exaltation of the physical aspects of the fascists, their courage and their strength, their tendency towards violence and irrationalism, recalled for him the time he had spent in the army during the First World War. An enlisted man who rose to the rank of sergeant, he led a bayonet charge against a machine gun post at Charleroi, which, although the attack was ultimately unsuccessful, made a lasting impression upon him. This experience was frequently recounted in his fiction and his political writings as an example of a throwback to a more glorious kind of war. It was also an example of the intellectual, a man of a poetry and culture, risking his life, prepared to spill on the battlefield. It was, for Drieu, an example of one of the few times he proved himself to be a man:

I will never forget the time during my youth when I was a combat infantryman who offered himself to wounds and death. I have a salubrious nostalgia for those days. In a period when France and Europe throb with more and more horrible sufferings and perils, it is the least of the duties of an intellectual who wishes to remain in some measure a man to expose himself, not out of
inclination but with openness and boldness, to anger and hatred.\textsuperscript{119} Soucy has analysed Drieu from a psychological perspective, and found that Drieu’s depression and anxiety was an expression of his self-hatred and that Drieu’s political thought was greatly influenced by what he wanted himself to be and was not able to become. A friend, Victoria Ocampo, remembered Drieu’s personality: “When Drieu spoke of himself (and he did so continually in his novels and in his essays) he was as cruel as he could be. I can safely say that I never once caught him admiring himself either in his writing or in his life. He belonged to that type of Narcissus who gazes at himself in order to detest himself; but, by not being generous with himself, he ended up by not being generous towards others.”\textsuperscript{120} Another contemporary, Louis Aragon, described Drieu as “a sad man, who had no hope, who gnawed through his life like a bit, an irresolute man… nothing could hold that large body and the world was too small for him.”\textsuperscript{121} He was a man who longed for the internal revolution and the break-through towards enlightenment and self-sufficiency that such an experience could bring, yet his own self-doubts and problems prevented it.

Drieu was disgusted by the dissipation of French society, and it was manifested in the physical appearance of the bourgeois that he encountered. “It is horrible to go for a walk and to encounter so much decadence, ugliness, or incompleteness,” he wrote. “The bent backs, the slumped shoulders, the swollen stomachs, the small thighs, the flabby faces.”\textsuperscript{122} Therefore, when Drieu encountered a politician who seemed to be the opposite of the frail and weak traditional parliamentarian, he became fixated. Jacques Doriot, was, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the converse of the typical Third Republic politician, whom Drieu characterised as “limp rags, men whom twenty years of parliamentary and liberal activity, twenty years of false philosophy, had deprived of all virility, of all male ability to look things in the face

\textsuperscript{119} Drieu, “En marge, II” (15 June 1944), Défense de l’Occident, no.50-51 (February-March 1958), p.88.
\textsuperscript{121} Louis Aragon, La Nouvelle Revue Française, September 1925, quoted by Alastair Hamilton, “Introduction”, p.xiv.
\textsuperscript{122} Drieu, Socialisme fasciste (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), p.111.
and to call a spade a spade.”\textsuperscript{123} In contrast was Doriot, whom Drieu admired greatly at first before becoming disillusioned. A former communist who became the leader of one of the largest fascist movements in France, Doriot was an active, strong and vital man who entranced followers with his robust and loud oratorical style. Drieu, as one of the intellectual leaders of the PPF, was responsible for many hagiographical pamphlets and books that shouted out praise for Doriot. One of the recurrent themes was that of Doriot’s brute physicality:

We have watched this son of a blacksmith, this former metallurgical worker, in the swell of his shoulders and back, in the bristling of his thick head of hair, in the vast perspiration of his forehead, continue to expand before us the work of fifteen. Before our eyes, he has taken the destiny of France in his arms and has lifted it high above him like a great Herculean brother.\textsuperscript{124}

Drieu also wrote of Doriot’s experiences in the riots of 6 February. Although he was at the time a communist, Drieu could not deny that Doriot the warrior was an impressive figure:

Those who saw Doriot then, alone, resisting two hundred police, charge into the pile, wheeling a café table over his head, heaving off the blows with his powerful shoulders, not going down until he was completely exhausted, know that there is in France at least one political leader who is a man.\textsuperscript{125}

Such excessive devotion did not go unmocked. Paul Nizan, a man of the left, was amused by some of Drieu’s comments, and wrote that for Drieu “it is enough to know that the men of the PPF will save France simply by ‘looking one another in the eye’ and that Doriot is a messiah because he is strong, because he is ‘male’, because he sweats a lot, and because he can speak a long time.”\textsuperscript{126} Not everyone was as impressed with Doriot as Drieu was. François Mauriac, recalling meeting Doriot for the first time and hearing him speak, wrote “I remember the feeling of depression and malaise that encounter left with me.” Mauriac could not help but see Doriot “as a

\textsuperscript{124} Drieu, \textit{Avec Doriot} (Paris: Gallimard, 1937), p.81.
\textsuperscript{125} Drieu, \textit{Doriot ou la vie d’un ouvrier français} (Paris, 1936), p.20.
kind of ogre.” Nevertheless, Drieu believed that Doriot represented the type of fascist who would be the intellectual man of action, a leader of the middle classes, and the dominant figure in his fascist utopia.

There was more to Drieu’s call for a rejuvenation of the body of France than purely adoration of the male physique. For Drieu, the need for rejuvenation was not only a matter of health and strength, but it was symbolic of the frailty of French spiritual decadence. As Soucy reminds us:

It would be a great oversimplification of Drieu’s fascism to reduce it to body worship alone. After all, Franco and Hitler were hardly athletic types, but this did not prevent Drieu from supporting their respective causes in 1936 and 1940; Stalin, Trotsky, and numerous other leftists displayed considerable physical robustness, but Drieu remained firmly opposed to their ideologies.

In fact, as even a cursory glimpse of a photograph of Doriot would reveal, there was obviously an element of idealisation and symbolism in his description of Doriot. Doriot came to represent more than he actually was; for Drieu, Doriot was an embodiment of the regeneration that France needed:

Doriot the good athlete stands before France not as a pot-bellied intellectual of the last century watching his ‘sick mother’ and puffing his radical pipe, but as an athlete squeezing this debilitated body, breathing his own health into its mouth.... Doriot has that peasant vigour which goes beyond games of words to reach the heart. Doriot will create a France where thousands of young couples will be happy, rushing each season to primitive pleasures, skiing, fishing, camping, swimming. With him the France of camping expeditions will conquer the France of cocktail parties and congresses.

Through Doriot’s leadership, under a fascist government, France could regain its potency and find a new intensity that would make it a power in the modern world.

Fascism, like a health spa, had the ability to take an ailing and weak nation and turn it

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into a healthy and dynamic authoritarian state: “totalitarianism offers the chance of a double restoration, corporal and spiritual, to the man of the twentieth century.”

The restoration that Drieu is talking about is similar to the idea of the reclamation of civilization and culture. This chapter has examined a variety of political and social issues that help us understand how the fascists saw society and how they hoped it would be constructed in an ideal fascist world. We have seen, both here and in Chapter Three, that classes and élites are an important aspect of the hierarchical structure of society that fascism advocates. History has shown us that such hierarchical thinking can lead to damaging and dangerous ideas about a hierarchy of races. This chapter has revealed, however, that the racial theories and racism of Nazism and Ezra Pound are the aberration. While the other fascists may be anti-Semitic, the form of their anti-Semitism is more likely to be based on the cultural prejudices than on exterminationist racial doctrine. As Brasillach’s case reveals, fascist anti-Semitism can actually be a by-product of the issue of constructing national identity. Drieu’s interpretation of race is even more complicated, as he dismisses the entire idea of racial identity in the twentieth century as being based on myth. Declaring that the races of Europe have interbred to such an extent that identifying people according to race is nonsense, he argues that fascists should concentrate more on the idea of a European identity. We can see therefore that racism and in particular anti-Semitism are not necessary features of generic fascism. Rather, racism and anti-Semitism can arise out of fascism’s emphasis on the creation of national identity. Racism is a part of fascism to the extent that nationalism encourages people to define themselves by differentiating themselves from others. Racism, we have seen, is not an essential feature of the fascist ideal.

This chapter has also questioned the long-held assumption that fascism and communism are hostile to each other. While in practical, geo-political terms, the fascist state will find itself in opposition to a communist state, this chapter has shown that in theory this is not necessarily the case. The idea of commonalities between communism and fascism was a feature of the totalitarian school of fascist

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interpretation. That interpretation rested largely on the style of rule and totalitarian, repressive activities of fascist and communist (or, we should more properly say, Nazi and Stalinist) regimes. The issue of a connection between the two ideologies was discussed by the fascists themselves and we have seen how Drieu, especially, admired certain qualities of communism, such as its authoritarianism, while condemning others, such as its economics.

Another aspect of communism that was admired by the fascists was its revolutionary nature. We have seen in Chapter Three that reactionary revolution was a tenet of the beliefs of many the fascists, and in this chapter we noted in greater depth what they understood revolution to mean. In fact, revolution takes on many forms in the fascist world, however, fundamentally, it is a drastic and essence-changing transformation. This transformation can be in the form of a reassessment of what the nation should be and how it should see itself. We saw that revolution for fascists is necessary to change the existing political systems, from democracy to authoritarianism. In this chapter, we have also seen how revolution can mean a physical embrace of violence and war on the part of society, or a personal physical revolution of the individual in the glorification of vitality, youth and manliness, or on a personal spiritual level through a transformative, enlightening experience that allows one to recognise both one’s own worth and one’s place in the collective. The fascist idea of revolution can perhaps be best summarised by Pound’s exhortation to the world, “Make it new”. Revolutionary change was respected for its capacity to inspire people to rise out of complacence and engage with the world and history.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Using both of the dominant historical methodologies for interpreting fascism and adapting them so that they work in conjunction shows aspects about fascism that are not apparent when using the regime model or the cultural model individually. This approach reveals a fresh perspective on fascism, and challenges some received notions of the nature of fascism. This thesis did not attempt to define fascism definitively. What it has done, rather, is to argue that the study of the aspirations and ideals of fascists can reveal new angles on a well-examined issue. It has provided evidence to support existing theories about the definition of fascism and added new evidence that questions certain aspects of the common wisdom about fascism.

As shown in Chapter Two, the regime model seeks to understand the qualities of fascism through a study of the fascist regimes of the first half of the twentieth century. Through examining the structures, activities and rhetoric of the Nazis in Germany, the Fascists in Italy, and a number of other regimes around the world, the regime model discerns common characteristics. These common characteristics, if they are decided to be unique to the fascist regimes, or different enough from the rest of the world as to typify a recognizable “fascist style of rule”¹, are said to constitute “fascism”. This thesis does not dispute that there is a place for the study of particular regimes; the importance of analyses of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, and other fascist regimes, almost goes without saying. However using these studies to generalise about the nature of “generic fascism” is methodologically unsound if it does not take into account other manifestations of fascism; by limiting the scope of their inquiry, scholars of fascism have limited the usefulness of their definition. By using the common qualities of fascist regimes alone, they have not identified the core elements of the ideology of fascism; they have, instead, identified the common aspects of fascist regimes in power in the early twentieth century. The regime

model’s weakness is its reliance on looking at examples of fascist regimes. How far one can rely on what one sees in these regimes as representing the qualities of fascism is uncertain.

That said, the questions that the regime model asks are valuable and need to be investigated. The regime model considers those issues that are the essential elements for understanding the nature of a political ideology. The relationship between élites, classes and competing interests; the organisational structures of fascist bureaucracies; the economic policies put into place; the way the regime manipulates, abuses, and placates the population are all areas of interest when trying to understand fascist ideology in practice. These are questions that are rarely posed by the cultural model, however.

The cultural model takes as its major subject the outlook and attitude of fascists. Its concern is the metaphysical philosophy of fascism, as well as the cultural conditions in which fascism arises and how fascism orients itself within a nation’s history and society. The fertile ground that is mined for this material is the writings of fascist intellectuals and the rhetoric of fascist politicians. Such sources are valuable, and this dissertation relies on those types of writings. It does so, however, in a significantly different way from the historians who use the cultural model, in that it uses those works to consider issues that are usually the subject of regime studies. By drawing on the work of literary figures with fascist leanings, this thesis not only assessed their philosophical outlook but also considered the practical implications of these ideas – for example, the philosophical issues related to natural élites were discussed, and this also led to a discussion of the way elitism would be incorporated into the structure of a fascist society.

Theoretical writings are useful, but they should not be used exclusively to understand the abstract components of fascism. The cultural model’s flaws rest in its emphasis on the spiritual and psychological aspects of the fascists and fascist movements, parties and regimes that it discusses. The nature of the cultural model is that it is less strict in its focus, but there is a discernible tendency within the cultural
model to study culture and ideas in order to understand fascism, a tendency that this
dissertation continued, with some modifications.

Such research using the cultural model reveals significant insights into the
philosophical perspectives of fascism. However, by examining cultural attitudes and
social goals and biases, the cultural model downplays the examination of larger
structural issues. It is interested in myths and feelings rather than the practical
realities of how the society is constructed. By focusing on the spiritual framework, the
cultural model neglects to some extent the issues of economic and social policy,
organisational composition of government and arrangement of society, and other
mundane topics that are necessary to understand how people would live and work in
a fascist system.

The cultural model’s weakness is not that it focuses on the abstract, but that it
does so to the exclusion of the concrete. The intellectual history tradition that the
cultural model has evolved from enables the student of fascism to go beyond fascist
regimes and political leaders in order to consider the work and ideas of artists,
intellectuals, historians and philosophers, both within fascist societies and without. It
is this gateway to different sources of understanding that this thesis drew on.

In this thesis I synthesised the best elements of the regime and cultural models
while discarding the limitations that prevent either from providing a full account of
fascism’s characteristics. My examination took as its primary subject of inquiry the
aspirations of fascism and fascists. The question that it asked is what an ideal, perfect
fascist society would be according to the particular form of fascism or the particular
fascist being examined. By asking what their idea of a fascist utopia is, my approach
isolated the style and form of rule, the relationship between the government and the
citizen and between citizens themselves, and the various attitudes and policies that
would be preferred by fascists. The regime model’s applicability to the study of the
four writers under review would have been limited on its own. Using the regime
model may have revealed details about the organisational structures and policies of
the Parti Populaire Français or the British Union of Fascists, for example. The regime
model is also a useful methodology for studying, for example. Vichy France and the
collaborationists in the Occupied Zone, and has been employed to that effect many times. However for studying intellectuals unconnected to the political framework of their countries and working mainly individually, the usefulness of the regime model is limited unless we adapt it by combining elements of the cultural model.

The cultural model arose out of the recognition of historians that people such as the writers discussed here have important things to say about fascism. By using a cultural model alone, we would have learnt many interesting things about the spiritual nature of fascism and fascism’s place as a political religion. The cultural model’s emphasis on metaphysics and myth would have overlooked, however, issues such as the position of various classes within the hierarchy and what legal, political, economic and social theories would be put into place under an ideal fascist system.

By using parts of both models and making our focus the idea of fascist utopias, we have learnt much about what an ideal fascist society would resemble. Chapter Two provided a critique of the historiographical work that has shaped the study of fascism, and how the two dominant models became popular. Chapter Three revealed how the fascists responded to the crises of the modern age, how the First World War caused them to reassess accepted notions about equality and democracy. It also illustrated the fascists’ dissatisfaction with their nations as they were, and how a ‘reactionary revolution’ was needed in order to bring about a national rebirth and rejuvenation. We saw how the two nationalities, starting from a similar point of criticism of their respective democracy and political climate, emphasized different fascist elements. The Anglophones, evaluating the British and American systems, rejected democratic egalitarianism and turned to meritocratic elitism. The French, reviewing the history of the Third Republic and its perceived failings, accentuated the need for a spiritual rebirth and rejuvenation of the individual and the nation through fascism.

Chapter Four examined specific social and political issues such as class and race, the relationship between communism and fascism, and how the fascists understood the concept of revolution. That chapter demonstrated that racism was not a necessary feature of fascism, but rather arose out of a form of hyper-nationalism
and the pursuit of the construction of a unified national identity. I also argued that some fascists of the interwar period, like historians fifty years later, saw much in common between their ideology and that of communism. The fascist emphasis on revolution, in many forms, was also examined and showed that fascists embraced revolution as a necessary political tool to bring about radical change in the political system but also as a way to bring about deep and fundamental transformations in the individual’s and the nation’s soul and identity.

The combined interpretative approach is a beneficial heuristic tool for the analysis of fascism. It is not intended to supplant the two existing models, both of which accomplish much that a focus on utopias does not. That said, the utopian approach explores avenues that are overlooked or under-emphasised by the regime model and the cultural model. By using the three models together, we can begin to understand in more detail and depth the elusive nature of the ideology of fascism.

While the four writers rarely spoke directly of utopia, one can extrapolate from their criticisms of the modern world and their admiration of particular ideas and policies what it is they imagined a better world to be like. What we have discovered is not a definition of fascism, but insight into the idiosyncratic fascist utopias of four individuals. This is not an exhaustive study, and as we have seen, the four writers are not always in agreement. Nonetheless, this examination has revealed certain similarities in world-view and objectives amongst the four fascist writers, and by considering them we have gained a better understanding of what it means to believe in a fascist ideology. What we have is not “a fascist utopia”, but four distinct visions of a fascist world. Before any final comment on a definition of “the fascist utopia” or “fascism” is possible, these utopian visions of the writers would need to be tested against other utopian ideas – not just of writers and philosophers, but of political leaders like Hitler and Mussolini. As with any political philosophy, fascism had an aspirational element, and this is worth further consideration and examination.
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