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The Five Stages of Fascism*

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At first sight, nothing seems easier to understand than fascism. It presents itself to us in crude, primary images: a chauvinist demagogue haranguing an ecstatic crowd; disciplined ranks of marching youths; uniform-shirted militants beating up members of some demonized minority; obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood; and compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, pursued with redemptive violence.

Yet great difficulties arise as soon as one sets out to define fascism.¹ Its boundaries are ambiguous in both space and time. Do we include Stalin? Do we reach outside Europe to charismatic dictators in developing countries like Nkrumah, with his single party and official ideology of Nkrumaism, or Saddam Hussein, gigantic statues of whose own forearms raise crossed swords over a Baghdad avenue?² What about imperial Japan in the 1930s or the nationalist syndicalism of Juan Perón in Argentina (1946–55)? How far back in time must we go? 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

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¹ We capitalize “Fascism” when referring to the Italian party, and refer to generic fascism in the lower case. Following a period of active study of generic fascism in the 1960s and early 1970s, strongly influenced by Marxism, scholarly activity shifted after about 1975 away from generic fascism to particular cases. See Tim Mason, “Whatever Happened to Fascism?” in *Reevaluating the Third Reich*, ed. Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (New York, 1993), pp. 253–62. Now the study of generic fascism is reappearing, in a rather traditional descriptive vein. Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1993), and Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London, 1996), approach fascism as a doctrine. Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison, Wis., 1995), provides an encyclopedic empirical survey. Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present, and Future* (New York, 1996), deals more fully with the present and future than with the past.

² Samir el-Khalil, *The Monument* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991). He does not evoke fascism overtly.

twentieth-century totalitarianisms of the Left and the Right.³ 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.⁴

Even if we limit ourselves to our own century and its two most notorious cases, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, we find that they display profound differences. How can we lump together Mussolini and Hitler, the one surrounded by Jewish henchmen and a Jewish mistress, the other an obsessed antisemite?⁵ How can we equate the militarized regimentation of Nazi Party rule with the laxity of Mussolinian Italy? Such eminent authorities as the late Renzo De Felice in Rome and Karl Dietrich Bracher of the University of Bonn have denied that German Nazism and Italian Fascism belong to the same category.⁶ This article argues for their conceptual kinship, for reasons that we will develop as we proceed.⁷

Five major difficulties stand in the way of any effort to define fascism. First, a problem of timing. The fascist phenomenon was poorly understood at the beginning in part because it was unexpected. Until the end of the nineteenth century, most political thinkers believed that widening the vote would inevitably benefit democracy and socialism. Friedrich Engels, noting the rapid rise of the socialist vote in Germany and France, was sure that time and numbers were on his side. Writing the preface for a new edition in 1895 of Karl Marx's *Class Struggles in France*, he declared that "if it continues in this fashion, we will conquer the major part of the middle classes and the peasantry and will become the decisive power."⁸ It took two generations before the Left understood that

³ Sir Isaiah Berlin, "Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (New York, 1991).

⁴ Jacob L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (Boston, 1952). Talmon's student Zeev Sternhell is the preeminent scholar today of fascism's intellectual roots in a heresy of the Left, national syndicalism. See, among many works, Zeev Sternhell with Mario Sznajder and Maria Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton, N.J., 1994).

⁵ The formidable Margherita Sarfatti, patron of the arts and Mussolini's official biographer, is the subject of Philip Canistraro and Brian R. Sullivan, *Mussolini's Other Woman* (New York, 1993). Mussolini's most notorious Jewish henchman was Aldo Finzi, implicated in the murder of the socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti in June 1924.

⁶ Renzo De Felice, *Fascism: An Informal Introduction to Its Theory and Practice: An Interview with Michael A. Ledeen* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1976), pp. 15, 55–56, 67, 94–96; Karl-Dietrich Bracher, *Zeitgeschichtliche Kontroversen: Um Totalitarismus, Faschismus, Demokratie* (Munich, 1976), p. 20.

⁷ Richard Bessel, ed., *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge, 1996), the papers of a conference in honor of Tim Mason, is the latest examination of the complicated but essential conceptual unity of the two regimes.

⁸ Friedrich Engels, 1895 preface to Karl Marx, *Class Struggles in France (1848–50)*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2d ed. (New York, 1978), p. 571.

fascism is, after all, an authentic mass popular enthusiasm and not merely a clever manipulation of populist emotions by the reactionary Right or by capitalism in crisis.⁹

A second difficulty in defining fascism is created by mimicry. In fascism's heyday, in the 1930s, many regimes that were not functionally fascist borrowed elements of fascist decor in order to lend themselves an aura of force, vitality, and mass mobilization. They were influenced by the "magnetic field" of fascism, to employ Philippe Burrin's useful phrase.¹⁰ But one can not identify a fascist regime by its plumage. George Orwell understood at once that fascism is not defined by its clothing. If, some day, an authentic fascism were to succeed in England, Orwell wrote as early as 1936, it would be more soberly clad than in Germany.¹¹ The exotic black shirts of Sir Oswald Mosley are one explanation for the failure of the principal fascist movement in England, the British Union of Fascists. What if they had worn bowler hats and carried well-furled umbrellas? The adolescent skinheads who flaunt the swastika today in parts of Europe seem so alien and marginal that they constitute a law-and-order problem (serious though that may be) rather than a recurrence of authentic mass-based fascism, astutely decked out in the patriotic emblems of their own countries. Focusing on external symbols, which are subject to superficial imitation, adds to confusion about what may legitimately be considered fascist.

This leads to the third problem with defining fascism, posed by the dauntingly wide disparity among individual cases in space and in time. They differ in space because each national variant of fascism draws its legitimacy, as we shall see, not from some universal scripture but from what it considers the most authentic elements of its own community identity. Religion, for example, would certainly play a much greater role in an authentic fascism in the United States than in the first European fascisms, which were pagan for contingent historical reasons.¹² They differ in time because of the transformations and

⁹ In the 1970s, Western Marxists criticized Stalin's interpretation of fascism and found an alternate tradition in August Thalheimer, the Austro-Marxists, and Antonio Gramsci. See, e.g., Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship* (London, 1974); and Anson Rabinbach, "Toward a Marxist Theory of Fascism and National Socialism," *New German Critique*, no. 3 (Fall 1974), pp. 127–53. Wolfgang Wippermann surveys the German case in "The Postwar German Left and Fascism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (October 1976): 185–219, and in *Fascismstheorien zum Stand der Gegenwertigen Diskussion*, 5th ed. (Darmstadt, 1989).

¹⁰ Philippe Burrin, "La France dans le champ magnétique des fascismes," *Le Débat* 32 (November 1984): 52–72.

¹¹ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (New York, 1961), p. 176. See also *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941), quoted in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York, 1968), 3:93.

¹² Payne, *History* (n. 1 above), pp. 490, 518, considers fascism inherently anticlerical; religious fundamentalisms, he asserts, are more likely today to produce authoritarianism

accommodations demanded of those movements that seek power. A little circle of dissident nationalist syndicalists, such as those whom Zeev Sternhell studies, functions differently from a party in search of alliances and of complicities within the country's elites. Disparate in their symbols, decor, and even in their political tactics, fascist movements resemble each other mainly in their functions (a point to which we shall return).

A fourth and even more redoubtable difficulty stems from the ambiguous relationship between doctrine and action in fascism. We shall have to spend much more time with this problem than with the others. As intellectuals, almost instinctively, we classify all the great political movements—all the “isms”—by doctrine. 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.¹³ By an analogy that has gone largely unexamined, much existing scholarship treats fascism as if it were of the same nature as the great political doctrines of the long nineteenth century, like conservatism, liberalism, and socialism. This article undertakes to challenge that convention and its accompanying implicit analogy.

The great “isms” of nineteenth-century Europe—conservatism, liberalism, socialism—were associated with notable rule, characterized by deference to educated leaders, learned debates, and (even in some forms of socialism) limited popular authority. 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. There was no “Fascist Manifesto,” no founding fascist thinker. Although one can deduce from fascist language implicit Social Darwinist assumptions about human nature, the need for community and authority in human society, and the destiny of nations in history, fascism does not base its claims to validity on their truth.¹⁴ Fascists despise thought and reason, abandon intellectual positions casually, and cast aside many intellectual fellow-travelers. They subordinate thought and reason not to faith, as did the traditional Right, but to the

than neofascism. In practice, however, fascisms can be close to churches identified with the national cause, as in Croatia, as Payne himself shows. Laqueur, *Fascism* (n. 1 above), pp. 95, 148–51, posits a closer link between religious fundamentalism and neofascism.

¹³ Roger Griffin and Roger Eatwell (n. 1 above) assert vigorously that fascism is to be understood as a doctrine. The most ambitious effort is Griffin's; he overcomes the problems of variation and contradiction by paring the fascist minimum down to national regeneration. Even Payne's more narrative *History* says “reading fascist programs” is his methodological starting point (pp. 11, 472).

¹⁴ A recent brief review of these assumptions within Nazism, with an extensive bibliography, is found in Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Iyer, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge, 1991), chap. 2.

promptings of the blood and the historic destiny of the group. Their only moral yardstick is the prowess of the race, of the nation, of the community. They claim legitimacy by no universal standard except a Darwinian triumph of the strongest community.

Fascists deny any legitimacy to universal principles to such a point that they even neglect proselytism. Authentic fascism is not for export.¹⁵ Particular national variants of fascism differ far more profoundly one from another in themes and symbols than do the national variants of the true “isms.” The most conspicuous of these variations, one that leads some to deny the validity of the very concept of generic fascism, concerns the nature of the indispensable enemy: within Mediterranean fascisms, socialists and colonized peoples are more salient enemies than is the Jewry.¹⁶ Drawing their slogans and their symbols from the patriotic repertory of one particular community, fascisms are radically unique in their speech and insignia. They fit badly into any system of universal intellectual principles. It is in their functions that they resemble each other.

Further, the words of fascist intellectuals—even if we accept for the moment that they constitute fundamental philosophical texts—correspond only distantly with what fascist movements do after they have power. Early fascist programs are poor guides to later fascist policy. The sweeping social changes proposed by Mussolini’s first Fascist program of April 1919 (including the vote for women, the eight-hour day, heavy taxation of war profits, confiscation of church lands, and workers’ participation in industrial management) stand in flagrant conflict with the macho persona of the later *Duce* and his deals with conservatives. Similarly, the hostility of the Nazi Twenty-Five Points of 1920 toward all capitalism except that of artisan producers bears little relation to the sometimes strained though powerfully effective collaboration for rearmament between German business and the Nazi regime.¹⁷

¹⁵ Michael A. Ledeen, *Universal Fascism: The Theory and Practice of the Fascist International, 1928–1936* (New York, 1972), explores Mussolini’s short-lived attempt to gather the other fascist movements around himself in an international organization. Hitler manifested little interest in his foreign disciples, showing notable reluctance to entrust the governance of conquered territories to Quislings like the original in Norway (out of power until 1942), Mussert in Holland, and Degrelle in Belgium. A recent study is Martin Conway, *Collaboration in Belgium: Léon Degrelle and the Rexist Movement* (New Haven, Conn., 1993).

¹⁶ Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), pp. 24–25, examines the ritual purificatory burning of captured socialist materials by the *squadristi*. For Italian Fascist racialism (more cultural than biological) directed against Libyans and Ethiopians, see n. 61 below.

¹⁷ Current authors still sometimes claim that the Nazis violated the aspirations of big business. See, for example, Payne, *History*, p. 190. In fact, most business leaders, whose negative memories of Weimar and the Depression were still fresh, swallowed their reluc-

Sternhell responds to this line of argument by asserting that every political movement deforms its ideology under the constraints of exercising power.¹⁸ Fascism, however (unlike Stalinism), never produces a casuistic literature devoted to demonstrating how the leader's actions correspond in some profound way to the basic scriptures. Being in accord with basic scriptures simply does not seem to matter to fascist leaders, who claim to incarnate the national destiny in their physical persons.

Feelings propel fascism more than thought does. We might call them mobilizing passions, since they function in fascist movements to recruit followers and in fascist regimes to "weld" the fascist "tribe" to its leader.¹⁹ The following mobilizing passions are present in fascisms, though they may sometimes be articulated only implicitly:

1. The primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether universal or individual.
2. The belief that one's group is a victim, a sentiment which justifies any action against the group's enemies, internal as well as external.
3. Dread of the group's decadence under the corrosive effect of individualistic and cosmopolitan liberalism.
4. Closer integration of the community within a brotherhood (*fascio*) whose unity and purity are forged by common conviction, if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary.
5. An enhanced sense of identity and belonging, in which the grandeur of the group reinforces individual self-esteem.
6. Authority of natural leaders (always male) throughout society, culminating in a national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group's destiny.

tance about Nazi autarky and thrived handsomely on rearmament. Peter Hayes, *Industry and Ideology: IG Farben in the Nazi Era* (Cambridge, 1987), finds an "intersection, not an identity, of interests" (p. 120). Daimler-Benz enjoyed particular favor with the regime. See Bernard P. Bellon, *Mercedes in Peace and War* (New York, 1990). The most important common interest, of course, was the emasculation of the labor movement. These issues are magisterially treated by Charles Maier, "The Economics of Fascism and Nazism," in his *In Search of Stability: Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 70–120.

¹⁸ Sternhell et al. (n. 4 above), p. 231, argue that actions conflict with programs no more extensively with fascism than with other political currents.

¹⁹ I draw these terms from Marc Bloch's description in summer 1943 of the two political systems then engaged in a life-and-death struggle: "the tribe that a collective passion welds to its leader is here—that is, in a republic—replaced by a community governed by laws." Marc Bloch, "Pourquoi je suis républicain," *Les Cahiers politiques*, Organe du Comité général d'études de la Résistance, no. 2 (July 1943), one of the "écrits clandestins" published in *L'Etrange défaite* (Paris, 1993), p. 215. He evoked the same distinction in *L'Etrange défaite*, p. 176: Hitlerism "remplace la persuasion par la suggestion émotive."

7. The beauty of violence and of will, when they are devoted to the group's success in a Darwinian struggle.

Programs are so easily sacrificed to expediency in fascist practice that, at one point, I was tempted to reduce the role of ideology in fascism to a simple functionalism: fascists propose anything that serves to attract a crowd, solidify a mass following, or reassure their elite accomplices. That would be a gross oversimplification. Ideas count in fascism, but we must be precise about exactly when and how they count. They count more at some stages than at others. At the beginning, their promise of radical spiritual-cultural renewal and restored national community helps fascists recruit a broad and varied public, including some respectable intellectuals.²⁰ Early fascist ideas helped amplify the disrepute of the liberal values to which the broad middle classes had largely adhered before World War I. But it is only by distancing themselves from those elements of the early radical programs that were threatening to conservatives that certain fascist movements have been able to gain and exercise power.

In power, what seems to count is less the faithful application of the party's initial ideology than the integrating function that espousing one official ideology performs, to the exclusion of any ideas deemed alien or divisive. Much later in the fascist cycle, at the climacteric moment, under the influence of war, parts of the original radical fascist programs that do not threaten existing social or economic hierarchies (such as the Nazis' racial obsessions) may recover their ascendancy. We will return to these matters when we discuss the stages in detail. The contradictions that obscure every reading of fascist texts can be resolved, therefore, only by the study of the choices made by the fascists in their daily actions.

To illustrate this proposition, consider the two most ambiguous concepts in the fascist lexicon: revolution and modernity. Fascists like to call themselves revolutionaries, but one discovers best by their actions what they really want to change. Their revolution consists of hardening the character and purifying and energizing the community rather than making the social structure or the economic system more just or free. Fascist militants proclaim themselves anti-bourgeois; what they hate in the bourgeoisie, however, is not exploitation but softness. Sternhell has put his finger precisely on what distinguishes those revolutionaries who abandon early fascism, when it begins to reposition itself for power, from those who remain faithful to it through all its transformations. The first remain committed to a change in the socio-economic order. The faithful,

²⁰ Walter L. Adamson, "Modernism and Fascism: The Politics of Culture in Italy, 1903–1922," *American Historical Review* 95 (April 1990): 359–90, holds that the principal effect of Mussolini's association with modernist intellectuals was the legitimation this lent early Fascism (p. 361). "The important issue . . . is not the content of fascist ideology but the cultural sources of fascist rhetoric and of the secular-religious aura it sought to project" (p. 363).

by contrast, preach a moral revolution in order to create “the new fascist man.”²¹ Fascist “revolutionaries” believe in change in the sense used by Tancredi, scion of the decaying noble Sicilian family in Giuseppe di Lampedusa’s great novel *The Leopard*: “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.”²²

Similar confusions surround the fascist understanding of modernity. Hitler loved to arrive theatrically aboard a supercharged Mercedes or by airplane. It is true that he nursed the archaic dream of installing German peasant colonies in the plains of eastern Europe, but this dream could be realized only by modern weaponry. Hitler execrated the Bauhaus style; the young Mussolini, on the contrary, was attracted to aesthetic modernism.²³ It has been traditional to try to resolve these conflicts by scrutinizing fascist texts.²⁴ These conflicts can best be resolved, however, by examining fascist actions: all fascists seek technical and military power while simultaneously trying to escape the destabilizing social effects of the industrialization such power requires. They combine technical modernity with a system of authority and discipline intended to suppress the disorderly social consequences of industrial expansion. The meanings that fascists give to the concepts of revolution and modernity, ambiguous in the texts, become comprehensible in their concrete applications.

The fifth and final difficulty with defining fascism is caused by overuse: the word “fascist” has become the most banal of epithets. Everyone is someone’s fascist. Consider Rush Limbaugh’s “feminazis.” A couple of summers ago, I heard a young German call Western-sponsored birth control programs in the Third World “fascist,” forgetting that the Nazis and the Italian Fascists were, for once, agreed in encouraging large families—except, of course, among those considered either eugenically or racially inferior. Those people were condemned to sterilization, if not worse.²⁵ The term “fascist” has been so

²¹ Sternhell et al., pp. 193, 249.

²² Giuseppe di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun (New York, 1950), p. 40.

²³ Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985); Walter L. Adamson, *Avant-garde Florence: Between Modernism and Fascism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).

²⁴ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism* (Cambridge, 1984), tries, with great erudition, to extract the meaning of the “modern” from within fascist texts.

²⁵ Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen, 1986), has transformed our understanding of Nazi family policy by underlining the antinatalist character of its programs of obligatory sterilization for foreigners, the incurably ill, Jews, and Gypsies. These antinatalist policies coexisted, however, with a natalist policy for “the master race.” See Atina Grossmann, “Feminist Debates about Women and National Socialism,” *Gender and History* 3 (Autumn 1991): 350–58.

loosely used that some have proposed giving it up altogether in scholarly research.²⁶

Nevertheless, we cannot give up in the face of these difficulties. A real phenomenon exists. Indeed, 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, antiliberal and antisocialist nationalist dictatorships. Then it spread its “politics in a new key” through much of Europe, assembling all nationalists who hated the Left and found the Right inadequate.²⁷ 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. We must have a word, and for lack of a better one, we must employ the word that Mussolini borrowed from the vocabulary of the Italian Left in 1919, before his movement had assumed its mature form.²⁸ Obligated to use the word fascism, we ought to use it well.

Unfortunately much scholarly work on fascism complicates things still further by two very widespread errors of approach. First, most authorities treat generic fascism in a static manner. With several remarkable exceptions—I think particularly of Pierre Milza and Philippe Burrin—they look for a fixed essence: the famous “fascist minimum.”²⁹ Second, most works consider

²⁶ Henry A. Turner, Jr., doubted that generic fascism is a valid or useful concept in “Fascism and Modernization,” in *Reappraisals of Fascism*, ed. Henry A. Turner, Jr. (New York, 1975), pp. 132–33. Gilbert Allardyce pushed skepticism furthest in “What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept,” *American Historical Review* 84 (April 1979): 367–88.

²⁷ The term is from Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna* (New York, 1980), chap. 3.

²⁸ The term *fascio* was used by syndicalists in the 1890s, as in the *fasci siciliani*; it emphasizes the solidarity of brothers in action. Pro-intervention syndicalists brought the word into the nationalist lexicon during World War I, as in the *Fasci di Difesa Nazionale* in Ferrara, to whose journal, *Il Fascio*, Mussolini contributed in 1917. The form *fascismo* seems to be Mussolini’s own invention in 1919.

²⁹ Pierre Milza, *Fascisme français: passé et présent* (Paris, 1987), presents a four-stage model of fascism; Philippe Burrin, *La Dérive fasciste* (Paris, 1986), elegantly traces the itineraries by which Jacques Doriot, Marcel Déat, and Gaston Bergery, steering between blockages and opportunities, shifted from the Left to fascism. Most recent authors seek some “fascist essence.” Payne, *History*, pp. 487–95, while rejecting any monocausal or reductionist theory, presents “elements of a retrodictive theory of fascism” that apply to movements as well as to regimes; Laqueur, *Fascism*, finds fascism like pornography, in that “it is difficult—perhaps impossible—to define in an operational, legally valid way,” but nevertheless presents “the essence of fascism” (pp. 6, 13–21); in *The Nature of Fascism*, Griffin proposes a “new ideal type” of fascism defined as “a genus of political

fascisms in too isolated a manner, without sufficient sustained reference to the political, social, and cultural spaces in which they navigate. Together, these two common errors of approach produce what we might call “bestiaries” of fascism. Like medieval naturalists, they present a catalog of portraits of one beast after another, each one portrayed against a bit of background scenery and identified by its external signs.³⁰

We can get beyond the “bestiary” approach by adopting three quite simple historical strategies. One is to study fascism in motion, paying more attention to processes than to essences. Another is to study it contextually, spending at least as much time on the surrounding society and on fascism’s allies and accomplices as on the fascist movements themselves.³¹ The more actively a fascist movement participates in the political life of its country, the less one can understand it in isolation. It is ensnared in a web of reciprocal influences with allies or rivals in its country’s civil society. Finally, we can put the disconcerting malleability of fascisms in time and in space to good use. That malleability is not necessarily an obstacle to understanding. It may even make understanding easier, by making comparison possible. Comparison is “a way of thinking more than a method,” and it works better when we try to account for differences than when we try to amass vague resemblances.³² Comparison works revealingly with fascisms, since every Western society has contained at least some marginal example. Their different fates across time and space in neighboring settings should help us to identify the principal factors in the varying success of specific cases, and even to isolate the constants.³³

ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism” (p. 26); for Eatwell, fascism is a “coherent body of thought (n. 1 above, p. xvii) whose “essence” is a “form of thought that preaches the need for social rebirth in order to forge a holistic-national radical Third Way” (p. 14).

³⁰ An extreme case of this genre, Anthony Joes, *Fascism in the Contemporary World: Ideology, Evolution, Resurgence* (Boulder, Colo., 1978), includes practically every mass-based dictatorship in the developing world.

³¹ A superior example is Adrian Lyttleton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy, 1919–1929*, 2d ed. (Princeton, N.J., 1987).

³² Raymond Grew, “On the Current State of Comparative Studies,” in *Marc Bloch Aujourd’hui: Histoire comparée et sciences sociales*, ed. Hartmut Atsma and André Burguière (Paris, 1990), p. 331.

³³ Marc Bloch, a great exponent of comparison in history, distinguished two kinds: the juxtaposition of similar phenomena in different cultures, such as feudalism in the West and in Japan; and the parallel study of “neighboring and adjacent societies” having known “change in the same direction.” Marc Bloch, “Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes,” *Revue de Synthèse* 46 (1928):15–50, reprinted in Marc Bloch, *Mélanges historiques*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1963), 1:16–40. This second type of historical comparison, confronting different outcomes for the same process in two neighboring regions, is the sharper tool. One thinks of the two halves of the *département* of the Sarthe, one republican

But one must compare what is comparable. A regime where fascism exercises power is hardly comparable to a sect of dissident intellectuals. We must distinguish the different stages of fascism in time. It has long been standard to point to the difference between movements and regimes. I believe we can usefully distinguish more stages than that, if we look clearly at the very different sociopolitical processes involved in each stage. I propose to isolate five of them:³⁴ (1) the initial creation of fascist movements; (2) their rooting as parties in a political system; (3) the acquisition of power; (4) the exercise of power; and, finally, in the longer term, (5) radicalization or entropy. Since different kinds of historical process are involved in each stage, moreover, we must deploy different scholarly strategies in the analysis of each.

Consider the first stage. First-stage fascism is the domain of the intellectual historian, for the process to be studied here is the emergence of new ways of looking at the world and diagnosing its ills. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thinkers and publicists discredited reigning liberal and democratic values, not in the name of either existing alternative—conservative or socialist—but in the name of something new that promised to transcend and join them: a novel mixture of nationalism and syndicalism that had found little available space in a nineteenth-century political landscape compartmented into Left and Right (though retrospect may reveal a few maverick precedents). This first stage is the part of the fascist elephant that scholars have found most congenial as a subject; examining one limb, of course, may mislead us about the whole beast.

Comparison is of little help to us at this first stage, for all modern states have had protofascist militants and publicists since the 1914–18 war. Fascism can appear wherever democracy is sufficiently implanted to have aroused disillusion. That suggests its spatial and temporal limits: no authentic fascism before the emergence of a massively enfranchised and politically active citizenry. In order to give birth to fascism, a society must have known political liberty—for better or for worse.

But early fascisms were so ubiquitous that we can hardly attribute their origin to any one particular national intellectual history. George Mosse has fingered post-Enlightenment Germany; Sternhell, France at the turn of the

and the other counterrevolutionary, compared so fruitfully by Paul Bois, *Paysans de l'ouest* (Paris, 1971); and of Maurice Agulhon's comparison of the different reception of republicanism in the early nineteenth century in two regions of the Var, one of them "virtually immobile" and the other "touched by the fever of industrial development": *La République au village* (Paris, 1979), p. 32.

³⁴ Milza proposes four stages: a first fascism, that of marginal movements of intellectuals from both Right and Left; a second fascism, that of militant activists on the road to power; a third fascism, exercising power; and a fourth, under the pressures of war.

century, followed by Italian disciples.³⁵ A body of thought that one can call “protofascist” appeared even in the United States, at the end of the nineteenth century. Brooks Adams, scion of a great New England dynasty, descendant of two presidents of the United States, lamented the moral decline of the United States as a result of the concentration of financial power.³⁶ Later on, in 1918, Adams believed he had found the remedy to American decline in an authoritarian regime directing a state socialism. After the First World War, the United States, too, entered the “magnetic field” of European fascisms. “Colored shirt” movements sprang up, such as the “Silver Shirts,” or “S.S.,” of William Dudley Pelley.³⁷

But it is further back in American history that one comes upon the earliest phenomenon that seems functionally related to fascism: the Ku Klux Klan. Just after the Civil War, some former Confederate officers, fearing the vote given to African Americans by the Radical Reconstructionists in 1867, set up a militia to restore an overturned social order. The Klan constituted an alternate civic authority, parallel to the legal state, which, in its founders’ eyes, no longer defended their community’s legitimate interests. In its adoption of a uniform (white robe and hood), as well as its techniques of intimidation and its conviction that violence was justified in the cause of the group’s destiny, the first version of the Klan in the defeated American South was a remarkable preview of the way fascist movements were to function in interwar Europe.³⁸ It is arguable, at least, that fascism (understood functionally) was born in the late 1860s in the American South.

Since fascisms take their first steps in reaction to claimed failings of democracy, it is not surprising that they should appear first in the most precocious democracies, the United States and France. But we come now to a paradox: it is not necessarily in the countries that generated the first fascisms that fascist systems have had, historically, the best chance of succeeding.

The second stage—rooting, in which a fascist movement becomes a party

³⁵ George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York, 1964), and other works. Zeev Sternhell, *Le droite révolutionnaire, 1885–1914: Les origines françaises du fascisme* (Paris, 1978); Sternhell et al. (n. 4 above).

³⁶ Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay in History* (New York, 1895).

³⁷ Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Rabb, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790–1970*, 2d ed. (New York, 1978), is a serviceable “bestiary” for the United States. Pelley is treated most fully in Leo P. Riboffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia, 1983). For a subtle discussion of how appropriate the fascist label is for the extreme right in the United States during the 1930s, see Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York, 1982), pp. 269–83.

³⁸ David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865–1965*, 3d ed. (Durham, N.C., 1987), chap. 1. Correspondences between fascism

capable of acting decisively on the political scene—happens relatively rarely. At this stage, comparison becomes rewarding: one can contrast successes with failures. Success depends on certain relatively precise conditions: the weakness of a liberal state, whose inadequacies seems to condemn the nation to disorder, decline, or humiliation; and political deadlock because the Right, the heir to power but unable to continue to wield it alone, refuses to accept a growing Left as a legitimate governing partner. Some fascist leaders, in their turn, are willing to reposition their movements in alliances with these frightened conservatives, a step that pays handsomely in political power, at the cost of disaffection among some of the early antibourgeois militants.

To illustrate the issues raised by the rooting stage, consider the growth of fascism among farmers. I have been studying a peasant movement in the west of France in the 1930s, whose leader, Henry Dorgères, linked himself openly with fascism, at least at the beginning, in 1934. I chose this subject not because his Greenshirts played a major role in interwar France—they did not, except for several conspicuous crowd actions exaggerated by the press—but because it was in the countryside that German Nazism and Italian Fascism first succeeded in becoming the representatives of an important social and economic interest. The comparison between the success of rural fascism in Germany and Italy and its relative failure in France seems to me a fruitful one. It permits us to identify those aspects of the French Third Republic that made it a less propitious setting than Weimar Germany or the Italian liberal monarchy for the political rooting of the local variety of fascism.

All three of these countries experienced massive strikes of agricultural workers: east-Elbian Germany during the postwar crisis in 1919–23; the Po Valley and Apulia in Italy in 1920–21; and the big farms of northern France and the Paris Basin during the two summers of the Popular Front, in 1936 and 1937.³⁹ The German strikes were broken by vigilantes, armed and abetted by local army authorities, in cases in which the regular authorities were too conciliatory to suit the landowners. The Italian ones were broken by Mussolini's famous blackshirted *squadristi*, whose vigilantism filled the void left by the

and the Klan in the 1920s are explored by Nancy Maclean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Klan* (New York, 1994), pp. 179–88.

³⁹ On east-Elbian Germany, see Frieda Wunderlich, *German Farm Labor, 1810–1845* (Princeton, N.J., 1961), pp. 52, 105–8; Erich D. Kohler, "Revolutionary Pomerania, 1919–1920: A Study in Majority Socialist Agricultural Policy and Civil-Military Relations," *Central European History* 9 (September 1976): 250–93; and Martin Schumacher, *Land und Politik: Eine Untersuchung über politische Parteien und agrarische Interessen* (Düsseldorf, 1978), pp. 294–309; on Italy, see Paul Corner, *Fascism in Ferrara* (Oxford, 1976); Frank M. Snowden, *Violence and Great Estates in the South of Italy: Apulia, 1900–1922* (Cambridge, 1986); and Simona Colarizi, *Dopoguerra e fascismo in Puglia, 1919–1926* (Bari, 1971); and on France, see Robert O. Paxton, *French Peasant Fascism* (New York, 1997).

apparent inability of the liberal Italian state to enforce order. It was precisely in this direct action against farm-worker unions that second-stage fascism was born in Italy and even launched on the path to power, to the dismay of the first Fascists, intellectual dissidents from national syndicalism. Many militants from the first stage resigned from second-stage Fascism at this point, complaining of being transformed into “watchdogs” for the big planters.⁴⁰

France had *squadristi*, too: Henry Dorgères’s Greenshirts (*chemises vertes*), active during the great strikes of agricultural workers in the hot summers of 1936 and 1937. But the Greenshirts’ role was limited to several symbolic actions in the big wheat and sugar beet farms of the north and northwest (Aisne, Somme, Seine-Maritime, Pas-de-Calais). It was the French *gendarmérie*, even with Léon Blum in power, who put down the agricultural strikes in France. The French landowners did not need the *chemises vertes*. The authority of the state and the power of the conservative farmers’ organizations left hardly any space in the French countryside for the rooting of a fascist parallel power. These differences in available space and allies seem to me much more influential than any differences or resemblances in vocabulary or program among rural fascists in France, Germany, and Italy.

That is to say, the most significant differences that comparison reveals to us concern the setting as much as the character of the fascist movements themselves. This seems to be a quite fundamental principle of good comparative method (see n. 34 above). The description of fascist movements in isolation does not explain much. It leads us straight back to the bestiary or, even worse, to pruriency, as in Visconti’s film *The Damned*, which invites us to leer at the decadent perversity of individual fascist thugs.⁴¹ We learn much more if we focus our gaze on the circumstances that favor the fascists—polarization within civil society and deadlocks within the political system—and on the fascists’ accomplices and allies. It is in the surrounding conditions that one must seek the differences that count, for movements that sound rather similar in their rhetoric have arrived at very different results in different national settings.

Therefore, the methods of intellectual history become much less helpful beyond the first stage in the fascist cycle. Every fascist movement that has rooted itself successfully as a major political contender, thereby approaching power, has betrayed its initial antibourgeois and anticapitalist program. The processes to be examined in later stages include the breakdown of democratic regimes

⁴⁰ The disillusioned words of Barbato Gattelli, a Fascist from the movement’s first days, quoted in Corner, *Ferrara*, p. 224.

⁴¹ Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (Bloomington, Ind., 1993), explores the nihilistic and erotic undercurrents within aesthetic evocations of Nazism after the 1970s.

and the success of fascist movements in assembling new, broad catch-all parties that attract a mass following across classes and hence seem attractive allies to conservatives looking for ways to perpetuate their shaken rule.⁴² At later stages, successful fascist parties also position themselves as the most effective barriers, by persuasion or by force, to an advancing Left and prove adept at the formation, maintenance, and domination of political coalitions with conservatives. But these political successes come at the cost of the first ideological programs. Demonstrating their contempt for doctrine, successfully rooted fascist parties do not annul or amend their early programs. They simply ignore them, while acting in ways quite contrary to them. The conflicts of doctrine and practice set up by successful fascist movements on the road to power not only alienate many radical fascists of the first hour; they continue to confuse many historians who assume that analyzing programs is a sufficient tool for classifying fascisms. The confusion has been compounded by the persistence of many early fascisms that failed to navigate the turn from the first to the second and third stages and remained pure and radical, though marginal, as “national syndicalisms.”⁴³

A thoughtful look at the first two stages in the original fascist cycle—the creation and emergence of such movements as plausible players on the political stage—shows how much improvisation was involved in the first steps of Mussolini and Hitler. Mussolini evidently believed in 1919 that his new *Fasci di combattimento* were destined to gather discontented veterans together with other discontented nationalists, from both Left and Right, in a vast movement for profound social change. We have noted how the first Fascist program, drafted in spring 1919, mixed nationalist territorial claims with social reforms that are astonishingly radical in the light of Mussolini’s later actions and macho persona. This early fascism was decisively defeated in the elections of 1919, for there was no space in Italian politics for a party that was both nationalist and Left. Mussolini would be totally forgotten today if some of his lieutenants in the provinces had not discovered different vocations—bashing Slovenes in Trieste in July 1920 and bashing socialist organizers of farm workers in the Po Valley in fall and winter 1920–21. Mussolini supported these new initiatives

⁴² It is curious how little scholarly attention has been devoted to the opening of spaces within which fascism may expand. The principal work is Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore, 1978).

⁴³ Payne, *History* (n. 1 above), describes dozens of cases. Sternhell considers that movements in opposition reveal more about fascism than regimes in power: “one is able to apprehend the true significance of the phenomenon” and “obtains a clearer understanding of fascist thought and behavior” if one studies the French movements that “never had to make the inevitable compromises.” Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Left nor Right: Fascist Ideology in France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986), p. 270.

by the *ras*, and his movement turned into something else, thereafter prospering mightily.⁴⁴ Hitler's efforts to recruit urban and working-class voters faltered through 1928; he began assembling a mass electorate in 1929–30 when he turned his attention to recruiting rural populations afflicted by the collapse of farm prices.⁴⁵ The two apprentices learned how to be second-stage fascists by trial and error. Their adaptations to the available space undermine any effort to portray historical fascism as the consistent expression of one coherent ideology.

At the third stage, the arrival in power, comparison acquires greater bite. What characteristics distinguished Germany and Italy, where fascism took power, from countries such as France and Britain, where fascist movements were highly visible but remained marginal? We need to recall that fascism has never so far taken power by a coup d'état, deploying the weight of its militants in the street. Fascist power by coup is hardly conceivable in a modern state. Fascism cannot appeal to the street without risking a confrontation with future allies—the army and the police—without whom it will not be able to pursue its expansionist goals. Indeed, fascist coup attempts have commonly led to military dictatorship rather than to fascist power (as in Romania in December 1941).⁴⁶ Resorting to direct mass action also risks conceding advantages to fascism's principal enemy, the Left, which was still powerful in the street and workplace in interwar Europe.⁴⁷ The only route to power available to fascists passes through cooperation with conservative elites. The most important variables, therefore, are the conservative elites' willingness to work with the fascists (along with a reciprocal flexibility on the part of the fascist leaders) and the depth of the crisis that induces them to cooperate.

Neither Hitler nor Mussolini took the helm by force, even if they used force earlier to destabilize the liberal regime and later to transform their governments

⁴⁴ Local fascist leaders were called *ras* after Ethiopian chieftains, for the Ethiopians' defeat of the Italian Army at Adowa in 1896 still rankled Italian nationalists.

⁴⁵ Nazi rural organizers had to overcome rural suspicions based on Point 17 of the party's Twenty-Five Points of 1920. It called for expropriation without compensation of land needed for national purposes, the abolition of ground rent, and the prohibition of speculation in land. Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1983), pp. 149–151, 215–21; J. E. Farquharson, "The Agrarian Policy of National Socialist Germany," in *Peasants and Lords in Modern Germany: Recent Studies in Agricultural History*, ed. Robert G. Moeller (Boston, 1986), p. 236. See, more generally, J. E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika* (Berkeley, 1976); and Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's "Green Party"* (Abbotsbrook, 1985).

⁴⁶ Payne, among others, considers authoritarian military dictatorships the most effective barrier, historically, against fascist acquisitions of power. See Payne, *History*, pp. 250, 252, 312, 321, 326, 395, 492.

⁴⁷ Interwar fascists could remember how a general strike had frustrated the Kapp Putsch in Germany in 1920.

into dictatorships.⁴⁸ Each was invited to take office as head of government by a head of state in the legitimate exercise of his official functions, on the advice of his conservative counselors, under quite precise circumstances: a deadlock of constitutional government (produced in part by the polarization that the fascists abetted); conservative leaders who felt threatened by the loss of their capacity to keep the population under control at a moment of massive popular mobilization; an advancing Left; and conservative leaders who refused to work with that Left and who felt unable to continue to govern against the Left without further reinforcement.

Comparison with the quite varied cases where fascism flourished but failed to take power can be instructive at this third stage. In France, if fascism did not arrive in power before the defeat of 1940, the explanation is not some mysterious allergy.⁴⁹ Early fascism prospered in France, but most conservatives did not feel sufficiently threatened in the 1930s to call on it for help, and fascism was not sufficiently rooted and recentered to impose itself as a partner.⁵⁰ British fascism had little space available because the Conservative Party succeeded in ruling consensually from 1931 to 1945. Franco's military dictatorship preempted Spanish fascism, and Salazar crushed Portuguese fascism after he had copied some of its techniques of popular mobilization.⁵¹

The fourth stage—the exercise of power—is conditioned by the manner in

⁴⁸ Lyttelton (n. 31 above) is still best for this process in Italy. For Germany, Karl-Dietrich Bracher, Gerhard Schulz, and Wolfgang Sauer, *Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung*, 3 vols. (Cologne and Opladen, 1962), is still basic. The most complete analysis of the final moments is Henry A. Turner, Jr., *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power, January 1933* (Reading, Mass., 1996).

⁴⁹ Serge Berstein, "La France allergique au fascisme," *Vingtième siècle: Revue d'histoire* 2 (April 1984): 84–94.

⁵⁰ Pierre Milza (n. 29 above); Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave, 1924–1933* (New Haven, Conn., 1986), and *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933–1939* (New Haven, Conn., 1995). The debate about the strength of native fascism in France turns on whether the largest movement, Col. François de La Rocque's *Parti social français*, successor to his paramilitary league, the *Croix de Feu*, dissolved in 1936, can properly be considered fascist. The positive case is made for both the league and the party by Robert Soucy and William D. Irvine, "Fascism in France and the Strange Case of the Croix de Feu," *Journal of Modern History* 63 (June 1991): 271–95. Kevin Passmore, "Boy Scoutism for Grown-Ups? Paramilitarism in the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français," *French Historical Studies* 19 (Fall 1995): 527–57, distinguishes between the league, which he considers fascist on behavioral more than ideological grounds, and the party, which he considers conservative. Jacques Nobécourt, *Le Colonel de La Rocque, 1885–1946, ou les pièges du nationalisme chrétien* (Paris, 1996), an exhaustive sympathetic biography, portrays La Rocque as a conservative victimized by false accusations and personal rivalries.

⁵¹ Stanley Payne, *The Franco Regime, 1936–1975* (Madison, Wis., 1987); Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (New York, 1994); António Costa Pinto, *Salazar's Dictatorship and European Fascism* (Boulder, Colo., 1995). See, generally, Martin Blinkhorn, ed.,

which fascism arrives in power. The fascist leaders who have reached power, historically, have been condemned to govern in association with the conservative elites who had opened the gates to them. This sets up a four-way struggle for dominance among the leader, his party (whose militants clamor for jobs, perquisites, expansionist adventures, and the fulfillment of elements of the early radical program), the regular state functionaries such as police commanders and magistrates, and the traditional elites—churches, the army, the professions, and business leaders.⁵² This four-way tension is what gives fascist rule its characteristic blend of febrile activism and shapelessness.⁵³

The tensions within fascist rule also help us clarify the frontiers between authentic fascism and other forms of dictatorial rule. Fascist rule is unlike the exercise of power in either authoritarianism (which lacks a single party, or gives it little power) or Stalinism (which lacked traditional elites).⁵⁴ Authoritar-

Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in the Twentieth Century (London, 1990).

⁵² Racial hygiene has recently proven a fruitful subject because it links Nazi practice to professional interests. See Michael H. Kater, *Doctors under Hitler* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1989); Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York, 1986). Burleigh and Wippermann (n. 14 above), p. 353, n. 1, advocate, convincingly, a more anthropologically informed study of how fascist regimes interacted with specific social groups.

⁵³ Perspicacious contemporaries saw this compound quality of fascist rule as a “dual state,” in which the “normative state” jostled for power with a “prerogative state” formed by the party’s parallel organizations. See Ernst Fraenkel, *The Dual State* (New York, 1941); and Franz Neumann, *Behemoth* (New York, 1942). The compound nature of fascist rule has been conceptually refined since the 1970s by the “polyocratic” interpretation. See Martin Broszat, *Hitler’s State* (London, 1981); Hans Mommsen, in many works, including *From Weimar to Auschwitz*, trans. Philip O’Connor (Cambridge, 1991); and *Der Führerstaat: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker (Stuttgart, 1981). For an analogous reading of Fascist Italy, see Emilio Gentile, “Le rôle du parti dans le laboratoire totalitaire italien,” *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 43 (May–June 1988): 567–91; and Philippe Burrin, “Politique et société: Les structures du pouvoir dans l’Italie fasciste et l’Allemagne nazie,” *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 43 (May–June 1988): 615–37. For “shapelessness,” see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2d ed. (New York, 1958), pp. 389–390, 395, 398, 402. She credits the term to Neumann, *Behemoth*.

⁵⁴ Juan J. Linz has made the classic analysis of authoritarianism as a distinct form of rule: “An Authoritarian Regime: Spain,” in *Mass Politics: Studies in Political Sociology*, ed. Erik Allard and Stein Rokkan (New York, 1970), pp. 251–83, “From Falange to Movimiento-Organización: The Spanish Single Party and the Franco Regime, 1936–1968,” in *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Societies: The Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems*, ed. Samuel P. Huntington and Clement Moore (New York, 1970), “Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes,” in *Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (Reading, Mass., 1975), vol. 3, esp. pp. 264–350. As for totalitarianism, Arendt included Stalin and excluded Mussolini, as did Carl Friedrich

ians would prefer to leave the population demobilized, while fascists promise to win the working class back for the nation by their superior techniques of manufacturing enthusiasm.⁵⁵ Although authoritarian regimes may trample due process and individual liberties, they accept ill-defined, though real, limits to state power in favor of some private space for individuals and “organic” intermediary bodies such as local notables, economic cartels, families, and churches. Fascism claims to reduce the private sphere to nothing, though that is propaganda (which has been quite successful, moreover, even with scholars).⁵⁶ Stalin’s Communist Party governed a civil society radically simplified by the Bolshevik Revolution; under Hitler, in contrast, the party, the bureaucracy, and the traditional elites jostled for power. Even if Stalin’s techniques of rule often resembled those of fascism, he did not have to concern himself with concentrations of inherited autonomous social and economic power.

The exercise of power involved the same elements in Mussolini’s Italy as in Nazi Germany.⁵⁷ It is the balance between the party and traditional institutions that distinguishes one case from the other. In Italy, the traditional state wound up with primacy, largely because Mussolini feared his own most militant followers, the local *ras* and their *squadristi*. In Nazi Germany, the party came to dominate, especially after the war began. This interplay between single parties and traditional elites helps us classify borderline regimes, especially if we bear in mind that the frontiers were fluid between authoritarian and fascist regimes, and they might be crossed in either direction. The Vichy regime was certainly

and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956). By the late 1960s, the totalitarianism concept had come to seem a Cold War artifact and remains in use today mainly in popular language. See Benjamin R. Barber, “The Conceptual Foundations of Totalitarianism,” in Carl J. Friedrich, Michael Curtis, and Benjamin R. Barber, *Totalitarianism in Perspective: Three Views* (London, 1969). See now Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, eds., *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁵⁵ The borders between the two kinds of regime are blurred here, for, in practice, neither gets its wish. Faced with aroused publics, authoritarians as well as fascists may attempt to create a Durkheimian “mechanical solidarity.” Paul Brooker, *The Faces of Fraternalism: Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan* (Oxford, 1991). Fascists may achieve no more than a “superficial” and “fragile” consent. Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 20 and chap. 8, “The Limits of Consent.” The most meticulous study of German public opinion under Nazism, Martin Broszat’s “Bavaria program,” concluded that it was atomized and passive. See Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria, 1933–1945* (Oxford, 1983).

⁵⁶ Robert Ley, head of the Nazi Labor Service, said that the only private individual in the Nazi state is a person asleep. Arendt believed him. See *Origins*, p. 339.

⁵⁷ Alberto Aquarone, *Organizzazione dello stato totalitario* (Turin, 1965), has not been superseded. See also the articles of Gentile and Burrin cited above.

not fascist at the outset, for it had neither a single party nor parallel institutions. As it became transformed into a police state under the pressures of war, however, parallel institutions appeared: the *Milice* or supplementary police, the “special sections” in the judiciary, the Police for Jewish Affairs.⁵⁸ Spain and Portugal, related to Vichy by style of rule as well as by sympathy, differed in that neutrality in World War II permitted them to reinforce steadily the predominance of the traditional state over these countries’ small fascist movements.⁵⁹

In the long run (the fifth stage), fascist “dual power” can evolve in either of two directions: radicalization or entropy. Mussolini’s regime subsided toward routine authoritarianism after the establishment of the dictatorship in 1925–26, except during colonial campaigns. The Ethiopian War (1935–36) set off a “rivoluzione culturale” and “svolta totalitaria” in which the Fascist regime tried to shape the fascist “new man” by instituting “fascist customs,” “fascist language,” and racial legislation.⁶⁰ Within the sphere of colonialist action, first in Libya and then in Ethiopia, the party’s arbitrary rule and policies of racial discrimination were free to set the tone.⁶¹ The radicalism of Italian Fascism’s early days reappeared at the end of the war in the phantom Republic of Salò that governed the north of Italy under German tutelage after September 1943.

Nazi Germany alone experienced full radicalization. A victorious war of extermination in the East offered almost limitless freedom of action to the “prerogative state” and its “parallel institutions,” released from the remaining constraints of the “normative state,” such as they were. In the “no-man’s-land” of what had been Poland and the western parts of the Soviet Union they put into application their ultimate fantasies of racial cleansing.⁶² Extreme radical-

⁵⁸ Michèle Cointet, *Vichy et le fascisme: Les hommes, les structures, et les pouvoirs* (Brussels, 1987). An interesting attempt to evaluate Vichy’s propaganda efforts as a failed fascist experiment is Denis Peschanski, “Vichy au singulier, Vichy au pluriel: Une tentative avortée d’encadrement de la société (1941–1942),” *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 43 (May–June 1988): 639–62. One may ask, with Philippe Burrin, whether an authentic fascism is compatible with foreign occupation: *La Dérive fasciste* (n. 29 above), p. 414.

⁵⁹ Salazar suppressed Portuguese National Syndicalism in 1934 and downplayed the Portuguese Legion after 1939. Costa Pinto (n. 51 above), pp. 160–65, 188–90.

⁶⁰ The terms are Renzo De Felice’s in *Mussolini: Il Duce: Lo stato totalitario, 1936–1940* (Turin, 1981), p. 100; for this and other controversial judgments by Mussolini’s principal biographer, see Borden W. Painter, “Renzo De Felice and the Historiography of Italian Fascism,” *American Historical Review* 95 (April 1990): 391–405.

⁶¹ Claudio Segrè, *The Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago, 1974); Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini’s Roman Empire* (New York, 1976); Luigi Preti, “Fascist Imperialism and Racism,” in *The Ax Within*, ed. Roland Sarti (New York, 1974), pp. 187–207.

⁶² In the debate about what drove radicalization, the artificial distinction between “intentionalists” and “functionalists” has been resolved, most effectively by Christopher Browning, in favor of an interaction between the leader’s intentions and competitive

ization remains latent in all fascisms, but the circumstances of war, and particularly of victorious wars of conquest, give it the fullest means of expression.⁶³

Focus on processes and discrimination among stages—this article’s principal methodological proposals—casts a clarifying light on many specialized themes in the study of fascism. Social composition, for example, evolves with successive stages. Any study that proposes a single, fixed social composition inherent in fascism is flawed.⁶⁴ It also becomes doubtful that we can identify a single unchanging fascist aesthetic that would apply to all the national cases.⁶⁵ The macho restoration of a threatened patriarchy comes close to being a universal fascist value, but Mussolini advocated female suffrage in his first program, and Hitler did not mention gender issues in his Twenty-Five Points.⁶⁶

Having picked fascism apart, have we escaped from the nominalism of the bestiary only to fall into another nominalism of processes and stages? Where is the “fascism minimum” in all this? Has generic fascism evaporated in this analysis? It is by a functional definition of fascism that we can escape from these quandaries. Fascism is a system of political authority and social order intended to reinforce the unity, energy, and purity of communities in which liberal democracy stands accused of producing division and decline. Its complex tensions (political revolution versus social restoration, order versus aggressive expansionism, mass enthusiasm versus civic submission) are hard to

harshness among subordinates who count on his approval. Browning’s most recent analysis is *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge, 1992).

⁶³ Omer Bartov makes a somewhat different point about how the special conditions of the Russian campaign inured the Army as well as the SS to brutality. See *The Eastern Front, 1941–1945: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare* (New York, 1986), and *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York, 1991).

⁶⁴ Stein U. Larsen, Bernt Hagtvet, and Jan Petter Myklebust, eds., *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Oslo, 1980), surmounts this problem better than most. Current work shies away both from class and from Hannah Arendt’s classless mass, preferring to explore links with more particularly defined groups: professions (n. 53 above), clubs, fraternities, and other “intermediary bodies.” See Rudy Koshar, “From *Stammtisch* to Party: Nazi Joiners and the Contradictions of Grass Roots Fascism in Weimar Germany,” *Journal of Modern History* 59 (March 1987): 1–24; and, more generally, Rudy Koshar, *Social Life, Local Politics, and Nazism: Marburg, 1880–1935* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986).

⁶⁵ Susan Sontag made an interesting effort to extract the elements of a fascist aesthetic from the work of Leni Riefenstahl: “Fascinating Fascism,” in Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York, 1980), but it may apply mainly to German culture.

⁶⁶ Still basic in English is Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society* (New York, 1975); Burleigh and Wippermann (n. 14 above) have an up-to-date chapter on women in Nazi Germany and, more innovatively, one on men. George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York, 1996), culminates with Nazi Germany. Essential for Italy is Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992).

understand solely by reading its propaganda. One must observe it in daily operation, using all the social sciences and not only intellectual-cultural history, and, since it is not static, one must understand it in motion, through its cycle of potential (though not inevitable) stages.

Defining fascism functionally, together with distinguishing clearly among successive stages, also helps us answer the burning question of this moment: can fascism still exist today, in spite of the humiliating defeat of Hitler and Mussolini, the declining availability of the war option in a nuclear age, the seemingly irreversible globalization of the economy, and the triumph of individualistic consumerism? After ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, the rise of exclusionary nationalisms in postcommunist Eastern Europe, the “skinhead” phenomenon in Britain, Germany, Scandinavia, and Italy, and the election of Mirko Tremaglia, a veteran of the Republic of Salò, as chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Italian Parliament during the Berlusconi government, it would be hard to answer “no” to that question.⁶⁷

The most interesting cases today, however, are not those that imitate the exotic colored-shirt movements of an earlier generation. New functional equivalents of fascism would probably work best, as George Orwell reminded us, clad in the mainstream patriotic dress of their own place and time. An authentically popular fascism in the United States would be pious and anti-Black; in Western Europe, secular and antisemitic, or more probably, these days, anti-Islamic; in Russia and Eastern Europe, religious, antisemitic, and slavophile. It is wiser to pay attention to the functions fulfilled by new movements of an analogous type, to the circumstances that could open a space to them, and to the potential conservative elite allies ready to try to coopt them rather than look for echoes of the rhetoric, the programs, or the aesthetic preferences of the protofascists of the last *fin de siècle*. We may legitimately conclude, for example, that the skinheads are functional equivalents of Hitler’s SA and Mussolini’s *squadristi* only if important elements of the conservative elite begin to cultivate them as weapons against some internal enemy, such as immigrants.

The right questions to ask of today’s neo- or protofascisms are those appropriate for the second and third stages of the fascist cycle. Are they becoming rooted as parties that represent major interests and feelings and wield major influence on the political scene? Is the economic or constitutional system in a state of blockage apparently insoluble by existing authorities? Is a rapid political mobilization threatening to escape the control of traditional elites, to the point where they would be tempted to look for tough helpers in order to stay

⁶⁷ Payne, *History* (n. 1 above), p. 496, along with all others who consider fascism a specific doctrine born of late nineteenth-century national syndicalism, is obliged to conclude that “the same forms of fascism could not be effectively revived” after 1945.

in charge? It is by answering those kinds of questions, grounded in a proper historical understanding of the processes at work in past fascisms, and not by checking the color of the shirts or seeking traces of the rhetoric of the national-syndicalist dissidents of the opening of the twentieth century, that we may be able to recognize our own day's functional equivalents of fascism.