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GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF FASCIST POLITICAL THEORY.

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THESIS SUBMITTED  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE  
McGILL UNIVERSITY.

April 1939.

## C O N T E N T S.

Chapter		Page
I	Introduction .....	1.
II	The Absolute State and the Principle of Personal Leadership.....	9
III	The Platonic Elements in Fascist Political Theory .....	22
IV	The Origin of Italian Fascism....	43
V	Early Modern Absolutism and Idealism .....	54
VI	The Risorgimento and the Rise of Italian Fascism.....	64
VII	The Influence of German Idealism.	75
VIII	Modern Influences: Nietzsche, Bergson, Sorel and Pareto.....	88
IX	An Examination of the Alleged Fascist Synthesis of the Individual and the State .....	115
	Bibliography.....	136



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

"Power always corrupts, and absolute power absolutely corrupts. All great men are bad." Such was the final judgment of Lord Acton concerning the possession of unlimited authority and the character of those outstanding personalities who occasionally arise to assume the unconditional leadership of the society in which they live. But the once unquestioned conclusions of many Victorian thinkers are now the object of considerable doubt. The fields of economics and political science have perhaps been most fertile in producing significant challenges to formerly accepted doctrines. Some of the most fundamental tenets of classical economic theory, expressed with such apparent finality by J.S. Mill, have been questioned and even repudiated by different schools of economic thought. The liberal-democratic tradition, for which an almost divine sanction had been claimed, has been renounced as a doctrine whose realization has been invariably marked by the rule of the unfit and the corrupt who have made representative government merely the servant of selfish party and class interests. Those truths which the Declaration of Independence affirmed to be "self-evident" are expressly denied by the recently developed authoritarian doctrine. All men, it asserts, are not created equal nor are

they "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." "Governments derive their just power from the consent of the governed" wrote Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. The General Will of the people is no more than an irrational force which has "no right to dictate the course of events and should often be firmly resisted"<sup>1</sup> by a government whose authority should be neither legally nor ethically derived from popular consent.

The validity of the democratic doctrine is directly denied by the assertion that both efficiency and morality require the dictatorial rule of great men whose superior wisdom and utter unselfishness qualify them to guide the destiny of the state. Absolute power in the hands of great leaders, it is said, in contradiction to Acton's dictum, is vital to a state's well-being. The political philosophy which maintains this contention is commonly called authoritarianism.

By authoritarianism or totalitarianism is meant that conception of the state and society which is at the foundation of Fascist political theory. It may be claimed, and is sometimes urged, that Communism is as authoritarian as Fascism. Russia, it is pointed out, is as authoritarian a state as Germany and Italy. All three countries are commonly referred to as dictatorships. In theory, however, Communism is essentially different from Fascism. Secondly the tenets of Communism must

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<sup>1</sup>J.S. Barnes, Fascism, P.117.



be distinguished from their application in Soviet Russia. According to Communist theory the present Soviet dictatorship is eventually to be replaced by a democratic "administration of things." Whether this transition will occur in Russia does not affect the theoretical principles of Communism. Dictatorships may exist in Germany, Italy, and Russia. Liberty in the democratic sense may be non-existent in these countries. A minority may have established itself in power and proceeded to eliminate ruthlessly all opposition.

But these similarities in practice do not alter the fundamental differences in the basic theoretical principles of Communism and Fascism. It is quite possible that the practical realization of different and even opposing political ideologies may bring about similar administrative conditions at any given time. In a period of war a democracy is very much like a dictatorship. It does not follow that democracies and dictatorships are founded upon common principles. Likewise, at certain periods, a particular Communist and Fascist administration may resemble each other. It is not to be deduced therefrom that Communism and Fascism are based upon similar social conceptions. According to Communist theory a transitional proletarian dictatorship is to be established upon the downfall of the bourgeois state. This dictatorship is presumed to disappear after society has been prepared for the advent of Communism. It is only in this temporary period that there will be what Trotsky called ( if one may quote the arch enemy of the Soviet regime) "the highest possible intensification of

the state." Following this period as Engels wrote, "Society will banish the whole state machine to a place which will then be the most proper one for it, the museums of antiquities." To speak of the authoritarian state as Communistic is a contradiction in terms because Communism maintains that the state, which is merely an instrument of class oppression will "wither away" when class antagonisms have been eliminated. The authoritarian state is only temporarily justified in Communist theory. Fascism, on the other hand, proclaims that the state is ultimately authoritarian. It is not destined to "wither away" but to retain with ethical justification under all conditions its absolute authority over all individuals and groups of individuals. An attempt will now be made to investigate more fully the nature of Fascist political theory.

It has been sometimes denied that Fascism has a distinctive theory. Bertrand Russell has remarked: "There is no philosophy of Fascism; there is only a psychoanalysis." To others it represents merely a successful party upheaval culminating in dictatorship. It obeys, it is claimed, no principle except that of expediency and it does not rest upon a precise body of political doctrine. Therefore no systematic exposition of its political philosophy is possible. Mussolini may write that "Fascism has a particular philosophy with regard to all the questions which beset the human mind." But he may also write with equal finality, "There is no need for dogma; discipline suffices." Certainly Fascism lacks the coherence and logical



construction of the theory of Communism. Its philosophy is vague. "Fascism is above all action and sentiment."<sup>2</sup> The exigencies of the moment have often caused it to alter fundamentally its theoretical concepts. It is sometimes amazingly indifferent to incompatible elements within its doctrine. There are two essential reasons for this lack of finality in Fascist theory. Firstly Fascism as a political creed was formulated, at least in Italy, after the actual establishment of an authoritarian administration. Communism sets out to achieve its aim according to a previously conceived theory. Its central theme is the elimination of class antagonisms. It appeals frankly to one class of society - the proletariat. Fascism, on the other hand, does not possess this clearly defined theory because its appeal is directed to diverse groups "united less by common<sup>3</sup> purposes than by common hatreds". Since it would gain the approval of various sections of the population, the peasants the small shopkeepers the great financial interests, the large landowners, and low salaried employees, it must not be too explicit in its doctrine for fear of alienating some of its followers. The Communists have one slogan, "Workers of the world, unite." The Fascists must cry, "Shopkeepers, peasants, great industrialists and low-salaried employees of the world unite!" The only and best possible basis of cooperation is a negative one. If the Fascist program proposes to provide security for

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<sup>2</sup> Alfredo Rocco, The Political Doctrine of Fascism, International Conciliation No.223, P.10.

<sup>3</sup> Sabine - History of Political Theory, P.747.

these classes of the population against the threat presented to their social status by the Communists, then all will combine in a movement to oppose the establishment of Communism. The threat of the proletariat may or may not be a real one but if the rest of the population is convinced of the peril of a Communist dictatorship, a sufficient incentive will be present to arouse in them a feeling of the need for the establishment of a strong authority to save society from Bolshevism. This was the principal argument used by Mussolini in 1923 and by Hitler in 1933 in their appeals to the people to support the Fascist parties. But Fascism must be more than a reaction against Communism. The fundamental question at this point is whether Fascism aims at replacing the capitalist democratic order with a new social system or whether it is interested only in the preservation of the existing social structure. The answer lies midway between these alternatives. Fascism would retain the capitalistic system of production. It upholds the right to private property. It believes in the necessity of classes. Economic relationships between classes may be altered by Fascist economic policy. Certain economic activities, such as strikes and trade union organization, may be prohibited by regulation. But these changed relationships do not alter the basis of the economic system. In the economic sense Fascism is essentially committed to the preservation of the capitalistic system.

But Fascism is more than a movement which would preserve the economic status quo. For in the political field, Fascism would introduce conceptions of society altogether different from



those prevailing in capitalist democracies. It rejects the whole democratic tradition and propounds a different political philosophy. Some would maintain that it is only by the Fascist change in the political structure that the existing economic order may be maintained. This is a problematical contention. We are concerned primarily with those anti-democratic concepts which are at the base of the Fascist political creed. Italian and German writers have attempted to provide a political doctrine of Fascism. The revolution, having been accomplished, the chaos is now reduced to order and a supposedly new theory of political organization emerges. "Fascism has theory which is an essential part of this historical phenomenon"<sup>4</sup> asserts Rocco. There is then a positive content to Fascist political philosophy with a logic of its own. It may have been formulated after the assumption of power by the Fascist party. But, it is claimed, the activities of the Fascist state do take place according to definite principles of a coherent and organic doctrine. Its principles are embodied in the program of a party. No other political creeds are tolerated by Fascist regimes and acceptance of authoritarian theory is developed by active propaganda and conformity to its practice is enforced by a relentless persecution of dissenters. "I am ordering you now," declared the Reich Statthalter of Thuringia at the Nazi District Conference in 1933, "to be intolerant with everything else. In future there must be in Thur-

ingia one political faith only... The Nazis claim the right to be intolerant in view of the necessity for uniform thinking and acting in the nation as a whole."<sup>5</sup> The nature and development of that way of uniform thinking and acting which Fascism would unconditionally impose upon all members of the state will be examined in the ensuing chapters.



## CHAPTER II

### THE ABSOLUTE STATE AND THE PRINCIPLE OF PERSONAL LEADERSHIP.

#### THE ABSOLUTE STATE.

The first principle of Fascist political theory is that the state is superior to all individuals and associations which are within it. Mussolini expressed the basic tenet of authoritarianism in the phrase : "Everything for the state; nothing against the state; nothing outside the state." All social activity has for its end the promotion of the welfare of the state even at the sacrifice of individual life or happiness. Everything is for the state. No individual or group may claim natural rights or civil liberties which the state is obliged to recognize. Nothing is against the state. International agreements must never diminish the absolute sovereignty of the state. There is nothing outside the state.

It will be asked why the state is vested with such omnipotent authority. The ethical justification which Fascism would offer for state absolutism is found in its conception of the nature of society. It is fundamentally an idealistic conception. Indeed from one point of view writes C. E. M. Joad, Fascism is the idealist "theory in action." It asserts that the "social concept has a biological aspect, because social groups are fractions of the human species each one possessing a peculiar organization...

with certain needs and .. ends.. in short, a life which is really its own." <sup>(1)</sup> Society thus possesses a distinctive personality whose ends are different from and superior to those of the individuals within the social organism. The individual is thus obliged to give unqualified allegiance to its sovereign will. For the social group, according to Alfredo Rocco, an eminent exponent of Fascism, is "not the sum of the several individuals which at a given moment belong to it. but rather the infinite series of the past, present and future generations constituting it. The ends of these social entities are not necessarily those of the individuals that belong to the group but may even possibly be in conflict with such ends, whenever the preservation and development of the species demand the sacrifice of the individual, to wit, in time of war." <sup>(2)</sup>

In order to justify its idealization of the state, Fascism would give its doctrine a scientific and philosophic basis. It claims to apply modern principles of evolution to political relationships. As there are in the animal kingdom many species each divided into numerous varieties, so is the human species composed of various distinct groups. As each animal variety is not merely the sum total of individual creatures living at any moment but is rather a series of such organisms with a peculiar mode of living and with ends of preservation and expansion, so is each human society an organism with a life of its own. Fascism would also

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(1) Rocco op.cit.,p.17

(2) ibid., p.17

appeal to modern philosophy as a vindication of its doctrine. The contemporary emphasis on time and the movement of life in contrast to nineteenth century positivism and mechanism is allegedly reflected in Fascist dogma. Indeed it claims Bergson, perhaps to his extreme discomfiture, as the inspiration for much of its philosophy. Fascism would propose an organic and historic conception of society which is designed to replace the old, atomistic and anti-historical concepts which did not recognize the temporal attributes of the social organism. If society is nothing more than the aggregate of individuals which compose it at any particular time, it has merely a static and spatial existence. But if it extends beyond the lives of the individuals who constitute but separate phases of its existence then it is vested with temporal attributes. That the state has an ideal existence is the first principle of Fascist political theory.

Four corollaries of this fundamental principle throw further light on the nature of authoritarian political doctrine and practice. Firstly, Fascism is essentially anti-individualistic. It insists that the individual subject his entire life to the domination of the state. It is designed Hegelianwise to prevent man from becoming a centre of his own by merging his life in the social organism. The state expresses the real will of the community and the individual develops his personality and promotes the common welfare only by attuning his personal will to the superior will of the state. It may be urged that this conception

of political society is basically similar to Rousseau's political theory. He advocated the subjection of the individual will to the general will of the community. But Rousseau, following Kant, conceived of the body politic as a device for the full realization of individual freedom. The individual born with the capacity to enjoy freedom is given the opportunity to realize it in the state. The first principle of Fascism, however, reveals that the welfare of an allegedly ideal state and not the freedom or happiness of the individual is the sole and supreme end of all social activity. The individual remains the "transient and insignificant" means to realize the social welfare. Fascism, writes Wickham Steed, represents a "revolution against the freedom of the human personality alike in its religious, social and political forms."<sup>(3)</sup>

Fascism is too recent a movement to have expressed itself in a coherent and consistent doctrine. It is natural, therefore, that its apologists frequently present various and even conflicting interpretations of its meaning. Giovanni Gentile would thus deny, in opposition to the nationalist Rocco, that Facism is essentially anti-individualistic. Rocco urged that the state constituted a distinct entity superior to the individuals who were within it. In apparently complete opposition to Rocco, Gentile, Italy's great educationist, writes: "In the case of Fascism, State and individual

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(3) from "The War against the West", by Aurel Kolnai, p.5



are one and the same thing...the State of the Fascists.. is created by the consciousness and will of the citizen... and is not a force descending on the citizen from above or from without...The Fascist State...is a people's state and as such, the democratic State par excellence."<sup>(4)</sup> Gentile would thus divorce Fascism from Hegelian philosophy. He rejects the conception of the state as an objective entity distinct from its individual members. It was not a "datum of nature...or a material presupposition," antecedent in the Aristotelian sense and superior in the Hegelian tradition to the people but was rather the common achievement of the citizens. In contrast to this idealism which would completely subordinate the individual's thought and action to the state, Gentile presents the Fascist conception of society which would rescue the individual from the inferior position in which he was placed by Rocco's exposition of the relation between individuals and society. Fascism, according to Gentile, regards the state as the common creation of the people. He would thus endow Fascist political theory with certain elements of individualism. The attempt, however, is unsuccessful. Gentile may assert that the state exists only because individuals are conscious of its existence. But he expressly denies that the consciousness of political society is the product of the individual's own thought. The people do not develop an autonomous political consciousness but are forced to become conscious of the state by the Fascist party and by "all the instruments of Propaganda and education which Fascism uses to

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(4) Gentile, The Philosophic Basis of Fascism, Foreign Affairs, Jan. 1928, p.302

make the thought and will of the Duce the thought and will of the masses." <sup>(5)</sup> For it is assumed in this "democratic State par excellence" that the masses are incapable of forming proper political outlooks. Their minds are the tablets upon which the Duce writes his conception of the state. The result, as Professor Hocking so aptly puts it, is "a perfect unity based upon the hypothesis of the complete vacuity of the Italian mind and conscience." <sup>(6)</sup> Rocco would subject the individual to the authority of an ideal state; Gentile would make him completely subservient to the will of a dictator. Neither conception permits the exercise of individual conscience independent of the state or its government.

A second implication of the Fascist conception of society is its inevitable opposition to all associations which would evoke an extra-State allegiance. All non-political loyalties must be suppressed in order that the citizens may be completely imbued with a political spirit. The Fascist struggle with the Church and its suppression of trade unions are thus motivated by a common principle. In the definition of Fascism, writes Gentile, "the first point to grasp is the comprehensive or totalitarian scope of its doctrine which concerns itself not only with political organization... but with the whole will and thought and feeling of the nation". <sup>(7)</sup> Independent labour organizations which elicit a loyalty independent of the state are consequently abolished. In like manner

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(5) *ibid.*, p.303

(6) Hocking, W.E. *The Lasting Elements of Individualism* p.130

(7) Gentile, *op.cit.*, p.299

Fascism is ideologically incompatible with organized religion unless it be regarded as a religion itself. The totalitarian state demands the complete allegiance of its citizens; it would appeal to their spiritual nature as well as to their temporal interests. It is readily understandable, therefore, as Monsignor Sheen of the Catholic University of America writes, that "the persecution of religion is a natural corollary of a totalitarian state. Once it is asserted that man belongs totally to the State, it follows that the state cannot tolerate a religion which says that he belongs also to God." The testimony of the eminent Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, illustrates the same point. "If these are churchmen," he writes, "who count on dictatorships of this kind to promote ...Christian civilization, they forget that the totalitarian phenomenon is an aberrant religious phenomenon in which a kind of earthly mysticism devours every other sort of mysticism and will tolerate no other one besides itself."<sup>(8)</sup>

That each state is exempt from all moral or legal obligation in its relations with other states is the third inference which may be drawn from the totalitarian conception of political society. The state is thus an absolute not only in regard to individuals and associations within it but also in all its external activity. What Gentile has termed its "infrangible integrity" must never be qualified by any international agreement or convention. Fascism does not permit of any conceivable diminution of the absolute sovereignty of the state. It thus makes

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(8) Nation, March 18, 1939, p.320

exceedingly difficult if not impossible the successful establishment of a League of Nations. It is true that membership in the present League does not imply any surrender of national sovereignty. However the international spirit of any conference of nations is antithetical to the national spirit of Fascism.

"Between States," wrote Fichte, "there is neither law nor right save the law of the strongest." This is the fourth corollary of the totalitarian state. Force is the only method of settling differences between various social organisms. The international jurist might urge that this is the philosophy of the jungle. The Fascist replies that among nations, as in the animal kingdom, only the fittest are entitled to and do survive. Struggle between social species is thus necessary and moral. The ultimate measure of fitness according to Gentile, one of the more humanitarian Fascists, is a "test in blood, such a test as only war can bring."<sup>(9)</sup> Fascist states, according to the logic of their doctrine cannot join in efforts to outlaw war for war is not to be banished but is the natural and ethical method of settling international differences. Armed conflict is not only inevitable but morally justified. It prevents national stagnation and stimulates patriotism. "We consider a perpetual peace as a catastrophe for human civilization," exclaimed Mussolini in an address commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the first Fascist combat squad. War is indeed, from one point of view, the ultimate object of a Fascist state for it is

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(9) Gentile, op.cit., p.290



the most effective means whereby the individual completely merges his personality in the life of the social organism. In its complete subordination of the individual to a supreme cause, war, more than Fascist practice itself, is a realization of the totalitarian ideal.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF PERSONAL LEADERSHIP.

That government should be entrusted only to those few individuals who are capable of apprehending the true interests of society is the second fundamental principle of Fascist political theory. "It is only the few," writes Gentile, "who represent the self-consciousness and the will of an epoch and who determine what its history will be."<sup>(10)</sup> These individuals, according to Fascism, are the true leaders of society. Fascism repudiates the democratic device of popular sovereignty in favour of government by an élite which is qualified by virtue of its talent and training to assume the unconditional leadership of society. Authoritarian states thus require great men who will consecrate themselves wholeheartedly and unselfishly, like Plato's philosopher-kings, to promoting the welfare of society. Good government is never attained if it is directed by the uninformed and prejudiced will of the masses. It is secured only by entrusting political power to the most capable minds. The democratic method of self-government does not make possible the selection of the best leaders. "Experience teaches us," writes

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(10) *ibid.*, p. 291

Mussolini, "that it is the schemers and agitators and demagogues who guide the masses when they are left uncontrolled." The people are unable to select good rulers; they are equally incompetent as judges of public policy. "The capacity to ignore individual private interests in favour of the higher demands of society is the very rare gift and the privilege of a chosen few."<sup>(11)</sup> The few constitute the rulers; the rest of society are the ruled. Fascism does not seek to identify these two classes by any such democratic expedient as the responsibility of political leaders to the people. Such a device would be inconsistent with its principles. The leaders derive their authority not from the people but from their ability to promote the common good. They, who are intellectually and morally superior to the masses, should not be made responsible to their will. Indeed the ruling body is ethically justified in introducing "measures opposed to the desire of the majority or theoretically of even the entire body of citizens, when such measures....are thought to be necessary to give effect to a program identified with the interests of the nation."<sup>(12)</sup> Fascism thus stands diametrically opposed to Rousseau's conception of the sovereignty of the general will of the people. The master morality of the rulers is under no obligation to render itself subservient to the slave morality of the ruled. The general will of the masses is but "the life instinct of the herd and is not... a rational

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(11) Rocco op.cit.,p.21

(12) Gini,Scientific Basis of Fascism-Political Science Quarterly Vol.42

force at all."<sup>(13)</sup> It is thus to the Fascist viewpoint, neither a useful nor moral medium of determining the true interests of society. Not the people, but "only the truly disinterested votes can thus be said to point to the general will,"<sup>(14)</sup> for only a select élite is capable of governing with an eye toward the general welfare rather than to private advantage. It is thus necessary to devise a system of government without being "hypnotized a priori by the principle of popular sovereignty...whereby government may tend to become the prerogative of a class of optimi."<sup>(15)</sup> The people, as individuals, have no moral right to possess the sovereign power. It is their duty to obey unhesitatingly the commands of the rulers who supposedly know and seek to realize the common good. They must believe implicitly in the wisdom of their leaders. They must be prepared to fight without objection on the ground of individual conscience. Fascism is well explained in its motto: "To Obey, To Believe and To Fight."

The division of society into classes of rulers and ruled is based on the supposition of the inequality of individuals. Fascism is opposed to the view that each individual is endowed with sufficient moral qualities or intellectual capacities to merit an equal voice in determining public policy or selecting political leaders. The principle of inequality is reflected even in the organization of the ruling body. A hierarchical system of authority is established which culminates in a supreme national leader.

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(13) Barnes, J.S. Fascism, p.92

(14) ibid., p.100

(15) ibid., p. 108

His power is absolute. He is responsible neither to the people nor to his party. Dr. Frank, German Minister of Justice in 1935, enunciated the principle of personal leadership in the following declaration : "We are under the great obligation of recognizing, as a holy work of the spirit of our folk, the laws signed with Adolf Hitler's name. Hitler has received his authority from God."<sup>(16)</sup> The will of one man and not the collective will of the people governs a Fascist society. Organized political opposition is forbidden. Authoritarianism does not recognize as useful or moral the democratic right of citizens to criticize political leaders or their policies. The entire nation, including the Fascist party, must submit ultimately to the leadership of a single individual.

An outline of the basic elements of Fascist political theory has been presented in the preceding pages. The principles enunciated were not derived from any specific doctrine expressed logically or even coherently. The most ardent Fascist would not deny that confusion and frequently contradiction pervade a not inconsiderable part of Fascist political theory. It is exceedingly difficult to discern whatever reality may be behind the bewildering facade of totalitarian propaganda. Firstly, the Fascist movement has not reached sufficient maturity to express itself in a body of systematic principles. Secondly, it is impossible for the observer to view so contemporary a phenomenon in an attitude of scientific detachment. It is for this reason that any attempt to

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(16) quoted from Aurel Kolnai, The War against the West, p.9.



assess the pragmatic value or to judge the ethical validity of Fascism has been omitted in this preliminary exposition of its doctrine. The succeeding chapters will endeavour to trace the origin and development of Fascist political theory and subsequently to reconsider its principles in the light of this historical treatment.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PLATONIC ELEMENTS IN FASCIST POLITICAL THEORY.

In a recently published German Journal of Jurisprudence a National Socialist legal authority wrote, "The present Reich has just begun construction of its wholly unique social system...which cannot be bound by the viewpoint of past centuries." It is perhaps reasonable to assume that this legal "expert" was unfamiliar with Aristotle's maxim: "He who considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them." To claim, for example, that "in this wholly unique social system...there is no such thing as personal liberty above or independent of the state which should be respected by the state" is a cardinal principle of authoritarianism. But it does not represent any original viewpoint in political theory. It may be found in the materialism of Hobbes and in the idealism of Hegel. In brief, there are many principles underlying the authoritarian doctrine which are neither original nor unique. If one is to obtain the clearest possible view of authoritarianism, its development should be regarded not as beginning in the year of Mussolini's March on Rome but with an historical appreciation of those ideas which compose Fascist ideology. It will be found that many of the conceptions of Fascism have their roots in established political thought. This fact does not suggest that modern dictators have consciously and deliberately adopted ideas previously expressed in political theory. Hitler makes no pretence to a

knowledge of political philosophy. Mussolini may or may not have been influenced by such political thinkers as Sorel, Nietzsche, Pareto and William James. Indeed Gaetano Salvemini writes that the "intellectual genealogy in which Sorel, Pareto and Nietzsche<sup>(1)</sup> were recruited to prepare the way for the redeemer" is a pure invention. The political philosophy of modern dictatorships may bear marked similarities to previous political theories because general social conditions are usually the principal determinants of the political theory formulated in any particular period. If conditions prevailed in the past similar to those which existed in Germany or Italy at the close of the Great War, it is reasonable to assume that similar conceptions of social organization should have been formulated in these periods. But ignorance of the knowledge of the past does not justify the claim to originality of the "unique viewpoint" of the present. Modern authoritarianism has introduced new concepts; it has refined and developed old ones; and it has borrowed extensively from established political doctrine. Its theory will be best understood by an historical appreciation of its principles.

Indeed, authoritarian practice as well as its theory should be viewed in an historical perspective. The governments of modern authoritarian states have many parallels in history. Dictatorship is probably as old as civilization. "Caesar, Cromwell, Napoleon and his nephew," writes G.B. Shaw "are the bygone Fascist leaders we<sup>(2)</sup> most talk about." The practice of dictatorship must, however, be

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(1) Nation - July 7, 1938

(2) Shaw-Guide to Socialism, Communism, Fascism p.442

distinguished from attempts to give it a theoretical justification in the form of a political philosophy. Modern Fascism would cause an upheaval not only in the realm of social relationships but also in the field of political theory. It would question those democratic principles which since the French Revolution have often been considered so final as to be given almost the attribute of immortality.<sup>3</sup> Fascist ideology, says Rocco, "will determine the formation of a new culture, of a new conception of civil life. The deliverance of the individual from the state...will be followed...by the rescue of the state from the individual. The period of authority...will succeed the period of individualism, of state feebleness, of insubordination."<sup>4</sup>

Is this a new conception of civil life? In his funeral oration, Pericles said, "Athenians are made for the city not the city for Athenians." How strikingly similar is this phrase to Rocco's enunciation of the "new" Fascist formula "individuals for society" instead of the old democratic conception "society for individuals!" Athens had become a city divided against itself in which rival parties sought power for selfish ends without regard for the well being of the community. Rulers governed according to personal whim with an eye towards expediency and private advantage rather than to

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<sup>3</sup> Mussolini's speech - March 27, 1939. "We decided to free the people from the nefarious influx of the principles of the world of '89."

<sup>4</sup> Rocco - op.cit., p.23.

moral principles of conduct. The ancient religious sense of fellowship had disappeared when the age demanded a restoration of political unity. The rich aristocrats of Athens struggled for power and wealth against a newly created and rapidly rising commercial class. Foreigners dwelt in the city without any appreciation of Athenian traditions but held to their own ideas and practices. Athens became a city composed of conflicting elements without common interests or a common purpose which would evoke the loyalty of its citizens.

To this disintegrating society Plato revealed the idea of a political community which called forth the loyalty and devotion of every individual. Plato argued on behalf of the supreme loyalty which should be given the state. He taught that the interest of the whole was superior to that of any part and took precedence over all claims of individual and group rights. There seems indeed to be a close parallel between Plato's conception of the state as an entity which witnesses the passing of many generations within its fold and the Fascist doctrine which asserts that "society has historical and immanent ends of preservation...quite distinct from those of the individuals which at a given moment compose it." Fascists thus maintain that their political doctrine is "linked with the great political writers of antiquity. Plato and Aristotle... who advocated a strong state and the subordination of individuals to it." It is probably true that Fascism and Platonism have

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<sup>5</sup>  
Rocco - *ibid.*, p.18

<sup>6</sup>  
*ibid.* p.26



the common goal of training citizens to take a corporate view of life and to look to the state and not to themselves in order to live moral lives.

In seeking some estimate of the common elements of Fascist doctrine and Platonism, it must be borne in mind that Plato has been invoked in support of the most extensive variety of political philosophies ranging from Liberalism and Democracy to Communism and Fascism. The most diverse streams of thought branch out from his comprehensive philosophy and consequently diametrically opposed doctrines may quite legitimately appeal to Plato as their original inspiration. In like manner, certain aspects of a moral code or a political creed may follow the Platonic tradition while other features may be totally inconsistent with the principles of Platonism. Fascism falls into this category. Certain phases of its doctrine are strikingly Platonic and others are the very negation of Platonism. It is proposed, therefore, to outline such common ground as may be discovered and subsequently to indicate the fundamental points of difference.

It is in matters of practical administration that the proposed commonwealth of Plato and the modern dictatorship have significant features in common. Both are supposedly "enlightened despotisms." The members of the body politic under both systems are sharply divided into classes of rulers and ruled. Plato conceived of the rulers as a class of wise guardians who were fit to rule because of natural capacities and who were

intensively trained to assume the responsibility of government. The supreme object of political organization was to establish justice and to enable all members of the community to live good moral lives. The natural way to ensure that the good will prevail was to establish a government of individuals who were capable of knowing the good and endowed with authority to establish its rule. Mill's dictum that good government is no substitute for self-government is expressly denied in the Platonic doctrine. It urges that good government is rather an eminently superior substitute. The people are not fit to govern for they have no appreciation of the good. Their thought and action are not motivated by noble or unselfish principles but by a desire to gratify trivial moods and worthless desires. "There is no order or constraining rule...in the life of a man whose motto is Liberty and Equality." <sup>7</sup> Plato's fundamental objection to democracy, as he conceived it, is that it has no sense of values. The democrat, he argues, regards all desires as "alike and deserving of equal honour." This attitude, thought Plato, was grossly immoral. It was supremely necessary that an evaluation of man's desires be made by reference to universal standards. But all men were incapable of discerning these ultimate criteria. It followed that the all-important task of government should be entrusted only to those wise men who could distinguish the moral law and reveal it to the rest of society. It was, of course, incongruous for these guardians who knew the good to consult the wishes of those who were unable to

perceive it. The authority of the guardians was derived not from the consent of the governed but from their ability to govern. It was necessary and just for the people to submit to the rule which the guardians established. Government was a highly specialized activity in which only a few were qualified to participate. It is entrusted only to those who are able to ascertain the common good and to promote the well-being of the state. In performing this function the government is justified in establishing its absolute authority. Its power must be all-embracing and extend beyond the control of political activity into spheres of social relationships and encompass the regulation of individual economic pursuits and even artistic interests. Standards of art and literature are established which enjoin the severest restrictions on artistic expression. Education is brought under the rigorous supervision of the government. In brief the guardians determine the kind of political, economic and even religious life which the people are obliged to lead.

In comparing the proposed administration of Plato's Republic and modern authoritarian practice, certain striking similarities suggest themselves. The conception of government by a selected elite is the first point of resemblance. Plato maintained that government was a task reserved for highly trained individuals endowed with exceptional ability and inspired by the most unselfish motives to further the common good. "Government" writes Barnes, an exponent of Fascism, "is an art, which should be reserved for statesmen...representative of their community's traditions and possessing a highly developed aesthetic sensibility with respect to this particular form of art." These rulers are entrusted with the task of

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(8) Barnes, op.cit., p.121

interpreting and realizing the public good. Their authority, like that of Plato's guardians, is not derived from the people but simply from their superior capacity to promote the common welfare. Fascism has no more confidence than Plato in the ability of the people to govern themselves or to select their rulers. For the people, like Plato's democrat who is guided by the impulses of the moment and not by any moral principle, are incapable of knowing the real good. "Majority government," writes Barnes, "...is not only no sure indication of the general will but may be regarded with practical certainty as corresponding to nothing of the kind."<sup>9</sup> Following Platonic thought, Fascism maintains that the general will can be furthered only by establishing a system wherein a universal, objective "moral law becomes the supreme motive of human activity."<sup>10</sup> Fascism, in its Italian form, although not in its German form as will be pointed out shortly, insists that questions of right and wrong must be determined by reference to an objective law of universal validity. It is necessary, therefore, to institute a government composed of such individuals as are able to apprehend this moral law accurately and to apply it effectively. Only a few individuals possess the necessary moral and mental attributes to discern this law and it is to such persons that government should be entrusted. "Fascism, in other words accepts the principle of government by an aristocracy in the sense of an elite and makes this its aim, in contrast to the liberal

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Barnes, op.cit.,p.118

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Barnes, ibid.,p.106

principle of popular sovereignty."<sup>11</sup>

A corollary to the proposition that only government by an elite is capable of ascertaining the common good is that such government should be vested with unconditional power in realizing this good. Hence the Platonic guardians had an army of auxiliaries to enforce their laws and the fascist dictator has a Party to attend to the execution of his decrees and a civil police to ensure unqualified obedience to them. Thus Professor R.F.A. Hoernle writes that, "the modern dictators stand to their loyal followers...in exactly the same position in which Plato's philosopher kings would have stood to the lower orders in Plato's ideal state."<sup>12</sup> The authority of the guardians and the dictator is absolute. The rulers not only have the right but the positive duty of suppressing every form of activity which they consider anti-social or anti-patriotic. It is reasonable to infer that the guardians, like the dictator, would stamp out all subversive movements. Recalcitrants would be disciplined and punished. "Whether they would have been killed or put in concentration camps," writes Hoernle, "is a mere detail of technique, governed by expediency."<sup>13</sup>

It might be objected to this comparison between the Fascist and the Platonic systems of government that the ruthless suppression of all liberty in modern authoritarian states testifies to the existence not of an ideal commonwealth as conceived by Plato but of an abject tyranny which he regarded as the lowest form of social organization. Indeed Plato's portrait of a tyrant probably corresponds to a democrat's conception of a fascist dictator. The

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<sup>11</sup>.  
Barnes, op.cit., p.109

<sup>12</sup>.  
Hoernle, Would Plato have approved of the National Socialist State?  
Philosophy, April 1938, p.168.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.168.

description of the tyrant perhaps merits some examination. "In his early days," writes Plato, "and at the beginning of his despotism, has he not a smile and a greeting for everybody that he meets, and does he not repudiate the idea of his being a tyrant, and promise largely both in public and in private?... But as soon as he has relieved himself of his exiled enemies...his first measure is...to be constantly exciting wars, in order that the commons may stand in need of a leader... Is it not further his intention so to impoverish his subjects by war taxes, as to constrain them to devote themselves to the requirements of the day, and thus render them less likely to plot against himself... For all these reasons must not a tyrant be always stirring up war?"<sup>14</sup> Perhaps Plato furnished the answer to the most pressing problem of the present time. Is peace compatible with dictatorship? And yet the likening of the Fascist dictator to the Platonic despot is not wholly justified. The modern authoritarian ruler is not regarded as a tyrant by those who subscribe to the authoritarian doctrine. He is rather acclaimed as a philosopher king. A tyrant's power is established and maintained by force and not by consent. The dictator is a tyrant only to those who do not accept his conception of the social good. But millions regard him as a great leader who is prepared to devote his life toward furthering the public welfare. His use of force in compelling individuals to obey his commands and his ruthless elimination of opposition are accepted as necessary and as ethically justified measures. Since he knows the truth he is justified in imposing it upon the

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rest of the populace by whatever means he chooses to employ. A sanction is thus given to the most dictatorial methods of administration for the government seeks only to establish the "good life" for the entire community according to principles of truth and justice.

The principle of absolute government by an elite is not the only common element between the Platonic and the Fascist political systems. Significant details of governmental organization and even specific measures contemplated by the philosopher-king and the modern dictator reveal striking parallels. A similar technique would be employed in the selection of new rulers. The democratic process of election by the people would be rejected in favour of a plan whereby those who revealed the greatest loyalty to the official orthodoxy would be selected as the future guardians or authoritarian rulers. A rigid and carefully supervised training would test their qualifications to assume the leadership of the state. Indeed the educational system of Plato's proposed Republic and the modern dictatorship are based upon common principles. Education is not conceived as the bringing out of the unique qualities of individuals but as the indoctrination of an established tradition to which the "educated" will hold fast. "To speak briefly," writes Plato, "the overseers of the state must hold fast to this principle... which forbids any innovation...upon the established order, re-  
quiring it, on the contrary, to be most strictly maintained." 15  
Such an educational scheme implies more than making academic training subservient to the ends of a particular government. It has a very positive aim which is the development among the



citizens of precisely that which the Fascists call a Weltanschauung. The long and intensive training is not intended to produce only administrative officials but primarily individuals with personal philosophies of life designed according to the pattern of the rulers. "Plato" writes Prof. Hoernle, "proposes to mould the souls of his citizens to a scheme of values to which ever after they shall be true.....this is exactly what every modern dictatorship is also trying to do." (16) For the dictator realizes, with Plato, that citizens must be taught to render an authoritarian regime that undivided allegiance which is vital to its existence. It is not surprising, therefore, that in Plato's Ideal State and in modern Germany and Italy there is perhaps no government activity to which so much importance is attached as the education of the younger generation. The instruments of public propaganda which are so ceaselessly at work in Fascist administrations seldom direct their appeal to the older and more mature minds with a relatively fixed cultural outlook. Fascism would appeal, writes Rocco, to those people who are "unencumbered by a fixed....social and political education. It is .... (17) to the young people that Fascist education is directed." The older generation is generally permitted to maintain its religious affiliations and to worship in some degree of freedom. But Fascist regimes struggle even to the point of violence with all rival institutions like the Church, which also seek to direct the education of youth. It is not accidental that the most violated clause of the Concordat between the Italian government and the

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(16) Hoernle, op. cit., p. 173

(17) Rocco, op. cit., p. 25

Vatican concerns the Catholic Action groups which compete with the Fascist youth organizations in their appeal to the younger generation. A divided allegiance is incompatible with the principles of totalitarianism.

The efforts of authoritarian administrations to make the whole cultural life of the people conform to certain official standards of social and political morality are revealed not only in educational programs but also in the rigid censorship of all artistic expression. A parallel to Plato's proposed censorship of art and music suggests itself. Professor Hoernle is prompted to write that "the campaign for the "purification" of literature and art in National-Socialist Germany runs on Platonic lines." Deviations from the prescribed standards are forbidden and originality is seldom afforded an opportunity to express itself. Innovation may threaten the unequivocal acceptance of Fascist principles. Authoritarians share Plato's fear that men may care most<sup>19</sup> for the song "which being newest is sung." The function of artistic endeavour in Fascist states is to propagate the authoritarian philosophy. All artistic movements considered asocial or anti-social are not tolerated. "So long as there remains in Germany any neutral or non-political art," Herr Goebbels has declared,<sup>20</sup> "our task is not ended." The Fascist suppression of all activity considered alien to its doctrine extends beyond the field of art into the realm of scientific investigation. The primary responsibility of the scientist is to the nation and not to the task of

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<sup>19</sup> Plato - op.cit., p.123.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from Joad, op.cit., p.651.

discovering objective truth. "The National State" declared Hitler, "will look upon science as a means for increasing national pride." In the same vein is the recommendation to educationists made by Dr. Frick, German Minister of the interior, "to produce the man political who in all his thoughts and actions is rooted in his nation ...Objective truth is secondary, and not always to be desired."<sup>21</sup>

It is perhaps time to draw the parallel between Platonism and Fascism to a close. Dr. Frick's statement furnishes the cue for the departure. Hitler's announcement in Mein Kampf that it is the duty of Germans "not to seek out objective truth, in so far as it may be favourable to others, but uninterruptedly to serve one's own truth,"<sup>22</sup> begins to reveal the fundamental cleavage between Platonic Philosophy and authoritarian doctrine. Hitler's statement is a consummate expression of the Sophistic position against which Plato inveighed all his life. In this respect an essential distinction must be made between German and Italian Fascism. The dominant Italian doctrine looks to a universal and objective moral law as the central motive of all human activity. Government by the people is rejected on the ground that the people are morally and intellectually incapable of discerning moral law. Hence arises the necessity of government by a selected elite. But German Fascism, as Joad writes, "is disposed to deny the existence of the absolute values of truth and of morality...In the two countries in which Fascism has come to power, the temper of the movement is different, and is apt to issue in different statements of doctrine."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>  
ibid. - p.616.

<sup>22</sup>  
ibid. - p.616.

<sup>23</sup>  
ibid. - p.619.

The question to be determined is whether the different "state-ments" indicate an underlying opposition of doctrines. It will be found that there are no fundamental differences for Italian Fascism resolves itself inevitably into the German form. Both movements will reveal themselves to be ultimately anti-Platonic.

Platonism postulates the existence of absolute and im-  
personal principles which could be discerned only by philosopher-  
kings. Rulers were to be guided by universal and rational truths  
and not influenced by the exigencies of the moment. Plato assumed  
the existence of absolute standards by reference to which all  
thought and action must be judged. "To serve uninterruptedly one's  
own version of the truth, which is the duty Hitler expressly en-  
joins upon the German people, would be anathema to Plato. That  
no man is above the moral law is a cardinal principle of Platonic  
thought. That the dictator is superior to the law which is simply  
his will is essential to the theory and practice of German author-  
itarianism. "Formerly," announced Herr Frank, Imperial Minister  
of Justice, "we were in the habit of saying: this is right or  
wrong; to-day we must put the question accordingly: What would  
the Fuhrer say? This attitude towards the Fuhrer as well as his  
own person, are the Categorical Imperative to which German life  
must henceforward conform." At this point there is no reconcil-  
iation between German Fascism and the Platonic conception of  
an impersonal law which is superior to all men. Law to Plato was  
an absolute principle of reason which was not man-made but nat-  
ural. Fascism, writes Rocco, stands opposed to the "doctrine of  
Natural Law developed in the course of the XVI, XVII and XVIII  
centuries." <sup>24</sup> The opposition remains but the

natural law which developed in early modern times had its origins in Greek thought. It is impossible for Fascists to claim Plato as the father of authoritarianism and to deprecate natural law as a valid guide to human conduct. If Fascism is "above all action and sentiment," it is not Platonic; it is Sophistic, the very philosophy which Plato so strongly denounced. The constitution of the Italian Fascist party exclaims that "in the ardour of struggle, action always preceded law...removed from dogmatic formulas." But any creed which does not put its trust in formulas discovered by dispassionate and rational inquiry, not in the heat of action, but in the sober atmosphere of detached contemplation cannot be termed Platonic. In its emotionalism and in its contemptuous rejection of intellectualism, Fascism stands diametrically opposed to Platonism. Inconsistency and the right to abandon formerly held concepts in favour of new ones adopted, as Gentile admits, when "conditions and considerations make them feasible and opportune" constitute Fascism's supreme virtue in the eyes of its exponents. But absolute knowledge rationally determined was virtue itself to the Greeks. "Fascism," writes Gentile, "returns to the most rigorous meaning of Mazzini's "Thought and Action" whereby the two terms are so perfectly coincident that no thought has value which is not already expressed in action...it is hostile to all science and philosophy which remain matters of mere fancy or intelligence." <sup>25</sup> Herr Wagner, the Bavarian Minister of the Interior, proclaims; "Whatever is useful to the German people is right; whatever is harmful is wrong." <sup>26</sup> If this be Fascism it

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Gentile - op.cit.,p.300

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from Joad - op.cit.,p.646.

is the negation of Platonism.

Exponents of Fascism are not entirely agreed on even the fundamental tenets of its doctrine. Barnes, who incidentally refers to Gentile as a "back-number" in Italy, would offer a more Platonic conception of the Fascist creed. He insists, in complete contradiction to the German theory of Fascism and to some Italian interpretations of Fascist principles, that there is a "universal didactic and objective moral law" which a selected elite must discern and communicate to the people. These exponents of Fascism repudiate the irrationalism and the relativism of the German doctrine. Indeed Plato's conception of the Good as an objective standard in terms of which all values are judged seems very similar to Barnes' interpretation of the Fascist creed as based upon the proposition that "questions of right and wrong are matters of objective and discernible truth, that goodness is the fundamental Norm for all action" (27) The Platonic parallel is further suggested by Barnes' conclusion that government should be entrusted only to those who apprehend the moral law. May Fascism, considered in this light, be legitimately compared to Platonism? C. E. M. Joad furnishes the answer in his remark that Fascism "takes over the Platonic principle of leadership without adopting the Platonic formula for determining the leaders" (28) Barnes may be true to the Platonic tradition in urging that the moral law should be supreme. But whose interpretation of the moral law should be followed? By what sign shall the Fascist philosopher-kings be known? Barnes' reply begs the question. He writes: "The answer to the question: "Who is to decide what

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(27) Barnes - op, cit., p.119

(28) Joad - op.cit.p.655

is right and wrong?" is:<sup>29</sup> "the competent authority." The only criterion by which the "competent authority" may be known is actual possession of power. Those who hold different conceptions of moral law engage in a struggle to establish their authority. That group which emerges triumphant is the "competent authority." A government which has successfully established its rule may apparently arrogate to itself the right to interpret the moral law. But its authority was only established by struggle. Is this a Platonic process? It is rather the application of Thrasymachus' dictum that "Justice is the interest of the stronger." Joad expresses the same conclusion in other terms when he writes that "the Italian principle that the rulers should be those who know the moral law reduces itself to the Nietzschean principle that government should be in the hands of those who have the will to power and are successful in obtaining power."<sup>30</sup> Plato outlined an elaborate scheme for the development of a superior class of citizens from whom future leaders could be selected. That these potential leaders should struggle for power was unthinkable to Plato. Indeed they had to be compelled to assume the burden of political responsibility. Those with the least "will to power" were to be entrusted with authority in the Platonic scheme. This proposal is precisely opposed to the Fascist position that government should be in the hands of those with the greatest "will to power" as revealed by a successful use of force. It will be shown later that Vilfredo Pareto's theory of a "circulation of elites" whose authority is established

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<sup>29</sup> Barnes - op.cit., p.115-116.

<sup>30</sup> Joad - op.cit., p.655.



by force and overthrown by force is a truer account of the Fascist conception of government than the Platonic doctrine.

Platonism must finally be distinguished from Fascism in its conception of the character of an ideal ruler. The philosopher-king is one who can arrive at a knowledge of the good by a profound intellectual insight. Such an individual cannot conceivably be the product of a Fascist education. Fascism distrusts intellectual calculations. It glorifies physical strength rather than mental prowess. Plato's guardians had to undergo a rigorous physical training. But this process represented only a phase of their educational development. It was followed by an intense training in mathematics, science and reached its culmination in a mastery of dialectic. Only then were the appetitive, the spirited and the rational elements of the personality blended into a harmonious whole. Fascist education may subordinate the appetitive or acquisitive instinct in its development of individuals who are prepared to sacrifice their material well-being and even their lives for a cause. But it does not subordinate this heroic spirit of self-sacrifice to the discipline of reason. In other words, the education of the Fascist does not proceed beyond the second stage of Plato's threefold scheme. The warrior, who has disciplined his desires for material comfort is not transformed into the philosopher. "A citizen and a soldier," writes Mussolini, "are synonymous in the Fascist state." The final product of Fascist education will be more adept in duelling than dialectic.

It may be concluded that the debt which Fascism owes to Plato concerns means rather than ends. H.B. Acton writes: "In his (Plato's) attitude toward government and democracy, he has much in

common with them (the Fascists). Plato held that in any well-ordered state a hierarchical organization was inevitable. He held that the average man is not fit for political responsibility... He held that government should be carried out by specially trained experts who would consult not the people's wishes but the people's good. He was prepared to welcome a rigid censorship of art and morals. He advocated the teaching of social and political myths which the rulers themselves did not believe in. He believed in a State religion with the punishment of heretics." <sup>31</sup> It is perhaps surprising and even disconcerting to note the application of these proposals in modern authoritarian states. But the resemblances generally concern only methods of administration. They do not relate to the ends of political government. The Platonic ideal State is designed primarily to enable individuals to live more wholesome and ordered lives. The Commonwealth was the necessary condition for the full development of the individual personality. Plato revealed the interdependence of all men and urged that they render allegiance to the state because it was the best instrument to promote the welfare of the members of the body politic. The Greek view of life presupposed no "opposition," writes Lowes Dickinson, "between the end of the individual and that of the State... the sacrifice of the individual to the State...is not because the individual is the means to the higher end of the State but because the State is itself his end, or at least part of it." <sup>32</sup> But Fascism, writes Rocco, regards "society as the end, individuals the means and its whole life consists in using individuals as instruments

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<sup>31</sup>

Acton - Philosophy, July, 1938. - p.308.

<sup>32</sup>

Dickinson - The Greek View of Life. - p.71.

for its social ends." (33) The ultimate individualism of Greek political philosophy reveals its opposition to Fascist doctrine. The anti-intellectualism of Fascism is irreconcilable with Platonism.

Plato's Athens, like modern Germany and Italy, lacked social solidarity. To restore political unity and to instill a sense of civic responsibility, Plato advocated a strong state and the subordination of individuals and groups to its authority. It is only to the extent that he, like other political thinkers who, lived in periods of social instability, asserted the supremacy of the political authority that he may be regarded as the fount from which there has flowed the modern theory of authoritarianism.

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(33) Rocco, op.cit., p.19.

## Chapter IV

### The Origins of Italian Fascism

If the seeds of modern authoritarianism are to be found in Greek idealism, their development may be observed in the Roman Empire whose "social and political traditions at the distance of fifteen centuries," writes a Fascist jurist,<sup>1</sup> "are being revived by Fascist Italy." Greek thought may have expressed in theory the doctrine of the supremacy of the state but it was in the Empire, writes Rocco, that there emerged in practice "the most solid state known to history," in which the preeminence of state authority was universally recognized. "The theory of state unity and authority was kept alive in the minds of (Italian) thinkers by the memories of the Roman Imperial tradition...when...in the Middle Ages the authority of the state was being dissolved into a multiplicity of competing sovereigns."<sup>2</sup> It was this Roman tradition which inspired Dante, Machiavelli and Vico in whose writings may be found the theoretical origins of Fascism. Ernest Barker writes that the "deification of the ruler was the cement...of the Roman Empire. It may seem a strange atavism that we should now be apparently recurring, in the twentieth century, to a similar practice."<sup>3</sup> The emperors were "as Rome made flesh" and they possessed unconditional supreme

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<sup>1</sup>Rocco - op.cit., p.24.

<sup>2</sup>ibid, p.27

<sup>3</sup>Barker, Philosophy - October 1936. p.387.

power. In its glorification of the personality of the ruler, and in its idealization of the state, the Empire may rightly be regarded as the forerunner in practice, as Greek philosophy was in theory, of modern authoritarianism. It is true that the Roman conception of the state was above all a universal one. Italian Fascism, Mussolini has said, is not an article of export. But in maintaining the absolute supremacy of the state and of its rulers, Roman world state philosophy and Fascist national state philosophy are based upon common principles.

A close parallel may be drawn between Italian Fascism in practice and the actions of the emperors. Augustus "sought to foster a spirit of unity in the empire. He made a deliberate effort to quicken the spirit of patriotism, to make men think about Rome rather than themselves, to stimulate a unified devotion to Rome. He became a patron of writers who devoted themselves to glorify Rome, to make it an ideal state, to give it a mission and destiny." He sought to "create a consciousness of unity in the state that had been broken up by years of civil war. Men had looked for so long to their own individual interests that they had turned their eyes from the state. The chords of patriotism needed to be touched anew... A restoration of state religion was desirable as an aid in intensifying patriotism." Hence arose the practice of emperor worship. Augustus sought some tangible object which would evoke the loyalty of all Romans. The worship

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<sup>4</sup>  
E.D.Wilsey - Roman World Philosophy, Columbia University Theses  
1930, p.32.

<sup>5</sup>  
ibid - p.67

first of the "Genius" of the emperor, and then of the emperor himself, was the culmination of this movement to revive patriotism. To strengthen authority in periods of instability there often occurs what Ernest Barker has called an "eruption of the personal...Institutions are clouded over...Men turn for their inspiration to the living flow of personality." <sup>6</sup> This emergence of the personal is seen in the deification of the Roman Emperor and in the glorification of the modern Fuhrer or Duce. The Roman encouragement of patriotic art savours quite strongly of modern Ministries of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment which supervise all cultural activity and "purify" it of any tendencies considered anti-social or anti-patriotic.

Is it merely accidental that Hitler should speak of the National-Socialist State as destined to endure for a thousand years and that the Roman writers should invent the myth of an Eternal City? Rome, having become a unity in fact by virtue of military conquest, then became a unity in the consciousness of its citizens. It was idealized as the almost perfect state. Livy would "commemorate the deeds of the foremost people of the world." As German historians and poets revive ancient Nordic legends, so did Livy idealize the heroes of olden times even as the poetical Plato would recall to a disintegrated Athens the ancient sense of community and fellowship. The Roman Imperial tradition is at one with authoritarianism in that it taught the priority of the social duty of citizens and the institution of a common way of life. But it is antithetical to fascism in that

the Roman tradition was considered a "human possession rather than merely a Roman possession."<sup>7</sup> This internationalism of Roman world philosophy is fundamentally opposed to the Fascist nationalist conception of society. "Cicero's estimation of the Roman state was a step from the particular towards the universal, from something for a race to something for all races of mankind."<sup>8</sup> Fascism may claim to spring from the Roman civilization but its particularism and its intense nationalism militate against the validity of this claim. No civilization which gave the world a *ius gentium* later to become a *ius naturale* can be the spiritual father of an ideology which repudiates natural law. "Law", wrote Cicero, "is the highest reason, implanted in Nature." If Fascism stands opposed to the doctrine of natural law, it is opposed to more than the theories of the French Revolution; it is antithetical to essential elements of Greek and Roman philosophy. "Humankind," writes Rocco, "lives in social groups...each endowed with a unified organization. And there is no unique organization of the human species...humanity exists as a biological concept not as a social one."<sup>9</sup> If this is true, it is only with considerable qualification that he is entitled to assert subsequently that "if Fascism can look back at all it is in the direction of ancient Rome whose social and political traditions are being revived by Fascist Italy."<sup>10</sup> For the Romans believed that they were working not "for a single country and a single people, but for the human race."<sup>11</sup> Cicero,

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7. Wilsey - op.cit., p.39

8. *ibid.* - p.39

9 Rocco - op.cit., p.16

10. *ibid.* - p.24

11. Friedlander - Roman Life and Manners. Vol.3 pp.22-23.



Vergil, Ennius and Horace thought of themselves as writers for humanity, for Rome had a universal mission and an obligation to all mankind. Not only Roman politics but its religious doctrine implied a sense of duty toward all men. "All things are mutually intertwined," wrote Marcus Aurelius, "and scarcely anything is alien the one to the other. For all things have been arranged side by side and help to order one ordered universe." The Roman tradition is essentially opposed to Fascist exclusiveness manifesting itself in political nationalism and theories of racial superiority and incompatibility. But in its idealization of the state, its glorification of the ruler and its insistence on social duty, it is a legitimate antecedent of authoritarianism.

The historical importance attached to modern authoritarianism by its exponents is revealed in the following outline of the Fascist interpretation of modern history. Following the disintegration of the Roman Empire the Middle Ages witnessed the almost complete extinction of the state. The age bore the "imprints of a triumphant particularism." The only unifying institution was the Church. Occasionally it might bring an Emperor to his knees but as an instrument tending to draw different peoples into a common political unity it was hardly successful. The independence of the feudal lords, the corporations and the cities was virtually complete. "The Fascist ideology cannot therefore look back to the Middle Ages, of which it is a complete negation. The Middle Ages spell disintegration; Fascism is nothing if not sociality." Fascist philosophy regards the

democratic tradition as prolonging the anarchy of the Middle

<sup>12</sup>Rocco - op.cit., p.24.

Ages. The individualism of democratic doctrine opposed, it is held, the restoration of the state. Fascism, then, in its task of finally rescuing the state from the individual, marks the "beginning of the end of the Middle Ages prolonged five centuries beyond the end ordinarily set for them."<sup>13</sup>

The rise of democracy and its attendant individualism are not associated with the development of Italian thought. Writing in 1926 (before the formation of the Rome-Berlin axis), Signor Rocco stated that the mediaeval disintegration was "the result of the triumph of German individualism over the political mentality of the Romans. The barbarians pulled down the great political structure raised by Latin genius." Indeed the fore-runners of liberal doctrines are not Italian. Grotius, Spinoza, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Kant are "individualists" from Holland, France and Germany. Italy's role in the development of the democratic tradition as revealed in the doctrines of natural law and individualism is negligible. Hence the motto of the French Revolution, "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" is really alien to Italian culture. It is true that in Italy perhaps more than in any other European country the authority of the state was dissolved into a multiplicity of opposing sovereign bodies. The practice of state unity was absent in Italy until the nineteenth century. Perhaps the presence of this disintegrated society impressed Italian thinkers with the supreme necessity of a strong central authority. England, on the other hand, had evolved a fairly satisfactory system of central government and this practical

success encouraged its thinkers to turn to the question of individual liberty rather than to that of state authority. The Italian political thinkers, however, from Machiavelli to Vico proclaimed the rights of the state and the preeminence of its authority.

The necessity of authoritative political administration was stressed by St. Thomas Aquinas and by Dante. The former taught that those states are most prosperous and peaceful which are ruled by one king whereas those which are governed by many are less stable because of the discord which arises between the rulers. Certainly there are doctrines of equality and individualism in St. Thomas Aquinas' writings which make them antithetical to modern authoritarianism. But in his advocacy of a strong state ruled by one man, he continued the Roman tradition of political authority to which Fascism would trace its origins. Aristotle thought that the rule of the many was the best possible, if not ideal, form of government. "A number of equally virtuous men," he wrote, "is less likely to go wrong than one man of virtue equal to theirs." St. Thomas Aquinas had less faith in the ability of the people to govern wisely. He wrote: "ideo manifestum est, quod multitudo est sicut tyrannus, quare operationes multitudinis<sup>14</sup> sunt iniustae. Ergo non expedit multitudinem dominari."

The unity of the Empire may long have disintegrated into a chaos of conflicting sovereignties but the tradition of Roman authority persisted in Italian thought and was vividly expressed in Dante's *De Monarchia*. Its theme was the theory of a strong state and the subordination of the individual citizens to its authority. Echoing Virgil who sang the praises of the

ancient Empire and called upon the citizens to sacrifice themselves for their country since it was "dulce et decorum...pro patria mori," Dante writes that "homo pro patria debet exponere se ipsum." Italian idealism which persisted through the Middle Ages and withstood the influx of democratic principles is a legitimate theoretical precursor of modern authoritarianism.

If the way in which the Czechoslovakian republic was recently dismembered is illustrative of Fascist political technique, it might be said of Hitler that: "He overpowered his open enemies by the help of faithless allies; he then armed himself against his allies with the spoils taken from his enemies. By his incomparable dexterity he raised himself from the precarious and dependent situation of a military adventurer to the first place in the nation...To such a man much was forgiven...hollow friendship, ungenerous enmity, violated faith." These words might well be those of a commentator on current history but they are from Macaulay, and refer to Francis Sforza, Italian hero and inspiration to Niccolo Machiavelli. "Fascism learns from Machiavelli," writes Rocco, "not only its doctrines but its action as well." <sup>15</sup> And perhaps because Fascism is action and sentiment more than theory and dogma does it owe so great a debt to this keen observer of political institutions and human nature. For he was less a creator of doctrine than an instructor in the art of government. He was concerned less with the abstract concept of state than with the concrete problems of administration. To Italian Fascists he is "the greatest of modern political writers." The preservation of Italian independence was, he judged, the

supreme end of all Italian political activity. To achieve this end any means were justified - even the rule of a tyrant. Likewise Mussolini lived in a broken and disillusioned Italy. He considered national unity to be the supreme need of the nation. To reach such unity any means were justified - even the surrender of hard and hardly won liberties by the institution of a dictatorship. The relationship between Machiavelli and Fascism is evident not only in a common justification of any means, however ignoble, to achieve a certain end, supposedly noble, but more particularly in the identity of the specific end towards which Machiavelli and Fascism would bend all their efforts. To restore order and efficiency to a torn and disrupted Italy was the vision held by Machiavelli and the supreme task which Fascism sets out to accomplish.

"What has vanished from Machiavelli," writes Figgis, "is the conception of natural law."<sup>16</sup> He admits of no impersonal standards by reference to which the actions of rulers or of the people are to be judged. The government was not bound by limitations of an absolute, objective law. Its authority was unqualified in internal and external relations. In this respect Machiavelli anticipated not only the absolutism which was soon to characterize the rule of national monarchs in Europe but also the twentieth century recrudescence of the doctrine of state sovereignty in the form of Fascism. He foresaw better than any man of his age the rise of the modern nation-state which was to assert its inalienable, unconditional sovereignty and demand "of the individual in the service of the community the sacrifice, not merely of his

purse or his person, but also of his conscience." <sup>17</sup> But this doctrine is not necessarily comparable to modern authoritarianism. It is as potentially democratic as autocratic. Machiavelli desired above everything else a strong and powerful state which would rescue Italy from the chaos into which it was falling. He was prepared to justify any means which would establish such political power. The sovereignty of the state must be unconditional but that it should rest with the people, as Rousseau urged, is compatible with Machiavelli's principles. "It is for the sake of the community," writes Sir Frederick Pollock, "that Machiavelli prefers free government to tyranny in the *Discorsi*". Fascism expressly repudiates the doctrine of popular sovereignty on the ground that it is incapable of realizing the good of the community. Machiavelli's position in regard to dictatorship and democracy is much more akin to the Communist theory of a transitional and temporary dictatorship than to the Fascist justification of permanent, authoritarian government. He did not advocate despotism as a principle but only as a necessary technique in "the making of a state and the reforming of a corrupt state. Once founded, a state can be made permanent only if the people are admitted to some share <sup>18</sup> in the government." Whether despotism would lead in fact to self-government is irrelevant to Machiavelli's thought. He taught that this transitionary process was vital to the state's well-being and even to its existence. In this respect his work is fundamentally opposed to the tenets of Fascism.

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<sup>17</sup>

ibid., - p.79

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Sabine, History of Political Theory. - p.347.

The common ground between Machiavelli and Fascism is their conception of an ideal state whose well-being should be the sole concern of all its citizens. Machiavelli, who demanded "the complete absorption of the individuality by the social<sup>19</sup> organism," is in this respect a legitimate forerunner of contemporary totalitarianism. In urging also that the state, by virtue of its unlimited sovereignty, is not obliged to recognize any moral or legal obligation in its relations with other states, he anticipates both the theory and practice of modern fascism. From a more historical point of view, Machiavelli foresaw and perhaps inspired the doctrine of nationalism which was to become the most important element in the theory of the modern state and which has been expressed in twentieth century authoritarianism to a hitherto unparalleled degree.

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Figgis, op,cit., - p.80.

## CHAPTER V

### EARLY MODERN ABSOLUTISM AND IDEALISM.

The disintegration of papal authority, the collapse of feudalism and the rise of modern nation states presented post-Renaissance Europe with new fundamental problems of political and social organization. The Renaissance and the Reformation had destroyed the authority of the mediaeval Empire. The unifying force of a common religion had disappeared. The old doctrine of natural law was no longer an adequate restraint on the claims of national princes to sovereign authority. Natural law had found expression in the common law and in the declarations of the Church. A command of a sovereign considered contrary to this law had not been recognized by the courts or by the Church. The disintegration of a common authority, however, made this mediaeval system outmoded and inapplicable to new political conditions. The "times demanded new legislation and new powers for the government which suited ill with the predominance of common over statute law."<sup>(1)</sup> The modern state was struggling to be born amid not inconsiderable birth-pangs. Formidable obstacles had to be overcome which militated against its claim to sovereign authority. Each state wished to formulate its own law. But the mediaeval tradition lingered in the doctrine of natural law and insisted that all statute law be referred to universal norms. Each state

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(1) A.D.Lindsay, Hobbes' Leviathan, Everyman edition p.xiii.



desired to assert its absolute authority over all individuals who came under its jurisdiction. But Christian ethics asserted the independent moral worth of the individual. The age was characterized by philosophical confusion and political upheavals. It was to be expected that this "unquiet world", as Richard Hooker called it, which saw itself "projected into a career of error and disorder.... was bound to interest itself in authority."<sup>(2)</sup> There emerged the doctrine of political absolutism which was at once strikingly similar to and yet fundamentally different from modern authoritarianism.

One of the principal tenets of Fascism, as has been pointed out, is its repudiation of natural law in favour of an omnipotent visible and personal authority. But its exponents lack an historical perspective if they consider this view unique to Fascist doctrine. If they regard authoritarianism as essentially an Italian or German development, then perhaps the "noblest Roman (or Teuton) of them all" was the Englishman, Thomas Hobbes. For he proposed a political philosophy which would establish finally and unequivocally the indisputable supremacy of the ruling body. He specifically stated that the supreme power might be lodged in an assembly. His doctrine does not preclude a democratically elected sovereign. But Hobbes held that there could be no order nor stability unless some kind of absolutism were permanently preserved. He revived the Greek and Roman idea of the supremacy of the state but rejected the ancient conception of an impersonal law as an authority limiting the competence of the personal sovereign. Natural law may have been a fitting

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(2) C. W. Hendel, *The Meaning of Obligation*, an essay in Contemporary Idealism in America, ed. Barrett.

concept for Platonic speculation but the world, despite the Greeks, was not governed by natural and universal laws discovered by the intuitive insight of philosopher-kings. It was ruled by powerful and often unlettered princes. Nor was it a Europe of one Empire. It was a continent of new and competing nations. The sovereigns did not represent the authority of an objective law. They made the law. "The laws cannot govern", wrote Hobbes, "only men can govern". The rulers were the supreme authority and their rule was personal, visible and tested by a successful use of force. The national princes were more than Platonic "guardians of the law"; they were "living laws". Living during the English political upheavals of the seventeenth century, Hobbes was convinced that authority was needed to restore order and security. If a supreme power were not forthcoming, mankind might return to a state of nature in which primitive struggle and the conflict of brutish desires threatened the extinction of the race. Agreements without a power to enforce them were but "words and breath". Fear would not restrain men from pernicious activities. Appeals to God were ineffectual. Force and absolute power were the only means to restore order to a disrupted society.

In justifying political absolutism, Hobbes anticipated a basic principle of contemporary authoritarianism. An emphasis on the "personal and the role of force are themes of a doctrine which has played its part in the making of the doctrine of Fascism."<sup>(3)</sup> It was Hobbes who gave these themes the most extensive and elaborate treatment they have probably ever received.

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(3) Barker, op.cit., p.392.

He taught that all individuals were obliged to obey the commands of a personal sovereign whose authority was indivisible and unconditional.

The principle of political absolutism has two important implications which are expressed in Hobbes' writings and in Fascist doctrine. They concern the problems of individual conscience and religious conviction. In denying to the individual the right to disobey the commands of the sovereign on the ground of personal opinion, Hobbes is at one with modern authoritarians. "The Diseases of a Commonwealth", he wrote, "proceed from the poison of seditious doctrines whereof one is That every man is Judge of Good and Evil actions." The Leviathan, like the National-Socialist dictatorship, would persecute the Lutheran who asserted his right to hearken to the voice of his individual conscience. But the Catholic who would render allegiance to an extra-political authority, like the Church, would also have as much reason to fear the Mortal God as the modern dictator. A Nazi jurist writes: "A treaty between a totalitarian state and a religious body is an impossibility. Concordats... are incompatible with the modern idea of a totalitarian state's sovereignty." This statement reveals a historical perspective only if the jurist in question realizes that the "modern" idea of a totalitarian state's sovereignty is nearly three hundred years old. Hobbes expressed precisely the same opinion when he wrote: "There be also that think there may be set up... a Ghostly Authority against the Civil.. that there walketh another kingdom....and every Subject is subject to two Masters.... who both will have their Commands observed as

Law; which is impossible....Either the Civil must be subordinate to the Ghostly and then there is no Sovereignty but the Ghostly : or the Ghostly must be subordinate to the Temporal, and then there is no Supremacy but the Temporal." In other words the totalitarianism, which is common to Hobbes and to Fascism makes it impossible for an individual to "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things which are God's." Fascism may pretend to abide by this doctrine but in so doing it has certainly limited quite drastically the extent of God's province. Hobbes' political philosophy and Fascist doctrine are identical in demanding the complete subordination of all individuals and associations to the authority of the state.

The parallel must not be drawn too closely for fear of overlooking fundamental differences which must now be brought to light. To what extent is Hobbes a theoretical precursor of Fascism? The same relationship which obtained between Platonism and Fascism is again discerned. The similarities in doctrine refer to means but not to ends. Indeed it may be said that Hobbes and contemporary authoritarians are united only in recommending like means to diametrically opposed ends. Fascism is committed to an idealist conception of the state. It urges, as has been pointed out, that all individual efforts should be directed towards realizing the good of an ideal society. Its outlook is essentially anti-individualistic and anti-materialistic . The Fascist virtues are courage and self-sacrifice. The ideal Fascist is an individual who would gladly risk his life and material prosperity for the sake of a cause which is greater than his own self-interest and

personal welfare.

Against this idealist position, Hobbes stands irreconcilably opposed. A fundamental materialism and individualism pervade his philosophy and political theory. He places the individual at the centre of things. He is the occasion and justification for political society. His welfare is the end of all social activity. It was futile to speak of the general will of an ideal society for such supposed entities were no more than a collection of separate, discrete individuals. Prof. Laski was only echoing Hobbes when he wrote : "The only realities are human beings...to ascribe personality to the embodiment of the collected will of a few is an antiquated anthropomorphism that imperils the scientific basis of law."

The supreme object of Fascism, writes Barnes, is to eliminate from the individual the "dissolving poisons of materialism". But it is Hobbes' premise that this materialism was ineradicable from human nature. It is futile to attempt to make a nation of heroes when the "first and fundamental Law of Nature is to seek peace and follow it." Man would not fly in the face of danger for the sake of a cause other than his own interest and security. He would make any sacrifice, even to the extent of surrendering his liberty, in order to achieve the peace he desired. Indeed Hobbes taught that he must surrender his freedom in order that he might live in peace. Hence he justified absolutism not to realize the good of an ideal state but as the only means of enabling individuals to pursue their personal and material advantage in peace. "The only way

to erect a .. Power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners and the injuries of one another... is to confer all power and strength upon one man or upon one Assembly of men.... This is the generation of that great Leviathan or Mortal God to which we owe...our peace and defence". Fascist doctrine completely repudiates Hobbes' "shop-keeper's morality" which considers the material welfare of individuals to be the supreme end of political organization. It justifies absolutism as the best means of realizing the welfare of the social organism . Its common ground with Hobbes' political theory is their advocacy of authoritarian government and their agreement concerning the relationship which must obtain between a political administration and individuals and associations under absolute government.

Hobbes' political theory was considered a significant factor in the development of authoritarianism because of his absolute repudiation of the claim of natural law to limit the legal competence of the personal sovereign. But his individualism and his materialism marked him as opposed to the sociality and idealism of Fascism. It remained for an Italian to reject both the concept of natural law and the utilitarian dictum that the greatest good of the greatest number was the supreme end of social activity. In asserting this position, Giambattista Vico anticipated several essential tenets of the Fascist creed.

Vico opposed the prevalent eighteenth century conception of an abstract individual, endowed with certain natural attributes and governed by universal natural laws, who was

projected as it were, into a society which did not fundamentally influence his personality and which was not essentially affected by his presence. He would recognize the specific and unique qualities of diverse social groups and individuals and their interaction upon one another. The individual, he considered, was moved more by an appreciation of historical tradition than by rational demonstration. Vico stressed national habit, custom and particularly history. The relationship between Vico and Fascism is distinctly revealed in Rocco's analysis of the Fascist temper. "Fascism" he writes, is the reawakening of a racial instinct... it has the force to stir the soul of the people and to set free an irresistible current of national will.<sup>(4)</sup> Such a movement obviously appeals to man's instinctive and emotional nature rather than to his rational processes. Its appeal is essentially Romantic. Ernest Barker believes that Fascism is largely but an expression of the "romantic factor in modern politics". Vico was one of the principal forerunners of Romanticism and particularly of that phase of the Romantic movement which Fascism embodies. He emphasized the concept of nation and nationalism, two of the most important ingredients of the Fascist doctrine. "Vico sketched modern society as a world of nations each one guarding its own imperium, fighting just and not inhuman wars. In Vico... we find the condemnation of pacifism, the assertion that right is actualized by bodily force, that without force, right is of

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(4) Rocco-op.cit.,p.29

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no avail!" This rejection of internationalism and distrust of abstract reason which would conceive of a world humanity governed by universal principles of law and morality are characteristic of Vico's thought and are expressed to an extreme degree in Fascist doctrine and action. It is this world outlook which enables Fascists to justify actions which would be judged immoral by other rational and ethical standards. For the Fascists conceive of a number of competing sovereign nations which engage naturally in periodic wars, "eternal law of mankind... interpreted by the liberal-democratic doctrine as a degenerate absurdity or a maddened monstrosity."<sup>(6)</sup>

This nationalist tradition pervaded modern Italian thought and expressed itself in the Risorgimento or the struggle to establish an independent Italy. An attempt will be made to trace the relationship between this tradition and the rise of the Fascist movement.

The first writer to study Vico's work with a true understanding of it, 'according to Croce, was Vincenzo Cuoco, Italian political thinker and an inspiration to the great figures of the Risorgimento. Living in the beginning of the nineteenth century, he represents the Italian reaction against the principles of the French Revolution. He belongs to the same school as Hegel and Fichte. Hegel, who witnessed the destruction of a disunited Prussia by imperial France wrote : "The Germans are a nation but they have never learned the subordination of parts to a whole which is essential both for national government and for real political freedom." Cuoco lived in an Italy which

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(5) *ibid.*, p.29

(6) *ibid.*, p.18



was struggling to develop into a unified and independent nation. He feared the disintegrating influence which the introduction of democratic principles might occasion and demanded, like the German idealists, the submergence of the individual in the life of the state. "Italy" he wrote, "has fared badly at the hand of Democracy which has withered to their roots the three plants of liberty, unity and independence. If we wish to see these trees flourish again, let us protect them in the future from Democracy." It is difficult to understand Cuoco's opposition to democracy. It certainly was not sufficiently flourishing in Italy at that time to have had any serious effect on national life. He probably considered democracy as a purely French phenomenon and his patriotic resentment against France which had subdued his country led him to oppose the principles which the French Revolution had proclaimed. His prime interest was not liberty for individuals but the establishment of a powerful Italy which would be free from foreign domination. Cuoco belonged to the nationalist tradition of Machiavelli and Vico which has attained its most extreme expression in Fascist doctrine.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE RISORGIMENTO AND THE RISE OF ITALIAN FASCISM.

In the Risorgimento, it is possible to discern not only the influence of Italian political philosophy but also the historical origins of modern Fascism. The present Italian regime claims to be continuing the tradition of Mazzini which was allegedly interrupted and almost destroyed by the introduction of the alien doctrines of materialism and individualism. These influences brought about, it is said, a disintegrated Italy whose unity and independence were to be finally achieved by their removal and by the re-affirmation of the ideal of duty and the establishment of a nation superior in fact as well as in theory to all the individuals which composed it. For Mazzini had written: "Training for social duty is essentially....unitarian . Life is but a duty, a mission "whose "definition can only be found in a collective term superior to all the individuals - in the nation." Because he considered the individual as an instrument for the attainment of the nation's ends, (did he not send Italian citizens to the Crimea in order that the nation might derive prestige from such action ?) he anticipates "one of the fundamental points of the Fascist doctrine."<sup>(I)</sup> It is problematical, however, whether such a spirit as that of Mazzini would find a welcome in present day Italy. He fought a war of liberation against a foreign ruler and sought to free Italy from alien domination. This was the

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(I) *ibid.*, p. 31.

supreme purpose of his life. But once national unity were established it is doubtful whether this liberator would have sanctioned the establishment of a totalitarian regime. Exponents of Fascism are unwarranted in identifying Mazzini's patriotism with their excessive nationalism. Thomas Masaryk rather than Mussolini seems the contemporary counterpart of Mazzini. The Czechoslovakian patriot fought for the establishment of a sovereign Czechoslovakian nation. Democracy, as well as Fascism, may ask citizens to sacrifice themselves and even to die for the integrity of the nation. This demand may well be made in the name of free government as the brief post-war history of the Czechoslovakian Republic has testified.

Indeed the casuistry of the Fascist claim that Mazzini was one of the forerunners of modern authoritarianism is revealed in its admission that after the unification of Italy, the Italian political tradition seemed to "exhaust itself" and became "enslaved in the days of freedom." Why should Italian thought "exhaust itself" in the moment of its greatest triumph? It is only by considering the Risorgimento as a sort of embryonic Fascism that this view is tenable. It was as much a democratic movement as a patriotic one.

The Risorgimento reflected two distinct movements which were confused in the nineteenth century because of their simultaneous appearance. National self-government and representative self-government were two aspects of the Risorgimento ideal. Fascism has conveniently neglected to consider this latter element.

The attempt to establish a workable democratic government followed from the achievement of national unity even as a similar development resulted from the establishment of an autonomous Czechoslovakian state. It is reasonable to believe that Italians did not struggle to rid themselves of foreign oppression in order that a national dictatorship might be created. In its nationalism, Fascism may be derived from the Risorgimento. But in its irreconcilable opposition to democratic government it would probably have been disavowed by those patriots who fought Italy's War of Liberation.

The essence of Mazzini's teaching, writes Giovanni Gentile, was that "life is not a game, but a mission; that, therefore, the individual has a law and a purpose in obedience to which and in fulfilment of which he attains his true value; that accordingly, he must make sacrifices, now of personal comfort, now of private interest, now of life itself." This is a heroic interpretation of life which to Gentile describes the Fascist temperament. But Fascism has no right to arrogate to itself exclusively this noble quality of individual self-sacrifice for the attainment of an ideal. Exponents and followers of all creeds will often sacrifice themselves for the sake of their convictions. The Communists who labour for their Revolution will sacrifice personal and material considerations for their ideals. Believers in any doctrine, who are sincere in their convictions, will subordinate private considerations to advance their cause. But the end itself must be objectively evaluated

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(2) Gentile, op.cit., p.292

before the struggle to reach it can be justified. Life, says Gentile, is "not the life which is, but also the life which ought to be." But it does not follow that the life which ought to be is that design for living which Fascism would impose upon society. In this interpretation of experience Communism is as "idealistic" as Fascism for both are concerned not with the life which is but with the life which ought to be. Fascism has not the right to arrogate to itself an exclusive concern for the future welfare of society and to demand the sacrifice of present advantage for future well-being. "Thought and Action" was the great slogan of Mazzini. By this he meant that the ideal Italy which has existed only in the minds of a few scholars and patriots be realized in actuality. The Risorgimento, writes Gentile, represented "Idealism understood as faith in the advent of an ideal reality; as a manner of conceiving life not as fixed within the limits of existing fact, but as incessant progress...toward the level of a higher law..."<sup>(3)</sup> The Risorgimento may have been inspired by such noble motives. But it is highly incorrect to claim, as does Gentile, that "no revolution ever possessed more markedly than did the Italian Risorgimento this characteristic of ideality, of thought preceding action."<sup>(4)</sup> The claim is not historically true. English liberal thought and Puritan religious belief preceded the American Revolution. Surely Rousseau's thought largely inspired the French Revolution. The "materialistic" Russian

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(3) *ibid.*, p.292

(4) *ibid.*, p.292

Revolution was preceded by several generations of Marxian scholarship. All these Revolutions resulted from dissatisfaction with existing conditions and were inspired by a faith that society would be improved by their occurrence. All possessed the "ideality" which Fascism arrogates to itself.

The religious and idealistic attitude toward life which the Risorgimento introduced was interrupted, claim the Fascists, by the parliamentary triumph of 1876. The spirit of Italian life from this time until the Great War was considered materialistic and anti-Mazzinian. "With the transference of power from the Right to the Left", writes Gentile, "begins the period of growth and development...growth in industry, commerce, science and education."<sup>(5)</sup> In the language of the capitalist it was an age of expansion in which unrestrained individualism and the practice of laissez-faire were the outstanding characteristics of national life. Gentile writes that in this period the limitations placed upon the individual all assumed that "each man must instinctively seek his own well-being and defend it." This utilitarian conception, it is argued, was contrary to the high ideals of the Risorgimento. Italian life during this period was dominated by a "crude positivism...Everybody wanted "facts", "positive facts". Everybody laughed at "metaphysical dreams", at impalpable realities."<sup>(6)</sup> This, says Gentile, was the "demo-socialistic phase of the modern Italian State." In this period of material progress, the ideals of the Risorgimento were forgotten. Fascism, it is hinted, is the movement

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(5) *ibid.*, p.294

(6) *ibid.*, p.295

which will redeem Italian life of its materialism. Fascism is apparently intended to "rehoist the time-honoured banner of idealism" which the materialists of the Left had cast down. It would trace its origins to the idealistic reaction which occurred in Italy towards the end of the nineteenth century. "Vico", writes Gentile, "the great Vico, formidable preacher of idealistic philosophy.... anti-Cartesian and anti-rationalist became the object of a new cult."<sup>(7)</sup>

The Great War provided the occasion for this national idealism to culminate in the form of Fascism. Post-war Italy was first overcome with a sense of frustration and spiritual disintegration. Gentile writes : "An anarchical spirit of dissolution rose against all authority."<sup>(8)</sup> The foundations of the nation were imperilled as political life was marked by the conflict of factions and economic life was disrupted by strikes and labour agitation. From the Fascist viewpoint the apparent collapse of the Italian nation was averted by the providential emergence of a new idealism which triumphantly called forth the loyalty of the people and reawakened their national spirit. This idealism was the essence of the Fascist movement founded by Mussolini in 1919 and established in 1923 as the supreme power in Italy.

The triumph of Italian Fascism represented to its exponents the solution of a century old crisis. It was the final vindication of idealism over, what the Fascists term, democratic individualism and Marxist materialism. It is needless

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(7) *ibid.*, p. 297

(8) Mussolini-My Autobiography, p. 103. (Hutchinson edition)

to point out and irrelevant to the purpose of this thesis that their interpretation of democracy would not be acceptable to a democrat. They have arbitrarily and without justification identified the individualism of democracy with the crassest sort of utilitarianism. Fascism denies all other political creeds the attribute of idealism which it arrogates to itself. The democrat may well take issue with Mussolini's judgment on the passing of Italian democracy: "Our democracy of yesterday had died; its testament had been read; it had bequeathed us naught but chaos".<sup>(8)</sup> A discussion of the Fascist interpretation of other political movements is, however, not within the scope of this thesis. Its prime concern is the positive content of Fascist political doctrine.

The distinctive elements of Fascist political theory are derived, as has already been noted, from the idealist theory of the state. It has been seen how Italian political tradition had for centuries stressed the transcendent character of the state. It has been said of the Italian economy of the sixteenth century that it possessed "the worst money and the best monetary theory." In like manner, Italian political life was marked by excessive disunity and yet there came out of Italy one of the strongest conceptions of state sovereignty. The same phenomenon will shortly be noted in the development of German political theory.

The nineteenth century added to this tradition that

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(8) Mussolini-My Autobiography, p.103 (Hutchinson edition).



which Ernest Barker has called the "inevitable corollary" to assuming a "superior organism," viz., "the superior person who represents its being and gives light and leading from above."<sup>(9)</sup> When the metaphysical conception of an ideal state was realized in actual political organization, a leader to interpret and to satisfy the needs of the social organism was required. The nation had been exalted into such a supreme value that it was held impossible for the unenlightened mass of individuals to discern and to guide its destiny. Democracy was rejected, therefore, in favour of government by a superior intelligence endowed with an intuitive insight into the general will. Fascism then, holds to the principle of government by an élite.

The two fundamental tenets of Fascist political theory are the idealization of the state and the principle of personal leadership. This personification of the state by an individual reveals the essential distinction between Fascism and democracy. The difference does not lie in opposing conceptions of the proper scope of state authority. Both democracy and dictatorships are compatible with the theory and practice of state sovereignty. "The social compact gives the body politic absolute power over all its members....and this power under the direction of the general will bears the name of sovereignty."<sup>(10)</sup> It is seen that a democrat as great as Rousseau who would not even permit the sovereignty of the people to express itself through representative government but insisted on the active

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(9) Barker-op.cit., p.400

(10) Rousseau-Social Contract -Bk.11,Ch.1V.

participation in political life of each citizen, nevertheless accorded to the body politic complete authority over all its members even to the extent of demanding the sacrifice of their lives in the interests of the state. The body politic remained completely democratic, however, because the sovereignty of the state was nothing more than the sovereignty of the general will of all its members. In other words, Rousseau identified state sovereignty and popular sovereignty. Gentile accuses democracy of setting up the individual against the state and of regarding liberty as synonymous with limitations of state authority. This conception of liberty may have been valid in the time of John Locke. It disappeared with Rousseau who established at one stroke the "indivisible" and "inalienable" sovereignty of the state and the fullest expression of the general will. Fascism does not identify the sovereignty of the body politic with the general will of its members. The Fascist state is supreme but its administration or its government is in the hands of a few distinct personalities who determine arbitrarily the general will of society and who possess unlimited power to execute those plans which they consider to be in the general welfare. The supreme power in the authoritarian state is the personal leader. The sovereign authority in the democratic state is the impersonal general will of the people expressed through their elected representatives. The difference between these two types of supreme power is not quantitative for both are equally supreme. It is the quality of that authority which constitutes the principal distinction between Rousseau's democracy and

totalitarianism. The assumption of supreme power by a Duce or a Fuhrer represents, according to Barker, "tides of contemporary thought which run against democracy," for the leader does not belong to "the world of democratic ideas and practice" but symbolizes "the incursion of another world."<sup>(11)</sup> The Fascist principle of arbitrary leadership is irreconcilable with the theory of democracy.

There is another interpretation of democracy which differs essentially from Rousseau's conception. This is the democracy of the "limited state" in which the body politic does not possess any legal right to infringe upon certain inalienable liberties of the individual. Gentile is correct in maintaining that, in certain respects at least, this democracy sets up the individual against the state. He is not justified in deducing that liberty is, by definition, a limitation of State authority and in implying that any increase in state authority is automatically a decrease in personal liberty. The state may add to its power and thereby add to individual freedom. But it must not, according to this view of democracy, deprive individuals of natural rights either by an increase or by a DECREASE in its authority. The state might, for example, prohibit freedom of worship by extending its authority over the religious activities of its citizens. Such an action, whether or not sanctioned by a majority of the people, would deprive citizens of natural and inalienable rights which such a democracy should guarantee. It would therefore constitute an undemocratic en-

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(11) Barker, op.cit., p.388.

largement of political authority. But by the same token, the state might lack the legal authority to prohibit slavery. An enlargement of its power to abolish violations of the natural right of each individual to freedom would not constitute any impairment of the democratic process but would rather contribute to its development. This theory of the limited state is, of course, completely removed from compatibility with totalitarianism. The Fascist state makes no compromise in its authority with any individual or group. It recognizes no individual rights except such as are granted by the state.

It may be concluded that the democratic state whose authority is limited by constitutional provisions is, by definition, irreconcilable with Fascist doctrine which recognizes no valid limitation of the sovereignty of the state. The democratic state whose authority is unlimited is also incompatible with Fascism since it rests upon the will and consent of the people.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE INFLUENCE OF GERMAN IDEALISM.

The relationship between the Italian idealistic tradition and Italian Fascism has already been traced. It is now necessary to examine the origin and development of the political theory of German Fascism. It will be found that German Fascism, like its Italian counterpart, arose among a people whose philosophy was steeped in a romantic and idealistic tradition.

The German Romantic movement dates at least as far back as Herder and Schelling. The idea of the Folk, or the conception of a society united by natural bonds of loyalty and common tradition, was expressed in the late eighteenth century literature and philosophy. Herder emphasized the individuality of diverse social groups in his criticism of some of the main notions of the Eighteenth Century Enlightenment. This appreciation of diversity was in marked contrast to the universality of the Enlightenment philosophy. The influence of Vico on Italian thought has already been noted. It is very significant that his works were familiar to Herder and the German Romantics. There is no explicit acknowledgment in Herder's writings of Vico's influence. J. R. G. Robertson, however, in his book, "The Genesis of Romantic Theory," is prompted to write: "Herder's 'Ideen zu einer Geschichte der Philosophie der Menschheit' seems unthinkable without a knowledge of Vico's *Scienza Nuova*." These German Romantics held that each people had its peculiar genius or spirit and their works contained the first expression of the Volksgeist idea. They decried the universal pretensions of the eighteenth

century European Enlightenment and insisted on the diversity and independence of national cultures. Each social group was not considered as progressing towards a final rationally conceived humanity according to eighteenth century European standards but retained its unique values. An essential element of Romanticism was a heightened historical appreciation which revolted against the notion that the past was but a prelude to eighteenth century civilization. The Romantic movement revealed and emphasized the individuality of each epoch and the autonomy of each culture.

The eighteenth century conception of Humanity involved the idea that all men belonged fundamentally to a great and single human family. Two conclusions were drawn from this notion. Firstly, all Humanity was considered to be governed by a universal Natural Law. Secondly, the equality of all men seemed to follow from the proposition that they all belonged to a single society. The ideology of the West, writes Ernst Troeltsch, was that of an "eternal, rational system of Order"... embracing an "eternal Law of Nature, the Equality of Man, and a sense of Unity pervading mankind."<sup>(1)</sup> The Stoic philosophy and the Christian tradition contributed to this ideology which would establish the fundamental equality of all individuals as moral beings. This universalism and equalitarianism, which were essential characteristics of Western thought, were antithetical

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(1) Troeltsch- The Ideas of Natural Law and Humanity in World Politics, an Appendix to Barker's translation of Gierke's Natural Law and the Theory of Society, p.202.

to the system of ideas which developed in Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. German Romanticism did not conceive of an equal Humanity governed by a universal Natural Law but of unique individualities which were qualitatively different and which obeyed an ever changing law. It opposed the Enlightenment ideal of an ultimate association of morally equal human beings in a "community of mankind." Its ideal was rather that of a number of national minds.... a hierarchy of ...different cultures... a world in which the people that from time to time enjoys the hegemony hands on the torch to the next."<sup>(2)</sup> Romanticism implied the "total dissolution of the idea of a universal Natural Law."<sup>(3)</sup> "Each society" wrote Rocco, "exists in the unity of both its biological and social contents....Fascism...rejects entirely the theories of natural law....which form the basis of the liberal, democratic and socialistic ideology"<sup>(4)</sup>. There is more than an incidental Romantic element in modern authoritarianism. The basic point of agreement is the ideal existence ascribed to the social group. The early Romantics idealized the tribe or Folk which was later developed into the national state. It should be pointed out that the Romantic concept had a metaphysical foundation which is lacking in Fascist theory. The Folk with its peculiar spirit was regarded as a particular manifestation or even

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(2) *ibid.*, p.212  
(3) *ibid.*, p.212  
(4) Rocco, *op.cit.*, p.16

creation of a Universal Spirit which was identified with God. The social group was thus carried "back into the life of the universal substance" and attached, as Barker writes, "to the immanent spirit of a pantheistic universe."<sup>(5)</sup> Fascism makes no pretence to this metaphysics but its political doctrine shows the unmistakable influence of Romantic theory in its idealization of the social group as a spiritual being with its own ends different from and superior to the ends of the individuals within the group. The idea of the tribe or Folk was that particular aspect of the Romantic tradition which was most influential in affecting the subsequent development of German political thought.

The State, according to Gentile, results from the "formation of a common consciousness" among the people. The Folk, writes Ernest Barker, "was envisaged primarily as a spiritual being, which owed its duty to the spirit of a common loyalty."<sup>(6)</sup> The Romantic movement was a reaction against the individualism of the French Revolution. Troeltsch called it a Counter-Revolution which "proceeded to erect both in the sphere of the State and in that of Society at large the "organic" ideal of a group-mind. (Gemeingeist). To realize this ideal, Romanticism sought to remedy the political disunity of Germany by the erection of a powerful unitary State."<sup>(7)</sup>

The authority of the State was even given a divine sanction and the arbitrary rule of the monarch was thus based on divine right. "The State" wrote Hegel, "is the march of God in the

<sup>(5)</sup> Barker, op.cit., p.396

<sup>(6)</sup> ibid., p.395

<sup>(7)</sup> Troeltsch, op.cit., p.203



world."

Each social entity was also regarded as possessing a distinct biological unity or a common blood. It is not difficult to anticipate from these early beliefs, as Barker suggests, the emergence of modern German racial theory. Two essential elements of German authoritarianism are thus discernible in the beginning of the Romantic movement. The first was the idea of the Folk which was soon to expand into the idea of the State. The second was the conception of a biological unity common to each Folk.

The Folk, it has been pointed out, was bound together by the bond of a common loyalty. But, as Hobbes revealed, an abstract entity can no more rule a society than an impersonal natural law. The object of common allegiance must be a visible and personal authority. The leadership principle was thus the third element of Romanticism which Fascism has embodied. "This," writes Barker, "was... the princeps... with his followers, gathered round his person in an elementary loyalty; or the dux and fuhrer of a whole people, chosen and followed by it for his personal quality."<sup>(8)</sup> Thus the Romantics glorified the legendary and historical figures of antiquity. The common loyalty due the leader was exemplified, for example, in the deification of the Roman emperors. These individuals seemed but historical manifestations of the leadership principle fundamental to all social organization. This is the teaching of German Romanticism but it is not an unfamiliar philosophy. It is the creed of Vautrin, Balzac's anti-social romantic rogue who remarks to

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(8) Barker, op.cit., p. 396

Rastignac: "In a million of these human cattle there may be half a score of bold spirits who rise above the rest, above the laws; I am one of them." It was a doctrine expressed independently by Carlyle and by Nietzsche who emphasized, however, its biological implications more than its political aspects. German Romanticism "placed leadership in the hands of great men, from whom the spirit of the whole essentially radiated and by whom it was organized."<sup>(9)</sup> This is the justification of the professed attempt of Italian Fascism to make the "thought and will of the Duce, the thought and will of the masses."<sup>(10)</sup> For the leader does not impose an egoistic and particularist thought upon the people; his thought is a concrete solidification of the spirit of the Folk. In the language of a democrat, it is a true expression of the General Will. The leader is the Legislator whom Rousseau described in the Social Contract. The Romantics, however, would not dispense with the services of such a transcendent intelligence once its particular task had been performed as Rousseau suggested. Aristotle believed it advisable to have a monarchical form of government if a qualified ruler were attainable. The Romantics believed that such super personalities were always revealing themselves in the normal course of history. They conceived of the leader as a "perennial factor of human life....the core and centre of the community,"<sup>(11)</sup> whose personality was the focal point toward which all individual and group loyalty was directed. Romanticism taught that the proper study of mankind was not man but the state

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(9) Troeltsch, op.cit., p.213

(10) Gentile, op.cit., p.303

(11) Barker, op.cit., p.396

and the extraordinary man who embodied the will of an ideal community.

This principle of personal leadership succeeded in reducing a universal spirit to a concrete and particular form. Each Volksgeist might be conceived as a different aspect of a World Spirit or Weltgeist. But the greater the intensification of the spirit, the greater the attributes of the personality who reflected that spirit. "The world and its Folks", writes Barker, might be "dissolved into a fluid play of the spirit but it would be solidified again in terms of concrete (12) personality."

The leader not only discerned but was the incarnation of that which democratic theory called the General Will and which Romanticism termed the Volksgeist. The impersonal spirit of the people was reduced to a concrete and personal manifestation. Rousseau wrote that the General Will was best expressed by all the citizens. The Romantics conceived of a General Will which could be transferred from an impersonal and inarticulate spirit and embodied in a personal and authoritative ruler. Hegel could thus conceive of the universal spirit vested in the Prussian monarch. A contemporary German philosopher follows in the same tradition when he writes: "The highest universality is also the highest individuality....The statesman who wills the universal...is not only the...instrument of the State : he is the State...On the other hand he needs the community of the Folk which acknowledges him and recognizes itself in him." (13)

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(12)ibid.p.396

(13)quoted from Barker,op.cit.,p.397

This Romantic doctrine illuminates that "legal theory which found in..the monarch - the bearer of the authority of the State," in "Bismarck - the minister provided by the Zeitgeist for the monarch", and in "Hitler - the leader whom, when the monarch was gone, the Volksgeist found for itself, and in whom it recognized itself."<sup>(14)</sup>

The Fascist leader is thus identified with the State . Louis XIV reputedly said "L'état c'est moi." These apparently identical declarations, however, have different connotations. The French monarch was merely revealing his personal sovereign authority over the people. He felt no need to seek any sign of public approval for his actions. His rule was an unmitigated despotism. The Romantic leader represents a different conception of a ruler. He seeks formal approval of his rule by means of plebiscites. Authoritarian leaders make efforts to gain universal acceptance which are unprecedented, paradoxically, in democratic states. The voting privilege often abused and unexercised in democracies, is almost forcibly imposed upon citizens of Fascist countries. It is true, of course, that little choice is offered the electorate. The Fascist plebiscite is not a form of self-government. Periodic and popular manifestations of universal approval are regarded as evidence that the leader is really interpreting and realizing the Volksgeist or the real will of the people. The despot does not employ any such expedient. He may be, in fact, less of a dictator than the Fascist leader.

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(14) *ibid.*, p.397

There is an essential difference between these two types of dictators. One is the despot or the Platonic tyrant whose individual will is supreme and unquestioned and whose rule is maintained only by force. The other is the leader who does not govern according to individual prejudices but who supposedly represents the super-personal and ideal will of the people. Like the Platonic guardian whose education freed him from personal passions and undisciplined desires, the Fascist dux or fuhrer is apparently free from individual prejudices and weaknesses. He is thus able to interpret and even to embody the real will of the people. It is for this reason that the modern dictator is commonly regarded and often deliberately portrayed as an ascetic who had devoted himself to the sole and supreme task of guiding the destiny of his people. His thought and will represent the genuine interest of the community and hence arises the necessity of making his vision of the public good the common thought of the people. A new state arose in Italy, according to Gentile, when the people "had the good fortune to find as their leader a man who could express in words things that were in all their hearts and who could make their words audible above the tumult." (15)

Barker suggests that "there is something here which is deeper than the antithesis of democracy and dictatorship." (16) If the leader does not impose his individual will upon the masses but serves rather to give an effective and valid expression to

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(15) Gentile, op.cit., p.297

(16) Barker, op.cit., p.399

the vague and impersonal will of the people, he appears less as a dictator and more as the representative of the people's thought and aspirations. The State and its leader are thus identified with the citizens. In this respect Fascism may claim to be not antithetical to democracy but another form of the democratic idea. Authoritarianism would only substitute what Barker aptly terms " a democracy of intuition " for the more familiar " democracy of discussion."

The fallacy in this reasoning is not difficult to discover. A "democracy of discussion" is not one of several forms of the democratic idea. It is the only form. A democracy is impossible without discussion. A "democracy of intuition" in which the people is content to be guided by the superior wisdom of a leader is no democracy at all. It may be urged that non-representative governments receive as much popular approval as governments which are directly responsible to the people. May it not be said that an administration whose policies are approved by ninety-nine per cent of the voting public is as democratic as one which may legitimately rule with the support of no more than fifty-one percent of the electorate ? The proposition is not valid because popular approval, even if unanimous, does not necessarily indicate the presence of democracy. Democracy is inseparable from self-government and is non-existent when the people are not permitted to determine public policy, either directly or through their elected representatives. Fascism allows or requests the people to approve or

disapprove, although only theoretically, of policies predetermined by an administration which is not elected by nor responsible to the people. This system is true not only of German plebiscites but also of the method of electing the representatives of the Italian Corporations. A list is prepared by the government and submitted to the people. The fundamental anti-democratic nature of this scheme is revealed in Barnes' frank admission that it "should not be regarded as homage to the idea of popular sovereignty. It should be regarded as merely a piece of useful constitutional machinery, thought out with a view to ... providing a safety valve for any really dangerous popular feeling."<sup>(17)</sup> It is thus evident that "there is a fundamental division between the doctrine of democracy as we know it in Western Europe and the German doctrine of leadership."<sup>(18)</sup> The difference between them reveals, as Barker points out, a curious but natural paradox. The impersonal democratic system is "based on the fundamental rock of personality."<sup>(19)</sup> Its very impersonalism has an equalitarian basis which recognizes the worth of each individual personality. But the system of personal leadership is "fatal to the general expression of persons and inimical to democracy....being founded on the ....impersonal clouds of an assumed Folk-person and its Volksgeist."<sup>(20)</sup>

This ideological difference between democracy and dictatorship refutes the claim of the Fascists to the

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(17) Barnes, op.cit. p.212

(18) Barker, op.cit., p.399

(19) ibid., p.399

(20) ibid., p.399

presence of a democratic quality in authoritarian government. The divergence between the two systems is only fully revealed when the leader is brought down from the heights where the Romantic idealists have placed him to the common plane of practical action. The leader may theoretically embody the true will of the people. In practice he is no more than an ordinary human personality. Nietzsche's dream of the evolution in distant time of a species of supermen has not yet been realized. The German Romantic movement was not followed by the emergence of transcendent individuals from whom the spirit of the whole people "radiated". It was rather obliged, as a German philosopher admits, to witness "despotism (21) made the legatee of its new system of ideas," in the nineteenth century. In like manner, the revival of the Napoleonic idea made a mediocre nephew the absolute ruler of France. Troeltsch ascribes the emergence of despotism in Germany to the "lack of great men who belonged to the War of Liberation." It may rather be said that subsequent events appropriately exposed the dangerous implications and fundamental weakness of the leadership principle when realized in practice. Great men may perhaps motivate or establish an authoritarian regime. It is seldom that they remain forthcoming in its subsequent development. A state based on arbitrary rule by a leader requires the continual emergence of great and superior personalities. It too often finds mediocrity or unredeemed ruthlessness

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(21) Troeltsch, op.cit., p.214



claiming the attributes of greatness. It was not so much fortuitous or unfortunate as it was inevitable that the Romantic exaltation of the State and its leader should degenerate into a slavish worship of inferior monarchical despots or unprincipled modern dictators.

The Romantic "stream is still there", wrote Troeltsch in 1922; "it is still a flowing river; and today we can hear (22) once more the great murmur of its waters everywhere." It is fortunate that he died before those waters rose in a tidal wave which would perhaps have numbered him among its first victims.

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(22) *ibid.*, p. 214.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MODERN INFLUENCES.

#### NIETZSCHE, BERGSON, SOREL and PARETO.

The origins of German and Italian Fascism have been traced to strong, native, idealist traditions. These historical movements exerted a fundamental, though unconscious and long-run influence on German and Italian political thought. But Fascism has also been conditioned by several unique and independent streams of thought which represent immediate and short-run influences upon the growth and character of its doctrine. Several late nineteenth and early twentieth century thinkers sensed a decline of the democratic tradition in Western Europe and anticipated, each in a particular fashion, the rise of modern authoritarianism. Outstanding among those associated with this trend of thought were Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Georges Sorel and Vilfredo Pareto. It is interesting to note that all these individuals have been claimed by Mussolini as the inspiration for much of the "dottrina" of Fascism. An appreciation of their influence will aid in the attempt to understand the meaning of the Fascist movement.

T.S. Eliot wrote of Machiavelli: "No great man has been so completely misunderstood." The same judgment might be passed on Nietzsche who was his greatest pupil. It is difficult to arrive at a precise conception of Nietzsche's philosophy for he was not given to orderly and systematic presentation.

There is no Nietzschean logic; one frequently finds contradictory positions dogmatically and brilliantly proclaimed. An examination of his writings will reveal certain striking similarities to Fascist theory and practice. Fundamental differences will also present themselves which are too quickly passed over in appraisals of Nietzsche which dismiss him as the philosopher of "Might is Right" and as the advocate of the rule of the Superman in place of weak and incompetent democratic government.

Two aspects of Nietzsche's thought mark him as an important precursor of certain principles of the Fascist doctrine. He bitterly denounced utilitarianism; he ridiculed the notion that the masses were capable of governing themselves. These ideas have all been explicitly expressed in Fascist ideology.

A loathing of Victorian utilitarianism is of the most salient characteristics of Nietzsche's thought. He abominated a society whose end was the greatest good of the greatest number particularly when the good was conceived in terms of material satisfactions for the many whose slavish mentalities were little above the animal level. He despised the "grocers' philosophies" of Mill and Spencer because of their craven solicitude for the welfare of the herd. The evolution and indeed the survival of the species demanded that middle class respectability be uprooted and an attitude of "dangerous living" or ceaseless psychological tension and even physical struggle be inculcated in its place. Nietzsche conceived of utilitarian ethics as an impediment to the natural functioning of the evolutionary process. A child of

Darwin, he extended the doctrine of the survival of the fittest from the purely biological field into the world of social ethics and political relations. It seemed that the fittest of men, in the struggle to survive, must be permitted to establish their authority over weaker fellow men. This struggle to possess and to exercise power was the principal characteristic of the human species. Mankind did and should not seek to gratify the desires of the mass of mediocre individuals. "Man does not desire happiness," and in answer to the English utilitarians, he wrote : "Only the Englishman does that....Wherever I found a living thing, there found I the will to power... Neither necessity nor desire, but the love of power, is the demon of mankind. You may give men everything possible - health, food, shelter, enjoyment - but they are and remain unhappy and capricious, for the demon waits and waits and must be satisfied." The meek, taught Nietzsche, shall not inherit the earth, for only the powerful are able to rule it. Life was an unremitting struggle in which the strong sought to dominate the weak and the weak attempted to resist conquest by the strong. Those with the greatest "will to power" emerge as the natural leaders of society. This was not only the inevitable but the morally justifiable outcome of the evolutionary struggle. This glorification and justification of power is a key formula of Fascist philosophy and practice. Fascism which teaches its followers to think with their "blood" rather than with their "brains" and to settle differences by an appeal to force draws its inspiration from the core of Nietzsche's thought.

The conception of struggle between superior and inferior

individuals led logically to a denunciation of the democratic doctrine which taught that the many were fit to govern themselves. Nietzsche associated the masses with mediocrity and considered that democracy was a device which enabled inferior individuals to gain an undeserved advantage over the superior few through the sheer force of numbers. The equalitarian basis of democracy which asserts that each individual possesses sufficient worth to warrant participation in public life was particularly repugnant to him. He rejected the Christian teaching of a divine soul common to all men. "That everybody as an "immortal soul" should have equal rank...cannot be branded with sufficient contempt. And yet it is to this miserable flattery of personal vanity that Christianity owes its triumph."<sup>(1)</sup> Democracy and Christianity had conspired to produce the myth of equality to prevent the emergence of superior individuals who were naturally fit to rule mankind. Humanity was divided into two distinct classes of the leaders and the led. "A higher culture", he wrote, "can only originate where there are two distinct castes of society."<sup>(2)</sup> It is the right of one class to command; it is the duty of the other to obey.

The relationship between this conception of society and Fascist doctrine is readily discernible. Fascism depreciates the masses and exalts the leaders. Its repudiation of democracy and its conflict with Christianity indicate a funda-

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(1) Nietzsche, quoted from Joad op.cit., p.631

(2) ibid. p. 635

mental Nietzschean outlook.

Although the Fascists may join Nietzsche in repudiating utilitarian ethics and democratic politics, an examination of the more positive content of their thought will reveal certain essential differences between their respective doctrines. Nietzsche disapproved of democracy but he was not the father of the modern idea of the fuhrer or duce. He wrote of Superman who were destined to rule over men. The conception of such a majestic personality is readily likened to the Fuhrerprinzip or the authoritarian principle of the personal leader in whom is embodied the spirit of the people. The comparison is completely illegitimate. The modern dictator is not comparable to Nietzsche's idea of the Superman. The latter would represent the culmination of an evolutionary process and would emerge as a member of a biologically superior species. This conception of the Superman differs essentially from the Romantic doctrine of the personal leader who arises in each society to embody the social spirit in his individuality. There is no evolutionary element in the Romantic idea. Its heroes are the figures of antiquity as well as the leaders of the future. They arise from the depths of society and their identification with the will and feeling of the people is their claim to authority. They are not superior beings who impose their rule from above but they rather seek universal recognition as the authentic embodiment of the general will of the same people whom Nietzsche despised.

A corollary of the Fascist principle of personal leadership is the conception of an ideal state. That mankind is divided into unique and diverse social organisms best described as nation-states is the heart of the Fascist doctrine. Nietzsche penned one of the most devastating denunciations of the state idea in all literature. His condemnation of the state constitutes the second aspect of Nietzsche's thought which is irreconcilable with authoritarianism. It cannot be urged that Nietzsche was "an apostle of the national totalitarian State" for "he denounced the State as the coldest of monsters and most frigid of liars."<sup>(3)</sup> The state in any of its forms was the enemy of exceptional individuals since its encouragement of the greatest possible increase in population placed a premium on mass mediocrity. It was simply a device of the masses to protect themselves from the Superman. "There where the State ceases to exist," Nietzsche asked, "do you not see the rainbow and bridge of the Superman?" He conceived of natural and universal forces tending to raise all men to newer and higher levels of thought and action. Life was "a dynamic surge beginning...with the strong, but ultimately drawing all men in its wake from the level of the average to the height of the maximum."<sup>(4)</sup> The State was an artificial creation which impeded this natural development by introducing uniformity and its attendant mediocrity into social organization. Nietzsche looked to an ultimate universal humanity which would transcend the "bovine nationalism" of the state and in which the efforts of Supermen to guide mankind to greater

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(3) Barker, op.cit., p. 389

(4) ibid, p. 389

heights of achievement would not be impeded by the unnatural and petty barriers of national states. Nietzsche would probably vent a most venomous spleen on the inordinate nationalism of the Fascist states and particularly upon their tremendous efforts to increase pell mell the numbers of their citizens and thus add to the mass of wholly superfluous and mediocre individuals. The State, the summum bonum of Fascism, is an abomination to Nietzsche.

In the attempt to array Fascism in a cloak of philosophic respectability, its doctrine is frequently likened to certain ideas of illustrious individuals as a vindication of Fascist philosophy although the lives and complete works of the people in question would deny the validity of the claim. Henri Bergson may be said to fall into this category. An examination of his writings will reveal certain concepts which bear marked resemblance to parts of the authoritarian creed and others with which Fascism is utterly irreconcilable.

By virtue of his alleged anti-intellectualism, Bergson is regarded as reflecting the dynamic and creative spirit of Fascism. The Fascist Weltanschauung, writes Barnes, conceives of life "as a work of art...the expression of an intuition... We must...learn to relegate logical and analytical processes to their proper sphere as means and not as ends, means to the achievement of ever vaster intuitive perceptions of ever more complex, but no less unitary, synthetic visions of life."<sup>(5)</sup>

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(5) Barnes, op.cit., p.65-67



This statement of the Fascist temper sounds eminently Bergsonian. The comparison is legitimate if it is not drawn too closely. The Fascist Weltanschauung which degenerates into "blood" rather than "brain" thinking is as much opposed to Bergson's thought, on the one hand, as the mechanistic philosophy of Spencer is on the other. Bergson insists that life is instinctive as well as intellectual. If there is, what Barker terms a "Nietzschean flavour" to Bergson, there is also a fundamental Kantian core to his thought. The Fascists have seized upon the Nietzschean fragrance but have too conveniently neglected the Kantian substance.

There is implicit, however, in Bergson's philosophy some expression of the principle of personal leadership, which, it has been seen, forms so vital a part of the Fascist doctrine. Bergson believes that the normal life process is occasionally disturbed and accelerated by a "sudden leap" motivated by the emergence of "exceptional individuals" who appeal "to the conscience of each of us persons" and "who represent the best there is in humanity."<sup>(6)</sup> For the world to Bergson is governed by two types of morality. One works for order and social stability. This is the morality of obligation. It evokes a common recognition of and allegiance to certain known and institutionalized habits and customs. The product of this morality is the crystallized mores of a people which tend to establish social cohesion. Bergson, unlike T.H.Green, does not perceive any significant

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(6) Bergson -Two Sources of Morality and Religion (English translation) p.68

creative force in the custom and tradition of a people. He invokes a second morality of aspiration to account for original achievement. This morality is manifest not in the masses but in a few outstanding individuals. "Life," he writes, "...imparts a new impetus to exceptional individuals...who can help society further along its way."<sup>(7)</sup> These individuals have no obligation to the established moral code. Their vision transcends the known bounds of human experience and reveals a new sphere of knowledge. "A vision of some ideal, incarnate in some ... hero or moral saint opens a new avenue of action." The limitation of the morality of obligation is surpassed by the revelations of the creative morality of aspiration. This morality is "undogmatised, vital, personal...attained through personal mystic experience."<sup>(8)</sup>

Such a philosophy seems to resemble the Romantic theory of personal leadership. It is not a Nietzschean conception of a new species of Supermen to be evolved in a biological process. Bergson's "exceptional individuals" have arisen throughout history. The "sudden leap" which they occasion is an ever-present phenomenon of human experience. Is the Fascist principle of the "leader" or the fuhrerprinzip deducible from Bergson's idea of the emergence and function of the "exceptional individual?" Bergson, himself, would deny the validity of such a deduction. He is convinced that the presence of the great leader is compatible with democracy. The superior individuals of whom he writes are somewhat akin to Rousseau's conception of the Legislator whose function is "to discover the rules of society

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(7) *ibid.*, p.82

(8) C.Barrett, *Philosophical Review*-Vol.43,p.302

best suited to nations." This "entreprise," writes Rousseau, "is too difficult for human powers...The legislator...must have recourse to an authority of a different order...to divine intervention...It is not anybody who can make the gods speak." <sup>(9)</sup> In like manner, Bergson endows the "exceptional individuals" with certain divine attributes. Of the creative force which is manifested in their activity, he writes : "Cet effort est de Dieu si ce n'est pas Dieu lui-même." He considers with Rousseau that these outstanding personalities are consistent with the democratic process. The Legislators, writes Rousseau, suggest laws but they must say to the people : "Nothing we propose to you...can pass into law without your consent." <sup>(10)</sup> The emergent individual is conceived by Bergson to be not the master of the people but "the servant who can help society further along its way." He is not the enemy of democracy. He is its agent." <sup>(11)</sup>

It is significant that Rousseau entertained certain suspicions as to the compatibility of the Legislators with the democratic system of self-government. Indeed he would force these superior individuals to depart from the body politic once their particular task had been accomplished. He feared that they might attempt to usurp the sovereign power of the people, His fears were well grounded. "Sudden leaps" instituted by "exceptional individuals" are not characteristic of the democratic process. They are much more analagous to the spectacular achievements of dictatorial in-

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(9) Rousseau, Social Contract (Everyman) p. 37

(10) ibid, p. 38

(11) Barker, op.cit., p.390

sight. Ernest Barker's observation is very pertinent. "It is not....clear," he writes, "that the process of democracy is compatible with the role which such individuals are appointed to play....The process of the life-force is not a democratic process, even if it issues in the creation of democratic principles." (12) The same criticism must be levelled at Bergson's morality of aspiration as at the Romantic principle of personal leadership. There are no criteria by reference to which society may judge the worth of would-be "exceptional individuals." Bergson may be quite justified in claiming that the prophets of Israel, Jesus and Socrates were such transcendent personalities. This is the judgment of time and history. But is it not tremendously important that all these "exceptional individuals" enjoyed only posthumous recognition? The prophets were voices in the wilderness; Jesus was crucified and the Greeks acclaimed the Sophists and executed Socrates. As a practical principle, the doctrine of exceptional leadership is not only non-democratic but fraught with the most fundamental perils to the democratic process. A dictator may attempt to vindicate his exercise of authority by an appeal to Bergson's philosophy. Authoritarian rulers have certainly claimed for themselves at least the attributes of "exceptional individuals". The real leaders of societies are often rejected by all but a few of their contemporaries and homage is too frequently given to insincere prophets, false Messiahs and spurious leaders. No one

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(12) *ibid.*, p. 390

would take issue with Bergson that the periodic rise of outstanding personalities has brought mankind forward by epochal "sudden leaps". The very principles of democracy, as Bergson asserts, may have been discovered by such individuals. But his exceptional leaders are all historical figures. None are contemporaries. Bergson himself would assuredly not place the modern duce or fuhrer in the same category as the prophets of Israel, Jesus or Socrates. But the essential point to grasp is that other people without as fine an appreciation of the good and the true, may do precisely this and not too illegitimately appeal to Bergson's philosophy as a vindication of their position because he has offered no criteria by which people may determine the qualities of exceptional leadership when they reveal themselves.

It would be, however, extremely unjustifiable to maintain that the spirit of Bergson's thought is compatible with authoritarianism. Any philosophy which is so deeply imbued with a sense of the importance of the free will of the individual is far removed from the spirit of the authoritarian doctrine. It was Bergson who revealed and appreciated the variety and novelty of human experience. He repudiated the uniformity and staticism which rationalistic determinism would impose upon human activity and his works reject the even greater regimentation of the will which authoritarianism involves. Bergson emphasized instinct to increase the freedom of the will from purely intellectual limitations. A philosophy which prohibits men from selecting alternative courses of action and which insists that "obeying" and "believing"

are to be preferred to thinking and doubting is irreconcilable with the spirit of Bergson's teaching. The individual, of whom he writes, is resourceful and unspecialized and free to develop according to the revelations of his own intuition. The regimentation of authoritarianism dams the very life-process which must be free to work its course in not one but in various directions in order that new truths may be discovered. Freedom of the will, essential to Bergson's thought, is alien to the authoritarian doctrine.

Among those who have exerted a profound influence upon the development of Mussolini's thought and consequently upon the character of Italian Fascism, the name of Georges Sorel, author of "Reflections on Violence", may perhaps stand foremost. Indeed an observer of the present Italian regime has been prompted to write: "Fascism is an application in a framework of intense nationalism of the "Reflections on Violence."<sup>(13)</sup> Mussolini, himself has said: "It is this teacher of syndicalism, who by his crude theories of the technique of revolution has contributed the most to form the discipline, the energy and the power of the Fascist followers."<sup>(14)</sup>

Fascism has learnt from Georges Sorel its action rather than its positive doctrine. The general technique of Fascist practice seems essentially derived from recommendations set forth in his writings. Several specific proposals have been adopted by authoritarian regimes with a zeal and thoroughness

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(13) Naudeau, L., Illustration, July 3, 1926, p. 2

(14) Mussolini, Address, June 22, 1925

which would probably have astonished their author. Three aspects of Sorel's thought in particular have exerted a profound influence on the Fascist movement. Firstly his reflections on violence have found consummate expression in Fascist action. Secondly his proposed organization of society into producers' syndicates has allegedly inspired Fascist corporatism. Thirdly his teaching of myths as an effective instrument in evoking universal enthusiasm for a cause has been applied on an immense scale by Fascist administrations.

That bourgeois society was in its final stage of decline was the core of Sorel's thought. He believed that the middle-class had acquired its privileged position by trickery and deceit and had guarded it by violence and revolution. But the indolence and craven love of comfort which overcame the original virility of the bourgeois were certain signs of its weakening power and moral decadence. It was futile, thought Sorel, to attempt to restore any vital quality to the deteriorating bourgeoisie. He looked elsewhere for a class which had the potential strength to establish a new social order and reflected on the means whereby the new society could be introduced. His conclusions were not new. They were fundamentally ideas which Marx had already expressed. Sorel considered that the proletariat alone could save society and that the process of salvation must be a violent one. It was for this reason that he rejected parliamentary socialism which would effect a peaceful transition to a new social order. "I do not hesitate

to assert", he wrote, "that socialism could not continue to exist without an apology for violence..The social war, for which the proletariat ceaselessly prepares itself....may engender the elements of a new civilization suited to a people of producers" (15) Sorel differs from the Marxists in giving a moral sanction to violence. He held that dislike of violence bespeaks cowardice more often than virtue and in so far as morality is concerned Sorel writes: "In Corsica...when the vendetta was the regular means of ... correcting the action of a too halting justice the people do not appear to have been less moral than today." (16) He expresses great admiration for American lynch law and Vigilance Committees as they flourished in the late nineties. In like manner the working class is justified in violating the law of the bourgeoisie and advancing its cause by the conscious employment of violence. The general strike was to Sorel the great culmination of the proletarian struggle. An energetic spirit of combat must be engendered among the workers' syndicates. "It is in strikes that the proletariat asserts its existence... The strike is a phenomenon of war. It is a serious misrepresentation to say that violence is an accident doomed to disappear from the strikes of the future." For the strikes must culminate in the final general strike which will "annihilate a condemned regime...and in the course of which both employers and the State would be set aside by the organized producers." (17)

Sorel's justification of violence employed on behalf of an ideal has been well integrated into Fascist theory and practice.

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(15) Sorel, Reflections on Violence (English translation) p.297-8

(16) ibid. p. 208

(17) ibid. p. 297



The influence of his apology for violence is clearly discernible in Mussolini's pronouncement : "You know what I think of violence. For me, it is moral, perfectly moral, but in order that its high morality be justified, it must be guided by an ideal."<sup>(18)</sup> It must be noted, of course, that the ideals which Sorel and Mussolini proclaim are fundamentally opposed to each other. The Fascist love of combat does not, to say the least, apply to class struggle. Sorel's doctrine of the general strike which "engenders the noblest, deepest and most moving sentiments that the proletariat possesses," is certainly anathema to Fascism which rigorously forbids any form of strike activity. Sorel has influenced the temper rather than the tenets of Fascism.

Sorel's plan of workers' syndicates has sometimes been regarded as the model for the corporative organizations of Fascist society. The Italian corporations are designed in the general syndicalist pattern. Workers and employers are organized into an elaborate hierarchy of syndicates and corporations. But apart from similarities in formal organization, Fascist syndicalism is utterly opposed to the proletarian syndicalism of Sorel. Firstly, the syndicates, according to Sorel's theory, were to be entrusted with the supreme political and economic power. The whole object of the associations was to do away with the state and its authority. Fascism, on the other hand, represents the highest possible intensification of the concept of state sovereignty. All economic organizations are placed under the control of the state. Any degree of local syndicalist autonomy is incompatible with the

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(18) Mussolini, Address June 22, 1925

principles of totalitarianism . Fascism, which regards all authority as resting at the apex of a bureaucratic system, is the negation of Sorelian syndicalism which considered that the supreme power should rest with the people organized into producers' syndicates.

To imbue the proletariat with an intense zeal to pursue its task of creating a new social order, Sorel advocated the teaching of myths. A myth may perhaps be described as a lie redeemed because it is motivated by intentions which are so noble that they transcend the bounds of mere truth and falsehood. The myth imparts a sense of unity and of common purpose. Indeed Sorel believed that epochal events in human history were often occasioned by the propagation of various myths. The boundless ardour of the French Revolution was largely inspired by myths created by a people "passionately fond of imaginative literature and very little acquainted with the economic history of the past.... Mazzini pursued what the wiseacres of his time called a mad chimera."<sup>(19)</sup> Myths, even if no more than the "products of the popular imagination", are not only of tremendous practical value according to Sorel but are morally justified. For if the "Revolution did not resemble the enchanting pictures which created the enthusiasm of its first adepts,"<sup>(20)</sup> it would never have been victorious on the other hand without these pictures. The precise content of the myth is of no consequence to Sorel. All the details may be historic-

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(19) Sorel, op.cit., p.135

(20) ibid, p. 134

ally inaccurate and logically defective. "Any attempt to discuss how far it can be taken literally....is devoid of sense. (21)

The object of the myth is to induce among men a mental and emotional attitude in which "their reason, their hopes and their way of looking at particular facts seem to make but one indivisible unity." (22) This uniform outlook which Sorel would induce through the medium of myths is the very foundation of the totalitarian frame of mind. Instead of the Sorelian myth of the general strike, Fascism proclaims the myth of the nation which would direct the entire thought and action of the people to the fulfilment of the nation's destiny. It does not matter that the Italian or the German race may be mere expressions devoid of all scientific validity. The historical destiny of the Italian nation may not involve a second Roman Empire and the Third Reich may not endure for a thousand years. The purpose of these myths is not to forecast the future but to reduce all individual and social effort to promoting the welfare of the nation and to engender a unanimity of outlook among the people. The Fascist, like the syndicalist, must be imbued with a heroic spirit which will inspire great deeds and sacrifices for a supreme cause. Devotion to the leaders, be they national or proletarian, must be unquestioned. Willingness to struggle for an ideal must spring instinctively from a personality suffused with national ardour and enthusiasm. The totalitarian outlook is implicit in the thought of Sorel.

It was Vilfredo Pareto who developed the rather vague

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(21)ibid, p. 136

(22)ibid, p. 137

ideas of Bergson concerning "exceptional individuals" and the crude theories of Sorel in regard to proletarian leaders into an elaborate doctrine of government by a succession of dominant élites. A friend of Sorel and like him an engineer, Pareto is an acknowledged and influential teacher of Mussolini. Sorel saw the decline of a degenerate bourgeois society and anticipated the rise of a vigorous proletariat. Pareto expanded this particular conclusion into a general and comprehensive doctrine of social leadership by a succession of governing élites. Herman Finer in his book "Mussolini's Italy" mentions four outstanding elements of Pareto's thought which have apparently influenced the character of Fascist doctrine. These are (1) "The importance of myths in government, (2) the theory of the circulation of élites or governing classes, (3) the relationship between force and consent, (4) the necessary relativism of social generalisation and the policies of government." (23)

This fourth aspect of Pareto's system of ideas is perhaps best described as the mental attitude in which he approached various social problems. The other three represent the conclusions of his investigations. It is perhaps advisable to consider his method before undertaking an examination of his conclusions. Pareto's analysis of social phenomena implied a repudiation of rationalism and positivism as valid guides in understanding human nature. Neither the world of nature nor of social organization can be encompassed or expressed by final social generalisations. Pareto

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(23) Finer, H., Mussolini's Italy p.28.

denied the validity of absolute laws. He, at least, would not be too quick to claim Plato as an embryonic Fascist. Experience could not be explained in terms of precise formulas because of numerous "imponderable" elements which defied complete and rational analysis. Fascists have sought to vindicate their temporizing and their lack of clearly defined intellectual system by an appeal to Pareto's judgments concerning the impossibility and futility of arriving at a definite philosophy. Fascism perpetrates the most extreme volte-faces in the name of relativism. It may, as Gentile writes, abandon with the utmost inconsistency programs which it has previously adopted. But is relativity of action really compatible with Fascist practice? It seems rather to be fundamentally opposed to the dogmatic spirit of authoritarianism. The absolute rule of one party and one leader is not particularly amenable to the rejection of declared policies. The dictator is able to abandon a proclaimed course of action only with extreme difficulty. It is the prerogative of a democracy to change its policy openly and without hesitation. A dictatorship may find itself obliged to pursue an announced program to its conclusion even if the action should involve its downfall. The illusion of a dictator's unerring judgment must be preserved. Certainly Mussolini could not withdraw from the Ethiopian campaign once he had undertaken to conquer the country without inflicting a severe and possibly fatal blow to his prestige. But a democracy may with perfect democratic logic apply sanctions against an aggressor nation and at the next moment remove them. To select from a range of alternatives is a democratic privilege. It is dangerous for a

dictator to alter a program in the light of new circumstances or convictions. Mussolini may declare that he is a "tempista" or one who acts spontaneously and without regard to rigid formulae, but his government is in reality more limited in the selection of various courses of action than a democratic administration. The particular will of a party is more subject to personal and environmental limitations than the general will of an entire people. For the people is freer to experiment and to depart from established custom than the most despotic regime. Pareto's relativism which implies a repudiation of absolutism, expressed in natural laws or political organization, is more compatible with the democratic process than with authoritarian rule.

Georges Sorel proposed the myth of the general strike as a necessary and practical weapon which the proletariat must employ in its struggle against the bourgeoisie. It was an expedient measure designed to aid the proletarian cause. Pareto was less a tactician and more a social psychologist. He undertook an investigation of the nature of human society which would explain why myths and legends were more readily believed than logically demonstrated truths. Why were the "enchanted pictures" drawn by the Romantics who largely inspired the French Revolution and the Italian War of Liberation a more effective incentive to revolutionary action than a rational exposition of the grievances of the French people or the Italian patriots? Pareto answers that the religious sentiment engendered by the myth is more firmly held

than a rationally acquired conviction . To persuade people to devote themselves to a cause, it is necessary to appeal to more than their rational faculties. "Cold reality..... and the reasonings of logic-experimental sciences,"<sup>(24)</sup> do not arouse the instinctive and emotional elements of human nature. Rational calculations touch but the fringe of experience. They do not reach the inexpressible spiritual qualities of the personality.

Pareto's doctrine of the efficacy of myths has been made a vital part of Fascist theory and practice. The elaborate propaganda machinery, so conspicuous a part of Fascist administrations, is directed towards the indoctrination of the minds of the populace with various myths. The myth of race inculcates a sense of a common blood. The myth of a second Roman Empire or a world-dominant Germany imparts a sense of ultimate victory to Fascist aspirations. It is irrelevant that the myth may be an unmitigated falsehood. Its effect, not its content, is the only pertinent consideration to Pareto and the Fascists. Its purpose is to capture the popular imagination. Rational explanation is unlikely to engender an attitude of unquestioning acquiescence. Doubt is too inseparable from reason. But is it not possible, asked Plato, to "contrive any ingenious mode of bringing into play one of those seasonable falsehoods,...so that, propounding a single spirited fiction, we may bring even the rulers... to believe it, or if not them, the rest of the city ?"<sup>(25)</sup> The people would lend their whole-hearted support to the proposed commonwealth if its meaning were presented in "mythical language".

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(24) Pareto-from *Finer, op.cit.*, p.29

(25) Plato, *Republic*, (Davies and Vaughan ed) p.113

The Platonic myth must be distinguished, however, from its use in a Fascist society. Plato conceived of the myth as a medium by which a rationally determined scheme could be communicated to an entire people. A poet as much as a philosopher, Plato would appeal to the romantic side of the human personality. But the appeal was made on behalf of a reason which, by expressing itself in its own terms, would not be heard by the spirited and romantic elements of human nature. The Fascist myth, on the other hand, is not an agent of reason expressing some fundamental, rational truth. It is not an allegory expressing rational judgments but a device designed to fire the popular imagination and to maintain it at a maximum level of emotional intensity. It is thus opposed to Plato's conception of a legend which would convince the people of absolute truths about political society and human nature.

That various élites periodically emerge to rule society in the third aspect of Pareto's thought which has greatly influenced the character of Fascist ideology. This idea follows the Bergsonian conception of individuals endowed with exceptional qualities of intelligence and intuitive insight who emerge "to help society further along its way." The élite is to Pareto a natural and organic phenomenon of social life. All spheres of human activity reveal the existence of élites which at any given time assert their dominance over all other individuals and associations. The most important of these groups are the governing élites. A balance is established between the rulers and the ruled which is never in complete equilibrium. The ruled masses



exert continual pressure on the ruling aristocracy and periodically produce new leaders who rise to become part of the governing élite. The composition of the governing class is never stable but is subject to constant infiltration of new elements. Social leadership is thus established, according to Pareto, by a succession or circulation of élites with the motivating force originating in the masses. Each élite normally loses its energy in time and is succeeded by another group animated by more energetic and vital principles. The continual flow of élites produces newer and more capable governments. Administrations are overthrown when they lose their vitality and are no longer socially useful and not by the mere whim and caprice of an electorate which is the false teaching of the democratic doctrine.

The circulation of élites is comparable to the windings of a river which imperceptibly but inflexibly winds its slow course. Occasionally, however, the waters become stagnant and cease to flow in a normal stream. A catastrophic flood bursts forth eventually with an intensity completely overwhelming the dominant élite which unsuccessfully tries to dam the outburst. The entire governing class, and not merely a few members, is replaced by a new élite. This is Pareto's explanation of Revolution..

The doctrine of the circulation of élites was readily acclaimed by the authoritarians since it might be construed as an apology for the Fascist Revolution and for the administration

which the Fascists introduced in Italy after their accession to power. Two aspects of Pareto's theory were particularly congenial to the spirit of the Fascist movement. Its leaders might claim to constitute that élite which had emerged to restore order and discipline to what Gentile termed the anarchical "débâcle" of post-war Italy. The Fascist Revolution might be justified as the natural movement of the masses acting through its leaders to overthrow a government which had proved incompetent and unable to assume the responsibilities of efficient administration. Secondly Pareto's doctrine furnished not only an apology for the Revolution but also a vindication of the dictatorial form of government which the Fascists established. The conception of a governing élite is essentially anti-democratic. Leadership is compatible with the democratic process but it is a leadership which not only arises from but is responsible to the people. Pareto's doctrine is that of a continual pressure and antagonism between the rulers and the ruled. Democracy insists that no distinction be drawn between these two classes. Self-government means simply that rulers and ruled are identified. The élite theory separates the governing class from the governed. Self-government is rejected in favour of a government by a select aristocracy which is distinct from and not responsible to the people. This anti-democratic conception of government by a group of leaders was welcomed by the Fascists as a justification of dictatorship.

As each group resists the movement which would deprive it of its authority, the new élite must employ force in order to establish its rule. "All governments use force", writes

Pareto, "and all affirm that they are founded on reason." The use of violence is a natural and justifiable social activity. As Sorel had pointed out, violence is a measure employed not only by revolutionaries but also by those who would guard their privileged position from the encroachments of revolutionary activity. The use of force is the fourth strand of Pareto's thought which has been woven into the pattern of the Fascist creed. Individuals, urged Pareto, are so diverse in their natures and interests that coercion is the only possible means of establishing social stability. Pareto regarded the use of force as the inevitable consequence of the ever-present tension between the governing class and the rest of the people. His apology for violence was considered a vindication of the Fascist Revolution. But if it justified the overthrow of the post-war Italian government by a more virile Fascist élite, it was much less reconcilable to Fascist theory and practice following the establishment of the authoritarian regime. According to Pareto's law of the circulation of governing classes, the Fascist regime must itself eventually disintegrate. The pressure which the masses exert upon the ruling body does not cease because the latter is fashioned according to the Fascist pattern. The circulation of élites remains a phenomenon of social life. Fascism, however, prevents the new leaders from emerging in a normal manner. Authoritarianism, by definition, permits of no challenge to or mitigation of its authority. New potential leaders are "purged" or exiled. But according to Pareto's own logic, it is impossible to prevent in-

definitely the pressure of the masses from seeking its normal level. The result of the continual repression is the accumulation of strength and energy by the emergent élite which inevitably asserts itself in a violent insurrection. Authoritarianism prevents the gradual infiltration of new leaders who have arisen from the masses. It is only a democratic regime which can safely acclaim new leaders. An authoritarian administration which proclaims and teaches that its "duce is always right" cannot conceivably permit the normal circulation of élites during the lifetime of the infallible dictator. Of all systems of government, authoritarianism is that which least permits a normal and peaceful transition between different administrations, "It is a commonplace of history," writes Laski, "that power is poisonous to those who exercise it...The corollary of dictatorship appears to be that it is incapable of voluntary abdication." But abdication, maintains Pareto, is a fundamental principle of social activity. If the surrender is not voluntary, it will be involuntary. Authoritarian regimes lack that flexibility which would permit the peaceful establishment of other administrations. Their destiny, then, is to be swept away in a revolution which is as inevitable as the upheaval which established their authority. The final lesson which Fascism learns from Pareto's doctrine of governing élites is that they who are created and maintained by the sword must ultimately perish by it.

## CHAPTER IX

### AN EXAMINATION OF THE ALLEGED FASCIST SYNTHESIS OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE STATE.

The streams of thought which merge to form the political doctrine of Fascism have been traced in the preceding chapters. It should be stressed that the rise of contemporary Fascist dictatorships has not been significantly influenced by adherence to any previously expressed political theory. Indeed it is not an exaggeration to state that Fascism in Germany and Italy began without any coherent political philosophy. "We had no encyclopaedists," writes de Stefani. "It was a movement as free as youth". It was found possible, however, to discern a number of definite principles which, whether recognized or not, underlay the spontaneous emergence of the Fascist movement. These were the principles of the absolute state and of personal leadership. Their fundamental implications have already been discussed.<sup>(1)</sup> It remains now to present some appraisal of the ethical validity and pragmatic value of Fascist political theory.

Fascism would ethically justify its doctrine in its claim to effect a synthesis which would reconcile man's "personal

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(1) cf. Chapter II

interests with those of the social group to which he belongs." (2)  
That such a synthesis is a necessary condition of any stable or moral political society would be granted by the exponent of any political creed. Fascism would maintain, however, that it has provided, for the first time in history, the medium whereby the individual may be at once a "self-regarding and a social animal." (3) It is the Fascist interpretation of modern history that from the Renaissance onwards, the Western world has cast off all authority and has plunged with lawless abandon into an orgy of unrestrained freedom. The Greek spirit, identified by the Fascists with scepticism, individualism and experimentation, completely overwhelmed the Roman tradition of discipline, social solidarity and respect for tradition. Liberty, it is alleged, degenerated into unmitigated license. "We may say with perfect truth", writes Barnes, "that the Greek spirit has ... prevailed over the Roman, until at last it has become a positive danger to society and to morality." (4) It is only in the present epoch that the world has become weary of its prolonged abuse of freedom. Fascism is presented as the movement which has emerged to integrate the Greek and Roman traditions into a new civilization. It is thus intended to restore the reign of order to a disordered world. Such is the Fascist interpretation of modern history from the time of the Renaissance and its appraisal of the role it is

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(2) Barnes, op.cit., p.31

(3) ibid., p.31

(4) Barnes, p.31

destined to play in building a new social order.

Before examining the alleged Fascist reconciliation of the individual and society, it is necessary to question the fundamental premise of its historical attitude. It may be categorically denied that, from the Renaissance to the advent of twentieth century Fascism, the world was "drunk with newly found freedom." Fascists are either ignorant of or refuse to recognize movements which effectively restrained the excessive individualism occasioned by the Renaissance. Admittedly the spectacular opening of new vistas of thought and action led at first to an exuberance which expressed itself in unbridled freedom. The discipline and authority of the Church, of mediaeval scholasticism and of orthodox tradition were discarded in the vigorous and stirring time of the Revival of Learning, But it is sheer distortion of subsequent history and movements of thought to assert that this unrestrained spirit continued unabated until the rise of contemporary Fascism. It was checked as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the eighteenth century the problem was not to limit an excess but to establish a greater degree of freedom. "Man was born free, but is now everywhere in chains", exclaimed Rousseau upon observing the social conditions of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. Indeed modern political philosophy from the time of Bodin has been occupied with the fundamental problem of discovering that type of society "in which each," as Rousseau wrote, "by uniting himself with all, may still...remain as free as before." Fascism, viewed in its proper historical

perspective, is not the only but another attempt to conciliate man's "personal interests and those of the social group to which he belongs."

The validity of the Fascist synthesis, now seen from a more balanced historical view, may finally be examined. Do the absolute state and the principle of personal leadership provide the means whereby the individual may fully develop his personality within a framework of social organization which calls also for his subordination to the rule of government? The Fascist solution according to its own logic can be a satisfactory synthesis only to the governing class. For the rest of society it is no solution but a complete capitulation to an authority whose control over the individual is unconditional. A democratic government may possess absolute power over its citizens but it is responsible to and elected by them. The democratic state is the means whereby the people seek to express their will and their thought. The Fascist government is not composed of the people but of an élite. It is the duty of the people to develop Nietzsche's slave morality of complete acquiescence. It is the right only of the select ruling class to express and to realize its will. "As for the ...anti-individualist reaction of the totalitarian or dictatorial type", writes Jacques Maritain, "it is not in the name of the social community or of the liberty of man considered collectively but in the name of the sovereign dignity of the state, or of the spirit of a people, or of a race and blood, that they would turn man over bodily to a social entity in which the person



of the chief is the only one to enjoy..the privileges of a human personality." <sup>(5)</sup> Fascism has not moderated inordinate individualism; it has served to eliminate all individualism except that of the leader. It does not provide the synthesis of self and society for it has denied the individual all media of expression. Fascism does not reconcile but subordinate the individual to the group.

### THE TOTALITARIAN STATE.

The authoritarian would urge, however, in the Hegelian tradition, that the citizen's whole life is realized in the state. It is only in the recognition of its absolute authority that the integrated personality may be developed. It would be universally agreed, as the Fascists maintain, that one of the most pressing needs of modern civilization is the practice of what Aldous Huxley has termed the "art of integral living." It is questionable, however, whether the State provides all the conditions necessary for the practice of this art."For the Fascist, all is in the State and nothing human or spiritual exists and much less has any value outside the State. In this sense Fascism is totalitarian, and the Fascist State, the synthesis and unity of all values, interprets, develops, <sup>(6)</sup> and gives power to every aspect of the life of the people." But is the State sufficiently inclusive to embody the infinite variety of individual capacities ? Legitimate doubt may be cast on the Fascist

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(5) Nation, March 18, 1939, p.320

(6) Mussolini -from Finer, op, cit., p.201

claim that the State is the "true reality" of the individual unless this reality be construed as that of one individual and not of each member of the body politic. To reduce the conflicting elements of the human personality to a harmonious whole is the alleged object of totalitarianism. Out of the individual's disparate experiences there should emerge a "work of art". But the integralist neglects the possibility, which is very great in a Fascist society, that vital elements of the individual personality may be suppressed in the synthetic process. The process of integration neglects the diverse and the unique and may produce an inadequate unification of life. The work of art may be an unfinished symphony. The individual may surrender rather than fulfill his personality. D. H. Lawrence in letters, as Henri Bergson in philosophy, spoke eloquently on behalf of an intuitive insight transcending the limits of rational calculations. But he was well aware of the dangers of a pseudo-intuitive vision which would aspire to express the totality of life but would serve rather to imprison the human spirit. The individual, who would find a "timeless consummation" of life in ecstatic contemplation of a cathedral instead experienced bitter disillusion. It was good that his illusion was destroyed. Even the "little faces carved in stone that peeped out of the grand tide of the cathedral...knew better. They knew quite well...that the cathedral was not absolute..."However much there is inside here, there's a good deal they haven't got in," the little faces mocked... There was life outside the Church. That was something great and

free." Lawrence attacked the materialism and positivism of his age. Fascism too, would revert to an idealism which insists that life goes beyond logic and cannot be explained in terms of a mechanistic system. But neither can it be reduced to an irresponsible flow of emotional feeling as Lawrence revealed. The intuitive vision may enter the realm of sheer fancy when it expresses itself in myths of racial superiority and national grandeur. The Fascist synthesis which expresses itself in a mystical and irrational idealism does not provide a valid and complete synthesis of life but a false and inadequate interpretation of experience. The Fascist individual does not develop an integrated personality by permitting the state to condition his entire life even as the German did not realize his freedom, despite Hegel, by subordinating himself to the authority of the Prussian monarch. For the Prussian state was not the "march of God" in the world even as the totalitarian state does not express the totality of human experience. To maintain that the function of the individual consists only in conforming to the will of the state seems to dwarf the significance of the human personality. Certain fields of individual and group endeavour should remain independent of the state and its authority. The Fascist attempt to confine art and particularly science to national dimensions serves to impede the fullest development of artistic and scientific achievement. The totalitarian pattern cannot conceivably be so comprehensive as to represent the unique and fundamental differences among men. Each individual can hardly

attain his full stature through obedience to the will of a state for each individual possesses a distinct body of experience which belongs solely to himself. Each views life through different lenses and selects that which most appeals to his nature. The state should provide for unity and security but it should not be given absolute adulation. It would not be claimed that health is the object of life. It is a means to a fuller and greater enjoyment of life. Likewise the state is a means to a greater measure of individual happiness and well-being. It is not the object of all social organization. "I urge", says Professor Laski, "that you must place the individual at the centre of things...the individual is the centre of the molecule and is linked to other associations... of which the state is one." The condition for the fullest development of the individual is provided when political society is founded upon the rock of the human personality and not upon Sombart's Fascist conception of a "super-individual Something to which man is to sacrifice himself."

#### THE NATION STATE.

An examination must now be made of the basic principle of Fascist political theory viz: that "each differentiated human group of which the nation State...is the most perfect example is a natural phenomenon which possesses an organic life embracing a series of generations of individuals composing it" (7) Two fundamental criticisms suggest themselves in a consideration

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(7) *ibid.*, p.81

of this idealistic conception of the state. Firstly, it is unlikely that the nation-state is the most perfect example of various social groups. Nationality does not provide a satisfactory principle of political organization. It is impossible to define a nationality. Birthplace is not an adequate criterion, or the German Jews would be German. Language is a deficient standard since the Czechs and the Slovaks do not speak German. Race, according to all scientific anthropological investigation, is a "purely linguistic category". "By any definition the limits of a nation are arbitrary."<sup>(8)</sup> Secondly the excessive nationalism of Fascist states makes,...the establishment of workable international political and economic institutions almost impossible. This national exclusiveness seems contrary to the pattern of modern social organization. Fascism opposes the tendency towards increased cooperation among various political entities. It claims that "the scientist in a fascist State is only free to search for truth as the State sees it",<sup>(9)</sup> but scientific investigation does not recognize political boundaries. It may attempt to make the state economically self-sufficient but the interdependency of all countries makes economic

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(8) Dr. Henry Clay-Lectures at McGill University-Feb. 8 1939.

(9) The Fascist, His State and his Mind by E.B. Ashton, from Joad, op.cit., p. 650

cooperation necessary if the highest possible standards of living are to prevail. Fascist nationalism, however, is an indispensable myth which would perhaps fatally weaken an authoritarian regime if it were exposed. The glorification of states into national entities "tends to diminish...if not destroy their obligation to have regard for the welfare of the Family of States or to the whole of Humanity...Fascism expresses open disapproval of the doctrine of the Internationalists who attach a higher value to the welfare of all humanity than to the welfare of individual States."<sup>(10)</sup> Indeed, Gini, an exponent of Fascism, writes of the Fascist aversion for all movements which would "place limits upon the free action of the national organism." It is precisely what Professor P. Corbett terms this "fetish of national sovereignty" which presents the most insuperable obstacle to the establishment of some measure of effective international cooperation. "For some time to come we shall have to reckon with the nation that runs amok, just as we have to reckon with the criminal within the nation... It is in the relations between political entities that our race has made its most dismal failure."<sup>(11)</sup> Fascist political theory which is inseparable from the state absolutism would prolong this failure.

It would be erroneous to think that democracies have made significant efforts to limit state absolutism in international affairs. States whose government has rested upon

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(10) Willoughby, W.W., -The Ethical Basis of Political Authority, p. 143

(11) Corbett, P., Sovereignty, the Wrecker, Queen's Quarterly, Winter 1934.

popular consent have been no less dogmatic in asserting their inviolable independence than dictatorships. But it is certain that a democracy can participate with much more freedom than a dictatorship in international cooperative experiments. A democracy may limit its national absolutism and remain democratic but an authoritarian state cannot, by definition, consent to any curtailment of its absolute authority.

### FASCIST INTOLERANCE.

A demoralizing scepticism is an all too obvious phenomenon of the twentieth century. "The crying need of civilization," writes the Fascist with justification, "is a general revival of faith."<sup>(12)</sup> But it is equally necessary that the various solutions be viewed in the spirit of Hume's philosophical scepticism. A unified way of life is not enough. There must be an evaluation of the proposed syntheses. Fascism, however, is so convinced of the validity of its particular solution that it is "resolved to build up a generation of believers as the only means of reaching out of the present chaos, cost what it may." What the authoritarians themselves term "Fascist intransigence" is one of their greatest shortcomings. With the unshakeable conviction that they alone are possessed of divine truth, Fascist governments seek to impose these truths upon all individuals. Who have such eternal verities that they may impose them upon a people "cost what it may" Fascism would justify its excessive regimentation by its idealism. It would sacrifice the transient and inferior individual for the

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(12) Barnes, op.cit., p.43

welfare of the nation. Thus it looks forward to a "generation of heroes who know no fear because of their faith, who gladly fly in the face of any danger and welcome martyrdom with a smile. This is no exaggeration. This is the root of the Fascist Revolution. Even if all appears to perish in one supreme heroic sacrifice, we shall be inevitably sowing the seed for an eventual and glorious harvest of our heart's desire..."<sup>(13)</sup> This is the spirit of the Mohammedan who gladly sacrifices his life to reap his reward in paradise. This is the spirit of the Italian who gives up his life in order that a future generation may enjoy the spectacle of a Second Roman Empire built upon the swamps of Ethiopia and the battlefields of Spain. This is the spirit of the Japanese who writes with passionate sincerity: "It is now most clear that the salvation of the entire human race is the mission of our Empire." All are fired with idealism. But zeal and ardour do not make their beliefs noble or valid. Zeal and bigotry are often joined in unholy alliance to persecute "unbelievers". Idealism does not imply acceptance of its Fascist version. Those who answer the call of freedom are possessed of no less idealism than those who die for the glory of a greater Reich or another Roman Empire.

Fascism would justify its use of violence as reflecting the "spiritual force" of its doctrine. The line of demarcation, however, between spiritual force and unmitigated brutality is exceedingly difficult to distinguish as Fascist practice has revealed.

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(13) *ibid.*, p. 50.



Certainly the recalcitrant who is the object of Fascist intransigence can make no such refined distinction. Indeed the distinction is a fanciful one. "Violence," writes Finer in answer to Mussolini, "is violence and no damned nonsense about it."<sup>(14)</sup>

A further objection to the Fascist approval of the use of force is that, once it has been sanctioned, it is difficult to prescribe limits to the field of its applicability. It may become the normal means of solving social problems. Peaceful persuasion is a slow process; "clean surgical" violence apparently eliminates dissidents at one stroke. Rather than seeking to convert heretics by a rational exposition of the merits of a particular creed, fanatics are often wont to have recourse to brute force as an effective and ethically justified method of revealing the truth to unbelievers. But it may be that the infidels have a positive contribution to make to the common welfare. Consequently their suppression would be contrary to the public good. If the grievances of a minority are genuine, they should obviously be voiced; if they are without foundation, their expression can hardly constitute any threat to the solidarity of the state.

The most serious criticism which can be brought against the totalitarian justification of violence is the inability of any political regime to judge the merits of those individuals and institutions which it would suppress as subversive influences.

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(14) Finer, op. cit., p.224.

Standards are neither permanent nor infallible. What is acceptable at one moment may be repudiated at another. Had the Weimar Republic and the Italian Socialist Party sought to establish their authority by the use of force Hitler and Mussolini would have been liquidated years before their accession to power.

The Fascist attempt to vindicate its employment of violence is unsuccessful. Firstly, it is doubtful whether violence, considered as the forcible suppression of all opposition to the established administration, should ever be sanctioned. Secondly, Fascism cannot justify its approval of force because of its idealism. It must first justify its idealism. When this is defined as a glorification of the state and the adulation of a leader, it may perhaps be held that an irrational idealism is as dangerous as scepticism is demoralizing.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF GOVERNMENT BY AN ELITE

"It seems proper to prove that the supreme power ought to be lodged with the many rather than with those of the better sort who are few." <sup>(15)</sup> In support of his contention, Aristotle presented three objections to government by an aristocracy which perhaps remain the most vital criticism that may be brought against the Fascist principle of government by an élite. Firstly, a number of equally virtuous men is less likely to go wrong than one man of virtue equal to theirs. Upon this assertion rests the democratic conviction that the

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(15) Aristotle, Politics, (Everyman ed. p.85

people is a better judge of the social welfare than the opinion of one man regardless of the extent of his wisdom. It is of course impossible to pronounce any final judgment on this issue. Fascism cannot be condemned by the standards which it repudiates. It is sufficient to maintain that the authoritarian doctrine of government by an élite, not responsible to the people and empowered to impose its alleged infallible conception of the social good upon the rest of society by propaganda or force, may be viewed with warranted scepticism. Secondly, Aristotle argues with considerable practical wisdom that discontent is unavoidable if public offices are confined to a minority to the exclusion of the multitude. He considered with Rousseau that each citizen should participate in some form of political activity. The modern state has obviously made this condition impossible. But it may legitimately be deduced from Aristotle's judgment that each citizen should have a voice if not participate in the affairs of government. If this voice is not afforded the opportunity to express itself, the people, it is alleged, will ultimately resent the continuous rule of a minority. Thus Fascism may draft every individual into some form of political organization but ultimate resentment is inevitable so long as authority is exerted from above and not by the mass of the people. The time has not yet arrived to pass judgment on the validity of this criticism of Fascist minority rule. But it has been urged that the French and Russian Revolutions were made inevitable by the prolonged suppression of liberty which denied

the people normal outlets of political expression and forced their activities into subversive channels leading to the adoption of violence even by those who would ordinarily abhor civil strife. It will be remembered that Pareto's doctrine led to the same conclusion. But "the simple fact, amply proven by logic and by history, that freedom preserves order better than does suppression is naturally never learned by those who expect to be dictators."<sup>(16)</sup> Thirdly, Aristotle expressed the opinion that the majority of citizens is less likely to be swayed by personal prejudices than a small group of individuals. Fascists may condemn democratic institutions on the ground that they establish the rule of an irrational and incompetent mob bent only on gratifying momentary and ignoble desires. But it is far from certain that dictatorial administrations are composed of individuals who devote themselves with complete disinterestedness to promoting the public welfare. The first consideration of all Fascist activity must be the safety of the authoritarian regime. A dictatorship, unlike a democratic government, cannot relinquish its authority to another party for other parties are prohibited. In this respect it seems reasonable to maintain that a democratic administration can seek to promote the common good with less regard to personal power and prestige than a dictatorship. Aristotle doubted whether philosopher-kings could be found who would interpret the moral law objectively and apply it disinterestedly. It is equally questionable whether authoritarian

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(16) F.R.Scott, What is Freedom of Speech, McGill University News, Autumn 1937, p.20.

rulers can develop such a highly refined sense of social responsibility as will be immune from the influences of personal bias and self-interest. If the people are generally depraved and unable to act with an eye to the general good, it is possible that the authoritarian leaders, who come from the people, will possess the same weakness as beset the masses.

It is interesting to note the opinion of some of the world's greatest geniuses concerning the theory of government by an elite. Those individuals who might be expected to belong to such a select body realize the dangerous implications inherent in the conception of government by a carefully selected class of exceptional individuals. Aristotle's misgivings have already been discussed. Time has not yet passed judgment on Albert Einstein but it seems reasonable to believe that he will not be placed among the dimmer lights of the twentieth century intellectual firmament. At the Harvard Tercentenary Conference in 1936 it was suggested that there be formed a "Court of Wisdom" composed of the world's leading scientists, philosophers, artists, poets, industrial leaders and others which would exert "such a moral force upon the people of the world that no ruler or ruling class would dare take action contrary to its judgment." On his sixtieth birthday, Einstein was asked whether he considered that such a court was practicable. His reply revealed a further fundamental weakness of the elite principle. "The obstacles", he wrote, "standing in the way of practical realization of such a plan are quite formidable... The first question that arises is,

in what manner should the vacancies be filled. By what means could we possibly prevent the quality of the membership from deteriorating ? The only possible way would be by the members having exclusive power of filling vacancies. This is the method of selection to membership in the academies. We know from experience that this method by no means eliminates deterioration. Even more difficult...would be the initial formation of such a body." Such were the serious doubts as to the advisability of establishing a non-political, legally incompetent group of the world's outstanding geniuses. How much more warranted is scepticism concerning the Fascist practice of endowing a political élite with supreme legal power to enforce its rule upon all the citizens of an authoritarian state. How is such a body to be initially formed and how is it to prevent deterioration of the quality of its membership become vital problems when a people has surrendered the sovereign authority to a governing élite. "Aristocracy", answers the Fascist, "with one wide alley...open for new elements... and another by which unworthy elements may be expelled." <sup>(17)</sup> But considerations, other than those of merit, exert the dominant influence in the selection of the new members of the elite. An authoritarian regime must be on constant guard against the emergence of too capable individuals who aspire to authority. Constant replacement of all officials, except the dictator, is an invariable occurrence in Fascist regimes. Exile or disfavour, as frequently as promotion, are the rewards for diligent service and proven

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(17) Barnes, op.cit., p.111

capacity. "Changing the guard" is a recognized principle of Fascist administration. Authoritarianism stifles rather than encourages the development of a governing class. A dictatorship, which maintains its power by the suppression of all other aspirants to authority, does not provide for the development of future leaders. Accordingly, as Shaw writes, "None of our present Fascist Leaders can answer the question (18) "Who is to succeed you ?" Fascism's most serious short - coming from the long point of view is its failure to develop new, capable leaders.

#### THE ETHICAL ASPECT OF FASCIST POLITICAL THEORY.

Finally, an appraisal of the ethical validity of the Fascist doctrine must be undertaken. The moral futility which pervades authoritarianism is perhaps its greatest weakness. Fascism is condemned in this respect by its own standards. It regards the moral law as a "reality recognizable in the heart (19) of all but the most hardened sinner." It is reasonable to assume that this innate morality be given the opportunity to express itself. Yet Fascism proceeds to charge an élite with the task of governing according to its conception of the social good. The people are expressly forbidden to participate in the sovereign power until the moral law is sufficiently developed among them. But Fascism does not permit the law to establish itself in the hearts and minds of the people. Social responsibility, only, will develop this morality. The great function of

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(18) G. B. Shaw, op.cit., p.449

(19) Barnes op.cit., p.116

civil society, according to Rousseau, was to develop man's moral nature. Fascism apparently expects this nature to develop itself since it affords it no real media through which it may be cultivated. Membership in political organizations is an insufficient medium. These groups serve only to establish Fascist order and discipline and to inculcate an attitude of blind obedience to the leader. They are spurious substitutes for real responsibility which alone can develop man's social nature to its highest level. If the people are potentially good, then every opportunity should be presented whereby this goodness may be realized. If the moral law resides in every man then the general will of all men is not necessarily "the will of a heterogeneous number of individuals each aiming at his personal advantage,"<sup>(20)</sup> but may rather reflect the collective interests of the community. The general will is not inevitably an irrational and dormant force; Fascism makes it inactive and incoherent. Democracies have not succeeded in developing a general will which expresses the true social good but it does not shut the door to the possibility of creating such a will. Fascism precludes this possibility by stifling the free expression of the individual conscience. A democracy undertakes "the most difficult enterprise which men living together in a complex society can attempt, viz- to elicit unity of will and firmness of decision out of the varying and often conflicting interests and opinions of a large body of people. To do this by authoritarian methods, backed by organized force, is relatively easy: to do it by discussion and vote makes

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(20) *ibid.*, p. 101



the greatest demands on men's resources of good sense and good  
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will."

Authoritarian governments may have succeeded in restoring national pride and personal honour to disillusioned peoples. Yet a fundamental defeatism remains their greatest defect. They have sought to justify dictatorial government on the ground that the people are incapable of governing themselves. The ideal form of government, according to the Fascist, is a "genuine aristocracy of merit to which better than to any other body we could leave  
(22)  
our destiny." Those who value human liberty must reply to this dictum that it is neither wise nor moral for mankind to surrender its destiny to any aristocracy. It is unwise for the possibility of establishing a permanently meritorious aristocracy is exceedingly remote; it is not moral for it denies man the ultimate control over his destiny which his moral nature demands.

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(21) Hoernlé. op. cit., p. 182

(22) Barnes, op. cit., p.113

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