

PHILOSOPHICAL IRRATIONALISM AND
ITALIAN FASCISM

APPROVED:

H W Kamp
Major Professor

Harry F. Snapp
Minor Professor

H W Kamp
Director of the Department of Government

Robert Toulson
Dean of the Graduate School

PHILOSOPHICAL IRRATIONALISM AND
ITALIAN FASCISM

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By

Tom R. Bentley, B. A.

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CHAPTER I

THE REACTION AGAINST THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The European intellectual movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, known generally as "the Enlightenment," was characterized by several major changes in traditional modes of thought. While the Enlightenment was a broadly based movement dealing with all of the many facets with which epistemology is concerned, this optimistic period culminated in its positivistic political philosophies. Montesquieu, in his admiration of British political institutions, attempted to transfer the doctrines of some of these institutions to the continent. Rousseau's admiration of the average man led to the theorist's desire for social and political equality. These two French political theorists had been preceded by the Dutch lawyer Grotius who emphasized the desire of rational men to live in peace with their fellow men. Grotius used this concept to develop a theory of international morality. These theorists are typical members of the movement which placed a high value on the possibilities for the individual achieving progress within the political process. In general, the political philosophies of the Enlightenment emphasized the well being of the individual. This well being, they felt, could be obtained from education and progressive social institutions derived through just governmental processes. The Enlightenment seemed to promise a bright

future for the nations which followed its ideals.

While the Enlightenment was reaching its culmination in the later years of the eighteenth century, certain major changes were taking place which would greatly revolutionize men's attitudes in the next century. Perhaps the greatest of these changes was the Industrial Revolution. This technological development brought about fundamental changes in the economic, social, and political life of Europe. The traditional social patterns based upon the guild system and the feudal society were rapidly swept aside. Mass production and the division of labor brought about the dehumanization of workers. The rise of the capitalistic society, in which a new producing class dominated the working class, resulted in increased agitation and unrest. The laboring masses fought for freedom from their subservient position, and this in turn caused anxiety and frustration within the capitalist aristocracy.¹ The unrest found in industrial capitalistic societies increased as industrialism and trade expanded in the nineteenth century.

The French Revolution was launched with passionate fervor, and it achieved success at least partially as a result of the strong belief in its ends; however, its success could not logically be followed by the attainment of all of the goals of the various revolutionary groups. Revolutions are

¹Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom (New York, 1941), p. 99.

necessarily led by men of action, and in the aftermath of a successful revolution such men are usually not content merely to fulfill the desires of their followers; instead, they are more intent upon achieving personal goals and fulfilling private ambitions.² This characteristic of revolutionary leaders does not contribute to social stability in periods following a successful revolution, especially in a nation such as France, where revolutionary ideals had been fought for with such fanatical zeal. Post-Revolutionary leaders found war a much easier pursuit than social reform. Much of the disillusionment found in France around the turn of the century was due to the failure of the Revolution to fulfill the ideals foretold by the Enlightenment. The practice of popular sovereignty resulted in internal despotism and external aggression for the nation which had fought so hard for freedom and equality.

The bloodshed and ruin produced by the Napoleonic and counter-Napoleonic armies as they surged back and forth across the face of Europe contributed to the attitude of despair on the continent. The end of the wars and the subsequent demobilization of Europe's armies contributed to the already serious problem of unemployment; various economic fluctuations continued to make the situation worse. On a continent troubled by unemployment, depression, revolution,

²Eric Hoffer, The True Believer (New York, 1951), p. 150.

and war, causes for the disenchantment with the optimistic ideals of the Enlightenment are quite apparent. A belief in man's rationality is difficult to sustain in surroundings such as Europe provided during this period.

The chaotic conditions which prevailed in Europe were duly noted by the European intelligentsia. Many members of this group saw no material evidence of the Enlightenment concept of man as a rational being; instead, many writers, philosophers, and political theorists began to develop a different view of man. Small and helpless in the vastness of the cosmos, man appeared powerless to order his fate. Rather than possessing reason, man seemed biologically tied to an animalistic existence.³ The positivism of the Enlightenment falsely described human nature; the nature of man could be best described as being dominated by a "servile herd instinct" instead of by rationality.⁴ This description of humanity, far removed from the optimism of the Enlightenment, was characteristic of the pessimistic attitude toward mankind which was beginning to develop during the reaction to the Enlightenment.

The pessimistic attitude toward the nature of man developed along with a belief in the loss of the ideals of Western culture. The cruel determinism that had accompanied

³Eric Hoffer, "A Strategy for the War with Nature," Saturday Review, XLIX (February 5, 1966), 73.

⁴J. W. Barnes, Fascism (London, 1931), p. 39.

the advent of materialism was readily accepted by the intellectual of 1800; rather than attempting to fight the moral problems posed by a modern industrial society, Europe's men of letters elected to accept these problems as a part of a natural process characterized by man's impotence in the face of fate's adversity. The intelligentsia decided to deny the humanism of man:

Those who had a full sense of the significance of the European tradition were paralyzed by its decay. They lost their power of initiative, their spontaneity, and their confidence, intimidated by the alien world of material necessity which dominated the new form of the tradition. Genius felt itself frustrated and failed to guide. The long-foretold disaster was now at hand. Europe passed into the hands of those who had deliberately renounced the influence of the old tradition..5

The initial acceptance of deterministic despair signaled the advent of a movement which would integrate the theme of man's irrationality into the literature, philosophy, and political theory of continental Europe. The movement, initiated by a reaction against the optimism of the Enlightenment, began an intellectual process which moved toward social and political chaos. The evil tragedy of totalitarianism, says Eric Hoffer, was in fact

⁵Lancelot L. Whyte, The Next Development in Man (New York, 1948), p. 128.

. . . an intensification and acceleration of something that had been going for decades. There is hardly an enormity committed in the twentieth century that has not been foreshadowed and even advocated by some noble "man of words" in the nineteenth 6

The intellectual movement away from traditional values was a foreshadowing of social injustice.

Part of the intellectual trend away from Western ideals was expressed within German Romanticism. While later members of this school were more directly involved in the body of thought which is known as philosophical irrationalism, the most important German Romanticist of the eighteenth century was Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Goethe's works reflect a general trend in German Romanticism and European literature as a whole to reintegrate man with nature. In Goethe's poetry and prose we see a rejection of the dualism of man's intellect and instinct, and the attempt to establish a new synthesis. Goethe desired to fuse intellectual knowledge with instinctive experience to create a unified biological man.⁷ Despite the integrity of Goethe's attempt to recognize the role of man as part of the animal kingdom, his ideas helped foment an intellectual movement in Germany and in Europe which became distinctly anti-humanitarian.

⁶Hoffer, op. cit., p. 28.

⁷Whyte, op. cit., pp. 118-119.

The Relationship between an honest attempt to recognize the biological nature of man on one hand and the excesses of fascism on the other may seem, at the outset, a tenuous one indeed; however, the relationship is direct and easily identifiable. From the emphasis on instinct and nature found in German Romanticism to the violent pronouncements of Benito Mussolini there exists a direct intellectual lineage. The purpose of this work will be to trace the development from responsible scholasticism to irrational political violence, and to locate the various sources from which the intellectual acceptance of anti-humanitarian violence spring forth. The process by which the protectors of the Western heritage promulgated its barbarian and inhumane antithesis is not one which should soon be forgotten.

CHAPTER II

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY ORIGINS OF PHILOSOPHICAL IRRATIONALISM IN EUROPE

Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century was a continent of disillusionment and despair, resulting primarily from the ravages of the Napoleonic wars and the failure of the idealism of the French Revolution.¹ This disillusionment expressed itself in the pessimism which characterized the culture of the early nineteenth century. A large part of the European intelligentsia seemed to feel that

. . . the chaos of Europe but reflected the chaos of the universe; that there was no divine order after all, nor any heavenly hope; that God, if God there was, was blind, and Evil brooded over the face of the earth.²

Romanticism, with its individualistic revolt against the evils of the modern machine age and its disavowal of any belief in universal reason,³ seemed a logical mode of expression for the confused and despairing European of the nineteenth century. Before the century had come to a close, the majority of Europe's men of letters had forsaken any belief in universal rationalism

¹Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy, (New York, 1926), pp. 300-301.

²Ibid., p. 302.

³William Barrett, Irrational Man, (Garden City, 1958), p. 109.

and reason, and had instead sought to relegate humanity to the role of a mere pawn pushed about in the cosmic struggle for survival and power:

Carlyle's glorification of brute force, Gobineau's race theories, Marx's economic determinism and his theory of the class struggle, Darwin's and Pavlov's zoological sociology, the dark forces of Wagner's music, Nietzsche's cult of the superman, and Freud's emphasis on the less human components of man's soul were all part of a blind striving to reintegrate man with nature.⁴

Such was the condition of an increasingly large segment of European thought as the nineteenth century progressed.

German Romanticism displayed as one of its primary tenets a reaction against reason. Mysticism and anti-intellectualism were dominant themes in German literature from Johann Wolfgang Goethe to Friedrich Nietzsche. The majority of German writers lauded passion, instinct, and will as being superior to the intellectual process. The same German romanticists who promulgated this revolt against reason produced almost all of the greatest German masterpieces of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵ Their works, in part, were fraught with extreme egotism, disillusionment,

⁴Eric Hoffer, "A strategy for the War with Nature," Saturday Review, XLIX (February 5, 1966), 28.

⁵Diana Spearman, Modern Dictatorship, (New York, 1939) pp. 365-366.

acknowledgement of the evil of human existence, and complete despair.⁶ It was within this intellectual environment that Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche came into prominence.

The progression in thought from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche is part of a larger picture of the development of philosophical irrationalism in Europe. To understand this movement fully one should understand the philosophy of Schopenhauer, its influence on the philosophy of Nietzsche, and, as a separate entity, the philosophy of Nietzsche. By distinguishing between these three separate bodies of thought, the currents and cross-currents of nineteenth century European philosophy are more easily definable.

Schopenhauer's rejection of Hegel is characteristic of the former's philosophical position. Schopenhauer put irrational will in place of Hegel's reason as the driving force in the universe, and this emphasis on will and life which he expressed qualify Schopenhauer as one of the founders of the European Lebensphilosophic.⁷ The influence wielded by Schopenhauer on Nietzsche in particular and on the Lebensphilosophic and philosophical irrationalism in general may be better understood after examining Schopenhauer's basic philosophic ideas.

⁶Eric Hoffer, "A Strategy for the War with Nature," Saturday Review, XLIX (February 5, 1966), 28.

⁷Frederich Copleston, Arthur Schopenhauer, Philosopher of Pessimism (Andover, 1946), pp. 203-204.

Schopenhauer's monistic philosophy defined blind, struggling will as the primary source of universal existence.⁸

Every action undertaken by a human being is a result of this universal will:

. . . will . . . alone gives him the key to his own existence, reveals to him the significance, shows him the inner mechanism of his being, of his action, of his movements. . . Every true act of his will is also at once and without exception of a movement of his body. The act of will and the movement of the body. . . are one and the same.⁹

Schopenhauer goes on to say that this same will which causes men to act is the sole source of energy for the whole universe, and it causes all action in the universe, from the growth of plants to the law of gravity.¹⁰

Individual men strive in vain to attain various goals, for as men are merely manifestations of the universal will, their actions and fate are determined by this will and not by men themselves.¹¹ This determination results in no rational ends for human beings:

Eternal becoming, endless flux, characterizes the revelation of the inner nature of will. Finally, the same thing shows itself in human endeavors and desires, which always delude us by presenting their satisfaction as the final end of will. As soon as

⁸William M. McGovern, From Luther to Hitler (Cambridge, 1941), p. 408.

⁹Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea, translated by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, Vol. I (London, 1883), p. 130.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 142. ¹¹Ibid., p. 147.

we attain to them they no longer appear the same, and therefore they soon grow stale, are forgotten, and though not openly disowned, are yet always thrown aside as vanished illusions.¹²

The universal will is characterized by the same type of ceaseless striving that is found in the actions of human beings. Although incidental acts of the will may be characterized by rationality, the will as a whole is aimless and irrational.¹³ Knowledge does exist in the universe, but knowledge is without exception completely subservient to the will.¹⁴ The will uses the intellect as a tool in the cosmic struggle for survival; the drives which men have to stay alive, to sustain themselves, and to defend themselves outweigh the purely intellectual capabilities of each man.¹⁵

Schopenhauer recognizes only one possibility for escaping the endless striving of the will. If man would free himself from the misery and despair of eternal strife, he

. . . disowns this nature which appears in him . . . he ceases to will anything, and seeks to conform in himself the greatest indifference to everything.¹⁶

¹²Ibid., p. 214.

¹³Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 230.

¹⁵Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea, Translated by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, Vol. III (London, 1883), p. 14.

¹⁶Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea, Vol. I, p. 491.

Only by living an aescetic life may one escape the cosmic struggle. An existence of this sort would ideally be characterized by the rejection of all worldly desires.¹⁷ The only goal in life would then be the contemplation of beauty, which is essential because

. . . in entering the state of pure contemplation we are lifted for the moment above all willing, i. e., all wishes and cares . . . We are no longer the individual whose knowledge is subordinated to the service of his constant willing . . . but the eternal subject of knowing purified from will. . .¹⁸

Happiness, indeed, increases in proportion to the amount of denial one enforces upon his will:

. . . we know that these moments in which, delivered from the ardent strain of will, we seem to rise out of the heavy atmosphere of earth, are the happiest which we experience. From this we can understand how blessed the life of a man must be whose will is silenced. . . for ever, indeed altogether extinguished, except as regards the last glimmering spart that retains the body in life, and will be extinguished with its death.¹⁹

Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy and its unusual ideals represented the beginning of a direct line of thought which was to become quite prominent in Europe. The various

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 491-493.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 504.

¹⁹Ibid.

theories which describe an irrational will or life force as the cause of all phenomena were influenced strongly by the philosophy of Schopenhauer. Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, and Georges Sorel were especially influenced by Schopenhauer's concept of the universal will, by his idea of the universe and of man as essentially irrational, and by his theory of the man of genius who contemplates beauty. The lineage of this trend in European thought will be dealt with at length in later chapters.

The more romantic aspects of Greek culture and the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer were the two dominant influences on Nietzsche's philosophy. The influence upon Nietzsche's thought resulting from Nietzsche's readings of Schopenhauer may best be understood by first examining Nietzsche's thoughts concerning certain facets of Hellenism. This is due to the fact that by understanding Nietzsche's obsession with the Greek deity Dionysus, one may obtain a much clearer perception of Nietzsche's basic attitudes toward philosophy and life in general.

While Dionysus was the patron of the tragic theater, and thus associated with what Nietzsche considered the highest peak of art, the deity was also the patron of the grape and joys derived thereof. Nietzsche saw in this combination of basic passions with intellectual achievement the ideal existence. Dionysus was for Nietzsche the symbol of pagan vitality which could rescue Western culture from its

eration.²⁰ Nietzsche felt that this degeneration could be traced to the period in which Apollonian concepts of art took hold in Greece. Apollonian art consisted of a mere reproduction of experience, whereas Dionysian art was emotion and life itself.²¹ Nietzsche recognized the values inherent in a balance between the order and continuity symbolized by Appollo and the primitive forces of Dionysian barbarism.²² Throughout his life, however, Nietzsche seems to have fallen prey to the darker drives of Dionysus;²³ by recognizing this tendency to favor the values represented by Dionysus, Nietzsche's philosophy becomes more comprehensible.

Schopenhauer's influence on Nietzsche dates from Nietzsche's student years at the University of Leipzig. The impart of Schopenhauer's philosophy, initiated when Nietzsche came across Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Idea in a second-hand book store, was almost immeasurable. This discovery occurred in 1865, and for ten years Nietzsche studied Schopenhauer with boundless enthusiasm. He converted many of his friends to the ideas of the great pessimist, and when Nietzsche accepted a

²⁰Barrett, op. cit., p. 159.

²¹Henry L. Mencken, The Philosophy of Frederick Nietzsche (Boston, 1913), p. 67.

²²Ibid., p. 72.

²³Barrett, op. cit., pp. 160-161.

teaching position at the University of Basel in 1869, one of his primary intentions was to spread the philosophy of Schopenhauer.²⁴

The influence of Schopenhauer is evident in Nietzsche's earliest writings. In The Birth of Tragedy (1872) Nietzsche attempted to make known the ideas which Schopenhauer expressed in regard to tragedy. Thoughts Out of Season (1874) includes a section entitled "Schopenhauer as Educator" in which Nietzsche, speaking of his mentor, says

. . . My confidence in him was there at once, and it is the same today as it was nine years ago. I understood him as if he had written for me. Hence, it comes that I have never found a paradox in him.²⁵

Such unbridled adoration characterizes the spirit in which young Nietzsche accepted Schopenhauer's basic concept of the blind, struggling will to live as the primary source from which all phenomena spring.²⁶ The importance of cultural genius is another of Schopenhauer's theories which obviously influenced Nietzsche.²⁷

²⁴A. S. P. Pattison, "The Opinions of Friedrich Nietzsche," Contemporary Review, LXXXIII (May, 1898), pp. 727-728.

²⁵Ibid., p. 728.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Copleston, op. cit., p. 110.

Despite the clearly recognizable effects of the philosophy of Schopenhauer upon Nietzsche, basic differences in the two men's opinions existed from the outset. Nietzsche felt that Schopenhauer's ideal state of existence, characterized by contemplation of beauty and denial of the struggling will, robbed art of its most important source. Involvement in the struggle of the cosmos is essential to a work of art, and esthetic detachment can only detract from the universality and durability of artistic achievement.²⁸ This particular divergence in the attitudes of the two philosophers in regard to the will's role in the creation of art is characteristic of their general difference of opinion concerning the nature of the universal will. Whereas Schopenhauer felt that ". . . the will to live everywhere preys upon itself. . . ." ²⁹ and that the basic will of the cosmos is destructive and should be denied, Nietzsche looked upon the will as something more than a mere struggle for life which is, in Schopenhauer's opinion, ultimately self-defeating. The universal will, according to Nietzsche, is a force which creates instead of destroying:

²⁸Frederich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and Genealogy of Morals, translated by Francis Golffing (Garden City, 1956), pp. 41-42.

²⁹Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea, Vol. I, p. 192.

It strives after power, after more power . . . The will to accumulate force is confined to the phenomenon of life, to nourishment, to procreation . . .³⁰

Staying alive is only one of the many manifestations of the will to power,³¹ which for Nietzsche is the primary force in the cosmos. The Will to Power, the major study on which Nietzsche was still working at the time of his final breakdown in 1889, is the definitive work in which he develops his theory that the original cause of all universal phenomena is the struggle for power.³²

In the final analysis, Nietzsche's all-inclusive will, which includes both good and evil and is creative, is the antithesis of Schopenhauer's negative, destructive will.³³ The pains and pleasures of existence which Schopenhauer sought to escape through contemplation were, for Nietzsche, parts of the essence of life which Nietzsche wholeheartedly accepted.³⁴ Although Nietzsche believed, as did Schopenhauer,

³⁰Frederich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, Vol. II, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici (New York, 1924), pp. 162-163.

³¹Ibid., pp. 165-166.

³²Frederich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, Vol. I, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici (New York, 1924), p. ix.

³³Mary S. Coolidge, "Ethics - Appollonian and Dionysian," Journal of Philosophy, XXVIII (August 14, 1941), pp. 459-460.

³⁴Thomas O'Hara, "Nietzsche and the Crisis," Commonweal, XXIII (March 13, 1936), p. 537.

that the petty man who strives only for material gain lives a meaningless life, Nietzsche had a quite different solution to this dilemma; the aim of a man should be to attain total power. This power, having been attained, would be used to develop culture and art to greater achievements.³⁵ The great man accomplishes great achievements through the power of his will rather than through its denial.³⁶

Nietzsche did not intend to pattern his philosophy after that of his great mentor; instead, Nietzsche sought to unravel the mysteries within himself by studying Schopenhauer.³⁷ In his writings which deal with Schopenhauer, Nietzsche looks upon Schopenhauer more as a symbol of his (Nietzsche's) own conception of man rather than as a source by which to model his works.³⁸ The Dionysian forces of human existence must be bridled by Apollonian discipline in order that culture may have unity and stability.³⁹ This discipline is closely akin to Schopenhauer's idea of denial and contumplation, and Nietzsche realized initially the necessity of such a balance attained through a degree of denial.⁴⁰

³⁵Walter A. Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1950.

³⁶Copleston, op. cit., p. 203.

³⁷Kaufmann, op. cit., p. 134.

³⁸Ibid., p. 141.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 150-151.

⁴⁰Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and Genealogy of Morals, p. 131.

Man, according to Nietzsche, is an undetachable appendage of nature. Spiritual development and physical development are part of the same inexorable struggle found in nature, and the two may not logically be dealt with separately.⁴¹ If an attempt is made to evaluate the spirit separately from the body, the value of the body is much greater than that of the spirit. The spirit is, at best, a minor aspect in the overall concept of the body's being.⁴² The primacy of the biological nature of human existence is a basic tenet in Nietzsche's philosophy.

The biological nature of man is only part of the structure of the universe, but this biological existence is held in common by all living things. The propensity to seek power is the standard characteristic found in men, animals, and plants alike.⁴³ Life itself is no more than a continuous process of conflict, overcoming, and defeat. The only lasting elements in life are the ever-changing "force-establishment processes,"⁴⁴ or the patterns of power seeking.

In a universe such as the one described by Nietzsche, moral laws in the conventional sense are an impossibility.

⁴¹Kaufmann, op. cit., p. 227.

⁴²Frederich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, translated by Thomas Common (New York, 1928), p. 133.

⁴³Nietzsche, The Will to Power, Vol. II, p. 110.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 124.

Nietzsche, in dealing with the idea of moral laws, says:

I take good care not to speak of chemical "laws": to do so savors of morality. It is much more a question of establishing certain relations of power: the stronger becomes master of the weaker, in so far as the latter cannot maintain its degree of independence---here there is no pity, no quarter, and still less, any observance of "law."⁴⁵

Nietzsche's "will to power" seems, at a casual examination, to be a neutral, uncaring force which involves no concepts of good or evil as such. Only strength and weakness appear to be the measurable aspects of such a force; the will to power, however, bears a striking resemblance to the Dionysian forces to which Nietzsche attributed the creation and vitality of life. If, as Nietzsche believed, a superior culture could be achieved through the power of a strong man's will, would it not then be possible to discover a useful purpose in the universal will to power? Nietzsche came to believe that the will might have a purpose, and this purpose might be similar to the most desirable aspirations of culture.⁴⁶

Once Nietzsche had developed the idea that brute power such as he observed in nature was synonymous with the highest aims of society, it was only natural for him to consider the strongest elements of society as virtuous, and the weakest as a detriment to society as well as a hindrance to the strong.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 115.

⁴⁶Kaufmann, op. cit., p. 146.

. . . It is the weaklings . . . who visit disaster upon the strong . . . it is the fear they inspire which forces the strong to be strong and, if need be, terrible. We should encourage that fear in every possible way, for it alone fosters a sound breed of men. It is the diseased who imperil mankind, and not the "beasts of prey." It is the predestined failures and victims who undermine the social structure, who poison our faith in life and our fellowmen.⁴⁷

The irrationality of the universe and the absence of any moral absolutes were the circumstances which Nietzsche felt could be utilized to transform European culture and cure it of its illnesses. Nietzsche's solution to the problems of modern Europe began with a total rejection of all that was humanitarian and currently moral. The moral values of Europe and the Western World were, Nietzsche believed, the fundamental cause of the degeneration and decline of Western Civilization. The weakness of these values lay in the fact that they were false values. Man seemed to have injected these false values into his culture until that culture was rotten to the core. The only solution, according to Nietzsche, would be a complete disavowal of contemporary Christian morality and humanitarianism, and the replacement of these imperfect values with values based on the primal will to power.⁴⁸

Only by a total "transvaluation of values," as Nietzsche termed this proposed reversal, could Western man overcome the

⁴⁷Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and Genealogy of Morals, p. 258.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 297-298.

crisis of his times. Nietzsche held that the most logical way to effect this change would be for each person to discover his own instinctual drives, and base the attitudes of the new order on these individual manifestations of the will to power.⁴⁹

Those in society who are weak are undesirable, because weakness is never creative and never progressive.⁵⁰ The transvaluation of values is a necessity if civilization is to be saved. This is true because the uncreative and regressive weaklings have gained control of modern society.⁵¹ Only through the transvaluation of values can society obtain the proper environment in which a new type of man may emerge, a man who would be ". . . colder, harder, less cautious and . . . would rather lie than tell the truth. . . ." ⁵² A complete absence of principles is a necessity for such a man, who, as a member of a new ruling elite, will dictate laws to society.⁵³ This strong new being, whose task it will be to deliver the law to mankind, will be

. . . such a monster of strength, that he craves
for a monstrous task . . . and rid of all bonds . . .

⁴⁹Eric Voeglin, "Nietzsche, the Crisis, and the War," Journal of Politics, VI (May, 1944), p. 185.

⁵⁰Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, p. 228.

⁵¹Nietzsche, The Will to Power, Vol. II, p. 303.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 336-367.

⁵³Ibid., p. 378.

(it is) he who determines values and leads the will of millenniums :⁵⁴ . Not "mankind," but superman is the goal.⁵⁴

Such was Nietzsche's panacea for the ailments of nineteenth century Europe.

Nietzsche's denunciation of Christianity is a logical expression of his general contempt for everything altruistic, humanitarian, charitable, and traditionally moral in Western culture. This anti-Christian facet of Nietzsche's philosophy is a re-occurring theme in his various works, and as such should be recognized as vital to his philosophy; however, in that this doctrine alone had no direct importance on the development of philosophic irrationalism, it need not be emphasized within this given context.

Nietzsche's influence on European letters of the nineteenth century is undeniable, and many of his theories contributed to the general trend of thought which made fascism more palatable to the European mind; Nietzsche had little if any direct influence on National Socialism in Germany,⁵⁵ but his influence on Italian Fascism was both secondary and immediate. The direct influence of Nietzsche's works upon Italian Fascism will be dealt with in Chapter IV, and Nietzsche's

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 385-387.

⁵⁵William Grenzmann, "Nietzsche and National Socialism," The Third Reich (New York, 1955), p. 217.

secondary influence on that movement will be traced in both Chapter III and Chapter IV.

One writer asserts that the original purpose of early philosophical irrationalism was to alert man to the dangers of mass society by arguing that individualism is heroic. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, according to this theory, sought to rescue man from a "slave society."⁵⁶ Certainly it is true that Nietzsche sought to make European man aware that, as Alfred Baeumler said:

. . . Europe has been living under pressure . . . she had been looking for something but could not find it: a form of life, a lost unity, a certainty in existence . . . The inhabitants of Europe live in the midst of countless uncertainties and countless contradictions. Each man tries to work out his own solution . . . Political and social problems appear; no one is capable of mastering them; no one knows what course to steer.⁵⁷

In his desire to call attention to these problems, Nietzsche pointed out the darkness and irrationality which is part of each human soul. If men had read Nietzsche solely to understand this paradox, they could have benefited immensely. According to Karl Jaspers, Nietzsche's message is vital to an understanding of the strange dichotomy between good and evil which exists in modern man.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Irving Louis Horowitz, Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason (New York, 1961), p. 151.

⁵⁷Alfred Baeumler, in Grenzmann, op. cit., p. 218.

⁵⁸Karl Jaspers, "Nietzsche and the Present," Partisan Review, XIX (January-February, 1952), pp. 29-30.

Nietzsche's artistic temperament, characterized by irresponsibility, prevented him from infusing his works with sound social and political conclusions. This led to the literal interpretations of his works as exhortations to violence, and his description of the need for moral reevaluation contributed to later movements which destroyed moral values and left nothing in their place.⁵⁹ The misinterpretations of Nietzsche's ideas helped create an atmosphere in which fascism could flourish.⁶⁰ The political tragedy of the twentieth century was aided immensely by the tendency of the European intelligentsia to dwell on the helplessness of man in an irrational universe.⁶¹ Nietzsche's influence on this attitude was immense, and certain aspects of this direct influence will be dealt with in the following chapter.

⁵⁹Bowle, op. cit., p. 381.

⁶⁰Spearman, op. cit., pp. 147-149.

⁶¹Hoffer, op. cit., pp. 29 and 73.

CHAPTER III.

PHILOSOPHICAL IRRATIONALISM AND FRENCH RADICALISM

The intellectual clarity which had once been the primary characteristic of French thought became clouded in the aftermath of the French Revolution. An intense patriotism which culminated with the Age of Napoleon sounded the death knell to the eighteenth century Enlightenment in France.¹ The period following the Napoleonic Wars marked the beginning of a decline in the vitality and intellectual leadership of France among the nations of Europe.² This decline was accelerated after 1870 as France continued to suffer defeats on the fields of battle and continued to lose prestige.³ The failure of the ideals of the Revolution and the other subsequent national defeats could result only in disillusionment and despair within France.

¹Roger Soltau, French Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1959), p. XXIV.

²John B. Wolfe, "The Elan Vital of France: A Problem in Historical Perspective," Modern France, Edited by Edward M. Earl (Princeton, 1951), p. 21.

³Ibid., p. 30.

Although the French nation made a rapid material recovery from its defeat at the hands of Prussia in 1870-1871, the attitude of the French intelligentsia underwent a marked change during the years following the war. Vestiges of the former idealism rapidly disappeared, and the German military victory was accompanied by a period during which the German influence upon French letters and scholasticism was quite pronounced.⁴ A curious paradox developed in that the German xenophobia which was imported to France during the period aided the development of a fiercely nationalistic mood within France in the years to come.⁵ French intellectualism was molded into a nationalistic pattern, and other peculiarly German ideas and institutions found their way into the intellectual community of France.⁶

During the period of German influence the writings of Frederich Nietzsche came into prominence among French scholars. Nietzsche was perhaps the most romantic German writer of the time, and his works had a tremendous appeal outside of Germany.⁷ Although much of Nietzsche's work was fragmented and devoid

⁴Jaques Chevalier, Henri Bergson (New York, 1928), p. 3.

⁵Julien Benda, The Treason of the Intellectuals (New York, 1928), pp. 57-58.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Remy de Gourmont, "A French View of 'Kultur'," The New Republic, II (January-February, 1915), 213-214.

of restraint,⁸ he was accepted enthusiastically by many French writers of the period. This ready acceptance may be attributed to the fact that the classical tradition of discipline in French letters was in a serious state of decline when Nietzsche's ideas began to attract attention.⁹ Nietzsche's irrationality seemed to appeal to the sense of despair which plagued the intelligentsia of France.

While the philosophies of irrationalism were being introduced into France, dissatisfaction with the established order was mounting. In addition to the failure of the ideals of the Revolution, the failure of the nation's armies, and the indecision of the French intelligentsia, the failure of various attempts at socialistic reform left another segment of the population full of disillusionment and despair. After the defeat of the Paris Commune, radicals of the left began to abandon the various socialist ideologies which had not resulted in the desired improvement of society.¹⁰ This development represented still another source which added fuel to the fires of social and intellectual unrest in nineteenth century France.

⁸Karl Jaspers, "Nietzsche and the Present," Partisan Review, XIX (March 27, 1952), 20.

⁹Benda, op. cit., pp. 172-173.

¹⁰Irving Louis Horowitz, Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason (New York, 1961), p. 183.

The opposition to the Third Republic which grew increasingly stronger in the later years of the nineteenth century and lasted well into the twentieth century was a result of the several causes which have been briefly mentioned. This revolt was both social and intellectual, and the social disorder was reflected by strong intellectual dissent, which in turn paved the way for greater social unrest. It was within this climate of social and intellectual upheaval, characterized by the influence of German letters, that the philosophy of Henri Bergson developed and came into prominence; Bergson's philosophy and its appeal is more readily understandable if observed within the context of conditions in the France of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Henri Bergson may be considered as one of the primary transmitters of philosophical irrationalism from Germany to France. Bergson held in common with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche the theory of a driving life force as the sole source of power within the universe. Bergson developed and refined this general concept within the framework of the irrationalist school, and he added potent innovations to the theories of the Lebensphilosophie. A close relationship exists between the individual philosophies of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Bergson. The trend within the body of philosophical irrationalism was developed substantially enough through Bergson to allow him to be considered as a most influential figure in the relationship between philosophical irrationalism and the violent,

anti-Revolutionary movements which took place in nineteenth century France.¹¹ The similarity between several of the most important irrationalist concepts of Bergson and the doctrines of fascism are quite apparent, and a familiarity with Bergson's philosophy is essential to an understanding of the process whereby fascism became palatable to the intelligentsia of both France and of Europe as a whole.

Perhaps the most significant Bergsonian concept which later became a part of fascist doctrine was that of the superiority of instinct over intelligence. This idea is the central theme of Bergson's philosophy.¹² Bergson reiterates the superiority of instinctive action over and over within his various works. This evaluation of instinct and intuition is the source from which most of the other Bergsonian concepts with political significance developed. According to Bergson, instinct and intelligence had a common origin within the evolutionary process, but they later followed divergent paths of development until they became two different (although inseparable) qualities. Instinct and intelligence are not the same, but they are interwoven and intermingled to a high degree of complexity. They work together and complement each other within a living organism, and both are necessary for the

¹¹Chester C. Maxey, Political Philosophies (New York, 1948), p. 365.

¹²William M. McGovern, From Luther to Hitler (Cambridge, 1941), p. 404.

proper functioning of the organism.¹³

Although both instinct and intelligence are necessary components of the proper functioning of a living organism, instinct is, according to Bergson, necessarily superior to intellect. Instinct is more highly specialized than intelligence, and it allows an organism to perform highly complex functions within the life process; intelligence, on the other hand, is "imperfect" and "troublesome to handle."¹⁴ The superiority of instinct is found in the fact that intelligence is able to deal only with the part of existence which is static or inert.¹⁵ Life consists of vital action and movement, and it is precisely this movement which the intellect is unable to deal with.¹⁶ "The intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life."¹⁷ Instinct alone has the capability for coping with the constant flux and flow of life.¹⁸

In a manner similar to Schopenhauer, Bergson emphasized the reaction of the living body to matter and the subsequent

¹³Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution (New York, 1911), pp. 135-136.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 165.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

action which follows, as an example of the driving life force which results in matter being moved in the universe.¹⁹

Motivated by an instinctive drive, the living body determines the degree to which it will change its environment to fulfill its needs,²⁰ The instinct and its function in driving the body to action are the forces behind animal and human existence. Spiritual values exist only in a material sense, relative to matter and the action involved between moving bodies and matter:

Spirit borrows from matter the perceptions on which it feeds, and restores them to matter in the form of movements which it has stamped with its own freedom.²¹

Bergson's philosophy occupies a logical role in the development of philosophical irrationalism. The universal will of Schopenhauer and the will to power of Nietzsche are natural forerunners of Bergson's description of instinct as the only agent capable of dealing with a universe which is in a constant state of flux. Bergson's place is an important one in the overall protest against reason which much of the intelligentsia of Europe was expressing.²² Within the philosophy of Bergson the general concepts of philosophical irrationalism were brought into a sharper focus, and his lucid style illuminates the similarity between these concepts and the doctrines

¹⁹Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory (London, 1911), pp. 4-5.

²⁰Ibid., p. 233. ²¹Ibid., p. 332.

²²Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy (New York, 1926), p.464.

of fascism. Bergson's attitude toward the intellect is that it is almost useless as compared to instinct or intuition; political theorist William Ebenstein has written that

The mistrust of reason is perhaps the most significant trait of fascism. Fascism . . . is frankly anti-rationalist, distrusting reason in human affairs and stressing the irrational, sentimental, uncontrollable elements of man.²³

The denial of reason undertaken by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and especially the influential Bergson is identical to the primary tenet of fascism.

The mutual distrust of the intellect held by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Bergson naturally resulted in all three philosophers placing a high value on instinctive action. The distance from instinctive action to violence is very short; violence, another of the basic doctrines of fascism,²⁴ has often been masked as healthy "action" within totalitarian regimes. When prestigious philosophers placed a high value on pure action unadulterated by reason, the rationalization of violence by fascism spokesmen was facilitated. Alfredo Rocco, a prominent ideological spokesman in the Mussolini regime, stated that fascism was and should continue to be

²³William Ebenstein, Today's Isms (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1954), p. 105.

²⁴Ibid., p. 106.

"action," and the ". . . unconscious reawakening of our profoundist . . . instinct. . ." ²⁵

Fascist doctrines almost always include the incorporation of a myth into the fascism program, a tendency exemplified by Mussolini's statements on the necessity of the Imperial Roman Myth to sustain the Italian people. ²⁶ The necessity of myths was recognized by Bergson, who wrote that while man is supposed to possess reason, ". . . he is the only creature to pin its existence on things unreasonable." ²⁷ In fact, Bergson observed that

. . . the most crass superstition has . . . long been a universal fact. We find it still survives. We find in the past, we find today, human societies with neither science nor art nor philosophy. But there has never been a society without religion. ²⁸

Bergson used the term religion in a general sense, equating it with myth and superstition. Bergson's evaluation of the myth, later re-emphasized by Georges Sorel, Vilfredo Pareto, and other irrationalists, eventually found its way into the ideology of fascism.

²⁵ Alfredo Rocco, excerpts from The Political Doctrine of Fascism, reprinted in Communism, Fascism, and Democracy, edited by Carl Cohen (New York, 1963), p. 335.

²⁶ Benito Mussolini, My Autobiography, translated by Richard Washburn Child (New York, 1928), p. 241.

²⁷ Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion (Garden City, New York, 1954), p. 102.

²⁸ Ibid.

Bergson's influence upon the European intelligentsia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is undeniable. Bertrand Russell has written that Bergson is the greatest French philosopher of the twentieth century,²⁹ and Dr. G. R. Dodson has stated that Bergson was the greatest thinker in the first part of the twentieth century.³⁰ In a book analyzing the theories of Sorel, Irving L. Horowitz observes that "Bergson, the talk of the stylish cafes, became the toast of the pre-war disenchanted and self-styled alienated intellectuals."³¹ By appealing to this type of individual, Bergson inspired many of the intellectual spokesmen of syndicalism and totalitarian autocracy, including Benito Mussolini.³²

The thought process which originated with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and to which Bergson contributed a great deal helped make possible the totalitarian violence of fascism.³³ The irrational school, of which Bergson was an important member, succeeded in causing a generation to abandon the simplistic dogmas of its forebears; the generation influenced by the

²⁹Bertrand Russell, The History of Western Philosophy (New York, 1945), p. 791.

³⁰George R. Dodson, Bergson and the Modern Spirit (Boston, 1913), p. 18.

³¹Horowitz, op. cit., p. 40.

³²McGovern, op. cit., p. 408.

³³John Bowle, Politics and Opinion in the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1954), p. 399.

irrationalists struck out on a revolutionary path in philosophy and history.³⁴ The fact that many of the leading philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contributed heavily to the doctrines of violence, intuitive action, moral relativity, and anti-intellectualism offers at least a partial explanation for the acceptance of fascism by the large part of European intelligentsia; this is especially applicable in the case of nations such as France and Italy whose social and intellectual fabric was fraught with general unrest, a disillusionment with traditional values, and an overall mood of frustration and despair. The conditions for upheaval were certainly present; the process would be consummated when nihilistic despair was translated into violent political action.

Violent political action was the primary concern of Georges Sorel. Born in 1847, Sorel was educated at the Ecole des Chaussées. Sorel made his living as an engineer and did not become interested in social science until he was forty-five years old.³⁵ He began to fall under the influence of Bergson around 1889.³⁶ Sorel frequented the Collège de France; there, along with scholars from all over Europe, he

³⁴Fritz Stern, The Politics of Cultural Despair (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1961), p. 124.

³⁵Sigmund Neumann, Permanent Revolution (New York, 1942), pp. 163-164.

³⁶Bowle, Op. cit., p. 400.

listened avidly to the lectures of Bergson.³⁷ Sorel was strongly influenced by Bergson's concept of the vital, instinctive life force,³⁸ and much of the historical and psychological basis of Sorel's political theory is contingent to a view of human existence which he developed under the influence of Bergson's teachings.³⁹

Sorel had been a Marxist before he felt the influence of Bergson, but as the years progressed Sorel's political theories moved farther to the right.⁴⁰ He abandoned Marxism and traditional socialism and developed his own theory of proletarian revolution which was known as the "New School of Syndicalism."⁴¹ Under this theory of syndicalism or labor unionism, the productive capacity of industry would be expanded by a complete absence of government restriction, the government having been destroyed by the violent revolution of the proletariat. The producers and manufacturers would govern themselves in conjunction with the syndicates or unions.⁴² Within this brief summary of Sorel's political theory the germs of fascism are evident, especially in regard to the use

³⁷Horowitz, op. cit. , p. 39.

³⁸Ibid., p. 40.

³⁹Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁰Michael Curtis, Three Against the Third Republic (Princeton, 1959), p. 51.

⁴¹Bowle, op. cit., p. 400.

⁴²Georges Sorel, Reflections on Violence (Glencoe, Illinois, 1950), p. 81.

of violence for political purposes and the substitution of selfcontrol for parliamentary control of industry.⁴³ A closer relationship will become clear upon a more detailed examination of Sorel's writings. After the creation of his theory of syndicalism, Sorel became an advocate of nationalism and monarchism,⁴⁴ thereby blending the fascistic tendencies toward imperialism and elitism into his own political theory.

Keeping in mind the steady movement of Sorel's political theories to the right, the influence of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Bergson upon Sorel must be considered. These three irrationalists were each an important factor in the development of Sorel's ideas;⁴⁵ in fact, Sorel's political theory would probably have taken a different turn had he not been deeply influenced by the writings of Nietzsche.⁴⁶ Sorel believed with Nietzsche that nineteenth century Europe had been corrupted by humanitarianism, and that the re-institution of the heroic pagan values of violence and bloodshed was necessary for Europe to recover its lost vitality.⁴⁷ Sorel was

⁴³Neumann, op. cit., p. 138.

⁴⁴Curtis, op. cit., p. 51.

⁴⁵Bowle, op. cit., p. 401.

⁴⁶Diana Spearman, Modern Dictatorship (New York, 1939), p. 146.

⁴⁷Sorel, op. cit., p. 106.

at one with Nietzsche in describing parliamentary government as a contributor to the decadence and corruption of the European middle class culture.⁴⁸ Sorel became the primary heir to Nietzsche and Bergson in the attack on intellectualism.⁴⁹ Georges Sorel is an integral member of the school of philosophical irrationalism. His philosophy is especially significant in that it represents the adoption of irrational ideas into the framework of an essentially political philosophy.

Sorel's syndicalism would necessarily be established by violent means. True to his mentor Nietzsche, Sorel believed that violence was the only solution to the decadence of Europe:

Proletarian violence not only makes the future revolution certain, but it also seems to be the only means by which the European nations--presently stupefied by humanitarianism--can recover their former energy. This kind of violence compels capitalism to restrict its attention solely to its material role and tends to restore to it the war-like qualities which it formerly possessed.⁵⁰

The ultimate aim of the proletarian revolution is the over-

⁴⁸Ibid, pp. 94-95.

⁴⁹Curtis, op. cit., p. 127.

⁵⁰Sorel, op. cit., p. 106.

throw of the state,⁵¹ the state which to Sorel represented the political and economic sources of the woes of European man.

The method by which syndicalist violence should be put into effect is the technique of the general strike. Sorel recognized the fact that unionists had been granted concessions as a result of violent clashes with the police during large strikes. He felt that the logical corollary to this state of affairs was to increase the strikers' violence to a large enough scale that the overthrow of the state would be obtained.⁵² Sorel felt that the courage and spirit of the workers, coupled with the cowardice of the bourgeoisie, rendered the success of the final syndicalist revolution inevitable.⁵³

Sorel's theory of the myth of the general strike is a most important contribution to the development of fascist ideology. He gives credit to Bergson for being part of the source of his own concept of the myth.⁵⁴ The myth is essential to syndicalism because it gives the movement ". . . high moral value and . . . great sincerity."⁵⁵ Victory is brought about

⁵¹Ibid., p. 135.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 90-91.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 53.

by the myth because ". . . men who are participating in a great social movement always picture their coming action as a battle in which their cause is certain to triumph."⁵⁶

Part of the myth's great value lies in its irrefutability; the critic of the myth's validity is answered by the refusal of the believer in the myth to enter into any discussion of that validity.⁵⁷ The myth is also irrefutable because of its mass nature:

A myth cannot be refuted because it is, at bottom, identifiable with the convictions of a group, being the expression of those convictions in the language of movement; and it is, in consequence, unanalyzable into parts which could be placed on the plane of historical description.⁵⁸

Because of these qualities which a myth possesses, it is essential to the success of the syndicalist revolution:

As long as there are no myths accepted by the masses, one may go on talking of revolts indefinitely, without ever provoking any revolutionary movement . . . the idea of the general strike (is) the only idea that could have any value as a motive force . . . revolutionary myths which exist at the present time are . . . the feelings and ideas of the masses preparing to enter into a decisive struggle; the myths are not descriptions of things, but are expressions of a determination to act.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 50.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 58.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 57.

Sorel cites Bergson's evaluation of instinct as being superior to intellect as an excellent example of the process by which a myth is used to assure the success of a revolutionary movement. The myth of the general strike is to be believed in rather than questioned. While the movement as a whole might suffer from an intellectual analysis of its several aims, no analysis is possible when all of the aims and aspirations are concentrated into one general concept-- the myth of the general strike, a violent day of revolution in which the existing order will be overthrown completely. The myth assures the success of its aims by remaining unitary and thereby free from critical examination.⁶⁰

Sorel neglected to establish a concrete plan for a society in which the victory of the revolution had come about. His comments on this subject were quite vague, and only a very general scheme is envisioned. The new syndicalist society would come into existence after the success of the revolution. It would be characterized by the absence of those governmental restraints which had hampered individual freedom within the old order. The freedom of workers, ownership of property, and the conduct of economic transactions would not be troubled by parliamentary governmental oppression as they had been. The desirability of this state of affairs should be evident in view of the achievements of capitalism. "The

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 140.

capitalist economic system has thrown full light on the extraordinary power of the individual unaided by the state. . ."⁶¹ The violent abolition of parliamentary government would allow the individual to reach his greatest possible potential. The labor-management relationship which existed within the traditional corporate structure would be destroyed, and the leaders of syndicates could serve together with their employers on mixed commissions to solve industrial problems.⁶² Sorel was purposely vague about the exact manner in which society would be ordered in the aftermath of a successful revolution; he felt that arguing about the future would detract from the present strength of the myth of the general strike.⁶³ Only the myth and the struggle itself had any value for Sorel:

The myth must be judged as a means of acting on the present; any attempt to discuss how far it can be taken literally as future history is devoid of sense. It is the myth in its entirety which is alone important. . . .⁶⁴

Sorel held great faith in Nietzsche's concept of the superman, and he extended the theory by stating that the

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 127.

⁶² Ibid., p. 81.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 144-145.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 144.

superior man already existed in the twentieth century. Sorel felt that the superman was best exemplified by the American captains of industry, and also by the pioneers of the American Frontier. Men such as Andrew Carnegie and Theodore Roosevelt, who disdained luxury and found value in the rough and tumble struggle of life, were in Sorel's view the true masters of mankind. Men of this type and this type only were capable of leading a Sorelian political movement. "Revolutionary syndicalism would be impossible if the world of the workers were under the influence of . . . a morality of the weak."⁶⁵

The political theory of Georges Sorel is strikingly similar to the fascist movements which Sorel lived to observe before his death in 1922. Sorel's advocacy of intuitive action, political violence, elitism, and the use of a myth represent ideas stemming from philosophical irrationalism congruent to fascism. All of these ideas were emphasized in the culmination of irrationalism which took place in the political theory of Sorel, and they were also evident in the budding reactionary movements which developed in France and Italy during the last two decades of Sorel's life.

Sorel's political theory marks the final point at which philosophical irrationalism was transformed into violent political action. Ideas which had been purely speculative began to become programmatic. Teachers, clergymen, news-

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 264.

papermen, and other members of the European intelligentsia began to take the irrationalists' ideas and put these ideas to practical political use. Ideas and theories were molded into magazine articles, newspaper articles, civic criticism, passionate speeches, slogans on posters, and all of the other communicative paraphernalia within the political process.⁶⁶ Many of the members of the European intelligentsia underwent a curious change and became purveyors of fascism; they became obsessed with political emotions never before dealt with by their professions and classes. Many of the intelligentsia scorned tradition and order while demanding immediate political action to cure the ills of their society.⁶⁷ These people integrated their political beliefs into their own individual scholarly work;⁶⁸ they became less concerned with the immediate success of their own race or nation.⁶⁹ Spiritual values were denounced, and an emphasis was placed upon practical values with an end of immediate material results in sight.⁷⁰ Many members of the European intelligentsia favored the use of force rather than reason to regain what they felt were the

⁶⁶Henry S. Kariel, In Search of Authority (Glencoe, Illinois, 1964), p. 66.

⁶⁷Benda, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 67.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 79.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 104-105

lost values of a long past culture.⁷¹ Now that a generation of social and intellectual leaders had decided to apply these ideas to their own individual roles in the political process, violent political action became a way of life.

The disillusionment and despair which had continued to grow in France during the nineteenth century exploded into political violence around the fin de siècle. Georges Sorel provided some of the intellectual leadership of the Confédération Générale du Travail (C. G. T.), which was the most important of the French syndicalist movements.⁷² Sorel voiced approval of the power which the C. G. T. had gained through the use of violence,⁷³ and he also began to take an interest in the syndicalist movement in Italy. Speaking of a promising revolutionary leader in Italy, Sorel said

. . . You will perhaps see him one day at the head of a sacred battalion, saluting with his epee the Italian banner. He is an Italian of the fifteenth century, a condottiere. People do not know it yet, but he is the only energetic man capable of redressing the weaknesses of government.⁷⁴

⁷¹Ibid., p. 117.

⁷²Scott H. Lytle, "Georges Sorel: Apostle of Fanaticism," Modern France, edited by Edward M. Earl (Princeton, 1951), p. 285.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 283-284.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 288 (citation in Lytle of an article by Sorel).

This man, who would soon take a reciprocal interest in Sorel and his other kindred spirits of violence within the revolutionary movements in France, was Benito Mussolini.⁷⁵

The syndicalist theories of Sorel eventually came to have a greater influence on Italian Fascism than they had in Sorel's own country.⁷⁶

The most practical political contributions which French irrationalism made to Italian Fascism were represented by the violent right-wing groups of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The most significant of these reactionary organizations was the Action Française. The Action Française, led by the monarchist writer Charles Maurras, opposed representative democracy and advocated absolutism. This group drew together within France various supporters and advocates of nationalism, extreme conservatism, and authoritarianism, and it later led to the development of overtly fascist organizations.⁷⁷ The Action Française represents the first major political organization in which the precepts of philosophical irrationalism were transformed into violent political action. Terrorist squads of the Action Française assaulted various individuals and groups of political

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Bowle, op. cit., p. 399.

⁷⁷ R. A. Schermerhorn, "French Political Thought," Twentieth Century Political Thought, edited by Joseph S. Roucek, (New York, 1946), pp. 446-447.

interests opposed to its own reactionary beliefs, and these hooligans also waged a violent campaign against the existing social and governmental order.⁷⁸

A special significance should be attached to the fact that the origin of the Action Française may be traced to a group of intellectuals and members of the French Academy who wished to achieve political ends by using violent means.⁷⁹ Spokesmen for the Action Française stated the intellectual debt of the group to Georges Sorel, and Sorel reciprocated by working with the organization for several years following the turn of the century.⁸⁰ The Action Française was sympathetic to the ideas of Nietzsche, and the group's leader, Maurras, launched an attack in word and deed on the same Christian morality which had been a favorite target for Nietzsche.⁸¹ The Action Française is an excellent study of the violent reaction by an intelligentsia which despairs over the decadence of its nation's social and political order. The same type of reaction was to take place a short time later in Italy on a much larger scale.

The intellectual relationship between Action Française and Italian Fascism was direct and simple. The Italian

⁷⁸Soltau, op. cit., p. 388.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 386-387.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 462.

⁸¹Stern, op. cit., p. 288.

Nationalist Party began as a disenchanted group of intellectuals who opposed democracy⁸² and favored authoritarian imperialism.⁸³ The Nationalist Party slavishly followed the example set by Charles Maurras and the Action Francaise.⁸⁴ The Nationalist Party eventually merged with the Italian Fascist Party, and most of the subsequent Fascist Party doctrine was originated by former members of the Nationalist Party.⁸⁵ When the Fascist Party spoke to the public in the terms of this originally French doctrine, the public had already been exposed to the irrational ideas. Several editions of Sorel's Reflections on Violence had been published in Italy, and articles by Sorel had been widely published in the newspapers and magazines of Italy.⁸⁶ One of the most interested readers of Sorel's works had been Benito Mussolini, a pupil whom Sorel had recognized as a potential purveyor of political violence.⁸⁷

⁸² Joseph Rossi, "Pre-Fascist Italian Political Thought," Twentieth Century Political Thought, edited by Joseph S. Roucek (New York, 1946), p. 569.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 571.

⁸⁴ John A. Abbo, Political Thought: Men and Ideas (Westminster, Maryland, 1960), p. 373.

⁸⁵ Rossi, op. cit., p. 568.

⁸⁶ Abbo, op. cit., p. 375.

⁸⁷ Spearman, op. cit., p. 147.

CHAPTER IV

PHILOSOPHICAL IRRATIONALISM AND ITALIAN FASCISM

The influence of philosophical irrationalism upon Benito Mussolini was evident from the earliest years of his readings and studies. When he was in his early twenties, Mussolini read avidly from the works of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Sorel.¹ The works of Karl Marx were also an influence on the young Mussolini,² but the influence of Marx will not be dealt with in this study, as Marx is not a member of the irrational school of thought. One must remember from the outset that all of Mussolini's readings served only to enhance his own pragmatic theories,³ and that Mussolini valued action and experience more than doctrine;⁴ nevertheless, the trend of Mussolini's thoughts and actions clearly shows that the greater part of whatever influence books and teachings had upon him falls within the realm of philosophical irrationalism.

¹Christopher Hibbert, II Duce (Boston, Toronto, 1962), p. 9.

²Chester C. Maxey, Political Philosophies (New York, 1948), p. 639.

³Herman Finer, Mussolini's Italy (London, 1935), p. 21.

⁴Benito Mussolini, My Autobiography, translated by Richard Washburn Child (New York, 1928), p. 22.

Mussolini derived from the pessimistic philosophy of Schopenhauer and the irrational theories of Nietzsche and Sorel the basic idea that a human life as such has no sacred value. This evaluation of human existence was expressed by the Fascist theorist Giovanni Gentile, and Mussolini heartily concurred with his spokesman.⁵ With this general attitude toward humanity, the more complex doctrines of Fascism attained greater palatability for Mussolini and his generation of Italians.

The influence of Nietzsche on Mussolini is quite obvious. Certain passages from the two men's writings are almost interchangeable. Nietzsche's ideas were perverted by Mussolini, and the Italian dictator used Nietzsche's terminology more than he used the true essence of Nietzsche's thoughts; however, the general influence of the German philosopher on Fascism remains apparent. In general, Nietzsche's concepts of the transvaluation of values, the eternal struggle for power, the moral value of violence, elitism, and the supremacy of the superman were the most important aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy that influenced Mussolini.

Philosophical irrationalism in France contributed a great deal to the ideology of Fascism. Bergson's evaluation of the intellect as subservient to the unconscious drives of instinct was part of the basis for the political theories of

⁵Finer, op. cit., p. 172.

Sorel,⁶ and Mussolini once stated that Sorel was the strongest influence on his theories of Fascism.⁷ Il Duce was obviously influenced by Sorel's concept of the myth as a political expedient. Sorel's emphasis on the use of violence was another source of Mussolini's doctrines. Mussolini borrowed the articulate terminology of Sorel to describe his own system of Fascist terror, and it served to give this terror a facade of respectability.⁸

The pragmatism of William James, often associated with philosophical irrationalism in Europe, is another of the sources which Mussolini himself admitted as having influenced his early thought.⁹ While many interesting possibilities exist in regard to an investigation of the influence of the American pragmatist upon Mussolini, the topic is not pertinent within the context of philosophical irrationalism as a phenomenon peculiar to Continental Europe; James was not involved in the European despair and discontent which was interwoven with philosophical irrationalism.

⁶George Sabine, A History of Political Theory (New York, 1937), pp. 893-894.

⁷James H. Meisel, "A Premature Fascist?--Sorel and Mussolini," Western Political Quarterly, III (March, 1950), 14.

⁸Ibid., p. 15.

⁹William K. Stewart, "The Mentors of Mussolini," American Political Science Review, XXII (November, 1928), 845.

In general, Mussolini's thinking was greatly influenced by the wave of irrationalism which had swept the European intelligentsia of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This fact is important in two respects. Primarily, an understanding of philosophical irrationalism provides an opportunity for an insight into Mussolini's thoughts. Many of the irrational concepts were incorporated in toto into the Fascist ideology. In addition to this, philosophical irrationalism in its several manifestations had imbued the post-World War generation with a detestation of the values of the current European order, and had originated new possibilities for transforming these values into something more worthwhile.¹⁰ This gave Mussolini a whole generation of dissatisfied and disillusioned Italians to mold into Fascists, and it also afforded him the advantage of speaking to this culture in terms which it already understood and held faith in.

The development of philosophical irrationalism in Continental Europe permeated philosophy and political thought in Italy. Responsible Hegelianism, represented in Italy by the venerable Benedetto Croce, was a polemical anathema to any philosophy espousing myths and the blind struggle for power as determinents in the course of history.¹¹ Mussolini and

¹⁰Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York, 1951), pp. 320-321.

¹¹Sabine, op. cit., p. 897 and p. 899.

his spokesmen used Hegelian terminology as an ad hoc rationalization for totalitarian terror.¹² The irrational theories of action, elitism, and instinctual knowledge are more philosophically congruent with Fascist thought, and that part of Italy's intelligentsia which acknowledged this symmetry were at least on firmer ground philosophically than the Fascist Hegelians. The segment of Italy's scholarly community which contributed to the irrational doctrines of Fascism was inexorably linked in both thought and action to the politics of Benito Mussolini. Several Italian men of letters owed a debt to philosophical irrationalism, and some of these scholars' theories were woven into the attitudes of Mussolini. This connection between the irrationalism of part of Italy's intelligentsia and the career of Il Duce represents yet another link in the chain of thought reaching from philosophical irrationalism in Continental Europe to the dictatorial terror of Italian Fascism.

Reactionary authoritarianism had been promoted by many Italian intellectuals around the turn of the century. The Nationalist Party was founded by intellectuals of this political posture. The Nationalist Party favored imperialism and opposed democratic representative government. Among the members of this party were the philosopher Alfredo Rocco and

¹²Ibid., p. 899.

the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio. Rocco later became a prominent Fascist spokesman. D'Annunzio was the most renowned literary figure in Italy.¹³ This reactionary poet fed the Fascist myth with exaggerated expressions of the glories of ancient Rome and incorrect racial doctrines concerning the origin of the Italian people.¹⁴ D'Annunzio became a popular rabble-rouser in the growth of Italian extremism, and in 1919 he was joined by Mussolini in the loosely-knit Nationalistic movement which solidified into the Fascist Party.¹⁵

Prior to his active participation in the Fascist drive to power, Mussolini traveled and studied in Switzerland. The future dictator, still in his early twenties, attended lectures given at Lausanne by the respected social economist Vilfredo Pareto.¹⁶ Pareto's social theories had strong overtones of irrationalism, and his primary emphasis was on the preponderance of irrational human behavior within the political process. This irrational conduct, according to Pareto, manifests itself in various "residues" such as traditional mores, folkways, political ideologies, and established social values.

¹³S. William Halperin, Mussolini and Italian Fascism (Princeton, 1964), p. 15.

¹⁴William Bolitho, Italy under Mussolini (New York, 1926), p. 47.

¹⁵Halperin, op. cit., p. 28.

¹⁶Wilhelm Grenzmann, "Nietzsche and National Socialism," The Third Reich, edited by Maurice Baumont, John H. E. Fried, and Edmond Vermiel (New York, 1955), p. 216.

The course of events in any society is characterized by constant conflict, and order is achieved only when an elite governing class exercises control over the irresponsible masses. The elite gains control and exercises power through a combination of force and the use of the "residues" which adopt a mythological character.¹⁷ These theories of Pareto were a strong influence on the youthful Mussolini. He was especially impressed by Pareto's emphasis on the elite as the only body capable of restoring and preserving the social order that incompetent administrators had allowed to disintegrate.¹⁸

Pareto and Sorel shared the ideas of elitism, myths, and the use of force as integral parts of social existence.¹⁹ Mussolini's admitted respect for Sorel as a teacher correlates with the avid interest of Mussolini in the lectures of Pareto. The common irrational theories, especially those of Pareto concerning the use of force for political purposes, made a lasting impression on Mussolini.²⁰ Pareto and Mussolini came to respect each other's ideas in a reciprocal manner. Less than ten years after Mussolini attended Pareto's lectures, the

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁸ Maxey, op. cit., p. 625.

¹⁹ Grenzmann, op. cit., p. 216.

²⁰ Grenzmann, op. cit., p. 216.

renowned social economist was writing articles which lauded Fascism. Mussolini returned this common ideological admiration by appointing Pareto to a seat in the Fascist Senate in 1923.²¹ The respected academician ended his days as an active participant in the totalitarian regime of Mussolini.

Professor Alfredo Rocco's involvement in reactionary and extremist political movements culminated in his role as an important Fascist governmental official and spokesman. Rocco helped found the nationalistic journal Politica which published serious scholarly articles by Nationalistic theorists.²² Rocco was named Under-Secretary of the Treasury by Mussolini in the first Fascist government,²³ and he eventually became the Fascist Minister of Justice.²⁴ In 1925 Rocco delivered an address expressing the basic tenets of Fascism. This initial statement of doctrine formed the basis of the philosophy of Fascism. It was later reiterated and expanded by Il Duce and his other Fascist spokesmen.

Rocco's Fascist Manifesto, entitled The Political Doctrine of Fascism, incorporates the arbitrary ideas of the movement

²¹Finer, op. cit., p. 28.

²²Herbert W. Schneider and Shepard B. Clough, Making Fascists (Chicago, 1929), p. 169.

²³Roy MacGregor-Hastie, The Day of the Lion (New York, 1963), p. 132.

²⁴Schneider and Clough, op. cit., p. 133.

into a single body of thought. This document contains numerous reverberations of philosophical irrationalism, and interwoven with these reverberations are most of the concepts of Italian Fascism. The relationship is so close that the two schools of thought are, in most cases, indistinguishable from each other.

Rocco proclaims the value of emotional and instinctual action which is so reminiscent of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Sorel:

. . . Fascism is, above all else, action and sentiment . . . Were it otherwise, it could not keep up that immense driving force, that renovating power which it now possesses . . . Only because it is feeling and sentiment, only because it is the unconscious reawakening of our profound racial instinct, has it the force to stir the soul of the people . . .²⁵

The biological nature of man's participation in society, a concept emphasized by Nietzsche, Bergson, and Sorel, is used by Rocco as a justification for the subordination of human beings to the growth of the Fascist state. He says that individual men and groups of men are given life by the organic nation, and that the development of the nation results in a greater collective life and growth that transcends the existence of mere individuals. The individual existence has

²⁵ Alfredo Rocco, excerpts from The Political Doctrine of Fascism, reprinted in Communism, Fascism, and Democracy, edited by Carl Cohen (New York, 1963), p. 335.

value only in the contribution which it makes to the life of the organic state.²⁶

The valuation of man as an element that must contribute to the growth of the state culminates in the justification and glorification of war. The survival and improvement of the organic nation require a sacrifice which may be inimical to the interests of an individual. The sacrifice and destruction of individuals in war are necessary for the sustenance of the nation.²⁷

The negation of an individual's worth necessitates the existence of an elite force to govern society. The masses are too involved in their own selfish interests to be trusted with the reins of government. Only a chosen few are capable of ignoring their own interests and devoting their lives to the greater needs of the whole society. There exists in each culture a natural elite which, because of its superior intelligence and cultural background, is capable of administering the governmental functions of a nation. The most important gift of this elite is its ability to decide matters of state through instinct and intuition.²⁸ This theory of elitism is almost identical to that found in the philosophies of Sorel and

²⁶ Ibid., p. 342.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 343.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 345-346.

Pareto, and the members of the theoretical elite bear a striking resemblance to Nietzsche's superman and Schopenhauer's creative genius.

The collective life of the individual, according to Rocco, makes him an active participant in the panorama of Italian history. The individual is sustained by the myth of Imperial Rome. The authority of the state and the primacy of its ends constitute the legacy of Rome. Rome was the greatest and most powerful state in the history of the world, and it maintained its eminence through the sacrifice of its citizens' blood and its citizens' lives. The myth of Imperial Rome is rejuvenated and sustained by Fascism; Rocco admonished the Italian people to honor their heritage:

. . . Fascism . . . was to restore Italian thought in the sphere of political doctrine to its own traditions which are the traditions of Rome . . . after the hour of sacrifice comes the hour of unyielding efforts. To our work, then, fellow countrymen, for the glory of Italy:²⁹

Rocco obviously took heed of the theories of Sorel and Pareto on the necessity of a myth to inspire a people.

Rocco's The Political Doctrine of Fascism reflects the obvious influence of philosophical irrationalism. In this Fascist document are echoes of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, Sorel and Pareto. The concepts of blind, struggling

²⁹Ibid., pp. 348-349.

will as a sustainer of life, the biological nature of man, the value of instinct over the intellect, elitism, and the myth are the same in irrational theory and in Rocco's statement. The Political Doctrine of Fascism is an excellent illustration of the debt which Fascist thought owes to philosophical irrationalism and its primary spokesmen.

The Fascist movement had no dearth of gifted spokesmen for its doctrines. The Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile contributed to the theory and practice of Mussolini's totalitarian ideology. Gentile was educated at the University of Pisa, and he taught at the universities of Palermo, Pisa, Naples, and Rome. Gentile served in several capacities within the Fascist regime, and he was eventually appointed as Minister of Education.³⁰ Gentile was influenced by both Hegel and the irrationalists, and his writings reflect the use of these two philosophies for Fascist propaganda. His Philosophic Basis of Fascism reflects the influence of philosophical irrationalism on the Fascist ideology.

In the Philosophic Basis of Fascism, Gentile elaborated the Fascist concept of the relativity of values. Despite the fact that a given Fascist program might be based on a specific idea or concept, that idea would be abandoned as soon as the

³⁰ David Cooperman and E. V. Walter, Power and Civilization (New York, 1962), p. 260.

need arose. No idea is of lasting significance, and its value is measured only by the degree to which it furthers the Fascist program.³¹ The "transvaluation of values" is exercised when the needs of the Fascist state demand it, according to Gentile.

The value of instinct is greater than that of reason, and this necessarily makes Fascism anti-intellectual. Gentile expresses this anti-intellectualism by saying that Fascism is:

. . . hostile to all science and all philosophy which remain matters of mere fancy or intelligence . . . By virtue of its repugnance for intellectualism, Fascism prefers not to waste time constructing abstract theories about itself. . .³²

There is scant need for intellectualism in a system in which the dictator makes all the decisions for the state on impulse. This is the function of Il Duce; his ideals consist of whatever arbitrary decision he makes at any given moment, and his decisions made instinctively are the supreme law of the nation.³³

The myth of the nation's supremacy causes the individual to be of no value except in his function as an appendage of the Fascist state. He realizes his existence only through

³¹ Giovanni Gentile, excerpts from The Philosophic Basis of Fascism, reprinted in Power and Civilization, edited by David Cooperman and E. V. Walter (New York, 1962), p. 261.

³² Ibid., pp. 261-262.

³³ Ibid., p. 261.

the state, and he is only a consequence of the life and growth of the state. The state controls him and decides for him the course of his life. The individual has no freedom except in his role in the organic state. The state binds him to this position, and in it he lives and dies.³⁴

Gentile's Philosophic Basis of Fascism contains the same irrational overtones found in other Fascist documents; it seems, however, to express more fully the negation of the individual. This negation of the individual became more pronounced as the Fascist government entrenched itself in power, and the irrational base of its ideology was expressed with increasing authority over the individual.

Perhaps the deepest exploration into Fascist ideology was attempted by the Italian philosopher Mario Palmieri in his book The Philosophy of Fascism published in 1936. This work, completed when Italian Fascism had reached a certain degree of maturity, involves a deeper insight into Fascism than most of the other works of Mussolini's spokesmen; it contains, however, the same basic doctrines which bear the stamp of philosophic irrationalism.

Palmieri elaborates the values of the Roman Empire in eloquent language. He says that the legacy of Rome is authority, law, and order, and that Rome must again be the center of civilization which dispenses morality and virtue to the rest

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 262-263.

of the world. This is the historic mission of Imperial Rome, and it must be fulfilled.³⁵

The masses, states Palmieri, are not capable of governing themselves, this being due to the fact that they cannot understand ". . . the ultimate reality of the universe . . . which does not reveal itself indiscriminately. . . ." ³⁶ This "ultimate reality" may only be understood by a superior leader. Palmieri describes the leader in colorful language:

. . . the divine essence of the hero . . . of the soul . . . is in a more direct, a more immediate relationship with the fountain-head of all knowledge, all wisdom, all love. . . .³⁷

Man has wandered astray for many centuries, and civilization has seen darkness due to the lack of authority, law, and order. Despite this disorientation of mankind, the ideas and moral values of Rome have continued to exist. It is through dictatorial Fascism that Imperial Rome will be reborn and end the woes of humanity; in fact, ". . . Fascism may finally furnish man with the long sought solution to the riddle of life."³⁸

³⁵ Mario Palmieri, excerpts from The Philosophy of Fascism, reprinted in Communism, Fascism and Democracy, edited by Carl Cohen (New York, 1963), p. 385.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 372-373.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 378.

Palmieri carries the Roman myth to an extreme, and within his romantic ideal of Fascism the ideas which originated in Continental European irrationalism take on the color of a holy crusade; however, Palmieri's work is merely another contribution to the Fascist attempt to cloak violence with an aura of respectability. The Philosophy of Fascism, extolling the same "values" which wreaked havoc on a generation of Europeans, is a vivid documentation of the influence of philosophical irrationalism upon Italian Fascism.

While Italian Fascism had numerous gifted spokesmen, the preponderance of responsibility for the creation of its doctrines belongs necessarily to Benito Mussolini. History points to Il Duce as the most important individual man in the era of Italian Fascism. Mussolini, as an agent of history, was largely responsible for the propagation and ascendancy to power of the Fascist movement. Throughout the course of this ascent, Mussolini's political pronouncements, political speeches, and his autobiography document his intellectual debt to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, Sorel, Pareto, and the entire body of European philosophical irrationalism. The expressions of the dictator's thoughts are living proof of his debt to philosophical irrationalism.

The influence of the philosophies of eternal cosmic conflict is overtly evident in the writings and speeches of Mussolini. The following passage is taken from a speech made in 1920 while Mussolini was still involved in the struggle for

political power; the words of this speech could almost be mistaken for an excerpt from Nietzsche's Will to Power:

Struggle is at the bottom of everything . . . struggle will always be at the root of human nature . . . it is a good thing that it is so . . . the day in which all struggle will cease will be a day of melancholy, will mean the end of all things, will mean ruin. . . ³⁹

Struggle and conflict, in the opinion of Mussolini, are integral parts of human existence.

The endless struggle for survival and power is reflected in the vital biological nature of man's social and political actions, according to Nietzsche, Bergson, and Sorel. This concept echoes through the words of Mussolini, and is used to justify the individual's role as biological necessity for the nation. In The Doctrine of Fascism, which is Mussolini's written program of the aims of the Fascist movement, one of the stated goals is to ". . . make the people organically one with the nation . . ." ⁴⁰ so that the state may use them to achieve its ends. Mussolini is constant in his belief that the people must be used to nourish the state. They are, says Mussolini in his autobiography, ". . . the vital food needed to reach greatness. . . ." ⁴¹ Individuals are the food and

³⁹ Benito Mussolini, "The Tasks of Fascismo," Mussolini as Revealed in his Political Speeches, translated and edited by Bernardo Q. di San Severino (London and Toronto, 1923), p. 112.

⁴⁰ Benito Mussolini, The Doctrine of Fascism (Firenze, 1936), p. 43

⁴¹ Mussolini, Autobiography, pp. 57-58.

blood of the body politic, and as such are entirely dispensable to the process of the growth and sustenance of the organic state.

The organic state, which is nourished by the sacrifice of individuals, is susceptible to infection like any living body. In the Fascist state controlled by Mussolini, infection consists of any political dissent. Il Duce had a cure for this type of illness. Speaking of Fascist violence in his regime, Mussolini said:

. . . It was necessary to cauterize the virulent wounds to have strength . . . It was necessary to curb political dissent. . . .⁴²

The "health" of the organic state depended on the constant vigilance of Fascism against political opposition. Fascism, wrote Mussolini, ". . . has to perform surgery--and major operation against succession . . ." ⁴³ Thus Mussolini corrupted the theories of man's biological nature in order to justify totalitarian terror.

Nietzsche's theory of the "transvaluation of values" which he based in part on the nature of man within the eternal biological struggle in a turbulent cosmos, influenced Mussolini while he was still in his twenties.⁴⁴ This influ-

⁴²Ibid., p. 205.

⁴³Ibid., p. 296.

⁴⁴Stewart, op. cit., p. 849.

ence is evident throughout Mussolini's writings and speeches. He constantly emphasized the need to abolish traditional morality and replace it with the arbitrary values of his regime. The Fascist state is endowed with a supreme will, and is therefore ethical unto itself.⁴⁵ The state must not cling to traditional values lest its progress be impaired.⁴⁶

Brotherly love, humanitarianism, and sympathetic kindness are inferior to other values of a higher nature.⁴⁷ The higher values espoused by Mussolini resemble the hearty, pagan values that Nietzsche advocated. These values involve conflict, the shedding of blood, and dying, and they are morally justifiable when done in the service of the Fascist nation.⁴⁸ The concept of the "transvaluation of values" contributed to Mussolini's doctrine the idea that violence and bloodshed are not only morally justifiable but are the highest virtues to which a people may aspire.

The influence of the theories of Sorel and Pareto in regard to the use of violence for political purposes is reflected in the writings and speeches of Mussolini. The

⁴⁵Mussolini, Doctrine of Fascism, p. 39.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 56.

⁴⁷Mussolini, "Either War or the End of Italy's Name as a Great Power," Speeches, p. 10.

⁴⁸Mussolini, Autobiography, p. 128

Italian despot had found in Nietzsche a moral justification for the use of violence. This enabled Mussolini to claim that ". . . violence has a deep moral significance . . ." ⁴⁹ In addition to this moral justification, Mussolini could also rationalize the use of violence as a legitimate and even desirable expedient within the political process; his mentors Sorel and Pareto had ascribed this role to violence in politics and society. The excesses of Fascist terror were excused as being morally valuable and of logical political necessity. In a speech at Milan in October of 1922, Mussolini described the relationship between his party and its political opponents:

. . . the Fascisti have gone forth to destroy with fire and sword the haunts of the cowardly Social-Communist delinquents . . . This is violence . . . of which I approve . . . and uphold . . . It is necessary, when the moment comes, to strike with the utmost decision and without pity. . . . ⁵⁰

War is the ultimate expression of bloodshed and violence, and Mussolini accordingly placed the highest esteem upon war. It enabled him to gain ". . . an understanding of the essences of mankind." ⁵¹ Il Duce's adoration of war became an integral part of the theories of Fascism, and in the official Doctrine

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 121.

⁵⁰Mussolini, "The Fascisti Dawning of New Italy," Speeches, pp. 161-162.

⁵¹Mussolini, Autobiography, p. 59.

of Fascism, Mussolini expressed the high regard which Fascism has for war:

. . . War alone keys up all human energies to their maximum tension and sets seal of nobility upon those peoples who have the courage to face it. . . All doctrines which postulate peace at all costs are incompatible with Fascism. . . .⁵²

The conflagration which visited tragedy upon millions of Europeans was made more acceptable by Fascism's theory of war, a theory which is the logical outcome of placing a moral and political value on the shedding of human blood.

The question comes to mind as to who may decide the time and degree of the use of violence, and Mussolini's speech to the citizens of Bologna in the spring of 1921 provides an answer. The moral and politically expedient violence of the state, said Mussolini, ". . . must have a character and style of its own, definitely aristocratic" ⁵³ The "aristocratic" bloodletting of the Mussolini regime was administered by a group of "aristocrats" well suited to the task--". . . the Fascisti, whom I considered and consider the aristocracy of Italy" ⁵⁴

The Fascist Party that Mussolini considered to be his own aristocracy (or elite) owed much to the terrorist squads that

⁵²Mussolini, Doctrine of Fascism, p. 27.

⁵³Mussolini, "How Fascismo was Created," Speeches, p. 138.

⁵⁴Mussolini, Autobiography, pp. 155-156.

aided the party in its rise to power. Mussolini held these crude street fighters, the "Black Shirts," in especially high esteem. After he had gained total power in Italy, Mussolini refused to consider suggestions to the effect that he disband his elite brawlers who had, as he stated, ". . . a deep, blind, and absolute devotion. . ." ⁵⁵ Their intrinsic merit sprung from the fact that these brawling hooligans through intuition and in ". . . their instinct . . . were led not only by strength and courage, but by a sense of political virtue. . ." ⁵⁶ The first elite to be inspired by philosophical irrationalism were the Black Shirts of Fascist Italy.

Mussolini's elite possessed the hearty pagan values of Nietzsche, and true to the theories of Pareto and Sorel, they used violence as a political expedient to raise their party to power. Mussolini was brutally frank in expressing the function of his elite. Their task, he wrote, was ". . . that of ruling the nation . . . by violence, for the conquest of power." ⁵⁷ Il Duce's elite began by using violence as a means to attain power, and they continued to use it to maintain themselves in power. This development was not out of keeping with the concept of values which characterizes the irrational doctrines of Fascism.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 207.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 132

The elite which rules by force must have a sense of direction, even though its action is arbitrarily guided to the attainment of divergent goals. Mussolini traced the pattern of this guidance in describing how victory was achieved by the Fascisti. The group intuitively realizes the necessity of violent action, and it readies itself to strike. When the moment to attack has come, the instinct of the leader has already made victory inevitable. He has organized his men for battle and his intuition has provided him with the proper strategy by which his forces may emerge triumphant.⁵⁸ Success through violence is achieved when the elite forces, led by the instinct of their duce, crush the opposition.

At this particular juncture in the description of Mussolini's thought, a combination of several ideas originating in philosophical irrationalism may be observed. The superiority of the instinct over the intellect, the effectiveness of the elite, the value of the forceful pagan virtues, such as heroism and bloodshed, the use of force, and the power of the leader are all component tenets of Mussolini's doctrine. They culminate and are fused together in Mussolini's attitude toward himself as the embodiment of the principles of power.

Mussolini firmly believed in his own indispensability to Fascism. In regard to the Party's debt to its leader, Mussolini wrote:

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

. . . the party could not have existed and lived and could not be triumphant except under my command, my guidance, my support and my spurs.⁵⁹

Mussolini felt that the Party and the State were inexorably bound to him. He believed himself to be the vessel of the moral and spiritual powers of the state.⁶⁰ Mussolini's image of himself was developed under the influence of the elitist theories and Nietzsche's concept of the superman.

Mussolini shared with Nietzsche a contempt for the European bourgeoisie, and Mussolini blamed the philistine middle-class for all of the social problems which plagued European society. Italy's deliverance from this situation had been contingent upon her willingness to shed her blood, and the prospects for this occurring were hampered by the cowardice of the middle-class bourgeoisie.⁶¹ Mussolini's instinct told him that ". . . Italy would be saved by one historic agency . . . righteous force . . ."⁶² The one individual capable of guiding the nation in its historic quest for power was, Mussolini knew, himself. The victory of his party and the regeneration of Italy had been achieved, ac-

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 144.

⁶⁰Mussolini, Doctrine of Fascism, p. 58.

⁶¹Mussolini, Autobiography, p. 21.

⁶²Ibid., p. 120.

ording to Mussolini, because "Violence . . . had been controlled by my will."⁶³

Mussolini solidified the totalitarian Fascist regime by actualizing his irrational theories of instinctive action, elitism, and violence. Il Duce blended these various themes together to create, true to his mentor Sorel, the myth of Imperial Rome. This myth held that a violent reformation of civilization would be achieved through the rebirth of Imperial Rome. In a speech in Trieste in 1920, Mussolini laid the groundwork for his myth. He spoke of Rome's illustrious history as the leader of world civilization, and stated that the task of Fascism must be to recreate this Empire to fulfill the Italian destiny of world leadership.⁶⁴ Fascism alone could fuse the values of ancient Rome with the reality of current political trends, for ". . . it is a faith. It is one of those spiritual forces which renovates the history of great and enduring peoples."⁶⁵ Mussolini continued to dwell on the theme of Imperial restoration throughout the years in which he held power. The creation of this Roman myth, a tactic reminiscent of the theories of Sorel and Pareto, was used to sustain a people who were suffering from the actualization of other less glorious irrational theories.

⁶³Ibid., p. 298.

⁶⁴Mussolini, "The tasks of Fascismo," Speeches, p. 113.

⁶⁵Mussolini, Autobiography, p. 241.

While the Imperial myth was an abstract and Romantic ideal, the concepts of syndicalism and the corporate state bore some resemblance to Mussolini's economic dictatorship. Il Duce acknowledged Sorel's ideas of the syndicalist myth as a source of Italian syndicalism.⁶⁶ In a statement made at the founding of the Fasci di Combattimento, Mussolini expressed the necessity of corporate syndicalism as opposed to representative government. Democratic representation, he stated, is less acceptable and effective than direct representation of economic interests before the Government.⁶⁷ The idea of Italian syndicalism, while closer to reality than the chauvinistic Imperial myth, was nevertheless another means for perpetuating authoritarianism. Based on Sorel's philosophy of the irrational myth, it served as a facade for the dictatorial control of Italy's industries and unions.

In retrospect, the influence of philosophical irrationalism on Italian Fascism in general and upon Mussolini in particular is undeniably and overwhelmingly significant. A question exists as to what extent Mussolini followed the doctrines from which he drew, and to what degree he used them for ad hoc rationalizations for totalitarian violence. An answer may lie in the juxtaposition of two of the dictator's pronouncements within the same year. On June 8th, 1923, Mussolini

⁶⁶Mussolini, Doctrine of Fascism, pp. 21-22.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 24.

made the following statement before the Italian Senate:

. . . The more I know the Italian people, the more I bow before it . . . The more I come into deeper touch with the Italian masses, the more I feel that they are really worthy of the respect of all the representatives of the nation . . . it would not matter if I lost my life, and I should not consider it a greater sacrifice than is due. My ambition is this: I wish to make the Italian people strong, prosperous, great and free⁶⁸

Eight months before this speech, Mussolini had said:

The masses are a herd, and as a herd they are at the mercy of primordial instincts and impulses. The masses are without continuity.

. . . They are, in short, matter, not spirit. We must pull down his Holiness the Mob from the altars erected by the demos.⁶⁹

Using the conduct of the Fascist Government as a yardstick by which to measure the sincerity of the public statements made by Mussolini, it is feasible to conclude that the Italian Senate was treated to an enactment of Mussolini's belief in the relativity of values in relation to the political gain to be derived thereof. The second statement is quite in keeping with Mussolini's adherence to elitism. Neither of his statements is out of keeping with the doctrines which he promulgated. The fact that this paradoxical situation is possible does not speak well for the theories upon which, misinterpretations and rationalizations notwithstanding,

⁶⁸ Mussolini, "The Internal Policy," Speeches, p. 319.

⁶⁹ Laura Fermi, Mussolini (Chicago, 1961), p. 68

Mussolini based his doctrines. Fascism is not far removed from philosophical irrationalism, one of the dominant philosophies of the period.

Mussolini may be looked upon as an oppressor of the Italian people. Il Duce's foreign and domestic policies certainly visited bloodshed and death to the masses of Italy and other nations as well. One must remember, however, that Mussolini's speeches advocating violence, elitism, and subservience to the state were cheered by millions of Italians during his regime. Members of all the various classes within Italy supported Mussolini's drive to power. This support is quite understandable in view of the fact that their leader spoke to them in terms which had permeated their intellectual milieu for almost a century.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: INTELLECTUAL IRRESPONSIBILITY

The sources which gave birth to philosophical irrationalism are much the same as those which allowed Italian Fascism to gain control of the nation. Irrationalism, as we have seen, developed as a result of European despair; the growth of fascism in any modern society is made possible by cultural despair. Despair with the existing social institutions is the phenomenon which makes fascism possible.¹ The feelings of inadequacy and isolation which plague many individuals in modern industrial societies cause them to believe that the whole society must be overthrown in order that they may achieve some sort of equality.² Alienated and despairing individuals, incapable of belief in themselves, place their faith in revolutionary movements such as fascism. A society which is undergoing rapid changes denies many individuals the opportunity for self-achievement and identification; mass revolutionary movements give the individual a chance to release the tensions caused by rapid social change. Personal insecurities are best assuaged by

¹John H. Hallowell, Main Currents in Modern Political Thought (New York, 1950), p. 612.

²Eric Hoffer, The True Believer (New York, 1951), p. 74

movements so great in volume that they involve a whole nation; therefore, nationalistic movements offer the alienated individual relief in that he may associate with and lose himself in the existence of the vital nation.³

The elements which contribute to the growth of mass movements were much in evidence in Italy following World War I. The younger generation of Italy and of Europe were thoroughly disgusted with their society and its bourgeois moral standards. There existed a longing for a completely new order with new values, and such a new order seemed possible only through the destruction of the existing society.⁴ The European middle class, aware that their nineteenth century world had been turned upside down, sought a new beginning:

The middle class established rational law and their sons destroyed it. . . the disillusioned son of a liberal civilization. . . leads the anti-bourgeois revolution led by . . . burghers who fell short of their aim (and have) . . . a secret yearning for the lost world . . .⁵

The insecurity and despair of "burghers who fell short of

³Harold D. Lasswell, World Politics and Personal Insecurity (New York, 1935), pp. 84-85.

⁴Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York, 1951), pp. 320-321.

⁵Sigmund Neumann, Permanent Revolution (New York, 1942), p. 37.

their aim" was answered by Benito Mussolini's "lost world"-- Imperial Rome. Italian Fascism allowed the alienated individual to find identity in the myth of Rome and the organic state. Fascism promised to rid the individual Italian of his problems and to give him, in return, a new life in a new order.

The intellectual faces peculiar problems during a period of social upheaval. Eric Hoffer says that many creative minds are overwhelmed by a desire for recognition, and that this desire leads to insecurity and self-doubt when recognition is not achieved.⁶ If we accept this fundamental postulate concerning the motivation of intellectuals, then the involvement of the Italian intelligentsia with Fascism is easily understood. Given academic respectability by the philosophical irrationalists, the ideas upon which Fascism was based were acceptable to men such as Rocco, Gentile, and Palmieri. Becoming involved in a political movement which had scholastic justification must have seemed well within the bounds of intellectual responsibility. The philosophical background provided by irrationalism was a handy device for rationalizing one's participation in a violent, anti-humanitarian revolution. The same holds true for all of the young students and intellectuals who joined Mussolini's party.⁷ Infused for years with

⁶Hoffer, The True Believer, p. 131.

⁷Deana Spearman, Modern Dictatorship (New York, 1939), p. 147.

the ideas of instinct, violence, elitism, they were ready prey for the totalitarian hierarchy of Italy.⁸

Due to the fact that the sources of philosophical irrationalism and of fascism are both found in cultural despair, a question may arise as to just how much of a cause and effect relationship exists between these two developments; this question is closely related to a similar question, that one concerning the degree of responsibility which should be placed upon the European intelligentsia for its acceptance of fascistic ideas. In attempting to answer these questions, an examination of several levels of a nation's intelligentsia must be undertaken.

One may quickly absolve the Italian masses of any guilt for the horrors perpetrated by fascism; were they not the collective victims of harsh and brutal dictatorship? Before answering this question, one must remember pictures of the cheering mobs that idolized Il Duce. Ignorance will not excuse the Italian masses that had been reared in the Christian tradition, a tradition with ideals which greatly transcend those of philosophical irrationalism. The witnessing of and participation in collective terror may not be lightly excused; each social order is only as just as the sense of values held by each individual citizen.

The Italian middle class and its intelligentsia also lived in a dictatorial police state. This class, however,

⁸Ibid., p. 149.

provided journalists who published the works of Sorel, Pareto, and the spokesmen of Mussolini. It also provided teachers for the Fascist schools and clergymen who condoned the inhumanity of Fascism. By ignoring for a while the value of the individual man, the Italian intelligentsia contributed to what may be considered one of the darker pages of modern European history.

In regard to Mussolini and his intellectual henchmen Gentile, Rocco, and Palmieri, their guilt is almost irrefutable. Leaders of the intelligentsia and body politic, their use of the written word and the political process to fulfill their own dark ambitions ranks as a major transgression within the contemporary political process. The use of philosophy in the pursuit of a perverted lust for power marks for these men a unique role in the history of tyranny and despotism, one in which the realm of intellectualism was misused as never before on such a wide scale.

Philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, Sorel, and Pareto may not, of course, be held accountable to history for the misuse of their teachings; however, the fact remains that their description of the nature of man was contrary in many respects to the Western tradition. By emphasizing the purely animalistic side of man, these philosophers neglected to a great degree the rational possibilities for the species. In view of this neglect for mankind's positive

aspects, the philosophical irrationalists may not be completely absolved of the part they played in the relapse of European culture into barbarism.

The burden of guilt for the institutionalization of anti-humanitarian fascism necessarily rests with all members of the Italian and European intelligentsia who promulgated its irrational doctrines, as well as with the citizens who accepted these ideas. The original description of man's impotence in a hostile universe may, like most philosophies, contain some degree of validity; however, an intellectual's acceptance of this condition constitutes intellectual irresponsibility. By failing to seek a rational solution to the plight caused by the darker side of man's nature, the European intelligentsia paved the way for the brutal terror of fascism. In their failure to work toward the spiritual uplifting of the Western tradition, the irresponsible followers of the irrationalist school contributed to the criminal excesses of Italian Fascism. The same despair which once gave birth to fascism may still be found in many industrial societies; whether or not this despair is allowed to jell into totalitarianism depends in part on the leadership which intellectuals provide in the practical and spiritual development of Western man.

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