

CHAPTER 8

What Is Fascism?

At this book's opening, I ducked the task of offering the reader a neat definition of fascism. I wanted to set aside—for heuristic purposes, at least—the traditional but straitjacketing search for the famous but elusive “fascist minimum.” I thought it more promising to observe historical examples of fascist successes and failures in action, through a whole cycle of development. Exposing the processes by which fascisms appeared, grew, gained power (or not), and, once in power, radicalized into a “fascist maximum” seemed a more promising strategy than to search for some static and limiting “essence.”

Now that we have reached the end of this historical journey, the imperative of definition can no longer be evaded. Otherwise we risk escaping from the nominalism of the “bestiary” only to fall into another nominalism of stages and processes. Generic fascism might disappear in our efforts to pick it apart. But first some other issues need to be considered.

Following fascism through five stages, in each of which it acts differently, raises an awkward question: Which is the real fascism? For some authors, usually those most concerned with fascism's intellectual expressions, the early movements are “pure” fascism while the regimes are corruptions, deformed by the compromises necessary for achieving and wielding power.¹ The regimes, however, for all their pragmatic choices and compromising alliances, had more impact than the movements because they possessed the power of war and death. A definition that does full justice to the phenomenon of fascism must apply to the later stages as effectively as it does to the earlier ones.

Focusing on those later stages requires us to give as much attention to

settings and to allies as to the fascists themselves. A usable definition of fascism must also, therefore, find a way to avoid treating fascism in isolation, cut off from its environment and its accomplices. Fascism in power is a compound, a powerful amalgam of different but marriageable conservative, national-socialist and radical Right ingredients, bonded together by common enemies and common passions for a regenerated, energized, and purified nation at whatever cost to free institutions and the rule of law. The precise proportions of the mixture are the result of processes: choices, alliances, compromises, rivalries. Fascism in action looks much more like a network of relationships than a fixed essence.²

Conflicting Interpretations

Now that we have watched fascism in action through its entire cycle, we are better prepared to evaluate the many interpretations proposed over the years. The “first takes” I noted in chapter 1—thugs in power and agents of capitalism³—have never lost their grip. The German playwright Bertolt Brecht even managed to combine them in his Chicago gangster Arturo Ui, who gets power through a protection racket for vegetable sellers.⁴

Both “first takes,” however, had serious flaws. If fascism and its aggressions are simply the evil actions of hoodlums reaching power in an era of moral decline, we have no explanation for why this happened at one place and time rather than another, or how these events might relate to an earlier history. It was difficult for classical liberals like Croce and Meinecke to perceive that part of fascism's opportunity lay in the dessication and narrowness of liberalism itself, or that some frightened liberals had helped it into power. Their version leaves us with chance and the individual exploits of thugs as explanations.

Considering fascism simply as a capitalist tool sends us astray in two respects. The narrow and rigid formula that became orthodox in Stalin's Third International⁵ denied fascism's autonomous roots and authentic popular appeal.⁶ Even worse, it ignored human choice by making fascism the inevitable outcome of the ineluctable crisis of capitalist overproduction. Closer empirical work showed, to the contrary, that real capitalists, even when they rejected democracy, mostly preferred authoritarians to fascists.⁷ Whenever fascists reached power, to be sure, capitalists mostly accommodated with them as the best available nonsocialist solution. We had occasion to see that even the giant German chemical combine

I. G. Farben, whose ascent to the rank of the biggest company in Europe had been based on global trade, found ways to adapt to rearmament-driven autarky, and prospered mightily again.⁸ The relations of accommodation, foot dragging, and mutual advantage that bound the business community to fascist regimes turn out to be another complicated matter that varied over time. That there was some mutual advantage is beyond doubt. Capitalism and fascism made practicable bedfellows (though not inevitable ones, nor always comfortable ones).

As for the opposite interpretation that portrays the business community as fascism's victim,⁹ it takes far too seriously the middle-level frictions endemic to this relationship, along with businessmen's postwar efforts at self-exculpation. Here, too, we need a subtler model of explanation that allows for interplays of conflict and accommodation.

Quite early the "first takes" were joined by other interpretations. The obviously obsessive character of some fascists cried out for psychoanalysis. Mussolini seemed only too ordinary, with his vain posturing, his notorious womanizing, his addiction to detailed work, his skill at short-term maneuvering, and his eventual loss of the big picture. Hitler was another matter. Were his *Teppichfresser* ("carpet eater") scenes calculated bluffs or signs of madness?¹⁰ His secretiveness, hypochondria, narcissism, vengefulness, and megalomania were counterbalanced by a quick, retentive mind, a capacity to charm if he wanted to, and outstanding tactical cleverness. All efforts to psychoanalyze him¹¹ have suffered from the inaccessibility of their subject, as well as from the unanswered question of why, if some fascist leaders were insane, their publics adored them and they functioned effectively for so long. In any event, the latest and most authoritative biographer of Hitler concludes rightly that one must dwell less on the *Führer's* eccentricities than on the role the German public projected upon him and which he succeeded in filling until nearly the end.¹²

Perhaps it is the fascist publics rather than their leaders who need psychoanalysis. Already in 1933 the dissident Freudian Wilhelm Reich concluded that the violent masculine fraternity characteristic of early fascism was the product of sexual repression.¹³ This theory is easy to undermine, however, by observing that sexual repression was probably no more severe in Germany and in Italy than in, say, Great Britain during the generation in which the fascist leaders and their followers came of age.¹⁴ This objection also applies to other psycho-historical explanations for fascism.

Explanations of fascism as psychotic appear in another form in films that cater to a prurient fascination with supposed fascist sexual perver-

sion.¹⁵ These box-office successes make it even harder to grasp that fascist regimes functioned because great numbers of ordinary people accommodated to them in the ordinary business of daily life.¹⁶

The sociologist Talcott Parsons suggested already in 1942 that fascism emerged out of uprooting and tensions produced by uneven economic and social development—an early form of the fascism/modernization problem. In countries that industrialized rapidly and late, like Germany and Italy, Parsons argued, class tensions were particularly acute and compromise was blocked by surviving pre-industrial elites.¹⁷ This interpretation had the merit of treating fascism as a system and as the product of a history, as did the Marxist interpretation, without Marxism's determinism, narrowness, and shaky empirical foundations.

The philosopher Ernst Bloch, a Marxist made unorthodox by an interest in the irrational and in religion, arrived in his own way at another theory of "noncontemporaneity" (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*). Contemplating Nazi success with archaic and violent "red dreams" of blood, soil, and a pre-capitalist paradise, utterly incompatible with what he considered the party's true fealty to big business, he understood that vestigial values flourished long after they had lost any correspondence with economic and social reality. "Not all people exist in the same Now." Orthodox Marxists, he thought, had missed the boat by "cordoning off the soul."¹⁸ Uneven development continues to arouse interest as an ingredient of prefascist crises,¹⁹ but the case for it is weakened by France's notoriously "dual" economy, in which a powerful peasant/artisan sector coexisted with modern industry without fascism reaching power except under Nazi occupation.²⁰

Another sociological approach alleged that urban and industrial leveling since the late nineteenth century had produced an atomized mass society in which purveyors of simple hatreds found a ready audience unrestrained by tradition or community.²¹ Hannah Arendt worked within this paradigm in her analysis of how the new rootless mob, detached from all social, intellectual, or moral moorings and inebriated by anti-Semitic and imperialistic passions, made possible the emergence of an unprecedented form of limitless mass-based plebiscitary dictatorship.²²

The best empirical work on the way fascism took root, however, gives little support to this approach. Weimar German society, for example, was richly structured, and Nazism recruited by mobilizing entire organizations through carefully targeted appeals to specific interests.²³ As the saying went, "two Germans, a discussion; three Germans, a club." The fact

that German clubs for everything from choral singing to funeral insurance were already segregated into separate socialist and nonsocialist networks facilitated the exclusion of the socialists and the Nazi takeover of the rest when Germany became deeply polarized in the early 1930s.²⁴

An influential current considers fascism a developmental dictatorship, established for the purpose of hastening industrial growth through forced savings and a regimented workforce. Proponents of this interpretation have looked primarily at the Italian case.²⁵ It could well be argued that Germany, too, although already an industrial giant, needed urgently to discipline its people for the immense task of rebuilding after the defeat of 1918. This interpretation goes seriously wrong, however, in supposing that fascism pursued any rational economic goal whatever. Hitler meant to bend the economy to serve political ends. Even in Mussolini's case, prestige counted far more than economic rationality when he overvalued the lira in 1926, and when, after 1935, he chose the risks of expansionist war over sustained economic development. If Italian Fascism was meant to be a developmental dictatorship, it failed at it. Though the Italian economy grew in the 1920s under Mussolini, it grew substantially faster before 1914 and after 1945.²⁶ In one genuinely aberrant form, the developmental dictatorship theory of fascism serves to label as "fascist" all sorts of Third World autocracies without an iota of popular mobilization and without the prior existence of a democracy in trouble.²⁷

It has also been tempting to interpret fascism by its social composition. The sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset systematized in 1963 the widely held view that fascism is an expression of lower-middle-class resentments. In Lipset's formulation, fascism is an "extremism of the center" based on the rage of once-independent shopkeepers, artisans, peasants, and other members of the "old" middle classes now squeezed between better-organized industrial workers and big businessmen, and losing out in rapid social and economic change.²⁸ Recent empirical research, however, casts doubt on the localization of fascist recruitment in any one social stratum. It shows the multiplicity of fascism's social supports and its relative success in creating a composite movement that cut across all classes.²⁹ His eyes glued on the early stages, Lipset also overlooked the establishment's role in the fascist acquisition and exercise of power.

The notorious instability of fascist membership further undermines any simple interpretation by social composition. Party rosters altered rapidly before power, as successive waves of heterogeneous malcontents

responded to the parties' changing fortunes and messages.³⁰ After power, membership "bandwagoned" to include just about everyone who wanted to enjoy the fruits of fascist success³¹ — not to forget the problem of where to situate the many fascist recruits who were young, unemployed, socially uprooted, or otherwise "between classes."³² No coherent social explanation of fascism can be constructed out of such fluctuating material.

A multitude of observers sees fascism as a subspecies of totalitarianism. Giovanni Amendola, a leader of the parliamentary opposition to Fascism and one of its most notable victims (he died in 1926 following a beating by Fascist thugs), coined the adjective *totalitaria* in a May 1923 article denouncing Fascist efforts to monopolize public office. Other opponents of Mussolini quickly broadened the term into a general condemnation of Fascist aspirations to total control. As sometimes happens with epithets, Mussolini took this one up and gloried in it.³³

Considering how often Mussolini boasted of his *totalitarismo*, it is ironic that some major postwar theorists of totalitarianism exclude Italian Fascism from their typology.³⁴ One must concede that Mussolini's regime, eager to "normalize" its rapport with a society in which the family, the Church, the monarchy, and the village notable still had entrenched power, fell far short of total control. Even so, Fascism regimented Italians more firmly than any regime before or since.³⁵ But no regime, not even Hitler's or Stalin's, ever managed to pinch off every last parcel of privacy and personal or group autonomy.³⁶

The 1950s theorists of totalitarianism believed that Hitler and Stalin fit their model most closely. Both Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, according to the criteria developed by Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski in 1956, were governed by single parties employing an official ideology, terroristic police control, and a monopoly of power over all means of communication, armed force, and economic organization.³⁷ During the rebellious 1960s, a new generation accused the totalitarianism theorists of serving cold war ends, by transferring the patriotic anti-Nazism of World War II to the new communist enemy.³⁸

While its scholarly use declined thereafter for a time in the United States, the totalitarian paradigm remained important to those European scholars, particularly in West Germany, who wanted to affirm, against the Marxists, that what had really mattered about Hitler was his destruction of liberty, not his relation to capitalism.³⁹ At the end of the twentieth century, after the demise of the Soviet Union had prompted renewed scrutiny of its sins and of many Western intellectuals' blindness to them, the totali-

tarian model came back into vogue, along with its corollary that Nazism and communism represented a common evil.⁴⁰

Thus the totalitarian interpretation of fascism has been as hotly politicized as the Marxist one.⁴¹ Even so, it should be debated on its merits and not with respect to its enlistment by one camp or another. It purports to explain Nazism (and Stalinism) by focusing on their aspiration to total control, and on the tools by which they sought to exert it. No doubt Nazi and communist mechanisms of control had many similarities. Awaiting the knock in the night and rotting in a camp must have felt very similar to both systems' sufferers (Jews and Gypsies apart, of course).⁴² In both regimes, law was subordinated to "higher" imperatives of race or class. Focusing upon the techniques of control, however, obscures important differences.

However similar it might feel, from the victim's point of view, to die of typhus, malnutrition, exhaustion, or harsh questioning in one of Stalin's Siberian camps or in, say, Hitler's Mauthausen stone quarry, Stalin's regime differed profoundly from Hitler's in social dynamics as well as in aims. Stalin ruled a civil society that had been radically simplified by the Bolshevik Revolution, and thus he did not have to concern himself with autonomous concentrations of inherited social and economic power. Hitler (totally unlike Stalin) came into power with the assent and even assistance of traditional elites, and governed in strained but effective association with them. In Nazi Germany the party jostled with the state bureaucracy, industrial and agricultural proprietors, churches, and other traditional elites for power. Totalitarian theory is blind to this fundamental character of the Nazi governing system, and thus tends to fortify the elites' postwar claim that Hitler tried to destroy them (as indeed the final cataclysm of the lost war began to do).

Hitlerism and Stalinism also differed profoundly in their declared ultimate aims—for one, the supremacy of a master race; for the other, universal equality—though Stalin's egregious and barbarous perversions tended to make his regime converge with Hitler's in its murderous instruments. Focusing upon central authority, the totalitarian paradigm overlooks the murderous frenzy that boiled from below in fascism.

Treating Hitler and Stalin together as totalitarians often becomes an exercise in comparative moral judgment: Which monster was more monstrous?⁴³ Were Stalin's two forms of mass murder—reckless economic experiment and the paranoid persecution of "enemies"—the

moral equivalent of Hitler's attempt to purify his nation by exterminating the medically and racially impure?⁴⁴

The strongest case for equating Stalin's terror with Hitler's is the famine of 1931, which, it is alleged, targeted Ukrainians and thus amounted to genocide. This famine, though indeed the result of criminal negligence, affected Russians with equal severity.⁴⁵ Opponents would note fundamental differences. Stalin killed in grossly arbitrary fashion whomever his paranoid mind decided were "class enemies" (a condition one can change), in a way that struck mostly at adult males among the dictator's fellow citizens. Hitler, by contrast, killed "race enemies," an irremediable condition that condemns even newborns. He wanted to liquidate entire peoples, including their tombstones and their cultural artifacts. This book acknowledges the repugnance of both terrors, but condemns even more strongly Nazi biologically racist extermination because it admitted no salvation even for women and children.⁴⁶

A more pragmatic criticism of the totalitarian model complains that its image of an efficient all-encompassing mechanism prevents us from grasping the disorderly character of Hitler's rule, which reduced government to personal fiefdoms unable to discuss policy options and choose among them rationally.⁴⁷ Mussolini, assuming multiple cabinet ministries himself but unable to impose orderly priorities on any of them, did no better. The totalitarian image may evoke powerfully the dreams and aspirations of dictators, but it actually obstructs any examination of the vital matter of how effectively fascist regimes managed to embed themselves in the half-compliant, half-recalcitrant societies they ruled.

The older concept of political religion—it dates to the French Revolution—was quickly applied to fascism, as well as to communism, and not only by their enemies.⁴⁸ At the level of broad analogy, it points usefully to the way fascism, like religion, mobilized believers around sacred rites and words, excited them to self-denying fervor, and preached a revealed truth that admitted no dissidence. Scrutinized more carefully,⁴⁹ the concept of political religion turns out to encompass several quite different issues. The most straightforward one is the many elements that fascism borrows from the religious culture of the society it seeks to penetrate. With its focus upon mechanisms, this subject tells us more about taking root and about exercising power than about achieving power.

A second element of the political religion concept is the more chal-

lenging functional argument that fascism fills a void opened by the secularization of society and morality.⁵⁰ If this approach is meant to help explain why fascism succeeded in some Christian countries rather than others, it requires us to believe that the "ontological crisis" was more severe in Germany and Italy than in France and Britain in the early twentieth century—a case that might be difficult to make.

It also suggests that established religions and fascism are irreconcilable opponents—a third element of the political religion concept. In Germany and Italy, however, the two had a complex relationship that did not exclude cooperation. They joined forces against communism while competing for the same terrain. While this situation led to a *modus vivendi* in the Italian case, it generated a "destructive mimesis of Christianity"⁵¹ in the Nazi case. At the opposite extreme, fascism could produce something resembling an unauthorized Christian auxiliary in the Romanian, Croat, and Belgian cases and an Islamic auxiliary, if we accept as fascist some extra-European movements I considered in chapter 7.

The fascist leaders themselves, as we observed in chapter 1, called their movements ideologies, and many interpreters have taken them at their word. It is commonplace to see fascism defined by extracting common threads from party programs, by analogy with the other "isms." This works better for the other "isms," founded in the era of educated elite politics. I tried earlier to suggest that fascism bears a different relation to ideas than the nineteenth-century "isms," and that intellectual positions (not basic mobilizing passions like racial hatreds, of course) were likely to be dropped or added according to the tactical needs of the moment. All the "isms" did this, but only fascism had such contempt for reason and intellect that it never even bothered to justify its shifts.⁵²

Nowadays cultural studies are replacing intellectual history as the strategy of choice for elucidating the attraction and efficacy of fascism.⁵³ As early as World War II, the American ethnographer Gregory Bateson employed "the sort of analysis that an anthropologist applies to the mythology of a primitive or modern people" to pick apart the themes and techniques of the Nazi propaganda film *Hitler Youth Quex*. Bateson believed that "this film . . . must tell us about the psychology of its makers, and tell us perhaps more than they intended to tell."⁵⁴ Since the 1970s and increasingly today, decoding the culture of fascist societies by an anthropological or ethnographical gaze has become a fashionable intellectual strategy. It shows vividly how fascist movements and regimes presented

themselves. The main problem with cultural studies of fascist imagery and rhetoric is their frequent failure to ask how influential these were. This rule has important exceptions, such as Luisa Passerini's study of the popular memory of Fascism in the Italian city of Turin in the 1980s.⁵⁵ Generally, however, the study of fascist culture by itself does not explain how fascists acquired the power to control culture, nor how deeply into popular consciousness fascist culture penetrated in competition with either preexisting religious, familial, or community values or with commercialized popular culture.

In any event, culture differs so profoundly from one national setting and one period to another that it is hard to find any cultural program common to all fascist movements, or to all the stages. The *macho* restoration of a threatened patriarchy, for example, comes close to being a universal fascist value, but Mussolini advocated female suffrage in his first program, and Hitler did not mention gender issues in his 25 Points. Since Mussolini favored the avant-garde, at least until the 1930s, while Hitler preferred conventional postcard art, it is unlikely that we can identify a single immutable fascist style or aesthetic that would apply to all the national cases.⁵⁶

A less-often-mentioned problem with cultural studies of fascism arises from their failure to make comparisons. Comparison is essential, and it reveals that some countries with a powerful cultural preparation (France, for example) became fascist only by conquest (if then). The effect of fascist propaganda also needs to be compared with that of commercial media, which was clearly greater even in fascist countries. Hollywood, Beale Street, and Madison Avenue probably gave more trouble to fascist dreams of cultural control than the whole liberal and socialist opposition put together.⁵⁷ The handwriting was on the wall for those dreams one day in 1937 when Mussolini's oldest son, Vittorio, gave his youngest brother Romano a picture of Duke Ellington, and started the boy down the road to a postwar career as a rather good jazz pianist.⁵⁸

All in all, no one interpretation of fascism seems to have carried the day decisively to everyone's satisfaction.

Boundaries

We cannot understand fascism well without tracing clear boundaries with superficially similar forms. The task is difficult because fascism was widely

imitated, especially during the 1930s, when Germany and Italy seemed more successful than the democracies. Borrowings from fascism turned up as far away from their European roots as Bolivia and China.⁵⁹

The simplest boundary separates fascism from classical tyranny. The exiled moderate socialist Gaetano Salvemini, having abandoned his chair as professor of history at Florence and moved to London and then to Harvard because he could not bear to teach without saying what he thought, pointed to the essential difference when he wondered why "Italians felt the need to get rid of their free institutions" at the very moment when they should be taking pride in them, and when they "should step forward toward a more advanced democracy."⁶⁰ Fascism, for Salvemini, meant setting aside democracy and due process in public life, to the acclamation of the street. It is a phenomenon of failed democracies, and its novelty was that, instead of simply clamping silence upon citizens as classical tyranny had done since earliest times, it found a technique to channel their passions into the construction of an obligatory domestic unity around projects of internal cleansing and external expansion. We should not use the term *fascism* for predemocratic dictatorships. However cruel, they lack the manipulated mass enthusiasm and demonic energy of fascism, along with the mission of "giving up free institutions" for the sake of national unity, purity, and force.

Fascism is easily confused with military dictatorship, for both fascist leaders militarized their societies and placed wars of conquest at the very center of their aims. Guns⁶¹ and uniforms were a fetish with them. In the 1930s, fascist militias were all uniformed (as, indeed, were socialist militias in that colored-shirt era),⁶² and fascists have always wanted to turn society into an armed fraternity. Hitler, newly installed as chancellor of Germany, made the mistake of dressing in a civilian trenchcoat and hat when he went to Venice on June 14, 1934, for his first meeting with the more senior Mussolini, "resplendent with uniform and dagger."⁶³ Thereafter the *Führer* appeared in uniform on public occasions—sometimes a brown party jacket, later often an unadorned military tunic. But while all fascisms are always militaristic, military dictatorships are not always fascist. Most military dictators have acted simply as tyrants, without daring to unleash the popular excitement of fascism. Military dictatorships are far commoner than fascisms, for they have no necessary connection to a failed democracy and have existed since there have been warriors.

The boundary separating fascism from authoritarianism is more subtle, but it is one of the most essential for understanding.⁶⁴ I have already

used the term, or the similar one of traditional dictatorship, in discussing Spain, Portugal, Austria, and Vichy France. The fascist-authoritarian boundary was particularly hard to trace in the 1930s, when regimes that were, in reality, authoritarian donned some of the decor of that period's successful fascisms. Although authoritarian regimes often trample civil liberties and are capable of murderous brutality, they do not share fascism's urge to reduce the private sphere to nothing. They accept ill-defined though real domains of private space for traditional "intermediary bodies" like local notables, economic cartels and associations, officer corps, families, and churches. These, rather than an official single party, are the main agencies of social control in authoritarian regimes. Authoritarians would rather leave the population demobilized and passive, while fascists want to engage and excite the public.⁶⁵ Authoritarians want a strong but limited state. They hesitate to intervene in the economy, as fascism does readily, or to embark on programs of social welfare. They cling to the status quo rather than proclaim a new way.⁶⁶

General Francisco Franco, for example, who led the Spanish army in revolt against the Spanish republic in July 1936 and became the dictator of Spain in 1939, clearly borrowed some aspects of rule from his ally Mussolini. He called himself *Caudillo* (leader) and made the fascist Falange the only party. During World War II and after, the Allies treated Franco as a partner of the Axis. That impression was fortified by the bloodiness of the Franquist repression, which may have killed as many as two hundred thousand people between 1939 and 1945, and by the regime's efforts to close down cultural and economic contact with the outside world.⁶⁷ In April 1945 Spanish officials attended a memorial mass for Hitler. A month later, however, the *Caudillo* explained to his followers that "it was necessary to lower some of the [Falange's] sails."⁶⁸

Thereafter Franco's Spain,⁶⁹ always more Catholic than fascist, built its authority upon traditional pillars such as the Church, big landowners, and the army, essentially charging them instead of the state or the ever-weaker Falange with social control. Franco's state intervened little in the economy, and made little effort to regulate the daily life of people as long as they were passive.

The Estado Novo of Portugal⁷⁰ differed from fascism even more profoundly than Franco's Spain. Salazar was, in effect, the dictator of Portugal, but he preferred a passive public and a limited state where social power remained in the hands of the Church, the army, and the big landowners. In July 1934, Dr. Salazar actually suppressed an indigenous

Portuguese fascist movement, National Syndicalism, accusing it of "exaltation of youth, the cult of force through so-called direct action, the principle of the superiority of state political power in social life, the propensity for organizing the masses behind a political leader"—not a bad description of fascism.⁷¹

Vichy France, the regime that replaced the parliamentary republic after the defeat of 1940,⁷² was certainly not fascist at the outset, for it had neither a single party nor parallel institutions. A governing system in which France's traditional select civil service ran the state, with enhanced roles for the military, the Church, technical experts, and established economic and social elites, falls clearly into the authoritarian category. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 brought the French Communist Party into open resistance and obliged the German occupation to become much harsher in order to support total war, Vichy and its policy of collaboration with Nazi Germany faced mounting opposition. Parallel organizations appeared in the fight against the Resistance: the *Milice* or supplementary police, "special sections" of the law courts for expeditious trials of dissidents, the Police for Jewish Affairs. But even though, as we saw in chapter 4, a few Paris fascists were given important posts at Vichy in the last days of the regime, they served as individuals rather than as chiefs of an official single party.

What Is Fascism?

The moment has come to give fascism a usable short handle, even though we know that it encompasses its subject no better than a snapshot encompasses a person.

Fascism may be defined as a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.

To be sure, political behavior requires choices, and choices—as my critics hasten to point out—bring us back to underlying ideas. Hitler and Mussolini, scornful of the "materialism" of socialism and liberalism, insisted on the centrality of ideas to their movements. Not so, retorted

many antifascists who refuse to grant them such dignity. "National Socialism's ideology is constantly shifting," Franz Neumann observed. "It has certain magical beliefs—leadership adoration, supremacy of the master race—but [it] is not laid down in a series of categorical and dogmatic pronouncements."⁷³ On this point, this book is drawn toward Neumann's position, and I examined at some length in chapter 1 the peculiar relationship of fascism to its ideology—simultaneously proclaimed as central, yet amended or violated as expedient.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, fascists knew what they wanted. One cannot banish ideas from the study of fascism, but one can situate them accurately among all the factors that influence this complex phenomenon. One can steer between two extremes: fascism consisted neither of the uncomplicated application of its program, nor of freewheeling opportunism.

I believe that the ideas that underlie fascist actions are best deduced from those actions, for some of them remain unstated and implicit in fascist public language. Many of them belong more to the realm of visceral feelings than to the realm of reasoned propositions. In chapter 2 I called them "mobilizing passions":

- a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions;
- the primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it;
- the belief that one's group is a victim, a sentiment that justifies any action, without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both internal and external;
- dread of the group's decline under the corrosive effects of individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences;
- the need for closer integration of a purer community, by consent if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary;
- the need for authority by natural chiefs (always male), culminating in a national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group's historical destiny;
- the superiority of the leader's instincts over abstract and universal reason;
- the beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when they are devoted to the group's success;

- the right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group's prowess within a Darwinian struggle.

Fascism according to this definition, as well as behavior in keeping with these feelings, is still visible today. Fascism exists at the level of Stage One within all democratic countries—not excluding the United States. “Giving up free institutions,” especially the freedoms of unpopular groups, is recurrently attractive to citizens of Western democracies, including some Americans. We know from tracing its path that fascism does not require a spectacular “march” on some capital to take root; seemingly anodyne decisions to tolerate lawless treatment of national “enemies” is enough. Something very close to classical fascism has reached Stage Two in a few deeply troubled societies. Its further progress is not inevitable, however. Further fascist advances toward power depend in part upon the severity of a crisis, but also very largely upon human choices, especially the choices of those holding economic, social, and political power. Determining the appropriate responses to fascist gains is not easy, since its cycle is not likely to repeat itself blindly. We stand a much better chance of responding wisely, however, if we understand how fascism succeeded in the past.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Fascism set off a tidal wave of ink. Renzo De Felice included 12,208 books and articles in a bibliography devoted largely to Italian Fascism.¹ Even more has been published about Hitler and Nazism. Another substantial list of works has been devoted to fascism in other countries, plus numerous studies of generic fascism. Obviously, no lone scholar, however diligent, could possibly master all the literature of all the fascisms. This bibliographical chapter is, therefore, necessarily selective. All I can do here is present a personal choice of works that were particularly helpful to me: by marking turning points, defining major interpretations, or covering essential aspects with authority. Many of them contain detailed bibliographies for more specialized reading. I make no claim to completeness.

I. General Works

The most authoritative narrative history of all fascist movements and regimes is Stanley G. Payne's prodigiously learned *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), but it describes better than it explains. Pierre Milza, *Les fascismes* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1985), is also well informed and wide-ranging. The most influential recent attempt to define fascism comes from Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1994), and *International Fascism: Theories, Causes, and the New Consensus* (London: Arnold, 1998), though his zeal to reduce fascism to one pithy sentence seems to me more likely to inhibit than to stimulate analysis of how and with whom it worked.

Short introductions to fascism are legion. Kevin Passmore's *Fascism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) is very brief but lively. Three of the most recent short introductions take sharply contrasting directions. Mark Neocleous, *Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), adopts a cultural-studies approach in which fascism reflects the dark side of modernity and capitalism, driven not by interests but by images of war, nature, and the nation. Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919–1945* (London: Routledge, 2003), presents a careful and thorough historical narrative. He stops in 1945, but Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Penguin, 1996), devotes half his limited space to the postwar period.

An excellent introduction to the rise of Nazism is Anthony J. Nicholls, *Weimar and the Rise of Hitler*, 4th ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). Conan Fischer,