FOR ABOUT three-quarters of a century, almost all academic discussion concerning Mussolini's Fascism[1] has tended to imagine the movement it animated, and the regime it informed, as entirely lacking a reasoned rationale. It early became commonplace to attribute to Fascism a unique irrationality, accompanied by a ready recourse to violence. Fascism, it has been argued, was full of emotion, but entirely empty of cognitive content. Fascists were, and are, understood to have renounced all rational discourse, in order to "glorify the non-rational." Their ideology, movement, revolution, and behavior were made distinctive by the appeal to two, and only two, "absolutes": "violence and war."[2]

Before the advent of the Second World War, some analysts had gone so far as to insist that "fascism" was the product of "orgasm anxiety," a sexual dysfunction that found release only in "mystic intoxication," homicidal hostility, and the complete suppression of rational thought.[3] Marxists and fellow travelers argued that since Fascism was "the violent attempt of decaying capitalism to defeat the proletarian revolution and forcibly arrest the growing contradictions of its whole development," it could not support itself with a sustained rationale. Its conceptions were "empty and hollow," finding expession in "deceitful terminology" consciously designed to conceal the "realities of class-rule and class-exploitation."[4]

For many, "Fascism [was] essentially a political weapon adopted by the ruling class . . . that takes root in the minds of millions . . . [appealing] to certain uncritical and infantile impulses which, in a people debarred from a rational, healthy existence . . . tend to dominate their mental lives."

By the end of the Great War, Gentile had formulated the principal outlines of a political philosophy that was to provide the union of nationalism and syndicalism with its rationale.[6] By 1918, Gentile spoke of anticipating the postwar emergence of a revolutionary "new state" that would be the expression of the "fully rational and concrete" national will of Italians in their collectivity. In that "revolutionary state," politics and morality, parochial and national interests, would combine in such a fashion that individuals would fully identify themselves with its actions. That new state would be a spiritual reality in which all would find their place. It would be a modern state that would provide labor fulsome standing. It would be a state charged with the accelerated development of an industrially, culturally, and politically retrograde peninsula. Gentile recognized that just such developments would be essential if the newly reunited nation was to escape from the palpably inferior position to which it was assigned by its industrially advanced contemporaries.[7]

The new state would find its leaders among those who would sense the needs of their time. Gentile was convinced that, particularly in times of crisis, uniquely gifted individuals were capable of intuiting prevailing political sentiment. Such leaders would be those who would represent their people as heads of state, or leaders of revolutions—manifesting a will not limited to his or her own individuality, but which would encompass the general will of all.[8]

Gentile's was a political concept rooted in the antiindividualism of classical idealism. The concept of politics entertained by Actualism was typical of that tradition. It was eminently inclusive—one in which the empirical, solitary, "abstract," individual, together with classes of individuals, the leadership of the state, and the state itself, constituted, in Gentile's judgment, an integral moral unity—what Gentile chose to consider a collective, if pluriform, "concrete individuality."[9]

That inclusive and collective sense of personhood underlay Gentile's entire conception of politics, law, and the state. By 1916, as a teacher of jurisprudence at the Atheneum in Pisa, Gentile taught that law and morality were, in some comprehensive sense, all one—with abstract distinctions to be made at the point at which the empirical individual found himself or herself confronted by statute law. For Gentile, law—at its very origins—was necessarily and inextricably *moral*—and, by implication, inescapably universal. As statute law, morality took on the features of "externality"—but faced with the responsibility of conforming, or not, to its strictures, the individual is compelled to deal with the intrinsic universality involved in the entire process.[10]

The single imperative ideal "to which all else is subordinated," Mussolini maintained, was the maximization of the interests of the nation.[19] Should the evidence indicate that the nation prospered under a monarchy, Fascists were monarchists. Should there be evidence that the monarchy was dysfunctional, Fascists would be republicans.

Governed by the same criteria, neither war nor violence were ends in themselves. They were approved if instrumental to the purposes of the nation and abjured if not.[20] Neither a collectivism nor an individualist economy—an economy govered by state administration or by "free market" initiatives—were, in and of themselves, perceived as essentially Fascist. Their advocacy turned on their ability to enhance those productive capabilities that were critical to national purpose.[21] The arrangements that were considered conducive to those ends were chosen by Fascist theo-

any given time, by what they considered best evidence.

descriptive and normative

Rejecting the presupposition of ontological realists—who attempt to fashion reality out of a suppositious relationship of individual *subjects* interacting with *external objects*—Spirito characterized "reality" as *pensiero pensate*, as something *thought*, a *product* of collective thinking. In effect, he sought (as did Gentile) to render reality "concrete"—as a form of collective consciousness. For Spirito, the very notion that one might coherently speak of an objective reality independent of collective reasoning was cognitively meaningless. For Actualists, reality could only be a product of the reasoning of a thinking community. The evidence for any reality, whatever, could only be given as part of a shared consciousness—*immanent* in collective consciousness itself. To speak of a reality that was independent of and/or antecedent to such consciousness could only involve ("intellectualistic," i.e., dogmatic) presuppositions that were epistemologically indefensible.

The Actualist conception of the communal "true" self, which identified itself with the state as the executive expression of the political community, was to become the normative rationale for Fascist totalitarianism. It was to displace the insistent individualism that characterized political liberalism since its emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

behavior whenever conditions permitted.

To anyone who knew anything about Mussolini, it was clear that there was very little that was conservative, liberal, or politically democratic about his most fundamental convictions. Through all the phases of his political apprenticeship, Mussolini had always been an elitist, as well as a singularly antidemocratic revolutionary. By the beginning of 1925, the liberals, together with the advocates of political democracy, had either fallen away or reinterpreted their convictions in order to render them compatible with those given expression by Mussolini on 3 January 1925.

In 1932, as corporative institutions were given concrete legal character, discussions devoted to their normative grounds became increasingly intense. Gentile noted that what had been a rather abstruse philosophical argument had suddenly become a "popular" concern. He wryly noted that the interest was contemporaneous with the fact that the principle of the identity of the individual and the state had been proposed as an alternative to traditional liberalism—a proposal that threatened to "touch the pocketbook" of property holders.[10] The Fascist rejection of liberal political and economic thought was seen as a direct threat to private property. The totalitarian antiliberal conception of the identification of the individual and the state had become a *practical* concern.

One of the central arguments of Actualism, bearing on that theme, turned on the conviction that the essence of the human being was *thought* and *thinking*—and neither could be conceived, in any real sense, as *private* or *individual*. Thought, as thinking—with all its judgments, convictions, evaluations, conclusions, and confirmations—*intrinsically* involves *language*. And there are no "private" languages. Every so-called private language, like every encryption, is parasitic on public language. "Correct usage" and comprehensibility imply common use. Actualists argued that the criteria governing all such activities are *collective* and *intersubjective*—the product of a common history. They are embodied in inherited speech modalities and in exchanges among the living, and through literature, with the dead. For Gentile and the Actualists there was no "private language," just as there were no uniquely individual judgments. Language, like the individual, was a function of interaction with an historic "audience"—composed of our present interlocutors, together with all those who have gone before, as well as all those who would, one day, come after us and judge our every thought, and the behavior it sponsored.[18]

Each one of us, it was argued, takes pride in our speech, in our prose, and in communication in general. We create ourselves in such exercises of free expression. We conceive of our communication as specifically our own—and yet, no one pretends that any of us has created the vocabulary, grammar, or syntax employed. The language in which we revel, which serves as a vehicle for our "unique" and "free" communication, is an historic, collective product. Without its availability we would all be essentially mute and infinitely less than we are.[19]

In such a conception, the "rules" and "laws" of language are necessary if the individual is to uniquely and freely express him- or herself. The rules and laws become an interior norm, rendering comprehensible the formulations that would otherwise be arbitrary and unintelligible. The individual would have achieved meaningful freedom of expression because he or she would have "identified," become one, with the inherited, collective patterns that govern effective speech.[20]

The individual might seek and find expression in a "pri-

niques, rules of conduct, and established

While the transformation to the new society into its communalist form would necessarily be slow,[30] Fascism had inaugurated the process by creating intermediate agencies between society, its economy, and the political state.[31] Through a chain of interlocking associations, commencing with a variety of youth and student groups, professional, labor, and entrepreneurial organizations, the population of the nation would no longer be composed of those who rule and those who are ruled; everyone would merge into a regime of governance. No longer would the government be distinguished from the general population; everyone would be involved in governance. There is no specific place where government would end and privacy begin.

Rousseau and many of his contemporaries were convinced that collective exposure to a standard public education, in circumstances as similar as possible, with training in comparable conditions so that each would be exposed to essentially the same stimuli, would tend to render citizens eminently uniform in their values, judgments, and aspirations. That would reinforce the harmony in which the energy of each was united, in liberty, with the will of all—to give rise to a system Fascists identified as "totalitarian democracy."[34] It is "democratic" because it embodies a harmony of sentiments and goals that is not coerced, that externalizes itself as the will of an historic community, finding its executive expression in the state.

ves.

All of this was transpiring while the international community lapsed into the Great Depression. Industrializing Italy was savagely impacted. Overall production declined precipitously. Unemployment escalated. Mussolini no longer spoke of the dislocation as being "*within* the capitalist productive system," but as being an affliction "*of* the system itself." He refered to the crisis "as no longer a transient disability, but a systemic disease."[72] For Mussolini, the weight of contemporary evidence convinced him that the inherited economic system required radical intervention.

That intervention would be effectuated through syndicates. Through them, workers and employers would directly participate in the nation's productive processes. They would directly collaborate in pursuit of defined ends through means collectively determined. The interventions of the state would no longer count as violations of speculative freedoms. They would be the product of deliberations undertaken by knowledgeable members of associations composed of those involved in every aspect of production.

What would emerge out of Spirito's projected "integral corporativism" would be a state economically individuated in and through persons, and collections of persons in syndicates, and corporations—all finding their political identity, as a national community, in the form of a totalitarian state. Historically, such a resolution would satisfy those ideological interests that had animated Fascism since its founding. It would supersede the old socialism—the antinational and antiproductive opponent of nascent Fascism—"to make its own that which remains alive and productive in the Bolshevik experience."[88]