INTRODUCTION

Dictatorship in the Age of Mass Politics

> [L]ong voluntary subjection under individual Führer and usurpers is in prospect. People no longer believe in principles, but will, periodically, probably [believe] in saviors.
>
> – Jacob Burckhardt

Burckhardt, Basel patrician and pessimist, was right. From his university chair in neutral Switzerland, the nineteenth-century pioneer of the history of culture saw Bismarck's founding of the German Reich in 1866/71 as the overture to a "world war" or an "era of wars" that would destroy the cultivated elite that Burckhardt exemplified. In the "coming barbaric age," mass politics and industry would create a nightmare world under the domination of vast military-industrial states whose miserable inhabitants would serve out their regimented days "to the sound of the trumpet."[1]

The rulers of those states would differ markedly from the dynasties of the past. Equality, as Burckhardt's contemporary Tocqueville also suggested, could serve as foundation for wholly new varieties of despotism. In Burckhardt's jaundiced view the egalitarianism of the French Revolution and Rousseau's doctrine of the inherent goodness of humanity had destroyed all foundation for legitimate authority. The result – from Robespierre and Napoleon to the future of "terrifying simplifiers" that Burckhardt saw coming upon Europe – was rule by force in the name of the people. In the "agreeable twentieth century" of Burckhardt's imagination, "authority would once again raise its head – and a fearful head." Mass politics and the levelling force of the market would compel the world to choose between the "outright democracy" that Burckhardt disdained and the "unlimited lawless despotism" that he feared. Despotism might not even

[1] Jacob Burckhardt, *Briefe*, ed. Max Burckhardt, 11 vols. (Munich, 1949–94), 5:119, 5:158, 8:276, 5:161; *Jacob Burckhardts Vorlesung über die Geschichte des Revolutionszeitalters*, ed. Erich Ziegler (Basel, 1974), 19; epigraph: Jacob Burckhardt, *Force and Freedom: Reflections on History*, ed. James Hastings Nichols (New York, 1943), 41.

be the rule of an individual, as in the past, but rather "the domination of a military corporate body [*die Herrschaft einer militärischen Corporation*]" employing unprecedented terrorist methods. His contemporaries, their wits dulled by the nineteenth century's religion of progress, "might not like to imagine a world whose rulers are utterly oblivious to law, public welfare, profitable labor and industry, credit, and so on, and can therefore rule with the most consummate brutality." But some might live to see it; Burckhardt took perverse pleasure in the thought that the return of "genuine naked force" would transmute the self-satisfaction of the commercial and industrial middle classes he so despised into "pale terror of death."[2]

The agreeable twentieth century proved closer to Burckhardt's forebodings or hopes than to the expectations of other observers of the historical process, from Immanuel Kant, to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx, to Richard Cobden. The teleological determinisms of Hegel and Marx – history as the self-realization of the world-spirit or of humanity as a species – were fundamentally optimistic. Hence the sovereign unconcern with which Hegelians and Marxists contemplated the unlucky or weak who perished under the spiked wheel of history. Cobdenite liberalism, the insular Anglo-Saxon successor to the Enlightenment faith in human perfectibility, was more optimistic still. The weak need not perish; free trade would painlessly "[draw] men together, [thrust] aside the antagonism of race, and creed, and language, and [unite] us in the bonds of eternal peace."[3]

After July 1914, millions slaughtered one another in ethnic and ideological massacres, industrialization through terror, and the two greatest wars in history. It required a genuinely heroic belief in Hegel's "cunning of reason" to see at least 100 million dead as advancing the progress of the world-spirit or the self-realization of the species. The "eternal peace" of the Cobdenites receded into the realm of fantasy. And the first of the two world wars led to the revolutionary despotisms that Burckhardt had foreseen, despotisms of mass politics that claimed to rest on the general will that Rousseau had imagined.

The new regimes were anything but uniform in pattern, despite their frequent grouping under the rubric of "totalitarianism" and their shared responsibility for the Second World War. Their single parties under quasi-military discipline and above all their common aspiration to total control of the individual made them appear loosely comparable, but they rested upon radically different political and social foundations. The Soviet regime came to power through revolutionary civil war in a country whose population was three-fourths peasant and whose fiercely authoritarian political culture derived from Byzantium, from the thirteenth-century Mongol conquerors of Moscow and Kiev, and from pitiless autocrats from Ivan the Terrible to Peter and Catherine the Great. By the time the party of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin consolidated its grip on Russia, war and

[2] Burckhardt, *Briefe*, 5:130, 8:290, 9:203, 9:263, 8:115.
[3] Richard Cobden, quoted in Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850–1983* (London, 1984), 6.

economic collapse had wiped the slate clean. The fragile Western-style civil society – modernity's characteristic web of religious and community groups, voluntary associations, and professional bodies – of nineteenth-century Russia had vanished, and with it any barrier to dictatorship other than the peasantry that Stalin duly crushed.[4]

The dictatorships of west-central Europe, Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany, arose by contrast in semi-legality within still-functioning industrial societies that despite their many differences shared the Western traditions of public law, limited government, and a civil society largely independent of the state. In Russia, as the dying Lenin apparently feared, a restored "Asiatic" dictatorship was one likely outcome of the collapse of Tsarist autocracy.[5] In Italy and Germany, dictatorship was a less foreseeable consequence of war and upheaval.

From the beginning, one major school of interpretation – in both countries – privileged the unique national characteristics that purportedly produced Fascism and National Socialism. In Italy, the Fascist regime laid jealous and exclusive claim to the heritage of the national movement that had created united Italy from the 1830s to 1870. Anti-Fascist intellectuals in return disparaged Fascism as the "revelation" of that same Italy's deficits in civility and modernity. Once its momentary political utility had passed, Benedetto Croce's famous dismissal of the regime's twenty years in power as a mere "parenthesis" in the triumphant history of a United – and Liberal – Italy won few converts. Italy's trajectory had indeed diverged after 1918 from that of Britain and France, despite common experience of industrial warfare, mass death, and near-defeat. The structural and ideological roots of that divergence clearly extended back far beyond the crises of the Great War and of its aftermath that had produced the Fascist movement.[6] The leaders of that movement, from its origins in 1919–22 to national ruin in 1943–45, were products of Liberal Italy, not visitors from another planet. Understanding Fascism's origins and career inevitably required causal analysis of its specifically national past.

In Germany, the eulogists of Germany's peculiarities, its monarchical-military-Protestant *Sonderweg* – its "eccentric route" to modernity midway between Russian despotism and Anglo-French democracy – held the upper hand until 1945. Thereafter, Germany's unique trajectory "from Bismarck to Hitler" abruptly reversed polarity, and became the foremost answer to the question "How was Auschwitz possible?" That phase held through the early 1980s. In the 1960s the first postwar generation of German historians, with help from a

[4] See especially the durable analysis of Martin Malia, *Comprendre la Révolution russe* (Paris, 1980).

[5] Lenin and the specter of an "*Aziatchina*": Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New York, rev. ed., 1981), 377–79, 393–94, 399–400.

[6] See the persuasive claims – from entirely different perspectives – that Fascism had a lengthy prehistory of Paul Corner, "The Road to Fascism: A Italian *Sonderweg*?," *Contemporary European History* 11:2 (2002), 273–95, and Roberto Vivarelli, *Storia delle origini del fascismo. L'Italia dalla grande guerra alla marcia su Roma*, 2 vols. (Bologna, 1990), especially vol. 2.

few of their elders, discovered Marx, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, and modernization theory. They fashioned a new "historical social science" *Sonderweg* along which the German people had goose-stepped from the wars of Otto von Bismarck through those of Adolf Hitler.[7] Social formations, politics, and culture had diverged sharply from the democratic West on the one hand, and on the other Germany's tumultuous economic growth had outstripped, by the eve of the Great War, the achievements of the first industrial nation, Great Britain. Prussia's victories, Bismarck's charisma, and political manipulation by the great man and his successors had fortified Prussian-aristocratic domination against industrial modernity and parliamentary democracy well into the twentieth century.

The social-historical *Sonderweg* school designated the Reich's post-1878 tariffs and "negative integration" as the tools that had unified the Prussian-Protestant "state-supporting forces" in a purported "marriage of iron and rye" and in common hatred for the Socialists and Catholics whom Bismarck had damned as "enemies of the Reich." When those remedies proved insufficient, Bismarck and successors had allegedly invoked "social imperialism": colonial, naval, and ultimately continental expansion to preserve the social order and purportedly preempt revolution at home. War in 1914 and the advent of Adolf Hitler were thus desperate bids to stave off domestic reform; the dictator's "stirrup-holders" of 1933 and the monocled nobles who commanded his assault on Soviet Russia in 1941 were merely the final stages of an iron continuity from Königgrätz and Sedan to Auschwitz and the ruined *Führerbunker* of 1945.[8]

Opposing views inevitably arose. British neo-Marxist historians of Imperial Germany mocked the new *Sonderweg* orthodoxy on many counts, but scoffed especially at the democratic credentials of the Western "model" that they themselves ungratefully inhabited. Imperial Germany, in their analysis, figured as a triumphantly modern state ruling a society that had undergone a "successful bourgeois revolution," even if that claim – apart from proposing

[7] "Historische Sozialwissenschaft," the school's usual self-description, is not wholly equivalent to "historical social science"; "social-historical *Sonderweg*" will nevertheless have to serve as shorthand for the school's major thesis.

[8] See especially Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Cologne, 1969), 501 (National Socialism as "extreme social-imperialism"); his *Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Göttingen, 1973); the fruitful variation on Wehler's continuity theme by a later fierce opponent, Klaus Hildebrand, *Deutsche Aussenpolitik 1933–1945: Kalkül oder Dogma?* (Stuttgart, 1971); and, from the direction of sociology, Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (London, 1967); among the elders, the influential refugee from Lenin and Hitler, Alexander Gershenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (Berkeley, CA, 1943); the German emigré Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy, and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience, 1660–1815* (Cambridge, MA, 1958) and "Political and Social Consequences of the Great Depression of 1873–1896 in Central Europe," in James J. Sheehan, ed., *Imperial Germany* (New York, 1976), 39–60; and the former SA and NSDAP member Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York, 1967); *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914* (New York, 1975); *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich* (London, 1986).

an even cruder linkage between society and politics than that put forward by opponents – left much of pre-1914 German history perplexing. Nor did the allegedly unexceptional bourgeois career up to 1914 that the critics described offer any clue to the sources of the Reich's undeniably exceptional efforts at world conquest from 1914 to 1945 – efforts too broadly supported by Germans from all social groups to pass as contingent phenomena without a past.[9] German scholars of a moderate conservative bent delighted in the British Left's critique, and inevitably exploited it to suggest that Germans should once again aspire to national pride. Others suggested that the *Kaiserreich* had been evolving peacefully toward parliamentary democracy until 1914, or that Germany had succumbed to Nazism in 1933 not from resistance to modernity, but from a surfeit of it, an abrupt overload of overlapping traumatic events – swift and thorough industrialization, total war, humiliating defeat, the sudden advent of genuine mass politics, hyperinflation, and the Great Depression.[10]

Finally, after Soviet collapse and West Germany's annexation of its eastern neighbor in 1989–90, skepticism about the *Sonderweg*'s explanatory power and very existence became general, and embraced not merely the lock-step social-historical concept of the 1960s and 1970s but virtually all suggestions that Germany's pre-1914 past might help explain 1933–45. The Reich's trajectory to and through the era of world wars mutated yet again, into a causally irrelevant German "parenthesis," an unfortunate interlude in the nation's orderly progress toward the stable democracy of the post-1949 and post-1990 eras.

The post-1990 consensus that Germany until 1914 or 1933 was in no significant way peculiar, and that statements to the contrary were quaint throwbacks was itself merely a by-product of generational change and political and historiographical vogue, not of shifts in the underlying evidence. One powerful if faintly indecent objection to the new orthodoxy was that the alignment of Italy and Germany with Western values and political norms, however deep and abiding it might appear from a twenty-first-century vantage point, only dated from 1945. The United States and Great Britain, not indigenous political or social forces, established or reestablished representative democracy in the lands under the bloody footprint of their armies, from Sicily and Normandy to the Elbe. Stalin memorably explained the process, as he himself applied it, in spring 1945: "This war is not as in the past. . . . Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise."[11]

The German people nevertheless defended their dictatorship in 1942–45 with such fervor that at least 7 million Germans – up to 10 percent of the

[9] See above all Geoff Eley's portion of idem and David Blackbourn, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Oxford, 1984) (quotation, 144); and the unrepentant "Interview With David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley," *German History* 22:2 (2004), 229–45. For a mildly embarrassed effort to explain later events, Eley, "What Produces Fascism?," in idem, *From Unification to Nazism* (Boston, 1986), 254–82.

[10] Manfred Rauh, *Die Parlamentarisierung des Deutschen Reiches* (Düsseldorf, 1977); Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York, 1992).

[11] Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York, 1962), 114.

population – died. Half of Germany's 5.3 million military dead perished after July 1944 – when the imminence of total defeat was apparent to the meanest intellect. And those who led and many who followed in that suicidal struggle, the entire top and middle management of National Socialist Germany and of its armed forces, and well over half the Germans alive in 1945, had received their intellectual furnishings and political socialization under the *Kaiserreich*.[12] Contingency after 1918 clearly played some role in their behavior, but scarcely explains a cohesion and fanaticism more deadly, to themselves and to others, than those of the warriors of Imperial Japan – whose rulers surrendered pusillanimously, largely from fear of domestic upheaval, after a mere 2.7 million dead.[13]

Yet even Germany's extreme behavior after 1933 did not necessarily rule out general interpretations that grouped it with other contemporary regimes. The common western European character of the Fascist and Nazi dictatorships struck most contemporaries as more salient than the resemblances of either to Soviet Russia. The term *totalitario*, which Liberal opponents of Benito Mussolini coined in 1923–24 and the dictator merrily plagiarized, only became popular as a sweeping "ism," a putative generic phenomenon embracing Moscow, Rome, and Berlin, in the 1940s.[14] Not so "fascism" (lower case), which originated in the Communist International in the months after Benito Mussolini's victory in 1922, over a decade before a second discernibly "fascist" regime arose. By the advent of Hitler in 1933 the term was long-established as the generic designation for the non-communist dictatorships that Marxists chose

[12] Except the dictator, whose Austrian origins often figure implausibly in efforts to attenuate German responsibilities. Numbers calculated from base data in *Die Bevölkerung des Deutschen Reichs nach den Ergebnissen der Volkszählung 1939*, 4 vols. (*Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, vol. 552) (Berlin, 1941–43), 2:6–7: roughly 65 percent of Germans alive in 1939 were born in 1905 and before, as were perhaps 57 percent of Germans alive in 1945 (assuming – given the sketchiness of civilian casualty data – that the dead of 1939–45 documented in note 13 were distributed relatively evenly by age group). See in addition the acute generational analyses of Peukert, *Weimar*, 14–18, and Bernhard R. Kroener, "Strukturelle Veränderungen in der militärischen Gesellschaft des Dritten Reiches," in Michael Prinz and Rainer Zitelmann, eds., *Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung* (Darmstadt, 1991), 272–79.

[13] German military dead (from a population of about 76 million): 4,923,000, plus a further 395,000 ethnic Germans, Alsace-Lorrainers, and others, according to the fundamental work of Rüdiger Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 1999), 219, 228; civilian casualties from air bombardment and Red Army atrocities taken from Overmans, "Die Toten des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Deutschland," in Wolfgang Michalka, ed., *Der Zweite Weltkrieg* (Munich, 1989), 859; Japanese dead (from a 1941 population of 74 million): John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York, 1999), 45. On the much-disputed sources of Japanese surrender, see above all the account, based in large part on decrypts and Japanese-language sources, of Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York, 1999), chs. 18–19, and especially 293–95, 310, 345–46.

[14] Jens Petersen, "La nascita del concetto di 'Stato totalitario' in Italia," *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico* 1 (1976), 143–68; Meir Michaelis, "Giovanni Amendola interprete del fascismo" NA 2158 (1986), 180–209; Leonard B. Schapiro, "Totalitarianism," in C. D. Kernig, ed., *Marxism, Communism, and Western Society*, 8 vols. (New York, 1972–73), 3:188–89.

to describe as "capitalist," and whose leaders were purportedly "agents" of malefactors of great wealth.[15]

The concept of fascism lived down its origins and its implausible identification – in Comintern orthodoxy – with a "monopoly capitalism" whose timorous representatives clearly did *not* rule in Rome or Berlin. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the archives of the interwar period slowly opened; the popularity of the concept of totalitarianism waned as Stalin's successors replaced mass terror with calculated selective repression. Ernst Nolte's *Three Faces of Fascism* (*Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche*, 1963) caught the new mood, and led an explosive wave of research into the putative "fascist phenomenon." With the enthusiasm of entomologists let loose in virgin rain forest, scholars created taxonomies of the interwar "fascist" movements. Paperback volumes sampling a bizarre variety of groups and regimes – one chapter per country – poured from the presses.

The taxonomists soon found themselves in difficulty: they were unable to define fascism convincingly and thus delimit it as a "genus." Nolte, who made the most valiant attempt at definition, described fascism as an "anti-Marxism" that had arisen in response to Bolshevism after 1917. But anti-Marxism was scarcely the most salient feature of Mussolini's *Fascismo* or Hitler's National Socialism.[16] Barrington Moore, Jr., in his 1966 epic, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, derived fascism not from Marxism-Leninism but from feudalism: "fascism and its wars of aggression" were "the consequence of modernization without a real revolution" under the direction of agrarian elites, a claim that implausibly stretched a monocausal economic-determinist variant of Prussia-Germany's *Sonderweg* to cover the Italian and Japanese cases.[17]

Others avoided the task of definition by simply listing or "modelling" fascism's presumed attributes – the "fascist syndrome" – without offering persuasive rationales for selecting one attribute or set of attributes rather than another. The "cases" furnished the characteristics that made up the social-science "model." That model, with impeccable circularity, then confirmed the author's choice of cases. The geographic and chronological limits of fascism varied notably from author to author, and few proponents of the concept agreed on causal hypotheses about fascism's origins, dynamics, or goals. No single

[15] Theo Pirker, *Komintern und Faschismus* (Stuttgart, 1966), 45 and Ernst Nolte, "Vierzig Jahre Theorien über den Faschismus," in idem, ed., *Theorien über den Faschismus* (Cologne, 1967), 21–23.

[16] MacGregor Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, 2000), 54–55; also Chapter 4, note 260.

[17] (Boston, 1966), especially 447–52, 506; for Italian anticipations of this notion, see Emilio Sereni, *Il capitalismo nelle campagne (1860–1900)* (Turin, 1968 [1947]), 312, and Giuliano Procacci, "Appunti in tema di crisi dello Stato liberale e di origini del fascismo," SSt 6 (1965), 225 ("blocco di potere di tipo prussiano"); but see also the suggestion of Giampiero Carocci, *Storia d'Italia* (Milan, 1975), 13–19, that Italy's trajectory so combined elements of the English, French, and Prussian roads that "coherent development" was lacking.

conceptual mold fit the "fascisms" of industrialized Germany and of agrarian eastern Europe or Iberia, much less the putative "emperor-fascism" of distant Japan. Many historians divided even the seemingly close Italian and German "cases." Some of the "ideological and moral roots of *Fascismo*" allegedly "grew from the soil of the French Revolution"; Italy's dictator ostensibly "believed in the idea of progress." The Hitler movement, by contrast, was purportedly an atavistic "radicalism of the Right," a twisted product of the German *Sonderweg*.[18] At a subjective level, it emerged that Italian and German "fascists" had failed dismally to find common ideological ground in efforts to found a "fascist international" in the early 1930s.[19]

By the mid-1970s, proponents of the concept were in considerable embarrassment. The taxonomists sought to divide fascism into two or more fascisms, or resorted to involuntarily revealing adjectives: pre-fascist, proto-fascist, quasi-fascist, semi-fascist, neo-fascist, fascistic, and fascistoid. Some scholars attempted to define fascism by connecting it – like the German *Sonderweg* itself – to the problematic social-science notion of modernization.[20] Others innocently continued to assume that generic fascism was a thing rather than a concept, and analyzed its presumed social bases in a variety of interwar European societies.[21] But the inability of its supporters to define it cleanly, to divide fascist movements and regimes convincingly from merely "authoritarian" ones, to explain its rise coherently, and to agree on whether it ended in 1945 provoked increasing skepticism.

Former believers chronicled the "deflation" of the concept: "we have agreed to use the word without agreeing on how to define it."[22] Skeptics argued that the common link between fascisms was mere style, the aesthetic of the violent

[18] Renzo De Felice, *Intervista sul fascismo* (Bari, 1976), 54, 74, 100, 106; De Felice apparently derived this left-right distinction from Jacob L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London, 1952); for a catalogue of differences between all three regimes, see Bernd Martin, "Zur Tauglichkeit eines übergreifenden Faschismus-Begriffs," VfZ 29 (1981), 48–73; on Japan's distinctiveness see also Peter Duus and Daniel I. Okimoto, "Fascism and the History of Pre-War Japan: The Failure of a Concept," *Journal of Asian Studies* 39:1 (1979), 65–76.

[19] Michael Ledeen, *Universal Fascism. The Theory and Practice of the Fascist International, 1928–1936* (New York, 1972).

[20] Taxonomy: Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism* (Princeton, NJ, 1964); Alan Cassels, *Fascism* (New York, 1975); Stanley Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison, WI, 1980) and *A History of Fascism* (Madison, WI, 1995) remain the best. Modernization: Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., "Fascism and Modernization," *World Politics* 24 (1972) 547–64 (548 for adjectival proliferation, including "fascistoid"); on the theoretical pitfalls, Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective," CSSH 15:2 (1973), 199–226, remains vital. For a recent exhumation of the concept, pleading for a "weak version" of the theory (a "simple authoritarian regime" cannot "*over the long term* maintain control . . . over an increasingly economically developed society"), see Sheri E. Berman, "Modernization in Historical Perspective: The Case of Imperial Germany," *World Politics* 53:3 (April 2001), 431–62.

[21] See especially Stein Ugelvik Larsen et al., eds., *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen, 1980).

[22] Gilbert Allardyce, "What Fascism Is Not: Notes on the Deflation of a Concept," AHR 84:2 (1979), 367–88.

political deed.[23] Yet others suggested that the social-Darwinist pseudo-science and the genocidal deeds of "German fascism" were indeed unparalleled – except perhaps in Stalin's Soviet Russia, with its pseudo-scientific dogma of class struggle and its up to 30 million dead.[24] Scholars continued to turn out slim volumes on theories of fascism, but with diminishing conviction. The most persuasive recent effort has largely confined itself to the history of ideas, defining fascism as a "genus of political ideology whose mythic core . . . is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism." But such definitions contribute little to understanding the regime dynamics and differing outcomes of the various putative cases of generic fascism.[25]

Historical interest in the meantime shifted to the peculiarities of the movements and regimes themselves. A "new social history" – *Alltagsgeschichte* in its German variant – of everyday life "from the bottom up" duly emerged. A postmodernist "cultural history" viscerally hostile to the analysis of a putatively imaginary historical process followed. Youthful scholars professing the new genres promised to color in many totally blank areas in the recent history of Europe. But contempt for high politics engendered at least two perilous liabilities. First, the "new social historians" of Nazi Germany often focused on minor episodes of non-conformism among the population. They failed to show much interest in how the regime demonstrably inspired fanatical belief and reduced recalcitrant individuals and groups to obedience. Some even implied that the non-political rhythms of everyday life overrode even the most violent forms of political change, a strangely innocent attitude in a century in which high politics had killed, maimed, dispossessed, or displaced hundreds of millions, and had divided Germany for forty-five years. Second, the new emphases on particularity, on history from the "bottom," and on evanescent and often trivial cultural phenomena to the exclusion of the commanding heights of government, armed forces, and industry led to a proliferation of works whose authors actively denigrated synthesis. Large-scale efforts to explain historical change became – in voguish jargon – "master narratives" or "metanarratives" suspect or convicted a priori of sinister political or cultural agendas. The consequence, as the mills of academic specialization ground steadily and the stream of Ph.D. dissertations,

[23] See especially Armin Mohler, "Le 'style' fasciste," *Nouvelle École* 42 (1985), 59–86.

[24] On the parallels between *völkisch* racism and Marxism-Leninism, see among others Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Zeit der Ideologien* (Stuttgart, 1983), ch. 3; also p. 347 in this volume. The clamorous "*Historikerstreit*" of the 1980s over the comparability of National Socialism unfortunately revolved around Ernst Nolte's absurd thesis that the "so-called annihilation of the Jews by the Third Reich was a reaction [to] or distorted copy" of Stalin's camps, and the debate was too intertwined with West Germany's bitter academic and political feuding to shed much light on the historical issues; the best summary is Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past* (Cambridge, MA, 1988). For the numbering of Stalin's victims – a subject of impassioned dispute – see above all Steven Rosefielde, "Stalinism in Post-Communist Perspective: New Evidence on Killings, Forced Labour and Economic Growth in the 1930s," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48:6 (1996), 959–87, and Michael Haynes, "Counting Soviet Deaths in the Great Patriotic War: A Note," ibid. 55:2 (2003), 303–09.

[25] Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991), especially 26.

monographs, journal articles, conference volumes, and essay collections on the era of the world wars widened relentlessly, was an increasing and apparently irremediable fragmentation of knowledge.

If self-referential analysis of national *Sonderwege* is inadequate, if theoretical and practical perplexities have deflated the generic concept of fascism, and if academic specialization and the histories of "everyday life" and of "culture" threaten to dissolve historical knowledge into disjointed particulars, little hope may exist for understanding the twentieth-century dictatorships that Burckhardt had imagined. Yet generalization is an inescapable duty. Fragments are not historical knowledge. Erudition without synthesis illuminates only minute disconnected portions of the past and contributes nothing to understanding the present. Synthesis without erudition, without ruthless testing of generalizations against the widest possible spread of evidence, replaces incoherence with hollow formulas. Perhaps the career of generic fascism in particular is a cautionary tale about how not to frame a concept. Perhaps fascism, from its Comintern origins in 1922 to its re-elaboration by historians in the 1960s and 1970s, sought to cover too broad a range of too disparate phenomena.[26]

Successful concepts also exist. The ideal-types that Weber helped pioneer have proven indispensable for analyzing significant characteristics of historical phenomena, from *domination*, whether *traditional*, *legal*, or *charismatic*, to *bureaucracy* and *the state*.[27] Generalizing abstractions ("isms") with apparently well-understood origins and histories have likewise helped mightily to order the historical evidence, just as the changing meanings of those abstractions are themselves vital evidence. Few but the most recalcitrant empiricists or mocking skeptics would dismiss notions such as "absolutism," the organizing drive of the early modern monarchical state toward internal and external power. *Nationalism* is for most working historians the passionate urge to merge ethnicity and state invented in the decades surrounding 1789 and spread murderously across Europe and the world.[28] *Communism*'s corpus of sacred books, historical development from the Bolshevik Revolution through the Third International, and Leninist-dictatorial practice – enduring in its remaining outposts around the globe – make it a concept of uncommon solidity. *Capitalism*'s origins, nature, and relationship to politics have aroused fierce debate, but few historians would dispense with the term. *Democracy*, despite appropriation by

[26] For intriguing discussion of this pitfall, see Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," APSR 64:4 (1970), 1033–53.

[27] Perez Zagorin, *Rebels and Rulers, 1500–1660* (Cambridge, 1982) is a particularly successful example of the use of ideal-types in comparative history; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *The Age of Bureaucracy* (New York, 1974); Fritz Ringer, *Max Weber's Methodology* (Cambridge, MA, 1997) and "Max Weber on Causal Analysis, Interpretation, and Comparison," *History and Theory* 41:2 (2002), 163–78, provide admirable introductions to Weber's ideas, their context, and their continuing usefulness. "Charisma": pp. 300–01 in this volume.

[28] See the splendid – and involuntarily complementary – discussions of Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London, 1960) and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY, 1983).

every known form of modern dictatorship, nevertheless has a modern history that stretches back to the English and French revolutions and a set of core values – popular sovereignty and rights *against* the state – that define the phenomenon and delimit it from other types of regime. *Liberalism* and *conservatism*, although increasingly awkward to define as the distance from their origins in the American, French, and industrial revolutions increases, are concepts ingrained in the very texture of nineteenth-century Western history.

Even *totalitarianism* has its uses. The concept's opponents initially damned it, with decreasing plausibility, as Cold War rhetoric that did an injustice to Stalin's purportedly humanist and progressive Marxism-Leninism by coupling it with Hitler's inhuman and allegedly backward-looking racism.[29] Others disparaged the notion as hollow and reductionist because no known regime was in fact "total," or plausibly complained that the concept's usual form, a syndrome or model, failed to illuminate its origins, development over time, and ultimate goals.[30] Yet totalitarianism is at least capable of clean definition as that form of dictatorship or dictatorial movement, inconceivable before the age of mass politics, that seeks total control over the individual in the name of an idea. Alternatively, as a scholar of the Cold War era, Martin Drath, suggested with breathtaking parsimony, totalitarianism was the outcome of a political movement's attempt "to impose, against the prevailing value-system of a given society, an entirely different system of values." In Drath's concept, all other aspects of totalitarian regimes derived from that "primary phenomenon" of forced value change, and "[o]nly the resistance to a totalitarian system that springs up – or is expected – from within existing society makes the system genuinely total." Either definition allows a neat distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian regimes; in Drath's words, "while authoritarianism is generally conservative, totalitarianism is rather . . . decisively revolutionary."[31]

[29] See especially p. 347. On a subjective level, neither Stalin nor Hitler seems to have seen the proposed distinction clearly, at least in private. Stalin remarked regretfully after June 1941 that "together with the Germans we would have been invincible!" Hitler's wistful verdict on his former quasi-ally was "a beast, yet also a notable man [*eine Bestie, aber immerhim von Format*]" (Svetlana Alliluyeva, *Only One Year* [New York, 1969], 392; Adolf Hitler, *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944*, ed. Werner Jochmann [Hamburg, 1980], 363; see also 336). The instant mutual comprehension between the two systems in August 1939 suggests that their resemblance – despite the ideological divide – was more than skin-deep. Their subjectively felt kinship is not necessarily decisive in validating the concept of totalitarianism – other levels of analysis exist. But opponents of the concept nevertheless need to confront squarely both that sense of kinship and Mussolini's high praise for Stalin's system as "a sort of Slavic Fascism" (Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937–1943* [Milan, 1980], entry for 16 October 1939).

[30] For the classic "syndrome" approach and its admitted weakness in explaining origins, Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, MA, 2nd rev. ed., 1965), 19, 21–22.

[31] "Totalitarismus in der Volksdemokratie," introduction to Ernst Richert, *Macht ohne Mandat: Der Staatsapparat in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands* (Cologne, 1958), xxiv, xxix; see also Werner J. Patzelt's illuminating discussion of Drath's ideas: "Wirklichkeitskonstruktion

Framing the concept as the unfolding of the will to total power of the bearers of an ideology that – in Hannah Arendt's words – "pretend[s] to know the secrets of the historical process" builds the dynamics of the movements and regimes into the definition itself. The futile although much-argued issue of whether any given regime actually approached "total" control thus becomes irrelevant. Despite the rambling confusion of Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*, a work that helped popularize the concept almost as much as Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin, her analysis of the dynamics peculiar to Nazism contained flashes of stunning prescience. Her description of the central role of the "will of the Führer" in the German dictatorship and in its accelerating radicalization, and of that will's reciprocal relationship to the "planned shapelessness" of Nazi rule offered a still-persuasive means of reconciling the schools of interpretation later known to generations of undergraduates as "intentionalism" and "functionalism."[32]

Finally, the putrescence of Marxism-Leninism and the fall of the first Marxist empire in 1989–91 desanctified the concept of *revolution* and freed it for wider use. From their beginnings, the Italian and German regimes intermittently described themselves as revolutionary – a claim that provoked scorn and derision from virtually all political opponents and most later scholars. The enthusiastic social-science analysts of revolution of the 1960s and 1970s invariably defined their subject, with a circularity rivalling that of many fascism theorists, as upheavals from the Left and "below."[33] Yet even supposedly "popular" revolutions come "from above": only charismatic authority and political organization can convert riot or *jacquerie* into revolution. And even in the epochal pseudo-revolutionary year 1968, a relatively value-free definition of the concept was possible: "a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of society, [and] in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, government activity, and policies."[34]

The Italian and German regimes undeniably fit that template, with the possible exception of changes in social structure – an issue for consideration in due course. But the tentative admission of Fascism and Nazism to the charmed circle of revolutions is no end in itself: it makes possible an understanding of their

im Totalitarismus," in Achim Siegel, ed., *Totalitarismustheorien nach dem Ende des Kommunismus* (Cologne, 1998), 235–44.

[32] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1966 [1951]), 348–49, 398–400, 402–05; for a sympathetic yet critical analysis of some of Arendt's gaps and inconsistencies, see particularly the account of Friedrich Pohlmann, "Der 'Keim des Verderbens' totalitärer Herrschaft. Die Einheit der politische Philosophie Hannah Arendts," in Siegel, ed., *Totalitarismustheorien nach dem Ende des Kommunismus*, 223–24; for an introduction to the intentionalist-functionalist dispute, Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London, 2000), ch. 4.

[33] For still-unsurpassed introductions to these issues, see Eugen Weber "Revolution? Counterrevolution? What Revolution?," JCH 9:3 (1974), 3–47, and Perez Zagorin, "Theories of Revolution in Contemporary Historiography," *Political Science Quarterly* 88:1 (1973), 23–52.

[34] Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT, 1968), 264.

dynamics derived from the study of other revolutions. Or of one revolution in particular: the first and greatest European secular revolution, the upheaval of 1789–1815. By 1791 the French Revolution had created what Lenin, much later, memorably described as "dual power" – an anomaly Lenin ended by coup d'état. In the France of 1791, the unsatiated revolutionary factions of the *Assemblée Nationale* and their supporters in the streets as yet lacked the capacity or will to seize power by force. They also lacked the preeminent organizational tool of later professional revolutionaries, Lenin's centralized, conspiratorial, implacable "party of a new type."[35] But they nevertheless laid siege to France's post-1789 constitutional monarchy and to its ministers. And they found, step by step, debate by impassioned debate, a road to power. The road they found was war.

From autumn 1791 onward the revolutionaries proclaimed the necessity of a "war of peoples against kings" both foreign and domestic; the Revolution had erased the traditional boundary between home and foreign affairs. France sat upon "a volcano of conspiracies about to erupt"; it was "surrounded by snares and perfidy"; "all nobles, aristocrats, and those dissatisfied with the Revolution have united against equality; all the kings of the earth are leagued against us." The revolutionaries inevitably preached preemptive attack on the "party of despotism" within and without: "Free France [was] on the point of fighting against enslaved Europe."[36] Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville, factional leader and ideocrat-in-chief, proclaimed in January 1792 that war was "a good thing [*un bienfait*]; it overthrows the aristocracy who fears it; it thwarts the [royal] ministers who endure it after pretending that they willed it (applause); *it consummates the revolution*." War, Brissot's comrade Maximin Isnard had already announced, was "*indispensable* for consummating the Revolution"; it might also, he added with sinister equanimity, "set all Europe ablaze."[37] Only popular mobilization and battlefield triumph could sweep away the remaining shreds of absolutism, and change forever the lives of all humanity. A "general rising of all the peoples" would found "universal liberty" and the salvation

[35] Lenin to Alexandra Kollontai, 17 March 1917; "The Dual Power" (April 1917); "What Is To Be Done? Burning Questions of our Movement" (1902), in Lenin, *Collected Works*, 45 vols. (Moscow, 1960–70), 35:297–99, 24:38–41, 5:464–67.

[36] Maximin Isnard, in *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860* (Paris, 1862–), 35:442 (29 November 1791); 39:416 (6 March 1792); 34:541 (31 October 1791); 37:88 (5 January 1792). A lecture by Timothy Blanning at Princeton University in April 1989 on "Nationalism and the French Revolution" introduced me to the astonishing sources quoted; see also his *The Origin of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London, 1986); for some of the background, Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue* (Ithaca, NY, 1986); François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1981); idem, "Les Girondins et la guerre," in idem and Mona Ozouf, *La Gironde et les Girondins* (Paris, 1991), 199–205; and Talmon's still indispensable *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*.

[37] "[La guerre]... consomme la révolution" (my emphasis): Brissot, *Archives Parlementaires*, 37:471 (17 January 1792); see also his exposition of the case for war on 29 December 1791, especially 36:607; Isnard ("guerre indispensable pour consommer la Révolution"), ibid., 37:85 (5 January 1792) (my emphasis).

of "France and [of] the human race." Secular apocalypse would answer the driving need – also deeply felt in later revolutions – for an end to the revolutionary process that would harmonize internal and external worlds: "We need a *dénouement* to the French Revolution (applause)."[38] The war of 1792–1815 granted *dénouement* indeed: it consumed the monarchy, the aristocracy, the revolutionaries who forced the monarchy to launch it, the dictator who extended and perfected it, and 1.8 million Frenchmen.

The example that France's revolutionary fanatics had set lay dormant for a long century. But a new revolutionary age might easily revive the structural conditions – the incompleteness of revolutionary breakthrough and the burning universal ambitions – that had impelled the men of 1791–92 to "consummate" their revolution through the conquest of Europe. Burckhardt's agreeable twentieth century provided a promising field for such experiments. And along with at least some of the abstractions already outlined, empirical study of the patterns and regularities that provide the underpinnings for concepts, and of the irregularities and discontinuities that mark the limits of those concepts, might be of service in understanding the resulting catastrophe.

That study is called comparative history. It has existed since the Greeks of the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. sought to grapple with their own variegated political forms – from monarchy through aristocracy to tyranny and democracy. Its modern fathers have been Max Weber, Marc Bloch, and Otto Hintze. Its purposes have been essentially two: to clarify the unique causes and consequences of historical phenomena by comparing them to apparently similar phenomena, and to derive general patterns and potential explanations for those patterns from the analysis of groups of comparable cases. The two procedures are not mutually exclusive; they complement one another.[39]

The comparative method unfortunately offers little guide to the selection of phenomena or cases for comparison.[40] That requires practiced intuition, knowledge that crosses the fiercely defended frontiers of academic specialization, and languages that the historian may not initially possess. Those who successfully overcome those barriers then face the need to invent unusual multi-dimensional forms of organization. They must strike a balance between chronological narrative and structural analysis, a task far harder when covering two or more subjects than in a typical single-threaded monograph. They must cope with the often severe imbalances between their cases in the quantity and quality

[38] Isnard, *Archives Parlementaires*, 37:547 (20 January 1792); Marguerite Élie Guadet, ibid., 36:382 (25 December 1791); Brissot, ibid., 36:600 (29 December 1791); Anacharsis Cloots, ibid., 36:79 (13 December 1791); "dénouement": Isnard, ibid., 35:67 (14 November 1791).

[39] For Bloch, see his "Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes," *Revue de Synthèse Historique* 46 (1925), 15–55; Hintze: *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze*, ed. Felix Gilbert (Oxford, 1975). William H. Sewell, "Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History," *History and Theory* 6 (1967), 208–18 and Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," CSSH 22:2 (1980), 174–97, usefully delineate some applications and pitfalls of the method.

[40] Sewell, "Marc Bloch," 213.

of sources. They cannot afford the luxury of ambiguity or doubt: comparison demands clarity and decisiveness in describing the characteristics of the cases being compared. They must brave accusations of reductionism and distortion, for comparison is impossible without compressing and truncating complex realities, without focusing on issues pertinent to the historian's purpose, and without imposing on all cases compared common conceptual frameworks that inevitably seem perverse to specialists. Worst of all, the comparative historian cannot fully know before writing whether comparison will illuminate individual cases or yield much in the way of a generalizing argument.

Some historical phenomena nevertheless demand comparison. The long history of the concepts of fascism and totalitarianism, whatever the merits of the concepts themselves, suggests that the great dictatorships of the interwar era were fundamentally comparable. And historians of those regimes have indeed frequently compared or contrasted them to one another. In the case of the Italian and German dictatorships, the postwar national historians on either side of the Alps have tended to emphasize dissimilarities – on the basis of deep knowledge of one case and a few references to secondary literature on the other. The main exceptions to this consensus on the uniqueness of one's "own" dictatorship have been the proponents of a generic fascism, from Italian Marxists or voices on the left of the German historical profession to Ernst Nolte on its far right. A few sophisticated attempts at comparison of the regimes' structures have given weight to similarities as well as differences, yet without force-fitting the evidence into generic "models."[41] But only a systematic multi-dimensional dissection of the origins, ideologies, structures, dynamics, and ultimate goals of the two movements and regimes can clarify the degree and levels of uniqueness and similarity of the two cases. Only comparison can clear the way for explanatory frameworks or theories that might at last give content to concepts such as fascism – or transcend them, approaching the understanding of the historical process through exacting titration of the causal factors of two closely related historical cases, from their distant and often disparate origins to their common ruin.

[41] See the exemplary articles of Wolfgang Schieder, "Fascismo e nazionalsozialismo. Profilo di uno studio strutturale comparativo," *Nuova Rivista Storica* 54 (1970), 114–24 and "Das Deutschland Hitlers und das Italien Mussolinis. Zum Problem faschistischer Regimebildung," in Gerhard Schulz, ed., *Die grosse Krise der dreissiger Jahre* (Göttingen, 1985), 44–71, and Gustavo Corni, "La politica agraria del fascismo: un confronto fra Italia e Germania," SSt 28 (1987), 385–421.