

Gentile, Giovanni. *Origins and Doctrine of Fascism*. Translated by A. James Gregor. London: Transaction Publishers, 2007.

Giovanni Gentile, (1875-1944), wrote *Origins and Doctrine of Fascism* in 1927 for an Italian audience. As the philosopher of fascism, Gentile brings pointed Hegelian idealism to fascist thought. Gentile served as the minister of education for Italy's fascist government, making extensive reforms of the Italian system. Gentile denies the existence of individual minds, arguing for Absolute Mind, which reveals itself in education. Gentile survived Mussolini's assassination, but was killed by Italian communists in 1944, while he served as president of the Italian Academy in the German puppet government Hitler imposed upon his southern ally.

- I. **The Divided Spirit of the Italian People Before the First World War.** Italy achieved spiritual renewal by its role in the Great War. Italy entered the War, electing against its former allies, when an insightful minority influenced the nation. After the War, two opposed mindsets warred within the Italian soul. Entering the War made Italy a nation. Every spiritual event comes at the price of work and loss. Opposed were the neutralists who hoped to gain more by sitting on the War's sidelines. But nothing of value derives from inaction, from not willing. Italy almost suffered civil war over the dispute between interventionists and the neutralists.
- II. **The New Italy of the Risorgimento.** Italian reunification (Risorgimento) arose primarily because one man imposed his will on history. It is as though this man were an idea incarnate, working itself out in real events. Mazzini's Idealism cleared the path for Italian reunification by his emphasis that only thought that resulted in action was real thought. He invested life with purpose; it is more than a game. Life is best when lived for what it can become, not what it is. To make "what ought" into "what is" requires dedication and suffering with self-sacrifice. It is essentially a religious task of awakening. Gentile recites the positions of various Italian thinkers on the essential religiosity of life.
- III. **The Waning of the Risorgimento and the Reign of Umberto I.** In political theory, the Left begins with the individual and proceeds to derive the state from him. The Right sites the individual within the organic State. From it derives individual freedoms, meaning, and liberty. The State has priority over individuals. The Rightist State can become static, and can quash the life it is made to support. The individual can find himself straining against the State and its laws, seeking to shake them off. Italy found a firm State from the reign of Umberto I. Umberto's insights were countered by a democratic movement that bent government to diminished influence over individual life in the name of personal freedom. When authority proceeds from below, from the individual and working class persons, Marxism and Masonry find uneducated minds on which to prey. These ideas disrupt the bonds between people which might unite them morally in service to the Fatherland. Materialism characterizes Marxism, but also every other political theory that takes as its starting point the individual in a democracy. Materialism doused the Risorgimento. Materialism left everyone pessimistic, ridiculing metaphysics and God, and convinced that morality deluded its adherents.
- IV. **Idealism, Nationalism, and Syndicalism.** Italy wanted to return to the ideas that made it great, and to abandon the materialism that sapped it. Italy sought faith in ethical realism, espousing ideals for which citizens might sacrifice themselves or do violence (Sorel). Italy sought a return to nationalism. Italy became anti-democratic, anti-socialist, and anti-Masonic. The syndicalists had recourse, aware or not, to Mazzini. They looked to tradition for the future's course. Their leader was Giolitti.
- V. **The Post-War Prostration and the Return of Giolitti.** After World War I, socialists, who had opposed the war, took heart from the anti-war sentiment of the Italian populace. Democrats found a leader in Woodrow Wilson. Italy, though it had won, felt defeated. People's dissatisfaction led to work stoppages and general anarchism. Talk of revolution was in the air.

- VI. **Mussolini and the Fasci di Combattimento.** Many rebelled against the thought that the half-million dead of the war died in vain. These veterans found in Mussolini a voice that honored their sacrifices. Mussolini began as a socialist, but supported the war as a necessary condition of Italy forming an authoritative state. The *Fasci di Combattimento* brought a revolution that established such a state.
- VII. **Redemption.** When the communists seemed to be making for a weak-willed revolution, the associations of veterans emerged. Mussolini led. The associations prevailed on 28 October 1922, when Fascist Italy was born.
- VIII. **Squadrist.** Fascist squads served as the military arm of the fascist government being born. When Mussolini came to power, he regularized the squads as militias, and proceeded to round up his opponents. The Giolittists were put down.
- IX. **The Totalitarian Character of the Doctrine of Fascism.** Fascist government does not cut and dice human life. The government is a governmental, religious, and moral unity. All falls within the purview of government. Fascism is totalitarian. That is the first point.
- X. **Thought and Action.** Still, fascism is not a religion or philosophy in the usual sense. This is the second point: fascism is an attitude toward action. It keeps life whole and treats it as a unity. It responds to circumstances, without tying the future up in great knots of long-term planning. Though fascism is anti-intellectual, it does not neglect science and philosophical rigor. Spirituality pulls together all pieces of life in thoughts that become actions. Fascism opposes a theoretical stance toward life. People who refuse to get involved in solving everyday problems are just bad citizens. They will be driven out. Fascism opposes that cultural decadence that robs citizens of commitment to the trials the nation faces. Decadence makes of citizens mere spectators. That is what intellectualism does. One sees the up and down, the good and bad, in everything, and takes a passive stance. Hence, fascism spends little time theorizing. It is busy doing things. Theory is a wan ally in reform. Fascism's mantra is life, not system or idea. So, some call fascism a method rather than a theory.
- XI. **The Center of the System.** The third point is this: fascism is a political method. It declines to define itself rigorously because it is moving forward and developing.
- XII. **The Fascist Doctrine of the State.** Individuals emerge within the fascist state. Logically, the state precedes the individual. The state even exists independently of the consciousness of the individuals who comprise it. The state is within us; we are within the state. We grow; it grows. We are implicit in the state. The state issues from us, from our creativity, but precedes us and envelops us.
- XIII. **The Fascist State as a Democratic State.** The state is in its citizens; they are responsible for its development. The state emerges only insofar as its citizens make the state real. The Leader propagates his thoughts and feelings to the citizenry. Reaching this ideal requires educational and reforming zeal, since the masses are slow. All value must start with the leader and devolve to the masses. This presents a constant danger of disintegration to the state.
- XIV. **The Corporative State.** Fascism seeks to replace the liberal state with a corporative syndicalist approach to government. This structure, in which unions of workers organize themselves to run their portions of economic life, better mirror the relation of state and individual than does classical liberal atomism. The state is immanent in every citizen; political structures should reflect that reality.
- XV. **Liberty, Ethics, and Religion.** One reaches societal consensus by imposing the state on all human activity. The state forms the individual; the individual influences the state.

Liberalism seeks to give the individual standing in this event. Individual liberty confutes state authority, seeking to balance powers. So the liberal state is a seething war, not unity to a purpose.

State authority is indivisible. Lacking a unified authority, the citizen loses focus. All religion, morality, economy, government, and any other spiritual element of human life aggregates and finds unity in the state. One must have such a state in which to live, or one dies.

The fascist state made an accommodation with the Roman Catholic church. The state has a necessary relation to God because it claims absolute authority. So, fascism has acknowledged that Catholicism is a real force in Italian lives. This is an accommodation with stresses of the gravest import. Italy has embarked on the ship of fascism. Ultimately, Italians will throw off allegiance to the Pope in favor of Mussolini.

APPENDICES

1. **The Philosophy of Fascism [1928].** Politics is the study of everything human. Government cannot be isolated or teased apart from economics, law, art, science, or religion. Fascist writers deride philosophy, and are right to do so to the extent those philosophies present arid abstractions divorced from the breadth of life. Fascism is a philosophy, a philosophy of praxis. Its subject is how to get things done in the human community. Fascism is action. The fascist state is a person itself, with its own aims and style, independent of the citizens who are its members. Fascism rejects license as a false form of liberty, and offers to mankind a certain and abiding structure for individual life. The state is not an aggregation of its individuals, but an ideal in the mind of a few, or even one. The fascist state subsumes all values into itself as the ultimate value.
2. **The Laws of the Grand Council [1928].** Italian fascism's extra-legal Grand Council was given constitutional status on September 20, 1928. All of Italian politics, by this change, resolves itself in the Grand Council, which consists in fascists alone. The Council is shaped by its leader, who through the Council depersonalizes himself and makes of his heroic insights a cultural institution. Henceforth, the citizen finds himself inside the discipline of the State. Outside the state, nothing exists. Fascism encompasses the totality of life.