DIVERGENT FASCISMS: GENTILE, BOTTAI, DE VECCHI AND THE 1935 DEBATE OVER ITALIAN EDUCATION

by

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(Under the Direction of David D. Roberts)

ABSTRACT

This study examines a debate on Italian Fascist education in 1935 between two prominent Fascist intellectuals, Giovanni Gentile and Giuseppe Bottai. It highlights an important historical moment for Fascism, one in which a new emphasis on aggressive foreign policy encouraged cultural conformity at home. The debate emerged during an interesting time for education policy as well. The centralizing policies of the Minister of National Education Cesare Maria De Vecchi produced criticism from many commentators, particularly from Gentile. The interplay between these characters has implications for our understanding not only of the scope for criticism within the regime but also of the importance of divergent interpretations of Fascism in the inner workings of the regime.

INDEX WORDS: Fascism, Italy, Education, Giovanni Gentile, Giuseppe Bottai

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B.A., University of New Brunswick, Canada, 2004

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2006

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So many people have contributed to this project that it would be difficult to name them all so I will restrict myself to thanking only a few. First of all, I would like to thank Patrick Cavaliere for introducing me to the fascinating history of Italian Fascism and encouraging me to pursue a graduate degree. I would also like to thank Laura Mason and Thomas Peterson for insightful and helpful suggestions on this project. Most importantly, I would like to thank David Roberts whose deep knowledge of the intellectual history of Fascism and professional and kind demeanor has made him not only a valuable resource, but an example to follow.

I would like to give a special thanks to George and Deborah Eves for being my first instructors and teaching me the value of self-directed learning and independent thought. Their support and help throughout my higher education has been a constant source of encouragement. I would also like to thank Sarah Jane Eves for being my first educational partner and for always being ready to cheer me up when I get discouraged.

Lastly, I would like to thank Francesco Evangelista whose tireless help and patience made this project possible. His knowledge of Italian language and culture has brought me even closer to the world of Gentile, Bottai and De Vecchi. Most valuable to me, however, has been his love and support which has made this whole process much less burdensome.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the spring and summer of 1935, Giuseppe Bottai, editor of the Fascist scholarly journal *Critica fascista* and former Minister of Corporations, wrote a series of articles criticizing the current education system and the reform of 1923 on which it was based. The author of the reform, Giovanni Gentile, a well-known philosopher and pedagogical thinker, replied with a letter published in a third issue. Both writers were concerned with the future direction of Fascist education, especially as it was being implemented by Cesare Maria De Vecchi, the Minister of Education from 1934 to 1936.

While this seemingly isolated exchange had little impact on the policy direction of the regime, it provides a window into the nature of Fascist debate, indicating the scope for criticism as well as the ideological conflicts that characterized Fascist rule at a watershed moment in the history of Fascism. 1935 was a turning point for Fascism as the Ethiopian war of that year was the first manifestation of a turn toward an aggressive foreign policy for the Fascist regime. This turn had both domestic and foreign origins. The economic crisis of the 1930s encouraged many countries, including Italy, to look to expansion as an outlet for excess labor as well as a source of raw materials and new markets.[1]

[1] Enzo Santarelli, "The Economic and Political Background of Fascist Imperialism," in *The Axe Within: Italian Fascism in Action*, ed. Roland Sarti, (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), 167-170.

On the domestic level, the nature of the Fascist experiment itself contributed to this new focus on foreign policy. From the declaration of dictatorship in 1925, the Fascists had attempted to construct new and to fully reform existing institutions, to implement what they referred to as a Fascist revolution. However, by the early to mid 1930s, many felt the regime had not gone far enough to fulfill its promises of a new Italy, one vastly different from the liberal nation that preceded it. A more aggressive foreign policy would allow the Fascist regime not only to fulfill its promises by making Italy great abroad but also demand greater Fascist discipline at home.

The acquisition of colonies was only one aspect of this new foreign policy orientation. The unique geopolitical situation created by Hitler's assumption of the German chancellorship in 1933 had equal importance. Mussolini began to perceive the growing hostility between Nazi Germany and the major powers of France and Great Britain as an opportunity for Italy to play a more active role on the world stage. At this time it was not obvious that Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, despite certain similarities, would become allies. Instead, Mussolini seemed prepared to act as the balancing point between Hitler and the democratic powers, a role he maintained as late as the Munich Conference of 1938. In any case, the international stage held great possibilities for the Fascist regime in 1935. The Bottai/Gentile debate took place within this context of growing optimism; although the frustrations of the past still lingered, the potential for creating a truly influential and Fascist Italy seemed possible.

This shift toward a more aggressive foreign policy, however, had repercussions for domestic affairs, particularly in cultural policy. In the years of regime consolidation after 1925, the Fascists had attempted to co-opt potential intellectual dissenters by having

an "open door" policy toward foreign ideas and by allowing an arena of debate in Fascist-sanctioned journals. Many young artists and intellectuals benefited from exposure to European modernist ideas and praised the radical elements within fascism for providing a revolutionary "third way" beyond capitalism and communism. Instead of repressing potential dissent, the regime channeled and organized it using patronage systems. The Ethiopian War changed the priorities of the Fascist regime, however. A deeper degree of domestic conformity came to seem essential to maintain the dynamism of the regime. Young radical Fascists could not longer criticize capitalism as Italian industrialists were supplying the Fascist war machine. The sanctions imposed by the League of Nations as well as an intensified focus on Italy as the cradle of civilization also undermined the regime's openness toward foreign ideas. This began an era of dogmatism and conformity that negatively impacted the scope for debate within the regime. It ended a period of cultural debate that "many intellectuals would remember as the most intense and engaging period of the dictatorship."[2]

How then do Bottai, Gentile and De Vecchi fit within the history of Fascism? We should begin with Giovanni Gentile, the eldest of the three characters in the debate. He was born in 1875 in Castelvetrano, Sicily. He received a degree in philosophy from the *Scuola normale superiore* of Pisa (Italy's most prestigious institution of higher education) in 1896 and held Chairs at the Universities of Palermo, Pisa, and Rome. He collaborated with Italy's most eminent twentieth-century philosopher, Benedetto Croce, on the journal *La Critica* and became the main proponent of Actualism, a specifically Italian form of philosophical idealism.

[2] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 191-120, quote from p. 120.

Gentile first became involved in political issues in 1914 when he joined those calling for Italy's intervention in World War I.[3] In 1922 Mussolini invited him to join his first government as Minister of Education. In 1923 Gentile joined the Fascist Party, declaring that the Fascists were the true heirs of Italy's founders who had been betrayed by the compromises of liberal politicians. He viewed the Fascist movement as the most likely vehicle for Italian civic renewal.[4] That same year he instituted a major overhaul of the Italian school system known as the *riforma gentiliana* (The Gentile Reform) or the Reform of 1923. After Mussolini's declaration of dictatorship in early 1925, Gentile was heavily involved in the construction of the Fascist state by serving as president of the Council of Eighteen that spearheaded this work. In addition, he was a member of the Fascist Grand Council from 1923-1929, founder and president of the *Instituto Nazionale di cultura fascista*, general editor of *Enciclopedia italiana* and director of the periodical *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*.

Although no longer in a position of immediate political power after 1932, Gentile continued to have influence. As the historian Emilio Gentile (not relation) aptly stated, "even when his cultural leadership within the regime began to decline, [Giovanni Gentile's] mark on the Fascist vision of the state remained strong and clear."[5] In 1943 Gentile reappeared on the political scene and later that year joined Musollini's Republic of Salò. Although a moderate in the Republic, Gentile was shot by Communist partisans while entering his villa in Florence on April 15, 1944.[6]

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[3] Italy joined the war on the side of the allies in May 1915.
[4] Giuseppe Calandra, *Gentile e il fascismo*, (Bari: Laterza, 1987), 1.
[5] Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, 58.
[6] Philip V. Cannistraro, "Giovanni Gentile," in *Historical Dictionary of Fascist Italy*, ed. Philip Cannistraro (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1982), 244-245.

De Vecchi's history is vastly different from that of Gentile. Born at the opposite end of the country in Casale Monferrato, Piedmont,in 1884, he served with distinction during World War I. In 1919 he joined the Turin *Fascio* and quickly dominated it. He was one of the so-called quadrumvirs[7] directing the March on Rome, representing the clerico-monarchist faction. After this time, however, De Vecchi became somewhat of a political embarrassment to Mussolini, especially after extreme Fascist violence broke out in Turin in December 1922.[8] In October 1923 Mussolini appointed him governor of Somalia to remove him from positions of power within Italy.

Returning to favor, he became minister to the Vatican in 1929 and served in this position for the first tumultuous years of the agreement between the Holy See and the Fascist regime. Mussolini appointed him Minister of Education in 1934 but, as Philip Cannistraro suggests, "his lack of subtlety and intellectual standing proved disadvantageous."[9] Because of his ties to the Monarchy and the Church, more radical Fascists doubted his commitment to a regime they perceived as revolutionary. When he was appointed to the education ministry, many felt that De Vecchi was an unusual choice. Tied as he was to the traditional ruling elite, they believed he would have little inclination to create a new, truly Fascist generation through education. Thus those like Gentile and Bottai who had been heavily involved in the construction of Fascist institutions were concerned for the future of Fascist education under De Vecchi – and even for the future

[7] The quadrumvirs were the four Fascists who directed the March on Rome. Each represented a different faction within Fascism.
[8] As leader of the Turin *Fascio*, De Vecchi would have been held responsible for any Fascist violence committed there.
[9] Philip V. Cannistraro, "Cesare Maria De Vecchi," in *Historical Dictionary of Fascist Italy*, ed. Philip Cannistraro (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1982), 168.

of the Fascist project itself, which could not continue without the creation of a new Fascist generation.[10]

After completing his tenure as Minister of Education in 1936, De Vecchi became governor of the Dodecanese and was involved in the war in Greece in 1940. In November of that year he resigned in protest of being undersupplied. For Mussolini this was the last straw and he refused to give De Vecchi another post until 1943. Continuing as a member of the Fascist Grand Council, however, De Vecchi voted to oust Mussolini in July 1943. Once Mussolini founded the Republic of Salò, De Vecchi went into hiding, escaping to South America. After a general amnesty was issued by the new Italian Republic in 1948, he returned to Rome where he died in 1959.[11]

The youngest of our three principle figures is Giuseppe Bottai. Born in Rome in 1895, he was quick to join the war effort in 1915, enlisting in the *Arditi*, the elite shock troops of the Italian army. Bottai founded the Rome *Fascio* and, during the socialist unrest of 1919-1920, became a *ras*, a leader of punitive expeditions against communists. In 1921 he received a law degree, became the director of the Rome office for *Il Popolo d'Italia* (Mussolini's daily newspaper), and was elected as a Fascist to the Chamber of Deputies. Also centrally involved in cultural production, particularly the founding and editorship of *Critica Fascista*, Bottai served as patron to many young radical Fascist intellectuals in the early 1930s.

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[10] Alexander De Grand showed that there was a renewed interest in education policy after De Vecchi's appointment in 1934. See *Bottai e la cultura fascista*. Bari: Laterza, 1978, 185. Giordano Bruno Guerri, in his introduction to Bottai's *Diario: 1935-1944* (Milan: RCS Libri, 2001, p. 14), indicated that Bottai started to concern himself with creating a new ruling class in 1932, three years before his debate with Gentile took place.

[11] Ibid., 167-168.

A true populist, Bottai was the main engineer of Fascist corporativism, a system of production management that included union-like organizations for employers and employees. Bottai saw the corporations as a post-liberal but democratic way of involving Italians in political and economic decisions.[12] As under-secretary to Mussolini in the new Ministry of Corporations from 1926-1929, Bottai contributed to the Labor Charter of 1927 and later became Minister himself, a post that he held until 1932.[13]

For four years thereafter Bottai held no cabinet position. In November 1936 he took over from De Vecchi as the Minister of Education, a post he held until 1943. His most important contribution in this position was the 1939 School Charter which, among other suggested reforms, advocated the institution of manual labor and applied the 1938 Racial Laws to the schools. A member of the Fascist Grand Council, he voted against Mussolini in July 1943. In 1944 he escaped to North Africa where he joined the French Foreign Legion, in which he served until the amnesty was issued. He died in Rome in 1959.

Many Fascists held that educating youth was the key to the success of the Fascist project. Therefore education was an important aspect of the regime's domestic policy. Only through the creation of a new "fascistized" generation could Fascism outlive its interwar leaders. It is well known that the regime attempted to form this "new man" through organizations for youth and after work activities, as well as through campaigns to change the customs, the language and even the demographic composition of Italians. The most important tool for fashioning Fascist Italians, however, was the education system. Each successive Minister of Education had this project in mind when managing Italian

[12] David D. Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 204.
[13] For more on Bottai's role in corporativism, please see pp. 53-57

schools. Despite this fact, there was some confusion about the type of man Fascism should create and even about what the essence of the Fascist project was. The differing opinions on the direction of Fascist education policy in 1935 reflected not only this confusion but also several of the most significant suggestions put forth to resolve it.

This study is guided by three main questions. Firstly, using the Bottai/Gentile/De Vecchi debate as an example, how was criticism expressed in this purportedly totalitarian regime? Was there a certain formula to follow or type of language that had to be used? Secondly, what does the exchange between the three ministers reveal about Italian education, especially in 1935? And finally, what do Bottai, Gentile, and De Vecchi's divergent interpretations of Fascism tell us about the nature of the phenomenon and about the dynamics of the regime in power?

Looking at this debate will help us illuminate a moment, a moment in which cultural parameters were constricting, yet in which debate continued over the nature of the Fascist experiment. This study will also indicate the range of characters who labeled themselves and their ideas "Fascist" and what the extent of this range implies about the nature of Fascism. The Fascist regime was not a monolith but was always contested, debated, defined and redefined.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND OF THE DEBATE: THE GENTILE REFORM

1: Gentile's Philosophy

The 1935 debate was centered on Bottai's critique of Gentile's 1923 reform of the education system, the most significant such reform not only of the Fascist period but of the whole history of unified Italy to that point. It was the product of approximately twenty-five years of pedagogical thinking that had made Gentile highly respected as an expert on education by the time Mussolini asked him to join his first cabinet in 1922. Thus, Gentile did not formulate his pedagogical thought in response to the new Fascist situation but rather as a solution to the challenges facing Italian culture and nationhood in the first years of the twentieth century.

At the time of Gentile's intellectual maturation, the dominant cultural paradigm in Italy (as in the rest of Europe) was positivism. This manifested itself on the philosophical plain by a belief in the existence of an external world separate from humans, one that could be "known" and studied using the tools of modern science. On the political plain it was represented by the aspects of Enlightenment thought that gave birth to European liberal democracy, which conceived society as the aggregate of formally equal individuals. Individuals had basic rights, such as the right to own property, which needed

protection from state power. Thus liberalism highlighted the distinction between public and private by setting the freedom of the individual and the state at odds.

The most significant nineteenth century alternative to liberalism, Marxism, was also positivistic, at least as it was understood by the end of the century. It placed at the heart of history material forces based on the means of production, which governed the organization of human society and its progression. While he left some room for agency, Marx's understanding of the world could be considered mechanistic, because it attempted to reduce all aspects of human life – political, social, cultural – to one's relationship to the means of production.

Many turn-of-the-century European intellectuals took issue with the materialist implications of these approaches to life and politics. They believed life consisted of more than matter and motion, that it was imbued with spiritual qualities that could not necessarily be "known" by science. Two prominent Italian intellectuals who held this view were Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile who together have been linked to neo-idealism because of their emphasis on the spiritual nature of reality. They believed the alternative mechanistic conception was ruining both philosophy and the life of the relatively new Italian state. Italy, they believed, needed a spiritual unity amongst its citizens to respond to the challenges of the modern world, a unity that was not provided by a liberal emphasis on individualism. Also, they felt that the concern for private interests encouraged by liberalism produced a citizenry concerned with merely short-term interests. They advocated a balance of freedom and responsibility that would encourage Italians to participate in political life.

On the philosophical plain, both Croce and Gentile rejected the positivist notion of a natural world, an abstract reality beyond human beings. Where they differed, however, was on the idea of unity. Unlike Croce who believed in distinct categories - such as the distinction between thought and action, ethics and politics - Gentile posited the unity of existence. He suggested that "true reality is that which is being realized by the activity of thought itself."[1] Thus the world was created through what Gentile referred to as "thought thinking" (*pensiero pensante*). Yet this idea was not merely mysticism as Croce charged in 1913 or some abstract philosophical system because Gentile defined thinking as the ultimate act, dissolving our usual way of positing a dichotomy between thought and action. Genuine thought necessitated action, rendering Gentile's philosophy intensely practical. In the words of one authority: "to posit unity around the act of thought thinking was to say that to think something is to believe it, to commit oneself to it, to conform one's actions to it, to want others to believe it, to seek to shape the world in accordance with what one thinks."[2]

Therefore Gentile was against those academics who attempted to remain disinterested members of society, "who would not involve themselves in politics, in real matters, those who would not involve themselves in the practical world."[3] The "decadent culture" that had developed in Italy after unification prevented intellectuals from meeting their full potential as participants in the new Italian state.[4] Thus when war broke out between Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Allied Powers in July 1914, Gentile was

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[1] Giovanni Gentile, *The Reform of Education* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), 74.
[2] David D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe: Understanding the Poverty of Great Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 136.
[3] Giovanni Gentile, "Origins and Doctrine of Fascism," in *Origins and Doctrine of Fascism: with Selections from Other Works*, ed. A. James Gregor (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002), 23.
[4] Ibid., 23.

dismayed that many intellectuals, including Croce, tried to refrain from commenting on the war and its potential impact on Italian culture. Gentile, believing that culture and politics, thought and action, were unified and, perceiving the war as an opportunity for national spiritual renewal, began to promote Italian intervention in October 1914, only three months after the war began. Gentile's philosophy necessitated political action, which helps to explain not only his pro-war position but also his move to Fascism in the 1920s.

If it was necessary for individuals to participate in the real world, then they would need some sort of collective mode of action. As individuals realized their creative capacity, their responsibility for the future would grow. They would become aware of their role in the ongoing creation of the world. This would develop within them a moral commitment to contribute to something greater than themselves. Even before he joined the Fascist Party Gentile believed the best vehicle for this contribution was the state. In 1920 he suggested that the will of the individual coincided "exactly with the will of the state;" they were united into a will of "a higher individuality."[5] This individuality was constantly being formed and reformed by the thought-actions of the wills that composed it.

This was not an imposition of the will of the state on the individual, however. Gentile maintained that the state was immanent in the will of the individual; in other words, we would understand the state, not merely as a limit to individual caprice, for example, but as the vehicle for collective action.[6] It was created and maintained and expanded through human thought. Freedom, for Gentile, was the ability to make ethical

[5] Gentile, *Reform*, 28.
[6] H.S. Harris, *The Social Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), 62.

decisions for the good of humankind. As one scholar has explained, "as our sense of responsibility grows, we need to expand our capacity to act, to shape what the world becomes. In concentrating and extending power through the state, we expand our collective freedom to act. Indeed, freedom requires that the state's reach be potentially limitless, totalitarian."[7] Thus for Gentile, the state was not incompatible with freedom but was rather the sum of all individual wills freely creating it.

Education had a fundamental role in this process. It was the way individuals became aware of their responsibility for the world and their creative capacity to act. Therefore the manner in which children were educated was always one of Gentile's highest concerns, one that occupied him from the turn of the century until his death in 1944. Not surprisingly, in his conception of education Gentile reflected his belief in unity. In the educational process unity was exhibited in the relationship between pupil and teacher, between student and subject, and between various forms of education.

For Gentile, education was a spiritual synthesis between teacher and pupil. While they obviously remained separate people, the two could not be separated in the actual process of education. The teacher stood for all of humanity by representing art, literature, religion and science to the student. The student, in turn, represented the individual personality because he or she had both the responsibility and freedom to learn.[8] Teachers and pupils formed a spiritual bond through the process of education. For example, although school teachers would leave their students at the end of the day and attend to

[7] Roberts, *Totalitarian Experiment*, 302.
[8] Harris, *Social Philosophy*, 86.

their own business or studies, they remained united with them because the teachers' spirit and mentality were also formed in scholastic life.[9]

Just as there was a synthesis between pupil and teacher so was there one between pupil and subject matter. While positivists maintained that the subject of study was separate from the one who studied it, Gentile insisted one could not separate the pupil or teacher from the subject for they were all created through the process of thinking. For example, the content of education, what Gentile referred to as "culture," derives its existence from those that study it: "culture *is* . . . only to the extent that the cultivated man feels its worth, desires it, and realises it."[10] Thus culture is always "becoming." He stated, "culture exists as it develops, and in no other manner. It is always in the course of being formed, it lives."[11] Similarly, the pupil is also constantly becoming through developing self-awareness and a growing sense of responsibility for the future. Thus the subject of study, the pupil who learns it, and even the teacher who facilitates this learning are all united in the process of becoming, the ultimate goal of education.

Gentile also disliked the division within the subjects themselves, which he believed was a product of the positivistic turn of the nineteenth century. For example, science was divided into chemistry, biology, physics, geology, etc. Chemistry, in turn, was divided into organic, inorganic, physical and analytical. For Gentile, this separation negated the unity inherent in knowledge and inhibited the student from understanding that the subject of education was a living being.[12]

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[9] Giovanni Gentile, *Sommario di pedagogia come scienza filosofica I: Pedigogia generale* (Florence: Sansoni, 1982), 125-126. This was originally published in 1913.
[10] Gentile, *Reform*, 136.
[11] Ibid., 127.
[12] Ibid., 167.

If teacher and pupil, student and subject were all united in the process of education, than the different forms of education should also be united. In Italian, there are two words for education, *istruzione* and *educazione*, which each have a distinct meaning. *Istruzione* indicates training and instruction, encompassing basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic as well as technical training. These skills would be developed through the memorization of facts, techniques, etc. *Educazione*, on the other hand, indicates upbringing, incorporating training in morals and manners into education. This branch of education would be more contemplative and learned by example (of a parent or teacher).

Gentile suggested that the difference between *istruzione* and *educazione* was that the first was concerned with the mind and the second with the heart; the first could not form the will, moral character, or self-discipline but only intelligence. However, in accordance with his philosophy of unity, Gentile disliked the separation of the two ideas for "man is neither mind without heart, nor heart without mind, but pure subject."[13] In order to create the world through thought thinking, man had to be united himself.

Not surprisingly, Gentile's emphasis on the unity of all that is involved in education extended to the nature of the subject matter. Against the subdivision evident in the sciences, Gentile posited that there should be no distinction between intellectual, moral and physical education. All, he said, should serve the spirit and its development for they are all derived from it. For example, a body is only given life when a spirit animates it, trains it, and makes it submit to the will. If all is derived from the spirit, the different forms of education should not be separated.[14]

[13] Gentile, *Sommario I*, 225.
[14] Ibid., 167, 204.

In light of his emphasis on spiritual and character development, however, it seems clear that Gentile would have favored *educazione* over *istruzione*. He would have seen *istruzione* as simply the training necessary to participate in *educazione*, the development of the will and creative capacity. For example, in his 1920 *Reform of Education* he suggested that schools emphasize subjects that demand direct spiritual involvement, namely art, religion and philosophy. He also suggested a de-emphasis on the sciences, which could even be made optional.[15]

Gentile advocated not only the unification of mental and spiritual education but also that of physical. Like all other objects, Gentile held that one's body was created by an act of thought; it was "within our own consciousness."[16] It was the soul, after all, that gave a body life. In describing the relationship between individual will and the body, Gentile stated that we "act upon our body, animating it, sustaining it, endowing it with our vigorous and buoyant vitality," as one acts to create the state, the future or any entity.[17] Gentile believed that physical education should be encouraged but only to the extent that it developed the moral will and helped to form character.[18]

Although he was clearly concerned with the spiritual development of individuals, Gentile was no advocate of organized religion. If we necessarily live in a world constructed by human thought, then any conceivable notion of God would be a human creation. Yet Gentile believed that religion played a fundamental if limited role in education. He took it for granted that the Catholic Church had emerged historically as the main vehicle for awakening Italian spirituality. In a 1923 interview with the

[15] Gentile, *Reform*, 240-241.
[16] Ibid., 204.
[17] Ibid., 204.
[18] Ibid., 204.

newspaper *La Tribuna* he stated "naturally, a child needs to be taught the religion of the land in which he was born, in the atmosphere in which he lives. . . . [T]he young Italian pupil must be taught the Catholic religion, in the same way that he is taught the language of Italian authors."[19] Gentile believed that learning religion in elementary school would develop student spirituality. He stated that the strength of Catholic schools was that they "had the capacity to instill a general conception of life – not constituting a model to be copied but rather a truth to absorb."[20] He considered religion the "primordial form of philosophy" and thus believed that teaching religion in the early grades would prepare students to learn and utilize philosophy in the higher ones. Just as a student would adopt his own writing style after years of studying the Italian language, he would also develop his own spiritual thought after years of studying Catholicism.[21] In other words, religion, for Gentile, was a foundation for the future understanding of human possibilities that would transcend traditional religious categories.[22]

2: The Italian Education System

Gentile's educational philosophy and his subsequent reform were formulated in response to the challenges facing the existing education system. It was based on the 1859 Leggi Casati (the Casati Laws) named after the Minister of Public Instruction,[23] Count Gabrio Casati, who implemented them during the first years of Italian nationhood.[24] At

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[19] Giovanni Gentile, *La Riforma della scuola in Italia* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1989), 24.
[20] Quoted in Gabriele Turi, *Giovanni Gentile: Una biografia* (Florence: Giunti, 1995), 187.
[21] Gentile, *Riforma*, 24.
[22] L. Minio-Paluello, *Education in Fascist Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 118. This difference was acknowledged by the Catholic periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica* in a 1919 article that stated that is was possible to form an agreement with Gentile, "if not in principle, at least in the practical questions that need an urgent solution." See Turi, *Giovanni Gentile*, 279.
[23] The Ministry of Public Instruction became the Ministry of National Education in 1929.
[24] Italy was mostly unified by 1861.

this time there were many demographic features of the new Italian state that led politicians to make education one of their top priorities. In the mid-nineteenth century Italy was largely rural and its inhabitants mostly illiterate. The government needed to provide literacy training in many remote places in the country to enable citizens to participate in a liberal democratic system.[25] Secondly, the government had to create the *desire* for participation among the citizenry. Because the Kingdom of Italy had been constructed primarily through the maneuverings of Piedmontese politicians and not by popular revolt, most "Italians" maintained their regional identities, continued to speak in dialect and saw little common ground between themselves and citizens from other areas. As a former prime minister of Piedmont famously stated, "We have made Italy, now we must make Italians."[26]

These concerns translated into five main goals of Italian politicians for the education system at the time of the Casati Laws. First, they wanted a degree of state control over schools.[27] Second, they wanted to provide basic education so that the citizenry could participate in the life of the nation. Third, they believed secondary and higher education should prepare individuals for service to society, no matter the sector in which they participate. They believed that "the *homo politicus* overshadow[ed] the *homo contemplativus*."[28] Fourth, they promoted instruction in the natural sciences, geography

[25] The franchise was limited at the time of unification (1861) but gradually expanded until universal manhood suffrage was introduced in 1913.
[26] The speaker was Massimo D'Azeglio who was prime minister before unification. The Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, in the Northwest corner of what is now Italy, was the driving force behind Italian unification. Its king, Vittorio Emmanuele II, became Vittorio Emmanuele II of Italy.
[27] During the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the Roman Catholic Church played a large role in education.
[28] Minio-Paluello, *Education*, 8.

and foreign languages to expand beyond classical education. And fifth, they did not believe religion should serve as the basis of education.[29]

While Gentile did not outwardly object to the first two goals, he certainly objected to the final three. Both goals three and four were heavily influenced by positivism. The third appeared to agree with Gentile's philosophy in the sense that it too objected to educated people refraining from participating in politics. However, it suggested that there was a separation between contemplation and political involvement, a division between thought and action. This dichotomy was in direct opposition to Gentile's philosophy. The fourth principle introduced more science education into schools. In his *Reform* Gentile advocated the opposite.

The fifth principle, concerning religious education, was of particular importance to nineteenth century politicians. The Italian liberal state was hostile toward the church. Because Italy deprived the Pope of his temporal power by annexing the Papal States in 1870, making him a "prisoner in the Vatican," relations between church and state were strained to the point that the Pope issued a *non expedit*, threatening excommunication to any Catholic that voted in Italian elections. The situation was not formally resolved until the Fascist Regime signed a Concordat and Lateran Pacts with the Vatican in 1929. Italian liberals feared not only that religious schools would promote "superstition" among the citizenry but that it would encourage anti-liberal sentiments. While Gentile agreed that a solely religious education would be detrimental, he did believe in the usefulness of religious instruction to provide the foundation for philosophical development. For Gentile, religion was acceptable, as long as it stayed within defined limits.

[29] Minio-Paluello, *Education*, 7-8.

Casati applied his earlier principles to the institutions established through the 13 November 1859 law. This law made elementary instruction (s*cuola elementare*) free and available to children in most communities. After elementary school (which lasted from ages 6-11) students could continue along one of three avenues: they could join technical schools, enroll in Normal School to learn to teach at the elementary level or attend secondary school in order to prepare for university. The subjects taught at secondary school (which consisted of two levels known as *ginnasio* and *liceo*) included classical subjects as well as the natural sciences and geography. After completing secondary school, students could enter university. The goals of liberal Italy's universities were twofold: to promote higher learning and to prepare young men for professional and bureaucratic positions.[30]

3: The Gentile Reform

While many subsequent Ministers of Public Instruction tinkered with the Casati laws, there was little significant reform until Gentile came into office. His elementary school reform introduced obligatory religious instruction in direct opposition to the emphasis on separation of church and state of pre-Fascist policies.[31] He viewed these as a residue of the previous century's positivism and the particular concerns of early Italian liberalism. He believed that by the early twentieth century Italy had moved beyond that "historical moment" and was now free to judge the place of religion in schools without bias. He felt no other discipline could adequately develop a pupil's spirit.[32]

[30] Minio-Paluello, *Education*, 9-12.
[31] Ibid., 118.
[32] Gentile, *Riforma*, 23-24.

Gentile also introduced the use of the "language of the state," i.e. Italian, as the only language of instruction. This was an attempt to suppress dialect and unite all Italians in one mother tongue, in other words, to "make Italians."[33] He also reduced the size of the classes to 25 pupils to encourage a more intimate learning environment.

Gentile also introduced important reforms for secondary schools including changes to *ginnasio-liceo*, normal schools (now called Magisterial Institutes), and technical schools, reducing the number and classroom size of them all. Since 1911, *liceo* had been separated into *liceo classico* and *liceo moderno*, the former emphasizing philosophical and literary education and the latter training in modern languages and the sciences. Gentile clearly favored *liceo classico* because his reform stipulated that its graduates could apply to any university.[34] Gentile believed *liceo classico* would provide the right training to develop the spirit or will of the student.[35] On the other hand, Gentile replaced the *liceo moderno* with the *liceo scientifico* which gave its graduates admittance to all faculties except law, philosophy and literature.[36] This limitation was part of a program of restricted access to university that was one of the main goals for Gentile's reform.

Further restrictions on access to university were made with changes to the technical institutions. According to the May 1923 law, the goal of these institutes was to prepare students for a wide range of professions (rather than a university education), what Gentile referred to as the "minor jobs that are called for today."[37] Not surprisingly,

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[33] Regio Decreto 1 Ottobre 1923, n. 2185.
[34] Regio Decreto 6 maggio 1923, n.1054, quoted at length in *La scuola e la pedagogia del fascismo*, ed. Maria Bellucci and Michele Ciliberto (Turin: Loescher, 1978), 209, 236.
[35] Gentile, *Riforma*, 36-37.
[36] Regio Decreto 6 maggio 1923, n.1054, 209, 236.
[37] Gentile, *Riforma*, 37.

therefore, graduates from the technical schools could only access a few university faculties. Those who graduated from the Commerce and Accounting technical institutes could enter statistics and economics and commerce faculties; graduates from surveying technical institutes could also apply to agriculture faculties. While this was only a partial restriction, the allowed faculties were those that were most career-focused. By limiting access to universities from the technical schools, Gentile was acting out his belief in the humanistic goal of university studies.[38]

Gentile even introduced two new secondary schools to deal with the problem of overcrowded universities: Complementary Schools and *liceo femminile*. The first were three year secondary schools to teach basic knowledge such as Italian language and history, mathematics, natural sciences and basic training such as simple design and stenography. This was a terminal school meant for those who would not pursue higher education.[39]

The second new school, *liceo femminile*, was designed to provide a "supplement of general culture" for young women who did not intend to pursue higher studies or seek professional certification.[40] The curriculum included not only literature and history but also dancing, singing and home economics. Minio-Paluello suggested that this was a provision for the sector of the aristocracy who wanted to produce genteel young women but could not pay for private schooling.[41] However, Gentile stated that the *liceo femminile* was meant to compensate for the reduced number of Magisterial Institutes.[42]

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[38], Gentile, *Riforma*, 209, 234.
[39], Ibid., 232.
[40] Regio Decreto 6 maggio 1923, n.1054, 236.
[41] Minio-Paluello, *Education*, 80.
[42] Gentile, *Riforma*, 38.

Whatever the particular goals, it was based in nineteenth-century ideals of female gentility, domesticity, and moral influence.

Another theme of Gentile's reform, combined with restricted access, was increased state control. For example, no new secondary schools could be instituted except by law, thus restricting the number of schools and putting more power in the hands of the government. Also, Gentile attempted to change the relationship between private schools, which were mostly Catholic, and the state by instituting that all private schools had to be open to state inspection, and had to hire teachers that met state criteria.[43] Most importantly, however, their students were subject to state exams. Although Gentile stated that he did not wish to eliminate private schools but rather abolish the privileges they enjoyed, he would have objected to the very idea of private institutions.[44] His belief in the virtues of an ever expanding state and the need to develop a sense of responsibility in the young were incongruent with the idea of private education.

The most important reform that Gentile instituted that both restricted access to university and increased the intervention of the state was the state exams. These exams were taken at various points throughout secondary school to determine admission, eligibility and promotion. While secondary schools exams were not unusual, Gentile's reform was unique in that the examiners were secondary school teachers and professors appointed by the Ministry of Public Instruction. In this way Gentile and subsequent ministers could control the number of students passing through the various levels of secondary school and maintain educational standards.[45]

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[43] Gentile, *Riforma*, 223, 249.
[44] Ibid., 40.
[45] Ibid., 242-243; Marzio Barbagli, *Educating for Unemployment: Politics, Labor Markets, and the School System – Italy,1859-1973* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 130.

In the fall of 1923 Gentile also reformed higher education. In keeping with his belief in the liberty individuals needed to create the future, Gentile maintained that professors needed a good degree of freedom in order to develop their student's potential. Only with freedom in education could students create a new Fascist future. Therefore, each university was given the ability to determine teaching materials and teaching method, the number and placement of exams, and the duration of each course of study. However, there were some semblances of state control in Gentile's university reform. At the administrative level, the rector of each university was to be appointed by the king and the dean of each faculty appointed by the minister (upon recommendation from the rector).[46] On a practical level, university graduates were required to take a state exam in order to enter a profession. This allowed the ministry to regulate the number of graduates in the professions.[47]

4: Reactions to the Reform

A few of the future Ministers of Education, including Giuseppe Belluzzo, believed Gentile's reform was a step back for Italian modernization because of its lack of university-level technical education. They believed that Italy desperately needed technocrats to respond to the challenges of the modern world and keep pace with other European nations. There had been a general perception in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that Italy had an overabundance of intellectuals; Gaetano Salvemini

[46] Regio Decretto 30 settembre 1923, n. 2102, quoted at length in *La scuola e la pedagogia del fas ismo*, ed. Maria Bellucci and Michele Ciliberto, (Turin: Loescher, 1978), 263-269.
[47] Barbagli, *Educating for Unemployment*, 130.

called them a "plethora of misfits" who were prone to political and social unrest. Some accused Gentile of simply worsening the situation.[48]

To the contrary, Gentile had been concerned about this problem for decades. He believed there were too many mediocre doctors and lawyers in Italy, a situation that only worsened after World War I. Therefore his reform was in part formed to eradicate this problem. By limiting access to university, Gentile hoped to reduce numbers in the intellectual class. Also, by preventing those with technical training from pursuing higher education, Gentile ensured that they would enter the job market sooner. It is important to note that Gentile's ideas of limited access were not new. In fact, a 1905 Royal Commission recommended the formation of terminal schools to limit the numbers entering university. This would fulfill demands of the workforce as well as raise the value of post-secondary education. The Complementary Schools and the *liceo femminile* were manifestations of this recommendation.[49]

Despite this fact, these new secondary schools were very unpopular. Few parents wanted to remove their children from technical schools and enroll them in the Complementary Schools. Even those who did soon abandoned the schools. An expert from the Ministry recorded:

> The frightening off of families . . . and their crowding at the doors of the [Complementary Schools] to withdraw their young produced a situation comparable to that in which a distrusted bank, even if unjustly, finds itself in danger and under siege by its depositors who reclaim there money. Financial men are acquainted with the *run*, this earthquake that can shake in one blow even the most solid institution if it has not prepared itself to face it.[50]

[48] Barbagli, *Educating for Unemployment*, 12, 108.
[49] Quoted in Barbagli, *Educating for Unemployment*, 108, 110.
[50] Ibid., 139.

The *liceo femminile* was even more of a failure. Only two hundred young women enrolled in the entire country. These schools were abolished in 1927.[51]

Students reacted against other aspects of Gentile's reform as well. They protested raising tuition and the addition of the state exam to the already existing graduating exam for university. They also desired the ministry to abolish the extra classes produced by the reform as well as the rigorous standards of the state exam that reduced the number of university students.[52]

Despite Mussolini's assertion that Gentile's was the "most Fascist of reforms," many fascists opposed Gentile's reform. Among these were Emilio Bodrero, a professor of philosophy who became undersecretary of Public Instruction in the late 1920s, as well as Giorgio Del Vecchio, Ermenegildo Pistelli and Dante Dini. They communicated to Mussolini that Gentile's scholastic ideas were essentially "antifascist" because, ironically, they believed it did not safeguard the prerogatives of the state.[53] They interpreted Gentile's program of freedom in the universities as a limit to state power whereas Gentile believed it would foster a sense of responsibility to the state in the educated classes. Another critique came from the founder of the Futurist artistic and political movement F.T. Marinetti, who joined Fascism at its first appearance in 1919. He believed Gentile's ideas were a relic of the past, declaring that "the Gentile reform is absurd, passé and antifascist."[54]

Although he had dramatically different political views, Piero Gobetti, the editor of the left-wing *Rivoluzione liberale* and prominent antifascist, agreed with Marinetti. He

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[51] Minio-Paluello, *Education*, 117.
[52] Turi, *Giovanni Gentile*, 332.
[53] Turi, *Giovanni Gentile*, 331.
[54] Piero Gobetti, "Gentile usupatore," in *La scuola e la pedagogia del fascismo*, ed. Maria Bellucci and Michele Ciliberto (Turin: Loescher, 1978), 280.

suggested that the reform was more reactionary than it was fascist. He drew a distinction between the two: "fascist reaction has a Latin, subversive, futuristic color. Gentile has imposed a mournful, clerical, bigoted habit, a Saracenic doctrinarism."[55] He believed that Marinetti's movement was the true precursor to Fascism. Both Futurism and Fascism were Milanese. Gobetti believed that the emphasis of Futurism, "the cult of velocity and progress, of sport, of courage, of war as the world's only hygiene" laid the foundation for Fascist ideas.[56] Gentile, on the other hand was not "dynamic" or "subversive" enough for Gobetti to accept him as a true Fascist. Instead he declared him a "usurper" who had no place in the Ministry of Public Instruction.[57]

Not all non-Fascists were so vehemently opposed to Gentile's reform.[58] Croce, for example, defended it from what he considered to be the unfair amount of critique it received. He believed that most of Gentile's critics were motivated by political purposes. He gave the example of his antifascist friend who said these critiques were "the first breach we hope to open in Fascism."[59] Croce wished to indicate to Gentile's critics that the latter's reform was not politically motivated but was rather the product of over twenty years of research and debate done by many scholars. He believed Gentile was the most authoritative representative of the spirit and thought of this work to improve Italian schools. The 1923 reform was "the fruit of long and ardent desires."[60]

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[55] Gobetti, "Gentile usupatore," 280.
[56] Ibid., 281.
[57] Ibid., 281.
[58] In 1923 Croce had not yet come officially come out against Fascism. In 1925, in response to Mussolini's declaration of dictatorship, Croce publicly declared himself opposed to the regime by issuing the "Manifesto of Antifascist Intellectuals."
[59] Benedetto Croce, "Una Scuola per il rinvigorimento del pensiero, del carattere e della cultura italiani," *La scuola e la pedagogia del fascismo*, ed. Maria Bellucci and Michele Ciliberto (Turin: Loescher, 1978), 273.
[60] Ibid., 274.

The experts, according to Croce, welcomed the reform. Teachers and principals he had spoken to thought the reform was excellent and, given due time, would foster a "true regeneration of Italian schools."[61] This dichotomy between public and expert opinion reminded him of his own brief stint as Minister of Public Instruction under Giovanni Giolitti in 1920. The press had condemned his reforms but when he contacted a school director to get his opinion many months later, the director said Croce's reforms were very beneficial.

Croce felt the most beneficial aspect of Gentile's reform was that it brought order to an education system that was not really a system but a tangle of often contradictory laws. Gentile brought a "solid, rational and coherent system, leading the way to a reinvigoration of mind, character and Italian culture."[62] It appears that Croce, while attacking critics like Gobetti, shared with him the opinion that Gentile's reform was not uniquely Fascist. For Croce it had scholastic, not political significance.

Another defender of Gentile's reform was the Catholic periodical *Civiltà Cattolica*. In a 1923 article it stated that the Gentile reform was the best since the unification of Italy. Since the 1860s, the article argued, the liberal school system had attempted to undermine the authority and educative role of the family and the church. Gentile's reform was a first step toward reinstating this authority.[63]

The article did recognize, however, that Gentile considered religion only the first step toward philosophy and therefore it did point out two flaws in the legislation. First, it did not provide a course in the Magisterial Institutes on teaching religion. Instead the

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[61] Croce, "Una Scuola," 275.
[62] Ibid, 277.
[63] *Civiltà Cattolica*, "Un Fiero colpo al laicismo," in *La scuola e la pedagogia del fascismo*, ed. Maria Bellucci and Michele Ciliberto (Turin: Loescher, 1978), 290-293.

curriculum for these institutes was heavily influenced by philosophy. To ensure that teachers conveyed true religion to their students, *Civiltà Cattolica* recommended joint inspection by ministry and religious authorities. Second, the reform did not allow religious instruction in secondary schools. Gentile would not have been inclined to address either grievance, as the first would have resulted in the reduction of state power and the second in the inhibition of philosophical development.[64]

Interestingly, *Civiltà Cattolica* recognized the totalitarian potential of Gentile's reform. It maximized centralization and only allowed pockets of liberty when it benefited the state. The author of the article even understood that the link between philosophy and the state was the key component of Gentile's concept of the "educator state": according to Gentile, "the state must teach, not because it has a religion . . . but because it has something . . . better than a religion: it has a philosophy."[65]

By the time Gentile resigned in 1924, he had completely restructured most aspects of the Italian education system. This was a culmination of years of research and debate that was fueled by a desire to combat nineteenth century positivism. After the completion of the reform, however, Gentile had new enemies to confront: the Fascists who felt his ideas were not radical enough. Every subsequent Minister of Public Instruction defined his program in reference to the Gentile reform. Each had his own plan for rendering the school system more "Fascist" than the one Gentile had created. From 1923 until his death in 1944, Gentile had to defend his reform and its Fascist nature, even as the definition of Fascism itself was being contested.

[64] *Civiltà Cattolica*, "Un Fiero," 293.
[65] Ibid., 295.

Between 1923 and 1935, the year of our debate, various Ministers of Education made changes to Gentile's reform, especially in regards to curricula. For example, Pietro Fedele (1925-1927) wanted to emphasize economics in the study of history and opposed the philosophical orientation of Gentile's reform. Also various ministers took measures to abolish the limits on classroom size and the number of secondary schools. These, as well as attempts to make the state exams less rigorous, were at least partially motivated by a feeling that Gentile's reforms were too elitist. In order to keep education separate from professional or vocational training, Gentile made schools more challenging and restricted. Many later ministers reacted to this and gradually reversed the trend.[66]

Most of the differences, however, came from differences in a respective minister's perception of the role of education in a modern Fascist country. For example, while Gentile believed education was meant to develop the creative capacity of individuals so that they could collectively make and remake the state, Giuseppe Belluzzo, Minister of Public Instruction from July 1928 to September 1929, believed that education should prepare students to meet the demands of a modern economy. He felt that the Gentile reform inhibited the development of future technical and industrial experts by restricting access from technical institutes to universities. As a former Minister of National Economy, he believed that the modern workforce demanded more than unskilled labor, it demanded technocrats to plan and drive production.[67]

Belluzzo also felt that Gentile's reform did not prepare the lower classes for their role in the new economy either. In opposition to the humanist emphasis on the reform, he planned to expand technical education at the lowest levels so that all workers could be

[66] Minio-Paluello, *Education*, 177.

[67] Giuseppe Belluzzo, "Economia e scuola technica" in *La scuola e la pedagogia del fascismo*, ed. Maria Bellucci and Michele Ciliberto (Turin: Loescher, 1978), 313, 316.

trained for industrial or agricultural employment. He also wanted to establish new industrial schools in less developed areas, despite Gentile's restriction on the number of schools.[68] One of Belluzzo's main acts was to put all industrial, commercial and agricultural schools under the authority of the ministry.[69]

By the time that De Vecchi became minister of education in 1934, Gentile's reform, the product of years of pedagogical consideration, had been altered by various ministers who had a very different concept of the nature of Fascist education and the direction the ministry should take. The greatest changes, however, were implemented by De Vecchi.

[68] Belluzzo, "Economia e scuola technica," 314-316.
[69] Legge 20 dicembre 1928, n. 3230 quoted at length in "Il richiamo dell'istruzione tecnico-professionale" in *La scuola e la pedagogia del fascismo*, ed. Maria Belluci and Michele Ciliberto (Turin: Loescher,) 1978: 319-320.

CHAPTER 3

CATHOLIC FASCISM? DE VECCHI, GENTILE AND THE BATTLE OVER CATHOLIC ACTION

While every minister after Gentile tinkered with the reform, De Vecchi exacted or was involved with the most significant changes to Gentile's Reform. The first of these was a product of the Concordat signed by the Fascist government and the Vatican in 1929. Article 36 of the Concordat stated that religion would be taught in secondary schools. Also, the subject would be taught by priests using church-approved textbooks.[1] This was a large departure from Gentile's Reform, one that changed the philosophical orientation of schooling. Gentile introduced religious education in primary schools to serve as a first step in a pupil's philosophical development. Making church-led religious education compulsory in *secondary* school turned that first step into the entire journey. It would leave no room, Gentile felt, for further philosophical development. This radically reoriented the philosophical core of education.

In conformity with the Concordat, the philosophy curriculum for secondary schools was altered so that philosophy would not compete with religion for the hearts and minds of students. As would be expected, Gentile's reform gave great weight to training in philosophy. Only through teaching students to philosophize could they realize their

[1] "Concordat between the Holy See and Italy (February 11, 1929)" in *Mediterranian Fascism: 1919-1945*, ed. Charles F. Delzell (New York: Walker, 1970), 163-164.

creative capacities and responsibility for the future. However, after the Concordat, the philosophy curriculum was reduced to a pure *history* of philosophy to which a number of church fathers were added.[2] For Gentile, this act removed the life from the philosophy curriculum and stifled its potential to produce active, Fascist citizens. This new cooperation between church and state, and the ramifications it had on education policy, occupied a good deal of Gentile's writing for many years after the Concordat.

A consequence of the Lateran Pacts that accompanied the Concordat was the creation of a new diplomatic position, Italian ambassador to the Vatican. The first to hold this position was Cesare Maria De Vecchi who, as we have seen, from the March on Rome, had represented the monarchist/Catholic faction of Fascism. Unlike Gentile whose definition of Fascism involved many philosophical premises**,** De Vecchi summed up his Fascism as "monarchic, Catholic, faithful in obedience to the Duce that Providence has given."[3] This tripartite loyalty made him a perfect candidate for ambassador. This did not mean, however, that he would bow to every wish of the Pontificate. De Vecchi made it very clear that his attitude toward the Holy See was within the "tradition of the House of Savoy," regarding state before church while remaining a faithful Catholic.[4] His first loyalty was to the king, and only on that basis to Mussolini, whom the king had appointed.

The direction of De Vecchi's allegiance was vitally important in the years directly following the Pacts. The agreement between church and state was by no means stable.

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[2] George L. Williams, *Fascist Thought and Totalitarianism in Italy's Secondary Schools: Theory and practice, 1922-1943* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 72.

[3] Cesare Maria De Vecchi di Val Cismon, *Tra Papa, duce, e re:Il conflitto tra chiesa cattolica e stato fascista nel diario 1930-1931 del primo ambasciatore del Regno d'Italia presso la Santa Sede* (Rome: Jouvence, 1998), 162.

[4] Ibid., 13.

This became painfully obvious in the years 1930-1931 as a battle developed over the religious youth organization *Azione Cattolica* (Catholic Action, AC). The organization had a long history but was expanded considerably by Pius XI in the 1920s.[5]

From a Fascist standpoint, there were two major problems with Catholic Action. The first was that the organization was meant to be supra-political and have groups all over Europe. It was also responsible only to the Pope.[6] This could not be tolerated under a regime with totalitarian aspirations. Only a few years before (1926-1927) the Fascists had eliminated all political opposition. No allegiance was allowed outside the state.

The second problem was that AC competed with similar Fascist organizations. From 1926 the Fascist Party had developed its own youth and university groups, the *Opera nazionale balilla* and the *Gruppi universitari fascisti* respectively. The first was for youths aged 8-18 and was organized along military lines. Its goal was to produce a new generation of loyal Fascists. The second was a series of university organizations which were less rigid than the ONB but also emphasized creating a new Fascist generation. AC provided an alternative to these Fascist organizations, one that proved to be quite successful. According to D.A. Binchy, Catholic Action's "real offense . . . was its popularity."[7] The Fascist hierarchy could not tolerate such competition.

The Fascist press, led by the Fascist Party secretary Giovanni Giurati and ONB leader Carlo Scorza, launched an offensive against Catholic Action in March 1931, charging the leadership of AC with subversive activity. The church denied these claims. The Fascists did not accept this response and violence broke out in late May. Fascists ransacked meeting halls, beat members and often their clerical leaders, destroyed

[5] D.A. Binchy, *Church and State in Fascist Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 500.
[6] Ibid., 496.
[7] Binchy, *Church and State*, 510.

archives and even invaded the Rome office of *Civiltà Cattolica*. In response, the Pope published an encyclical in which he stated that the clash over Catholic Action was primarily a battle over who would control the intellectual and moral formation of youth. It condemned the regime's efforts "to monopolize the young . . . for the sole purpose and exclusive benefit of a party and of a regime based on an ideology that clearly resolves itself into a veritable pagan worship of the state."[8] Pius XI was clearly indicating that the young would either become loyal Fascists or loyal Catholics; there could be no compromise. Ten days later the party created a new rule stating that one could not be a member of a Catholic organization and a member of the Fascist Party.

De Vecchi played a vital role in the negotiations between church and state during this conflict. He was in close contact with Mussolini and influenced many important decisions. For example, the tension had grown so great by May 29 that the Pope would no longer receive De Vecchi. Mussolini, in response, ordered the prefects to dissolve Catholic youth organizations.[9] This was one of the most important actions of the Fascists in the battle and was one of the key reasons for the Pope's encyclical.

De Vecchi was a constant go-between for Mussolini and Pius XI during the negotiations that began in late July to end the conflict. These resulted in accords that were signed in September 1931. They greatly limited the powers and activities of AC, reducing it basically to an organization of religious discussion groups. Mussolini lifted the ban on simultaneous membership in the AC and the Fascist Party and removed Giuriati and Scorza from positions of power.[10]

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[8] Quoted in Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 135.
[9] De Vecchi, *Tra Papa, Duce e re*, 225.
[10] Koon, *Believe*, 136-137.

This conflict indicates that the relations between church and state were by no means stable after the Concordat. Many, if not the majority of Fascists opposed any power-sharing with the church, which went against the totalitarian principles expounded by Gentile and supported by most in the Fascist hierarchy. This suggests that despite the fact that he remained loyal to the Fascist government during the conflict, De Vecchi's Catholicism put him at odds ideologically with most significant members of the party. His close relationship to the Pontificate during this battle for the hearts and minds of young Italians set the stage for his conflict with Gentile when the former was minister of education four years later.

Even before he became minister, however, De Vecchi found himself directly at odds with Gentile. In 1933 both men were competing for the right to harmonize two societies for *Risorgimento* studies. While this seems like only a small confrontation, the ideological stakes were high. Most Fascists agreed that the regime was a continuation of the *Risorgimento*, Italy's struggle for nationhood in the nineteenth century. Defining this movement, therefore, was key to Fascist self-understanding. De Vecchi's ideological goal in this conflict was to emphasize the role of the House of Savoy in the *Risorgimento* and align this part of Italy's history with the "spirit of the Concordat."[11] On the practical level, he wanted to regiment and centralize *Risorgimento* studies. Gentile, however, wanted to emphasize less the role of Piedmontese politicians and more the ideological roots of the *Risorgimento* in the eighteenth-century.[12] His practical plan involved less radical reorganization. Despite the support Gentile received from the societies themselves, however, De Vecchi out maneuvered him and received the mandate to relign

[11] Quoted in Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 173.
[12] For more on Gentile's interpretation of the *Risorgimento* see pp. 50-54.

Risorgimento studies from Mussolini himself. His restructuring of these societies placed them, and their interpretation of the *Risorgimento*, in his control. No doubt this experience, and the animosity between these two Fascists that developed as a result, made Gentile fear for the future of education when De Vecchi became minister two years later.[13]

Many Fascists interested in education were surprised by the appointment of De Vecchi in 1935. He was not considered an intellectual and, beyond his control of *Risorgimento* studies, his previous positions had given him little experience in the cultural realm. One scholar describes him as "a rude, dull-witted reactionary completely closed to culture" who was "leery of all intellectuals, whom he suspected en masse of anti-Fascist leanings."[14] Gentile, apparently, agreed with this description of De Vecchi. In a letter to a fellow professor he wrote "I begin to worry about the new minister who is in good faith but an ass and a fanatic with a hard head."[15] However, De Vecchi served a particular purpose for Mussolini that was unique to the period of the mid 1930s. His emphasis on militaristic obedience to the Duce and loyalty to the monarchy (and empire, as is evident below) fits well with the rhetoric of the turn toward war in Africa. His appointment made political if not educational sense. Therefore De Vecchi's reforms ought to be viewed in light of the circumstances and his own interpretation of Fascism.

De Vecchi's belief in obedience to authority was most evident in his many centralizing reforms he orchestrated as minister. He gave the Fascist Party secretary and head of the Balilla organization permanent seats on the *Consiglio superiore*, the main consultative body of the ministry, in an attempt to start coordinating educational efforts

[13] Fogu, *Historic Imaginary*, 174-175.
[14] Koon, *Believe*, 69, 54.
[15] Quoted in Koon, *Believe*, 70. According to police reports, teachers agreed with Gentile's assessment.

of party and state. He also concentrated all power over elementary education in the hands of the minister and took over most of the duties of provincial ministerial representatives.[16]

As would be expected from the two ministers' differing opinions on Fascism, a good number of De Vecchi's policies were in direct opposition to Gentile's reforms.[17] Most importantly, he abolished freedom of teaching in universities. The ministry now decided which courses could be taught at universities and what subjects would be required for each program of study. This went against Gentile's concept of the freedom of teachers and students, especially at the university level. De Vecchi also centralized higher education. He stipulated that not more than one institute of higher education could exist in a community. Therefore many technical and commercial schools became faculties of local universities. Gentile's desire, however, was to set apart universities for the pursuit of knowledge and to leave professional training to technical and other schools. While many of these changes had not yet taken place by the time of our debate, De Vecchi's overall direction was clear by the spring of 1935.[18]

Gentile was well aware of these changes and addressed them in two lectures on the Italian cultural tradition in early 1936, the first addressed to an artists organization in Naples and the other to secondary school teachers in Florence. Gentile used these and other similar lectures to define what it meant to be not only Italian, but also Fascist, the two concepts being inseparably linked in his mind. He identified the Italian tradition first as inherently secular. It began with the Renaissance and the dawn of humanism, particularly with Giordano Bruno, a philosopher who was burned as a heretic in 1600.

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[16] Koon, *Believe*, 180-181, 70.
[17] L. Minio-Paluello characterizes De Vecchi's policies as an "open challenge" to Gentile's reform (176).
[18] Minio-Paluello, *Education*, 181.

The tradition was continued in the eighteenth century by Giambattista Vico, who renewed a distinctly Italian humanism in opposition to the French rationalist school. This Italian tradition became more pronounced during the *Risorgimento* of the early nineteenth century. According to Gentile, philosophers, writers and poets such as Rosmini, Gioberti, Leopardi and Manzoni all contributed to the desire to create an Italian nation.[19]

The most important character of the *Risorgimento* period for Gentile was the writer and patriot Giuseppe Mazzini. Gentile identified him with his own actual idealism by stating that Mazzini believed that "only thought which expressed itself in action was real thought."[20] He suggested that the Risorgimento heroes were inspired by an idea of Italy, formulated by Mazzini, one that made them act to achieve this goal. Thus Gentile defined the *Risorgimento* as inherently spiritual and intellectual, inspired by the leading cultural figures of the time. Equally significantly, he identified other leaders of the unification, such as Cavour and Garibaldi, as Mazzinians because they were inspired by the idea of Italy. By placing Mazzini at the center of his interpretation of unification, Gentile defined the *Risorgimento* as essentially a spiritual movement and excluded interpretations, such as De Vecchi's, that emphasized the political machinations of Cavour and the Piedmontese monarchy.[21]

Gentile believed that Fascism was the final culmination of the Italian tradition. In an article entitled "*L'Ideale della cultura e l'Italia presente*" (The cultural Ideal and Italy Today) from February 28 1936, he stated that the Fascists too were inspired by an idea of Italy. According to Gentile, Mazzini was working toward the creation of the Italian

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[19] Giovanni Gentile, "La Tradizione Italiana," in *Frammenti di estetica e di teoria della storia*, ed. H.A. Cavallera, vol. 2. (Florence:Le Lettere, 1992.), 111-116.
[20] Gentile, *Origins*, 5.
[21] Ibid., 5.

nation. The Fascists were working toward advancing and extending that nation, continuing the victory that was begun in World War I when all of Italy joined to defend the Fatherland. He believed Fascism would turn Italy the nation into a modern nation state, one that would be recognized among the great powers of Europe. This would be achieved, he maintained, in a uniquely Italian way, one that was Mediterranean, intelligent, universal and humane.[22]

Gentile maintained that this Italian tradition had to be taught in schools in order for it to continue. He felt, however, that at the present time there were two dangers to the tradition's development. These dangers clearly came from the policies of the ministry. He identified the first as a kind of false discipline. He stated that "discipline, . . . freely submitted to . . . an authority capable of interpreting our inner needs, can be converted into external obedience, false and corrupt, rising from character-ruining hypocrisy."[23] Here Gentile was clearly criticizing not discipline itself but the kind of unthinking obedience promoted by De Vecchi's reforms. The second danger was the restoration of the role of religion in education. Gentile felt that this had the potential, through a return to traditional Catholicism, to subject "national culture to a practical and mechanical form of external religiosity and consequently to limit internal spiritual liberty."[24] This reflects his own ideas of secular spiritualism and attacks the role for Catholicism envisioned by the current Minister.

While Gentile's attacks on De Vecchi were fairly subtle in the first lecture from 1936, in the second they were plainly stated. Addressing a Florentine *Liceo* on April 15,

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[22] Gentile, "L'Ideale della cultura e l'Italia presente," *Memorie Italiane e Problemi della Filosofia e della Vita* (Florence: Sansoni, 1936), 381-382.
[23] Gentile, "L'Ideale," 385.
[24] Ibid., 385.

1936, Gentile directly quoted parts of speeches by De Vecchi. He criticized the minister for always evoking Imperial Rome.[25] Paying tribute to Ancient Rome, however, was not an unusual practice for a Fascist minister in the mid 1930s. The new focus of the regime after the invasion of Ethiopia encouraged a glorification of the ancient empire and the prospects for a new one.

Obviously, Gentile did not like the sort of Rome De Vecchi was promoting. Quoting De Vecchi he stated that the minister was trying to inculcate millions of elementary school children "with a profound civil consciousness of the religious and military spirit of Rome" and to instill in the general public "the breath of Rome and the certainty of Rome's destiny."[26] It is obvious that Gentile would object to any militaristic or religious focus in education, especially one that favored a nationalism based on Rome rather than one based on Italy. In the article he gave two main objections to De Vecchi's use of Rome. The first was that the minister evoked the Catholic Rome. The second objection was De Vecchi's constant repetition of the word "Rome" itself. This reminded Gentile of a character from the poem *Socrate immaginario* by Galiani: "In my house/ I want everything to be Greek. And I want/ even my dog/ to wag his tail in a Greek manner."[27] Thus he defined De Vecchi's invocation of Rome as nonsensical, trivial repetition.

Gentile framed his criticism of De Vecchi's Rome by his own definition of the Italian tradition, one that was based not on ancient empires but on the glory of a new Italy:

[25] Gentile, "Tradizione," 105.
[26] Ibid., 105.
[27] Ibid., 105.

> A tradition is true and hence constructive, if it is alive. And when today we hear on the other hand people celebrate at the top of their lungs . . . the Italian tradition or, which is the same thing, the tradition of modern Rome, *of that Rome by which Christ is Roman*, we must tell those puny Romans, who have become so cocky as a result of the Lateran Pacts, that their Italy is not the authentic Italy, our own Italy; I mean the Italians' Italy. And even less the Italy of today's Italians, of fascism.[28]

He continued by defining Italy as intensely modern and as following the tradition he had outlined in this and his previous lecture of that year: "Italy is inside of us today. In our children, offspring of various revolutions, of the community and of humanism, that liberate the Italians from the two medieval myths of empire and church and from dogmatism, and finishing with the fascist revolution turning up at last, after the great test of the world war, to liberate spirits from the materialistic ideologies of liberal individualism and of classic socialism."[29] In this way Gentile defined Fascism in opposition to De Vecchi's interpretation, downplaying the roles of Catholic and Ancient Rome in Fascism's development. In fact, he stated that Fascism had created a new Rome, "new, despite shifting rhetoric, it simply is no longer that of the Caesars or that of the Pontificates, but the Italian Rome."[30] Gentile's Rome was a modern city, the capital and more importantly the symbol of the new Italian state which was born of a secular, humanist tradition.

Through this critique, Gentile was not only commenting on De Vecchi's fitness for the ministry of education, but also on the direction of the regime as a whole. Even though he supported the Ethiopian conflict, Gentile appears to have disliked the rhetoric of empire and of the virtues of ancient Rome that the war inspired. The cultural climate that accompanied the war was no longer friendly to his idealist interpretation of Fascism.

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[28] Quoted in Alessandra Tarquini, "The Anti-Gentilians during the Fascist Regime," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, No. 4 (Oct. 2005): 655, her translation.
[29] Gentile, "Tradizione," 106-107.
[30] Ibid., 110.

Political and philosophical opposition to Gentile grew through the 1930s.[31] In fact, Gentile's immediate political influence had waned, even though he still maintained important cultural positions in government and society. Gentile would not be useful again to Mussolini until well into World War II.

However, Gentile's 1936 critique had significant immediate consequences. De Vecchi did not appreciate Gentile's comments. In a letter to Gentile he did not address the issues Gentile had raised directly but instead questioned Gentile's right to criticize his policies: "you would do well to concern yourself with philosophers and philosophy and to abstain from concerning yourself with me and my work as a fascist minister."[32] Despite Gentile's impressive record of involvement in the regime and his extensive work as minister of education, De Vecchi attempted to distinguish himself, who he considered a loyal Fascist minister doing the work of the regime, from Gentile, who he viewed as an unpractical intellectual. The fact that De Vecchi would say this to the author of a major Fascist reform and a leading Fascist intellectual indicates the strong animosity that grew between the two men due to their differing definitions of Fascism. This animosity was confirmed the next day when De Vecchi removed Gentile from the directorship of the *Scuola Normale Superiore* of Pisa.

Thankfully for Gentile, this situation was only temporary and he was reinstated in 1937.[33] It was not Mussolini, however, who came to Gentile's aide; rather, it was the new minister of education, Giuseppe Bottai. Bottai had a great deal more respect for

[31] For more on the increase of political opposition to Gentile in the mid 1930s see Tarquini, "Anti-Gentilians," 656-660.
[32] Tarquini, "Anti-Gentilians, 655, her translation.
[33] Ibid., 665-656.

Gentile's work than had his predecessor. However, he did have his own critique of Gentile's reform which shall serve as the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

GIUSEPPE BOTTAI: CRITICISM, CORPORATIONS, EDUCATION

While one can easily label Gentile an "intellectual" Fascist and De Vecchi a monarchist and Catholic Fascist, Bottai is more difficult to classify. Renzo De Felice convincingly called him the second most important Fascist. Involved from Fascism's beginnings, he held positions of power in every stage of Fascist development, from the lawless years immediately following the war, to the construction of the Fascist state, to the turn toward an aggressive foreign policy, to involvement in World War II and the fall of Mussolini. His ideas, however, are not so easily documented. In his writings, Bottai had to carefully construct all his arguments so that he would not appear to disfavor the work of the regime or to disapprove of any faction within it. Thus he used certain turns of phrase and other rhetorical tricks to get his point across in an inoffensive way. This often produced vague arguments that made his true opinion difficult to decipher. In order to understand his interpretation of Fascism, as well as his views on the education system, we must decode his language, reading between the lines to discover hidden meanings.

One point that is relatively clear in his writings, however, is that Bottai always felt caught between two forces in Fascism. On the philosophical plain, these forces were thought and action, the very two that Gentile synthesized in his own writing. While Bottai never posed a complete unity between thought and action, as Gentile did, he displayed both in his daily life. He was both a *Ras* and the editor of the most significant

Fascist journal. He served as both an *ardito* in World War I and as minister of education in World War II.

In his writings Bottai often wrote against groups within Italy that represented, in his mind, the extreme of either action or thought. Extreme action was represented by a group that could be best labeled the intransigents. They consisted mostly of the other *ras* and their supporters, tended to be anti-intellectual and believed that the essence of Fascism was action. They were advocates of Fascist Party power and wished to exact an immediate, sweeping revolution with the party at the helm. Extreme thought, on the other hand, was represented, in Bottai's mind, by an archetypical version of a liberal intellectual. To the mind of many Fascists, an intellectual of the liberal period wished to pursue knowledge objectively and disinterestedly with little, if any, regard for the political implications of his thought. Such intellectuals were still present in the Fascist period and were often viewed as a threat to the development of a Fascist conscience in the general populace. Bottai, Gentile and other Fascist intellectuals argued against both these extremes. They argued against the intransigents that Fascism was not just a movement of action but also of intelligence. Against the liberal intellectuals they argued that thought always had political meaning and that intellectuals, therefore, had to use their intelligence in the service of the state.

Bottai attempted to navigate his way between these two factions throughout his career. This can be clearly seen by examining two articles he wrote in 1924 and 1943 commenting on early Fascism and his role in it. In the first, entitled "Fascism as Intellectual Revolution," Bottai casts himself as an intellectual while in the second, "Twenty Years of *Critica Fascista*," he emphasizes the role of action in his life. Yet in

each of these, and especially in the juxtaposition of the two, one can clearly see his balancing act between thought and action, one that was played out on both the intellectual and political levels.

In the first article Bottai is quick to point out that he repudiates both intellectualism and anti-intellectualism. He states: "a mad passion for discipline leads to blindness, a mad passion for the critical spirit leads to intellectual anarchy."[1] Thus he rejects both the overly militaristic emphasis of most intransigents but also the tendency of intellectuals to become merely subversives. However, he still identifies Fascism, from the very beginning, as a movement of intellectuals. He indicates that the Fascist intellectuals were from different backgrounds but were unified by their war experience and the unique intellectual perspective it produced.[2]

In his second article he reaffirms this connection between World War I and intellectualism. He states that for a "small vital core group of men, scattered among various units on the wartime and revolutionary battlefronts, the war was also fought with weapons of the spirit, of the mind, of a new intelligence."[3] However, Bottai defines his intellectualism in opposition to the "bloodless pallor of intellectual hysterics" of the liberal tradition.[4] He insists that in the years 1915-1923 he had little time to become an intellectual. The studies that he did perform were always in the midst of "battles,

[1] Giuseppe Bottai, "Fascism as Intellectual Revolution," in *A Primer of Italian Fascism*, ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 76.
[2] Ibid., 76.
[3] Giuseppe Bottai, "Twenty Years of *Critica Fascista*" in *A Primer of Italian Fascism*, ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Lincoln, NE:University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 188.
[4] Ibid., 188.

insurrections, and punitive sorties."[5] The criticism that inspired his journal was a "criticism in arms."[6]

Bottai refers to this new intellectualism in his 1924 article as well; only in this case he puts less emphasis on action. He indicates that the intellectual revolution of Fascism was approaching the problems of the postwar world in a new way, ignoring nineteenth century methods. This did not mean that the Fascists denied the use of intellectual traditions. Rather "refusing the culture of the nineteenth century . . . means enabling one's intelligence to grasp things with immediacy, that is, to understand them anew and to re-evaluate them."[7] Thus Bottai was advocating a kind of intellectual presentism, one that encouraged a new way of thinking about the problems of the modern world.

In his 1943 article, Bottai identifies intellectual presentism as the main reason for the founding of *Critica Fascista*. This time, however, presentism assumes a slightly different meaning. Rather than producing a new way of thinking about problems, the new intellectualism is "present" because it is the thought process that accompanies action. Bottai envisioned *Critica Fascista* as a type of self-criticism whereby Fascists could comment on their actions, *as they were in progress*. Thus, despite the fact that Bottai never proposed a total unity between thought and action, as Gentile did, he insisted they both needed to be present in order to continue the development of Fascism. Fascism

[5] Bottai, "Twenty Years," 188. It is important to note that the Fascists interpreted the Fascist reaction against communism in the early 1920s as a revolution or a series of battles. They were fighting against a national enemy and for a new post war Italy, one that the communists, with their pacifism and internationalism, threatened.
[6] Ibid., 188.
[7] Bottai, "Intellectual Revolution," 76.

presented revolution in power and, as the regime attempted to construct a new state, self-criticism was necessary to maintain the proper course.[8]

One of the challenges Bottai wished to confront from an intellectual presentist perspective was how to create an elite group to guide Fascism. In his 1924 article he states "Fascism's central problem remains the creation of a new ruling class, whether externally, at the national level, or internally, within the party apparatus."[9] This problem motivated a good number of Bottai's decisions – the founding of *Critica Fascista*, his relationship with young intellectuals, and even his interest in education policy. Creating a new Fascist ruling class, he felt, was the key to maintaining and expanding the Fascist revolution.

Despite this presentist perspective, Bottai did make comparisons between Fascism and the past, principally with the French Revolution. He addressed this issue at a conference in Pisa on November 10, 1930. He begins by stating the standard Fascist line, that the liberal-democratic regimes of the nineteenth century were the enemies of Fascism. The question remains, he insists, as to whether these regimes embodied the "ideal nucleus" of the French Revolution. Bottai believes that the essence of the 17 articles of the "Declaration of the Rights of Man" still have worth.[10] They were meant to liberate not only a burgeoning bourgeoisie, as some scholars maintained, but also the entire third estate from the system of restrictions and privileges that characterized the

[8] Bottai, "Twenty Years," 189.
[9] Bottai, "Intellectual Revolution," 78.
[10] Giuseppe Bottai, "Corporativismo e principi dell'ottantanove" *Autobiographia del Fascismo* ed. Renzo De Felice (Bergamo: Minerva Italica, 1978), 354-355.

Ancien Regime. This more universal significance Bottai identifies as part of the essence of the "Declaration" that Fascists should praise.[11]

While Fascism may be able to accept the "essence" of the "Declaration," Bottai assured he listeners that it could not accept its language. Because it was formulated in response to the challenge of absolute monarchy, the "Declaration" spoke of the rights of the individuals in opposition to the rights of the state. It in fact viewed an individual's rights as freedom from state control.[12] This was unacceptable to any Fascist that perceived the relationship between individual and state as reciprocal dependence.

Bottai insists that is was the liberalism that emphasized freedom from the state that was passed down to the democracies of the nineteenth century. He suggests that all liberal systems were based on the supremacy of the individual over the state. Thus they considered "the legal system not as the realization of man's social life, in which the individual celebrates the essence of social man, but rather as a limited system that defends the citizen from the state. And that [is why] the liberal state degenerated into an atomistic, abstract democracy."[13]

If the liberal state betrayed the true essence of the Revolution, Bottai asserts that Fascism will restore it. He states that the principles of 1789 need a state "in which the life of the citizen is completely realized, in which the citizen finds and develops his moral personality, and in which he finds an effective and total regulation of his life."[14] This, Bottai suggests, is the sort of state that Fascism wished to create, a totalitarian state that

[11] Bottai, "Corporativismo," 357.
[12] Ibid., 358.
[13] Ibid., 359.
[14] Ibid., 361.

gave citizens moral purpose and involved them more constantly and directly in political decision-making.

He also outlined his definition of Fascism in the first years of the Italian Republic after World War II. In his memoirs, *Vent'anni e un giorno (24 luglio 1943)* Bottai went to great lengths to distinguish his brand of Fascism from that of Mussolini and other prominent Fascists. Even in 1949 Bottai was caught between two factions, antifascists and the archetypical Fascist that the partisans despised (akin to an intransigent). Bottai at this time was in an interesting and potentially difficult position. He had been a prominent Fascist from the first days of the regime but he also, with Dino Grandi and Luigi Federzoni, led the coup that ousted Mussolini from power in July 1943. He had to define his Fascism in such a way as to not betray the regime he worked so hard to build while at the same time justifying his betrayal of Mussolini.

Perhaps surprisingly, his comments in 1949 are for the most part consistent with his Fascist writings. For example, in an article entitled "Il mio fascismo," he insists that the essence of his work as a Fascist was for revisionism. He advocated "discussion, criticism, self-criticism, and above all revision."[15] This is very similar to the ideas he expressed in 1924 and 1943. However, in 1949 he took it a step further by stating that he intended to create his own internal opposition.[16] While he may have phrased it this way to appeal to an antifascist audience, in reality, internal oppositions characterized the Fascist regime. As we have previously indicated, there were many factions within Fascism vying for power. Each of these could be considered a small opposition party,

[15] Giuseppe Bottai, "Il mio fascismo," *Vent'anni e un giorno (14 luglio 1943)* (Milan: Garzanti, 1977), 5.
[16] Ibid., 5.

complete with their own leaders and agendas. Thus Bottai's actions were simply symptomatic, and did not mark a departure from the norms of the regime.

Nevertheless, Bottai tried hard to mark a distinction between his Fascism and that of intransigent Fascists. He states that in the first months of the regime he formed a group of friends that Mussolini dubbed "Bottai's brood." They advocated "a living and dynamic discipline that finds and sustains the new values."[17] This was against "the cancerous, despotic, shrewish discipline that the little provincial tyrants [i.e. *ras*] exercised with only their own consent."[18] This delineation between two kinds of discipline is reminiscent of Gentile's separation between his concept of discipline and De Vecchi's. Thus it is most likely that Bottai would have sided with Gentile in the De Vecchi-Gentile debate, a point that is reinforced by his move to reinstate Gentile after he became minister of education.

This indicates that Bottai was just as concerned with defining what his Fascism was *not* as what it *was*, a point that was reinforced in another article entitled "Il Fascismo tra illegittimità e legittimità" [Fascism between Illegitimacy and Legitimacy]. This time he frames it within the normalization debate of the mid 1920s. Again, he defines two differing factions. The first were the intransigents who wanted immediate, swift revolution, or in other words, a sweeping change in political institutions. The second group was the old liberals, who desired a return to liberal democratic principles, a move that would "normalize" the Fascist Party. Bottai identified his revisionism as between these two. He was against some Fascists' revolutionary illegality as well as the old

[17] Bottai, "fascismo," 7.
[18] Ibid, 7.

legality of the former liberals. He wanted to imbue Italian institutions and political life with "the spirit of the revolution."[19]

But what of the substance of Bottai's Fascist revolution? He believed that the corporative state was the solution to Italy's postwar political and economic crisis. The corporative system was essentially a collection of unions meant to involve everyone based on economic function. Thus it was to include both employers and employees. Corporativism was an attempt to reduce class conflict by resolving labor disputes in a non-confrontational manner, mediated by the state. Employer and employee were meant to be united by the common goal of production for the greater society.

In addition, many corporative supporters wanted to place agricultural, industrial and commercial experts into positions of power to better direct the Italian economy. This would produce a new technocratic class that, freed from responsibility to a parliament because of the Fascist dictatorship, could implement the reform Italy needed to compete with other European powers. These leaders would naturally come to the fore if all those involved in production were organized by trade or industry. In truth, the corporative system treated all producers as experts because it was meant to give them the ability to make decisions that reflected their particular expertise and affected their particular field.

The advocates of corporativism saw political potential for a corporative state as well. They felt that if the corporations were given legislative power, everyday people could be involved in a form of direct democracy that never could be experienced in representative forms of government. As one scholar notes, the supporters of corporativism "felt that organizations based on economic function could have the greatest

[19] Giuseppe Bottai, "Il Fascismo tra illegittimità e legittimità," *Vent'anni e un giorno (14 luglio 1943)* (Milan: Garzanti, 1977), 20.

impact, because the individual's job was his most 'social' activity, and because it involved him every day. Within these organizations, the people would participate together in making decisions that directly affected them – and that also had broader implications."[20]

Bottai and others advocated the creation of a new legislative body made up of representatives from each corporation. This would replace the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Italian parliament, as the country's legislature.[21] Thus members of corporations could be involved with decisions that affected their own lives as well as those that affected the entire nation. In this way, advocates of corporativism interpreted Fascism as a "third way," the first two being liberalism and socialism, to deal with the unique political and economic challenges of the modern world.

Thus Bottai's support of corporativism, as well as his revolutionary but scholarly approach to Fascism, made him particularly popular with young intellectuals who were trying to express their often radical views in a one-party state. He served as patron to many youth journals in the late 1920s and early 1930s. He "arranged subsidies, gave editorial suggestions, and smoothed out any political difficulties that might arise."[22] In fact, Bottai was the main force behind the regime's campaign "Make way for youth," which set up patronage systems for young intellectuals and favored them in competitions for scholarly and artistic positions. Most of these youth were anti-capitalist and therefore

[20] Roberts, *Syndicalist Tradition*, 253.
[21] Ibid., 53; Bottai, "Fascismo," 23. The Chamber of Deputies still existed, although most power was concentrated in the hands of Mussolini.
[22] Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 98.

supported corporativism as a viable alternative to laissez-faire capitalism that would empower workers.[23]

The implementation of corporativist institutions began during the revolutionary reforms of 1926, during the first flurry of Fascist state-building.[24] Mussolini established the Ministry of Corporations with himself as the minister and Bottai as undersecretary in order to begin planning the implementation of the corporative state. That same year, Alfredo Rocco's Labor and Antistrike Law passed. It laid the groundwork for the corporative state by stipulating collective labor contracts, instituting labor courts to settle disputes, and outlawing strikes. In 1927 Bottai, Rocco and Mussolini collaborated on the "Labor Charter," the most well-known document on corporativism. It outlined the principles and basic structure of the corporate state. For example, it required employers to negotiate collective labor contracts and give a paid vacation to those who work year-round. Yet at the same time it reaffirmed Fascism's commitment to private property by assuring employers that the state would only interfere in cases where private initiative was lacking.[25] Three years later the National Council of Corporations was founded and in 1934 a law was passed that established the corporations and outlined in detail their function. Finally, in 1939 the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations replaced the Chamber of Deputies.[26]

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[23] Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 30, 94-95.

[24] Other important laws passed in 1926 include the Law for the Defense of the State, which made it a capital offense to attempt to assassinate Mussolini or a member of the royal family, outlawed opposition parties, made it illegal to speak ill of Fascism abroad, and set up a Special Tribunal to hear all cases of a political nature.

[25] What this means in practice is uncertain.

[26] "Labor Charter (April 21, 1927)," 122-123, "Law on Formation and Functions of the Corporations (February 5, 1934)," 126, and "Law Creating the Chamber of Fasces and of Corporations (January 19, 1939," 129, *Mediterranean Fascism: 1919-1945* ed. Charles F. Delzell (New York: Walker, 1970).

All of these official actions, however, did little to produce a viable, functioning corporate state. The Labor Charter was not law and therefore was not legally binding for employers or employees. The laws that were passed in the 1930s had a piecemeal quality and therefore they had limited effect. There were both ideological and practical reasons for this situation. On the ideological level, Fascism's orientation was changing in the 1930s from a focus on building new institutions and creating consensus at home to aggressive policies abroad. Additionally, only some Fascists supported corporativism, so its fate was linked to the ebb and flow of factions within the regime. On the practical level, corporativism was never popular with employers. They viewed it as a threat to their autonomy and preferred their own professional associations such as the General Confederation of Italian Industry (*Confindustria*).[27] The regime never forced employers to comply with the corporations, either. Businessmen provided an important counter balance to anti-capitalist Fascists that helped Mussolini maintain equilibrium between factions. Without the participation of employers, however, an organization that attempted to bring employer and employee together could never get off the ground.

Perhaps because of the increasingly clear fate of corporativism, Bottai, though not giving up on his corporativist dream, began to focus more on the creation of a new Fascist ruling class through education. In the April 15, 1935, edition of *Critica Fascista*, Bottai inaugurated a series on education entitled "Il problema della scuola" or "the School Problem." Bottai was not the only Fascist to write on the issue of education in 1935. De Vecchi's appointment had sparked a renewal of interest in the subject. Ernesto

[27] Roberts, *Syndicalist Tradition*, 275.

Codignola, Luigi Volpicelli, and Nazzareno Padellaro all wrote articles advocating reform.[28]

Bottai's article was an introduction to this series and therefore addressed general problems of education instead of focusing on certain policy issues. His argument follows this general format: he identified the problem, identified and discredited those responsible, called for a new vision for schools and someone to implement it. As one would expect, he began with the 1923 reform. He identified the problem: twelve years had passed since it was implemented and in that time Fascism had developed and the reform had not. Even the ministers of education that followed Gentile did not help the reform evolve: "considered as something complete and definitive, not susceptible, therefore, to historical development, the reform was the object , here and there, of exterior, occasional retouches and amendments."[29] Instead of attempting to understand the essence of the Gentile's work, Bottai indicated that the ministers performed plastic surgery, giving no more than facelifts to the reform. They did not try to grasp its internal mechanism in order to encourage it to develop "according to its spirit and its revolutionary life."[30]

After identifying the issue and those responsible, Bottai briefly mentioned De Vecchi. He stated that the minister had pointed out, "with supreme exactness," this fragmentary approach to education reform in a speech to the Chamber of Deputies.[31] By doing this, Bottai separated De Vecchi from the ministers he was critiquing while keeping him on the sidelines of the argument. This allowed Bottai to comment on the

[28] De Grand, *Bottai*, 185-187.
[29] Bottai, Giuseppe, "Il problema della scuola," *Critica Fascista* 13, No.12 (April 15, 1935): 233.
[30] Bottai, "Il problema," 233.
[31] Ibid., 233, 234.

current state of education without criticizing the present work of the regime. This would also keep the reader focused on Gentile's reform.

Bottai's disapproval of the education ministers and the Fascist critics of the reform was very strong. He stated that their criticisms were "a retreat continuing toward that formal and extrinsic conception of teaching and of culture, that verbose vanity, with which antifascism, in the years of grace, 1923 and 1924, bombarded the scholastic politics of the regime."[32] By comparing those who advocated and implemented small alterations to the reform with its antifascist critics, Bottai laid the heaviest charge against them, that of treason against the Fascist state.

Not only so but he also suggested that they were not in agreement with the Duce. They would not give the reform the significance he did, although Bottai believed that Mussolini's assessment had to be understood in context.[33] Bottai was careful to point out that when Mussolini stated that Gentile's reform was the "most Fascist of reforms," the revolutionary reforms of 1926 (such as Rocco's antistrike law and the Law for the Defense of the State) had not yet been implemented. By comparing Gentile's reform to these sweeping changes, Bottai suggested that Mussolini's statement no longer stands.[34]

Bottai, however, did see some worth in the reform. He stated that the reform was a "series of measures . . . that constituted the major effort of the [Fascist] Revolution to create its own school system, and that would have the power to generate, organically and

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[32] Bottai, "Il problema," 233.
[33] Ibid., 233. In fact, in 1931 Mussolini declared that the '23 reform stemmed from "an error due to the times and to the mindset of the then minister." See Tarquini, "Anti-Gentilians," p. 654, her translation. Mussolini's vision for Fascist education had evidently moved on.
[34] "The Rocco Labor and Antistrike Law (April 3, 1926)," 115-118, "The Exceptional Decrees: Law for the Defense of the State," 67-69, *Mediterranean Fascism: 1919-1945* ed. Charles F. Delzell (New York: Walker, 1970).

. . . successfully, the new order destined one day to oust and definitely cancel the old."[35] Thus Gentile's reform was the first step in the goal Bottai identified in his 1924 lecture, the creation of a new Fascist ruling class. He insisted in this instance, however, that the school system has not been able to carry out this task because it was in a multifaceted crisis, "an authorship crisis, a system crisis, and a conceptual crisis."[36]

Bottai indicated that the current crisis was partially the result of a lack of pedagogical thinking in the preceding few years. He revealed that in universities the positions that were usually reserved for pedagogical studies now went to other disciplines. For Bottai it seemed as if "pedagogy is dead."[37] While he may have been attempting to discredit only certain Fascist intellectuals and former ministers of education, his critique could extend to De Vecchi. As we have seen, the current minister was not an intellectual who concerned himself with the overarching pedagogical problems of the school system but instead worked to centralize administrative control and create obedient Fascists.

Bottai indicated that even the small amount of pedagogical thinking that did exist was outdated and/or useless. He stated that "in the remaining writings we find rehashed idealism (the more it contributes the more rancid it becomes), the wastes of an obtuse eclecticism, the rhetoric of a politics that is neither political nor pedagogical."[38] As the alterations of many education ministers were fragmented, so too was pedagogy.

Bottai's remark about idealism is interesting because it suggests that he was not in favor of the ideological underpinnings of Gentile's reform. This would not be surprising

[35] Bottai, "Il problema," 234.
[36] Ibid., 234.
[37] Ibid., 234.
[38] Ibid., 234.

as "Bottai's brood" of young intellectuals tended to be anti-idealist. For example, the youth journal *Saggiatore*, founded by two students at the University of Rome Philosophy Department, of which Gentile was chair, criticized idealism for remaining too abstract. The authors advocated a more pragmatic approach to philosophy that emphasized developing ideas based on real-world experiences. Gastone Silvano Spinetti, the editor of another journal *La Sapienza*, organized an Anti-Idealist Congress in 1933 that was attended by hundreds of youth.[39] It aimed at attacking the philosophical basis of Gentile's interpretation of Fascism in an attempt to formulate a more radical alternative. Clearly Gentile's ideas were favored by few in the postwar generation.

Returning to the theme of fragmentation, Bottai blamed this tendency on a "flood of technicism." By using the word technicism, Bottai was not attempting to criticize a particular minister of education, the technocrat Belluzzo, or an emphasis on technology in education; rather he was identifying "a particular mental bureaucracy . . . [that] lives to analyze and . . . claims to solve the problems themselves, in their individuality and particularity."[40] This, he believed, was the mental attitude that kept ministers of education and pedagogical thinkers from creating a unified vision for Fascist schools.

At the end of his article, Bottai gave no suggestion for improvement but did indicate that someone must take the initiative to change the situation: "to whoever wants to set with courage and resolution to the job of reconstruction . . ., the experiences of these twelve years are able [to help]. And the necessity for a more politicized school system surely rises from these experiences."[41] Interestingly, Bottai did not identify De Vecchi as the one who should reform the schools. There could be a couple of

[39] Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 102, 108-109.
[40] Ibid., 234.
[41] Ibid., 234.

explanations for this. First, Bottai might not have wanted to address a Fascist minister directly. Calling him to do more might have appeared to be criticizing his existing work and therefore the ongoing work of the regime. Second, Bottai probably did not think that De Vecchi was the right man for the job. As De Vecchi was not a pedagogical thinker, it would be difficult for him to create a unifying vision for schools. De Vecchi was not likely to prove the savior of schools for which Bottai was searching.

Throughout his article, Bottai never sought to discredit Gentile's reform. Why would Bottai rather blame Fascist ministers for the state of education in 1935 and not the reform itself? There are at least three possible explanations for this. Firstly, Bottai could have been personally in favor of the reform. However, this is unlikely as he stated it was no longer relevant after 1926. In addition, he had scathing words for the idealism on which the reform was based. Secondly, he could have avoided criticism out of respect for a major Fascist reform. This is quite likely as he would not want to go against the word of the Duce, who pronounced its importance at the time. Thirdly, Bottai could have been attempting to compare himself, someone who recognized the need for a unitary vision for education, with the previous ministers who did not. Perhaps Bottai was preparing to take a leading role in this endeavor.

Unlike his first article, which was general in focus and concerned the Gentile Reform, Bottai's May 1 article, "L'autonomia universitaria," was more specific and concerned a particular problem of the contemporary school system: the degree of autonomy given to universities. There are other differences between the two articles as well. In the latter, De Vecchi plays a bigger role and Bottai outright attacks the 1923 reform. The argument is in general easier to follow and can be summarized thusly: Bottai

begins by praising De Vecchi but then indicates that more needs to be done; he identifies the problem, indicates that the 1923 reform did not help, and gives suggestions for improvement. This format is very similar to those that Bottai would use for his next two articles, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Bottai began his article by praising the current work of the regime, specifically a measure by De Vecchi that lowered retirement age for university professors and for middle school teachers. Interestingly Bottai paid homage to De Vecchi's Fascist career by calling him "Quadrumvir De Vecchi" in the first sentence of the article. In the next sentence he referred to him as a "militarist and fascist of the purest character."[42] This reveals that Bottai knew of De Vecchi's reputation and approximately where he fit on the ideological spectrum of Fascism. It is unlikely, however, that Bottai was simply displaying his knowledge of De Vecchi's career in this comment. He was more likely attempting to do one of two things: either he was sugar-coating his critique or he wished to indicate that the critique was not meant to discredit the minister or his work.

This idea was reinforced by Bottai's comments on the measure itself. He stated that if it was quickly implemented, it would be "the first step toward a radical reform of the school system."[43] Unlike the last article, where Bottai gave no indication as to whether De Vecchi could bring about the desired reform of education or not, here he suggested it was possible. He reinforced this idea by stating that "this first act of the minister affirms that he will be able to see and energetically fix the unhealthy parts of the current school system."[44] This separated De Vecchi from the other ministers of education that Bottai mentioned in his first article. Perhaps this also suggested that Bottai hoped

[42] Giuseppe Bottai, "L'autonomia universitaria," *Critica Fascista* 13, no.13 (May 1, 1935): 266.
[43] Ibid., 266.
[44] Ibid., 266.

that, if he praised this measure, De Vecchi would institute the reforms he recommends in this rest of the article. Of course, it is difficult to know whether Bottai's praise of De Vecchi was meant in all sincerity or if Bottai was simply paying lip service to show loyalty to the regime. Bottai needed to ensure that no one would question his loyalty to Fascism based on his critiques of education.

While his praise of De Vecchi might not have been completely sincere, his praise of the measure was, for a number of reasons. Firstly, he stated that it was "extremely rare if [university professors over 70] conserve the capacity to produce, scientifically[45] and with sufficient open-mindedness, to follow with sympathy the movement of new ideas."[46] In other words, it would be difficult for older professors to adjust to modern ideas. This would have been particularly significant if professors, many of whom started their careers in the liberal period, were unable to accept new Fascist ideas. Such a situation would inhibit the training of the new Fascist ruling class, almost all of whom would pass through universities. Bottai had in mind this idea of replacing the old class with the new when he stated that "by shortening the length of teaching careers, the renewal of personnel will be more frequent and become advantageous . . . also to the assistant class and those who aspire to professorships."[47] As Bottai was patron at this time to many young intellectuals, he would feel the need to "make way for youth" in university faculties acutely.

[45] *Scienza*, the Italian word for science can also mean "knowledge." Bottai and Gentile often use this term to signify wider learning, although a corresponding word in English cannot always be found. Therefore we have translated "science," "scientific" and "scientifically" directly while asking the reader to keep the nuance in mind.
[46] Bottai, "L'autonomia," 266.
[47] Ibid., 266.

Bottai identified this measure as a good first step but also indicated that more needed to be done to solve the "crisis" of the school system he mentioned in his first article. One specific point that needed revision was the degree of administrative and didactic autonomy given to universities. He believed the question of university autonomy was particularly urgent at that time as De Vecchi's measure had left a number of vacant positions. Who decided how they will be filled was a key issue.[48]

The issue of vacant positions, Bottai suggested, was complicated by a dualism in university power. This rendered it difficult to fill the universities with the "fascist spirit" or to "renew teaching to be in greater harmony with the development of knowledge and life," the two reasons for which Bottai praised De Vecchi's measure. He explained that "the dualism could best be defined as a contrast between two mentalities: between a liberal mentality and a fascist mentality. That is, more concretely, [a dualism] between the freedom of the faculties and the proposed authority of the university government."[49] The structure of this government Bottai summarized as follows: the university government was responsible to the minister, who gave the king a nomination for rector. The rector nominated the deans which with the rector comprised the Academic Senate. The faculties, however, were essentially autonomous. This created an imbalance of power: "the faculties, thus constituted, become the rulers [*padrone*] of the university; they decide which positions are tenured and which are not; . . . in all terms, the faculties are the rulers of the fundamental part of a university."[50] Thus the faculties had no set authority above them that would influence their decisions.

[48] Bottai, "L'autonomia," 266.
[49] Ibid., 266.
[50] Ibid., 266.

Not only did the fact that they were responsible to no higher authority make Bottai question the Fascist nature of faculties, so did their method of decision-making. Bottai lamented that faculties used the "old method" of majority vote. This rendered all votes equal and gave no extra weight to the vote of the dean or that of a professor "who follows the movement of ideas."[51] Their votes were equal to a professor who has no concern for anything outside his teaching. This was counterproductive to any attempt to fill faculties with the new "fascist spirit" or encourage in them the acceptance of postwar intellectual trends. Not only so, but it assured the persistence of liberal forms of government in a post-liberal state.

Bottai did not want to appear to suggest that the advent of Fascism had done nothing to affect this situation. He stated that in the liberal period, some authors complained about the "university mafias" that were sometimes found in faculty governments. He cited cases of professors filling vacant positions with their friends or with people who would serve their own interests. But just as the "fascist spirit" had brought change to Italian government, it was also changing education: "we are saying that the new moral climate created by Fascism in public life, has penetrated also into universities . . . that the cases of the very deplorable university mafias are, in fact, less numerous."[52] This slight improvement, however, did not solve the more general problem of the high degree of freedom given to faculties.

Bottai blamed the persistence of the autonomy of the faculties on Gentile's reform. He stated that "the power of the universities is today, fundamentally in the hands of the faculties . . . and the reform of 1923 did not, in this point, change anything that had

[51] Bottai, "L'autonomia," 266.
[52] Ibid., 266-267.

previously existed."[53] This was an accurate critique but Gentile would not have seen anything antifascist about giving freedom to faculties. In fact, his philosophy necessitated giving a certain degree of autonomy to professors. Gentile believed that if professors were given the liberty to determine their own teaching methods and materials, they would be free to develop in their pupils a responsibility to collective create the Fascist future. Yet Bottai viewed this freedom as simply a remnant of liberal practices. In it he found no revolutionary potential.

Bottai did believe, however, that the power balance within universities was not wholly bad. He believed that the "political and technical power" given to the Academic Senate by the Gentile Reform had potential. He was also encouraged by the rectors who "have generally demonstrated an activity and an interest highly beneficial to the [communities] outside of their universities."[54] The problem, however, was that the rectors' influence was most often apparent rather than substantial because it lay outside the law. Getting to the heart of the issue, Bottai indicated that they have no control over granting teaching positions. The rectors, therefore, could not be relied upon to solve the problem at hand.

The problem of faculty autonomy was compounded, Bottai believed, by the negative consequences of democratic government: "in the faculties, where all have power, it is difficult to take initiative. The dean himself knows that agreement is not obtained easily."[55] Bottai also indicated that "squabbles" were too often the result. He noted that academic squabbles were often the worst: "men who are in every other way gentle as lambs, the best of gentlemen, ingenuous of the first order, become ferocious,

[53] Bottai, "L'autonomia," 267.
[54] Ibid., 267.
[55] Ibid., 267.

unjust and vulgar if they suspect their professional dignity would be diminished in the slightest way."[56] This intense personal concern Bottai would have viewed as a threat to instilling a Fascist way of thinking in education. The new generation needed to be trained to be concerned with the good of the nation first, and these professors would not encourage this.

Near the end of the article Bottai gave some suggestions for improvement but indicated that he was not the one to do them: "we must not, nor do we want to substitute ourselves for him, alone, who can see things from every side and provide for them."[57] In other words, Bottai viewed it as the minister's prerogative to correct the situation. This does not necessarily mean that he believed De Vecchi was the right person to reform the Italian education system. Rather it is equally probable that in this statement he was referring less to De Vecchi personally and more to the position of minister of education in general. It was the duty and the privilege of the minister to spearhead reform.

Bottai recommended that the power of the faculties be circumscribed to a technical and consultative function. The Academic Senate should be given the powers once enjoyed by the faculties. As the Academic Senate was responsible to the minister, this would concentrate power in his hands.[58] Bottai was in part recommending an action that would begin the process he identified in his first article: using the Gentile reform as a platform on which to build a revitalized Fascist education system. The Academic Senate was established by the reform and he now wishes to give it more powers. However, his critique on the freedom of faculty members suggested that he was not entirely committed to the spirit of the Gentile reform.

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[56] Bottai, "L'autonomia," 267.
[57] Ibid., 267.
[58] Ibid., 267.

Bottai indicated, however, that removing faculty autonomy was not reducing the level of freedom in universities. His recommendation was not "an abolition of university autonomy, but rather a limitation and discipline of the faculties for the reinforcement and institutionalization of organized autonomy [*autonomia inquadrata*] in the sense of hierarchy and authority which today does not exist" in the school system.[59] In this way Bottai fit his critique into a significant thrust of the Fascist program, especially after the turn toward a more aggressive foreign policy, that of disciplining Italians to obey the Fascist state.

Nearing the end of his article, Bottai referred to the first type of university autonomy he mentioned: administrative autonomy. He indicated that it was introduced by the Gentile reform and brought universities to the attention of municipalities and local corporations. This gave new individuality and life to the universities. However, it also turned healthy competition between universities into battles "not worthy to be considered above economic battles."[60] In other words, competition between universities became similar to that between corporations "in the old style" of laissez faire capitalism.[61] Thus administrative autonomy also encouraged a regard for personal or institutional interests that superceded a regard for national ones. Bottai insisted that the schools had to become like the corporations in this respect and prefer public interest over private.[62]

These two articles comprise Bottai's first attack on Italian education in 1935 and reveal a good deal about Bottai's concerns at that time. For example, Bottai was clearly concerned with creating a new Fascist ruling class. Consistent with his article from 1924

[59] Bottai, "L'autonomia," 267.
[60] Ibid., 267.
[61] Ibid., 267.
[62] Ibid., 268.

and his youth patronage connections, Bottai continued to look toward creating a new generation that would lead the Fascist revolution, even though opportunities for youth were becoming increasingly scarce as the Ethiopian war progressed.

As in many of his articles, Bottai again seemed to be placed between two factions. On the one hand were the Gentilians who continued to support the 1923 reform and its philosophical bases. Bottai evidently viewed many aspects of this reform as outdated even though he may have sympathized with some of its basic principles. Regardless of his views, he could not attack such a sweeping Fascist reform directly. On the other hand was De Vecchi and his supporters. Bottai could not criticize the current work of the regime despite the fact that he found many weak points in the education system. He might not have believed De Vecchi was the best man for the job but the minister was appointed by Mussolini and therefore could not be directly questioned. Bottai wished to create a truly revolutionary Italy, but the very totalitarian nature of the regime that he advocated rendered critique of the status quo difficult.

As we have seen in the first two articles on education, Bottai needed to use coded language and sometimes vague phrasing in order to pass judgment on the work of the regime. This renders his true opinion on the reform, and on the current state of education, difficult to decipher. While he still used a kind of Fascist double-speak in his next two articles, his true opinion was made clear enough to prompted a response from Giovanni Gentile and make his intentions more plain to the reader.

CHAPTER 5

ANATOMY OF A DEBATE: BOTTAI, GENTILE AND THE FREEDOM OF EDUCATION

Bottai's article, "La libertà degli studi e esame del Stato," [Freedom of Studies and the State Exam] published in the June 1, 1935, edition of *Critica Fascista* as well as its sequel are both similar to and different from the previous two articles. They are similar to "La problema della scuola" in that they tackle more global problems of the school system, namely the state exams and the persistence of a careerist culture in university. However, both these articles go into detail describing these themes and prescribing solutions, as did the earlier "L'autonomia universitaria." It was these two articles of June 1935 that prompted Gentile to write in response, commenting not only on them but also on the general state of Italian education.

As in his first article, "Il problema della scuola," Bottai begins his argument by citing Mussolini's comment on Gentile's reform. He then states "It is obvious to anyone who believes the words of the Duce that the 1923 reform was among the first and most revolutionary of the regime."[1] Instead of explaining away Mussolini's comment as historically specific, as he did in his first article, Bottai attempts to find what is revolutionary about it. Bottai indicates that commentators believed it was a pedagogical

[1] Guiseppe Bottai, "La libertà degli studi e l'esame di stato" in *Fascismo e politica culturale: Arte, Letteratura e ideologia in "Critica fascista,"* Carlo Bordoni, ed., (Bologna: Brechtiana, 1981), 198.

revolution "matured in the mind of one of the greatest contemporary thinkers, who, recalling culture to its formative function, has restored to schools, decadent during the positivist period in a fact-based encyclopedianism, its educational task [*compito educativo*]: the formation of intelligence and spiritual personality."[2] And Bottai himself fully endorsed this characterization. It is clear, then, that Bottai, like Gentile, disliked the emphasis placed on *istruzione* in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century schools and they believed that *educazione* was necessary for the success of the Fascist project. He stated that restoring an educative role to the school system would be required if schools "truly wanted to become the most powerful tool in the hands of the State . . . to educate the new generation."[3]

Unlike his first article, in which he only mentioned Mussolini in passing, here Bottai introduces the Duce into his argument, identifying him as an intellectual Fascist who recognizes the need for *educazione*. He states that Mussolini "always has demanded that culture provide fertile ground for the development of intelligence."[4] This was made evident, Bottai suggests, when the Duce renamed the Ministry of Public Instruction the Ministry of National Education in 1929.[5] While Mussolini may not have always supported intellectual factions within Fascism, he was himself an intellectual. He served as a secondary school teacher before World War I and as a journalist throughout his life. Thus Bottai had some genuine basis for including Mussolini in his argument. However, by identifying Mussolini as an intellectual, Bottai was arguing against those Fascists, like De Vecchi, who were wary of an intelligent approach to Fascism.

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[2] Bottai, "Libertà," 199.
[3] Ibid., 199.
[4] Ibid., 199.
[5] Ibid., 199.

Although he had previously agreed with the commentators' assessment, in a following passage he maintains that focusing on the reform's pedagogical achievements obscures its "revolutionary" and "fascist" nature.[6] He indicates that the word "pedagogical," in fact, is a "dreadful adjective dear to the technicians in the field [of educational philosophy]."[7] This comment might have been spoken against those Gentileans who avidly defended Gentile's reform. Gentile himself certainly would have seen a pedagogical reform as "revolutionary" since education was needed to create contributors to the totalitarian state. Bottai, however, indicates that Gentile's reform actually did very little to change the intellectual level of students: "things go . . . as before: teachers educate if they have the spirit of educators and the youth do not seem to rise, with the new method of teaching and the new exams, to a higher intellectual level."[8] As in his last article, Bottai is suggesting that Gentile's reform did little to change the situation that had dominated in the liberal period.

Despite his bleak assessment of the reform's impact, Bottai indicated that it did have "revolutionary" and "fascist" components: "the most *revolutionary* seed [*germe*] of the reform is in the distinction between the educative and professional purposes of the school system; and the most *fascist* is in the statist character given to the judgment of intellectual maturity and professional capacity, . . . [by] the state exam."[9]

Bottai treats the most revolutionary aspect first by lamenting the ill effects that career-focused students had on schools in the liberal period. He stated that the "*liceo* license" or diploma, "became the necessary pass . . . for all employment and the glorious

[6] Bottai, "Libertà," 199.
[7] Ibid., 199.
[8] Ibid., 199.
[9] Ibid., 200.

institute of the Italian secondary school, *liceo classico*, fell into a deplorably low state."[10] Students and parents alike viewed schooling as simply a step toward a career, and even some of the best teachers gave into this way of thinking. The 1923 reform attempted to take away this focus and relieve the heavy flow of students entering *liceo classico* by instituting a *liceo scientifico*.[11] Bottai is clearly stating that the quality of education was compromised by a careerist mentality. This, unlike many of his comments in "L'autonomia universitaria," is in keeping with the so-called "spirit of the reform." Gentile attempted to restore a purely educational function to *liceo classico* and university by funneling career-oriented youth into technical institutes as well as the Complementary Schools his reform had created. This would foster the humanistic sort of education Gentile felt was needed to train the new ruling class. He believed that only through the free pursuit of knowledge could pupils realize their creative capacity and responsibility for the future.

Like Gentile, Bottai believed that a truly educational focus would also be beneficial for technical training for a career. Bottai suggests that the professions cannot subsist without true education, for the two are intertwined: "a technical ability without culture does not exist, without a solid culture that gives solidity and intelligence to that ability. And public school . . . is not able to separate culture and technique [*tecnica*], nor is it able or has the need to separate *istruzione* from *educazione*."[12] Moreover, Bottai maintains that *educazione* is necessary for creating new Italians. He states that "in all types of schools, the school has to educate, educate morally and politically: to make men, Italian men, Fascists. Not automatons, nor brainiacs, but whole men, of intelligence and

[10] Bottai, "Libertà," 200.
[11] Ibid., 200.
[12] Ibid., 200.

the will to think and act, with the ability to command and the readiness to obey."[13] This gives us a picture of the kind of ruling class Bottai wanted to create. He was against the "automatons" that a "believe, obey, fight" mentality would produce as much as he was opposed to the kind of disinterested intellectuals that marked the liberal period. His sort of ruling class would combine thought and action, using their intelligence to create the Fascist future. This is exactly the sort of ruling class Gentile wanted to create as well, one that was well-trained in the pursuit of knowledge and could apply that training to the challenges Italy faced.

In light of the well-known "masculine" quality of Fascism, it goes without saying that neither Gentile nor Bottai included young women in their respective formulations of the new ruling class. Gentile's creation of the *liceo femminile* suggests that he maintained a traditional perspective on gender roles. Bottai, for his part, used only the masculine form when he described the ruling class. Although he could have been using the male form as the generic, as was common at the time, the patronage network for youth that he helped to found suggested otherwise. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat has clearly shown, young women of the 1930s discovered, unsurprisingly, that the regime's "make way for youth" program was meant for their male contemporaries. Women were largely excluded from the competitions and patronage connections this campaign created. As we might expect, most Fascists did not consider women part of the new ruling class.[14]

Bottai believed that students should first form their general intelligence, before focusing on a career. He explains, "it is necessary that youth enter school with a spiritual state not excessively preoccupied with the practical, professional results [of education], at

[13] Bottai, "Libertà," 201.
[14] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 95-96.

least for some time: not until he has learned to love with a pure heart, disinterestedly, the worth of culture, of that culture that . . . is necessary for . . . his profession."[15]

Bottai indicates that the disinterested study of culture in *ginnasio-liceo* remained through all the changes in the ministers of education, which shows that the regime has not abandoned the reform. "On the contrary," he states, "all the wonderful development of technical and professional institutes, which is enriching Italian schools, with always greater adherence to the needs of industry, commerce, and agriculture, demonstrates the regime's intention is to integrate, develop and perfect the animating spirit of the reform [which is] at the base of scholastic politics."[16] Not only is Bottai praising the very "touch ups" he condemned in his first article, he demonstrates in this statement that he does not fully agree with "the spirit of the reform." Gentile's reform aimed at limiting technical education, not expanding it. For example, Gentile spoke out against the technocratic reforms suggested and implemented by Belluzzo.[17] However, part of Bottai's statement clarifies this apparent contradiction to some extend. Unlike in his first article when he stated education policy should follow "in the spirit of the reform," here he indicates that the regime should "integrate, develop and perfect" that spirit. While Bottai agreed with the overarching principle of the supremacy of *educazione* over *istruzione*, he also desired the development of a technocratic class. This was in keeping with corporativism, which envisioned involving people in public life on the basis of their economic expertise. This represents a real divergence from Gentile's beliefs.

Despite this fact, Bottai did agree with Gentile that professional culture should be discouraged in universities. If *ginnasio-liceo* is no longer expected to focus on the

[15] Bottai, "Libertà," 201.
[16] Ibid., 201.
[17] Turi, *Giovanni Gentile*, 391.

professions, than it would be absurd if the universities did. In such a situation, "the university would become a 'professional school,' inferior to the secondary school that serves to prepare for it."[18] Although the main thrust of Gentile's reform was meant to restrict access to university so that it could be a purely educational institution, Bottai accurately indicates that a careerist mentality still pervaded universities at this time. He identifies this as a persistent, pre-reform tendency. Yet, he indicates, the job market has changed for *liceo* graduates. In the past students simply needed to graduate from secondary school to find a position with an adequate salary that included some prestige. But by 1935 they had to continue to university to find a job with a comparable level of pay and prestige, which "augments the number of lawyers, engineers, naturalists, etc., that gradually increase the number of 'unemployed graduates,' in search of a position that does not correspond to the dignity of a university graduate."[19] Thus Bottai is lamenting the long-term Italian problem of an overabundance of intellectuals. As we stated in the first chapter, Gentile's reform was meant to reduce this "plethora of misfits," but had evidently not solved the problem permanently.[20]

Bottai proposed his own, two-pronged solution to this problem: "on the one hand, the purely scientific tone of university education [must be] elevated, and on the other hand the state has to powerfully intervene – and we speak of the fascist, corporative state – in the professional sphere."[21] In fact, he suggests that the educational function of schools should be left to the Ministry of Education while the careerist aspect should be given over to the jurisdiction of the corporations. This would clearly separate the

[18] Bottai, "Libertà," 202.
[19] Ibid., 202.
[20] The overabundance of intellectuals is still a problem in Italy today.
[21] Bottai, "Libertà," 202.

academic from the careerist aspects of schooling. In keeping with the participatory focus of corporativism, Bottai clarifies that "we are intending to speak of the corporations properly speaking and not of their ministry."[22] In other words, Bottai intends to give more power not to the bureaucracy but to the members of the corporations themselves.

It is unclear, however, how Bottai would be able to implement such a plan. Perhaps this would involve giving management of technical schools to the corporations. If so, it would be reversing Belluzzo's law that brought technical schools under the ministry's jurisdiction. In any case, it is not clear how such a move would affect careerism in university. Bottai was attempting to eradicate an *attitude* toward higher education that had persisted decades. Short of removing requirements for universities degrees from the professions, little practical change could achieve Bottai's goal. However, Bottai indicates that the root of his suggestion comes from the 1923 reform, which attempted to keep the "scientific," that is knowledge-centered, purpose of the university exams by creating a separate state exam for entering the professions.[23] Bottai considered the state exam the first step in state intervention to eradicate the problem at hand.

Bottai did provide some more practical advice to encourage the development of a humanistic university culture. He places the responsibility with the faculty: "it should be a point of honor for every faculty to not allow students to obtain a degree unless they have demonstrated some aptitude for scientific research."[24] He indicates that this would go a long way to eradicating pedantry and careerism in universities. He suggests that focusing on scientific production would have other benefits for university culture as well.

[22] Bottai, "Libertà," 202.
[23] Ibid., 202.
[24] Ibid., 204.

It would "give air and respite to youth that, especially at university age, have the most need of serenity and spiritual liberty, of time for sports and for the formation of their political, military and fascist conscience."[25] Thus, like Gentile, Bottai believed that a degree of freedom in education along with a focus on the pursuit of knowledge would both benefit the physical and mental health of students and, more importantly, enable them to help create the Fascist future.

The scientific culture of universities would benefit from the new focus as well because it would show that the most intelligent youth are those who "live the most fully and completely the ideals of their proper age."[26] In other words, these youth would also be active and athletic. In fact Bottai proposed that frequent physical activity, organized by GUF, should be obligatory so that "military culture" would develop among youth. This would serve more than one purpose. Firstly it would prove to those doubting Fascists, like De Vecchi, that intellectuals were every bit as virile and committed to fighting for Fascism as other youths. Also, it would train intelligent men to serve in imperialism and war, as Bottai himself had done.

Bottai also felt that requiring students to be proficient in scientific research would benefit the economic sphere as well. It would demonstrate that the best technicians are also the most intelligent students and that the best professionals are those that studied outside of their particular field. The formation of intelligence, he believed, was a "fundamental dogma of the Fascist spirit that issues forth from the Duce, marvel of intelligence and mental agility."[27] Again, Bottai is trying to defend an intelligent

[25] Bottai, "Libertà," 204.
[26] Ibid., 204.
[27] Ibid., 205

approach to Fascism from those in the regime who inherently distrust intellectuals, like De Vecchi, using the one unquestionable example of an intelligent Fascist.

Bottai concluded that the level of studies could only be raised through renewing the universities' scientific purpose. He also indicated that "only through lightening the Ministry of National Education from the practical exercise of the professions, will it become the Ministry of Fascist Education."[28] Removing the responsibility for career training from the ministry would free it to focus on its educational function: the spiritual and political formation of future Fascists.

The sequel to this article, released in the June 15 volume of *Critica Fascista*, has many of the same themes. Its structure, however, is more varied than the other articles. It starts with the current work of the ministry and, instead of identifying a problem (since this is a sequel to the last article), Bottai introduces his theme – state exams, principally the exam at the end of *liceo* (*esame di maturità*) and the qualifying exam for the professions taken after university. He discusses various aspects of these exams and then makes recommendations on how to improve them. Throughout this article it is clear how much Bottai and Gentile continued to share similar views of the role of schools in Fascist Italy, although their suggestions for improvement diverged on specifics.

The article begins, like "L'autonomia universitaria," by praising De Vecchi. Referring to him again as Quadrumvir De Vecchi, Bottai states that "we want to be inspired by the minister, whose purity of fascist sentiment no one can doubt."[29] Here, as before, he making the essential, ritualistic reference to De Vecchi as a loyal Fascist

[28] Bottai, "Libertà," 205.

[29] Guiseppe Bottai, "La libertà degli studi e l'esame di stato: II" in *Fascismo e politica culturale: Arte, Letteratura e ideologia in "Critica fascista,"* Carlo Bordoni, ed., (Bologna: Brechtiana, 1981), 206.

minister. He also pays tribute to De Vecchi's past and future work by, after quoting him at length, characterizing the quotation as "golden words, worthy of a collaborator with the Duce in the assiduous formative work of a national Fascist consciousness. And worthy of him who, after collaborating with [Mussolini] in the March on Rome, is preparing to bring into the school system the spirit of the revolution."[30] As in Bottai's second article, the author here pays lip service to the current minister in order to show his loyalty to the regime.

The quotation Bottai cites from De Vecchi's speech provides a small window into the minister's concerns in the spring/summer of 1935. Citing "the complexity of that ensemble of institutes, functions, individuals, and duties that is the ministry of education,"[31] De Vecchi insisted that he wanted to bring direction to the school system, indicating to each person and institution their "field of action."[32] He attempted to give this direction through the many centralizing and simplifying reforms he instituted during his time as minister of education. His focus on the "field of action" suggests his bias against intellectuals, implying that they must be directed from above in order to contribute in a meaningful way to the Fascist revolution.

Bottai, however, makes no comment on the implications of De Vecchi's statement and instead returns to the subject of *educazione* by briefly looking at private schools. It is important to remember that Gentile regimented the private schools by subjecting them to the state exams, although by doing this he also officially recognized them. Thus they came under the jurisdiction of the minister, at least to a certain extent. Bottai states that "the private school . . . that exiles every professional purpose and is only a matter of

[30] Bottai, "Libertà II," 206.
[31] Ibid., 206.
[32] Ibid., 206.

purely educational culture does not have any reason to exist in a Fascist state."[33] Bottai is acting as a true totalitarian by wanting the schools to transcend the public/private distinction. Even though private schools were placing the emphasis on *educazione* that Bottai desired, they were not creating a Fascist consciousness in their students. Most likely they were fostering Catholic values, many of which were in opposition to the Fascist faith in the totalitarian state. Bottai suggests that no educational institution should rival those of the regime. Because he cites ONB, GUF and other institutions aimed at "organizing studious youth," he was almost certainly denying Catholic Action a place within Fascism.[34] Regardless, he maintains that a "fascist education is obligatory for all future citizens of the state."[35] Like Gentile who protested the educational reforms resulting from the Concordat, Bottai saw Catholic education as a threat to the development of a Fascist consciousness.

Returning to the theme of the June 1 article, Bottai again affirmed that universities, and by extension all schools, had to be liberated from an overwhelming concern for the professions so that they could focus on *educazione*. He maintains that this is the true sense of "freedom of studies," referring to his title.[36] This accent on freedom in education, of course, again recalls Gentile.

Bottai suggests that there is also a practical reason for separating careerism from universities. He rightly states that one needs more than just a classroom education in order to qualify for a profession. Medical students, for example, need to spend many hours in a clinic gaining practical experience. Therefore Bottai concludes that if outside

[33] Bottai, "Libertà II," 206.
[34] Ibid., 207.
[35] Ibid., 207.
[36] Ibid., 209

experience is required for most professions, then university should not be considered a training school for employment. Bottai maintained that a scholarly focus at university would enable a student to better learn during practical training by providing "a ready intelligence."[37]

Bottai suggests that there are two main reasons why there are too many professionals. Firstly, it is easy to pass the qualifying exam. Bottai feels that if outside experience was taken into greater account, than the state exam would become more rigorous. Secondly, there is no cap on the number of professionals in each field. Bottai suggests that if the number of professionals in every field "would be determined in relationship to the needs of society in national, regional or other contests" then the "lamentable plethora" of professionals would be reduced.[38] Like Gentile, Bottai wishes to restrict higher education in order to encourage the pursuit of knowledge that would train a new ruling class. Here he is further suggesting that the most talented professionals could join the new elite, a reflection of his technocratic beliefs. This is divergent from Gentile's purely humanistic conception of the ruling class.

Bottai complained that, in reality, the state exam had little weight as it was virtually a double of the university graduating exam. He noted that this was a problem from the time of the reform. The judging committee for the state exam, he stated, would be moved to compassion because of the years of schooling and exams the students had to undergo. Bottai suggested that the judges would allow them to pass the exam because the students were evidently qualified enough to graduate from university. Bottai insisted that the standards for a state exam should be higher. This desire to give more power to the

[37] Bottai, "Libertà II," 209.
[38] Ibid., 210.

state exam was consistent with the "spirit of the reform" even if Bottai was criticizing one of its main features.[39]

Bottai then addresses the reform of the *esame di maturità*, the state exam at the end of *liceo*. He believes it should be more accurately renamed the "university admission exam." It should also be taken at university instead of at *liceo*, as the qualifying exam for *ginnasio* is taken at *ginnasio*. Bottai can foresee one objection to this – that the responsibility of testing a student in all subjects cannot be left to the faculty to which he applies. Bottai maintains, however, that committees of professors could be formed to test students before they apply to specific faculties. This, he suggests, would probably give students an opportunity to decide which faculty they would like to join.

Bottai shows similarity to Gentile by suggesting that giving the admitting exam at university would discourage the fact-based examination performed by *liceo* teachers. Bottai states that "there is all hope that [a professor] will finally judge the youth's maturity and intelligence rather than the sum of the things he knows or does not know."[40] Gentile would support any move that would discourage a positivistic, atomistic approach to knowledge in favor of a more holistic one. This is the true kind of knowledge that Gentile wanted the universities to create through the freedom he gave them in his reform. Bottai shows other similarities to Gentile as well. He states that the emphasis on quantity of knowledge instead of quality turns each *liceo* course into simply a preparation for the exam. This steals "the serenity necessary for the educative work of a disinterested culture."[41] In this way Bottai agrees with Gentile that *educazione* is fostered by a teacher's freedom to use his/her time in the pursuit of knowledge. However, it is unlikely

[39] Bottai, "Libertà II," 210.
[40] Ibid., 212.
[41] Ibid., 212.

Gentile would have wanted to give any extra burden to university professors as he wanted to give them as much freedom as possible.

Yet Bottai does not see the admittance exam as an extra burden for professors. Keeping with his emphasis on *educazione*, he indicates that all the professors would have to determine was whether the student "has intelligence and loves study." How would this be determined? Bottai explains that "the youth will be . . . invited . . . to display the results of his high school culture, his studies, his reading, and his ideas on how much he knows, or how much he understands he does not know."[42] This suggestion, however well-intentioned, seems a little naïve. Giving no actual criteria for judgment leaves a great deal of room for subjectivity on the part of the professor.

In closing, Bottai identifies two possible objections to his plan. First, that it would overload professors. Bottai, however, believes that universities would have the ability to form many examining commissions, thus diffusing the burden.[43] The second objection is that some students, at least the craftiest ones, would take the exam at a university at which they think they can pass easily and then enroll at another institution. Bottai counters that students should be required to stay at the university at which they take the exam for at least one year before they could be allowed to transfer.[44]

Gentile was closely following Bottai's articles and responded in a letter published in the July 1, 1935, edition of *Critica Fascista*. While his letter is highly critical, Gentile does not comment on Bottai's specific suggestions. Instead, he uses the common ground between himself and Bottai as a launching pad to attack his critics, especially De Vecchi.

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[42] Bottai, "Libertà II," 212.
[43] Ibid., 212.
[44] Ibid., 213.

He begins his letter by addressing Bottai as a fellow intellectual Fascist who understands the importance of education to the Fascist project: "I admire your example of a political man sensible to the significance and the political worth of these [educational] problems that should stay always in the front of our minds, even in moments like this . . . of great cares and passions of national conscience."[45] Gentile is suggesting that especially when the nation is faced with great challenges, perhaps like the war in Ethiopia or the Great Depression, policy makers should be concerned with education.

Referring more specifically to Bottai's articles, Gentile states that although he does not agree with all of Bottai's judgments and proposals, "after reading your last article . . . I want to tell you that you have seen the sign, and that in these two points [of the freedom of studies and the state exams] are truly the substance of the fascist reform of the school system of 1923, even if the word 'freedom' sounds bad to the ears of many Fascists."[46] Here Gentile affirms what we already suspect, that Bottai's comments were generally in line with Gentile's reform and that both of them were in opposition to more intransigent and authoritarian Fascists. Gentile continues this last point by stating that he is pleased that Bottai is not "afraid" of freedom in the schools as a "peril for Fascist education." Gentile would most likely have perceived that De Vecchi was "afraid" of freedom in education. The minister's centralizing policies limited the freedom of intellectuals, who he suspected of having antifascist leanings. Gentile maintains that Bottai understands that, on the contrary, freedom is *needed* for the development of knowledge and culture, for "the heightening of national and great power." He continues "you understand that Fascism has nothing to fear from this freedom; on the contrary! It

[45] Giovanni Gentile, "Libertà degli studi e programmi" in *Fascismo e politica culturale: Arte, Letteratura e ideologia in "Critica fascista,"* Carlo Bordoni, ed., (Bologna: Brechtiana, 1981), 223.
[46] Ibid., 223.

has to promote this liberty if it wants to be the training ground [*palestra*] of men and not puppets."[47] Gentile maintained that De Vecchi's policies, as well as the new "believe, obey, fight" mentality, would produce what Bottai referred to as "automatons" who would not have the intelligence to lead Italy into a Fascist future.

Gentile states that any counter-reform would be absurd since "Fascism builds not destroys."[48] Gentile also believes that any counter-reform at this time would have a negative effect on the populace as they faced many problems "that would be distressing without their boundless faith in the Duce whose touch can resolve [all problems]."[49] Thus Gentile suggests that it would be against the nature of Fascism and bad for the nation for a significant counter-reform in the education system.

Gentile suggests, however, that calls for a counter-reform in the philosophy curriculum are already troubling the Italian people. He states that the "prophets of the counter-reform" wanted the teaching of philosophy (which, he interjects, became "more sullen and authoritarian" after 1929) to be based no longer on actual philosophical texts, as Gentile had stipulated in his reform, but rather on textbooks, which had been widely used in the liberal period.[50] This deprived the student, not only of engaging with actual philosophical works, but also of the freedom to choose which philosophers to study "under the double control of the government curriculum and state exam."[51]

Gentile states that these reforms are unlikely to become law if the minister of education has "good understanding."[52] He quotes a speech that De Vecchi made to the

[47] Gentile, "Libertà," 223.
[48] Ibid., 224.
[49] Ibid., 224.
[50] Ibid., 224.
[51] Ibid., 224.
[52] Ibid., 224.

Chamber of Deputies in which he indicated that over the past thirteen years Fascism had marched forward and the schools had followed. Gentile agrees with this statement but states that if the minister "continues to take the position of watchman, as in each of the recent university measures, the progress [of the education system] would have all the air of a march backwards."[53] For Gentile, freedom in schools was not a pedagogical preference, but a fundamental belief. Without this freedom students could never realize that their needs were one and the same with that of the state, that they needed to place all their faith in the Fascist regime which was their best vehicle for creating a new, revitalized Italy. Thus while De Vecchi sees increasing control over the school system as "fascistization," Gentile views it as the opposite.

He concludes his letter by defending himself against those who accused him of being too "affectionate for my creation."[54] These critics, he maintains, blame Gentile for all the aspect of the "Regime's reform" that they do not like. Addressing Bottai he states "you know that there is only one thing I desire: the good of the schools, that is of the country, I am ready to contradict myself [*disdirmi*] if this good calls for it." Gentile finishes by stating that every work of the Fascist regime, however small, is the product of collaboration. He alone is not responsible for the reform or the current problems of education in Fascist Italy.

Clearly Bottai and Gentile were working within the same framework as they commented on freedom in the schools, although their arguments did contain different elements. They agreed that a focus on *educazione* and freedom of education were the most important issues facing Italian education, and by extension the whole nation, in

[53] Gentile, "Libertà," 224.
[54] Ibid., 224.

1935. Only through controlling *educazione* could the Fascist regime mold Italians into Fascists and only by giving teachers and students freedom in education could a new ruling class be formed that would continue the Fascist experiment. While Bottai's corporativism caused him to view careerism in a way that occasionally differed from Gentile's he was generally working within the same framework which stood in stark contrast to that of De Vecchi.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The exchange between Gentile, Bottai and De Vecchi is revealing on a number of levels. On the rhetorical level, it gives us an indication of the way criticism could be expressed in totalitarian regimes. As a basic principle, both Bottai and Gentile sought to avoid directly criticizing the regime and the current minister. Bottai, for example, always maintained that his suggestions were meant to further the revolutionary work of the regime, to bring the schools fully in line with the advance of Fascism so far. He also began two of his four articles by honoring the current work of the regime through a sort of ritualistic praise of Minister De Vecchi. Gentile also praised the regime and referred to himself as a faithful fascist who supported the ongoing Fascist revolution. Although he also praised De Vecchi for continuing the work of the regime, Gentile's criticisms of the minister were less veiled than those of Bottai. Because Gentile stretched this rhetorical rule too far, De Vecchi could perceive that Gentile's comments were hostile and use the power of the ministry to punish him.

Another key rhetorical device used by both Gentile and Bottai is praise of the leader, Mussolini himself. This was one of the most effective ways to show loyalty to the regime. For example Bottai praised Mussolini's intelligence in order to identify his intellectual perspective with the Duce. He also avoided holding Mussolini responsible for the problems in the education system by blaming former ministers instead. This is

similar to the early modern practice of blaming corrupt ministers instead of the king. Gentile also paid tribute to Mussolini, in his case to avoid suggesting that the regime was not doing enough to correct current problems. Even De Vecchi pledged loyalty to the Duce. This study suggests that praising the leader was a necessary part of Fascist critique.

This debate has significance not only in the field of rhetoric; it also very revealing of the state of the Italian education system in 1935. In twelve years, the Gentile reform had not yet achieved some of its main goals. It had not limited the number of post-secondary students, nor had it removed a careerist mentality from the universities. In key ways, the school system still resembled its liberal counterpart. By 1935 the reform simply might not have had enough time to fully develop; however, this process was hindered by the many "facelifts" given to the reform by the subsequent Ministers of Education. The lack of a unified vision for schools opened the way to a hodgepodge of legislation and institutions that inhibited any sweeping education reform.

This study also reveals that there was much controversy surrounding De Vecchi and his reforms. While there were some, like Gentile, who openly criticized the minister, Bottai's opinion was less clear. Bottai was politically astute and knew well how to frame his opinion in order to avoid offending those in power. Despite his attempts, his articles and other comments on Fascism presented in this study suggest that his belief in freedom in education, his focus on the potential of youth, and his intellectual approach to Fascism would make him likely to disapprove of many of De Vecchi's reforms. As minister, however, Bottai reversed very few of De Vecchi's decisions, save the one that removed Gentile from the *Scuola Normale*.

In fact, very few of the ideas Bottai expressed in 1935 were reflected in the School Charter of 1939. For example, the adjudication of the *esame di maturità* was not given over to university professors. Moreover, Bottai gave even more responsibility to *liceo* teachers by reducing the number of ministry representatives on judging committees, thereby allowing teachers to test their own students.

The separation of professionalism from the universities was also not reflected in the Charter. The purpose for universities was outlined in article 19: "the university's goal is to promote the progress of science in an order of high political and moral responsibility and to provide the necessary scientific training for carrying out professional work."[1] This idea is reinforced by article 6 which stated that the goal of schools was to prepare students to be "capable of facing the actual problems of scientific research and production" and that they "may be trained according to reason and needs."[2] Thus Bottai's idea of separating professional training from universities and putting it under the jurisdiction of the corporations never materialized.

There are two possible reasons why the reforms Bottai put forth in 1935 were not realized when he was minister, one practical and one political. On the practical level, Bottai had had far less experience in education than his predecessor Gentile, who had had twenty-four years experience teaching and six years experience on the ministry's *Consiglio superiore* before instituting his reform. Faced for the first time with real educational institutions, teachers and students, Bottai may have seen the impracticality of many of his ideas. As L. Minio-Paluello attests, Bottai had "very broad and rather vague

[1] Giuseppe Bottai, "School Charter" in Charles F. Delzell, ed., *Mediterranean Fascism* (New York: Walker, 1971), 153.
[2] Ibid., 150.

ideals, which he had to match with strong, hard facts."[3] This author even indicates that, in a 1938 speech to the Chamber of Deputies, Bottai "joked about the people who looked at the schools from far away and thought only in terms of revolutions and reforms."[4] Bottai had evidently received a rude wake-up call by the time he issued the School Charter.

There were also political reasons why few of Bottai's 1935 ideas were reflected in the Charter. The turn toward a more aggressive foreign policy had become more pronounced as the relationship between Italy and Germany became closer. By 1939 the axis had been formed, Italian racial laws had been instituted and war was just around the corner. At the same time, however, Bottai and others who had grown tired of the ritualistic pageantry encouraged by the Fascist Party in the 1930s were searching for true revolutionary change within Fascism. The School Charter, especially with its emphasis on mandatory manual labour, was meant to provide some real substance to the Fascist revolution. This new concern left little room for comments on freedom in universities or on the humanist goals of education.

What is most important about this debate, however, is not whether Bottai's assessments in 1935 were later borne out, but rather its symptomatic nature. It is evident that the direction of the Fascist regime was unclear at this time and there was a diversity of opinions as to the way it should go. Fascism was not merely Mussolinism. Each major Fascist had his own ideas of the regime's potentialities and how it should reach them, which invariably involved a role for education. De Vecchi believed that Fascism had the potential to create a strong centralized state that would be at the command of the

[3] Minio-Paluello, *Education*, 185.
[4] Ibid., 186.

king and turn Italy into a powerful nation. Gentile held that the Fascist state could serve as the vehicle through which individuals create and recreate the future, through their constant ongoing participation. Bottai believed that Fascism, through corporativism, had the truly revolutionary potential to involve all Italians in decision-making, creating a state that was more participatory than parliamentary democracy and that encouraged social harmony in a way communism could not.

These divergent opinions are also evident in each character's ideas on how to continue the Fascist project. De Vecchi believed that creating a disciplined populace, obedient to existing authority would perpetuate the regime. Gentile and Bottai, on the other hand, both saw youth as harbingers of the Fascist future. Gentile believed that Fascism needed to create a new ruling class that would consist of youth trained in the humanities, whereas Bottai desired a ruling elite made up of both humanists and technocrats. Bottai's later belief in mandatory manual labor represents a democratizing element in his vision for Fascism that further drew a distinction between his ideas and Gentile's seemingly "elitist" views. Despite their differences, however, all of these theories suggest that education was the key to continuing the Fascist revolution.

What are the implications of such ideological diversity? Without a unified vision, the Fascist regime had difficulty making real, revolutionary changes to Italian society, as is evident through this study on education. The ideological fluidity of Fascism made it flexible enough to bend with the circumstances and also made it easier, temporarily, for Mussolini to perpetuate the regime by balancing the various factions within it. Allowing Fascists to view the potentialities in Fascism in their own way enabled Italians with

diverse political opinions to adhere and contribute to the regime. This provided temporary support for the regime but inhibited the development of lasting change.

The views of Gentile, Bottai and De Vecchi are three of the most significant divergent Fascisms within the regime. The exchange between these Ministers of Education highlights the dynamics within the regime that allowed and even encouraged such ideological diversity. Most significantly, it shows the strong faith in Fascism that drove those with divergent opinions to use the regime as a vehicle for change and to remain loyal to it even when it was moving in a direction they did not like. This provides a small contribution to our understanding of the importance of belief and correctly-structured criticism in the dynamics of power in totalitarian dictatorship.

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