“Fascism may be defined generally as a political and social movement having as its objective the re-establishment of a political and social order, based upon the main current of traditions that have formed our European civilisation, traditions created by Rome, first by the Empire and subsequently by the Catholic Church.”¹ So declared James Strachey Barnes, one of the convinced “universal fascists” of the interwar period.² As this chapter seeks to demonstrate, examination of the “fascist intellectual”—a publicist figure theorising the relevance of the ideology—takes us into a realm of microanalysis where some of the assumptions developed by generic theories of what “fascism” is can be problematised. For example, despite his presentation of Italian Fascism in the definition above as a restoration of old values, we should note that Barnes’s vision simultaneously embraced wholesale political and social revolution too. Moreover, closer scrutiny reveals that Barnes’s theme of promoting internationalism is somewhat at odds with a narrow and radical vision of the “palingenesis,” or rebirth, of the national community that generic fascism theorists often highlight as forming the core of all true fascisms. Yet as we will see, despite this tension Barnes’s anti-Semitism in particular revealed his reliance on resurgent nation states as a bulwark against the decadence and decay he found promoted by a corrupt international order driven by liberalism and to a lesser extent communism.

Curiously, Barnes’s own story reveals a transient life, though gravitating around Italophile sentiments he acquired in his youth. Born in India, he grew up in Italy before entering formal education in Britain. He adhered to the Roman Catholic Church, wrote books supporting Italian Fascism, and by the late 1930s contributed to American periodicals too, especially Social Justice, before becoming a publicist for the Fascist regime after its entry into the war. Following the Second World War, Barnes eventually settled in Italy, where he

---

¹ James Strachey Barnes, The Universal Aspect of Fascism (London: Williams and Norgate, 1928), 35.
lived until his death in 1955. His idiosyncratic embrace of a pro-Fascist politics during this period synthesised an international vision outlining the rejuvenation of “strong” and “young” nations with an evocative theme of a pan-European Catholic revival. Furthermore, Barnes’s endorsement of Italian Fascism as a politically revolutionary force conforms to what some analysts of fascism now refer to as “political modernism” too. In sum, Barnes set out a worldview steeped in a “sense of an ending,” as well as envisioning a radical sense of a “new beginning.” This allowed him to set his assertions for a new configuration for Europe in an apocalyptic tenor, while also believing himself to be living through a time of elemental renewal and regeneration. As we will see, he stressed that Fascism in Italy and elsewhere represented the politics of the future, while liberalism and communism, driven by hidden Jewish forces, were the corrupt ideologies of a dwindling era. Yet before grounding such themes in samples of Barnes’s publicism, in particular as Europe entered into war around 1939, it is first useful to set out in more detail parameters for the qualitative analysis of such fascist writings.

Firstly, regarding the issue of the nature of “fascism” as a generic phenomenon, the approach embraced in this chapter will broadly conform to the now-dominant view of the ideology as one combining a sense of nationalised spiritual revolution with a populist, anti-liberal and anti-capitalist politics, and calling for the constitutional reordering of the modern nation-state. Moreover, it will engage and expand on this approach to raise a series of larger research questions. Indeed, although setting out a core set of qualities can help to give focus to enquiry, such general definitions offer a mere skeletal approach for understanding fascism as a complex intellectual trend that can be identified as a product of modernity. So to build on such a core working definition, we can employ a more expansive framework, drawing on further observations set out by a range of cultural theorists who have examined fascism. This will establish a heuristic “cluster” of analytical themes for contextualising a sample of the materials developed by Barnes in the wider milieu of interwar fascisms.

---
