**Fascism**

**Is Fascism an ideology?**

Of all the belief systems described in this book, Fascism least measures up to the definition of an ideology. The historian Hugh Trevor-Roper described it as an “ill-assorted hodge-podge of ideas”. If the definition of ideology is ‘a coherent set of values and beliefs’, then fascism fall down on the coherence. It is more an emotional response than a rational value-system. Indeed, Hitler claimed that Nazism was ‘*Weltanschauung*’, a ‘world view’, rather than a systematic set of rational intellectual ideas. Fascism demands unquestioning faith and obedience from its followers, rather than a commitment based upon reason and persuasion.

**How did fascism begin?**

There are two starting points for fascism. Partly it developed as a far-right response to the First World War, arising from the economic deprivation in Europe that was a feature of the aftermath of war. Soldiers returning home to Germany from the trenches, dejected in defeat, faced the economic hardship that arose from the draconian reparations demanded by the Versailles Treaty. They had lost their honour and been denied the glory of victory only to face the ignominy of poverty. And although Italy was on the winning side, many Italians had lost their lives in the war and their economy was weak, characterised by high inflation and high unemployment. They had expected to gain from the Versailles Treaty, but in fact they received very little. Many Italians felt that their government had been humiliated at Versailles by the ‘Big Three’, the United States, Britain and France. This led to growing resentment, particularly as they had endured such heavy losses fighting for the Allies.

The second starting point lies in the ideas of nineteenth century thinkers who, while not necessarily fascists themselves, espoused ideas that were late to become central to the fascist ideology. Writers such as Giovanni Gentile, Nietzsche, Herbert Spencer, Arthur de Gobineau, and others all made contributions that were influential to the emergence of fascist thought.

The name ‘fascism’ derives from the Italian word for a bundle of sticks – the symbol of Mussolini’s Italian fascist party. The symbolism is important. An individual stick can be easily broken, but a bundle of sticks is much stronger. To fascists there is ‘strength through unity’. Individuals are weak, but collectively the people are strong. To many observers the only true form of fascism was to be found in Mussolini’s Italy. Hitler never used the phrase fascism in relation to Nazism. Indeed, Italian is different to Nazism in that the former emphasises the importance of a voluntarisic nation state which anyone can join, whereas the latter emphasises the importance of race. Subsequent fascist movements have often embraced racism, although racism in not a necessary condition for fascism. One of the problems in exploring the nature of fascism as an ideology is that it is often used as a term of abuse for any far-right sentiment rather than an objective description.

**Core values:**

The core values of Fascism are:

Anti-rationalism

Struggle

Leadership & elites

Corporatism/National Socialism

Ultra-nationalism

Racism & Racialism

Totalitarianism & Monism

**Anti-rationalism**

Fascism is often defined more by what it stands against than what it stands for. It is anti-rational/anti-intellectual; anti-Enlightenment; anti-liberal; anti-conservative; anti-communist; anti-bourgeois; anti-capitalist; and, certainly in the case of Nazism, anti-Semitic. Fascists believe that Enlightenment thinking, based on rationalism and exemplified by liberalism, had resulted in weak democratic governments which had brought destitution and dishonour on their peoples. Capitalism is corrupt and lines only the pockets of the idle rich, or, in the case of Nazism, the Jews. The individualism which is central to free market liberal belief pits citizens against fellow citizens in pursuit of profit, undermining the collective of national or racial identity.

In rejecting anti-rationalism/anti-intellectualism, fascists turn to myths. Hitler directed his people to ‘book burning’, symbolic of the rejection of intellectual thought, and fascists urge their people to ‘Think with the blood’. The French philosopher, George Sorel, proposed the importance of the ‘political myth’, by which me meant that the masses needed a myth in which to believe in order to galvanise them into action. He called this ‘the will to action’. Sorel rejected bourgeois liberalism, claiming that the masses needed a leadership of revolutionary idealists. A similar notion was put forward by the German philosopher, Oswald Spengler, in his book, *The Decline of the West* (1918), in which he argued that capitalism had undermined the creativity of Western culture and produced a decadent civilization on the verge of collapse. A further myth was advocated by Sorel’s fellow Frenchman, the philosopher Henri Bergson. He proposed the myth of ‘**vitalism**’, a life force which gives expression to human existence. Life force is based on emotion and instinct rather than cold reason.

In the natural world animals are governed by instinct and emotion rather than rationalism. Fascists believe it is therefore only natural to act on impulse, rather than to theorise about life. Rationalism and intellectualism are flawed, they have served to create weak governments rather than facilitate the true destiny of the people. Intellectual life was spurned and Mussolini’s slogans included ‘Action not Talk’ and ‘Inactivity is Death’ (1). Among the myths that fascists promote is the myth of the super race or super nation.

Fascists believe in the reawakening of a glorious past, offering the promise of an equally glorious future. This is perhaps best illustrated in the German folk song, featured in the play *Cabaret*, ‘*Tomorrow Belongs to Me’*. To Italian fascists the glorious past lay in the Roman Empire and they sought to create a new and modern Roman Empire that reached into Africa. To German fascists the glorious past lay in the myth of Teutonic knights, part of the Aryan race, who once ruled over middle Europe. They see a reawakening of Aryan values and the creation of a new thousand-year rule of the Aryans, or Third Reich. This **millenarianism**, a belief in the coming of a thousand-year rule of their people, is a central myth in fascist thought. It imbues a sense of destiny and purpose among its people; building the new millennium restores respect among the people and provides much-needed employment. Fascists therefore embrace a **romanticism** that portrays a new social harmony, the glorification of war and the optimism of a golden future.

Their vision of the future often drives them towards a curious fusion of the celebration of a mythical past and a desire for **modernisation**. Mussolini sought to build Italy’s industrial and technological infrastructure, and industrial scenes were celebrated in the art of exponents of **futurism**, such as Filippo Marienetti. In Germany, too, the need to create high-tech war-machines were evident in the development of Panzer tanks, V2 rockets and doddle-bugs. German motorcycle stormtroopers represent a modern cavalry and the tactic of *blitzkrieg* (lightning war) was reliant on rapidly deployed motorised infantry.

Fascists also believe in the myth of a visionary leader who will rise above the herd and interpret the ‘general will’ of the people. This idea is a distortion of Rousseau’s concept of the General Will. Fascists believe that only the leader, who will emerge naturally from the pack, can fully understand the desires of the people to achieve their destiny. This informs the convoluted fascist idea of a ‘totalitarian democracy’. The leader can interpret the will of the people, even if the people do not fully understand for themselves what their will truly is. The people should therefore offer total obedience which brings with it freedom: they are freed from the decisions a citizen of a democracy is forced to make. Instead, the leader unburdens them of these worries and shows them the true path to their glorious destiny. Fascists embrace the ‘cult of personality’, particularly embodied in Mussolini and Hitler, whose impressively stage-managed public appearances to vast audiences, such as Hitler’s Nuremberg Rallies, were designed to emphasise their charismatic leadership. In these moments Hitler and Mussolini perfectly exemplified Weber’s charismatic authority.

A further, related myth is that of the ‘superman’. This idea was a distortion of Nietzsche’s notion of the ‘overlord’ or ‘*Ubermensch*’. The masses require strong leadership because otherwise they would follow the ‘herd instinct’. A new elite would provide the moral leadership necessary for society to progress. In Nazi Germany the ‘superman’ took on a racial overtone. The ‘superman’ was Aryan, blond- haired and blue-eyed, the ‘new man’, given to obedience, honour and heroism, prepared to lay down his life for the glory of the nation state or race. Nietzsche argued that human beings were motivated by an emotional will rather than the rational mind, identifying what he called ‘the will to power’. Fascism is therefore about the ‘politics of the will’.

Anti-rationalism is further apparent in the fascist notion of an **organic state:** a community forged by a common past, a shared language and culture, and an innate set of loyalties and emotional bonds. This national community, or *Volksgemeinschaft*, as the Nazis called it, provided the common identity of the people. To Mussolini it was possible for anyone to join the nation state, it simply required a willingness to obediently submit to the strictures and goals of the state. For Hitler it was more a matter of racial purity and therefore not everyone could join. Indeed, Hitler believed in the myth of the ‘*Herrenvolk*’, the master race, or Aryans. He saw the universe in terms of a **‘Manichaean’** (2) struggle between goodness and evil, light and dark, with the Aryan race representing goodness and light and the Jews, the ‘destroyers of culture’, representing evil and darkness.

Fascism’s denunciation of Enlightenment values have led some to claim that it is nihilistic (rejecting all moral and political principles). Nazism is particularly open to this criticism. However, fascism does positively promote certain values. These include the belief that struggle leads to progress, that elitism is natural, that the state and corporatism provide the basis for social and economic organisation, and that imperialist expansion or ultra-nationalism is the privilege of the superior nation or race. These more positive values are explored below.

**Struggle**

It was no coincidence that Adolf Hitler chose to call his autobiographical work *Mein Kampf*, ‘My Struggle’. Fascists regard struggle as both inevitable and honourable. It is, after all, a feature of the natural world in which the strong survive and the weak perish. These ideas were drawn from the influential work of the British Victorian biologist, Charles Darwin, outlined in his book *The Origin of Species* (1859). He observed and recorded the process of ‘natural selection’, or the ‘survival of the fittest’ species, and his work went on to inspire the concept of ‘social Darwinism’, a belief that human struggle is socially and politically inevitable. Such struggle would result in the survival of the strongest nation or race and the extinction of the weakest. Hitler is said to have stated ‘Victory is to the strong and the weak must go to the wall’.

In Nazi Germany these ideas led to the promotion of racial purity. Mixed marriages were prohibited by law and a programme of **eugenics** was introduced. Eugenics is the theory and practice of selective breeding and is used widely with farmed and domesticated animals. Race horses, cats and dogs, for example, are commonly selectively bread. Towards the end of the nineteenth century some scientists began to consider the possibility of applying the principles of eugenics to the human race.

In Germany eugenics eventually led to the forced sterilization of mentally and physically disabled people and, with the introduction of the T4 programme in 1939, their execution by the state. Ultimately, the Final Solution, in which millions of Jews were killed in concentration camps, was an expression of racial eugenics.

The belief in struggle was further reflected in the expansionism of both Italy and Nazi Germany, but particularly the latter. Hitler’s policy of *lebensraum* (living space) derived from the belief that the superior race (or nation) could justify annexing neighbouring territories in order to ensure they had the resources necessary for their people and to establish self-sufficiency or **autarky**. In search of this goal, Hitler sought to build a Greater Germany, annexing Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Similarly Mussolini sought to create an African empire through the invasion of Abyssinia.

Finally, struggle to fascists represents a vehicle by which progress can be achieved. Fascists believe in ‘creative destruction’, the idea that out of the ashes of war the new millennium will arise. They extol the virtues of war. War provides honour and glory and the promise of victory. Mussolini once said ‘War is to men what maternity is to women’.

**Leadership & elites**

Among the ideas that fascism rejects are equality and the liberal belief in government limited by constitution. Fascism is elitist. It believes in a single patriarchal, authoritarian leader. The leader rises above ‘the herd’ and has the insight to interpret the ‘general will’ of the people (a distortion of Nietzsche’s idea of the *Ubermensch* or ‘overlord’). This absolves the people of the need to be involved in the decision-making process and reduces them to the ranks of obedient masses. Instead the leader determines the destiny of his people. This is ‘totalitarian democracy’, freeing the people from the burden of choice and, at the same time, awakening them to their destiny. Under fascism, democracy and egalitarianism are presented as a liberal fiction which contradict natural inequalities.

The leader is revered and considered infallible. Fascist leaders have displayed charismatic authority and exemplified the ‘cult of personality’. This is apparent in the grand titles which many leaders have adopted. Adolf Hitler was referred to as Der Fuhrer (the leader, or ‘guide’), Benito Mussolini as Il Duce (the Duke), and Francisco Franco as the Generalissimo. Carefully staged rallies, such as the Nuremberg rallies, theatrically placed the leader centre-stage to emphasise their unique position and the veneration with which they are seen. At the Nuremberg rallies the crowds chanted ‘Adolf Hitler is Germany; Germany is Adolf Hitler!’ The strength of fascist leadership is evidenced through the militarism of such occasions. Fascists exalt the martial virtues of duty, obedience, honour, courage and self-sacrifice.

While fascism eschews social class as a divisive socialist myth, three distinct groups are evident in many fascist societies. There is a visionary leader who interprets the general will of the people. There is a warrior elite, such as the SS, which embodies honour and self-sacrifice. Finally, there are the obedient masses who are ignorant and submit to the leader’s absolute authority.

**Corporatism/National Socialism**

Fascists oppose socialism because socialism emphasises the important of class conflict, which is divisive to the nation or race. However, in their attempt to establish a mass appeal fascist parties have often used some of the language and concepts of socialism. Indeed, the Nazi party called itself the ‘National Socialist’ party. In fact there is some common ground between Fascism and Socialism, in so far as together with socialists, fascists believe in collectivism and oppose capitalism.

Fascists oppose discrimination based on social class. To Fascists, capitalism is also seen as divisive, emphasising the importance of individual endeavour and achievement rather than the importance of the nation or race. Capitalism is driven by self-interest, which runs contrary to the collective interest of the fascist state. In the interests of the ‘greater good’ of the state both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany witnessed some nationalisation of industries. Under a fascist state all are united in working for the glory of the nation and everyone has a place in this noble struggle.

However, the economic model most associated with Fascism, particularly Mussolini’s Italy, is corporatism. It was this economic model which inspired Oswald Moseley, a member of MacDonald’s second Labour government, to leave the Labour Party and ultimately create the British Union of Fascists (see below). Corporatism is a tripartite relationship between businesses, the employee unions, and the state. In theory it is an equal relationship whereby each agency would be working for the good of the state. Trade unions, therefore, were not expected to represent the narrow, selfish interests of their members, but to galvanise their members into maximising their endeavours for the benefit of the state. Some unions were encouraged, including an organisation for clerics. In practice this tripartite relationship was not equal. Although the state did not fully nationalise industries, it did set the agenda. This was evident in Goring’s four year plans in Germany, modelled on Stalin’s five year plans. It can be argued that corporatism was little more than an instrument of the state and an ideological slogan (3). In Italy there were 22 corporations by 1927 and in 1939 Mussolini replaced the Chamber of Deputies in parliament with the ‘Chamber of Fasces and Corporations’.

In Nazi Germany corporatism emphasised the desire to create an ethnically pure Aryan race. It promoted of a society bound by the common bonds of history and culture and was characterised by **xenophobia**. At its heart was a fear of economic ruin and political instability considered to be brought about by Jews who sought the destruction of western culture.

**Ultra-nationalism**

Fascist states are chauvinistic, imperialistic and expansionist. The belief that they are superior to other nations or the ‘master race’ provides a justification to annex other countries. In order to ensure they have the resources necessary to satisfy the demands of their superior nation or race fascists believe that they should be able subjugate neighbouring territories and acquire their material assets. This philosophy is best exemplified by the Nazi policy of *lebensraum* (literally ‘living-room’ or ‘living space’), the name given to the eastward expansion of Hitler’s Germany. Indeed, the Nazis believed that the nation-state of Germany was a relatively recent creation (it was established in the 1870s) and that the Aryan race was reclaiming its homeland from the arbitrary establishment of national borders. Similarly, in Italy Mussolini sought to expand into Africa to create a new Roman Empire.

The acquisition of neighbouring territories with their resources further allowed for economic self-sufficiency or **autarky.** Fascist states would not wish to be dependent on imports from other countries as this would undermine their position as the superior nation. It is important, therefore, to secure conquest over other nations and to plunder them.

Within the nation state fascists adopt the position of **integral nationalism** in which individual identity is eschewed in favour of the national community. Privacy and individualism are not tolerated in fascist society and citizens are expected to adopt a fanatical sense of mission to build national regeneration. In their endeavours to establish national greatness fascist nations look beyond their borders and assert their might abroad. This accords with their belief in social Darwinism and the ‘survival of the fittest’ as well as the promotion of martial values, the glory of war and struggle.

However, within the drive towards expansionism fascism holds the seeds of its own destruction. As was evident both with the German and Italian armies in the Second World War, expansionism ultimately leads to a weakening of the supply chain to such an extent that frontiers cannot be held. This became the reality in North Africa for the Italian army and in Stalingrad for the German army (4). The expansionism inherent in ultra-nationalism (which promotes the ideal of world domination) will inevitably bring about the collapse of fascism.

**Racism and Racialism**

Not all fascists are racist, although most fascist are chauvinistic or jingoistic towards other nationalities. Italian Fascism was voluntaristic: it allowed for anyone to sign up to the new Italian nation (although Italian Fascists held a dislike of Slavs and Gypsies) and in 1933 Mussolini said “Race! It is a feeling, not a reality…National pride has no need for the delirium of race.” Nazism, on the other hand, was both racist and racialist. The First Programme of the Nazi Party (1920) stated, “None but those of German blood…may be members of the nation.” That said, Italian fascists believed that Africans were inferior, which helped to justify Italian expansionist claims in North Africa.

Race is a theory which suggests that there are biological characteristics which can allow us to determine specific human sub-groups. Racism is different from nationalism, which is a legal entity. German fascism emphasised the concept of *volk,* or race, and placed particular importance on anti-Semitism.

Racialism is the pseudo-scientific assertion that there are discernable distinctions between races which determine attributes such as intelligence. It establishes a hierarchy of races which commonly placed Aryans as the most civilised of races and Jews as the destroyers of civilisation. As an idea racialism emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century and informs thinking on selective breeding or eugenics. It accords with the tenets of social Darwinism, widely accepted in Nazi Germany, which proposes that only the fittest should survive. This, in turn, fuelled ideas of the imperative of racial purity. Under the Nazis racialism led to the sinister practice of phrenology: the measurement of skulls to determine racial origin. Such practices condemned some to the gas chambers at Auschwitz and other concentration camps as part of the Final Solution, or the genocide of the Jews.

German Fascism was therefore inherently racist. Following the idea of such thinkers as Arthur de Gobineau (1816-82) and Houston Chamberlain (1855-1939) German fascists adopted theories of racial conflict and racial supremacy. They believed in the categorisation of races and the superiority or inferiority of some races over others. For example, they believed that the race they classified as Negroes were intellectually inferior, but that the Jews were both inferior and sinister, bent on world-domination. Anti-Semitism was a powerful doctrine within Nazi belief. From these ideas emerged the Nazi laws to prohibit mixed marriages, the T4 Programme in 1939 (the extermination of those with physical or mental disabilities because they weaken racial purity) and the Final Solution. Contemporary fascists are also often racist, such as Serbian nationalists at the time of the Bosnian War who believed in the ethnic cleansing of Muslim ethnic Albanians. However, it would be wrong to assume that racism is always a characteristic of fascist groups.

**Totalitarianism and ‘Monism’**

Totalitarianism, or the ‘total state’, demands the complete obedience of citizens and subservience to the interests of national unity. Totalitarian states are often characterised by charismatic leaders who exert absolute power, indoctrination of citizens and the erosion of civil liberties, expansionism, and the formal organisation of state terror. In Italy it extended to economic planning through corporatism.

Fascists also believe in ‘monism’, a single source of truth and single value system. This runs contrary to the liberal notion of pluralism. Monism was exemplified in the totalitarian nation states of fascist Italy and Germany. Bourgeois capitalist society is too atomistic, too individualistic to allow for the mobilisation of a nation, which is the highest political virtue. Thus fascist states reject the rights of private individuals and the liberal tolerance of competing beliefs and promote subservience to the state. Only in the thoughts of the leader and the concordant values proposed by the state can the truth be found.

**Differences between Italian Fascism & Nazism**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Italian Fascism | Nazism |
| On the corporate state | Supports the corporate state | Accepts some role for private enterprise; sees the state as a vessel for the advancement of the race |
| On racialism/racism | Volunturistic | Racist/anti-Semitic |
|  |  |  |

**Fascist Thinkers**

Although the First World War was the catalyst for fascism, many of the ideas which underpin the ideology owe their origins to thinkers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**Giovanni Gentile** (1875-1944) is regarded as the founding father of fascism. An Italian philosopher who was loyal to Mussolini, he worked in Mussolini’s government from 1923. Gentile’s philosophy involved the rejection of individualism and the promotion of a corporate state. The individual has no meaning outside the state. He called for the abolition of parliament and the need for autarky (or self-sufficiency). He believed that the state provided meaning and purpose to people’s lives, famously saying that “Everything for the state; nothing against the state; nothing outside the state”. In his philosophy the distinction between the public and private domain does not exist. The only true state was one of totalitarian corporate syndicalism. Total obedience to the state was the only true way for a civilization to develop. Gentile’s influence was greater on Italian fascism than German fascism: German fascists held the state less reverence and saw it more as a means to an end, a vehicle for the race. His ideas accord with the fascist notion of an ‘organic community’ where loyalties and emotional bonds are forged by a common past.

***Fascinating Fact:***

Gentile ghost-wrote the essay *A Doctrine of Fascism* (1932) for Mussolini.

**Georges Sorel** (1847-1922) was a French philosopher who, though not a fascist, inspired fascist thought. He believed in the importance of the ‘political myth’. He believed that societies become more decadent at a certain stage of development. A powerful, absolute leader is needed to achieve collective goals. He therefore argued that in order to arouse mass movements into action it was necessary to present a powerful, inspiring myth rather than try to persuade them by force of rational argument. He therefore espoused the idea of the ‘call to action’, the notion than in order to inspire people to action a myth will be most effective. To him, emotional appeal was more powerful than reason. Fascism embraced many myths, including the myth of the ‘superman’ or the ‘super-race’.

***Fascinating fact:***

Sorel was in fact a socialist and declared himself as such in 1893.

**Henri Bergson** (1859-1941) was a French philosopher who believed that intuition and experience were more important than science and rational thought in understanding reality. He proposed the theory of ***vitalism***, the idea that human existence is given meaning and purpose by a ‘life force’ rather than by cold rational intellect.

**Frederick Nietzsche** (1844-1900) was a German philosopher, poet and composer who challenged the view that humans act according to reason. Like Sorel he was not a fascist, but he proposed that human beings are driven by powerful emotions rather than by rational thought: ‘the will to power’. It is natural that humans desire to dominate others and the masses require a visionary leader capable of rising above the herd. According to Nietzsche the democratic notion of egalitarianism is flawed; instead he advocated an elite of ‘overlords’. This idea was distorted by the Nazi’s in their belief in a single visionary leader and a super-race.

**Vilfredo Pareto** (1848-1923) was an Italian sociologist, economist and philosopher who argued that democracy is an illusion and that the ruling class is always able to assert itself. This fuelled Mussolini’s desire to replace the Italian parliament as a democratic sham. He promoted the idea of Darwinian economics in which a minimal state allowed competing economic groups to struggle for survival.

**Oswald Spengler** (1880-1936) was a German historian and philosopher who believed that western culture was in danger of extinction because of liberal capitalism. In *The Decline of the West* he argued that civilizations are prone to decay and liberal capitalism has weakened the creative energies of western culture. Parliamentary democracy undermines the necessity for strong political leadership.

**Arthur De Gobineau** (1816-1982) was a French aristocrat whose ideas inspired the concept of an Aryan master race. De Gobineau contributed to the development of the pseudo-science of racialism. He believed that there is a hierarchy of distinctive races and that race created culture. In de Gobineau’s view the white race, including the Aryan race, is dominant and superior and the Jewish race was the least creative. De Gobineau’s theories fuelled eugenics, the science of selective breeding, in humans. This justified the Nazi’s T4 programme, the ‘euthanasia of the sick’, in which those with physical or mental disabilities were killed. De Gobineau’s ideas were also accepted in Romanian fascism, the Lebanese Phalangist movement and the Catholic extremists of the Croatian Ustase movement.

**Houston Chamberlain** (1855-1929) proposed similar ideas to de Gobineau, but more specifically identified the ‘Teutons’ was the highest group within the Aryan race. Hitler believed that the Third Reich would see a reawakening of the civilization of the Teutonic knights. Chamberlain also proposed that the Jewish race was degenerate and further advanced the argument for eugenics.

**Benito Mussolini** (1883-1945) was an Italian fascist dictator who liked to portray himself as the founding father of fascism and who developed the fascist economic model of corporatism. He believed that human existence is meaningful within the state. Outside the state he believed no human values can exist. He promoted nationalism, corporatism, public works programmes, expansionism, and the cult of personality. Under him, Italian fascism emphasised **statism** (the idea that the state is the most appropriate vehicle for resolving problems and for furthering the economy). Private property was allowed, but it was contingent upon the state. He often echoed Gentile’s belief that ‘nothing exists outside the state’.

***Fascinating fact:***

Late in 1943 Mussolini was defeated in a vote in the Grand Council of Fasces and he was subsequently arrested. Escaping from prison, Mussolini was eventually killed at the hands of Italian partisans in 1945. His body was hung from a lamppost in order to prove his demise.

**Adolf Hitler** (1889-1945) was the German dictator who embraced ideas of anti-Semitism and racialism. Hitler’s contribution to fascist philosophy was to place at its heart the importance of race rather than the nation state. Central to this is a battle between good and evil: the German people representing the forces of good and the Jewish people representing the forces of darkness. He proposed that the ‘herrenvolk’, the Aryan master race, had a right and a duty to exert their dominance over others. His biographical work, *Mein Kampf* (1925), argues for the struggle towards expansionism for the German nation. He also accepted the ideas social Darwinism in relation to racial stereotypes.

***Fascinating fact:***

Within Hitler’s ancestry it is believed there was Jewish blood. Hitler’s father was Alois Hitler, the illegitimate son of Maria Shickelgruber.

**Themes within Fascism**

This section briefly explores three key themes within fascism: the relationship between fascism and religion, gender and welfare provision.

**Religion**

Fascism has an uneasy but complex relationship with the established church. In Italy the Catholic Church and the fascist government co-existed in largely passive acceptance. However, in Spain far-right Catholicism supported Franco’s fascist regime and in Croatia the Catholic Ustase was fascist. The hierarchy, tradition, authoritarianism and collective community of both institutions certainly accord. However, fascist states are often anti-clerical.

The Nazi’s promoted their own brand of ‘positive Christianity’ which built on the notion of the German people as the representatives of light against the forces of darkness. It belended Nazism and racial purity with Christianity, denying the Semite origins of Christ and the Bible. German stormtroopers had the slogan *Gott Mit Uns* (‘God with us’) inscribed on their belts.

**Gender**

As with religion, fascist ideas about gender are more complex than might be assumed. Fascism promotes militarism, discipline and masculine heroism, but Italian fascism was in favour of extending voting rights to women.

Mosely’s British Union of Fascists believed it was unnatural for women to have more influence than men, even though 20% of the BUF support came from women.

In Nazi Germany, however, women were encouraged to stay at home rather than join the workforce, the argument being that this would reduce the male unemployment rate. In Nazi Germany it was seen as the duty of women to procreate in order to further the Aryan race.

Homosexuality was considered degenerate in Nazi Germany (even though it was evident in many Nazi circles) and was declared ‘wrong’ by the BUF.

**Welfare provision**

Fascists reject egalitarianism which they perceive to be a doctrine of the weak and to be unnatural. They therefore see social welfare as acceptable only to provide assistance to the people of their own nation or race. Thus, in Greece, Golden Dawn support the distribution of food and welfare to destitute Greeks during the economic depression in order to ameliorate their poverty which they believe has resulted from global capitalist exploitation.

**Fascism in Britain**

**The British Union of Fascists**

It is a curious fact that the creator of the most successful fascist movement in Britain had served in Ramsay MacDonald’s second Labour Cabinet. **Oswald Mosely** (1896-1980) had entered parliament as a Conservative MP in 1918 at the age of 21, but crossed the floor of the House to join Labour in 1924. A committed Fabian, Mosely served as the MP for Smethwick from 1926. In 1929 he joined MacDonald’s cabinet and was given specific responsibility for tackling unemployment.

Early in 1930 he published the ‘Mosley Memorandum’, a set of policy proposals including import tariffs, the nationalisation of key industries and the creation of public works to alleviate mass unemployment. However, his memorandum was rejected by the cabinet and in May 1930 Mosely resigned and set about funding a new political party, imaginatively called the New Party.

After failing to secure a seat in the general election of 1931 Mosely went on a fact-finding visit to Mussolini’s Italy. Impressed by what he saw as Mussolini’s success in rebuilding a nation, Moseley abandoned his New Party, which soon dissipated, and created another new party: **The British Union of Fascists** (BUF). He was attracted to the corporatism of Mussolini’s Italy and to the success of infrastructure projects and public works. The BUF was anti-communist, anti-Semitist, protectionist, nationalistic and authoritarian in its views.

The BUF’s policies included the remodelling of parliament along corporatist lines. Mosely envisaged a smaller bicameral parliament with one chamber representing the colonies, the church and industry, whilst the other would be a chamber of experts. This idea is an echo of Mussolini’s Chamber of Fasces and Corporations.

The party soon gained popular support and, at its height, it claimed 50,000 members. Even the *Daily Mail* supported it, a 1934 headline proclaiming “Hurrah for the Blackshirts!” (the nickname given to the members of the BUF after the black-shirted paramilitary uniforms they wore). Twenty per cent of the BUF’s support came from women.

Mosely’s rhetoric involved the image of a flame igniting the world and lighting the way into the future. He admired both Mussolini and Hitler, both of whom he tried to emulate, and at his wedding he was presented with a signed photograph of Adolf Hitler from the Fuhrer himself. However, he lacked the charismatic authority of his continental role-models.

The Party gained its strongest following in the East End of London amongst the poor white community who felt displaced by immigrants. Anti-Jewish and anti-communist BUF marches became commonplace in the East End and increasingly they turned violent, with anti-BUF supporters sometimes barricading the streets. Support for the party began to fall away, not least because of the party’s perceived links with the Nazi party. In a march in 1936, the so-called Battle of Cable Street, violent scuffles broke out and led to the Public Order Act (1936) banning quasi-military uniforms. The BUF lost any significant support at this point. Mosely was interned in May 1940 and the BUF was banned.

**The National Front**

The National Front is a far-right British political party which was formed in 1967, emerging from the League of Empire Loyalists (see below), and which espouses white-supremacy. While protesting that it is not fascist, it has established links with neo-Nazi groups at home and abroad. It adopts an anti-immigration stance, calling for enforced repatriation, proposes “white family values” and supports the fourteen words (the white supremacist slogan, inspired by a passage from Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*: “*We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White Children”.* More recently it has argued for a ban on white, as well as non-white immigration to the UK. The party also supports the return of capital punishment and engages in holocaust denial.

Membership of the National Front is banned in the police and prison service. At its height in the 1970s it secured a membership of 20,000. It polled almost 200,000 votes across the country in general elections and won seats on local councils. It does, however, seek election through the ballot box and to this extent it is willing to operate within liberal democracy. This arguably makes it a right-wing populist party rather than truly fascist. It is racist, but does not fully embrace the core values of fascism. During the 1980s it was blighted by in-fighting and one of its founder members, John Tyndall, broke away to establish the British National Party (BNP).

**The British National Party**

The British National Party (BNP) a far-right populist political party which was founded by John Tyndall in an attempt to create a respectable, electable far-right party in the UK (although Tyndall once claimed that Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* was his bible). It seeks a ‘white ethnicity of Britain’ and advocates the voluntary repatriation of immigrants, but does not share all the values of fascism and advocates working through the liberal democratic electoral process. Until 2009 it restricted its membership to ‘indigenous British people’, but a European court ruling led to it opening its membership to all. In 2010 it fielded a small number of ethnic minority candidates in the general election.

In 1999 Nick Griffin challenged John Tyndall for the party leadership and won, seeking to modernise the party. In 2009 Griffin won one of two BNP seats in the European Parliament. The party has also won local council seats, but has not yet won a seat in the Westminster Parliament. However, in the European and local elections of 2014 it lost many of its council seats and both of its seats in the European Parliament. Consequently Nick Griffin resigned as party leader in July 2014 and the post is currently held by Adam Walker, a former teacher banned for life from the profession for verbally abusing pupils and slashing their bicycle tyres.

Its current policies are populist rather than fascist, although many observers claim them to be fascist. David Cameron once said, “If you vote for the BNP you are voting for a bunch of fascists…” (5) and some political scientists, such as Nigel Copsey claim that the party is a recalibration of fascism. However, the BNP denies that it is fascist.

Its 2010 manifesto promised improved classroom discipline in schools, an end to defence cuts, protectionism, re-nationalisation of the railways, redirecting foreign aid to the NHS, the abolition of speed cameras, and withdrawal from the European Union (which it believes saps British identity and sovereignty). It advocates the teaching of British history in schools, the reintroduction of national service, withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights and the return of capital punishment. In recent years it has adopted an anti-Islamic position.

**Fascism & far-right populism in the UK**

Aside from political parties in the UK there have been a number of far-right groups that have promoted populist ideas. All have been marginal in mainstream politics, but some have been more influential in attracting public attention than others. Some of the more significant groups are discussed below.

**The League of Empire Loyalists**

The League of Empire Loyalists was a far-right pressure group founded in 1954 by A. K Chesterton who had been a member of the British Union of Fascists. Many of its members were former members of the Conservative Party who were disillusioned by One Nation Conservatism. The League campaigned against the dissolution of the British Empire, asserting that English people were the world’s natural leaders. Increasingly the group became opposed to non-white immigration to Britain and was anti-Semitic. Many observers argue that the group was too reactionary to be considered truly fascist. One of its leading members, Colin Jordan, went on to found the White Defence League. The League of Empire Loyalists was officially wound up in 1967 and was replaced by the National Front.

**The White Defence League**

The White Defence League was a far-right group created in 1957 by Colin Jordan, a former member of the League of Empire Loyalists. Its members included a young John Tyndall who went on to help found the National Front and, later, the British National Party. Publishing a magazine entitled *Black and White News*, it was anti-Semitic and anti-immigration. It has been described as a radical neo-fascist group, although it was primarily racist, seeking “racial purity”. Some of its members were implicated in the 1958 Notting Hill race riots.

**League of St George**

The League of St George was a neo-fascist group formed in 1974 which sought to continue the ideas of Oswald Mosley. Membership of the League was by invitation only and never exceeded 100, seeing itself as an intellectual club of the far-right. The League established links with neo-Nazi groups and was considered so extreme that even and National Front members were banned from joining it. It supported the idea of a Europe for European people only. In Ireland it supported the Republican cause.

**Column 88**

Column 88 was a neo-Nazi paramilitary group which openly began its activities in the UK in the 1970s and disbanded in the 1980s. It was led by a Cambridge graduate and secondary school teacher, Colin Jordan, and members undertook military-style training under the supervision of a former Royal Marine Commando. At one such training camp in 1975 it was said to have shared facilities and training with the League of St George. Its name comes from the position of the letters ‘H H’ (for Heil Hitler) in the alphabet, the eight letter.

**Combat 18**

Combat 18 is a neo-Nazi organisation which takes its name from the initials of Adolf Hitler, the first and eighth letters of the alphabet. It was formed in 1992 by Chris Sargent, a former BNP member, and has orchestrated violence against immigrants and left-wing activists. It is hostile to electoral politics. It has links with football hooliganism.

**White Wolves**

White Wolves are a splinter group of Combat 18 who have claimed responsibility for racially motivated bombings, including the 1999 Brixton nail bombing. It espouses the idea of ‘leaderless resistance’.

**The English Defence League**

The English Defence League (EDL) is a far-right anti-Islamic movement whose members have often been involved in football hooliganism and street demonstrations. It vows to’ stop the rise of radical Islam’. In 2013 its co-founders, Tommy Robinson and Kevin Carroll, left the EDL, claiming that it had become too extremist.

**Britain First**

Britain First is a far-right, anti-Islamic movement formed in 2011 and founded by four former members of the BNP. It is against mass immigration and seeks to preserve what it views as the British culture. It has tried to distribute Bibles in mosques.

**Fascism abroad**

**Spain**

Fascism emerged as a political force in Spain during the 1930s and remained the country’s dominant ideology until the mid-1970s. It is debatable, however, to what extent Spain in this period was genuinely fascist or rather ultra-conservative. The fascist ruling elite, led by General Franco, came to prominence during the Spanish Civil War, inspired in part by the fascist inclined Falange Party. Francisco Franco, a military general, was involved in plotting a coup in 1936 to overthrow the republican left-wing Popular Front, which had seen the Spanish monarchy retreat into exile. In 1939 Franco seized power and dissolved the Spanish parliament, declaring himself to be Head of State for life. Inspired by Mussolini, he ruled over Spain until his death in 1975 and gave himself the title ‘Generalissimo’.

Although supported by Hitler and Mussolini in the civil war, Franco never formally joined the Axis powers in the Second World War. Spain remained officially neutral.

It is questionable to what extent Franco’s regime was genuinely fascist. Many observers view it more as a far-right nationalist government. Certainly Franco’s Spain was authoritarian, nationalistic, militaristic, anti-communist, anti-liberal, and anti-Semitic. It was committed to a type of corporatism (national syndicalism) and demanded land reform and nationalisation of banks and credit. It pursued isolationism and autarky. Spanish fascism also embraced the integralism of an organic society. The ideas of Franco’s Spain were exported to South America, notably Bolivia, Peru, and Chile.

However Spanish Falangism displayed a deeper sense of religious commitment than other forms of fascism, putting Catholic universalism above the nation (6). It also lacked a sense of a truly visionary leader – the monarchy in exile was still revered by many Spanish people. Certainly it was militaristic and it sought to glorify the Spanish Empire, but its expansionist plans were limited to attempts to retain the last remnants of colonial empire. For these reasons Franco’s Spain is not regarded as truly fascist.

**France**

The French National Front is a far-right political party that was founded in 1972 and is socially conservative and protectionist. Throughout much of its history it has been led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, but in 2011 he was succeeded by his daughter Marine Le Pen. Jean-Marie Le Pen came second in the first round in the French Presidential elections in 2002 and in 2012 Marine Le Pen won 18% of the popular vote in the first round. The party takes a strongly authoritarian stance on law and order, supports economic protectionism, is anti-immigration (supporting the deportation of unemployed immigrants), Eurosceptic and has suggested that the holocaust is partly a product of historical inaccuracy.

**Greece**

In recent decades Greece has seen the growth of a far-right neo-fascist party which has managed to secure 7% of the popular vote and seats in the Greek parliament in the 2012 elections (it won 21 seats in the first election in 2012 and 18 seats in the subsequent second election). Golden Dawn in founded in 1980 by Nikolaos Mikaloliakos and registered as a political party in 1991, but gained prominence and electoral success in the twenty first century after the Greek economy suffered significant downturn. It rejects the neo-fascist label which some scholars attach to it, but its members sometimes wear paramilitary uniforms and its flag features an insignia which is similar in design to the swastika.

Golden Dawn is xenophobic and nationalistic. For example, it’s policies include “Doctors with Borders” (a reference to the international medical charity *Medicine sans Frontiers*), in which Greek people would be prioritised for healthcare. Its membership is drawn heavily from poor urban areas, notably in Athens, where violence against immigrant communities has been orchestrated by the party. In some parts of the city there have been reports of vigilante groups of Golden Dawn supporters on the streets at night effectively controlling districts. Several members of the party were arrested and charged with forming an illegal organisation after the murder of the anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas in 2013. The group has also been accused of football hooliganism and violence.

Golden Dawn’s policies have included ‘Doctors without Borders’; labour camps for immigrants who refuse to accept repatriation; placing land mines along the Greek borders to prevent illegal immigrants, Greek expansionism with the annexation of Cyprus, and a Eurosceptic and an anti-Zionist position. It demands the return of capital punishment for drug dealers, a ban on trade unions, and an end to the separation between church and state (7). It is opposed to ‘communist internationalism’ and ‘liberalism’ and emphasises the importance of the state.

It urges its members to be “aware that nationalism is the only absolute and true revolution because it seeks the birth of new ethical, spiritual, social and mental values” and that “Nationalism sees people not only as a numerical entity of individuals but as a qualitative synthesis of people with the same biological and spiritual heritage, which is the source of all creation” (8). Their manifesto goes on to say “The economy should be planned so that it serves the national policy and ensures the maximum self-sufficiency without dependence on international markets and control of any multinational companies” and “Derived from the people, the nation – race, needs to be strengthened and developed through the state.” These pronouncements place it clearly within the fascist tradition. Its manifesto offers a vision of struggle, of expansionism and ultra-nationalism, of an all-embracing state to which the individual is subjugated and of racial intolerance. Indeed, in 1987 Mikaloliakos wrote, “We are the faithful soldiers of the National Socialist idea…”; that same year, Golden Dawn members distributed leaflets claiming “Rudolf Hess is immortal”, and on a number of occasions Golden Dawn members have been seen to be giving the Nazi salute.

**Neo-Fascism in Europe**

Many of the European far-right groups since the Second World War have differed from traditional fascism in two respects. In the newly-emergent former eastern European states in the last decades of the twentieth century a number of groups were more associated with football hooliganism and racism that genuine fascist beliefs. This was true in Russia and Poland in particular. This labelling of such groups merely underlines the fact that fascism is often used as a pejorative term rather than a description of an ideology. Other groups with more serious political ambitions, including the French National Front, Golden Dawn in Greece, the Allenza Nazionale in Italy (which, for a while, formed part of Berlusconi’s coalition government), and the BNP in the UK have all been apparently willing to work within the pluralist liberal democratic tradition. More recently neo-fascist groups have been inclined towards Islamophobia in the wake of events subsequent to 9/11 and towards anti-immigration rhetoric as a result of ailing western economies after the 2008 global financial crisis. However, However,Hoit is impossible to judge whether the new-found commitment of neo-fascist and far-right groups to the principles of liberal democracy are genuine, or whether they are a Trojan horse to gain power.

**Useful websites/further reading:**

Many of the groups discussed in this chapter have their own websites. *Some of these may be blocked by schools/colleges.*

There is a useful chapter on fascism in: Heywood, A, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan (London, 1992) 4th edition (2007); other useful introductory sources include: Passmore, K., *Fascism, A very short introduction*, OUP, (Oxford, 2002); Hood, S. & Jansz., *Introducing Fascism: A Graphic Guide,* Icon (London, 2013); and Woodley, D., *Political Ideologies*, Philip Allan (Oxford, 2009), Chapter 6.

**Accessible primary sources:**

There is a dearth of these. Some scholars attempt to read Hitler, A., *Mein Kampf*, (Vol. 1, 1925; Vol. 2, 1926), but the received wisdom is that this work is incredibly turgid!

**Endnotes**

1. Heywood, A, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan (London, 1992) 4th edition (2007) p 207.
2. Manichaeanism is an Iranian Gnostic religion founded in the third century which portrays the universe in terms of a struggle between a good, spiritual world of light and an evil, material world of darkness.
3. Heywood, op cit, p 219.
4. In Stalingrad and on the Eastern Front the two sides, both fuelled by a belief in the importance of the collective over the individual, pitched themselves into a battle in which individual lives were of little value.
5. *The Daily Telegraph*, 31/05/09.
6. Passmore, K., *Fascism, A very short introduction*, OUP, (Oxford, 2002), p 77.
7. *The Guardian*, 3/5/2012, ‘A gain for Golden Dawn would be a dark day for Greece’.
8. <http://www.xryshaygh.com/index.php/kinima>; The Manifesto of Golden Dawn**.**