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Why the Italian Case is Interesting

The question of the anti-Jewish racial policy introduced by the Fascist regime in Italy in the 1930s was long considered relatively insignificant. The underlying reasons are manifold. One reason is linked to the subjective behavior of the Italian people, the great majority of whom rejected the regime's racial policy—unlike what happened in many other parts of Europe. It thus appeared exaggerated to attribute undue importance to decisions that ran counter to the conscience of most Italians. A second reason has a more objective basis. Antisemitism was never a *constituent* element of Italian Fascist ideology, as it was of Nazi ideology. No theoretical writings existed, like Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, to indicate that the attack on the Jews was one of the primary objectives of Fascism. A third reason is the delayed and comparatively moderate nature of Fascist racial policy. It began to be implemented in 1938, fifteen years after the Fascists seized power and, despite the truculent language in which it was announced, was based on the motto of "discrimination not persecution," which even today is cited as an extenuating circumstance.

These reasons could account for the attitude of several historians who wrote the matter off as something marginal in the European

context. This is the case of George L. Mosse, who appears to have been blinded by the slogan “discrimination not persecution” and by the fact that the racial laws were not enforced against those who had rendered important services to the country and the regime. He concluded that “Italy protected its Jews wherever it could.”¹ It was indeed a truly singular way of protecting Jews—promulgating and zealously enforcing laws that excluded them from schools and public office, drastically curtailed their economic and intellectual activities, and contained provisions like the bans on owning radios and going on holiday. Indeed, the explanation of attitudes like Mosse’s lies in the conviction that Fascist racial policy was adopted as a result of pressure from the Nazi ally and of Mussolini’s decision to gratify Hitler, a decision taken reluctantly and watered down in actual practice. This explanation is not completely unfounded: Hitler’s pressure to make this choice did exist and was effective. However, in-depth historical analysis reveals the baselessness of an explanation based on the foreign-policy factor alone. Even the greatest historian of Fascism, Renzo De Felice, who gave some credence to this thesis in his book on the history of the Italian Jews under Fascism,² substantially corrected this stance in his monumental biography of Mussolini.³

There are many reasons for believing that Fascist racial policy should not be considered a marginal affair: first, because of the imposing weight of the Fascist racial laws, embodied in hundreds of pages of enactments, decrees, provisions, and ministerial and police circulars; second, the thoroughness and painstaking care with which they were enforced; third, the significant effect that racial policy had on the university and scientific community, leading to the dismissal of many faculty members and researchers, some of whom emigrated, and the dismantling of many scientific schools, which proved to have devastating effects on the quality of research. A fourth factor of great importance is the involvement of practically the entire Italian intelligentsia in the regime’s racial campaign.⁴ De Felice pointed out that “in the vast

majority of cases” the press “was violently antisemitic” and that anti-semitic political writings “were extensive beyond all imagination.”⁵ But the most striking phenomenon is the almost unanimous involvement of the world of culture.

These elements alone would be enough to show that the case of Italian racism cannot be considered marginal and deserves thorough scrutiny by historians. However, one other question must be asked: is it

¹ George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution. A History of European Racism* (New York: Fertig, 1978).

² Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1961; new ed. 1988); cited here from Renzo De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy: A History*, preface by Michael A. Ledeen, trans. Robert L. Miller, notes and documents trans. Kim Englehart (New York: Enigma Books, 2001).

³ This eight-volume biography was published between 1965 and 1997: Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883–1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965); *I. La conquista del potere, 1921–1925* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966); *Mussolini il fascista: II. L’organizzazione dello Stato fascista, 1925–1929* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968); *I. Gli anni del consenso, 1929–1936* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974); *Mussolini il duce: II. Lo Stato totalitario, 1936–1940* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981; 2nd ed. 1996); *Mussolini l’alleato: I. L’Italia in guerra, 1940–1943: 1. Dalla guerra “breve” alla guerra lunga* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), 2. *Crisi e agonia del regime* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990); *Mussolini l’alleato, II. La guerra civile, 1943–1945* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997).

⁴ De Felice has pointed out how the racial campaign involved practically the entire Italian upper crust and was rejected by the popular masses (De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, p. 374).

⁵ “In at least two segments of the Italian people, anti-semitism found significant support ...: the cultural world and the youth. ... It is no mystery that the Italian cultural elite, whether Fascist or pro-Fascist, supported anti-semitism on a very large scale. ... Few intellectuals, even among those who enjoyed positions of such prestige as to have nothing to gain, were able to avoid the uproar of those years” (De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, pp. 373–375).

true that no form of theoretical elaboration of a racist nature existed in Italy? Were this indeed the case, it would lend weight to the thesis that racist policy was dictated only by political convenience, even though it involved broad sections of the establishment and the intelligentsia.

I started to work on these issues about fifteen years ago, showing in a first article⁶ not only that a purely Italian theoretical and “scientific” elaboration of racism did exist and enjoyed surprisingly wide currency, but also that there was heated debate over the various possible tendencies and in particular between a racism of a biological nature based on the German variety and a “spiritualistic” racism that actually prevailed. I also explored the influences of demographic and eugenic conceptions on the developments in the late 1930s; in this research I took into account the fundamental contribution by Carl Ipsen on the relation between demography and foundation of the totalitarian state.⁷ I suggested a reconstruction of the links between the early development of racial issues, which date back to the origin of the regime, and the turning point that led to the anti-Jewish racial policy. This research established a point of contact with Pietro Nastasi’s on the effects of racial policy on the scientific community.⁸ Then, in a book co-authored with Nastasi, I synthesized these lines of research.⁹ The present article describes the main theses and contains further developments.¹⁰

In our view, whereas, in the German case, the theoretical foundations of Nazism “deterministically” led to the Shoah, in the case of Italy a more sophisticated analysis is required, one that takes account of multiple concurrent factors. These factors may be summed up as follows: (a) demographic policy, which focused on the problem of increasing the Italian population and was one of the central aspects of Fascist policy in the 1920s; (b) the development of racial science, based on eugenics, and the qualitative improvement of the “Italian race”; (c) the imperial and colonial turning-point in the history of Fascism, which led to contact with the African populations over whom the Italians were called upon to assert their capacity for domination and

- ⁶ Giorgio Israel, “Politica della razza e antisemitismo nella comunità scientifica italiana,” in *Le legislazioni antiebraiche in Italia e in Europa* (Rome: Camera dei Deputati, 1989), pp. 123–162. See also Giorgio Israel, “È esistita una scienza ebraica in Italia?” pp. 29–52 in Antonio Di Meo, ed., *Cultura ebraica e cultura scientifica in Italia* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1994).
- ⁷ Carl Ipsen, *Dictating Demography: The Problem of Population in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- ⁸ Pietro Nastasi, “La comunità matematica italiana di fronte alle leggi razziali,” pp. 365–464 in Massimo Galuzzi, ed., *Giornate di storia della matematica* (Cosenza: Editel, 1991).
- ⁹ Giorgio Israel and Pietro Nastasi, *Scienza e razza nell’Italia fascista* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998, 1999²). See also Giorgio Israel, “Scienza e razzismo: un caso italiano,” *Prometeo* 66 (1999): 14–37; idem, “Mathematics, Fascism, and Racial Policy,” pp. 21–48 in Michele Emmer, ed., *Mathematics and Culture 2000* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2003); Pietro Nastasi, “Il contesto istituzionale,” pp. 817–944 in *La matematica italiana dopo l’unità. Gli anni tra le due guerre mondiali* (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 1998); Pietro Nastasi, “La matematica italiana dal manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti alle leggi razziali,” *Bollettino dell’unione matematica italiana* A-8 (1998): 317–346.
- ¹⁰ The literature on these topics is now quite extensive. For a long time the only contribution was De Felice’s *Storia degli ebrei*, which identified the German influence as the principal determinant in the racial policy. In his later writings, De Felice corrected this reductive view, observing that the “driving idea” behind the 1937–38 racial policy was “wholly consistent” with the approach that Mussolini had developed from 1927 on in his speeches and articles on the subject of racial demography and that had been taken up again in 1936 in a series of anonymous articles and memoranda “on European demographic events, in particular in Italy, France and England” that “in themselves revealed the importance he attached to the problem” (De Felice, *Lo stato totalitario* [1996], p. 292). Starting in the 1980s, an extensive literature developed, consisting mainly of articles and essays devoted to specific issues and witnesses’ accounts and documentation, with nothing new emerging at the interpretative level. A well-known scholar in this field, Mario Toscano—the bulk of whose twenty-year production was recently collected in *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia. Dal 1848 alla guerra dei sei*

placed the “qualitative” enhancement of the race at the focus; (d) the revolutionary and anti-middle class turning-point of 1937, in which Mussolini identified the topic of race as the central issue; (e) the alliance with Hitler’s regime, which represented a further step towards the adoption of racial policies; (f) the deteriorating condition of the Jewish minority, whose juridical status had been seriously undermined by the Lateran Concordat between the state and the Catholic Church in 1929; (g) Mussolini’s decision to consider Zionism and “international Judaism” as a “relentless enemy” of Fascism.

All these factors are equally important and decisive in identifying the Jews as a “race” to be expelled from the life of the nation and led up to the 1938 racial legislation. In the case of Germany, the link between the original racial theories and the policies of extermination appears deterministic and suggests the metaphor of the “inclined plane.” By contrast, in the case of Italy the situation is more complex and is better represented by the metaphor of a set of “tracks”—the above mentioned factors—all of them converging towards the “final station” of Fascism’s racial policy.

The significance of this matter is not only purely historical. Italian “spiritualistic” racism displays elements of originality and even modernity: it revolves less around the concept of race in a strictly biological sense than around the concept of *ethnic group*, still in vogue today, with all the ambiguities this entails. The saying “discrimination not persecution” reflects the idea that the worst misfortune that can befall mankind is to create half-castes. Therefore, in the search for precursors of Italian racism we must think of Gobineau, who, as Lévi-Strauss has pointed out, believed that “the great primary races of early man ... differed in their special aptitudes rather than in their absolute value. Degeneration resulted from miscegenation, rather than from the relative position of individual races in a common scale of values.”¹¹ The most authoritative theoreticians of “Italian racism” went as far as to deny altogether the existence of races defined in a biologically invariable

giorni (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002)—followed a line substantially consistent with De Felice’s. Michele Sarfatti, after contributing to an important documentary collection of fascist racial legislation (Michele Sarfatti, ed., 1938, *Le leggi contro gli ebrei*, special issue of *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 54(1–2), 1988), wrote several books based on an original interpretative line, including *Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell’elaborazione delle leggi del 1938* (Turin: Zamorani, 1994). In Sarfatti’s interpretation, the racial laws were the inevitable effect of domestic and international political factors and of the regime’s identification regime of the Jews as enemies. Sarfatti differs from De Felice’s in that he does not treat the racial policy as a latter-day event but as the conclusion of a quasi-deterministic process, although he always focuses solely on political factors, which are analyzed through the dynamics of legislation. For an interpretation in which demographic and eugenic factors into consideration in the formation of the racial policy, see Israel, “Politica della razza.” Seven years later, Roberto Maiocchi took up the same topics in “Scienza italiana e razzismo fascista: la demografia di Corrado Gini,” in *Per una storia critica della scienza* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Universitario, 1996), pp. 347–370. This develops a sham controversy based on nonexistent errors allegedly contained in Israel, “Politica della razza” and grossly confuses positive and negative eugenics. After the publication of Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, which presents the new line of interpretation, Maiocchi published *Scienza italiana e razzismo fascista* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1999), which was essentially devoted to the same issues, although focused more on the demographic and eugenic aspects (with a wealth of documentation) and based on theses akin to ours. But Maiocchi ignores *Scienza e razza* and again indulges in the old controversy. Michele Sarfatti, in *Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000), and *Le leggi antiebraiche spiegate agli italiani di oggi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), reiterates his opinions without taking into account the literature having appeared in the meantime. Toscano must be given credit for openly discussing this literature, if only to repeat his own skeptical position about all attempts to identify a line of continuity and coherence in the Fascist attitude to the Jewish question and to warn against the risk of mechanistic interpretations—a risk he perceives in both Sarfatti’s interpretations and those of Israel, Nastasi, and Maiocchi, despite their fundamental diversity. To this incomplete list we may add: Roberto Finzi, *L’Università italiana e le leggi antiebraiche*

way—let alone the existence of racial superiority given once and for all. Instead, they affirmed the existence of population formations (“ethnic groups”) that historically had attained characteristics of excellence, so as to discourage any half-caste forms, which implied the necessity to preserve biological purity from a given point on. This was the case of the Italian population. There is no need to say that the divide between the notions of ethnic group and of race is very fine, if not nonexistent. We are reminded that “the original sin of anthropology, however, consists in its confusion of the idea of race, in the purely biological sense ... with the sociological and psychological productions of human civilizations.”¹²

There is another aspect that makes the topic of Fascist racism interesting. The ouster of Jews from the scientific and university community had serious consequences for Italian science and culture. In 1938, Jewish professors actually accounted for 7% of the faculty, while the Jewish minority amounted to less than one-tenth of one percent of the Italian population. This raises the old question of Jewish pre-eminence in science, which was widely used in the regime’s propaganda to assert the need to reduce undue Jewish influence. This issue has recently been revisited in an article aimed at refuting Veblen’s well-known thesis.¹³ As we shall see, the dominant view among Italian Jewish scientists represents a further argument for rejecting Veblen’s “metahistorical” thesis and confirms the idea that “the whole issue of the role of Diaspora Jews in world history ... needs to be treated ... as a historical question like any other.”¹⁴

From Nationalism to the “Problem of Problems”

It is a fact that the rise of racism in the second half of the nineteenth century found theoretical support in the development of the anthropology of races and eugenics. In that period, the scientific community

considered the study of these topics to be a respectable branch of research. There was no anthropologist who did not delight in measuring skulls and analyzing somatic conformations in order to establish racial “differences” and infer mental and cultural specificities from them.

In Italy, too, research in demographics, eugenics, and ethnology expanded considerably. However, there was no tendency to support racism on the basis of this research, at least not until the 1920s. For example, Cesare Lombroso, in spite of his somatic determinism, enunciated the theory that the blacks were the ancestors of the Aryans. And one of the “founding fathers” of Italian anthropology, Giuseppe Sergi, although tempted by the idea of considering the Mediterranean ethnic stock to be superior to the Aryan stock, was unwilling to accept the concept of race, which he considered a source of serious conceptual “disorder” in anthropology.¹⁵

(Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1997); Anna Treves, *Le nascite e la politica nell’Italia del Novecento* (Milan: LED, 2001); Alberto Burgio, *Nel nome della razza. Il razzismo nella storia d’Italia, 1870–1945* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999). Mention should also be made of Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (London: Routledge, 2002), which is incorrectly presented (cover blurb, p. 4) as “the first book to examine in detail the debates over racial theory in Fascist Italy between the academic and scientific community, and among the Fascist leadership itself.” Gillette does not cite the books by Israel, Nastasi, and Maiocchi, although he was certainly acquainted with Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, which he cites it in an earlier article (Aaron Gillette, “The Origins of the ‘Manifesto of Racial Scientists,’” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6 (2001): 305–323) that is not mentioned in the 2002 book.

¹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History* ([Paris:] UNESCO, [1952]), p. 5.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ David A. Hollinger, “Why Are Jews Preeminent in Science and Scholarship? The Veblen Thesis Reconsidered,” *Aleph* 2 (2002): 145–163.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁵ Giuseppe Sergi, “Di una classificazione razionale dei gruppi umani,” *Atti della SIPS*

The situation changed rapidly when Italy entered World War I. The issues of national identity and the demographic problems facing the country now came to the forefront. The “scientific” definition of the concept of nationality was considered useful in resolving the problems arising from the lack of homogeneity afflicting Italy: this concept was viewed as a “*principium individuationis* of the civilized peoples, indeed, more precisely, of those producing original civilizations.”¹⁶ But it was above all the demographic question that lay at the focus of discussion.

Three main demographic problems had arisen from the very beginning of the process of Italian unification: declining birth rate, the need for a rational distribution of the population over the territory, and emigration due to lack of jobs. Unlike the first, the other two problems were specifically Italian. One of the fundamental limitations of the liberal ruling class throughout the period 1861–1922 was its failure to find a solution to the problem of territorial distribution and above all to the dramatic problem of emigration. In the case of the latter it adopted a somewhat reckless approach, attempting to duck the problem by encouraging mass emigration. These problems were aggravated by World War I, so it was no coincidence that demographic science blossomed in Italy and was cultivated by a scientific school of great international prestige.

A primary role was played by the most eminent Italian demographer, Corrado Gini. He analyzed the lessons of the war concerning the possible role played by demography and eugenics in national reconstruction.¹⁷ Concerning the problem of emigration he put forward a new argument that was to be adopted by Fascist policy several years later: emigration was a factor that impoverished the weaker and poorer nations to the benefit of the richer ones. It had to be combated by reversing the abject policies of the liberal ruling class that had sold short Italy’s only treasure, the demographic factor. The issue of eugenics, too, was of central importance for Gini, who strove to disprove the pessi-

mistic opinions concerning the effect the war would have on constitutional structure and “race.”

The supporters of eugenics emphasized the qualitative improvement of the population and not only the quantitative aspects dear to the demographers. For example, the geneticist Ettore Levi (director of the Italian Institute of Hygiene and Social Welfare) insisted on the idea that eugenics can help prevent the “decadence” of the “race” either by “facilitating mating between individuals of good stock, so as to produce the largest possible number of individuals of good quality” or by “preventing as far as possible mating between dysgenic elements so as to reduce as far as possible the relative proportion of such elements.”¹⁸ In this way he supported not only the milder *positive* eugenics (that aimed at improving the race by applying hygienic and health measures) but also the *negative* form (aimed at achieving improvement by prohibiting mating with “defective” individuals).

The growing interest of the scientific world in demographic and eugenic issues within the framework of a national mobilization of science is convergent with the regime’s adoption of the population issue as a crucial political problem, and indeed as *the problem of problems*, according to the definition given it by Benito Mussolini.

Although Fascism had inherited the demographic problems, it in-

(*Società Italiana per il Progresso delle Scienze*) (Rome: SIPS, 1908), pp. 232–242, on p. 232.

¹⁶ Francesco Orestano, “Le sintesi nazionali. Saggio di una valutazione aristocratica delle nazionalità,” *Atti della SIPS* (Rome: SIPS, 1917), pp. 461–483, on pp. 473–4.

¹⁷ Corrado Gini, “Gli ammaestramenti del passato sul dopo-guerra che sta per iniziarsi,” *Atti della SIPS* (Rome: SIPS, 1920), pp. 127–151; idem, “La guerra dal punto di vista dell’eugenica,” *Atti della SIPS* (Rome: SIPS, 1922), pp. 44–75.

¹⁸ Ettore Levi, “Demografia ed eugenica in rapporto al movimento contemporaneo per il razionale controllo delle nascite,” *Atti della SIPS* (Rome: SIPS, 1926), pp. 99–122, on p. 99.

initially failed to adopt a clear stance on policy. However, from 1923 on, Mussolini adopted a decidedly pronatalist and populationist stance aimed at halting emigration. He went so far as to advance the idea that the population issue should become the constitutive paradigm of Fascist ideology. The winning formula was launched in 1923 by the authoritative Fascist lawmaker Alfredo Rocco: "Number is the true strength of a race."¹⁹ The philosopher of Fascism, Giovanni Gentile, proclaimed in 1924 that the demographic question was the "main and most pressing problem of our national life."²⁰ After a period of uncertainty, the issue was vigorously taken up again and a set of extremely harsh legislative measures made emigration de facto impossible. Then Mussolini intervened personally with two solemn theoretical stands: the so-called "Ascension Day speech" (May 26, 1927) and an article published in September 1928 in the magazine *Gerarchia*, with the title "Strength in Numbers."²¹

In his Ascension Day speech, Mussolini equated a declining birth rate with the moral decadence of a nation and launched the slogan, "take care of the race, starting from motherhood and childhood." In "Strength in Numbers," Mussolini was inspired by the conceptions of Oswald Spengler and the ideas contained in a book by Richard Korherr, a Roman Catholic who later became a member of the SS.²² Korherr claimed that the declining birth rate was linked to the decrease in religious feeling, which was itself facilitated by the phenomenon of urbanism. His proposed remedy was a profound spiritual transformation led by a strong political leader and a strong Church. It was certainly no coincidence that Mussolini referred to this text and had an Italian translation of it published a year before the signing of the Lateran Concordat. He declared that the demographic and racial question was

... the purest touchstone used to test the conscience of the Fascist generations. The question is whether the soul of Fascist

Italy is or not irreparably contaminated by hedonism, bourgeoisification, philistinism. The birth rate is not only an indicator of the enhancing power of the fatherland, it is not only, as Spengler says, "the sole weapon of the Italian people," but also the one that will distinguish the Fascist people from the other European peoples as it will be an indicator of its vitality and its will to hand down this vitality through the centuries.

In 1927, Fascism succeeded in cutting its last ties both with socialism and with bourgeois liberalism and in basing its totalitarian and revolutionary political conception on the issue of *racial nationalism*. From this time on this issue became obsessively central in Mussolini's mind and was coupled with the ambition to transform the meek, peaceful, and good-natured Italian people into a tough self-confident people, certain of their destiny; in other words, as he said, into a "master race."

It is beyond my present scope to give even a brief outline of the population policies of the Fascist regime.²³ I shall merely underline several phases of these policies.

The first period was 1927–1936. The initial result—an outright success for the regime—was the solution of the emigration problem. This was also based on the new internal migration policy, that is, on the transfer of large numbers to uninhabited, often unhealthy, areas, mostly ancient swampland (Maremma, the Pontine Marshes, Sardinia, Sicily,

¹⁹ Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, p. 110.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 111.

²¹ Benito Mussolini, "Numero come forza," *Gerarchia* (September 1928): 1.

²² Korherr's *Geburtenrückgang* was originally published in German in 1927. Mussolini's article was republished as an introduction to the Italian edition (Richard Korherr, *Regresso delle nascite, morte dei popoli* [Rome: Libreria del Littorio, 1928]). The German edition contained a foreword by Spengler.

²³ For an exhaustive exposition see Ipsen, *Dictating Demography*.

the Ferrara area, and Puglia). The land reclamation projects were another success for the regime. Substantial numbers of people, drawn above all from northern Italy (Veneto, Friuli), were transferred to these areas, where new low-density towns were constructed in the middle of zones given over to agriculture and subdivided into small family properties.

Internal migration represented a laboratory not only for the regime's attempt to implement a demographic policy aimed at increasing the birth rate but also for applying principles of correct and healthy habits of daily life and eugenic principles. It is no coincidence that the physician Nicola Pende spoke of these internal colonies as "human plant nurseries" from which a kind of "Italian stock that has been truly selected and tested for working productivity and fertility" had emerged.²⁴ The land reclamation zones—especially the Pontine plain near Littoria, a city created *ex novo* by Mussolini—became not only a terrain for implementing the regime's population policies, but also a testing ground for the dominant anthropological, eugenic, and racial theories. The reclaimed Pontine marshes—defined by Guglielmo Marconi, the chairman of the National Research Council, as "a great human biology laboratory"²⁵—swarmed with anthropologists, biologists, and demographers anxious to test their racial theories and put them into practice. This phase marks the transition from a purely *quantitative* interest in the demographic question to a *qualitative* view focused on the issue of race improvement.

However, the most vigorous transition towards an openly racial phase came to the fore in the colonization of East Africa. This process intensified as the areas of internal migration gradually became saturated. A drastic change occurred with the conquest of Ethiopia, where colonization and the transfer of workers began in late 1935 and immediately attained a vast scale.

The link between the colonization of the occupied areas of Africa and the requirements of the policy of demographic and racial expansion

was clearly stated by Mussolini. In a speech delivered in August 1936 he declared that "fertile peoples have a right to empire, those who have the pride and will to spread their race over the face of the earth, virile peoples in the narrow sense of the term."²⁶

However, the new form of demographic expansion, this time carried out in an alien context in which the colonists came into contact with different "races," raised a number of new problems, the greatest of which was the colonists' tendency to establish promiscuous and even family relations with the "natives." As De Felice observed,

Due to the presence of many Italian soldiers and colonists in those lands, Mussolini wanted to avoid race mixing on a large scale, not just through legislation, but also by instilling ideals of racial "consciousness" and "dignity" in the Italian people. The need to take action became even more pressing once news began filtering back more and more insistently from the AOI [Italian East Africa] regarding the "awful behavior by civilians and military personnel towards indigenous women," the "irresistible sexual hunger shown by our citizens," and the serious repercussions this had on Italian relations with the natives and on law and order. At one point, the problems became so serious that Mussolini ordered the colonists' and the military's mail in East Africa to be opened to discover those who were guilty of such "crimes" against race. It finally reached the point where three Italian women, who had had sexual relations with the natives, were ordered flogged and condemned to five years in a concentration camp.²⁷

²⁴ Nicola Pende, *Bonifica umana nazionale* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1933), p. 241.

²⁵ Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, p. 153.

²⁶ See Ipsen, *Dictating Demography*, p. 176.

²⁷ De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, pp. 221–2.

This sparked the first episode of racial legislation. In April 1937, a law was passed prohibiting Italian colonists from entering into “a marital type relationship with a person who was a citizen of Italian East Africa,” an offense punishable by one to five years imprisonment. Sexual relations were not prohibited, provided they were purely occasional and not accompanied by any form of stable cohabitation. Men were not allowed to share the bed of a black concubine in a habitual fashion or to systematically take their meals with her or offer her gifts.

Thus direct contact with different “races” helped transform the regime’s demographic and racial policy into an explicitly racist policy. This transition was clearly stated by Giuseppe Bottai, the minister of national education:

As was natural and logical, it was necessary that, after considering the *quantitative* aspect of the problem and having traced out the plan for the demographic battle, the policy of the Duce should go on and define the *qualitative* aspect of the same problem, now that with the establishment of the Empire the Italian race has come into contact with other races and must therefore be protected from any dangerous blood contamination.²⁸

This transition was noted also by De Felice, who pointed out that, along with many other causes that changed Mussolini’s attitude to the Jews, “we must add events that influenced him indirectly: once Ethiopia had been conquered, the policy regarding ‘race’ entered a new phase beyond those related to health, demography, and eugenics. On a formal level racial policy toward the populations of the Empire had nothing in common with the problem of the Jews. But its impact upon it, though indirect, should not be underestimated.”²⁹

Racial Theories

I shall now give a rapid outline of the main ideas current at the time in the scientific community regarding the demographic, anthropological, eugenic, and racial issues, with reference to the ideas of some of its main figures.³⁰

Mention has already been made of Corrado Gini. In 1926 Gini took on a central role in the policies regarding population when the Central Bureau of Statistics (ISTAT), of which he became the director, with very wide-ranging powers, was set up under the direct control of Mussolini. Gini interpreted his powers in such a sweeping and authoritarian way that he expected to be able to submit bills to Parliament like a government minister. This led to serious conflicts, which obliged Mussolini to demand his resignation in 1932. But during his seven years at the helm Gini was the unchallenged master, together with the Duce, of the regime’s demographic policy. He always remained loyal to the regime, to the point of welcoming the prospect of a new Nazi-Fascist world order when Italy and Germany signed the Pact of Steel.

Gini had been a student of Vilfredo Pareto’s and was influenced by the latter’s “theory of the circulation of élites.” According to this theory, in every society there exists a Gaussian distribution of ability that does not coincide with the distribution of wealth and power. As a result, intense competition takes place in the lower and middle classes, leading to the emergence of “superior” elements through a process of natural selection favored by a high mortality rate. This was thought to lead to the formation of a new élite to replace the old decadent one.

²⁸ Circular of August 6, 1938, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato (hereafter ACS), Rome, Ministero dell’Interno, Direzione Generale Demografia e Razza (1938–1943), b. 4, fasc. 5. See also Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, p. 120.

²⁹ De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, pp. 221–3.

³⁰ For further details see Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*.

Gini used this concept as the basis for his well-known “cyclic population theory.”³¹ According to Gini, there exists in society a differential fertility that represents a positive factor of social renewal: the worthier elements of the lower classes rise on an ascending current and become part of the upper classes. The upper classes do not represent a positive element in demographic dynamics because of their lower growth rate, which, although not necessarily leading to a deterioration of the human race, does stand in the way of its rapid evolution. In the more refined versions of the theory, Gini rejected out of hand the Malthusian view as well as any reduction of population dynamics to rationalistic, deterministic, or mathematical schemes. Populations were like biological individuals and, like them, followed a life process, an *evolutionary parabola* towards extinction. This is the stage at which the differential fertility (namely, the differential birth rate) that exists in the various social groups—and which decreases with increasing wealth and social status—comes into play, determining an upward flow. Therefore the social pyramid is renewed by the flow rising from the bottom towards the top and the parabolic trend is interrupted by the emergence of a new cycle. This gives rise to a cyclic trend in the population.

There is no doubt that Gini aimed to use his theories as the foundation of Fascist demographic policy. He acknowledged that he held the same views as Mussolini after the “Ascension Day speech,” emphasizing that a declining birth rate was a phenomenon typical of white-race demographics and that his theories could explain its causes and provide a solution for the problem. Moreover, the cyclic theory could be considered as the scientific demonstration of the claim that the population of “proletarian” Italy was the only one in Europe capable of being renewed. The Italian people were the “lowest” element and thus capable of rising along the upward flow towards the top of the pyramid, thereby interrupting the parabola of decline and triggering a new cycle of development. Gini himself observed in 1931 that the Italian racial composition provided a biological foundation for the belief that

Italy was about to enter a new and glorious historical period. Gini’s cyclic theory thus lent itself to being adopted as the official scientific demographic theory of Fascism. Mussolini’s statement, made in 1937, that the parabola of nations is “a direct projection of the demographic flow that forms its blood stream,”³² clearly reflects Gini’s notions.

Nevertheless, Gini’s theory contained a pessimistic element, inasmuch as it predicted that sooner or later the driving force would run out of steam and that, unless some form of biological regeneration that involved racial contamination occurred, there would be a decline in the Italian population. This led to Gini’s wavering in his opinions about the need to maintain racial purity. In the first presentation of his theory, in a lecture delivered at Trieste in April 1911, he adopted an openly racist stance, provocatively asking why such a rich, intelligent race with such a glorious past as the Italians of Trieste had failed to expand vis-à-vis an intellectually and economically inferior race like the Slavs. In 1931, however, he claimed instead that the high level of fertility in Veneto was probably due to mixing with the fertile blood of the Slavs,³³ a claim that led him to be accused of anti-Fascism, from which he was saved by his authoritative position. On numerous other occasions, in particular during a conference held in Uppsala in 1941, he claimed instead that mixing the races should be avoided after its initial period of usefulness had passed.

It should be pointed out that the biologicistic nature of Gini’s theory led him closer than any other contemporary thinker in Italy to a bio-

³¹ The early formulations of the theory may be found in: Corrado Gini, “Il diverso accrescimento delle classi sociali e la concentrazione della ricchezza,” *Giornale degli Economisti* (1909); idem, *I fattori demografici nell’evoluzione delle nazioni* (Turin: Bocca, 1912).

³² Benito Mussolini, “Vecchiaia,” *Il popolo d’Italia* (January 15, 1937): 1.

³³ Corrado Gini, *Le basi scientifiche della politica della popolazione* (Catania: Studio Editoriale Moderno, 1931).

logical conception of race, notwithstanding his rejection of the negative eugenic theories. Therefore, in spite of a number of internal inconsistencies and fluctuations, Gini's theories had a decisive impact because they drew attention to the biological and racial premises underlying demographic phenomena. This tendency—and therefore the intersection between demographic issues and eugenics³⁴—is illustrated by a 1931 article by Gini in which he presented the results of ISTAT-sponsored research on large families. Gini explained that, in addition to the customary demographic form to be filled in, an anthropometric form had been devised for the purpose of gathering qualitative and quantitative data on the somatic constitution of the parents of such families.³⁵

It was no easy matter to get a naturalistic eugenic science accepted by the Italian scientific and cultural world, however. The reason for this was the distrust of mechanistic approaches to the demographic question and the widespread rejection of the idea that the question of fertility could be fully rationalized. A factor of considerable importance in this resistance was the Roman Catholic world, its positions authoritatively expressed in the work of Fr. Agostino Gemelli (founder of the Catholic University of Milan and president of the Pontifical Academy of Science), who attacked the Nazi eugenics program on scientific, moral, and religious grounds.³⁶ Even in medical circles, which one might expect to be more receptive to eugenic issues, there was opposition, such as that expressed in 1930 by two Jewish biologists, Paolo Enriques and Carlo Foà, who attempted to interpret the regime's policy as a rejection of eugenics, at least in its negative form.

A particularly important role was played by the school of *constitutional medicine*, led by Nicola Pende, who adopted a stance favoring the biologicistic approach, subsequently tempered by a "spiritualistic" vein. According to Pende, the birth and growth of the individual could be subjected to "orthogenetic" control so as to produce healthy and socially useful individuals and thus improve the race. Pende's theories were developed starting in the 1920s and combined

with a program of practical action. The latter consisted in registering individuals using a "biotypological" form invented by Pende himself and subjecting them to the control of a network of orthogenetic institutes or clinics, the prototype for which he set up at the University of Genoa. Pende's activities attracted the attention of Mussolini, who established an increasingly close relationship with the "Fascist physician" (as Pende defined himself), to the point of creating an ad hoc chair for him at the University of Rome. Pende was an official scientist of the regime and received all sorts of awards and honors. His views were always a theoretical pillar of the regime's racial policy.³⁷

Pende defined *human biotypology* as the unified science of biological sciences, which subsumes and applies them all, inasmuch as it addresses the problem of the human personality. It is the science of the individual, that is, of concrete morphological-dynamic human reality, while the species is merely an abstraction of scientific thinking. The biotypological view entails structuring biology and its applications into four aspects.

The first is the reform of clinical medicine, which must abandon any reductionist approach. The second derives from preventive and

³⁴ Significantly, in 1934, Gini became president of the Italian Society for Genetic and Eugenic Studies

³⁵ Corrado Gini, "Nuovi risultati delle indagini sulle famiglie numerose italiane," *Atti dell'INA* (Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni) IV, (Rome: INA, 1932), pp. 7–46, on p. 9.

³⁶ On the other hand, Agostino Gemelli on several occasions took a violently antisemitic stance and approved the anti-Jewish racial laws introduced by Fascism. See Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, pp. 35 and 268.

³⁷ See Nicola Pende, *Bonifica umana razionale* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1933); idem, *Scienza dell'ortogenesi* (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'arti grafiche, 1939); idem, *Trattato di biotipologia umana individuale e sociale con applicazioni alla medicina preventiva, alla clinica, alla politica biologica, alla sociologia* (Milan: Vallardi, 1939).

orthogenetic medicine and individual hygiene. To implement this branch it is necessary to devise a “biotypological record for a rational orthogenesis of the individual” and then use it to record the population down to the grassroots level. The third follows from biology and the improvement of the races. Indeed, according to Pende, the Italian people was composed of different races, all of them identifiable, on which a differential hygiene could be imposed by means of biotypological studies. Pende thus affirmed the existence of different stocks or races of the Italian people but expressed his reluctance to amalgamate them and to allow potentially detrimental crossbreeding. The different races must be enhanced separately, each preserving its own biological and psychological heritage. The fourth field of application of biotypology is that of sociology and politics. Medicine and health care must become national medicine and national health care: “The four great problems that trouble our minds and the great heart of our Duce with respect to creating a greater fatherland, namely the problem of young people, the problem of women, the problem of the race, and the problem of the worker, cannot be addressed without the best possible knowledge of the individual needs of these four pillars of national biology.”³⁸

Pende laid great emphasis on the practical efficacy of his theories and on their relevance to Fascist policies. To apply them, it was necessary to make systematic use of the biotypological record of every individual “an indispensable register for the Fascist State, as at any time it makes it possible to know the balance of its greatest and most solid asset—national human capital.” This record is “the authentic individual document of identification, health, and evaluation of a citizen who, as a citizen of the Fascist Regime, must truly be a productive cell harmoniously and consensually incorporated in the unitary cell complex of the Mussolinian State.”³⁹

Pende’s view aroused objections, above all in circles that rejected any materialistic approach, including many Catholic groups. In 1929,

Agostino Gemelli launched a violent attack against the constitutionalist schools.⁴⁰ However, the gap between the two approaches gradually closed. Pende argued that his conception was not based on a static idea of race as an element defined by fixed and invariable biological characteristics. Rather it was grounded in a concept of “lineage” (*stirpe*), understood as a population formed through crossbreeding but endowed with qualities worth preserving. Furthermore, this idea of “lineage,” since it was not grounded on an idea of pre-existing genetic purity, referred to a complex of factors that were not only biological in nature but also cultural, spiritual, and even climatic and dietary. Ultimately Pende tended to consider his approach to be a kind of “spiritualistic racism” that he believed would be readily accepted by dominant opinion in Italy. As we shall see, this interpretation was rendered explicit in the fury of the controversy that accompanied the promulgation of the racial laws. Moreover, Pende, on a number of occasions, emphasized the gap between his views and those of Nazi racism, including a reference to “recent errors committed by leaders of peoples close to us regarding the problem of races.”⁴¹ He later took up the issue again in an increasingly critical tone and set himself up as the natural interlocutor of the Catholic world insofar as he theorized an “acceptable” racism. Furthermore, Pende’s views served as a conceptual bulwark against the threat represented by the more extreme forms of biologicistic racism based directly on the German theories.

³⁸ Nicola Pende, “La biotipologia umana, i suoi principi e le sue applicazioni,” *Atti della SIPS*, (Rome: SIPS, 1934), 1:173–181 on p. 181.

³⁹ Nicola Pende, “La cartella biotipologica ortogenetica individuale, quale fondamento della medicina preventiva e della bonifica della stirpe,” *Atti della SIPS* (Rome: SIPS, 1938), 1:283–286, on p. 286.

⁴⁰ Agostino Gemelli, “Sulla natura e sulla genesi del carattere,” *Atti della SIPS* (Rome: SIPS, 1930), 1:169–195.

⁴¹ Pende, “La biotipologia umana,” p. 181.

Another contribution to the debate on the demographic-racial question came from a current of physiological research on the role of diet in health and in improving the race. Two physiologists, Filippo Bottazzi and Sabato Visco, stand out. The leading role was played by Visco, professor of general physiology and dean of the Faculty of Science at the University of Rome, a person of modest scientific worth but great political influence. The main theme with which he made his personal contribution to the racial question was the role of diet in improving the race—which catalyzed the founding of the National Institute of Nutrition—and the historical claim of the supremacy of (an ethnically cleansed) Italian science, which led him to develop a history of science that he manipulated specifically for this purpose. Visco found many points of agreement with Pende and joined forces with him in combating the German type of biologicistic racism. His role and effectiveness in this context enabled him to become head of the Race Bureau set up in the Ministry of Popular Culture. There he promoted widespread cultural activity through the publication of monographs on the topic. Furthermore, Visco's university position allowed him to promote the establishment of chairs and advanced courses in "race biology."

A central role in the elaboration of the racial issue was played by anthropology. The contribution made by the anthropologist Sergio Sergi—son of Giuseppe Sergi, whom he succeeded as leader of the school—was consistent with the trend towards an Italian style of spiritualistic racism. He gave the concept of race a biological, cultural, and environmental meaning, anticipating the modern concept of ethnic group. Identifying the racial characteristics of the Italian peoples, Sergi did not deny the many interwoven strands of different stocks, but claimed that a unified "Mediterranean" strain had definitely been in existence for some time.

Sergi was a promoter of what he termed "State anthropology," an "imperial" doctrine at the service of the regime's projects. He believed

that the most important real-world applications of State anthropology consisted of field experiments in the colonies in the service of the regime's racial doctrines and in the "human biology laboratory" of the Pontine Marshes. In the latter context, incidentally, together with Gini and Pende, we find also Visco, who proposed compiling a "nutritional record." The Veneto peasants who helped reclaim the Pontine Marshes were thus racially "reclaimed" through painstaking work at the grass-roots level involving the compilation of four different forms—Gini's anthropometric form, Pende's biotypological form, Sergi's anthropometric form, and Visco's nutritional form—in addition to the ordinary ISTAT and ONMI (the Opera Nazionale per la Maternità e l'Infanzia [National Institution for Motherhood and Infancy]) records. Few facts are more revealing than these activities of the eugenic-racial obsession that clouded the minds of so many scientists in the second half of the 1930s.

After the "imperial" turning point reached by the regime in 1936, a dramatic new phase began in which the racial policies took the form of legislated discrimination. The first to be affected were the residents of Italian East Africa, who were subjected to the first segregationist laws. Starting in 1937, the Jewish question, hitherto limited to traditional antisemitism, was transformed into a racial question. Science played a leading role in this transition. The first official act of the anti-Jewish racial campaign was actually the publication of a "scientific" document, the *Manifesto of the Racialist Scientists*, which referred above all to the Jews.

Manifold Factors, One Result: An Anti-Jewish Racial Policy

The problem of the origins of Fascism's antisemitic racial policy is complex. This policy cannot be considered as the necessary consequence of the racial theories we have been examining. But neither can it be reduced to a mere act of acquiescence to the will of the Nazi ally. It is interesting to examine the evidence provided by Giorgio Almirante, who was editor of *La difesa della razza*, the theoretical review of Fascist racism. This is what he wrote in 1938: "Racism is the greatest and most courageous self-recognition ever attempted by Italy. Those who fear, even today, that it is a foreign imitation (and there is no lack of young people among them) do not see that they are reasoning ad absurdum: for it is truly absurd to suspect that a movement designed to give Italians an awareness of race—that is, something like nationalism multiplied five hundred percent—can lead to subservience to foreign ideologies."⁴²

To provide a convincing explanation for the emergence of the anti-Jewish policy it is necessary to take into account a number of factors and political transitions, including the growing role played by the racial issue in the regime's practice and ideology, which made the adoption of discriminatory measures appear a natural idea.

The first important transition that changed the condition of the Jewish minority in a radically negative direction occurred after the signing of the Lateran Concordat (February 11, 1929): Mussolini instituted legislation that changed the structure of the Italian Jewish communities and made the state responsible for their supervision and protection and turned them into instruments of the regime. This was one consequence of the Concordat, which laid the foundations of a deterioration in the civil and institutional condition of Italian Jews.⁴³

A second important event was the violent antisemitic press campaign launched in early 1934. The newspapers that distinguished

themselves in this campaign were *Il Tevere*, *Ottobre*, and *Il regime fascista*. The campaign was based initially on the most vulgar of anti-semitic topics and then focused on Zionism, which was singled out as an antinational movement. The attack caused a dramatic rift within the Italian Jewish world between Zionists, pro-Zionists, and anti-Fascists, on the one hand, and anti-Zionists and Fascists on the other (represented in particular by the official organ of the Jewish Fascists, *La nostra bandiera*). The campaign turned particularly violent after the arrest on March 11, 1934, of two Jewish anti-Fascists, Zion Segre and Mario Levi, who had brought newspapers and anti-Fascist manifestos of the Justice and Freedom movement into Italy from Switzerland. For *Il Tevere*, this was the ultimate proof that the Jews were anti-Italian and could not be assimilated.

But the 1934 campaign was carried out by groups that were not representative of Mussolini's views. The Duce's decision to use or ignore this kind of campaign is related to the complex, tortuous, and fluctuating phases of his relations with the leaders of the international Zionist movement. Phases of convergence alternated with phases of coolness, before the final rupture in 1937. Any reconstruction of the official attitudes concerning the Jewish question must take account of

⁴² Giorgio Almirante, "Né con 98 né con 998," *La difesa della razza* 1, (October 20, 1938): 47–48. We should also remember the declaration by Bottai (see n. 29) regarding the inevitability of the transition from the quantitative to the qualitative phase of racism.

⁴³ On the basis of the Concordat, only Roman Catholicism was a State religion; the others were merely "permitted." Prior to the Concordat, a Jew could belong or not to the Jewish *università* without this having any implications regarding his or her Jewishness. In its aftermath, any Jew who did not belong to a "community" was not recognized as a Jew; a decision to quit the community required a formal renunciation of religion as well. In practice this amounted to the reinstatement of a "legislative" ghetto.

the regime's wavering about the stance to adopt on the Middle East question and the diplomatic and strategic choices oscillating between the Jews and Arabs in an anti-British key.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, in 1934 Mussolini came out against Hitler's racist antisemitism—though by itself this is no indication of a fondness for the Jews.

After a period of relative calm, the situation deteriorated again in the autumn of 1936. This time the pretext was the Nazi Party congress held in Nuremberg in September. This was covered extensively in the Italian press, which allotted much space to Goebbels' speech in which he relentlessly attacked Bolshevism and Judaism. Roberto Farinacci's *Il regime fascista* poured oil on the flames with exceptional violence, peremptorily demanding that Jews give irrefutable proof of their Italian-ness. Mussolini kept silent and seemed unwilling to endorse Farinacci's extremist views. However, a new phase of the campaign was initiated in April 1937, with the publication of Paolo Orano's *Gli ebrei in Italia*,⁴⁵ which summed up the topics of the preceding campaigns and combined them into a working synthesis: the Jews must take sides "against international Israel, against Zionism, against the arcane apostles, the galvanizing messianisms"; for the Jewish communities, "the day of reckoning"—the renunciation of any form of separateness from national life—"has arrived." Orano came to this sinister conclusion: "It is the [Jewish] problem itself that must be abolished. Fascist Italy does not want any of it. There is no need to say more."⁴⁶

This time Mussolini sent an explicit signal in the form of an article published in his daily, *Il popolo d'Italia*.⁴⁷ In it he claimed that a "new problem" had arisen because the harmonious relationship between the Italian Jews and the rest of the Italian population had changed over the previous decade. The signal was received; the rest of the press vied to be in the forefront of taking up the themes treated in Orano's books and wallowing in antisemitic overzealousness. But the campaign languished until 1938, surviving only in the same extremist dailies that had always concerned themselves with it in the past.⁴⁸ This was not the end of the

matter, however. Mussolini was studying the best way to approach it, abandoning up the conventional antisemitic path that was likely to bring the Jews more sympathy than hostility.

Mussolini's distancing himself from traditional antisemitism clearly emerges in a communiqué issued by the Italian government.⁴⁹ Here it was explicitly stated that the regime had no intention of persecuting the Jews *as such*. Any necessary action would be determined by other reasons. The bulletin states that any misleading controversy on this subject was probably due to the correct perception that international Judaism was all too frequently implicated in anti-Fascist movements. This statement was a clear political warning. Jews as such are not targeted by the regime, but *a Jewish group* and *a Jewish problem* are. The *group*, which must be kept under surveillance, is made up of Jews who only recently acquired Italian nationality and have not been completely assimilated into Italian society. The *problem* involves the quota of Jews permitted to be part of the nation's life: it must be proportional to their number and their merits. This seems to foreshadow the first two provisions of Fascist racial legislation: the expulsion of all Jewish students,

⁴⁴ Such a reconstruction can be found in De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*.

⁴⁵ Paolo Orano, *Gli ebrei in Italia* (Rome: Pinciana, 1937).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁴⁷ O. Gregorio, "Gli ebrei in Italia," *Il popolo d'Italia* (May 25, 1937).

⁴⁸ Mention should be made of the republication in Italian, by Giovanni Preziosi, of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, greeted with enthusiasm in the usual circles. See Gianfrancesco Sommi Picenardi, "Un libro boicottato," *Il regime fascista* (November 20, 1937); Arthos (pseud. of Julius Evola), "La volontà di potenza e l'autenticità dei 'Protocolli,'" *La vita italiana* (December 1937). Also worth mentioning are: Giulio Cogni, *I valori della stirpe italiana* (Milan: Bocca, 1937); Giulio Cogni, *Il razzismo* (Milan, Bocca, 1937²); Julius Evola, *Il mito del sangue* (Milan: Hoepli, 1937); Arthos, "Israele, il suo passato, il suo avvenire," *La vita italiana* (August 1937).

⁴⁹ *Informazione diplomatica* No. 14, dated February 17, 1938.

professors, and officials from the schools and universities (because they were too numerous and too influential) and the deportation of foreign Jews.

The “solution” dreamt up by Mussolini may be summarized as follows. There is no specific “Jewish question,” but there is a “racial question.” There is no intention of attacking Jews as such. However, Jews should be made to realize that they are part of a distinct race and consider establishing an autonomous national entity for themselves in some part of the world, although not in Palestine. Those who do not accept this inevitable necessity must be prepared to suffer marginalization in the Italian community. It is clear that Mussolini’s decision to put the Jewish question on the agenda was not linked exclusively to international affairs, namely, to the definitive break with Zionism and to the impression that too many Jews were anti-Fascists. The true reason lies in Mussolini’s feeling that Fascism was being diluted and that all the typical bourgeois vices were undermining the strength of the regime. The regeneration of the Italian people and its transformation into a strong race of dominators was not progressing as planned. It was therefore necessary to give Fascism a new revolutionary impulse: racial policy must represent an act of rupture, a “new five hundred percent nationalism,” in Almirante’s words.

That in those years Mussolini was obsessed by the question of the decadence of Western civilization is shown by his intention to write a book-manifesto setting out the characteristics of a “new civilization” that would inject new life into the West. The title of the book was to be *Europa 2000* and its central theme demographic and racial.⁵⁰ Mussolini’s son-in-law (and foreign minister), Galeazzo Ciano, made this entry in his diary on September 6, 1937:

The Duce has lashed out against America, a country of Negroes and Jews, an element leading to the breakdown of civilization. He wants to write a book: *Europe in the Year 2000*. The races

that will play an important role will be the Italians, the Germans, the Russians, and the Japanese. The other peoples will have been destroyed by the acid of Jewish corruption. They even refuse to have children because of the pain they cause. They do not realize that pain is the only creative element in the life of a people. And also in that of individuals.⁵¹

The demographic-racial obsession merged with Mussolini’s new nightmares and targeted the Jewish component. The new revolutionary turning point approached in 1938; Mussolini described its terms in a semi-secret speech delivered to the National Council of the PNF (National Fascist Party) on October 25, 1938, in which he described the three “heavy body blows” that he had intended to deliver to the Italian bourgeoisie “in the regime’s sixteenth year.”⁵² The first “blow” was the abolition of the “servile and foreign” form for “you,” *lei*, and its replacement with the more virile *voi*, which also inaugurated a campaign to purify Italian language and culture. The second “body blow” was the introduction of the “Roman step,” which Mussolini claimed to have invented, asserting that it was not at all a mere copy of the German goose step. The third “heavy body blow to the bourgeoisie” was the racial policy.

If we ignore the clumsiness of its theoretical background and its lack of coherence, Mussolini’s speech shows that he had thought about the issue and had endeavored to come up with an original “Italian” solution. Fully aware of the absurdity of claiming that the Italians had always been racially homogeneous, Mussolini affirmed that the Italians were the fruit of crossbreeding among different stocks, which, however, had been relatively isolated for at least 1500 years and had formed a

⁵⁰ See Nino D’Aroma, *Mussolini segreto* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1958), p. 225.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 291.

⁵² For the text of this speech, see *ibid.*, pp. 103–104.

racially pure stock that was quite distinct from the non-Mediterranean Aryan race. It now comprised the pure *Mediterranean Aryan* race, whose racial purity was not based on the purity of the bloodline but on the acquisition of a “racial awareness,” that is, on a spiritual factor. Moreover, Mussolini observed, all those who came to Italy took on the Roman character.

This speech gives an outline of the main features of the Fascist racial policy. The insistence on the spiritualist nature of this racism is quite clear. Yet the transition from the classical antisemitic approach to a racial approach did not mean that the antisemitic issue was set aside. Not only was the first and only stomach to receive Mussolini’s third “body blow” that of the Jews; the entire antisemitic apparatus of the various Farinaccis, Interlandis,⁵³ and Oranos, as well as the traditional Catholic attitude, adopted the new context. Nevertheless, the context was important, because Mussolini was convinced that the racial policy directed against the Jews would be more acceptable if incorporated into a framework emphasizing the racial superiority of the Italians.

The choice of this context implied selecting as collaborators those who had been actively and “scientifically” involved in the problem of race. Scientists were called on to help the Duce elaborate the racial turn in theoretical and practical terms.

It must be emphasized that Fascist racism had a history and dynamic of its own, which produced its racist policies. This dynamic definitely was accelerated by the creation of the Nazi-Fascist alliance, but this alliance point was not the cause of the racist policies.

The very expression “discriminate,” which is indicative of the unique characteristics of Italian racism, arises out of the transition described earlier: the starting point should not be antisemitism, the persecution of the Jews, but rather an assertion of the distinctive racial characteristics of the Italian race and the adoption of measures to enhance its feelings of racial superiority and to provide tangible confirmation of the difference between the Italians and other races. The

Jews are one of these other races and, indeed, the only one present in the national territory. Hence it is necessary to separate it, to pluck it from the heart of national life. Moreover, Mussolini made no mention of the Jews in the secret speech, although the first anti-Jewish legislation had already been enacted. The adoption of a state policy of antisemitism is justified by its interpretation as a measure to defend the Italian race. This is the significance of the distinction between discrimination and persecution: antisemitism as such, despite the increasingly anti-Jewish thoughts of Mussolini and Fascist environments, was still not a constituent element of the regime’s policy, as it was in Hitler’s policy.

The Clash between Racisms

In view of the foregoing, it is not surprising that, when setting up an anti-Jewish policy, Mussolini avoided addressing himself to the old champions of traditional antisemitism like Roberto Farinacci, editor of *Il regime fascista* (a representative of the Fascist far right), Giovanni Preziosi, editor of *La vita italiana*, and even Telesio Interlandi, editor of *Il Tevere* (who was, however, soon to provide important propaganda support as editor of the review *La difesa della razza*). Mussolini was resolved to follow a racial and “scientific” approach to the Jewish question and wanted to keep everything under his own close personal control. For this purpose, he turned to a young anthropologist who had already distinguished himself on the racial question, Guido Landra, a 25-year-old assistant university lecturer. Landra had already established close relations with the circles directing racial policy in Germany. There is no doubt that his efforts in this direction had brought him to the notice of the Duce, to whom he had already sent his notes in February

⁵³ Telesio Interlandi was editor of the racist newspaper *Il Tevere* and later of *La difesa della razza*.

1938.⁵⁴ Landra's role in drafting the "Manifesto degli scienziati razzisti," the first document of the racial campaign, coincides with the sole and short phase based on a German type of biologicistic racism.

Despite the difficulties involved in reconstructing the genesis of the "Manifesto," it has now been carried out in detail.⁵⁵ Mussolini decided that the racial campaign would begin with the publication of a manifesto by scientists. In February 1938 he summoned Landra. In the presence of Dino Alfieri, the minister of popular culture (Minculpop)—whom he directed to set up a bureau for the study and organization of the racial campaign within the Minculpop—he outlined to Landra the main features of the new racial policy and gave him the task of drawing up a "manifesto." The contents of the document reflect its author's views: abundant biological racism and a mixture of confused doctrines about the origins of the Italian population. It is quite conceivable that Mussolini made Landra privy to a complex of theories he himself had developed in a rough form (as De Felice remarked, Mussolini was certainly no theoretician) and that Landra added his own contribution, emphasizing the biologicistic, pro-German approach and ignoring the approach of other forms of racism, including Pende's.

On July 14, 1938, the document, entitled "Il Fascismo e i problemi della razza" (Fascism and race problems) was published in *Il Giornale d'Italia*. It later became known as the "Racist Scientists' Manifesto." The names of the signatories to the "Manifesto" were not published until July 25, in an official PNF communiqué; their signatures were probably affixed without their being consulted about its contents to any great extent. The signatories included important names like Nicola Pende, Sabato Visco, Franco Savorgnan (the head of ISTAT), Arturo Donaggio (chair of the Italian Psychiatry Society), Edoardo Zavattari (director of the Institute of Zoology at the University of Rome), and other lesser figures (Lino Businco, Lidio Cipriani, Leone Franzì, Guido Landra, and Marcello Ricci).

The "Manifesto"⁵⁶ is a ten-point declaration that begins with the

axiom that "human races exist." It goes on to claim that "large races and small races exist" and that, from the biological point of view, the smaller groups, such as the Nordic and Mediterranean ones, are often the "true races." The third point asserts that "the concept of race is a purely biological concept" and cannot be reduced to the concepts of people and nation, which are based on historical, linguistic, and religious aspects. Thus "the existing population of Italy is of Aryan origin and its civilization is Aryan." It defines as a myth the idea of "the contribution of huge masses of men in historical times," arguing that the racial composition of the Italians has remained unchanged for a thousand years. "There now exists a pure 'Italian race,'" which cannot be reduced to the nation's historical and linguistic unity but comes from the "very pure bloodlines that unite present-day Italians with the generations that have lived in Italy for thousands of years" and which constitutes "the highest title of nobility of the Italian Nation." The reference to the "purity of the blood lines" clearly represents the closest point of contact with the German point of view, a proximity that is reinforced by the remark that "the issue of racism in Italy must be treated from a purely biological point of view, without philosophical or

⁵⁴ See Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*.

⁵⁵ It is odd that a master of archival research like De Felice did not provide a complete reconstruction of the genesis of the "Manifesto," thus leaving the responsibilities of the different actors in the shadow. A first reconstruction that takes some of the documents into account was offered by Mauro Raspanti ("I razzismi del fascismo," in *La menzogna della razza. Documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell'antisemitismo fascista* [Bologna: Grafis, 1994], pp. 73–89): it allowed him to confirm the thesis of the multiple nature of Fascist racism, already proposed in Israel, "Politica della razza." A complete reconstruction, including an appendix with all the relevant documents, is given in Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, pp. 369–383. I briefly summarize it in what follows.

⁵⁶ For the complete text, see Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, pp. 365–367.

religious intentions.” However, it is also claimed that “the conception of racism in Italy must be essentially Italian and the direction Aryan-Nordic.” This conceptual mix-up is quite a mess: while it is clear what the term “Aryan-Nordic” refers to, nothing is said about “Italian” racism. However, in order to dispel any suspicion that Italian racism is only a servile copy of the German variety, the “Manifesto” adds that “this does not mean, however, introducing into Italy the theories of German racism unaltered, or claiming that the Italians and the Scandinavians are the same thing.” What is intended, rather, is “to indicate to the Italians a physical and above all psychological model of human race”—and here the balance tilts in favor of the spiritualistic side. “All the work done so far by the regime in Italy is basically racism,” the document goes on to state, so that “it is high time for Italians to openly proclaim themselves racist” and elevate themselves “to an ideal of higher awareness of themselves and of greater responsibility.”

The consequences are then drawn explicitly. A clear-cut distinction must be made between the Mediterranean peoples of Europe (Westerners) and the eastern peoples—the Africans and the Semites. It follows that “the Jews do not belong to the Italian race.” The Jewish nucleus represents the only population in Italy that has never been assimilated precisely because “it is made up of non-European racial elements and displays an absolute difference compared with the elements that gave rise to the Italians.” Therefore, in order to avoid altering “the purely European physical and psychological characteristics of the Italians,” it is necessary to avoid any cross-breeding with races such as the Jewish race, which are bearers of civilizations that are different from that of the “millennial Aryan race.”

Thus the “Manifesto” tilted distinctly towards the biological racism approach, albeit with several confused concessions to the spiritualistic approach. It actually suppressed all reference to the civilization of Rome, which is perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the text. It is not surprising that, in the heated debate that followed (see below), Bottai

stressed this serious omission: “I called Pende to find out what was happening concerning these race issues. An attempt is being made to straighten out the ideas: especially to combine the idea of ‘race’ with the idea of ‘Rome.’”⁵⁷

The first reactions from the Catholic world clearly revealed the prevailing point of view in that milieu. The Jesuits split into those who were favorable and those who were mildly critical. Those favorable were probably influenced by a scientism that has always been an ingredient of the theoretical views of the Society of Jesus. For instance, Father Angelo Brucculeri (a senior member of the Society) praised the “Manifesto” unreservedly, claiming that “while all kinds of vague ideas, gross misunderstandings, and extraordinary idiocies have been accumulated on the concept of race, the Fascist teachers at our universities have condensed into a small number of clear theories the entire content of racism, [and these] do away with the irrational debris on which a certain theory of race has been based and which documents the disarray and decadence of contemporary thought.” Indeed, the claim that the concept of race is purely biological “must be shared by researchers of all schools and beliefs” and refutes one of the main causes of the current confused ideas regarding racist theories.”⁵⁸ By contrast, the Jesuit review *La civiltà cattolica* (always at the forefront of Catholic anti-semitism) sophistically asserted that the “Manifesto” approach could be reconciled with the rejection of Nazi racism: “Those familiar with the tenets of German racism will immediately notice the wide difference between those proposals and the ones by the group of Italian Fascist scholars. It would confirm that Italian Fascism doesn’t wish to be identified with Nazism or German racism, which is intrinsically and explicitly materialistic and anti-Christian.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Giuseppe Bottai, *Diario 1935–1944* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1989), p. 128.

⁵⁸ Angelo Brucculeri S. J., “Razzismo italiano,” *L’avvenire d’Italia* (July 17, 1938).

⁵⁹ *La civiltà cattolica*, No. 2115 (August 6, 1938): 277–78.

Other official Catholic circles perceived a serious problem implied by biological racism: what is the status of Jews who converted to Catholicism? In order to avoid questioning the linchpin of the Church's centuries-old policy regarding the Jews—applying pressure by all possible means, even persecution, to convert them and ultimately cancel out their historical presence—a spiritualist racism appeared to be more appropriate. In any case, the racial measures recommended by the “Manifesto” met with an attitude of benevolent understanding in official Catholic circles and, as the Italian ambassador to the Holy See remarked, “were not unfavorably received in the Vatican.”⁶⁰

Let us now consider the debate that opened up among the leadership of the regime. According to all the evidence, Pende and Visco immediately protested vigorously against the contents of the document, and did so in the presence of the secretary of the PNF, Achille Starace. The dispute was over the biologicistic nature of the document, which ran counter to the “Italian” notion of racism. In early August 1938, Pende sent a telegram to the Duce's private secretary, Sebastiani, requesting the publication of a new race declaration; immediately afterwards he and Visco repeated the request to Mussolini and Alfieri. At the time it seemed that the matter would be settled immediately with a heavy defeat for both of them: Alfieri replied harshly, threatening to squelch any scientific opinion they might express, even those not regarding the race issue, under a blanket of silence in the entire national press. The committee of “Manifesto” signatories was disbanded and Landra was nominated to head the Bureau of Race Research and Propaganda (“Ufficio Razza”), which began its work on August 16, 1938, within Minculpop.

But Pende unhesitatingly repeated the main points of his conception in a speech to the Italian Association for the Advancement of Science (SIPS).⁶¹ In reaction, on September 14, Landra sent Alfieri a report bitterly criticizing the professor and recommending that he be silenced. He also accused Pende of stirring up problems between Fas-

cism and the Church, by implying that the regime was about to take distasteful measures.⁶² Pende replied on October 5, in an article⁶³ in which he forcefully reiterated his point of view, which he claimed to be the official racist theory of Fascism. It should be noted that the issue of the university publication in which the article was published opened with a list of Jewish lecturers teachers who were to be dismissed in the coming days and announced emphatically that the racial question had now become a cornerstone of the regime's policy.

Pende presented a definition of race that characteristically attempted to reconcile the biological with the spiritual idea: “Race is a people's shared biological inheritance, made up of flesh, hearts, and minds, which a people has received from its ancestors over the millennia as a blood inheritance that it must transmit, pure and enhanced, to subsequent generations, otherwise it will be lost.” Pende pointed out that “a number of hasty and superficial and outrageous writers about racism in Italy” had “passed judgments that cannot be approved, neither by the humane sciences nor even by our political authorities.” Above all, these writers have forgotten that they “belong to Roman stock” as well as the existence (“as our Duce was the first to state”) of an “Italian type that is specifically ours, ethnically speaking.” After criticizing as illogical and unscientific the “mythical-romantic,”

⁶⁰ See De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, p. 279. The Catholic daily *L'avvenire d'Italia* remarked that Catholicism never questioned the existence of racial differences but considered that they should be subordinated to the primacy of the spirit (“Il fascismo e il problema della razza,” *L'avvenire d'Italia*, July 15, 1938).

⁶¹ Nicola Pende, “La profilassi delle malattie e anomalie ereditarie,” *Atti della SIPS* (Rome: SIPS, 1939), 6: 63–73.

⁶² For Landra's document, see Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, pp. 370–372.

⁶³ Nicola Pende, “Noi e gli altri nella difesa della razza,” *La vita universitaria* (October 5, 1938), pp. 2–3.

“historical-traditionalist,” and “political-imperialistic” concepts of race, Pende went on to claim that “Fascism, in accordance with human biology and with religious feeling, is of the view that there are no ... superior or inferior races. ... Nothing justifies what the Duce has rightly termed *delirium of race*.” As against the scientific concepts of race and even the “pure and static” anthropological form, Pende favored a “dynamic-synthetic-evolutionary” form: “... for Italy it is quite possible to maintain the existence of a synthetic Italian type: this is the type that Rome forged for many centuries by amalgamating the pre-ethnic Aryo-Italian peoples and molding them into a higher ethnic unity that stands out from the other European Aryans, namely the *Roman-Italian unit*, with its own specific anthropological and psychological features arising, as the Duce was the first to recognize, out of the successful mixing of the different blood lines of the Aryo-Italians and the early Mediterranean peoples of the pre-Roman and Roman age.”

From this theoretical definition (the one “that we Fascists must adopt”) stem the correct methods of Fascist racial eugenics:

Not only is it necessary to maintain our blood line pure from contamination by different races, not only is it necessary to avoid the numerical and qualitative impoverishment of our generations: it is also necessary to ensure ... the breeding and creation of superior beings, the racially elect, the *biological general staff* of the Italian nation. ... *Marriage eugenics* must, in my opinion, follow the motto, *Italians with Italians*: that is, Italians must endeavor to mate among themselves. ... There is no need to add that intermarriage between Italians and peoples who, like the Jews, the Ethiopians, the Arabs, are very distant, above all spiritually, from the Roman-Italian lineage, must be severely prohibited. ... Italy can serenely look forward to its Duce completing the great work of constructing a new unified Italian race by continuing the work of Rome [emphasis added].

We see how the expressions like “purity of blood” and “biological general staff” are watered down by the appeal to spiritual characteristics that represent the distinctive elements of race and, in particular, by the appeal to the civilization of Rome. Several days later Pende reiterated this “spiritualistic” approach in the Duce’s review *Gerarchia*, claiming that “in biological marriage policy there is a clear need to ban marriages with colored races and races that, like the Jews, have nothing to do with Roman stock, and that, *especially as far as the soul is concerned, differ fundamentally from the Roman-Italian spiritual type*.”⁶⁴

Pende’s reaction does not seem to have borne the desired fruits. Alfieri displayed increased hostility to him and Interlandi unleashed a violent attack in *Il Tevere*, accusing him of betraying the regime’s racial policy and practically of aiding and abetting the Jews.⁶⁵

This was a trying moment for Pende, who nevertheless kept his head and mounted a counterattack that swept away his enemies in a few days. He wrote to Alfieri to complain about “the insult unworthy of Fascist ethics” directed against him and his incredulity that the minister could “have authorized its publication” in *Il Tevere*. He demanded peremptorily: “Would you tell the Duce to give instructions to Interlandi to leave me alone.” He also wrote a letter to the Duce’s private secretary, Sebastiani, enclosing a letter addressed to Mussolini. The letter to Mussolini is a masterpiece of both obsequiousness and academic arrogance. Pende demands “full and exemplary justice against the offender” who falsified his “racist ideas,” which, by asserting the principle of “marriages among Italians and only among Italians,” were sanctioned precisely in the racial measures adopted by the Grand Council of Fascism. The strongest and perhaps decisive signal transmitted by Pende to the Duce is the reference to the fact that his racism

⁶⁴ Idem, “La terra, la donna e la razza,” *Gerarchia* (October 1938): 663–669. Italics added.

⁶⁵ Telesio Interlandi, “Canovaccio per commedia,” *Il Tevere* (October 17, 1938), p. 1.

can obtain the blessing of the Vatican: "Father Gemelli told me I had the approval of the authorities on the other bank of the Tiber." He concluded by observing that figures like Interlandi "do more harm to the regime than a thousand Jews together."⁶⁶

At this stage Mussolini came to a decision: he abandoned the supporters of biologicistic and pro-German racism to their fate and decided to give Pende and Visco a free hand, thinking it preferable to leave the scientific management of racism to wily veteran academics. The Duce repaid pro-German racist extremism with the same coin with which he had paid Fascist revolutionary extremism after his seizure of power—by eliminating its more radical proponents and pushing the others into the background. Starace himself was given the job of finding someone who could stand up to Interlandi and bring him back into line. Pende's blitzkrieg, successful, was followed by a period of increasing honors for him. The following November saw approval of his project to set up an Institute of Orthogenesis and Improvement of the Race, accompanied by an Exhibition of Fascist Racial Orthogenesis, as part of the Universal Exhibition that was to be held in Rome in 1942.

In the meantime, Landra continued his activities as head of the Minculpop Race Bureau. A telegram from the Italian embassy in Berlin provides details of a visit he made to Germany, accompanied by Lino Businco, in December 1938.⁶⁷ He was received by his German counterpart, Walter Gross, who showed him around Prof. Eugene Fischer's Anthropological Institute, the Nazi party's Racial Education School, and the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He also had the opportunity of meeting Alfred Rosenberg, Heinrich Himmler, and party secretary Rudolf Hess, and even of being decorated with the Cross of the Order of the German Red Cross, first class, by Adolf Hitler in person. However, the carpet had now been pulled from under him. Sabato Visco had not been idle and had acted silently, as effectively as Pende. He had established confidential links with the new head of Minculpop, Alessandro Pavolini, who was also a representative of

radical Fascism. Even though little is known about what he did in practical terms, the results are eloquent: in February 1939, without a word of explanation, Landra was sacked as head of the Race Bureau and replaced by Visco himself. Landra remained a simple functionary of the Bureau until in September 1940, when, after being accused by Visco of not following his directives, he was dismissed from the Ministry by Pavolini. After receiving several pleading letters from Landra, Mussolini instructed Pavolini to reinstate him in a position that would at least entitle him to receive a salary on which to survive.

The leaders of this victorious group were not, as Interlandi, Landra, and Giovanni Preziosi claimed, Jews in disguise. Indeed, in accordance with the typical style of feuds among currents within a dictatorship, Pende responded with the symmetrical accusation, charging that his opponents had caused more damage than a "thousand Jews together." The winners were rather champions of *another* racism, which they lose no opportunity to cultivate. As head of the Race Bureau, Visco promoted a series of books on racism, beginning with one by Giacomo Acerbo on the "foundations of Fascist racial doctrine,"⁶⁸ which provides a full outline of their views and includes a reaffirmation of the need to "exclude the Jewish minority from executive functions and educational activities." This book aroused an angry counter-reaction from Giovanni Preziosi in *La vita italiana*,⁶⁹ followed by an attack by

⁶⁶ All the documents referred to here are contained in the Pende file in the papers of Mussolini's private secretary (ACS, Segreteria particolare del Duce, Rome) and have been transcribed in Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, Appendix 2, pp. 369–383.

⁶⁷ See De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei*, Appendix 27.

⁶⁸ Giacomo Acerbo, *I fondamenti della dottrina fascista della razza* (Rome: Minculpop, Ufficio Studi e Propaganda sulla Razza, 1940).

⁶⁹ Giacomo Preziosi, "Per la serietà degli studi razziali in Italia," *La vita italiana* (1940): 73–75.

Farinacci that appeared in the same publication. However, these were only marginal and impotent reactions.⁷⁰ The Catholic world had taken the hint and made its choice of camp.⁷¹

The period that followed marked the beginning of a process of gradual correction of the “Manifesto” thesis. This task was entrusted to the Higher Council for Demography and Race (to which only two of the “Manifesto” signatories, Visco and Savorgnan, belonged), which proceeded to draw up a new text that was approved on April 25, 1942. The commission charged with drafting the new text was composed of a group of well-known academics: Raffaele Corso (ethnography), Biagio Pace (ancient Italian archaeology), Antonino Pagliaro (linguistics), Umberto Pierantoni (genetics and biology of race), Giunio Salvi (human anatomy), Sergio Sergi (anthropology), and Arnaldo Fioretti, representing the PNF.

The document delivers a point-by-point criticism of the 1938 “Manifesto.”⁷² It criticizes its definition of race as “naïve,” “illogical” and coincident with that of species; and it underlines the need to establish “the physical and *psychological* characteristics ... in the case of transition from the concept of species to that of race” [emphasis in original]. The distinction between greater and lesser races is rejected, as it would deny the smaller groups any racial characterization and reduce them to variants of the larger races, thus excluding the existence of races such as the “Italian Aryan.” The validity of the statement that race is a biological concept is acknowledged and it is accepted that the transmission of morphological traits, both physiological and psychological, is hereditary, although it is asserted that “these traits can be modified over time by endogenous and exogenous factors so that inheritance may present new traits that enhance or impair the individual.”

The document also attacks the thesis that the Italian population is of Aryan origin, rejecting it as “an unjustified and indemonstrable negation of anthropological, ethnological, and archaeological discoveries” that prove “the exotic influences” of different races on the autoch-

thonous population of the peninsula. It accepts the idea that the alleged large Aryan contribution to the Italian population is a myth, provided that a period exceeding a thousand years is taken into consideration. One must not attribute “to the barbarian invasions any influence on the formation of the Italian race that is actually out of proportion to the number of invaders and their capacity for biological predominance. It has been proven, on the other hand, that the Italians are biologically dominant over all allogenic groups.” Strictly speaking, it is necessary to say that an “Italian race” exists, not a “pure” Italian race; in fact “there are no longer any pure human races on the face of the earth and all scholars agree with this observation.”

The document reacts harshly to the Germanic tone of the “Manifesto,” expressed in the theses that the concept of racism must be Italian and the direction “Aryan-Nordic.” The authors of the “Manifesto” had admitted the need not to subscribe to the postulates of German racism, but they did not explain in what respects the Aryan-Nordic direction differed substantially from German racism. If their idea was to point out to the Italians a model different from the non-European civilizations, it is not clear how this could “raise the Italians to a superior self-awareness,” because the Aryan-Nordic model suggested an “implicit devaluation of the physical and psychological nature of the Italians.” What is dangerous is “to forget that a Mediterranean unity did exist, and became a political reality under Rome.” As for the Jews, they are clearly not racially homogeneous with the Italians. But it is contradictory and senseless to claim that the Semitic race is composed

⁷⁰ Moreover, Landra was sacked by Visco precisely on the charge of having stirred up the campaign against Acerbo’s book, in cahoots with Preziosi.

⁷¹ For instance, the Jesuit Father A. Messineo praised Acerbo’s book enthusiastically (*La civiltà cattolica*, No. 2169 [1940]: 216–9).

⁷² The complete document (ACS, Segreteria particolare del Duce, Rome) can be found in De Felice, *Lo Stato totalitario*, pp. 868–877.

of two groups, an Arab group that has been assimilated and a Jewish that cannot be.

The Council's rewriting of the "Manifesto" was based on a reappraisal of the alleged pre-Aryan stock that was supposed to have given rise to the civilization of Rome, thereby reaffirming the gap between Italian and German-Aryan racism. "It is possible to postulate the existence in Italy, ever since the Upper Paleolithic, of a race that possessed great creative and assimilatory qualities, and whose physical type and specific ethnic and cultural genius were destined to predominate." These were the *Italian proto-Mediterraneans*. The much later influx of Aryan or Aryo-European groups led to interactions with this race, and these had positive effects because of the favorable environment determined by that race. Otherwise it would not be possible "to explain why these groups, which penetrated the rest of Europe, were for many centuries incapable of creating a civilization even remotely comparable with that of our peninsula." Rome was the expression "at once typical and grandiose" of "this close intermingling of ethnos and civilization between the pre-existing populations and the Aryan element that arrived later."

The spiritualistic overtones of Italian racism had now been re-established. The new "Manifesto" waxed lyrical on the subject:

Thus the people of Italy, as they enter the stage of history, have the form of a unified people. This proves that several *superior genetic traits, both physical and psychological, had prevailed in the syncretism of the various elements*, which were nevertheless linked by elective affinities, giving rise to a superior type of human being. To the genetic principles that it expresses *physically*—noble profile, solidity and harmony of the body architecture, always adaptable to varying environmental conditions—and *spiritually*—productive qualities of the mind, clear and immediate perception of reality, heightened ethical sensitivity

and acute political and juridical intuitiveness, creating and shaping systems to regulate society—the Italian race owes its fundamental originality, which it has never lost sight of in the course of the numberless events of its millennial history. ... The ethnic make-up of Italy, the result of this thousand-year long process, became clearly defined when Augustus perfected his administrative system; and even today, nearly two thousand years later, this still represents the essential structure of modern Italy [emphasis in original].

All the attempts made over the centuries to dilute these lofty qualities failed. The barbarian invasions passed "without leaving a trace on this homogeneous granite block of the Italians, tried and tested by Rome." When the invaders' political function ceased, they melted away like snow in the sun, like the Arabs in Sicily. And the Jews? The question is shrugged off in a few words: "*The Jews, an extraneous and naturally disruptive ethnic group, have always been a distinct minority that has not only had no effect on, but has not even come close to affecting, the biological and spiritual unity of the Italian race*" [emphasis added].

The end result is always the same. Here, though, we get there via another theory, which is specific to "spiritualist-Mediterranean" racism.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that this theory offered no substantial advantages with regard to a "scientific" and "rigorous" definition of the concept of "Jew" vis-à-vis the biologicistic definitions. In Germany, on the occasion of the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg in 1935, Hitler had given orders to draw up, in the space of two days, a "law for the protection of German blood and honor." The experts involved spent sleepless nights in the vain attempt to come up with a sensible definition of race in the biological sense and presented a clumsy solution that may be considered an outright "theoretical" defeat of the regime. The different approach followed by Italian racists began by defining as a "Jew" anyone born of Jewish parents—a definition that

was backward-looking and thus defined nothing. After several modifications, the idea adopted was that a “Jew” was anyone who had even a single Jewish parent but professed the Jewish religion or “had in any case displayed manifestations of Judaism.” This sidestepped the difficulty by moving from the objective plane to the subjective plane of a manifestation of identity. Those who insisted on seeking a “scientific” definition of Jewish race were the biologicistic racists à la Landra, who gravitated around *La difesa della razza*. But here, too, the failure is quite glaring. According to a question-and-answer column of December 5, 1939, which dealt with readers’ mail, one of the most complex problems raised in the many letters received by the editor was “how can you tell a Jew from an Italian?” The answer:

It must immediately be acknowledged that anthropology today still has inadequate resources for setting up complete criteria for distinguishing among the different races. However, as is easy to see, this does not mean that such differences do not exist. In order to be considered sufficiently complete, the differential criterion must take into account not only the macroscopic differences but also the less obvious ones such as blood, physiology, etc. In Jews, the following complex of characters are observed most frequently—rather short stature, short brachycephalic skull, curly hair, nose typically shaped like a “six,” fleshy, pronounced lower lip.⁷³

In essence, the failure of any racial theory to define its own object must not be considered surprising, unless the concept of race is believed to have some objective foundation.⁷⁴

I conclude with a few observations regarding the criticism that may be (and in part has been) leveled against the interpretation suggested here. The most common criticism warns against the risk of directly deriving anti-Jewish persecution from the racially oriented currents of

demography and eugenics.⁷⁵ This concern is legitimate; it was precisely in order to avoid any deterministic interpretation that I avoided the metaphor of the “inclined plane” and emphasized the need to take account of multiple factors, which could produce their end result only by acting synergistically. Moreover, it is indeed when we admit that the antisemitic tradition in Italy was weak and was by no means a constituent element of Fascist ideology, and, furthermore, that the choice of anti-Jewish policy was not due to a single exogenous factor, that we must take account of a large number of factors, from which it would be pointless to exclude racial policy. It has been said that in many countries, for instance in Scandinavia, brutal eugenic policies were implemented without giving rise to anti-Jewish policies, indicating that eugenics by itself does not necessarily have a connection with racism.⁷⁶ The second statement is patently false: eugenics is inconceivable without a concept (lacking all objective and scientific basis) such as “race.” It is by definition a racist practice in that it aims at endowing the “fitter” races with better chances of prevailing over those less endowed—to use Francis Galton’s terminology. As far as the first statement is concerned, it merely confirms the inconsistency of an “inclined plane” theory, although it does not represent a refutation of the claim that racist policy can strongly contribute to the creation of a terrain suited to the practice of discrimination against minorities deemed to be undesirable. Italian Fascism was not constitutionally antisemitic. When, however, due to a series of domestic and international factors as here described, it adopted a hostile attitude towards certain minorities (East Africans, Jews), it

⁷³ *La difesa della razza* 2(3) (December 5, 1939).

⁷⁴ Giorgio Israel, *La questione ebraica oggi. I nostri conti con il razzismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002).

⁷⁵ We referred to this criticism in n. 10 above.

⁷⁶ Ernesto Galli Della Loggia, “Razza e fascismo. Il legame ambiguo,” *Il Corriere della Sera* (October 16, 1998), p. 35.

found a powerful theoretical and practical justification in its own racial ideology. The currents of demography and eugenics made a decisive contribution to the creation of such an ideology.⁷⁷

The Effects on the Scientific Community

It lies outside the scope of the present article to give even an approximate account of Fascist racial policy. We shall merely mention a few significant points relevant to our argument.

The enforcement of the racial measures was neither superficial nor lackadaisical. It was supervised by the Central Demographic Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior, which had been transformed into the General Directorate for Demography and Race⁷⁸ (known as “Demorazza”). The new bureau showed itself to be highly zealous and promoted a census of all the Jews in Italy, carried out in record time in September 1938. On the basis of files found in the Central State Archives and in other archives, it is clear that practically all Italian Jews were registered. This centralized registration was accompanied by registration by local police stations in an often incredibly pedantic fashion. Information was collected concerning even the minutest details: these ranged from the (prohibited) presence of servants in the home, to the (prohibited) frequenting of holiday or spa resorts, to lists of publishers who had published books written by Jews, to the (prohibited) ownership of radios, cameras, or animals; and even to control of a passage through the home of Aryans or “illegal” inclusion in the telephone directory.

The thrust of the anti-Jewish racial policy of Fascism is demonstrated above all by the overwhelming nature of the related legislation. The first decree-laws (Sept. 5 and 7, 1938) provided for the exclusion of Jewish students and teachers from all schools, universities, academies, and societies of science, letters, and arts, and deprived naturalized Jews

of foreign extraction of their Italian nationality. The measures referring to schools and universities were combined into a consolidated text (Nov. 15, 1938). On November 17, a first complete and comprehensive law “in defense of the race” was promulgated, together with provisions relating to weddings, obliging the celebrating official to determine the couple’s race and nationality. A definition was also given for the members of the Jewish race, their rights, and those among them who could be “discriminated,” that is, who were entitled to exemption from the racial measures on the grounds of “exceptional” services to the country and Fascism. On November 21, it was declared that Italian citizenship was a precondition for membership in the PNF. December 22 saw the publication of the provision for the retirement and pension system for Jewish military personnel. On February 9, 1939, a large number of enabling regulations were issued, including above all a wide-ranging and complex legislative measure that set limits on the ownership of real estate and of industrial and commercial assets by citizens of the Jewish race. This was followed, on March 27, by a measure setting up the state agency to manage and liquidate Jewish-owned property. On June 29, 1939, a decree was issued to regulate the practice of the liberal professions by Jews. On July 13, provisions covering testamentary matters and rules governing the use of family names were promulgated. I shall not detail a series of other “minor” decrees, culminating in the exclusion of Jews from the entertainment world (April 19, 1942), already observed in practice. If we also take account of the innumerable ministerial and police circulars, it may be said that we are

⁷⁷ On the relationship between eugenics and antisemitism, see also Massimo Ferrari Zumbini, *Le radici del male. L'antisemitismo in Germania: da Bismarck a Hitler* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001).

⁷⁸ The linking of these two terms is a further illuminating indication of the logical connection between the demographic question and the racial question that existed in the Fascist conception.

up against a massive regulatory corpus that had such extensive ramifications in Italian legislation that it took until 1987 to abrogate it completely!⁷⁹

As we have seen, one important and specific feature of the racial policy is that it began in the field of education and culture. The predominantly “cultural” nature of racial policy is confirmed by the establishment, on September 5, 1938, of the Higher Council for Demography and Race, composed almost entirely of university staff, including many well-known scientists. In the meantime, the review *La difesa della razza* had begun publication, enjoying massive financial support (with the participation of several of the largest banks and industries in the country). Its circulation in the universities was imposed in a circular by the minister of national education, Bottai: “I am certain that the universities will fall into line and will work together towards the attainment of the goals that the regime has set itself in order to safeguard the genius of the race.”⁸⁰

Even before the racial laws were promulgated, the zealous minister had initiated a census of Jewish teachers, delivering race determination forms to all school and university authorities. On the eve of the laws’ promulgation, *Il Tevere* and *Vita universitaria* published lists of Jewish university professors and lecturers, demanding that they lose their chairs. *Vita universitaria* also published a list of school textbooks written by Jewish authors, the use of which was to be prohibited. The Italian Jewish community numbered less than 50,000, plus another 10,000 foreign Jews who had been living and working in Italy for many years. Nearly 4,000 of them, including professors, members of the armed forces, public- and private-sector office workers, members of the liberal professions, and businessmen were stripped of all civil rights; about 6,000 students were expelled from schools and universities. Some 174 upper-secondary-school teachers were dismissed, along with 99 full professors—about 7% of all full professors in the country. The disciplines most affected were: medicine, 18; mathe-

matics, physics and chemistry, 17; law, 23; the arts and philosophy, 20. Of course, this disproportion (7% of full professors, when Jews accounted for only 0.1% of the Italian population) sparked the customary attempts to account for the Jewish pre-eminence in culture and science. Some described it as the result of a plot; others, as demonstrating that science had taken a turn for the worse and become an expression of the typically Jewish mindset, inclined towards abstraction and formalized theories far removed from intuition. It should be noted, however, that the clash between “Jewish science” and “Aryan science,” a classic theme in German racism, did not have a strong following in Italy, except in a series of articles published in *La difesa della razza* and *La vita italiana*: its main theorists were Julius Evola and Guido Landra.⁸¹

A rapid perusal of the names of the university professors dismissed gives some idea of the cultural devastation caused by the racial laws.

The Italian school of physics, (the “Via Panisperna boys”), renowned the world over for its pioneering research in nuclear physics, was wiped out. Scientists of the caliber of Bruno Rossi (the founder of cosmic-ray theory), Enrico Fermi (whose wife was Jewish), Emilio Segrè, Ugo Fano, and Eugenio Fubini emigrated to the United States. Franco Rasetti, although an “Aryan,” emigrated to Canada rather than remain in a country responsible for such disgraceful behavior. Giulio Racah moved to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Leo Pincherle

⁷⁹ V. A., *L’abrogazione delle leggi razziali in Italia (1943–1987)* (Rome: Senato della Repubblica, “Problemi e profili del nostro tempo,” 1989).

⁸⁰ Circular of August 6, 1938, ACS Rome, *Ministero dell’Interno, Demorazza*, b. 4, fasc. 5.

⁸¹ See, for instance: Guido Landra, “Scienza,” *La difesa della razza* 2(17) (July 5, 1939): 20–23; Julius Evola, “Gli ebrei e la matematica,” *La difesa della razza* 3(8) (February 5, 1940): 24–28; Arthos, “La scienza ebraica, la relatività e la ‘catarsi demonica,’” *La vita italiana* 28(326) (May 1940): 501–512.

emigrated to England, and Sergio De Benedetti and Bruno Pontecorvo to Paris (the latter ultimately to the USSR).

In mathematics, the quality of the loss was more significant than the actual numbers. The list begins with Vito Volterra, nicknamed “Mr. Italian Science,” and Tullio Levi-Civita, perhaps the greatest Italian mathematician of the time, author of fundamental contributions to the mathematical aspects of relativity theory, and includes Beppo Levi, Guido Fubini (the creator of differential projective geometry), Guido Castelnuovo, and Federigo Enriques (the leaders of the Italian school of algebraic geometry).

Another casualty was the Turin school of biology, founded by the distinguished histologist Giuseppe Levi. In addition to Levi himself, two of his students and future Nobel laureates were lost to Italian science: Salvatore (Salvador Edward) Luria and Rita Levi Montalcini.⁸² The biomedical sciences lost Maurizio Mosé Ascoli, Camillo Artom, Mario Camis, Amedeo Herlitzka, and Mario Donati, the greatest Italian surgeon of the day. Chemistry lost two of its main protagonists in the industrial sector: Giacomo Mario Levi and Giorgio Renato Levi. In the field of statistics, mention must be made of Giorgio Mortara—the only researcher in statistics and demography who could match the prestige of Corrado Gini—and Roberto Bachi, who emigrated to Palestine where he later founded the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. Perhaps the most ironic loss was of several of the regime’s most authoritative theoreticians in the field of “corporative” law: Gino Arias, Giorgio del Vecchio, and Guido Tedeschi (who emigrated to Palestine); as well as the economists Bruno Foà, Gustavo del Vecchio, and Marco Fano. Other distinguished names included the eminent geographer Roberto Almagià—all the maps hanging in schools and offices had to be replaced, because they bore his name—the literary historian Attilio Momigliano, and the philosopher Rodolfo Mondolfo.

Some of the pathways followed by this devastation were quite unexpected. One case in point is that of Tullio Terni, who committed

suicide in 1946 when he was expelled from the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei because of his previous Fascist sympathies. To be considered on a par with dyed-in-the wool Fascists who had had much greater responsibilities—such as the mathematician Francesco Severi, who got his Rome university chair back less than two years after the postwar purges, and the physiologist Sabato Visco, who was actually able to resume his post as dean of the faculty—appeared to him as an even greater infamy than that of 1938.

The “freeing” of such a large number of posts led to an occasionally indecent rush to occupy the vacant chairs. Some Fascist circles did not turn a blind eye to the consequences: how could so many scientists be replaced without lowering the quality of Italian scientific research? There was no unanimity. Some shared the opinion of Sabato Visco who, during a speech to the Chamber of Deputies, claimed that the university had viewed the loss of the Jewish teachers “with the greatest indifference” and had indeed “gained in spiritual unity.” According to Visco, the catastrophic forecasts of certain “right-minded” thinkers had proved groundless.⁸³ In fact, the Fascist review of the University of Rome, *Vita Universitaria*, which gave space to his speech in the wake of the racial laws, had warned that “it will not be easy to fill all the chairs with scientifically well-trained individuals.” It suggested filling the gaps with temporary appointments, because “the intention had not been to expel the anti-Fascists, the old, and the Jews from the Italian universities in order to fill them with the untrained or the merely shrewd.”⁸⁴

This kind of concern did not trouble the Scientific Commission of the Italian Mathematical Union (UMI) in the slightest. Meeting on

⁸² A third future “Aryan” Nobel laureate, Renato Dulbecco, was trained in Levi’s school.

⁸³ See *Vita universitaria* (May 20, 1939).

⁸⁴ “Come coprire i vuoti,” *Vita universitaria* (October 5, 1938).

December 10, 1938, it released the following communiqué, which represents one of the most disgraceful acts of compromise between the world of science and the anti-Jewish racial campaign:

The Scientific Commission of the UMI met on December 10, in a room of the Mathematics Institute of the Royal University of Rome. ... After a friendly exhaustive discussion the following was decided: a representative of UMI will visit H.E. the Minister of National Education and notify him of the Commission's vote against any of the mathematics chairs left vacant as a result of the race-integrity measures being taken away from the mathematical disciplines. ... The Italian school of mathematics, which has gained great renown throughout the scientific world, has practically been created entirely by scientists of Italian (Aryan) race. ... Even after the elimination of several Jewish *cultori*, it retains scientists who, in number and quality, suffice to maintain Italian mathematical science at a very high level in comparison with the situation abroad. It also has teachers whose intense efforts of proselytism to science ensure that the Nation has elements that are worthy to fill all the required posts.⁸⁵

In this ridiculous and brazenfaced document the *pupils* are raised to the rank of “teachers worthy of filling all the necessary posts” and their *teachers* are downgraded to the rank of mere “Jewish *cultori*” (i.e., educated amateurs). The regime rewarded the mathematicians for their zeal by setting up the National Institute of Higher Mathematics (INDAM), the direction of which was entrusted to Francesco Severi, and which was inaugurated in the presence of the Duce himself. At the same time, the National Institute for Applied Computation (INAC) was entrusted to Mauro Picone. The two great Fascist mathematicians vied with each other for the primacy of representing Fascism in

mathematics (and mathematics in Fascism), arguing whether it was preferable and more advisable for Fascist society to follow the “pure” approach (Severi) or the “applied” one (Picone).⁸⁶ There is no doubt that, in a period unfavorable to the creation of basic research agencies, Severi's Institute represented a novelty on the international scientific scene, comparable with only a few other institutions, such as the Institut Henri Poincaré in Paris and the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. In fact, however, the analogy with these institutions is purely formal, for both INAC and INDAM were forced to vegetate in complete isolation from international research. In fact, advanced scientific research had been tending towards an internationalist model for years. Places like the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton were designed to allow international research to flow into them as openly as possible, favoring all kinds of exchanges and interactions. What possible meaning could there be to setting up institutions that were interesting and promising on paper but were actually based on the principles of nationalism, autarky, and rejection of sharing, aimed at asserting the primacy of Italian science and based on racial discrimination to boot? The result could only be provincialism and isolation, with priority given to a narrow nationalistic mentality and the consequent triumph of the mediocre. This is indeed what happened, just as in Germany, where the model that had provided the inspiration for Princeton—the Institute of Mathematics at the University of Göttingen—had been dismantled under the racial laws. Clearly it was untrue that it was easy “to fill the gaps.” Applied to the world of scientific research, the racial policy expressed to an extreme degree an autarkic nationalistic outlook that isolated Italian science

⁸⁵ *Bollettino dell'UMI* (1939), 1:89. See also Carlo Pucci, “L'Unione Matematica Italiana dal 1922 al 1944: documenti e riflessioni,” *Symposia Mathematica* 27 (1986): 187–212.

⁸⁶ On these topics, see Israel, “Mathematics, Fascism, and Racial Policy.”

from international science, locked it up in a “ghetto,” and caused it irreparable harm.⁸⁷

The example of geometry illustrates the situation particularly well. Mention has been made of the “Italian school of geometry,” which enjoyed outstanding prestige the world over for a number of decades and to which many Jewish mathematicians contributed: first Corrado Segre, and then Guido Castelnuovo, Federigo Enriques, Gino Fano, Beniamino Segre, Alessandro Terracini, and many others. In the 1930s the prospects of this school were very dim, for a number of internal reasons that cannot be dealt with here—mainly its inability to open up to the predominant trend towards axiomatics and towards the algebraic and topological approach. There is no doubt that the greatest living representatives of this school, Enriques and Castelnuovo, were the only ones who, together with Severi, could muster sufficient prestige and international relations to cope with this decline. After the dismissal of Enriques and Castelnuovo, Severi adopted a bitterly “autarkic” and defensive attitude towards the trends “imported from abroad” and indeed endeavored to pass this defensive attitude off as the beginning of a rebirth of Italian geometry. The minister of national education, Giuseppe Bottai, although not having a clue about this kind of question, was willing to back up this attitude. He was invited to give the keynote address at the Second UMI Congress in 1940, which the chairman, Luigi Berzolari, had defined as “truly national,” because it was to show “that, even after the departure of the professors of Jewish race, there was no decrease in the scientific production of our country, and indeed it had taken on new life and vigor in the Fascist climate.”⁸⁸ Bottai in turn proclaimed that “Italian mathematics, no longer the monopoly of geometricians from other races, regained its own specific genius and multifaceted nature, as a result of which the Casoratis, the Brioschis, the Bettis, the Cremonas, and the Beltramis shone in the climate of unity of the Fatherland. With the power of the purified and liberated race, it resumes its upward path.”⁸⁹

Only rarely has such a proclamation of resurrection turned out to be nothing but an obituary.

The Jewish Scientists: Integration and Exclusion

In Italy, the phenomenon of scientific emigration did not reach the same mass proportions as in Germany. Since the racial policy of the Fascist regime did not represent a direct threat to life, many Jewish scientists did not emigrate, especially in cases where their advanced age made it

⁸⁷ The episode just described was followed by other, no less serious events. In October 1938, the top echelons of Italian mathematics decided, without any outside request, to replace the only Italian representative on the editorial board of *Zentralblatt für Mathematik*, the principal international journal reviewing mathematical publications and published in Germany: the Jew Tullio Levi-Civita was to be replaced by Enrico Bompiani and Francesco Severi. The *Zentralblatt* had closed one eye concerning the presence on the board of Levi-Civita and Richard Courant, the renowned German Jewish mathematician who had emigrated from Göttingen to the United States some time previously. Clearly, as soon as the issue of the presence of Jewish scientists on the *Zentralblatt* editorial board had been raised, the Nazi authorities could no longer pretend that nothing was wrong. After receiving confirmation of Levi-Civita’s removal, Otto Neugebauer, the editor of *Zentralblatt*, resigned, together with Courant, the American mathematicians O. Veblen and J. D. Tamarkin, the Dane H. Bohr, and the Briton G. H. Hardy. In his letter to the publisher, Julius Springer, Veblen stressed that international scientific solidarity had received a death blow and the remaining links between the world of international mathematical research and German and Italian circles had been cut; the *Zentralblatt* could no longer be considered “a useful scientific undertaking.” For further details, see Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, pp. 324–325.

⁸⁸ See Pucci, “L’Unione Matematica Italiana,” p. 210.

⁸⁹ *Atti del Secondo Congresso dell’Unione Matematica Italiana* (Rome: Cremonese, 1942), p. 5.

more difficult to abandon the established contexts of their lives and face the difficulties involved in starting again in a totally different social and cultural context—what Arthur Koestler, in his *Arrow in the Blue*, called the risks of “misery and aimlessness of permanent exile.”

However, the limited extent of the migratory phenomenon did not alleviate the negative effects of the racial policy. This can be seen if we consider the reinstatement of Jewish university professors after the war. This reinstatement took on a peculiar form: since none of those who had taken their places were removed, the reinstated Jewish professors were assigned new chairs *ad personam*, which lapsed with their deaths. In this way, a category of social “misfits” was created who were readmitted to participation in a university life, the flow of which had practically not been modified vis-à-vis the period prior to the fall of Fascism. The “reinstated” had become extraneous to the new context that had been created, to the organization of the scientific schools, and to the power structure.

A factor that limited the emigration process was related to the peculiar attitude adopted by Italian Jews in the face of the national situation. It has often been said that the attitude of the East European Jews was that of someone who always “has his bags packed,” that is, who is skeptical about the society in which he lives and so strongly expects to be the victim of the umpteenth persecution that he has adopted a natural psychological tendency to be ready to emigrate. This Jew is representative of the true cosmopolitan. This view is essentially similar to that underlying Veblen’s interpretation of the Jewish pre-eminence in culture and science.⁹⁰ According to Veblen, the Jew, insofar as he has realized that his liberation is partial and temporary, and insofar as he has also abandoned the strict observance of religion and the Jewish way of life, takes on a “skeptical, estranged, alienated” mind set. Veblen’s intellectual Jew could be said to be a “wanderer in the intellectual no-man’s land” in that he is both physically and mentally a wanderer in no-man’s land.

The case of Italy shows that Veblen’s theory lacks general validity and that it applies, at best, to some geographic categories of Jews and therefore cannot account for the Jews’ pre-eminence in science and culture. Italian Jews—and, in particular, the cultivated Jews and Jewish scientists—displayed none of the characteristics described by Veblen. Their temperament was neither skeptical nor alienated nor estranged, their attitude towards the country in which they lived was not mistrustful or circumspect, and they did not live with their bags packed.

Indeed, if a country existed in which, at least in the early years of national unity, the process of Jewish emancipation had been successful, it was Italy. The vast majority of Italian Jews had been largely “assimilated” and felt they were Italian citizens in all senses of the word, without envisaging the concept of a dual Italian-Jewish status. Italian Jews were practically all patriotic, often more so than the others, almost as if to show their gratitude for their liberation from segregation in the ghettos and from discrimination. They took part in World War I, suffered their own casualties, and were awarded their medals. Nor did this attitude change substantially with the rise to power of Fascism. A comparatively large number of Jews were Black Shirts; when the regime demanded that state functionaries take an oath of loyalty, only twelve university professors refused to do so, of whom four were Jews.⁹¹ Among the mathematicians, only Volterra refused to take the oath: not Castelnuovo, not Levi-Civita (who was an anti-Fascist), not Enriques (who was a sympathizer with the regime). A comparatively large number of Jewish professors taught “corporative” law and several participated in the drafting of the early stages of the regime’s demographic and eugenic policy. This merely shows that they thought and

⁹⁰ Thorstein Veblen, “The Intellectual Preeminence of Jews in Modern Europe,” *Political Science Quarterly* 29 (1919): 34–43.

⁹¹ See Helmut Goetz, *Der freie Geist und seine Widersacher* (Frankfurt a.M.: Haag & Herchen, 1993).

acted *like ordinary Italians* and that their links with Judaism were often reduced to retaining a family name that indicated their ancient origin.

Of course this attitude was facilitated by the absence of any concrete persecution. The only significant manifestations of antisemitism were those of Catholic origin, although the Church had essentially been pushed to the sidelines of political life and anticlerical currents were strongly represented in the dominant liberalism. As mentioned earlier, the situation changed after the Concordat, which marked the return of Catholic currents to political life and a return to the circulation of antisemitic poisons. Nevertheless, until the end of the 1920s, the situation seemed to be comparatively peaceful. In conclusion, the attitude displayed by Italian Jewish intellectuals was mainly that of assimilated people who were comparatively indifferent to the religious question and divided equally into supporters of the regime and anti-Fascists, more or less like the rest of the Italians. Of course, it is possible to discern a greater proportion of anti-Fascists among Jews, although this does not substantially alter the picture we have given. The Italian Jews' attitude towards Zionism is consistent with this picture, too: support for was of only marginal significance until the pressure of the regime convinced the Jews to turn in that direction. The regime's waving of the banner of Zionism as proof of Jewish duplicity regarding their national conscience was a mere pretext to justify the campaign of persecution.

The evidence proving the Italian sentiments of the Italian Jews was vast and even more widespread in intellectual environments. Here we shall simply note, as a hint of a case study,⁹² the viewpoint of a top-ranking Jewish scientist, the physiologist Giulio Fano, a senator of the Kingdom, one of the internationally best-known and most distinguished figures of Italian science at that time. Fano wrote a book describing his own travel experiences, published just before he died.⁹³ Of particular interest to us is the part dealing with his trip to Palestine, which provides the pretext for a long discussion on the question of Zionism.

Fano adopted a detached attitude to the Jewish question, as though it did not concern him at all. He considered it obvious that "no one believes today that the entire Jewish people can travel back to Palestine, also because the vast majority of Jews would not accept the invitation." He considers himself to be one of these, that is, one of those who would follow the assimilation process to its conclusion: "The rest of Israel, the Jews of the Diaspora, are probably doomed to disappear, to be absorbed by the nations in which they have in many cases been living for centuries and of which they share the respective civilizations, to which they contribute with a patriotic spirit."⁹⁴ He does admit, however, that the Zionist idea cannot be reduced to the creation of homeland for the persecuted, for those excluded from such a patriotic assimilation: "There will always be many Jews who keep the Jewish idea alive." Nevertheless, Fano shows some distrust of Zionism and fears that it could have negative repercussions; that is, it could "allow to persist, and even aggravate, the distressful conditions of the Jews in the nations that persecute them or that tolerate them unwillingly or contemptuously."⁹⁵

"But what does this Zionist Judaism consist of? Is it a religious faith, a philosophic conviction, or an ethical aspiration?" asks Fano. He leaves the answer to a Zionist interlocutor, who tells him that it is something of all these things and none of them in an absolute sense. The historical distinctiveness of Israel has crystallized around considering itself to be "God's people," "election" experienced as a task and not as a privilege, and the conviction of having a moral task to fulfil in the world. This is a feeling, Fano remarks, that "is enough to explain the astonishment and diffidence that not only non-Jews, but also highly

⁹² For more details, see Israel and Nastasi, *Scienza e razza*, pp. 174–176.

⁹³ Giulio Fano, *Un fisiologo intorno al mondo* (Rome: Dante Alighieri, 1929).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

intelligent Jews of noble sentiments feel towards the Zionists.” However, the Zionist goes on to say,

if decadent Europe has any hope of rising again and regaining its hegemony in the world, it can only attain this aim by repudiating national jealousies and taking up the defense of a close-knit brotherhood among the various peoples composing it, taking the prophetic word as the motto of its banner. For this reason Europe is unfair towards the Jews. In them it sees only too often accumulators of money and exploiters of the work of others and does not understand the strength of the fervor of the spiritualism that animates, supports, and drives the various representatives of Judaism and the extent of the contribution, which is considerable when compared to their small number, they bring to the development of letters and those pure sciences that presuppose a complete abstraction of all material interest.⁹⁶

On which Fano comments:

I realized that all discussion would be pointless and I distanced myself from those noble hearts and those fervent minds increasingly convinced of the unbridgeable disproportion between the means available in the present and in the future and the objectives to be attained. ... Obviously legitimate albeit unattainable for those majorities of oppressed and persecuted eastern Jews, although destined to be shattered against the now traditional forms of patriotism so profoundly rooted in the hearts of the majority and better part of the western Jews.⁹⁷

Fano is a typical Italian Jew who reaffirms the ideal of complete integration with the country, despite the multitude of sinister signals indicating its illusory nature. In a slightly pathetic reversal, the Zionist

project is declared “illusory” and “imaginary,” while Jewish assimilation in the advanced European societies is declared to be concrete and realistic. But Fano does not manage to dispel a certain anxiety when he mentions the “malevolent or contemptuous nations” that “persecute” or only “tolerate” Jews. This accounts for much of the drama of Italian Jewry, especially the intelligentsia, who are reluctant to admit that the happy times in which one could be confident of the Jews’ full participation in the life of the nation have passed. Those were the times in which the Jew Vito Volterra—democratic, progressive, and anti-Fascist—could declare, in lyrical tones and even with a touch of actual “Latin racism,” that:

Gentlemen, I come from the center of Latin-ness. The country in which I have spent my life is the very cradle of the Latin people. This landscape and this sky, which over the centuries have witnessed so many important historical events, the very air that one breathes there—all of these enable us to relive a distant past and merge into the great memories, present events, and future dreams. ...

All those here, like me, have faith in this ancient, fertile and vigorous Latin race.

But war has illuminated many facts, many characteristics, and, like all that arouses extraordinary and unexpected emotions, with its terrible lightning bolts, has revealed the true nature of individuals, of peoples, and of things. How our way of judging has changed. How many surprises mankind and nations have reserved for us! Mankind was heroic and was unaware of it. Many of those we believed to be civilized were none other than barbarians and criminals.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 116–119.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 119–120.

It was murmured that the Latin people were ancient, that they had grown old. That they were weak and that in the struggle for existence one day or another they would be doomed to succumb. ... For the group of nations comprising it, the Latin race is now stronger than at any other period in history. It is infinitely more heroic than in the past. ... If the word virtue is given its Latin sense of *virtus*, it is virtue, *virtus*, that is today the characteristic of the Latin race.⁹⁸

We have quoted this passage at length because it comes from the pen of one of the greatest Italian scientists and Jews of the time and shows, more than would be possible any other way, how great was the assimilation of Jews into the national community. Conversely, it reveals the dramatic nature of the gradual marginalization of this community, which reached its peak with the 1938 racial laws. The episode that attests to this drama more than any other was the suicide of the Jewish publisher Angelo Fortunato Formigini, who, after the promulgation of the racial laws, leaped from the Ghirlandina Tower in Modena. The cynical comment of the PNF secretary, Achille Starace, was that “he died like a Jew: he jumped off a tower to save a pistol bullet.”

Concluding Remarks on Veblen's Thesis

In a letter addressed to Ernst Nolte, François Furet wrote:

... the Jews comprise a group of people in the modern world—should I say a people?—particularly drawn toward democratic universalism in its political and philosophical form. There are multiple reasons for this, some relatively clear, others more mysterious. It is easier to understand why the Jews enthusiastically celebrated the egalitarian emancipation of individuals

than to explain their exceptional contribution to the science and literature of Europe in the last two centuries.⁹⁹

In my opinion it is no less difficult to understand why many Jews adhered to democratic universalism than it is to appreciate the exceptional contribution made by Jews to European literature and science. This may actually be considered to be two sides of the same problem. It is no coincidence that Furet talks about the contribution made by Jews to science and literature over the past two centuries. Indeed, although the Jewish presence in science was significant in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, it was never pre-eminent. Pre-eminence may be seen only starting in the nineteenth century and above all in the twentieth century. But the attraction to democratic universalism, too, appeared during the same period—not just for the obvious reason that such a political conception emerged only in the modern age, but because Jews' participation in political and social life was practically nil before the end of the eighteenth century, with only rare exceptions in which it was permitted, such as medieval Spain (at least within certain limits). Hence the Jews' entry into political and social life, predominant adherence to democratic universalism, and success in cultural and scientific life are contemporaneous and interrelated phenomena. The link between them is the process of emancipation initiated by the measures adopted during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic regime.

For the Jews, after centuries of persecution and above all of exclusion from society, the Age of Enlightenment and the great middle-class revolutions of the eighteenth century opened up horizons of redemption and liberation. For the first time, society opened its doors to

⁹⁸ In a speech delivered in 1922 (in French) to the Congress of the Latin Union at the University of Paris (draft, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome, Volterra Archive).

⁹⁹ François Furet and Ernst Nolte, *Fascism and Communism*, trans. Katherine Golsan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), p. 59.

them in the name of reason and of the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. In exchange, of course, the Jews were required to give up their specificity and difference and to merge with the idea of *abstract man*, the subject of the new free society. This society—and it is of fundamental importance to emphasize this aspect—had to be founded on a scientific basis. The enlightened project of the new democratic society aimed to transfer the certainty and rigor of the Newtonian method—which had enjoyed so much success in the study of natural phenomena—to the field of social processes.¹⁰⁰ *Freedom* and *rationality* are two facets of the same view experienced by Jews in the process of emancipation and which they generally accept enthusiastically. The price to be paid, in terms of a loss of identity and alienation from one's own religious, cultural, and social traditions seemed to be low compared to the promises of the paradise whose gates were being opened wide.¹⁰¹

Many Jews were attracted by the “abstract man” ideal and by a society founded on the “citizen,” a figure within which all differences and consequent discriminations were supposed to disappear. We know, too, that the enlightened and revolutionary ideal of the egalitarian reform of society was based on a *scientific view of society* itself; or, more exactly, on the idea that the science of nature could, in terms of concepts, methods, and tools, provide a model on which they founded a rational science of society. Therefore, the entry of Jews into the world of science implied an unconditional acceptance of the rationalist and objectivist view of the world. *Science* represented the cultural context closest to that view of society that promised to do away with the injustice and discrimination of which the Jews had so dramatically been the victims.

Of course the Jews did not approach the world of democracy and of European culture empty-handed, but came with a centuries-old tradition of intellectual practice, even if exercised primarily in the study of Torah, Talmud, and Kabbalah. It must not be overlooked that, be-

cause of the fundamental role attributed to the “word” and to “study,” illiteracy has always been rare among the Jews. Furthermore, the type of textual analysis, based more on the hermeneutic and logical dimension than on history, produced a predisposition for a scientific type of analysis. The secret of the Jews’ “pre-eminence” in science and culture—a topic used so obliquely by modern antisemites in support of their racist theories—must be sought in the convergence of all these aspects. Intellectual and practical energy that had formerly been bottled up or channeled in different directions displayed all its vitality along the path offered by emancipation.

One typical example of what we have observed is the biography of the French mathematician Orly Terquem (1782–1862). Terquem had a very solid grounding in biblical and talmudic studies, which he had pursued assiduously. His biographer Eugène Prouhet tells us that Terquem “had confessed to him that these studies had given him a taste for difficult things. And this is why those parts of mathematics that demanded the strongest mental concentration were always the most attractive to him.”¹⁰² At the same time, however, Terquem had learned to channel these specific faculties in a direction that was quite different from the analysis of the sacred texts. Concerning the Talmud, he wrote that “nothing is more contagious than transcendental folly: the most robust intelligence can come to grief here.” He defined the “exclusive”

¹⁰⁰ See Giorgio Israel and Bruna Ingrao, *The Invisible Hand. Economic Equilibrium in the History of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990, 2000).

¹⁰¹ Gershom Scholem gives us a compelling description of the effects of abandoning some of the more traditional cornerstones of Jewish thinking, in particular of mysticism and the Kabbalah. See Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

¹⁰² Eugène Prouhet, “Notice sur la vie et les travaux d’Orly Terquem,” *Bulletin de bibliographie, d’histoire et biographie mathématiques* 8 (1862): 81–90. I am preparing an article on the Terquem and his work in both scientific and Jewish topics.

study of Talmud as the “most sterile, useless, foolish, inept, and brutalizing” activity.¹⁰³ Terquem was the classical example of the Jew won over to enlightened rationalism who had directed all his analytical capacity to the scientific field. At the same time, he had not rejected his own Jewish identity and had undertaken the task of formulating and championing the principles of a “modernist” reform of Jewish religious practices, which led him into a number of clashes with more orthodox circles.

Although expressed very schematically, what has been said above can provide us with the elements we need to treat the problem of the role of Jews in modern Western society “as a historical question like any other.”¹⁰⁴ Of course, a more profound analysis must involve probing into all the specific situations and grasping all the specific aspects and details. Above all, it must take into account the wide variety of forms in which the hope of a complete emancipation and full participation in European society was frustrated to varying degrees. The different forms into which the attitude of the Jews evolved reflect the different degrees of acceptance by a part of the surrounding culture and society. In this way it is possible to verify whether a thesis like Veblen’s actually reflects a knowledge of a particular type of Jewish experience—above all of that of the Mitteleuropean and Eastern Jews, who were subjected to the harshest of disappointments after the hopes aroused in the early nineteenth century had been dashed. This kind of Jew was particularly widespread among the immigrants who sought refuge in the United States. Veblen’s main error is to have hypostatized this particular figure and to have made it the prototype of the “Jewish mentality” without any further specification.

The case of Italy, in addition to some aspects of specific interest, provides us with perhaps the clearest example of the superficiality of Veblen’s assertions and, at the same time, with confirmation of the value of a historiographic analysis that brings the issue back to the realms of rationality and relinquishes any temptation to give a general definition

of the specific “characteristics” of peoples, groups, or ethnic assemblages, thus providing fresh fuel for theories of a racial nature. The Italian case also teaches us that, however much the concept of race is watered down to that of “ethnic group,” it still leaves us in an extremely dangerous zone in which that “infernal cycle” described by Lévi-Strauss,¹⁰⁵ which is related to the confusion between the biological field and the sociological, psychological, and cultural fields, can be triggered. By refusing to content oneself with speaking of “peoples” and “cultures,” one inevitably ends up by going back to consideration of “races.”

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁰⁴ David A. Hollinger, “Why are Jews,” p. 163.

¹⁰⁵ Lévi-Strauss observed that “once he had made this mistake [the above-mentioned original sin], Gobineau was inevitably committed to the path leading from an honest intellectual error to the unintentional justification of all forms of discrimination and exploitation” (Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History*, p. 5). This is a consideration that befits several theoreticians of Italian racism.