

# Intellectuals and Anti-Fascism: For a Critical Historization

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WE ARE WITNESSING TODAY a paradoxical and unsettling phenomenon: the rise of fascist-inspired political movements in the European arena (from France to Italy, from Belgium to Austria), accompanied, in the heart of intellectual circles, by a massive campaign to denigrate the entire anti-fascist tradition. In Italy, the media presents anti-fascism as being responsible for the catastrophic shifts of the “first Republic”; while the main biographer of Mussolini, Renzo De Felice, has led a battle to overcome the “anti-fascist paradigm,” which is, according to him, the major defect of post-war historiography.[1] In Germany, since the reunification, the appellative “anti-fascist” is used as an insult, in more or less deliberately forgetting all that anti-fascism represented, for the German exile and for the struggle against Hitler’s regime, before it was transformed into the state ideology of the German Democratic Republic.[2]

In France, the campaign against anti-fascism was launched a few years ago by Annie Kriegel’s article in *Commentaire*. [3] It experienced its lowest moment during the publication of a vile pamphlet that tried to present Jean Moulin as a Soviet spy, [4] and its crowning moment, on a much higher cultural plane, with François Furet’s *Le passé d’une illusion*, a book in which anti-fascism is reduced to a giant enterprise of mystification that allowed Soviet totalitarianism to extend its influence over Western culture. [5]

What is at stake is important: what remains of the intellectuals’ anti-fascist involvement? Can we, today, call ourselves anti-fascists? Those who are convinced, as I am, of the historical value and of the political relevance of anti-fascism, and thus of the necessity to fight a harmful form of revisionism, cannot allow themselves to answer these questions by hiding behind an apologetic idealization of the past. One would be tempted to respond that, by ridding oneself of anti-fascism, one risks effacing the only decent face that Italy was able to put on between 1922 and 1945, Germany between 1933 and 1945, France between 1940 and 1944, Spain and Portugal for almost forty years. But, although necessary, this answer is not enough. To defend anti-fascism as an “exemplary” memory, in the noblest sense of the word, and as a still-living lesson of the past, one must proceed to its critical historization, by grasping the weaknesses and limits that often go hand-in-hand with its greatness. And to understand the intellectuals’ relationship to anti-fascism, one must delve deep into the sources of their involvement.

One of George Orwell’s last essays, “Writers and Leviathan,” is devoted to the relationship that took shape in Europe during the 1930s between intellectuals and politics. In it, he emphasizes (starting for the most part from an autobiographical reflection) the almost inevitable nature of the irruption of politics into culture. Writers were no longer able to shut themselves up in a universe of aesthetic values, sheltered from the conflicts that were tearing apart the old world. “No one, now, could devote himself to literature as single-mindedly as Joyce or Henry James,” he wrote. [6] The same reckoning had already been made, a dozen years earlier, just before the war, by Walter Benjamin, who affirmed the necessity of contrasting the politicization of art and culture — and the involvement of artists and intellectuals — with the aesthetization of politics implemented by fascism:

*Fiat ars, pereat mundus*: that’s the word of command of fascism, which, as Marinetti recognizes, expects from war the artistic satisfaction of a sensory perception altered by technology. That is obviously the perfect realization of art for art’s sake. During Homer’s

time, humanity made itself a spectacle for the gods of Olympus; now it has made itself its own spectacle. It has become alien enough to itself to succeed in living its own destruction like some aesthetic enjoyment of the first order. That is the kind of aesthetization of politics practiced by fascism. Communism's response is to politicize art.[7]

In other words, the intellectual had to "stick his neck out," to scrape against the asperities of the present, to become in his way "militant" if he did not want to stagnate like a fossil, like an anachronistic and useless figure of the man of letters living outside his time.

### **Intellectual Mobilization**

THE NOTION OF THE "INTELLECTUAL," which definitively enters Western vocabulary during the Dreyfus affair, designates precisely that mutual interference between literature and politics that will profoundly mark the entire history of the twentieth century. Of course, this figure does not lack illustrious precedents, from the philosophers of the Enlightenment to the revolutions of 1848, in which a number of men of letters participated. But it is only with the turn of the century that this phenomenon takes on new dimensions, till it becomes, during the period between the two wars, a major aspect of European and Western culture. In *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (*La Trahison des clercs*), Julien Benda tried to capture this image of the engaged man of letters with an ideal-typical definition: "men whose function is that of defending eternal and disinterested values, like justice and reason." [8]

Upon close inspection, though, intellectuals' entry into politics was not always based on these values. Already the Dreyfus affair was an intellectuals' dispute: Maurice Barrès against Emile Zola, Edouard Drumont against Bernard-Lazare. In other words, nationalism against universalism, anti-Semitism against equality, militarism against the republic. During the 1920s and 1930s, these conflicts were to become more pronounced: besides the intellectuals who mobilized to defend democracy, there were others who worked to destroy it. A large part of European culture adhered to values that contradict those of the revolutionary tradition of 1789. Nationalism, anti-Semitism, the "conservative revolution," anti-democratic elitism and fascism all exercised a considerable attraction on a great number of intellectuals in Italy, in France, in Germany, and even in a traditional seat of liberalism like England.[9] One often tends to forget them, out of a kind of retrospective overlap that hides the fact that Gramsci became a central figure of Italian culture only after the war and the fall of fascism, that Maurras and Drieu la Rochelle were just as influential, in France in the 1930s, as Malraux and Gide, and that, under the Weimar Republic, Ernst Jünger was just as famous as Erich Maria Remarque, and Oswald Spengler was much more widely read than Walter Benjamin or Ernst Bloch.

A literary prefiguration of this dichotomy — the democratic, rationalistic, anti-fascist intellectual on the one hand, on the other the romantic and apocalyptic nihilist, rebelling against modernity — was portrayed by Thomas Mann, in the beginning of the 1920s, in *The Magic Mountain*. The two heroes of this novel, Settembrini and Naphta, have been interpreted as the two souls of the author, who had published, at the close of WWI, a manifesto of the "conservative revolution" under the title *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, and who was to go on to embody the democratic consciousness of his country when, exiled in the United States, he launched his "Summons to the Germans" (broadcast by the BBC) to denounce the crimes of National Socialism. Others have seen in it a literary transfiguration of the dialogue that Mann had begun with his brother Heinrich, whose philosophy is close to Settembrini's humanist positivism. More recently, this novelistic conflict, set by the author in the heart of the Swiss Alps, on the eve of WWI, has been evoked as the prefiguration of another famous philosophical dispute, this time entirely real, that took place in Davos, in 1929,

between the last representative of the German *Aufklärung*, the Neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer, and Martin Heidegger, the young author of *Being and Time*, founder of a new form of political ontology that would lead him, a few years later, to accept the Nazi regime.[10]

The parabola of the European intelligentsia of the interwar period unfolds between these two philosophical and political poles, ones that are indeed opposite, but not always without shared viewpoints. Some critics have even formulated the hypothesis that the portrayal of the nihilist Naphta was inspired in Thomas Mann by the young Georg Lukács, author of *Soul and Form*, who was attracted, near the end of the war, by Communism to the point of becoming, in 1919, People's Commissar in the Ministry of Education in the ephemeral Hungarian Soviet Republic led by Bela Kun.[11] As a romantic, Naphta is a kind of two-headed Janus, one conservative, even reactionary, the other revolutionary. This metaphorical figure serves here to remind us that many of the intellectuals — often Jewish and anti-fascist — who were destined to play a considerable role in the revitalization of post-war political philosophy were themselves students of Heidegger. One has merely to think of Hannah Arendt and Hans Jonas, or even of the Marxists Herbert Marcuse and Günther Anders. The fact is that, during the 1930s, Naphta had to choose: his rejection of *Zivilisation* could shelter either in the teutonic mythologies cultivated by National Socialism, to the point of accepting the mysticism of blood and soil, or in the radical criticism of the face of modernity embodied by fascism.[12]

If the “engaged” intellectual, the rebellious humanist portrayed by Benda “*situated in his time*,” according to the definition Sartre will give of him a few years later — is far from taking up all the terrain during the first half of the century, he will nonetheless experience a considerable increase in popularity during the thirties. The great turningpoint that marks the political involvement of the intellectuals is not 1917, the October revolution, but 1933, when Hitler came to power in Germany. This engagement often coincides, it is true, with their entry into the magnetic field of Communism, which however does not constitute the point of departure but only the result of their radicalization. In 1917, John Reed, for whom the Russian Soviets were going to “shake the world,” remains an exception. In 1934, on the other hand, Heinrich Mann is far from being isolated when he publishes *Hatred*. At the end of the First World War, Louis Aragon, the future eulogist of Stalin and official poet of French Communism, had reduced the October Revolution to a simple “ministerial crisis.” No one could react with the same offhandedness faced with Nazism. After 1933, the anti-fascist involvement of intellectuals was to be massive. It would lead many of those who had remained indifferent or who had not hidden their skepticism when faced with the workers’ uprisings in Turin, Berlin and Budapest in 1919-1920, to approach the Soviet Union, perceived as a rampart against the rise of the brown plague in Europe.

### **Anti-Fascism in Exile**

THIS ANTI-FASCIST MOBILIZATION would be marked, between 1935 and 1937, by two international conferences in defense of culture: the first was held in Paris, the second in Valencia, in republican Spain, in which some of the most significant cultural figures of the time participated.[13] It would reach its peak during the Spanish Civil War, when defense of the Republic came to be identified with the defense of European culture. Numerous writers enrolled in the international brigades or went to Spain to support the Republic, from George Orwell to Ernest Hemingway, from André Malraux to Arthur Koestler, from W.H. Auden to Stephen Spender, from Benjamin Péret to Octavio Paz. The alliance between the anti-fascist intelligentsia and communism would be sustained for a long time, weakened by the Russo-German pact of 1939, then renewed in 1941 and sealed by the resistance. In 1945, European culture was, to a great extent, set under the banner of anti-fascism.

Several elements were at the source of this political turning point for the intellectuals.[14] First of all, Hitler’s rise to power in Germany — followed a year later by the clerical-fascist coup d’état of

Dolfuss in Austria, then by Franco's *pronunciamiento* in Spain — was experienced as a real trauma. Though Italian fascism remained a national phenomenon, isolated, unknown and misunderstood, which could even win over an important sector of Italian culture, from D'Annunzio to Gentile, and even of its avant-garde (the Futurists), the advent of National Socialism to Germany suddenly gave fascism a European dimension, by making it look like a terrible threat, not just for the worker's movement but, more generally, for democracy and culture throughout the continent. This threat was not limited to the political sphere, for it seemed to call civilization itself into question. One had only to listen to the declarations of Nazi leaders to understand that the inheritance of the Enlightenment was in danger: Goebbels did in fact announce that "the year 1789 will be crossed out of history." [15]

Anti-fascism was also identified with the struggle for peace, in a continent where the wounds from the First World War were still open, and where the political balances seemed increasingly more precarious. The Italian attack on Ethiopia, the re-militarization of the Rhineland, the war in Spain, the Sino-Japanese war, then Munich and finally a new war: this escalation aroused an increasing anxiety whose echo was felt in art and culture. Last but not least, fascism had made intellectuals one of its favorite targets, as attested by the thousands of writers, journalists, scientists, academics and artists forced to emigrate. The anti-fascist culture was also, to a very great extent, a culture of exile. Its unity was cemented by a crowd of outcasts wandering from one country to another, from one continent to another, like the ambassadors of a humanist Europe threatened with annihilation. Anti-fascism also expressed itself thanks to a pleiad of German-language journals published in Paris, London, Prague, Zurich, Amsterdam, Moscow and New York by exiles from Central Europe, most of them Jewish. All these intellectuals, Peter Gay has written, contributed to giving to the spirit of Weimar "its true home: exile." [16]

Many critics have emphasized the limits of this anti-fascist involvement, often as generous as it was blind. It wasn't just the "organic" intellectuals and the fellow-travelers of Communist groups that refused to see the tyrannical aspects of Stalinism. André Gide's *Return from the USSR*, George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, Victor Serge's *Midnight in the Century*, and Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, all published between 1936 and 1940, are exceptions, unnoticed upon their publication or soon forgotten — like Gide's book — after an ephemeral sensation. The general tone of anti-fascism with regard to the Soviet regime was rather one of a certain complacency, if not of an uncritical admiration. During the Paris Congress of 1935, Magdeline Paz and Henri Poulaille found it difficult to present an appeal in favor of the libertarian writer Victor Serge, deported to Siberia. [17] With regard to the USSR, the dominant attitude was not that of Gide or Orwell, but of the Fabian socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb, two intellectuals fundamentally foreign to Communism by tradition, culture, and temperament, who nonetheless published *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization* (1935); or of the German writer Lion Feuchtwanger, who was present at the Moscow trials and who approved of them enthusiastically in *Moscow 1937*.

But one did not necessarily have to convert to the cult of Stalin, after 1933, to defend the USSR. Anti-fascism cannot be reduced to a simple variation of Soviet Communism. In *The Passing of an Illusion*, on the other hand, François Furet stigmatizes "the completely negative idea of 'anti-fascism'" as product of the "great Comintern turning point of 1935," with which, thanks to a clever mystification, Russian totalitarianism is supposed to have disguised itself as a herald of democracy. [18]

This thesis simplifies historical reality for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it erases all the non- and even anti-Stalinist tendencies acting in the heart of anti-fascist culture; on the other, it seems to ignore the fact that, in western Europe, one could not fight fascism by opposing or doing without the support of the Communists and of the Soviet Union. To ignore these facts can lead only to dangerous detours, as a lucid figure of liberal anti-fascism, Norberto Bobbio, recently pointed out: "Over these last years of historic revisionism, I have come to note with bitterness that the rejection

of anti-fascism in the name of anti-communism has often led to another form of equidistance that seems to me abominable: the one between fascism and anti-fascism.”[19]

The turning point of the Comintern, in 1935, did not determine but fitted into a turning point that had already begun, in the worker’s movement as well as in the intellectual world, in 1933. In France, the first appeal for unity of action against fascism followed by a few days the riots of February 6, 1934. It is signed by the Surrealists (André Breton, René Crevel and Paul éluard) and by writers attracted to Communism like Jean-Richard Bloch and André Malraux. A few days later, a similar appeal launched by the philosopher Alain and the ethnologists Paul Rivet and Paul Langevin, obtained several thousand signatures in a few months. A *Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes* (CVIA)[20] thus took shape. In short, far from constituting a subproduct, the anti-fascism of the intellectuals precedes the adoption of a policy of the Popular Front by the Communist Party and the SFIO (*Section française de l’internationale ouvrière*).

The alliance between the representatives of European culture and Communism is the product of fascism. The inability or unwillingness to see the true face of Stalinism is all the more intensified when the threat of fascism is great, immediate, terrible. Rare, in Europe, were any anti-fascists ready to denounce Stalin’s crimes, or who understood that though the Communists were allies in the struggle against fascism, their policies should not be supported, and that the anti-fascist struggle itself risks being vitiated if one passes over in silence Soviet despotism, the trials, the summary executions, the deportations, the camps (to say nothing of forced collectivization, ignored at the time even by the most virulent anti-Communist literature). That was the course followed by the Surrealists who, in 1936, denounced the Moscow trial as “an abject police production,” and by the intellectual milieu that had gathered in New York around the *Partisan Review*, over which Trotsky exercised a certain influence, and which supported an investigating committee, presided over by John Dewey, that aimed to unmask these show trials.[21] We could add the names of Communist intellectuals who broke with Stalinism, from Paul Nizan to Manes Sperber, from Arthur Koestler to Willy Münzenberg.

During his intervention at the Congress for the Freedom of Culture, in 1935, the Italian anti-fascist Gaetano Salvemini, exiled at the time in the United States, very explicitly expressed his reservations with regard to Stalinism, and thus aroused, as Breton had before him, the disapproval of a large part of the public: “I would not have the right to protest against the Gestapo and the fascist Ovra,” he asserted, “if I tried to forget that a Soviet police-court policy exists. In Germany there are concentration camps, in Italy there are islands transformed into places of detention, and in Soviet Russia there is Siberia.”[22]

In addition, the theory of totalitarianism (putting Stalin’s Russia and Hitler’s Germany side by side, like two forms of a new absolutism), whose first formulations were elaborated by some ex-Communist essayists (Franz Borkenau) or conservative-liberals (Eric Voegelin and Waldemar Gurian, then Friedrich Hayek and others) was perceived much more as the sign of a retreat of intellectuals towards an attitude of skeptical passivity and impotent pessimism than as an example of a more effective and lucid involvement. The theoreticians of totalitarianism did indeed grasp the despotic nature of Stalin’s regime, but the logical conclusion implicit in their thesis — the impossibility of an alliance with the USSR — became, after 1941, completely unreal. They themselves, beginning with Raymond Aron, refused to draw such a conclusion. Not until the beginning of the Cold War could the concept of totalitarianism be legitimized within the political culture of the western world in order to defend the “free world” against Soviet communism. But during World War II, such an attitude could never have been accepted.

This infernal dialectics between fascism and Stalinism explains to a great extent, without justifying it, the silence of many intellectuals about the crimes of Stalinism. First the threat of fascism, and

then the immense prestige and historical legitimacy acquired by the USSR during the Second World War, led a considerable part of western culture to ignore, underestimate, exculpate and even legitimize the Soviet regime. The examples cited above of the Surrealists, of the New York intellectuals and of other independent socialists prove that it was possible to be both anti-fascist and anti-Stalin, and that the fascination exercised at the time by Stalinism on the anti-fascist intelligentsia was not irresistible.

Furet, on the other hand, contrasts the beneficial virtues of a liberalism historically innocent and politically clairvoyant, a true antithesis of totalitarianisms, with the anti-fascism of the intellectuals. His vision of anti-fascism is as unilateral as his apology for liberalism is ahistorical. One of the conditions for the political radicalization and the adherence of intellectuals to Communism, in the context of economic depression and the rise of fascism, resides precisely in the historical crisis of classical liberalism. Left shaken and weakened by the First World War as well as undermined by nationalist pressures, liberal-conservative institutions were fundamentally incapable of opposing fascism. If fascism had been begotten by the collapse of the old liberal-conservative order, how could one identify with this order to fight its monstrous progeny?

If fascism buried liberal democracy, it did so by attacking first the left, the worker's movement, then the Jews and other "anti-national elements," not by calling into question the traditional elite that had established its power in the framework of liberal institutions. Can we forget the adherence to fascism of all the pillars of Italian conservative liberalism: the monarchy, the bourgeoisie and even a considerable part of intellectual society (Vilfredo Pareto and Giovanni Gentile, even including, until 1925, Benedetto Croce)? Can we forget Winston Churchill's praise of Mussolini? Can we forget the thoroughness with which, between 1930 and 1933, the Prussian elite rid themselves of their façade of liberalism and dismantled the democracy of Weimar while preparing for Hitler's accession? In such a context, in western Europe, the USSR seemed much more apt to block fascism than the traditional forces of a deliquescent liberalism.[23]

Of course, we can reproach the intellectuals who upheld the myth of the USSR with having lied to themselves and contributed to deceiving the anti-fascist movement, whose critical conscience they could have respected instead of making themselves the propagandists of a despotic regime. But we can be certain that no mass mobilization against the Nazi threat could have come into being under the guidance of the old conservative politicians.

The struggle against fascism needed a hope, a liberating and universal message that the land of the 1917 revolution seemed to offer. If a totalitarian dictatorship like Stalin's could embody these values in the eyes of millions of men and women — that is indeed the tragedy of Communism in the twentieth century — it is precisely because its nature and its origins were profoundly different from those of fascism. That is what liberal anti-totalitarianism seems fundamentally incapable of understanding.

### **Anti-Fascism and Anti-Semitism**

WHAT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO FATHOM, however, is the silence of anti-fascist intellectuals faced with another chasm in the twentieth century, Auschwitz. The genocide of the Jews in Europe — an extermination that was meant to be total, with no exceptions — was not foreseeable. Many historians are inclined to think, rather, that Hitler was not acting according to a carefully-laid strategy, and that his radical anti-Semitism came to be transformed into a genocidal plan only in the terrible conditions of the war in the East, which was a war of conquest and annihilation. The fact remains that, from 1933 onward, a heavy threat weighed on the Jews, even if no one could yet grasp its catastrophic outcome. The emigration of about 400,000 Jews from central Europe, between Hitler's accession to power and the outbreak of the war, revealed the gravity of this threat in an

unquestionable way.

Yet all through the 1930s anti-Semitism was never perceived by anti-fascist intellectuals as one of the founding elements, even as the “central issue” of the Nazi system, but rather as the simple propagandist corollary of a regime that had chosen for its enemies democracy, liberalism, Marxism and the worker’s movement, the crushing of which had moreover been one of its first steps, if not its very conditions for existence. Few intellectuals had the clairvoyance of Gershon Scholem who, three months after Hitler’s coming into power, wrote from Palestine to his friend Walter Benjamin, exiled in France, a letter in which he defined the advent of Nazism as “a catastrophe of a worldwide historical dimension”: “The proportions of the defeat of the socialist and Communist movements in our eyes take on a sinister and unsettling aspect,” he wrote, “but the defeat of German Judaism truly beggars comparison.”[24] In another letter to Benjamin, in February 1940, Scholem posed the crucial question: “what will happen to Europe after the elimination of the Jews?”[25]

Just after the war, the final solution appeared as just one of its tragic pages among many others, and occupied only a marginal place in intellectual discourse. The dominant attitude was that of silence. Auschwitz was neither the Dreyfus affair nor the Spanish Civil War, nor was it Vietnam, events that triggered intellectuals’ debate and to which they reacted by taking on their “responsibilities.” Sartre’s *Réflexions sur la question juive* [translated by George J. Becker as *Anti-Semite and Jew*], published in 1946, is a revealing example of this “blindness of scholars” faced with Auschwitz. Sartre designates the Jews as the forgotten victims of the war, but he never places their genocide in the center of his thinking. Even after the Nazi extermination camps, in his eyes the “Jewish question” remains the French anti-Semitism of the Dreyfus Affair and of the Third Republic. This famous essay, in which the gas chambers are scarcely mentioned, and then in a completely marginal way, could easily be interpreted as the most significant testimony to the blindness of European culture facing one of the greatest tragedies of the century. But Sartre’s example is far from unique.[26]

This blindness had of course profound causes, stemming as much from the general context of the war — despite its specificities, the suffering of the Jews formed part of a huge massacre that spared almost no nation, and its visibility was reduced in a continent in ruins — as from an older lack of understanding of the nature of Nazi anti-Semitism, which was thought of as an obscurantist and medieval holdover, not as a form of reactionary modernism. It was, according to a stereotype that dated back to the socialist culture of the nineteenth century, “the socialism of fools,” that is to say a simple propaganda weapon. An industrial and bureaucratic genocide was an absolute novelty whose possibility was not reckoned in the categories of anti-fascist culture.[27]

Under Mussolini’s and Hitler’s regimes, the latter retained only its “regressive” and purely negative characteristics: anti-liberalism, anti-communism, anti-individualism, anti-parliamentarianism, anti-rationalism. Fascism is thus reduced exclusively to its reactionary aspect. Rare are those who discern the roots of fascist movements in industrial society, in the mobilization of the masses, in the cult of technology — those, in short, who recognize fascism as a reactionary variation of modernity. There is nothing more puzzling, on the ideological level, than fascist movements, a nebulous assemblage in which conservatism and eugenics, futurism and neoclassicism, cultural pessimism and “conservative revolution,” spiritualism and anti-Semitism, regressive romanticism and technocratic totalitarianism all cohabit; in other words, an eclectic magma where we find Georges Valois and Alfred Rosenberg, Filippo T. Marinetti and Arno Brecker, Julius Evola and Albert Speer, Oswald Spengler and Ernst Jünger, Giovanni Gentile and Carl Schmitt.

This jumble of contradictory sensibilities hid the nature of fascisms as “revolutionary” regimes, whose rejection of liberal and democratic modernity aimed not for a return to a bygone era but to the establishment of a new order, hierarchical, authoritarian, non-egalitarian, nationalistic, even

racial, but not backward-looking: fascist mysticism is biologized, its cult of technology aestheticized, its scorn for democracy founded on the mobilization of the masses, and its rejection of individualism proclaimed in the name of a "community of the people," sealed by war.

It is impossible, however, to grasp the modernity of fascism on the basis of a philosophy of history postulating the evolution of humanity toward the ineluctable triumph of reason. An important characteristic of anti-fascism, which helps to explain its complacency with respect to Stalinism as well as its blindness before the genocide of the Jews, lies in its stubborn defense of the idea of progress, one of the great categories inherited from the European culture of the nineteenth century. "Men and women of the resistance," wrote James D. Wilkinson in *The Intellectual Resistance in Europe*, "resemble their spiritual ancestors of the eighteenth century, the philosophers." [28] The plethora of journals that appear or are revived in 1945 — *Esprit*, *Les Temps modernes*, *Critique* in France, *Der Ruf* and *Der Anfang* in Germany, *Il Ponte*, *Belfagor* and *Nuovo Politecnico* in Italy — claim explicitly to follow this humanist rationalism embodied by Lessing, Voltaire and Cattaneo. The return to liberty and democracy is experienced as a new triumph of the Enlightenment, of reason and law, which makes fascism seem a parenthesis to history, an ephemeral regression, an anachronistic and absurd relapse into an ancestral barbarism, a failed attempt to stop the march of humanity toward peace and progress.

In this climate of confidence in the future, in which history seems finally reinstalled on its natural tracks, no one worries about the survivors of the Nazi extermination camps. No one wants to listen to their story, and Primo Levi encountered the greatest difficulties when he tried to publish *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This Is a Man*, published in America as *Survival in Auschwitz*), which was rejected in 1947 by Einaudi, the most prestigious of the anti-fascist publishing houses in Italy. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, profited from the price it had to pay to conquer the Third Reich. The struggle for progress was identified with the fight to defend the fatherland of socialism. The spirit of the time had been anticipated, on the eve of the war by the philosopher Alexandre Kojève, who, during a conversation with Roger Caillois, thought he saw in Stalin, as Hegel before had seen in Napoleon in Jena, the Spirit of the world, the man of the end of History. [29]

For Theodor Adorno, however, National Socialism was a refutation of Hegel's philosophy of history. In 1944, he in turn believed he had encountered the spirit of the world (*Weltgeist*), not on horseback, or in the form of a Soviet tank, but in the Hitlerian V-2s, the robot bombs which, following the example of fascism, "combine a total blindness with the most advanced technical perfection." [30] Adorno's philosophical position is the same as the Frankfurt School, which brings together one of the most significant movements of German anti-fascist exile. Jews without a country and "without attachments," its leaders participated in the anti-fascist movement while still remaining at its fringes, aware that, despite its defeat, Nazism had already changed the face of the century and the image of mankind. The feeling of a definitive annihilation, that of the Jewish world of central Europe, permeates the writings of the Judeo-German intelligentsia in exile. Auschwitz seemed to them a caesura in history, like "a quasi-total rupture," Hannah Arendt writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, "in the uninterrupted flow of western history as man had known it for more than two millennia." [31]

For the intellectuals of the Frankfurt School, recognition of Auschwitz as a rupture in civilization is inseparable from a radical calling into question of the idea of progress. If Nazism tried to erase the humanist inheritance of the Enlightenment, it must also be understood, dialectically, as a product of western civilization itself, with its technological and instrumental rationality henceforth free of any emancipatory aim and reduced to a plan of domination. In this perspective, Auschwitz can be apprehended neither as "regression" nor as parenthesis, but rather as an authentic product of the west, as the emergence of its destructive face. In 1944, Horkheimer and Adorno perceive Auschwitz as the symbol of a "self-destruction of reason." [32] Exiled to the United States, Günther Anders was



one of the first, along with Albert Camus and Georges Bataille in France, to consider Hiroshima as the founding event of a new era in which humanity is irrevocably in a position to self-destruct.[33] Far from celebrating a new triumph of the Enlightenment, these isolated figures cannot think of the war as a victorious epic of progress. Before the spectacle of a civilization that transformed modern technology into a “fetish of decadence” (Benjamin), the only feeling possible is shame, a “Promethean shame” (Anders) as great as the extent of the disaster.

### The Balance Sheet

IF ONE WANTED TO DRAW UP a critical balance-sheet of the anti-fascist involvement of intellectuals during the 1930s and 1940s, it is this fundamentally pessimistic way of thinking, quite marginal in the European culture into which it introduces a dialectical, melancholic and desperate dissonance, that seems to me the most interesting and lucid one today. The profundity of these intellectuals’ gaze stemmed also from their isolation, the price of which was an almost complete invisibility and powerlessness, which could only accentuate their despair.

This lucidity, favored by exile, presupposed a detachment, a critical distancing, which was not granted to those who, in Europe, were involved in the struggle. Here, where the anti-fascist fight was identified with hope for a new world, the intellectuals’ state of mind was different. Indeed, in this fight they were neither the most numerous nor the most generous. The partisans’ guerilla warfare — need we be reminded? — was made up of proletarians, rarely of writers. Among the latter, some chose collaboration, others opted for different forms, more or less comfortable, of “adaptation,”[34] but their participation in anti-fascist resistance was not negligible. They indeed were the ones who shaped the culture of the resistance, who wrote for its press, who gave it its color and its style. For a little while, they truly embodied, in the eyes of the world, the universal values of justice and reason that Benda had spoken of fifteen years earlier. That is why the memory of those who chose to fight against fascism, with their pens and often with weapons, should be preserved. It is also thanks to thousands of intellectuals, Communist or not, anonymous or famous, who were shot, who died in combat, in a prison or concentration camp, if the air we breathe today is freer than that of the Europe that swallowed them up.

If we do not think of democracy as a simple procedural norm — according to the vision of Hans Kelsen and Norberto Bobbio — but as an *historical* conquest, we should deduce from this that it is impossible to be democratic, at this end of the twentieth century, without being at the same time anti-fascist. A “non-anti-fascist” democracy would be fragile indeed, a luxury that continental Europe, which was well acquainted with Hitler, Mussolini and Franco, cannot allow itself.[35] That is a lesson that the history of the intellectual anti-fascist resistance should have taught us, clearly and definitively.

Translated from the French by Charlotte Mandell

### Footnotes

1. See Renzo De Felice, *Rosso e nero* (Turin: Baldini & Castoldi, 1995).
2. In its editorial dated July 22, 1991, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote that “there is no anti-fascism that is not guilty” and declared the 1990s a new era of “anti-anti-fascism” (cf. Wolfgang Schneider, “Deutschland erwacht,” *Konkret*, 1991, No. 10, pp. 30-34). See also Antonia Grünberg, *Antifaschismus: Ein deutsches Mythos* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993).
3. Annie Kriegel, “Sur l’antifascisme,” *Commentaire*, no. 50, 1990.

4. Thierry Wolton, *Le grand recrutement* (Paris: Grasset, 1993). This work at the very least has the merit of having provoked Pierre Vidal-Naquet's response, *Le trait empoisonné: Réflexions sur l'affaire Jean Moulin* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993).
5. François Furet, *Le passé d'une illusion: Essai sur l'idée communiste au XXe siècle* (Paris: Laffont/Calmann-Lévy, 1983), p. 126. Translated by Deborah Furet as *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
6. George Orwell, *Collected Essays*, vol. 4 (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 409. Viewable online at [http://www.orwell.ru/library/articles/leviathan/e/e\\_wal.htm](http://www.orwell.ru/library/articles/leviathan/e/e_wal.htm)
7. Walter Benjamin, "L'oeuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproductibilité technique," *Essais 1935-1940* (Paris: Denoel-Gonthier, 1983), p. 126. Translated as "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *Selected Writings: Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003).
8. Julien Benda, *La Trahison des clercs* (Paris: Grasset, 1975). Translated as *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (New York: Norton, 1969).
9. Cf. Alastair Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism: A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism, 1919-1945* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1976).
10. Cf. Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).
11. This hypothesis is at the center of the entire second part of Judith Marcus's work, *Georg Lukács and Thomas Mann: A Study in the Sociology of Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987). On the multiple faces of romanticism, see Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).
12. Cf. Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
13. On the Parisian Congress of 1935, see Michel Winock, *Le siècle des intellectuels* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1997), chapter 27, and Herbert R. Lottman, *The Left Bank: Writers, Artists, and Politics from the Popular Front to the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), chapter 6. On the Valencia Congress, see Andrés Trapiello, *Las armas y las letras: Literatura y guerra civil (1936-1939)* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1994), chapter 10.
14. Cf. Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Gli intellettuali e l'antifascismo," *Storia del marxismo*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), pp. 441-490. English translation: *The History of Marxism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).
15. Quoted in Karl D. Bracher, *La dictature allemande: Naissance, structure et conséquences du national-socialisme* (Toulouse: Privat, 1986), p. 31. English translation: *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism* by (Jean Steinberg, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970).
16. Peter Gay, *Le suicide d'une république: Weimar 1918- 1933* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1993), p. 180; and *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Norton, 2001.)
17. Lottman, *The Left Bank*, pp. 178-184 of the French edition.

18. François Furet, *Le passé d'une illusion*, p. 193.
19. Norberto Bobbio, *De Senectute* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), pp. 8-9.
20. Cf. Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les intellectuels en France, de l'Affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1986), pp. 98-99; Lottman, *The Left Bank* especially chapter 5 in Part II, pp. 148-158 of the French edition.
21. Cf. Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), especially chapter 5, pp. 128-162.
22. Quoted in Marcello Flores, *L'immagine dell'URSS: L'Occidente e la Russia di Stalin (1927-1956)* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1990), p. 214.
23. The liberals who fought against fascism, like the Italian movement *Giustizia e libertà*, chose to collaborate with the Communists. See, on this subject, the testimony and thought of Norberto Bobbio, who was one of its leaders (*Dal fascismo alla democrazia*, Turin: Baldini & Castoldi, 1997).
24. Letter dated April 13, 1933, in Gershom Scholem and Walter Benjamin, *Briefwechsel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980). Translated as *Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, 1932-1940* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989).
25. Scholem and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel*, p. 319. See also Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: Histoire d'une amitié* (Paris: Calmann- Lévy, 1981), p. 247. Translated as *Walter Benjamin: Story of a Friendship* by Lee Siegel (New York: New York Review of Books, 2003).
26. On this subject see Enzo Traverso, *L'Histoire déchirée: Essai sur Auschwitz et les intellectuels* (Paris: éditions du Cerf, 1997), chapter 1.
27. Cf. Dan Diner, "Antifaschistische Weltanschauung: Ein Nachruf," *Kreisläufe: Nationalsozialismus und Gedächtnis* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1995), p. 91.
28. James D. Wilkinson, *The Intellectual Resistance in Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 276.
29. Cf. Denis Hollier, ed., *Le collège de philosophie 1937- 1939* (Paris: Folio-Gallimard, 1995), pp. 67-68. See also Lutz Niethammer, *Posthistoire: Ist die Geschichte zu Ende?* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1989), p. 77.
30. Theodor Adorno, *Minima moralia, Réflexions sur la vie mutilée* (Paris: Payot, 1991), p. 53. Translated as *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life* by E. F. Jephcott (New York: Verso Books, 1996).
31. Hannah Arendt, *Les origines du totalitarisme* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 11. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).
32. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectique de la raison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 15. Translated as *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).
33. Günther Anders, "über die Bombe und die Wurzeln unserer Apokalypse-Blindheit," in *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. I. über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution*

(Munich: C.H. Beck, 1985). See also Albert Camus, "8 août 1945," *Actuelles: écrits politiques* (Paris: Folio- Gallimard, 1997), pp. 67-69. On Bataille's thoughts after Hiroshima, cf. Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'oeuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. 437-442. Translated as *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography* by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (New York: Verso Books, 2002).

34. Philippe Burrin, *La France à l'heure allemande 1940- 1944* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1995), analyzes the forms of "adaptation" the French intellectuals adopted during the German occupation (chapter 21, pp. 321-345). Translated as *Living with Defeat: France under the German Occupation, 1940-1944* by Janet Lloyd (London: Arnold, 1996).

35. According to Marco Revelli, "the anti-fascist paradigm is, in a certain way, the democratic paradigm historicized, contextualized, adapted during mass totalitarianisms and dictatorships." Giovanni De Luna and Marco Revelli, *Fascismo, antifascismo* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1995), p. 30.