

FEATURED REVIEW

Fascination with the Persecutor: George L. Mosse and the Catastrophe of Modern Man

By Emilio Gentile. Translated by John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021. Pp. 224. Cloth \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0299334307.

Jeffrey Herf

University of Maryland-College Park (jherf@umd.edu)

George Mosse's place among the leading historians writing about fascism and Nazism, modern Germany and Europe since World War II is secure and will remain so. He established that distinction with the publication of *The Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1961), *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (1964), *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (1975), *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (1978), *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (1980), and essays of the 1980s and 1990s collected in *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (1999). In 1966, when he founded, with Walter Laqueur, *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Mosse created a journal which since then has regularly offered interpretations of fascism and Nazism that brought its ideological dimensions into the mainstream of historical scholarship, and which continues to present scholarship of the first rank under its current excellent editors. All or some of these works have, since their publication, rightly been on course syllabi for undergraduates and comprehensive-exam reading lists for master's and doctoral students. They are cited and quoted in the texts and bibliographies of numerous scholarly works on these subjects. Mosse also trained and mentored a very distinguished group of historians of European intellectual and cultural history.

Mosse was a historian of remarkable boldness and creativity on a range of subjects including nationalism, racism, antisemitism, masculinity, responses to World War I as well as the origins of the Holocaust, and fascism, both in Germany and elsewhere. Emilio Gentile's *Fascination with the Persecutor: George L. Mosse and the Catastrophe of Modern Man* is the first English-language work to examine Mosse's works on fascism and, in particular, the evolution of his conceptual approach to the subject. Gentile, an Italian historian of fascism known also for his work on political religion, skillfully traces the evolution of Mosse's thinking about fascism from the development in the 1950s of his views about the need for a cultural, not only intellectual, approach to the subject, to the fruits of that approach in the well-known works of the 1960s and 1970s cited above. Gentile supplements judicious selections from Mosse's published works with examination of Mosse's lecture notes from when he taught at the University of Iowa in the 1950s, his contributions to seminars with other leading historians of modern German history at Stanford University in autumn 1963, and from more lecture notes from courses Mosse taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the 1960s and 1970s. Gentile's research reveals that Mosse's lectures, though delivered as if they were extemporaneous comments based on notes, were in fact carefully written essays

and stunning examples of the intersection of teaching and research in a research university. The result of Gentile's work is a book that presents key elements of Mosse's conceptual approach to the history of fascism in Europe in the twentieth century, while focusing less on the empirical research that emerged from those methodological starting points.

Gentile writes that "the fundamental question inspiring Mosse's research on fascism was "why it could attract so much popular support and govern by consensus for some time after it took power." (6). Why, as well, since "culture has indeed so often been joined with catastrophe . . . Mosse's studies on contemporary history have been a constant observation of the evil that, neither unique nor banal, demonstrates how man's longing for a happy and healthy world can be twisted to a wholly unforeseen conclusion. This is the reason why Mosse's books can be read as chapters in a single work or as different versions of the same book, rewritten from diverse vantage points, to analyze the genesis, development, and success of the movements that led to the triumph of totalitarianism, to the degradation of the individual, to the depersonalization of individuals, to the Final Solution." (6)

Gentile summarizes Mosse's scholarship as follows: The "basic plot of Mosse's historical writing," according to Gentile, "is a tragic vision of modern humanity." In response to the rapid change, disorientation, and fear that accompanied the rapid industrialization and modernization of Germany, Italy, and other countries of Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Mosse argues, fascist mass movements satisfied the need of their participants for certitude, stability, faith, authority. "The catastrophe of modern man has been the consequence of the hope of conquering a better world, rejecting the reality of the present through a leap toward utopia. Fascism succeeded because it gave to the masses the illusion of being able to satisfy 'the yearning for a fully furnished house'." (6-7) Fascism yearned for a "new man" embedded in nationalist collectivity that overcome the alleged alienation and loneliness of modern, liberal society.

In his 1950s lectures in Iowa, Gentile observes, Mosse argued against interpretations, whether Marxist or liberal, that "undervalued the importance of ideas, reducing them to a mere reflection of social conditions or of the interests of power, thereby denying their function as factors that can provoke or influence events, produce change or oppose resistance to them." (21-22) Gentile reports that Mosse's lectures of that decade repeatedly stressed "the importance of studying the ideological aspects of this movement [fascism and Nazism], in opposition to traditional scholarship, which had ignored it, deeming the subject of no importance or unworthy of serious consideration." (25) Drawing on Mosse's lectures and *The Culture of Western Europe*, Gentile documents Mosse's criticisms of traditional intellectual history and "social, political or economic analysis" because they did not pay attention to the production and diffusion of stereotypes and myths that percolated into the popular culture of Germany in the late nineteenth century. Through his criticism of Marxist reductionism as well as traditional intellectual history in the 1950s, and his movement to cultural history of popular mentalities, Mosse "thought he had finally found the instrument able to penetrate the mind of his persecutor and discover the reason for his attraction and his success." (34)

It was in the late 1950s that Mosse turned his scholarly focus to the history of antisemitic ideology. His move to the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1957 coincided with his first published article on modern antisemitism, a phenomenon that he saw as intricately linked to other cultural currents. In a 1961 article, Mosse complained that "historians by and large ignored" the romantic and mystical ideologies that were so important as predecessors of fascism and Nazism.¹ In that and other essays of those years, he also urged intellectual historians to extend their concern beyond the certified "great thinkers" to focus as well on the diffusion of ideas in institutions and their resulting spread into popular mentalities.

¹ George L. Mosse, "The Mystical Origins of Nationalism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (January-March 1961): 218-27; reprinted in George L. Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1980) and cited in Gentile, 217.

Mosse's 1961 essay appeared in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, part of the mainstream of the profession. At this point, more than Gentile acknowledges, Mosse was moving from the margin into the mainstream, from outsider to insider, from dissenter to leading figure in the American historical profession – a journey aided by the fact that he was teaching in the History Department at the University of Wisconsin, then and since a leading department in the American profession. In 1966, Mosse, together with Walter Laqueur, established their own journal, the *Journal of Contemporary History*. Based in London, its editorial board composed of historians from Britain, France, Italy, Israel, the United States, and the Federal Republic of Germany, the journal fostered a cosmopolitan, international community of scholars. It offered historians attracted to Mosse's and Laqueur's ideas opportunities to publish that did not depend on the editorial judgments of editors such as those at *The Journal of Modern History* or the *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Gentile mentions but does not dwell on the importance of the journal and on the thirty-year, almost daily, collaborative work that Mosse and Laqueur did together. Their partnership and the publication of the journal deserve a larger role in Gentile's history of Mosse's work on fascism because together they produced a unique and powerful approach to modern European history that neither could have achieved on his own. Mosse, a historian who wrote almost nothing about political history, either within or between nations, worked productively with Laqueur, who wrote very regularly about the ideological dimensions of international affairs, about the Holocaust, and who was at home in the think-tank world of Washington, D.C.² Together they established a journal that moved from a dissent from the mainstream to become one of the most important journals in the field of modern European history.³

A particularly interesting aspect of Gentile's research concerns a seminar at Stanford University in fall 1963 on "The Intellectual Foundations of National Socialism," in which Mosse presented his ideas on the importance of a cultural history of fascism. Gentile presents selections from Mosse's texts delivered to his fellow participants Karl Dietrich Bracher, Juan Linz, Gordon Craig, and Hugh Seton-Watson, all of whom were also themselves significant contributors to the scholarship on Nazism and fascism. Mosse stressed the importance of research on images, stereotypes, flights from reality, the institutionalization of ideas, and popular moods. The engagement with these leading figures of the scholarship on fascism and Nazism would seem to indicate an interest on their part in a synthesis of political with the kind of intellectual and cultural history Mosse had in mind. One wishes for a fuller history of that seminar and of its debates. Gentile offers us Mosse's contributions but not the replies from these other important historians. Did they agree or disagree? Were the issues joined? In his *The German Dictatorship* (first published in German in 1969), Bracher included both *The Crisis of German Ideology* and *Nazi Culture* in his bibliography. He certainly shared Mosse's focus on the importance of the ideological factor and the primacy of antisemitism in the Nazi party and regime. Gentile's focus is on Mosse, but the issue of how the other seminar participants responded remains to be examined.

Gentile next presents Mosse's view on threats to the individual and liberal values in Germany as paradigmatic of threats endemic in modernity in general, not peculiar to Germany's path to modernity. As Mosse put it in *The Culture of Western Europe*, that work's "stress upon Germany is due to the fact that eventually in this century, that unhappy nation came to typify the totalitarian state at its most extreme."⁴ The Germany that emerges in

² Walter Laqueur's published work on antisemitism, fascism, the Holocaust, foreign intelligence, the Soviet Union, terrorism, and Zionism is vast. On fascism in particular, see Walter Laqueur, ed., *Fascism: A Reader's Guide: Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976).

³ Jeffrey Herf, "From the Margins to the Mainstream: Refugees and the Successors on the Jewish Question, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust in German History," in *The Second Generation: Émigrés from Nazi Germany as Historians*, edited by Andreas W. Daum, Hartmut Lehmann, and James J. Sheehan (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 197–209.

⁴ Gorge L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1961), 5–6; cited in Gentile, 41.

these pages is not that of the classic Sonderweg, of the Germany that diverged from France and Britain after 1648, but rather of a country that, to use Mosse's verb, typified a general crisis of rapid modernization and fundamentalist anti-modernity. Totalitarianism, by which Mosse meant the abasement of individuals in larger collectivities, emerged *everywhere* from mass movements of disoriented individuals yearning for authority, who were inspired by romantic ideologues promising a new "totality of life" that would overcome the divisions of liberal and bourgeois society. Gentile draws attention to the presence of that generalizing impulse, which was evident even in *The Crisis of German Ideology*, the work that established Mosse's standing as a historian of the intellectual and cultural origins of Nazism in modern German cultural and intellectual history. Gentile's reading of that work as well as of Mosse's *The Culture of Western Europe* draws attention to the frequent references, even in those works, and in his lectures of those years to what Gentile called "the catastrophe of modern man." That said, Mosse the historian did not displace the specificities of German history to the extent that the philosopher Hannah Arendt did in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) or that the social theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno did in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).⁵ Yet Gentile offers evidence that Mosse too viewed the specific catastrophes of Italy and Germany as examples of more general issues that were not limited to those two countries in those decades. The generalizing aspect of Mosse's work became more evident in his works of the 1970s and 1980s.

Already in 1961, in *The Culture of Western Europe*, Mosse saw fascism not as a deviation from main trends of European history or even a short-term reaction to World War I. Rather, it promised a solution to problems of "modernity," by creating nationalist collectivities in which individuals sacrificed freedom for security. It was a popular movement, anti-parliamentary and illiberal but not anti-democratic. It offered a popular alternative to parliamentary democracy. With its plethora of uniforms and parades, Mosse wrote, "fascist propaganda gave birth to a new art form . . . manipulating mass meetings. Fascist gatherings were religious rites in which allegiance to the myth was reaffirmed in a spectacular visual manner." They were "probably the only original cultural contribution the Fascist movement has made."⁶

Gentile mentions Mosse's discussion of völkisch ideology and antisemitism in Germany but offers only an abbreviated account of the extent to which Mosse examined those issues in *The Crisis of German Ideology*. In view of his praise for Mosse's discussion of the role of ideology, it is odd that Gentile pays only modest attention to Mosse's analysis of the antisemitic dimensions of völkisch ideology. *The Crisis of German Ideology* was very much a book about Germany and did offer a modern version of the Sonderweg thesis.⁷ Gentile cites some of Mosse's work on the place of hatred of Judaism and the Jews in Germany, sentiments that Mosse argued culminated in an "anti-Jewish revolution" in the Nazi years, but his work on antisemitism remains a dimension of his oeuvre that does not fit well with Gentile's generalizing historical reflections on the catastrophe of "modern man."

With Mosse's *The Nationalization of the Masses* in mind, Gentile recalls that work's examination, yet again, of the myths, rites and rituals, and symbols of nationalist, and then fascist and Nazi, mass movements. Gentile sees the years 1969–1976 as a departure from Mosse's earlier work on ideology to one more focused on popular perceptions that emerged from such ideologies. I see more continuity than Gentile suggests was the case. For example, at

⁵ On this issue, see Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Herf, "The Displacement of German History in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*," in "Politisierung der Wissenschaft". Jüdische, völkische und andere Wissenschaftler an der Universität Frankfurt am Main vor und nach 1933, edited by Moritz Eppe, Johannes Fried, Raphael Gross, and Janus Gudian (Düsseldorf: Wallstein Verlag, 2016), 447–468.

⁶ Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe*, 347–348; cited in Gentile, 52–53.

⁷ On antisemitism and the Sonderweg, see Steven E. Aschheim, "Nazism, Normalcy, and the German Sonderweg," in Steven E. Aschheim, *In Times of Crisis: Essays on European Culture, Germans, and Jews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2001), 105–121.

the 1963 Stanford seminar, Mosse described fascism as “a revolutionary movement which had its immediate origins in the rejection of the materialism of the *fin de siècle*. Because it centered its revolt against this, it turned toward the esthetic, romantic, literary, the ‘myth,’ rather than toward the concrete and practical means of change. It became a ‘deplaced’ [displaced] revolution, an antibourgeois revolution, which the bourgeoisie could fully accept. . . . Moreover, fascism combined Nietzschean ecstasy with its domestication.” The result of the fascist revolution was not a structural change in society, but one intended to “create a new mind, a New Man.”⁸ That programmatic statement was already evident in *The Culture of Western Europe* in 1961, and in 1964 in *The Crisis of German Ideology*. Gentile refers to Mosse’s view of a “new politics” evident in the 1975 work *The Nationalization of the Masses* as “the most original and innovative feature of Mosse’s historical writing for its methodology as well as for the development of his concept of fascism.” (106) As Gentile himself demonstrates, the methodological innovation and originality of the period 1969–1976 was a continuation of Mosse’s earlier work.

One virtue of *Fascination with the Persecutor* is that Gentile treats Mosse as a conceptualizing and theoretically oriented historian, an aspect of his accomplishment that sometimes becomes overshadowed by the creativity of his work. But in emphasizing this aspect of Mosse’s work, Gentile gives little attention to the way Mosse combined historical theorizing with empirical research. The impression left by *Fascination with the Persecutor* is that Mosse was long on hypotheses, assertions, arguments, and theories but short on evidence to support them. It is an odd shortcoming in a book intended to offer praise. This is a pity, as the enduring value of reading Mosse’s works lies precisely in his integration of theory and practice, concepts and research, and in his immersion in the details of particular popular novels, songs, statues and memorials, and the visual imagery of fascism. Gentile offers very few of those crucial details that were the results of Mosse’s craft as a historian.

At times, that gap may have led Mosse to overreach. For example, according to Gentile, Mosse pointed out that Nazism gained support from many intellectuals and large parts of the professional middle classes who, he claimed, bought into it in order to reaffirm bourgeois morality and “respectability” and reestablish order and security in societies burdened with the ills of modernity.⁹ These arguments were certainly interesting, but were they right? Was the Nazi party primarily driven by a yearning for respectability? Were such impulses evident in the murder and torture of political opponents in Italy and Germany? Did the Einsatzgruppen restore order or, as Michael Wildt has argued, were their leaders instead inflamed with the intoxication of smashing bourgeois morality?¹⁰ Was Martin Heidegger’s delight at destroying “academic freedom” part of the search for order, or was it simply relishing destruction and persecution of the enemies of the Third Reich? Were university professors who welcomed the firing of their Jewish and liberal colleagues mostly thinking about creating “the new man,” or were they grubby opportunists who saw job opportunities for themselves and their students? Steven Remy’s excellent study of the response of the faculty of the University of Heidelberg to Nazism in power offered evidence of both types of motivation.¹¹ Were Germans who divorced their Jewish spouses after the passage of the Nuremberg Laws seeking respectability, or as Marion Kaplan and Saul Friedländer reminded us, did they break wedding vows when those became inconvenient in the climate of antisemitic persecution?¹²

⁸ George Mosse, “What is Fascism?”, lecture delivered at “The Intellectual Foundations of National Socialism” seminar, Center of European Studies, Stanford University, autumn 1963, cited in Gentile, 59–60.

⁹ Mosse, “What is Fascism?”, 67.

¹⁰ Michael Wildt, *The Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office*, translated by Tom Lampert (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

¹¹ Steven P. Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth: The Nazification and Denazification of a German University* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹² Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Vol. 1: The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

Gentile raises the issue of Mosse's contact with Albert Speer, who attained fame first as Hitler's favorite architect and then as the armaments minister of the Nazi regime in the last several years of World War II. Mosse's intention in doing so was to enhance his understanding of Nazi culture and its mass appeal. Speer was convicted of crimes against humanity at Nuremberg and sentenced to twenty years in prison. Following his release, he achieved massive success as an author with his global bestseller, *Inside the Third Reich* (1970). Gentile writes that contact with Speer permitted Mosse "to penetrate the mentality of Nazism and especially its symbolic universe through the self-representation given by the principal artificer of the Nazi liturgy, thereby redirecting historiography's attention on one of the most important aspects necessary to understand the nature and essence of National Socialism and the reason for its success." (88) In a 1976 review of Speer's diaries from Spandau prison, Mosse wrote, "none of the class analysis so popular today can discover the truth about National Socialism as it conceived of itself, as it represented itself and was accepted by the masses of its most fervent supporters. . . . This is the National Socialism Speer tells us about."¹³ It is also the National Socialism that George Mosse had been writing about for more than a decade before he met Albert Speer.

Mosse's enthusiasm for Speer's account and Gentile's approval thereof raise the issue of whether what Gentile calls fascination with the persecutor and the valid desire to recall past mentalities led Mosse to uncritical acceptance of the image that Speer was trying to convey. In his 2017 study of Speer's remarkably successful efforts to weave myths and lies about his role in the Nazi regime, Magnus Bretchken notes that cultivating relationships with prominent Jewish scholars such as Mosse and Jewish public figures such as Simon Wiesenthal served Speer's efforts to obscure the truth about his own role in the Third Reich and lend himself some moral credibility in the face of critics who questioned the validity of his image of Nazi Germany.¹⁴ Bretchken reports that in spring 1977 Mosse even invited Speer to speak at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Fortunately, nothing came of the invitation, one that would have likely caused a damaging scandal for Mosse and the university. While more scholarship about Speer's role has been published since, the broad outlines of his implication in the crimes of the Nazi regime had been well-known since the original Nuremberg war crimes trial. Gentile should have addressed this issue.

In his exposition of Mosse's 1978 work *Towards the Final Solution*, Gentile writes that "the phenomenon of the Holocaust was at the origin of Mosse's thinking on the catastrophe of modern man that occurred in Europe at the climax of an epoch characterized by the greatest expansion of its culture and of its hegemony during a period of immense industrial and technological progress, which in spite of this, led to the most barbaric war that humankind had ever known." (119) Gentile notes that from *The Culture of Western Europe* to *Toward the Final Solution*, Mosse focused on the modern origins of racism, that is, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That body of work focused primarily on racism based on fine distinctions among Europeans of the same skin color. Mosse's modern periodization did not include the origins of racist biology in Europe in the beginnings of the Spanish Inquisition in the fifteenth century, or the racist ideology applied by Europeans in their first encounters with Africans in the sixteenth century, as well as in the Atlantic slave trade beginning in the seventeenth century.¹⁵ Mosse did refer to the very long legacy of anti-Judaism in European Christianity and its secularization in antisemitism, the term invented by Wilhelm Marr in

¹³ George Mosse, "Albert Speer's Hitler," *Quadrant* (October 1976), 54; cited in Gentile, 88.

¹⁴ Magnus Bretchken, *Albert Speer. Eine deutsche Karriere* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2017), 443, 457.

¹⁵ On the origins of racism in the Spanish Inquisition, see Benzion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (New York: Random House, 1995); Leon Poliakov, *The History of Antisemitism, Vol. 2: From Mohammed to the Marranos* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). Poliakov's work was first published in France in 1965 and first translated into English in 1973. On early European racism towards Blacks, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1515-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1968), and George M. Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

nineteenth-century Germany. Yet, though Mosse mentions the long history of anti-Judaism, it played a subordinate role in *Toward the Final Solution*.¹⁶

Gentile's reading of Mosse's texts leads him to attribute to Mosse the following historical explanation of the Holocaust: He writes that Mosse was convinced

that the murder of the Jews had been the apogee of the catastrophe of modern man, led to carry out the most atrocious crimes by the hope of being able to build for himself "a fully furnished house" where he would have order and stability to live a life in conformity to what middle-class European society considered most sacred and most cherished: the principles and values of the nation, morality, respectability, the virtues of character, of behavior, of manners, the beauty and harmony of the body, all conceived as foundation stones of a well-ordered society. These ideals, born historically but sublimated as eternal values, became integral components of National Socialism, as well as nationalism and racism. (128)

The above may strike historians of antisemitism as leaving out the motivations specific to that hatred. Yet Gentile offers some textual evidence in support of his view. Nevertheless, factors such as a search for order and respectability do not explain why the Nazi regime engaged in mass murder at all, or why, once Hitler decided to do so, the Nazis decided to murder the Jews rather than some other group.¹⁷ Gentile's source is "The Holocaust and Modern Manners and Morals," an unpublished lecture by Mosse from a series he gave on the Holocaust in 1981–1982. In that text, Mosse wrote that "the Holocaust integrated what society thought respectable, [as] building upon the ideas of normalcy and abnormalcy which informed norms of behavior, and [these] had become personalized through the stereotypes of respectability."¹⁸ Yet neither Gentile's interpretation nor Mosse's formulation are convincing. While Mosse made a plausible case that racism and antisemitism were major elements of European culture, the radical antisemitism that took the leap from persecution to extermination during the Holocaust was not driven primarily by a search for normalcy or respectability

In fact, Mosse knew very well that other causes were more important than those mentioned above. In her fine biography of Lucy Dawidowicz, Nancy Sinkoff quotes a letter of fulsome praise that Mosse wrote to Dawidowicz after reading her now-classic work, *The War Against the Jews: 1933–1945* (1975). He would, he wrote, be "interested to see whether you run into the same difficulty that I had so many years ago when, in *The Crisis of German Ideology*, I first put forward the idea of the primacy of the Jewish question in National Socialism. That has not been accepted today in many quarters, in spite of all the accumulation of evidence."¹⁹ Assuming that Mosse meant it was the first time *he* had expressed that view—rather than suggesting it was the first time anyone had—it is noteworthy that he rightly pointed out that in 1964, he had indeed stressed "the primacy of the Jewish question" and had done so by examining thinkers known for their hatred of Jews in particular.

Toward the Final Solution was published three years after Mosse sent his letter to Dawidowicz. It is not a book about "the catastrophe of modern man"; rather, it offered evidence to support the claim that racism and antisemitism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were part of mainstream, not marginal, mentalities in Britain, France, and Germany. It documents the writings of Arthur de Gobineau, Houston Steward

¹⁶ On the long-term in the Western tradition, see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).

¹⁷ See e.g., Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ George L. Mosse, "The Holocaust and Modern Manners and Morals," cited in Gentile, 128.

¹⁹ George Mosse to Lucy S. Dawidowicz, April 7, 1975, cited in Nancy Sinkoff, *From Left to Right: Lucy S. Dawidowicz, the New York Intellectuals, and the Politics of History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2020), 301.

Chamberlain, Count George Vacher de Lapouge, Richard Wagner, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Wilhelm Marr, Protestant and Catholic forms of antagonism to Judaism and Jews, August Rohling's *Talmud Jew*, anti-Jewish themes in conservative politics in pre-World War I Germany, and the rise of ideas about a national socialism in France, Germany, and Austria also before World War I. It includes an account of a resurgence of antisemitism in the radicalized politics of Central Europe after World War I. Mosse was specific about Germany: "The future of racism in Europe was largely bound up with the failure or success of Nazi Germany. As that nation seemed to be about to dominate Europe, all racist policy was eventually set within that context."²⁰ He offered a summary of "the intellectual development of the single most important figure in the history of European racism," that is, Hitler.²¹ He concluded that "the Nazi implementation of racial policy was essentially the climax of a long development" that had begun in the eighteenth century. It was a stream that flowed "on into the future."²²

The historical scholarship of the forty-five years since *Toward the Final Solution* has expanded our understanding well beyond Mosse's account of how racist and antisemitic ideology was translated into practice with the murder of the Jews of Europe. The similarities and differences between the specificities of antisemitism and those of racism directed at peoples of color preoccupy scholars far more than was the case then.²³ Contrary to Gentile's claim, Mosse's text was not one about the "catastrophe of modern man." It was about a set of ideas about racism and antisemitism in several European countries from the middle of the nineteenth century to the midst of the Holocaust in the 1940s. It, like Mosse's other works, was about particular ideas and ideologies, and the resulting texts in particular times and places that were associated with particular historical contexts. These specificities do not play a sufficient role in Gentile's account of the evolution of Mosse's work on fascism.

And yet, Gentile has a point about Mosse's work on fascism. While Hannah Arendt and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno could suffice with abstractions in their fields of philosophy and social theory, Mosse the historian had to write about particular circumstances, places, persons, and events with proper names, such as Italy and Germany, and Mussolini and Hitler. He could not theorize away from events, people, and places. He could not, and he did not want to, ignore the specifics of evidence and the details. Emilio Gentile is right to remind us that Mosse's conceptual work paved the road for later work on those fascinating details and particulars. He did so with criticism of what he viewed as the inadequate efforts to explain fascism that came from Marxists, liberal political historians, and the discipline of intellectual history as it was then defined.

Yet, while Gentile has done well to draw our attention to Mosse the theorist, *Fascination with the Persecutor* offers too little of Mosse the historian, the scholar who combined theory and method with research and evidence. The tensions between the general and the particular, between grand theories and historical specificities evident in Mosse's work are ineradicable and welcome aspects of the historian's craft. We need not agree with Mosse's search for "a general theory" of fascism or Gentile's references to "the catastrophe of modern man" to acknowledge that George Mosse's work remains an essential aspect of the historiography of the era of fascism in Europe's twentieth century, and of the contemporary history of the various forms adopted by echoes of fascism in the twenty-first century as well, both within and outside Europe.

²⁰ George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1978), 202.

²¹ Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 204.

²² Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 231.

²³ Frederickson, *Racism*; Jeffrey Herf, "A Comparative Perspective on Antisemitism, Radical Antisemitism in the Holocaust and American White Racism," *The Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (December 2007): 575–600.