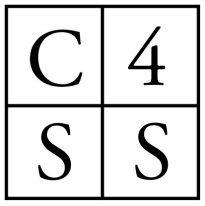
NOTHING IS MORE INANE AND ANTI-INDIVIDUALIST THAN DEFENSIVE CLOSING OF RANKS. WHY SHOULD IT REMOTELY MATTER IF A COMMUNIST OR LIBERAL MIGHT ATTEMPT TO UTILIZE FACTOIDS ABOUT THE INDIVIDUALIST ANARCHISTS WHO JOINED FASCISM AS SOME KIND OF RHETORICAL CUDGEL AGAINST US? WHY SHOULD WE CARE MORE ABOUT WHAT LIBERALS OR COMMUNISTS THINK AND SAY THAN WE CARE ABOUT FINDING THE TRUTH FOR OURSELVES?



FROM STIRNER TO MUSSOLINI
BOOK REVIEW
"THE ANARCHIST-INDIVIDUALIST ORIGINS OF ITALIAN FASCISM"

REVIEWED BY WILLIAM GILLIS

stomping the skulls of immigrant babies or defend the cannibalism of raider societies or make memes treating Assad's gas attacks like Nickelodeon goop. As the infectious processes of reason and empathy broadly ratchet towards certain social norms and common values, the fascist finds a thin "freedom" in his rupture with them, creating an opposite community with opposite values of hardness and shallow instinct.

There is, I believe, a substantive sense in which fascism really did *emerge* from (individualist) anarchism, and that's as our antithesis. Yes, the socialists, liberals, and conservative influences upon fascism were *vast*, and counted for the overwhelming bulk of their numbers. In comparison, the number of "individualist anarchists" who joined them was a barely visible dust mote. But what our presence contributed was a crystalizing clarity that catalyzed and reshaped those long-existing reactionary elements.

In this sense, while both anarchism and fascism are modern ideologies, we are at the same time purifications of eternal tendencies throughout history, the modern dimension being our self-awareness.

It is frequently marveled that anarchists and fascists often agree in our models of the world, but pick completely different values to fight for. Where liberals, socialists, communists, libertarians, conservatives, etc embrace delusions of some kind of compromise, some middle path between freedom and power, anarchists and fascists both tend to understand the actual landscape.

What matters is the *values* we align with.

For this reason, "*I will not be ruled*" on its own is not a *half-step* to anarchism's "*I will not be ruled and I will not rule*" but sometimes a move in the completely opposite direction.

In 1910 Luigi Fabbri and Armando Borghi abducted an anarchist woman who had shamed their friend by divorcing him. Together, they forced her into a gynecological exam so the doctor could publicly pronounce her deformed and incapable of sex.

All three were prominent leaders in the Italian anarchist scene and involved in criminal activities. Despite having been abducted, medically raped, and slandered by her scene rivals, when the cops raided them for publishing anti-war articles, Maria Rygier refused to turn on anyone and tried to take full responsibility. She was sentenced to three years in prison where she was *again* medically raped, this time by representatives of the state.

Disenchanted with the anarchist scene's patriarchs and looking for support from dissidents within the movement, upon release Rygier took up with a prominent Stirnerite, Massimo Rocca. But if you're looking for a triumphant vindication of individualist underdogs against rapist scene patriarchs, this is not that story. Despite their origins in the anarchist movement, Rygier and Rocca would go on to play central roles in the emergence and establishment of fascism. Many of their followers would join them as fascists, with one, Leandro Arpinati, even rising to the status of "second Duce," just behind Mussolini in power and popularity.

Stephen B. Whitaker's obscure book *The Anarchist-Individualist Origins of Italian Fascism* has been cited on occasion by communist reactionaries as a cudgel against anarchism and individualism. Yet whatever their misappropriations, the title

shouldn't be read to imply this is a book *blaming* individualist anarchism for the rise of fascism, it merely focuses on one specific ideological arena among many others (like syndicalism and communism) where fascists found root and that contributed to the stew of early fascist ideology. There are *many* origins of fascism. Whitaker is quite clear from the outset, "*I believe [anarchism's] intellectual influence on fascism was quite small*," on the other hand, certain readings of Stirner and certain fringe currents in the anarchist movement, "*were quite influential*." No one should be under the illusion that *influence* is the same thing as *causal blame*, yet, at the same time, the specific social points of overlap and mutations of an ideological current can be critical to understanding the initial rise of fascism and continuing weak points for entryism today.

Whitaker is not particularly hostile to anarchism or its individualist currents, but at the same time is very clearly ignorant of it; his understanding of anarchism as a philosophy seemingly stems entirely from reading George Woodcock, Max Stirner, and a couple haughtily ignorant liberal commentators in political science journals clumsily trying to categorize anarchism within their discursive frameworks. (More on how badly he butchers Stirner later.) Unsurprisingly his ideological contextualizations are often impaired as a result. But Whitaker also appears to be a sincere *historian* and his book is still a treasure trove of references to interviews, letters, and articles nowhere else translated to English. Of course I'm not fluent in Italian, and was limited in how much I could verify via google translate and via other sources, but together the book's references reveal a deeply dysfunctional anarchist scene, undermined by toxic personalities, powerful patriarchs, and horrible edgelord takes that it's unfortunately quite easy to see contemporary parallels to.

Again I must emphasize that similar specialized historical accounts can and have been written of Fascism's parallel origins in

How can the good thing be in any way tied to the bad thing except through spurious and tenuous associations, a tiny spattering of nonsensical contradictions!

Yet, I actually *do* think there's something to the instinctive understanding that fascism is just the polar opposite of us. Even if that doesn't mean that everyone on the opposite side of us on any issue is therefore a fascist.

I've long emphasized a two-tiered description of fascism: not just as the macroscopic politics of palingenetic ultranationalism, but also an underlying philosophy of power beneath it that stands as the exact opposite of anarchism. This philosophy of power is hostile to reason and all about shrinking one's circle of care and identification. Intellectual arguments for compassion and truth must be discarded as pointless or unsustainable via moral and epistemic nihilism, but it's not enough to dismiss them as specters, the continuing pull of reason and empathy requires an *active resistance* lest it corrupt the fascist. Thus violence becomes a purifying loop that sheds off compassion and reason. The self-evident lie of the nation, race, etc (virtually all fascists admit such collective abstractions are a lie, from Anglin to Spencer), is a useful lie not just because it provides a way to mobilize social power, but also because it helps secure one's own head against the ever threatening spiral of reason and compassion.

In this sense fascism is a project defined not just as one pole in the eternal conflict of power vs freedom, but by its evolved resistance to *the anarchist creep,* that is to say the dangerous infectiousness of our perspective. Not just through cultivating a continuous loop of violence that burns away the weeds of higher thought and empathy, but also through creating social pressures to vice-signal. Even when the fascist cannot engage in daily physical violence, he can still make a combative public show of his lack of concern for others. He can sing "nuke em till they glow" or speechify about

that the anarchist movement needs a specifically *antifascist* line of consideration, of focus in analysis and practice; it cannot simply assume that antifascism follows trivially from anarchism (or egoism or whatever).

If today – in a world of eco-fascists many of whom who sincerely want to collapse civilization, initiate a race war and return to closed small tribes, or national-bolsheviks sincerely committed to war on the *existing* capitalist class, to say nothing of myriad other strains – it is self-evidently absurd to cling to old marxist analyses that fascism is merely a stage of capitalism, or that fascists are pawns of the capitalists. We laugh in the face of boomers who still grab at claims that fascism is literally defined by "cultural and ideological homogenization" in contrast to virtually every fascist ranting about preserving cultural diversity from globalism. But these absurdities were once quite popular in no small part because studying actual fascists, tracing the potency of their ideological appeals, or remembering knowledge gained in struggles against them was dismissed as unimportant, or even *a threat*.

It was not that many years ago that "antifa" was a widely hated word in anarchist spaces and the most basic sorts of campaigns, to, for example, deplatform Death In June, provoked sneering if not fervent hostility. *It's literally impossible for that dude to be a fascist, he's gay.* My favorite of such takes to this day remains, '*um killing people for sport is obviously the least fascist thing, it shows they have a liberated libido.'*

Yes, this is a collectivist sort of wagon-circling, but it also stems from dismissively approaching fascism as purely a social or even institutional phenomenon rather than an ideological movement. Or, even as merely a substitute word for "the bad thing." In this context a book like *The Anarchist-Individualist Origins of Italian Fascism* can only be treated as an infuriating attack.

liberal, communist, and conservative circles. The question that antifascist anarchists should zero in on is *what can we learn from this*?

The standard defensive take is that every sort of person can take a reactionary turn. If fascism can win converts from *every* ideology that just goes to show such conversions have non-ideological or pre-ideological motivations. But this is a plainly spurious defense. Anarchism, Communism, and Liberalism have won proponents from every single ideology under the sun, including the ranks of fascists. This does not mean that there are not *specific* things that can be said, *specific* dynamics or tendencies that can be analyzed, about *how* a specific ideology most often wins converts from another specific ideology, to what degree it is successful, and through what arguments or conceptual dynamics. Moreover ideologies and movements are not homogeneous, that anarchism, communism, and liberalism may each have corners or failure modes particularly conducive to corruption in specific ways is all the more imperative to examine such rather than sweeping everything under a rug.

Nothing is more inane and anti-individualist than defensive closing of ranks. Why should it remotely matter if a communist or liberal might attempt to utilize factoids about the individualist anarchists who joined fascism as some kind of rhetorical cudgel against us? Why should we care more about what liberals or communists think and say than we care about finding the truth for ourselves?

Whitaker's historical account focuses on four individuals – Massimo Rocca, Maria Rygier, Torquato Nanni (a socialist politician with some anarchist inclinations), and Leandro Arpinati – and traces their personal trajectories around and through the Italian anarchist scene and the early fascist movement. It's important to note that each of these figures had a

rocky relationship with fascism as it developed and ultimately felt jilted by certain developments, but it is just as important to note that their objections were not grounded in anything like anarchist principles. These were not hybrids of anarchism and fascism, but straight up *fascists,* even if they occupied contentious sub-positions within fascism. And sadly they were not isolated wingnuts, but important and influential individuals with supporters. Rocca and Rygier were internationally respected and published anarchist voices. Arpinati served as Undersecretary to the Minister of the Interior where he acquired his title as "*second Duce of fascism*." Rocca pushed Mussolini into his pivot to a pro-war socialism. All were friends with Mussolini.

While their individual reasons and arguments differed in some ways, in broad strokes there was a subsection of the egoist anarchist scene in Italy that embraced participation in the First World War and used their printing presses and clandestine distribution capacity to disrupt the Italian Left and strengthen Mussolini as a champion. Partially as a result of this defection of individualist printmakers & distroists, between 1915 and 1920 no significant anarchist journals were published in Bologna. This turn to warmongering was a conjunction of a fetishization of violence among some individualists and a broader populist perception of Italy as a poor nation revolting against the rich through the medium of national conflict in sections of the wider Left (particularly among syndicalists). Mixed up and loosely cited Nietzsche and Stirner were leveraged to defend a haughty elitism of the ubermensch while the charisma of militancy brought prestige and followers.

In some cases the mutations and contortions were clearly venal and opportunistic, the result of specific types of rotten character that had regrettably found a place in the milieu, but in many cases it seems like certain ideological formulations ratcheted themselves.

individuals. Anarchists didn't successfully (if at all) apply pressure to stop those friendships and so he was able to court "antifascists" into flipping sides. Similarly, much confusion was clearly had before folks recognized that there can be insurgent or revolutionary threats that must be studiously opposed simultaneous to our opposition to the ruling establishment, never downplaying one threat to focus on the other, much less allying with one against the other. And of course, we can't afford to ignore how the allure of bravery and militancy can obscure invalidating downsides.

The absolute necessity of enforcing No Platform, pressuring disassociation, Three Way Fight, etc. are lessons folks have obviously learned the hard way again and again in different subcultures and scenes as fascist creep sets in, but it's really arresting to read the particulars of the very first anarchists to struggle with these dynamics at the literal dawn of the fascist movement.

Sadly, while antifascism – as a specialized project, discourse, and milieu – has been pretty much defined by the recognition of these lessons, this perspective *isn't* a given in every circle that anarchists operate in.

It has been frequently said that, "*every anarchist is an antifascist by definition so focusing on antifascism is a dangerous distraction*." And, as the populist traction of the Trump era wanes, much hay has been made once again about antifascism as implicitly liberal. Something that focuses on minor enemies to the benefit of the status quo. Identical things have been regularly said about "feminism." In some real sense anarchism is trivially feminist by definition, but while those two concepts *should* ultimately converge, they clearly haven't fully in practice. Feminism and antifascism *can* be appropriated by liberals to serve the status quo, but this is no reason to reject them. It's long been my contention

sided with Rocca. This sort of thing could have been partially derailed if the individualists who didn't go fascist had the spine to stand simultaneously against *both* sorts of rot early on.

It would obviously be a mistake to read Whitaker's book in isolation; just as there are Anarchist-Individualist Origins of Fascism, there are also *Bolshevik Origins of Fascism*, *Socialist Origins of Fascism*, *Liberal Origins of Fascism*, etc. Whitaker focuses on Nanni's supposed individualism, but let us never forget that the vast majority of fascism's initial origins were with the state socialists. And in particular, the creeping mistake of "left unity," the bizarre but ever popular delusion that "*we're all on the same side,*" is no small part of how an egoist streetfighter like Arpinati could end up best friends with a literal mayor like Nanni and then a prominent politician like Mussolini.

The dangers of circling wagons and accepting or overlooking problematic allies to defeat a specific enemy are eternal. In both left-unity or individualist-unity, it was on display throughout the sordid rise of fascism, in almost exactly the same way they've continued to be a problem in the last few decades. When you're under siege and someone shitty offers you friendship, it takes far more spine and courage to burn that friendship than it does to merely throw more punches against your common enemy.

Italian anarchists took *way* too long to settle on deplatforming and ostracizing the protofash egoists. Yes, streetfighting and attacks on protofash egoist talks were common (although the Novatori started it by starting pistol fights at conferences). But one of the most shocking things in Whitaker's book is that venues and conferences *continued* to give them a platform basically until they were openly at war with the entire anarchist movement as explicit fascists. Further, Arpinati was able to recruit from anarchist ranks well into his reign of terror on the anarchist movement because he *maintained personal friendships* with specific

It's worth going through the individuals Whitaker traces with some depth, if only because there's so little coverage of them in English.

The most important for an ideological autopsy, in my opinion, was Massimo Rocca (who went by Libero Tancredi while he identified as an anarchist but swapped back to his legal name as a fascist). This asshole's roots as an anarchist ideologue are sharp and colorful, and show his early differences from the mainstream anarchist scene.

> *"In 1905 , Rocca moved to Milan to become editor of Li Grido della folla. Under his leadership the newspaper began to take on a more belligerent tone, exalting regenerative violence and chaos; referring to dynamite as "holy"; and, condemning basic legal rights, humanitarianism, and ethics. … He and others like him distributed pamphlets and put up posters which spoke of rebellion against the "myth of positive evolution in society, naturalism in science, society's ingenious faith in progress""*

Rocca was expelled *from Il Grido della folla* and left Milan, the heartland of individualist anarchism in Italy, for Rome to found *Il Novatore anarchico*.

> "*At the 1906 anarchist congress of Monino, near Rome, supporters of Rocca's newspaper, the novatoriani, started a massive fistfight during which pistol shots were fired and at least one person received knife wounds."*

The novatori proclaimed that "*a war today is more fatal to the bourgeoisie than the proletariat and is a favorable occasion for starting a revolution*." And Rocca declared that "*anarchism in the truest sense of the word, is the revolt of the ego against altruism*."

(Abele Rizieri Ferrari, who a little later came to be known under the pen name "Renzo Novatore," would have been 16 at the time; Rocca, his senior, was just 22.)

Despite Rocca having a militant following within the scene, he got into serious conflicts with other individualists (a far more diverse lot, including many sharply altruistic and focused on morality) and he was accused of looting funds from Rome's Libertarian Youth newspaper to fill the coffers of *Il Novatore*. This was a pattern, to say the least.

> *"he would convince anarchist colleagues to pay for his meals in the local trattoria by railing against them during the meal with snippets of his Stirnerian-Neitzschean logic such as, "You pay for my lunch because you're weak. I, on the other hand, am strong.""*

When the outcry at his general scumfuckery built to a sufficient level, Rocca skipped town, moving to the US, where he contributed to other anarchist publications (from Paris to Chicago) and continued to publish *Il Novatore*. His popular notion of an elite rebellious minority, a libertarian aristocracy, seeking to elevate themselves slowly drifted over time, with the *Italian race* increasingly filling the role of this minority on the global stage. Similarly, as Whitaker puts it, he urged folks to

> "*abandon intellect and focus on instinct which, according to Rocca, leads people to think of themselves as Unique Ones, to revert to their more "natural" state, rejecting the abstract structures of the intellect."*

This reading of Stirner as a rejection of reason for nature/instinct was not the only hot take he had percolating. Achieving the union of egos, Rocca speculated, would require the inception of a truly brutal and total war of all against all, with the eventual

them, but also because I know damn well that this review will be screamed about and relayed to people as some outrageous outsider hitpiece on Stirner, egoism, or individualist anarchism. And at the exact same time many opportunist communists will salivate to link it as some kind of proof that Max Stirner secretly lived another century, grew a mustache, and renamed himself Adolf Hitler.

But I think Rygier's turn to fascism is fascinating because we can appreciate that she was no doubt motivated by her extremely fucked up adversaries in the anarchist movement. You can't learn just how far Borghi and Fabbri went in their struggle for popularity and influence against her, as well as their allegiance to their bro, and not fucking loathe them. And we can absolutely lay some of the blame for her pivot to fascism at their feet while relieving her of not one iota of responsibility and agency. Blame can overlap and multiply! It's not zero-sum!

Too often the worst sort of abuse or misbehavior is covered up by "*the other side is worse!!"* Just as fascist creep is cultivated by a failure to recognize and excise it, it is also cultivated by failing to handle other problems. False binaries are created by inaction against or tolerance of different flavors of fucked up shit. Green reactionaries take root in part by pointing out how bad the bureaucratic reds are. Nazbols take root by emphasizing just how bad the capitalist libs are. Ranks close, political identities become mutable flags of convenient counter-coalitions rather than anything consistent.

The Italian individualist anarchists were absolutely right to take issue with the organizationalist currents that dominated the scene, that often pacified and attempted to control or centralize anarchism (and thus give space to corruption). But there wasn't a strong base of options beyond Fabbri and Borghi (I would kill to learn Malatesta's complicity or ignorance of events), so Rygier

an anarchist for more than a day and seen the worst corners of our scene.

This is the most chilling thing about *The Anarchist-Individualist Origins Of Italian Fascism*: it reads like a friend at a potluck dishing scene drama about one edgelord or another today. Even as the majority of the Italian anarchist movement lies just out of focus, occasionally throwing a chair or a rock at the protagonists and introducing an interlude of hospitalization, you can't look away from the fuckery, you already know it so intimately.

This is the frank truth, for all our heroism and angelic exemplars, the anarchist milieu has always had a problem with a fringe of militancy-worshiping shits for whom the attraction of "anarchism" is a promise of getting away with whatever they wanted. A "might is right" sort of attitude often tied to a fetishization of criminal/warrior aristocratic elites in the name of militarism. The spine for "action" is substituted for the spine for values. *Who cares if that dude abused his partner, he went to a tree sit once so nothing can be done*.

The recruitment of such is an inevitable byproduct of how anarchism frames itself and the struggles it is engaged in. Failing to address these little shits – as well as allowing much of the mainstream of anarchism to be captured by centralized power structures – leads to a false dichotomy between tepid manipulative gatekeeping organizationalists and bloodthirsty scumfuck "individualists" where both sides reinforce the other. *If you're not in favor of breaking glass in motel pools to cut up children* (because "social war") *you must therefore be with the pacifist lib grifters and identity politicians.*

I started this review with Borghi and Fabbri's medical rape of Rygier mostly because it's a shocking lost fact that should damn well be at least a footnote on every goddamn thing about either of survivors finding themselves balanced in detentes with one another. Thus: cynical egoism and violence – even on the part of conservatives and the state – is only ever good because it ratchets society towards this rupture.

And ultimately one final breach grew: Rocca fervently believed that morality was a spook, and humanitarianism or altruism particularly pernicious, but he struggled with inevitable critiques that *any* position one might take (like rejection of altruism) would still itself constitute a morality. And so Rocca finally came to accept that the best way to smash the most repugnant morality was to replace it with an explicitly and consciously *fake, arbitrary, and hollow* morality. Humanitarianism was too potent and perpetually reemergent a spook, the only way to smash it was to replace it with blind duty, with the arationality of obedience to the collective will the best possible *escape* from spooked thinking. Nationalism was thus a useful tool to suppress the intellect and return to instinct/nature.

If this sounds too severe a contortion to warrant any consideration besides a laugh, consider the tens of millions who praised Trump's *honesty* because his flagrant lies *didn't hide that they were lies*. It is sometimes argued in certain lazy currents of philosophy that reason constitutes a tyranny because it has an overwhelming and almost inescapable force in our minds. The compulsion that reasoned argument exerts on us is starkly unique, and thus *unfair*. Through reason we are not just forced into a single path, we are forced in the most intimate and mentally demanding way possible. Reason, once it sinks its teeth into us, never lets us go, never grants us a moment's release, instead it ratchets in reinforcing spirals that consume our minds. Stirner uses the phrase "*the rule of absolute thought*." It's easy to see how reason is self-reinforcing. Doubt, curiosity and the care to *get things right* reinforce themselves; a little investigation proves how much more investigation is required. Many of us embrace this

and see such reflection and vigilance as the very core of agency and freedom. But in Stirner's language, the "*labor of thought*" is a sanctified spook that "*misleads people into scrupulousness and deliberation*." Of course there's many ways to read Stirner's passages on "thought" as itself a fixed idea and few of them look anything like an endorsement of Rocca's flight. Yet it is true that many feel a certain kind of *release* from the tyranny of responsibility and diligence when they embrace a self-aware lie. Every day that you renew your service to the lie, its blatant nature is inescapable and reminds you of your conscious rejection of scruples. Escaping the "*tyranny of thought*" back to instinct is no easy task and Rocca believed he'd found the path. What's a little absolute authoritarianism if it allows you the "freedom" of turning your brain to goo?

And of course who would drive and sit on top of this authoritarian beast besides the elite rebels, the *truly unique* ones:

> *"It is useful to note the difference between single rebels and the great mass of subversives. It is necessary to distinguish between those who know how to be uniquely themselves… These are the only ones who have the right not to obey the law. The others... deserve the intervention of social coercion to force them to submit to the consequences and responsibility of their actions, which they do not know how to take freely,"*

It was this language of elites that Rocca was able to make palatable to the existing forces of the right as he pivoted politically. What once had been a moral or rebel aristocracy of enlightened insurrectionaries could hook up with the self-legitimizing narratives of the actual ruling aristocracy. In this way the scandalously militant and *revolutionary* rhetoric of the left could be repackaged in ways the right could actually embrace. This is perhaps one of the most key aspects of fascism that

idea that there's an ideological *complete contradiction* is simply not true. No one spontaneously explodes upon emphasizing some parts of his texts and ignoring others, much less in rearranging and reconstructing things, or just using him as a loose springboard for what arguments they find personally compelling instead.

The actual living person Johann Kaspar Schmidt who got the "big forehead" nickname Max Stirner, was, like any other person, of such vast complexity as to defy compression into any set of texts, much less the few we have from him. He might have had a somewhat unified and coherent philosophical project, where each piece depends critically upon every other piece, he might even have had radically different intuitions, ideas, and responses than are implied within the few scant and highly contextually-bound texts we have, but this is not how *texts* work. Texts, for better or worse, end up existing as an assortment of arguments placed alongside one another.

I'm not suggesting that, for example, Rocca's endorsement of a worldwide war of all against all as the path to a union of egoists is some kind of intelligent development on Stirner, nor anything that Johann Kaspar Schmidt would have recognized. Rocca and Arpinati were bloodthirsty scumfucks, Rygier a vengeful opportunist. They clearly drew at best very loosely from Stirner's texts and it's not at all clear that they had any real love for anything else that might be called anarchist theory (and recall that Stirner never identified with the term or the movement).

But even though Whitaker whiffs completely on understanding the ideological elements in play, his book nevertheless documents an anarchist scene annoyingly similar to today's. We don't shoot each other with pistols at bookfairs, but the scumfuckery of some noxious egoist wingnuts and the abusive power of some red scene patriarchs will have immediate resonances to anyone who's been

And of course Parker endorsed racial hierarchy and emphatically embraced Ragnar Redbeard, the inane "anarchist" writer constantly endorsed alongside Stirner by fascists, whose book Might Is Right has had many republications literally covered in swastikas. Countless other more personal and intimate examples of such turns exist, although it's beyond the purview of this book review to laboriously list them all. This is adamantly *not* to say that every or even most egoist anarchists become fascists or such outright scumbags. But if being an anarchist and respected egoist for decades like Parker still isn't an inoculation against such heel turns today we can't just write off Rocca and Arpinati as strange historical anomalies and continuing fascist and reactionary endorsement of Stirner a completely illiterate opportunism.

While I found value in Stirner in my youth, I must admit I have never been able to fathom the people who defensively cling to him, who *identify* with him as some kind of flag. I suppose if you are too weak to stand in the face of sneering collectivists it may help to have something else to throw in front of you as a shield. Some external authority to prop up your voice and draw the fire of responses away from you personally. Some shared idol to rally a tribe of dissidents. And, of course, if the outgroup comes for this token, the ingroup must always circle the wagons lest they be picked off one by one by the hordes of moralist communist bureaucrats all around. But I dunno, surely folks understand that an actual fiery individualism wouldn't feel the need to remind everyone of one's asserted individualism or to immediately form and cling to some new tribe?

I am, to say the least, disappointed and vexed by the incessant shallow dismissal that "*Stirner opposed collectivism and nationalism is collectivism, they're exact opposites, fascist Stirnerites are a complete contradiction from which nothing can be learned*." Of course, Stirner would have laughed at the nazis. Of course, he personally had passages at odds with some of their specific positions. But the distinguishes it from mere militant reaction or hypernationalism: the palingenesis. Fascism is not *just* an embrace of hierarchy and raw power, a rejection of modernism or the enlightenment project, a shrinking of empathy and care to just "one's own"; it supercharged existing reactionary forces by giving them a revolutionary project. No longer pallid defenders of the status quo, reactionaries could finally dream about their own violent rupture to a fantastical future.

It's important to emphasize that, despite being a complete asshole whose self-serving actions repeatedly burned bridges and whose ideology was almost as toxic as it gets, Rocca was not a marginal and isolated wingnut but a prominent figure in the anarchist movement who gave speeches and contributed to numerous journals and had a militant base of friends and followers. Rocca and Rygier existed alongside Fabbri and Borghi on a shortlist of anarchist intellectuals who debated publicly, mobilized followers, and whose words were carried across Italy.

The fact that their distros/journals were quite active and they drew crowds and speaking opportunities has been largely obscured by anarchists who have, from the start, emphasized the (also valid) degree to which these assholes were marginal. A good example of early language dismissing them can be found in the very fun *Living Like Nomads: The Milanese Anarchist Movement Before Fascism* by Fausto Butta, where he quotes Luigi Molinari,

> "*It is time to end this opportunistic lie that a considerable number of anarchists support the war … Who are, then, these warmonger anarchists? Maria Rygier and Libero Tancredi! The former represents nobody but herself; she is free to contradict her noble past and abandon to their destiny those proletarians in whom she had instilled an anti-militarist consciousness. The latter has never been an anarchist, in scientific*

terms. His anarchism really is a synonym of chaos, and on this point he surely agrees with the bourgeois newspapers, to which he has always contributed and to which he is giving a benevolent service"

But while it's true the overwhelming majority of the Italian anarchist movement (individualists included) sided with Malatesta against the war, it's hardly like Rygier and Rocca had no followers or compatriots. Prominent individualist writers like Oberdan Gigli and Mario Gioda joined the pro-war anarchists and their current had a whole newspaper, *La Guerra Sociale* (whose director Edoardo Malusardi also went from individualist anarchism to fascism).

Rocca would eventually stray so far as to be repeatedly attacked and hospitalized by anarchists, but it's a testament to his influence and status that he continued to get invitations to give addresses at anarchist meetings, even while his crew was increasingly socially shunned.

When the fascios were founded Rocca was one of the core founding members in Rome, and he managed to become seen as fascism's leading economic proponent. Rocca's downfall with fascist ranks came from his sharper elitism. He led a faction that believed fascists – not their wider base of support – were Nietzschean elites who should eliminate all others from political power, disdaining the non-mobilized middle class that merely supported the fascists rather than leading their streetfighting. This, of course, was not a politically opportune stance for Mussolini, so Rocca was pushed out in 1924. He continued to push his same line and became denounced as "antifascist" for it. But even exiled to France in 1926 he continued to push for Mussolini to return to "true fascism" and take *more power* for the *true elites*, writing multiple fascist books, grumbling about how local actual antifascists shunned him, and working as a paid batshit scumfuckery like Rocca and Arpinati.

For decades Sidney Parker was one of the most prominent individualist anarchists and Stirnerite egoists in the world, certainly the anglosphere, ruling as editor of Minus One and EGO, writing the introduction to a popular print of The Ego and Its Own, and generally being a thorn in the side of the British anarchist scene. In 1993, Parker finally abandoned anarchism, writing:

"*Anarchism is a creed of social transformation aiming at the ending of all domination and exploitation of man by man. Its adherents seek the creation of the Judeo-Christian myth of a heaven on earth. The central anarchist tenet is: Dominating People Is Wrong. It is based on the belief that all, or almost all, individuals are, or can be, equally capable of taking part in decision-making.*

I no longer accept these propositions.

As a conscious egoist I can see no reason why I should not dominate others – if it is my interest to do so and within my competence. Similarly, I am prepared to support others who dominate if that will benefit me. "If the condition of the State does not bear hard on the closet-philosopher, is he to occupy himself with it because it is his 'most sacred duty?' So long as the State does according to his wish, what need has he to look up from his studies?" (Stirner) Sometimes, indeed, I may behave in an "anarchist" fashion, but, by the same token, I may also behave in an "archist" fashion. The belief in anarchism imprisoned me in a net of conceptual imperatives. Egoism leaves any way open to me for which I am empowered."

of solidarity, empathy, or compassion, and find happiness in torturing animals? And wait just a minute: how is anything "*natural*" to a creative nothing? Why should arguments of what is "*natural*" matter to a creative nothing? Is Rocca right that the ego boils down to a return from the compounding loop of reflective thought to natural instinct?

In every choice of one value or identification over another there are mechanisms of causation and reasoning that are always inherently at play. Everyone has a morality and ethics is innate to the very process of weighing any choice. Those who never joined us in explicitly plugging conceptual mechanisms into the hole of the creative nothing are free to drift loftily above any consideration of this tangle; a lack of *awareness* can, of course, serve as a sense of freedom. If you're not aware of the actual causal mechanisms by which one choice tugs at you more than another you can treat the happenstance flicker of feelings across your life as a kind of fountain of randomness or even wildness. But nothing is really left to object to the "Stirnerite" who simply happens to feel flickers of sadism and a lust for power. And even less is able to be objected to when the fascist argues that caring about strangers is *unnatural*, because their distance from immediate stimuli and instinctive responses, to say nothing of continual social entanglement, makes it impossible to be tormented by their torment or refreshed by their refreshment without requiring the adoption of the dread conceptualization.

I do not mean to imply that answers *cannot* be given, and some self professed "Stirnerites" have indeed given various answers. My point here is that these are non-trivial issues and fascists or other reactionaries coming down on the other side of them are not simply reading "*don't do a collectivism*" and doing a collectivism anyway. They are diverging in ways from Stirner's own trajectory, but they are often still sincerely reading him and being influenced by him. Even if they end up running with him into absolute informer to the fascist secret police during the occupation of France.

In seeming contrast to Rocca's individualist anarchist arc is the socialist Torquato Nanni, one of the many, many, *many* state socialists who followed Mussolini to fascism, albeit one closer in many ways to certain anarchist circles.

Nanni started as a passionate anti-clerical activist and socialist leader on the border of Romagna and Tuscany who had strong associations with anarchists, particularly Arpinati. Nanni's politics are far more muddled and there's a case for disputing his inclusion in a book on individualist anarchists, after all he was a participant in the Socialist Party and a sitting mayor, even if he wasn't hugely into the party. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the Bolshevik revolution as a presumed horizontal direct democracy. This was a man friendly with the staunchly non-individualist Fabbri and Borghi in a period when Rocca and eventually Rygier were fighting with them. Whitaker focuses on his affinities with individualist anarchists, but I think it's important to clarify how muddled the situation is.

It's true that Nanni emphasized socialism as an individual faith of a noble elite few, was hostile to the reformism of the party and saw the value of socialism in "*critique, disintegration, and offensive*," but all things considered he reads most strongly to me more like a modern Bookchinite, or maybe even a council communist, than anything close to an individualist anarchist. His fixation on direct democracy and the Paris Commune are hardly the markers of individualist anarchism. Indeed, as mentioned, he became *the mayor* of Santa Sofia with the intent of transforming the local administrative region into a true workers council.

Nanni, long more of a militant than a reformist despite his own political office, was basically at odds with the Socialist Party

during the crisis about "interventionism" in the first world war, but slunk back to the party in 1918, more inspired by the Bolsheviks than Mussolini's increasingly doomed pro-war crusade. Yet in the September 1919 occupation of Fiume he swapped right back into deep alliance with Mussolini. In no small part because Nanni wanted a revolution, *any* revolution. He became increasingly convinced that the Italian socialists simply didn't have the bloodlust necessary for a revolution as successful as the Bolsheviks', and the fascists *did* have that bloodlust.

This is a common line in all the characters here, and it had wide currency across ideological camps in Italy of the time. The infamous syndicalist Georges Sorel, we mustn't forget, leapt from praising Lenin to Mussolini, because *hey at least the fascists were mobilized for violence*. The common valuing of militancy for militancy's sake, on violence as an immediatist or irrationalist *means without ends*, was conjoined at the same time with an apocalyptic hunger for a revolution to shatter the establishment and existing order, *no matter who it took* to get it going. All of the figures Whitaker covers were influenced by this combination. It is also, sadly, rather timeless. National Bolsheviks and eco-fascists today continue to leverage the same sort of argument, "*I'll ally with anyone serious about smashing The Bad System and steeled for action, everything else is a distraction*." Whether capitalism or civilization is held as the ur-enemy that we must narrowly focus on defeating at any cost, fascist creep goes into overdrive. And the same sort of somewhat paradoxical conjunction of irrationalist immediatism with revolutionary instrumentalism. We see the same with folks urging collaboration with boogaloos while griping that "*antifascism is just liberalism because it shies away from absolute violence; at least these reactionaries are happy to shed blood here and now*." The cult of militancy and rupture remains eternally attractive to a certain set.

If the *only* problem, the *only* thing holding us back from a become the most popular nazi podcast wasn't citing a then still *quite obscure* figure like Stirner to gain points, but because they actually sincerely found value in him. And that value was precisely in stripping away compassion for others. Mike Peinovich and Alex McNabb had been attracted to right-libertarianism because it provided justifications to dismiss the suffering of those without their privilege and a narrative that let them see themselves as elite. But they chafed at libertarianism's strict morality and occasional concern with the oppressed, as well as the implicit globalist cosmopolitanism of markets. In Stirner they found an escape, a way to renounce those fetters and embrace the callousness they actually felt. And while Stirner does not share the inextricable *essentialist* elitism of Nietzsche who despairs of a world drowning in sheeple, the reader is still invited to an elite circle of the few brilliant souls who cast themselves free of specters. Casting off the "fixed idea" of caring about others from the apex of a hierarchy of enlightenment has obvious resonances with fascistic frames, although the boys would quickly discover they could get even stronger highs mainlining anti-semitic conspiracies and racial pseudoscience.

Now obviously this example of neonazi usage of Stirner requires them to scratch off more than a few things and certainly requires ignoring the absolute nuclear bomb of his line, "*I love men too — not merely individuals, but every one*." But let's be frank: Stirner wrote very much in the way of snarky critique, and very little in the way of positive argument. He emphasizes tearing down fixed concepts or memetic complexes, and gives only the most tepid excuse or even appeal to not be a massive prick. He's strong on "*I will not be ruled*" but relatively fleetingly and barely makes any substantive case for the other half of anarchism: "*I shall not rule*." Why should we love? Stirner's avoidance of positive ethics, leaves him to functionally duck the question "*I love them because love makes me happy, I love because loving is natural to me*." But what if loving *isn't* natural to you? What if you were born feeling no sense

nothing."

But in many other approaches the stripping away does not arrive at a common freedom but at an even more particularized and isolated *last twitch* of the mind. This is the place that Rocca went by embracing natural preconceptual instinct as the antithesis to "*thought for thought's sake*." It is also how fascists use Stirner to this day. In their hands Stirner is a tool to strip away, to reject any recognition of commonality. Why should you care about the stranger under the bombs in another country? If they are your property to be used, they are at best not particularly ready-to-hand, and at worst something more like a tool abandoned to the weeds at the edge of your farm. Indeed what could conceivably move you to care about their plight but some *alien parasite*, some Humanist Brainwashing? To care about the abstraction of people far away, laboring under the terror of the drones, is surely to fall prey to the God that is the abstract "Man."

Long ago, in the era before fascism was discovered by liberals (so prior to 2017), I happened across a small brand-new blog of right-libertarians mocking C4SS. The thrust of their critique was that mutualists clearly hadn't read Stirner because they still did cringey humanist shit like care about foreigners. I laughed and rolled my eyes even further to discover they'd registered a .biz domain – an affectation that had just gotten popular among right-libertarians. There was no way this "therightstuff.biz" would ever draw an audience, just another shitty wordpress by two random dudes. …Later, of course, they would start a podcast on that site called "*The Daily Shoah*."

Now obviously their usage of Stirner was rather mercenary. I mean they also had posts up at the same time praising *tradcath* shit. It should not be contentious that if you weld *Stirner* to *Catholicism* you're gonna have to strip away some of Stirner. But we can recognize that while also recognizing that what would revolution, is timidity and unwillingness to act, to spill blood, then even the most reactionary scumbag is more sympathetic and has more potential than the mewling handwringing of some – no doubt *liberal* – comrade wondering if we really need to stomp this row of infants to death to prove our militancy. And woe betide the sort of sniveling coward who asks questions like "*okay but what exactly is the causal relationship between these means and the ends we're seeking?"*

Whitaker emphasizes the anarchist influences upon Nanni and I think seems confident to simply point out his revolutionary focus and belief in autonomous participatory communes, conjoined with his noises about "the individual" but while Nanni was certainly not a classic organizationalist or party man, it's unclear to me how much Whitaker thus believes or seeks to imply he should be classified with the individualist anarchists. *Every* anarchist makes obligatory noises about individual idealism or individuality – as individualist anarchists know all too well, this often means very little in practice.

Nevertheless, one way in which Nanni is central to the story of the individualist anarchists who went fascist is through his close friendship with Leandro Arpinati. Indeed, Nanni would eventually write Arpinati's biography.

Arpinati is the most central figure in Whitaker's book, the common thread he traces to illustrate the other converts to fascism in passing. Originally a young militantly anti-clerical socialist who worked for Nanni, doing public lighting for Santa Sofia, he abandoned socialism for anarchism in 1909.

Arpinati's mixture of Stirner and Nietzsche, or at least the popular interpretations going around, made him something of a wingnut in his initial affinity group, but he was embraced by them because 1) there were so few anarchists in his town, and 2) he repeatedly

demonstrated personal militancy and bravery, like disarming a farmer threatening to murder his wife. I also can't help but get the impression – reading between the lines – that Arpinati was quite charismatic in his streetfighter youth.

The first meeting between Mussolini and Arpinati was hostile. The anarchist-turned-socialist Andrea Costa had died and the local socialists of Civitella were dedicating a covered market to the traitor, Arpinati's crew went to paste up denunciations while Mussolini issued the dedication and denounced them from stage, *quoting Stirner at them*.

Despite – or perhaps because of – these initial sparks, they grew close. Arpinati was taken with Mussolini's political power and Mussolini wanted local allies, so they patched things up and Arpinati's anarchist crew operated as occasional local bodyguards for Mussolini. While Arpinati's crew had started out rather mainline-anarchist, his influence had been significant and more and more newcomers drifted to his take on individualism.

But, after his father died, Arpinati moved to Bologna in 1910 and worked as a railway electrician. There he was a follower of Rygier and earned a reputation as a scab by consistently voting against strikes, rejecting them as deplorable *collective* action rather than individualist attack, all while he bummed around the anarchist scene for food and lodging.

When war broke out Arpinati refused to support the local railway workers in a general strike. It's hard not to wonder if this was rooted in anything different than his contrarian rejections of prior strikes. Yet Nanni, recounting this, praised him for having the foresight to see war as a fecund site of rupture: "*In a flash of intuition his spirit anticipated that revision of all human values – social, ideological, moral – which the war had brought with it.*" It's also true that Arpinati saw the union bosses as out of line with the

yourself.

The creative nothing was probably meant as a non-concept, a kind of topological defect or singularity in our language that formal conceptualization cannot capture. The sort of *beyond the horizon* where Wittgenstein thought everything important laid. I am, in my old age as a cranky ideologue, a notorious criminal many times over convicted of scientism, not particularly sympathetic anymore to the usage of non-concepts of any kind. In my mind they've long since revealed themselves as a cheap trick, a rug to sweep things under, a shell game for folks running scams in the back alleys of philosophy. But even those who embrace or accept the appeal to such non-concepts must still admit they have a certain tendency to get immediately replaced by concepts. What fits into the hole? A mere phenomenological experience of almost cartesian remove and immanence? An anti-reductionist vitalism? A collapse to bare pre-conceptual biological instinct? A self-reflective loop of conscious integration? The array of things folks have implicitly or explicitly stitched into the 'creative nothing' is vast and quite varied.

Some provide a springboard for empathic blurring of identification, in this sense the stripping away of arbitrary conceptual scaffoldings and historical happenstance allows for a very *humanist* move from identifying as *a thing* or *a set of things* (just more inert chains) into identifying with all fountainheads of the 'creative nothing.' This replicates the core premise of anarchism: *your freedom is my freedom*, because what matters is *freedom*, not the arbitrary particularities of some given context in which it is expressed. We are not our various social or physical identities or some clotting of memetic parasites in our brains, but the *motion* underneath, and that *motion* is itself the same *motion* in my brain and yours. The same underlying characteristic or property. This, in various languages, is a common conclusion of some different concepts that get plugged into "the creative

concede any rhetorical ground.

In particular we must understand that nationalism has *two* sides, not just the construction of a flat and illusory solidarity with one's countrymen, but the stripping away of empathy and identification with the foreigner. And of the two it is the *latter* that is the graver mistake and more deadly poison. The mistake of nationalism, nativism, etc, is most centrally about *reducing* one's circle of care. When fascists scream that an American or a White life should be worth more to you than a Korean life, they are not demanding you *elevate* your compassion for some average American, they are demanding you *decrease* your compassion for every Korean. And when they justify this by appealing to some supposed natural or inherent pull to value one's kin over strangers, the proper retort is not to litigate whether or not you are truly "kin" with every other American. The fascist wants to get around to reducing that circle of care too! Contemporary fascist movements have embraced the micro-scale and hyper-local. Ask a fascist today if he thinks there should be border controls between US states or counties and he'll often smirkingly answer in the affirmative. From neoreactionaries to national-anarchists and countless other currents, the evolution of the fascist movement has been to collapse the already small number of individuals you are allowed to care about. To characterize fascism in terms of a drive for some vast homogenous and totalizing society is to miss that fascist movements have *always* positioned themselves as defending a diverse patchwork of isolated islands against the (supposed) homogenizing effects of global connectivity. The Third Reich *explicitly* positioned itself as the champion of local *culture* against the corruption of global *civilization*.

The fascist project is in no small part to shrink your identification with others, to remove all sense of a common spark of creative brilliance, emerging and situated in different contexts, different lives, and to instead suppress this identification ultimately *even in* rank-and-file on the issue of war. But whatever his strongest motivation, he radicalized harder and harder in support of the war and contrarian hostility to his comrades. This embrace of war found immediate expression in constant brawls with anti-war anarchists.

> *"He took to brush-cutting his hair when his head was not bandaged – so that opponents could not "immobilize his head while others punched him in the face.""*

A particularly striking image amid these fights is a meeting of the anarchist union Societa Operaia where Arpinati, Rygier, and Rocca fought some two hundred members of their audience who assaulted the stage for over an hour with thrown chairs and general fisticuffs.

Suffice to say, the anarchist movement as a whole had ceased to tolerate their bullshit. And Arpinati was more than a happy pugilist in response. Amid the fighting at home he tried to sign up for the military but was rejected. This deeply undermined his standing in the facsist movement for decades. Common graffiti in Bologna later under fascism would read "*Did Arpinati fight in the war? No!*"

Anarchists too had a certain disgust for the pro-war non-serving Arpinati and, after joining the first Bolognese fascio de combattimento in 1919, he got a very harsh reception in his hometown of Civitella. This was basically the end of his presence in the anarchist movement.

Soon enough he and Rocca were being used as bodyguards by Mussolini. This was a period of conflict within fascist circles over right and left alliances, with the Bolognese fascist chapter veering further left than Mussolini and appointing a secretary "*from the*

ranks of the anarcho-syndicalists." (Whitaker gives no further details than that, being focused on the individualist currents, and my Italian isn't good enough to go looking for the scandalous particulars.) In any case the Bolognese chapter was a disaster electorally and collapsed in numbers before it was basically seized, replaced, and taken control of by Arpinati in 1920. Militancy progressed rapidly as strikes and minor land reform stirred up class conflict and Arpinati and the fascists positioned themselves as defenders against socialist bullies (a similar note to his hostility to union bosses).

> "*On May Day the fascists paraded through Bologna singing the movement's fight song, Giovinezza, and taunting the socialists. Much to Arpinati's surprise and delight, the socialists did not respond to "the myth of [their] invincibility in the public squares of the city." Arpinati wrote to Pasella, "The local socialists showed exasperating calm; the Chamber of Labor remained hermetically sealed all day. I am convinced they will never make the revolution."*

It's important to note just how critical the youth and student population was to the fascist movement at this time (a far cry from the relatively aging chuds and boneheads that primarily comprise their rallies in our own era). Most members were between the ages of 16 and 26, and the absence of students over the summer collapsed the fascist fighting forces. But when the students returned, Arpinati once again led armed fascists through the streets and ended up in a gun battle with socialists, successfully killing a young worker. This victory got Arpinati appointed head of the armed squads and the ranks swelled from 20 to over 300.

Arpinati occupied a weird hybrid space during this period. The anarchist movement hated his guts, and the goals of his pro-war

find arguments over what constitutes The *Real* Stirner, this is not such a rare reading. I've encountered it among green anarchists and even neoreactionaries. It has a certain kind of gravitational pull because it avoids the perpetual goalpost moving of simply declaring every single conceivable sentence one could offer up within language as just another specter of reified thought. The Natural thus provides a ground, a clear goal, an explanation of what all Stirner was on about that many people find comfortingly clear. Of course even these Stirnerites wouldn't capitalize it as an abstract concept "The Natural" but they would nevertheless emphasize that *the point* is something like listening to your body or more directly flowing from its desires rather than getting lost in a tangle of cognition and social concepts.

Whether collapsing desire construction and mutation down to a direct connection with one's base instincts can be really extended into a general endorsement of "*the authority of nature*" is less interesting than whether folks repeatedly feel an attraction to such leaps.

Certain currents of fascists have repeatedly embraced Stirner, not as in an attempt to claim something popular for themselves, as many egoists have dismissively assumed, but because they clearly and explicitly find personal resonances with Stirner. You'll often find Stirner right beside Evola on fascist reading lists in 8chan or the like, not because they're consciously trying to *steal* Stirner – the vast majority of their audience has never even heard of him – but because those recommending him have their own connection to and sincere fondness for him. These fascists see themselves as individualists par excellence and it's vital that we understand fascism as not necessarily the *exact opposite of individualism* but often as a perversion or *specific form of individualism*. This requires going beyond the inane boomer mis-definitions of fascism in mere terms of totalitarianism, collectivism, or homogeneity. And it requires us to kick off from a defensive posturing that dare not

on Logic & Reason, as a "*disciple*" of Hegel, and as a mere proto-Nietzsche he is later surpassed by Nietzsche who embraces true moral relativism. There's so much askew with this account it's staggering.

There are many ways to read an author and exegesis of Stirner is almost as completely boring and fruitless as exegesis of Marx, many a brain has curdled pursuing either. I have no interest in excavating or defending The Real Stirner, but some reads are just laughably divergent from anything close to reality.

I think the more interesting question is: *did figures like Rocca happen to misread Stirner partly in the same way that Whitaker does?*

And it seems very clear from his own words that Rocca did see Stirner as advocating a rejection of thought and return to natural instinct. Indeed this seems to be one of the weird instances where we can actually see some evidence that these fascists actually read Stirner rather than just picking up "the gist" from social interactions where he at best served as a cartoonish meme. And not just *The Ego And Its Own*! It's in *Stirner's Critics* where he rambles at length about rejecting thought for its own sake, valuing it only in terms of its capacity to to dissolve one's scruples. There's a bit of a leap necessary to go from there to worshiping natural instinct, and there is text of Stirner critiquing being dragged along by one's hungers, but inveighing *against thought itself* is not the sort of 101 level canard most people opportunistically pick up from Stirner at a glance. Granted, it's quite at odds with Whitaker's framing of Stirner as Logic & Reason bro, but we can pick out a kind of coherent arc where thought is the realm of spooks intervening over and distracting from the physical base of your impulses and instincts.

While, again, words cannot emphasize how dreary and wasteful I organizing and their anti-war organizing couldn't be more different, but he still had a certain identification with the anarchists. He evidently conceptualized his differences primarily in terms of who was likely to actually achieve the glorious revolution or rupture, anarchists or fascists.

> "*On June 26th, 1920, active troops from two of the Army's best divisions mutinied, refusing to board ships… The anarchists called a general strike in support of the mutineers and within 24 hours Bologna was in revolt… When [the socialists] refused to support the anarchists, "the Ancona rebels greeted this message with howls of indignation… When the revolt collapsed on Jun 30th, Arpinati took it as further proof that the socialists would not make a revolution."*

In short, while the anarchist movement was anti-war, its revolt in that name was far more sympathetic to Arpinati than the socialist suppression of the revolt. At least the anarchists were in favor of revolutionary action. (As is their wont, the socialists approved brutal state action to put down the anarchists, tools that the fascists would promptly turn on them.)

Bookstore burnings, gunfights and grenade throwings ensued between the fascists and the state socialists, just as Arpinati had cut his teeth trading live fire with anarchists, with the cops backing Arpinati's fascists and the landowners, Catholic orgs, and wealthy throwing money on them. "*By March, membership in the fascio rose to between five and eight thousand."* One of the successes of Arpinati's street terror was that it largely avoided the socialist leadership to instead prioritize murdering small socialist functionaries. The socialist leadership didn't care as much about such lower level folks and the political leaders of other parties didn't see this as a threat to norms protecting them, so the fascists were largely free to terrorize the socialist base into hiding. Beyond

the examples of murders, one particularly gruesome detail Whitaker gives is of a basement Arpinati used to personally torture opponents.

During this period Arpinati's *personal friendships* managed to win him converts from the ranks of antifascists. (I'll say nothing about contemporary embarrassments of self-proclaimed antifascists maintaining friendships and even romantic liaisons with fascists, but at least there are stronger pressures to disassociate and draw lines today.) Similarly he was involved in repeatedly intervening to save Nanni from his own fascist rank-and-file who just wanted to kill a socialist of any stripe. But within a couple years Arpinati himself was outmaneuvered in power games by a syndicalist also climbing the fascist ranks and he briefly declared himself done and ran off to Libya, before inevitably returning and once again clawing his way up.

By 1924 he was once again the official leader of the Bolognese fascists and he turned his attention to systematically building support for the fascist regime, stealing control of nurseries and summer camps from the socialists and pouring money into sports projects and leagues. If you check Arpinati's wikipedia page today practically the bulk of it is about his ties to various sports.

In 1929 Mussolini appointed Arpinati Undersecretary to the Ministry of the Interior, removing Arpinati from his very strong regional powerbase to try to undermine him. But he only grew in power, becoming the "Second Duce" of fascism by 1932. It's easy to see how this heralded his fall, accusation of "antifascism," imprisonment, and internal exile in 1934, but his stances within the fascist milieu were increasingly out of line with the necessities of state.

Arpinati was obviously centrally attracted to the violence and the revolutionary potential of fascism, to be valued in-themselves, corrupted by social institutions, but that rather humans could, with some work, recognize and come to change ourselves towards what was good (like freedom), including in our bodies (Godwin and the cosmist currents both endorsed radical self-alterations to cure involuntary death). There were many other currents of course, I emphasize the promethean ones as strenuous counterexamples to this midcentury liberal notion of anarchism as an appeal to nature.

Because Whitaker and his liberal sources are reading things through that lens they radically misunderstand and misrepresent the whole of anarchism and the messy diversity of individualist anarchism, finally characterizing Stirner in such nature-worshiping terms:

> "*Stirner, too, sanctioned the authority of nature, presupposing in his Union of Egoists that each of the Unique Ones was at heart good. Like other nineteenth-century anarchists, therefore, even Stirner fell back on the notion that some natural authority would be "invoked spontaneously by each person," despite the "massive tension between each individual and the society in which he was ensnared." "* (Whitaker internally quoting from Fowler's The Anarchist Tradition of Political Thought)

Meanwhile, actual Stirner:

> "*Owner and creator of my right, I recognize no other source of right than — me, neither God nor the State* ***nor nature*** *nor even man himself with his "eternal rights of man," neither divine nor human right*."

Whitaker's reading of Stirner goes on to create a funhouse narrative whereby Stirner is a moralist of The Natural and focused

are essentially good in our core nature and we've lost sight of that and been warped by social institutions. This generation of the movement took very strongly to Wilhelm Reich (silly orgone and all) because he was a prominent figure pushing this same simplistic perspective. Even if Kropotkin had a more nuanced view, what was printed in *Mutual Aid* and in *Ethics* didn't do much of anything to counter such beliefs and on-the-ground popular mobilizing narratives; movements don't do nuance. This widespread appeal to nature as good directly coursed into the creation of green anarchism and primitivism. Even if there remained minority currents in anarchism that objected or didn't formulate their perspectives in such terms, "*nature = good*" is indeed reflective of the mainstream in this era.

But where Whitaker and the liberals he cites go wrong is in reading this perspective backward into the anarchist movement in the 19th century and early 20th. Certainly there was some presence around the milieu of the occasional appeals to human nature (and nature more widely) as good and the ground of anarchism's values, but it was hardly hegemonic the way it became during anarchism's midcentury retreat and eclipse. Indeed much of anarchism at this time was a fiery prometheanism, believing fanatically in progress through science, reason, and technology, with the radical new technologies of revolver and dynamite as unprecedented levelers that would enable the transition to a society *never before enacted*. This was not the narrative of Rousseau or Lewis Henry Morgan that liberal discourse is familiar with. The movement was a point of intersection between quite varying currents that all had similar conclusions about the rejection of domination, and that mixed, hybridized, innovated, and drew in wildly varying influences. Figures like William Godwin were utilitarians who believed in a long struggle towards human perfection until everyone was so individually enlightened that coercion would become a distant memory. Such was absolutely not a perspective that humans were naturally good but happily chucking any socialist ends. But he also saw nationalism and street violence as "antiauthoritarian" because they broke the status quo and allowed the suppressed natural elites like him to claw their way up. He continued his prior fight with syndicalism from within fascism just as he had fought it within anarchism. His focus on natural elites (he published Evola naturally) made him hostile to attempts to build a wider base and bring people into the party.

Arpinati kept some power and popularity and as the second world war dragged on he refused entreaties by Mussolini to help him restructure the government, instead trying to make a play to fund the resistance movements and place himself on Mussolini's throne after the Allies ousted him. There's a neat little anecdote about how the deluded fool felt sure the anarchists would hear him out and, lol, of course we didn't. He made other plays, hoping the monarchy would rise against Mussolini and install himself; he also personally helped evacuate British generals trapped behind lines, in hopes of winning standing with the Allies. Thankfully, Arpinati and Nanni were assassinated together in April 1945 before he could regain footing in the post-war era.

In contrast to Arpinati and Nanni, and more in keeping with Rocca, was the saga of Maria Rygier, who we already saw betrayed and attacked by the patriarchs of the anarchist milieu.

Her break with organizationalist ranks greenlit widespread misogynist attacks on her, with Borghi attacking her femininity, dress, figure, sanity, etc. But even as she repeatedly went down for others and sealed her lips behind bars, the organizationalist left spared no sympathy for her. Syndicalist leaders even rejected prison reform while Rygier was a quite prominent recurring prisoner, stating:

"*prisons, except for extreme cases of political persecution,*

> *are not for conscientious workers, but for the dregs of society!"*

Leading Rygier to furiously rejoin:

> "*syndicalism, when it is not union action… is reduced to a single passive exercise: write, write, write, with presumptuous dilettantism, insensitive to the fervor of battle"*

It's hard not to read this onto her parallel narrative arc from staunch anti-militarist to nationalist warmonger. The syndicalists and scene patriarchs no doubt deserved her absolute hatred, but one can see in the above passage this hatred mutating to focus on their lack of militancy. Where she went to prison and proved her commitment, so many of her abusers and detractors sat relatively comfortably at home and pontificated in abstract sneers. Of course *commitment* is not the same thing as *militancy*, to say nothing of making a fetish of violence, but the slippage between those ideas sure is perennial. When a detractor has never risked their own skin, has never applied their fists, it's hard not to fixate on that division between you. Of course, certain people like Fabbri and Borghi absolutely did take personal risks, but it's easy to understand Rygier seeing things differently from her position.

Obviously Rygier's plight in the scene is sympathetic, yet no amount of persecution by your "own side" can ever excuse or justify pivoting to evil for friends and/or revenge. What's morally correct doesn't become fungible just because you face abuse and the enemy offers community and means of retaliation. It's actually quite easy to give one's life for anarchy in a single moment of bravery and pain, but the true test of *commitment* is whether you're willing to shoulder pain and isolation over decades, to be constantly betrayed by "comrades." A shallow violent militancy is often the easy way out compared to saying the unpopular thing, snobbish literary focuses, and while he was involved in anarchist circles before the war, he was also rather representative of the survivors that flourished in the post-war period. He was running from the legacy of violent direct action and concerned with social legitimacy, desperate to write off figures like Bakunin as evil firebrands and to reframe figures like Kropotkin in terms of his own perspective. His book was strongly slanted to reproduce that analysis as well as to characterize anarchism in the rear-view mirror as a failed project and historical episode. For anarchists like my father that came up in the 50s and 60s it's an incredibly apt summary of their zeitgeist. But Woodcock's *Anarchism* is not the place to find a charitable or even fair reading of individualist insurrectionaries.

Woodcock was also writing to an audience of post-war liberals, whose reference frame was very different from that of anarchism. The academic liberals that Whitaker cites are all in this frame and to them anarchism is not just a deludedly utopian artifact of lost history, but also a deeply strange one that they are preoccupied with trying to fit into their own notions of individualism and communitarianism. Since neither they nor Whitaker really bother to read beyond some surface selections, they do a lot of strawman inference to try and resolve how anarchism solves the problems most pressing about it in their paradigm.

There's also a belief that anarchism is centrally defined by the belief that human nature is good. This – as I've repeatedly tried to emphasize to contemporary anarchists – was the widespread takeaway for decades after Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* (one of the few anarchist texts to survive in influence and circulation in the US after the Palmer raids). It wasn't just the warped takeaway of liberal critics, but it was also sincerely what much of the rank-and-file movement came to believe over these decades. Watch documentaries of old anarchists that persisted through the 40s and 50s and you hear repeated explicit references to this. *Humans*

Yet I certainly wouldn't recommend Whitaker's book as a corrective.

The ideological analysis in The Individualist Anarchist Origins of Fascism is just all kinds of shoddy and I've done my best to strip it out in relaying the preceding historical accounts. It's hard to exactly peg where Whitaker is coming from in terms of his own ideology. At many points he seems to be condemning individualist anarchism from a socialist perspective, at other points from a liberal perspective, but there are a few distinct points in the book where he even seems sympathetic to his fascist characters. He clearly finds individualism somewhat suspect (or at least alien), thinks the extrajudicial execution of Nanni and Arpinati is self-evidently bad (*a crime!*), and bemoans that Arpinati has been written off as a fascist rather than recognized for his accomplishments in *good government*. But even that shocking and disgusting sympathy gets nuanced with something that looks like a critique of the ways that historical narratives have pretended that fascism was completely wiped away and wasn't part of contiguous traditions through modern Italy.

Whitaker claims he wrote the book to push back against historical accounts that flatten or homogenize fascism's internal ideological diversity and also cleave it from all prior and following history. That's certainly well and good, but the end result is a book certain to mislead liberals and socialists, or, even worse, provide grist to actual fascists. It's a *useful* book for anarchists, but for anyone not already fluent in anarchism there's a serious danger of his warped accounting doing lasting damage.

As I've mentioned, in (barely) trying to understand anarchism, he pulls heavily from really unqualified liberal academics and from Woodcock's infamously problematic summary of anarchism. A lot has been written critically on Woodcock's 1962 *Anarchism,* its influences and resulting influence. Woodcock was a pacifist with

resisting the popular or mythologized abusers, and sticking to it through all the backlash.

Today we regularly hear people whine that they *had no choice* but to become a tankie, or proudboy, or ecofascist, or work for a liberal organization alongside cops, because some folks were *mean* to them and the monsters were *nice*. I can think of nothing as spineless and craven as making your values so un-fixed as to be dependent upon whether they get you friends.

Rygier unfortunately sought allies not just with vile scumfucks on the edge of the anarchist milieu like Rocca, but by March 1917 she had also joined masons and *sitting politicians* in forming The Committee of Public Safety to force Italy to more deeply commit to the war. This included a plan to "*execute the king and hold the royal family hostage*" to ensure a dictatorship. They planned and advocated mass repression and imprisonment of Germans and anti-war activists (including virtually the entire anarchist movement).

Mid 1920 Rygier's commitment to fascism wavered, as Mussolini declared war on Masonry. She threw herself in the opposite direction and got attacked and her place ransacked by fascists. Throughout all of this she continued to loudly assert that she had proof Mussolini had been an informant for the French secret police and that it was this evidence that provided her with insurance and was stopping Mussolini from imprisoning or killing her. Nevertheless, *eventually* she realized that bragging about blackmail diminishes its effectiveness and she fled to France.

Whitaker doesn't cover much of Rygier after her departure and there's even less available online. But it's important to note the opportunism and lack of principle to her supposed "anti-fascism" and critiques of Mussolini. Basically her argument was that

Mussolini was a blackmailer and opportunist (pot meet kettle), as well as a stooge of France to undermine Italian national interests. Like Rocca, Nanni, and Arpinati she was shunned by actual anti-fascists, although unlike Nanni and Arpinati she didn't catch a bullet for her sins. She died a monarchist.

Although Whitaker centers four figures in his history, no one should walk away with the impression that these were the only examples of fascist creep in anarchist ranks.

I already mentioned the individualist anarchist newspaper editor turned fascist, Edoardo Malusardi, but there was also Mario Gioda, an individualist-anarchist and follower of Rocca who became the leader of the Turin fascio and slaughtered eleven workers in December 1922. Gioda came to be seen as an urban elitist and eventually marginalized within fascist ranks. Whitaker mentions Mammolo Zamboni, another anarchist turned fascist seen as heretical by other fascists, because he was protected by Arpinati.

And there was Leo Longanesi, an anti-conformist who explicitly sought to blend anarchism with conservatism and who represented an agrarian populist wing within fascism. Longanesi gets the best quote in Whitaker's book:

> "*[fascism was composed of] ruffians, violent people, married people, braggarts… vaguely fanatic people who agitate for no particular reason against all that they do not understand, more than anything else from a natural need to exalt themselves and rail against something: unable to clearly formulate their own ideas, they condemn those of others: in continuous personal rivalries, yesterday anarchists, tomorrow police informers, today individualists, tomorrow communists… readers of pamphlets, debtors, eternal idlers and inventors of systems for winning at roulette, living in perennial and confused fanaticism."*

I list these other individuals to push back against the inevitable attempts to dismiss and minimize all contact between individualist anarchism and fascism.

While liberals, syndicalists, state socialists and communists each have a vast array of members who jumped ship for fascism – anyone thinking of using these details as indictment of individualist anarchism should think long and hard before throwing stones on this – and the *vast majority* of individualist anarchists in Italy obviously did not become fascists, there was undeniably a lot of crossover in the early days.

While nowhere near as much as he was tied to the socialist movement (see the copious praise that Lenin and Trotsky heaped on him) or the liberals and conservatives that flocked to his promises, Mussolini was astonishingly deeply enmeshed with anarchists. His father was part of Bakunin's anarchist international. He was personally close with the infamous muslim individualist anarchist Leda Rafanelli in Milan. He knew Carlo Tresca, praised Gaetano Bresci and Malatesta, collaborated with Luigi Bertoni and translated two of Kropotkin's books. He praised Stirner and Nietzsche and quoted them at his adversaries. Mussolini even appealed to (individualist) anarchism openly as justification of fascism: "*To us, the doomed ones of individualism, there is nothing left for the dark present and the gloomy tomorrow but the ever consoling religion… of anarchism!*" Mussolini even supported Sacco and Vanzetti and complained privately to his friends that American fascists didn't side with them.

Running away from this history will get us nowhere and provide no useful antibodies against the resurgence of fascist creep in the worst fringes of our movement.