Note for readers: I realize this submission is a bit long – almost 50 pages (with photos), and that expecting folks to read the whole thing would be impolite and inconsiderate. It is the first draft of a chapter in my dissertation, which explains its length. So if you are pressed for time, I can recommend two ways of reading the chapter. If you are primarily interested in the historical work, I recommend reading only pp. 2-25, 44-51. If you are interested in a reading of George Sorel’s *Reflections on Violence*, then just the introduction and middle section will be of interest, pp. 2-10, 25-44. I hope this makes it more manageable!

Chapter 5

The Cunning of Violence:

Georges Sorel and the Reinvention of War,

1900-1914

It is impossible to express ideas about the *patrie* except in mythical form.

* Georges Sorel, *La Ruine du monde antique*

They were to die by hundreds and thousands. They were ready, but not for death as a mere accident in

the bloody strife: they intended their death to be a sacrifice alight with the conviction of truth.

* Daniel Halévy, *Péguy*

On January 22, 1914, a few months before the outbreak of World War I, Jean Jaurès exhorted to an audience of students,

Today, you are told: act, always act! But what is action without thought? It is the barbarism born of inertia. You are told: brush aside the party of peace; it saps your courage! But I tell you that to stand for peace today is to wage the most heroic of battles…Defy those who warn you against what they call ‘system’! Defy those who urge you to abandon your intelligence for instinct and intuition![[1]](#footnote-2)

Condemning a deformed intellectual culture that he believed motivated the cries for war, Jaurès would spend the next six months calling for de-escalation in the hopes of preventing war’s outbreak and the inevitable human catastrophe. But he fought a losing battle. Fellow political leaders across the political spectrum were increasingly seduced by the virtues of war against the German “hereditary” enemy, with the more bellicose seeking recompense for France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. Jaurès could not undo this overwhelming compulsion for revenge: on July 31st, he was assassinated at a café by Raoul Villain, a *revanchist*.

As Jaurès was warning students of “those who urge you to abandon your intelligence” for war’s “instinct and intuition,” former critics of the Republic on both the left and right were now urging precisely that. Charles Maurras’s royalist Action Française and Maurice Barrès’s romantic hymns to “rootedness” grounded in “the soil and the dead” were calling upon young

Figure 1: Jean Jaurès, leader of the French socialist party, is assassinated. He founded L’Humanite.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Figure 2: Jaurès funeral. Leaders from the left and right used it as an opportunity to praise the importance of French "unity" on the eve of war.[[3]](#footnote-4)

men to vindicate their individuality and authenticity in battle, despite the fact that both had long understood their nationalism as a form of anti-republicanism. As Maurras once put it bluntly: “The republicans can choose: the Republic, or the Country?”[[4]](#footnote-5) Charles Péguy, who had written in his 1910 *Notre jeunesse* that the Third Republic stood for “those who believe in nothing, not even in atheism, who devote themselves, who sacrifices themselves to nothing…And who boast of it,” enthusiastically volunteered to march for a republic he once believed embodied “the sterility of modern times.”[[5]](#footnote-6) Even Gustave Hervé, who had for years worked as a committed antimilitarist and socialist, was pleading with authorities to conscript him on the eve of war. After proudly announcing in his 1906 *Leur patrie* that if faced with war “we [working class] shall not march, whoever be the aggressor,”[[6]](#footnote-7) the man who helped lead the most vibrant anti-patriotism movement in Europe became on the cusp of war a committed nationalist, even renaming his magazine La Guerre sociale to La Victoire.[[7]](#footnote-8)

The trouble was that many of these critics rallied to the republic for reasons that went beyond strategic necessity. By their own accounts, they were also laying claim to a specific understanding of violence, one that positioned war as a means of repudiating the official intellectual culture of the Third Republic and its rationalism, cosmopolitanism, positivism, and belief in progress. Indeed, many of them believed they were spurning base instrumental or utilitarian considerations, which were said to be “egoistic.” They were searching, rather, for a loftier “individualism,” a return to reality and “concrete experience” as found in redemptive violence and collective struggle. Péguy gave poetic voice to this romanticization of war: “Blessed are those who die in great battles / Lying beneath the sun in the sight of God’s face. / Blessed are those who die in a high place / Surrounded by the trappings of great funerals.”[[8]](#footnote-9) Their nationalism, H. Stuart Hughes laments, combined “respect for authority with the cult of spontaneous creation.” It was why younger generations “greeted the outbreak of the slaughter with enthusiasm.”[[9]](#footnote-10) The effect was akin to an “enchantment” of violence. Critics registered with horror this prospect of violence embodying a value of its own standing. In linking together spontaneous action and creativity, violence somehow stood outside of reason. In that independence laid its mystique, its moral power.

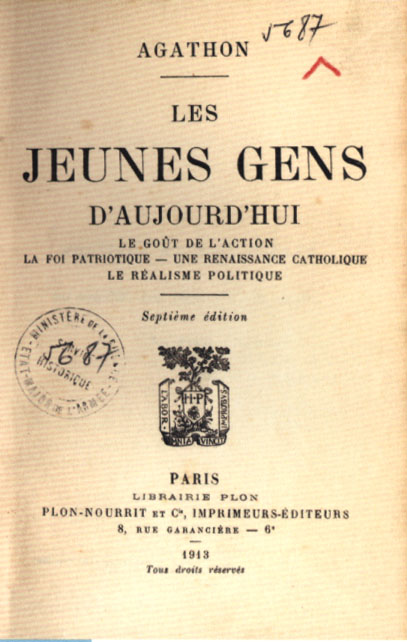
 

Figure 3: An illustration of an "anti-militarist" being mocked for his anti-patriotism, and portrayed as a hooligan when compared to the nationalist drum major.[[10]](#footnote-11)

Figure 4: "Agathon" was the pseudonym for two French intellectuals, Alfred de Tarde and Henri Massis. "Jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui" (1913) was an influential study—and really a defense—of the new nationalism and the renascence of a Catholic faith among France’s elite young men. It stressed a rejection of “intellectualism” and “rationalism,” an affirmation of the “classical spirit,” and an ode to Barres’s cult of “national energy.”

Why did war remake thinkers who were traditionally the first to attack the republic and its democratic institutions into its most strident nationalist defenders? What political problems did war’s enchantment of violence appear to solve? Liberal political theorists have long suggested that these events were a romantic and irrationalist turn to anti-democratic chauvinism. The “mystique of violence” found in fin de siècle Europe, according to Raymond Aron, amounted to “invectives against democracy” in the name of an “aesthetic of existence” and a “degraded romanticism.”[[11]](#footnote-12) Judith Shklar and Isaiah Berlin agreed: it was “the apotheosis of the romantic will” driven by an “escapist motivation” to return to “life and motion” and “the perpetual movement of reality.”[[12]](#footnote-13) Intellectual historians of the period have often offered a similar line of interpretation, with some deeming it a “romantic anti-capitalism” and an “alternative political tradition” from liberal democracy altogether.[[13]](#footnote-14)

This chapter argues that such interpretations are mistaken. The rally to the Republic by many of its critics was neither reducible to strategic resignation in the face of geopolitical necessity nor a romantic escape from democratic politics. Rather, it was an effort to reconceive war as an answer to a perceived crisis of democracy that French republicanism and universal male suffrage seemed incapable of resolving. It was for this reason that the enchantment of violence was repeatedly linked to a reassertion of direct, popular action against a state seen to be corrupt, bureaucratic and unresponsive to the people. However perverse, many figures leading this nationalist revival like Maurras, Barrès, and Péguy understood themselves to be continuing the bottom-up, populist sentiments already underway during Boulangism in the late 1880s.[[14]](#footnote-15) Against the existing cosmopolitan, pacific and elitist republic and its abstract individualism and philosophical rationalism, they juxtaposed a spontaneous, “real” people grounded in the life and soil of the nation. As Péguy put it, they were searching for “the marrow” of France, everything that made up “the *tissue* of the people.”[[15]](#footnote-16) These alignments reflected more than just the legacy of the successive political crises of the Third Republic. They also marked a hard-won theoretical achievement, one that saw the enchantment of violence as part and parcel of re-envisioning popular power and social cohesion in the face of political stasis and moral entropy.

To understand this achievement, this chapter focuses on the most visible theorist of violence during this period, Georges Sorel. Admired by Carl Schmitt and Mussolini, and retroactively mythologized as the intellectual “father of fascism,” Sorel stood at the intersection of the network of intellectuals who led the way to this enchantment of violence.[[16]](#footnote-17) His *Reflections on Violence* (1908) was a key text for reconceptualizing violence during these years. This chapter uses an analysis of his *Reflections* to clarify the broader relationship between the enchantment of violence and the democratic theory and practice of the Third Republic. It argues that the enchantment of violence provided a remedy for two perceived problems with French democracy: its republican model of citizenship was seen to be atomizing rather than associating, and it was leading France into moral decline. The two problems were, moreover, thought to be grounded in the prevailing rationalism and moral skepticism of French political and intellectual culture. Unlike republican social theorists who turned to the state for a solution, however, thinkers on both the far left and right searched for a corrective in “lived” experiential grounds of collective belonging and national renewal, a means for unmediated collective self-constitution. Thus, rather than outright rejecting the traditional republican aspirations for social cohesion and moral improvement, they sought a specifically moral and anti-statist alternative. With Sorel’s aid, French thinkers across the spectrum found a solution in violence, but not by renegotiating the parameters of its employment—its moral justification or criteria of legitimate use—but by redefining what violence *was*: as a practice of reasserting the moral foundations of “the social.” This reconceptualization served as a pivot for critiques of the state by both the left and right during the 1900s to converge on the cusp of war into a nationalist defense of it, in the name of the *patrie*, the embodiment of the “real” people as opposed to its abstract substitute posited by French republicanism. It helps explain why many intellectuals who were traditionally the first to attack the republic and its democratic institutions became on the eve of war its most strident nationalist defenders, finding in war a means of collective salvation.

The chapter begins by first describing how intellectual tendencies on the far-Left and far-Right in France worked out a shared critique of the republicanism of the Third Republic in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair. These tendencies—especially Hubert Lagardelle’s Le Mouvement socialiste and Péguy’s Cahiers de la Quinzaine—helped formulate an “irrationalist” response to republicanism that helped define the crisis of democracy in France in moral terms. The chapter then reconstructs an interpretation of Sorel’s account of violence to chart how he formulated an ameliorative practice adequate to the moral reconstruction of “the social” on the basis of experiential grounds: the cunning of violence. I show that Sorel endorsed violence for its own sake, which he saw as sublime. Yet thanks to contemporary work in French philosophy and psychology, which was increasingly locating freedom in domains outside of reason, such sublime violence became repositioned as an anti-statist practice of *freedom*, capable of conveying the will beyond the constraints of instrumental or utilitarian reason. Positioned as a practical alternative to the prevailing state ideology of progressive universalism, violence reappeared as an engine of social cohesion and moral improvement.

In the final section, I describe how Sorel’s “cunning of violence” was adapted as a conceptual fulcrum and alibi for the reorganization of strands of socialist, catholic, and scientific thought into an irrationalist nationalism by 1914—what Zeev Sternhell has famously called a political synthesis “neither right nor left.”[[17]](#footnote-18) Although Sorel originally intended sublime violence to provide a practice for the working class movement, it was adapted towards new ends both within and outside of France. Its corresponding redefinition of the class struggle in mythic, aesthetic terms paved the way for the displacement of the working class as the revolutionary subject by the “nation” while binding the new nationalism to an enchanted notion of violence. As a result of his appropriation, Sorel’s conclusion that a corrupt and decadent France could only be restored by either “a great foreign war, which might reinvigorate lost energies” or “a great extension of proletarian violence” that would induce “disgust with the humanitarian platitudes with which Jaurès lulls [the bourgeoisie] to sleep,” exemplified broader reorientations of French political thought at the end of the Belle Époque.[[18]](#footnote-19)

What is at stake is showing how neither Sorel nor the enchantment of violence to which his *Reflections* contributed should be dismissed as aberrations from the consolidation of a democratic political culture during the Third Republic.[[19]](#footnote-20) Rather, the enchantment of violence responded to a real contradiction contained within the latter’s republican ideology: its abstract vision of the social body was incompatible with its commitment to a popular will that was free, unified and self-grounding. Although the Third Republic sought to contain this contradiction through the construction of a modernizing state apparatus and a positivistic belief in progress, in so doing it actually opened up the conceptual space for its supposed “opposite,” a militant nationalism based on a return to “concrete experience,” a “real” non-abstract people, and eventually a one-sided particularism. In that sense, the enchantment of violence was the reverse image of the republican universalism of the Third Republic. The latter had inadvertently tasked an irrationalist nationalism with forming the bounded and cohesive people that its own idea of freedom presupposed. Rather than dismissing Sorel as a simple advocate of violence then, he needs to be interpreted diagnostically, as a figure whose repudiation of republicanism brings into view its contradictory shape.

Both Sorel’s efforts and the broader enchantment of violence would recall, if only half-consciously and against his intention, the legacy of democratic terror in the French political tradition that he so detested. That legacy sought the violent reconstitution of a disintegrating social body through a moral and aesthetic reconstruction of the will of the people. Even over a century after the French Revolution, then, the essential dilemmas of the modern reconstruction of peoplehood were recapitulated. But in this instance, the leading lights of French political thought flinched in the face of those challenges and, like so many in August 1914, found in war a means of bypassing them, only to dialectically tighten the grip of those historical dilemmas in more violent ways.

**The Moral Crisis of Democracy in the Wake of the Dreyfus Affair**

Along with Sorel’s *Reflections*, the enchantment of violence appeared at an inflection point in anti-republican discourse of the Third Republic. Up until the wake of the Dreyfus Affair—a watershed event of French history, dividing the country over the fate of a Jewish military captain falsely accused of treason—disputes over the proper form of French government typically divided socialists and republican political thinkers against their Catholic and royalist counterparts. Despite Pope Leo XIII’s 1892 encyclical calling for Catholic reconciliation with the republican regime, the divisions between the two continued to widen. Indeed, from the 1890s up until the publication of the *Reflections* in French in 1908, France experienced a steady intensification of the workers’ movement that roughly correlated with the rise of republican anticlericalism. Fear of a general strike on May Day 1890, for example, brought 38,000 members of the army and police into Paris—the most, Susanna Barrows notes, since the crushing of the Commune.[[20]](#footnote-21) Yet these events were followed by the repeal of Le Chapelier’s Law in 1884 by Waldeck-Rousseau’s republican government which finally legalized trade unionism. The 1890s further witnessed waves of working class and anarchist violence, including several bombings of judges and politicians and peaking with the killing of President Sadi Carnot in 1894; these were the same years that the Ferry Laws were passed, establishing free, compulsory, and secular education in France. The Dreyfus Affair followed by the official separation of church and state in 1905 further aligned republicans and socialists against royalism and reaction. It seemed to verify the affiliation between socialism and anticlerical republicanism. By the mid 1900s, when Sorel was embedded in revolutionary syndicalism, working class militancy had been steadily intensifying for almost two decades: the year that the *Reflections* came out in Italy—1906—was the year that the Confederation Générale du Travail (CGT) adopted the Charter of Amiens, which announced the dominance of revolutionary syndicalism within the workers’ movement and the tail end of its “golden age.”[[21]](#footnote-22)

And yet, almost immediately after publishing *Reflections*, Sorel and his syndicalist companions on the left began to be solicited by the Catholic right. First George Valois (future founder of the ultra-nationalist Cercle Proudhon and then the Faisceau) and then Maurras (leader of France’s largest nationalist organ, Action Française) approached Sorel about the latent filiation they detected between revolutionary syndicalism and the royalist, nationalist movement. A member of Action Française even helped introduce Sorel’s work to the broader right: Paul Bourget, a playwright and contributor to Andre Gide’s *Nouvelle Revue Française*, based his 1910 play *La Barricade* on the *Reflections*. The acknowledgment of affinity did not go unreciprocated. In a letter to Maurras on 6 July 1909, Sorel thanked him for a copy of his *Enquête sur la Monarchie*, writing, “It appears to me certain that your critique of contemporary experience well justifies that which you’ve wanted to establish… I have long been struck by the madness of our contemporary authors who ask democracy to do work that none but royalists, full of the sentiment of their mission, could approach.”[[22]](#footnote-23)

The reasons for this new alliance were not reducible to political convenience. Even if by 1908 the republican left had broken with the revolutionary working class movement, which was itself entering dire straits, that was by no means an obvious invitation for the far right to court the latter.[[23]](#footnote-24) The pivot, rather, was substantive. It lay in a new shared idiom of anti-republicanism, one that critiqued the Republic not only by calling on traditional platitudes of church and family, but also on contemporary work in French philosophy and psychology concerned with the irrational, intuition, life, and the will. These were the years, after all, in which virtually every major intellectual program in Europe was concerned with the irrational sources of human motivation and association. The study of crowd psychology, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, vitalism and “collective effervescence” found their origins between 1885 and 1914. In particular, French intellectual life was being swept up in the charismatic influence of the philosopher Henri Bergson, whose lectures at the College de France became society events that spurred a vogue fascination with irrationalism and Catholic spiritualism.[[24]](#footnote-25) So widespread was this cultural “crisis of reason,” a “revolt against reason,” or more recently an “embrace of unreason,”[[25]](#footnote-26) that one scholar concluded that by 1914 “nothing remained of the proud structure of European certainties. The demolition was systematic, and covered almost every field of culture.”[[26]](#footnote-27)

The intersection of anti-republicanism with this broader intellectual reorientation shaped an irrationalist anti-establishment discourse that questioned whether a rationalist and positivistic political culture could successfully reconstitute the French social body. Its central thrust was two-fold: the Third Republic encouraged moral decline, and it was unable to secure the cohesion of the social body without an ever-expanding statism. It was this idiom of anti-republicanism that helped bridge the anarchist syndicalist movement with royalist, nationalist tendencies, both of whom came to see their generation as living through a crisis episode in a moral epic. And indeed, from the late 1890s to the mid 1900s, the intellectual networks surrounding Sorel had been refining a revisionist interpretation of Marxism as a science of morals rather than a critique of political economy that drew on these philosophies of irrationalism. This was especially true of



Figure 3: Georges Sorel (1847-1922)

Hubert Lagardelle’s *Le Mouvement socialiste* and Péguy’s *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, both of which Sorel was involved and provided the immediate context for the *Reflections*.

Lagardelle’s journal was one of the central organs for elaborating revolutionary syndicalism’s political theory in France.[[27]](#footnote-28) It was in its pages that Sorel’s *Reflections* first appeared in French, serialized in its 1906 issues (after earlier appearing in its Italian analogue *Il Divenire sociale*). It thus provided the initial French audience for *Reflections* before the pieces were assembled into book form for publication in 1908 on his friend Daniel Halévy’s encouragement.[[28]](#footnote-29) *Le Mouvement socialiste* also provided a venue for Sorel’s highly original work on Marxism during these years, which by the early 1900s established him as one of its leading authorities.

Sorel originally became involved with the journal in 1899 during the heyday of the Dreyfus Affair. Like others who answered Emile Zola’s call for intellectuals to defend Dreyfus and safeguard the universal value of truth—even if it meant tarnishing the esteem of France’s military—Sorel joined Dreyfusism. He saw in it the sense of justice that he believed formed socialism’s essence.[[29]](#footnote-30) However, after Dreyfusism was exploited by petty electoral politics and virulent anti-clericalism, especially with scandals like “l’affair des fiches” and culminating with the separation of church and state in 1905, he abandoned it and parliamentary democracy generally.[[30]](#footnote-31) He was joined by other leading revolutionary socialist organizations, like Victor Griffuelhes’s CGT and Hervé’s *La Guerre sociale*. Disaffection from parliamentary politics was for many revolutionary socialists cemented when the former socialist-liberal alliance for republican defense turned on the working class: a violent repression of a miners’ strike in May 1906 by Clemenceau, which left hundreds dead, was for many a point of no return.

Though its readership was comparatively small, and despite the role its contributors would play in the rise of French fascism in the coming decades, even its scholarly critics admit *Le Mouvement socialiste* was “one of the best [journals] that had ever existed in Europe, and the influence of its contributors on the development of the syndicalist left was considerable.”[[31]](#footnote-32) The intellectuals who formed its core—Lagardelle, Sorel, Halévy, Griffuelhes, Marcel Mauss, Antonio Labriola—became known as the “nouvelle école” or new school of socialism. Under Lagardelle’s editorial direction, the “new school” called for a rescue of the spirit of Marx from Marxism and for an autonomous workers’ movement. They also disseminated revisionists like Eduard Bernstein and promoted the work of Bergson, even developing a reputation as the “Bergsonian Left.”[[32]](#footnote-33)

The journal was particularly well known for its antagonistic stance towards parliamentary socialism, which was seen as a capitulation to the Third Republic’s representative democracy. As Pierre Rosanvallon puts it, they endorsed a “sociological socialism, derived directly from the activities of labor groups” against the doctrinal socialism “founded on a philosophical theory.”[[33]](#footnote-34) Lagardelle himself had debated Durkheim over the irreconcilability of the two, insisting against the latter that working-class consciousness was incompatible with support for the republic; Durkheim, in response, accused Lagardelle and his colleagues of leading an incoherent anti-social movement that threatened to abort any gains socialism might gradually achieve through institutional reform.[[34]](#footnote-35) This theoretical conflict intersected with the broader “crisis of Marxism” during these years. This crisis—can or should we modify Marx’s arguments in light of present conditions?—revealed geopolitical and nationalist anxieties. “Official” Marxism in France was sometimes seen as German in spirit and thus anti-French. In recovering Marx from social democrats in Germany and Jules Guesde in France, Lagardelle and his journal participated in a broader effort to find a distinctly French form of Marxism. To critique official Marxism—even if in the name of the true Marx—was a way of defending French exceptionalism.[[35]](#footnote-36) It identified the spirit of Marx with the French revolutionary tradition and France as the true home of socialism. Hence why thinkers associated with both nationalism and revolutionary syndicalism also latched onto Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: aside from being a moralist, anarchist, and anti-capitalist, he was French.[[36]](#footnote-37) Proudhon’s claim that war was a civilizing force, that war was “divine… primordial, essential to life and to the production of men and society” anticipated the link between violence and “the social” that many revolutionary syndicalists and nationalists would embrace on the eve of World War I.[[37]](#footnote-38) Perhaps unsurprisingly then, before Sorel even encountered Marx in the late 1890s he was already praising Proudhon, and much of his return to “the spirit of Marx” during his days at *Le Mouvement socialiste* is accented towards the latter.[[38]](#footnote-39)

If the *Reflections* drew its distinctive revisionism from Lagardelle’s journal, its moralization of war and violence was tempered elsewhere: the circle surrounding the poet and essayist Charles Péguy, editor of the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*. The *Cahiers* was a vibrant (and financially precarious) publication that gathered together strands of Catholic, irrationalist and socialist thought. Some of its members overlapped with Lagardelle’s journal. Péguy started the *Cahiers* after failing his agrégation at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) and opening up a bookstore in the Latin Quarter. The intellectuals who gathered there—Sorel, Péguy, Halévy, Julien Benda, Eduard Berth, Romain Rolland, and many others—worked to formulate an alternative political program to the official parliamentary socialism of Jaurès and Lucien Herr, the influential librarian at the ENS. As Halévy joked, Péguy’s bookstore became known as “a haunt of old Normale students more or less denormalized.”[[39]](#footnote-40)

The trajectory of Péguy’s circle was as politically heterogeneous as it was morally unbending. Like Sorel, its members began as committed Dreyfusards. But whereas Halévy and Sorel abandoned the Dreyfusard movement after its cooptation by parliamentary politics, Péguy remained committed to its “mystique,” even as he acknowledged that corrupt politicians had derailed it.[[40]](#footnote-41) Further conflicts within the circle came over their attitudes towards Bergson. Sorel and Péguy adored Bergson, and it was with Péguy that Sorel began attending Bergson’s lectures in 1900—“the traditional activity of the aspiring French intellectual,” as Kaplan quips[[41]](#footnote-42)—each Friday afternoon.[[42]](#footnote-43) Péguy, like many others, saw in Bergson “a new religious and philosophical inspiration for politics,” indeed “the last hope of a desperate age.”[[43]](#footnote-44) Benda found the philosopher insufferable, attacking him in *Une philosophie pathétique* (1913).[[44]](#footnote-45) A final divisive issue was Péguy’s spiritual conversion to Catholicism in 1908, which alienated both readers and fellow contributors to the *Cahiers*. Sorel found it peculiar himself. With that conversion, the *Cahiers* assumed an idiosyncratic place among the French right, a Bergsonian conservatism nudged between the integral nationalism of Maurras’s Action Française and the narcissistic individualism of Barrès in the pages of the *Echo de Paris*.

Péguy was not alone in turning to religious experience as an escape from what he imagined was a suffocating abstract intellectual culture. Even at the ENS, the number of students

Figure 4: Charles Péguy, Editor of the *Cahiers* *de la Quinzaine*.

Figure 5: People lined up outside of Henri Bergson's lectures, 14 February 1914.[[45]](#footnote-46)

professing religious identification swelled during these years.[[46]](#footnote-47) Nevertheless, if the *Cahiers* circle split over the legacy of the Dreyfus affair, Bergson and religion, they were united by their common interest in a moral interpretation of socialism. It was that concern that more than anything motivated its members. That interpretation, Sorel argued, consisted in a “new evaluation of all values by the militant proletariat” (*RV*, 80), a return to the masculine virtues associated with producers in industrial society: heroism, contact with the “concrete,” work and struggle, and principled moral rectitude against mere political opportunism.

This set of values, perhaps independently haphazard, took on a polemical coherence against the backdrop of the Cartesianism and rationalism championed in places like the École Polytechnique (where Sorel received his engineering training). In its critics’ eyes, Cartesianism was antithetical to the moral sensibilities of the productive classes. It was cold and sterile; it knew no pain. That was why it could imagine the world as simply an object of contemplation. Because the perspective of the worker entailed pain and forbearance, however, it could never doubt the existence of the world or reduce it to an object of thought as “intellectuals” did. Instead, the workers’ perspective inclined towards philosophical naturalism.[[47]](#footnote-48) To contemplate the world as an object of skeptical doubt in the name of reason was ridiculous and proof of the bourgeoisie’s moral and intellectual decadence. It was the historical mission of the productive classes to clear this clutter away, to furnish a new value system for a modern industrial France. By embodying the virtues of men living “concretely,” rooted in industry, tradition, life and soil, producers provided a better template for modern citizenship.[[48]](#footnote-49)

Thus, part of what was distinctive to these Left intellectual tendencies like Lagardelle, Péguy, Sorel, and the leaders of the CGT like Griffuelhes and Émile Pouget was their insistence that socialism was a moral point of view in addition to an economic science. It was for that reason that socialism was capable of supplanting republicanism as a science of morals. They believed that not only the terms of economic arrangement, but also the proper moral bases for a modernizing industrial society were at stake. As Sorel himself acknowledged in a letter to Benedetto Croce in 1907, “If I were to sum up the great concern of my entire life, it would be to investigate the historical genesis of morals.”[[49]](#footnote-50) Sorel remained committed to that approach throughout his shifting political affiliations and even after he fell out with Péguy and the *Cahiers* after 1912.

This moral interpretation of socialism bridged segments of revolutionary syndicalism and the royalist, nationalist movement, despite the fact that the value system of the former was explicitly proletarian (or what they imagined to be “proletarian”). On one hand, it could bridge them because, in portraying the social antagonisms of the Third Republic as above all moral struggles, it viewed society as a moral entity. Of course, the idea that society could be a moral achievement did not originate with Péguy, Sorel, Lagardelle, and their colleagues. It was a notion they already shared with Durkheim and the social theorists of the Third Republic in their efforts to reground republicanism in the wake of the Commune.[[50]](#footnote-51) But the republican sociology of morals that Durkheim, Frederic Le Play, and Hippolyte Taine developed was compatible with moral conventionalism. It had in its canon, for example, Ernest Renan’s *Vie de Jésus* (1863), a text that sought to humanize, and so relativize, Christianity’s origin. Renan’s 1882 “Qu-est-ce qu’une nation?” lecture, which famously acknowledged the nation as constituted by shared mores and historical amnesia, did so to construct a theory of the nation that was emphatically conventional. Taine’s equally famous claim that society was a product of the “race, milieu and moment” triptych was, beyond its conservatism, also an ode to a historicist and relativizing social science.

This moral conventionalism was unacceptable to many political thinkers associated with both the royalist right and revolutionary syndicalism. They thought it was a covert justification for democratic statism. The insistence on the conventionality of moral and political association both deprived France of transcendental moral foundations and fragmented the social body, leaving it to be clinched together only “mechanically” through the state’s “top-down” instruments of integration like education and the family, civic nationalism, the standardization of a common language, and the creation of a modern welfare state.[[51]](#footnote-52) Indeed, Charles Gide, Le Play, Durkheim and others had largely abandoned the moral naturalism of revolutionary republicanism—what Dan Edelstein has called its original “cult of nature.”[[52]](#footnote-53) The new architects of liberal republicanism had reconceptualized the state, rather, as an agent of progress in the name of which it could “make the social [faire du social].” “Established elites, steeped in a liberalism that counted Tocqueville and Guizot among its progenitors,” Philip Nord explains, had finally “shucked off the Jacobin legacy.”[[53]](#footnote-54) They forged in its place a new republicanism that viewed “the social” as an artifact of state-sponsored instruments of cohesion, cementing together discrete social formations and transforming the state from a site of political sovereignty into an instrument of economic improvement and social harmony. The effect was that, as Jacques Donzelot has argued, state sovereignty was gradually redefined in terms of its role as guardian of social progress rather than an expression of popular will, and indeed he describes republican social theory as, essentially, an attempt to contain and then displace the field of politics.[[54]](#footnote-55) Violence, in turn, was defined as barbaric and whose transcendence was a marker of a well-constituted social fabric. Indeed, the repudiation of violence formed a core component of national identity, one that became increasingly central to the self-understanding of French republican ideology even as its civilizing violence abroad was becoming indispensable to French political and material culture (chapter 2).[[55]](#footnote-56)

While agreeing with republican social theory that society was a moral phenomenon, then, the irrationalist anti-republican synthesis also insisted that the former, far from promoting cohesion and morality as it promised, actually amplified moral relativism, atomization and statism. Sorel complained, for example, of the “egoism” which it unleashed: “Egoism of the basest kind shamelessly breaks the sacred bonds of the family and friendship in every case in which these oppose its desire” (*RV*, 188). Indeed, because of that egoism, Sorel (quoting Proudhon) feared that “France has lost its morals” (*RV*, 216). For the implications, one had only to look to Barrès’s *Les Déracinés* or “The Uprooted” (1897), a popular novel, part of a trilogy on “national energy” and which told the story of young Frenchmen from Alsace and Lorraine alienated from their homelands by the pernicious influence of a Kant professor. Kant was a convenient stand-in for the political culture of the Third Republic: rational, cosmopolitan, universalistic, homogenous, an allergic-reaction—so Barrès thought—to life, instinct, intuition, individuality and everything “lived” and “concrete,” namely, *la France profonde*. (That Kant was German was an added benefit.) Though more subtle, Péguy was equally melodramatic. Influenced by Sorel, he called in *Notre jeunesse* for a return to French culture “before the professors crushed it,” to recover “what a people was like before it was obliterated” by the scientific or statist point of view. “We do not yet know,” Péguy mourned, “whether our children will reunite the threads of tradition, of the republican *mystique*.” Torn apart by a debased republicanism and “the sterility of our times,” we are “out of touch with the main body, the generations of the past.” And so, “the *de-republicanization* of France”—the displacement of a transcendent republicanism by its amoral and statist shell, i.e. the parliamentary Third Republic—“is essentially the same movement as the *de-Christianization*of France. Both together are one and the same movement, a profound *de-mystification*.”[[56]](#footnote-57) The mystical and therefore “real” Republic (Péguy), the lived experience of the *patrie* (Barrès), the “most noble sentiments” of concrete morality (Sorel): each were related attempts to reinterpret the social antagonisms of France in moral terms, as episodes of morality’s *longue durée* and driven towards relativism and conventionalism by the doctrinal republicanism of the regime.

What brought parts of revolutionary syndicalism and royalist nationalism into proximity, in turn, was their shared search for a morality not through the state, but—like the broader turn to irrationalism in European intellectual thought—in the immediacy of experience, particularly as it was available in the ethos of “ordinary” people. Such a morality was opposed to the elite intellectualism or skepticism of democratic ideology. As the Dreyfus Affair made clear, so long as the socialist left had been affiliated with republican anti-clericalism, there could be no rapport between the two. But thanks to irrationalist anti-republicanism forged by Péguy, Lagardelle and others, a political synthesis was possible on the basis of a reassertion of naturalistic morality, grounded in a vision of activity, industry and the normative family—a romantic radicalism grounded in what they called “life.”

Together, they downplayed the element of economic struggle in socialism and magnified its moral aspect, gradually recasting the class struggle as one between classes who were less defined by their place in the productive system than their moral convictions. It was out of this interpretation that groundwork for a shared critical diagnosis of democracy was put forward. But such groundwork did not answer the all-important question of how the moral foundations of the social could be reconstructed. It did not yet offer a set of ameliorative practices that could enact and bring forth moral order from within a relativistic, skeptical, and utilitarian political culture. The political thinker who most vigorously worked out a solution was Sorel. His *Reflections*, which finally appeared in book form in 1908, was to make the case that collective violence could be a practice of freedom and an instrument of moral improvement precisely because it defied the constraints of the abstract—whether that was of language or of parliamentary democracy.

**The Cunning of Violence: The Argument of the *Reflections***

Sorel’s *Reflections* appeared at a time in which proletarian violence and militant agitation had been escalating, even as the Third Republic denounced them both as irrational and anti-social. Yet despite the fact that a reconceptualization of violence is the *Reflections*’ chief accomplishment, there is virtually no in-depth analysis of what Sorel meant by it. This neglect is likely the consequence of the *Reflection*’s stature. Its canonical status has led contemporary theorists to ignore it in favor of his minor writings, particularly in the philosophy of science, to better account for his overall intellectual portrait.[[57]](#footnote-58) The ironic result is that Sorel’s *Reflections*, its view on violence assumed to be familiar and settled, has received disproportionately little treatment. But as Alice Kaplan wryly notes, despite its relative neglect by recent academic scholarship, “the book least worth reading was the book most often cited and probably the only book the fascists knew much about.”[[58]](#footnote-59)

The central symptom of this neglect is that scholars have consistently read the *Reflections* to endorse violence for its own sake. Shklar spoke for an entire generation of readers when she concluded that “what distinguishes [Sorel] from most other revolutionaries was that he was not at all concerned with a better future, or indeed with improving society in any way.” Strictly speaking, he could not even be classified as a political thinker.[[59]](#footnote-60) This view has persisted among contemporary readers like Corey Robin, Moishe Postone, and Dominick LaCapra, with the latter recently describing Sorelian violence as “left utterly void of content,” even a “blank utopia.”[[60]](#footnote-61) This view is not altogether wrong. Violence for Sorel *is* that, but only when viewed from one perspective: the political actor. A more careful reading shows, however, that the *Reflections* builds its account of violence from two simultaneous perspectives. On one hand, Sorel describes proletarian violence from a functionalist or Archimedean perspective: we need violence to redraw lines of class conflict at a time in which parliamentary democracy is erasing them through “social legislation” and mixing everything into a “democratic morass” (*RV*, 78). Into democratic homogeneity violence injects moral and social differentiation. On the other hand, for violence to accomplish this task, those who engage in it must do so in ignorance of its overall purpose; they cannot hold in their mind’s eye this “merely” strategic goal. To do so—to engage in violence for utilitarian reasons—would risk debasing their moral rectitude, reducing their sublime violence to the same utilitarian type wielded by raison d’état or what Sorel called “force.” Rather than differentiating the classes, it would remake proletarians in their enemies’ image. Popular accounts of Sorel conflate this latter view for his complete account,[[61]](#footnote-62) thus obscuring how Sorel built into his account of violence a distinction between its subjective and objective dimensions: disavowing its function is how it fulfills that function.

Thus, like Hegel’s cunning of reason, Sorel formulates something of a “cunning of violence” to serve as a motor for historical and moral development: “The striving towards excellence, which exists in the absence of any personal, immediate or proportional reward, constitutes the *secret virtue* that assures the continued progress of the world” (*RV*, 248). This “cunning of violence” prevents his valorization of sublime violence from succumbing to subjectivism. It is specified, moreover, in relation to Sorel’s own interpretation of France’s political situation, which also consisted in an “objective” and “subjective” aspect: it tended towards decadence, and it extinguished the will. Linking these elements together shows why, when confronted with a democratic society which could not bring about the form of freedom it presupposed, Sorel turned to violence as an ameliorative practice while at the same time reconceptualizing its essence in moral and aesthetic terms, as sublime.

In elaborating violence in its “objective” aspect, Sorel argues that proletarian violence counteracts the movement towards national decadence brought about by parliamentary democracy’s tendency to consolidate elite power while undermining the class struggle. Traditionally, he claims, French political culture has been hostile to the class struggle because of the rights of man: “Judging all things from the abstract point of view of the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme*, they said that the legislation of 1789 had been created in order to abolish all distinction of class in law.” For this reason, legislation tailored to the conditions of the working class—social legislation—has been opposed because it “reintroduced the idea of class and distinguished certain groups of citizens as being unfit for the use of liberty” (*RV* 51). It enshrined in law a formal distinction that the revolution was supposed to have abolished.

With the founding of the Third Republic, however, social legislation became palatable because it was recast as republican, i.e. a means of integrating disenfranchised classes into modern citizenship and resolving “the social question” in universal, progressive terms. Policy programs like Léon Duguit and Léon Bourgeois’s “solidarism” had helped create a state-run system of social security and insurance that could fulfill the demands of “social right,” enact a “social economics,” and secure cross-class solidarity in the name of progress while regulating anomie via the family and the workplace.[[62]](#footnote-63) It was this attempt to republicanize social antagonisms that Sorel disdainfully called “social peace,” and in the *Reflections* he specifically attacks Jaurès and Bourgeois as its sophists.

According to the *Reflections*, solidarism’s “social peace” has made parliamentary socialism effete and counter-revolutionary. Rather than standing firm in their convictions, socialist politicians seek compromises with the ruling class and become opportunistic. “Parliamentary socialism,” Sorel observes with loathing, “feels a certain embarrassment from the fact that, at its origin, socialism took its stand on absolute principles” (*RV*, 68). Remade as realists, parliamentarians become hypocritical calculators and strategists. The pursuit of social peace, moreover, cannot help but recapitulate asymmetries of power. This point is important, for Sorel is arguing that what we conventionally understand to be rational deliberation aimed at generating consensus on questions of public good can, in practice, rarely realize the political freedom of the dispossessed under exploitative capitalist conditions. Liberal democratic politics, in a situation of unequal social relations, will stage social conflict as tacitly organized by the question of what concessions are needed from the bourgeoisie to appease the working classes: “Such a discussion presupposes that it is possible to ascertain the exact extent of social duty and what sacrifices an employer must continue to make in order *to maintain his position*” (*RV*, 56). It is thus reformist in essence; it rotates the seat of capitalist power without ever superseding it. Negotiations turn on questions of social “duty” where fulfillment of this duty allows the bourgeois benefactors to feel a “supposed heroism,” one that is identified more accurately by its beneficiaries as barely concealed “shameful exploitation.” By making the class struggle a question of the proper relation between the classes, of what the ruling class owes the poor and what social legislation is therefore required by the state, such discussions cannot but take the form of special pleading. At its worst, it moralizes reformist politics so that its revolutionary counterpart appears not only practically unfeasible but morally repugnant, a violation of one’s duty to cultivate a national consensus enjoyable by all democratic citizens. Hence why “parliamentary socialists no longer believe in insurrection…they teach that the ballot-box has replaced the gun,” or why “parliamentary socialism does not mingle with the main body of the parties of the extreme Left” (*RV*, 49-50). By framing class struggle around civic harmony and duty through social legislation, such struggles entrench exploitative social relations and on those grounds alone are to be rejected as counter-revolutionary (*RV*, 55-62, 107).

According to Sorel, this displacement of violent class warfare for the pursuit of social peace has ushered France into a state of decline. On its face, this claim was not new. The concern with decline and decadence was a fixture of late nineteenth century European intellectual culture. Between conservative disciplines like crowd psychology[[63]](#footnote-64) and criminal anthropology,[[64]](#footnote-65) “decadence” and “degeneration” were concepts in widespread use, organizing an array of social ills like the declining birth rate, alcohol consumption, criminality and sexual pathology within a common framework that analogized the compulsive repetition of France’s revolutionary history to the intergenerational reproduction of the social body. Decadence linked biology and history together in a common national narrative of depletion, of vital life thwarted or suppressed.[[65]](#footnote-66)

Sorel was intimately familiar with this discourse for reasons both personal and intellectual.[[66]](#footnote-67) Yet his understanding of decadence was distinct from the strictly historical-physiological notion. Drawing on his own studies of Vico and Proudhon, he portrayed decadence as a moral condition whose outstanding symptom was the substitution of intellectualism for heroism, and cunning for violence (*RV*, 184-9, 211-2).[[67]](#footnote-68) Indeed, earlier in Sorel’s career, in *Le Procés de Socrate* (1889), he had already insisted that philosophy ruined ancient Athens by destroying its spirit of heroism and the traditional family, replacing them with intellectualism and homosexuality. The former union of poetry and politics, and its enchanted understanding of nature, history, and the family, were supplanted by an enervating culture more interested in philosophical disquisition and pleasure than war and reproduction. Fatally, it had turned away from the egalitarianism of “life”—demonstrated by the complementarity of sexual difference and of soldierly fraternity in battle—for the hierarchies of “thought.” Ancient Greeks before their decline, Sorel extols, were not unlike the captains of industry in America, muscular in their pursuit of collective self-interest. But now there is nothing but “bourgeois cowardice” in France (*RV*, 62). The ruling classes have surrendered their historical mission as “creators of productive forces” for the pacific “noble profession of educators of the proletariat.” The consolidation of statism, decadence, and the loss of heroism by abstract philosophy—this is the objective situation and it is by all accounts a dim one.[[68]](#footnote-69)

This objective situation for Sorel evinces a subjective side: it enervates and paralyzes our collective will.[[69]](#footnote-70) Rationalism and its belief in progress, born in the Enlightenment and now the credo of the Republic, gives rise to an intellectual culture that denigrates the practical bases of knowledge and privileges abstract reasoning. And like Péguy’s claim in *Notre jeunesse* that all things begin as “mystique” and are debased into “politique,” Sorel sees in this culture a fall from intuition and feeling into abstract formalism and prediction, that is, the emergence of a utilitarian culture he calls “probabilism.” This degeneration of thought—the subjective side of decadence—disempowers actors because it substitutes for the unconditional will a form of cognitive and moral reasoning fit only for deadened workers in capitalism, not citizens in a free society.[[70]](#footnote-71) Why, after all, would people commit to a revolution if they predicted that their actions would likely fail, particularly if their opponent was a social order backed by the state? “Theoreticians of democracy,” with their subsequent calls for reasonable and practical action, “greatly restricted the field upon which this absolute man may extend the action of his free will” (*RV* 262).

According to Sorel, Marx is the thinker who best grasps the consequences of orienting our wills towards prediction and calculation: a collection of free individuals maximizing self-interest will produce, in the aggregate, laws of social tendency, thereby dialectically transforming the sum of free actions into a determinate system governed by social compulsion. As Marx teaches us,

When we reach the last historical stage, the action of independent wills disappears and the whole of society resembles an organized body, working automatically; observers can then establish an economic science which appears to them as exact as the sciences of physical nature. The error of many economists consisted in their ignorance of the fact that this system, which seemed natural and primitive to them, is the result of a series of transformations that might not have taken place, and which always remains a very unstable structure, for it could be destroyed by force, as it had been created by the intervention of force... (*RV*, 168)[[71]](#footnote-72)

Though this phenomenon was familiar enough to nineteenth century political and economic thinkers, it was only at the end of the century that it began to carry urgency as a crisis of *freedom*. Weber was to eventually supply its canonical formulation as the “iron cage” thesis. “The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so,” he laments in 1930, for the duty towards economic progress was “now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism…with irresistible force.”[[72]](#footnote-73) The disenchantment of the world, Weber understood, went hand-in-hand with the dialectical reversal of individual freedom into structural compulsion. It was a realization that alarmed an entire generation of European intellectuals, and many—as Sorel would—turned to vitalist mysticism as a metaphysical escape hatch.[[73]](#footnote-74)

Central to Sorel, however, was how this dilemma represented a crisis of the will. Sorel’s work in the philosophy of science originally led him to see determinism—understood not as fatalism, but as a simple statement about the regularity of natural phenomenon under conditions held constant—as something that expanded the jurisdiction of man’s will since it guaranteed the natural world’s experimental manipulability by industry and technology.[[74]](#footnote-75) But in modern democracies populated with atomized citizens, utilitarian in spirit and locked into calculation rather than action, humans became a part of determined nature rather than standing above it as its willful experimenter and producer (like, say, an engineer). Parliamentary democracy, where a self-regarding politician jockeyed for votes as if at a Stock Exchange, was simply another instance of man despiritualized into determined nature; party politics, like the market, resembled a machine that viewed each citizen as quantitatively interchangeable with any other (*RV*, 221-2). A remedy was thus needed in the form of unmediated collective will, prior to both language and utilitarian reason, a will so primordial that it could not be captured by the forms of mediation that have ossified into a mechanical social system: man “must have in himself a powerful motive, a *conviction* which must dominate his whole consciousness, and act before the calculations of reflection have time to enter his mind” (*RV*, 206). Or as Sorel put it earlier in the preface to his friend Ferdinand Pelloutier’s *Histoire des bourses du travail* (1902), “Teaching the proletariat to will, instructing it by action—this is the whole secret of the socialist education of the people.”[[75]](#footnote-76)

“It is here,” Sorel announces, “that the role of violence in history appears as of utmost importance” (*RV*, 77). Proletarian violence—“a very fine and heroic thing…at the service of the immemorial interests of civilization”—Sorel enthusiastically proclaims, “comes upon the scene at the very moment when the conception of social peace claims to moderate disputes,” it “confines employers to their role as producers and tends to restore the class structure just when they seemed on the point of intermingling in the democratic morass” (*RV*, 85, 78). It can undo the parliamentary rotation of power that cuts off revolutionary transformation. It can reverse the objective tendency towards decadence. “The danger which threatens the future of the world may be avoided,” indeed, violence “may save the world from barbarism” (*RV*, 85).

Sorel describes this turn to violence almost like an empirical discovery, as if in searching for an ameliorative practice for the extinction of the will and moral decadence he is simply taking up and examining whether the recent resurgence of proletarian violence in France could be an effective remedy. Indeed, the structure of exposition in the *Reflections* reflects this belief: the second half of the book is framed as a “test” of whether proletarian violence, in fact, contains within it all of the elements of a solution to France’s present crisis. In reality, however, what follows is Sorel’s effort to reconceptualize the meaning and nature of violence. Already theorized by republican social theory as irrational, political violence was implied to be anti-social and therefore something which undermined the conditions for republican freedom. But in Sorel’s hands, that non-rational attribution to violence—which he did not dispute—was revalued through the framework of Bergson’s intuitionism so that this irrationalist violence became a practice of freedom and, moreover, not anti-social at all, but centrally formative of the social.

Specifically, the *Reflections* argues that, thanks to proletarian violence’s “mythic” basis, it can reignite our faculty of collective willing (our shared powers of self-compulsion). Violence sustained by myths can call into being a will *external* to the system of law-like regularity that appropriates our individual freedom as a means of our subjection. It engenders the “sublime,” the moral and aesthetic quality of action that is proof of our freedom. These myths “are not descriptions of things but expressions of a will to act” (*RV*, 28). Specifically, they are “a body of images capable of evoking instinctively all the sentiments” of “war...against modern society,” a mental visualization of an “artificial world” that we hold to be irrefutable, not because there is no evidence against it but because it is not something to which epistemic procedures of refutation are relevant: “A myth cannot be refuted since it is, at bottom, identical to the convictions of a group…unanalysable into parts which could be placed on the plane of historical descriptions” (*RV*, 118, 29). They are not empirical descriptions, or historical and sociological theses. Their aesthetic content is drawn, rather, from time out of mind. In fact, because “people who are living in this world of myths are secure from all refutation,” particularly the myths of revolution, it has “led many to assert that socialism is a kind of religion” (*RV*, 30). Yet simply because myths are “not astrological almanacs” does not mean they are religious, even as they remind us that what distinguishes religion from science is precisely the mythic element. The latter is what gives to religion its validity and binding compulsion, completely alien to modern positivistic reasoning and its withering skepticism. It was a fact neither Durkheim nor Renan could ever grasp no matter how much they sought to demystify religion by writing their histories. Indeed, Marxism contained a mythic aspect too, and in Sorel’s view the goal of revisionism was to recover that mythic core—the vision of catastrophe and revolutionary deliverance—from its disenchantment by the “scientific” Marxists of his day (*RV*, 122-9). After all, the falsity of myths “does not prevent us from continuing to make resolutions,” to *act* on their behalf (*RV*, 116).

What is important to Sorel is not the true but banal claim that humans can be motivated by the irrational or the fictitious. What matters, rather, is that an appeal to the aesthetic is the means by which a voluntarist freedom is redeemable. When we act on mythic grounds, “our freedom becomes perfectly intelligible” (*RV*, 27). To act independently of rational or cognitive considerations is to come to know the deep psychology of our inner life, “our willing activity” and its “creative moment” that rationalist sciences confuse and obscure by viewing our actions from the outside and the standpoint of their completion (*RV*, 25-27). Or he put in *Humanité nouvelle* around the same time, “to organize does not consist in placing automatons on boxes! Organization is the passage from order which is mechanical, blind and determined from the outside, to organic, intelligent and fully accepted differentiation; in a world, it is a moral development.”[[76]](#footnote-77) The moral regeneration of society requires wrestling a politics of will out of a deterministic and atomized social order. While Sorel draws this redefinition of freedom as an inner subjective experience, as willing and invention, largely on the basis of his reading of Bergson,[[77]](#footnote-78) modeling freedom on creativity was also Sorel’s way of insisting on the moral superiority of the productive classes over intellectual ones. And because creative production was a mystery of the interior life, it made sense that socialism had mythic elements since it was a doctrine for producers.[[78]](#footnote-79)

The classic examples of myths, according to Sorel, were the myths of deliverance that motivated Greek soldiers, the Jews and Christians of antiquity, and the leaders of the Protestant reformation (*RV*, 115-6). In each case, images of imminent catastrophe and redemption motivated the will of the persecuted, and no amount of empirical and worldly persuasion could touch their conviction. Such myths exaggerated every conflict, so that every struggle bore world-historic weight (*RV*, 58-63). According to Sorel, the history of social movements teaches that all great historical transformations are motivated by such myths, and even if none of the myths are realized in their details, it does nothing to the accomplished fact that, moved by such myths, political actors have reshaped the world.

It is no accident that Sorel often associates myths with the religiously persecuted. For Sorel, myths are not only sources of motivation. Fear of the state works just as well, after all. What is distinctive about myths is that assert an *ethics*. Turning from Bergson to Nietzsche and Proudhon, he puts the problem thus:[[79]](#footnote-80)

At the beginning of any enquiry on modern ethics this question must be asked: under what conditions is regeneration possible?… And if the contemporary world does not contain the roots of a new ethic, what will happen to it? The sighs of a whimpering bourgeoisie will not save it if it has forever lost its morality (*RV*, 224).

If political actors are to regain contact with their “willing activity,” but in a way that does not exacerbate degeneration and decline, they must be guided by myths that can furnish to the world a new system of valuation that breaks with that of the existing social arrangements. They need myths that isolate the persecuted from their societies (like the Christians and Jews of antiquity), allowing them to act in ways exonerated from the mediations of existing political society. In other words, they need myths that can inspire “sublime” action, aestheticized conduct that is non-instrumental and pre-reflective, sustained by absoluteness of conviction and belief in vindication. “When working-class circles are *reasonable*, as the professional sociologists with them to be,” Sorel scornfully remarks, “there is no more opportunity for the sublime than when agricultural unions discuss the subject of the price of guano with manure merchants” (*RV*, 210). Sublime violence is violence at once moralized and aestheticized, guided by images of catastrophe and redemption. It is conducted without traces of utilitarianism. It is at once free and morally uplifting—precisely the type of behavior Sorel believes parliamentary democracy discourages with its emphasis on “social peace,” realism, compromise, and “reasonable” debate. Indeed, Sorel practically chokes with rage at the prospect of politicians joining a social movement, as happened in the Dreyfusard movement (“no more heroic characters, no more sublimity, no more convictions!”) (*RV*, 213).

Until the founding of the Third Republic, Sorel believed that the most significant modern myth that could sustain sublime violence was that the French Revolution’s “wars of liberty.” That revolutionary myth, an image of newly sovereign people in need of defenders against a jealous Europe, motivated generations of soldiers while protecting their sublimity from base utilitarian considerations. Like the Christians of antiquity acting on faith in redemption, the revolutionaries fought and died independently of the outcome: win or lose, their souls would be saved. But, alas, the historians of the Third Republic—especially Jaurès and Taine—have disenchanted the French Revolution (*RV*, 90-1). By writing its history, by rendering it as if it were any other event, they have destroyed the mythic element, revealing the revolution for what it was in fact: a “superstitious cult of the State” (*RV*, 99). “The prestige of the revolutionary days” has been badly damaged. They can no longer sustain free action.[[80]](#footnote-81)

With the myth of the revolution’s wars of liberty disenchanted and exhausted, a new myth is now needed to rekindle the mythic in society, the better to resurrect the faculty of willing. That myth is the catastrophic general strike, the modern heir to the *mystique* of the French Revolution and thus its latest iteration.[[81]](#footnote-82) For democracy’s disenfranchised, “the war of conquest interests them no longer. Instead of thinking of battles, they now think of strikes; instead of setting up their ideal as a battle against the armies of Europe, they now set it up as the general strike in which the capitalist regime will be destroyed” (*RV*, 63). The myth of the general strike “awakens in the depth of the soul a sentiment of the sublime,” it inspires action undaunted by victory’s implausibility and thus “brings to the fore the pride of free men” (*RV*, 159). It brings together the need for a collective will with a new system of values that repudiates the intellectualism and decadence of a dying France.[[82]](#footnote-83) From its sublime violence will arise an “ethic of the producers for the future” (*RV*, 224).

At once anti-republican and non-rational, the practice of violence was singularly capable of reasserting a total moral vision of society in catastrophic conflict with the existing one. And because of the cunning of violence, it would not be mere subjective assertion, but a real motor of moral and historical change: by refusing instrumental considerations, violence for its own sake would rescue from democratic homogeneity the moral absolutes of social antagonism. It was both “violence for violence’s sake” and a technical instrument for the realization of moral progress. Citing Nietzsche and Renan freely, Sorel believed he had effected a transvaluation of violence’s value, tearing it away from its denigration by effete parliamentarism. No longer destructive, violence was productive; not nihilistic, it was value creating; the opposite of selfishness, it was a means of suppressing egoism for collective moral improvement: “it is the birth of a virtue, a virtue that the Intellectuals of the bourgeoisie are incapable of understanding, a virtue which has the power to save civilization” (*RV*, 228). Or again, “It is to violence that socialism owes those high ethical ideals by means of which it brings salvation to the modern world” (*RV*, 251).

With this argument, Sorel effectively redefined violence. What distinguished the essence of violence from crime or mere force, he argued, was that it took sustenance from an aesthetic ideal which, in virtue of being the self’s inner creation, was untouched by reason’s corrosive abstraction. For that reason, it stood for an ethical practice of value creation. For a generation of Frenchmen in search of individuality and the immediacy of fraternity, however, this intertwinement of the moral and the aesthetic became much more than an idiosyncratic intellectual synthesis. It provided the most sophisticated argument for why violence could be a fountain of “concrete” or communal values with which to redefine the relationship between the individual and the collective in ways that overcame the atomizing force of democratic ideology. It made the case for violence as a practice of freedom.

It is important to stress that this argument was not automatically “fascist” or “totalitarian,” as political theorists who narrate Sorel as part of the prehistory of fascism frequently insist.[[83]](#footnote-84) There were affinities to be sure, which Sorel’s historical appropriation and canonization demonstrates. But to call Sorel fascist is to deliberately obscure how his aestheticization of violence was embedded in an already existing republican project of searching for a moral solution to the seemingly intractable dilemma at the heart of French democratic modernity: in the wake of disincorporating the people into free and equal citizens, how do we reconstruct its social body? If fragmentation was the enabling condition for a deterministic society governed by quasi-natural social laws, how can the refounding of “the social” be accomplished, the better to ground the freedom of a collective will of the people? There were, moreover, major theoretical obstacles to a fascist appropriation. For one, Sorel’s *Reflections* is uncompromisingly anti-statist. For another, the cunning of violence posits the agent of historical and moral improvement to be the working class as distinct from the nation, and indeed the former’s separation from the latter was a condition for progress. The *Reflections* actually critiques patriotism as a smokescreen for democracy’s statism.

Nevertheless, these obstacles were conjoined to invitations to appropriation. This was especially true in the way Sorel thought about authority: because of how he construed the cunning of violence, Sorel was often compelled against his own inclinations to portray the workers in ways that frequently undermined his own stated anti-authoritarianism. On one hand, Sorel believed that the myth of the general strike contained within it an image of a future society with no masters (*RV*, 238-9). The whole point, after all, was to unravel the structures of authority that sustained worker exploitation, whether it was in the State or the factory, and to replace it with a fantasy of spontaneous, organic fraternity. Hence the *Reflection*’s status as a canonical text for the French anarchist federalism. Yet in Sorel’s own descriptions, the workers were repeatedly analogized to people enthralled by a *mystique*: God, nature, revolution and redemption. They were soldiers in battle—possessed of a will, to be sure, unlike their enemies who were deadened “automatons”—but participating in what were essentially military maneuvers. Inwardly free and individual, they were nevertheless obedient to a greater authority.

For example, Sorel states that “Proletarian acts of violence” are “purely and simply acts of war; they have the value of military maneuvers and serve to mark the separation of classes” (*RV*, 105). Rather than acting from jealousy or a sense of self-regard, proletarian violence is dispassionate and soldierly. At the same time, such individuals are not dissolved into a collective. They retain their individuality. “In the wars of Liberty,” Sorel cites as an example, “each soldier considered himself as an *individual* having something of importance to do in battle, instead of looking upon himself as simply one part of the military mechanism entrusted to the supreme direction of a leader.” During these wars, Sorel is struck by the contrast between the “*automatons* of the royal armies,” and the revolutionary army, a “collection of heroic exploits by individuals who drew the motives of their conduct from their enthusiasm” (*RV*, 240-1). What convinced the French revolutionary soldier of his irreducible individuality was the myth of the revolution, which guaranteed his vindication. His violence was thus immune to corrupting qualifications or compromises. Sublime violence was perhaps the only way that the will could appear in the world prior to any mediation that would deaden in, making of it a machine. And yet Sorel wanted both soldiers motivated by their own enthusiasm rather than an overall plan, and military leaders attuned to that enthusiasm enough to let it alone and channel it towards strategic victories. The cunning of violence made that possible.

Many of the intellectuals who would go on to support or collaborate with fascism were beholden to this fantasy. Repudiating the liberal assumption that the individual and the community were in tension, that fantasy insisted on a qualitative form of individualism that was constitutive of the collective. What gave irreducible worth to the citizen-as-soldier was that the battle’s outcome could depend on any one of them. All individual elements were simultaneously world-historical, indeed mythic.

If we wished to find, in these first armies, what it was that took the place of the later idea of discipline, we might say that the soldier was convinced that the slightest failure of the most lowly soldier might compromise the success of the whole and the life of all his comrades—and that the soldier acted accordingly. This presupposes that no account is taken of the relative values of the different factors that go to make up victory, so that all things are considered from a *qualitative and individualistic* point of view (*RV*, 241-2).

Sorel saw in the experience of revolutionary war the “most striking manifestation of the *individualistic force in the rebellious masses*” (*RV*, 243). These were not automatons following orders, interchangeable with one another as parliamentary democracy sees each vote or capitalism sees each worker. They were also not utilitarian, rational skeptics, positivists and intellectuals, but *individuals*. They had faith.

Perhaps the best way to describe the implications of Sorel’s “cunning of violence” is that the condition of freedom for Sorel requires one to be situated at the intersection of two forms of authority: a horizontal and collective authority generated bottom-up, which was at the same time subservience to the authority of the mythic. To be free is to be beholden to a myth and its corresponding ethos, one that draws out the sublime action that can constitute a new “social,” a kind of primordial fraternity outside of language, institutions, and reason. And because of the intellectual context in which Sorel was embedded, the turn to the mythic was seen as a return to *reality*. For it was in the immediacy of “concrete” experience that reality was touched. Not myth, but “reason” and its abstracting tendencies divorced us from our own reality. To aestheticize violence was thus to return to the reality and spontaneity of our free will, vouchsafed to us by metaphysical fiat. We were always free. If we have forgotten, it is only because of the flights of reason; myths, by returning us to the inner duration of our selves, act as an emancipatory corrective.

Sorel seemed largely unconcerned with this two-fold authority that his account of freedom requires, clinging as he did to the notion that he had discovered a horizontal politics without masters. It was a vision of a spontaneous democratic society without any of the corrupting mediations of the existing one. The danger of this anti-authoritarianism and anti-statism was that it was so wary of authority, so infatuated with images of disruption and transgression, and of finding a point outside of mediation (the precognitive will) to reconstitute the social, that it simply could not imagine any viable form of authority that was not mythic. Indeed, Sorel implied that no authority could reconstitute modern freedom *except* mythic ones. He had made a virtue out of authority that was ahistorical and decontextualized.

**The Myth of the *Patrie***

Sorel’s redefinition of violence as a mythic, war-like practice connected the ongoing moral revisionism of socialism to a specific political practice. This “cunning of violence” resonated with broader critiques of republicanism and was frequently appropriated by several movements both within and outside of France. Amid these appropriations and adaptations, there was a clear pattern of displacing the revolutionary role the *Reflections* assigned to the working class with that of “the nation”—by Sorel himself included. Indeed, whatever appropriation the *Reflections* enjoyed appeared intertwined with its adaptation into a nationalist idiom.

For example, members of Action Française invited Sorel and Eduard Berth—a regular at Péguy’s *Cahiers* and one of Sorel’s more dedicated followers—to found a magazine called *La Cité Française*. Its opening statement, which Sorel signed, stated that the group’s goal was to “liberate French intelligence” from the “ideologies which have taken over in Europe for the past century.” To that end,

It is necessary to awaken the conscience which the classes ought to possess themselves and which is presently smothered by democratic ideas. It is necessary to awaken the proper virtues of each class, and without which each will not be able to accomplish its historical mission.[[84]](#footnote-85)

The allusion to the *Reflections* was unmistakable, with its call for proletarian violence as a means of cultivating the ethos of the working class necessary for historical development. Yet the manifesto was immediately followed by Sorel’s own addendum that added a clarion call “to restore to the French a spirit of independence” by taking the “noble paths opened by the masters of national thought [la pensée nationale].”[[85]](#footnote-86) After *La Cité Française* failed to take off, its participants took their “Sorelian royalism” into several splinter tendencies.[[86]](#footnote-87) Berth would help found the Cercle Proudhon. Founded by George Valois, a member of Action Française, the Cercle was an ultra-nationalist league whose 1912 manifesto declared democracy the greatest threat to the modern world, for democracy substituted “abstract” liberties for “concrete” ones. In so doing, it endangered the individual, the family, and society. The group was charged with “reawakening the spirit,” to defeat “the false science” underlying democracy and capitalism, and to resuscitate the *patrie* and its “laws of blood.”[[87]](#footnote-88) In its pages and in Valois’s speeches, Sorel was repeatedly referred to “our master.” Jean Variot, an artist and journalist who first met Sorel at Péguy’s *Cahiers*, subsequently founded *L’Independence*, an intellectual outlet for Sorel where he published nationalist and anti-Semitic essays that alienated many of his former allies on the left while winning him new followers on the right.[[88]](#footnote-89)

In *L’Independence*, the former Dreyfusard now suggested that the affair was a Jewish conspiracy and repeated xenophobic platitudes long associated with the French right. In particular, his writings now focused on the Jew as “anti-artist,” revealing that his attempts to reinfuse politics with an aesthetic dimension implied real social content: Sorel’s redefinition of citizenship on the basis of productive labor (understood as the objectification of a mysterious, inner creativity of the will) served as an alibi for the political exclusion of those whose social ascriptions marked them as incapable of participating in this new sociality of instinct, intuition, and creative production. Moreover, Sorel published two essays in *L’Action française*: a review of Péguy’s book on Joan of Arc, praising it for its patriotism, and an essay critiquing parliamentary socialists and their complicity in state-led repression of strikers.[[89]](#footnote-90) This move towards a militant nationalism was shared by many participants of the former “Bergsonian Left.” Lagardelle, disaffected by the failures of revolutionary syndicalism, would abandon his anti-patriotism and eventually become the minister of labor under Petain’s Vichy; Hervé, for his part, abandoned antimilitarism, discovered in national tradition a remedy for social division and fragmentation, and became a Mussolini enthusiast. Péguy’s fate was short-lived. As literary types are wont to do, he performed his own theory. Increasingly enchanted with death as a form of spiritual redemption and rebirth, he enthusiastically rushed into war in August 1914 only to die on September 4th with a bullet to the head.

The same appropriation and adaptations occurred outside of France. In Italy especially, “Sorelismo” encouraged the reorganization of working class energy into nationalist forms of collectivism. The Italian futurist, Filippo Marinetti, published his infamous and widely read “The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism” in the French literary magazine *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909. It was a screed against history and the past, both deeply anti-establishment and ultra-nationalist. It exalted, among other things, the existential rebirth of a “new man” into the rebellious masses: “We shall sing of the great multitudes who are roused up by work, by pleasure, or by rebellion; of the many-hued, many-voiced tides of revolution in our modern capitals.”[[90]](#footnote-91) Touched by Sorelismo, he would soon claim that war was “the sole cleanser of the world,” and that “I believe that a people has to pursue a continuous hygiene of heroism and every century take a glorious shower of blood.”[[91]](#footnote-92) Marinetti was, moreover, only the most bombastic of those influenced by Sorelismo.[[92]](#footnote-93) As Shlomo Sand explains, “Sorel’s presence in Italian culture from the end of the nineteenth century onward was too important to be ignored. The French friend of [leading Italian intellectuals] was known as an important philosopher, not only in



Figure 9: An illustration in the magazine Epinal in 1915, Thor—“the old Germanic divinity” and avatar of barbarism—is crushing the emblems of “civilization”—French churches. Besides seeing Germany as the hereditary enemy of France, it construes the battle for civilization not in the secular terms of republicanism, but of a battle against paganism by the Church. Paris, BNF, Estampes et Photographie, Li-59 (17)-Fol.



1. Figure 8: Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto appeared in the French paper Le Figaro, announcing the cult of war, intuition, movement, industry and speed. In it, Marinetti writes, “We wish to glorify war—the only cleanser of the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive act of the libertarian, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for women.”

syndicalist circles and not just on the political fringes, but also among an entire generation of university graduates in the second decade of the twentieth century.” So widespread was Sorel’s influence in Italy that Sand compares it to the influence of Sartre and later Foucault in the sixties and seventies in Latin America.[[93]](#footnote-94) Sorel’s canonization as part of fascism’s intellectual pantheon was assured with Mussolini’s proclamation that “Who I am, I owe to Georges Sorel.” Finally, despite the fact that Sorel’s engagement with the right actually only lasted a few years, he was nevertheless mythologized as one of the intellectual forebears of fascism in France, too. Sorel was included by Vichy’s Information Services in a 1941 list of the political thinkers who constituted its pedigree: Sorel and Péguy stood aside Joseph de Maistre, Barrès, and Maurras.[[94]](#footnote-95)

The almost effortless displacement of the working class by the nation helps bring into view how, rather than representing alternative political programs, the irrationalist anti-republicanism of the mid-1900s and the nationalist, populist republicanism on the eve of war might be theoretically continuous. They shared a common way of thinking about how political freedom and social cohesion were related, where the latter became a condition for the former. Sorel himself approved of this “discovery,” writing of Mussolini that his genius consisted in discovering “the union of the national and the social, which I studied but which I never fathomed.”[[95]](#footnote-96) War’s reconceptualization as an answer to the social question—because it drew out individuality, creativity, and moral uplift in ways compatible with collectivism—itself transformed the meaning of the Republic. No longer the guardian of social harmony and economic progress that the elite social theorists of the Third Republic had defined it as, it was now a mythic source of authority and in the name of which a higher (and inward) freedom could be experienced. In obedience to the myth of the Nation, men would fight not for egoism or instrumental considerations, but civilization, morality, and “life” itself.

For sure, part of the broad conversion from anti-republicanism to enthusiastic nationalism was spurred by the weakening of syndicalism more broadly, which after 1908 witnessed violent repression by the state and lost momentum. But the circumstantial reasons for this conversion contain theoretical significance. The aestheticization of violence thus needs to be understood in this context as a theoretical catalyst for reorganizing working class energies into a larger politics of nationalism. Sorel’s notion of myths and sublime violence clearly gratified a widespread urge on the eve of World War I for an intellectual orientation that could unite the political, the aesthetic and the moral in ways that answered the perceived crisis of France. Fragmented by republicanism and lacking experiential grounds for social cohesion that were organic and spontaneous rather than procedural or mechanical, Sorel’s arguments paved the way for war to be viewed as far more than security maneuvering. To enter into war with Germany was to defend transhistorical, indeed “mythic” sources of authority—the *patrie*, progress and civilization.

For those swayed by Sorel’s arguments, to defend mythologized authority in war was the condition of modern freedom. It was as if for Sorel and his generation, democracy erased freedom from the world in the moment that it promised it to all individuals as self-evident and axiomatic. If only the relativism and utilitarianism of French political culture could be overcome, we could finally have in our possession the proof of our freedom: that was the desire that the turn to intuition, “sublime” violent self-renewal intended to gratify. What violence supplied was not factual datum but psychological conviction in our freedom that the empirical world refused to yield through “rational” reflection. The resurrection of political freedom thus depended on an enchantment of violence.

1. Quoted from Frederick Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason: France, 1914-1940* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. “Jaurès assassiné,” *L’Humanite* (1 August 1914). Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale de France (BnF), Droit, Économie, Politique. Grand folio, Lc2-6139*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Photo from Brown, *Embrace of Unreason*, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Cited in Daniel Halévy, *Charles Péguy and the Cahiers de la Quinzaine* (New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947; first published in 1918), 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Charles Péguy, *Temporal and Eternal*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958; first published 1932), 22-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Gustave Hervé, *My Country, Right or Wrong?*, trans. G. Bowman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1910; first published 1906), 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Paul B. Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens: Antimilitarism in France, 1870-1914* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 201-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Charles Péguy, “Eve” in *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* 15th series, no. 4 (1913). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New York: Knopf, 1958), 344. See also Eugen Weber, *The Nationalist Revival in France, 1905-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Jean-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (Dover: Berg, 1985; first published 1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. “L’Antimilitariste et le Tambour-Major,” *Le Petit Journal. Supplément illustré* (11 April 1909). *BNF*, Philosophie, Histoire, Sciences de l’homme, Fol-Lc2-3011. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Rene Avord (Raymond Aron), *Les Dictateurs et la mystique de la violence* (New Delhi: Bureau d’information de la France combattante, undated), 3, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Isaiah Berlin, "The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," in *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 575; Judith Shklar, "Bergson and the Politics of Intuition," *The Review of Politics* 20, no. 04 (1958), 634-656, at 635. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le peuple introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France*(Paris: Gallimard, 1998); Pierre Birnbaum, “Catholic Identity, Universal Suffrage and ‘Doctrines of Hatred,’” in Zeev Sternhell, ed., *The Intellectual Revolt Against Liberal Democracy, 1870-1945* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1996), 233-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Maurice Barrès, “Les Enseignements d’une Année de Boulangisme,” *Le Figaro*, February 2, 1890; Eugen Weber, *The Nationalist Revival in France, 1905-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Quoted from Charles Péguy’s *Notre jeunesse* (1910) republished in Péguy, *Temporal and Eternal*, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Lawrence Wilde, "Sorel and the French Right," *History of Political Thought* 2, no. 2 (1986): 361-374; Mark Antliff, "Bad Anarchism: Aestheticized Mythmaking and the Legacy of Georges Sorel," *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* 2011, no. 2 (2011): 155-187; Jack J. Roth, "The Roots of Italian Fascism: Sorel and Sorelismo," *The Journal of Modern History* 39, no. 1 (1967): 30-45; Shlomo Sand, “Legend, Myth, and Fascism,” *The European Legacy* 3, no. 5 (1998), pp. 51-65.  [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right Nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996; first published 1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; first published 1908), 72. Hereafter cited parenthetically in text as *RV*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Jacques Donzelot, *L’invention du social: essai sur le déclin des passions politiques*(Paris, 1984); Rosanvallon, *Le peuple introuvable*. For a good approach to resituating Sorel within republicanism, see Eric Brandom, "Georges Sorel, Émile Durkheim, and the Social Foundations of La Morale," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 38 (2010): 201-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth Century France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. After trade unions were legalized, they were eventually brought together in the Confédération Générale du Travail in 1895. Alongside the CGT were to be the bourses du travail, spearheaded by Sorel’s close friend in the syndicalist movement Ferdinand Pelloutier. Bourses du travail functioned as labor exchanges and places for political organizing. Although the mid 1900s were the height of syndicalist activism, major defeats exhausted its momentum and by 1909 support for a general strike had declined considerably. For a brief discussion, see Jeremy Jennings, *Georges Sorel: The Character and Development of His Thought* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 116-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Georges Sorel, “Lettre de Georges Sorel à Charles Maurras,” 6 July 1909. Published in appendix of Pierre Andreu, *Notre Maître, M. Sorel*(Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1953), 325-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Gerald C. Friedman, "Revolutionary Unions and French Labor: The Rebels Behind the Cause; Or, Why Did Revolutionary Syndicalism Fail?" *French Historical Studies* 20, no. 2 (1997), 155-81; for a broader political account of this alliance, see Gabriel Goodliffe, *The Resurgence of the Radical Right in France: From Boulangisme to the Front National* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 115-96; David M. Gordon, *Liberalism and Social Reform: Industrial Growth and* Progressiste *Politics in France, 1880-1914* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 171-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993; Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*; Malcolm Vout and Lawrence Wilde, "Socialism and Myth: The Case of Bergson and Sorel," *Radical Philosophy* 46 (1987): 2-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Irving Louis Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason: The Social Theories of Georges Sorel* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1961); Brown, *The Embrace of Unreason*. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. S. P. Rouanet, "Irrationalism and Myth in Georges Sorel," *The Review of Politics* 26, no. 1 (1964), 45-69, at 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. The program of the journal is described by Sorel in “Le syndicalism révolutionaire,” *Le mouvement socialiste*17 (1905), 267-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Michel Prat, ed. “Lettres de Georges Sorel à Daniel Halévy (1907-1920),” *Mil neuf cent: Revue d’histoire intellectuelle* 12 (1994), 151-223. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Georges Sorel, “Morale et socialisme,” *Le Mouvement socialiste*, March 1899, 209-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. “L’affair des fiches” was a scandal where efforts to “republicanize” the army and administration included using Freemasons to collect information on the religious activity of officers. It occurred discretely for years until it broke in 1904. Sorel’s fullest statement on the collapse of Dreyfusism is in his *La Révolution dreyfusienne* (Paris: Rivière, 1909). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*, 16. See also Jennings, *Georges Sorel*, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. See the editorial board’s “La Crise du Socialisme français,” in August 1899, 129-31; Hubert Lagardelle, “Le Socialisme et l’Affaire Dreyfus,” in *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, February 1899, 155-66 and May 1899, 285-99; Edouard Bernstein, “Démocratie et Socialisme,” trans. Albert Lévy, *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, April 1899, 321-37. On their self-understanding as the “Bergsonian Left,” see also Shklar, "Bergson and the Politics of Intuition,” 645-6; James Jay Hamilton, "Georges Sorel and the Inconsistencies of a Bergsonian Marxism,” *Political Theory* 1, no. 3 (1973): 329-340; Vout and Wilde, “Socialism and Myth.” [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Rosanvallon, *Le people introuvable,* 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. From Steven Lukes, *Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work*(Middlesex: Penguin, 1975), 542-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Sorel actually makes this case in “Socialismes nationaux,” *Cahiers de la Quinzaine,* 3rd series, no. 14 (April 22, 1902). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Proudhon even appeared in a regular column of *L’Action française* entitled “Our Masters” in July 1902, praised for his pastoral turn of mind and prudish views on the family. Other “masters” included Fourier and Baudelaire. See “Nos maîtres,” *L’Action française*, 1, 15 July 1902, 63-75, 145-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, ed. Stewart Edwards, trans. Elizabeth Fraser (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1969), 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Georges Sorel, “Essai sur la philosophie de Proudhon,” *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger,* 33 (1892), 622-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Halévy, *Péguy*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. The dispute within the circle came to a head over Halévy’s publication of *Apologie pour notre passé* (1910), which defended his disillusionment with Dreyfusism. It solicited in the *Cahiers* Péguy’s famous (and vicious) reply, *Notre jeunesse* (1910). For Sorel’s appreciation of Péguy’s “mystique,” however, see K. Steven Vincent, “Citizenship, Patriotism, Tradition, and Antipolitics in the Thought of Georges Sorel,” *The European Legacy* 3, no. 5 (1998), 7-16, at 12.  [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual life*(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 63. For a broader discussion of “political Bergsonism” as a cultural event, see Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*. For a more complete account of Bergson’s influence on Sorel, see Vout and Wilde, “Socialism and Myth”; Hamilton, “Georges Sorel and the Inconsistencies of a Bergsonian Marxism.” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Halévy, *Péguy*, 74. Bergson’s praise of Péguy was mutual. Eulogizing Péguy after the war, he writes: “He had a marvelous gift for stepping beyond the materiality of beings, going beyond it and penetrating to the soul. Thus it is that he knew my most secret thought, such as I have never expressed it, such as I would have wished to express it.” Cited from Charles Péguy, *Basic Verities: Prose and Poetry*, trans. Anne and Julian Green (New York: Pantheon, 1943), 9. Like Halévy’s *Apologie pour notre passé*, Benda’s essay solicited a defensive response by Péguy in his *Note sur M. Bergson et la philosophie bergsonienne* (1914). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Shklar, "Bergson and the Politics of Intuition,” 646, 635. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Julian Benda took an unusual place within the circle. Despite being the member who stayed the longest, Benda was also the thinker who fit the circle least; he was also a Jew, a committed rationalist, and largely intellectually incompatible with Péguy. It was a dispute over Benda’s *L’Ordination* that led to Péguy and Sorel’s eventual break. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. Photo from Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 342-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Georges Sorel, “Science and Morals,” in Georges Sorel, *From Georges Sorel: Vol 2, Hermeneutics and the Sciences*, ed. John L. Stanley, trans. John and Charlotte Stanley (New Brunswick: Transactions Publishers, 1990; first published 1900), 133: “pain is found in all manifestations of our activity… Perhaps we could better translate this observation by saying that pain is the primordial manifestation of life, the one that gives irrefutable proof (for our consciousness) of our immersion in the physical world and demonstrates our existence and the existence of the world simultaneously… Thus, the role of pain is very great in the world… In vain are these philosophies [based on pleasure] adorned with a grand scientific apparatus, for they offer no help in constituting the morals of society.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. For a broader discussion of Sorel’s “industrial” view of citizenship, see Vincent, “Citizenship, Patriotism, Tradition, and Antipolitics”; Richard Vernon, “‘Citizenship" in ‘Industry’: The Case of George Sorel," *The American Political Science Review* 75, no. 1 (1981), 17-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. Letter to Croce, 6 May 1907. Published in *Critica* 26, no. 2 (20 March 1928), 100.  [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Despite the common characterization of Sorel and Durkheim representing opposite ends of French intellectual life during the Third Republic, Eric Brandom has made a compelling case that it is their common interest in the moral dimensions of “the social” that bring them, on certain matters, surprisingly close together. See Brandom, “Georges Sorel, Émile Durkheim.” [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Eugen Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).  [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Nord, *The Republican Moment*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. Donzelot, *L’invention du social*. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Péguy, *Temporal and Eternal*, 22-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Interpretative work on Sorel has occurred in roughly two waves. The first, classical interpretation of Sorel located him squarely in the prehistory of fascism and interpreted the *Reflections on Violence* extracted from his broader intellectual biography. Besides Sartre’s infamous reference to Sorel’s “fascist utterances” in his preface to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, this was the view of Isaiah Berlin and Hannah Arendt, as well as his scholarly interpreters like Jack Roth and later Zeev Sternhell, e.g. Isaiah Berlin, “Georges Sorel” in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 296-332; Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 66-83; Roth, “The Roots of Italian Fascism; Sternhell, *Neither Right Nor Left*; Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, trans. David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994; first published 1989), 36-91; Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason*; Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*; Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*; Curtis, *Three Against the Republic.* Recently, political theorists and historians have sought to correct this initial canonization as a proto-fascist by turning to his philosophy of science, especially his scientific conventionalism. The result is that he has been redescribed as a liberal pragmatist or a radical democrat, e.g. Jennings, *Georges Sorel*; John Stanley, *The Sociology of Virtue: The Political and Social Theories of Georges Sorel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); John L. Stanley, “Sorel’s Study of Vico: The Uses of the Poetic Imagination,” *The European Legacy* 3, no. 5 (1998), 17-34; Arthur L. Greil, *Georges Sorel and the Sociology of Virtue*(Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981); Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (New York: Verso, 1985). For a more subtle account of how to situate Sorel historically, see K. Steven Vincent, “Interpreting Georges Sorel: Defender of Virtue or Apostle of Violence?” *History of European Ideas* 12, no. 2 (1990), 239-57. The problem with these two waves of scholarship is that, by correcting for the long-standing interpretation of Sorel as a proto-fascist by turning to his philosophy of science, the problem of violence in his writings was not revisited. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. Shklar, “Bergson and the Politics of Intuition,” 648; Vincent, “Citizenship, Patriotism, Tradition, and Antipolitics.” [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. Dominick LaCapra, *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence*(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 97. This is by far the most prevalent view on Sorel. Three recent expositors are Corey Robin, who specifically characterizes Sorel’s myth of the general strike as action for action’s sake; Moishe Postone, who describes Sorel’s aimless violence as an escape valve from structural domination; and Martin Jay, who views it as a simple clarion call for revolutionary violence. See Corey Robin’s *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism From Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 217-245; Moishe Postone, “History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism,” *Public Culture* 18, no. 1 (2006), 93-110; Martin Jay, *Refractions of Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1. These interpretations are not wrong. But on my view, they simply take Sorel’s “subjective” analysis for the *total* account, thereby neglecting violence’s antinomian structure in the *Reflections*. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. From Raymond Aron, see his *Main Currents in Sociological Thought, Vol. 2: Durkheim, Pareto, Weber* (New Brunswick: Transactions Publishers, 1999; first published 1967), 167; or his pseudonymously published pamphlet, “Les Dictateurs et la mystique de la violence.” For Benjamin’s reading of Sorel as the emblem of “mythic violence,” which though a bit inscrutable is still action for its own sake, see “Critique of Violence,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986). A good analysis of some contemporary readings of Sorelian violence can be found in Richard Bernstein, *Violence: Thinking Without Banisters* (New York: Polity, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. Donzelot, *L’invention du social*; J.E.S. Hayward, “The Official Social Philosophy of the French Third Republic: Léon Bourgeois and Solidarism,” *International Review of Social History*, 6, no. 1 (1961), 19-48; Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen*. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. Robert A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave LeBon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic*(London: Sage, 1975); Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors*. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848 - c. 1918*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 42-73; Jennings, *Georges Sorel*, 40-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 59-62; Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness & Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Donna Jones discusses this “cultural vitalism” in terms of a displacement within social theory of Marx and Hegel for Nietzsche and Bergson, see *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. Sorel discusses Le Bon often sympathetically but critically; see his reviews of Le Bon’s work, compiled in Georges Sorel, "Sorel, lecteur de Le Bon: Huit Comptes Rendus (1895-1911)," *Mil neuf cent. Revue d'histoire intellectuelle* 1, no. 28 (2010), 121-54; for his relationship to Lombroso and criminal anthropology, see Jennings, *Georges Sorel*, 40-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. Besides Sorel’s substantial “Etude sur Vico,” published in 1896 in *Le Devenir sociale* and published now as *Etude sur Vico et autres textes* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), see his preface to *Histoire des bourses du travail* by Ferdinand Pelloutier (Paris 1902), republished and translated by Richard Vernon as “On revolution without politics,” in *Commitment and Change: Georges Sorel and the Idea of Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 93-110. See also Stanley, “Sorel’s Study of Vico.” [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. “If…the bourgeoisie, led astray by the *nonsense* of the preachers of ethics and sociology, returns to the *ideal of conservative mediocrity*, seeks to correct the *abuses* of the economy and wishes to break with the barbarism of their predecessors, then one part of the forces which were to further the development of capitalism is employed in hindering it…” (*RV*,76). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
69. “Many philosophers, especially those of antiquity, have believed it possible to reduce everything to a question of utility; and if any social evaluation does exist it is surely utility… the moderns teach that we judge our will before acting, comparing our projected conduct with general principles which are, to a certain extent, analogous to declarations of the rights of man; and this theory is, very probably, inspired by the admiration engendered by the Bill of Rights placed at the head of each American constitution” (*RV*, 25).  [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
70. Georges Sorel, “La Science dans l’éducation,” *Le Devenir Sociale* 2, no 2-5 (1896). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
71. Sorel makes this case earlier in an essay in *La Riforma Sociale*, reprinted in *Saggi di critics del Marxismo* (1902) and translated as “Necessity and Fatalism in Marxism” in Georges Sorel, *From Georges Sorel: Essays in Socialism and Philosophy*, ed. John Stanley (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987; first published 1976): “We should never lose sight of the fact that it is in the economic order and under the regime of free competition that chance furnishes ‘average’ results, capable of being regularized in such a way as to draw attention to tendencies analogous to mechanical processes; these average results can be suitably expressed in the form of natural laws” (123). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
72. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 1990; first published 1930), 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
73. Marinetti would repeatedly refer to “war, the sole cleanser of the world” as an expression of the “élan vital” and “healthy violence” in his infamous claim that “We believe that only a love of danger and heroism can purify and generate our nation.” See Filippo Marinetti, “Futurism: An Interview with Mr. Marinetti in *Comoedia*,” in *Critical Writings*, ed. Gunter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux), 62. Leaning similarly on a vitalist reading of Darwin and equally alluding to Sorel, José Ortega y Gasset would soon write, “all utilitarian actions aiming at adaptation, all mere reaction to pressing needs, must be considered as secondary vital functions, while the first and original activity of life is always spontaneous, effusive, overflowing, a liberal expansion of pre-existing energies.  Far from being a movement enforced by an exigency—a tropism—life is the free occurrence, the unforeseeable appetite itself,” in “The Sportive Origin of the State,” in Jose Ortega Y Gasset, *History as a System: and other Essays Towards a Philosophy of History*, trans. Helene Weyl (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1941), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
74. Sorel adapts the notion of “determinism” from Claude Bernard, one of the leading philosophers of science in the Third Republic and an experimental physiologist. The best discussion of his influence on Sorel’s early writings is Jennings, *Georges Sorel*, 45-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
75. Sorel, “On revolution without politics,” 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
76. Georges Sorel, “The Socialist Future of Syndicates,” republished in Georges Sorel, *From Georges Sorel: Essays in Socialism and Philosophy*, ed. John Stanley (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987; first published 1976), 84. Originally appeared in *Humanité nouvelle* in March/April 1908. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
77. “Bergson, on the contrary, invites us to consider the inner depths of the mind and what happens during a creative moment: ‘There are’, he says, ‘two different selves, one which is, as it were, the external projection of the other, its spatial and, so to speak, social representation. We reach the former by deep introspection, which leads us to grasp our inner states as living things, constantly in a process of becoming, as states not amenable to measure… But *the moments when we grasp ourselves are rare*, and this is why we are rarely free… To act freely is to recover possession of oneself, and to get back into pure duration.’” (*RV*, 26). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
78. Sorel explains, “Socialism is necessarily very obscure, since it deals with production, i.e. with the most mysterious part of human activity… No effort of thought, no progress of knowledge, no rational induction will ever dispel the mystery which envelops socialism” (*RV*, 139-40). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
79. Approvingly leaning on Durkheim’s “La Determination du fait moral” (1906), Sorel writes, "it would be impossible to suppress the *sacred* in *ethics* and that what characterized the sacred was its incommensurability with other human values" (*RV*, 205). On Lagardelle and Péguy, he says “The new school is rapidly differentiating itself from official socialism in recognizing the necessity of the improvement of morals” (*RV*, 223). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
80. “There can be no national epic about things which the people cannot picture to themselves as reproducible in the near future; popular poetry implies the future much more than the past; it is for this reason that the adventures of the Gauls, of Charlemagne, of the Crusades, of Joan of Arc, cannot form the object of a narrative capable of moving anyone but literary people. Since we have begun to believe that contemporary governments cannot be brought down by riots like those of 14 July and 10 August, we have ceased to regard these days as having an epic character” (*RV*, 91). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
81. As Sorel explains, “We might, in fact, be led to ask if our official socialists, with their passion for discipline and their infinite confidence in the genius of their leaders, are not the authentic heirs to the royal armies while the anarchists and the adherents of the general strike represent today the spirit of the revolutionary armies who, against all the rules of the art of war, so thoroughly thrashed the fine armies of the coalition” (*RV*, 243). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
82. Again, Bergson is Sorel’s influence. The general strike "groups them all in a coordinated picture... it colours with an intense life all the details of the composition presented to consciousness. We thus obtain that intuition of socialism which language cannot give us with perfect clearness - and we obtain it as a whole, perceived instantaneously" (*RV*, 118). [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
83. Berlin, “Georges Sorel”; Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le peuple introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998); Josep R. Llobera, *The Making of Totalitarian Thought* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Jacob Talmon, “The Legacy of Georges Sorel,” *Encounter*, 34, February 1970. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
84. “Déclaration de la ‘Cité Française’” reprinted in appendix of Pierre Andreu, *Notre Maître, M. Sorel* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1953), 327-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
85. “L’ ‘Indépendance Française,’” reprinted in appendix of Pierre Andreu, *Notre Maître, M. Sorel*(Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1953), 329-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
86. Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism*, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
87. “Déclaration,” in *Cahiers du Cercle Proudhon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
88. For a good discussion of his L’Independence writings, see Wilde, “Sorel and the French Right.” [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
89. Georges Sorel, "Le Réveil de l'âme Française," *L'Action Française*, April 14, 1910; Georges Sorel, "Socialistes Antiparlementaires." *L'Action Française*, August 22, 1909. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
90. Filippo Marinetti, “The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism,” in *Critical Writings*, ed. Gunter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux), 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
91. Marinetti, “Futurism: An Interview with Mr. Marinetti in *Comoedia*,” 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
92. For a study of Sorel’s influence, see Jack Roth, *The Cult of Violence: Sorel and the Sorelians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
93. Shlomo Sand, “Legend, Myth, and Fascism” *The European Legacy*3, no. 5 (1998), 51-65, at 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
94. Eugen Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 442. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
95. Roth, *The Cult of Violence*, 186-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)