

Chapter One

The Incubus of Doctrine

The Nationalist movement represented a curious relic of a broader counterrevolutionary tradition whose roots and origins lay in Europe. The tradition rested on Catholic natural law and on an aspiration to reconstruct the patrimonial states and societies that prevailed before the nineteenth century, the odious “age of progress.” The counterrevolutionaries upheld absolute rule and forms of social organization based on hierarchies, corporations, and particularisms. They opposed the natural righteousness of man proclaimed by Jean Jacques Rousseau, the theories of popular sovereignty that began with John Locke, and the classical economics based on the concepts of laissez-faire, specialization, and comparative advantage originating with Adam Smith.

Like the European counterrevolutionaries, the Argentine Nationalists embodied “a futurism of the past” that aimed to reconstruct a conservative authoritarian government and to restore the temporal power of the church, particularly over education, that the anticlerical liberals had taken away. Again like the counterrevolutionaries, the Nationalists were often less easily identifiable by what they actually proposed than by the “vigor of their negations.”¹ These negations were directed chiefly against the modern world, which the Nationalists reduced to a string of reified abstractions: liberalism and individualism, democracy and capitalism, socialism, communism, and “cosmopolitanism,” Judaism and Masonry.

The Discourse of Counterrevolution

The Nationalists drew eclectically from many different sources, their notions often “bundled together or left in a liquid state, so that anyone could extract a twig or take a sip and believe that he had discovered the truth.”² Typical of such ideological promiscuity and blurred referents was a statement in 1933 by the young Nationalist Julio Irazusta, who proposed the following principles to achieve the country’s “salvation” during the Great Depression:

Traditional political doctrine, . . . restore order, . . . renew the eternal tradition of humanity, innovate conserving and conserve innovating, reestablish the primacy of the political over the economic, restore destroyed or subverted spiritual hierarchies.³

Irazusta’s vocabulary of “salvation” and “subverted spiritual hierarchies” echoed the nineteenth-century Catholic ultramontane movement. His expression “traditional political doctrine” evoked Edmund Burke or Joseph de Maistre. The self-contradictory phrase “renewing the eternal essence” was a borrowing from the nineteenth-century European Right, which originated in German idealism. “Innovate conserving and conserve innovating” contained a pragmatic note reminiscent of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s inaugural speech in 1933, while “the primacy of the political over the economic” imitated Charles Maurras’s precept *politique d’abord* (politics first).

The cosmopolitanism the Nationalists perennially decried thus obtruded constantly in their own ideological formulations to a point that the movement often appeared little more than a plagiarism of its European forerunners. The Nationalist movement enshrined Catholic dogmas whose origins lay in ancient Greece, while reflecting precepts of Roman law like the concessionary theory of sovereignty: the only groups able to function as such in society were those formally and explicitly recognized by the ruler.⁴ Following the legal code known as the *Siete Partidas* of medieval Spain, the Nationalists assumed that each person was not “atomistic” or individualistic but belonged within a broader fabric that was “social and organic.”⁵ The opposition of the Nationalists to what they

called centralized despotism and their quest for a church free of subjection to the state recalled Spanish Carlism. Like its French counterpart in the late nineteenth century, the Nationalist movement could at times be accurately characterized as “a synthesis of antirationalism, antipositivism, racism, and nationalism.”⁶ Like Portuguese integralismo, Nationalism began as “traditionalism,” an aesthetic cult of the past, before it evolved into a political movement.⁷ The rabid version of Nationalism that appeared in Argentina in the mid-1970s often bore striking resemblances to the movement led by Franco during the Spanish civil war.

Many of the institutional vehicles the Nationalists created and led had European precursors. The Liga Patriótica Argentina of 1919, for example, echoed the French Ligue des Patriotes of 1882. The campaigns of the Nationalists against political parties and parliamentary “corruption,” or in favor of “class solidarity,” had innumerable European parallels such as the Italian Idea Nazionale of 1911.⁸ There were other strong similarities between the ways the Nationalists deployed history and myth for political purposes and the manner these were used by the Legion of the Archangel St. Michael in interwar Romania.⁹

The Nationalist movement in Argentina had several close parallels in Latin America, although none of these other movements commanded quite the same influence or achieved a similar longevity. Like the Mexican sinarquistas in the 1930s and the early 1940s, for example, the Nationalists strongly supported Franco’s movement in Spain. Both Nationalism and *sinarquismo* were suspected of Axis sympathies during the war, and both combined the rhetoric of scholasticism with Maurras’s notion of *le pays réel* (the real country).¹⁰ A sinarquista text of 1941 replicated one of the core doctrines of the Nationalists, as it aspired for “the old regime, the one before the French Revolution. At that time there was spiritual, social and political unity.”¹¹ Like the Brazilian Integralists of the late 1930s led by Plínio Salgado, the Nationalists depicted their movement as a “dike against the destructive avalanche of the values of nationality” and as the opponent of both communism and capitalism. Integralists and Nationalists shared

a concept of revolution that signified not the conventional figurative sense of the word as the beginning of something new but its literal meaning as a “constant regression to the origin, a return to the point of departure.” An Integralist, expressing sentiments entirely in keeping with the Nationalists, declared that in the modern age, each human being was becoming “an automaton. . . . Capitalism wants to deprive man of his last spiritual residues. . . . The instinct of the machine is enslaving everything.”¹²

Throughout its history, the Nationalist movement maintained a web of contacts abroad. The fastest messages to penetrate from Europe came from Rome, disseminated by priests who worked part-time as journalists and political activists. A flourishing trade in books with Spain kept the Nationalist intelligentsia abreast of current Spanish fashions. French influences, by contrast, often arrived more slowly and sometimes indirectly by way of Spanish or Latin American writers. In the early twentieth century, for example, Argentines grew familiar with the ideas of French writer Hippolyte Taine through the works of Spaniards like Angel Ganivet and with those of Ernest Renan through the Uruguayan author José Enrique Rodó.

Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese influences always predominated above all others. In the 1920s and 1930s, the only English-language authors the Nationalists discussed with any frequency were Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton, and Sinclair Lewis. Lewis’s *Babbitt*, for example, provided an abundance of ammunition for the anti-American campaigns in Argentina during this period, although *Babbitt* himself often sounded like the Nationalists. Thus, *Babbitt* saw New York as the Nationalists viewed Buenos Aires, as “cursed with unnumbered foreigners,” and he lumped together “foreign ideas and communism.” He regarded European countries as “old dumps” and attacked the “long haired gentry who call themselves liberals and radicals.”¹³ Fifty years later, in the mid-1980s, the catalog of a Nationalist bookstore in Buenos Aires listed a total of thirty-four “classics” of the European Right. Fourteen of the authors of these books bore Hispanic names, eight were French, and three were Eastern European,

but only two bore Anglophone names and only three German names.¹⁴

Before 1914, conservative Catholics, Latin American anti-positivists, and the writings of the Spanish “Generation of 1898” represented the strongest influences on the intellectuals later identified with the Nationalist movement. French influences led by Maurras, whose writings one Argentine commentator dubbed the “romantic manifestations of anti-romanticism,” became prominent in the 1920s.¹⁵ By the 1930s and 1940s, the leading Nationalists, who often possessed advanced classical educations, were drawing ecumenically from a wide range of different sources—from ancient authorities like Plato and Thucydides and from contemporary writers like the Russian mystic Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdiaev, whose tract *The New Middle Ages* commanded great popularity.¹⁶ After 1945, Argentina remained one of the few countries in the world where the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* remained on display in book shops. In the mid-1980s, Nationalist publishers continued to stock new editions of such canons of the genre as Louis Veuillot’s *L’illusion liberale*. Other books bore quaint or ominous titles, for example, *Vatican II and the Liberal Error*, *Masonry, Communism and the Atomic Bomb at the Service of International Judaism*, and *Was Marx a Satanist?*

The Nationalist movement thus remained a slave of fashion, continually embracing and discarding its foreign mentors. Such mentorship took several different forms. The Nationalist periodicals often reproduced extensive fragments from foreign works they admired, using them as sources of authority and propaganda. Sometimes, however, the influence of European writers became more difficult to document, since it consisted of unattributed practical applications of ideas or concepts originating abroad that reappeared in heavily mutilated forms. The works of the European philosophers or the classical authors admired by the Nationalists were often ingested slowly over long periods in university classes or other organized study groups. As a young man, Federico Ibaruren, for example, recorded his first contact with the writings of the medieval scholastics in classes offered by the

lay religious association Acción Católica (Catholic Action). He and many of his classmates, he admitted, were “lazy adolescents [and] ill-prepared.” But these classes eventually induced Ibarguren’s “second religious conversion” and a life-long commitment to counterrevolutionary Catholic philosophy.¹⁷

The roots of the Nationalist movement lay in the counter-revolution, but beyond that, its ideological linkages stretched back over two thousand years through medieval scholasticism to the Greeks. Inherent to the Nationalist outlook, for example, was the view of the early Christian philosophers led by Saint Augustine who depicted the universe and its constituents as a hierarchy under God, in which the “higher” properly ruled the “lower.” Thus, society, or the earthly city, as Augustine called it, should be “an ordered concord of its members in rule and obedience,” and those members belonged to the two commonwealths of church and state.¹⁸ The vindication of what the Nationalists called “national tradition” recalled the still older Aristotelian idea that “a thing contains what is necessary to fulfilling its purpose.” Therefore “each People, like each person, has through history a charge, a mission,” and “history has the end of promoting civilization.”¹⁹ These were the basic connections that in Argentina inspired Jordán B. Genta to define his inflammatory teachings as a “humanist pedagogy, with a classical content.”²⁰ As another member of the movement put it, the Nationalists rejected

all the modern errors: materialism, positivism, pantheism, and that false, gross philosophical movement that began with Descartes and culminated in Kant. We sustain Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas: great and glorious thinkers . . . rooted in ancient Greece.²¹

The Nationalists viewed absolute rule and a society composed of corporate institutions as natural to humanity, part of the order established by God. The legitimacy of absolute rule stemmed from the proposition of the scholastics led by Aquinas that men in a community “form a single mystical body . . . a necessary whole, which therefore needs one single head.”²² Thus, “the head of state concentrates in himself complete sovereignty, and does so by God’s grant, Lord of all power.”²³

However, an obligation to serve the *bonum commune* (common good) and to avoid the arbitrary and tyrannical abuse of power limited the ruler's authority. If the ruler misused power, he or she could be legitimately overthrown. In practice, although each society could possess only one sovereign "head," power became diffuse and decentralized, and society was constituted as "cells," "nuclei," and "vertebrae."

The principal cell of the nation has to be the municipality and the family; the nucleus is the province; and the vertebrae which give shape to the whole system is the state.²⁴

At least in principle, the Nationalists therefore adhered to the archaic style of absolutism that posed a government of "compromise, conciliation, and accommodation" and a system of decentralized power based on implied consent: once more, the ruler had no superior but ought never to become a despot.²⁵ The Nationalists subscribed to Aristotle's dictum that "man is a social animal," so that without the subsocietal institutions to bind them together, men and women became "beasts." Social inequalities were "natural," since society comprised the same rank order of intelligences and abilities as it did cells and nuclei. The concept of freedom was understood by the Nationalists in the terms defined by natural law as being derived from God rather than from some mythical Rousseauistic state of nature or as the juridical concession of a temporal power. The Nationalists often pointed to the medieval guilds as prototypes of the corporate institutions on which they aspired to reconstruct society. Finally, people themselves could not legislate, only fulfill the divine law: "The decisions [of men] do not go beyond a purely regulatory power of the divine laws which create the constitutions of the peoples."²⁶

The Nationalists viewed the French Revolution as a "rebellion against God" that had destroyed the "natural order" of society under the anciens régimes and "corrupted the blood of the Christian world . . . with the poison of liberalism."²⁷ The revolution "killed, massacred and mutilated twenty million people, destroyed the natural hierarchies . . . and infected the world with absurd doctrines."²⁸ In abolishing the

guilds, the French Revolution extinguished, in Burke's phrase, the "historic, peculiar institutions" and the "intermediate authorities" that formed a necessary link between the individual and the state.²⁹

In the liberal era following the French Revolution, the Nationalists contended, morality ceased to be an absolute fixed by natural law and instead became a purely relative notion determined by the reasoning of each person, who thereby became "the center of all." Liberalism inflated a person's vain and "unbridled feeling of selfhood," which the Nationalists condemned as "the Judaeo-Protestant God of the inward conscience."³⁰ Erroneously following Rousseau and "believing man good," the liberals "had cast aside all his constraints in favor of laissez-faire" but in doing so induced "moral anarchy."³¹ The liberal principle of "freedom before the law" again assumed the false notion of human beings as individuals. The "individual" of the liberal scheme was the "unsocial" and alienated human being, who was therefore scarcely human at all. For all these reasons, liberalism led to the "unmanning of man." Thus, liberalism

has destroyed social solidarity and exalted the isolated individual, the modern specimen of the rootless man; the inhabitant of the great world cities, egotistical, atheistic, destructive. . . . With the liberal revolution the naked citizen appears, the perpetual climber, grasping, dominated by his appetite, unruly.³²

De Maistre, Menéndez Pelayo, and Others

Leonardo Castellani, a priest and one of the leading Nationalist writers between the 1930s and the 1960s, listed several nineteenth-century French and Spanish writers as the chief sources of the movement's basic ideological stances: Joseph de Maistre and the Count Gustave de Bonald and Juan Donoso Cortés, Jaime Balmes, and Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo.³³ There were countless references to these writers in all the major Nationalist books and periodicals, from *La Nueva*

República in the late 1920s to the monthly publication *Cabil-do* issued during the military dictatorship of the late 1970s.³⁴

From his home in Savoy, de Maistre had led the conservative onslaught against the French Revolution. “*Nous ne voulons pas la contre-révolution, mais le contraire de la révolution*”; de Maistre wanted not only to destroy the revolution but also to construct a new society that was its exact antithesis. He rejected all written constitutions: “The rights of peoples are never written,” or if they are written, they amount to no more than “declaratory enunciations of prior [unwritten] rights.”³⁵ He argued that the rights of a people proceeded from concessions by a sovereign in accordance with natural law, and he attacked all representative bodies as perennial sources of subversion. The French *parlements*, for example, were “Protestant in the sixteenth century, ‘*frondeur*’ [i.e., anti-absolutist supporters of the Fronde] and Jansenist [i.e., antiorthodox Catholic] in the seventeenth, Enlightenment-contaminated [*philosophe*] and republican in the eighteenth.”³⁶ Furthermore, “among all monarchs, the harshest, the most despotic and intolerable is the people-monarch” embodied in the movements led by Jacobinism.³⁷

Rousseau’s social contract was de Maistre’s other principal target. “It is a capital error,” he contended, “to represent the state as the consequence of a choice based on the consent of men, upon a deliberation, and upon a primitive contract.”³⁸ Rousseau had “constructed his whole philosophical edifice on the anti-Christian proposition that Man is good.”³⁹ Instead, according to de Maistre, human nature was depraved and required an absolute monarchy, supported by the church, to subdue and contain it. De Maistre’s writings displayed other strong influences of natural law: forms of government should reflect the “nature” of peoples; governments achieved peace when rulers observed the “fundamental law”; the basic nuclei of each nation were the family and the corporations.⁴⁰

Bonald’s writings developed many of the same themes. The strong xenophobic streak in the Argentine Nationalist movement, for example, became reminiscent of Bonald’s warning that the great danger of representative government lay in the

opportunity it “offered for foreigners to intervene in [national] affairs with their gold.”⁴¹

The men of the [revolutionary] party do not belong to their own country. . . . The Revolution is their homeland. . . . [Moreover the Revolution shows] a profound hatred for Catholicism, whose destruction is the single aim of its policy.⁴²

Bonald attacked the doctrine of popular sovereignty with arguments similar to de Maistre's. Political power, he claimed, was independent of men, since it “resides in natural law. . . . It is divine, because God is the author of all the natural laws of the states.”⁴³ As another apologist of the *ancien régime*, Bonald viewed absolutism as sanctioned by natural law and therefore completely legitimate. He drew the distinction between absolute power, which he regarded as legitimate, and the arbitrary and therefore lawless power he saw as having arisen during the French Revolution. “Absolute power,” he said, “is power independent of the subject, but arbitrary power independent of the law. And when you erect the people as the power, you necessarily confer upon it an arbitrary power, that is, power independent of the law.”⁴⁴ Finally, Bonald stood out among the early European counter-revolutionary writers as one of the first to lament the rise of an industrial society and the impersonal production and consumption relations it fostered.⁴⁵

Gustavo Franceschi, a Catholic dignitary in Argentina connected with the Nationalists, declared that “Spanish philosophy, from Seneca to Balmes, will be a perennial source of wisdom, an art of living, a limitless land of vital experience, of practical discipline, of intimate creations.”⁴⁶ Among the Spanish philosophers the Nationalists most widely admired, Donoso Cortés was remembered as an eloquent opponent of liberalism during the 1848 revolutions and as a proponent of military dictatorship to protect public order.⁴⁷ “When legality can save society,” Donoso contended, “uphold legality; when it cannot, embrace dictatorship.”⁴⁸ He was an early prophet of the impending ideological war between Catholicism and socialism, and he viewed the latter as “Jewish-inspired.”⁴⁹ Socialism was the most obvious enemy, but Russia, he

pointed out, represented the great lurking danger to the Western world.⁵⁰ Balmes, a nineteenth-century Spanish priest, became influential in Argentina during the 1920s and 1930s as another critic of the French Revolution who sought to resurrect the old guilds the revolution had abolished. From this position, Balmes became one of the main precursors of modern corporatism.⁵¹

Among these five seminal ideologues of the counterrevolution, however, Menéndez Pelayo, “the lay saint of the Falange” as Raymond Carr has called him, left his mark most deeply in Argentina. In the nineteenth century, Menéndez Pelayo led the quest to restore what he called Spain’s “true Catholic self” and its “providential mission.”⁵² “Only through [religion],” he declared, “did the Spanish people develop its own way of life and an awareness of its collective strength, only through religion did Spain gain legitimate, well-rooted institutions.”⁵³

In his quest for the “real Spain,” Menéndez Pelayo disparaged the eighteenth century, the age of the Enlightenment, and exalted the medieval era and the Golden Age of the sixteenth century. “In the Middle Ages, we never ceased to consider ourselves one People.”⁵⁴ Spain’s past greatness would revive, he urged, when it rekindled the Senecan discipline and the militant crusading spirit that had prevailed under Ferdinand and Isabella, *los reyes católicos*. Spain had reached its acme in the sixteenth century when it was “most intolerant,” when it expelled the Jews and launched the Counter-Reformation. At this point, religion inspired “Spain the evangelist over half the earth, Spain the hammer of the heretics, Spain the light of the Council of Trent, Spain the cradle of Saint Ignacio [Loyola].”⁵⁵

Menéndez Pelayo lauded the Spanish Inquisition: “Never was there more or better writing in Spain than in the two centuries of the Inquisition.”⁵⁶ The eighteenth-century Enlightenment, however, “the most perverse and ungodly age in history, dismantled stone by stone the beautiful edifice of old Spain. . . . Spain then forgot its religion, its language, its science, its arts, and everything that had made it wise, powerful, and feared in the world.”⁵⁷ At that time, Spain fell victim

to the pernicious influence of the philosophes, Jansenists, Masons, and Jews. Menéndez Pelayo abhorred the tolerance, skepticism, relativism, and materialism he believed had arisen during the Enlightenment and denounced them as incompatible with Spain's intrinsically "spiritual character."⁵⁸ His "myth of Castile" exalted the "most Catholic purity" of both Spain and Spanish America and depicted the Spanish conquest of the Americas as a vast evangelical enterprise accomplished by armies of priests and soldiers: the "union of the cross and the sword."⁵⁹

In Argentina, the Nationalists betrayed many traces of the rhetoric and the conceptual schemes of Menéndez Pelayo. Thus, the Catholic church, the Nationalists often claimed, "represents the historic essence of our nationality."⁶⁰ Under the spell of Menéndez Pelayo's "myth of Castile," the Nationalists extolled the "ancient apostolic and warrior spirit of the Middle Ages and the Catholic kings" that had accomplished the conquest of the Americas. When the Nationalists urged the reunification of Latin America, they usually meant unity on the essentially metaphysical foundation envisaged by Menéndez Pelayo: "a unity of the peoples on the basis of the Catholic, Apostolic, Roman faith."⁶¹ "We belong to the Christian west," proclaimed Genta in Argentina, "because Spain sowed this territory with the spirit of the two Romes, the human spirit of Caesar and the divine spirit of St. Peter."⁶²

In the same mode, the Habsburg kings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries became "the source of honor and authority as the incarnation of the state, the first servant of the res publica, the first slave to duty, and the minister of God." The eighteenth-century Bourbon dynasty, by contrast, was "inspired in French despotism" and therefore "centralist and all-absorbing."⁶³ The Bourbons made religion subject to the state," and they were the source of "the foreign and liberal" malignancies that had arisen since the late eighteenth century.⁶⁴ Under the Bourbons, the "reasoning" that characterized the hated Enlightenment superseded "spiritual vocation and an acceptance of the metaphysical." A world based on "Reason" replaced that founded on Aristocracy, and "Single Truth [i.e., Christian revelation interpreted by an infallible

Pope] became a matter for each man's judgment."⁶⁵ According to Federico Ibarguren, the Bourbons transformed Spanish America, "this ancient land of missionaries and soldiers, into an underdeveloped colony, into an immense factory with no soul."⁶⁶

At first, the Nationalists appropriated the ideas of Menéndez Pelayo and his Spanish followers almost verbatim, but by the late 1930s, the Argentine historical revisionists were beginning to modify this vision of Spanish history into the autochthonous cult of Juan Manuel de Rosas. In the version of Argentine history created by the revisionists, Rosas occupied the same role as the Catholic monarchs and the Habsburgs in Menéndez Pelayo's Spain, and the Rosas regime became the archetype for the indigenous, Catholic, and paternalist autocracy the Nationalists wished to establish. For the revisionists, Rosas's "liberal" successors, as the instigators of spiritual decline and the conduits of a destructive materialism, occupied the same position as the Bourbons for Menéndez Pelayo. The Argentine liberal oligarchy, Nationalists declared, "ruled the country after [the fall of Rosas] under the [Bourbon] system of enlightened despotism."⁶⁷

In all these cases, history became the mistress of politics and propaganda, as the revisionists sought to chart the directions of the future from the starting point of a mythic past. Like Menéndez Pelayo, the Nationalists established cults of the symbolic events and the historical figures who supposedly embodied the values they aspired to restore. No effort was to be spared to propagate these ideas among the general population. Thus, education, Federico Ibarguren believed, should always be based on a national "historical apologia."⁶⁸ "The revision of our history," said José M. Rosa, "is a thankless but deeply patriotic task. . . . From this task will emerge the Argentina of tomorrow."⁶⁹

Other Authorities:

Renan, Taine, and Maurras

The Nationalist movement bore strong traces of two nineteenth-century French conservative writers, Ernest Renan

and Hipolite Taine, and it was deeply influenced by a third French writer, Charles Maurras. Renan's popularity stemmed from his opposition to the "profoundly materialist" society he claimed followed the adoption of universal suffrage. Renan yearned for the return of the old France before 1789 with its "patriotism, enthusiasm for beauty, love of glory." "Justice and government," he lamented, "have been taken over by the mass, and the mass is crude, gross, dominated by a sense of superficial self-interest." Democracy stood at odds with "God's design," while liberal utilitarianism was "blind to beauty."⁷⁰

The environmental determinism created by Taine saw each "civilization" or nationality as the product of a "directing principle" (*faculté maitresse*) that sprang from a synthesis of race, milieu, and "moment," or historical situation.⁷¹ Like Renan's, Taine's influence in Argentina spread slowly and indirectly through works such as Angel Ganivet's *Idearium Español* written in 1898. Ganivet converted Taine's *faculté maitresse* into what he called the *espíritu territorial* (territorial spirit), national character that sprang from the synthesis between environment and history. Thus, for Ganivet, Spanish history from the Roman conquest onward was "a permanent struggle for independence," first against the barbarians and then against the Moors.⁷² Taine's view that "at root history is a problem of psychology" reappeared in Ganivet's version as "every society possesses a personality."⁷³ Finally, like Taine, for Ganivet, "all peoples possess a real or imaginary hero who embodies their own [ideal] qualities." Among the examples Ganivet submitted were Don Quixote and Robinson Crusoe.⁷⁴ In Argentina, this idea also influenced the cult of Rosas.

In mid-nineteenth-century Europe, the ideas that emerged from the counterrevolution were for a long time at odds with these more secular threads associated with Renan and Taine, since Catholics considered the latter tainted by the Enlightenment and German idealism. De Maistre and his successors had objected to Kant, the leading Idealist, as strongly as to Rousseau, since it was Kant, they claimed, who had invented the pernicious "God of the inward conscience." In making

morality and belief into an issue of personal choice, Kant's ideas mortally threatened Catholic metaphysics based on natural law and the Fall of Man.⁷⁵ Kant's German successors, led by Johann Fichte and Johann von Herder, developed his notion of the self-directing individual into the concept of the self-determining *Volk*, which became the philosophical foundation of modern nationalism, the claim that nations had the right to self-determination.⁷⁶ From around the middle of the nineteenth century, the Catholics faced other challenges from positivism and Darwinism, the former proclaiming itself a new religion to replace Christianity and the latter preaching what Catholics perceived as the pagan cult of the winners.

The Nationalist movement in Argentina bore the imprint of the deep clashes in the nineteenth century between the primitive counterrevolutionaries and these later ideological currents—national self-determination, positivism, and Darwinism—and of the ways such clashes were eventually resolved. In the nineteenth century, the French clerical historian, Fustel de Coulanges, attempted to resolve the conflict between the clericals and the Nationalists by presenting the church as the chief agent of national identity. He sought to demonstrate the “spiritual,” and therefore clerical, foundations of France, arguing that the church had served as the leading institutional nucleus of the evolving national community. For the same reasons, the Catholic clergy represented a vital force in France's origins and development.⁷⁷ The scheme created by Coulanges also provided a way of reconciling clerical doctrine with positivist and even Darwinist thought since the history of each nation could now be viewed as a process of ascent and selection, as positivists and Darwinists insisted it should, except that henceforth, religion and the church held center stage in the whole process.

These attempts to update the clerical counterrevolution took numerous forms. “Christianity,” wrote Menéndez Pelayo, for example, “constructed the unity [of Spain]. The church educated us in our hearts by its martyrs and confessors, its fathers, the admirable system of its councils. Through this we became a nation, a great nation.”⁷⁸ Italian social theorist Wilfredo Pareto divided society into what he called the

exceptionally gifted minority and the “mediocre” majority. Thus, society formed a pyramid, as it did in the eyes of the counterrevolutionaries, although the “natural elite” now claimed this distinction not by virtue of birth but in accordance with the laws of natural selection.⁷⁹ Writing around 1880–1914, Maurice Barrès offered yet another way to link the doctrines of counterrevolution with those of nationalism. Barrès shared the nostalgia of the counterrevolutionaries like de Maistre for the local and provincial “liberties” that prevailed in France before the revolution. However, on top of this idea, Barrès placed Taine’s idea of national identity rooted in the “directing principle”: the triad of race, ancestry, and “spirit.” He then proposed to restore France as a “living unity” based on the old “liberties” and a perception of common roots and a common biological inheritance but at the same time depicted French history as a teleological quest for its inner “character,” “genius,” and “*disposition primitive*.”⁸⁰

In Argentina, Barrès’s influence paralleled that of Menéndez Pelayo’s. Using historical myth in much the same way, but omitting Menéndez Pelayo’s strong, typically Spanish clerical emphasis, Barrès contended that France had stood at its peak in the seventeenth century under Louis XIV. But it then declined as Voltaire and Montesquieu infected it with the “Jewish and German spirit” of the Reformation.⁸¹ Barrès thus integrated the provincial particularism that characterized the counterrevolutionaries with the new brand of nationalism that emerged from Darwinism and positivism.⁸²

The works of Gustave Le Bon, a French contemporary of Barrès, were republished decade after decade in Spanish and Argentine editions, and he, too, became another strong influence on the Nationalists. Le Bon stood out as one of the early theorists of irrationalism, stressing instinct and intuition as opposed to reason as motivating forces in human behavior.

In all our acts the part played by the unconscious is immense and that played by reason so small. Reason is too new in humanity, and too imperfect to reveal to us the laws of the unconscious, and still less to replace them.⁸³

Le Bon saw popular democracy as mass irrationalism in action and combined his mistrust of reason with Taine's notion of "the mental constitution of a people" formed by its history.

The life of a people, its institutions, its beliefs and its arts [represent] the visible thread of its invisible soul. [Each people is] an organism created by the past. . . . Infinitely more numerous than the living, the dead are infinitely more powerful than they.⁸⁴

The Nationalists displayed the influence of many other European writers, among them Georges Sorel, who proposed using myth for political purposes to create "an epic state of mind" among the general population.⁸⁵ The popularity of Berdiaev in Argentina stemmed principally from his idea that socialism and democracy wrongly neglected the "ontological communities. [They reduced] the world to atoms . . . as if there were no history and no religion." Socialism, he wrote, imposed a compulsory brotherhood and was an outcome of "Jewish chiliasm," since it embraced the same false notion of the redemption of humanity or the "millenarian deception," as he called it, as Judaism. Berdiaev led another onslaught against Kant, whose "God within Man" provoked the "revolt against God" that characterized the modern age.⁸⁶

But among all the leading figures of the European Right, Maurras always commanded greatest attention and popularity in Argentina.⁸⁷ "Maurras's influence," declared Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, a prominent Argentine Nationalist, "was such that he inspired the first nationalist movements outside France, including ours."⁸⁸ To Juan E. Carulla, another leading Nationalist, Maurras seemed "one of the greatest political philosophers of all time."⁸⁹ Following Maurras's death in late 1952, Irazusta acknowledged him as "our greatest teacher of politics of his time." Alberto Falcionelli, another Nationalist writer prominent in the early 1950s, felt that Maurras's key contribution was to stress that the state should encourage "the multitude of small, spontaneous associations and autonomous groups that existed before the state itself and would probably survive after its demise." Maurras, he said, "was our Thomas Aquinas."⁹⁰ Finally, writing as recently as the mid-1970s, Enrique Zuleta Alvarez depicted Maurras as "the most notable

political thinker to have arisen in France during the past two centuries, and one of the great figures in western letters and thought.”⁹¹

The leader of Action Française and the founder of Integral Nationalism, Maurras devoted his long career, which spanned from the Dreyfus Affair in the 1890s to the fall of the Pétain regime in 1944, to a campaign to restore the French monarchy. In the present age when monarchy no longer ruled, Maurras asserted, the rule of justice was replaced by the rule of gold, which was now “the judge of all thinking.” The rule of gold was “indifferent, the most absolute, the least responsible” of all possible forms of government.⁹² As gold held sway, society passed

from the authority of the princes to that of the merchants. Gold is without doubt a representation of force. . . . Tenacious and volatile, it is also impersonal. Its rule is indifferent, regardless of friend or enemy, of citizen or foreigner.⁹³

Resurrecting the ancien régime, Maurras claimed, would replace the “laws of gold” of a society corrupted by materialism with the “laws of blood” that would reunite France and restore its past grandeur. Like Menéndez Pelayo, Maurras aspired to an absolutist regime acknowledging local autonomies and customary rights, and like Barrès, he idealized the folk cults of old provincial France. Here among the provinces, he asserted, behind all its institutional superficialities and legal superstructures, lay *le pays réel*.

Maurras joined the cult of seventeenth-century France led by Barrès and others, and like them, he viewed the French Revolution as the greatest catastrophe of modern history. “Saving civilization,” as Maurras put it, meant destroying “Rousseau’s optimistic metaphysics,” “Kantian idealism,” and the “God of the inward conscience” espoused by Protestants and Jews, concepts he viewed as the “microbes of romanticism and Revolution.”⁹⁴ Liberalism, too, he declared, was the “first beast to kill.” Maurras saw popular democracy as the “monstrous Judaeo-Masonic regime” or the “Dictatorship of the Mob.” He echoed the counterrevolutionaries as he lamented the destruction of the guilds or “natural corpora-

tions” by the French Revolution and denounced the order that replaced them as one that “leaves men naked before capital and the state” and “exalts the egotism of bad passions.” Individualism, he contended, isolated “the individual from his peers,” dragged “him systematically out of society, [and] separated man from the basic requirements of existence.”⁹⁵

In most respects, Maurras lacked true intellectual originality, and his remarkable influence stemmed chiefly from his striking rhetoric. His republican followers in Argentina ignored or rejected his plea for monarchy but took from him the biting epigrams he used to attack the liberal-democratic state. “Society,” Maurras proclaimed, as he repudiated Rousseau’s contract theory of the state, “arises not from an act of wills, but from a fact of nature.” Democracy falsely assumes that men are “small, similar cubes, equal in height, in dimension, and in weight.”⁹⁶ Maurras dubbed the Protestants “Catholics who have abandoned the idolatry of the Trinity for Jewish monotheism.”⁹⁷ He hailed the Catholic church as “the last obstacle to the imperialism of gold, the last bastion of free thought.”⁹⁸

Maurras too became a rabid xenophobe, who was constantly attacking France’s foreign residents. “*Les métèques*,” he called them, in a term derived from ancient Greece. He sought to utilize anti-Semitism as an instrument to mobilize the masses. “Everything,” he once remarked, “seemed impossible or extremely difficult without the providence of anti-Semitism.”⁹⁹ At one point, Maurras taunted a Jewish member of the French government as “a symbol of the foreign,” threatening “to kill him like a dog” if he continued to attack Action Française.¹⁰⁰ He attacked the “four confederate states: Jews, Protestants, Freemasons and *Métèques*.” Maurras’s doctrine of *politique d’abord*, politics first, transformed the conventional definition of politics as the art of the possible into an objectified pure science whose truths could be discovered and put to practical use. But as he effected this change, he divested the practice of politics of any moral restraints or ethical boundaries and therefore legitimized the use of violence or terrorism for political ends. Those who mastered the science of politics, he claimed, were justified on the authority of

such mastery in seizing power and ruling as an “enlightened” elite.

Yet Maurras’s influence on the Argentine Nationalists stopped short of being total and all-encompassing, not because of his support for monarchy but because he was an unbeliever who regarded the church merely as an arm of the state. This position left Maurras suspect among Catholics, who also looked askance at his idea of politics first because it endowed men with powers they believed belonged to God. When the Vatican condemned Action Française and its doctrines in 1927, the clerical and Nationalist groups in Buenos Aires immediately followed suit.

To say that politics comes first [as in *politique d’abord*] is to assert that the body politic is constructed prior to the existence of Christian morality. . . . For Action Française the nation before all: *Salus populus suprema lex est*.¹⁰¹

Subsequently, the so-called Maurrasians in Argentina explicitly disavowed this label, describing it as “flattering but unacceptable. . . . Action Française is directed by an unbeliever . . . and its doctrines on the relationship between politics and morality [are] unsatisfactory.”¹⁰²

The Ideological Synthesis in Argentina

The controversy over Maurras in the late 1920s offered an important clue to the basic ideological affiliations of the Nationalist movement. Despite its confusion, heterogeneity, and mutability, the movement’s ultimate loyalties lay with conservative clericalism and the European counterrevolution and only second with the European New Right that emerged immediately before 1914. Nevertheless, the Nationalists borrowed continually from Maurras and Action Française. Using Maurras’s language, they denounced liberalism as “not equitable but tyrannical.” Liberalism “does not enhance human personality, but cheapens and degrades it.”¹⁰³ Liberalism contradicted “national tradition” and was therefore “bastard,” the result of a “foreign Masonic weed,” “a malignant

heresy.”¹⁰⁴ A person educated by liberals would become the odious “international type,” a mere “machine for production and consumption.” Liberalism produced “social depersonalization” and the “dehumanization of culture.”¹⁰⁵ Liberal universities were the sources of “subversive ideas, which have infected the whole [national] organism.”¹⁰⁶

Democracy met with similar condemnation and rejection. Universal suffrage and the secret ballot conferred an “unconditional and irresponsible liberty” and falsely assumed “everyone’s capacity to govern with no other restriction than having reached the age of eighteen.”¹⁰⁷ Democracy’s false egalitarian dogmas induced a “flattening of hierarchies at the behest of the multitude.”¹⁰⁸ Among the other reprehensible manifestations of democracy stood feminism, whose origins, the Nationalists contended, lay in “the United States, which has encouraged [feminism] in order to spread pacifism” and to weaken resistance to American imperialism.¹⁰⁹

Drawing from the European tradition, the Nationalists led other onslaughts against capitalism and “materialism.” Capitalism led to “moral perversion” and the enthronement of avarice and envy.¹¹⁰ To envy someone, said the Nationalists, meant wanting to be that other person, and as this was impossible, envy implied a death wish. They quoted the Spanish proverb: *Querer ser otro es ya querer no ser* (To wish to be someone else is to wish not to be).¹¹¹ Because capital itself was impersonal and mobile, capitalism also represented “anonymous and vagabond wealth.” In this “vagabond” guise, capitalism became the instrument of foreign penetration. Faced by the inroads of world capitalism, one Argentine writer saw his country as having become “a foreign degeneration of liberalism.”¹¹² Nationalists dismissed the nineteenth century, the age of capitalist “progress,” in the terms made famous by Léon Daudet, one of Maurras’s collaborators, as “the stupid century.”¹¹³

Nationalists viewed Socialist and Marxist ideas as offshoots of liberalism, products of the profane myth that human beings were capable of achieving perfection. Thus, leftism of every hue represented “the summit of the rationalist deviation”; the Left was a consequence of the “pagan Renaissance,” “the

false Protestant Reformation.”¹¹⁴ The deviation had reached its final abysmal expressions in Rousseau and Marx.

Luther became the precursor of Thomas Münzer, the ideologue of [sixteenth-century] Anabaptist communism, and of René Descartes, the father of all the forms of modern Idealism, including the mechanicism [*sic*] of Rousseau and the historical materialism of Marx.¹¹⁵

Liberalism and socialism were alike, too, in the sense that “the principle of the equality of all born from liberalism is the same principle as the leveling of all” embodied in socialism.¹¹⁶ “Communist theory and practice,” proclaimed Genta, “are no more than modern liberalism carried to its final conclusion as the negation of western Christian order.”¹¹⁷ If liberalism undermined society through its notion of person-as-individual, the leftist movements, as doctrines of class and international brotherhood, split the nation’s natural organic unity. The Nationalists often echoed a remark attributed to Lenin in 1914: “Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even the most just, purest, most refined, civilized breed.”¹¹⁸ Allegiance to communism and socialism were incompatible with citizenship. In 1934, a Nationalist observer saw only misfit immigrants, reminiscent of Maurras’s *métèques*, rather than true Argentines at a Communist party rally in Buenos Aires. The demonstrators were “sinister looking mulattoes, Galician [*gallego*] taxi drivers, Basque milkmen, and fanatical women.”¹¹⁹

The Nationalists followed their European mentors into the “stinking marshes,” to use Weber’s characterization, of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-Freemasonry. Foreigners contaminated the “national essence” and polluted national tradition: “Let us clean out of the country all the whining dross who are the failures from abroad,” urged Lugones.¹²⁰ For decades, the Nationalists led campaigns against immigration, to halt the inflow, for example, of the “thousands of Czechs, Poles, Armenians, Bulgarians and Russians who have invaded our shores.”¹²¹ Xenophobia at times lapsed into overt racism. The country should impose an absolute ban on non-European immigrants: “Asians [*amarillos*], Muslims, Syrians,” as Federico Ibarguren described them.¹²²

For the Nationalists, Jews were “the deadly enemies of the nation and of the Catholic faith of the people.”¹²³ Jewish “materialism” stood in irreconcilable opposition to the “spiritual character” of the Latin peoples. Jews, the Nationalists argued, were the occult sources of the spirit of “skepticism,” “tolerance,” and “relativism” that appeared during the Renaissance and then took over most of the Western world. Jews had prompted the liberal or Socialist quests for the new world order they eventually intended to dominate. In offering the opportunity of earthly paradise and salvation, socialism and communism represented a new version of the Judaic myth of the coming of the Messiah.¹²⁴ As the Great Depression deepened in 1931, one Argentine anti-Semite explained its causes as follows:

The present state of the world, with its profound illness, its universal disorientation, its enormous unemployment . . . has a hidden cause, which manipulates, intensifies and coordinates the other more visible causes with incredible and tenacious intelligence: this is the Jewish war against the Christian world.¹²⁵

In Argentina, as in Europe during this period, Jews were commonly depicted as “creeping along in darkness with a dagger in one hand and dynamite in the other.”¹²⁶ Jews were scheming to inoculate “Christian governments” with “liberalism” to kill them, to destroy the landed classes by taxation, to form great industrial monopolies, and to seize world supremacy by controlling gold supplies.¹²⁷

The “world league” of Freemasonry became another instrument of the Jews. The Freemasons aimed

at the destruction of the Christian faith and its replacement by ancient paganism; since Freemasonry too does not acknowledge any Fatherland it has become the natural ally of the Jews against church and state.¹²⁸

Freemasonry was “mixed up in nearly every antireligious and political disorder that has divided and bloodied [the country].”¹²⁹ In the terms that Genta viewed the world, “Jewry, Masonry, and communism are the three ideological manifestations of the negation of the Divine Redeemer.”¹³⁰

Finally, Jews, Masons, or simply foreigners posed other threats because of the economic power they wielded in Argentina. Between the wars, and to some extent after 1945, the Nationalists led campaigns against the Jewish or formerly Jewish families in Buenos Aires which owned the grain-exporting houses and against the consortium headed by Otto Bemberg which dominated the Argentine beer industry. Jewish-owned businesses, Nationalists often claimed, formed part of an international conspiracy to subjugate the country to the imperialists. In 1933, Nationalists invoked this idea as they launched an abusive campaign against Sir Arthur Samuel, a British government minister of Jewish family who had tactlessly suggested that Argentina join the British empire.¹³¹ In this period, it was common to link economic nationalism, directed mostly against the British, with antagonisms against the Jews. In 1935, a Nationalist journalist complained about the criticisms of the German Nazis that appeared in the *Buenos Aires Herald*, a local English-language newspaper. "Either the *Herald* receives money from the Jews to attack Germany," he declared, "or the *Herald* is a Jewish newspaper, edited by Jews and written by Englishmen."¹³² By 1940, the British and the Jews, "the Siamese twins" as they were now being called, had openly banded together in a military campaign for world domination.¹³³ Throughout, propaganda against the British bore the heavy taint of the techniques of anti-Semitism. "We have before us," wrote Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, in a reference to the British in Argentina,

an enemy whose techniques of world domination have the following features: astuteness, cunning, indirect maneuvers, ill-faith, constant lies, the subtle manipulation of its local agents. And let us not forget that this enemy has been here for the past hundred years. Let us not forget that we are victims of an educational system [created by this enemy] designed to deprive us of an awareness of reality.¹³⁴

Simultaneously, the Nationalists scorned the United States and the "Jewish-Yank plutocracy in Wall Street."¹³⁵ "The Yank film," another Nationalist believed, was "a weapon of social corruption controlled by the nation-less Jews, which poisons the souls of our boys."¹³⁶

In sum, behind the multiple and intertwined ideological threads at play in the Nationalist movement stood some identifiable primary elements. The roots of the movement lay in scholasticism and the early-nineteenth-century counterrevolution. On top of these roots stood a range of more contemporary influences led by Taine, Menéndez Pelayo, and Maurras. In synthesis, the Nationalists were opposed to the modern world and to the ideas, systems, or social groups they regarded as its embodiments.