A Novel Form of Government: Hannah Arendt on Totalitarianism


Hannah Arendt was born in 1906 to Jewish parents in the city of Hamburg, Germany. She died in December, 1975 leaving behind a legacy of political philosophy which exemplified her own existence: a life of discourse and action in a "public realm" she sought to preserve. Arendt's academic foundation began at Heidelberg University where she studied philosophy under the direction of Karl Jaspers. She completed her work at the age of twenty-two with a dissertation, entitled "The Concept of Love in St. Augustine." She was steeped in the classics and trained in the subtleties of German philology.

Arendt's scholarly career began in the early 1930s with her biography of Rahel Varnhagen,1 in which she depicted the deleterious effects of human existence when it is bereft of a free public space. The work was not completed until the 1950s, and it proved to be somewhat autobiographical. She maintained that Rahel could be at


2. The use of "pariah" was not only self-revealing for Arendt but also suggests her view of the Jew in modern society. Cf. Judith Shklar, "Hannah Arendt as Pariah," Partisan Review 50:1 (1983), 64-77. Despite its factual errors it is still a useful portrait.

home in the world only by clinging to her Jewishness and fulfilling herself as a "conscious pariah." This became a recurring theme in Arendt’s work, and there are good reasons for it, since her own public space was closed by Hitler’s rise to power.

Arendt fled Germany in 1933, and her subsequent work, historigaphical and philosophical, was written against the backdrop of the Nazi seizure of power and the destruction of the Jews. It was these events, not merely Jew-killing, but the extermination of categories of people, which she interpreted as the breakdown of Western tradition. This prompted her tour de force, The Origins of Totalitarianism, whose original title, The Burden of Our Time, is more revealing of the pathos of its author. It is a stark book, grim in its description and nearly abject in its conclusions. But as Stephen Whitfield points out, it remains an essential item of bibliography on the subject.' This was followed (1940s and 1950s) by numerous articles on Jewish identity and politics.

But Arendt did more than describe and analyze the "elements" behind categorical destruction-she offered a theoretical alternative. Her philosophical masterpiece, The Human Condition,' and her series of articles in Between Past and Future,' can be viewed as theoretical alternatives to the forces she believed were behind the rise of totalitarianism. Here there are essays on freedom, authority, culture, and history; all are thematic assaults on the totalitarian monster. Indeed, On Revolution' was a defense of America’s founding and the first modern effort to create a public space for free men. Also, the book’s leitmotif, "the social question," was an admonition against the spurious forces of consumption that she had defined earlier with her categories of "animal laborans" and "homo faber." Even her biographical "sketches" in Men in Dark Times' were an effort to illuminate that small space of freedom created by those who struggled against the doctrines and dogmas of their times. Her final work, The Life of the Mind,' was a metaphysical treatment of the mental faculties (thinking, willing, judging) and represented an effort to un-

understand man’s proclivity toward totalizing theories, the very foundation of totalitarianism.

But *Origins* became not only a biographical turning point for Arendt, it also marked a decisive change in philosophical mood. It was a special effort in historiography that wedded factual commentary to philosophical conceptualization, a combination she would not return to until *On Revolution*. Moreover, much of her later work was a vicarious philosophical assault on those she thought supported the rise of totalitarianism or its pseudoscientific foundation. Hence, she waged a continual war with Hegel (especially his *Geisterreich*) and Marx, especially the idea of historical necessity and the elevation of labor to nobility, i.e., as a reason for rulership. Methodologically speaking, her categories and formulations were tools she used to criticize the "origins" that became totalitarianism.

Arendt’s *Origins* is a lengthy book concerning crimes of enormity. It cannot be understood from a single perspective. Therefore, any single study will be guilty of sins of omission. This is as it should be. The book and its subject demand rethinking. Her purpose was not to "explain" totalitarianism, as though one might trace an effect back to its efficient causes. Explanation is inadequate for grasping the negative grandeur of something so sweeping in which so many people were involved. It is too big, too deep. But it is not impenetrable.

What something is to Arendt, at least in the realm of human affairs, can only be understood in terms of how it comes about. In other words, the what of something is virtually inseparable from why it comes into being. This is the essence, and the difficulty, of her phenomenological style. Thus what might appear a priori is in fact an a posteriori mode of analysis. Add to this her regular use of literary figures to establish a motif, her metaphors of drama to depict a mood or even an era, and the problem of analysis is compounded.

The first two-thirds of Arendt’s book deal with the "origins," or what she prefers to call the "elements, of totalitarianism—namely, antisemitism and imperialism. But this is somewhat misleading. Anti-Semitism is central to her book and, of course, central to Nazi ideology. But it is not Jew-hatred, as such, that forms the backdrop for totalitarianism. It is race-thinking, of which anti-Semitism forms a significant but not exclusive role. It has become a commonplace to see Arendt criticized for concentrating too heavily on the "Jewish

10. For both style and convenience the shortened title will be used. Unless otherwise noted all citations in parentheses will refer to this edition (1968).
question." She has been accused of serving herself and her people (because of her Zionist identification) by trying to locate the source of modern evil (totalitarianism) in anti-Semitism. Yet Arendt vigorously rejects monocausal explanations and the effort to understand any event in terms of a single force. Thus she repudiates the "scapegoat" theory (Jews have always been purged). She is very careful to distinguish between anti-Semitism and Jew-hatred, and to show how race-thinking (not merely anti-Semitism) was elevated to racism, that is, a doctrine for political control.

Furthermore, there is a tendency to ignore the fact that her chapters on race-thinking and racism are not located in her section on anti-Semitism, but in her section on imperialism. This should have signaled the careful reader. A careless reading or, perhaps, an antagonistic one, could lead to bifurcating an intended association. Arendt was unambiguous on this matter: racism and bureaucracy are the "two main political devices" of imperialism. (185) The symmetry between racial hostility (in the case of the Nazis) and class antagonism (in the case of Marxism-Leninism) animate her study of imperialism. Together with bureaucracy ("administrative massacres") they fuse into political doctrines of historical transcendence.

This new imperialism, formed from doctrines of racism and class-consciousness, indicates to Arendt the initial political significance of the new ideologies: the ultimate destruction and not the promotion of the nation-state system. The former importance of common culture and language (features of the nation) and citizenship under law (features of the state) finally gave way to a Dionysius-like god of blood and soil or a Lucretian god of fatalism and materialism. When propelled by an ideological movement race and class take on an imperialistic grandeur quite different and much more fatal than traditional theories of empire-building. This will form the theme for our first section.

The imperialist nature of the new ideologies does not emanate from the usual desire to extend one's belief, satisfy one's greed, or guarantee one's security. It is compelled by the inner logic of the doctrines themselves. Arendt's concern in the last third of her book is to illustrate how totality is achieved by the historification of man, either through nature (the genetic unfolding of Aryan supremacy) or economics (the dialectical ascendancy of the worker class). From the

11. While some of these criticisms will be dealt with en passant, specific critics will be identified in section III, below.
premise of race or class as a starting point, Nazi Germany and Marxist Russia sought to imperialize the world through the extension of these ideas over all time and space. Hence section II will be an analytical treatment of totalitarianism once in power. I will show how totality is finally achieved not through the regulation of man’s behavior (the concern of earlier tyrannies) but through the complete domination of all human mental operations.

Finally, any complex and lengthy book whose theme is inherently controversial will generate confusion as well as debate. *Origins* has been misread, its themes have been attacked, and its author criticized on various accounts; and Arendt herself has been reticent, even reluctant to defend the work as a whole.

There are two broad reasons the book is misread or misunderstood. The first is simple ideological bias and the volatile nature of its subject. Arendt began work on the book in 1945 and completed it in 1949; it reached public attention in 1951. By this time the crimes of Hitler were widely known, if not precisely documented, but the crimes of Stalin were not. There was an obdurate refusal by socialists and fellow-travelers alike to admit to terror and mass murder committed by a socialist regime. Simultaneously, the Cold War, the adversarial posturing by the democratic West and the Communist East, had not yet reached full force. Thus the book did not reach a highly receptive audience on first appearance.

Second, the book fell prey to both modern historiography, which has frequently been a nemesis of Arendt’s, and the new political "science" with its demand for "methodological rigor." The notion of "process," the idea that history moves according to its own dynamic, dominates scholarly interpretation. Unlike Herodotus, the first great historian, who saw an event in terms of what brought it about, modern historiography sees every event as a significant but determinable consequence. Thus Hitler’s Germany is seen by liberals as aberrational, a glich in the historical movement whose determinable conclusion is the progress (and education) of all mankind. Likewise, Stalin’s excesses are seen by socialists as a result of rapid industrialization in the face of growing "capitalist encirclement." This encirclement itself is seen as an effort to thwart the economic development of the working class.

In addition to the new historiography there is a tendency to overburden historical events with techniques of the new "science," which has difficulty accommodating the view that totalitarianism is new, as Arendt claimed. It will not fit the earlier typologies. There is no
model for the unprecedented. Besides, from the point of view of certain of her critics, her analysis is replete with subjective valuations ("virus," "phantasm," "nightmarish") and her vision is apocalyptic. Without a precedent or model, totalitarianism appears to her critics like an exaggeration (albeit an extreme one) of earlier despotisms. Without a model or construct to work with, they cannot see the novelty of totalitarianism. Sadly, its significance is lost on them as well. To be sure, the book is not without its flaws. But much of the criticism is procedural rather than substantive. Section III will examine *Origins* from this perspective.

I

The purpose of Arendt’s extended excursus on race, sometimes going beyond what was necessary to prove her point, was not to locate the cause of totalitarianism. Her purpose was simple, but shocking: she meant to trace totalitarianism back to its mental ferment, to the thinking process. The recurring use of antecedants and metaphors was intended to illustrate the groundwork necessary for totalizing theories. Her effort to comprehend totalitarian thinking, particularly its generation, has led critics to see racism as the foundation for totalitarianism. She, however, sees neither racism generally, nor anti-Semitism particularly, as a precondition to totalitarianism. Her concern goes deeper. She wishes to reveal the foundation of totalitarianism in the enduring fear of all mankind, mortality. In one form or another, through one philosophical guise or another, the process of human petrification underlies and secretly animates man’s doctrines of human existence. There is an agony of finiteness, a dynamic of death, what she calls "worldlessness," in man’s search for immortality. 12

This process of decrepitude was given "scientific" and overwhelming popular expression in 1853 by Count Arthur de Gobineau. By the turn of the century his "law of decay" found its way into scientific theories, popular sentiment and, finally, political doctrines. Unlike race-hatred, which may emanate from individual fear, even social bias, "doctrines of decay," as Arendt puts it, "seem to have some very intimate connection with race thinking." Again, unlike race-hatred,

12, This is a recurring theme in Arendt’s work. See specifically *The Human Condition*, 17-22, 248-57. Also, see "The Concept of History," in *Between Past and Future*, 41.
or the components that support it, racism seeks to move people through an explanation of all history that finds "one single reason, one single force according to which civilization always and everywhere rises and falls." (171)

Yet this suggests a subtle but significant philosophical distinction between the ideology of racism and that of class struggle. The former finds in race the basic degeneration of man that can only be arrested through the restriction or elimination of inferior races; while the latter, mostly through the theories of Hegel, Darwin, and Marx, sees the positive and progressive development of man in the overcoming of unnatural economic conflicts. Rather than the optimism of perfectability inherent in Marxism, the racial theories inspired by Gobineau were grounded in the pessimism, the doom of racial degeneration. It was this fear that Hitler exploited.

The presence of fear mixed with hatred animates all followers of ideology. This leads inexorably to the notion of a conspiratorial menace; that is, thematic hostility toward those outside the ideology is justified on the grounds of self-preservation. In other words, the ideology in one respect is able to mobilize the masses to counter what is seen as a preexisting threat.

One of Arendt's more precarious arguments relating to anti-Semitism as the centerpiece of Nazi ideology, and the one that has provoked the wrath of the postwar Jewish community, is her claim (clearly more evident in Eichmann in Jerusalem) of Jewish responsibility for their own destruction. She maintains that in a "desperate misinterpretation," those Jews concerned with uniting their own community, especially in the face of a disintegrating Christian faith, "hit on the consoling idea that anti-Semitism . . . might be an excellent means for keeping the people together, so that the assumption of eternal anti-Semitism would even imply an eternal guarantee of Jewish existence." (7) Thus Arendt sees the theological idea of chosenness secularized into a conspiracy for the purpose of cohesion. Once secularized, this conspiracy was finally confronted by an anti-Christian anti-Semitism that was forged into a movement of racial destruction.

But Arendt's effort to understand the mechanics of race-thinking, particularly the kind that could result in the charnel houses of Europe, did not concentrate on human malevolence or the psychic force of fear alone. Indeed, there were tangible reasons for anti-Semitism that were visible enough to the average citizen and concrete enough to be exploited by the adroit demagogue. And Arendt
categorizes these reasons in terms of power, wealth, and state authority, maintaining that, prior to the eighteenth century, the nation-state had been built on a system in which state institutions, legal and bureaucratic, placed the state above the socio-economic classes it represented and the parties and factions arrayed against it. (11) The fact that these governments courted Jews as bankers and agents, and offered them certain privileges for their services, suggested a symbolic unity with the state itself. (25) The fact that the Jews lived under special laws, which at once were privileges and restrictions, only served to prove the association. It was only later that the Jews became a special target of hostility for the growing middle and lower classes. Just as class and social status began to supplant the state as a source of identity—that is, as economics was intruding into the political apparatus of the state—the Jews became an object of suspicion because they began to lose their economic power, although they retained their wealth. (cf. 4) This was particularly obvious in Austria-Hungary, where the Jews could not be identified on the basis of nationality or class.

The irony of this shift in state power, as Arendt points out, is that the Jews were losing their privileges and positions as counselors and financial advisers towards the end of the nineteenth century. This was the very time antistate groups arose and accused them of manipulating state power. While the attack on the Jews was racial, at least ostensibly, Arendt sees its political significance as carrying over into imperialism as the result of the destruction of the classic state system. That is, she sees no mere coincidence in the connection between racial concerns within the state and imperialistic ambitions initially based on economics which ended with theories of racial hegemony.

In many respects this is the most difficult and strained of Arendt’s arguments; it is also the most brilliant and easily misunderstood. But she means for us to see that the state began to break down as a legal entity and became preoccupied with the rise of social (i.e., economic) classes. This marked the advent of the growth of the middle classes, whose sole concern was material benefits and comfortable living. The Jews appeared to be the only obstruction in the path of a rapacious bourgeoisie. She argues that the growing tension between the state (whose concern was citizenship) and society (the guardian of class interests), between legal rights and material affluence, was coupled to the growth of the European state system. That is, as the empires began to withdraw into smaller units, the Jews appeared to be the
only "class" identified with state authority. This prompted a period of anti-Semitism in which "an almost unified opinion could be achieved," for this was "the moment when social discrimination changed into a political argument."

The law according to which this process developed was simple: each class of society which came into conflict with the state as such became anti-Semitic because the only social group which seemed to represent the state were the Jews. (25)

The transformation of social discrimination into a "political argument" forms, for Arendt, that grey area between psychology and ideology, between racism and race-thinking. This is the point at which state participation was conditioned by social class and ethnicity, not citizenship and cultural ties.

Broadly viewed, racism is determinable by its application to this or that category of people. But its result, whether social bias and discrimination or a hatred that seeks the annihilation of a certain group, originates in one of two sources: psychological fear, which manifests itself as hostility toward a specific group or, of greater significance, nature, which seems to form the fabric of history itself. While the first forms the foundation for stratification and differentiation, whether legal or social, the second establishes a way of thinking that aims at the dominance of one race over all others. In other words, history is determined in light of race; it becomes a battleground for the natural struggle of races. The first is usually fixed to time and recedes when events and circumstances change. The second can only be remedied through the destruction of all opposition.

In its particular application to the Jews, the first source (psychological fear) seems to have telescoped into the second as theories overran events. Jew-hatred was already common in Europe, especially in France, just as the Jews were losing their financial power over state action. As class distinctions began to break down because of the economic insufficiency of the market system and because of the growing masses, the Jews were the only conspicuous representatives of state authority. At this point Arendt’s analysis gravitates into social psychology. Her concern now is to show how racial bias can be extended into social discrimination and, from here, into racial theories.

By the end of the nineteenth century the affection and attention of Jews was openly sought because of the status they held as financiers
and entrepreneurs. On the one hand, Jews curried the favor of polite society, and, on the other, they found that favor conditioned by the fact that they were Jewish: different, unique, odd-definitely not "normal." Arendt points up the ambiguities of the Jews who sought to be like (and liked by) everyone else only to find their acceptance based on a perceived peculiarity. (79-88)

The basic consequence of these ambiguous views found expression on the part of those outside society who felt Jews were responsible for its corruption. This eventually led to a purgative view on the part of those in society who sought to cleanse themselves of their "vice" by expressing their "righteousness" in a cathartic anti-Semitic attack. This process is dramatically portrayed by Arendt in her extraordinary account of the Dreyfus Affair.

At this point Arendt (as a Jew) engages in a certain amount of self-criticism, which was to have lasting effects and which is most apparent in her work on Eichmann. Her analysis becomes not only polemical, but heretical as well. She maintains that the identification of an individual based on inherent qualities associated with some generally defined group was not only a criterion used by anti-Semites, but also by the Jews themselves. The cultivation of this self-image became the basis of the attack on the Jews; politically, it was a surrogate assault on the nation-state with which the Jews openly sought association. Thus Arendt’s effort to explain the Nazi choice of the Jews as their object of hatred is partially motivated by a self-conscious analysis of Nazi, as well as Jewish, claims of identification with state systems that became the object of contempt for those who lived in them. Such an analysis, of course, was problematic for the postwar Jewish community.

First, she describes the parvenus, those Jews who sought assimilation largely at the cost of their Jewishness and certainly at the price of their dignity. Here Arendt uses Disraeli to illustrate the too-frequent practice of Jews seeking acceptance on any terms so long as they are granted access to the more fashionable circles. In contrast is the pariah, exemplified by such figures as Heinrich Heine, Charlie Chaplin, and Franz Kafka. While the pariah did not seek acceptance by non-Jews, he also resigned himself to a politically passive existence; he abandoned his political fate to others. Another type, and one that wins Arendt’s approbation, is illustrated by the figure of Ber-

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13. Cf. her discussion on Disraeli, who exemplified this attitude because he consciously exploited it.
nard Lazare. This is the archetypical conscious pariah, who did not seek acceptance for social reasons but demanded, instead, acceptance as a Jew. His very rebelliousness was as a Jew who sought public recognition for Jews. While Lazare's action gained him the respect of anti-Semites, it was the parvenu who typified Jewish behavior and seemed to suggest the changing relations between state and society.

It was thus not manifest Jew-hatred alone that brought about the holocaust. It was the simultaneous degeneration of the state as a guarantor of rights and the decline of nation as a defining feature for acceptance which allowed race-thinking to be transported by imperialism. In other words, the race-thinking of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe did not by itself bring about the racism that concluded in twentieth-century political doctrines.

Indeed, the breakdown of the old class system, whether social or economic, and the simultaneous rise of the masses made racial theories—not just Jew-hatred—particularly popular because the individual was isolated from any significant association with an outside or larger group. No longer attached to state, nation, or class, the individual—superfluous, frightened, and in search for something to cleave to—could find comfort in the essential of natural discrimination, race. Thus one of the basics of nature's method of differentiation became the foundation (and formation) for a romantic movement in which the individual could find a place for himself in the development of world history. This, of course, is the advent of ideological thinking based on race. And Arendt renders the proper metaphysical conclusion in terms of its impact on mental life:

The inherent irresponsibility of romantic opinions received a new stimulant from Gobineau's mixture of races, because this mixture showed a historical event of the past which could be traced in the depths of one's own self. This meant that inner experiences could be given historical significance, that one's own self had become the battlefield of history. (175)

While race-thinking may have "sharpened and exploited existing conflicting interests or existing political problems," it was not destined to goad people toward racial doctrines that could be elevated to state policy. Without benefit of imperialism, which itself destroyed the basis of nationhood, race-thinking would have slipped into that historical bin of obloquy with other unacceptable ideas of Western humanity. It was imperialism, the grandeur and illusion, which finally
"necessitated the invention of racism" as its only possible "explanation," and without which incorporation of foreign peoples would have been demanded, rather than the domination that actually followed. Thus race, not territory, became the delimiting factor for community.

With the historical and sociological groundwork laid for racism, Arendt's analysis now turns on the importance of economics. Here we begin to see how racism was instrumental to the foundation of colonial capitalism and how it was couched in the language and thinking of expansionism. Arendt found in the theories of Hobson and Hilferding an understanding of "the scramble for Africa." Superfluous white men, largely spat out by their own countries, took their superfluous capital to search for the superfluous commodities of Africa. The adventurers, brigands, and scoundrels who could not tolerate the boredom and routine of polite society found themselves caught up in the "Great Game" (Kipling) of expansion "for its own sake." The compelling logic of economic growth was soon justified in terms of the sanctity of the white race, then the final, desperate need to "exterminate the brutes" (Conrad). First self-interest, then economic pressure was justified on the ground of racial hegemony. It was this attitude, this fear mixed with omnipotence, that these same adventurers took back with them when they returned to Europe as the elite, that group of leaders of the mob that brought totalitarianism to power.

Arendt's description of the whites in Africa is at once historical and literary, graphic and emotional, even though she self-consciously avoids psychological phraseology. But the kind of racism that could entrench itself in an ideology that could eventually find practical application in the ovens of Dachau is traced by Arendt specifically to the imperialist disposition of rootless, restless, and displaced persons in the colonies of Africa. The confrontation of white settlers with the blacks of Africa created a sense of moral vertigo that separated whites from the niceties of the Western world. Drawing heavily on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Arendt renders her story of the confrontation of civilizations while at the same time dramatizing the distinction between racism and race-thinking.

Leaving behind the anchors of Western civilization, with its standards of conduct, its dominance of nature and the tangible comfort of home and hearth, the white colonizers were thrust into a context where the cues of reality were distorted. Just like primordial man, the settlers had to confront nature directly. The conventions and norms
that had served to restrain certain impulses became frustrating impediments to their survival. The rootless Europeans began to look at the Africans as though they were an extension of a tumescent jungle that had no respect for the *politesse* of public life. They had come face to face with peoples who had learned to live in harmony with nature, who had made certain concessions to it. Without benefit of evolution or the techniques of survival, the settlers were forced to deal with nature, and its products, in a brutal way. This was artifactual man imposing his world on an atavistic natural man nearly helpless in the face of his modern counterpart.

The Boers were both the precursor to and the prototype for the kind of racism that imperialism finally exploited. "Race was the Boer's answer to the overwhelming monstrosity of Africa." (185) The incongruous recognition on the one hand that the natives had come to terms with nature was at the same time met with the recognition by the Boers that these very savages were human like themselves. This, perhaps, suggested what they were, or might become. This fear of "sameness" was dealt with by the Boers in the development of an ideology of superiority. But instead of imposing order on the jungle by confining themselves to a specific territory and fortifying it with the staples of civilization, they found themselves aping savage behavior by roaming the jungle nomadic style, bound only by blood (a tribal characteristic) rather than territory, a feature of the state. It is this quality of transience, the absence of foundation and the loss of collective identity, which Arendt argues is the stamp of race-thinking. (185-86) Once this mentality was transported back to Europe it had the expected results.

The disintegration of the nation-state system, formerly held together by law and cultural norms, was now taken over by the parochialism of ethnicity and religion. This made race and economics the principal cohesive factors. As classes began to degenerate into masses, the notion of the state gave way to the demand for profit. The idea of empire, the political extension of one state over the domain of another, was subsumed under the banner of trade. Once profits were sought for their own sake the incorporation of the state by economics was complete. This marked the beginning of the new imperialism: "Expansion as a permanent and supreme aim of politics is the central political idea of imperialism." (125) What the imperialists ended with politically was a system of economic priorities that constantly placed the body politic in a position of confrontation. What cohesion may have been gained out of the class struggle for economic ascendancy
was acquired at the expense of the political stability of the state. Arendt's conclusion is a stark one, even if Leninistic: "The cry for unity resembled exactly the battle cries which had always led people to war; and yet, nobody detected in the universal and permanent instrument of unity [expansion] the germ of universal and permanent war. (153) All that remained was an organization to set the whole process into motion.

In addition to race-thinking that came to rest in racism and expansionism motivated by economic considerations, the advent and growth of bureaucracy forms the thematic third portion of the historical origins of totalitarianism. While not without its metaphysical implications, bureaucracy proved to be a methodological device for Arendt to place her theories of race and class in an organizational framework. The reasons for this seem fairly obvious. Without a framework of organization the racial hatred of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seems to be little more than a composite of individual and group bias (the Boers and Huguenots, for example) that totally lacks a structured setting that a leader could seize and mold into a movement. Together they formed the political foundation of the twentieth century. They constituted, in Arendt's formulation, two "new devices" of political organization that ushered forth with imperialism: "one was race as a principal of the body politic, and the other bureaucracy as a principal of foreign domination." (185)

Relying heavily on the description of Joseph Conrad for the sense of superfluousness, the prose and insight of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* for the sense of isolation, and T. E. Lawrence's aimless wanderings in a fictional world, Arendt argues that the breakup of the nation-state system spawned racism as a substitute for nation while bureaucracy became a surrogate government. Without it the scramble for investment might have turned into what Conrad called a "dance of death and trade." By contrast she shows how race became the *modus vivendi* for the Boers and European mob, and how bureaucracy became the decisive "device" of control in Algeria, Egypt, and India.

From a purely structural standpoint, Arendt turns Weber's rationalist theory of the bureaucracy inside out, as it were. Instead of viewing the bureaucracy as a rational model of administration that works according to certain prescribable (and controllable) rules, she views it from the outside. Her concentration is on the administration of the British Empire in Africa (whose behavior never would have been tolerated at home). Here the elements of *arcane imperii*, unpredic-
tability, arbitrariness ("rule by reports"), and diffused responsibility as well as callousness ("administrative massacres") form a Kafkaesque nightmare of unreality.

Arendt is particularly meticulous in her distinction between administration by a civil service that acts from law (France, for instance, even though its bureaucracy has become arrogant and intractable) and a government that acts from decrees:

At the basis of bureaucracy as a form of government, and its inherent replacement of law with temporary and changing decrees, lies this superstition of a possible and magic identification of man with the forces of history. (216)

Caught up in forces larger than himself, man retreats metaphysically. He can absolve himself from moral responsibility and disengage himself from acts that are seemingly directed by those who are the charges of history. While laws are written and serve as a recourse for everyone, decrees are arbitrary and serve only the needs of the moment. The bureaucrat’s first principle is to shun every general law because by its very nature law is stable, serving to solidify people into a community. At the same time law demystifies even the lawmakers, for everyone falls under its command.

Once the instrumentality of the individual is accepted, he must follow the anonymous forces of the process, and, in the words of Cecil Rhodes, he could "do nothing wrong, what he did became right. It was his duty to do what he wanted. He felt himself a god-nothing less." In a more sober, and even more frank opinion, Lord Cromer (the Consul General of Egypt) summed up the essential efficacy of this new rulership when he said that the bureaucrats have become "instruments of incomparable value in the execution of a policy of imperialism." (215)

There seem to be two forces at work here. First, there is the mystical belief by the people (especially the Pan-Slavs) in a determinable history that will reveal the ascendancy of one group. This leads to a pseudomystical bureaucracy that can operate as an instrument of historical revelation. The people then "never really know why something is happening, and a rational interpretation of laws does not exist"; what remains is the "brutal naked event itself." (245) Hand in hand with this is the loss of a need for a rational reliance on written, therefore questionable, laws as a guide for one's own behavior. What the individual is left with are events and acts, whether manmade or
natural, whose interpretation is beyond reason and whose consequence can never be known. The identification of misfortune and evil with destiny can then be accounted for, even justified, as an eruption of history’s conclusion. In other words, bureaucratized events (murder through “administrative massacres” or death camps) appear to the individual as the final solution to the natural struggle of races or the economic fight of classes.

Arendt never lost sight of the importance of this new form of human organization and its relation to ideology. Some twenty years later in On Violence she defined bureaucracy as “the rule of an intricate system of bureaus in which no man, neither one nor the best [a characteristic of the British in India], neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible, and which could properly be called rule by Nobody.”¹ The implications for democratic theory aside, what happened in terms of political organization was the development of the sense that the universe seemed to be ruled by arbitrary forces larger than man and thus independent of his own judgment. Viewed by the lonely, isolated individual, men became “living abstractions and witnesses of the absurdity of human institutions.” (189) The essential absence of self-criticism within the bureaucracy or doubt from outside of it allowed for a movement that was undirected. The increasing weight of numbers and final seizure by the mob now meant the phantom world of the Dark Continent was ready for export to Europe.

According to Arendt, the superfluidity and restlessness of the whites in Africa and elsewhere was transplanted to European soil in the form of isolation and unreality—the loss of traditional anchors by which to judge others and themselves. It was a contagion. These factors made the transmutation of racism into ideology possible. At the same time, the acquiescence to a bureaucratic structure, which seemed incomprehensible to those over whom it exercised control, undermined the state as the prime political and social integrating force.

Since neither the Germans nor the Russians participated extensively in overseas imperialism, Arendt maintains that the same attitude developed within the heartland of Europe itself. This “continental imperialism” ultimately had the same effect in central Europe. The pan-movements developed on the heels of economic imperialism and captured the imagination of broader strata only with the triumphant imperialist expansion of the Western nations in the eighties.” (222)

Arendt’s ability to mediate between theory and practice, often revealing the absurdity or danger in each, is at its best in her analysis of the pan-mentality. As a form of political thinking, the metaphysical first step in the formation of the ideological mind, the pan-movements revealed a deep hostility to the nation-state system. And we must keep in mind the purity of their motives. They were rather un-sullied by the capital motivations of "normal" Western imperialism. Indeed, the basic "political" quality of the pan-movements was the fact that this internal colonialism remained hostile to all existing political bodies and that they were marked by their capacity as mass movements, "to think in continents and [feel] in centuries." But what is important here is their nonmaterial concern, which laid the foundation of ideology. Arendt underscores the importance of this fact: "The point is that a rather complicated ideology and organization which furthered no immediate interest proved to be more attractive than tangible advances and commonplace convictions." (225)

What finally happened, of course, was the complete subversion of traditional institutions and affection for concrete territories: the settled nationalism of the nation-state system gave way to what Arendt terms "tribal nationalism." This new tribalism, besides its disregard for geographical continuity, was based on an appeal to qualities that were supposed to be inherent to the individual—the near mystical characteristics of blood and spirit.

Before the breakdown of the nation-state system, nationalism, taken to the extreme, developed into chauvinism, which always refers to the tangible achievements of a state—the cultural and material advances of one’s nation. But tribalism is more inverted. It relies on pseudomystical elements in one’s own soul that are generalized in a blood type—the tribe. Thus the racism that developed out of the race-thinking inherent in the pan-movements had its origin in the simultaneous beginning of the nation and death of the state as a legal arbiter over citizens.

The growth of this new nationalism amounted to an atavistic tribalism that transformed the state as an instrument of law into a guardian of national sentiment. Either the fact of birth (genetic origin) or cultural background (origin of beliefs) became the criterion for class or factional strife. This degeneration of law into ethnic sanctity is located by Arendt in the French Revolution, whose very humanism subverted the notion of citizenship. The French Revolution at once proclaimed the rights of man and, at the same time, elevated the idea of nation to sovereignty. What this meant was that the
rights of men (formerly citizens) were to be guaranteed by an institution whose foundation was national (i.e., ethnic) in origin, and that its laws were subject to nothing universal or superior.

The practical outcome of this contradiction was that from then on human rights were protected and enforced only as national rights and that every institution of a state, whose supreme task was to protect and guarantee man his rights as man, as citizen and as national, lost its legal, rational appearance and could be interpreted by romantics as the nebulous representative of a "national soul" which through the very fact of its existence was supposed to be beyond or above the law. (230-31)

Thusly viewed, nationalism was transmutated from geographical sovereignty, implying the rights of citizens, into a consortium of national (ethnic) interests whose purpose was tribal purity. The state must now control the centrifugal forces of "blood."

Of course this new state encumbrance found real application in the pan-movement, especially in the Pan-German distinction between Staatsfremde, which means "aliens of the state," and Volksfremde, which describes those who were aliens of the nation. It was only one logical step away from incorporating this "tribal nationalism" into Nazi legislation.

One can see here how both administratively and legally the state was put into the authoritarian position of centralizing its power in order to control the disintegrating influence of ethnic factionalism. Given the constant interterritorial migration of most peoples of Europe, we can see how the search for one's "own land" led to a social-psychological breakdown into the atomization that forms a precondition to Arendt's totalitarianism. This search, this need to locate one's own people, led to the rootlessness that was the base of an "enlarged tribal consciousness." In other words, the search for ethnic solidarity uprooted people from their common soil, tradition, and culture and drove them into the parochialism of tribal loyalty. Thus blood, not territory, language, not law, supplanted the idea of state and formed the basis of communal adhesion. We are now at a point where inarticulateness of a people could be assumed by a leader and molded into an organization that only needed the concept of "future" to give its existence both meaning and movement. Unlike the simultaneous growth of imperialism, with its need for superiority, or national mission, or white man's burden, the pan-movements were animated by
notions of chosenness that were frantically propelled by religion (Russian Pan-Slavs) or genetics (Pan-Germans).

The near-religious foundation of the pan-movements (especially the Pan-Slav variant) acquired its mythical force in its concern not merely with notions of superiority, but with finality as well. This naturally brought them into conflict with the People of the Book, whose claim to chosenness rested not only on God's favor but His determination that they would be around to the End. In constant competition with other incipient groups who hated the state, the pan-movements' hatred of the Jews was given historical credibility because Christianity, a religion of Jewish origin, had already conquered Western civilization. Thus chosenness meant that exclusivity and racial hatred were at least partially transformed into religious fear.

The real significance of the pan-movements, as Arendt sees it, is that they, for the first time, developed not only a cohesion out of their own ethnic solidarity, but fully formulated anti-Semitism into an ideology. Unlike the Dreyfus Affair, which revealed the political power of anti-Semitism, or the German Stoecker movement, which used anti-Semitism as an instrument of propaganda, the pan-movements' tribalism broke entirely from both facts and circumstances and founded itself on the destruction of the Jews. Thus Arendt sees the real character of imperialism, with its "alliance between capital and mob," fully developed in the pan-movements. That is, expansion (not just economic appropriation) is combined with religious fervor (not just chosenness, but finality) to form a movement coveting all temporal existence-ideology. In this way domestic policy can be combined with foreign policy for the permanent and final looting of foreign territories and the complete subjugation of alien peoples.

Thus far we see how the ideas of race and class, the policy of imperialism, and the new arcane imperii of bureaucratic control did more than bring totalitarianism into the world. They formed, first, a basis of movement, then a type of organizational control that could function almost independently of any functionaries who appeared to make the whole business run.

Racial solidarity and class consciousness formed the foundation for ideological thinking. Imperialism (or its continental variant, the pan-movements) served as a vehicle for the transmission of the ideology while simultaneously seeking to fulfill it. For its part, bureaucracy was less a method for the administration of policy and more the in-
instrumentalization of man on behalf of nature and history. Seen in terms of nature (the biological evolution of Aryan supremacy) and history (the material development of the proletariat), bureaucracy became the organizational dynamic of race and class.

But only the groundwork had been laid for totalitarianism. The elements of the movement needed to be cohered for the purpose of seizing and maintaining power. Race and class interests now needed articulateness of purpose and direction toward their natural (genetic) and historical (material) conclusion. Through the formation of an ideology of race or class, the movement became a purpose realized only by the domination of all outsiders.

II

Old tyrants invoke images of the past; while the new tyrants invoke images of the future.

-G. K. Chesterton

Mass society was the canvas for Hannah Arendt’s portrait of totalitarianism. Her illumination of the mass man revealed a public and private life that was devoid of content. He was no longer part of society, but its result. Psychologically, the average man was overcome by a sense of redundancy in which he saw himself no longer as a mover and maker of events but as their product. This was reflected in a “self-centered bitterness,” a term with obvious ontological overtones. The real novelty of this self-centeredness is that it did not mask itself in the veil of traditional individualism, with its concern for achievement and recognition. There was no effort toward self-assertion for either the plaudits of praise or the claims of success. Nor did this mass man take comfort in the company of others in whom he might have sensed a common heritage, even a bond of suffering. He was alone.

Sociologically, what this man felt was superfluidity—the sense of being expendable in one’s own society. Arendt sees here the deforation, the disintegration of a mental life that had been cultivated through 2,000 years of philosophical and religious experience. What it means to her is the radical loss of self-interest, the cynical or bored indifference in the face of death or other personal catastrophes, the passionate inclination toward the most abstract notions as guides for life, and the general contempt for even the most obvious rules of common sense.” (316)
Superfluousness, along with a growing nihilism, were coupled to the disintegration of the old class system. This prompted a hostility toward active citizenship. It was no coincidence that led the apolitical to join the apathetic. The business of politics and public life could now be left to the mob, "primarily a group in which the residue of all classes are represented." But most important, the mob’s antipathy toward high society and the conventions of the old order prompted its search for a leader whose purpose was their destruction. As a product of this society, rather than a part of it, the mob hated not only government and authority, but any and all who had an investment in them. Politically, this "prevented the growth of a citizenry that felt individually and personally responsible for the country." (314) With no visible leader to cling to, the individual submerged himself in a brooding but identifiable rage.

For a time, the pan-movements of the nineteenth century and the party system of the twentieth deflected the rage of these lonely men. But they soon degenerated into a peculiar kind of selflessness. Arendt sees this selflessness as an abject helplessness in which, as she puts it, the source of all the worries and cares which make human life troublesome and anguished is gone." Metaphysically, this begins the logos of self abdication whose principal feature is "selflessness in the sense that oneself does not matter." Equally important, however, it is not "the expression of individual idealism" but is, instead, "a mass phenomenon." (315) From an organizational standpoint, it constituted a new terrifying negative solidity.

Historically, this was the point at which the mob and its leaders seized control of the lonely mass by offering it an ideological explanation that made its previous existence appear preparatory to a new order. Thus we get the testimony of Oswald Spengler, who was not only famous for one of the "rise and decline" theories (The Decline of the West), but who, in many respects, was the articulator of the European mind and the conscience of Germany.

Like the French in 1793 we must go right through to the end in our misfortune, we need a chastisement compared to which the four years of war are nothing .. , until finally the terror has brought to a head such a degree of excitement and despair, that dictatorship, resembling that of Napoleon, will be regarded universally as a salvation.'

Written *circa* 1918, this was not a prophecy but a longing. His unknown but fellow Aryan would soon satisfy Spengler’s melancholia.

Thus the mass’s disaffection with the previous conventions made it susceptible to leaders who were prepared to hone the new order into a new conventionalism. Those who arose in Germany were sprung from the mass. Hitler was not an aristocrat, Weimar bureaucrat, or even a bourgeois entrepreneur. He could offer the masses access to power that had previously been used against them. Thus chicken farmers, bohemians, and pornographers could ascend to positions for which they had always held contempt or envy. The inmates could now run the asylum with a kind of dreamed-of vengeance that motivates the politically disaffected. Now the individual could give public expression to his private rages.

What is important is to understand the historical union of a leader sprung from the masses and the mentality of the masses that made the leader possible. There existed a reciprocity of abdication. None of the totalitarian leaders sought political leadership for the usual reasons: personal gain, fulfillment of individual goals, status. While the ascendency of these leaders may have been marked by the usual machinations, none claimed power under the banner of excellence, national glory, or even national security. Thus leaders and led, mob and mass, could abdicate personal ambition and give themselves over to an idea whose historical significance made their relationship inevitable: racial supremacy and working-class domination. Of course Hitler was keenly aware of this reciprocity when he told his followers, "All that you are, you are through me; all that I am, I am through you alone." (315) Even Stalin, who valued his own prowess after the succession struggle, considered himself the historically determined exponent of Marxism-Leninism. Similarly, a noted French writer, Alain Peyrefitte, once observed of Mao Tse-tung that "the Chinese know the narcissistic joy of loving themselves in him. It is only natural that he should have loved himself through them.'

This reciprocity also reflects the leader’s claim that he is not merely another "strong man" whose personal charm, style, and craft vaulted him into leadership. This also suggests why totalitarian leaders, unlike

16. *The Chinese: Portrait of a People*, trans. from the French by Graham Webb (New York; Bobbs-Merrill, 1977). Arendt reminds us that Mussolini was probably the first party leader who consciously rejected a formal program and replaced it with inspired leadership and action alone. (325n) Unlike Hitler, Stalin, or Mao, Mussolini did not need a "program" or ideology to inspire abdication, only specified goals.
tyrants of the past, target their terror at more than current opponents. The tyrant, who confuses his person with his power, terrorizes those who threaten his power. Totalitarian leaders, on the other hand, use their terror to justify their own utility in the fulfillment of the idea. The leaders may then use terror and divest themselves of any claim to personal gain. The fact that Hitler and Stalin, or Mao Tse-tung, ascended to leadership did not constitute proof of their superiority, but of their necessity. It was a historical imperative.

Unlike the Western democracies, in which the leader is seen as the head of government, or, sociologically, as the head of the people, the totalitarian leader is the symbolic unity of an atomized body that is integrated through his person. As the cohesive for this fractionalized mass he is seen as the reified personality of the entirety. It is not his will they follow, it is their will-personified.

This personification of history through the articulation of a single will establishes the major function contained within the logos of self-abdication: the total subjectification of history-the interpretation of history in terms of the idea. The abdication of personal judgment, even on such personal matters as one's own experiences, left an experiential void which could then be filled along with history. The result was a coterminous relationship between the Then and Now, between a vapid individual and history, which only needed to be filled by a party or a leader. It was Trotsky who seized on this point when he said, "We can only be right with and by the Party, for history has provided no other way of being right." (307n)

At the primary level, where the lonely man encounters himself in manifold, the "Self and world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time." (477) This is why totalitarian propaganda, which precedes terror and is most conspicuous in the movement phase, did not seek to refute opposing arguments, since its appeal was not to the thinking, hence, critical mind. Both logic and rationality require appeal to real experience or that which has been learned by appreciation of historical sequence. This broad formulation fits what Arendt elsewhere termed "common sense," and whose general decay reflects a proclivity toward ideological thinking." But in the movement phase of totalitarianism the mass mentality is characterized by an immediacy which makes logic and history superfluous.

In the prepower phase, before the leadership seizes full control

and when propaganda is both effective and necessary, the Nazi and Communist movements both appealed to empty minds that were particularly susceptible to the *logico-deducto* reasoning that compels totalitarian thinking. Never influenced or deterred by facts or historical truths, "they presented disagreements as invariably originating in deep natural, social, or psychological sources beyond the power of reason." (311-12) Of course this kind of reductionism makes rational appeals to human intelligence mock exercises in self-service.

This is precisely why history became the ultimate lever in totalitarian manipulation: it suited a mind that was predisposed to infinite regression. Of course the predisposition toward this kind of thinking had been established by Western civilization on both the religious and secular fronts. Religion, while anchored in some finite past, claimed an origin that was beyond personal experience, even rational understanding. At the same time, it remained bound to some chiliasmatic conclusion that suggested a state of perfectability. It found its counterpart in various forms of secular historicism: the idea of a philosophy of history, cyclical conceptions (Spengler), ideational movements (Hegel), material conceptions (Marx), or, in the case of the Nazis, a genetic unfolding of racial superiority. In any case, the idea of a determinable history became particularly suited to the totalitarian mentality in terms of what Richard Hofstadter calls "the paranoid style." History, to such a mentality, is more than a repository of conspiracies; instead, "history is a conspiracy."  

Of course an ideology is itself a delusion, so an Adolf Hitler or a Joseph Stalin is going to appear paranoid for articulating such a system. Interestingly enough, however, Arendt reminds us that both Hitler and Stalin rode the back of a pre-existing conspiracy—a Jewish takeover and bourgeois domination—which made their rise popular. Both identified the popular "conspiratorial menace." In Hitler's case, his rise to power was in part a mandate, but more the result of initiative than creativity. This is exactly why, as Arendt concluded, totalitarian movements "never preached a new doctrine, have never invented an ideology which was not already popular." (361)

But what is important here is the element of historicity that gives transcendence to the ideology. Without this historical element the Communists could never have generated boundless hostility toward the bourgeoisie; and they hardly needed racism or anti-Semitism to start its operation. Once the individual accepts the temporal ex-

aggeration of the ideology he withdraws from facticity and is drawn into a whirlpool of infinite regression. From this perspective, totalitarianism is hardly limited to the Nazi or Communist species, for "it will make little difference whether totalitarian movements adopt the pattern of Nazism or Bolshevism, the laws of life and nature or of dialectics and economics," (361) Only for Hitler were the Jews first among unequals.

Whether through history (couched in the rhetoric of dialectical materialism) or nature (under the banner of Aryan supremacy), conspiracy must be seen in the light of historicity. It is either the condition of this tendency, or its predisposition, which totalitarian leaders form into an undifferentiated mass. Neither Hitler nor Stalin (who had to cultivate this tendency) ever forgot what could be done to control the mass once the groundwork had been prepared. Hitler wrote in Mein Kampf:

"In Vienna, "I laid the foundations for a world concept in general and a way of political thinking in particular which I had later only to complete in detail, but which never afterward forsook me." (222) At the same time, this suggests why the goals of totalitarian regimes can never be reached and why their claims to power must always remain incomplete.

Totalitarian regimes can never be perfect, or perfected; hence, motion is endemic to these systems throughout their strata. Every personal discretion by a functionary, every alteration in mood or temperament, every assertion of independence constitutes an act of defiance, even sabotage. This creates an atmosphere of mistrust which needs no further provocation for punishment. While Arendt ascribes little precision to "motion," it appears to be a general psychological condition of people whose daily lives are incompatible with the party's most recent interpretation of events. Hans Buchheim says of this motion that "it corresponds to the incompatibility of the unlimited claim to control with the natural conditions of human life."19 This prompted what Arendt calls a "carefully graduated hierarchy of militancy." (367) Indeed, from an organizational perspective (i.e., in terms of regimenting lower-level cadres and the administration of terror to nonparty members), this became one of the reinforcing dynamics of totalitarian regimes. They were always trying to ferret out their "enemies," "traitors," "deviationists, and socially dangerous elements. Thus Richard Lowenthal concluded from this

practice that totalitarian regimes are "revolutionary" not only in their method of seizing power, but in their methods of maintaining manipulated change: "they tend to produce a permanent revolution from above."20

Historicity and paranoia (as a consequence of conspiratorial thinking) transform the totalitarian ideal into a state of impermanence. This guarantees the falsity of reality, which can only take place in human memory and be understood longitudinally—as the mind reaches back to comprehend what it was not present to see. Accordingly, history has no spatial restrictions or temporal constraints. The "rectification of history" includes purging all dissidents, even retroactively, as far back as the organic origin of man or the dialectical fountain of class struggle.

But this does not leave our thoughtless and isolated individual in the lurch. Since the claims that are made on behalf of totalitarian ideology are made with great moral suasion, self-sacrifice and devotion are the basic demands made of him. And, contrary to some myths about totalitarianism, the individual is not without his rewards. Because of strong "moral" enlistment (on behalf of an exploited worker class, or the sanctity of the Aryan soul), the individual can find personal achievement and ethical comfort in his absorption into something larger than himself. This is what prompted Eric Hoffer to conclude that "craving, not having, is the mother of a reckless giving of oneself." What is left, then, is an intellectual residue that is bereft of personal moral responsibility; hence, Adolf Eichmann.

This is the point at which the "logicality" of the ideology takes root; it "begins with the mind's submission to logic as a never-ending process on which man relies in order to engender his thoughts." (473) This process necessarily precludes freedom of action, a new beginning, or natality (as Arendt varies it) because man "bows down to an outward tyranny" that circumscribes the discursive nature of thought; hence, thought-lessness. Once the ideology is formulated, and its premise accepted, there begins a logos of self-deliverance.

The thoughtless Eichmann and the banal Molotov were not prototypical murderers whose minds were empty of content. They were men who had lost the capacity for the kind of discriminating judgment that must constantly choose between things that are given. The mind of man is always caught between velle and nolle ("to will" and "not to will"), between yes and no, right and wrong. When man aban-

doned the brutish enslavement of instinct and became conscious (by falling under the need to make choices), he thrust himself into the realm of freedom, and hence, the need to act. But the other side of freedom is responsibility whose *conditio sine qua non* is consequence, the natural world’s first response to our choices.

Guided only by imperfect knowledge into a future he knew nothing about, man became encumbered by consequences that were unforeseen and, too often, undesirable. This forces man into a metaphysical retreat—the desire to avoid these consequences by displacing responsibility onto someone else. The public abdication of moral responsibility (for one’s actions) was paralleled by a mental abdication and a search for deliverance from an outside source. An ideology was particularly well-suited to assume the mantle of responsibility since its prime function was "to explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise": the genetic evolution of race or the material development of productive forces.

Arendt was relentless in her effort to point up the quasiscientific and pseudophilosophical relevance of ideology and its concern to make itself the method for knowing the world. It is the magnetic (because its counts more on human indolence than inability) claim to "knowledge" that attracts the thoughtless, for it succeeds in its effort to make thinking unnecessary. This is what Arendt had in mind when she argued that "the self-coercive force of logicality is mobilized lest anybody ever start thinking—which as the freest and purest of all human activities is the very opposite of the compulsory process of deduction." (473)

From this perspective, the "force of logicality" draws man into a neoprimitive condition where his conscience can be explained or directed, flattered or condemned, in terms of the unfolding of the idea. Philosophically, then, the individual *qua* man can be viewed as an atavism whose existence must be understood in terms of the idea (its premise) that regulates it. This prompted Arendt’s most inclusive definition of ideology:

An ideology is quite literally what its name indicates: it is the logic of an idea. Its subject matter is history, to which the "idea" is applied; the result of this application is not a body of statements about something that is but the unfolding of a process which is in constant change. The ideology treats the course of events as though it followed the same "law" as the logical exposition of its "idea." Ideologies pretend to know the mysteries of the whole historical process—the secrets of the past, the intricacies of the present, the
uncertainties of the future—because of the logic inherent in their respective ideas. (469)

Obviously, the inclusiveness of this definition, with its three fundamental components (logicality, history, process), transcends the current assumption that an ideology is confined to a set of ideas used merely as social and political levers. Otherwise Hitler could have stopped with anti-Semitism. By itself racial hatred can serve as a social lever; but its goals are finite, restricted by time and enemies. Indeed, it was Aryan supremacy as a biological "fact," unencumbered by historical constraints, that offered Nazism its totalist dimension. Likewise, Stalin and his heirs needed more than class antagonism to extend their domination into the future. (Of course Lenin led the way when he declared capitalist imperialism to be the last vestige of a dying bourgeois class, thus sustaining a "warfare personality" some time into the future.) Communism in particular not only leans on a regression of excuses for its past failures, but has demonstrated a near-infinite number of justifications for its future expansion. But totality is finally achieved when the ideology intrudes and conquers the sanctum sanctorum of the lonely man—the thinking mind.

As Arendt has it, the formation of thought increases as propaganda decreases. Once in power totalitarian regimes no longer need the hoped-for support of wavering masses but require, instead, a process of thinking that will follow the historical development of the idea. She notes that "as soon as logic as a movement of thought—and not as a necessary control of thinking—is applied to an idea, this idea is transformed into a premise." (469) This is one of Arendt’s most significant contributions to the understanding of ideology—its operational guise. Logic, "as a control for thinking," seeks factual knowledge (as a relation to human experience) and internal consistency in order to approximate some facet of truth. On the other hand, logic "as a movement of thought" carries the individual along with the premise that sets the logical process into motion. The human mind, especially the one that has abdicated self-sufficiency, bows down to this inexorable mental force, "drawing conclusions in the manner of mere argumentation." (470) Of course this whole process cannot be interpreted by a new idea, since this would lead to new consequences. Nor can it be understood in terms of new experience, since this would contravene the very process by which the logic moves and seeks fulfillment.
The process of argumentation now becomes the very basis of human understanding. Yet the truth of human existence can never be fully achieved or even understood because the process of the logic does not have the truth as its purpose but the fulfillment of the idea. (470) Existentially speaking, the individual abdicates his freedom and the choices that naturally flow from it in favor of an internal tyranny that is as systematic as any in the outside world. This became quite evident when the ideologies were elevated to national doctrine, through state support, and when "free public opinion" adopted them to such an extent that the masses, and even "intellectuals," could not think independently of them.

The compulsory process of logicality is most visible in Hitler's use of men and material to destroy the Jews—men and material that could have gone to the war effort. Indeed, one notes a still-shocking intellectual residue in this illogicality in "revisionist" explanations of Stalin's terror and the failure of communism. Rationalizations abound in the effort to justify compulsion and mass murder in the name of industrialization and modernization. Thus Robert Burrows argues that "Arendt's inability to see a relationship between the politics of Stalinism and the goal of rapid modernization helps to explain her judgment." From this he concludes that Arendt failed to see that "the increased use of fear and coercion occurred during and immediately after the first phase of radical social transformation and is possibly related to the tensions and strains created by that process.

Of course such squalid apologetics simply will not square with the facts. The various five-year plans and the rationalist penumbra used to justify them were in fact nullified by the Great Purges. Stephen Whitfield rightly points out that the purges really began in earnest after collectivization and took with them a good part of the managerial class. Judged merely by utilitarian standards, the Soviet economy, ostensibly building socialism, was a disaster of wastefulness and inefficiency. Also, one might well ask how Soviet apologists account for the vast number of N.K.V.D. divisions and members of the Internal Guard Service who were used to guard concentration camp inmates. There were tens of thousands who would have defended Russia against the German onslaught. Indeed, how does "rapid and

radical modernization of most aspects of Soviet society" serve to explain the fact that the Soviet Union was producing no more grain when Stalin died than it did in czarist Russia?

Hardly exhaustive, these illustrations only hint at the compelling aspects of logicality. Once the premise has been accepted, everything is swept aside: "nothing matters but consistency." (458) This formed the basis of a new coinage for Arendt, "supersense." And it is a seemingly innocuous description for the remolding of man as a thinking animal. It is the antithesis of the traditional world of common sense in that it denies man's fortuitous response to his fellows, as well as the contingent behavior that heretofore formed the events of human history. Rather than seeing the world as composed of individual men who perform discrete acts, thus making the world common through the sense of those who see or hear of the achievements, ideology seeks "to make the world consistent, to prove that its respective supersense has been right." (458)

This is how ideologies destroy the common given world, that is, a world made common through the spontaneous act of creating an artifact of mutual confirmation. (Arendt sees the American Revolution as the quintessential model for such a foundation.) But in totalitarianism the modality of these sharing experiences is fictionalized through the ideologies, that is, "systems based upon a single opinion that proved strong enough to attract and persuade a majority of people and broad enough to lead them through the various experiences and situations of an average modern life." (159)

The experiences that hold a people together must be shared. And a community, even more than a political artifact, is held together by a consensus, not a "truth," no matter how valid its claim. But in their effort to fabricate a new mankind, totalitarian regimes create one opinion which "claims to possess either the key to history, or the solution for all the 'riddles of the universe,' or the intimate knowledge of the hidden universal laws which are supposed to rule nature and man." (159) However this may be, totalitarian regimes, with their quasiscientificity and pseudophilosophical insights, have already created a "public opinion" post hoc, with the adoption of the premise: that is, racial superiority or class supremacy. What remains is assent, which, contrary to the canons of liberal democratic theory, is arrived at from top to bottom. Thus totalitarian governments do not seek approval, but confirmation.

If we have learned from Aristotle, there is no "public" opinion, that is, an individual judgment that is derived from the public, when only
one is held as valid. It should be no surprise then that of all the ideologies that have competed in the effort to create public opinion only two have come out on top: "the ideology which interprets history as an economic struggle of classes, and the other that interprets history as a natural fight of races." (159) Of course the groundwork had already been laid. Anti-Semitism was current in Europe, even if only in the vulgarized form of Jew-hatred. And hostility toward the bourgeoisie and upper social classes existed before Marx and Engels whipped the frenzied masses into elite political formations. This is what prompted Konrad Heiden's sage conclusion that propaganda is not "the art of instilling an opinion in the masses. Actually it is the art of receiving an opinion from the masses." (361)

This is what inspired Arendt's understanding of logicality. In order to fashion a social idea—whose most conspicuous features were hatred on the one side and the gullible belief in perfection on the other side—into a political weapon, totalitarian leaders had to establish a process that would sustain the movements long enough for them to seize and maintain power. At one and the same time, it had to be simple enough for common mass consumption and yet complex enough to preclude heresy from within the external formations. In other words, the masses had to see the telos of the ideology as consonant with the premise of hatred. Arendt tells us how this works: "Comprehension is achieved by the mind's imitating, either logically or dialectically, the laws of 'scientifically' established movements with which through the process of imitation it becomes integrated." (471)

This was how the two totalitarian movements, "so frightfully 'new' in methods of rule and ingenious in forms of organization," improved themselves as "a political weapon and not as a theoretical doctrine." (361, 159) Thus the individual delivers himself over to a process of quasi-scientificality by aping mental operations whose disconnectedness is beyond his comprehension.

Ideologies and Weltanschauungen existed before the twentieth century. Of course the mere premise of racism and communism gave the would-be panaceas no more power than their predecessors. The ascendancy of racism (as a struggle between the races) and communism (as a struggle between the classes) turned out to be more important because of the political power they acquired. It is worthy to note here that Arendt, unlike others who have dealt with the subject, resisted any temptation to parallel ideology with religion, even though religion acquired tremendous political power during the time of the theocratic states. Of course the novel force of racism (through
Nazism) and communism (through Marxism-Stalinism) rested on their claim to offer purification and ascendancy through an earthly struggle. The appeal was to the temporal mind.

Indeed, temporality is the first victim and real battlefield for the logicality of the ideology whose telos (Aryan hegemony or worker domination) requires the absolute destruction of the means-end category as a principal guide to human conduct. Perfection as an end in human affairs implies, indeed presupposes, imperfection in the all-too-human world of prescientificity. Once the premise is accepted, all life’s experience, every human event, all perceptible contradictions are reduced to a concealment of the "true" reality that will be unveiled with the future unfolding of the process. Hence logicality provides "an axiomatically accepted premise deducing everything else from it; that is, it proceeds with a consistency that exists nowhere in the realm of reality." (471) This is how ideologies mock reality by seeking to parallel its vital functions. Joseph Berger’s distinction between the two meanings of "truth" serves as a nice illustration. The Russian word *istina* "denotes the correspondence between the notion and the objective reality." However, *Pravda* (also the name of the major Soviet newspaper) connotes "the higher concept of truth, a truth elevated to the rank of an idea . . . that truth which needs to be attained, truth in action." 23

As Arendt sees it, this begins the world of unreality, the fictional existence of totalitarianism. "Truth," here, is not the effort to order and understand the discrete incidents of human existence. Nor is it what truth can only be, a retrospective—the mind’s reliance on memory to measure what has been given the senses against what it already knows. Instead, in the name of ideological consistency, truth becomes prospective, an activist formulation, not for ascertaining reality, but for bringing it about. This is why ideologies can only be activistic, that is, directed toward future events. Hence ideologies can only mimic explanation since all ideological statements are directed toward an unknown future.

The activist pursuit of ideological truth actually concludes in a self-fulfilling prophecy. For instance, Hitler’s claim that Nazi Germany was fighting for its survival (biological, as well as territorial) was given the ring of truth by allowing the war to continue until the Red Army was in Berlin. Likewise, the Soviet effort to single out "deviationists" on the grounds that they were remnants of the "dying classes" was

23. As quoted by Whitfield in *Into the Dark.*
not mere ideological rhetoric. It was a warning of their forthcoming extermination. Whitfield summarizes this nicely: "In announcing reality the Soviet regime was expounding a prophecy that would be made true." 24

Coeval with the totalitarian destruction of truth is what Arendt calls an "extreme contempt for facts." The elimination from Soviet texts of the record of Trotsky's participation in the Russian Revolution is only one illustration of the problem. Since a people's understanding of facts and the ways they come to know them constitute the basis of their common world, the obliteration of facts means a disintegration of communal life. Facticity, as a mental factor, forms the network for the sense of community, the anchor of common recognition and understanding. The way it is interpreted by the members of the community forms the adhesive that binds a people together: it is the substance of tradition, as well as myths. In other words, it is the foundation of what we call common sense.

With the defeat of common sense by totalitarian ideology the bearings of the thinking mind are skewed, and individual judgment is distorted. When this happens men no longer share the world in common but, "the structure of their minds, and this they cannot have in common, strictly speaking; their faculty of reasoning can only happen to be the same in everybody." 25 What this does to freedom is, of course, frightfully obvious. Man is driven from the public realm into himself. Once he emerges, his "faculty of reasoning" unites with others to create, not a common world, but an identical one; assuming each one starts from the same premise—which a Marx or Hider might happily provide.

III

The first edition of Origins appeared in 1951 and was shocking enough to any reader, even a sympathizer. It is mined with innuendos and portents of a chthonic fury. The history of the past two centuries suggests to Arendt a "radical assault" on human beings. In the preface to the first edition she speaks of the totalitarian effort to "destroy the essence of man"; and its appearance illustrates the beginning of an "absolute evil." One is discomfited by the book. But then, no one should be able to, dwell on the dark side of humanity for nearly 500 pages without feeling abused even threatened! After all, "human na-
ture as such is at stake." (459) Her conclusions are extreme, but so are her discoveries.

Arendt sees totalitarianism as more than an extremity. It is new. But the "novelty thesis," partially formed from her discovery that totalitarianism is more than despotism, was not explicitly stated until July, 1953 in her essay, "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government." This made its first English appearance in *The Review of Politics* and was subsequently revised and incorporated into the totalitarianism book as the last chapter, and also is mentioned in the opening lines to her new preface (1958). This should dispel the idea that Arendt was developing a "theory." The fact that it was taken as such was of no concern to her, although it did prove salutary for the profession in any case. However, the revision of this article did see its first inclusion in monograph form in the 1955 German edition of Origins, which Arendt translated herself.

More important, however, is the fact that the novelty thesis was related to Arendt’s subsequent work on ideology and terror, that is, the extremity of ideological thinking and the ambiance of fear that separates totalitarianism from even the worst forms of tyranny. It was, stated badly, one of those post hoc "insights of a more general and theoretical nature" that grew out of her continuing analysis of the elements of total domination.  

Obviously, the period from 1953 to 1958 was a germinal one for Arendt. In her important 1953 essay, "Understanding and Politics," she makes constant reference to totalitarianism, maintaining at one point that "its very actions constitute a break with all our tradition; they have clearly exploded our categories of political thought and our standards for moral judgment." 27 For the 1958 edition of Origins she re-emphasized the importance of "superfluidity" (the dominant condition of mass man) and tied it more closely to the notion of "senselessness" (a condition of irrationality depicting the meaningless of one’s own existence). 28 Clearly, then, her work on ideology

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27. *Partisan Review* 22 (1953), 379. The importance of this essay to an understanding of Arendt’s later development cannot be overestimated. Many signs of her later theoretical and metaphysical ideas were first manifest here.
and terror was based on new material and her own observations on what she had found. The idea of introducing a new form of government into existing typologies was a post hoc one for Arendt, the result of further examination. These further observations and refinements had nothing to do with "theory" or "model-building." Indeed, her purpose is clearly, if generally, stated in the preface to the first edition: "Comprehension . . . the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality-whatever it may be."

Comprehension does not proceed from fixed variables, thus yielding results from some apparent chain of events. Nor does it seek explanation through a search for the knowable, verifiable, or demonstrable relationships which are visible to the careful observer. Instead, it seeks a synthesis, some coherence, out of the seeming incongruities, paradoxes, the intangibles and invisibles, which actually defy explanation. Reading Origins, one is bound to ask about the connections between the Dreyfus Affair, the expansionism of Cecil Rhodes, the bureaucracy of Britain, and the rise of Nazism; or, the isolation of the Boers, the export of capital to India, Pan-Slavism, and the rise of Stalinist Russia. One of Arendt's critics captures her method quite well: "To find the causes of a phenomenon is not, strictly speaking, to explain it but simply to understand it better." 29 Thus comprehension becomes understanding which is not knowledge, but a final reconciliation to a world in which totalitarianism is possible.

Of course the book is not above criticism. Arendt was first in this area and pays a heavy price for it. But much of the criticism is procedural and too often directed against the obiter dicta of its author rather than the substance of her conclusions. There are three fundamental reasons for this: the so-called thawing of the Cold War, the positivists' attack on the concept of totalitarianism as a "tool" for model-building and comparison; and, finally, the indiscriminate use of the concept by students, politicians, and even intellectuals.

The thawing of the Cold War began sub rosa, with the de-Stalinization of Soviet life and politics. Khrushchev's "secret speech" at the Twentieth Party Congress and the rhetorical effort at "peaceful coexistence" had a disarming effect on the populace, if not the politicians, of the Western democracies. Coupled to this was the common confusion of totalitarianism with Fascism. With the destruction of Fascism, at least the warlike Italian variant, there was a diminution of totalitarianism, or its perceived significance. The term seemed ap-

propriate only for the Soviet Union and China, and little was known about China: the myth of "agrarian reformers" predominated until the late 1950s. While some scholars recognized and even accepted the symptoms of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union, the de-emphasis of blatant terror and mass murder mislead many intellectuals to believe that, whatever merits totalitarianism had as a category, Stalin’s death sealed it as an anomaly in human contrivance.

The end of Nazism, the death of Mussolini, and the de-tensification of the Cold War inspired Arendt’s critics to put a historicist gloss on totalitarianism. They maintained that Hitler’s regime generally and Stalin’s rule particularly were aberrations in Western thought and practice. In her modified introduction (after 1958), a statement appears that reveals Arendt’s concern that scholars had made no real attempt to understand totalitarianism as a phenomenon. She notes that for some time after the defeat of Nazi Germany the concern of the world was “criminal activities” for the “purpose of prosecution of war criminals.” In other words, in righteous indignation the world sought moral culpability in terms of Western standards of good conduct, or at least acceptable behavior. There was no effort to understand and reveal the weaknesses of Western civilization that made such monstrous crimes possible. The aberrational thesis, and the rationalist penumbra used to justify it, kept Western scholars from examining the very premises of Western culture, thus clearing the way for the illusion of progress.

But ideologically speaking, the death of Stalin was followed by a return to an intellectual left-wing status-quo-ante. That is, after Stalin’s excesses were finally recognized, that portion of the intellectual community that sought to remedy the failures of capitalist democracy that had occurred during the interwar years rose to the surface once again. The general discontent with capitalism’s "rise and decline" pattern prompted both a popular and intellectual willingness to try some variant of socialism in earnest. While most scholars were willing to accept the true character of Hitler’s tyranny, even to the point of conceding its totalitarian nature, few in the growing socialist camps were prepared to do the same with Stalin’s Marxist

state. It was Nazism and Hitler that were anathema to this growing socialist movement. But it was Stalin, not Marx, who was cast aside.

One such effort to save the theory but not the man was made by the noted psychologist Eric Fromm. A member of the Frankfurt School and reflecting its general sentiment on this matter, Fromm tried to separate Marxist-Leninist ideology from its most intractable and violent practitioner. In his afterword to the 1961 edition of George Orwell’s *1984*, Fromm describes “the betrayal of the socialist hopes by Stalin’s reactionary state capitalism.” Instead of condemning the man, the ideology; or, of course, socialism itself, he saw Stalin’s crimes as a function of antisocialist behavior, namely, capitalism. After all, didn’t everyone know that it was capitalism and/or right-wing dictators that perpetrated such terrible crimes? And despite the fact that N.A.Z.I. stands for National Socialist Workers party, it had been “assumed” to be a “right-wing” enterprise—a illusion that still dominates the literature despite the fact that Hitler’s regime was one of the most centralized, socialistically oriented systems of its day.

Certainly one of the theoretical strengths of *Origins* is Arendt’s introduction of the similarity between Nazism and Bolshevism, between the organization of terror on behalf of class or race, and between an ideology of materialism and one of genetics. This link could not have been made by the conventional Left or Right. The basic similarity Arendt found, and the one which enraged a growing socialist movement, was in the compelling logic of an idea. The discovery of ideological thinking prompted Arendt’s belated conclusion that the major crisis of twentieth-century existence is not a struggle between theory and action, but between theory and theory. Certainly this has become obvious in the real loss of the means-end category of political discourse. Apparently those *who* are more inclusive in their ends (there are more workers than Aryans) are willing to justify any means on their behalf. In other words, Hitler’s socialist state could be universally condemned because it was restricted to the ascendancy of only the Aryan race; but the crimes of a socialist movement based on worker ascendancy and propelled by history are pardoned, or rationalized, as painful expedients on behalf of economic necessity. The doomsaying behind theories of racial decay fails to in-

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31. We are not yet ready to greet the "end of ideology." There seems to be a need by some to separate socialist regimes based on worker ascendancy and animated by history (its material forces) from a socialist system founded on race and driven by nature.

spire apologetics like the eschatology of a classless society.

To her credit, Arendt never stated which regime best fulfilled the ideal of totalitarianism. While she was guilty of concentrating too heavily on Nazi Germany, this has less to do with her own bias than it does with the fact that Stalin was still alive when she wrote and was not inclined to make his materials available. But judged by her criteria, Soviet communism was responsible for more murders, its terror was more complete (and arbitrary), and its ideological pervasiveness more thorough, than its Nazi counterpart. The Katyn massacre, the war against the peasants of the Ukraine, the massive starvation of five nationalities, as well as the arbitrary arrests that could descend on any strata of society, place Stalin’s socialist state at the peak of totalitarian domination.

But it is this similarity, the apparent symmetry, not in terms of the idea but in the logicality of the idea, that prompts the broadest and most often heard criticism of Arendt’s work. It is what Alexander Groth refers to as the “unitotalitarian” approach, that is, Nazism and Soviet communism are assumed to be so much alike that they can be considered identical. Such a misunderstanding, of course, immediately prompted the conclusion that Arendt was self-consciously constructing a theory rather than describing a phenomenon. This misinterpretation of *Origins* led to the frequent positivist attack of her work as an example of an a priori methodology. Characteristically, Robert Burrows accuses her of a priori reasoning and chides her “theory” for its weakness as a tool in comparative political analysis. 33

Yet the Nazi regime based on race and the Communist regime founded on materialism are not so similar that they can be conflated. They are neither congruous nor complementary in purpose or function. Nor does Arendt say they are. What she says is that there is a consequential similarity between an ideology based on genetics and one based on economics. There are common features in a system that obliterates people in ovens and a system that annihilates them through starvation. If the dissimilarities of the two systems are pronounced enough to contravene her association between them, neither Burrows nor anyone else has given us the benefit of this in-

sight. What she claims is a similarity in ideological thinking and a
method for administering terror that transcends both the ability and
purpose of previous despotisms.

Much of the confusion surrounding Arendt's work (especially
*Origins*) can be traced to what appears to be strange historiography.
She takes her lessons from Herodotus, who believed that the events
of history owe their existence exclusively to men. 34 As manmade
creations, events stand in defiance of history seen as a process in
which men are merely the actors in a determinable and inexorable
movement. Accordingly, each event is new and will finally disclose its
own past. But more important, the event can never be seen as the in-
evitable consequence of those incidents that seem to compose it.
Thus Arendt maintains that "the event illuminates its own past, it can
never be deduced from it." 35 This seems odd indeed, to a world of his-
toriography dependent on theories of progress, genetic develop-
ment, cycles, or a dialectical movement. But a detachment from our
modern prejudice reveals an a posteriori mode of analysis that only
seems novel because of its profundity. Through it she is able to dis-
close truths and reveal connections that otherwise would have
remained hidden within a "system" of history. Regardless of the
events she chose to focus on, Arendt's conclusions about both
regimes are the result of having traced totalitarianism (as a conse-
quence) back to those discrete incidents which made it possible.

Moreover, Burrows (as do similar critics of Arendt) falls into
another error partly because of Arendt's unorthodox methodology.
And it seems a characteristic faux pas of those who largely ignore the
first two-thirds of her book and assume its last third to constitute a
theory. Burrows proceeds from a false premise and is drawn into a
logically correct but factually false conclusion: "It is perhaps ironic
that a person who sees totalitarianism as an attempt to translate
reality into a fiction should herself produce a fictitious theory!"
What he ignores is the fact that there is always a "fictional" quality to
time, even one that aims at empirical validation, since theory seeks
to explain events and outcomes it is not privileged to know. Theory
hovers around, it seeks to approximate, knowledge; and it remains
theory so long as there is some margin for error. But once knowledge

34. Arendt's "methodology" has caused no small amount of confusion for her readers,
especially the novice. The best single source for a clarification is her essay, "The Con-
cept of History: Ancient and Modern," in *Between Past and Future*, supra.
is secured through the accumulation of facts, it no longer is subject to the tentativeness of understanding—it requires acceptance. We ignore it at our peril. For instance, physicists no longer refer to the "theory" of thermodynamics. In the world of human affairs, knowledge demands acceptance from those who value the truth. This leads to a reconciliation with things as they are; the grim, the ugly, the evil. At the same time, understanding requires an effort to seek meaning. In other words, truth draws upon facts and forms the very basis of thought, while understanding gives it moral (aesthetic) significance. Thus knowledge (drawn from facts) and understanding (leading to meaning) are quite different things. What has made Origins stand up over time is the understanding it yields through the descriptive powers of its author.

Since the growth of positivism, or what Arendt calls "scientism" to apply the techniques of physical science to the world of human affairs—there has been a constant and concerted search for representations of reality. Most often this is done through the development of theoretical models or constructs: One such effort is made by Benjamin Barber, who attacks Arendt for viewing totalitarianism as a dimension (albeit, the worst) of the human condition, and as something other than an anomaly in political history. In "Conceptual Foundations of Totalitarianism," Barber concludes that:

A carefully and ethically nurtured language of comparative political analysis will leave little room for concepts like totalitarianism; and if neglected with sufficient vigor, it is not impossible that the totalitarian construct will be overtaken, if not by oblivion, at least by creeping desuetude. 37

Barber concedes its atypicality but essentially denies its novelty; he thus rejects its construct(ive) utility.

A more extreme example is seen in a work by Noel O'Sullivan, who goes so far as to suggest that Arendt conjured up a "model" in the last third of her work and then proceeded to search for evidence to support it. "She assumes," he argues, "that because we have the word [totalitarianism], we must therefore be able to find a phenomenon corresponding to it." 38 If this were indeed the case, her critics would

37. In Totalitarianism in Perspective, supra, 39 (emphasis added).
do well to attack her evidence rather than what it claims to represent. It would also prove salutary if they would demonstrate how totalitarianism is only a modification of conventional despotism. Then again, if Origins is understood in its entirety, it can be seen for what it is—an effort to understand something that is unique and, therefore, something that cannot be compared to anything else.

No doubt part of Arendt’s rejection of this scientism is due to its inability to yield understanding where only understanding, and not knowledge, is possible. Arendt understands better than most that not all things are knowable. By its nature, a theoretical model denies the intrinsic novelty of something, for it seeks out repetition in human affairs. Its applicability rests on its ability to be used again; its validity lies in replication. It presupposes a comparison between things that have been decided a priori to have a base in comparison. To have predictive value or, more modestly, an explanatory function, the model must correspond in its parts to the reality it seeks to represent. Likewise, for the model to have comparative value its parts and/or functions must correspond to those of the object under inquiry. Barring this comparison, this theoretical “fit,” the object must be declared sui generis, and it then becomes the basis for a model. For Arendt’s critics to claim that she described little more than exaggerated tyrannies, they would be obliged to explain the reliance on ideology, the mass extermination of nonenemies, the ubiquitous paralytic terror, and the dysfunctional elimination of their own citizens—all of which transcend despotism as the term has been understood since Plato.

Similarly, a construct is valid only when it allows the mind to see what is not present to see. While a model is representative in parts and/or function, a construct seeks representation—at least in the field of human affairs—through sequence and consequence. It is necessarily more precarious as an analytical tool since it seeks to envisage what could not have been known to the participants—namely, the interrelationship and meaning of the discrete events as they were unfolding. From this perspective, Arendt’s critics should have concentrated on her evidence and proved that (1) it could have concluded in something else, or (2), the consequence was not what she claims. Taking the latter tack would require them to prove that those events and those systems are definable in terms of pre-existing categories.

Whether in the form of the new political science or that of modern historiography, Arendt has to deal with the tendency to simply
equate totalitarianism with its elements or origins." For both the academic and the layman, totalitarianism is composed of so many "ingredients" (parts or functions). This satisfies the search for comparison, the need to place the essence of a thing next to something else in order to measure its worth. What we are left with is the unprecedented. Arendt never claimed her conclusions could not be formed into a theory. But these conclusions were not seen by her as either putative or heuristic, so she made no claim for their "utility." Philosophical conceptualization and classical historiography simply resist utility on behalf of "scientific" investigation.

Finally, one of the more obvious reasons the term "totalitarianism" has fallen into disrepute is because of its denigration through common discourse. Much like "fascism," it has become an epithet to level at an opponent. This was particularly the case in the heated rhetoric of the Cold War. Its conceptual value has been partially degraded by its terminological misuse. Thus Herbert Spiro, in his entry under "totalitarianism" for the 1968 edition of the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, describes the concept in terms of so much propaganda and Cold War sloganeering.

The word, which first gained popular currency through anti-Nazi propaganda during World War II, later became an anti-Communist slogan in the cold war ... [sic]. As the social sciences develop ... [i]f these expectations are borne out then a third encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, like the first one will not list "totalitarianism."

In her concluding remarks to the first edition of *Origins* (subsequently replaced by her chapter on ideology and terror), Arendt stressess the fundamental insecurity of totalitarian regimes vis-à-vis other nations, including other totalitarian regimes. She also portrays their struggle in terms of an ideological self-interest that can only be satisfied with the destruction of all competition. This, of course, only heightens the ideological struggle between East and West and

39. Spiro ignores the fact that the term was in common use in the 1930s and that Mussolini was fond of the idea of a "totalitarian state." In fact, one of the earliest contributions to political thought that made use of the term is found in Walter Lippmann's *The Good Society* (1936). It is of some consequence that as recently as 1970 Spiro and Barber coauthored an article in which they argue that the "primary and crucial" function of theories of totalitarianism is "the identification of enemies." Of course they never answer the obvious question: Why the need for a new name to call someone? Surely such pre-existing epithets as tyrant, dictator, or despot would have sufficed in "the identification of enemies." Cf. *Politics and Society* 1:1 (November, 1970), 11.
necessarily puts Western foreign policy in a position of counterideological policy formation. And she is unequivocal in her conclusion about the imperialistic designs of totalitarianism: "it presupposes the existence of one authority, one way of life, one ideology in all countries and among all people of the world."40

In her *On Violence* (1969), Arendt noted herself how anticomunism had become the "leitmotif" of American foreign policy. But this observation, even its necessity, was prompted by her insight that totalitarianism's imperialistic designs were necessitated by the demand of the ideology to prove its premise historically, as well as spatially. But it is quite another matter to accuse Arendt of writing a treatise and developing a concept as an ideological counterpropaganda device. This is nothing but a specious attempt to empty the concept of all content. Instead, her critics ought to have explained one of the book's most controversial themes, namely the centrality she gives to anti-Semitism, which actually did more to weaken her formulation than it did to support her thesis. Her critics would also have to explain the dearth of counterideological recommendations which, at some point, should have attended the book-none followed in subsequent editions.

Furthermore, one of the long-standing complaints of Arendt's supporters has been the absence of any programs, agenda, or set of goals. Indeed, Whitfield notes how her thought has always lacked a certain "combat readiness." He further points out that Arendt never felt overwhelmed to defend the Western democracies in the first place and, "contrary to Barber and Spiro, Arendt never claimed that the democracies were 'forces of light,' since the very design of her book showed how totalitarianism had originated within nineteenth-century European society."41 It was not National Socialism nor Soviet Marxism Arendt sought to counter, it was the Holocaust kingdom and the Gulag archipelago.

**Conclusion**

Completed in 1949 and published in 1951, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was Arendt's first major monograph. It was written against the backdrop of the highly emotional, ideological postwar years and occasionally reflects these qualities. But regardless of

41. *Into the Dark* supra, 159.
Arendt's personal or philosophical predispositions toward her subject matter, it was the first serious effort to examine totalitarianism not only historically, but phenomenologically as well. Indeed, her methodology spawned as much criticism as did her conclusions, particularly since she saw totalitarianism as a novel form of government. But what her method revealed was a Western attraction for determinism and necessity, which she expressed as logicality, scientism, and historicism, and whose surrogates were Hitler and Stalin. In her subsequent works she is vehement in her effort to overturn the modern notion of process which, she claims, separates the modern period from the past "more than any single idea." She sees the deterministic conception of man's history through the idea of process as having degraded the individual by fitting his achievements into fatalistic events that can only be understood in terms of an overall process. What this means, of course, is that all acts, every entity, is degraded into a function that makes man not part of the whole, but its result.

Unusual historiography, indeed! It was not automatic consequences (taken from cause-and-effect sequences), nor natural results (infallibly predicted from human weaknesses or vice), nor a priori conclusions (drawn from some cyclical theory of history) that informed Arendt's mode of understanding totalitarianism. Such are the modern modes of analysis. And such techniques lead to interpreting history by commonplaces, which makes predetermination the basis of man's existence. They are masquerade for historicism.

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