

Total Terror
Hannah Arendt on Totalitarianism

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Chapter Four

Total Terror

Mistress, I dug upon your grave
To bury a bone, in case
I should be hungry near this spot
When passing on my daily trot.
I am sorry, but I quite forgot
It was your resting-place.

– Thomas Hardy

It was a sign of his good fortune – and terrible destiny – that Nikolai Bukharin was pursued throughout his short career by characters from the Old Testament. Among the youngest of the “Old Bolsheviks,” Bukharin was, in Lenin’s words, “the favorite of the whole party.” A dissident economist and accomplished critic, this impish revolutionary, standing just over five feet, charmed everyone. Even Stalin. The two men had pet names for each other, their families socialized together, and Stalin had Bukharin stay at his country house during long stretches of the Russian summer. So beloved throughout the party was Bukharin that he was called the “Benjamin” of the Bolsheviks. If Trotsky was Joseph, the literary seer and visionary organizer whose impolitic arrogance aroused his brothers’ lethal envy, Bukharin was undoubtedly the cherished baby of the family. But not for long. Beginning in the late 1920s, as he sought to slow Stalin’s forced march through the Russian countryside, Bukharin tumbled from power. Banished from the party in 1937 and left to the tender mercies of the Soviet secret police, he confessed in a 1938 show trial to a career of extraordinary counterrevolutionary crime. He was promptly shot, just one of the 328,618 official executions of that year. Not long before his murder, Bukharin invoked a rather different biblical parallel to describe his fate. In a letter to Stalin, Bukharin recalled the binding of Isaac, the unwitting son whose devout father, Abraham, walks him to Mount Moriah, where, on God’s instructions, Abraham prepares him for sacrifice. At the last minute, an angel stops Abraham, declaring, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” Reflecting on his own impending doom, however, Bukharin

envisioned no such heavenly intervention: “No angel will appear now to snatch Abraham’s sword from his hand.”¹

The biblical reference, with its suggested equivalence of Stalin and Abraham, was certainly unorthodox. But in the aftermath of Bukharin’s execution it proved apt. For no other crime of the Stalin years so captivated Western intellectuals as the blood sacrifice of Bukharin. It was not just that this darling of the communist movement, “the party’s most valuable and biggest theoretician,” as Lenin put it, was brought down by a thug.² Stalin, after all, had already felled the far more formidable Trotsky. It was that Bukharin confessed to fantastic crimes he did not commit. For generations of intellectuals, Bukharin’s confession would symbolize the depredations of communism, how it not only murdered its favored sons, but also conscripted them in their own demise. Here was an action, it seemed to many, undertaken not for the self, but against it, on behalf not of personal gain, but of self-destruction. Not even the dark immoralists of the European night, with their schoolboy felonies of self-advance, could have anticipated such a stunning reversal of ambition. “It may be understandable,” wrote Hannah Arendt, that a Bolshevik

will not be shaken in his conviction by crimes against people who do not belong to the movement or are even hostile to it; but the amazing fact is that neither is he likely to waver when the monster begins to devour its own children and not even if he becomes a victim of persecution himself, if he is framed and condemned, if he is purged from the party and sent to a forced-labor or concentration camp. On the contrary, to the wonder of the whole civilized world, he may even be willing to help in his own prosecution and frame his own death sentence if only his status as a member of the movement is not touched.³

Turning Bukharin’s confession into a parable of the entire communist experience, Arthur Koestler, in his 1941 novel *Darkness at Noon*, popularized the notion – later taken up by Merleau-Ponty in *Humanism and Terror* and Godard in his 1967 film *La Chinoise* – that Bukharin offered his guilt as a final service to the party. Having committed himself throughout his career to the notion that the party was always right, Bukharin felt obliged, when accused of leading a counterrevolutionary conspiracy, to affirm that commitment, even at the cost of his own life.⁴ Not Stalin, then, but Bukharin, was the true Abraham, the devout believer who avowed his faith by giving up to his jealous god that which was most precious to him.

But where Abraham's readiness to make the ultimate sacrifice has aroused persistent admiration – Kierkegaard praised him as a “knight of faith,” prepared to violate the most sacred of norms for the sake of his fantastic devotion – Bukharin's has provoked almost universal horror.⁵ Not just of Stalin and the Bolshevik leadership, but of Bukharin himself – and of all the true believers of the Right and Left who turned the twentieth century into a wasteland of ideology. Moralists may praise familiar episodes of suicidal political sacrifice such as the Greatest Generation storming Omaha Beach. But the willingness of the Bukharins of this world to give up their lives for the sake of their ideology remains, for many, the final statement of modern self-abasement. Not because the sacrifice was cruel or senseless – not even because it was undertaken for an unjust cause or was premised on a lie – but because of the selfless fanaticism and political idolatry, the thoughtless immolation and personal diminution, that are said to inspire it. Communists, the argument goes, collaborated in their own destruction because they believed, they believed because they had to, they had to because they were small. According to Arthur Schlesinger, communism “fills empty lives” – even in the United States, with “its quota of lonely and frustrated people, craving social, intellectual and even sexual fulfillment they cannot obtain in existing society. For these people, party discipline is no obstacle; it is an attraction. The great majority of members in America, as in Europe, *want* to be disciplined.” Or, as Leslie Fiedler wrote in his eulogy for the Rosenbergs, “their relationship to everything, including themselves, was false.” Once they turned into party liners, “blasphemously den[ying] their own humanity,” “what was there left to die?”⁶ Abraham believed in his faith and was deemed a righteous man; the communist believed in his and was discharged from the precincts of humanity.

As we now know, Bukharin's confession, like so many others of the Stalin era, was not quite the abnegation that intellectuals have imagined. From 1930 to 1937, Bukharin resisted, to the best of his abilities, the more outlandish charges of the Soviet leadership. As late as his February 1937 secret appearance before the Plenum of the Central Committee, Bukharin insisted, “I protest with all the strength of my soul against being charged with such things as treason to my homeland, sabotage, terrorism, and so on.” When he finally did admit to these crimes – in a public confession replete with qualifications casting doubt upon Stalin's legitimacy – it was after a yearlong imprisonment, where he was subject to brutal interrogations and threats against his family. Archival evidence suggests that he confessed because he hoped that he might save

himself. Bukharin had reason to believe that Stalin might protect him. Soviet leaders who confessed were sometimes spared, and Stalin had intervened on previous occasions to shield Bukharin from more vicious treatment. Bukharin also sought to protect his family. As Robert Conquest has argued, threats against family members were one of the most effective means for securing cooperation with the regime; in fact, many of those who refused to confess had no children. Instead of manic self-liquidation, then, Bukharin's confession was a strategic attempt to preserve himself and his family, an act not of selfless fanaticism but of self-interested hope.⁷

But for many intellectuals at the time, these calculations simply did not register. For them, the archetypal evil of the twentieth century was not murder on an unprecedented scale, but the cession of mind and heart to the movement, the pouring of persons into swelling columns of history. Reading the great mid-century indictments of the Soviet catastrophe – *Darkness At Noon*, *The God That Failed*, 1984, *The Captive Mind* – one is struck less by their appreciation of Stalinist mass murder – it would be years before Solzhenitsyn turned the abstraction of the gulag into dossiers of particular suffering – than by their horror of the liquidated personality that was supposed to be the new Soviet man. André Gide noted that in every Soviet collective he visited “there are the same ugly pieces of furniture, the same picture of Stalin and absolutely nothing else – not the smallest vestige of ornament or personal belonging.”⁸ (Writers consistently took public housing, whether in the Soviet Union or the United States, as a proxy for communist dissolution. Fiedler, for instance, made much of the fact that the Rosenbergs lived in a “melancholy block of identical dwelling units that seem the visible manifestation of the Stalinized petty-bourgeois mind: rigid, conventional, hopelessly self-righteous.”)⁹ Perversely taking Stalin at his word – that a million deaths was just a statistic – intellectuals concluded that the gulag, or Auschwitz, was merely the symbol of a more profound, more ghastly, subtraction of self. Even in the camps, Arendt wrote, “suffering, of which there has been always too much on earth, is not the issue, nor is the number of victims.” It was instead that the camps were “laboratories where changes in human nature are tested,” where “the transformation of human nature” was engineered and men and women burned to ash as proof of an ideological equation.¹⁰

If we owe any one thinker our thanks, or skepticism, for the notion that totalitarian terror was first and foremost a crime against the self, it is most assuredly Hannah Arendt. A Jewish-German émigré, one of the greatest of those refugee intellects who helped turn American letters

from an isolated province of the English language into the polyglot empire it is today, Arendt was certainly not the first to claim that totalitarianism was an assault upon the self.¹¹ But by tracing the ideologue's ghostly outline against a backdrop of imperial misadventure and massacre in Africa, waning aristocracies and dissolute bourgeoisies in Europe, and atomized mass societies throughout the world, Arendt gave this vision of self-destruction wrought from ideologically inspired terror history and heft. With a cast of characters drawn from the European landscape – from Lawrence of Arabia and Cecil Rhodes to Benjamin Disraeli and Marcel Proust – Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* made it impossible for even the most complacent to assume that what she called "total terror" was a dark emanation of the German soil or Russian soul, a geographic accident that could be ascribed to one country's unfortunate traditions. Totalitarianism was, as the title of the book's British edition put it, "the burden of our times." Not exactly a product of modernity – Arendt tried repeatedly to dampen the causal vibrato of her original title, and she was as much a lover of modernity as she was its critic¹² – but its permanent guest, unwelcome to a few, all too welcome to everyone else, those unfortunate marionettes of modern mass society.

It would be a mistake, however, to read Arendt's *Origins* as a direct response to Stalinism or Nazism, as a transparent report of factual experience, unmediated by assumption or belief. As Arendt was the first to acknowledge, she came to the bar of political judgment schooled in "the tradition of German philosophy," taught to her by Heidegger and Jaspers amid the crashing edifice of the Weimar republic.¹³ Making her way through a rubble of German existentialism and Weimar modernism, Arendt devoted herself to – there can be no other word for it – creating totalitarianism.¹⁴ With a vision so acute it seemed she literally could see that which had never been seen, with a sensibility so mordant it burned holes through the twentieth century's assembled pile of political cant, Arendt gave totalitarianism its distinctive cast, a curious blend of the novel and familiar, the startling and self-evident. Arendt's would become the definitive statement – so fitting, so exact – not because it was so fitting or exact but because it dissolved real elements of Stalinism and Nazism into oft-navigated currents of modern thought. Not so much twentieth-century German philosophy, as we shall see, but the traditions of Montesquieu and Tocqueville and the notions of terror and anxiety – the assault upon the self, the rise of mass society, the decline of old elites – they developed in the wake of Hobbes.

But then, within a decade of giving us *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, this gift of purported political sight, Arendt asked for it back. In 1961, she traveled to Jerusalem to report on the trial of Adolph Eichmann for *The New Yorker*. Two years later, she published *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, which turned out to be not a report at all, but a wholesale reconsideration of the dynamics of political fear, in the most extreme circumstances of Nazi Germany – and, by implication, Stalinist Russia.¹⁵ Not unlike Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* or the first half of Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* posed a direct challenge to the account of fear that had earned its author her greatest acclaim. Not unlike these literary precursors, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* sought to show how the perpetrators and victims of fear did not abandon the familiar concerns and calculations of ordinary men and women, how perpetrators and victims remained selves in every sense of the word, and how regimes of fear relied upon hierarchies, institutions, and forms of individual agency analogous to those found in free regimes. But unlike these earlier works, *Eichmann* was written before, not after, its author had penned her more fantastic account of terror.

No one likes to return a cherished gift, least of all one like *Origins of Totalitarianism*, which sits so comfortably atop the mantle of the modern mind. Arendt’s request in *Eichmann* to have *Origins* back produced a storm of outrage, much of it focused on her depiction of Eichmann, her savage sense of irony, and her criticism of the Jewish leadership during the Holocaust. But an allied, if unspoken, source of fury was the widespread hostility to Arendt’s effort to upend the familiar canons of political fear. For in *Eichmann*, Arendt sought to show that much that Montesquieu and Tocqueville – and she herself – had written about political fear was simply false, a histrionic demonology that served the political needs and imperatives of Western intellectuals rather than the truth. Arendt paid dearly for her attempt. She lost friends and probably sleep, was deemed a traitor to her people, and was hounded at talks and public lectures.¹⁶ But it was worth the cost, for in *Eichmann* Arendt managed “a paeon of transcendence,” as Mary McCarthy put it, offering men and women a way of thinking about fear in a manner worthy of grown-ups rather than children.¹⁷ That so many would reject it is hardly surprising; little since Hobbes had prepared readers for the genuine novelty that was *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Forty years later, we’re still not prepared.

*The Origins of Totalitarianism*¹⁸

If Thomas Hobbes hoped to create a world where men feared death above all else, he would have been sorely disappointed, and utterly mystified, by *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. For what could he possibly have made of men and women so fastened to a political movement that they lacked, in Arendt's words, "the very capacity for experience, even if it be as extreme as torture or the fear of death?"¹⁹ Hobbes was no stranger to adventures of ideology or experiments of faith, but his ideologues, the preachers and teachers of Presbyterian purity and radical democracy, were avatars of the self, attracted to ideas that enlarged them. Gesturing toward democratic Athens and republican Rome, Hobbes's revolutionaries imagined themselves as too big for this world. They hoped to break down its walls in order to make room for their enormous egos. It was precisely because they thought that their political exploits would enhance their own personal status that Hobbes felt compelled to recommend the fear of death as a more fulsome contribution to the cause of the self. Fear was supposed to tame the Hobbesian ideologue, but in the name of a brisker form of honor, a more piquant glory.

For Arendt, however, ideology was not a statement of aspiration but a confession of irreversible smallness; terror did not increase but deplete the self. Bolsheviks were attracted to Bolshevism and Nazis to Nazism, she maintained, because these ideologies confirmed their adherents' own feelings of superfluousness and loneliness. Big ideas of classless societies and master races preyed upon that sense of insignificance and worldly privation that was so pervasive among modern men and women. With their driving refusal of freedom, Arendt's ideologues welcomed terror, for it also released them from the responsibilities of autonomy and independent thinking. Intoxicated by its grand vision, terrified of its power, the subjects of totalitarianism happily acceded to its demands. So long as a totalitarian regime relieved them of the burdens of selfhood, they were prepared to submit to its dictates, whatever the cost. Should the regime demand that they die, should it sacrifice them upon the altar of its ideology, they would go with nary a murmur. Not as martyrs to a glorious cause, but as the inglorious confirmation of a bloody axiom. Hobbes, who worked so hard to reduce the outsized heroism of his contemporaries, would hardly have recognized these men and women whose own death was but a trivial chronicle of a larger truth foretold.

Though very real differences would have broken up any imagined fraternity of England's civil warriors and the Nazis and Bolsheviks, it was not the criminal largesse of the twentieth century that forced Arendt in the direction she took, away from Hobbes; indeed, she insisted that it was not the body counts of Hitler and Stalin that distinguished their regimes from earlier tyrannies.²⁰ An altogether darker insinuation of the Western imagination, a vision of the self besieged from within and without, lured her toward her bleak destination. Between the time of Hobbes and that of Arendt, the self had suffered two tremendous blows, the first from Montesquieu, the second from Tocqueville. Montesquieu never contemplated the soul-crushing effects of ideology, but he certainly imagined souls crushed. It was, after all, he who first argued, against Hobbes, that fear, redefined as terror, did not enlarge but reduce the self, that the fear of death was not an expression of human possibility but of desperate finality. Though the notion that terror crushes the self now exudes a bland self-evidence, Montesquieu had to work hard to establish its truth. Writing after Hobbes, he summoned all of his polemical and forensic skills to convince his readers that terror and selfhood were not allies but mortal enemies. It was a mark of his considerable success that when Arendt set out to write about totalitarian terror she could practically take that idea for granted.

When Montesquieu set terror in opposition to the self, he was thinking solely of despotism's victims. But with his portrayal of men and women reduced to brutish objects of violence, he set the stage for imagining the self – any self, anywhere, under any conditions – as perpetually on the brink of collapse. And that was where Tocqueville stepped in. Writing after the French Revolution, Tocqueville was convinced that the terrifying instruments of the Old Regime had been put away with the Old Regime itself. Yet he retained Montesquieu's image of the fragile self. Only he viewed its weaknesses as a democratic innovation. The democratic self was supposed by Tocqueville to lack the capacious inner life and fortified perimeter of its aristocratic predecessor. Like the Bastille, the old self had been felled, allowing society to flood its deepest chambers, turning the individual into a hapless waterway of alien influence. This new, democratic self, as we have seen, did not need to see instruments of torture in order to hand himself over to power. Weak and small, he was ready for submission by virtue of his character. Total terror, when it came, was thought to be so terrifying precisely because the modern self was presumed to be so accommodating. So powerful was this conviction that Arendt was able to

apply it, as we shall see, not only to terror's victims but, even more wildly, to its wielders as well.

While the influence of Heidegger on Arendt is by now well known – indeed, it has recently become the topic of racy academic gossip (the two were lovers for several years)²¹ – the debt of Arendt to Montesquieu and Tocqueville has yet to be fully itemized.²² In her private letters, Arendt confessed that she discovered “the instruments of distinguishing totalitarianism from all – even the most tyrannical – governments of the past” in Montesquieu’s writings, and that Tocqueville, whose work she read carefully while drafting *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, was a “great influence.”²³ Indeed, many of her most basic convictions about totalitarianism would have been inconceivable without the prior interventions of Montesquieu and Tocqueville. Montesquieu pioneered the notion that terror occupied a world unto itself, with its own animating principle and political sociology, as a counter to Hobbes’s claim of fear’s universality. So did Montesquieu argue, also against Hobbes, that despotism carved out a separate order of personhood from the common mould of humanity. Surveying the unhappiness of the lonely masses and the social ambitions of paternalistic democracies, Tocqueville anticipated a form of state power so omniscient, intrusive, and terrible, it would make the Grand Inquisitor tremble. Arendt took these various claims a step further, asserting that totalitarian terror was such a novel creation that it required a new place in that pantheon of regimes cherished by ancient taxonomists of political form.²⁴

But it was in propounding three ideas in particular – the self’s weakness amid the mass; ideology’s appeal to lonely, superfluous men and women; and total terror’s fusion of victim and victimizer – that Arendt displayed her greatest debt to Montesquieu and Tocqueville. Not because these ideas were simple repeats of the past; like all great political theorists, Arendt innovated when she borrowed, and borrowed when she innovated. It was instead that she used these ideas to turn Nazism and Stalinism – two cases, ostensibly, of political fear at its most vengeful and vicious – into spectacular triumphs of anti-political terror and anxiety. Melding Montesquieu’s despotic terror with Tocqueville’s mass anxiety, Arendt’s total terror was not an instrument of political rule. It was not even a weapon of genocide; one will look in vain throughout the last third of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, where Arendt finally addresses the phenomenon of totalitarianism itself, for any reckoning with the project of eliminating an entire people. Total terror, as Arendt understood it, was a cataclysmic effort to escape the

psychological burdens of the self, a project of “radical evil,” the darkness of which derived from the elimination not of the Jews or the kulaks but of individual freedom and responsibility, of the human condition itself. If Arendt’s totalitarianism constituted an apotheosis, it was not of human beastliness. It was of a tradition of thought that had been preparing for the disappearance of the self from virtually the moment the self was first imagined.

Self Amid Mass

Arendt opened her discussion of totalitarianism with a lengthy consideration of the mass, for “totalitarian movements,” she wrote, “are possible wherever there are masses who for one reason or another have acquired the appetite for political organization.” Hitler, she reminded her readers, came to power through the legal mechanisms of majority rule, and both he and Stalin retained power only because they “had the confidence of the masses.” For Arendt, the mass denoted less a political grouping or sociological category than a pathological orientation of the self, an unsettled ether within that made selfhood impossible. Arendt’s mass man was a specific social type – the rootless, isolated individual – with a lethal psychology – lonely, anxious, selfless. Members of the mass suffered from feelings of “selflessness” – not the selflessness of altruism but “selflessness in the sense that oneself does not matter.” This selflessness extended from the highest to the lowest concerns of the individual, from the masses’ “lost interest in their own well-being” to their “lack of self-interest” and “decisive weakening of the instinct for self-preservation.” So weak was the masses’ desire to preserve – let alone advance – themselves that it was a safe bet that any “organization could succeed in extinguishing [their] individual identity permanently.”²⁵

Because each member of the mass had nothing that was particularly his own, it was difficult to identify what he had in common with his fellows. Lacking specific attributes, what could he possibly share with other, equally selfless men and women? Like its individual components, the mass did not have concrete and discrete interests, economic or political, and so did not and could not pursue specific, achievable, political goals. The mass was different from other political incarnations, past or present – whether it was the workers’ movement, with its clear-eyed vision of proletarian interests, or the Jacobins, claiming to speak on behalf of the French people – because of its decidedly apolitical orientation. “Masses are not held together by a consciousness of common interest and they lack that specific class articulateness which is

expressed in determined, limited, and obtainable goals.” Where classes had “limited group obligations” narrowing their aspirations, the masses were flooded by “all-pervasive influences and convictions which were tacitly and inarticulately shared by all classes of society alike.”²⁶

Given the mass’s apparent lack of concentrated political purpose, what made it such potent political fuel? According to Arendt, it was the desperate anxiety of its individual members, that terrible, negative energy of a people without connection, roots, or affiliation. “The chief characteristic of the mass man,” she wrote, is “his isolation and lack of normal social relationships.” The First World War had demolished what remained of Europe’s old, integrative class structures – decrepit aristocracies, vital bourgeoisies, and organized proletariat – and their corresponding political parties. While traditional classes and parties pursued selfish ends, they did command and bind the individual to a larger institution; without them, the individual was left to his own devices. In addition, the nation-state – committed to far-flung imperial holdings, speaking in the wake of the war on behalf of an ever-widening array of ethnic groups and peoples – could no longer offer its subjects and citizens a firm basis for collective identity. In the Soviet Union, the situation was slightly different. Though the First World War had been equally lethal to Russia’s traditional class structure, Lenin, according to Arendt, demonstrated “his greatest instincts for statesmanship” when he propped up independent trade unions, supported national forms of self-organization, and gave birth to a middle class through his NEP policies – efforts designed to “bring some structure into the population.” Stalin, by contrast, set about with grim efficiency to abolish all forms of organization “in order to fabricate an atomized and structureless mass,” a project at which he proved extraordinarily adept.²⁷

It was “in this atmosphere of the breakdown of class society,” Arendt remarked, that “the psychology of the European mass man developed.” The mass may not have shared a politics, but it did possess a distinctive psychology, a “terrifying negative solidarity” born of the anomie and rootlessness of postwar Europe.²⁸ Totalitarianism arose when this selfless, anxious entity was thrown suddenly into political motion, and brought the world spinning along with it. Totalitarian mass movements, which were “preceded” by “social atomization and extreme individualization,” attracted “completely unorganized” men and women – as opposed to “the sociable, nonindividualistic members of the traditional parties” – because mass movements provided a psychological solution to these widespread feelings of anxiety. For the “most conspicuous external characteristic” of these totalitarian movements was “their demand for total, unrestricted,

unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member.” And “such loyalty,” she insisted, “can be expected only from the completely isolated human being who, without any other social ties to family, friends, comrades, or even mere acquaintances, derives his sense of having a place in the world only from his belong to a movement, his membership in the party.” By fitting the individual with a “band of iron” that pressed him up against his fellows, allowing no room for separation or individuation, totalitarian movements allayed, or attempted to allay, that anxiety born of isolation.²⁹

Thus did Arendt announce, early on, her decidedly Tocquevillian orientation. For it was Tocqueville who first seized upon the mass as the generative source of modern tyranny. And it was Tocqueville who first argued that the primary experience of the mass was neither fear in the Hobbesian sense nor terror in Montesquieu’s sense – both responses to power from above – but the anxiety of rootlessness. Like Tocqueville against Montesquieu and Hobbes, Arendt believed that the mass was the preeminent agent of political creativity in the modern world, and that mass anxiety was a psychological condition that fueled regimes of repression. Though she appreciated the fact that Stalin had created the social conditions of this anxiety – and that other totalitarian regimes could do the same³⁰ – the primary thrust of her argument was that the psychological burdens of the mass were the result of a preexisting, pervasive anomie, wrought from the various disruptions of modern history, and that it was this anxiety that produced state repression.

Though Tocqueville had set the stage for this psychological appreciation of the mass, Arendt offered three critical emendations to his script. First, she insisted that mass psychology “did not result from the growing equality of condition.” Where Tocqueville had thought that the anxiety of rootlessness was a product of equality and peculiar to the modern democrat, Arendt argued that anxiety was not connected to equality, that it had no class component. For Tocqueville, equality and anomie were inseparable; Arendt insisted they were not, that anomie was a function of the breakdown of the nation-state, the dissolution of modern class structures, imperialism, and the First World War. After all, she claimed, the United States, “the classical land of equality of condition and of general education with all its shortcomings, knows less of the modern psychology of masses than perhaps any other country in the world.” In Europe, she added, “highly cultured people were particularly attracted to mass movements” and “highly differentiated individualism and sophistication did not prevent, indeed sometimes encouraged, the self-abandonment into the mass for which mass movements provided.”³¹ Equality, as the

American example demonstrated, could produce quite different forms of political and social organization, and it was only the worst form of class snobbery – not to mention factually wrong – to assume that it was the modern democrat alone who suffered from the vertigo of anomie.³²

Second, the mass's rootlessness and isolation – what Arendt called its “superfluosity” and “loneliness” – were of a far more radical nature than Tocqueville had suggested.

Tocqueville's mass may have been culturally and psychologically unhinged, but its members had jobs to do, livings to earn, mouths to feed. Though the props of the old order had been pulled, his mass was still a vital participant in an industrializing economy. Not so Arendt's. Her mass suffered the indignity of being expendable, of not being necessary even for the reproduction of everyday life. In an age of mass industry, individuals were no longer important. Deprived of real artisanal work, where they could see in the products of society a mirror of themselves and their effort, they were reduced, at best, to a condition of anonymous labor on the assembly line, and, at worst, permanent unemployment. Where Tocqueville's rootlessness left the individual alone with his work, providing him with that “most elementary form of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world,” Arendt's superfluosity took even this away, removing from men and women all “contact with the world as the human artifice.”³³

These feelings of superfluosity induced loneliness, “the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man.”³⁴

Loneliness was distinct from isolation and solitude, for isolated, solitary men and women were able to hold onto a sense of themselves and of the world. Isolated, a person might lack the political power that comes with comradeship. But he was still capable of work, of knowing his own power and appreciating the solidity and reality of the external world. A solitary person might be alone, but could still engage in a dialogue with herself. Thus, when Tocqueville described isolation and rootlessness, he still insisted upon the usage of the self: The self was frightened of its own independence, its own will. Men and women, Tocqueville wrote, were “afraid of themselves,” by which he meant that some portion of the self was afraid of another portion of the self.³⁵ But, for Arendt, it was impossible for the self to be afraid of itself, for loneliness, she argued, only “happens when all by myself I am deserted by own my own self.” Permanently deprived of work and fellowship, the lonely person's sense of the world was so attenuated that he could not even confirm the truth that the world or he existed, that he was a self

at all. Not even the inner dialogue of the solitary was possible because “self and world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time.”³⁶ What the lonely self suffered, then, was a desperate and strange form of selflessness – not the altruism of old, but the existential incoherence of old age.³⁷ For Arendt, then, total terror sprang from the deepest, most intense needs of a remnant psyche – the need to establish one’s own existence and the reality of the external world – which made totalitarianism all the more dangerous and likely to be repeated in the modern age, where superfluousness and loneliness had become, and were likely to remain, indisputable realities of everyday life.

What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the evergrowing masses of our century. The merciless process into which totalitarianism drives and organizes the masses looks like a suicidal escape from this reality.³⁸

Finally, Arendt reversed Tocqueville’s claim about the mass’s transition from activity to passivity, arguing that the twentieth-century mass exploded from passivity to activity. For all of its weak-willed shapelessness, Tocqueville’s mass was an active agent, the only active agent in a revolutionary world that had seen its kind disappear. What provoked Tocqueville’s horror in part was how this active agent pacified itself. In the first volume of *Democracy in America*, the mass was a dangerous Jacobin beast that subdued one and all that challenged it. In the second volume, the anxious mass gathered its dispersed energies and handed them over to a dictator, or, more insidiously, directed them toward the paternalistic vacuum of the democratic state. Arendt’s mass, by contrast, was inert, a vast lake of underground anxiety waiting to be tapped. And when it was tapped, it did not produce the weird stasis that Tocqueville described in *Democracy in America*. Instead, it became that distinctive creature of twentieth-century politics, the mass movement, an entity, Arendt insisted, with no structure – structure was a feature of permanence – only direction.³⁹ Where Tocqueville had thought that the mass would be transformed from active, vibrating atoms into frozen molecules of joined constraint, Arendt depicted the opposite metamorphosis: Liquid inertia ignited into a gas of violent motion, producing not Tocqueville’s immobility of submission, but unpredictable explosions of death and destruction.

Ideology

Among ideology's great appeals was that it provided to the anxious mass a simultaneous, if contradictory, solution to these twin feelings of superfluousness and loneliness. Ideology was significant for Arendt less for its specific ideas than for the psychological function it performed for its adherents. Throughout *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she rejected the notion that men and women were drawn to anti-Semitism or communism because these ideologies offered attractive moral ideals of a new world – in the case of communism, for instance, the notion of a classless, egalitarian society – or because these ideas in and of themselves (as opposed to the act of believing in them) held out the promise of benefits to their disciples – in the case of Nazism, for example, the fact that German Aryans would be one day become the rulers of the earth. For Arendt, it was the act of believing in ideology, not the substance of the ideology itself, that explained its appeal. The content of ideology was arbitrary and irrelevant, and the ideologies most attractive to the mass were those that denied them any concrete material or political benefit.⁴⁰ What mattered was the form of these ideas, the ferocity and intensity with which they were held, even in the face of all experience and evidence. It wasn't what the ideology said, but how it was said and what believing in it did for the self. And what believing it did for the self was, like all other matters of the mass, psychological. Like so many who would write about mass ideologies after her – whether fascism or communism, radical feminism or Black Nationalism, populist conservatism or anti-globalization or militant Islam – Arendt approached ideology less as a set of specific ideas than as a state of mind to be analyzed, a mode of thought impervious to all experience save the intense anxiety of its proponent.

Arendt focused on that formal aspect of ideology – its emphasis on impersonal laws of motion – that most forcefully rebutted humanity's presumption of its own significance. Whether it was the survival of the fittest or the struggle of classes, ideologies of racism and communism envisioned relentless forward movement, which helped garner their many devotees. Previous schemes of the cosmos – religion, Platonic philosophy, ancient Greek mythology – had conceived of laws, human and divine, as pillars of stability and permanence amid interminable flux, as willed impositions of order upon an otherwise chaotic world. Arendt's ideologues, by contrast, imagined laws as both natural and historical processes of ceaseless development. They saw every particular creation as in an advanced state of decay, fertilizing the soil like a rotting corpse, preparing for the birth of some new, more advanced, life form. They were drawn to an

image of nature as Darwinian evolution, historical and progressive rather than cyclical. Each birth, each death – each life – was preparation for the next stage of development. Everything was not what it was, but what it was becoming.⁴¹ Because becoming signaled nothing so much as the death of older forms, it meant that everything was always dying. Hobbes's ideologues were attracted to ideas that increased them, that celebrated the integrity of the human personality and the solidity of its artifice. Arendt's were swept up by visions of human eclipse, by ideas that cast death, including their own, not as an irreversible or regrettable fact of life, but as a way, the way, of life. Human existence was an endless river of demise, its only purpose to keep flowing and make room for the finer waters rushing behind. Could the Arendtian ideologue have found a more vital confirmation of his own inconsequence than a world where he was a mere staging ground for the future, where all life was a form of death?

These totalitarian ideologies of permanent motion, of death as the way of life, made no appeal to their followers' interests, to their concrete goals or particular needs. To the contrary, they preyed upon and advanced the "complete loss of individual claims and ambition," "extinguishing individual identity permanently." And though ideology demanded a certain kind of selflessness from its adherents, this was not to be confused with the idealism of causes past. Idealism, Arendt pointed out, "always springs from some individual decision and conviction and is subject to experience and argument." But mass men and women were as incapable of willed action, of discrete choice and specific decision, as they were of conviction. They did not sacrifice themselves for the sake of a greater good, on behalf of a vision of the future in which they would be remembered. They wished, insofar as they were capable of wishes, to be as forgotten in the future as they were in the present.⁴²

Arendt's ideologues could fear neither their own death nor even the demise of their race or class. What they feared above all else was the disconfirmation or absence of ideology – not, again, because they were drawn to its particular content but because they were so agreeably flattened by its horizons. Whether it was anti-Semitism or Marxism, racism or communism, the Arendtian ideologue was as unconcerned about specific ideas as he was about his own fate. Indeed, when an ideological movement was defeated, the affections of its adherents immediately evaporated; released from one grand idea, they were ready for the next. It was the logic of forward motion, of birth and decay conceived not as cycle but as upward spiral, that mattered.

So long as ideology managed to keep the world moving, at least in their imaginations, they were prepared to follow.

Ironically, the very same ideologies that dissolved the individual into a world of ceaseless motion also provided him with a sense of solidity and connection, allaying his feelings of superfluosity and loneliness. Ideological propaganda “gave the masses of atomized, undefinable, unstable and futile individuals a means of self-definition and identification which not only restored some sense of the self-respect they had formerly derived from their function in society, but also created a kind of spurious stability which made them better candidates for an organization.”⁴³ Ideology offered its adherents a premise, which, through the sheer “negative coercion of logic, the prohibition of contradictions, became ‘productive’ so that a whole line of thought could be initiated, and forced upon the mind, by drawing conclusions in the manner of mere argumentation.” With its initial premise and iron logic, ideology created a coherent world, albeit an entirely fictitious one. It ferreted out a putative order amid meaningless chaos – not the imposed order of human or divine rule (imposition was too arbitrary and contingent an event), but the impersonal, indisputable, eternal order of mathematics, where two plus two equals four. This order had the kind of strange consistency one finds in conspiracy theories – impervious to real experience, to the unanticipated occurrence and to the all-too-real illogic of everyday life. But it provided that “strait jacket of logic” in which desperate, anxious, lonely men and women found meaning in a meaningless world. In a more communal social setting, men and women enjoyed the assurance of common sense, the stability of conventional opinion that helped the self assimilate the world’s happenstance. Deprived of that common sense, men and women felt compelled to “exchang[e] the freedom inherent in man’s capacity to think” for this relentless conveyor belt of logic. Premises pursued to their logical conclusion were of particular appeal to lonely people, who were in desperate need of “the only capacity of the human mind which needs neither the self nor the other nor the world in order to function safely,” namely, “the ability of logical reasoning whose premise is the self-evident.” Ideologues were so powerful because they understood that it was only “through sheer imagination” that the “uprooted masses” could “feel at home,” and that ideology was particularly well suited to provide that kind of willed imaginary existence.⁴⁴

It was no wonder, then, that so many of Stalin’s victims willingly confessed to crimes that they did not commit. True mass men, they concluded that it was better to die with

ideology's therapeutic premise and iron logic intact than to resist the coercions of its fictitious truths and propositions. For without that coercion, they would be lost, exiled from the one structure that provided them with a sense of belonging and coherence, a sense of self and world.⁴⁵ Drawing a page from *Darkness At Noon*, Arendt wrote of the mode of thought that had induced the likes of Bukharin to confess:

You can't say A without saying B and C and so on, down to the end of the murderous alphabet....The coercive force of the argument is: if you refuse, you contradict yourself and, through this contradiction, render your whole life meaningless; the A which you said dominates your whole life through the consequences of B and C which it logically engenders.⁴⁶

The only resources that might enable an individual to refuse these compulsions of logic were Tocqueville's old stand-by's: "great strength of character to resist constant threats" and "great confidence in the existence of fellow human beings – relatives or friends or neighbors."⁴⁷ In other words, a heroic cast of mind and a close-knit association of fellows.

Total Terror

In analyzing, first, the anxious self, lost amid the mass, and, second, the psychic appeals of ideology, Arendt necessarily resorted to distinctively Tocquevillian categories. Tocqueville, after all, had pioneered the notion that state-sponsored repression and fear were made possible by preexisting pathologies of the mass, and in these first two phases of her argument, Arendt was describing the deep cultural and psychological preconditions of total terror. Not total terror's causes but the "elements," in her famous phrase, that "crystallize[d] into totalitarianism."⁴⁸ But as she sought to understand how mass anxiety could be transformed into total terror, Arendt entered into a new terrain, that of Montesquieu. Though totalitarianism had mass roots, its final flower was state violence and terror. And in Montesquieu's conception of how despotic terror reduced its victims to biological things, Arendt found a piercing insight into the entire apparatus of total terror – not just its victims, but also its wielders and the politics that sustained it. Where Tocqueville pointed her in the direction of psychology to understand the broad social and cultural background to state terror, Montesquieu led her to biology in order to make sense of terror's structure and consequences. Like despotic terror, total terror prompted a journey downward, to ever deeper and deeper levels of human existence, away from politics. It was at

these levels, the deepest known to humanity, that totalitarian victim and victimizer met, fused, and went on to wander in a shared netherworld of inchoate biological drives and needs.

Like Montesquieu, Arendt believed that total terror divested its victims of all those accumulations of civilization – intimacy, mutuality, attachment, reason, desire, interest, character, identity – that go by the name of humanity. And like Montesquieu, she argued that by eliminating these human contrivances, terror reduced men and women to the barest strips of nature. Or, put more chillingly, by eliminating these contrivances, terror discovered or unleashed those elements of nature that are always present in men and women but which civilization nevertheless manages to contain. In the camps, she claimed, the psyche was destroyed “without the destruction of the physical man.” So much so that the men and women of the camps could “no longer be psychologically understood.” Where there was psychology, now there was biology. These were “inanimate men” – “bundles of reactions” – whose only freedom, such it was, was to respond to physical prodding, out of the instinctive, wholly biological effort to preserve the species. Men and women became entirely alike, as predictable as nature itself (sometimes even more predictable), utterly lacking in that human capacity “to begin something new out of” one’s “own resources, something that cannot be explained on the basis of reactions to environment and events.” After being subjected to unrelenting violence, “nothing...remains but ghastly marionettes with human faces, which all behave like the dog in Pavlov’s experiments, which all react with perfect reliability even when going to their own death, and which do nothing but react.”⁴⁹

Arendt insisted that what she called “total domination” was only possible in the camps. Total terror could “theoretically” never be extended beyond the perimeters of the camps’ four walls until totalitarian regimes had successfully subjugated the entire world to their rule.⁵⁰ Notwithstanding these claims, what was so remarkable about her account of the victims of total terror was how closely it paralleled her discussion of the mass. In the camps, men and women lacked individuality, will, identity. Men in all their plurality were transformed into Man, the species. Not only did men and women disappear, but so did the memory of them; their death was as anonymous as their life. Total terror did not just destroy conviction but the capacity for conviction.⁵¹ Each of these elements was characteristic of the men and women of mass society. It was as if the victims of Auschwitz and the gulag experienced a death in life only slightly more toxic from the one they already suffered, or would have suffered, outside the camps.

“Extermination,” she wrote elsewhere, “happens to human beings who for all practical purposes are already ‘dead,’” which was precisely how she understood the broken lives of mass society. It was no wonder, then, that she believed that “terror fits the situation of these ever-growing masses to perfection.”⁵² Arendt was reluctant to grant any human attribute or support to total terror. Hence her insistence that total terror’s victims lacked desire, will, and character, and her emphasis, as we shall see, on the impersonality of ideological rule. But she could not escape the conclusion that the men and women of mass society had been lying in feverish wait through the long nineteenth century, that fetid summer of bourgeois creation, desperate to freeze themselves in the wintry terror of the short twentieth.

Like Montesquieu, then, Arendt was forced to the inadvertent suggestion that terror possessed a kind of subterranean pull. Civilization and humanity, she noted again and again, were wrenching elevations, while terror, as a consort of pure nature, trafficked in the lower depths. “Man’s ‘nature’ is only ‘human’ insofar as it opens up to man the possibility of becoming something highly unnatural, that is, a man.” Humanness required men and women to look beyond the biological drives for food, shelter, and the reproduction of the species, revealing itself in the stylized creations and actions – as opposed to physiological reactions – of free men and women. But Auschwitz and the gulag “show that human beings can be transformed into specimens of the human animal.”⁵³ Terror revealed in the disassembly of civilization’s great, and difficult, work, in the destruction of centuries of effort on behalf of the designed, in the reduction of men and women to a species. Terror was not in fact natural; it was an ally of an ideological conception that reduced the world to a vision of the natural. Nor was it a reversion to pre-history and barbarism.⁵⁴ But it fraternized with the natural, or at least with an imagination of the natural, preying upon the inchoate, almost mute satisfaction that men and women took in nature’s anonymous rhythms and currents. That is what, I think, Arendt meant when she wrote that “terror...is not so much something which people may fear, but a way of life.”⁵⁵ As we shall see, Arendt hoped that fighting terror would become the great, unnatural, project of a renewed humanity. But given her conception of terror’s natural affinities, was she recommending anything more than a shaking of fists at the weather?⁵⁶

Though Montesquieu laid two pieces of the groundwork of Arendt’s account of total terror – the destruction of self and the spurious attractions of the natural – her analysis of total

terror's actual politics would have been, at first glance, as mystifying to the Frenchman as it would have been to Hobbes. Montesquieu's despot, let us recall, was a tyrant of the old school, a Caligula of lust and sadism whose imprint was felt throughout society. Despite the cruelty, his was a fairly conventional set of crimes, familiar enough to those whose imagination of evil extended no further than the vices of lust, greed, and so forth. Terror was a tool of the despot's pleasure, satisfying his enormous appetite for violence and, by subduing his subjects, ensuring that he would have whatever he wanted. The origin and meaning of terror, then, could ultimately be traced back to his personality. For all of the despot's depravity, the long shadow cast by his figure over the despotic realm was, in retrospect, oddly reassuring, suggesting that at least one person had had a hand in creating a monstrous world where so many suffered. The particular identity of his victims and adjutants may have disappeared, but his remained.

Arendt's leaders, by contrast, were inconsequential to the regime's atmospherics and functioning. In her opening gambit, she declared, "Nothing is more characteristic of the totalitarian movements in general and of the quality of fame of their leaders in particular than the startling swiftness with which they are forgotten and the startling ease with which they can be replaced," and the rest of the book followed ineluctably from that premise. The regimes of terror were not organized like traditional hierarchies, with all lines of authority pointing gloriously north. Nor were they tightly centralized affairs, concentrations of organized power ready to carry out the orders of the ever watchful, supremely visible leader. Instead, they were like an onion, with each peeled layer revealing ever more remote points of power. No one official obeyed the orders of an immediate figure of authority; there were no such personal lines of authority or communication in a totalitarian state. Instead, each official was forced to divine the wishes, never expressed, of the leader. The leader, in turn, was equally mysterious. He was sure that he existed through the mass, and they, through him, which meant only that it was nearly impossible to tell who was who. The state was not a discrete entity; proliferating offices, it merged with the shadowy mass movement that propelled it.⁵⁷ Amid this vast democracy of crime, Arendt's leaders were practically invisible.

As individual personalities, totalitarian leaders lacked the despot's appetite for violence. Himmler was famously unnerved by the sight of blood; Hitler was unfailingly vegetarian in his personal dealings. The practitioners of terror were remarkably free of any and all vices of self-regard. Like their victims, they had no "evil motives of self-interest, greed, covetousness,

resentment, lust for power.” Because they had no conventional desire for power, there were in totalitarian regimes no palace coups of the sort that disrupted more traditional tyrannies. These fiendish boy scouts turned to total terror, then, not on behalf of their own interests. Stalin and the Bolsheviks did not launch the purges in order to protect their power, trounce their enemies, advance their interests, or fulfill their pleasures. Hitler and the Nazis – and their many supporters – did not build concentration camps in order to establish themselves as the master race. For they did not “not care if they themselves” were “alive or dead, if they ever lived or never were born.”⁵⁸ Not only could total terror not be ascribed to its wielders’ self-serving motives, but it had no utilitarian purpose whatsoever. It was invariably propounded just at the moment when opposition to a regime had been destroyed. It wreaked havoc upon the economy, undermined national security (Stalin famously launched his purge of the Red Army on the eve of Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union; Hitler insisted upon the destruction of the Jews, even at the cost of winning the war), and usually worked to the detriment of its wielders. Any effort to understand total terror as a rational means to a specific, politically intelligible end betrayed a woefully inadequate imagination of disaster.⁵⁹

The sole and complete purpose of total terror was to serve the totalitarian ideologies of motion that inspired it, “to make it possible for the force of nature or of history to race freely through mankind, unhindered by any spontaneous human action.” Indeed, not only was terror designed to “liberate the historical and natural forces” described by ideology, but also, if it was to be truly total, “to accelerate them to a speed they never would reach if left to themselves.” Total terror, in other words, was not supposed to maintain order in society or in the concentration camps, to make it possible for regimes to carry out vast projects of genocide or forced collectivization. Its purpose was to eliminate the spontaneity of human freedom itself, to render men and women the impersonal transmission belts of nature and history. To accomplish this end, all men and women would have to be stabilized, to be purged of any but the most limited and basic reactions. This requirement applied to the victims, who would have to go to their deaths quietly and efficiently if a new species was to be created, and to the victimizers as well. The concentration camps could not tolerate guards and commandants who enjoyed the sight of killing, who sought to participate in gristly feasts of humiliation and murderous excess. For if the camps were turned into “amusement parks for beasts in human form,” if lustful sadists allowed their pleasures to run amok, the movement of death in life would be slowed. Auschwitz

was a factory of racism, built not for the benefit of its foremen, bosses, and owners, but for the sake of the product itself: “The Nazis did not think that the Germans were a master race, to whom the world belonged, but that they should be led by a master race, as should all other nations, and that this race was only on the point of being born.”⁶⁰ Ultimately, Arendt concluded, if the real beneficiary of terror was motion itself, it stood to reason that even terror’s wielders would have to be prepared to have the knives turned on themselves – if for no other reason than to keep things moving. And so they were:

The process may decide that those who today eliminate races and individuals or the members of dying classes and decadent peoples are tomorrow those who must be sacrificed. What totalitarian rule needs to guide the behavior of its subjects is a preparation to fit each of them equally well for the role of executioner and the role of victim. This two-sided preparation . . . is the ideology.⁶¹

In arguing that total terror’s wielder ultimately shared the same fate and characteristics as its victims, Arendt both repudiated and extended Montesquieu’s analysis of terror. On the one hand, she collapsed Montesquieu’s distinction between terrorizer and terrorized, undercutting his argument that terror was designed for the sole benefit and pleasure of its wielder. On the other hand, she applied to terror’s executioners the same analysis that Montesquieu had applied to its victims, claiming that both parties were reduced to the level of biological, predictable reactivity. Thus did she amplify a glimmered premonition in Montesquieu’s own writing – that terror was, in the end, not a tool of its handlers but an instrument of a deeper, more elemental dispensation. Terror was not political in any sense; it spoke to the deepest drives of a humanity that had been reduced to the status of animals. If Arendt’s total terror was more horrifying than Montesquieu’s despotic terror, it was only because she pursued his notion of terror’s attributes to its logical conclusion, claiming that terror was ultimately its own impersonal lord and master, a monstrous presence that turned individuals as powerful as Hitler and Stalin into the merest of implements.⁶²

Terror as Foundation

As we have seen, each of Arendt’s predecessors – Hobbes, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville – was convinced that the established or familiar claims of political morality were no longer capable of grounding political arguments and political forms. And each of them found in fear the basis of a new morality and politics. Each theorist created an image of terrible consequence

– the state of nature, despotism, mass democracy – and each mobilized the fear of that image on behalf of some alternative political form – the sovereign, absolute state of Hobbes; the fragmented, lawful regime of Montesquieu; the pluralist republic of Tocqueville. Arendt was no different. As she argued at the end of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* – and would elaborate with ever-growing force in her subsequent work – the catastrophes of the twentieth century revealed that the foundations of Western civilization were shattered, that Europe had finally reached an “end in history.”⁶³ It was no longer possible to argue or to act as if the familiar categories of liberalism, conservatism, or socialism remained intact. In the face of crimes so wholly unanticipated and so free of self-interest, tired moral antidotes like “love thy neighbor as thyself” were no longer viable or adequate. It was necessary to establish a new foundation, and in total terror, Arendt found it. “Every end in history,” whether Auschwitz or the gulag, “necessarily contains a new beginning.”⁶⁴ Though in her wiser moments she realized that “no conceivable chronicle of any kind could succeed in turning six million dead people into a political argument,” that “horror, or the dwelling on it . . . cannot become the basis of a political community or party in a narrower sense,” she seemed to believe that the fear of that horror could help establish a new, more encompassing political morality.⁶⁵

The fear of concentration camps and the resulting insight into the nature of total domination might serve to invalidate all obsolete political differentiations from right to left and to introduce beside and above them the politically most important yardstick for judging events in our time, namely: whether they serve totalitarian domination or not.⁶⁶

To seize the opportunity amid the catastrophe, she insisted, it was necessary to recognize that the threat of total terror no longer lay, as it did for Hobbes, in a hypothetical future, or, as it did for Montesquieu, in a distant geography. Total terror, like Tocqueville’s mass anxiety, was already here, an “ever-present danger,” made all too lethal by the realities of modern superfluosity and loneliness, which had “become an everyday experience of the evergrowing masses of our century.” The possibility of total terror would not come to an end with the death of Stalin, and indeed might even “assume” a more “authentic form” with his passing. New forms of total terror might find a home in less spectacular settings than the gulag or Auschwitz, but that was small comfort. For when “the authentic mass man takes over,” she wrote, “he will have more in common with the meticulous, calculating correctness of Himmler than with the

hysterical fanaticism of Hitler, will more resemble the stubborn dullness of Molotov than the sensual vindictive cruelty of Stalin.” This was a danger that was “only too likely to stay with us from now on.”⁶⁷ Once this growing threat was recognized, it was possible to set about constructing a polity in which men and women could find a home, the task she set herself for the remainder of her life.⁶⁸

But as she set about building this home for men and women amid the shadow of total terror, Arendt became aware of a problem that had plagued Hobbes, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville, and which makers of horror films know all too well: as terrors become familiar, they cease to arouse dread. The theorist who tries to establish fear as a foundation for a new politics must always find a demon darker than that of her predecessors. There has always been a tendency, even an incentive, among those possessed by what Arendt called a “fearful imagination,” to up the ante, to dig deeper in search of ever more novel, and more frightening, forms of fear.⁶⁹ This impulse of course is not peculiar to theorists of fear. As John Stuart Mill, referring to the skepticism of his father, wrote of Christianity:

I have a hundred times heard him say, that all ages and nations have represented their gods as wicked, in a constantly increasing progression; that mankind have gone on adding trait after trait till they reached the most perfect conception of wickedness which the human mind could devise, and have called this God, and prostrated themselves before it. This *ne plus ultra* of wickedness he considered to be embodied in what is commonly presented to mankind as the creed of Christianity.⁷⁰

But among secular theorists of fear, the quest for the ultimate demon has been especially intense, for unlike religious writers who can look up to the goodness of God for originating insight and moral clarity, theorists of fear can only dig downward into the negative experience of fear itself. Thus Montesquieu, seeking to outdo the horror of Hobbes’s state of nature, imagined a form of terror that threatened the very basis of that which made us human. It was terror’s inhumanness, its complete and utter devastation of the vast infrastructure of the victim’s selfhood, that made it so terrible. In Arendt’s case, it was her closing images of interchangeable victims and victimizers – of terror serving no interest and no party, not even its practitioners; of a world ruled by no one and nothing, save the impersonal laws of motion itself; of a form of terror so total, that even its wielders were eclipsed by it – that yielded the necessary “radical evil” from which a new politics could be built.⁷¹

But as her friend and mentor Karl Jaspers was quick to recognize, Arendt had come upon this notion of radical evil at a terrible cost: It made moral judgment of the perpetrators of terror nearly impossible. Referring to the God of the Old Testament, Jaspers wrote to her in 1951, “Hasn’t Jahwe faded too far out of sight?” This question, she replied, plagued her “for weeks” without her “being able to come up with an answer to it.”⁷² Though she tried to formulate a response, what she wrote only reinforced the unanswered power of Jaspers’s question: How was it possible to hold the Nazis and Bolsheviks responsible for their deeds if they were as superfluous as their victims? If the true ruler of the totalitarian universe was terror itself⁷³ – and not its wielders – how was it possible to put its wielders, better understood as its instruments, on trial? Were the Nazis not, as Ronald Reagan would argue some thirty-five years later while laying a wreath near the headstones of the SS, also terror’s hapless victims? If the governing force of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia was an ideology of motion that inspired murderous action, if the practitioners of terror were as subject to ideology’s verdicts as their victims, if the perpetrators were truly the will-less, identity-less, selfless mass that she described – indeed, so selfless that they could not resist the knives being turned upon them – how could they be judged as doers of evil?⁷⁴ They hadn’t done evil, for they were incapable of doing anything. By this Arendt did not mean that they were merely following orders or subject to power from above; as she pointed out, regimes of terror did not issue orders, in the sense of discrete edicts from discrete officers, prescribing specific tasks, and there was little in the way of power coming from above.⁷⁵ She meant that first mass society and then ideology and finally total terror had rendered men and women – all men and women, from Hitler down through the Jews, from Stalin to the kulaks – incapable of acting. Total terror and radical evil may have done what natural fear, despotic terror, and mass anxiety did for her predecessors – found a new politics – but, as Arendt would come to realize, it was a false foundation, inspiring an operatic sense of danger and catastrophe, but obscuring the hard political realities of rule by terror.

Eichmann in Jerusalem

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt pulled back from this account of fear, offering revision upon revision regarding three of *Origins*’ critical arguments – the self amid the mass; the nature and function of ideology; and the purpose and politics of terror. Instead of the selfless individual, Arendt gave us Eichmann the social-climbing careerist, that self-interested virtuoso

of his own ambitious destiny. Instead of the anomic mass, there was a snobbish party hierarchy, with deep roots in what she called “respectable society.” Instead of ideologies of incidental content confirming the worthlessness of the self and providing it with a sense of wholeness, ideology, she now claimed, appealed to its adherents’ sense of their own grandeur, projecting the Nazis as heroic creators of a new world – not, as she had argued in *Origins*, mere implements of a preordained future. Ideology was also a moral narcotic, altering its adherents’ sense of ethical reality so that they could do terrible things with minimal disruptions of conscience. Its popularity was reinforced by the fact that so many authoritative men, leaders of high social standing whom Eichmann and other mid-level Nazis respected, believed in it. And, finally, instead of total terror rendering the self into a non-self, it now became an instrument of genocide – imagined by Hitler and his cronies, but requiring the support of middle managers like Eichmann, collaborators throughout Europe, and enforcers within the Jewish community itself. Terror did not reduce everyone, from the most to the least, into non-agents; instead it turned everyone into agents. Each of these agents made choices. Though some of these choices were far more constrained – and therefore excusable – than others, it served no purpose, save obfuscation, to act as if all agency had disappeared. Arendt was determined that no one, not Eichmann, not the Jewish leadership, not even the vast number of those killed in concentration camps, should claim the alibi of passivity. To Nazism’s collaborators and victims she granted the status of actors, to its executioners the status of criminals, and to both the capacity for identity, will, and choice. Everyone would now enjoy the dignity and bear the burden of being judged – for deeds over which each had some, albeit radically incommensurate, measure of volition. It was that dignity and burden that *Origins* had denied and which *Eichmann* restored.

The Careerist and the Social Climber

Though words like tyranny, terror, and genocide – that family of political phenomena surrounding twentieth-century political fear – possess today a strange and awful grandeur, it was the singular achievement of Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* to insist that they were forms of work. “What for Eichmann was a job, with its daily routine, its ups and downs, was for the Jews quite literally the end of the world.”⁷⁶ For there to be tyranny, terror, and genocide, someone had to tyrannize, terrorize, and kill. Since such efforts required years for their successful completion, those who conducted and carried them out had to be compensated or coerced. Though Arendt

did not explicitly state this, she clearly assumed, with good reason, that compensation was the favored method among non-Jewish Germans.⁷⁷ Individuals were paid to do this work, promoted if they did it well. Thus did genocide become a job, even a career. For some, a career in fear lent a much-needed leg up. For others, those who sought not only to live but also to live well, it offered a spot in the higher circles of politics and society.⁷⁸ But whether their careerism was of the first or second sort, it was aspirational. The careerist was no passive spectator, no victim. He actively sought more for himself. And it was this quest for more that led him to participate in terror. Terror, in other words, did not constrain its wielders' desire or limit the self; it elicited and preyed upon their desires, stoking the self.

A classic social climber, Eichmann was a careerist of the second sort. Possessing a knack for negotiating with local functionaries and organizing large-scale operations, he was chiefly responsible for the deportation and transit of millions of Jews to Auschwitz and to Poland's other extermination camps. But unlike that other fascist who made the trains run on time, this one, claimed Arendt, "had no motives at all" – "except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement," at work and in the higher circles of the Nazi party and German society.⁷⁹ Before he joined the Nazis, Eichmann was a *déclassé* loser, with few skills and even fewer prospects. He joined the party because he "was fed up with his job as traveling salesman" and saw in Nazism an opportunity for "somebody like him – already a failure in the eyes of his social class, of his family, and hence in his own eyes as well" to "start from scratch and still make career." Hitler, after all, had worked his way up, and it was precisely his upward mobility that made him and his movement, in Eichmann's eyes, so worthy of esteem: "His success alone," Eichmann said, "proved to me that I should subordinate myself to this man." Eichmann's encounter with Nazism, as he understood it, was a story of hard work, which sometimes paid off but often did not. He had little memory for the political details of Nazi history, whether the Wannsee Conference or the deportation of a few thousand Jews from France. What he remembered were drinks with the fancy and the wellborn, bowling with a high government official in Slovakia, hob-knobbing with the rich and powerful. Nearing the end of the war, as various Nazi functionaries brooded over their impending fate and that of Germany, Eichmann fretted over snubs from superiors refusing to invite him to lunch.⁸⁰

Prior to Arendt, few theorists had explored these connections between careerism and rule by fear. George Winstanley, one of the more visionary leaders of those sects that so upset

Hobbes, had alluded dimly to the perils of ambition, how a pinched desire for advance could induce oppression of those below and submission to those above. “Covetousness,” he declared at the height of the English Revolution, “begets fear lest others should cross them in their design, or else begets a fear of want, and this makes a man to draw the creatures to him by hook or crook, and to please the strongest side, looking what others do, not minding what himself does.” A century later, Rousseau stated the case more plainly: “Citizens only allow themselves to be oppressed to the degree that they are carried away by blind ambition.”⁸¹ But these were stray comments, outposts of malcontent wisdom rather than full-blown political philosophy. Indeed, most theorists – from Montesquieu and the Framers to twentieth-century pluralists and free-marketeers – have considered a flourishing desire to protect and advance one’s position, whether social or economic, an antidote to tyranny and persecution. Interest and ambition, according to this school of thought, give each individual a personal, more vital, stake in maintaining her freedom. Contending interests and competing ambitions produce cooperation or stalemate, both of which are opposed to the practice of oppression. Interest checks interest, ambition checks ambition, and whatever nefarious designs each individual or group may have upon the other are prevented from reaching fruition.⁸² Even those theorists whose commitments might render them hostile to careerism and social climbing – civic humanists, for instance, or Marxists – have usually worried more about the threats these impulses pose to virtue or class solidarity than about their contributions to political tyranny or rule by fear.⁸³ [tk on humanists]

With the exception, then, of *The Persian Letters* – a novel, it should be recalled, not a treatise – *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is our sole sustained enquiry into the relationship between careerism and rule by fear.⁸⁴ Arendt’s analysis of careerism was at odds not only with much of modern thought, but also with *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, where jobholding hardly made an appearance.⁸⁵ If what Arendt had claimed in *Origins* about the loss of self were true – about the individual’s lack of interest, agency, and identity – Eichmann, as she portrayed him in 1963, would have been an impossibility. Eichmann was self-interested and self-serving, virtually every move he made calibrated to bring some good to himself.⁸⁶ His values, moreover, were those of a particular class milieu and reinforced reigning political and social hierarchies. “What he fervently believed in up to the end was success, the chief standard of ‘good society’ as he knew it.”⁸⁷ The Nazis created their own hierarchy and preyed upon the preexisting hierarchy of respectable society. The measures of Eichmann’s self-advance were these vertical rungs of the

Nazi party and good society. Eichmann sought, in other words, to ascend within those very hierarchies that Arendt had claimed in *Origins* did not exist – not in the mass society that preceded Hitler’s rise to power, and not in his twelve-year reign.

Snobbish philistinism and snubbing hierarchy, according to Arendt, suffused the Third Reich. Eichmann had been born into a “solid middle-class family.” But without any skills save sales, Eichmann quickly tumbled down the social ladder. Thus, despite the fact that Eichmann’s father had been quite close to the father of Ernst Kaltenbrunner, a party luminary eventually tried and hanged at Nuremberg, “the relationship of the sons was rather cool: Eichmann was unmistakably treated by Kaltenbrunner as his social inferior.”⁸⁸ Such snobbishness seemed to survive the regime and its destruction as well. Recounting a story from the end of the war, for instance, Arendt told of how Königsberg woman suffering from varicose veins accosted a physician who warned her to flee the oncoming Red Army. “*“The Russians will never get us,”*” the woman replied. “*“The Führer will never permit it. Much sooner he will gas us.”*” While the physician was struck by the woman’s suicidal priorities, Arendt seemed more impressed by her highbrow disdain. For as Arendt wrote, “The story, one feels, like most true stories, is incomplete. There should have been one more voice, preferably a female one, which, sighing heavily, replied: And now all that good, expensive gas has been wasted on the Jews!” Turning racism into a smug elitism, Arendt wrote that the belief of upper crust Germans in higher and lower orders produced the strangest expressions of remorse in postwar Germany. In the 1950s and 1960s, elite Germans, according to Arendt, thought that the real crime of the Nazis toward the Jews was not the extermination of six million but that so many “‘prominent’ Jews” had been sent into exile. “There are more than a few people,” she wrote, “who still publicly regret the fact that Germany sent Einstein packing, without realizing that it was a much greater crime to kill little Hans Cohn from around the corner, even though he was no genius.”⁸⁹ (Writing from Paris in 1970, Mary McCarthy told Arendt a similar tale of snobbery and genocide, this time from postwar Britain. According to McCarthy, George Orwell’s widow, Sonia, had heard, by way of Stephen Spender, someone in Britain say, “Auschwitz, oh, dear *no!* That person was never in Auschwitz. Only in some very *minor* death camp.”)⁹⁰ All of these instances of social arrogance reinforced the notion that Nazism was an affair not of the masses but of the classes.

But perhaps, it might be argued, Eichmann’s careerism was a form of psychological weakness. Eichmann, according to this interpretation, would have been little different from the

classic conformists of American social commentary, those bankrupt figures from *Democracy in America*, *Babbitt*, and *The Lonely Crowd* whose fawning dependence on the approval of others was a symptom of their own internal vacuity. (This reading might explain the American penchant, which Arendt so disliked, for ferreting out that elusive “Eichmann in every one of us.”⁹¹) Eichmann, however, did not need the approval of all others, just of those who might have done him some good. With a nose for power, he aimed for ascendance, not acceptance, seeking nothing so much as a governor generalship over a Nazi territory, much like that possessed by Hans Frank over Poland or Reinhardt Heydrich over Czechoslovakia.⁹² To transform his careerism into an inner weakness misses its aspirational qualities, how he sought his good in the accumulation of power and prestige. To reduce that aspiration to a psychological flaw, moreover, is to substitute a therapeutic diagnosis for a moral judgment. Eichmann’s careerism was certainly worthy of contempt – not, however, because it signaled internal pathology but because it registered a base set of values hitched to a genocidal project. Arendt additionally insisted that careerism was the language of and path to success within a particular class. It emerged from a social structure, which solicited the contribution of individuals to its maintenance. To the extent that Eichmann’s careerism reflected a retrograde social consensus, then, it was a vice of morals and politics, not a failure of psychology or personality.

Ideology

In her analysis of ideology in *Eichmann*, Arendt also emphasized these categories of selfhood and hierarchy. First, she argued that to the extent that Eichmann believed in the ideology of Nazism, it was not because it denied him any concrete benefits or preyed upon his weak sense of self. To the contrary, Nazi propaganda depicted a political landscape of great historical endeavor, with individuals cast as the heroic creators, not anonymous transmitters, of a grand future. In Nazism, men like Eichmann could imagine themselves as bigger than they were. Second, she claimed that ideology either anaesthetized or palliated the individual’s conscience, shielding him from the reality of what he was doing. In *Origins*, Arendt argued that ideology depicted a fictitious reality as a salve to those who no longer believed in the credibility of their own existence or in that of the world’s. Ideological fiction was a stand-in for that sense of reality that the mass man craved. In *Eichmann*, ideology was also a fiction but of a politically instrumental sort: It enabled the individual to overcome his “innate repugnance” to committing

horrendous crimes, justifying the killing of Jews or simply sanitizing the act.⁹³ Finally, Arendt stressed that what made these ideologies so credible and useful to men like Eichmann was the fact that influential, respectable people believed in them. While Arendt's new conception of ideology had its flaws – particularly its failure, shared with *Origins*, to take seriously the integrity of anti-Semitism as an idea – it brought to her analysis a much-needed element of old-fashioned realism. Ideology was no longer the Wagnerian apocalypse depicted in *Origins of Totalitarianism*; it was now just another form, albeit far more deadly, of politically driven mystification.

At first glance, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* seemed to confirm what Arendt had written about ideology in *Origins*. Eichmann, she wrote, was an “idealist,” someone, according to his own definition, “who *lived* for his idea...who was prepared to sacrifice for his idea everything and, especially, everybody,” including his family and himself. But Arendt made this point in order to draw a contrast between the idealist and “the businessman,” the humdrum accommodator who aspired to nothing particularly grand, not even the high-flown career that Eichmann imagined for himself. Ideology, in other words, was significant less for its sacrifices or liquidation of self – in pointed contrast to *Origins*, Arendt insisted that the ideologue held onto “his personal feelings and emotions” – than for the grandeur of its adherents' ambitions.⁹⁴ The ideologue sought to do something of worldwide historical significance, and looked about for ideas – eliminating Jews, for instance – that allowed him to fulfill that desire. Unlike the ideologue in *Origins*, who measured greatness in the impersonal forces that crushed him, the ideologue in *Eichmann* saw greatness in his actions, in the world he would create, which would remember his deeds with gratitude and reverence. No one, Arendt claimed, understood this urge so well as Himmler. In speech after speech, Himmler impressed upon his followers the grand task they were about to perform. If the job of slaughtering the Jews was “difficult to bear,” the S.S. could warm to the thought that it was also “historic, grandiose, unique” and that it was they who were doing it.⁹⁵ It was not just the task, in other words, that appealed to the S.S.; it was also the fact that they would perform it.

Such words were particularly persuasive to Eichmann who was an inveterate braggart. (So intense was Eichmann's braying impulse that Arendt wondered how it was that he managed to remain in hiding for so long after the war.⁹⁶) Eichmann bragged because he sought to escape the anonymity that normally attends those who live their lives according to the rules of the

game.⁹⁷ He thus suffered from the familiar vices of self that Arendt claimed in *Origins* had been eliminated by mass society and total terror. Behind the grand declamations of ideology stood a human being with an unfortunate, though hardly peculiar, penchant for self-aggrandizement. One heard in the actual words of ideology not the destruction of self – at least not the Germans’ self – but a wish for the self’s elevation. In the heroic words was the braggart, in the political vision the aching careerist. As in *Origins*, Arendt made a direct connection between ideology and motion, but here it was not just the impersonal motion of nature or history, but also the upward mobility of the careerist.

From a humdrum life without significance and consequence the wind had blown him into History, as he understood it, namely, into a Movement that always kept moving and in which somebody like him – already a failure in the eyes of his social class, of his family, and hence in his own eyes as well – could start from scratch and still make a career.⁹⁸

Ideology had finally been brought down to earth, back to the familiar self with his familiar longings, vices, even interests. Perhaps that is why Arendt made a point of noting that Himmler’s grand ideological statements were always delivered toward the end of the year, “presumably along with a Christmas bonus.”⁹⁹

In *Origins*, Arendt argued that Nazism was an ideology of substitution for a world that was not there, a psychological remedy for a lonely being who no longer believed in anything, including the evidence of his own senses. In *Eichmann*, Nazism became an ideology of diversion and exculpation, which presumed that the world in all its ugliness – and the individual in all his inwardness – was still there. The purpose of ideology was to accommodate the individual, in his heart, to that ugly reality. Arendt began from the premise that most Nazis, like most men and women, had an “innate repugnance toward crime.”¹⁰⁰ While this instinctual revulsion did not quite qualify as conscience, it signaled that some portion of humanity’s moral inheritance had withstood the assaults of mass society and ideological indoctrination, and remained housed within the walls of the self. This residual, if flickering, inner light posed a significant challenge to the Nazis who sought to elevate murder to the status of virtue – or, failing that, to the status of an unpleasant and unspoken task that simply had to be performed.

Arendt wrote of the Nazis’ effort to bridge the divide between conscience and what they were doing in somewhat contradictory ways. At times, she claimed that the Nazis successfully

turned mass murder into a positive moral duty. Here, the injunction to kill assumed that quality of denied gratification so characteristic of traditional moral commandments like “thou shalt not steal.” Killing Jews, in other words, required the same refusal to yield to inner temptation – in this case, the desire not to kill – that not stealing required in another era. Killing all Jews, without exception, even had the imprimatur of Kant’s categorical imperative, of which Eichmann possessed a fairly coherent, if simple, understanding. Thus, to kill a few Jews out of sadism or rage was of lesser moral stature than to kill all Jews, without emotion and for only the purest – that is, the most law-like and universalizable – of reasons.¹⁰¹ While this almost fanatical pursuit of Jew-killing was reminiscent of the internal renunciation described by Arendt in *Origins*, this renunciation, she now claimed, was of an altogether more traditional sort: It resembled nothing so much as the familiar Christian ideal of doing the good, however malignantly defined, for its own sake, imposing a regime of strict self-denial in order to create a kingdom of ends. So persuasive, if upside down, was this moral world that someone like Eichmann, according to Arendt, committed “his crimes under circumstances that [made] it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he [was] doing wrong.”¹⁰²

But this moral inversion was not nearly as successful as Arendt made it out to be, as she herself understood. Had the Nazis not possessed some sense that they were doing wrong, why would they have resorted to euphemistic “language rules,” where nothing – not murder, concentration camps, or gas chambers – could be called by its proper name? Part of this linguistic obfuscation, no doubt, was meant to confuse foreign visitors and to conceal the Nazis’ crimes from the external world; the Nazis were worried about bad publicity and feared that should they lose the war, they would be judged in a less than positive light. But the Nazis used these words even among themselves, “in the ordinary pursuit of their murderous duties.” The Final Solution required an extensive bureaucracy, with far-flung offices scattered throughout occupied Europe, where not every individual could be considered a reliable ideological foot soldier. In the face of possible intransigence and opposition, which the Nazis did confront, coded references “proved of enormous help in the maintenance of order and sanity.”¹⁰³ The Nazis resorted to euphemism, in other words, because they could not guarantee that everyone, particularly among their own ranks, would accept the horror of what it was that they were doing. The evil that they did could not be talked about, at least not without considerable evasion. But whether the Nazis’ ideology created successful converts or not, Arendt’s discussion suggested

that the purpose of ideology was fairly old-fashioned: to deflect attention from – or to justify – moral horror so that its executioners could carry on their murderous business.¹⁰⁴

Finally, Arendt argued that what made Nazi ideology persuasive to men like Eichmann was the simple fact that so many of the men he respected and longed to associate with seemed to believe in it.

His conscience was indeed set at rest when he saw the zeal and eagerness with which “good society” everywhere reacted as he did. He did not need to “close his ears to the voice of conscience,” as the judgment has it, not because he had none, but because his conscience spoke with a “respectable voice,” with the voice of respectable society around him.¹⁰⁵

Eichmann genuinely believed in the authority of his social betters; like so many social climbers, he presumed that those who had reached the top had gotten there for a reason – whether talent, virtue, or some other measure of status. And that reason made them, and their opinions, worthy of respect and emulation. Eichmann also believed in their beliefs because it was personally beneficial to him. Aping the opinions of his betters was a path to success. Power was on their side, so it behooved him to subscribe to the beliefs that went with that power. These twin elements in Eichmann’s makeup – the sincere and the instrumental, the moral and the careerist – were inseparable, for in Eichmann’s eyes, success was a moral good, the standard by which men were judged worthy or not. The only reason he sought to join his social superiors and to enjoy the power they enjoyed was that he esteemed these goals to be worthy ends. He thought his superiors were genuinely better, and therefore desired to be among them and to share in their power, for that would mean that he too was better. True, had his superiors not possessed this element of power, he might not have subscribed to their beliefs. But that did not prove that his desire for power was superior to his moral sense. It merely showed that, for Eichmann, power was morality. However elites chose to articulate their specific version of moral truth, Eichmann would have followed them because he genuinely believed that whoever had power was worthy of being followed. As he claimed of Hitler:

[He] may have been wrong all down the line, but one thing is beyond dispute: the man was able to work his way up from lance corporal in the German Army to Führer of a people of almost eighty million....His success alone proved to me that I should subordinate myself to this man.¹⁰⁶

Terror, Genocide, and Agency

Having discovered the role of careerism and reinterpreted the character of ideology, Arendt was finally prepared in *Eichmann* to reconceive the purpose of terror, to recognize and acknowledge that it was in fact a means to an end, an instrument of genocide. In the opening two sections of *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt had attempted to understand the origins of the Nazi genocide – hence her discussion of anti-Semitism and of imperial Europe’s racist massacres. But by the time she broached the topic of total terror in the third, and most influential, section of *Origins*, genocide had dropped out of her account. In the third section of *Origins*, the aim of terror was to eliminate human freedom and individuality, to liberate the impersonal motion of nature or history from the dull drag of the self. Thinking perhaps more of Stalin than of Hitler, she diminished the specifically genocidal aspirations of these rulers, and so terror became an end unto itself, a “way of life,” as she put it in essay, rather than a tool “which people may fear.”¹⁰⁷ In *Eichmann*, however, Arendt returned to her earlier intuition that genocide – the elimination of an entire people, not of the self – was the primary aim of the Nazis. Nazism, she wrote, was “an enterprise whose open purpose was to eliminate forever certain ‘races’ from the surface of the earth.” Eichmann was guilty because he had “supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations.” While these statements are so obvious today that they approach banality, they signaled Arendt’s newfound appreciation that Nazism was “an attack upon human diversity as such,” an attack on the irreducible plurality of peoples rather than persons, on men and women conceived as members of a race rather than as agents and selves.¹⁰⁸

With her clarity about the Nazis’ genocidal aims restored, Arendt was able to appreciate terror’s instrumental qualities, that terror was a rational means to a mind-boggling political end. The Nazis faced a significant obstacle in their quest to eliminate the Jews: In Europe, there were more non-Nazis or anti-Nazis than there were Nazis, and in the concentration camps, there were more victims than perpetrators. Like all regimes of fear, the Nazis worried that these numbers might coalesce into a potential opposition, or that only the most hard-bitten anti-Semites would thoroughly cooperate. When Arendt argued in *Origins* that the Nazis – and Stalinists – had used terror after all opposition had been eliminated and that terror was therefore not instrumental to securing order or obedience, she had overlooked the fact that rulers always worry about losing power, no matter how secure it is. And that when that power is based on fear, it can seem to its

wielders even more tenuous. As the Nazis accumulated more power and territory, and set about to do what had never been done before, they had good reason to be nervous about resistance; they were governing foreign territories, attempting morally perilous and unprecedented tasks. Terror was a means of overcoming these obstacles. It enabled the Nazis to maximize the impact of the resource they did have – violence – and minimize, especially in the camps where they were outnumbered, the resource they did not have – people. It was thus a utilitarian adaptation of means and ends, turning non-Jews into either collaborators or non-resisters, and Jews into either cooperators or non-resisters.

For many of her readers, Arendt's discussion of collaborators, cooperators, and non-resisters deflected attention from the ultimate perpetrators of evil, the Nazis themselves, and cast the Jews as the immoral agents of their own demise. As one of her most vehement critics noted, "Our enemies have for years been engaged in a campaign of whitewashing the culprits and blaming the victims. The latter, brutally murdered not so long ago, are now being killed for a second time by the defilers. Among these enemies Hannah Arendt now places herself."¹⁰⁹ But by focusing on these other actors, Arendt was not seeking to minimize the role or evil of the Nazis. She was trying instead to show that terror did not entail the simple monopoly of all power and agency on the part of the fear-wielders and the total lack of power and agency on the part of the fear-sufferers, that terror could be – and was, in the case of the Holocaust – an affair of collusion. In regimes of terror, she suggested, there could be no "clear-cut division between persecutors and victims" because the perpetrators critically depended upon the absence of challenge to make their power seem greater and the consequent fear of it more potent. The Nazis' victims and collaborators helped make that possible. It was for that reason that the Nazis, according to Eichmann, "regarded this cooperation [between the Jewish councils and the Nazis] as the very cornerstone of their Jewish policy." Like Hobbes, Arendt possessed a particularly theatrical conception of power and fear, where the image of power, as much as its reality, inspired fear. Resistance, however minimal or futile, was dangerous to the wielder of fear for it suggested that his power was not irresistible, that it could be opposed, and that the fear of it need not dictate obedience pure and simple. Conversely, non-resistance was extremely useful to the Nazis, for it inspired an image of grim irresistibility, arousing fear among potential opponents, curtailing any effort at resistance. Obedience was the result of such non-resistance, and "in politics," as Arendt wrote of Eichmann, "obedience and support are the same." In terror, they

were not the same, but neither were they antithetical. For in a few cases where potential collaborators and cooperators resisted their assigned roles – in Denmark, for instance, where the entire country, from king to commoner, mobilized to protect the Jews – the Nazis’ power eroded, their terror proved ineffective, and the genocidal project collapsed, even among the Nazis themselves. “The Nazis, it turned out, possessed neither the manpower nor the will power to remain ‘tough’ when they met determined opposition.”¹¹⁰

Arendt was certainly aware of the constraints the Jews faced, that when they tried to resist, they were not only killed, but also tortured. She thought the question “Why did the Jews not resist” – which the Israeli state prosecutor asked with mounting fervor throughout the Eichmann trial – a sheer obscenity. Virtually no one had acted otherwise. And it was a “cruel and silly” question for it ignored the obvious fact that “there exist many things considerably worse than death, and the S.S. saw to it that none of them was ever very far from their victims’ minds and imagination.” In not resisting, the Jews had chosen, with good reason, “the comparatively easy death the Nazis offered them – before the firing squad or in the gas chamber” over gruesome tortures.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, it was important to raise the issue of non-resistance in order to show that it contributed to the efficacy of terror and that the Jews exercised agency in opting for it. The Jews faced a choice between the gas chamber and torture. It was certainly not a good choice, and the choice they made was more than understandable. But it was a choice, and to treat it as if it were not was to ascribe to the Nazis’ victims a level of passivity and lack of rationality that they did not possess and to the Nazis a level of maniacal omnipotence that they may have hoped to possess but never did. Such a view almost turned the Jews into the animals that the Nazis often imagined them to be. It also minimized the true evil of regimes of fear, which was that they asked their victims to cooperate, willfully, in their death. The Nazis did not grant the Jews the benign grace of passivity and disappeared agency. They demanded far more, that the Jews use their agency to help “organize their own destruction.” That was, she wrote to Jaspers, “the naked truth,” and though it was a truth whose enunciation, she feared, might “stir up more anti-Semitism than ten kidnappings,” she did not blink from it.¹¹²

But Arendt had a second problem with the question, “Why did the Jews not resist?” She thought it presumed that the Jews acted as a cohesive whole, that when they cooperated in their destruction, it was as a unit. In fact, she argued, the Jews, like all communities, were divided between elites and their followers. And it was these elites – the leaders of the Jewish councils,

the officials of Jewish organizations, the Zionist negotiators who sought the release of Jews to Palestine – who counseled their followers to take the path of cooperation and non-resistance. Terror worked best when it could conscript those whom the victims trusted, their indigenous and local leaders. Contrary to what centuries of political theorist had taught – that terror requires the obliteration of social organization, the decimation of that rich fabric of associations that today goes by the name of civil society – and what she herself had claimed in *Origins*, Arendt now realized that these organizations and their leaders were the transmission lines of terror. The Jewish councils were not the simple puppets of the Nazis; had they been, the Jews would not have trusted them as they did. It was precisely that they were independent, that they were able to meet their followers’ needs in the Jewish ghettos, that they were run by men of high standing in their own communities, that made them such potent sources of authority. Far from the Nazi regime requiring the total abolition of independent civil society, it actively fostered certain kinds of minimal social independence and autonomy so that when the time came for more severe measures, these institutions would have garnered enough trust and social capital to implement them. “The whole truth,” Arendt gloomily concluded, “was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people” – words that every one of today’s celebrants of civil society might wish to heed.¹¹³

The Jewish leadership, according to Arendt, chose to collaborate with the Nazis for several reasons. First and foremost, they were without any allies in the wider population. Looking beyond the walls of their ghettos, they could rely upon virtually no one to come to their aid. With a few exceptions, the Nazis were extremely effective in severing these links of support – not all links, it should be stressed, just those that could be used against them – between the Jewish population and their neighbors. In the few cases where men and women in the surrounding cities and countryside came to their aid, the Jewish leadership was able to mount a challenge. Thus, each nation’s traditions and values, the degree to which non-Nazis collaborated, contributed to the success and failure of the Holocaust; far from the Final Solution being a trans-European phenomenon that ran roughshod of the peculiarities of country, it was shaped by the specificity of borders and political cultures. But second, she insisted, the Jewish elites were influenced by an ideology of eternal Jewish victimhood and passivity – which saw anti-Semitism as an irreducible reality of life, an animus that was intractable and all-pervasive

among Christians. This ideology induced a kind of fatalism, leading many leaders to believe that working with the Nazis was the best they could do. And finally, she argued, they suffered from an ideology of pseudo-realism. Though she was certainly aware of the genuine risks the Jews and their leaders faced if they resisted, Arendt believed that in the name of being realistic, the elites discouraged other possible taking other options, sometimes even forsaking genuine opportunities for rebellion. They failed to see how their realism was more than realism: It provided active support. Had they done nothing, she argued, the fate of the Jews could have been no worse – the Jews considered, that is, as a whole; the fate of individuals, who would surely have been tortured, would have been worse – and it might have been a good deal better.¹¹⁴ The failure of the Jewish leadership to mount an opposition, then, was symptomatic of that fearful rationality Hobbes had described so long ago: The rationality of short-term calculation dictated that the Jews acceding to the dictates of fear; it reckoned with the costs of resistance to specific Jews, who would surely have suffered far more than death, rather than to the Jews as a whole, and it assumed that if they cooperated in the here and now, they might buy enough time in the future to survive until the liberating armies of the allies arrived. It was not a crazy calculation, but did induce fear and cooperation in fear.

Fear and Foundation

When the history of twentieth-century fear is written, *Eichmann* suggested, it would be better to dispense with phantasmagoria like total terror and radical evil, and confront instead the dull realities of careerists and collaborators. By insisting on this collision between terror and triviality, Arendt did not seek to discount the gravity of the Holocaust or, by implication, of Stalinism. She sought instead to deprive fear of any legs, to show that it could not underwrite politics. Arising from and depending upon the normal exchanges of ordinary human beings, fear lacked the melodramatic, mythic power she had ascribed to it in *Origins*. Eichmann, the Nazis, even genocide, did not deserve the imprimatur of radical evil, which inspired a terror verging on awe. Evil, as she wrote to Gershom Scholem, did not belong to a netherworld; it was very much a part of our world, the outgrowth of mundane compromises, vapidness and vanity, and human, all too human, vices. If one dipped into fear to draw sustenance from its welled reserve, one would draw up at best a few drops:

I changed my mind and do no longer speak of ‘radical evil.’ . . . It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never ‘radical,’ that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. . . . It is ‘thought-defying,’ as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to go the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its ‘banality.’ Only the good has depth and can be radical.¹¹⁵

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt dispelled the sacred aura that so many before her – and since – have found in the politics of fear, refusing to grant to it the primordial, religious overtones that linger around words like Holocaust. Her much-maligned tone of irony, her bitter laughter at the sheer comedy of Eichmann the man, which many took as indifference or callousness, reflected her effort to deny evil – and the fear of evil – the last word, which *Origins* had come awfully close to granting. Looking hard at Eichmann and reflecting on her earlier work, Arendt finally heeded the wise counsel of Jaspers, who had warned her as early as 1946 not to allow the Nazis to take “on a streak of ‘greatness’ – of satanic greatness – which is, for me, as inappropriate for the Nazis as all the talk about the ‘demonic’ elements in Hitler and so forth. It seems to me that we have to see things in their total banality, in their prosaic triviality, because that’s what truly characterizes them. Bacteria can cause epidemics that wipe out nations, but they remain merely bacteria. I regard any hint of myth and legend with horror, and everything unspecific is just such a hint.”¹¹⁶ In following the advice of Jaspers, Arendt may have lost fear as a foundation for politics, but she also lost it as a source of nightmare. Perhaps it was this liberation from the total terror of her own imagination that explains the “curious state of euphoria” she experienced upon writing *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.¹¹⁷

Two Ideas and Their Strange Careers

In the three decades since her death, Arendt’s two attempts to make sense of twentieth-century political fear have enjoyed a curious fate. On the one hand, historians of Nazism and Stalinism have decidedly rejected most of the central arguments and categories of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Despite their considerable differences, Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen agree that men and women in pre-Nazi Germany and Nazi Germany itself did not suffer from anomic loneliness, that Nazism as an ideology and movement depended upon and grew out of a socially integrated civil society with a thick web of institutions and vibrant civic

associations.¹¹⁸ Against Arendt's view of Nazism as a mass-driven phenomenon, many historians emphasize its elitist dimensions, how intellectuals, state officials, military officers, professionals, clergymen, and business magnates organized the "consensus" for the Holocaust.¹¹⁹ Contrary to her claims that the content of Nazi ideology was less important than its psychological function, the most serious historians of the Holocaust agree that anti-Semitism was a coherent ideology with great substantive appeal, particularly among traditional conservative circles of the German Right. Drawing from a deep vein of counter-Enlightenment thinking, and speaking as it did to decades of frustration and discontent with the liberating promises of the French Revolution, "redemptive anti-Semitism" was critical to the worldview of the Nazis.¹²⁰ Finally, as Tzvetan Todorov has argued, in the camps – and here he was referring to both the Soviet and Nazi camps – agency survived, not merely agency but a particularly moral form of agency.¹²¹

Among Soviet historians, a raft of recent studies, many drawing from archives opened after the collapse of communism, lends even less support to Arendt's theses in *Origins*. Against her notion that the individual leader of a terror regime was of little consequence, one of the premiere historians of the Soviet purges has written, "The figure of Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin hovers like a specter over these events. As the most powerful political leader of the state and the center of a growing quasi-religious cult, he was personally responsible for much of the bloodshed." Though Stalinism, like Nazism, was primarily a top-down affair, it also, like Nazism, had its bottom-up aspects, though not in the atomistic, mass sense that Arendt invoked. Terror was a two-way street, with low-level party officials and grassroots organizations sometimes suffering from it, other times benefiting from it in the form of promotions or in the opportunities offered to them by Stalin to wage lethal war against mid-level regional bureaucrats. Sometimes they even initiated it.¹²² Selfhood did not die in the 1930s; it survived, sometimes by going into hiding, other times out in the open. Indeed, according to one historian, in every year up until 1935, the president of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets received approximately 77,000 letters, filled with "complaints, petitions, denunciations, confessions, and advice." For some, selfhood meant a positive identification with the regime, an opportunity to make their voices heard. Bolshevik ideology, for these citizen writers, was not an obstacle to self, but an elevation of self. For instance, one particularly egalitarian minded worker wrote to Molotov, the foreign minister, instructing him in the fine arts of diplomacy, while another

warned party leaders that they were growing out of touch with the rank-and-file, and compared them to the figure of Antaeus from Greek mythology, “who perished after he lost contact with the earth.”¹²³ Within two years of Arendt writing about terror’s assault on the self, of claiming that Stalin’s death might only signal the beginning of an even more concerted campaign against the human condition, Soviet newspapers began publishing, for the first time, letters to the editors, where ordinary citizens would openly complain of Bolshevik perfidy and malfeasance.¹²⁴ Terror did not rend the fabric of everyday life, shredding the ties that bind in order to spin new ideological cloth; it threaded its way into that fabric, with citizens denouncing each other to the authorities over perceived slights, marital squabbles, and the like. Ordinary vices – this was the stuff from which much mischief was often made, not in lieu of ideology, but as the everyday content of ideology, which inflated and heightened trivial conflicts into total war. As one survivor of the era put it, “You should never step on anybody’s toes. Even a minor incident may be fatal. Your wife has an argument with her neighbor and that neighbor will write an anonymous letter to the NKVD and you will have no end of trouble.”¹²⁵

Despite the overwhelming evidence arrayed against *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, many contemporary intellectuals, particularly those of a more literary or philosophical bent, continue to insist on its relevance for understanding not only the totalitarian experiments of Hitler and Stalin but also the history of twentieth-century terror as a whole. The atomized society; the breakdown of traditional forms of authority and hierarchy; the lonely self, evacuated for the sake of an incoming ideology; the loss of individuality, agency, spontaneity, and freedom; a terror so impersonal that nothing save an inscrutable radical evil can be said to rule – these are among the favored tropes of contemporary intellectuals who claim *Origins* “not as a *past* document but as an aid in our own *present* thinking.”¹²⁶ Whether they are talking about totalitarianism, the reaction against globalization, the revival of nationalism and ethnic identity, the necessity of civil society, or the threat of radical Islam, intellectuals worry about a dangerous anomie and its potential contributions to ideological terror.¹²⁷ Across the political spectrum, from Jeanne Kirkpatrick’s stated preference for totalitarian over authoritarian dictatorships – the former, utopian, anti-traditional, ideological, terrifying; the latter, customary, patriarchal, familiar, frightening – to Foucault’s administrative power ruling silently, invisibly, lethally, in the service of no one and nothing, save the imperatives of an impersonal enlightenment and the release of bodily motion and biopower, Arendt’s marriage of modernizing ideology and total terror sits at

the center of contemporary consciousness, often in defiance of the facts. Indeed, for some intellectuals, the empirical flaws of Arendt's argument only testify to her deeper, more visionary grasp of totalitarian evil. Arendt's was a special gift, they claim, a gift for "metaphysical insight," a capacity, similar to that of a fiction writer, to see the truth or meaning underneath or beyond the verifiable fact. Some writers even resort to the dark arts to explain her genius: "To penetrate to the devil's soul," wrote Irving Howe in 1991, "you need a touch of the devil yourself; to grasp the inner meaning of totalitarianism...you must yield yourself a little imaginatively, even as some critics remarked rather nastily about Orwell, with a streak of morbidity."¹²⁸

And what of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*? What of the terror of careerism, collaboration, and cooperation? Of the self-interest that lurks behind or beside or about ideological pronouncement, of the ambition that propels belief? Of the persistent hierarchies and class structures, where social and political betters wield authority over their inferiors, the collaborators and enforcers who fear their superiors because, in part, they crave their power? Of the victims who do not lie prostrate but make choices, who maximize interests, improve their condition, sometimes securing survival, sometimes not, but often at the cost of collaborating with evil? Of the indigenous elites who steer their followers away from opposition and resistance? Of the violence that does not destroy reason, selfhood, and agency but elicits and depends upon it? Despite a range of studies confirming the presence of some or all of these elements in regimes of fear – not just in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany, but in Pinochet's Chile, in the dirty wars of Argentina and Uruguay, in the Eastern Europe of the Brezhnev years and beyond¹²⁹ – many contemporary intellectuals remain uninterested in these categories. While certain arguments in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* continue to draw attention – the banality of evil, for instance, usually referenced as a slogan rather than an idea – none has achieved sufficient rhetorical velocity or philosophical thrust to dislodge this vast submerged consensus about the origins, nature, and function of terror, which *Origins* helped to create.

Now that the era of big government is over, the selfless ideologue, that blinding dramaturge of the apocalypse, has proven to be a far more instructive character than the ambitious careerist. For the ideologue warns us of the perils of wanting too much, politically, reminding us of the terrible things that happen when we stop thinking shortsightedly. Like Hobbes's state of nature, the ideologue is a condensed statement of admonition and alarm,

alerting us to the dangers of impending trespass, that we are approaching, once again, the killing fields. Whether it is the 1988 French film “Le process de Mai,” a cinematic judgment upon the excesses of May 1968, with voiceovers from France’s Jacobin past (“Terror finds its beginnings in virtue”) or liberal criticism of Ralph Nader’s 2000 presidential campaign, invoking Dostoevsky against the “fanaticism” and “left-wing utopianism” of third parties, the generated sense of mortal danger is palpable and therefore useful.¹³⁰ The careerist may not be the most attractive of figures – indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, he can be a source of considerable disappointment for many intellectuals, closet romantics who, like Tocqueville, revile political enthusiasm but pine for it once it disappears – but his preferred walking path is the marketplace rather than the corridors of state power. He cares for himself, not grand ideas. He is realistic and pragmatic, not utopian or fanatic. That careerism may itself be an ideology, that realism and pragmatism may be just as lethal as abstraction, that mere ambition may induce collusion and support for evil, that some of the worst cases of twentieth-century fear are the product of ordinary vices rather than extraordinary ideas – these were the suggestive implications of Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. But running afoul of the self-image of the age, they are ignored.

Notes

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- ¹ Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, 1980), pp. 13, 152, 270-381; J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 40, 559, 588; *Genesis* 22:12.
- ² Cohen, p. 152.
- ³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951, 1973), p. 307.
- ⁴ Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York: Bantam, 1941); Getty, p. 366; Cohen, p. 473.
- ⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: A Dialectical Lyric*, in *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 131-34.
- ⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center* (New York: Da Capo, 1949, 1988), pp. 104-5; Leslie Fiedler, "Afterthoughts on the Rosenbergs," *An End to Innocence* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), pp. 42, 45. For more recent instances of this argument, see Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 179; François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Deborah Furet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 116-24; Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 118; Martin Amis, *Koba the Dread* [get exact page #s].
- ⁷ Getty and Naumov, pp. 40, 48-49, 369-70, 392-399, 411, 417-19, 526; Cohen, pp. 375-380; *The Great Purge Trial*, ed. Robert C. Tucker and Stephen F. Cohen (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1965), pp. xlii-xlviii); Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 142, 301.
- ⁸ *The God That Failed*, ed. Richard Crossman (New York: Bantam, 1949), p. 163.
- ⁹ Fiedler, p. 26.
- ¹⁰ Arendt, *Origins*, pp. 458-59. Elsewhere, she writes, "The unprecedented is neither the murder itself nor the number of victims and not even 'the number of persons who united to perpetrate them.' It is much rather the ideological nonsense which caused them, the mechanization of their execution, and the careful and calculated establishment of a world of the dying in which nothing any longer made sense." "Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps," in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), p. 243.
- ¹¹ For a useful history of the concept of totalitarianism, see Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Also see Stephen J. Whitfield, *Into the Dark: Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), pp. 8-24; Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 37-45.
- ¹² Margaret Canavon, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 17-23, 28-29; Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1996), pp. 63-65; Dana R. Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 180-81; Young-Bruehl, pp. 200-3.

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- ¹³ “An Exchange of Letters between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt,” in *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, ed. Ron H. Feldman (New York: Grove Press, 1978), p. 246.
- ¹⁴ I recognize the considerable irony of this claim, for as Arendt herself wrote, one of the chief challenges she faced in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was that she wished “to write historically about something – totalitarianism – which I did not want to conserve but, on the contrary, felt engaged to destroy.” Arendt, “A Reply to Eric Voegelin,” in *Essays in Understanding*, p. 402.
- ¹⁵ In claiming that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was no simple trial report, I confess to be unpersuaded by the claim of one of Arendt’s most able interpreters – indeed, by the occasional testimony of Arendt herself – that the book was simply an account of one man, Eichmann, on trial for his specific deeds and crimes, rather than a reconsideration of the Holocaust and, in fact, of totalitarianism as a whole. As Arendt and her interlocutors made clear in their correspondence, she and they understood all too well how *Eichmann* revised some of the main tenets of *Origins*. See Villa, *Philosophy, Politics, and Terror*, p. 44; Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin, 1963, 1964), pp. 280, 285; Young-Bruehl, p. 367; *Correspondence*, pp. 525, 542; *Between Friends*, pp. 147-48, 160-61; “An Exchange of Letters between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt,” pp. 240-51.
- ¹⁶ For various reports on the Eichmann controversy, see Young-Bruehl, pp. 347-78; *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy 1949-1975*, ed. Carol Brightman (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), pp. 146-54, 160-62, 166-67; Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence 1926-1969*, ed. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), pp. 510-11, 515-16, 521-33, 535-36, 539-43, 545-47, 562, 564, 566, 581-82, 593.
- ¹⁷ Mary McCarthy, “The Hue and Cry,” *Partisan Review* (January-February 1964), p. ???.
- ¹⁸ As readers will note, my entire discussion here is drawn from the last third of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the section titled “Totalitarianism.” I have limited myself to this section for several reasons. First, unlike the first two sections of the book on anti-Semitism and imperialism, where Arendt wrote lengthy genealogies of totalitarianism’s historical preconditions, “Totalitarianism” was the only part of the book where she addressed the phenomenon of totalitarianism itself. It is her most sustained enquiry into the problem of total terror, and therefore of most interest and significance to us here. Second, this was the section of the book that received the most notice and attention throughout the Cold War. It certainly was the most influential. In recent years, scholars have profitably studied the first two sections of the book, particularly Arendt’s discussion of imperialism. While these studies are most welcome, they lie outside the framework of what I am interested in here – namely, Arendt’s contribution to a theory of fear, and its resonance throughout much of the twentieth century.
- ¹⁹ *Origins*, p. 308.
- ²⁰ *Origins*, pp. 438, 458-59; “Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps,” p. 243; Villa, pp. 16-17.
- ²¹ Elzbieta Ettinger, *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Richard Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 31-69. For persuasive critiques of the Arendt-as-Heidegger-acolyte thesis, see Villa, pp. 61-86; Benhabib, pp. 51-56,

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- 102-22; and Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 230-40.
- ²² Though see the suggestive comments in Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Canavon, pp. 60, 67, 117, 120, 186-91, 159-60, 214, 273; Benhabib, pp. 68-71.
- ²³ Canavon, p. 86; *Within Four Walls: The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher, 1936-1968*, ed. Lotte Kohler (New York: Harcourt, 2000), p. 80; Pitkin, p. 116.
- ²⁴ *Origins*, p. 461.
- ²⁵ *Origins*, 306, 311, 314-15, 348.
- ²⁶ *Origins*, pp. 311, 314. Also see "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," p. 406, where she writes, "To me, modern masses are distinguished by the fact that they are 'masses' in a strict sense of the word. They are distinguished from the multitudes of former centuries in that they do not have common interests to bind them together or any kind of common 'consent,' which, according to Cicero, constitutes *inter-est*, that which is between men, ranging all the way from material to spiritual and other matters. This 'between' can be a common ground and it can be a common purpose; it always fulfills the double function of binding men together *and* separating them in an articulate way. The lack of common interests so characteristic of the modern masses is therefore only another sign of their homelessness and rootlessness.... The loss of interests is identical with the loss of 'self.'" For a useful discussion of Arendt's different conceptions of "the people" in *Origins*, see Margaret Canovan, "The People, the Masses, and the Mobilization of Power: The Paradox of Hannah Arendt's 'Populism'," *Social Research* 69 (Summer 2002), pp. 404-11.
- ²⁷ *Origins*, 313-19, 327-29, 331, 337.
- ²⁸ *Origins*, p. 315. Though Arendt disapproved of resorting to categories of psychology to understand politics, she often entertained them in the context of totalitarianism and its mass origins. For instance: "If there is such a thing as a totalitarian personality or mentality, this extraordinary adaptability and absence of continuity are no doubt its outstanding characteristics." *Origins*, p. 306. For a useful discussion of Arendt's "moral psychology," see George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), pp. 53-55.
- ²⁹ *Origins*, pp. 317, 323-34, 465.
- ³⁰ "Totalitarian government always transformed classes into masses...." *Origins*, p. 460.
- ³¹ *Origins*, p. 316.
- ³² Few of Arendt's contemporaries and admirers heeded this caveat. Like Tocqueville, they argued that it was democracy and equality that created the conditions of totalitarianism. As one representative text in social science put it, "The plain fact is that most of the requisites of mass democracy are requisites of totalitarianism." Cited in Benjamin R. Barber, "Conceptual Foundations of Totalitarianism," in Carl J. Friedrich, Michael Curtis, and Benjamin R. Barber, *Totalitarianism in Perspective: Three Views* (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 18-19. Also see *Totalitarianism*, ed. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1954), pp. 17, 57.
- ³³ *Origins*, p. 475. Also see p. 459.
- ³⁴ *Origins*, p. 475.
- ³⁵ *Democracy in America*, p. 701.

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- ³⁶ *Origins*, pp. 476-77.
- ³⁷ *Origins*, pp. 476, 478, 315.
- ³⁸ *Origins*, p. 478.
- ³⁹ *Origins*, p. 398.
- ⁴⁰ *Origins*, pp. 305, 348, 355-56, 361-63, 412.
- ⁴¹ *Origins*, pp. 362-70.
- ⁴² *Origins*, pp. 307, 314, 349-50.
- ⁴³ *Origins*, p. 356.
- ⁴⁴ *Origins*, pp. 469-70, 477, 353.
- ⁴⁵ *Origins*, pp. 307, 381-2.
- ⁴⁶ *Origins*, pp. 472-43.
- ⁴⁷ *Origins*, p. 353.
- ⁴⁸ "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," p. 405.
- ⁴⁹ *Origins*, pp. xxxiii, 438, 441, 456-7.
- ⁵⁰ *Origins*, pp. 422, 456-57.
- ⁵¹ *Origins*, pp. 433, 443, 468.
- ⁵² "Social Science Techniques" and "On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding," in *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 236, 357.
- ⁵³ *Origins*, p. 455.
- ⁵⁴ *Origins*, p. 316.
- ⁵⁵ "On the Nature of Totalitarianism," in *Essays in Understanding*, p. 357. This statement of course only begged the question of whether what she was describing could or should be called terror. After all, if no one was afraid, if the subject of terror had been so thoroughly dominated as to experience it as a way of life, in what way could it bear any resemblance to anything associated with fear, including terror?
- ⁵⁶ "In so far as life is decline which ultimately leads to death, it can be foretold. In a dissolving society which blindly follows the natural course of ruin, catastrophe can be foreseen. Only salvation, not ruin, comes unexpectedly, for salvation and not ruin depends upon the liberty and the will of men." Arendt, "Franz Kafka: A Reevaluation," in *Essays in Understanding*, p. 74.
- ⁵⁷ *Origins*, pp. 305, 325, 374-5, 395-401, 403-49, 413, 459.
- ⁵⁸ *Origins*, p. 459.
- ⁵⁹ *Origins*, pp. xxxiii-xiv, 344, 393, 412, 440, 464.
- ⁶⁰ *Origins*, pp. 412, 454, 465-66.
- ⁶¹ *Origins*, 468.
- ⁶² By "monstrous" I do not mean horrible or awful so much as impersonal. Arendt turned terror's wielders into terror's instruments, which is what made hers a theory of monstrosity. It is this analysis of Arendt's theory as monstrous that makes me skeptical of Richard Bernstein's argument that Arendt's theory of the banality of evil in *Eichmann* is not a repudiation of her theory of radical evil in *Origins*. According to Bernstein, those who claim that the later theory is a departure from the earlier theory, believe, mistakenly, that in the earlier theory, Arendt viewed the doers of evil as possessed by a "Satanic greatness," that they were monsters or demons in the traditional, Shakespearean sense of grand villains. As he correctly points out, that is not the case; as I have argued here, Arendt claimed in *Origins* that in a very real way there were no doers of evil under totalitarianism, for there were no doers at

all. Total terror made everyone superfluous; that was its monstrosity, its radical evil. But as I will argue in the next section of this chapter, in *Eichmann*, Arendt revised this theory of superfluousness, arguing that there were in fact doers of deeds under totalitarianism. Total terror was the work of specific actors pursuing specific ends. Superfluousness no longer referred to the impersonality of the entire regime, to the loss of self and agency under the lordship of terror. Superfluousness now meant the eradication of whole groups. The Nazis sought to make the Jews superfluous. Understanding terror as the effort by a discrete group of political actors to eradicate an entire people was quite different from understanding terror as an impersonal regime that ground everyone, including the rulers, into dust. See Richard Bernstein, "From Radical Evil to the Banality of Evil: From Superfluousness to Thoughtlessness," in *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 137-53. For an excellent discussion of these issues, see Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, pp. 39-60.

⁶³ *Origins*, p. 478. "The very existence of totalitarian movements in the non-totalitarian world, that is, the appeal totalitarianism exerts on those who have all the information before them and who are warned against it day in and day out, bears eloquent witness to the breakdown of the whole structure of morality, the whole body of commands and prohibitions which had traditionally translated and embodied the fundamental ideas of freedom and justice into terms of social relationships and political institutions." "On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding," in *Essays in Understanding*, p. 328.

⁶⁴ *Origins*, p. 478.

⁶⁵ "The Image of Hell," in *Essays in Understanding*, p. 199; *Origins*, p. 441.

⁶⁶ *Origins*, p. 442. Elsewhere, she wrote, "No-one can give us a logical demonstration that we all have human rights, but the camps and the bomb between them show us what can happen if we do *not* agree to share the earth with others." As Jaspers wrote to her, "What you have learned, what you have to say, is analogous: the individual human's fear for what humanity can become. But that is *only* an analogy. For only the passive soul is resigned and says: après nous le deluge. – But you are determined that this shall not happen, and so you write and take the path of possible salvation." Canavon, p. 199; *Correspondence*, p. 105.

⁶⁷ *Origins*, pp. 327, 459-60, 478.

⁶⁸ As Margaret Canavon has rightly argued, "Her theory of action, like the rest of her political thought, is rooted in her response to totalitarianism and is not an exercise in nostalgia for the Greek polis." Canavon, p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Origins*, p. 442.

⁷⁰ John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), p. 26.

⁷¹ *Origins*, p. 459.

⁷² *Correspondence*, p. 165.

⁷³ I take this to be a fair extrapolation from Arendt's statement that "terror, in the sense we were speaking of it, is not so much something which people may fear, but a way of life." "On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding," in *Essays in Understanding*, p. 357.

⁷⁴ Cf. the following statements: "The manipulators of this system believe in their own superfluousness as much as in that of all others." "The unreality which surrounds the hellish experiment, which is so strongly felt by the inmates themselves and makes the guards, but also the prisoners, forget that murder is being committed when somebody or many are killed,..." "No one except for the leader in power at the moment is immune from terror." "The ideal type

of the totalitarian functionary is the one who functions no matter what, who has no life outside his function.” “The totalitarian dictator, in sharp distinction from the tyrant, does not believe that he is a free agent with the power to execute his arbitrary will, but, instead, the execution of laws higher than himself. The Hegelian definition of Freedom as insight into and conforming to ‘necessity’ has here found a new and terrifying realization.” *Origins*, p. 459; “Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps,” “Mankind and Terror,” and “On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding,” in *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 241, 303, 305, 346.

⁷⁵ “In the language of the Nazis, the never-resting, dynamic ‘will of the Fuehrer’ – and not his orders, a phrase that might imply a fixed and circumscribed authority – becomes the ‘supreme law’ in a totalitarian state.” *Origins*, p. 365.

⁷⁶ *Eichmann*, p. 153.

⁷⁷ One of the few claims regarding “Hitler’s willing executioners” that historians Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen agree upon is that virtually every German in Reserve Police Battalion 101 who massacred Jews in Western Poland was a willing actor. None faced any real threat of punishment or retaliation; each had and made a choice. It should be pointed out, however, that Goldhagen utterly rejects the thesis of careerism. Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992, 1998), pp. 75, 169-170, 192; Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), pp. 379-81, 384.

⁷⁸ Interestingly enough, as Browning reports in his study of Hitler’s Reserve Police Battalion 101, of the few battalion members who refused to participate in massacres of the Jews in Western Poland, the two most voluble explained their reluctance by the fact that they, unlike their comrades, had no career ambitions within the police. As one put it, “I was somewhat older than and moreover a reserve officer, so it was not particularly important to me to be promoted or otherwise to advance, because I had my prosperous business back home. The company chiefs...on the other hand were young men and career policemen who wanted to become something.” Browning, pp. 75, 169-70.

⁷⁹ *Eichmann*, pp. 287, 45.

⁸⁰ *Eichmann*, pp. 29, 31-33, 52, 61-62, 81-82, 113, 126, 234.

⁸¹ George Winstanley, “A New-Years Gift for the Parliament and Armie,” in *Divine Right and Democracy: An Anthology of Political Writing in Stuart England*, ed. David Wootton (New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 321; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality Among Men*, in *Rousseau’s Political Writings*, ed. Alan Ritter and Julia Conaway Bondanella (New York: Penguin, 1988), p. 52.

⁸² For classic statements of this argument, see Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Anne Choler et al (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), II.4, V.11, V.1, VIII.6, XI.1-6, pp. 18, 57-58, 72-73, 116-17, 154-66; *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1987), Nos. 10 and 51, pp. 122-28, 319-22; Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 63-86, 89-103; Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, 1982), pp. 7-36.

⁸³ Referring to Hungary in the 1980s, Michael Burawoy writes, “Working-class consciousness was layered with strong petty bourgeois inclinations that subverted class unity.” Michael

Burawoy, “Dwelling in Capitalism, Traveling Through Socialism,” in *The Critical Study of Work: Labor, Technology and Global Production*, ed. R. Badoz, C. Koeber, and P. Kraft (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), p. 32.

⁸⁴ Likewise Brecht’s *Galileo*, which also explores the connections between careerism and persecution, is a play, not a treatise.

⁸⁵ When she did mention jobholding, it was only to say that it didn’t matter: Few Nazis had any “genuine interest in specific jobs;” such interest had been pulverized by ideology, unemployment, and the assembly line. Though she admitted that Himmler understood that “most people are neither bohemians, fanatics, adventurers, sex maniacs, crackpots, nor social failures, but first and foremost job holders and good family men,” she concluded that his genius lay in his recognition deep within the jobholder lay a desire “to sacrifice everything.” *Origins*, pp. 339, 409, 459, 475. Also see “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility,” in *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 128-29. For hints of Arendt’s evolving view of the political significance of jobholding (as opposed to her more philosophical explorations in *The Human Condition* of the distinctions between work and labor), which would come to fruition in *Eichmann*, see *Correspondence*, pp. 212, 223.

⁸⁶ *Eichmann*, pp. 65, 75-76.

⁸⁷ *Eichmann*, p. 126.

⁸⁸ *Eichmann*, pp. 31-32.

⁸⁹ *Eichmann*, pp. 111, 134.

⁹⁰ *Between Friends*, p. 275.

⁹¹ *Eichmann*, p. 286.

⁹² *Eichmann*, p. 75.

⁹³ *Eichmann*, p. 93.

⁹⁴ *Eichmann*, p. 42.

⁹⁵ *Eichmann*, p. 105. It should be noted that Arendt here states that in making such appeals, Himmler explicitly avoid justifying the Nazis’ crimes “in ideological terms.” By that, however, she means simply that Himmler did not refer explicitly to the formal doctrines of Nazism. Yet, the quotes she cites here from Himmler make it clear that when he spoke of the grand historical task ahead of them, he was referring to “the Jewish question.” That Arendt would refuse to call this ideology is merely an instance of her failure to take seriously the idea of anti-Semitism. In any event, even if Arendt were correct about the issue of anti-Semitism, there is little reason to agree with her claim that appeals to human ambition and political grandeur are not ideological.

⁹⁶ *Eichmann*, pp. 29, 46, 47, 238.

⁹⁷ Eichmann’s bragging was an effort “to break out of his anonymity.” *Eichmann*, p. 238.

⁹⁸ *Eichmann*, p. 33.

⁹⁹ *Eichmann*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁰ *Eichmann*, p. 93.

¹⁰¹ *Eichmann*, pp. 93, 105, 135-38, 143-150.

¹⁰² *Eichmann*, p. 276.

¹⁰³ *Eichmann*, pp. 85-86, 277.

¹⁰⁴ Again, Browning provides evidence on behalf of Arendt’s insights. According to Browning, the leaders of Reserve Police Battalion 101 worked hard, summoning every ideological argument in the Nazi arsenal – from anti-Semitism to appeals to history to denunciations of

moral cowardice – to persuade ordinary soldiers to kill Jews. And where ideas failed, alcohol succeeded. Browning, pp. 2, 56, 69, 73-74, 82, 159, 162, 177, 184-86.

¹⁰⁵ *Eichmann*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁶ *Eichmann*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁷ “On the Nature of Totalitarianism,” in *Essays in Understanding*, p. 357.

¹⁰⁸ *Eichmann*, pp. 269, 277, 279. Thus do I take issue with the claims of Villa and Bernstein, both of whom, in their different ways, conflate Arendt’s treatment of the superfluousness of individuals, best seen in *Origins*, with her treatment of the superfluousness of peoples, best seen in *Eichmann*. In *Origins*, superfluousness meant the individual’s loss of significance and utility, and it was best captured by the sheer invisibility of the totalitarian leader himself; in *Eichmann*, superfluousness meant the obsolescence of a discrete people, such as the Jews. See Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, pp. 13-14, 19-20; Bernstein, pp. 143-45. I also take issue with the longstanding accusation of Arendt’s critics who claim that she showed a greater appreciation of the evils of the Holocaust, of the assault on the Jewish people, in *Origins of Totalitarianism* than she did in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. If anything, as I indicate, Arendt in *Origins* was far less concerned with these crimes as crimes against the Jews or crimes against a people (“crimes against humanity”) than she was in *Eichmann*.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Young-Bruehl, p. 356.

¹¹⁰ *Eichmann*, pp. 120, 124, 165, 171-73, 279.

¹¹¹ *Eichmann*, pp. 11-12, 124-25.

¹¹² *Correspondence*, p. 417.

¹¹³ *Eichmann*, p. 125.

¹¹⁴ *Eichmann*, pp. 10-11, 39, 117, 131-33, 154, 186-88.

¹¹⁵ “An Exchange of Letters between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt,” in *The Jew as Pariah*, pp. 250-51. Though Jaspers agreed with Arendt’s thesis of the banality of evil, he disputed the universality of Arendt’s claim regarding evil. As he wrote in a letter to her, “The point is that *this* evil, not evil per se, is banal. I wasn’t altogether happy with your phrasing of this point in your response to Scholem. *What* evil is stands *behind* your phrase characterizing Eichmann.” Jaspers’s response was quite ironic, given that it may have been he who first provided Arendt with the basis for her notion of the banality of evil – not as a specific account of Eichmann but of the Nazis as a whole. See *Correspondence*, pp. 542, 62.

¹¹⁶ *Correspondence*, p. 62.

¹¹⁷ *Between Friends*, p. 166. For more on Arendt’s “enjoying the Eichmann business,” see *Correspondence*, p. 479.

¹¹⁸ Goldhagen explicitly refutes Arendt’s atomization thesis. Goldhagen, pp. 580-81. For an older account, see William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town 1922-1945* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1954, 1984).

¹¹⁹ Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 105.

¹²⁰ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Volume 1: The Years of Persecution* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 73-112; Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹²¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996).

¹²² Getty, pp. 6, 14.

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- ¹²³ Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 8; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 175-78.
- ¹²⁴ Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 161-63.
- ¹²⁵ Fitzpatrick, p. 208.
- ¹²⁶ Richard Bernstein, "The Origins of Totalitarianism: Not History, but Politics," *Social Research* (Summer 2002), pp. 382, 391; Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, pp. 13-14, 37-38, though see his thoughtful qualifications on pp. 52-60.
- ¹²⁷ See, among others, Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 91, 98-101; Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 3-4; Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule* (New York: Basic, 1996), p. 27; Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine, 1995, 1996); Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 109-14.
- ¹²⁸ Isaac, pp. 60-64; Irving Howe, "Totalitarianism Reconsidered: Yesterday's Theories, Today's Realities," *Dissent* (Winter 1991), p. 67. For a more muted, careful statement, see Kateb, p. 54.
- ¹²⁹ In addition to the sources cited in footnotes 120-127 above, also see *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, ed. Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya, and Thomas Lahusen (New York: New Press, 1995); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Tina Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghosts After Communism* (New York: Vintage, 1995); Patricia Politzer, *Fear in Chile: Lives Under Pinochet* (New York: New Press, 1989, 2001); Lawrence Wechsler, *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990, 1998); Tina Rosenberg, *Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America* (New York: Penguin, 1991), pp. 77-142, 333-87; Mark Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote: A Parable of the Cold War* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Daniel Wilkinson, *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002).
- ¹³⁰ Kristin Ross, *May Day and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 150-51; Todd Gitlin and Sean Wilentz, "To Those Who Supported the Nader Campaign," *Dissent* (Spring 2001), pp. 93-96.