Mechanisms of Totalitarian Development

by

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Abstract: There has been quite a bit of public discourse in the United States over the past decade about the future of democracy. Early twentieth century totalitarianism spread in societies across Europe. The spread of totalitarianism quickly hijacked democratic institutions and turned neighbors against one another. How did this happen? Hannah Arendt lived during the spread of totalitarianism. In her seminal work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt described the ways in which totalitarian impulses infected Europe. At about the same time, totalitarian societies were being diagnosed by another author, George Orwell, in his novel *1984*. Despite the differences in audience and methodology, the two authors have much in common. The vital conditions described by Arendt and Orwell include loneliness, disappearance of social bonds, and the emergence of mass politics. The cases presented by Arendt and Orwell help us understand which seeds of totalitarianism exist in our own society.

Introduction

Despite decades since the writing of George Orwell's classic novels *1984* and *Animal Farm* and Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism,* these works remain relevant in our modern context. Although the word "fascist" remains disturbingly unclear in modern political discourse, Orwell described the word as having lost its "last vestige of meaning"[1] because its use was employed inconsistently and was often weaponized in order to label anyone who was not liked. In subsequent decades, the word has not regained its meaning, remaining a rhetorical cudgel for opportunistic political actors.

However, fascistic, and, more importantly totalitarian movements are socio-political phenomena that did come to exist. Totalitarian movements had popular support and led to the destruction of the previous relatively tolerant societies in which they arose. Despite plenty of misuse around the term "fascist"it remains a possibility that a totalitarian movement could come to exist in our modern world. It is of the utmost importance to understand the mechanisms by which totalitarian regimes come to power, enforce their rule, and win support among the people.

I argue that totalitarian leadership naturally emerges from preexistent mob politics, rather than the view placing emphasis on personal or individual charisma as a necessary characteristic of leaders. Next, I explore the role of propaganda to see to what extent the success of totalitarian movements is predicated on lies and deception. Then, I discuss how social institutions like class, religion, and family moderate the relationship between the individual and society, and how the dissolution of these institutions play an important role in creating the necessary preconditions for totalitarian development.

The development of totalitarian rule is predicated on two processes of destruction, that of societal bonds and institutions, and that of the individual itself. These are the characteristics of totalitarian rule that differentiate it from more common authoritarian governments and tyrannies. When discussing the chances of the development of totalitarian rule in the Far East, Arendt highlighted the importance of "man's typical feeling of superfluousness"[2] in contributing to a culture where totalitarianism can thrive. Later, she stated that in addition to destroying public life, "totalitarian domination as a form of government is new in that it is not content with this isolation and destroys private life as well."[3]

Theoretical Framework

Arendt and Orwell laid the theoretical framework behind an investigation of a developmental view of fascism. Orwell used narrative to convey the feeling and mood of totalitarian society, particularly in *1984* and *Animal Farm,* in which he displayed an inside view of living in the revolution and the post-revolutionary state. His other essays and works shed light on psychological factors like groupthink, social pressure, and an importance of charisma in a totalitarian leader.

Orwell placed an overt emphasis in *1984* on the tools of a totalitarian regime, including control over thought, torture, and enforcement of contradictions onto its people through state violence and threats. More subtly and especially in his other works, he described crippling social loneliness and atomization that an individual in a totalitarian society feels. Atomization is the process of separating an individual from their social and cultural connections to institutions, communities, and practices. An atomized society is one in which many of the factors that contribute to social cohesion and connectedness have been weakened or dissolved entirely. The idea of social pressure as a method of control permeated many of his works, and clearly had a large impact on his thoughts about society. I examine Orwell's conception of what the necessary preconditions of totalitarianism are, and how ordinary people interact with increasingly despotic and controlling government and social structures.

Origins of Totalitarianism provides the primary lens through which I analyze Arendt's view, although other readings are also used. Arendt laid down a history of totalitarianism in twentieth century Europe, starting from its fascination with antisemitism leading into imperialism. She showed how these forces work within a societal nihilism that exemplifies a lost faith in the traditional principles of morality. This loss of faith amplifies the willingness of the people to find the new world philosophy of consistency, which is promised and ostensibly provided by totalitarian movements.

Arendt's view highlighted social institutions as moderating forces within a society and discussed how they were gradually broken down by historical and political forces to create mass politics, which brought to the fore a new kind of politics and a new political project, totalitarianism, to go along with it. Without moderating institutions, totalitarian movements can destroy truth, the individual, and even history itself. She described in detail the mechanisms of development and control that were used in the totalitarian movements of the twentieth century.

Orwell's account of totalitarianism differed in its scope and applicability, but it connected well with many of Arendt's propositions on how and why fascism can come to power. Together, they present a larger picture of totalitarianism and how it developed historically and could develop contemporarily. They showed fundamental agreement about the utmost importance of loneliness and fear as factors in the development of such movements. Both perspectives show how truth becomes destroyed, and how reality must exist and be preserved for a society to remain free.

Charisma

George Orwell's view of fascism emphasized the role of the cult of the charismatic individual, the appropriation of political fervor or instability, and control over individual thought. This leads to an indifference to objective truth[4] and the erosion of the individual as a free thinker and autonomous actor. In Orwell's framework, fascistic development could happen quickly, with the masses of a nation changing their beliefs in an instant.

Many of Orwell's writings on fascism regarded how it operates once already in power. However, he believed that fascist movements could easily be manufactured by charismatic leaders with grand visions for the future. In his *Review of Adolph Hitler's "Mein Kampf"*, Orwell stated that while "It is easy to say that at one stage of his career he was financed by the heavy industrialists… They would not have backed him, however, if he had not talked a great movement into existence already."[5] Implied in this is that Hitler's leadership of the movement preexisted the strength of the movement itself. That he brought into existence that the people would readily swing from their present ideology to a fascist alternative. In *The Road to Wigan Pier,* Orwell stated that, "the astute young social-literary climbers who are Communists now, … will be Fascists five years hence."[6] There are many reasons Orwell believed that society would turn on a dime; he clearly believed that the power of social pressure is nearly inexorable.

He attributed much of Hitler's success in mobilizing the movement to personal charisma. Orwell himself found Hitler's personality to be in some way appealing. He wrote, "The fact is that there is something deeply appealing about him."[7] Orwell described how Hitler presented himself to be an almost heroic, self-sacrificing victim struggling against the forces of destiny. Doubtless, this is exactly how Hitler wanted to be viewed. Of course, Orwell recognized that Hitler was a force for evil in the world, and unequivocally stated that he should die. However, he also clearly gave Hitler's force of personality its due, and Hitler created a cult of personality around himself, which has been subject of fascination for many researchers.

Arendt had a different vision of the impact of personal charisma. Her emphasis was not on the leaders of totalitarian movements and parties, but the people they represent. She wrote that, "the totalitarian leader is nothing more nor less than the functionary of the masses he leads."[8] She quoted one of Hitler's speeches to the Sturmabteilung and other party members in 1936,[9] "all that you are, you are through me; all that I am, I am through you alone."[10]

Arendt did not discount Hitler's charisma. She explicitly stated that people around the world had a "fascination to which allegedly no one was immune."[11] He had a magnetism that attracted people to him, convinced people of his authority, and made people think he was a genius or even a Christlike figure. However, his charisma was not the gift that allowed him the societal fascination that he received. In a footnote in *Origins*, she dismissed the importance of his personal charisma in becoming as powerful as he did. She claimed that "fascination is a social phenomenon"[12] and his "magic spell" had much more to do with the society in which he existed.

Given this view, the crowd he spoke to desired confidence and resoluteness, and he spoke with confidence and played the part of a genius until people believed he was one. In addition, despite Hitler's charisma his influence as an individual was largely impermanent. Arendt pointed out that Hitler himself had little to do with the neo-Nazi and fascist movements of postwar Germany. Hitler the individual died, but the movement continues in modern times because it does not rely on him to guide it.

The "totalitarian delusion" does not rest with the leaders of the movements, but with the people under a specific set of societal preconditions. While Orwell was correct about how quickly societies can turn to fascism, Arendt showed that this swift change of heart may not be due to the persistent and personal charm of the totalitarian leader. Instead this swift change may be due to the preexisting social prejudices to which the leader panders and fearmongers. Arendt's perspective relegates personal charisma to a far less important role than many others would like to think. As long as the people have an outlet through which they can channel their anger, the movement will continue.

Propaganda

Propaganda is an important way for leaders to mobilize their supporters. It helps in the pre-totalitarian context to create the necessary preconditions for totalitarian takeover. It was used in the fascist and communist regimes to encourage the people to unite for the common good. For example, Hitler used lies and rhetoric to push a message of the fundamental essence of a nation.

He convinced those around him to unite around the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft,* or "national community". This concept entailed total national unity, and the abolition of class conflict with a message of racial purity. He lied about Jewish conspiracies. Hitler said what he needed to in order to get people to follow him.

However, the lies employed by Hitler and his propagandists may not have been the reason for his success. Rather, Hitler's lies and pre-takeover propaganda served to prime the populace and plant the seeds of a common enemy, the Jews. He also wanted to convince people of the necessity of action in the face of his perceived enemy. However, Arendt did not believe that the popularity of these leaders is due to "the victory of masterful and lying propaganda over ignorance and stupidity."[13] She explained that the Nazi propaganda leading up to totalitarian rule was not always full of lies, but that the Nazis often stated clearly and exactly what they intended to do, "boasting of their past crimes and carefully outlining future ones."[14]

Indeed, in Hitler's speeches in 1922, before his rise to power, he clearly stated his intent. He said of Jewish leaders,"they see that behind them the anti-Semitic wave grows and grows; and when the masses once recognize the facts, that is the end of these leaders." He wrote of democracy that "Democracy is fundamentally not German: It is Jewish"[15] and that, "there are only two possibilities: either victory of the Aryan, or annihilation of the Aryan and the victory of the Jew." In another speech, Hitler said of Jews that, "For there is one thing he knows quite well: in the last resort there is only one danger which he has to fear and that danger is this young movement"[16]. He called for the explicit expulsion of Jews, and to relegate them to concentration camps[17].

Not only did Hitler make his intent for the Jewish people clear, he also made it clear that he waned to dismantle the state and recreate it in revolutionary fashion. The rhetoric that he promoted long before he came to power was quite explicit in terms of the goals of the movement. Although Hitler obviously also peddled lies about Jews and foreigners, and concealed some of his own intent, he also made it clear that he was directly threatening the Jews, as well as the foundation of the state itself. He was effective in garnering public support despite stating his goals explicitly, mainly because of the societal preconditions in which he operated, namely the dissolution of the class structures of the State into the masses.

Nazi rhetoric was accepted and embraced by the people who knew full well what it meant. A centuries-long history of anti-semitism and socioeconomic conflict left them willing to accept the characterization of the Jews as the enemy. They accepted the idea that unity in the face of a Jewish threat mattered more than the rights of Jewish people. To say that the people broadly

did not know what was happening is to obfuscate and evade responsibility. Hitler explicitly called for violence against the enemy and said that however the social system was to be created after his revolution did not matter, because this State would naturally realize itself from the "essential character" of the people. After calling for unity in the fight against the common enemy, the Jews, Hitler said,

> How afterward we divide up this State, friends - we have no wish to dispute over that! The form of a State results from the essential character of a people, results from necessities which are so elementary and powerful that in time every individual will realize them without any disputation when once all Germany is united and free.[18]

The German people at the time passively accepted an obvious play for political power to the detrimental expense of Jewish people. They did so because of their previously bleak experiences of World War I and dissolution of social institutions that left them atomized and apathetic towards their fellow citizens. The long European history of antisemitism has many models of explanation. Arendt wrote that the rise in antisemitism was a result of the sudden lack of reliance of Jewish financiers along with their continuing wealth and separation from national power structures.[19] Given the long culture of European antisemitism, along with Germany's humiliation at the treaty of Versailles, German citizens were already primed for the rhetoric that Hitler advanced. Hitler did not require charisma or lies to send the most important thrust of his message. All he had to do was channel the loneliness and hate that was already there.

The Masses

Arendt said that Hitler recognized the fact of his interdependence on the masses of the German *Volk*. Her view was that totalitarianism was only possible in a society of "masses", which are explicitly distinct from the concept of social class. Ordinarily, the binds of social class and other institutions constrain people in their political and social action, in accordance with the interests of their class. However, the masses are a group in which the constraints provided by social class and context are no longer strong enough to hold these people together, resulting in a large group of atomized and isolated people. These are the people who are key to the growth and development of authoritarianism and totalitarianism.

Arendt made the case that totalitarian movements latch on to these people and provide them with an appetite for politics. These newly politically organized movements inject a new attitude into a political mainstream. This new attitude does not have the same respect for the norms in which traditional politics is conducted, because they are placed against the political

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system rather than being incorporated into it.[20] This opposition, having been previously excluded from the political system, has little experience with the methods of politics in the status quo and are thus more willing to engage in riskier political behavior, especially when encouraged by a mobilizing force.

If these people can be mobilized into masses and separated from traditional class structures, they may respond to this atomization with tribal nationalism. When class interests disappear, those politically similar forces and interests that generally cohere social groups are replaced with lack of interest cohesion. This lack can be filled with the interests of whatever movement is mobilizing the masses because "the masses do not inherit… the standards and attitudes of the dominating class"[21].

The important question to answer is exactly how these masses are created. Arendt argued that is achieved through two distinct processes: dissolution of social institutions and dissolution of individual autonomy. By first destroying that which holds us together as a society, the leader creates a people yearning for connection. Then, by fusing the concept of the State with personal identity, Hitler was able to recreate the State and it's society as one entity. Hitler made it very clear that he wanted the traditional structures of society to dissolve, and in their place he wanted one German *Volk,* the *Volksgemeinschaft.*

Orwell saw, too, how important it was for a totalitarian State to eliminate the bonds of loyalty to social institutions other than the State. In *Animal farm,* he displayed the complete and utter loyalty to the totalitarian cause during the purges. When leader "Napoleon" had four so-called "conspirators" brutally killed, more animals stepped forth to accept the same punishment, even after witnessing what would happen to them. This behavior displays the absolute commitment and the fusion of personal and national identity that Arendt described. It is a fusion that Hitler clearly attempted to achieve on a mass scale.

Social Institutions

The social institutions of class, religion, and political parties, along with the threat of statelessness, and even the family, helped the German movement create the atomized masses especially susceptible to totalitarian leadership. Many of these social institutions had been previously weakened by the forces of Imperialism, which encouraged the flouting of national boundaries and traditional power structures. The decline of institutions was also exacerbated by the social traumas of World War 1 and the philosophical nihilism that had taken hold. These institutions faced a unique period of vulnerability and were exploited by opportunistic leaders and weaponized against themselves.

Socio-economic class is an extremely important social institution in both Orwell and Arendt's reckoning of totalitarianism. Class structures make up one of the most important aspects in identifying a person's relationship with the society in which they live. Different socioeconomic classes have dramatically different social experiences and prejudices. Broadly, social class separates people based on a combination of social and economic factors, and this separation leads to specific political interests for different social classes. Social class contributed greatly to the ability of one to participate in politics and obtain political representation.[22]

While not as strictly rigid as feudal class structures, European social class in the 1800s and early 1900s determined the potential for educational attainment, responsibility to the State, and private wealth. Those who had accumulated wealth but did not lay within the higher strata of European society had been politically emancipated and provided with the ability to begin to demand representation and power, and so were provided with a similar class interest. The traditional aristocratic powers were laid in opposition to the increasing power of the bourgeoisie. The very poor had been largely neglected over the course of European history and were also primed with anger and resentment at the status quo. But the poor were held back by apathy, a lack of power, and a status quo that pitted them against each other in competitive institutional structures[23].

Another important social institution is that of religion and the relationship it has between the individual and society has been a critical part of navigating social identity for centuries. Throughout Hitler's regime, he attempted to subordinate the various churches of Germany under his authority. This was attempted through the creation of a *Reichskirche,* meaning "imperial church" through incorporating into the political sphere the authority of existing religious establishments, both Catholic and Protestant.[24] Religion as a social institution is a powerful influence on people's personal and moral identity. Given the power that it had over people, politically independent religious groups posed a clear threat to Nazi domination. Hitler's totalitarian movement had a lot of support among Protestant religious authorities, who adopted his ideological views quickly, hoping that Hitler would restore some of the privileges that the Protestant church had before the secularization process of the Weimar government.[25]

The German Christian Movement was a Protestant organization that sought to bring Protestantism in line with Nazi ideology. In Germany at the time, there was a formal confederation of 28 Protestant churches of various sects, primarily the Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches. The German Christian movement managed to get enough power within this organization to install Ludwig Müller, a pro Nazi theologian as the head of the confederation in 1933[26]. The goal of the Nazi State was to create a unified German Evangelical Church that would fuse the religious authority of the church with the ideology of the party. In a 1933 speech Müller

said, "As he has done to every people, so the eternal God has also to our people given its own particular innate law. This has materialized in the Fuhrer Adolf Hitler… Adolf Hitler shall grow the German Christian National Church which will include the entire people. One people! One God! One Reich! One church!"[27]

This would destroy the ability of any of the German Protestant churches to establish anti-Nazi sentiment and bring the moral authority of Christianity into the fold of the totalitarian ideology. Indeed, Hitler himself was often characterized as a Christ-like figure and used religious language to support his rhetoric.[28] Speaking of the National Government, Hitler said that it has, "a duty to reestablish the unity of spirit and will of our *Volk*. It will preserve and defend the foundations upon which the power of our nation rests. It will extend its strong, protecting hand over Christianity as the basis of our entire morality."[29] Hitler explicitly evoked Christianity as part of the fundamental foundations of Nazi belief during the beginning of his rise to power.

Again, stating exactly what his actions and intentions were he said, "to secure for the German Volk the great religious, moral and ethical values anchored in the two Christian confessions, we have eliminated the political organizations while, at the same time, reinforcing the religious institutions."[30] His goal was to morph German Christianity into a tool of Nazi control and doctrine, and to use it to claim moral and spiritual legitimacy.

While complete domination of religious practice failed in Nazi Germany, the German State attempted to and, in some degree, succeeded in hollowing out the socio-political power that religion held during Hitler's regime. Many initially resisted Nazi rule and denounced the belief system being pushed by the Nazi party. The Catholic church initially resisted but later in the war ended up cooperating with the Nazi government. Perhaps the most ardent and consistent religious opponents to Hitler's regime were the Jehovah's Witnesses.[31] Notably, after the failure of the creation of a united Nazi church, Hitler stopped speaking about Christianity in his speeches and changed his tune about its importance to the regime. "Today a new State is being established, the unique feature of which is that it sees its foundation not in Christianity and not in a concept of State; rather, it places its primary emphasis on the self-contained *Volksgemeinschaft*."[32]

While many Nazi Party members ended up in specifically Nazi-oriented religious sects, Christianity itself was not even necessary for the Nazi party. Indeed, many Nazi party members turned away from Christianity entirely to embrace forms of Nordic paganism, "Indo-Aryan" belief systems, and other mystical and spiritual beliefs.[33] However, in the end, what mattered the most was that whatever belief system was followed, it upheld and promoted the ideology of the Nazi party and subordinated itself to the power of the State. Many belief systems became mere vehicles of ideology for those in power to provide a spiritual basis for their social, political, and

racial claims by hollowing out old religious traditions and replacing the substance with new content.[34] The goal of the Nazi government was to subjugate other religious by depriving "religious groups [of]… independent identity but maintain[ing] an external existence." [35]

Even the idea of the family is under attack under totalitarian rule. Arendt discussed how even equality of condition is not sufficient for totalitarian rule. For true totalitarianism to take root, all "nonpolitical communal bonds between subjects, such as family ties and common cultural interests" must cease to be nonpolitical.[36] As Arendt explained, social bonds created for their own sake are not created for the interests of the nation, and so pose a threat to total control.

What the dissolution of these social institutions (among others) lead to is the narrowing of options when it comes to the individual's relationship to their society. Normally, social institutions act as a sorting and organizing mechanism for individuals to form subgroups within the broader society. They can (but don't necessarily) create communities in which people feel like they belong. These communities often end up becoming more important to the individual's identity than one's identification with the nation. Communities and intermediate social associations, especially a plurality of competing ones, serve as "constraining tissue" for behavior and moral norms, which prevent citizens from becoming entirely alienated from society[37] by providing a community on a human scale as opposed to a national or global scale.[38]

Alexis de Tocqueville posed the question in *Democracy in America,* "What political power would ever be in a State to suffice for the innumerable multitude of small undertakings…?"[39] When there are many small competing associations, their cumulative social power and connective force poses an immense challenge to the totalizing push of totalitarian movements. Smaller sub-communities are important in providing an alternative basis for self-identification that is either nonpolitical or unassociated with the totalitarian movements. In multitudes they create a robust set of potential identities for those living within the sphere of these competing associations.

Control

For both authors, the goal of totalitarian movements is to break down these communities. In *The Doctrine of Fascism,* Benito Mussolini wrote that, "The Fascist conception of the State is all embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value."[40] If someone has no other moderating social institutions to belong to, the nation is left as an alternative. "The people" of the nation as a social entity becomes the largest and only group yet caters to no individual within it.

These are the atomized masses that Arendt described. Masses have nothing standing between themselves and the State and belong only to the same group as everyone else. However, no one belongs within the group because it recognizes no differentiation between individuals. Whatever leader emerges from these masses then has the unmitigated power of the people and can claim legitimacy as the conduit of the people, a claim Hitler made many times. In this way, political power is supplemented with the social power over the individual and this forms the key distinction of totalitarian movements.

The goal of individual control is the other key aspect in the development of totalitarian regimes, along with the destruction of societal bonds. This goal was explicit in Mussolini's *Doctrine of Fascism.* He wrote that there can be "No individuals or groups (political parties, cultural associations, economic unions, social classes) outside the State"[41] under fascism. Mussolini wanted the State to eclipse mere politics and take on a transcendent role in human experience. "The Fascist State, as a higher and more powerful expression of personality, is a force, but a spiritual one. It sums up all the manifestations of the moral and intellectual life of man."[42] The State was thought of as absolute, resolute, and the direct rejection of all long-obsolete spiritual practices, as well as a rejection of the individual, except where the interests of the individual overlap with those of the State.

To accomplish the totalitarian State, it is necessary to diminish the individual in favor of "the people". Outlined both in *Animal Farm* and *Origins* is the seemingly bizarre fact that a person becomes "willing to help in their own prosecution and frame [their] own death sentence if only his status as a member of the movement is not touched."[43] Orwell displayed this phenomenon in *Animal Farm,* when during the purges by the totalitarian leader, members of the farm gave themselves up as part of the conspiracy that did not even exist. They watched their comrades die in front of them for confessing to being part of the plot, and then do so themselves and are summarily killed.

This phenomenon is baffling because it represents the dissolution of the self-preservation instinct and the sake of the movement. However, it speaks to the primary difference between traditional autocracy and totalitarianism that Arendt makes in *Origins*. Whereas autocracies historically focus on one-party political rule, totalitarian societies develop complete control over not only the State, but also the mind of the individual. Besides breaking down social institutions, totalitarian rule comes about through the deliberate destruction of the unique individual. Their personality, morality, and individuality must become one with the masses and thus the State.

Neutrality in any pursuit cannot be allowed; such a pursuit could provide a *raison d'être* to the masses separate from the *raison d'état* of the totalitarian society. To the totalitarian leader, these concepts must be fused. Popular adherence to any social nonpolitical action, community, or principle is anathema to this goal.

Destroying the individual begins by isolating them politically and socially, culminating in existential loneliness. Arendt called loneliness, "the essence of totalitarian government,"[44] and Orwell exemplified the lonely and atomized individual in *1984.* Here we see Winston, a person who is isolated and controlled by the fascistic political structure in which he lives. Winston wrote in his diary, "To a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone … from the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude."[45]

To not feel like you belong to society and to feel unnecessary to it is an extremely prevalent problem. Loneliness in this way feels desperate and inescapable, and so terribly "other" that it could feel as though one is dead. Both Arendt and Orwell described the totalitarian citizenry as "living corpses" and to be already dead. Totalitarianism supposedly promises a way out of the loneliness, through the great unity of the *Volk,* but individuals must sacrifice their identity and their own perceptions of reality. Arendt and Orwell shared the view that totalitarian citizens must fuse their whole identity with that of the State and trust the nation to guide them.

Destroying the Individual

Totalitarian society manufactures loneliness through its use of terror. One of the ways in which terror is inflicted upon the people is through the secret police and torture. The secret police play an important role in totalitarian governments. Although they do not engage in the activities commonly ascribed to the police, they are important in cementing the policies of the leader. They encourage the general population to spy on each other and organize such efforts to an unprecedented degree. As Arendt and Orwell described it, this meant that no one could possibly trust one another with any sort of serious thought, lest they betray them.

The secret police also serve to simply enforce fear in society by seeking out enemies, or in the case of more developed totalitarian regimes, completely random people to "liquidate". Arbitrarily killing may seem unnecessary, but for Arendt and Orwell, it served to break the concept of martyrdom and further alienate the citizenry from their fellows. Those who would risk their personal safety and die for it under a totalitarian regime would be seen differently from others if not for arbitrary killing by secret police. Because innocent and guilty alike share in the same fate no matter what they do, becoming a martyr for a cause loses its power, and relegates even suicide to a meaningless gesture.

The terror of the secret police, along with the concentration camps, fundamentally and permanently psychologically altered the population.[46] Especially in the camps, people were treated as if they were already dead.[47] The police explicitly attempted to break down the individual's personality and change them into an animal-like being. The camps' most important purpose was not the value of the forced labor they employed, but "The killing of man's individuality"[48] itself.

Also important to creating a citizenry ideal for totalitarian rule is keeping the population in a perpetual state of movement. Noted by both Arendt and Orwell is the ability of leaders to constantly change the direction of the movement, along with its reasons and enemies. Arendt wrote that the Nazi and Soviet party lines were constantly fluctuating for purely utilitarian reasons. The idea of "What is useful today can be injurious tomorrow,"[49] makes a clear presence in Orwell's writings as well, especially in *1984* and *Animal Farm*.[50]

These societal conditions enable the development of any totalitarian movement. The individual has been systematically broken down and recreated in the form of the Ideal subject, "people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction and the distinction between true and false no longer exist."[51] Both Arendt and Orwell described these people as being rendered absolute slaves of the totalitarian State, to be used and disposed of at the whim of the leader. Thus the individual no longer has any relationship with the society except through the political, and no relationship to themselves except obedience.

Orwell's totalitarianism differed from that of Arendt's in that it was a more politically created movement pushed by certain individuals through lies and charisma. Once in power, the leader rules through sheer force, rigid class structure, lies, and fear. Orwell's totalitarianism is a distinct and acutely political phenomenon. He believed that the people are more easily fooled or coerced into supporting totalitarian leaders by the strongman leader, who seeks the power of a king but aided by the means, reach, and power of modern technology. These enabling factors create a new kind of monarch or dictator with absolute socio-political control over his subjects.

Arendt described totalitarianism as a social phenomenon instead. It was neither inevitable nor easily foreseeable. It was a result of centuries of political and social factors, catalyzed by a moment in history during times when institutions were weak. In such moments of societal decay and despair, the people will accept repugnant things just to cling to something. She was one of the early scholars who identified totalitarianism as a distinctly different form of government than previous dictatorships, monarchies, and tyrannies. In totalitarianism the leader grows from the masses and channels and morphs them into a façade of unity. The masses cling to the consistency promised by totalitarian ideology, traumatized by the destruction of traditional social mores and political institutions.

Conclusion

I think Orwell understood much about the mechanisms of totalitarian rule, and the societal preconditions of a totalitarian movement. However, I think that his model of totalitarianism is flawed in that it is based on the motivations, means, and end of a traditional authoritarian king or dictator, and not on totalitarianism as an entirely new form of government. The perspectives of Orwell and Arendt share much; the importance of loneliness, how masses form through atomization, and the dissolution of social institutions. Both authors described a feeling of history and reality itself coming to an end under the rule of fascist governments.

Comparing the writings of Orwell and Arendt underscores the conditions that the mechanisms by which totalitarian leaders come to power can and must be understood. A totalitarian movement does not need a single charismatic leader to talk the State into existence; rather the leader emerges naturally from the preexistent mob. The totalitarian State furthers the mob mentality of the people through the destruction of social institutions in order to isolate the individual from society. Once isolated, the destruction of the individual can take place. Both Orwell and Arendt illustrated that the State keeps the people in a perpetual confusion mired in terror and takes away the significance of any action that any individual could take.

The complete subjection of individuals and their social context is what differentiates totalitarianism from traditional authoritarian or tyrannical regimes. Despite the horror inflicted under those regimes, their reemergence remains a distinct possibility. Arendt and Orwell both recognized that the totalitarian temptation will likely remain with us because the means and rewards of doing so retain their availability and allure. There will always be reasons to engage in totalitarian politics, especially now as large geopolitical problems look increasingly unsolvable by the traditional mechanisms of political engagement and action. The perception of unsolvable problems delegitimizes social institutions which then appear superfluous and, thus, worthy of dissolution.

Although we sling around the word "fascist" in modern political life and can understand the uniqueness of historical context in which twentieth century fascism arose, it is possible to recognize where we find the seeds of a real totalitarianism planted in our own societies. Totalitarianism grows where individuals have been alienated from their society, and their identities absorbed into the masses. It grows where social institutions that bind a country together are dissolved and weaponized against the people. When we dehumanize our enemies, and passively accept political violence and violent rhetoric, we walk the same steps as those before us. The threat of totalitarian politics has not left us, nor will it.

As suggested by both authors, loneliness, atomization, and mass politics are all mechanisms of totalitarian development. Among the methods of combatting this are to create the social associations and institutional bonds between individuals and society that totalitarian government attempts to dissolve. Creating social bonds that cut across different subgroups of society creates communities that one can belong to, reducing the personal significance of movement politics to the individuals within it. Individually, it is also important to recognize the potential for totalitarian violence and evil that passively exists within society, lest we assume that we can move past such methods.

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