Chapter 9

THE THEORY OF TOTALITARIAN LEADERSHIP

Peter Baehr

Introduction

What attributes did Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin possess that enabled them to become the supreme leaders of totalitarian regimes? What did these men achieve in the course of their totalitarian careers? Were the Führer and his Bolshevik nemesis essential or auxiliary to the regimes they led? What, exactly, do totalitarian leaders do that is quintessentially totalitarian, as distinct from simply tyrannical or authoritarian? Hannah Arendt answered all these questions, yet her theory of totalitarian leadership is among the least known and, in narrative terms, more fugitive aspects of her oeuvre. Instead of confronting the issue of leadership directly, she unravels it over the 150 pages that make up Part III of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* ([1951d] 1973). Arendt's rationale will be explained presently. But it indubitably makes large demands on readers who, bereft of a central statement, struggle to make sense of her labyrinthine account.

This chapter examines Arendt's theory of totalitarian leadership.[1] It begins with her description of "the masses," proceeds to her account of Hitler and Stalin as rulers of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, and concludes with a discussion of Arendt as a covert sociologist: a thinker who recurrently resorts to sociological explanations, despite her express opposition to sociology as a discipline. Throughout this chapter, Arendt's notion of leadership is contrasted with the Weberian idea of charismatic domination, an idea she thought absurd when applied to totalitarian conditions.

Masses

> "There is no class that cannot be wiped out if a sufficient number of its members are murdered." (*Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 320)

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Hannah Arendt's theory of totalitarian mass leaders – Hitler and Stalin – is integral to Part III of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, yet its centrality is easy to underestimate.[2] While her treatments of the "mob" and the "masses" are explicitly heralded in subsection titles to Chapters 4, 5 and 10 of *Origins*, totalitarian leaders receive no such explicit attention. What explains that asymmetry? For Arendt, leaders are not distinct from masses; they are entirely imbricated with them. Repeatedly, Arendt describes the totalitarian Leader – almost always employed in the upper case – as the "agent," "impersonator" and "functionary" of the masses so that, in the totalitarian context, he who says masses, says leader too. Equally, totalitarian *movements* are mass organizations (323).[3] In a passage that appears to deflate the leader's integral importance, Arendt claims that Hitler "depends on the 'will' of the masses he embodies as the masses depend on him." Without the leader, the masses would "lack external representation." Without the masses, "the Leader is a nonentity" (325). The significance she assigns to the masses requires us to be sure of what Arendt means by this and other cognate terms.

Totalitarianism is only possible, Arendt claims, in societies in which classes have dissolved into masses, where party politics has been reduced to ideological posturing, and where the responsibilities of citizenship have succumbed to apathy on a large scale. Classes are interest-bound formations, determined by their place in the productive process. They provide individuals with a sense of social membership and solidarity. Conventional political parties represent class forces to various degrees. Masses are something quite different and are not to be confused with the riff-raff of bohemians, crackpots, gangsters, outcasts and conspirators Arendt dubs "the mob."

Masses come in two complementary forms. First, they compose individuals who exist within the interstices of class society and party politics. Bereft of organizational affiliation, inexperienced in conventional politics and lacking conviction, masses call down a plague on all houses. Having never been previously organized by the party system, or ever convinced by its rhetoric, they offer virgin territory for the totalitarian movements to plow.

Alongside this first meaning of "masses" – a permanent fixture of modern societies, witness to the inability of class formations to incorporate many segments of the populace – Arendt introduces another. On this reckoning, masses are the product of a specific constellation; they constitute the detritus of all social strata that have lost their former social identity and emotional bearings as a result of abrupt political, geopolitical and economic dislocation – the same conditions that Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons said produce anomie (a term Arendt assiduously avoids). In continental Europe, masses in this sense emerged in one of two ways. In the first manifestation they were a consequence of the turmoil that followed World War I: revolution, military defeat,

economic depression, break-up of empire, foundation of new ethnically based states, the resultant displacement of those now deemed aliens. This pattern was evident in most parts of central Eastern and Western Europe. Social calamity smashed much of the class system. In its place arrived a "new terrifying negative solidarity" – a "structureless mass of furious individuals" – comprised of completely superfluous people: unemployed workers, dispossessed small businessmen and "former members of the middle and upper classes" (315). Common to all was an undiluted sense of bitterness, betrayal and a loathing of status quo parties – especially those that had previously claimed to represent them.

In Germany and Austria, Hitler took advantage of this crisis, mobilizing masses that had been politically disenfranchised and economically emasculated in the interwar years, and organizing them into movements. The masses furnished the social basis of the Nazi dictatorship and, after 1940, the totalitarian regime. But the point to emphasize is that they preceded totalitarian rule. In the lands dominated by Bolshevism, conversely, masses were principally the artifact of a deliberate *policy* contrived by Stalin that aimed at pulverizing all groups and factions that were independent of the state. Arendt contends that Lenin, fearful of the inchoate nature of Soviet society, deliberately sought to foster stratification by multiplying interests and identities based, for instance, on independent trade unions, councils and nationalities. Stalin, by contrast, was intent on radically reversing this process. He wished to "fabricate an atomized and structureless mass" (319) the better to dominate society as a whole. To do this he set about liquidating property owners, independent peasants, trade unions and councils, and purging the military and bureaucracy, including factory managers and engineers. All "nonpolitical communal bonds" (322) were similarly severed by a reign of terror that encouraged denunciation and the cutting of friendship and family ties. Instead of a totalitarian movement organizing the masses, as in Germany, the totalitarian state in Russia created them.

Although Arendt claims that Hitler and Stalin are mass leaders and as such "outside the class and national system of respectable European society" (327), she locates their first home squarely in the mob, the transgressive, criminal or semi-criminal fringe of society. Hitler's early adult years read like a history of dashed ambition and marginality; temperamentally an outsider, he helped shape a party "almost exclusively composed of misfits, failures and adventurers." Stalin, too, was accustomed to living in society's shadows, a human node of "the conspiracy apparatus of the [prerevolutionary] Bolshevik party" (317). Failure "in professional and social life, perversion and disaster in private life" (327), far from disqualifying Stalin and Hitler from mass leadership, only added luster to their appeal, for such men appeared to be heralds of a broader

catastrophic destiny, ready to sacrifice everything to the cause of the movement (327). Still, for all their indubitable mass traits, the rulers of National Socialism and Bolshevism were also anomalous. Hitler and Stalin were older than the masses they incarnated and were not originally of mass stock. What, then, might a bona fide mass leader look like, a leader actually incubated by the masses rather than simply articulated to them via the underworld? Such a person was more likely to resemble "the stubborn dullness of Molotov" than the "hysterical fanaticism of Hitler" or the "sensual vindictive cruelty of Stalin" (327). Heinrich Himmler – "the most powerful man in Germany after 1936" (337–38) – is for Arendt the representative mass figure: "meticulous, calculated" and correct (327). Himmler

> was not a bohemian like Goebbels, or a sex criminal like Streicher, or a fanatic like Hitler, or an adventurer like Goering. He proved his supreme ability for organizing the masses into total domination by assuming that most people are neither bohemians, fanatics, adventurers, sex maniacs, crackpots, nor social failures, but first and foremost job holders and good family men. … The mass man whom Himmler organized for the greatest mass crimes ever committed in history bore the features of the philistine rather than of the mob man, and was the bourgeois who in the midst of the ruins of his world worried about nothing so much as his private security, was ready to sacrifice everything – belief, honor, dignity – on the slightest provocation. Nothing proved easier to destroy than the privacy and private morality of people who thought of nothing but safeguarding their private lives. (338; see also Arendt [1945a] 1994, 128 for an earlier version of this formulation)

The remark that Heinrich Himmler was "the most powerful man in Germany after 1936" appears to sit uncomfortably with Arendt's insistence that, in Germany, Hitler was the supreme leader. Her point, however, is not that Himmler was a more important figure than Hitler, whose skills I turn to next. It is that Himmler was the chief practical organizer of the regime's "changing nuclei of militancy" (370), the pivot of constantly expanding radicalism that oversaw the *Einsatzgruppen* (the mobile killing squads that followed the Wehrmacht into occupied foreign lands), the SS in its many, ever more extreme, iterations (Death's Head units, Waffen-SS, Security Service) and the death camps.[4] Yet Arendt is emphatic that "it was Hitler himself – and not Himmler, or Bormann, or Goebbels – who always initiated more 'radical' measures; that they were always more radical than the proposals made by his immediate environment; that even Himmler was appalled when he was entrusted with the 'final solution' of the Jewish question – all this has now been proved by innumerable documents" (375, fn. 89).

Fascination without Charisma

In advancing her theory of totalitarian leadership, Arendt pointedly departs from a number of then-current interpretations of Bolshevism and National Socialism. These accounts, she believed, were mistaken in a general sense (they harked back analogically to past regimes – autocracies, dictatorships, tyrannies and so forth – and were thus disabled from registering the true novelty of totalitarian leadership) and in a host of particular ones. It is erroneous, for instance, to portray Hitler and Stalin as motivated by *raison d'état* (321). Pursuit of the national interest, in the tradition of Richelieu and Metternich, supposes rational aims and bounded commitments – to the nation to which the state is devoted. In contrast, totalitarian rulers are recklessly contemptuous of limits, national or otherwise. Their ambition is global rule – not of a state, but of a movement. To that end, the security of the rulers' own nations must be gambled in permanent strife, their economies frequently rendered dysfunctional as ideological imperatives undermine instrumental rationality, and millions of the rulers' own nation-state citizens purged, executed, starved, deported, enslaved and killed in combat.

> Our bewilderment about the anti-utilitarian character of the totalitarian state structure springs from the mistaken notion that we are dealing with a normal state after all – a bureaucracy, a tyranny, a dictatorship – from our overlooking the emphatic assertions by totalitarian rulers that they consider the country where they happened to seize power only the temporary headquarters of the international movement on the road to world conquest, that they reckon victories and defeats in terms of centuries or millennia, and that the global interests always overrule the local interests of their own territory. … What strikes the outside observer as "a piece of prodigious insanity" is nothing but the consequence of the absolute primacy of the movement not only over the state, but also over the nation, the people and the positions of power held by the rulers themselves. (411–12)

Nor is it accurate to imagine that totalitarian leaders burn with the lust for power as that vice has traditionally been conceived. It is not groveling obeisance that totalitarian leaders crave, nor are they satisfied with monopolizing the machinery of state.[5] Totalitarian leaders seek to dominate "human beings from within" (325), a thoroughly penetrative kind of domination realized through the terror they unleash and the ideology they orchestrate. The so-called Leader Principle is another mistaken label for totalitarian leaders. While totalitarianism is not the rule of a clique or a gang (407), and while the leader's dominion is uncontested (405), the Leader Principle is not, of itself, a

totalitarian concept but rather an authoritarian one that has, somewhat misleadingly, been rhetorically borrowed by the Nazi movement. Strictly speaking, a Leader Principle suggests hierarchy and authority. Hierarchy implies that authority seeps down from the top to the bottom through a series of graduated layers of delegation and responsibility. Authority supposes restraints on both leaders and led. When combined, hierarchy and authority regularize and stabilize the arrangements to which they apply. But that is exactly what totalitarianism resists: stabilization would calm the typhoon movement that drives totalitarianism ever onward and outward.

These standard interpretations of totalitarian leadership err by being broad-brushed and anachronistic. They are easily dispatched. Arendt saved special effort, however, to refute a more stubborn academic attribution that derived, at least circuitously, from sociology: the claim that one of the two totalitarian leaders, Adolf Hitler, resembled a charismatic leader. While the term *charisma* has an ancient lineage, and originally carried a pronounced religious stamp, in Arendt's day as in ours it was pivotally associated with the work of Max Weber (notably, [1922] 1978). Arendt specifically recoiled from applying Weber's account of charisma to either Hitler or Stalin, yet she offered a theory of leadership that is arguably more searchingly sociological, and more sociologically nuanced, than Weber's own. His celebrated pure type of charisma was designed to fit a thousand instances: military, religious, political and artistic. A concept with an eagle's perspective, it is a triumph of historically informed abstraction. Yet note how little it tells us about any one case. Arendt's optic was more focused. Suspicious of a term – *charisma* – that invited so many heterogeneous uses, Arendt stressed the unprecedented character of totalitarian leadership. Only two cases had so far appeared.[6] Her job was carefully to delineate them, not use either or both as a platform for a global theory of leadership.

In order to understand the peculiarities of Arendt's contrastive argument, it helps to recall the basic components of charisma as Weber depicts it.

Pure or "genuine" charisma, Weber says, is doubly extraordinary: its bearer is "treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" ([1922] 1978, 241); its life-blood, at least initially, is a psychological condition of human excitement, enthusiasm or distress that may or may not be related to a wider social crisis. In the intense personal devotion to the master that it inspires, and its irreverence for tradition and legality for their own sake, "charismatic belief revolutionizes men 'from within' and shapes material and social conditions according to its revolutionary will" (1978, 1116). Nonetheless, the fealty of both close associates and the rank-and-file is neither unconditional nor uncritical. The leader must bring forth the requisite material and emotional satisfactions to keep the following

committed to his mission. Charisma, to retain its spell over heart and mind, must continually display its powers. Should triumphs succumb to disaster and the promised well-being for all believers fail to materialize, the leader will find himself deserted, ridiculed and, worst of all, ordinary. In the final analysis, therefore, the charismatic figure is the captive of others' devotion. When that devotion turns to indifference or hostility, the gift of grace vaporizes (1978, 242, 1114).

Though the ability to perform miracles of various kinds is, thus, a condition of charisma's longevity, it is not the ground of its claim to legitimacy. This rests upon the "conception that it is the duty of those subject to charismatic authority to recognize its genuineness and to act accordingly." It is this moral imperative, this demand of allegiance on behalf of a leader convinced that he or she is the vessel of some deity or of providence, that constitutes charisma's "authoritarian principle" of legitimacy (Weber 1978, 242, 266). By contrast, *plebiszitäre Herrschaft* (Caesarism, Bonapartism, etc.) reflects a situation in which charisma has strayed such a long way down the road of rationalization that the premises of its original claim to legitimacy have been inverted; in short, charismatic legitimacy is subjected "to an anti-authoritarian interpretation" (1978, 266). Instead of the leader's authority being founded upon a mission which the following, to the extent that it recognizes him, is duty-bound to acknowledge (charisma in its purest revelation), legitimacy is now *formally* derived from the will of the following itself, whom the charismatic (political) leader professes to embody. Legitimacy in this way assumes a democratic coloration.

Superficially, two Weberian themes reemerge in Arendt's discussion of totalitarian leadership: irreverence toward tradition and positive legality; the leader's providential mission and revolutionary will.[7] But the precise meaning Arendt gives to these properties, and the manner in which she articulates them, bears no substantive relevance to Weber's theory. As I have shown elsewhere (Baehr 2001), Arendt's political thought was anti-Weberian in all relevant respects. To avoid offending the adored Karl Jaspers, for whom Weber was in turn a hallowed figure, Arendt kept her public disagreements with the latter in check. It is thus entirely in character that, when Arendt turns her guns on *charisma* as an explanatory concept, Weber entirely escapes her cannonade. Instead it is the unfortunate Hans Gerth (1940), sociologist and former student of Karl Mannheim, whom she attacks (361–63, n.57; [1951–52] 1994, 388). Arendt equally detested the stated or implied attribution of charisma to Hitler that was becoming fashionable in postwar Germany and evidenced in historian Gerhard Ritter's introduction to *Hitler's Table Talk* (Picker and Ritter 1951). It was not only that such usage came with an odor of apologetics, as if Hitler's charisma might help explain the credulity of his listeners. It was also that the lens of charisma distorted a clear-sighted appraisal of the

peculiar make-up of Hitler's entourage. What alternative account, then, did Arendt offer?

In Arendt's long review of *Hitler's Table Talk* ([1951–52] 1994), and, more succinctly, in a footnote to *Origins*, she acknowledges Hitler's "brilliant gifts as a mass orator," while noting that Stalin, by contrast, who lacked such gifts, was "able to defeat the greatest orator of the Russian Revolution," namely, Leon Trotsky (361). Now, it is in face-to-face encounters that witnesses have most often described the allure of Hitler's personality.[8] Arendt was unimpressed. Fascination is a tautological concept. People are fascinated by people who are fascinating. The secret to Hitler's fascination, she responded, lay not in some ineffable, captivating quality, some "magical spell" that floored all listeners, robbing them of independent thought. Hitler's appeal was rooted in something far more mundane: the social propensities of the audience to which he spoke. Her argument is thoroughly sociological. "Fascination is a social phenomenon, and the fascination Hitler exercised over his environment must be understood in terms of the particular company he kept" (305, fn. 1). On her account, Hitler's entourage consisted of people whose capacity for discriminating judgment was all but obliterated. They had succumbed to the "chaos of opinions" that characterized the cynical and iconoclastic interwar years. But where others were indecisive and confused, Hitler was unwavering and clear, an obelisk of iron protruding from a trampled field of corn. Accordingly,

> The problem of Hitler's charisma is relatively easy to solve. It was to a great extent identical with what Professor Ritter calls the "fanatical faith the man had in himself," and it rested on the well-known experiential fact that Hitler must have realized early in his life, namely, that modern society in its desperate inability to form judgments will take every individual for what he considers himself and professes himself to be and will judge him on that basis. Extraordinary self-confidence and displays of self-confidence therefore inspire confidence in others; pretensions of genius waken the conviction in others that they are indeed dealing with a genius. ([1951–52] 1994, 291–92)

Two features in particular gave Hitler a stature that in other times and among other people would have been derided as dangerous nonsense. The first was his "apodictic tone," convictions uttered with the utmost dogmatism. Hitler knew firsthand, Arendt explains, the maelstrom of opinions to which modern people are subject and that make them hunger for certainty. Hitler understood that "a role consistently played is unquestioningly accepted as the substance itself" ([1951–52] 1994, 292). Second, he formulated this role in a form, logical consistency, which was literally compelling. Indeed, if "logic is defined as

the capability to press on to conclusions with a total disregard for all reality and all experience, then Hitler's greatest gift – the gift to which he owed his success and which brought about his downfall – was one of pure logic" ([1951–52] 1994, 292–93).

I shall return in a later section to the perverted logicality of totalitarian rulers. For the moment, however, it is worth noting the multiple divergences between Arendt's sociological analysis of fascination and Weberian or Weberian-inspired interpretations of charismatic domination. Whereas charismatic leaders, obsessed with their own destiny, see a difference in kind between themselves and those who serve them, totalitarian leaders take full responsibility for the actions of their minions. And in contrast to Weber's theory of charisma, where the leaders' aura depends on the personal proofs they offer – miracles, military victories – and that demonstrate their unique qualities as saviors, Arendt argues that the credibility of totalitarian rulers hinges essentially on the organization they lead. So long as that organization is intact, the leaders are beyond reproach (387–88). The gift they flourish, moreover, is not the grace of religious, artistic or military illuminati but the gift of pure logic, a world view of "seamless coherence." The leaders' platform of rule rests not on legitimacy but on the absurdity of a "fictitious world." Totalitarian rulers are not exceptional individuals who announce a new message to the world and who emotionally transform those whose lives they touch. On the contrary, nothing "is more characteristic of totalitarian movements in general and of the quality of the 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" (305). Even Arendt's use of language signals her distance from Weber. When Weber invokes charismatic *Herrschaft*, he typically means a specific kind of rulership; he also writes, more sparingly, of charismatic authority.[9] For Arendt, "totalitarian authority" is a contradiction in terms, while *Herrschaft* – a term she uses in the title of the German edition of *Origins* – is meant with all the brutish coercive hardness with which *domination* is generally associated today. Finally, totalitarian leadership offers no pathway to what Weber described as routinization: the transmission of the charismatic patina to durable institutions such as the papacy or royalty. As already indicated, routinization would negate the radically dynamic nature of the movement the leader leads. It would create not a diluted or sublimated totalitarianism but an entirely different kind of regime type.

Hans Gerth is hence plainly wrong, Arendt ([1951d] 1994) insists, to portray National Socialism as a combination of bureaucracy and charisma, types of authority that for Weber pull in opposite directions. The problem with Gerth's formulation (1940) is not its oxymoronic infidelity to Weber. It is that he and other sociologists are tone deaf when they apply to both Hitler and

Jesus of Nazareth the same concept. Used in this way, a sociological hammer – charisma in this case – flattens the vital differences between a religious figure such as the Christ who offers a dispensation of love in which all people are children of God, and a maniacal demagogue like Hitler who seeks to dominate the whole globe and liquidate categories of people stigmatized as aliens. Sociologists, Arendt thought, appear to have been contaminated by the more general loss of discriminating judgment, nailing to diverse groups of people the same idea and thereby failing to identify human specificity. It is a big claim and, for my purposes, it can be left as such. More intriguing is that against all protestations to the contrary, Arendt falls back repeatedly on sociological kinds of reasoning even as she criticizes sociologists. The leader, on her account, is a distillation, a personification, of the masses. Fascination is a property of the group, not the individual. And the leader plays a role in an organization. What else are these contentions if they are not sociological?

What Do Totalitarian Leaders Do?

My summary of Arendt has, to this point, emphasized her argument that the leader is a vector of the masses. But she also states repeatedly that totalitarian leaders are actors and that their actions are vital to the movements they lead. Stalin, we saw, actually created the masses by destroying all solid social groupings. He "changed the old political and especially revolutionary belief expressed popularly in the proverb 'You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs' into a veritable dogma: 'You can't break eggs without making an omelette' (Arendt [1950a] 1994, 275–76). Hitler, too, was a gifted creator of organizations and ideological fictions. And both men were the chief experimenters of the movements they led, responsible for "hideous discoveries in the realm of the possible" (436), in particular, the discovery that human spontaneity can, under certain conditions, be expunged. Totalitarian leaders, furthermore, ensure that "no reliable statistics, no controllable facts and figures are ever published" so as to disorient those whose common sense disinclines them to believe "the monstrous" realities of the concentration and death camps (436).

If the will is a spring of action, Stalin and Hitler were supremely willful beings. Unlike law, which is an artifact of civilization that defines what is permissible and that establishes procedures and boundaries, the will is a human faculty that is essentially mercurial – except that its one constant exertion in the totalitarian case is toward global domination. "What could be more limitless than a man's will, and more arbitrary than an order justified by nothing but the 'I will'?" Arendt asked ([1966a] 2003, 244). "In the language of the Nazis, the never-resting, dynamic 'will of the Führer' – and not his orders, a phrase that might imply a fixed and circumscribed authority – becomes the

'supreme law' in a totalitarian state" (365; Arendt is quoting from Nazi documents). Equally, "the will of the Führer can be embodied everywhere and at all times, and he himself is not tied to any hierarchy, not even the one he might have established himself" (405). It is their "simple minded purposefulness" and "stubbornness" that moves Hitler and Stalin to "choose those elements from existing ideologies which are best fitted to become the fundaments of another, entirely fictitious world," the world of the Trotskyite conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion (362).

In one of the few concessions that *Origins* makes to received opinion, Arendt grants that Stalin and Hitler are the preeminent totalitarian leaders. She also notes their admiration for each other. "The only man for whom Hitler had 'unqualified respect' was 'Stalin the genius' [citing Hitler's *Table* Talk], while we know from Khrushchev's speech to the Twentieth Party Congress 'that Stalin trusted only one man and that was Hitler' (309–10). Stalin's attack on Jewish "cosmopolitanism," unleashed in the last years of his life, was yet one more tribute to the memory of his Nazi foe (xl). The depraved qualities of the Führer and Stalin are similarly taken for granted by Arendt. They are responsible for inverting the most essential imperatives of Western ethics. "For just as Hitler's 'Final Solution' actually meant to make the command 'Thou shalt kill' binding for the elite of the Nazi party, Stalin's pronouncement [a reference to the denunciations of the Great Purge of 1936–37] prescribed: 'Thou shalt bear false testimony,' as a guiding rule for the conduct of all members of the Bolshevik party" (xxxiii). Radically evil these men certainly are. But as makers and shapers of movements they exemplify something approaching genius.

Consider their more prominent achievements. Both manage to divest themselves of the constraints of party programs so as to release their radicalism from doctrinal impediments (324). Both are innovators: "Perhaps it was Stalin who was the first to discover all the potentiality for rule that the police possessed; it certainly was Hitler who, shrewder than Schoenerer, his spiritual father, knew how to use the hierarchical principle of racism, how to exploit the anti-Semitic assertion of the existence of a 'worst' people in order properly to organize the 'best' and all the conquered and oppressed in between, how to generalize the superiority complex of the pan-movements so that each people, with the necessary exception of the Jews, could look down upon one that was even worse off than itself" (241).

Both enjoy "the confidence of the masses" until the very end of their rule (306) and are willing to identify themselves fully with their agents:

> The supreme task of the Leader is to impersonate the double function characteristic of each layer of the movement – to act as the magic defense of the

> movement against the outside world; and at the same time, to be the direct bridge by which the movement is connected with it. The Leader represents the movement in a way totally different from all ordinary party leaders; he claims personal responsibility for every action, deed, or misdeed, committed by any member or functionary in his official capacity. This total responsibility is the most important organizational aspect of the so-called Leader principle, according to which every functionary is not only appointed by the Leader but is his walking embodiment, and every order is supposed to emanate from this one ever-present source. (374)

Hitler and Stalin also command the utmost allegiance from their entourage. The highest functionaries – the "policy-makers" (386) – unlike those more distant from the epicenter of rule, are loyal not because they believe the leader to be personally omniscient and incapable of mistakes, another divergence from the grounds of charismatic authority. Nor does the elite swallow much of the propagandistic bilge that the masses imbibe. The rulers' closest associates are faithful because, rather than being stupefied by the leaders' extraordinary qualities, they are in awe of their de facto dominance. "The point of their [the associates'] loyalty is not that they believe the Leader is infallible, but that they are convinced that everybody who commands the instruments of violence with the superior methods of totalitarian organization can become infallible" (388). And that assurance is itself related to another idea: "a firm and sincere belief in human omnipotence. [The associates'] moral cynicism, their belief that everything is permitted, rests on the solid conviction that everything is possible" (387).

Arendt was acutely sensitive to the rhetorical, or what she calls the stylistic, features of totalitarianism. The role of oratory – brilliant in Hitler's case, leaden in Stalin's – is twofold: it constructs an "entirely fictitious world" – the world Jewish conspiracy, the Trotskyite plot – that provides the masses with ideological points of reference; and it confuses the non-totalitarian world into thinking that totalitarian leaders are demagogues pure and simple, thus dramatically underestimating their menacing novelty. Granted, those who lead the movement are opportunists. They are willing shamelessly to harness popular causes such as national grandeur or dilate gravely on socialism in one country, while actually pursuing world domination and what the hated Leon Trotsky accurately described as a "permanent revolution" (317). Stalin and Hitler are skilled liars, purveyors of fantastical conspiracy theories, and able to weld "the masses into a collective unit" with "impressive magnificence" (333). The rulers understand better than anyone "the terrible, demoralizing fascination" with which "monstrous falsehoods can eventually be established as unquestioned facts" (333). The rulers'

> art consists in using, and at the same time transcending, the elements of reality, of verifiable experiences, in the chosen fiction, and in generalizing them into regions which then are definitely removed from all possible control by individual experience. With such generalizations, totalitarian propaganda establishes a world fit to compete with the real one, whose main handicap is that it is not logical, consistent and organized. (362)

The capacity to divine the course of history and nature, Arendt believes, lies at the heart of the claim that totalitarian leaders are infallible. All setbacks and zigzags to the contrary, the "Leader is always right in his actions" (383), unbending in certitude, and unwilling to concede mistakes on any matter of importance. This is because all apparent defeats are in fact part of a grander process, temporary milestones on the way to historical triumph – a triumph rendered necessary and intelligible once one locates the key to the mysteries of the world. The leaders' "language of prophetic scientificality" corresponds, in turn, to the needs of the masses, people "who had lost their home in the world and now were prepared to be reintegrated into eternal, all-dominating forces which by themselves would bear man, the swimmer on the waves of adversity, to the shores of safety" (351). Moreover, totalitarian leaders do not have to wait for events "to make their predictions come true" (349). They understand that reality itself can be fabricated to realize these predictions. In their conception, a fact is not a datum that is independently true; it is an episode that can be made true with sufficient power to make it so. Hence, just as the assertion that the bourgeoisie is a dying class is made true by liquidating its members, so the claim that Jews are sub-normal is demonstrated by creating death camp conditions of terror, starvation and disorganization that break their solidarity and reduce them to the status of tortured beasts (349–50).

Mechanisms of Movement

Previous sections identified a number of abilities that totalitarian leaders possess, always understood by Arendt as related to the nature of the masses and the movement – the body that organizes the masses and makes them fit totalitarian subjects. One last attribute of totalitarian leaders is left to explore, and Arendt leaves us in no doubt that it is the most important. It concerns the leader's role as totalitarian dynamo, the person more responsible than anyone else for initiating change, ensuring that the movement keeps pressing forward with violent storm force, uprooting the ramparts of civilization as if they were no more than flimsy garden trellises. Totalitarianism contained a (mass) movement, and it was itself a movement. Stalin and Hitler's "idea of domination was something that no state and no mere apparatus of violence can ever

achieve, but only a movement that is constantly kept in motion: namely, the permanent domination of each individual in each and every sphere of life" (326). Or as she put it elsewhere: "One should not forget that only a building can have a structure, but that a movement … can have only a direction, and that any form of legal or governmental structure can be only a handicap to a movement which is being propelled with increasing speed in a certain direction" (398).

Many scholars have noted Arendt's dislike of physical cause and effect models as applied to human conduct. Structural models of generative mechanisms, so beloved by modern "realist" theorists of social science, repulsed her equally. When tempted to invoke naturalist analogies, she preferred the image of chemical elements crystallizing to form new phenomena, hence her depiction of totalitarianism as emerging out of a number of elements such as imperialism, racism and anti-Semitism. On occasions, she reached for organic comparisons, likening totalitarian organization to an onion (413, 430), to a virus (306), and the totalitarian leader to a "living organization" (361, 362, 386; the term is taken directly from *Mein Kampf*); or she summoned meteorology: totalitarianism is akin to a devastating desert sandstorm (478) encompassing the earth, drawing force from the "organized loneliness" of mass societies.[10] There are, however, two very large exceptions to Arendt's hostility to physical analogies. The first is her ubiquitous reference to the state or administrative "machine"; a check using my Kindle e-reader yields 60 uses of "machine" or "machinery" in *Origins*. The other exception is the language she employs to make sense of the ferocious, unceasing interventions of totalitarian leaders. Here is a notable statement:

> In the center of the movement, as the motor that swings it into motion, sits the Leader. He is separated from the elite formation by an inner circle of the initiated who spread around him an aura of impenetrable mystery which corresponds to his "intangible preponderance" [referring to a passage in Boris Souvarine's book on Stalin]. (373)

Aside from yet another departure from charisma in its Weberian formulation – the totalitarian leaders' appeal derives from the inner circle rather than from the leaders' personalities – Arendt asks us to consider two ideas: the leader, perhaps rather like the eye of a hurricane, is at the center of the movement, not above it; and he is like a motor: "The machine that generates, organizes, and spreads the monstrous falsehoods of totalitarian movements depends again upon the position of the Leader," a man who uniquely understands the laws of race or history and whose prognostications – couched in centuries or millennia – can never be disproved by facts (383). The "real role" of leaders,

she says, is "to drive the movement forward at any price and if anything to step up its speed" (375, fn. 89). Hannah Arendt did not drive an automobile, and it is hard to imagine her, oil-streaked and dungaree-dressed, poring over the entrails of an internal combustion engine in the pit of an auto mechanic's shop. But the motor image she invokes suggests something like an engine's drive-shaft, which Wikipedia defines as a "mechanical component for transmitting torque and rotation, usually used to connect other components of a drive train that cannot be connected directly."[11] Perhaps if she had lived in the Internet age, Arendt might have compared the leader to a modem or a router or an Ethernet hub. But the physical simile was the one she employed, comparing on several occasions (408, 409, 418, 421) totalitarian rule to a "transmission belt" (she takes the term from Isaac Deutscher). "Through the net of secret agents," writes Arendt, "the totalitarian ruler has created for himself a directly executive transmission belt which, in distinction to the onion-like structure of the ostensible hierarchy, is completely severed and isolated from all other institutions" (43).

Ultimately, we can best grasp what Arendt means not by overanalyzing her similes but by identifying what she strove to convey by them. And this becomes evident if we look at the springs of movement, the propulsive energy, that she imputes specifically and exclusively to totalitarian leaders. These mechanisms of motion are plentiful. Rather than the inspired message brought by charismatic figures, they are the totalitarian leader's singular contribution to the society he dominates.

Among the most cited mechanism is the regular, sanguinary practice of the party purge. By it, Stalin ensured after 1934 that the regime remained constantly in flux. The purge is a device intended to secure permanent instability. Purges impede the establishment of settled routines, explode the principle of seniority, sever bonds of loyalty and solidarity among colleagues, create a profusion of new jobs, offer opportunities of rapid advancement for party members in lower rungs of the administration, and cement the dependence of all employees on the leader (323, 390, 431–32). The Nazi counterpart to the purge, after the dispatch of Ernst Röhm, is "the notion of racial 'selection which can never stand still' [Arendt quotes Heinrich Himmler]," and which requires "a constant radicalization of the standards by which the selection, i.e. the extermination of the unfit, is carried out" (391). Early Reich records show that the extermination of full Jews was to be followed by half and one-quarter Jews, the termination of the insane to be followed by that of the incurably sick, and, such principles of selection were extended to a host of foreign nations and ethnicities deemed less pure than the Aryan race.

Another mechanism of movement is the multiplication of offices and the programmed competition between and among them. Both National Socialism

and Bolshevism spawned scores of organizations that duplicated and re-duplicated the functions of each of their organs. The Nazi regime had two organizations for students, another two for women, another two for lawyers, professors, physicians and so on. In the Soviet Union, the state, party and NKVD apparatuses all had their own independent departments of economics, education, culture and military affairs, and the NKVD, the security apparatus, secreted its own "special department" that functioned as an NKVD within the NKVD (401–403). "Technically speaking," says Arendt, "the movement within the apparatus of totalitarian domination derives its mobility from the fact that the leadership constantly shifts the actual center of power, often to other organizations, but without dissolving or even publicly exposing the groups that have thus been deprived of their power" (400). All these shadow organizations believe they embody "the will of the Leader" because none of them is deprived of its existence, even as another set of organizations sprouts alongside, "a game which obviously could go on forever." But the leader's will is "unstable" and often secret. The only rule of thumb totalitarian subjects can reliably follow is that, under conditions of "planned shapelessness," power is inversely related to the visibility of organizations (400–401). As for the leaders, they are engaged in an unending double task. On one hand, they must establish the fictitious world of conspiracy and millennial ambition; this is a hallmark of totalitarian movements. On the other, they must

> prevent this new world from developing a new stability; for a stabilization of its laws and institutions would surely liquidate the movement and with it the hope for eventual world conquest. The totalitarian ruler must, at any price, prevent normalization from reaching the point where a new way of life could develop – one which might, after a time, lose its bastard qualities and take its place among the widely differing and profoundly contrasting ways of life of the nations of the earth. The moment the revolutionary institutions became a national way of life … totalitarianism would lose its "total" quality and become subject to the law of the nations, according to which each possesses a specific territory, people, and historical tradition which relates it to other nations – a plurality which *ipso facto* refutes every contention that any specific form of government is absolutely valid. (391)

The purge and the principle of the competitive duplication of offices, we have seen, are two springs of motion. The third is an imputation of enmity and, with it, a judicial concept, which explodes all normal standards of positive law.

Secret police, Arendt observes, are a mainstay of all despotic regimes. Their job is to track down and neutralize "suspects," people with dangerous thoughts and objectives. But the secret police of totalitarian regimes do not pursue

suspects; the Gestapo and NKVD have a different quarry: the "possible crime" of the "objective enemy." Objective enemies are those who are innocent of any crime other than their existence. They are Jews, gypsies, landlords, priests, indeed any group the regime has targeted for destruction. They stand convicted for what they are and what they might do as carriers of tendencies. And their identity, or rather their identification, is constantly changing. Foreseeing the extermination of the Jews, the Nazis started preparing for the liquidation of the Polish people and of certain categories of Germans. The Bolsheviks graduated from the descendants of the ruling classes to the kulaks, Russians of Polish origin (between 1936 and 1938), the "Tartars and the Volga Germans during the war, former prisoners of war and units of the occupational forces of the Red Army, and Russian Jewry after the establishment of the Jewish state" (424). Deprived of a standard tool of despotic regimes – the provocation – the secret police in a totalitarian state have lost much of their power. It no longer falls to them to hunt down malcontents or goad individuals into attacking the regime. Their job is restricted to capture and execution. Exactly which protean foe stands next to be dispatched is a decision exclusively for the totalitarian leader as circumstances suggest it. "The totalitarian police … is totally subject to the will of the Leader, who alone can decide who the next potential enemy will be and who, as Stalin did, can also single out cadres of the secret police for liquidation," as occurred during the Moscow Trials of the 1930s. And this initiative, in turn, "corresponds exactly to the factual situation reiterated time and again by totalitarian rulers: namely, that their regime is not a government in any traditional sense, but a *movement*, whose advance constantly meets with new obstacles that have to be eliminated" (424–25; italics in the original).

A final mechanism of movement, of which leaders are the spring, is discussed most fully in "Ideology and Terror," an essay attached to the second and all succeeding editions and printings of *Origins*.[12] This develops an argument encountered embryonically in Arendt's analysis of fascination. Arendt claimed that Hitler and Stalin were ideological pioneers; only with their emergence "were the great potentialities of ideologies discovered" (468): recourse to "stringent logicality" was "exclusively" their work (472). It is not that Stalin or Hitler stumbled across some great or new idea. It is that they pressed the logic of ideologies to their furthest extreme. Ideologies in the totalitarian form are claims to total explanations not of "what is, but what becomes … They are in all cases concerned solely with the element of motion" (470), and they proceed independently of experience. Both leaders took pride in their "supreme gift" for "ice cold reasoning" (Hitler) and the "mercilessness of dialectics" (Stalin) "and proceeded to drive ideological implications into extremes of logical consistency." For this reason alone, Hitler and Stalin

> must be considered ideologists of the greatest importance. What distinguished these new totalitarian ideologists from their predecessors was that it was no longer primarily the "idea" of the ideology – the struggle of classes and the exploitation of the workers or the struggle of races and the care for Germanic peoples – which appealed to them, but the logical process which could be developed from it. According to Stalin, neither the idea nor the oratory but "the irresistible force of logic thoroughly overpowered [Lenin's] audience." The power, which Marx thought was born when the idea seized the masses, was discovered to reside, not in the idea itself, but in its logical process which "like a mighty tentacle seizes you on all sides as if in a vise and from whose grip you are powerless to tear yourself away; you must either surrender or make up your mind to utter defeat." (471–72)

The content of the ideology "is devoured by the logic with which the 'idea' is carried out." Hence the logic of Bolshevism made workers lose rights they had held even under tsarism, and the logic of National Socialism helped destroy a huge number of Germans. The inherent logicality is shown in the "argument of which Hitler like Stalin was very fond: You can't say A without saying B and C and so on down to the end of the murderous alphabet" (472).

Indispensable-Dispensable Leaders

Perhaps the hardest part to grasp of Hannah Arendt's discussion of totalitarian leaders is her account of what might be called their indispensable-dispensable function. Again and again, she scorns a view of them as uniquely, gifted, mesmerizing figures turned from the same clay as charismatic personalities. The leaders' aura was utterly contrived. "The consistent and ever-changing division between real secret authority and ostensible open representation made the actual seat of power a mystery by definition" (400). Totalitarian rulers are agents and impersonators – isomorphs – of the masses. They do not try to routinize their power because routinizing it would stabilize it, creating an entirely new and conservative regime. In apparent tension with that description, Arendt characterizes the rulers as absolute in their power,[13] essential to the regimes they lead and, once installed, invulnerable to internal revolt, be it by the army or the secret police. How is one to reconcile these contrasting contentions?

Arendt distinguishes two phases of the leaders' career: the pre–total power stage and a second stage in which the leaders are firmly entrenched at the center of their movements. In the first stage, the leader's

> position within the intimate circle depends upon his ability to spin intrigues among its members and upon his skill in constantly changing its personnel. He

> owes his rise to leadership to an extreme ability to handle inner-party struggles for power rather than to demagogic or bureaucratic-organizational qualities. He is distinguished from earlier types of dictators in that he hardly wins through simple violence. Hitler needed neither the SA nor the SS to secure his position as leader of the Nazi movement; on the contrary, Röhm, the chief of the SA and able to count upon its loyalty to his own person, was one of Hitler's inner-party enemies. Stalin won against Trotsky, who not only had a far greater mass appeal but, as chief of the Red Army, held in his hands the greatest power potential in Soviet Russia at the time. Not Stalin, but Trotsky, moreover, was the greatest organizational talent, the ablest bureaucrat of the Russian Revolution. On the other hand, both Hitler and Stalin were masters of detail and devoted themselves in the early stages of their careers almost entirely to questions of personnel, so that after a few years hardly any man of importance remained who did not owe his position to them. (373–74)

While the leader is vulnerable in the first stage, his position is impregnable in the second. Stalin and Hitler maintained their ascendancy through an unrivaled capacity for productive intrigue, the ability to shuffle personnel to maximize insecurity and skill in handling rivalries within the Party. But it is not these talents that are decisive in the second phase. The leader dominates his circle because of its "sincere and sensible conviction that without him everything would be immediately lost" (374). Everyone, including the entourage and ministries, knows that their temporary power has no independent basis of justification; it springs "directly from the Leader without the intervening levels of a functioning hierarchy" (405). It is the leader's knowledge "of the labyrinth of transmission belts [that] equals supreme power" (408).

Moreover, "the Leader is irreplaceable because the whole complicated structure would lose its *raison d'être* without his commands." Naturally, the leader's intimates know well enough his frailties. No talisman, the ruler "is needed, not as a person, but as a function" (387). Yet far from muting his importance to the movement's highest ranks, the leader's functional quality actually amplifies it. Comprehending "everything and everybody in terms of organization," the totalitarian entourage appreciates that undermining the leader, or seeking to replace him through coups d'état, is tantamount to collective suicide (374). Concerted opposition is difficult, even if it were considered, because duplication of tasks and constant "removal, demotion, and promotion make reliable teamwork impossible and prevent the development of experience" (409). The leader takes it for granted that the organization will obey whoever succeeds him. Yet so long as he is alive he claims to be the embodiment of destiny (408), the one person who correctly interprets "the essentially reliable forces in history or nature, forces which neither defeat nor

ruin can prove wrong because they are bound to assert themselves in the long run" (349). His removal or replacement, Arendt contends, would jeopardize the credence of the Great Lie, the fictitious, conspiratorial world the leader has enunciated and on which totalitarianism depends. Indeed, "systematic lying" is practiced "more consistently and on a larger scale" once the leader is installed in power (413).[14] A palace revolution would also be an acknowledgment of error or precariousness; it would "break the spell of infallibility which surrounds the office of the Leader and spell doom to all those connected with the movement" (387). Collapse or major disturbance at the highest level would confront the whole fictitious edifice with "the factuality of the real world," an event "which only the movement steered in an infallibly right direction by the Leader [is] able to ward off" (387).

Of pivotal importance to the leader's "absolute monopoly of power," and the ultimate demonstration of it, is his relationship to the chief of police, epitomized by men such as Beria and Himmler (405–6). Neither official ever challenged their leaders for supreme power. Neither one of them survived his leader's fall. Himmler swallowed poison. Beria was shot by a Soviet general. While they were alive, both men were in command of formidable economic and coercive resources. Yet both were "totally subject to the will of the Leader" (425). It is the leader, not the police, who decides who the next "objective enemy" is to be. And because the enemy is "objective" – a category chosen almost at random to enable the continuing radicalization of the movement-regime – the traditional tools of the police in non-totalitarian countries are redundant. Secret information has relatively little purchase because real plots are unlikely. More generally, the leader's position as the One who can see into the future, the hermeneutician of Fate, makes him thoroughly indispensable (382–83). So, too, does the fact that "the multiplicity of the transmission belts, the confusion of the hierarchy, secure the dictator's complete independence of all his inferiors and make possible the swift and surprising changes in policy for which totalitarianism has become famous" (409).

The reader who has come this far with me is likely to be perplexed by this section. It seems plainly hard to reconcile with at least some of the sections before it. Taken as a whole, Arendt's analysis has almost a Zen quality. The leader looks to be everything and nothing, to have absolute power, yet a vessel of the masses, to be indispensable, but to provide no channel of routinization and quickly forgotten. What are we to conclude? At least two interpretive options are possible. One is to portray this oddity as evidence of Arendt's confusion; she is contradicting herself. The other is to imagine she knew what she was saying, was aware of the puzzle I just noted, and thought she had expressed herself well enough to have resolved it. Here the onus falls not on Arendt, but on us. That burden is not without precedent.

In Romano Guardini's *The Lord* (1954), believers are instructed that what the scriptures record Jesus Christ as saying, he did say and that he meant what he said. So that if Jesus talks about the "rewards" that God will provide the faithful for the good deeds they perform, it is rewards we must consider and understand, however strange that seems to Kantian and post-Kantian ethical systems in which we are enjoined to do good for its own sake. If the Lord talks of rewards, Guardini argues, it is not because His standards are more primitive or naïve than ours. It is because modern people arrogantly assume they know better. For to "desire good for its own intrinsic dignity, and so purely that the pleasure of goodness is the sole and entirely satisfying motive behind our virtue – this is something of which God alone is capable." Jesus's idea of reward "is a warning-call to humility."[15]

Great authors are not God or even gods. But we call authors great because of their interpretive fecundity and because they are greater than us. We may criticize their arguments. We may show they got their facts wrong. We may claim that their theses have been superseded by modern or revisionist scholarship. But when it comes to the coherence of an argument, its jigsaw nature, commentators are advised to be more circumspect. It could well be, as R. G. Collingwood ([1939] 1978: 28–43) emphasized, that an alleged confusion in an author's work is a result of our failing to understand the question it sought to answer. Arendt continually exposed the strangeness of totalitarian rule. Her genius was both to depict it free of meat-grinding categories such as charisma, and to attempt a novel interpretation that could grasp totalitarianism's paradoxes. The best I can do is to suggest the following, partial solution to the puzzle of leaders' indispensable dispensability: It is not Leaders who are dispensable, but particular leaders. The Leader, whoever it is, is the hub of totalitarian movements. Particular leaders can be replaced. The role of Leader, however cannot be avoided without endangering the whole edifice of totalitarian rule. Nor can Leaders emerge or survive without the organization they embody and on which they depend. The Leader, masses and movement are intrinsically connected. This is at root a structural argument that invokes roles more than persons. It is, in other words, an argument that American functionalists of the 1940s and 1950s would have in principle found perfectly congruent with sociological explanation.

Hannah Arendt and Covert Sociology

Arendt's story of totalitarianism ends in 1953 with the death of Stalin,[16] and that is where I shall end too. She took comparatively little interest in post-Stalin conditions. Writing shortly after the Hungarian uprising in 1956, Arendt (1958c) contended that Khrushchev and his supporters showed few indications

of relinquishing totalitarian domination or the mindset that accompanied it.[17] She was, overall, pessimistic about Russia's immediate prospects. In contrast, by 1966, when she wrote a new Preface to the third edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt was confident that the regime had evolved into a non-totalitarian system of one-party dictatorship.

It would be possible to use this chapter's reenactment of Arendt's theory of totalitarian rule to answer an obvious, but important, cluster of questions: How well does her theory match up to the accounts of regime witnesses and modern historians published after 1951? Do they sustain, modify or refute her theory? Is she more perspicacious about Hitler than Stalin or vice versa? Arendt herself believed that the work of Nadezhda Mandelstam (*Hope Against Hope*), Roy Medvedev (*Let History Judge*) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (*In the First Circle*) overwhelmingly supported her theory, and my own view is that she was broadly correct in this assertion ([1972] 2015). If one adds the novels of Vasily Grossman (*Forever Flowing*, *Life and Fate*), one sees even more reason to believe that she offered a compelling and accurate interpretation of the violent, motile, unmasking, fictitious world that is at the center of her account of totalitarian leaders. For Hitler, Arendt might do less well. The Gestapo was undermanned (Johnson 2000). The German population was not in a permanent state of fear for its own safety – except, later, when faced with aerial bombing and rampaging Russian troops. Anti-Nazi comments were common (Klemperer [1995] 1999). Yet Arendt was also percipient. Ian Kershaw's (2008, 320–57) analysis of "working towards the *Führer*" is already anticipated in a quote that Arendt finds in Nuremberg documents to the effect that Hitler's orders were "intentionally vague, and given in the expectation that their recipient would recognize the intent of the given order, and act accordingly" (399).[18]

Nonetheless, a critical reading of Arendt's theory of leadership, still less an updating of her work, was not the objective of this chapter. My aims were different. First, I presented Arendt's theory in as comprehensive and coherent form as I was able to muster. Second, I sought to show how an unforgiving critic of sociology depends on explanations that time and again have a sociological character, even as she comprehensively departs from Weberian theory. The point of this exercise was not to trip up Arendt. It was simply to show that a kind of sociological reasoning – highly idiosyncratic and bracingly imaginative, to be sure – is entailed in the structure of her argument. Arendt's critique of a sociological concept, charisma, coined by a bona fide sociologist, camouflages this fact but does not negate it. Nor does Arendt hide her own sociological debts. In *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Simmel's description of the secret society forms the bedrock of her own analysis of the initiation ceremonies, consistent lying, cult of leadership and conspiratorial fictions of totalitarian movements; on this Arendt is explicit (376, n. 91). More generally, the social appears

in *Origins* as court society, the bourgeoisie, the mob and the masses. All, in Arendt's construction, are socially real. All have effects on the polity. All can be analyzed in their own right. Leaders, in one crisp formulation, "represent" totalitarian movements; they play roles and carry out "functions," acting as the "embodiment" of the organizations they serve (374). Moreover, if we date sociological *thinking* to the Scottish Enlightenment or to Montesquieu and de Tocqueville, as Raymond Aron (1965b) urged us to do, we will be persuaded that such thinking does not require a self-conscious disciplinary signature.[19]

What, then, does sociological reasoning entail? Formally, a sociological *account* is one in which some aspect of human agency is attributed to the influence, pressure and facilitation of collective practices and resources, such as interaction rituals, modes of propaganda, sanctioned performances and linguistic codes.[20] To the degree that the social, under any description of it, is shown to affect human conduct, one has in essence a sociological explanation. Using a language that was foreign to her own discursive idiom, we might say that Arendt's category of "the social" is an *explanandum*, something to be explained by something else, namely, the collapse of antiquity and the emergence of the bureaucratic-capitalist world. The social is, further, an *explanans*, that is, something – a force, an antecedent condition, a mixture of elements – that itself has explanatory import and of which other things are predicated: conformism, the rule-of-nobody, the rise of a laboring society. A sociological account approaches *competence* when the social is clearly defined and a social theory is clearly articulated. A sociological account is potentially *successful* when the social is cogently demonstrated to entrain human agents, that is, channel, energize or impede their activities with regularized effects.

Now, let us allow that Arendt's manifold references to "the social" and "society" throughout her work (1958a, 1963g) are allusive rather than systematic (Pitkin 1998). This puts her sociological competence in question, but not her covert sociology as such. Often "society" and "the social" function merely as residual categories in Arendt's explanations. Yet they and their cognates are also capable of assuming a constitutive form as they did in *Origins*. And if we take her work as a whole, we see that the terms *society* and *the social* variously designate market relationships, the sphere of necessity, a hybrid realm between the public and the private realms, high society and mass society. Arendt treats them as illusory in one context, potent in another, potent in their illusions in yet another. By turns, "the social" functions as a metaphor for thoughtless compliance and conformity, snobbishness and hierarchy, wilful introspection, a one-dimensional identity, and a disassociated identity. The social is sometimes ontological and timeless, like Heidegger's *das Man*, at other times historical and novel. As civil society it exists in contradistinction to the state yet also in alliance with it. Depending on Arendt's argument, "the

social" appears to be the stigma of inauthenticity, the ground of inauthenticity or the outcome of inauthenticity. Arendt's discussion of Jewish assimilation employs categories – notably, parvenu and pariah – that are *themselves* modes of social status classification. More generally, Arendt's Jewish writings throw a long sociological shadow. The Jews' position, Arendt explains, is that of a distinctive stratum defined by its relationship to the state (bereft of citizenship) and by its social marginality. The Jewish parvenu is a member of an outgroup, belittled by internalizing the social standards of the oppressor, adapting to an alien world through "impression management."[21] Writing of the German Jews of the late Enlightenment, Arendt stated that they understood "that the past clung inexorably to them as a collective group; that they could only shake it off as individuals" – in other words, that even escape required a sensitivity to their social conditioning ([1957] 1997, 106). Equally, she acknowledged, in social constructionist vein, that facts "have their own particular way of being true: their truth must always be recognized, testified to" ([1957] 1997, 92).[22] Mostly, as one would expect from the above, "society" or "social" are invoked negatively, yet even this usage is by no means ubiquitous.[23]

Might we, though, distinguish a social explanation from a sociological one, and say that Arendt advanced only the former? That would leave her unsullied. But the distinction is as pedantic as it is dubious if only because sociology is the discipline par excellence of social things, social facts, social habits, social formations, social geometry, social interactions, social bonds and social relations. From Emile Durkheim to Florian Znaniecki to Robert Nisbet, sociologists have been the greatest explorers of the meaning of social phenomena. It is true that some sociologists today trumpet the death of society and hence the death of sociology as traditionally practiced, but this is and is likely to remain an exotic view. It also has no relevance for our discussion of Arendt because, as we have seen, she not only developed concepts of the social but also assigned to them conditioning vigor. And wherever society and "the social" are invoked as conditioning factors of human conduct, and wherever the actions of men and women are deemed influenced by rituals, ideologies and the myriad of groups to which they are attached – clubs, military and paramilitary units, secret societies, concentration camps and a thousand other human ensembles – we are in the very heartland of sociological explanation. Only its type, scope, complexity and manner can be at issue. Is sociological explanation dissembled or explicit, supposed or demonstrated, plausible or fanciful, evidentiary or merely asserted? These are the stakes of a sociological account.

In sum, the question is not whether Arendt resorted to sociological explanation in her writings – given her subjects, she could hardly avoid one – but how adequate it was. Philosophers, historians, human geographers, political theorists take note. You may not be interested in sociology, but sociology is

implicated in your practice whenever you deal specifically with *social* formations and predicate on them reasons, motives and energies. Purists will be unsettled by Arendt's covert sociology. Others may consider it doubly felicitous. Sociologists are able to read Arendt as a major thinker with whom they have something in common, and Arendt's legacy has one more medium, and one new audience, through which to exert intellectual influence.

Notes

1 My focus is on Hitler and Stalin, the supreme rulers of their regimes, rather than the larger tier of ministerial heads and commanders that includes Molotov, Beria and Himmler (and Eichmann) and the military chiefs of staff. This focus accords with Arendt's own usage.
2 To my knowledge, this chapter is only the second specific and sustained treatment of Arendt's theory of totalitarian leadership. The other is by Margaret Canovan (2004). My discussion of the "masses" draws extensively on Baehr (2007).
3 To avoid the ungainly repetition of bibliographic details, all quotes from and references to *Origins* appear in parenthesis with relevant page numbers only.
4 Arendt also says that chief of police – Himmler and his Soviet equivalent, Beria – occupy "the most powerful public positions" (405).
5 In her last public statement on Stalin, Arendt acknowledged Stalin's desire to humiliate both his enemies and his own officials ([1972] 2015).
6 On Arendt's ambivalent assessment of Maoist China, see Baehr (2010)).
7 Other aspects of charisma are comparable to Arendt's claims about totalitarian leadership; for instance, both are characterized by personalized, ad hoc recruitment, and a nonchalance toward economic rationality. But it is just this kind of comparative, decontextualized cobbling that Arendt deplored. It subsitutes analogy for specificity.
8 When I interviewed Hitler's architect and armaments minister, Albert Speer, in 1977, shortly after his release from Spandau Prison, he too spoke of Hitler's "charisma."
9 Sam Whimster, in email correspondence (22 November 2014), observes that aside from a few early fragments, Weber's term "is always Herrschaft. I notice that in my [Whimster's] translation of the 'The three pure types of legitimate rule,' I vary the translation of Herrschaft to include power, authority and domination. Given the labile nature of charismatic gifts, domination is too strong, perhaps, though the charismatic leader is clearly a *Beherrscher*."
10 The desert analogy also appears in Arendt (2005a, 202). "Both psychology, the discipline of adjusting human life to the desert, and totalitarian movements, the sandstorms in which false or pseudo-action suddenly bursts forth from deathlike quiet, present imminent danger to the two faculties that patiently enable us to transform the desert rather than ourselves, the conjoined faculties of passion and action."
11 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drive_shaft
12 It appeared originally in the *Review of Politics* 15/3 (1953a): 303–27.
13 "In the Third Reich … there was only one man who did and could make decisions and hence was politically fully responsible. That was Hitler himself who, therefore, not in a fit of megalomania but quite correctly once described himself as the only man in Germany who was irreplaceable" ([1964c] 2003, 30). The background of Arendt's

statement must be recalled: she was rejecting grand theories of history that reduce human beings to mere emblems of trends.

14 Arendt argues that Hitler's adoption of nationalist rhetoric was an example of such a lie (413). It was a lie because he did not believe it – Hitler had often opposed nationalism as a narrow doctrine – and because its corollary was the notion that National Socialism was not for export but would rest content with revisions of the Versailles Treaty (returning lost German territory), the unification of Germany and Austria and annexation of other contiguous German-speaking lands. These were traditional demands of German post–World War I foreign policy. As such, they were far too limited for Hitler. Stalin also lied when he publicly embraced socialism in one country. In fact, his aim was to conquer the whole world.

15 The passage is unpaginated in my e-reader. It comes from the chapter "Sincerity in Virtue," which is Chapter II of Part II.

16 *Origins* was completed in the fall of 1949, published in 1951. Later editions (1958, 1967) contain various small updates to take account of Stalin's rule up to his death in 1953.

17 This article appeared as "Epilogue: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution," in the 1958 second edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace; 2nd edition, 1958), 481–510. It was expunged from later editions and reprintings of *Origins*.

18 "Ceaseless Radicalization" and "The Drive for Radicalization" – chapters 13 and 14 of Kershaw (2008) – also largely recapitulate her arguments, albeit with many more examples than Arendt herself could have known about. Similarly, Michael Mann (1987) emphasizes the centrality of constant mobilization in the Soviet case.

19 Arendt agreed. Speaking to students at Cornell University, she designated Tocqueville the "first Social Scientist" who "anticipates most" of social science's later "discoveries." Arendt, "From Machiavelli to Marx" (1965) *Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress* (Speeches and Writings File, 1923–1975), Image 50.

20 For instance, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* contains a sociological account of the role of language in the erosion of conscience of Nazi functionaries. Nazi slogans and catch phrases – the SS motto "My honor is my loyalty," euphemisms such as "final solution," "special treatment," "resettlement" – functioned both to conceal the enormity of what was being done, and to lend murder the moral tincture of duty. During the war, the slogan was "the battle of destiny for the German people" coined either by Hitler or by Goebbels, which, as Arendt observed, "made self-deception easier on three counts: it suggested, first, that the war was no war; second, that it was started by destiny and not by Germany; and, third, that it was a matter of life and death for the Germans, who must annihilate their enemies or be annihilated" ([1963c] 1994, 52).

21 The expression is Pitkin's (1998, 26), not Arendt's, but it is apposite. *Rahel Varnhagen* is Goffmanesque *avant la lettre* except in its insistence on an authentic inner self.

22 Arendt added: "Perhaps reality consists only in the agreement of everybody, is perhaps a social phenomenon, would soon collapse as soon as someone had the courage forthrightly and consistently to deny its existence. … Only truths discovered by reason are irrefutable; only these can always be made plain to everyone. Poor reality, dependent upon human beings who believe in it and confirm. For it as well as their confirmation are transitory." Compare with Peter Berger's concept of "structures of plausibility" ([1965] 1973, 53–56; and 1992, 123–43).

23 Arendt ([1959b] 2000) actually defends the integrity of social relationships in "Reflections on Little Rock." On the importance of society and sociability for thinking, see Arendt (1989, 10, 19, 26–27, 42, 69–70, 72–74).

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