Perhaps because they take place in relative slow motion and without the shock and awe of large-scale bombing, these wars are all too often ignored or accorded only brief blips of attention in the media, the United Nations, and so on. Without the involvement of large powers and strategic interests like oil or exported terrorism, there is limited concern about nations set asunder by domestic and even regional conflicts. It hardly helps that these are occurring in Africa, and that the issues and combatants are unknown and unclear. The conflict in Darfur has seemingly garnered some additional interest, mainly because it has been labeled 'genocide'. But the established pattern of death and decay matters most when it appears to threaten, however circuitously, some aspect of security in the richer nations. Thus as the bird flu has migrated from South East Asia to Europe and Africa, concerns have been expressed that a lack of a public health infrastructure in the most devastated African countries will allow the avian virus to gain a foothold among people before (outside) experts can identify and contain it. With Afghanistan, international efforts to create stability have recently been enlarged as social disorder and a lack of government control have greatly increased the production of opium. It is a sad state of affairs when the social consequences of chronic wars must appear to threaten the richer nations before they even consider serious efforts to do something about them.

See also: Civil Wars; Cold War; Correlates of War; Health Consequences of War and Political Violence; Long–Term Effects of War on Children; Military–Industrial Complex, Organization and History; Nuclear Warfare; Warfare, Modern; Warfare, Trends in; World War II

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Totalitarianism and Authoritarianism

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Introduction

Totalitarianism and authoritarianism are relatively new political terms that have appeared only in the twentieth century. They denote contemporary autocratic political regimes; that is, the form of government where the ruler is endowed with, and exerts, absolute power. Such political regimes, however, have existed from the very beginning of human history. Therefore, the first question we may like to have answered touches upon these terms

themselves. How are they related to other, older concepts that were used previously and actually are still being used as a name for autocracies, such as tyranny, dictatorship, despotism, or absolutism? The answer can be obtained when we look at the history of political discourse in the twentieth century. Before we do that, however, let us try to clarify the generic problem underlying our theme: what are autocratic and nonautocratic forms of government?

Autocratic and Nonautocratic Political Regimes

The distinction between autocratic and nonautocratic governments seems as old as the very concept of Western politics which emerged with the birth of the city-state (*poleis*) in ancient Greece (eighth to sixth centuries BC). Until then existing states – empires often stretching over huge masses of land – might have reached quite an impressive level of technical development and sophistication. Nevertheless as far as their form of government was concerned, they were administered like great households. The imperial rulers assumed the role of guarantors of cosmic order in the human world and acted as mediators between gods and men. They exercised complete administrative, managerial, judicial, military, and fiscal authority and were free to accept or to repudiate any laws and norms governing the society of their subjects in any time. No matter how different the style and results of their administration of human affairs might have been, they all were 'despots'. There were no 'politics' under their domination. The 'hydraulic' societies of the Old World – "political systems dependent on the maintenance of large-scale irrigation systems for their survival," to use the terminology of Karl Wittfogel – could be underdeveloped, or have a highly sophisticated and differentiated structure. They nevertheless lacked that dimension of human life for which the necessary condition is the existence of public space and which cannot materialize in the company of slaves but only among one's peers: freedom.

The Aegean region was located on the outskirts of the world and organized from the capitals of mighty ancient empires. The state power was weak and decentralized and the region was highly unstable, finding itself in permanent flux and reconfiguration. Whereas the traditional 'imperialistic' approach to the problem of instability and disorder would have been conquest followed by centralization of power, the Greek solution was radically different. It was achieved gradually in a process that extended over centuries and which is known as *synoecismos*. Those who administered their affairs at home, that is, within their own 'private' households (*oikiai*) as autocratic despots, established *polis* – a common space to deal with common matters. The rule (*arche*), instead of being in

possession of one, was put, as Herodotus reports, "into the midst of the people (*es meson toi demoi*)." As opposed to 'barbarian' autocratic rule, there was no human ruler in the Greek *polis* endowed with supreme authority. Not the divine will of Emperor or Pharaoh, but the law, *nomos*, was accepted as the genuine source of order in the human world.

This change had a revolutionary implication: Whereas pre-political societies were structured hierarchically, the constitution of a political community ruled by law presupposed a principally horizontal organization. It required the radical limitation of ruling power and introduced an entirely new concept of governance. The elementary intention of the 'rule of law' was to turn the heads of family households into citizens: to enable them to voice out their opinions in the ongoing debate concerning the 'common good'; to empower them to speak and act in public. Conflicts and disputes in *polis* could not be resolved by the intervention of the almighty ruler, but strictly within the margins of political justice. Binding decisions in all disputed matters could be taken only by the proper judiciary organ of *polis* in a 'due process of law'. Freedom and equality of citizens before the law (*isonomia*) meant that they had the right to submit accusations against each other and when sued they were entitled to a fair and public trial. Elected jurors who sat in judgment of their fellow citizens, swore to listen impartially to both sides and vote strictly on the issue at hand.

The ancient and modern rules of law can be compared only with great caution. The ancient society and state differ substantively from their modern equivalents. Notwithstanding the fundamental difference between the Greek 'pagan' understanding of man and the Christian idea of humanity, it is true that in protecting the 'common good' *polis* enforced 'public interests' by means which modern Europeans would certainly label as violations of individual rights. This fact, however (the historical records establish the evidence that the restrictions of the personal freedoms of citizens did not happen often nor in many matters in the ancient Athenian democracy), is simply irrelevant for our current analysis. The point is that the political use of power – when the ruler acts as a 'guardian of law' – and the seizure of power – when he promotes his self-interests and uses his tyrannical will – were perceived by the Greeks as opposites. Despite the realistic observations of historians that too often these rulers did not live up to their own promises and disregarded moderation and self-control yet, the love of freedom and the contempt for tyrants represented the fundamental values underlying the Greek political culture. It was this distinction between the autocratic and nonautocratic forms of government, between sheer life and 'good' life, in the words of Aristotle, between the slavish life of a society pursuing the goal of its self-preservation, sheltered by the

superhuman activities of its divine ruler and organized as a kind of household and the life that can be led only in the plurality of free human agents that brought the Greeks into revolt against the Persian king. And it is the same distinction, representing the core political idea of Western civilization, we want to comprehend and study when examining the contemporary phenomena of totalitarianism and authoritarianism.

Totalitarian Search for a New Concept of State

Totalitarianism and authoritarianism represent specific forms of autocracy that came into existence only in the twentieth century. However, when these terms appeared in the European political discourse for the first time in the 1920s, they were not used by opponents of authoritarian regimes, but by their own propagators and protagonists. They appeared in the language of those who were looking for some solutions to escape the evils of modern liberalism.

It was Benito Mussolini and the theoreticians of Italian fascism (Giovanni Gentile) who coined the term *totalitario* in the early 1920s to describe a new type of state whose task was to lead Italy out of the postwar crisis. Also Antonio Gramsci, the most prominent Italian Marxist, presented the Communist Party as the vanguard of a 'totalitarian movement'. In Germany, the word *totale* was introduced into the political vocabulary by the nineteenth-century Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz who dealt with the concept of 'total war'. *Der totale krieg* by Erich Ludendorff and *Die totale mobilmachung* by Ernst Junger, published in the 1930s, departed from the German interpretation of World War I and reflected an attitude that was deeply rooted in the German mind – one that viewed war not only as the use of force in the relations between the states competing in the international arena, but as an eminent act of culture, *eine innere Notwendigkeit* ('a spiritual necessity'). The 'turn to the total state' was seen by Karl Schmitt, the most prominent legal scholar at the time and briefly the 'crown jurist of the Third Reich', as a necessary step in strengthening the feeble governance in the Weimar Republic which came into existence after the loss of the war. Schmitt's critique of liberalism is especially important. Schmitt was definitely not a political radical; on the contrary, he was a conservative. What he was afraid of was the decline of the Western civilization he could observe during his lifetime, and especially the disorder spreading like plague within his own national society. Schmitt's remedy for the political crisis of the Weimar Republic was to revive the use of strong authority through an authoritarian rather than Nazi (national socialist) state.

The slogan of Mussolini, "All within the state, none outside the state, none against the state," demonstrates clearly what totalitarians disliked in liberalism. It was 'too little state' and too much privatization of life in liberal 'bourgeois' society and its essentially negative concept of freedom as freedom 'from' politics. It was its conformism, mediocrity, and easiness. It was its alienation from the public sphere which, they believed, ought to be again animated by the ancient Roman or traditional Germanic spirit. It was the fact that under the conditions of 'mass society' emerging as a final result of the process of modernization, the form of government that was almost automatically associated with the general idea of progress – liberal democracy – was sinking into a deep crisis.

The totalitarian search for a new concept of state did not come out of the blue but was catalyzed by the cataclysmic event of the Great War (1914–18). The first all-out military conflict after 99 years of peace entirely changed the social and spiritual climate on the European continent. The 'Golden Age of Europe' had ended. First, the unprecedented mass mobilization of whole national societies and then the horrors of the front severely undermined the self-confidence of the European middle class and subverted the central dogma of modern Europe: the belief in progress. The old certainties and the prudent, cultivated optimism of the past disappeared. Practically all European national societies, with the middle class decimated in the carnage that lasted for more than 4 years, suffered great instability as a result of the war. The new European political architecture and the harsh reparations imposed on the defeated Central Powers by the Paris Peace Conference provoked in Germany the 'Versailles syndrome', making the revision of the Versailles Treaty a major German political objective in the interwar period. The inability of the European nation-states to implement even the most basic objectives of the postwar plans for European unity paved the way for Hitler's constitutional *coup d'etat* and for laying the foundations of a totalitarian state through the Nazis' Enabling Act of March 1933.

The Intellectual Resistance of the 1930s and 1940s

Artists such as Arthur Koestler, George Orwell, Ignazio Silone, and Albert Camus, to name only the most prominent ones, were among the first to criticize the autocratic states emerging in Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union. These open-minded, critical intellectuals became suspect in the eyes of their political leaders and were quickly turned into state enemies. The stream of emigrants, especially from Germany, appeared first in many European cities and later in the United States. Prominent philosophers, scientists, writers, and journalists opened a kind of

intellectual front against Nazism, Fascism, and Bolshevism and began their struggle for freedom and human dignity by theorizing about totalitarianism and authoritarianism – mostly from either a liberal or Marxist point of view. Karl Manheim, Ludwig von Mieses, Friedrich Hayek, Herbert Marcuse, Mark Horkheimer, Franz Neumann, Sigmund Neumann, Victor Serge, Emil Lederer, Raymond Aron, Franz Borkenau, Ernst Fraenkel, Herman Rauschnigg, Rudolf Hilferding, Eric Voegelin, Karl Popper, and many others, including Leon Trotsky, tried to cope with totalitarian phenomena in their writings and to formulate the principles of intellectual resistance. Marcuse's *The struggle against liberalism in the totalitarian view of the state* (1934), Horkheimer's *The authoritarian state* (1940), and Sigmund Neumann's *Permanent revolution. Totalitarianism in the age of international civil war* (1942) definitely are classics.

Totalitarianism and authoritarianism, through the Nazi, Fascist, or Bolshevik states, made a significant number of European public intellectuals refugees and stateless cosmopolitans and forced them to test their ideas against harsh reality. As Jeffrey Isaac pointed out, a new literary form was, in fact, invented, or at least reinvented, on this occasion: the political book combining history and political criticism. It is important to realize that totalitarianism was not only condemned by all its enemies, but served them often also as a new and shocking source of their inspiration. The totalitarian world was phantasmagoric, it was a living nightmare, but still it "could not be written off as unrealizable." It "seemed literally to defy comprehension; it was confusing not only to its protagonists but to its victims and potential victims as well." A disturbing question, indeed – raised and developed later by Hannah Arendt – was coming back again and again: What is the nature of this monstrosity? How can anything like that come into existence in the human world? Who are those who were able to come up with the idea of the 'Final Solution'? What state of human mind can bring into existence and keep in operation a bureaucratically organized and technologically advanced system of death factories?

Theorizing Totalitarianism and Authoritarianism during the Cold War

The 'classic' period in the history of these concepts started with a conference on totalitarianism held by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston, 6–8 March 1953. Organized by Carl J. Friedrich, who later published a seminal work in the research of totalitarian phenomenon with Zbigniew Brzezinski *Totalitarian dictatorships and autocracy* (1956), and opened by a lecture of George Kennan, the conference made the first step to a comprehensive definition of totalitarianism based on the

presupposition that "totalitarian regimes constitute a relatively novel species in the long history of autocratic government."

Since the times when European public intellectuals began launching their antitotalitarian campaign, the political situation in the world changed. World War II ended in Europe by the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany on 8 May 1945. Only a few years later, however, the victorious coalition broke up and Europe was again torn apart by a new 'ideological' conflict between the liberal West and the communist (i.e., totalitarian) East. The 'old' continent definitely lost its supremacy in world affairs and was divided into two 'antagonistic' camps, lead by the United States and the Soviet Union, which emerged from the war as the new superpowers. The Western perspective was clear enough: one form of totalitarianism was defeated, but the second one became much stronger than ever before. The European civilization and its liberal principles were again endangered and forced to struggle for survival. The Fulton speech of Churchill in March 1946 and the Long Telegram of George Kennan from Moscow to the state department in the same year, followed by the famous 'X' article on 'Containment' which appeared in *Foreign affairs* in Summer 1947, represent unmistakable signs that times were, indeed, changing. Within a few years, the Cold War was in full swing and this has to be borne in mind when looking at all attempts, especially those in the 1950s, at a new conceptualization of the twentieth-century autocracy.

First of all it was argued by Friedrich and Brzezinski that "totalitarian dictatorship is historically unique and *sui generis* . . . that fascist and communist totalitarian dictatorships are basically alike, or at any rate more nearly like each other than like any other system of government, including earlier forms of autocracy." This argument brought about the next step: to attempt to define it.

The result of these endeavors was the following proposition: the totalitarian dictatorship can be characterized by six basic features or traits:

1. an official ideology, consisting of an official body of doctrine covering all vital aspects of man's existence, to which everyone living in that society is supposed to adhere, at least passively; this ideology is characteristically focused and projected toward a perfect final state of mankind, that is, it contains a chiliastic claim, based upon a radical rejection of the existing society and conquest of the world for the new one;

2. a single mass party led typically by one man, the 'dictator', and consisting of a relatively small percentage of the total population (up to 10%) of men and women – a hard core of them passionately and unquestioningly dedicated to the ideology and prepared to assist in every way in promoting its general acceptance – such a party being

hierarchically, oligarchically organized and typically either superior to, or completely intertwined with the bureaucratic government organization;

3. a system of terroristic police control, supporting but also supervising the party for its leaders, and characteristically directed not only against demonstrable 'enemies' of the regime, but against arbitrarily selected classes of the population; the terror of the secret police systematically exploiting modern science, and especially scientific psychology;

4. a technically conditioned near-complete monopoly of control, in the hands of the party and its subservient cadres, of all means of effective mass communication, such as the press, radio, and motion pictures;

5. a similarly technologically conditioned near-complete monopoly of control (in the same hands) of all means of effective armed combat; and

6. a central control and direction of the entire economy through the bureaucratic coordination of its formerly independent corporate entities, typically including most other associations and group activities.

This definition can still serve undoubtedly as a good point of departure for any research of totalitarian phenomena. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the expectations of those who needed such terms to use in various fields of value-free scientific research remained unfulfilled. The problem was methodological: As the proceedings of the mentioned Boston conference demonstrate, what characterized this gathering of prominent personalities was an atmosphere of mobilization. The Cold War context set the tone of the totalitarianism debate and created around it, "the mood of political crisis and ideological urgency."

Totalitarianism, which now took the shape of Soviet communism, was not perceived not so much as a scientific problem, but represented a serious challenge to Western freedom. Its clarification became, in Friedrich's words, "the central problem of our time." Or as George Kennan put it in the first sentences of his opening lecture: "We have come together to discuss a phenomenon of our time that has brought the deepest possible misery to untold millions of our contemporaries . . . (which) has demeaned humanity in its own sight, attacked man's confidence in himself, made him realize that he can be his own most terrible and dangerous enemy, more bestial that the beasts, more cruel than nature."

Did George Kennan speak here as a public intellectual regardless of his actual position in the American political system or as an official herald of American postwar realism in international affairs? What was more important for him, the shock, supported by the wellproven empirical evidence, that totalitarian dictatorships are materialized evil, transforming the human world into hell? Or the fact that such regimes, because of their devilish nature, had to be regarded by the state department as hostile to the United States?

The idea that the Soviet Empire should be 'contained' offered a clear direction to the US foreign policy driven by American national interests in the age of the atomic bomb. It should not be overlooked, however, that as far as the nature of totalitarianism itself is concerned, this perspective rather blurred important distinctions and can easily be seen as the root cause of many serious confusions. The largest among them concerns the distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian autocratic governments that started to gain currency in the political vocabulary of the Cold War period, especially in the United States, misleading not only those who studied contemporary autocratic forms of government, but also those who had to use these concepts in practice. It was undoubtedly true that there were very remarkable differences between the military dictatorships in Latin America or Southeast Asia (which were labeled as authoritarian) and the Stalinistic form of government that spread to Eastern Europe and embodied, according to the experts from the Pentagon and the state department, pure totalitarianism. Nevertheless, the fact that the former were friends and the latter foes of the United States could be accepted as sufficient reason only by those who relied on the use of force in international relations, who most probably rightly argued that the United States should not hesitate to protect freedom by intervening militarily in the American 'zone of influence' and to head-off the communist world revolution by all available means. However, as far as the debate on totalitarianism is concerned, it was only a matter of time before it became apparent that this reasoning was too narrow and too determined by the spirit of the "imperialistic republic," to use the terminology of Raymond Aron (1974).

Retreat from Totalitarianism and Its Survival: The Attempts to Deconstruct the Concept in the 1960s and 1970s

The process of gradual change, in the Soviet Union and in the other socialist countries in Eastern Europe, which started in the middle of the 1950s and culminated at the end of the 1960s still bears a name that explains how strongly the communist variety of totalitarianism was connected with the chief dictator: de-Stalinization. Joseph Stalin died in 1953. Nikita Khrushchev delivered his famous secret speech, denouncing the 'cult of personality' of the previous adored leader and disclosing the horrible crimes of Stalin's regime, in 1956 to the 20th CPSU Congress. No matter whether Khrushchev's proclaimed goal to return from Stalinism to true Leninism was meant sincerely and regardless of the principal question whether any reform of communism was only a vain

attempt to 'square the circle'; the political situation in Europe at the end of the 1960s was remarkably different from the previous decade.

Thanks to Khrushchev and other reformers, communism lost its savage face and acquired at least some human qualities. The whole world was observing with a kind of relief and with hope that what was going on in the socialist camp under the label of de-Stalinization was showing unmistakable signs of being capable of at least some positive developments. For sure, there were crises within the system (the Hungarian Revolution of 1956) or crises between superpowers (the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 which brought the world closer to nuclear conflict than ever before). In spite of various setbacks, however, the reformist spirit seemed to be prevailing, even gaining, step by step, new ground. The ideological confrontation between East and West was being reformulated. If at the outset of the Cold War the East–West relations were characterized by an uncompromising Manichean struggle between life-and-death enemies, the relaxed 1960s gave birth to a much more benign concept of 'peaceful coexistence of the countries with different social systems'.

The 'thaw' in the Eastern bloc contributed positively to the stabilization of the international situation. The Cold War was not over, but no one could doubt that it entered a new, qualitatively different phase. The tension declined and in retrospect, the 1950s could easily be perceived as a 'nightmare'. The scene cleared up and in daylight everything that had come into existence in the darkness began to reveal its ghostly nature. This shift was also found in political terminology and it is not at all surprising that, under the new circumstances, the classic definition of totalitarianism came under fire.

Two trains of argument were used, due to the essential ambiguity of terms noted previously. On the one hand they describe political phenomena and serve as instruments for historical analysis. On the other hand, they design political ideas that have the power to 'act' in the human world and to change eventually the course of human matters; political ideas as used by politicians whose discourse is not descriptive but prescriptive.

Subsequently, one type of criticism was coming from those who intended to clarify the content and validity of the term 'totalitarianism' from the point of view of the behavioral, social, and political sciences. What behaviorists disliked, when they tried to find its place in the context of their research, was that they heard in it – as Michael Curtis put it – too much of "emotive overtones." According to these critics, the term 'totalitarianism' should be tested as an analytical tool to be used in the process of causal explanations and for that purpose it had to be, above all, depoliticized. The 'counter-ideological uses of totalitarianism' could not guarantee that this term was justified from the point of view of value-free, neutral, and objective science; that there is such a social and political reality.

A scientific term, it was argued, can be useful only if it is sufficiently general to be applied to a number of cases. As a matter of fact, all available definitions of totalitarianism – sometimes reflecting the reality of Hitler's regime in Germany, sometimes corresponding to the Stalinist period of Soviet communism – were strangely at odds with this requirement. Even if we could omit all the differences between Nazism and communism and focus on what they had in common, "there is hardly much to be gained by having the term so highly specified that it merely replaces one or two proper names," argued Stanislav Andreski. Those who suggested that societies formed by these regimes should be studied as examples of a new social 'species', of a new type of society characterized by a number of distinctive traits, simply did not respect well-established scientific methodology. Such an approach to social phenomena involved too much categorization, too much essentialism, and an excessive concern with the uniqueness of extremist criminal regimes which, in their pure form, existed only for a very limited period of time (the Nazi regime in Germany became truly totalitarian only after 1939 and Stalin's regime in the Soviet Union corresponded to the above-suggested definition in the period of the 'great purges' in the second half of the 1930s and again after World War II until Stalin's death in 1953). The conclusion, which was supported by Benjamin Barber, Michael Curtis, and Herbert Spiro, among others, was clear: the concept of totalitarianism was of very limited analytical or heuristic value. The best thing would be to 'retreat from it', to not use it at all and let it disappear from the political lexicon.

The second type of criticism came from those who were convinced that what was at stake in the ongoing totalitarianism debate concerned, above all, the realm of prescriptive political ideas. The most important example here was the German case. For in Germany, for obvious reasons, it was more difficult than anywhere else, or rather impossible, to separate social and political sciences from politics and to keep the scientific discourse neutral and value-free in the Weberian sense. Throughout the postwar period, the German debate concerning the nature of contemporary autocratic regimes took place in the context of denazification. Germans, burdened with their own totalitarian past, simply could not identify themselves with the American point of view. No doubt that it was the American Marshall Plan of postwar reconstruction of Europe that helped to overcome the gap which the war opened between Germany and all other Europeans. No doubt, it was the pro-American foreign policy of the first chancellor of the post-Nazi German state, Konrad Adenauer, that helped build a bridge from the totalitarian past toward a 'democratic' future and enabled Germany

to rise from the ashes and to overcome the postwar marasmus and disorder. Nevertheless, as the heated polemics that burst out at the beginning of the 1960s triggered by the scandalous discoveries of the Nazi pasts of many prominent German politicians clearly demonstrated, neither American money invested in future European stability nor Adenauer's awareness of the importance of close transatlantic cooperation could solve the central problem of the newly democratic and newly liberal German political community: how to achieve a real reconciliation; how to restore the shattered spiritual balance; and how to heal the German mind, which seemed still disturbed by what had happened during the war despite all undisputable signs of economic growth and political recovery.

While the dominant feature of the American perception of totalitarianism was that it was communism that had to be contained now and kept out of the free world, the German focus was clearly on the homefront. The arguments that appeared first in the 1960s, however, indicate that real soul-searching was extremely difficult in the existing climate of ideas. The thaw in the East did not so much provoke questions concerning the future of the divided European continent, but inspired left-wing Western European intelligencia to take up sometimes very militant anti-American attitudes and to condemn, as had happened many times before, the antihuman traits of world capitalism.

The renaissance of the left in the 1960s brought another resolute attack against those who used the term 'totalitarianism'. It was criticized as an instrument of the Cold War serving, above all, the interests of American hegemonic policy. Especially in Germany, it could be unmasked as part and parcel of a self-righteous strategy of those who wanted to divert attention away from their own disgraceful Nazi past and make a new career in the democratic regime. If the principal argument of Friedrich and Brzezinski was that "totalitarian regimes constitute a relatively novel species," the left-wing opponents of the term were suggesting its deconstruction, that is, the return to the traditional, ideological antagonism and to the terms 'fascism' and 'communism'. Whereas the reforms in the East demonstrated dynamism and the still-unexploited potential of the socialist movement, the right-wing extremism had to be condemned by all 'progressive' people in the world – not so much on moral grounds but because history itself was following the path of progress. With this move, however, the debate on contemporary autocracies came, as Karl Bracher, who opposed the left-wing criticism of totalitarianism, pointed out, full circle. The arguments that were based on the differences between fascist and communist political ideas and socioeconomic concepts – rather than on similarities between the 'forms of government' and social realities produced by the communist and fascist political praxis – were unpleasantly reminiscent of the critique of Western liberalism in the 1920s and 1930s.

Bracher's refusal of the left-wing deconstruction of the term 'totalitarianism' is worth mentioning. To dump this term "is historically wrong, because this move simply fails to consider the long history of the totalitarianism debate started in 1922 and 1933." The criticism of the Cold War uses of the term – which had its champions still in the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, Jean Kirckpatrick (1980) – might be justified. What was not acceptable for Bracher – and what makes this strategy to 'solve' the problem more than dubious from any reasonable point of view – was the unreflected ideological bias of those who presented it. What seemed to be completely forgotten by the left-wing critics was the original meaning of the term: that what is at stake here is the struggle of European civilization in the twentieth century for its freedom; that it is vital in this struggle to be able to distinguish, under the conditions of the contemporary world, between dictatorship and democracy.

Bracher agreed with Friedrich and Brzezinski and other supporters of the classic definition that the structural similarities are more important than the ideological differences between left-wing and right-wing totalitarian governments. On the other hand, he was neither on the side of those who were actively engaged in Cold War international politics and were striving to 'contain' the archenemy, nor did he subscribe to any value-free, neutral scientific methodology. As a German, he was quite aware of the political dimension of the totalitarian problem. On the other hand – and again as a German, we may add – he was also aware that to understand totalitarianism requires a different type of knowledge. What must be looked for in the totalitarian debate is a knowledge that 'knows' how to cope with the generic problem of autocratic versus nonautocratic forms of government in our times and that is able to see the general dilemma our civilization was confronted with, from the very beginning, in the concrete social and political, that is, historical context we are part of. However, it is this context that has to be properly reflected in the first place. The totalitarianism debate itself represented a serious problem for Bracher, a problem that by its nature, as we will see in the final section of this article, opens the door not only to the core problem of European politics, but also of European philosophy. What matters, is not only the term itself, but – to repeat once more Bracher's argument – how it was used under the given concrete circumstances and what set in motion its own history.

From Revolutionary Terror to Asthma of Normalization: Totalitarianism Lived and Analyzed by Václav Havel

The political developments of the 'golden sixties' reached their peak in 1968. The student protest movements sweeping throughout Western Europe and the United

States, and the Prague Spring – an unprecedented attempt in the Eastern European socialist camp to open the closed communist system and to endow it with a 'human face' – were monuments of the spirit of the times and marked the end of an era. The prevailing climate of ideas in the 1970s and 1980s was very different. The students of the French, German, or American universities returned to their classrooms with the sense of urgency and mobilization among Western public intellectuals withered away. East–West relationships were characterized by a return to more 'realistic' policies possible within the existing bipolar political architecture. The reformist spirit of the 1960s was replaced by a more traditional version of international politics – conceived as an interplay of security and 'national' interests of the principal actors of the international system; defined and hammered out under the conditions of the Cold War, predominantly by the two leading superpowers whose competition for influence and control over world affairs was moderated by their shared concern for avoiding nuclear conflict and for keeping global balance and stability.

However, what on the Western side of the Iron Curtain could be registered as just a change of political atmosphere or a shift of paradigm was rightfully perceived by the open-minded and liberal inhabitants of the East as a catastrophe. Hundreds of thousand people fled from Czechoslovakia after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops on 21 August 1968, convinced that there was no future for them or for their children in that part of the world. The icy blow of 'Realpolitik', which replaced the 'thaw' of the Prague Spring, the fact that the Soviet step was in fact approved by Washington as an operation within the confines of the Soviet 'zone of influence', gave to the new emigrants a lesson that was later best articulated by Milan Kundera, a Czech writer, living in exile in France, as a Central European "tragedy." Central Europe, wrote Kundera,

> is a family of small nations (which) has its own vision of the world, a vision based on a deep distrust of history. History, that goddess of Hegel and Marx, that incarnation of reason that judges and arbitrates our fate, is the history of conquerors. The peoples of Central Europe are not conquerors. They cannot be separated from European history; they cannot exist outside of it; but they represent the wrong side of history; there are its victims and outsiders. (Kundera, 1984)

With due respect to Kundera and all others who solved this Central European problem in their individual lives by escaping to the West, it was not in the circles of emigres, but among those who stayed at home – and this is definitely different from the situation in the 1930s and 1940s – that important arguments emerged which significantly enriched the ongoing totalitarian debate.

There are many names in all countries behind the Iron Curtain that should be mentioned in this context. Certainly not only Central Europeans but also Russians contributed in a substantive manner to the uneasy task of disclosing the real nature of the socialist regimes that had tried to hide beneath more fashionable clothes in the changing world of the 1970s and 1980s to secure favorable conditions for their survival. For the purpose of this article, however, only one of them will be referred to in this section, a Czech dissident and playwright and later the president of the newly liberated, postcommunist state, Václav Havel.

Václav Havel belongs to the same generation of Czech intellectuals as Milan Kundera, also appearing on the public scene of his country in the 1960s. The Prague Spring of 1968 also represented a significant crossroads in his life. Nevertheless, not only was he never a member of the Communist Party – which is why he did not need to 'sober up' after having been temporarily intoxicated by the Marxist ideology – but his choice in the aftermath of the Soviet-led invasion that crushed the experiment of the 'socialism with human face' was different from Kundera's. Having decided not to leave his country under any circumstance, he has become undoubtedly one of the most sensitive and most penetrating observers of the post-1968 transformation of the Central European communist variety of totalitarianism.

His reflections on the nature of contemporary autocratic governments noted the remarkable difference between the "revolutionary ethos and terror" of the Stalinist 1950s and the depressive, deadening atmosphere – "dull inertia, pretext-ridden caution, bureaucratic anonymity, and mindless, stereotypical behaviour" – so typical of the era of 'normalization' that spread throughout Czechoslovakian society after the defeat of the 'counter-revolution' in 1968.

In its original version, the defining feature of a totalitarian regime was the combination of idealistic hopes for a better world with the use of brute force and physical violence:

> In the fifties there were enormous concentration camps in Czechoslovakia filled with tens of thousands of innocent people. At the same time, building sites were swarming with tens of thousands of young enthusiasts of the new faith singing songs of socialist construction. There were tortures and executions, dramatic flights across borders, conspiracies, and at the same time, panegyrics were being written to the chief dictator. (Havel, 1992)

The society that was essentially liberal and 'open' in the past (and already the Nazi occupation and the horrors of World War II (1939–45) had strongly undermined this capacity) was being forcibly 'closed' after the communist constitutional *coup d'etat* in February 1948. The building of

a socialist 'radiant future', foreseen in Marxist–Leninist ideology, was accompanied by the ruthless and oppressive policies of the Communist Party which seized the monopoly of power and quickly formed a totalitarian political regime. It must be noted, however, that it was not only the immoderate lust for power of the new rulers combined with the blind conviction and commitment of the "enthusiasts of the new faith" that sent the Czechoslovakian democracy into the abyss. The Czechoslovakian communists certainly had their share in it, but the real 'historical force' behind their success was the Soviet Union whose territorial and political gains had to be recognized in postwar Europe and whose emerging global influence was also reflected in the American policy of 'containment'.

In spite of the fact that the 1950s could indeed be perceived in retrospect as a 'nightmare', there was something in this period that surprisingly Havel could label as "positive." Even though the closing of society was carried by all sorts of brutal means, it took place in an environment that was still nontotalitarian, still bearing some traces of the old, pre-revolutionary world. It was this 'ancestral' aspect that gave the beginning phase of Czechoslovakian totalitarianism its specific local color and flavor.

What was not entirely missing in the 1950s and what immediately took on more visible, more tangible, and socially more significant forms after the 'nightmare' was gone, was the hope for the future. When people began first to feel and then later to perceive the signs of a dawning new day, there appeared the dimension of the human condition that is able, despite all terrors, tragedies, and deaths to impart meaning to human life: the faith that the painful experiences with communism could be healed and the belief that the society could return to the state in which it had existed in its pretotalitarian past. It was this attitude that was helping people to see the light at the end of the tunnel, even when there was no real reason to believe that the communist regime had to collapse quickly and when it turned out that the broadly spread speculations concerning the American interventions against communism was a sheer illusion. And it was this state of mind that nourished the gradual change in the social atmosphere of the 1960s; what made the vast majority of Czechs and Slovaks believe, during the Prague Spring of 1968 and even still when they saw Soviet tanks in the streets of Prague and other cities in August of that year, that socialism – whatever this word meant – was after all reformable, that Central Europeans were not doomed to remain forever – as Kundera said in 1984 – the 'victims and outsiders' of European history.

The 1970s and 1980s meant, first of all, the end of this hope and the unpleasant discovery that Central Europe was indeed finding herself at a kind of dead end. The bipolar political architecture of the Cold War turned out to be a much stronger element in shaping her destiny

than the desire of the Central Europeans to actively participate in its creation. The period of 'normalization' in Czechoslovakia started not at the moment of Soviet occupation, but when the huge majority of Czechs and Slovaks simply gave up and conformed to their historical lot – by either willingly cooperating with a 'rehashed' ruling power or retreating to the private spheres of their lives and succumbing to passivity. The spirit of resistance of 1968 was taken over in 1969 by the 'captive mind', named and analyzed by another outstanding Central European, the Polish poet Czeslav Milosz. The regime that emerged under the domination of this 'captive mind' could serve, as Václav Havel pointed out in 1986, "as a textbook illustration of how an advanced or late totalitarian system works:"

> (It) depends on manipulatory devices so refined, complex, and powerful that it no longer needs murderers and victims. Even less does it need fiery Utopia builders spreading discontent with dreams of a better future. The epithet "Real Socialism", which this era has coined to describe itself, points a finger at those for whom it has no room: the dreamers. (Havel, 1992)

In other words, being exposed to the influence of an external power and in a desperate effort to adopt itself to the geopolitical conditions in the changing world-totalitarian form of government in Czechoslovakia dramatically changed its style and external manifestations. The main force of Havel's writings on totalitarianism consists in his unique ability to offer an authentic analysis of this – sometimes horrifying, sometimes only ridiculously absurd – metamorphosis.

First, what got lost entirely was the revolutionary character of totalitarian government. Although ideologically it uncompromisingly adhered to the original teachings, at the same time it dropped its original intention to transform the existing social and political order according to the Marxist–Leninist blueprint. It "set itself a single aim: self-preservation." Instead of using the straightforward ruthless policies of its early days, instead of perpetrating acts of open violence against the defeated social classes (which were to be physically destroyed), the 'normalization' regime was created by unprincipled opportunists who simply desired to keep themselves in power. With the exception of a relatively small group of counterrevolutionaries and revisionists who deserved exemplary punishment, all others were to be offered a possibility to preserve their own well-being and their relatively safe and undisturbed existence. The ticket one had to buy to be admitted was quite cheap and the vast majority was easily persuaded. No class origin, no conviction, no commitment, not even difficult moral choices were required to get on board; just the formal agreement with the Soviet occupation and at least tacit

consent with the basic goals of 'normalization'; the readiness to give up all ideals and noble visions and be flexible enough to adapt oneself to the requirements of a new situation.

The ruling power simply offered to the ruled a kind of bizarre 'social contract': a relatively undisturbed private life and even some personal benefits in exchange for loyalty to the regime, the willingness to accept its concept of politics, and understanding what the nature and role of public space is in 'socialist' society. Here the history of totalitarianism made another full circle. It began by critiquing the 'bourgeois' ideal of private liberties and the liberal claim for freedom from politics. The Italian Fascists and the German Nazis emphasized the necessity of building a strong state and strived to impose a new concept of politics on the 'decadent' Western societies and to solve the crisis of European civilization by reviving the ancient virtues and values. The communist revolutionaries, departing from the progressive teachings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, wanted to see the bourgeois oppressive state 'wither away' and be replaced with a political order of a new type, with a new form of administration of human matters. However, what the disciples and heirs of the totalitarian 'founding fathers' got and what they found themselves actively supporting, after the power of their ideological premises and political enthusiasm 'burned out', was quite opposite to their original intentions: a kind of cheap, but 1000 times worse imitation of the 'rotten' and supposedly outdated 'bourgeois' political regime.

The politics that pursued the idea of the total state ended in the 'lessons of the years of crisis' (1968/1969) which used the language of the old revolutionary slogans, but whose message had an entirely different meaning:

1. Any effort to open up the socialist system and to reform its form of government was considered dangerous and leading to destabilization, intolerable to the ruling forces of this world.
2. Only fools and martyrs could be so irrational as to act against this fundamental and invincible 'law' of human history.
3. In the era of Real Socialism, politics should be understood not as a sphere of human responsibility and agency, but as a kind of empty ritual. Its aim was to protect the society from any change – to keep it in the state in which it already was.
4. It was perfectly acceptable that, under the given circumstances, not everybody had the ambition, or the stomach, to become a politician. In that case he was only advised to mind his own business and to stay away from politics.

There is no doubt that the 'liberalization' of the traditional elements of totalitarianism (i.e., their reinterpretation in connection with the above-mentioned 'social contract')

made life much easier and more bearable for the enslaved peoples. At the same time, however, it obviously did not include any increase of their freedom, but on the contrary their further enslavement. A society where an advanced or late totalitarian system came into being was not any more decimated by the revolutionary 'reigns of terror and virtue', and some socialist governments even managed to offer to their population quite a high standard of living. But it did not mean, on the other hand – and that is the principal message of Václav Havel – that the inhabitants of the world of 'Real Socialism' were safe from the destructive effects of 'totalitarian radiation'.

There was no unmanipulated public space available for them, no ideologically undistorted language to address the relevant social issues and to formulate and discuss new political ideas. There was no communication as regards the public good and common matters, and there were no citizens committed to rediscovering the original meaning of politics in their concrete situations. There were no events besides various anniversaries to make news and to form stories; no social movements to be seen; no experiences to be transformed into political knowledge; and no hope, at least for the living generations, that the political situation could be ever changed. What remained was a society, relatively well fed, surviving under a kind of socialist welfare condition, but suffering a strange disease that Havel compared to asthma: one is still alive but struggling for air to oxidize the blood, having permanent difficulties in breathing:

> It is not true that Czechoslovakia is free of warfare and murder. The war and killing assume a different form: they have been shifted from the daylight of observable public events, to the twilight of unobservable inner destruction. It would seem that the absolute, "classical" death of which one reads in stories (and which for all terrors it holds is still mysteriously able to impart meaning to human life) has been replaced here by another kind of death: the slow, secretive, bloodless, never-quite-absolute, yet horrifyingly ever-present death of non-action, non-story, non-life and non-time; the collectively deadening, or more precisely, anaesthetizing, process of social and historical nihilization. This nihilization annuls death as such, and thus annuls life as such: the life of an individual becomes the dull and uniform functioning of a component in a large machine, and his death is merely something that puts him out of commission. (Havel, 1992)

Havel's description of the destruction of 'stories' in a world controlled by totalitarian forces, his story about a deep crisis that points to the very core of our humanity – to the primordial need of every human being to impart meaning to his or her life – reveals undoubtedly a new truth concerning the essence of totalitarian government. It illustrates on the one hand the closed totalitarian mind

in action, endless conformism, and hopeless thoughtlessness of its protagonists. On the other hand, however, it also articulates the reasoning behind the dissident revolt against this system that spread all around Central Europe in the late 1970s and 1980s. It testifies to the dissidents struggle with 'nothingness' and social amnesia, but also to the essential uncertainty and vulnerability that accompanied this enterprise. Again in the words of Václav Havel:

> I am attempting to say that the struggle of the story and of history to resist nihilization is in itself a story, and belongs to history. It is our special metastory.
>
> We do not know how to talk about it because the traditional forms of storytelling fail us here. We do not yet know the laws that govern our metastory. We do not even know yet exactly who or what is the main villain of the story (it is definitely not a few individuals in the power center: they too are victims of something larger, just as we are).
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> It is clear: we must tell the story of our asthma, not despite the fact that people are dying from it, but because they are not.
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> One small detail remains: we have to learn how to do it. (Havel, 1992)

Hannah Arendt's Difficulties of Understanding and the Future of Totalitarianism in the Era of Globalization

The last word is usually given to someone who is capable of summing up the previous discussions and to bring contradictory positions into proper perspective. Hannah Arendt was definitely not a harmonizer. She developed her own way of writing about the political crisis of European civilization in the twentieth century. Especially the way she approached the Jewish tragedy of World War II when she agreed to go to Israel in 1962 as a journalist to cover the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann and publish her report on the 'banality of evil', openly went against the mainstream understanding of the totalitarian phenomenon and was controversial, at the very least. It is, however, commensurate to the nature of the subject under investigation to conclude with the most challenging, the most provocative author in the field.

Hannah Arendt (1906–75) was a German Jew. Her first exposure to 'totalitarian radiation' took place when Hitler seized power of the Weimar Republic in 1933. She fled from Germany in the same year, but before she left – first to work in France in an organization that facilitated Jewish emigration to Palestine and later to start a new life and a distinguished academic career in America – she had a chance to observe the emerging totalitarian regime in the first months of its existence, that is, literally *in statu*

nascendi. She commented on her experiences of 1933 more than 30 years later in an interview she gave on German public television in 1964. What was shocking for her at the moment when the new regime emerged was not the radicalism of its political program and, above all, its openly anti-Semitic policies, but the strange social change that occurred almost instantly. Anti-Semitism as such was definitely not anything new. As were all Jews in Germany, Arendt was used to its occasional manifestations. The radicalism of the Nazis in this respect was indeed a gloomy, ominous sign for the future. Nevertheless, it was not at all surprising: "We didn't need Hitler's assumption of power to know that the Nazis were our enemies!"

Much more depressing than the political changes resulting from the nature of the Hitler's Nazi regime was when Arendt characterized as a 'personal problem' – to see "not what our enemies did but what our friends did, 'how quickly they' co-ordinated or got in line."

> In the wave of Gleichschaltung (co-ordination), which was relatively voluntary – in any case, not yet under the pressure of terror – it was as if an empty space formed around one. . . . I will never forget that. (Arendt, 1994b)

Isn't it exactly this 'unforgettable' trait characterizing the majority of German intelligentsia in the 1930s that should actually be identified and factored in as an important, but too often forgotten, element in the history of German totalitarianism? Isn't it here that the research of the nature of totalitarian regimes should start from? Isn't it true that the capacity for coordination was definitely not limited only to the German intellectuals and occurred in many other forms and in many other situations in Europe in the twentieth century? Hannah Arendt's answer to these disturbing questions, based first on her own personal experiences and then tested against the shocking realities and brutal facts of the European politics of her times, was unequivocal. The position she departed from in her inquiries into the nature of totalitarianism could then be formulated as follows:

1. The emergence of autocratic political regimes in the twentieth century that can be labeled totalitarian was not the result of an attack against Europe led by barbarous villains who came from the outside and struck like a bolt from the blue.
2. It was enabled or at least facilitated by the striking inability of modern European societies to find individually or collectively, in the framework of the international system they created, an adequate response in the moment when the barbarians appeared.
3. The rise and hitherto only temporary success of totalitarian movements is a historical turning point. Both Hitter's and Stalin's regimes were in the end defeated, but something irreversible and epoch-making happened through their attempts at global domination.

After Auschwitz, the world simply cannot be the same as before: "The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition."

Totalitarianism represents the most radical denial of human freedom, unknown and unprecedented in human history, and that is why the politics whose aim it is to ward off this danger needs to start from a new beginning. The crimes again humanity committed against millions of innocent people; genocides such as the Holocaust which took place in the heart of 'civilized' Europe, in the milieu of modern, enlightened, and progressive European society whose most common reaction to all these horrors was neglect of the victims and the attitude of 'coordination', have revealed the depth of the crisis of European civilization.

What comes under fire in the moment of confrontation with the totalitarian threat are not only the institutions of the modern nation-state but also the basic ideas and fundamental values underlying the modem European concept of politics. Neither social sciences, describing and analyzing social reality from the neutral, value-free point of view (equating totalitarianism "with some well-known evil of the past, such an aggression, tyranny, conspiracy"), nor the perspective of traditional liberal politics (committed to the protection of the free Western world and fighting against its external totalitarian enemies) can help us find an adequate response to the most fundamental political problem we have faced in the twentieth century. According to Hannah Arendt, the main difficulty with totalitarianism lies in our inability to understand it; "to reconcile ourselves to a world in which such things are possible at all;" to regain the capacity to act in the moment when totalitarian tendencies emerge in the midst of turmoil and political crises; to keep public space open even if the plurality of existing options are fading away under the given social and political circumstances and the seemingly invincible Laws of Nature or Laws of History are requiring our unconditional surrender and 'coordination'.

According to its own anamnesis, modernity liberated man from the shackles by which his Promethean human nature had been bound to the Earth. It was the era of reason and science; the era of technological advances, industrialization, and urbanization; the era of fast development in all spheres of human life and the visible improvement of people's living conditions; the era that introduced the concept of religious tolerance; the era of social and political emancipation reaching all layers of the European population; the era when democracy, the rule by the many – which had appeared for the first time in ancient city-states – was rediscovered and adapted to the new conditions as a political form corresponding better than any other form of government to the progressive trends within European society; the era of constitutionalism, the rule of law, and liberal politics, based on common

sense and enlightened self-interest, subscribing to the concept of limited government and declaring respect for the unalienable, that is, natural rights of man; the era when equal sovereign states replaced the medieval Christian Empire in Europe and gradually invented all new forms and procedures of international law and politics; the era when the world – literally discovered by Europeans – was really 'Eurocentric', that is, Europe undisputedly played a leading role in world affairs.

The actual political experience of the twentieth century, however, puts the whole modern period into a radically new perspective. Totalitarian governments have been created by political movements that have come into existence in the nontotalitarian world (surely "they have not been imported from the Moon," remarks Arendt ironically). If we want to understand this event that according to Arendt is the central event of our times and the main symptom of the crisis of European civilization, it is Europe's modernization project that has to be questioned and thoroughly reconsidered in the first place. Totalitarianism must be studied in the proper historical perspective and its 'crystallizing elements' traced back to their origins in previous centuries.

Besides the rise of totalitarian movements themselves in the 1920s – whose sharp criticism of Western 'decadent' liberalism was accompanied by their "avowed cynical realism" and by "their conspicuous disdain of the whole texture of reality" – there are two other nineteenth-century elements of totalitarianism that Arendt suggests we must take into account: anti-Semitism, which became a kind of secular ideology, widespread in the emancipated European national societies; and imperialism, the element of "expansion for expansion's sake," the limitless pursuit of power, which "grew out of colonialism and was caused by the incongruity of the nation-state system with the economic and industrial developments in the last third of the nineteenth century."

> In this sense, it must be possible to face and understand the outrageous fact that so small (and in world politics, so unimportant) a phenomenon as the Jewish question and antisemitism could become the catalytic agent for first, the Nazi movement, than a world war, and finally the establishment of death factories. Or, the grotesque disparity between cause and effect which introduced the era of imperialism, when economic difficulties led, in a few decades, to a profound transformation of political conditions all over the world. (Arendt, 1973)

However, going back before the final crystallizing catastrophe took place in the 1930s, when Hitler seized power in Germany, does not mean for Arendt to get involved in anything like a scientific historiography: "I did not write a history of totalitarianism but an analysis in terms of history," she replied to Eric Voegelin's critical

review of her seminal book. The aim of her study was not to offer a causal explanation of historical phenomena, but to let the event of the emergence of totalitarianism "illuminate its own past"; by enfolding the 'story' in historical time to obtain better comprehension and

> it does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities, that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be. (Arendt, 1973)

"The process of understanding is clearly and perhaps primarily, also a process of self-understanding," says Arendt, connecting her studies on antisemitism, imperialism, and totalitarianism with the debate concerning contemporary European politics. As already discussed, the totalitarian movements emerged in Europe after the Great War (1914–18). This first pan-European military conflagration after the long period of relative peace and prosperity (which began in 1815 when the Vienna Congress of leading European states ended the decades of turmoil and disorder triggered by the French Revolution) was indeed an epochal event. What changed after its termination was not only the political map of Europe, but also the general climate of ideas on the continent. European politics after the Paris Peace Conference (1919–20) took place in an environment that was radically different from the prewar period, from the "World of yesterday" as we can learn about, for instance, from the autobiography of Stephan Zweig. As distinct from the wonderful, and in many ways delirious, and seductive '*Belle Époque*' that European society was living through immediately before World War I, the postwar era made Europeans to wake up to very different realities. What disappeared in the first place was the relaxed, self-confident 'Eurooptimism' that accompanied the European politics throughout the entire nineteenth century. Four million members of European middle-class societies killed on the fronts were not the only victims of the first all-out conflict after 90 years of stability in Europe; there was also the central political idea of European modernity: the idea of progress.

The twentieth century "has become indeed, as Lenin predicted," Arendt stated in the opening sentence of her study On Violence, "a century of wars and revolutions, hence a century of that violence which is currently believed to be their common denominator." It has become a century when European civilization, instead of leading the world to its better future, has found itself in mortal danger, threatened by the totalitarian attempt at global conquest and total domination. It has become a century that has undermined and radically problematized the very foundations of European modernity.

> Never has our future been more unpredictable, never have we depended so much on political forces that cannot be trusted to follow the rules of common sense and self-interest-forces that look like sheer insanity, if judged by the standards of other centuries. It is as though mankind had divided itself between those who believe in human omnipotence (who think that everything is possible if one knows how to organize masses for it) and those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives. (Arendt, 1973)

To understand the nature of totalitarianism presupposes the realization above all that in spite or their opposite attitudes as far as the necessary outcome of historical processes is concerned, 'progress and doom are two sides of the same medal' that the task is not to stick to the one or the other and to become either a reckless optimist or a reckless prophet of despair, but to emancipate our thought from the superstition that all events in the human world are in the end dictated by 'historical necessity'. What Arendt had been looking for with her writing was a comprehension of the human situation that would help people regain insight into what they – and not the blind forces of nature or history – are doing; a comprehension that aims at restoring the original 'free', spontaneous character of human political activity and at recovering the dignity and the full power of human agency. To comprehend the totalitarian attempt at global conquest and total domination does not mean only to study certain sets of empirical observable facts – political and social systems, the methods of enforcement of state power, spontaneously grown worldviews and popular beliefs, the official state ideologies, and so on and so forth – but above all to be ready to receive from God the greatest gift a man could desire: the "understanding heart King Solomon was praying for": "the divine gift of action, of being a beginning and therefore – being able to make a beginning."

What can save us from the spell or curse our century of totalitarianism imposed on us is not an intervention from outside or from above, but our own faculty of imagination

> which alone enables to see things in their proper perspective, to be strong enough to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice, to be generous enough to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as thought it were our own affair . . . . Without this kind of imagination, which actually is understanding, we would never be able to take our bearings in the world. We are contemporaries only so far our understanding reaches. If we want to be at home on

this earth, even at the price of being at home in this century; we must try to take part in the interminable dialogue with the essence of totalitarianism. (Arendt, 1994a)

Conclusion

The twentieth century ended and all three varieties of totalitarian form of government that played a central role in its history – fascism, nazism, and communism – are gone and will not return. Nonetheless, the experience mankind has made in the first years of the new millenium is sending us a clear signal: it is not over yet. The open societies subscribing to nonauthoritarian forms of government are confronted with their new enemies and are exposed to new threats in the beginning of the twenty-first century. The international system is becoming less stable and more vulnerable. The idea of total domination has certainly not lost its power in the age of globalization. The grand debate on totalitarianism that would shed some light on our current dilemmas – the debate we tried to track down here, from its beginning in the 1920s to the final collapse of the Soviet Empire and the fall of Berlin Wall – still needs to be resumed, but, as far as this author knows, it has not happened yet. The appeal of Hannah Arendt, reacting to the totalitarian horrors of World War II – "human dignity needs a new guarantee which can be found only in a new political principle, in a new law on the earth" – is as relevant today as it was when it was made by her more than 50 years ago.

The substance is in: (1) keeping on building effective and politically powerful networks of understanding and solidarity between Europeans and Americans and all other democratic nations; (2) cultivating the real dialog within and among their open societies; (3) opposing political conformism and appeasement; and (4) supporting all those who resist opresion in their countries and confront dictators and populist leaders.

Totalitarianism, in short, remains with us as the greatest threat and the greatest temptation for those who are, and eventually will be, endowed in the current world with power. The future is unknown and largely unpredictible and we must be aware of what is at stake today as it was always the case in the history of our civilization: to maintain in emerging world politics the element of freedom which is still the essence and very nature of our humanity.

See also: Behavioral Psychology of Killing; Colonialism and Imperialism; Dictatorships and Authoritarian Regimes, Insurrections against; Gandhi and His Legacies; Genocide and Democide; International Criminal Courts and Tribunals; Nationalism and Warfare; Peace and Democracy; Power, Alternative Theories of; Power, Social and Political Theories of; Reason and Violence; Social Control and Violence; Torture (State); Violence as Solution, Culture of; World War II

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