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Shorten, Richard

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RETHINKING TOTALITARIAN IDEOLOGY: INSIGHTS FROM THE ANTI-TOTALITARIAN CANON

Richard Shorten
University of Birmingham

Abstract

‘Totalitarianism’ first emerged in interwar Europe, and did so as an explicit intellectual engagement. Thereafter, it persisted as a point of reflection, often more implicitly, and in political theorising especially. The main product of the initial engagement was a structural model isolating a discrete regime-type and marginalising the ideological dimension. Over time, dissatisfaction with the model became widespread. But dissatisfaction ought not to exclude the possibility that it was the relatively looser intellectual attention which followed that contains all the resources sufficient for constructing a more compelling account. By tracking debates in twentieth-century political thought, we can clarify the content of a new ideology-oriented, ‘post-revisionist’ theory of totalitarianism: its coherence as an ideational product is to be found in the synthesis of three distinct currents of thought (utopianism, scientism, and revolutionary violence), emphasised in disproportion by three consecutive positions taken up across the ‘anti-totalitarian canon’. Evaluating these three positions turns out to raise issues that are conceptual, contextual and empirical. Attending to those leads us, lastly, to reflect on the understanding of ideology itself that may be appropriate to conceptualising ‘totalitarian ideology’.

RETHINKING TOTALITARIAN IDEOLOGY: INSIGHTS FROM THE ANTI-TOTALITARIAN CANON

Commentators, whether they are historians, social scientists, or philosophers, usually think they know well enough what the theory of totalitarianism is, even if they may have reason to dispute its usefulness. ‘Strictly defined’, writes Anne Applebaum, ‘a totalitarian regime is one which bans all institutions apart from those it has officially approved’.¹ It is therefore a regime characterised by the existence of a single political party, a single educational system, a single moral code, and so forth. Operating on the same assumptions, we can similarly find Leszek Kolakowski affirming that, in respect of the Soviet Union, ‘the totalitarian character of the regime – i.e. the progressive destruction of civil society and absorption of all forms of social life by the state’, is something which ‘increased almost without interruption between 1924 and 1953’.² And equally, if we look to the historian Richard Overy’s rejection of a ‘political-science fantasy’, we discover a ‘totalitarian model’ in which particular public figures wield total, unlimited power: regimes of ‘domination through fear by psychopathic tyrants’.³

This structural model of totalitarianism tends to foreground a specific feature: the exercise of total control, emanating outwards from a political centre, typically facilitated by the technological reach of the modern state. The problem is its state-centredness. It postulates an optimum degree of social control, a society totally pervaded and shaped by those in power. Applebaum exemplifies this tendency because she contends that the ‘best’ definition of the term is still Mussolini’s: ‘Everything within the state, nothing outside of the

¹ A. Applebaum, *Iron Curtain* (London, 2012), p. xxiii.

² L. Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (London, 2005), p. 794.

³ R. Overy, *The Dictators* (New York, 2004), pp. xxvii, 73.

state, nothing against the state'.⁴ Those who reject the structural model are known as 'revisionists'. Various, they challenge how far total control was reality rather than just aspiration;⁵ restrict totalitarianism's usefulness to an aid in Western liberal-democratic self-understanding, by way of a negative template;⁶ or even denigrate it as a self-serving tool of domestic political legitimization.⁷ But the point is that revisionists do all of these things only inconclusively if they take Mussolini's definition to be the authoritative one. What if Mussolini's boast – irrespective of its attainment in social and political practice – misses what were truly the animating purposes of a new political formation, ones that perhaps better matched aspirations embodied in Hitler's Third Reich and Stalin's Soviet Union? The structural conception of totalitarianism abstracts from Mussolini when it makes the chief aspiration 'statist'.⁸ But totalitarian ideology, especially as expressed in Hitler's Third Reich and Stalin's Soviet Union, was richer than to simply make the state an end-in-itself. Totalitarianism, it will be argued here, should cease to be understood as denoting an (a)typical set of institutional arrangements and corresponding practices, and begin to be appreciated instead in terms of the shared ideological space between ostensibly dichotomous prescriptive visions, and in this way as comprising particular beliefs, attitudes and outlooks that were no less striking. In other words, one special motivation for what is offered below is to call time on the convention whereby we treat 'fascism' and 'communism' as distinctive

⁴ Applebaum, *Iron Curtain*, xiii. See B. Mussolini, 'The Doctrine of Fascism', in T. Ball and R. Dagger (ed.), *Ideals and Ideologies* (New York, 1991), pp. 288-97.

⁵ E.g. W.S. Allen, 'Totalitarianism: The Concept and the Reality', in E. Menze (ed.), *Totalitarianism Reconsidered* (Port Washington NY, 1981), pp. 97-107.

⁶ M. Halberstam, *Totalitarianism and the Modern Conception of Politics* (New Haven CT, 2000).

⁷ S. Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London, 2001).

⁸ Ironically, compared against the contemporaneous regimes in Germany and Russia, historians generally find that Fascist Italy was the least (structurally) totalitarian. E.g. A. de Grand, 'Cracks in the Façade: The Failure of Fascist Totalitarianism in Italy', *European History Quarterly*, 21 (1991) pp. 515-35.

ideological formations but employ ‘totalitarianism’, by contrast, to refer to a practice of political rule that corresponds to fascism/ communism-in-power.

Up to a point it might fairly be objected that the picture presented of contemporary totalitarianism theory has omitted to mention several fruitful lines of enquiry this intended contribution joins up with. Several theorists have, over the last couple of decades, been active in the process of trying to clarify the content of a new version of totalitarianism theory.⁹ However, one significant reason why such attempts have often fallen short is because they have largely ignored the resources contained within the history of political thought. That the history of political thought should hold out this prospect is, in one sense, counter-intuitive. An adequate conception of totalitarian ideology must certainly be informed by a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of intellectual transmission than the kind implied, for instance, in Bertrand Russell’s famous statement, in *A History of Western Philosophy*, that ‘at the present time, Hitler is an outcome of Rousseau’.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the broader point is that twentieth-century political thought was informed in important ways by reflection upon totalitarianism, both with respect to its intellectual heritage, and with regard also to the ethical problems posed by the realities of the Nazi Holocaust and the political mass murder committed in the name of Soviet communism.

Where the structural version of totalitarianism theory dates back to Friedrich and Brzezinski’s *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956) and, beyond that, to explicit

⁹ S. Tormey, *Making Sense of Tyranny* (Manchester, 1995); T. Todorov, *Hope and Memory* (London, 2005); E. Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, trans. by G. Staunton (Princeton NJ, 2006), esp. ch. 6; D.D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London, 2006); and A. J. Gregor, *Totalitarianism and Political Religion* (Stanford CA, 2012).

¹⁰ B. Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London, 1961), p. 660. Russell’s statement is dated, of course. Yet accounts of totalitarianism’s philosophical ancestry continue to be informed by an unreflective notion of intellectual transmission. See, for example, Y. Sherratt, *Hitler’s Philosophers* (New Haven and London, 2013), where the metaphorical device of the ‘poisoned chalice’ (p. 61) is quite typical of a habit of ducking methodological issues by idiomatic expression.

intellectual engagement with totalitarianism in the interwar period,¹¹ political theorising in the post-1945 period took up the issue less systematically – sometimes obliquely – but nearly always with its ideological identity in mind. Accordingly, it is by tracking debates in twentieth-century political thought that we might construct a new ideology-oriented – ‘post-revisionist’ – theory of totalitarianism. In what follows we shall consider, in chronological order, three schools of thought that, at successive intervals, enacted significant revisions to what thereafter grew into received accounts in the hands of political theorists.¹² Viewed in retrospect, each of these accounts owed a good deal to their local contexts of articulation, so that there is reason to appraise them with these contexts in mind: each school of thought tended to view totalitarianism from the vantage point of concerns ‘closer to home’, to put the matter colloquially. Furthermore, as we shall see, there are question marks that need to be placed against the internal cogency of some of the arguments offered, as well as their ‘fit’ with the available historical evidence. Before that, however, from a disciplinary perspective, the relationship between totalitarianism and various pertinent applications of the idea of ‘the canon’ warrants some attention.

The anti-totalitarian canon and totalitarianism’s (semi-)canonical sources

From the disciplinary standpoint of the history of political thought, a first proposition, that there is such a thing as an anti-totalitarian canon, which might moreover be a fertile source of insight not only into political justification after totalitarianism but also into the ideological make-up of a totalitarian project, is perhaps less controversial than a second proposition, that this project has canonical sources. Neither proposition, however, is without complication.

¹¹ C. Friedrich and Z. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge MA, 1956).

¹² An omission in this chronological scheme is Hannah Arendt, for the reason that it is impossible to assign her thought a determinate place within it; rather, she might be thought to have something to say to each of the three lines of interpretation.

Let us consider what is at stake respectively, for we may anticipate that our proposed exercise will commit us to some version of each.

Concerning our first proposition, canons are usually thought of as comprising the select key works that have, over time, and in virtue of repeated reference to them, ‘earned’ a special place within a given field of cultural life. In the particular field of political theory, there tends to be a further connotation: that *the* canon is a set of works as ‘texts’, unified in virtue not only of accumulated reference across them, but also of raising the same ‘perennial problems’.¹³ Hence, the very idea that there is a readily-identifiable political theory canon is potentially compromised by a counter-possibility: that questions are not recurrently raised, but depend instead on time and place.¹⁴ Our question must be: what would this mean for an anti-totalitarian canon?

We can say, initially, that an anti-totalitarian canon would resist compromise by this counter-possibility, since it would be largely untouched by problems of historical distance. Any claim to a timeless frame of reference would be jettisoned because all that would be supposed is the identity of problems persisting across a finite period of time.¹⁵ No more than *this* notion would apply: that roughly between 1945 and the half-century that followed, some political theorists asked a single, persistent question; namely, ‘how should political and social life be ordered with the Holocaust and the Gulag in consideration?’. ‘Some’ here is a suitable qualification – for if what we want to do is to give an anti-totalitarian canon substantive meaning, we are not required to assert that *every* political theorist working in this period posed the question. Our initial alighting on firmer ground will not, however, hold for very

¹³ G.H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (London, 1937), p. 4

¹⁴ Q. Skinner ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, *History and Theory*, 8 (1) (1969), pp. 3-53.

¹⁵ R. Lamb, ‘Skinner’s Revised Historical Contextualism: A Critique’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 22 (2009) pp. 59-63.

long. Other misgivings will likely arise. How are we to determine membership of this canon? To have asked the question must be among the criteria. Although we might think that we are not obliged to specify any other, since that would only raise the issue, more general to the discipline, of what counts as ‘political theory’. Can we take statements of anti-totalitarianism at face-value? Again, no special defence would seem due of the presumption that any member of our canon is asking a question actually-articulated, rather than another one less transparent. There is a further issue, though, no less general yet acutely relevant, that picks up on the latter misgiving. This concerns permutations on the question of how to order political and social life post-Holocaust and post-Gulag.

Even when, across a condensed historical space, a question persists, that question may nevertheless be given important variation in inflection, perhaps depending on what we might think of as the most immediate time and place. Importantly, because locating that inflection may require alertness to the detail of the postwar conversation we are projecting, it transpires, after all, that framing a persistent problem should not divert our attention from the kind of ‘contexts’ usually called on to *challenge* the status of canons. Variation in the inflection of the question, furthermore, is likely to bear strongly on the use we wish to make of an anti-totalitarian canon, since it would be inconsistent to suppose that ‘totalitarianism’ posed political theorists any non-opaque problem – one *not* liable to be given local inflection – when dispute over totalitarianism’s identity is our very purpose in revisiting political theory’s contribution. The relevant point is that particular methodological implications follow: just as, properly-conceived, thinking totalitarian ideology is an exercise not only in studying primary texts – Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, or Stalin’s speeches to Party congresses – but also in employing a contextual reading of those sources, then by that token the same must apply to (re)thinking totalitarian ideology on the resource of twentieth-century political thought. The ‘secondary text-sources’ in the latter case – theorists’ accounts – will have their contexts as well,

variously linguistic, political, social, and cultural. It is to these that we can anticipate tracing a question's permutation. And, significantly for our proposed exercise, it is in light of some appreciation of those permutations that we can hope to give the accounts better appraisal.

If our first proposition is robust, then, and if defending the idea of an anti-totalitarian canon serves further as pointer to appropriate strategies for its uses, what of our second, perhaps more challenging, proposition? That totalitarianism itself has canonical sources in one sense returns us to our previous point. We would expect statements of anti-totalitarian political philosophy to 'implicate' specific sources depending upon the particular permutation of the question being asked. In another sense, that we should even be interested in the proposition is a function of disciplinary conventions: to write – think? – in the terms of canonical figures and/ or their texts, often as a shorthand for arguments. Disciplinary convention is one way, indeed, in which we are free to interpret Bertrand Russell's statement on Rousseau and Hitler: not as a statement of causality in a particular instance, rather as a general judgment on where, in political life, the well-known Rousseauian arguments lead (the General Will, the Lawgiver, the civil religion). However, it is the interpretation contrariwise – Russell's as a causal statement – that takes us to the central point regarding the complexion of a totalitarian project, and this concerns ideological inheritance and the continuity of ideas across time. For totalitarian ideology to have a canonical source must either imply, first, that the former was (already) present in the latter or, second, that the ideology appears later, but is nonetheless causally-derived – perhaps in partial, indirect, complex ways – from the source in question. Let us consider the both scenarios.

The first scenario, given reflection, can be ruled out as too improbable to arise. To locate totalitarian ideology as already 'in' any canonical source would be to imagine a very unlikely continuity, granting several considerations. One is our general inclination to think

that the twentieth-century formations were ‘unprecedented’ and/ or ‘unique’.¹⁶ Another is the general intellectual remoteness of our sources from the rather-less-cerebral conditions, politically and socially, in which the later formations emerged. For the analyst to credit this scenario is also, perhaps, to succumb to the temptation of her vantage point: the intrusion of hindsight, so as to give continuity a false impression. ‘No one in 1880 could have imagined a Hitler’, writes Fritz Stern, ‘any more than in 1933 people could have imagined an Auschwitz’.¹⁷ Acute awareness that an outcome is troubling is, of course, what can colour a source’s perception, as some infamous examples show.¹⁸ Looming is the ‘mythology of prolepsis’, imposing retrospective significance in the intellectual history of totalitarianism in ways that distort that history.¹⁹

It is because it drops the claim for continuity, however, that the second scenario stands up to scrutiny far better, and demands more of our attention. Picturing totalitarian ideology having a relation to a canonical source so that while the ideology appears later there is nonetheless a transmission of ideas between the two implies, importantly, a notion of ideational change. In picturing so – and to return to the term ‘implicate’ we specified before – we should be clear about the standards to which the canon is being held: ‘causal’ implication comprises later ‘readers’ – totalitarians – making use of a past philosophical figure’s words, and entails *only* that degree of moral responsibility attached to what (we

¹⁶ Cf. D. Stone, ‘The Historiography of the Holocaust: Beyond “Uniqueness” and Ethnic Competition’, *Rethinking History*, 8 (1) (2004) pp. 127-42.

¹⁷ Cited in G. Wheatcroft, ‘Hello to All That!’, *New York Review of Books*, LVIII (11), 23 June 2011, p. 32.

¹⁸ Cf. Karl Popper’s construction of Plato’s ‘noble lie’ – conventionally translated as the ‘myth of metal and earth’ – as the proto-Nazi ‘myth of blood and soil’. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. D. Lee (London, 1987), p. 182; Popper, *Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 1, *The Spell of Plato* (London, 1999), p. 139.

¹⁹ Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding’, pp. 22-3.

think) those figures should, and should not, have omitted to mention.²⁰ It is the detail of this transmission, rather, that raises the practical issues so far as investigation is concerned. At what point, exactly, do the mechanisms for transmission become so indirect and convoluted that we have to make the judgment that, after consulting the available evidence of texts, historical political discourse, and other records of political activity, a purported canonical source is no source at all? These are mechanisms likely to consist, for example, in the broad-level dissemination of ideas, their unconscious repetitions, their remaking to meet the demands of new practical circumstances, and so forth. Further, just what sort of ‘line’ of causal derivation would we be hoping to find? In order to negotiate issues like these, what we might propose, finally, is the practical value of deploying a particular device: the idea of the ‘representative thinker’.

The history of political thought is not traditionally attuned to dealing in ideational content that is loose, fragmentary, and open-ended. Texts, arguments, concepts, and (types of) context are all conventionally-fixed units of analysis. Likewise, thinking totalitarian ideology has, in the past, comprised a search for ‘unified wholes’.²¹ But required in the exercise about to be commenced may be the disaggregation of lines-of-derivation in the plural,²² so that the (semi-)canonical sources are several not singular; and so that ‘implication’ is not either/or, but consists rather in degrees. Framing the connections between the history of ideas and totalitarian ideology accordingly resonates with the idea of a ‘representative thinker’ because, deployed as a device, it might allow for these nuances in

²⁰ This point is often confused. Hence familiar figures in a kind of ‘anti-canon’ are subjected to wildly disproportionate censure, on grounds often left vague. For the term ‘anti-canon’, see J. Rée, *Philosophical Tales* (London, 1987), pp. 42-3. For a good discussion, see G. Kateb, ‘The Adequacy of the Canon’, *Political Theory*, 30 (4) (2002) pp. 482-505.

²¹ As Roberts has argued, the search for coherent visions for totalitarian societies is natural yet misconceived (*The Totalitarian Experiment*, pp. 39-45).

²² Though in need of disaggregation, note that these may be lines that are open to cutting-across one another at any point. That too is a matter to be investigated according to the available evidence.

interpretation, while still retaining fidelity to some disciplinary conventions. Let us begin with an attempt at definition, with our particular ends in view: the representative thinker shares ideational content in common with totalitarian ideology, but does not articulate that ideology in full *avant la lettre*, rather only in such quantity that minimally-present are the key elements constitutive of one of those lines of derivation. What analytical purchase might this derive? By example, consider why Hobbes forfeits representative status. Having supposedly proposed the ‘totalitarian state’ as solution to an omnipresence of deep-rooted social conflict, Hobbes was popularly made canonical source in the postwar years,²³ though on this charge he has at best (or worst?) only a claim to have articulated key elements according to the outdated structural model. Clarification of the complexion of a totalitarian project is not the only pay-off here, since also on offer is a conception of the relationship with prior philosophical ideas that is carefully-qualified. No representative thinker, *à la* Russell, will have ‘caused’ Hitler; rather, she may only be said to have indirectly lent legitimacy to *emerging aspects* of totalitarian ideology. Lastly, fidelity to disciplinary conventions is such that ‘shorthands’ are kept available in order to express positions and tap into all the associations implied. Of course, at the second-order level, it is this that enables our prospective engagement with texts in the anti-totalitarian canon that are already coded in the shorthand of specific canonical ‘targets’. To anticipate one conclusion we shall eventually reach, one that has special implications for how totalitarianism’s ideological identity should be reconceived, the figures that are germane are, in their own ways, all architects of ‘post-’ and ‘counter-’ Enlightenment visions. In addition to anything else, therefore, thinking carefully about the adequacy of the respective representative thinkers that our anti-totalitarian

²³ E.g. G. Catlin, *The Story of the Political Philosophers* (New York, 1939), p. 238.

canon functioned with helps to contest injudicious ascriptions of a totalitarian identity to the Enlightenment mainstream.

Three perspectives from the anti-totalitarian canon

The view from Cold War liberalism

Our first theoretical position assumed in the anti-totalitarian canon was that defended by the Cold War liberals. *Prima facie*, it may have appeared that Cold War liberalism, coming to sustain a particular consensus about totalitarianism in the 1950s, was no real departure from the default structural theory then in the process of being clarified by Friedrich and Brzezinski; for their six-point ‘syndrome’ definition made ample space – alongside the criteria of centralised state institutions and practices – for ‘passive adherence’ to an ‘official body of doctrine’, post-individualistic and ‘chiliastic’ in form.²⁴ ‘Chiliastic’ here is a proxy for ‘utopia’ and, denoting the Kingdom of Christ on earth, it approximated what Cold War liberal thinkers usually (though not always) rendered into more secular terms of reference.²⁵ The distinction of the Cold War liberals was (quite apart from dislodging the fixation on the state as end-in-itself) to put the accent on utopia, until it filled up nearly the whole of the conceptual space in the critique. Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin, and Jacob Talmon are chief among the personalities in intellectual life who, in the immediate post-war decades, as tensions between East and West were ossifying, responded to the question about how political and social life should henceforth be ordered, by answering that ‘utopian’ schemes

²⁴ Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, pp. 21-22.

²⁵ Some theorists of political religion continue to make ‘messianism’, ‘chiliasm’, ‘Heavenly City’, the ‘New Faith’, etc. into rough approximations of utopia. Whether the religious idiom genuinely enriches an understanding is a moot point, particularly if there is no thesis of actual descent from religious sources. See note 95.

would need to be unambiguously ruled out.²⁶ Popper's contribution to the anti-totalitarian canon came via two books he labelled together his 'war effort'.²⁷ In Berlin's case, it was via the manifold essays and lectures he authored and presented.²⁸ Talmon went on to complete a trilogy on the theme.²⁹ Appraising the theoretical cogency of these texts, primarily as normative accounts of anti-totalitarianism rather than rounder statements of (liberal) political philosophy, leads us to a balance sheet that is mixed: two recurring weaknesses are to conflate concepts and to employ them in rigid, binary oppositions. Let us proceed by reviewing these weaknesses, before considering the (geo)political context, and then the strength of the available historical evidence.

Popper conceived 'utopian' schemes as one part – the undesirable, dangerous part – of a pair of possible solutions to social problems. Schemes of utopian 'social engineering' were implemented in terms of ideal patterns or 'blueprints for a new order'. They therefore required a 'clean canvas' to start from. There was no need for discussion and disagreement – these engineers simply affirmed 'a singular, rigid version of the ideal state'; thus, these engineers were 'omniscient as well as omnipotent'. The dangerous element was the compulsion – in order to attain the clean canvas – to 'purge, expel, banish, kill'.³⁰ This was the 'closed society', for Popper, the purview of the first of his two texts; but utopianism was at fault too for a second reason: historicism. It is the problem with 'historicism' that takes us

²⁶ See esp. J-W. Müller, 'Fear and Freedom: On "Cold War liberalism"', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 7 (1) (2008) pp. 45-64.

²⁷ Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 1, *The Spell of Plato* (London, 1999) and Vol. 2, *The High Tide of Prophecy* (London, 1999); Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London, 2002).

²⁸ See esp. I. Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, 1969), 41-117; and Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in *ibid*, pp. 118-172.

²⁹ J. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London, 1952); Talmon, *Political Messianism* (London, 1960); Talmon, *The Myth of the Nation and the Vision of Revolution* (London, 1980).

³⁰ Popper, 'Utopia and Violence', in *Conjectures and Refutations* (London, 1995), 360; Popper, *Open Society*, Vol. 1, p. 166.

to the conceptual conflation in Popper's case. By historicism, Popper referred not to the conventional meaning, the idea that moral values are relative to historical periods, but to 'long-term prophecies', aimed at discovering laws of history.³¹ This would be question-begging in itself, though principally at issue is the counter-intuitive equation of utopianism with *determinism*. Upon closer inspection, the real mark of utopians, in Popper's theory, is not possession of a blueprint of the ideal state (albeit required), rather possession of a 'plan or blueprint of the historical path that *leads towards*' this state.³² In other words, this is social closure by historical prediction, not by confidence in a detailed picture of what the good society will look like. The primary danger is not now the utopian engineer as a kind of Promethean figure, free to re-make society from the group upwards, but a specific kind of certainty as regards a supposedly 'utopian' project: that society is head inexorably in that direction regardless. Contrary to its declared purpose here,³³ liberal, anti-totalitarian 'piecemeal' social engineering would seem to have its grounding not in anti-utopianism, but in anti-determinism.

Isaiah Berlin's statement of anti-totalitarianism could ostensibly be deemed to conflate the same. Berlin associated utopianism with 'monism', and his attack on monist thinking began in the 1953 lecture 'Historical Inevitability'. Monism approximated to 'the belief that some single formula can in principle be found whereby all the diverse ends of men can be harmoniously realised'.³⁴ But while monist thinking could be given particular expression in deterministic philosophies of history – being ordered around belief in a 'single

³¹ Popper, *Open Society*, Vol. 1, p. 3.

³² Popper, 'Utopia and Violence', p. 358; italics added.

³³ This is not to say that totalitarian political thought does not have grounding in determinism, which we consider next, in reviewing critical theory's position.

³⁴ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', p. 169.

“cosmic” over-all scheme which is the goal of the universe’ – those philosophies were not its *necessary* expression.³⁵ Berlin was more careful because while he was outwardly clumsy to have said that monism pictured, at its core, the possibility of a perfect social harmony liable to be rendered as a ‘final’ state of affairs, by ‘final’ he really meant something-other-than-predetermined: only arrival at a state that we have no further need to modify. That being said, Berlin’s critique of totalitarianism did share at least one failing with Popper’s. In effect, binary oppositions were reworked from closed/open society and utopian/piecemeal engineering to monism/pluralism and positive/negative liberty. Jacob Talmon employed, lastly, his own blunter, though equally epistemologically-limiting, dichotomy: liberal versus totalitarian democracy. These were two contrasting strands supposedly having emerged out of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment, and Talmon’s definition of a totalitarian democracy echoed Berlin’s definition of monist thinking: it was ‘based upon the assumption of a sole and exclusive truth in politics’ and postulated a ‘preordained, harmonious and perfect scheme of things’.³⁶

To have conflated and/ or crudely-bifurcated concepts is a fault of the Cold War liberal accounts internal to the texts. But an assessment of their contexts of reference points to a fault in the external dimension – their one-sidedness. Biographically, most of the relevant figures had reason to make communism the primary target: Berlin remarked that it was witnessing an angry mob in Petrograd that gave him his ‘lifelong horror of physical violence’.³⁷ It was communism’s message to the workers that held the attention, and this message had an unambiguous producer – Marx, whose philosophy was made indistinguishable from Soviet communism, even as it was articulated during Stalinist times.

³⁵ Berlin, ‘Historical Inevitability’, pp. 51-2.

³⁶ Talmon, *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, p. 2.

³⁷ R. Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (London, 1992), p. 4.

Marx for Popper, for example, was ‘the last of the great holistic system builders’, whose belief in historical inevitability lent Marx-ists a vital justification for suppressing the kinds of criticism that threatened to hold up the historical destiny.³⁸ Indeed, Popper’s utopian/determinist conceptual conflation can be explained by this primary target: some commentators have suggested contrariwise that the Viennese-born Popper’s real concern was with fascism and with Marxism only indirectly, inasmuch as the absence of fascism from Marxism’s own blueprint blunted its capacity to resist fascism in central Europe (i.e. on classical Marxism, fascism should not have been a historical reality at all);³⁹ though to suggest so rather concedes the point that, for Popper, the significance in Marxism was that it operated with a blueprint in the first place. This hostile and selective rendering of Marx extends to Berlin’s treatment. There, Marx becomes a principal exponent of positive liberty – the freedom ‘to lead one’s prescribed form of life’ – who, by doing so, adopts a supremely coercive stance towards the individual human personality, for two salient reasons: first, because he pictures ‘self-realisation’ in unity – i.e. conformity – with the self-realisation of a collective political subject; second, because his framework commits him to the idea that this ‘true’ self – ‘higher’ self – will be unknown to an empirical (‘lower’) self.⁴⁰ Almost needless to say, a contemporaneous political agenda hovers in the background, which these liberal philosophies could at least be made to speak to, even assuming that was not the intention.⁴¹ In political debate, detaching liberalism from utopian conceptions could leave intact the minimal or negative liberalism desired.

³⁸ Popper, *Open Society*, Vol. 2, p. 354.

³⁹ M. Hacoen, *Karl Popper – The Formative Years, 1902-1945* (Cambridge, 2000), esp. pp. 353-354, 397, 426.

⁴⁰ Berlin, ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’, pp. 131, 147.

⁴¹ See F.S. Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?* (London, 1999).

So if, in the ambit of the Cold War liberals, the utopian reading of totalitarianism has its primary application to communism, what empirical support, finally, does that have? Assuming that communism *will* logically be the ‘better fit’ than the reality the Cold War liberals leave out: fascism. Certainly, a story can be told about modern thought in which there are successive modifications to inherited ‘utopian’ terms for conceiving the community, until we reach a kind of terminus in Stalinist theory and practice.⁴² A plausible, albeit abridged, version could run as follows: (a) The pre-Marxian utopian socialists – especially Charles Fourier – introduce the idea of a higher self, pictured by Fourier as a body of fully-coordinated passions.⁴³ (b) The young Marx integrates that demand for meaningful human experience with terms lifted from Romanticism, before the later Marx identifies the ‘proletariat’ as the demand’s addressee.⁴⁴ (c) Lenin goes on to reaffirm this vision of an association of men in ‘higher’ freedom (superficially employing a distinction between utopia and ‘realism’ in political strategy, though justifying the harshest of measures precisely *because* of the vision).⁴⁵ (d) Stalin, in the conceptual innovation of ‘socialism in one country’, shifts Marx’s addressee from proletariat to ‘Russian’ proletariat, thereby taking communist utopianism in a direction marginalised in the prior Marxist tradition but that the inheritance of utopian terms of reference more than facilitates.⁴⁶

⁴² A recent characteristic account is J. Gray, *Black Mass* (London, 2007).

⁴³ Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements*, (ed.) G.S. Jones and I. Patterson (Cambridge, 1996).

⁴⁴ On Marx and Romanticism, see Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, pp. 335-7. Marx’s anthropology owes particular debt to Romanticism and his assertion of man’s capacity to ‘fashion things... in accord with the laws of beauty’ is described as having provided a ‘normative frame’ for Stalinism’s New Man. P. Frizsche and J. Hellbeck, ‘The New Man in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany’, in S. Fitzpatrick and M. Geyer (eds.) *Beyond Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 308, 317.

⁴⁵ Lenin, ‘The State and Revolution’, in *The Lenin Anthology*, (ed.) R.C. Tucker (London, 1975), pp. 374, 380, 344.

⁴⁶ E. van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin* (London, 2002), p. 93.

However, in respect of this story, we should note two things. First, it is not the only story that can be told, even about the intellectual history behind Stalinism alone. This we will see with the two subsequent positions assumed in the anti-totalitarian canon. Second, a utopian reading may not, in fact, be without application to Nazism, at least in particular form. Indeed, thinking about the utopian content of Nazism allows us to consider how Cold War liberals might have offered a more robust account of totalitarian political thought.

Critical theory and the pathologies of reason

A tradition of critical theory, coming especially to intellectual attention in the 1960s, narrated totalitarianism rather differently, chiefly by implicating science, thereby dislodging a consensus concerning the dangers of utopianism. Critical theorists were often disinclined to use the term ‘totalitarian’ directly, not least since they saw it as a Cold War rhetorical prop.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, when they came to outline the affiliation between science, domination, and modern society at large, totalitarianism was their principal subject. Like the Cold War liberals, the critical theorists inflated one theme that the structural model emphasised. But in contrast to Friedrich and Brzezinski, instead of casting science in the instrumental role of providing resources for the extension of state power – sustaining monopolies of communications, aiding the work of a secret police – they gave science the constitutive role in totalitarianism’s legitimation. Specifically, it was the critique of technical rationality that they deemed capable of bringing into focus the ‘hidden’ forms of domination that connected the modern liberal mainstream to more transparently-coercive regimes. In this line of interpretation, there is a continuity that runs between the neo-Marxism of the Frankfurt

⁴⁷ E.g. M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, (ed.) C. Gordon (Brighton, 1980), pp. 115-6.

School and the poststructuralism of Michel Foucault.⁴⁸ To the question of how political and social life should be conceived in the wake of recent experience, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Foucault all answered: by rethinking the commitment to reason. Further, the agenda took its cue from Horkheimer's pre-war declaration, which found special resonance in the sixties: 'Anyone who doesn't want to speak about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism'.⁴⁹ Although the line of interpretation is one more nuanced than is sometimes presented, a general assessment takes us to two specific shortcomings, excepting the tendency to hyperbole. First is an over-emphasis on 'everyday' manifestations of controlled subjectivity (following from Horkheimer's injunction to theorise totalitarianism from within capitalism). Second is a mishandling of the scientific ethos of the totalitarian programmes in genocide, via their reduction to broader features of a modern 'bureaucratic' mentality. In turn, these two shortcomings can be described as follows; though in such a way that might lead us to accept the validity of a qualified version of the interpretation.

At the core of the critical theory account is the idea that science is constitutive of totalitarianism because modern reason, in its dominant technical, 'instrumental' form, is complicit in domination. 'Enlightenment is totalitarian', propose Horkheimer and Adorno, since the attempt to transcend repressive myth with liberating reason necessarily results in reason's own repression of that judged hostile because it persists in being unknowable: Enlightenment and dictator 'know' things and men, respectively, only insofar as they are able to 'manipulate' them.⁵⁰ Foucault explicitly took up the same connection, as evidenced in this statement he made, when asked to sum up the total of his research: 'The relationship between

⁴⁸ See also H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London, 1994).

⁴⁹ M. Horkheimer, 'The Jews and Europe' in *Critical Theory and Society*, (ed.) S.E. Bronner and D. Kellner (New York, 1989), p. 78.

⁵⁰ T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by J. Cumming (London, 1997), p. 9.

rationalisation and the excesses of political power is evident. And we should not need to wait for bureaucracy or the concentration camps to recognise the existence of such relations'.⁵¹

In its barebones, then, common to critical theory is a thesis whereby reason is a tool in the service of power because it legitimises knowledge claims and obstructs ethical objections to prescribed courses of action. This is a thesis that might well seem to support the extension-of-capitalism reading of totalitarianism. Also contained within the critical theory account, though, is a more discriminating evaluation, in which science gives substantive ideological content to an actual totalitarian project. On this reading it is really 'scientism' as distinctive worldview, rather than as technique, that puts the meat on the bones of the totalitarian 'New Man'.⁵² At times, for instance, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* explicitly counterpoises totalitarian 'barbarism' to liberal capitalism. One such case is their discussion of anti-Semitism: where capitalism responds to instrumental rationality's impoverishment of human experience with (false) gratification in the culture industry, elsewhere the same impoverished subjects are directed to find gratification in wreaking vengeance on scapegoated minorities.⁵³ At such times, Horkheimer and Adorno give rather more of what is due to the exceptions at stake. Not all, though, because the second weakness of the critical theory account comes into view on the same example.

A persistent (though not omnipresent) temptation of the critical theory account is to articulate a quasi-functionalist, bureaucratic 'cog-in-the-machine' theory of the political violence of modern states.⁵⁴ In Horkheimer and Adorno's conception, the identities of victim

⁵¹ Foucault, 'Politics and Reason', in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, (ed.) L.D. Kritzman (London, 1990).

⁵² E. Gebhardt, Introduction to the 'Critique of Methodology' section of *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, (ed.) A. Arato and E. Gebhardt (New York, 1982), pp. 512, 374.

⁵³ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 192

⁵⁴ D. Moses, 'Genocide and Modernity' in D. Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of Genocide* (New York and Basingstoke, 2008), p. 165

and perpetrator are secondary to the functions performed: ‘Jews’ may be replaced by some other victim-group, ‘just as workers can be moved from one wholly rationalized production center to another’.⁵⁵ Yet this tendency is not omnipresent because we find within Foucault’s mature positions a more discriminating evaluation, one which consciously transcends the quasi-functionalist theory. That this is a conscious move, moreover, is evident in that it would seem part of a decision to replace one conception of totalitarian scientism with another. Foucault’s early conception is the ‘carceral society’: modern disciplinary power displaces fixed locations of sovereignty, operates bottom-up through the modern human sciences, and impresses itself, insidiously, upon ‘docile bodies’.⁵⁶ These docile bodies are the passive ‘cogs’ that form the stereotypical totalitarian subject and thereby substitute for Cold War liberalism’s ideological fanatic.⁵⁷ Foucault’s later conception contrasts by employing the category of ‘biopolitics’: modern power now has an interest not in docile but in ‘fit’ subjects. Not only does this move restore a rather more credible sense of agency to our totalitarian subject; it also entails the possibility of biopolitical concerns being given divergent expression in different types of political regime, from welfarist to genocidal.⁵⁸ The Nazi episode now becomes exceptional, doing more than merely refining supposedly ‘Enlightenment’ techniques of social discipline, since it gives distinctive expression to

⁵⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 207.

⁵⁶ See esp. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth, 1979).

⁵⁷ A careful reading of a particular passage of *Discipline and Punish* (p. 169) suggests this is an intentional substitution. ‘Historians of ideas’ serves as code for Cold War liberals, charged with having failed to come to terms with modern power’s displacement:

The Enlightenment, which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines.... Historians of ideas usually attribute the dream of a perfect society to the philosophers and jurists of the eighteenth century; but there was as well a military dream of society; its fundamental reference was not to the state of nature, but to the meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine, not to the primal social contract, but to permanent coercions, not to fundamental rights, but to indefinitely progressive forms of training, not to the general will but to automatic docility.

⁵⁸ E.R. Dickinson, ‘Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy: Some Reflections on Our Discourses about “Modernity”’, *Central European History*, 37 (2004) pp. 1-48.

‘racism in its modern, “biologizing”, statist form’.⁵⁹ Out of this reconsideration we can construct the qualified account of totalitarian scientism. When viable, we may say that it will emphasise two aspects: first, scientific classification; second, ‘evolutionism’, in fact. On the one hand, science legitimises what Foucault referred to as ‘dividing practices’, manifest generally in modern bureaucratic rationality, but manifest with rather more extreme possibilities when marking off those as racially-without-value, for instance. On the other, science also opens up those possibilities in view of an idea of the evolution of ‘the species’ coming to inform rules governing the articulation of knowledge, evolutionism being especially susceptible to-being made to endorse the claims of scientific racism.⁶⁰

Qualification due side, there should be little surprise that the critical theory account can be made to illuminate Nazism, in view of particular reasons. For all the hyperbole about totalitarianism’s continuity with the modern liberal mainstream, many of the key figures had a special emotional investment. The Frankfurt School’s exile in the United States was driven by Hitler’s rise to power, and Steven Aschheim’s description of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as the ‘by-now classic attempt to account for Nazism’ well sums up its wider reputation.⁶¹ While the appearance of Foucault’s work, and poststructuralism in general, might be located broadly within a crisis in the intellectual authority of Marxism in post-war France, Foucault’s biographer equally finds reason to emphasise that ‘throughout his life’ his subject was ‘haunted by the memory of Hitler’s total war and the Nazi death camps’;⁶² certainly, while

⁵⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. by R. Hurley (London, 1990), p. 149.

⁶⁰ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London, 1995), pp. 36, 103; G. Gutting, *Michel Foucault’s Archaeology of Scientific Reason* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 192. See also P. Atterton, ‘Power’s blind struggle for existence: Foucault, genealogy and Darwinism’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 7 (4) (1994) pp. 1-20.

⁶¹ S. Aschheim, *Culture and Catastrophe* (Basingstoke, 1995), p. 6.

⁶² J. Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (Cambridge MA, 2000), p. 171.

Foucault's reflection on the Holocaust, so far as published work goes, is neither sustained nor systematic, any 'genealogy' of the Gulag is absent from his work.⁶³ To factor in contexts of reference to our appraisal, we may consider that discernible alongside the agenda to (re-)root 'fascism' in capitalism, with greater sophistication than other leftist thought permitted, is a particular emotional dynamic.⁶⁴ In complex ways attention is being given, variously, to the Nazi period, to capitalism, and to a crisis in orthodox Marxism. Hence we cannot simply (as in Cold War liberalism's case) label critical theory's account of totalitarianism one-sided. But note, that complexity should not be mistaken for an analytical virtue. For example, not the investigation of Soviet communism, rather self-serving politics, was principally bound up with the delegitimation of 'scientism', because identifying Soviet communism in those terms permitted Western Marxism – the otherwise opaque category to which critical theory shared an allegiance – to be default-defined in opposition.⁶⁵

For the time being we should consider only the purchase that the (amended) critique of totalitarian scientism has upon Nazism's history. In the light of our earlier assertion that utopianism might account for one part – if only one part – of the intellectual background to Stalinism, the historical evidence might be taken to suggest something similar here. An articulation of a scientific strand can be viewed as built sequentially, to reprise our earlier exercise. (a) A conception of the nation is, across the nineteenth-century, transformed into a conception of race, where important markers are Arthur Comte de Gobineau, who not only provides the basis for separating members of different racial categories, but also introduces a

⁶³ A. Milchman and A. Rosenberg, 'Michel Foucault, Auschwitz and the Destruction of the Body' in Milchman and Rosenberg (eds.), *Postmodernism and the Holocaust* (Amsterdam, 1998), p. 204

⁶⁴ Cf. the interpretation of fascism validated by the Comintern: 'Fascism in power is the open, terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, the most chauvinistic, the most imperialistic elements of finance capitalism'.

⁶⁵ M. Jay, *Marxism and Totality* (Los Angeles and Berkeley CA, 1984), pp. 1-21.

racial interpretation of history,⁶⁶ and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who both (re)points that racial interpretation in the direction of progress, not decline (as Gobineau had), and fixates on one particular racial category: the Jews.⁶⁷ (b) Racial conceptions become reconfigured biologically, in interaction with wider cultural forces like social Darwinism.⁶⁸ (c) Approaching the period of the Third Reich itself, racial miscegenation is redescribed as a principally ‘Jewish’ threat to the heredity of the Aryan racial stock.⁶⁹ Anti-Semitism does not exhaust the entirety of Nazi ideology, and a defect of Yvonne Sherratt’s account of Hitler’s intellectual pedigree is to imply otherwise.⁷⁰ But anti-Semitism, in racial and not religious form, was the centrepiece of Nazism’s scientific current. The failure of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to have pinpointed exactly, rather than abstrusely, where modern science was implicated in totalitarianism is, on the strength of the account just indicated, to have downplayed the specific grounding to Nazi anti-Semitism in a fear of the ‘biologised’ Other.⁷¹

⁶⁶ A. de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races* (New York, 1999), pp. 151, xxi.

⁶⁷ H.S. Chamberlain, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 1 (London, 1910).

⁶⁸ A general reception of Darwinian ideas served to establish race on a more explicitly biological and hereditary basis. ‘Social Darwinism’ was the social application of the idea of natural selection, whereby species progress by adaptation to changing local environments. For a strong thesis regarding Darwin’s influence on Nazi ideology, see R. Weikert, *Hitler’s Ethic* (Basingstoke, 2011).

⁶⁹ Hitler, in *Mein Kampf*, trans. R. Manheim (Boston, c1943), can be read as concurring with Gobineau – ‘all occurrences in world history are only the expression of the races’ instinct of self-preservation’ – and as following Chamberlain, by opposing Aryans and Jews as ‘creators’ and ‘destroyers’ of cultures respectively (pp. 263-9). His views on miscegenation provide evidence of their combination with a Social Darwinian flourish: ‘Such mating is contrary to the will of Nature for a higher breeding of all life... The stronger must dominate and not blend with the weaker, thus sacrificing his own greatness... if this law did not prevail, any conceivable higher development of organic living beings would be unthinkable’ (pp. 258-9).

⁷⁰ Sherratt, *Hitler’s Philosophers*.

⁷¹ See esp. ‘The Elements of Anti-Semitism’ in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 168-209, which enumerates seven ‘theses’ about the Jews, though the combined effect of which is only to efface the more simple idea which rings rather truer: that what had previously been religious prejudice was transformed, by the spirit of modern science, into racial prejudice, thereby supplying anti-Semitism with a modern foundation.

The revolutionary passion in French anti-totalitarian thought

A third school emphasises a final theme to be addressed – revolutionary violence. This can be presented as a distinctly ‘French’ entry to the anti-totalitarian canon. Really, it consists in a revisionist historiographic position on the French Revolution, though we ought to register Sunil Khilnani’s point that historiography can function as political theory ‘by other means’.⁷² To the question of how we ought to think about politics post-Hitler and post-Stalin, this is a position that responds approximately as follows: by being particularly attentive to the expectations that political actors might invest in political violence, expectations that – if they pass unnoted – unwisely lead us to accommodate those actors, by rationalising their ends and means. Locating this position is more challenging than was for our previous two.

Before the revolutionary historians, critical theorists had sought to call attention to ‘bloodless’ domination. Theirs was a departure from the structural model of totalitarianism which, in Friedrich and Brzezinski’s early conception, had made explicit space for ‘terror’. Revolutionary historians now wrested the emphasis back to political terror, specifically in its Jacobin episode, though they disagreed with Friedrich and Brzezinski on its nature. Totalitarian terror was not simply the repression of opposition.⁷³ Nor even was totalitarian terror an expediency for the sake of a greater good: the utilitarian justification. Rather, an important impetus to the violence that historians like François Furet found in the discourses of revolutionary political cultures was regeneration. Though the primary study was of France in the 1790s, the coverage extended to the twentieth century, since the connection was to have thought about political violence in relation to ‘identity’, violence being pictured as transforming identity, so that acts of violence themselves might help give shape to a New

⁷² S. Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution* (New Haven CT, 1983), p. 172.

⁷³ Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, p. 129

Man and a new society.⁷⁴ Two generations of commentators in post-war France made this connection. The first – a largely neglected voice – was that of Raymond Aron and Albert Camus, in the 1950s. The second came to maturity in the 1970s, the decade instead of France's 'antitotalitarian moment'.⁷⁵ In neither case do we find, on the basis of a survey of the relevant texts, an unambiguous explication of an identity-related justification of totalitarian political violence, and of course to hold these texts to that particular standard would only be to set them up to fail for reasons we have so far not defended. But these commentators can be faulted, perhaps, for indecision about what it was that they *did* want to say. Proceeding to survey that allows us, once again, to pinpoint two shortcomings. Here, the veracity of this line of critique of totalitarian violence is obscured, first, by an ambiguity that is general, but expressed especially in insufficiently-discriminating recourse to religious metaphor; and second, by a pattern of historical reductionism, in which a reading of one event is projected back onto that of another.

Camus, in *The Rebel*, took as his target the Sartrean attempt to justify violence philosophically, going all the way back to Jacobinism to engage that target. But aside from ascribing totalitarian violence a deep history, so that it could not be written off in terms of contingent 'excesses', he left unclear the precise relationship he was trying to discern between 'metaphysical' rebellion and 'historical' rebellion.⁷⁶ Aron, writing in various places,⁷⁷ was plainer. He exposed a 'myth of Revolution' whose charms, he implied, had

⁷⁴ On justifications of violence according to 'identity', see V. Bufacchi, *Violence and Social Justice* (Basingstoke, 2007), 128-45; and J. Keane, *Reflections on Violence* (London, 1996), esp. pp. 59-104.

⁷⁵ M. S. Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left* (Oxford, 2004).

⁷⁶ A. Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. by A. Bower (London, 1971); R. Aronson, *Camus and Sartre* (Chicago IL, 2004).

⁷⁷ See Aron, 'The Future of Secular Religions', in *The Dawn of Universal History*, trans. by B. Bray (New York, 2002), pp. 177-202; Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, trans. by T. Kilmartin (London, 1990); and Aron, *Democracy and Totalitarianism*, trans. by V. Ionescu (Ann Arbor MI, 1990).

even obstructed Camus' efforts to render it lucid, doing so by separating a commonsensical, sociological conception of revolution from one grounded in a dramatic 'expectation of a break with the normal trend of human affairs'; a move that came far closer, analytically, to isolating the regenerative aspect.⁷⁸ However, Aron detracted from this clarity in the use he made of 'secular religion' theory.⁷⁹ The religious idiom he was keen to apply could be helpful when there was an analogy to be made – for which the casting of revolution in an 'eschatological' role was apt, permitting the conveying of expectations of salvation lying behind a sudden catastrophic moment.⁸⁰ But just as often Aron was less judicious, rooting totalitarian politics per se in alternative outlets for depleted religious belief.⁸¹ A focus on the second generation shows repeat evidence of the ambiguity problem, and even greater signs of historical reductionism. When François Furet came to challenge the 'social interpretation' of the French Revolution, he was either uncertain, or hesitant, about what connected the 1790s with the revolutionary politics of the twentieth century.⁸² For the most part he was content to implicate them together in a variant of the utilitarian justification for violence: the unbounded revolutionary dictatorship, on the Jacobin precedent, as the only means of preserving unity in times of danger.⁸³ Only on occasion did he directly identify revolutionary violence as regenerative, doing so in his conception of 'the revolutionary passion', connoting the fusion of bourgeois self-hatred, extreme voluntarism, and 'immanence' that Jacobinism passed on.

⁷⁸ Aron, *Opium*, esp. pp. 51-58.

⁷⁹ See R. Shorten, *Modernism and Totalitarianism* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 60-72.

⁸⁰ For a useful account of the attitudes that comprise eschatological politics, see A. Orsini, *Anatomy of the Red Brigades*, trans. by S. J. Nodes (Ithaca NY, 2011), pp. 3-4.

⁸¹ Aron's 'functionalist' version of secular religion theory is problematic because it is obliged to appeal to the kind of secularisation arguments that postulate a secular substitute in the place of a theological original. For criticism, see H. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge MA, 1983).

⁸² F. Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. by E. Forster (Cambridge, 1981).

⁸³ Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion*, trans. by D. Furet (Chicago, 1999), p. 66.

‘The revolutionary passion’, Furet wrote, ‘transforms everything into politics’.⁸⁴ Notable is how casually this historical transfer (supposed only fascism and communism combined) is invoked: who influences whom, exactly?⁸⁵

Where two problems that circumvent the critique of totalitarian revolutionary violence are internal to the arguments, again the external target is specific. Emblematic is Furet’s thesis: ‘Today the Gulag leads us to reflect afresh on the Terror, by virtue of its ideational project’.⁸⁶ To rehearse a now well-known story, the context of reference can be viewed as cultural, whereby in a particular intellectual milieu, anti-totalitarianism functioned as overdue reckoning with Marxism, now appraised in the light of both a record of Soviet violence – Red Terror – and a rethink of the contemporary relationship with a (national) revolutionary tradition. For both Camus and Aron, discrediting Sartre’s political positions, taken up in the company of other Soviet ‘fellow-travellers’, was often the background concern. From 1974 onwards, Solzhenitsyn’s revelations were often cited as the prompt.⁸⁷ The reckoning with Marxism should not, though, entice us to reduce French anti-totalitarian thought to a simple reprise of Cold War liberalism, because one purpose of locating the former’s position carefully is to show that its commitments are distinct. Both schools may have looked upon a reformed communism as without prospect, since for both the ‘problem’ was deep-rooted in communism’s intellectual history. But in the second school that problem shifts from abstract idealism to a body of thought on the (realist’s) question of the justification of violence.

⁸⁴ Furet, *The Passing*, pp. 1-33, esp. pp. 31-2.

⁸⁵ Furet’s conception of the ‘revolutionary passion’ has garnered relatively little comment in the critical literature yet it is where Furet’s thesis found resonance in other ‘revisionist’ historiography. See Courtois, ‘Conclusion: Why?’, in S. Courtois, N. Werth et al., *The Black Book of Communism*, trans. by J. Murphy and M. Kramer (Cambridge MA, 1999), p. 728.

⁸⁶ Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, p. 12.

⁸⁷ The so-called ‘Solzhenitsyn effect’: *The Gulag Archipelago* was first published in France in 1974.

How does the outline of a corresponding historical narrative stand up to the available evidence, textual and otherwise? In the very least, modifications would have to be made to the idea that a straight line connects Lenin and Stalin to an originary, Jacobin proposition that violence in politics can be a regenerative force: (a) That is because the proposition may *pre-date* the French Revolution: Machiavelli, for instance, pondered whether men's exercise of martial capacities could rebound back onto their capacities as citizens, serving to counter private interest.⁸⁸ (b) Because, even in Robespierre, the proposition may have been secondary to an 'instrumental' logic, terror being *necessity* as much as purification.⁸⁹ (c) Because the theme that violence could be wedded to moral rejuvenation largely *bypassed* Marx and Engels, even while they were sometimes given to overstep the utilitarian 'mid-wife' justification that historical teleology provided.⁹⁰ (d) The evidence would seem rather that both early and late Bolshevism *reconnected* with the theme. Consider Trotsky – 'to make the individual sacred we must destroy the social order which crucifies him' – or Stalin's campaign for the 'intensification of the class struggle', accompanied by demands for Soviet political subjects to be 'active' and 'energetic' fighters.⁹¹ To say the least, the Soviet

⁸⁸ See esp. E.A. Rees, *Political Thought from Machiavelli to Stalin* (Basingstoke, 2004). Thus the contrast that Arno Mayer draws between Machiavelli's justification of violence (instrumental) and Jacobinism's justification (regenerative) may be too stark: Mayer, *The Furies* (Princeton NJ, 2000), pp. 99-102.

⁸⁹ Robespierre, 'On the Principles of Political Morality', in *Virtue and Terror*, (ed.) S. Žižek (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 114-55. Jacobin discourse certainly does, however, broach the idea of 'purifying' France through the purging of its 'enemies'. Cf. the statement of the Public Prosecutor of the Revolutionary Tribunal, Antoine Quentin Fouquier-Tinville, when tasked with trying those charged with counter-revolutionary activities: 'If we purge ourselves, it is because we want the right to purge France.... we intend to prune the dead branches of this great tree'. Cited in Orsini, *Anatomy*, p. 174.

⁹⁰ Marx's most quoted conception of violence is, of course, 'the mid-wife of every old society, pregnant with a new one': 'Capital', in *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Collected Works*, Vol. 35 (London, 1989), p. 739. But typically, whenever Marx seems to endorse violence in stronger terms, that is via direct reflection on the French revolutionary precedent. E.g. 'unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless required heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war and national conflict to bring it into the world': 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in *Later Political Writings*, (ed.) T. Carver (Cambridge, 1996), p. 33.

⁹¹ Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, (ed.) S. Žižek (London: Verso, 2007), p. 63; D. Priestland, 'Stalin as Bolshevik romantic: ideology and mobilisation, 1917-1939', in S. Davies and J. Harris (eds.), *Stalin: A New History* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 200.

embrace of the idea that acts of violence could be creative was not undiluted. But Camus, Aron, and Furet were right to seek to illuminate the background to a communist orientation on violence that could exceed expediency.

Rethinking the canon's insights?

Appropriate to our exercise at this point is to take stock and review. We began by suggesting that an anti-totalitarian canon will include all those twentieth-century political theorists who asked a question regarding totalitarianism's meaning for political life, at least in some permutation. With our particular purposes in view – to use that canon to reconstruct an account of totalitarian ideology – we then went on to propose that those theorists can be located across three significant schools of thought: Cold War liberals, critical theorists, and revisionist historians in France, were all drawn to attempt to validate accounts of totalitarianism. In the course of undertaking those attempts, we have reflected that each school came up against three problems. The first obstacle consisted in the constraints imposed by time and place: we have tried to note exactly where each school was prompted to ask a more particular question – about Marxism, about Nazism, even liberalism, or else more distinct historical events. The second obstacle lay in the argumentative strategies employed, where for each school we amplified two weaknesses: conceptual conflation and bifurcation (Cold War liberals), generalisation beyond political dictatorships and reduction to bureaucracy (critical theorists), ambiguity and historical reductionism (revisionist historians). A third obstacle concerns the historical evidence available. What we could note here is that because the interpretations of modern political experience that we have discussed are conceived at quite a high level of abstraction, it is possible – selectively – to marshal evidence in support of them all, without pronounced differences in the plausibility of those applications. Hence this possible inference: the claims that utopianism, scientism and

revolutionary violence have to constitute totalitarian political thought are not mutually exclusive of one another; rather, these three sources might be reconcilable. The possibility of that reconciliation takes us towards the final stage of our exercise. Yet before that, we need to consider the scope of each account's potential application.

Already, in reflecting on the argumentative strategies employed across the postwar conversation, we have indicated how it is that the set of intellectual commitments that make up each of our currents of thought need to be rethought. Continuing to amend the postwar accounts allows us to extend the applications. Specifically, this part of our exercise enables us to bring into view, in turn, a story that Cold War liberals *could* have told about Nazism; a story that critical theorists could have told about Stalinism; and one that revisionist historians could have told about an orientation on the right in politics. Note that in this we return too to our earlier discussion on 'the canon'. For identifying the 'representative thinker' of current of thought is a significant step in clarifying its complexion.

Nazi utopianism

Cold War liberals tended to employ a conception of utopia whereby there was a collective political subject receptive to its message. Into that collective political subject, individuals with plural identities dissolved; far worse still was the fate of those defined as outside the collective political subject: 'gas chambers, gulags, genocide', said Berlin, 'are the price men must pay for the felicity of future generations'.⁹² In order to render an account of totalitarian utopianism optimally robust, what we need to pick out is a single most important feature of the Cold War liberal imaginary. This is a collective political subject's invariable character as 'oppressed' – hence *for* that subject, *eutopia*'s appeal, the Greek root designating 'happy-

⁹² Berlin, 'The Pursuit of the Ideal', in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, (ed.) H. Hardy (London, 1991), p. 16.

place'. We need to pick this feature out because it is first clue towards appreciating how Nazism functioned as utopia as well.

In unrevised form, the Cold War liberal position is inconsistent with recognition of Nazism's utopian character. In the mainline of that position, totalitarian utopias are rationalistic utopias. They project a social world based on rational principles in the place of an 'irrational' status quo. By the conventional contrast, the 'irrational' is precisely what Nazism appeals to.⁹³ In Berlin, 'monism' usually pictures a *rationalistic* social harmony, because it is through Reason (capital 'R') that human beings have access to knowledge as to what constitute harmonious ends. In Talmon, it is rationalism that threatens to become 'messianic'. Subjects of oppression, however, can be thought to want to embrace utopias not to achieve their 'rational' selves – rather their 'true' selves. The two may overlap, but they may not. The key point follows. Properly understood, *totalitarian utopias are (and must be) utopias of authenticity; they may be (though need not be) rationalistic utopias*. This revised understanding permits us not only, as we shall see shortly, to identify the outline of a utopian strand in National Socialism, but also to locate more accurately the utopian current in Soviet communism. Moved to centre stage is the notion of man's estrangement from his 'species-being' under the conditions of modern social life: Marx's non-alienated New man – the idea that Berlin's warning about positive liberty leans so heavily on – thereby comes to have, at its core, the claim to represent a *true* self. There are suggestive implications also for how a conception of utopianism per se might be modified, with totalitarian utopianism being one sub-set thereof. We might now say that the general feature of any utopian theory is to trace all the ills of existing society back to a single source; that this identity in form allows for

⁹³ Note that it may not be inconsistent to hold that a political movement exercises an irrational appeal while finding legitimization, in other aspects, by scientific reason.

variation in content (rationalist/ irrationalist, hedonist/ ascetic, etc.);⁹⁴ and that the particular feature of totalitarian utopias is to trace ills back to a state of in-authenticity.⁹⁵

Further to the content of a totalitarian utopianism, what also stands in need of correction, from the mainline of the Cold War liberal position, is the conceived point of origin. Here specifically, the usefulness of identifying its representative thinker enters the picture. We saw earlier that it was Marx-qua-utopian whom Cold War liberals fixed attention on, though ‘the Enlightenment’ was also cast as an important origin (and from which Marx’s alleged complicity was only an extension); Enlightenment rationalism, in Berlin and Talmon respectively, fed political projects that were ‘monist’ and ‘messianic’.⁹⁶ The Enlightenment thinker that Cold War liberals particularly levelled accusations at was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and although it *is* Rousseau who can help clarify the origin and content of totalitarianism’s utopian strand, this is not for the reasons *they* identified, one consequence of which is significant, insofar as it redirects our attention to the counter-Enlightenment. Rousseau’s general will was the central reference (as it was also for Bertrand Russell, in his infamous ‘Hitler is an outcome...’ formulation).⁹⁷ The general will was taken as emblematic of Enlightenment rationalism. The general will amounted to the will of a collective subject. And on Berlin’s rendition of positive liberty especially, the general will entailed the division

⁹⁴ G. Kateb, *Utopia and its Enemies* (London, 1963), pp. 5-6.

⁹⁵ In this regard, totalitarian utopias *are* usefully clarified by analogy to religion (cf. note 25). A narrative structure of Eden, Fall, and re-union with God organises past, present, and future of a collectivity according to a pattern of victimhood, struggle, and salvation, in which ‘salvation’ will entail the recovery of an authentic self. Roger Griffin’s idea of ‘palingenesis’ is specifically useful, because it allows us to pinpoint both that creation ‘anew’ is the totalitarian utopian expectation, and that the object of re-creation is the collective political subject. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1995), pp. 26-56.

⁹⁶ See esp. Berlin’s account of the Enlightenment in *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, (ed.) H. Hardy (Princeton NJ, 2006), p. 54.

⁹⁷ Russell mainly alleged that Hitler was ‘an outcome’ on the grounds that this doctrine of Rousseau’s ‘made possible the mystical identification of leader with his people’ (*History of Western Philosophy*, pp. 660, 674.)

of true and illusory selves – the latter, naturally, in need of being ‘forced to be free’.⁹⁸ But aside from Rousseau’s concept being atypical of the Enlightenment mainstream, this reading misses how, in the emergence of the utopian current we are identifying, the reception of the Rousseau of the *Social Contract* was layered upon a prior reception of the Rousseau of the two *Discourses*. The latter might be thought of as Rousseau the counter-Enlightenment thinker – the Rousseau who identified ‘nature with simplicity’ and celebrated ‘the inner life’.⁹⁹ Accordingly, we might obtain clarity on totalitarianism’s utopian strand by picturing collectivism intersecting with an imperative to recover a ‘natural’ condition, most characteristic of the early Rousseau: ‘all institutions that place man in contradiction with himself are of no value’.¹⁰⁰ Not that this is simply an exercise in picturing so for clarity’s sake. Upon the basis of this imperative, it is fair to say, *was* how Rousseau was read by would-be totalitarians; notably, across both the post-Enlightenment right and left.

Let us consider once more the utopian background to Stalinism, before we apply the reconceived account to Nazism. On the post-Enlightenment left, we gave significance earlier to the pre-Marxian ‘utopian’ socialists, for having introduced the idea of a higher self. But informing this conception was already, perhaps, Rousseau’s project, where we might see not an introduction, but a substitution: of Fourier’s body of fully-coordinated passions, say, for Rousseau’s soul of moral conscience.¹⁰¹ Rousseau’s reception on the right does not even call

⁹⁸ Popper, *Open Society*, Vol. 2, p. 81; Berlin, ‘Rousseau’, in *Freedom and its Betrayal*, ed. H. Hardy (Oxford, 2002), p. 46.

⁹⁹ Berlin, ‘Rousseau’, 41-2. On Rousseau as counter-Enlightenment thinker, see G. Garrard, *Counter-Enlightenments* (London, 2006), pp. 17-28.

¹⁰⁰ Rousseau, ‘The Social Contract’, in *The Basic Political Writings*, (ed.) D.A. Cross (Indianapolis IN, 1987), p. 223.

¹⁰¹ Cf. F. Manuel and F.P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Oxford, 1979), p. 681: ‘The spirit of Jean-Jacques, the enemy of the philosophes, hovers over every line that Fourier wrote. The play of contrast between natural man and artificial man of the *Discourse on Inequality* is reflected in the antithesis of the happy man in the phalanstery and the wretched man of civilization.’

for the caveat, because looking for the take-up of a utopia of authenticity – this time, in *irrationalist* form – leads us to plausible textual evidence. To recognise that, we first have to locate Nazism's utopian strand in overall terms. As with the case on the left, that strand ought to be viewed as emerging out of frustration with Enlightenment individualism, but this time as developing as a utopia of 'nation', rather than a utopia of 'class' (and note: not yet of 'race', because *that* must await legitimation by nineteenth-century science).¹⁰² Reviewing some of the textual evidence for this characterisation presents a final opportunity as well to amend the relevant positions associated with Cold War liberalism.

What we are suggesting now, then, is that National Socialism, in one specific part of its ideological make-up, comprised an irrationalist, collectivist utopia of national authenticity. Claudia Koonz emphasises 'the desire for moral rejuvenation of the *volk*', and the 'socialist' component – though care is called for – should be seen as the means to that end.¹⁰³ Two distant intellectual origins that laid foundations for this conception – origins that Isaiah Berlin, in particular, was confused about – are Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte.

Herder's importance is to have given voice to a particular combined idea, and to have done so, indeed, in creative adoption of Rousseau. The aspirations Herder invested in nationalism – the combined idea, because for Herder it was simultaneously collectivist and an affirmation of (group) uniqueness – grew out of his hostility to Enlightenment rationalism: the 'cold philosophy of the age'. From Rousseau's *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* Herder drew out the case that Enlightenment rationalism was fundamentally incapable of

¹⁰² Cf. E. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide* (Princeton NJ, 2005), p. 34.

¹⁰³ Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge MA, 2003); Weikart, *Hitler's Ethic*, p. 111. As a designation, 'workerism' has some advantages over 'socialism', fascism in general making possible the identification of the worker as 'stern, male, and muscular'. Cf. T. Judt, *Postwar* (London, 2007), pp. 199-200.

picturing the community in terms genuinely resonant of human experience.¹⁰⁴ He concluded that authentic human experience – the simplest of ‘delights’ – had to be bounded within the limits of the nation, because of shared language; and therefore, that every language-base, cultural expression of national character had to be cherished: ‘every nation has its centre of happiness within itself’.¹⁰⁵ The conclusion, then, may have transcended Rousseau. Nonetheless, it was a reading of his early texts that led Herder to outline several propositions vital to an irrationalist utopia of national authenticity: that reason could separate man from community; that the natural community was one whose distinctive culture had organically developed; and that there was a connection between the realisation of the human self and participation in national project.¹⁰⁶ A credible liberal position might have made this connection.¹⁰⁷ Yet Berlin did the opposite, turning Herder into an anti-totalitarian by proxy, in virtue of his pluralism’s supposed challenge to the Enlightenment’s (dangerous) monism.¹⁰⁸ The mistake is instructive rather than incidental, because the more convincing account of totalitarian utopias will contend (contra Berlin) that always privileged are select portions of humanity – nations, classes – not ‘humanity’ per se.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Herder, ‘Another Philosophy of History’ in *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. by I.D. Evrigenis and D. Pellerin (Indianapolis IN, 2004), p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12, 19, 20, 44, 69, 76, 103.

¹⁰⁷ Caution is still called for, because the correction can be overstated. E.g. L. Greenfeld, *Nationalism* (Cambridge MA, 1993), pp. 345, 384.

¹⁰⁸ Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, (ed.) H. Hardy (London, 2000), esp. pp. 231-39.

¹⁰⁹ Berlin tended to think the reverse: that monism’s appeal to ‘humanity’ was the danger because it flattened the diversity of human aspirations to a singularity. Only in later work did he give fascism intellectual antecedents in Romanticism. M. Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (London, 2000), p. 247.

Secondly, Fichte took the utopia of nation significantly further, because his was an explicitly political – not only cultural – programme.¹¹⁰ Here, Talmon certainly took note of what Fichte's conception of a nation amounted to: a 'messianic' project, in which particular peoples – not classes, as in Marxian 'totalitarian democracy' – could be active agents in realising utopian schemes for fundamental human improvement.¹¹¹ But by that point he was obliged to have revised his original conceptual framework, the one that coincided with the main line of Cold War liberalism: totalitarian democracy is no longer exclusively an affair of the left, nor is it exclusively rationalist, because in the early nineteenth century utopian schemes fork off into two types (one left and rationalist, one right and irrationalist).¹¹² There is also a moment in Berlin's work – again, obscured in the mainline of Cold War liberalism – in which he has to allow for a kind of irrationalist variant of positive liberty, one indeed epitomised by Fichte: Berlin earlier associated the perversion of liberty with the reaction against the Enlightenment, because 'romantic liberty' likewise disrupted the 'nuclear, central, minimal meaning of liberty' as the absence of restraint or coercion on the part of other human beings, its specific quality being to envisage liberty as the individual's self-realisation through union with some larger movement.¹¹³ Hence, then, we might appreciate the significance that Fichte had for Nazi utopianism. In his conception of the self as a 'kind of supra-self, a transcendental entity'¹¹⁴ – that the nation embodied – he was to first develop the idea that freedom must signify submission to the nation.

¹¹⁰ Zeev Sternhell locates the political programme earlier, in Herder: Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, trans. by D. Maisel (New Haven CT and London, 2010), pp. 88-9.

¹¹¹ Cf. Fichte's message to the Germans, 'If you sink, all humanity sinks with you, without hope of future restoration': *Addresses to the German Nation*, (ed.) G. Moore (Cambridge, 2008), p. 196.

¹¹² Talmon, *Political Messianism*, pp. 199-201, 229-92.

¹¹³ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Freedom: Romantic and Liberal', in *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, p. 155.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-8.

Marxism, Stalinism, and scientism

We have just seen, then, how the utopian critique can be modified so as (contra the intent) to make sense of National Socialism. Our next task is to restate the scientistic critique so that it has application to the intellectual history behind Stalinism.

Critical theorists were certainly opposed to Stalinism. The potential complicity therein of a late ‘determinist’ Marx was one reason they made appeal to a young (non-scientistic) alternative. This was ironic, if the Cold War liberal story carries force: it was to appeal to those texts and concepts already pointing Marxism in the direction of totalitarian utopianism. But the irony should not detract from the capacity of the critique of totalitarian scientism to accommodate strands of the histories of the ideologies of far right and far left simultaneously, provided a careful distinction is made between the two. We saw earlier that the critical theory account points to extreme, totalitarian possibilities in light of two possible commitments of the modern scientific worldview: categorisation and evolutionism. In turn, what this points to is an apt representative thinker by which to frame the connection: Darwin. Critical theorists invoked figures of their own to serve the same illustrative purpose: Homer’s Odysseus (‘the self who always restrains himself’),¹¹⁵ the Marquis de Sade (instrumental rationality free of moral conscience),¹¹⁶ and Jeremy Bentham (architect of the Panopticon).¹¹⁷ It is the later Foucault, however, wresting the emphasis from the eighteenth-century ‘Enlightenment’ to Europe’s nineteenth century, who helps us arrive at an important amendment to the received account. Darwinism can be said to consist in a set of ethics that

¹¹⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 55.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-6.

¹¹⁷ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 152. In this respect, Foucault remarks, Bentham may have been the ‘complement to Rousseau’. But what he wishes to indict is the ‘transparent society’, not the danger of Rousseauist collectivist visions of recovering authenticity.

were in important ways ‘post-Enlightenment’, emphasising not free will and optimism, but fatalism and a kind of pessimism.¹¹⁸ And politically, Darwinism was open-ended – Darwinian concepts could be adapted and co-opted divergently. Hence the contrast we shall elucidate now, the consequence of which is to expand totalitarian scientism’s scope of reference: *National Socialism and Stalinism thought differently about the nature of history and history’s units*, and in this the idea of legitimation by different Darwins is a useful characterisation. The two cases share an inverted pattern.

On the one hand, Nazism stopped short of embracing the Darwinian-inspired thesis of historical inevitability, where Marxism embraced that thesis full-on. One way of giving clearer meaning to the outline of the particular scientific strand that we sketched earlier is to say that what National Socialism took together from Gobineau, Chamberlain and the social Darwinists was a strong theory of history (i.e. ‘strong’, because it made races crucial collective units) but not a deterministic theory. *Mein Kampf* makes plentiful reference to the ‘laws of Nature’, resonating with the thesis of *Capital*: a ‘rigid law of necessity’ entails ‘the victory of the best and the strongest’.¹¹⁹ Yet also registered in Hitler’s writings is an anxiety that this racial value – though given in nature – will never find assertion, through the required human agency.¹²⁰ Of course, that the communist tradition did embrace historical inevitability is not a novel claim; though it is appropriate to flesh out the ways in which this embrace can be considered – fatally – ‘scientific’, as well as where critical theory’s blindspots lay. Briefly, we may suggest as follows: Communism’s ‘developmentalist’ account of history is

¹¹⁸ Cf. Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler* (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 16.

¹¹⁹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 262.

¹²⁰ Cf. G.L. Weinberg (ed.), *Hitler’s Second Book: The Unpublished Sequel to Mein Kampf* (New York, 2003), p. 32: ‘The significance of this racial value of a people will... only become completely effective if this value is recognised, duly valued and appreciated by a people. Peoples that do not understand this value, or for lack of natural instinct no longer feel it, then begin immediately to lose it’.

rooted in its Hegelian origin – despite critical theory’s appeal to a young Marx –¹²¹ this debt to Hegel being canonised by Engels, whose thinking (at least as received in Soviet Marxism) was unmistakably Darwinian.¹²² Marx’s own thinking was less so,¹²³ though over time his identifications shifted from Hegel to Darwin. Thus he superimposed on Hegel’s developmentalism the (Darwinist) idea of progress proceeding unconsciously, via conflict. It was Engels, regardless, who formalised the legacy, doing so by exceeding the proposition that history was subject to its own laws, because the laws of nature now extended into human history; in this, Engels influenced both Plekhanov and Lenin’s accounts of ‘dialectical materialism’.¹²⁴ At the end of this chain is Stalin, who elevated dialectical materialism into state doctrine, and quoted liberally from Engels (who else?) when called upon to explicate the theory.¹²⁵ Thus was the embrace of historical inevitability fatal, because the expectation that ‘qualitative’ social change was ‘natural and inevitable’ helped silence ethical objection.

On the other hand (to continue the contrast of how it was that two movements came to think about history) where the units of history are concerned, rather than its overall nature, the Darwinian connection is reversed. In place of National Socialism on race, the communist

¹²¹ On developmentalism, see Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment*, ch. 2. Horkheimer took note of the Hegelian connection elsewhere, but there is no treatment of the Hegel-Marx-Stalin relationship in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. See ‘The Authoritarian State’, in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, (ed.) A. Arato and E. Gebhardt (New York, 1982), p. 105.

¹²² Engels, ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’, in *Marx and Engels, Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, (ed.) L.S. Feuer (London, 1976), pp. 126-7, 129-30.

¹²³ As A. Gouldner summarises, ‘for Marx, Darwin is Hegel scientised and modernised while Hegel is the philosophical depth of Darwin – without the English “crudity”’. Marx resisted a full acceptance of Darwinism because Darwin was captive to a Hobbesian image of ‘the war of all against all’ – ‘crude’ (on Marx’s own expression) because it was an approximation to bourgeois, market society only. Cf. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms* (London, 1980), p. 72; Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence, 1846-1895*, trans. by D. Tarr (London, 1934), pp. 125-6.

¹²⁴ Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, pp. 625-32; Lenin, ‘The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism’, in *The Lenin Anthology*, pp. 640-4.

¹²⁵ Stalin, ‘Dialectical and Historical Materialism’, in *The Essential Stalin*, (ed.) B. Franklin (London, 1973), pp. 303-4, 307.

tradition was never prone to extend 'biological' conceptualisation to *its* principal units. Thus, contra the National Socialist case, membership of a social class was not an inherited characteristic. The communist 'tradition' is an important marker though, because it helps direct our attention to how – during the period of Stalinism itself – these bounds may have been breached. There, in the ideological decontestation of class, Soviet discourse came closest to imitating Nazi discourse. Circumspection is required in the interpretation. Imitation came in virtue of a 'nationalisation' of the (general) terms of Marxist discourse reflecting back onto the (particular) understanding of social classes. An enthusiastic nationalism was not an integral 'part of original Marxism'.¹²⁶ Nor can we find Stalin retreating from original Marxism's cosmopolitan position early on. In 1913, he is to be found writing sympathetically on regional autonomy within a superseded Russian Empire; and certainly, rejecting the notion that national character is biologically-determined: true to Marx, it was a 'reflection of the conditions of life'.¹²⁷ Yet commentators may be right to associate late Stalinism's turn to Russian chauvinism with a distinctive encounter with 'biopolitics' staged in the Soviet case. The attempted eradication of national differences through the deportation of the non-Russian nationalities meant rigid classification coming to play a part in Soviet thinking. And on that basis, the eclipse of 'nurture' by 'nature'¹²⁸ could inform the perception of enemies of the regime of all kinds – (re)cast as 'vermin' and 'filth'.¹²⁹ Class

¹²⁶ Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin*, p. 53.

¹²⁷ Stalin, 'Marxism and the National Question', in *The Essential Stalin*, p. 63.

¹²⁸ A. Weiner, 'Nature and Nurture in a Socialist Utopia: Delineating the Soviet Socio-Ethnic Body in the Age of Socialism', in David L. Hoffmann (ed.), *Stalinism* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 237-74.

¹²⁹ J. Baberowski and A. Doering-Manteuffel, 'The Quest for Order and the Pursuit of Terror: National Socialist Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union as Multiethnic Empires', in Geyer and Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Beyond Totalitarianism*, p. 213. However, the threat implied was to social not racial hygiene, the Nazi case. National distinctiveness, not racial 'pollution', contra E. Weitz, always remained the target. Cf. Weitz, 'Racial Politics without the Concept of Race', *Slavic Review*, 61 (1) (2002) pp. 54-61.

enemies *too* could come to be defined by objective characteristics, from which they had no opportunity of escape.¹³⁰

A rightist orientation on revolutionary violence

The last account that calls for extension beyond its original scope of reference is the critique of revolutionary violence. We saw earlier that, for a revisionist historiographic position on the French Revolution, what holds together Jacobinism-Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, as a singular, on-going revolutionary project, is the theme of violence qua regeneration. Is that theme articulated to a significant level in the intellectual background to Nazism? Our answer must be yes, albeit with a clarificatory distinction.

Our attention is initially steered away by Nazism's rejection of any ideological kinship with 1789.¹³¹ Though on closer consideration, that rejection only points to the utility of thinking in terms of two discrete, largely self-enclosed orientations on revolutionary violence that were available for totalitarians to draw on: one left, one right. The distinction is that *the rightist orientation is equally informed by an idea of moral rejuvenation but has no anchor in the French revolutionary era*. Yet there are good reasons for tracing such an orientation through to its reception and reworking in the Nazi era: first, far more so than Stalinism, Nazism is characterised by a celebration of violence as an intrinsic quality; second, there is validation in the 'new consensus' in fascist studies, whereby fascism (rather than 'counter-' revolutionary) has its own distinctive sense of revolution.¹³² A further reason involves what we can infer about *both* orientations, left and right: namely, that totalitarian

¹³⁰ Weiner, 'Nature and Nurture', p. 246.

¹³¹ Cf. Goebbels: 'the year 1789 is hereby erased from history'.

¹³² R. Griffin, 'The Primacy of Culture: the Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37 (1) (2002) pp. 21-43.

revolutionary violence – like totalitarian utopianism, like totalitarian scientism – has a post-Enlightenment ethos. In clarification of that ethos as manifest here, Nietzsche is the most eligible representative thinker (though with some careful qualification required).¹³³ Textual evidence concerning Nietzsche's place within the leftist orientation suggests the connection is wrongly obscured in the mainline of French anti-totalitarian thought, because in the construction of Soviet violence between original Marxism and early Bolshevism, the integration of Nietzschean themes is important facet: Lenin borrowed from figures in the Russian tradition of revolutionary conspiracy who identified with nihilism;¹³⁴ Trotsky's defence of terrorism can be viewed as exhortation to express a 'will to power'.¹³⁵ The Nietzschean connection that Bolshevism can be thought to *share* with Nazism is more general: his significance is to have challenged the prohibition on violence (a prohibition endorsed by the mainstream of the Enlightenment) by proposing a cult of 'hardness', in place of compassion. Let us try to identify where it is that Nietzsche exerts the more particular influence in Nazism's case, by tracing some evolving terms of the rightist orientation.

A rightist orientation on revolutionary violence, we have said, has no anchor in the French Revolutionary era. But there is relevance in the reaction to the French Revolution, where some commentators have found, but then overplayed, a cue to fascism.¹³⁶ Joseph de Maistre's indictment of the Jacobin Terror as divine punishment 'for the sake of regeneration' does direct attention to a bizarre mirroring of the Revolution's own purification

¹³³ Many supposed affinities between Nietzsche's thought and Nazism are unconvincing. See J. Golumb and R.S. Wistrich (eds.), *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism?* (Princeton NJ, 2002).

¹³⁴ M. Burleigh, *Blood and Rage: A Cultural History of Terrorism* (London, 2008), pp. 27-67.

¹³⁵ B.G. Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism* (University Park PA, 2002), p. 144.

¹³⁶ E.g. Berlin, 'Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism', in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, pp. 91-174.

metaphor.¹³⁷ It is confirmation also that right and left alike have been prone, historically, to construct violence as a creative force. However, evidence of Maistre's actual influence on later fascist ideologies is thin.¹³⁸ More accurately, we should contend that only post-Nietzsche does the Nazi practice of revolutionary violence gain real shape. And the initial contribution is a particular reading of Nietzschean texts themselves: the will to power undermines the status of objective truth and so *myth*, rather than reason, will henceforth be the basis for (re)producing 'healthy' forms of life.¹³⁹ That contribution should not be overstated, because while it was possible to find in those texts diagnosis of this general cultural predicament, Nietzsche himself was uninterested in how the *masses* might be brought to respond to it. Hence the significance next of Georges Sorel, for having attended to precisely that issue: Sorel, whose own political commitments began at least on the left, offered a Nietzschean correction to Marxism whereby the specific myth capable of moving the masses was that of the general strike;¹⁴⁰ and because Sorel noted that strikes could involve violence, he was led to consider the ethics of violence explicitly. Therein, crucially, we might locate the transmission to Nazism of distinctive version of violence's identity-related justification.

For Sorel, 'proletarian violence', as a 'pure and simple manifestation of class war', promised not so much to yield material advantage, as to 'save the world from barbarism': it could restore the class struggle with 'energy'.¹⁴¹ Prior to now, much has been made of

¹³⁷ Maistre, *Considerations on France*, (ed.) R. Lebrun (Cambridge, 1994), p. 8.

¹³⁸ G. Garrard, 'Isaiah Berlin's Joseph de Maistre', in R. Wokler and J. Mali, (eds.) *Isaiah Berlin and the Counter-Enlightenment* (Philadelphia PA, 2003), pp. 117-32.

¹³⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by W. Kaufmann (New York, 1968).

¹⁴⁰ Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, (ed.) J. Jennings (Cambridge, 1999), esp. pp. 116-17.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 58.

Sorel's reception in fascism in the Italian case.¹⁴² But in the particular respect of violence, what we are suggesting is that Sorel casts a more useful light on the German case – even, to be sure, in the absence of a direct relationship.¹⁴³ Recognising so requires us to give greater import to a conceptual substitution possible from Sorel's original scheme: revolutionary nation for revolutionary proletariat.¹⁴⁴ Of course, this is a substitution that Italian Fascism can also be pictured as making (and where the substitution's appeal may have lain likewise partly in the 1914-18 experience).¹⁴⁵ Yet the substitution was performed with special significance in National Socialism.¹⁴⁶ There, violence was not only sanctioned on a different scale, but regenerative violence found impetus in other sources, absent in Fascism. Combination was key. 'Redemptive anti-Semitism', for instance, had utopian and scientific determinants as well, since (for the anti-Semite) the transformation of the self that was projected would equally entail eradicating an infected presence and overcoming national-collective decline.¹⁴⁷

Conclusion – totalitarian ideology on a 'Collingwoodian' approach

¹⁴² Z. Sternhell, with M. Sznajder and M. Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, trans. by D. Maisel (Princeton NJ, 1994).

¹⁴³ On the account presented in T. Ryback, *Hitler's Private Library* (London, 2010), there is no evidence that Hitler read Sorel, having left that to others affiliated with the Nazi movement, like Carl Schmitt. By contrast, Mussolini *did*, 'greet[ing] it as an epiphany': R. Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason* (Oxford, 2004), p. 60.

¹⁴⁴ Sorel, *Reflections*, pp. 93-101.

¹⁴⁵ Central to Sternhell's thesis is that 'the true dimensions' of 'the historical significance of Sorelianism' only became apparent after the First World War (*Fascist Ideology*, p. 89).

¹⁴⁶ The claim is not that Nazi violence per se was regenerative. Many aspects may well have been prosaic. Furthermore, when Hitler's stances on violence *did* repackage intellectualised themes, this was in significantly cruder form. 'Hardness' is what is frequently appraised positively. Another feature is the transposition into political life of military vernacular. Cf. N. Gregor, *How to Read Hitler* (London, 2005), pp. 33, 29.

¹⁴⁷ S. Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1933-1939* (New York, 1997), p. 87.

Finally, our exercise has reached the point to leave behind the validation of theoretical accounts in historical texts and other types of political discourse, and to briefly engage a more open-ended theme, one principally methodological. To appreciate why we might wish to engage such a theme, recall the claims we began from: time is ripe for an ideology-oriented theory of totalitarianism; an anti-totalitarian canon is a neglected resource; tapping such a resource will require careful attention to a range of issues, conceptual, contextual, and empirical. Recall also that our earlier discussion on method. A plausible perspective on totalitarianism and the history of ideas, we suggested, would be one that pictured several sources existing in complex relationship with the relevant twentieth-century formations. We have since located those sources, in three particular currents of thought. All three emerged in reaction to the Enlightenment and extended across the intellectual backgrounds to National Socialism and Stalinism inclusive. On this basis, we are able to conclude that ‘totalitarian ideology’ comprises a synthesis of (what we have meant by) utopianism, scientism, and revolutionary violence. We must now reflect not on content but on the validity of ‘totalitarian ideology’, as conceptualisation.

We conventionally treat ‘fascist ideology’ and ‘communist ideology’ as valid units for analysis. We withhold that from totalitarian ideology, typically doing so because we wish instead – on the remnants of the outdated structural model – to make totalitarianism refer to fascism/ communism-in-power. Should we continue to wince at the term? Not, we might think, if we are only identifying a shared ideational space, not challenging ‘rival’ designations, though some putative ideational equivalence. And analytically, we have deliberately provided for the synthesis of the same currents of thought in dis-similar proportion and/ or character. But this alone will not justify the conceptualisation. That also invites an account of the understanding of ideology itself being applied. Here, our central

claim can be that ‘totalitarian’ ideology is defined by particular performance at three significant levels of legitimation.

Why should other understandings of ideology be either unavailable or insufficient? First, ‘fascist studies’ has an established concern with identifying a ‘fascist minimum’.¹⁴⁸ But proposing a ‘totalitarian minimum’ will be meagre return if that comprises a set of only three overlapping ideological features (fewer than have been identified in the fascist case). Second, a ‘cluster’ conception of totalitarian ideology might take us further, by connecting those features together, where they complement and mutually reinforce.¹⁴⁹ However, this would also be yield to a standpoint external to the object under investigation, the analyst inferring the connections for herself. Hence, third, why a ‘morphological’ conception would be more profitable, elucidating those ‘decontestations’ – enacted by totalitarians themselves – which lock together common meanings-for-concepts into coherent patterns.¹⁵⁰ Yet on the evidence of this article, no such elucidation is possible. Totalitarians do not decontest uniformly. For example, some fix meaning for social solidarity in class, others in race.¹⁵¹ All this points us to a fourth alternative, which we can identify in relation to R.G. Collingwood.

An understanding based on the ‘Collingwoodian’ approach takes us back to the possibility we considered in connection with the anti-totalitarian canon: that the questions

¹⁴⁸ E.g. R. Eatwell, ‘The nature of “generic fascism”: the “fascist minimum” and the “fascist matrix”’, in C. Iordachi (ed.), *Comparative Fascist Studies* (London, 2010), pp. 134-61.

¹⁴⁹ Gentile gestures towards such an account in *Politics as Religion*. See Griffin, ‘Cloister or Cluster? The Implications of Emilio Gentile’s Ecumenical Theory of Political Religion for the Study of Extremism’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion*, 6 (1) (2005) pp. 33-52.

¹⁵⁰ M. Freeden, ‘Political Concepts and Ideological Morphology’, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 2 (2) (1994) pp. 140-64.

¹⁵¹ The commonality is, instead, to have cashed out social solidarity in ‘thick’ terms.

may differ.¹⁵² There, we were interested in making sense of our ‘secondary-text sources’ for totalitarian ideology – theorists’ accounts. Only now we are interested in first-order thinking – totalitarian political thought itself. Why should a Collingwoodian approach help us to give that systematic characterisation? In brief, because it makes it possible to picture how utopianism, scientism and revolutionary could have provided totalitarians with particular questions they found themselves wanting, or needing, to ask, answers that were capable of cohering, but that were equally open to being given local colour.¹⁵³ On the issue of how to read a text, Collingwood famously encourages us to reflect: ‘what question did So-and-so intend this proposition for an answer’.¹⁵⁴ Assuming we are relaxed about reading totalitarianism as a text (which we can be, if braced not to expect sophisticated chains of logical reasoning), then the vital insight concerns three significant levels of legitimation that thereby come to both register, and validate, totalitarianism’s identity *as* ideology. They are as follows.

Level 1 concerns *community*. When totalitarians advance propositions that are best approximated to utopianism, it is in trying to answer a question about how community ought to be constructed, because that (to adopt Collingwood’s terminology) is what ‘arises’.¹⁵⁵ In these terms, we may now view our assertion that utopianism led Nazism and Stalinism – in common – to conceive ‘authentic’ community in reference to a collective political subject, but at odds, to locate that subject in different sources of solidarity, and with different expectations invested in ‘reason’. Level 2 concerns *history*. Whenever totalitarians invoke

¹⁵² Q. Skinner, ‘The rise of, challenge to and prospects for a Collingwoodian approach to the history of political thought’, in D. Castiglione and I. Hampsher-Monk (eds.), *The History of Political Thought in a National Context* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 175-188.

¹⁵³ Those questions, totalitarians asked in common. There might well be others, asked by one type of totalitarian, but not by another.

¹⁵⁴ R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford, 1978), p. 39.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

scientism, that is in the course of asking how (for their own political project) the terms of historical justification should proceed. Scientism, we have seen, is expansive enough to be made to affirm at least two visions of history, as answers: one in which the collective subjects that are its principal actors are given scientific classification, and another in which (mainly non-scientifically-classified) actors are understood to participate in a deterministic process. Level 3 concerns *political action*. It is to a question about the nature of conflict that revolutionary violence provides answers. For totalitarians of all hues, the commission of violence will not only have an instrumental purpose – to effect a moment of transition – but a regenerative purpose as well. To spell this out via single phrase we have little used: what is proposed at the prior two levels, then given final shape at the third, is the totalitarian ‘New Man’.

We should be clear about the advantages of codifying totalitarian ideology on the ‘logic of question and answer’. It allows for the conceptual elasticity that our appraisal of the anti-totalitarian canon suggests is required. We also become reconciled, methodologically-speaking, to troubling – but ineradicable – points of inconsistency. Collingwood’s injunction that ‘no two propositions can contradict one another unless they are answers to the same question’ may be the solution to a long-standing puzzle, what Arendt identified as a dynamic animated simultaneously by history’s inexorable laws and a conviction ‘everything is possible’.¹⁵⁶ Whether political theorists can be reconciled to implications that are normative rather than methodological is a different matter. Our shorthand ‘Rousseau, Darwin, plus Nietzsche’ might at least be a start. For contrary to what is often imagined, that would bide us to be wary bedfellows not of those who identified with the Enlightenment, rather of those who opposed it.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33; H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London, 2004), pp. vii-ix.