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Totalitarianism and the End of the End-of-Ideology

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Abstract

Is there such a thing as totalitarian ideology? In an earlier era the end-of-ideology thesis answered that there was, albeit in order to do so the authors of the thesis articulated a notoriously weak theory of ideology itself – one long since discredited. Ever since the thesis' heyday in the 1950s there has been confidence about theorising, in separation, both fascist ideology and communist ideology. However, there has been considerably less confidence about describing an ideology of totalitarianism *per se* which might, amongst other things, straddle the two. The argument of this article is that such discomfort should cease. Totalitarianism has distinctive ideological identity in its own right, and the term itself refers (or should refer) to more than simply the regime-stage assumed by extremist political movements. But in order to make this argument stick, the challenge is in part methodological: it is to find the conception of ideology most up to the job. Many of the standard conceptions prove unavailable. In their place, totalitarian ideology should be (re)thought on the notion of the 'recalcitrant text', insofar as incoherence is the main problem involved. This holds general lessons for methodology in ideology studies, and for the problem of identification in particular. In a word, we are far too choosy about the objects we are prepared to devote meaningful time to study, and in the process we sell short our potential to apprehend a multi-layered ideological field.

Totalitarianism and the End of the End-of-Ideology

Is there such a thing as totalitarian ideology? By way of an anecdotal introduction, consider the problem like so. In the multi-authored *Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, the chapter on totalitarianism is placed within the section of the book that covers the history of the discipline, not within the section that includes entries on distinctive, self-standing ideologies in their own right. In other words, ‘communism’ and ‘fascism’ are just like liberalism, conservatism and socialism; ‘totalitarianism’ is not.¹ Why should that be? And does it indicate a wider convention that needs challenging?

The argument of this article is that the reluctance to theorise totalitarian ideology is a hangover from the end-of-ideology thesis. That thesis did give totalitarianism an ideological identity, but did so only at the cost of presenting ideology itself as the great bogeyman. Yet a half century and more after the thesis’ heyday this inauspicious precedent does not, and should not, prevent an ideology of totalitarianism from being constructed along more promising lines; in particular, by using a more adequate conception of ideology. However, at the same time, the sceptics of the end-of-ideology thesis – as well as, presumably, the editors of the *Oxford Handbook* – are onto something real, which should not be played down. From the perspective of ideology studies, there is a special obstacle that arises in theorising totalitarianism, as compared with the objects that are the mainstay of our investigations.² That is the problem of incoherence.

¹ See E. Gentile, ‘Total and Totalitarian Ideologies’, in M. Freeden, L.T. Sargent and M. Stears (Eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 56-72; and cf. A. Brown, ‘Communism’ and R. Eatwell, ‘Fascism’ in *ibid.*, pp. 364-384, 474-492.

² In previous work I have made cases for understanding totalitarianism as *ideology* to audiences of both political theorists and intellectual historians. The case made here is intended to persuade the ideology scholar. For the argument directed at political theorists, see R. Shorten, ‘Rethinking Totalitarian Ideology: Insights from the Anti-Totalitarian Canon’,

To attempt to resolve this problem, the article proposes a central illustrative idea: the ‘recalcitrant text’. This idea is intended to be illustrative in at least three senses. First of all, there is the everyday sense in which recalcitrance means unruly, stubborn, and difficult to deal with. In light of these sorts of connotation the notion of the recalcitrant text is taken to suitably characterise the ‘worldly’ kind of political thought that analysts of ideology handle; and which articulations of totalitarian political thought can be expected to exemplify. Second, there are the various technical senses, most familiar to literary theorists, whereby any given text may prove resistant to ‘encompassing’ formulation.³ From one of these senses the case for rethinking totalitarianism on the notion of the recalcitrant text implies a claim which is metaphorical: the overall ideology can be viewed as such. This involves the ‘text’ in the sense going beyond reference to the physical object alone (including discourse as well as the written word), and extending further to what happens ‘between’ authors and their readers (or speakers and their hearers).⁴ A third sense of the recalcitrant text is imported from the history of political thought. And here the claim becomes literal, not metaphorical. The text is the default unit of analysis in the history of political thought, and the suggestion is that the field of ideology studies should be sure not to sever its connection to this cognate discipline:⁵ totalitarian ideology can be interpreted through a small number of texts in the form, indeed, of the physical object. Only a very lofty version of the history of political thought – better understood as the history of political philosophies, and to be contrasted with the history of

History of Political Thought XXXVI(4) (2015), pp. 726-761. For the argument directed at intellectual historians, see *Modernism and Totalitarianism* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2012).

³ R.A. Rosengarten, ‘The Recalcitrant *Distentio* of Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*’, *Literature & Theology*, 27(2) 2013, p. 170.

⁴ See esp. D. Harlan, ‘Intellectual History and the Return of Literature’, *American Historical Review*, 94 (1989), pp. 581-609.

⁵ Cf. M. Freeden, ‘Editorial. The resurgence of ideology studies: Twenty years of the *JPI*’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 21(1) 2016, pp. 1-2.

political languages – will be in tension with the study of ideology.⁶ Moreover, their combination in creative and exploratory ways might be especially apposite for the empirical study of past ideological configurations.⁷ Hence, taking our bearings from the history of political thought, the more accurate designation of the illustrative idea is not quite the recalcitrant text, rather the ‘pamphlet’. In respect of our prospective sources of totalitarian thought, this designation is apt as an indicator not so much of predicable length, rather than of the relative coherence of the argument we should be braced to find. In other words, as opposed to Hobbes’ *Leviathan* – with its explicit debt to geometrical reasoning, the template is Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* – with its elaborate digressions, overlapping themes, and distinct emotional register.

It is important to emphasise that there is an independent reason for interpreting totalitarian ideology through some select texts (*qua* pamphlets) that may be only few in number. In the main the possibilities for creatively combining a less lofty history of political thought with the study of ideology will tend to point to the analysis of a source-base which is broad, not narrow. Yet we should expect one of the peculiarities of the totalitarian political context to be to raise select texts to a privileged position. Namely, there will be predictable ‘top-down’ pressures in the ways in which the relevant political messages are consumed by popular audiences, meaning that, in comparison with other ideologies, ‘elite’ thought becomes abnormally representative of wider, everyday patterns of political thinking. A good way of thinking about this is by analogy to Ian Kershaw’s influential notion of ‘working

⁶ I. Hampsher-Monk, ‘Politics, political theory, and its history’, in J. Floyd and M. Stears (Eds.) *Political Philosophy versus History?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 113.

⁷ The approach taken here to totalitarian political thought draws inspiration very much from the empirical (non-Marxist) tradition in ideology studies, as opposed to the critical and Marxian tradition. However, for suggestive integrations of Marxist and non-Marxist approaches in this area, see the articles in the special issue “‘The Fascist Revolution’: Utopia or Façade? Reconciling Marxist and non-Marxist Approaches”, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 11(4) 2012.

towards the Führer'. In the totalitarian context, elites set the tone for patterns of political thinking, much as they do for the formulation of policy.⁸ Note, however, that making totalitarian ideology largely a matter of elite discourse is not the same as theorising the sort of ideational package which is monolithic. The end-of-ideology perspectives tend to identify the sources correctly – and by contrast with many of the critics of theories of totalitarianism. Yet what they miss is the recalcitrance.⁹

The structure of the discussion which follows is threefold. Before getting to the actual proposal for how analysts of ideology might add totalitarianism to their collection of cases, the article proceeds through two stages. Taken together, these two stages are intended to persuade an audience of ideology scholars to apply 'business-as-usual' – as with the study of other ideological configurations, to endorse a shift from macro- to micro-analysis. In theorising totalitarianism, this is presented as amounting to a shift from structure to content. Therefore, a first section contrasts two theories of totalitarianism – one structural, the other ideological – each of which emerged by the middle of the twentieth century. Honing in on the latter theory, a second section contrasts two ways of thinking about totalitarian ideology: the legacy of the end-of-ideology thesis is to think about that as structural still, and thus to fail to apply the more promising analysis of content.

The proposal is presented in the third section. With some general lessons for identifying ideologies in mind, the proposal proceeds by weighing up some different methodological options open to the analysis of totalitarian ideology's content. There, an unpacking of the idea of the recalcitrant text is shown to point to the value of interpreting totalitarianism on a 'Collingwoodian' approach. That has previously been championed by

⁸ I. Kershaw, "'Working towards the Führer": reflections on the nature of the Hitler dictatorship', in I. Kershaw and M. Lewin (Eds.) *Stalinism and Nazism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 88-106.

⁹ Such critics tend to find inspiration in less elitist modes of social history. See, e.g., M. Malia, 'Revolution Fulfilled: How the Revisionists are Still Trying to Take the Ideology out of Stalinism', *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 June 2001, pp. 3-4.

Quentin Skinner on behalf of the study of the history of political thought. One aim here is adapt the approach so that it can be integrated into our range of methodologies for analysing political ideology. But another aim is more ambitious: to call for an expansion of that methodological range, so that an extended collection of ideologies can each be given their own identities, and by a process of trial-and-error. Thus, just prior presenting the textual evidence in favour of understanding totalitarianism on the Collingwoodian approach, the article makes some suggestions regarding the bigger picture. It recommends for ideology scholars a spirit of inventiveness, so that we may begin to map an ideological field which is not only fuller, but also more complex, more variegated and, in particular, inclusive of many sorts of configuration which seem to lack coherence on first sight. An appendix to the proposal is a tentative effort to accommodate Islamism.

Two theories of totalitarianism: from structure to ideology

A shift in the interpretation of totalitarianism is called for so that an ideological model comes to supplant a structural one. In the commentary on totalitarianism, such a shift has already been in train roughly since the 1990s.¹⁰ The shift is anticipated, however, in the earliest thinking on the subject. A revealing fact is that even by the 1950s there was a split in theories of totalitarianism that ought to have been evident to the observer. A first model was dominant ('structural' totalitarianism); but there was also a second, an early articulation of 'ideological' totalitarianism. The best way of viewing what is peculiar, and also inadequate, about the early ideological account is by contrast with the structural model. Common to all the 1950s theories of totalitarianism is to have fastened together the politics of the far Left

¹⁰ For the argument in favour of an ideological model, see Shorten, *Modernism and Totalitarianism*, esp. Ch. 1. See also S. Tormey, *Making Sense of Tyranny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); E. Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, trans. by G. Staunton (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); D. D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2006); and A. J. Gregor, *Totalitarianism and Political Religion* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

and Right. The structural model pictured far Left and Right as possessing a shared space which by no means covered the whole of them (plenty about communism and fascism did not overlap), and the most influential example is Friedrich and Brzezinski's *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, where the authors cash out this space in terms shared 'traits' – really, a mixture of institutions and practices. Typically, therefore, the structural model is interested in the following sorts of feature: the one-party state, the dictator, the secret police force, control of communications and surveillance. But the key point is that when combined, all of these institutions and practices suggest a single feature that is overarching, which became this type of theory's hallmark: the exercise of total control, emanating outwards from a political centre, entering into all aspects of social life 'below'.¹¹ Thus, the structural model can be considered to be the social science expression of Mussolini's (in)famous attempt at definition: 'Everything within the State, nothing outside of the State, nothing against the State'.¹² What, it should be asked, is its residue? The answer exists in the form of a continuing analytical convention: to treat 'fascism' and 'communism' as the distinctive ideologies, but to treat 'totalitarianism' instead as the (a)typical set of institutional arrangements and assorted practices that corresponds to such ideologies in-power. By convention, then, totalitarianism appears to be a word only for a logic of rule.¹³ And if it has any ideological content at all, that is only the advocacy of the state as end-in-itself.

Meanwhile, the ideological model that also emerged by the 1950s has a similarity and difference. Similarly, it conceptualises a shared space between Left and Right. Differently, that space is cashed out not in terms of institutions and practices, rather in terms of attitudes,

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

¹² B. Mussolini, 'The Doctrine of Fascism' in T. Ball and R. Dagger (Ed.) *Ideals and Ideologies* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 288-97.

¹³ This applies also to Left approaches in the present, e.g. G. Lioukakis, *Totalitarian Capitalism and Beyond* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), S. Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

beliefs and outlooks. Now fastened together are otherwise contrasting – indeed, competing – prescriptive political visions. This time, the clearest example of an approach are those many works of political fiction which gave free rein to the imagination precisely in order to depict what may be called totalitarianism’s mindset, of which the best known are Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon* (1941) and *Arrival and Departure* (1943), and George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949).¹⁴ Yet one pertinent fact is that as distinct as they were, these two models – that grew up simultaneously – were seldom explicitly disentangled. Going back to the Friedrich and Brzezinski thesis is a case in point. They too allowed totalitarianism’s mindset to loom quite large. Friedrich and Brzezinski considered that the new-style political dictatorships of the twentieth century were ‘totalitarian’ because they were based on two conditions of modernity. The first of these conditions pointed to the structure of political rule, but the second pointed to ideas. First, ‘modern technology’ facilitated total control by means of coercion and repression (for instance, new communications systems regulated information flows). Second, the politics of ‘mass legitimation’ – the background setting of modern democracy – meant total control could also be achieved with popular support. In the last analysis, though, it would be fair to say that Friedrich and Brzezinski leaned to structure as opposed to ideology. This is evident in the particular trait (within their list of six) that explains ideology’s function. There, they state that totalitarians will possess ‘an official ideology, consisting of an official body of doctrine, covering all vital aspects of man’s existence, to which everyone living in that society is supposed to adhere, at least passively’.¹⁵ In this very exact stipulation, the reference to ‘passive adherence’ is the decisive aspect. It entails that ‘legitimation’ remains principally a matter of coercion, as

¹⁴ Outside of political fiction, see the historio-genetic approach of the early post-war period, which centred intellectual history. E.g. H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Schocken, 2004), G.L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964).

¹⁵ Friedrich and Brzezinski, *op. cit.*, Ref. 11, pp. 10-11

opposed to a genuinely prescriptive vision being in the offing – configured to win hearts and minds. This is where the end-of-ideology thesis marks an advance. It amplifies what Friedrich and Brzezinski leave undeveloped.

Two conceptions of totalitarian ideology: from structure to content

It was promising to have tried to conceptualise a shared space between the two ‘totalitarian’ cases that were known at the time, fascism and communism, in terms of beliefs, attitudes and outlooks. This remains the challenge. Indeed, one measure of a successful conception of totalitarian ideology is to accommodate present and future cases, where a form of political Islamism is currently the foremost prospective case in contention. But for the time being, consider especially that conceptualising a space in this range is liable to involve dealing in different ends of sophistication. With beliefs, for instance, the challenge might well be to give more accurate definition to the common possession of a ‘post-liberal’ political philosophy (expressing dissatisfaction with a world of commerce and rights discourse). At a lower end of sophistication – with attitudes and outlooks – the challenge may include getting a clearer grasp on aspects like a peculiar emotional appeal (as expressed in more ritualised behaviours, such as mass rallies). Alongside the writers of political fiction, the theorists of the end-of-ideology do respond to something like this challenge. For them, the ‘ideology’ in totalitarianism is far from simply an instrumental tool of power, or advocacy of the state as end-in-itself. Neither is it passively consumed. Conversely, it inspires enthusiasm.

End-of-ideology theorists like Daniel Bell, Edward Shils and Raymond Aron were in little doubt that totalitarianism was ideological.¹⁶ The meanings that they gave to ideology

¹⁶ D. Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York: The Free Press, 1962); E. Shils, ‘The End of Ideology?’, *Encounter*, 5 (1955), pp. 52-58; R. Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, trans. by T. Kilmartin (London: Transaction, 1990).

are striking, and are perhaps fourfold.¹⁷ First, they specify, ideology is utopian: the ‘advent of the sceptics’ is to be ‘prayed for’, argued Aron, since aspirations to found the good society have a predictable connection to the destruction of human life.¹⁸ Second, ideology is mystifying: it is the sort of illusion that might stir extreme passions, but the very opposite of being grounded in reality. This was suggested in Bell’s insinuation that Marxism was itself a ‘false consciousness’. Third, ideology is all-encompassing: it makes demands of man’s both public and private existences.¹⁹ Fourth, ideology is absolutizing – rigid and inflexible, the mirror opposite of pragmatism, brooking no opposition whatsoever. In certain respects, all of these claims about totalitarian ideology may have *something* to recommend them. But viewed as a response to the challenge set out above, there is a shortcoming that is new at this point. To put this sharply, the end-of-ideology authors dislodge a structural theory of totalitarianism only to articulate a structural theory of ideology itself. The ideological dimension of totalitarianism is thereby foregrounded; but in itself appears as unwieldy and indivisible, and also as uniformly (if no longer passively) consumed. Raymond Aron permits this to be seen clearly when he writes, in 1955, that ‘every one of the ideologies which, for a few years or a few decades, has seized the imagination of the crowd or of thinking men, reveals, retrospectively, a *simple structure with one or two guiding ideals*’.²⁰ Perhaps rather more than Aron intends, this should be taken to be a remark which is revealing about (the understanding of) the internal shape and configuration of a belief system. On the basis of the remark, the four meanings of ideology just stated can be placed in a rough order of priority.

¹⁷ J.L. Dittberner has suggested that the ‘ideology’ in end-of-ideology is ambiguous in view of having at least *seven* different meanings. Only the four most general are picked out here. Dittberner, *The End of Ideology and American Social Thought, 1930-1960* (UMI Research, 1976), pp. 151-3

¹⁸ Aron, *op. cit.*, Ref. 16, p. 324.

¹⁹ This meaning can also be described as ‘totalism’, a psychological condition involving ‘total immersion in a synthetic identity’: E. Erikson, ‘Wholeness and Totality – a Psychiatric Contribution’ in C. Friedrich (Ed.) *Totalitarianism* (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1964), p. 159.

²⁰ Aron, *Opium*, p. 305; italics added.

Primary is the rigidity of the system, or its ‘absolutizing’ quality. Fanatical behaviour – expressed both in extreme passions and the intrusion of public into private life – is premised upon that rigidity (i.e. the ‘mystifying’ and ‘all-encompassing’ qualities). As for the ‘utopian’ quality, the suspicion might well be this is left out of Aron’s statement insofar as it is simply implied. In one aspect, the understanding of ideology as utopian amounts to a partisan reaction to an immediate target: the contemporaneous spectre of communism in the earliest (and ‘hottest’) phase of the Cold War.

To state all this is to do no more than point to an obvious, if pleasing, paradox. When the end-of-ideology thesis is simultaneously considered as a contribution to totalitarianism theory and to ideology studies, this is to make totalitarianism *ideological*, and ideology *totalitarian*. However, the suggestion is that this paradox is consequential. Theories of totalitarianism have still not yet made best use of some quite conventional tools for ideology analysis – let alone more inventive ones, and especially in respect of content. How to show this? Labouring with inadequate tools is particularly evident in the recent popularity of theories of political religion.²¹ These theories are heirs to the end-of-ideology thesis because they continue to make the key argument into one concerning ideological structure – from which quasi-religious behaviours are understood to derive (for example, rituals, cults and spectacles).²² Echoing Aron, the contemporary theorists of political religion propose that the mark of totalitarian ideologies is a particular kind of rigidity: to elevate a single ideal to a position of supreme importance, so as to determine the rest of the system. On the theory’s key analogy this single ideal involves, in the traditional and monotheistic religions, the concept of God; in the totalitarian political religions, the ideal becomes one or other human collectivity

²¹ E.g. Gentile, *op. cit.*, Ref. 10; M. Burleigh, *Sacred Causes: Religion and Politics from the European Dictators to Al Qaeda* (London, HarperPress, 2006); R. Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

²² Shorten, ‘The Status of Ideology in the Return of Political Religion Theory’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12(2) (2007), pp. 163-87.

in God's place – class, race or nation (which likewise functions as 'object for veneration' and 'supreme ethical precept of public life').²³ This is decontestation-as-sacralisation: the challenge of the complexity of ideological content is papered over by what appears to be a novel claim about ideological structure, the key pay-off of which is to be able to explain a special *intensity* in belief.²⁴ It is no accident that many of the authors of the end-of-ideology make use of religious tropes: Daniel Bell described the thinking that concerned him as 'chiliastic', 'millenarian' and 'apocalyptic',²⁵ Raymond Aron derided intellectuals as political religions' new 'priests', and in this sense the contemporary theorists of political religion simply mimic them.²⁶ But while the account of totalitarian ideology certainly needs to make space for structural specificities – all ideologies can be expected to possess those – that cannot, surely, be the final word on the subject, in the absence of saying much that is enlightening about the substance, as well as intensity, of belief.

So what would it mean to go beyond conceptualising totalitarian ideology as a structure and to do a better job of engaging content? It would be wrong to suggest that the end-of-ideology perspectives are all structure and no content, inasmuch as they feature utopianism. But they leave content one dimensional, making it a matter of utopianism alone (much as did those 'Cold War liberals', like Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper, who inhabited the same intellectual milieu).²⁷ But the challenge is not just to extend the content, since the further deficiency of these perspectives is to have failed to square it. For instance, in many of

²³ Gentile, 'The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 1(1) (2000), pp. 18-19.

²⁴ Shorten, *op. cit.*, Ref. 22, pp. 179-182. See also the discussion of the relationship between fundamentalism and ideology in Freeden, 'Editorial: Fundamentals and foundations in ideologies', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 10(1) (2005), esp. pp. 7-9.

²⁵ Cited in Dittberner, *op. cit.*, Ref. 17, p. 148.

²⁶ Aron, *op. cit.*, Ref. 16.

²⁷ As a phrase, the 'end of ideology' emerged out of the early meetings of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, a Cold War collaboration between liberal intellectuals which tried to build an anti-Communist cultural front: H. Brick, 'The End of Ideology Thesis' in Freeden, Sargent and Stears (Eds.) *op. cit.*, Ref. 1, pp. 90-112.

the 1950s theories, ‘utopia’ is problematically defined. Never really resolved is how utopianism may consistently drive projects of far Right and Left alike. One project seems to point to rationalism, universalism and optimism about human nature; the other does not. This example, then, points to a kind of combined problem facing the account of totalitarian ideology: to get fascism and communism, and further prospective cases, to share a space in ideological content that is important enough to matter, but that meanwhile makes sense. In other words, now redefined in a more exact sense, *that* is the problem which can be sharpened up as ‘recalcitrance’.

To turn now to the proposal to tackle this problem, there is a pointer to common content around which recent commentary on totalitarianism tends to be agreed: the idea of the New Man.²⁸ This can be taken as a vital interpretive clue. But what remains less satisfying is a hesitance to make the final step and, from the perspective of ideology study, to extend business-as-usual. Certainly, in a good deal of the recent commentary, the category of ideology has been handled with more sophistication than is the case with the end-of-ideology thesis. But a feature which is striking, not to say a little bizarre, is doubt as to whether, ultimately, totalitarianism’s ideological content can be apprehended by the category of ideology itself. For instance, in an extended discussion, David D. Roberts reflects that ‘the assumption that “ideology” is at issue’ will have to be rejected, insofar as it is a category which has ‘made it especially hard to grasp the possible place of intellectual antecedents and articulated ideas’.²⁹ However, my argument is that this is unfounded if the options for conceptualising ideology go further than Roberts credits. Equally, I argue, this is where a

²⁸ See Ref. 10.

²⁹ Roberts, *op. cit.*, Ref. 10, p. 41. On Roberts’ explanation, although ‘ideology’ takes analysis beyond the narrower understanding of totalitarianism as form of political rule, one problem is to imply a ‘blueprint’ – dubious for denoting something that comes fully-formed significantly in advance of practice. In preference, Roberts pinpoints a distinct ‘mode of collective action’.

dilemma lately arising in the interpretation of totalitarian ideology can, and should, speak to the future study of ideology at large.

The problem of identification is well recognised as one of the methodological issues foremost to ideology studies. But here, as elsewhere, our ability to think in the clearest terms about an issue of methodology is held back by a single point of confusion. Namely, that when we talk about ideology (or ideologies), we are unsure which of two things we take to be our primary object of study. Does that object comprise reasonably-bounded packages of political thinking? Or does it comprise a reasonably-clear level of articulation (i.e. that which takes place in real-world contexts)? Uncertainty is expressed, for instance, in our distinctions between ‘major’ and ‘minor’ ideologies, or between ‘families’ and ‘segments’; and it is only sidestepped in the use of expressions like ‘ideological configuration’ (which has been reverted to twice even in the analysis above).³⁰ The latter expression, however, already indicates a preference to take on a broader object of study than might otherwise be the case. In other words, ideology scholars are already tilting toward the understanding whereby ideology covers a level of articulation. They should commit themselves more fully, for if a ‘real world’ of political thinking deserves ideological analysis, then logically that must be so in whole, not just part. The mistake, however, would be to see such a choice as a stark either/or. Rather than to *stop* thinking in terms of reasonably-bounded packages, the productive way of analysing an extended field may be to multiply their number.

Thus, there is a challenge which is common to the analysis of totalitarian thinking and to reinvigorating ideology study in general. Once we accept a brief to analyse thought-constructs of all sorts of degree of *prima facie* coherence, we will find we need the right

³⁰ Cf. J. Alexander, ‘The Major Ideologies of Liberalism, Socialism and Conservatism’, *Political Studies*, 63(5) (2015), pp. 980-994; Freedon, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 94-96.

kinds of tools for the job.³¹ In order, therefore, to identify what may be newcomers – like totalitarianism – to an extended field, the solution may consist in the trial-and-error application of a whole assortment of methodological strategies. For we are likely to find the need not only for re-sharpened tools, but for different kinds of tools in order to perform different kinds of job. Where totalitarianism magnifies a dilemma for study in general, a first claim regarding this widened area of study therefore involves the analysis of an ideological field pictured as far more multi-layered. A specific claim concerns interdisciplinarity: an opportunity to refine and/ or supplement strategies will be presented by *openness* towards interdisciplinarity. For the attitude towards study being promoted, it may be fruitful to think of a package becoming reasonably bounded at the moment a ‘pattern’ can be found to a body of defences of a certain way of living, thinking and/ or doing, and on the understanding that patterns identify linkages and/ or independencies that are regular and archetypal.³² To effect this, however, may require a certain amount of nudging. Analysts will need to get into the habit of thinking, without prejudice, about the ‘units’ between which linkages and interdependencies may exist as open-ended and interchangeable: in a more creative take on inquiry, the only restraining condition should be that units are kept commensurate within a single analysis. It is in this particular respect that interdisciplinarity is suggestive, because the intersection of ideology studies with various disciplinary traditions – intellectual history, political science, sociology, psychology – will produce prospective units in a variety (concepts, values, symbols, images, emotions, rhetorics, rituals, illusions, dispositions, and so on). Where such units are already established tools for ideology analysts, none will need to be newly fashioned, but it may be that these are only for starters. First, that is because within the disciplines, there are likely to be distinct approaches that throw up different options.

³¹ It is, after all, precisely the intention to analyse thought-constructs with varying degrees of sophistication which is the mark of separation with the disciplinary area of political philosophy.

³² Freedden, *op. cit.*, Ref. 24, p. 5

Second, it is because a trial-and-error approach is likely to lead to further refining of units selected, in order to get them to do the precise job required. To return from the general to the particular, one new interpretation of totalitarianism in creative spirit is to find pattern by adopting some units in both these respects. One way of providing totalitarianism with the coherence that is otherwise missing, to show now, is in the act of applying one specific approach from the history of political thought.

Totalitarian ideology as a recalcitrant text

To summarise, totalitarianism's ideology is complex. A vital clue is provided in the New Man idea (or more formally, anthropological revolution), but for the purposes of identification this should be taken as no more than a clue. Rather more likely is that more than a single dynamic will be in play. To do the decoding, end-of-ideology perspectives pick out single fundamental ideals like 'race', 'nation' and 'class', yet that is to reach for the 'macro' kind of analysis which can only ever illuminate up to a point. Thus, one key task for micro analysis is to treat such ideas as code to various things that are actually going on, as opposed, in the cruder sense, to simply the focal points of political fanaticism. In pursuing of this more enlightening form of interpretation, the problem is that the tools most readily to hand prove to be ineffective. Hence, on the reasoning just presented, totalitarianism is precisely one of those instances where in order to discern pattern, newly-fashioned units may be called for.

Consider that many of the most obvious strategies for micro analysis are failures. A good illustration is in trying to apply to totalitarianism the various methodological strategies that have been proposed for fascism in the last two decades of study. The analogy is especially appropriate for the reason that the history of commentary on 'generic fascism' has followed the same course: from a focus on structure and institutions to one centred around

content and ideas.³³ The strategies have been basically threefold. None would seem effective in totalitarianism's case but, importantly, for different reasons, which provides a yet sharper sense of the obstacles the new tools must get around.

A first option for a content-focused theory of fascist ideology has been the 'fascist minimum'.³⁴ One aspect of the problem in constructing totalitarian ideology is to specify an ideological space important enough to matter. A minimum lists the shared features of two or more cases that overlap, yet just a crude exercise in reconciling standard ideas associated with fascism and communism suggests the direct commonalities are so few as to be meaningless.³⁵ Although a 'totalitarian minimum' does have one same advantage as a fascist minimum – sensitivity to irreducible differences in overlapping cases.³⁶

³³ See esp. R. Griffin, 'The Primacy of Culture: The current growth (or manufacture) of consensus within fascism studies' in C. Iordachi (Ed.) *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 127-133.

³⁴ E.g. E. Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966).

³⁵ One crude exercise that points to the paucity of the 'totalitarian minimum' is to place a version of the fascist minimum next to a similar minimum for communism, and to note that the overlap is only small.

For instance, take Noel O'Sullivan's minimum for fascism (O'Sullivan, 'Five Main Tenets of Fascist Ideology' in A. Kallis [Ed.] *The Fascist Reader* [London: Routledge, 2003], pp. 156-163):

- (i) corporatism
- (ii) permanent revolution
- (iii) leader principle
- (iv) messianic faith
- (v) autarky

Place this next to Archie Brown's list for communism (Brown, 'Communism', *op. cit.*, Ref. 1):

- (a) Communist party monopoly
- (b) democratic centralism
- (c) state ownership
- (d) centrally-planned economy
- (e) internationalism
- (f) long-term aspiration to build classless (and stateless) society

When placed adjacently, the only real overlap is at (iii) and (b) – between fascism's leader principle and communism's democratic centralism.

³⁶ Cf. I. Kershaw, 'Hitler and the uniqueness of Nazism', *Journal of Contemporary History* 39(2) (2004), pp. 239-254.

Two alternative strategies are more promising. In effect, they concede the overlapping space is small, but seek to say more by shifting the emphasis to linking up the (few) features so that they become intelligible when taken together. In other words, they make the attempt to find pattern. A second strategy is thereby the totalitarian ‘matrix’ or ‘ideal-type’.³⁷ Here, respectively, the emphasis is on connecting up features into a gridlike system or, as is comparable, on finding logical consistency between a set of features which may extend a little further, since the measure becomes abstraction – which will likely make less of a requirement that the features be expressed in each representative case. But take just two ideas standardly associated with totalitarianism: utopia, and a belief-in-science taken to extreme degree. Trying to connect up just these two idea meets with frustration, since on Hannah Arendt’s well-known example, while the utopian feature points to human hubris, totalitarian science points to über-determinism.³⁸ This failure is helpful to note since it provides a very sharp sense of one challenge facing new tools if they are to discern pattern effectively. Not simply to reconcile inconsistency, but to take on what are ostensibly points of outright contradiction.

Third, trialling a morphological strategy is interesting because trying – and failing – to identify a core of conceptual decontestations points not only to the difficulty of finding significant regularities, but also to the creative rethink of units.³⁹ Once more, irreducible differences between overlapping cases can be expected to mean that, at most, no more than a few propositions about key political concepts are advanced by *all* totalitarians. For instance, concerning the concept of solidarity, fascists and communists will advance propositions with

³⁷ E.g. R. Eatwell, ‘The nature of “generic fascism”: the “fascist minimum” and the “fascist matrix”’, in Iordachi (Ed.) *op. cit.*, Ref. 33; Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1995).

³⁸ H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. vii-ix. For Arendt, totalitarians think themselves validated by the laws of historical inevitability, yet equally insist – without limits to ambition – that ‘everything is possible’.

³⁹ See Freeden, ‘The Morphological Analysis of Ideology’ in Freeden, Sargent and Stears (Eds.), *op. cit.*, Ref. 1, pp. 115-137.

reference to nation or to class contrastingly in each case. However, the infrequency of uniquely ‘totalitarian’ propositions about key concepts will only be decisive if propositions about those concepts are universally constitutive of what ideology is. Generally, morphology proposes that a configuration is exempt from ‘full’ status of ideology if it fails to provide enough conceptual decontestations to answer all questions deemed basic to political life. This is the understanding that debars new entrants (like nationalism) to the field on equal terms.⁴⁰ What this precludes, though, is the possibility that at least in part, ideologies may be identified in virtue of addressing questions which are selective and rather idiosyncratic to political life. Perhaps questions asked can be as constitutive as answers given. In which case, the analyst cannot assume they come prefabricated, on the supposition they are constant.

So what new methodological strategy for interpreting totalitarianism might fare better? The following is projected as the model for creatively combining insights from across disciplines. On the one hand, a morphological strategy is adapted so that emphasis extends out from answers to the questions to which they are attached. To supplement that move is where instruction may be taken from the history of political thought. In a general respect, thinking about ideology on the notion of the recalcitrant text ought to renew the understanding that when we are interpreting ideologies we are, like historians, interpreting texts, complete with the corresponding demands. But the more particular – and ‘disciplinary’ – insight is provided in the ‘Collingwoodian’ approach to textual interpretation. Collingwood’s approach – from which Quentin Skinner famously draws inspiration – is apposite because of the implication that in order to comprehend in its worldly character, we will have to steel ourselves for a fair amount of detective work.⁴¹ In order to comprehend the text in all its richness, warts and all, Collingwood (and Skinner) urge the analyst to solve this

⁴⁰ Freedman, ‘Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?’ in *Liberal Languages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 204-224.

⁴¹ G. S. Cousé, ‘Collingwood’s detective image of the historian and the study of Hadrian’s Wall’, *History and Theory*, 29(4) (1990), pp. 57-77.

following problem: ‘What question did So-and-so intend this proposition for an answer?’.⁴² In adaptation of morphology, this problem tallies with getting at questions as an interpretive task in its own right. Like Collingwood’s historian, the analyst of ideology will need to move back and forth between ‘question’ and ‘answer’ – matching them together; rather than focus on the answers alone – no matter however closely they are read. But the strategy also involves an adaptation of the insight from Collingwood. In Collingwood’s discussion, the suggestion is (perhaps unconsciously) to interpret texts by matching together a *single* coupling of question-and-answer. No consideration is given to the plural. Yet a significant possibility is that ideologies – and for matter, the more accurate meanings of historical texts – may comprise *several* couplings of question-and-answer. In a nutshell, the proposal is that totalitarianism can be identified in a pattern of regular question-and-answer couplings that are capable of being reasonably-clearly specified.⁴³

An empirical demonstration that tries to specify these couplings is offered below. Prior, in order to indicate some general lessons, it is useful to extract three respects in which this strategy has purchase on the kind of ideology which is recalcitrant. First, the strategy accepts that such an ideology may have no more than a few generalizable features: the couplings are pictured as several, but without requirement that they extend to any great length. For totalitarian ideology to have full status, it will be enough to show a pattern’s presence. Second, the strategy has the capacity to accommodate the appearance of contradiction: shifting the focus of interpretation towards the questions that totalitarians ask makes up for the tension that might well exist between the answers they give. Third, a way of accommodating inconsistency not within but between totalitarians is provided for in the distinction between answers and propositions. Consider that to comprise the difference

⁴² R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 39.

⁴³ In other words, this is to anticipate the presence within a text of more than a *single* intended meaning.

between ideological content which is thematic and parochial. The answers that totalitarians give will be thematically similar but the propositions that they offer in support of them may be parochially different.

The demonstration below contends that totalitarianism's substantive themes are threefold. Two of these have been anticipated in the discussion so far; none has been given much definition.⁴⁴ First, 'utopianism' refers to the perfected community. Second, 'scientism' refers to the claims of totalitarians to know and speak 'truth' on the authority of science. Third, 'revolutionary violence' refers to the expectation that the commission of violent acts will enable a New Man to emerge 'reborn'. A longer demonstration would be more persuasive, but the aim is to offer enough to show the value of the strategy, and in the process to evidence the case for admitting totalitarianism to our classificatory schemes on more equal terms.

On the claim that it is 'elite' thinking that matters most in the totalitarian political context, two specific texts are used as microcosms to represent, and resolve, the recalcitrance of the ideology. One is Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The other is Stalin's *Short Course*, a text which has often been compared to Hitler's, and which was the officially-sanctioned reader in Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet Union, being taught in all formal places of learning).⁴⁵ As texts, both *Mein Kampf* and *Short Course* are meanwhile also excellent exhibits of recalcitrance in the literal sense. Relevantly, George Steiner separates four distinct types of such difficulty as follows.⁴⁶ First, recalcitrance can be 'contingent', whereby unusual

⁴⁴ These 'themes' can be pictured as intellectual resources that totalitarians draw on. See Shorten, *op. cit.*, Ref. 10, Chs. 3 – 5.

⁴⁵ This is a text edited and partly written by Stalin himself. In the very precise sense it is an expression of elite (not individual) discourse. Of its genesis, Kolakowski comments that the details are sketchy, but that it was most likely 'compiled in the main by a team of official writers and then revised by Stalin' – his 'distinctive style' frequently being on display. Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (London: W.W. Norton & Co, 2005), p. 862.

⁴⁶ G. Steiner, 'On Difficulty' in *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 118-47.

passages of text require homework to tidy up their meanings.⁴⁷ This very much applies to totalitarianism's texts, because not only are *Mein Kampf* and the *Short Course* themselves products of the specific interwar historical contexts, their actual content necessitates reconstructing some further contexts. In the detail, both texts contain lengthy expositions of various political experiences after roughly 1900. Second, Steiner states that recalcitrance can be 'modal', which is really the problem of empathy when a stance expressed towards the human condition appears alien to one's own.⁴⁸ It is very clear that this will apply, and so care must be taken to avoid imposing the sorts of value judgment which distort interpretation. Third, recalcitrance can be 'tactical'. This is when authors deliberately manipulate their readers, and though in general that difficulty will require decoding rhetoric, here it is expressed in the tendency of *Mein Kampf* to report episodes that are factually untrue.⁴⁹ Fourth, recalcitrance is 'ontological', and by this Steiner has in mind texts that challenge canonical conventions.⁵⁰ The genres to which *Mein Kampf* and the *Short Course* belong are an important consideration for the retrieval of original meaning. Both are part political philosophy, part justification of political action; but the former is also autobiography, the latter authoritative party history – with the full title *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*. It will be evident in the demonstration that fidelity to these genres is one consideration on the detective work required. Difficulties of the conceptual, modal, tactical and ontological types are each picked out for comment. When specified, the pattern of totalitarian ideology consists in these three couplings: (1) Totalitarians advance utopian propositions in answer to a question about community, (2) They turn to science in answer to a question about history, and (3) Asking a question about political action and conflict takes them to revolutionary violence.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

(1) *Community as question, utopianism as answer*. The first step in demonstrating the value of the strategy derived from Collingwood must be to apply his fundamental problem to our chosen texts. So, to adapt Collingwood (and taking one text, one theme first): ‘To what question did Stalin intend a “utopian” proposition for an answer?’ By definition, it is proposed, utopianism can be understood as allowing totalitarians to envisage the authentic community as being built upon the collective political subject, and as such it is has two key elements: perfectionism and collectivism. Stalin’s relation to utopian thought is contested. This is one reason to handle the textual evidence very carefully.⁵¹ What can be said is that Stalin *inherits* a utopian conception because an earlier Marxist tradition transmits to Bolshevism the vision of a proletarian collective realising its ‘higher’ self. Yet it is what Stalin does with this which is of interest: *his* proposition is distinctive, and amounts to an modification in the form of the doctrine of ‘socialism in one country’.⁵² Sometimes, this is taken to be to postpone utopia, but more plausibly the distinctiveness is (*contra* Marx) to reconcile ‘perfection’ with the persistence of the state, and to push ‘collectivism’ closer toward (Russian) nationhood. That clarification is one necessary aspect of the interpretation of totalitarian ideology, but it is not yet to show the particular value of the question-and-answer strategy. To use Collingwood’s further phrase, the novel point is the question which ‘arises’.⁵³

Both *Mein Kampf* and the *Short Course* can be read, it is suggested, by division into discrete parts, according to the particular couplings of question-and-answer in play – ‘arising’ – at any one time. Each section excerpted here for close comment is representative of one

⁵¹ The textual evidence can deceive. For example, in *The State and Revolution*, Lenin appears to *repudiate* utopianism, but utopianism figures there in the context of a justification of political strategy – not community: Lenin, ‘The State and Revolution’, in *The Lenin Anthology*, (Ed.) R.C. Tucker (London: W.W.Norton & Co. 1975), p. 344.

⁵² See E. van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁵³ Collingwood, *op. cit.*, Ref. 47, p. 38.

such part (to re-iterate, there is no claim for complete coverage). Here, a relatively self-enclosed section of the *Short Course* where Stalin lets utopianism speak fairly unfettered appears in Chapter 9, ‘The Bolshevik Party in the Period of the Transition to the Peaceful Work of Economic Restoration (1921-25)’. Before offering the commentary, this (in full) is the passage where Stalin provides socialism in one country with its most explicit, and retrospective, justification:

The Party gave plain and definitive answers to all these questions. Yes... a Socialist economic system could be and should be built in our country, *for we had everything needed for the building of a Socialist economic system, for the building of a complete Socialist society...* Now, the main task was to proceed to build a new, Socialist economic system all over our country... Neither the delay of the revolution in the West, nor the partial stabilization of capitalism in the non-Soviet countries would stop our advance – to Socialism... But the Party knew that the problem of the victory of Socialism in one country did not end there. The construction of Socialism in the Soviet Union would be a momentous turning point in the history of mankind,... marking a new epoch in the history of the world⁵⁴

In and around this passage in the text, the utopian language is striking. Utopian collectivism appears in a reference to the ‘self-sacrificing efforts of workers and peasants’ – the alliance of social groups that Stalin is projecting. Utopian perfectionism appears in all these sorts of phrases (together with a peculiar hubris): the ‘destiny of Socialism’, ‘final victory’, a ‘new epoch in the history of the world’, an ‘advance to Socialism... which nothing can stop’.⁵⁵ There is also a direct reference to questions and answers. To identify the most important question, it is helpful to consider both context and genre. Here, utopianism is appearing at stage in a chronological party-history which recounts the reconstruction of society following the upheaval of the Civil War. Thus, the underlying question is, How to construct the political community? The first-hand reports help to see this further: ‘...this raised the

⁵⁴ J. Stalin, *History of the C.P.S.U (Bolshevik) (Short Course)* (1939). Available online at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1939/x01> (accessed 14/04/16).

Italics added

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

question in all its urgency: what were to be the perspectives, the character of our development, of our construction...?', 'all these questions confronted the Party... no longer as theoretical questions, but as practical questions'.⁵⁶ These reports are not inaccurate (there is no 'tactical' difficulty to clear up). Rather, the question in the abstract (like the utopian answer in parochial form) simply has a local articulation. In an additional expression of recalcitrance, further homework to address the contingent difficulty would probably find there is an immediate motivation for letting utopianism speak so unfettered: to carefully position a Bolshevik action having been taken at the time between alternatives posed on the Left, by 'Trotskyites', and on the Right, by 'Bukharinites'.

Next, taking our second text on the same theme, how is *Mein Kampf* to be read so that likewise, utopianism comes to play a particular role? In the first place there are modal difficulties that get in the way of accepting that *Mein Kampf* is in any way a 'utopian' text. In moving from communism to fascism, it is important to emphasise that the utopian answer to the question of community changes in the detail of the propositions: the collective subject is no longer a class but a *national* community, and the perfectionism involved is the realisation of the authentic 'national' self. The relevant point, however, is that change in the detail can be tracked against the broader continuity of the question-and-answer coupling itself. To excerpt a section here, the language of utopianism is especially intense in *Mein Kampf* across a set of chapters that open its second volume.⁵⁷ Combined, chapters 1 to 4 of the second volume take up the topic of nationhood and the relationship to both race and state (in which the text's ubiquitous use of the term *völk* is a reference to the nation in ethnic form). Again, consider utopianism's presence in respect of its two key elements. First, perfectionism appears in a variety of expressions: 'a new philosophy of life', 'a lofty inner goal', 'the higher

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. R. Manheim (London: Pimlico, 1992), Vol. 2, *The National Socialist Movement*.

mission', 'the mission of humanity', the 'noble development' of man.⁵⁸ Second, in order to grasp the collectivist element, value judgments have to be avoided. Negatively, collectivism appears in the association of Jewishness with 'hyper-individualism' and 'egoism and selfishness'.⁵⁹ In the constructive part, collectivism feature in the positive valuation given to 'racial unity' and to the 'tightly organised political community of faith and struggle, unified in spirit and will'.⁶⁰ The specific information that makes it plausible to identify a question *per se* – to which these propositions about utopianism form the corresponding answer – appears in chapter 2 ('The State'). There, Hitler himself poses a local version of the question of the true community: What is the proper relationship between *völk* and state?⁶¹ He argues that his opponents, the bourgeois liberal and the international Marxist, unequivocally get community wrong. The first opponent can only have an 'artificial' conception of the state because he fails to grasp the connection between race and 'human cultural development'.⁶² Rather, the true community will need to give free rein to the 'culture-creating ability' peculiar to the Aryans.⁶³ The second opponent, the Marxist, misses the state's legitimacy precisely as the tool for *achieving* the 'higher level' of human development. In short, when properly ordered, *völk* is prior to state. It is very clear again that, thematically, utopianism provides Hitler with the resource for this response to a community question. The passage that contains the best precis of the utopian reasoning on show appears at the end of the chapter (with emphasis added to some further perfectionist language):

The state is a means to an end. Its end lies in the preservation and advancement of a community of physically and psychically homogenous creatures. This preservation

⁵⁸ Hitler, *op. cit.*, Ref. 60, pp. 396, 361, 359, 365.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁶¹ In the chapter prior, Hitler has just staged a discussion of the meaning of the vital term, 'völkisch'.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 355.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

itself comprises first of all existence as a race and thereby permits the *free development* of all the forces dormant in the race... Thus the *highest purpose* of a völkisch state is concern for the preservation of those original racial elements which bestow culture and create the *body and dignity of a higher mankind*. We, as Aryans, can conceive of the state only as a living organism of a nationality which not only assures the preservation of this nationality, but by the *development of its spiritual and ideal abilities* leads it to the highest freedom⁶⁴

(2) *History as question, scientism as answer*. To move to a second theme of totalitarianism's ideological content, the starting point must again be to apply Collingwood's problem by adaptation. So, 'to what question did Hitler and Stalin intend their "scientific" propositions for an answer?' Totalitarians should once more be seen as responding to an abstract question which is common to them. Scientific propositions respond to a question about the meaning of history. It makes sense this time to begin with *Mein Kampf* as the text, on the grounds that it is the easier case to demonstrate: *Mein Kampf* embraces assumptions and expectations drawn from the world of natural science more explicitly than does the *Short Course*. In Stalinism, social classes are never quite 'biologised' in the same way that racial species are in Nazism.⁶⁵ Regardless, and to demonstrate currently, in each text a common phrase which is revealing is the 'laws of nature'.

'History' is introduced early in *Mein Kampf*.⁶⁶ Within the autobiographical genre, Hitler reports that beginning from his school years, 'to an ever-increasing extent *world history* became an inexhaustible source of understanding'. The term 'Nature' – capitalised – appears increasingly as Hitler recounts his pre-war years in Vienna. Often, this is taken to track the growing influence of social Darwinism on his thought.⁶⁷ In the earlier parts of the text, nature tends to be presented as grounds for a basic 'aristocratic principle' of

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

⁶⁵ Cf. E. Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*, trans. J. Lloyd (London: The New Press, 2003).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶⁷ E.g. D.C. Watt, 'Introduction' in *ibid.*, p. Xxx.

leadership.⁶⁸ However, on the interpretation being offered here, nature's central importance is not manifest until it serves as *history's* principles. The indicative section is chapter 11 of the first volume, 'Nation and Race', in which Hitler fixates on the loss of racial purity and the 'mingling of Aryan blood'.⁶⁹

When understood thematically, scientism should be understood as a resource that allows totalitarians to think carefully about both history's character and history's subject-matter, by adopting loosely 'Darwinian' ideas on classification and evolutionism.⁷⁰ Note especially here the potential solution to the one of the sharpest challenges facing a methodological strategy. Scientism expresses a point of contradiction with utopianism which seems striking: where the utopianism that was picked out earlier allows totalitarians to think in terms of open-ended possibility, scientism provides a sense of what is predetermined. However, this does not entail that, when properly handled by interpretation, the two cannot be reconciled, in identifying a pattern. For totalitarians, scientism provides the knowledge of how the (utopian) end-state will materialise. For the Nazi utopia to materialise, all that is necessary is for history to follow its own 'rigid law of necessity', as a scientifically-knowable struggle between races-as-species.⁷¹ That is Hitler's 'scientific' proposition when the history question arises. One distinctive aspect is that Hitler frames this as a question about historical *decline*. Textually, this can be seen by noting that the discussion in 'Nation and Race' is really an extension of the chapters which precede it, which asks:⁷² Why did the German Reich collapse at the end of the First World War? In effect, Hitler makes this (very) local question into the totalitarian's abstract question about history. He surveys a range of the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 74. Again, this in opposition to both bourgeois parliamentarianism and 'Jewish' Marxism.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁷⁰ An innovative account of Hitler's political thinking which places 'Nature' ahead of all else appears in T. Snyder, *Black Earth* (London: Bodley Head, 2015), pp. 1-11.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 205-257.

symptoms of collapse, from economics through to politics then culture, before finally getting to the single root cause: ‘The deepest and ultimate reason for the decline of the old Reich lay in its failure to recognise the racial problem and *its importance for the historical development of peoples*’.⁷³ In this answer, the ‘science’ of race is being used, first, to identify history’s proper subject-matter: the ‘development of peoples’ (really, races). Second, and shortly after in the text, it is used to identify history’s evolutionary direction (and also in such a way that combines with Hitler’s concerns about decline): ‘events in the lives of people are not expressions of chance, but processes related to the self-preservation and propagation of the species and the race and subject to the laws of Nature, *even if people are not conscious of the inner reason of their actions*’. One parochial variation, then, of Hitler’s question-and-answer is his peculiar anxiety that the Germans will ultimately refuse to be led by history’s supposedly ‘iron logic’. He ‘who misjudges and disregards the racial laws actually forfeits the happiness that *seems destined to be his*’.⁷⁴

In the case of Soviet communism, there will of course be less that is novel in the claim that a question about history is being answered in a language of science, even if the debt to Darwin is less stark. The inheritance is traceable from Marx himself (‘we know only a single science, the science of history’).⁷⁵ Interestingly, though, Stalin’s version of question-and-answer points to two things. First, to a very particular resolution of Marxism’s long-standing determinism/ voluntarism tension – which now steps outside Marxism’s inherited terms.⁷⁶ Second, Bolshevism’s question-and-answer underlines that for totalitarians, scientific insight into history’s principles enables them to derive special legitimacy for their

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 257; italics added.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 257, 260, 263; italics added. Hitler goes on to argue that if a people transgresses against ‘the principle of blood purity’, then its victory in the struggle between races is jeopardised, and ultimately it will be deserving of its historical fate (p. 265).

⁷⁵ K. Marx, ‘The German Ideology’ in *Early Political Writings*, (Ed.) J. O’Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 119-81.

⁷⁶ Cf. A. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

projects. In the *Short Course*, a local format of the question about history appears in chapter 4, in a part of the narrative which reconstructs party history after the defeat of the Russian Revolution of 1905.⁷⁷ Really, the question is, How and why did ideological orthodoxy come to be stamped on the Party in an era of ideological flux?⁷⁸ To that, ‘Dialectical and Historical Materialism’ is the answer, provided in a fairly self-standing section of text (which, indeed, tends to be excerpted into general readers in Soviet Marxism).⁷⁹ This is a pertinent passage:

[...] if the world is knowable and our knowledge of the laws of development of nature is authentic, having the validity of objective truth, it follows that social life, the development of society, is also knowable, and that the data of science regarding the laws of development of society are authentic data having the validity of objective truths.

Hence the *science of the history of society*, despite all the complexity of the phenomenon of social life, *can become as precise as, let us say, biology*, and capable of making use of the laws of development of society for practical purposes.

Hence the *party of the proletariat* should not guide itself in its practical activity by causal motives, but by the laws of development of society, and by practical deductions from these laws.

Hence socialism is *converted from a dream of a better future for humanity into a science*.⁸⁰

In raising this conception of history to the status of party orthodoxy – rather than another – the Bolsheviks thereby succeeded (opines the *Short Course*) against ‘the motley crowd of revisionists and renegades of the period’. Certainly, the anti-utopian language is observable. But in the main note, first, that it is a version of historical materialism that steps outside Marx’s own: it is the intrusion of Darwinian thinking, of the type that Engels, via Plekhanov, transmitted to Lenin (and it is revealing that the section of text quotes both figures liberally). Not only does history have its own laws, but ‘laws of nature’ extend into human history.

⁷⁷ Stalin, *op. cit.*, Ref. 54.

⁷⁸ See A. J. Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism, And Totalitarianism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), Ch. 5: ‘The Heterodox Marxism of V.I. Lenin’.

⁷⁹ E.g. B. Franklin, *The Essential Stalin* (London: Croom Helm, 1973), pp. 300-33.

⁸⁰ Stalin, *op. cit.*, Ref. 60; italics added.

Second, note that insight into the natural laws of human historical development goes further than legitimising the substance of the Bolshevik political project alone; it also, in an especially ‘worldly’ feature, establishes the epistemic authority of that project – in a competition with rivals for the leadership of the Russian Social Democracy.

(3) *Political action as question, revolutionary violence as answer.* In review, for totalitarians, utopian propositions answer variations of the community question; scientific propositions answer permutations of the history question. What about propositions involving a third theme in the ideological content of totalitarianism, revolutionary violence? By way of definition, such propositions may be understood to be those which do not justify violence in politics as a matter of necessity, but instead as a matter of transforming identity. Hence, violence will be regenerative – destructive and creative at the same time. And hence, totalitarians will be able to picture the ‘New Man’ being given final shape, somehow being given new direction by embracing conflict. Isolating discrete sections of text that match together question and answer is not so easy in this case, and perhaps that is only to be expected. One reason is that violence may be less a matter of (totalitarian) reasoning than practice. Another reason is that violence may also be expressed as much in imagery and metaphor.⁸¹ Nevertheless, it proves quite possible to show that sections of both *Mein Kampf* and *Short Course* not only evidence question-and-answer, but point also to some distinctive propositions.

The following passage of *Mein Kampf* contains one instance of violence’s identity-related justification:

The soul of the people can only be won if along with carrying on a positive struggle for our own aims, we destroy the opponent of these aims.

⁸¹ Metaphors and images of violence feature throughout *Mein Kampf*.

The people at all times see the proof of their own right in ruthless attack on a foe, and to them renouncing the destruction of the adversary seems like uncertainty with regard to their own right if not a sign of their own unright.

The broad masses are only a piece of Nature and their sentiment does not understand the mutual handshake of people who claim that they want the opposite things. What they desire is the victory of the stronger and the destruction of the weak or his unconditional subjection.

The nationalization of the masses will succeed only when, aside from all the positive struggle for the soul of our people, their international poisoners are exterminated⁸²

Here, the most indicative clause is the reference to winning the soul of the people. The local version of a question about action and conflict appears just prior in the text – where Hitler raises the issue of ‘regaining German power’ in the face of the disarmament imposed at Versailles.⁸³ In itself, this is unremarkable. However, the revealing aspect is that Hitler actively amends this (his) question, ‘Not: How shall we manufacture arms? But: How shall we *manufacture the spirit* which enables a people to bear arms?’⁸⁴ What is at stake therefore changes, so that identity becomes the subject.

In the case of Stalinist violence the corresponding propositions are, notably, to be found in the presentation of the ‘intensification of the class struggle’ (which Kolakowski viewed as one of Stalin’s very few genuine innovations to Marxism).⁸⁵ This doctrine states: the more the building of socialism progresses, the fiercer the class struggle becomes, because the enemy grows ever more desperate. In terms of parochial content, enemy-construction appears to be what is distinctive to Stalinist propositions about violence:

Political double-dealers usually begin with deceit and prosecute their nefarious end by deceiving the people, the working class, and the Party of the working class. But political double-dealers are not to be regarded as mere humbugs. Political double-dealers are an unprincipled gang of political careerists who, having long ago lost the confidence of the people, *strive to insinuate themselves once more into their*

⁸² Hitler, *op. cit.*, Ref. 57, p. 307.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 300

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

⁸⁵ Kolakowski, *op. cit.*, Ref. p. 867.

*confidence by deception, by chameleon-like changes of colour, by fraud, by any means...*⁸⁶

This passage appears in Chapter 10 of the *Short Course*, in a discussion of ‘The Bolshevik Party in the Struggle for the Socialist Industrialisation of the Country’. The question being answered thereby concerns an assessment of the threat posed to ‘socialism’ in the period, and a justification of the actions taken – against internal subversion in particular. ‘Deceit’ is the indicative motif: it points to a particular motor of Stalinist violence in an obsession with ‘unmasking’ enemies. It is ever more weakened enemies who are driven to wear masks and engage in underhand tactics. Hence, one more quixotic meaning that our strategy makes it possible to infer – and accommodate – is the special emphasis that in order to gain final shape, the Soviet New Man will need to display constant vigilance against the ‘chameleon-like’ enemy plotting against the new society being built.

Appendix: Accommodating Islamism?

Before concluding, let us briefly take up one challenge for the theory of totalitarian ideology mentioned earlier. Can the theory now proposed accommodate Islamism, the foremost potential expression in the contemporary world?⁸⁷ There is one main obstacle to doing so.

Unlike the interwar totalitarianisms, Islamism has – to disputed extent – a lineage in traditional, monotheistic religion. Here, I try to overcome this obstacle by showing how the question-and-answer approach *might* be extended. I do so only hesitantly since authoritative

⁸⁶ Stalin, *op. cit.*, Ref. 60; italics added

⁸⁷ It is not clear that Islamism is the best (least worst?) description for the potentially totalitarian political-thought construct. Alternatives include ‘radical Islamism’, ‘Islamic militancy’, and ‘Salafi-Jihadism’. See, respectively, J. Bale, ‘Islamism and Totalitarianism’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 10(2) (2009), pp. 73-96; H. Hansen and P. Kainz, ‘Radical Islamism and Totalitarian Ideology: a Comparison of Sayyid Qutb’s Islamism with Marxism and Nationalism Socialism’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8(1) (2007), pp. 55-76; J. Burke, *The New Threat: The Past, Present, and Future of Islamic Militancy* (New York: New Press, 2015); S. Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2016).

extension would require direct contextual knowledge, and in any case the very marker of the approach is to interpret texts first-hand – in their most worldly features. One strong conviction, nevertheless, is that to encompass Islamism by (simply) employing political religion theory is mistaken:⁸⁸ the task – as with all other cases – is to reconcile three broad ‘modernisms’ (utopianism, scientism, revolutionary violence) with all that is distinct to Islamism’s discrete lineages and thought-behaviours. This suggests an exercise whereby which the ‘couplings’ may need refinement. Yet once more, the prospect is to identify some totalitarian content without reverting to structure. To gesture at such an exercise, I hone in on three previous authors who, likewise, have moved from ‘totalitarianism’ to Islamism.

Paul Berman’s *Terror and Liberalism* offers a good basis for attaching Islamism to utopianism. If here, however, utopia is located as one of the Islamists’ answers, the problem is that Berman is not interested enough in specifics. Loosely (for Berman) Islamism poses a question about constructing community: reign of sharia, restoration of a caliphate.⁸⁹ And he finds commonality with fascism and communism in expressing an ‘ur-myth’ – the myth of Armageddon – by which a ‘people of God’ (literal or metaphorical) experiences attack, war, and finally deliverance.⁹⁰ But is Islamism utopian *in the same way* as fascism and communism? Or does the fit between theory and empirics need puzzling a little further? Collectivism seems to be on show (true Muslim believers form a collective political subject). But perhaps perfectionism is harder to reconcile?⁹¹ In different ways, fascists and communists seek free expression of human authenticity; instead, Islamists seem to point to submission (to God). Closer reading of primary sources is what should support further

⁸⁸ Though it is not his subject, this is Gentile’s suggestion (Ref. 10, p. 141). For him, secular totalitarianisms express the ‘sacralisation of politics’, and religious totalitarianisms might express the ‘politicisation of religion’.

⁸⁹ P. Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York and London: W.W.Norton & Co, 2004), pp. 98-99

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-51

⁹¹ One advantage of recalcitrance is to cope with the appearance of contradiction, yet this is far from being meant to endorse a category mistake.

reflection on this. Berman uses *some* primary texts – those of Sayid Qutb – but the absence of any obvious intellectual leadership to Islamism is one quite valid reason to hesitate.

A good precedent for trying to pinpoint the second coupling in Islamism – history/science – is John Gray's *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern*. One of Gray's central intuitions seems (feels?) right: that a distinguishing feature of Islamism (as with fascism and communism) is to ask a question about history's ultimate meaning. But does Islamism use science as the resource from which to produce an answer? This issue is where a question-and-answer approach should focus its energies here. Gray moves far too quickly to situate Islamism within a general nineteenth-century cult of progress (the 'Positivist catechism').⁹² The burden of proof must be to *demonstrate* that Islamism's strong truth-assertions do come from confidence in a deterministic philosophy of history, since a commonsensical view says they derive instead from deference to scriptural authority ('literalism', 'fundamentalism').⁹³ On this score, Gray offers no first-hand textual evidence. His case rests rather on the background religious residue in positivism – allegedly, providence emptied of 'transcendence and mystery'.⁹⁴ This case is weak: Gray's theological reference is to eschatological traditions which are Judeo-Christian.⁹⁵ However, there is certain a possibility to pursue the kind of textual engagement which might mediate (more successfully) between the mutation of 'local' theology and the formation of a pattern of historical thinking. The commentator Malise Ruthven offers a pointer. He highlights the significance of an Islamic doctrine of 'manifest success' by which worldly failure signals God's disfavour; and where, accordingly, confidence in history's direction may become linked to political setbacks (say, the

⁹² J. Gray, *Al-Qaeda and What It Means to be Modern* (London: Faber, 2003) p. 27.

⁹³ A. Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 275.

⁹⁴ Gray, *Heresies: Against Progress and other Illusions* (London: Granta, 2004), p. 2.

⁹⁵ See esp. Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Penguin, 2007).

nineteenth-century colonisation of parts of the Islamic world by the West).⁹⁶ This raises a very suggestive parallel with Nazism, by similarly emphasising anxieties focused around declinism.

The third coupling, action/ revolutionary violence – and once more, the need to reflect further – is well featured in Roger Griffin’s *Terrorist’s Creed*. In Griffin’s highly original account, the key definitional feature of Islamism becomes an ‘existential dread of permanent anomy’ intensified by ‘the erosion of the Islamic sacred canopy’ (in other words, the superseded, meaning-supplying worldview). This dread is what fuels the ‘active nihilism’ expressed in acts such as those involving martyrdom.⁹⁷ From a question-and-answer perspective, Griffin’s account offers food for thought because violence is situated in response to a local question about ‘*jihad*’.⁹⁸ Yet retuning may be required nonetheless because Griffin relies on quite a grand thesis about a historical-psychological void: reasonably, there will be much which is *not* ‘existential’ in Islamist violence (or not purely so), and perhaps thinking about that will necessitate then careful selection, and reading, of Islamist texts. Certainly, those texts would need to supplement the works of fiction (Dostoevsky, Conrad, *Taxi Driver*) that Griffin often, albeit creatively, reads off from.

Conclusion

Totalitarianism presents a complication for textbook-style classifications of ideology, and in this it is not alone. Close consideration of the basis upon which it may enter such classifications is interesting, because since the middle of the twentieth century debates about totalitarianism’s identity have been, at the same time, debates about the meaning of ideology.

⁹⁶ See, recently, M. Ruthven, ‘Inside Obedient Islamic Minds’, *New York Review of Books*, 63(6) (2016), pp. 79-81

⁹⁷ Griffin, *Terrorist’s Creed: Fanatical Violence and the Human Need for Meaning* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 193

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

The most serious obstacle to totalitarianism's inclusion in classificatory schemes concerns an apparent incoherence in its content. Yet, it has been argued, if only the tools of analysis in ideology studies were to become more flexible, then totalitarianism belongs to a range of political thought-constructs which may become ideologies. To provide such flexibility, what may be helpful is the sort of interpretative pluralism which is informed by interdisciplinarity. Meanwhile this would amount to an attitude to study which would help resolve a current uncertainty: namely, whether what defines ideology is, on the one hand, enclosure within a package or, on the other, articulation within a particular realm of discourse. Ideology is both of those things.

The potentially most far-reaching aspect of what I have proposed, however, consists in strategies for dealing with the whole broad sweep of ideology's troublesome cases. Ideology scholars are faced with handling a large number of 'also-rans', of which just a few are environmentalism, welfarism, and populism (and it is not the 'isms' that are stake, since other relevant constructs are, say, 'anti-immigration' or 'reaction'). The interpretive pluralism I have proposed is addressed first of all to the identification of the also-rans, but in the longer run may also speak to a second problem of methodology: boundaries.⁹⁹ It is fair to say that one problem here is the extension of the other, because where identification tackles ideology's coherences internally, the boundary problem engages that in an external respect. In an ideological field which is cast as both busier and multilayered, a central task will likely become that of explaining the ways in which ideologies are overlapping. Thus, adjusting the lens so as to reframe the whole, we should be readied to view a complex picture. In places ideologies will intertwine, segments of some will overlay others. Explaining this picture is a demanding prospect, which may, for instance, require reconciling different methodological strategies so that they can be deployed without contradiction in any one overarching

⁹⁹ See Freeden, 'Editorial: Ideological boundaries and ideological systems, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 8(1) (2003), pp. 3-12.

assessment. And if that is so, then ultimately what ideology scholars may sooner or later come up against is a challenge far bigger than the one the discussion started from. In order to make space for new entrants, textbooks of ideology will need not just extending but also significantly rethinking in their organising principles.