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HEGEL: WHY LIBERAL THOUGHT IS NOT ANTI-TOTALITARIAN ENOUGH

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Abstract: This paper discusses totalitarianism against the background of Hegel’s concept of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). It employs Hegel’s concept of experience from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* so that the reader could “experience” totalitarianism (in Hegel’s sense), and thereby apprehend a universal (*sittlich*) ethical life within the state as a true antidote against totalitarianism. “Hegel’s” state, understood here as an emergent middle that balances between its relation to itself (domestic policy) and to the other states (foreign policy) is contrasted with the totalitarian state that suspended its self-relation in the name of its relation to the outside, either in the form of a “total war” (Hitler) or the “total peace” (Stalin). Contrasting the totalitarian state with that of Hegel’s aims to reveal, in turn, the substantial defect of liberal thought. Despite the fact that “total war” and the “total peace” had taken place, liberal thought still stubbornly preoccupies itself with domestic issues, traditionally with the question of how to secure the “Maginot” line between the state and its citizens, at the expense of overcoming its own impoverished knowledge of the state as an instrument, since this utilitarian knowledge of the state combined with the fact that the state is also the sovereign individuality appearing on the scene of foreign relations turned out to be totalitarian. Totalitarianism and liberalism are thereby not understood simply as enemies but rather as a tragical couple. To reveal this mutually enforced interdependence, the paper illustrates it on different and more commonplace examples in order to clarify how liberal thought can overcome animosity against its totalitarian enemy, namely via “experiencing” totalitarianism as nothing but the hitherto unknown dark side of its own instrumental understanding of the state.

Keywords: Arendt; experience; Hegel; the State; totalitarianism

Don’t think twice. Bob Dylan

Introduction

Despite understanding that “the moment one accepts the notion of ‘totalitarianism’, one is firmly located within the liberal-democratic horizon,” and that totalitarianism is an ideological notion “guaranteeing the liberal-democratic hegemony” and “dismissing the Leftist critique of liberal democracy” (Žižek 2001, 3), the following paper *does* accept this deeply ideological notion and assume the liberal anti-totalitarian stance. Since the only possible refutation of liberalism “can only consist, therefore, in first acknowledging its standpoint as essential and necessary and then raising it to a higher standpoint *on the strength*

of its own resources” (Hegel 2010b, 512). Raising liberal thought to a higher standpoint serves to demonstrate that its current stance is far from assuming a genuine anti-totalitarian position. Therefore, “one is firmly located within the liberal-democratic horizon” only when one uncritically presupposes that the “liberal-democratic horizon” *already* contains the genuine anti-totalitarian stance.

A tension between the true anti-totalitarian stance and the liberal-democratic horizon, however, is foreshadowed, in my view, already in the emblematic work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* from Hannah Arendt, who is – for our inquiry – quite a representative figure as far as she was elevated into an untouchable authority for those who are located within that liberal-democratic horizon (Žižek 2001, 2).

It is inherent in our entire philosophical tradition that we cannot conceive of a “radical evil,” and this is true both for Christian theology, which conceded even to the Devil himself a celestial origin, as well as for Kant, the only philosopher who, in the word he coined for it, at least must have suspected the existence of this evil even though he immediately rationalized it in the concept of a “perverted ill will” that could be explained by comprehensible motives. Therefore, *we actually have nothing to fall back on in order to understand a phenomenon* that nevertheless confronts us with its overpowering reality and breaks down all standards we know. There is only one thing that seems to be discernible: we may say that radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous. (Arendt 1973, 459, the emphasis is mine)

Facing the incomprehensible, we cannot fall back on a firm ground to assume a comfortable distance that would allow us to make a picture of totalitarianism. We are thereby forced to feel our human finitude, the finitude of our own cognitive capabilities.

We are, therefore, left alone to be satisfied with analyzing varied origins of totalitarianism. These origins, however, amount to *external* conditions from which totalitarianism arose. As far as this externality of the origins is not overcome, Arendt’s unpleasant conclusion that “totalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations” remains consequent (Ibid, 459). Since the mere external origins, as external, cannot be totalitarian in themselves, they have to *turn out* to be totalitarian. Yet, this necessity of turnover of mere conditions into the real totalitarian solutions amounts to necessity of contingency, which eludes our explanation and understanding (cf. Ibid, 470).

This unexplainable residue, however, has to be counterbalanced; as it is. The superego’s imperative “never forget” is employed. As its shadow consequence, humanity will forever suffer from a “consuming fever of history” (Nietzsche 1997, 60). The various names of our time beginning with a prefix “post-” prove that malady as well as that the past becomes a “gravedigger” of our present (Ibid).

For this trouble with totalitarianism, and its contingency, respectively, a need to develop a genuine anti-totalitarian standpoint arises in order to break the too narrow “liberal-democratic horizon” from within. Hence, the following discussion must be at odds with both the idea of the incomprehensibility of totalitarianism, and typically Auschwitz, and the decision of some philosophers to plead guilty to totalitarianism (cf. Badiou 1999, 28).

Being guilty of what she cannot comprehend, philosophy becomes no longer possible. Facing the unthinkable, philosophy “is in the pass of an impasse” (Ibid, 30).

According to Alain Badiou, it is neither the duty of nor within the power of philosophy to conceptualize the extermination of European Jews. In this respect, Badiou virtually shakes hands with Hegel who ridicules then regarded philosopher Krug for being under obvious misconception, according to which the transcendental idealism supposedly aims to idealistically (i.e. a priori) deduce every concrete phenomenon, for instance, a dog, a cat, or a Krug’s own pen, the last is Hegel’s own example (Hegel 1986: 194). Not only the extermination of Jews, but also a pen or a jug are as the concrete phenomena instances of the “unthinkable” in this regard. It has to be so, because thinking or philosophy is marinated “in the element of universality” (Hegel 2018: 3).

Yet, to the extent that the extermination of Jews, the “bloodlands”, gulag, or the whole totalitarian experience are understood as the *failures* of the modern state, they are encompassed “in the element of universality”, since they are encompassed as failures of something universal, and hence they are thinkable. Instead of dealing with the particular things, such as a jug, we are facing the inner tension between the universal concept of the state and its particular historical shape or failure.

What the particular endangers is nothing less than the very universality as such. For Arendt, totalitarianism endangers human nature *itself*, its universality (Arendt 1973, 458). She is thus almost on the same page, since here what is at stake is rather the universality or nature of the state.

A true primacy of the particularity would not be attainable except by changing the universality. Installing it as simply existing is a complementary ideology. (Adorno 1973, 313, translation modified)

Instead of ideologically or in normative fashion imposing the universal onto the particular shape of the state, the “true primacy” of the particular would mean to open the floodgates to the particular and let the universal tremble before the particular. Only that particular that makes the universal alter is fully dignified and appreciated; only that altered universal is thereby “grasped as the nothing of that [particular – TK] of which it is the result” (Hegel 2018, 58). Only when totalitarianism makes us change our universal concept of the state and alter the “hegemonic” way we are accustomed to thinking of the state and answering the question, what is the state, do we fully dignify the totalitarian shape of the state and do justice to it. Then we finally experience totalitarianism in terms of Hegel’s notion of experience. Then the ordinary (universal) “truth” or “nature” of the state alters.

The totalitarian failure of the modern state is, hopefully, what precisely does not kill the modern state, but makes it stronger. In Hegel’s words, the state as “spirit is all the greater, the greater the opposition out of which it returns into itself” (Hegel 2018, 199). Driven by the confidence that totalitarianism stands for this “opposition”, the proposed account of totalitarianism aims to strengthen the modern state from within.

Hegel's Notion of Experience

Hegel's notion of experience is employed here just because it allows assuming a *phenomenological* perspective, a perspective of consciousness, "consciousness of the object" (Hegel 2018, 56). The object is something *for* consciousness that changes when consciousness undergoes experience of it, and thereby consciousness, too, changes and its new shape emerges, because the disappeared object has existed *only* for the respective shape of consciousness, or, more precisely, only for *knowing* which is "the being of the object for consciousness" (Ibid).

For instance, when I recall the great films I saw when I was young, these films do not exist anymore, since they do not exist for me, i.e. for my present shape of consciousness, not because I suffer from amnesia, but because for my – hopefully more mature – consciousness these films no longer appear great but rather bad. Hence, their greatness, as the being of these films, is no longer vividly present but merely present as a memory, since this greatness was absolutely dependent on a respective shape of my consciousness which no longer exists. Fortunately, I underwent what Hegel calls experience which overcame (*aufheben*) both the respective adolescent shape of my consciousness and the greatness of these films. Both cancelled each other out *via* experience. The point of Hegel's *Phenomenology* is, however, "to grasp the general pattern of experience" and to "see the forest for the trees" or bad films (MacDonald 2006, 219).

Throughout *Phenomenology*, Hegel portrays "the whole series of shapes of consciousness in their necessity" (Hegel 2018, 58), and this necessity amounts to the emergence of the new object (Ibid). Therefore, there is no necessity *of* this emergence, since there is just the necessity *as* the emergence of the new object (cf. MacDonald 2006, 221). By the way, perhaps, "it is for this reason that the exposition [*Darstellung*] of knowing as it appears is to be undertaken" (Hegel 2018, 52).

The respective shapes of consciousness correspond to their respective objects, which are not concrete phenomena such as a pen, a film, or salt but they are "encompassed in the element of universality". For instance, salt or a pen encompassed in this element are what Hegel conceptualizes as the "thing". The object called the thing corresponds to the shape of consciousness called "perceiving", which not only perceives, but perceives *things* and nothing else. Together, they constitute an interwoven pair or an interdependent couple, just as all the other shapes of consciousness are paired with their respective objects.

Accordingly, we assume that there is correspondence or interdependence between the specific shape of consciousness, generally known as liberal, *and* its object, which is the state susceptible to fail, endanger individuals, and to turn out to be totalitarian. We assume that the liberal shape of consciousness is paired or interwoven with the object called totalitarianism and that this consciousness must experience its object in Hegelian way in order to overcome its dependence on it.

What makes experience or emergence of the new object possible, according to Hegel, is a certain double meaning of the object (Hegel 2018, 57), or rather a misunderstanding of this double meaning. The object means both something for consciousness *and* something "*an sich*", or "in itself", which is independent from consciousness, i.e. its subjective knowledge about the object.

The ordinary misunderstanding lies in the fact that “for consciousness, the object seems to be such only in the manner that consciousness knows it; consciousness seems, as it were, to be incapable of getting behind the object to the object as it is in itself” (Hegel 2018, 56). Yet, *undergoing* the dialectical movement called experience (Hegel 2018, 57), consciousness experiences its reversal (Hegel 2018, 58) and finds out that it has already got there from here, “behind the object to the object as it is in itself”.

As a result of experience, “what we [or consciousness] would assert to be [...] essence [of the object - T.K.] would instead not be its truth but rather only our knowing of it” (Hegel 2018, 55). What, at first sight, seems like the truth of an object, this truth that lies out of reach of the cognitive capability of consciousness suddenly vanishes at the very moment when the “poor” *finite* consciousness takes the appearance (of the object) seriously and appropriates this appearance as revealing the truth of the object.

The supposedly unreachable truth of the object behind the scene, the object in itself, turns into nothingness (cf. Hegel 2018, 57) as soon as consciousness appropriates *that* what appears on the scene *as* the object *in itself*, in its truth, in its totality and absoluteness.

Against this background, our question is: What truth of the state present behind the scene turns into nothingness or vaporizes by taking seriously the totalitarian appearance of the state?

One can claim, nevertheless, that the totalitarian state is no longer the particular historical appearance of the state but rather the very “betrayal” of the state or the radical negation of the state.

This reasoning recalls a perennial question whether Jesus Christ betrayed God, as a mere prophet pretending to be the messiah, or revealed God. The “dialectical” answer is that he did simultaneously both: he revealed God and thereby he betrayed him, yet only *as* an abstract otherworldly being.

Accordingly, what “truth” of the modern state did the totalitarian state reveal and thereby what “truth” of the modern state did it render obsolete as abstract or otherworldly? In other words, what knowledge or knowing¹ of the state did the history of totalitarianism render obsolete?

Taking any appearance seriously implies the willingness of consciousness to put at risk its own knowledge about the object and, as the case may be, to say farewell to its own precious knowledge, and thus to confess for being wrong. One who takes appearance seriously must be ready to cut off oneself from its knowledge projected behind the scene, as the “truth” of the object, and mustn’t fear “death” of that knowing which constitutes the object. One must be ready to say goodbye to the old world (of the object) and welcome the arrival of the new world. One must be on the road to the reversal of its consciousness, on the road to its “Damascus moment“, to sacrifice this day for tomorrow (cf. Matějčková 2018, 335).

This process of getting rid of one’s own wrong knowledge is, I think, what propels history forward and, in the same process, cures the “consuming fever of history” Nietzsche

¹ The meaning of both terms is the same, here.

complained about. This relinquishment of the outdated knowing is what Hegel calls “lingering with the negative” (Hegel 2018, 21).

A Preliminary Note

Out of the horrific experience of totalitarianism, we are told, mankind must derive one conclusion: the dark totalitarian essence of the modern state mustn't appear again. Regrettably, this merely leads to the immediate and *practical* lesson which aims to restore and brace the old pre-totalitarian order. This practical lesson leaves untouched the much more inconvenient, *theoretical* lesson that is to be drawn, namely how to change the knowledge of the state accordingly. Without taking this theoretical lesson one can easily see how the post-totalitarian imperative to “watchdog the state” is cut from the same cloth as the pre-totalitarian imperative to “beware of the state”.

That idea of watchdogging the state that aims to prevent a repetition of history presupposes the same old-fashioned free individual employed by the outmoded contractual theories of the state. Yet, this supervising of the state precludes what Hegel called a universal life within the state (Hegel 2008, 228) and considers this life to be proto-totalitarian one. Since what else is the very purpose of supervising of the state than preventing this life to appear? However, is not the very absence of a universal life within the state the cause of totalitarianism?

The liberal idea of supervising the state still stubbornly operates within the framework of knowing that the state is a mere instrument that is to be employed as the rule of law in order to protect the citizens against its dark totalitarian double. The state is hence both the rule of law and the latently totalitarian state. This *doublethink* of the state amounts to the spiritual dependence of a liberal consciousness on totalitarianism and a prolongation of the fear of the state.

If Christ rudimentarily means the collapse of the distance between God and men and if totalitarianism likewise means the collapse of the distance between the state and its citizens, then, principally, only two lessons can be learned from totalitarianism. Either a “reactionary” restoration of that distance, or – which is fundamentally the Christian and Hegelian option – the reconceptualization of God, and the state respectively, accordingly as the spirit since spirit stands for the internalization and overcoming of that distance. Either totalitarianism was simply an exception from normality, *or* this exception, taken seriously, retroactively changes the knowing of what the “normal” state is.

These two options are equally possible and no dialectical mediation between them can overcome them. Since the dialectical movement called experience rather introduces a choice between these two options, yet it simultaneously opts for the latter: the *retroactive* reconceptualization of the abstract notion of the state, God, etc.

Learning to Experience by Way of Examples

As indicated above, there is no better example which illustrates Hegel's notion of experience than that of Christ who is God in-itself *only* for Christian consciousness (cf. Hegel 2018, 57). Exclusively a Christian experiences God “in-itself”. What enters into appearance is nothing but God in-itself, yet only for a Christian. Consequently, what “was previously the [God - TK] in-itself, is not in itself, or that it was in itself only for

consciousness“ (Ibid). What was previously God in-itself, i.e. God as an abstract being, still holds true, but only for consciousness which refuses to take the appearance of Christ seriously. In contrast, only for whom God reveals himself, the old truth of God as an abstract and inhuman being turns into nothingness. This turning into nothingness is equivalent to relinquishing old knowledge or truth of God as obsolete and to undergoing experience which thereby “suspends the burden of the past” (cf. Žižek 2001, 53).

The difficulties of taking the appearance seriously are nicely illustrated by the good soldier Švejk, the main protagonist of the book *The Fateful Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk During the World War*, written by the Czech novelist Jaroslav Hašek early after the Great War. All his adventures are tricky and hard to understand, starting with a story how Švejk, encouraged by his striking honesty, passionately joined the Austrian army and exclaiming his will to fight and die for the Keiser. So, having the “pleasure” to encounter Švejk, Austrian military officers (*as well as* the reader of the book) are deeply astounded and don’t know how to comprehend Švejk’s feeble-minded behavior that appears to them, whether it is a mere pretense or contrariwise the truth of Švejk, the revelation of his idiocy. One can come either to the “Christian” conclusion, that Švejk not only behaves *like* a feeble-minded but he simultaneously *is* feeble-minded, *or* conceive of Švejk as a provocateur attempting to fool them.

The manner in which Švejk appears to Austrian officers, how he is *for* them (i.e. like a fool) contradicts what Švejk is “in-itself” for them (i.e. an ingenious provocateur). This contradiction is indeed unbearable, but *only* for them. “We see that consciousness now has two objects: One is the first in-itself, and the second is the being-for-it of this in-itself” (Hegel 2018: 57). Both objects or moments which differ – Švejk *for* officers and Švejk *in-itself* for officers – are present in the officers’ consciousness.

It is upon this difference which is present that the testing depends. If, in this comparison, the two do not correspond to one another, then it seems as if consciousness must alter its knowing in order to make it adequate to the object. However, in knowing’s alteration, the object itself is, to consciousness, also in fact altered; (Hegel 2018, 56)

So, if the officers’ consciousness alters “its knowing in order to make it adequate” to the Švejk’s idiocy, then, “in this knowing’s alteration”, Švejk as a provocateur disappears and turns into an idiot, or this “new object shows itself to have come to be through a reversal of [the officers’ - TK] consciousness itself” (Hegel 2018, 58).

Accordingly, I would say that it is not so much Švejk personally who fools the officers, but what gets them mad in the first place is rather their own stubborn reluctance to alter their own knowing about Švejk, their refutation to experience Švejk in Hegel’s sense and take a lesson from “history” of his feeble-minded behavior.

Recalling the Jewish joke that ends up with the exclamation „Why are you telling me you’re going to Lemberg, when you are really going to Lemberg?“, the officers, too, should exclaim: “Why are you, Švejk, telling me (by your behavior) that you’re a fool, when you really are a fool?”

Rather than an intruder from outer space, the good soldier Švejk is a mere *mirror* which objectively manifests the very misconception of the officers about him. Švejk reflects it, just

as the revealed God mirrors the Jewish misconception about God as an abstract being. The more the officers believe that Švejk is a provocateur, the more this belief makes them mad.

Understood in this way, *symptomatically* and *idealistically*, Švejk is an *expression* of that misconception and, simultaneously, a *protest* against that misconception, to paraphrase Marx's famous line concerning religion. Since religion, too, understood accordingly, is a mirror that reflects the people's conception of God to the people. If religion is *materialistically* reduced to a mere artificial product of wicked priests and their *interests* to fool the people, the very possibility of experience is lost in advance.

Standing for all objects in general, the cases of Christ, Švejk and religion reveal that the object in its essential truth is nothing incomprehensible that eludes our cognitive capabilities. The object is rather transparent, just a mirror which reflects to consciousness its own knowledge of the object, either knowledge that lives up to the revealed actuality or that does not pass the test of the comparison. Such knowledge is obsolete and needs reconceptualization, e.g. the knowledge that Švejk is a provocateur does not pass the test of comparison with his idiotic appearance that is for other (people).

Consequently, the truth no longer lies beyond appearance but appears in appearance. Out of the experience – which is always experience of truth that appears – the new true object arises (Hegel 2018, 57). “This new object contains the nothingness of the first” (Ibid). It represents overcoming of the first. For instance, Švejk as a “revealed” fool contains the nothingness of Švejk as a provocateur. Likewise, Christ as the revealed God contains the nothingness of God as an invisible and abstract being.

Returning to totalitarianism, what new true object or knowledge of the state arises and thereby contains the nothingness of knowledge of state as the latently totalitarian state?

A Return of the State

Our preliminary answer is that the knowledge of state that arises out of undergoing experience of totalitarianism is the knowledge of the state as the rule of law, yet in the *new* sense that the rule of law no longer defends the freedoms of an individual (in the instrumental manner), because it actualizes the freedom of an individual and represents its highest possible accomplishment.

This understanding of the rule of law not only contains the nothingness of the totalitarian knowledge of the state as an instrument to be employed by class or nation, but also the liberal knowledge of the state as the rule of law understood in the *old* sense as an instrument to be utilized on behalf of defending freedoms of individuals against the possible degradation of the state into the totalitarian one.

Here, we see clearly what the liberal doublethink is. Despite Bob Dylan's appeal “Don't think twice,” liberal thought literally thinks of the state twice: the state is, on the one hand, the rule of law *and*, on the other, the latently totalitarian one. This doublethink is what Hegel sharply criticizes as the inability to merge two thoughts (cf. e.g. Hegel 2010a, 177).

This liberal doublethink proves our thesis that liberal thought is reluctant to experience *itself* in totalitarianism. As suggested above, experiencing or recognizing Švejk as a “revealed” fool overcomes the possibility to think of him as a foxy provocateur for the second time.

Nonetheless, how could it be that the state, understood as fulfilment of men's freedom, represents the *positive* lesson from the tremendous excesses of violence of the totalitarian state? How could it be that the state should be the cure against wrath of the state? Comparing the state with the spear of Parsifal, we can justly ask why only the weapon that caused the wound can heal it.

To utilize the example of Švejk again, one should not externalize the blame for "excesses" of Švejk's feeble-minded behavior on him personally, because one should rather see and thus experience one's own misconception about him *in* the excesses of his "symbolic violence". For this misconception that Švejk is "in itself" a foxy provocateur with evil intentions one gets mad in the first place.

Accordingly, why is the knowledge of the state as an instrument the misconception that is to be experienced in totalitarianism as its spiritual fatherland? Why is it this concept (*Begriff*) of the state that is to be experienced in totalitarianism? Why should one relinquish this concept of the state? Why is the totalitarian state a mirror or revelation of this concept? Why does not this knowledge of the state pass the test of the comparison between itself and the totalitarian state? Why is this knowledge disproved by totalitarianism?

The easiest way to answer and to relinquish this knowledge of the state is to ask what the state was *for* the totalitarian consciousness or ideology.

The Boredom of Fascism and a Total War of Nazism

Fascistic ideology or fascism, with or without racial supplement, speaks of *Volksgemeinschaft*, or alternatively of *Volksstaat*. It is an "imagined community" with all the characteristics that Benedict Anderson prescribes to nation. *Volksgemeinschaft* is (1) *imagined* "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members"; then, it is imagined (2) as *sovereign* in political sense; (3) as *limited* or particularized in the sense that it doesn't identify itself with mankind; and (4) as a *community* "regardless the actual inequality and exploitation", so it is "always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 2006, 6-7).

From all of these characteristics, the most problematic is to prescribe political sovereignty to *Volksgemeinschaft*, in contrast to nation, since sovereignty implies political re-presentation. This dash, however, aims to signalize that political representation is *alienated* from what is present. For this reason, *Volksgemeinschaft* disrespects political representation *as such*, as something alienated from it. Therefore, its political sovereignty has to be understood differently, namely that *Volksgemeinschaft* enters into the political domain just as it is, or, in other words, it does policy in the *direct* manner. It does not split itself into two: presentation and its (political) representation.

Entering the domain of politics as *already* formed *in advance*, *Volksgemeinschaft*, by its pure definition, forgets that it is plastically formed only retroactively by its political representation, hence no sooner than it enters the domain of politics. Ignoring this "divine" power or "constructivist" moment of a political representation, *Volksgemeinschaft* "colonizes" the domain of politics and thereby turns the state into *Volksstaat*.

Alone by its name, the nation-state manifests the same impoverished understanding of political representation. Its power to re-create, re-form, and give a form to collectivity, which merely seems to be already formed, is also not apprehended. *Volksstaat* thus still sheds a critical light on the nation-state.

Since the collectivity is not retroactively formed by politics, it has to find its cement in some apolitical principle (e.g. language, culture, religion, shared history, philosophy), or in nature (e.g. race). Since race is as apolitical as language, for instance, the racial nationalism merely makes visible the dark side of even the most “progressive” and humanistic nationalism. Yet, Hannah Arendt defends nationalism as “the precious cement [...] binding together a centralized state and an atomized society, and [that] actually proved to be the only working, live connection between the individuals of the nation-state (Arendt 1973: 231).

As its etymology suggests, the more impoverished the (fascist) understanding of politics is, the stronger the unity of community, its horizontal comradeship, its fraternity. The absolute equality based on race, and hence natural principle (Ibid, 360) is thereby foreshadowed.

A unity of *Volksgemeinschaft* is then the *organic* unity in the sense that it is *immediate* or *given*. *Volksgemeinschaft* does not have to “wait for some future time” and “depend upon objective conditions”: its establishment can “be realized immediately in the fictitious world of the movement” (Ibid, 361).

Volksgemeinschaft stands for an alternative and opposition to disintegrative forces of alienation of both the capitalist alienation caused by class struggle (Marxism), and alienation of political representation (liberal-democracy). Generally, as *Gemeinschaft*, it refuses alienation imbedded in modern atomized society (*Gesellschaft*).

As a consequence, both classes and a modern, atomized individual, and hence a free and independent individual, have to dissolve in this organic and immediate community, as sugar dissolves in coffee. In case of fascism with the racial supplement, the Nazism, not all atomized individuals have the “right” to be dissolved in *Volksgemeinschaft*. These individuals, first and foremost the Jews, are to be exterminated.

The status of the state and political representation has to change accordingly. The *Volksstaat* no longer stands *above* the atomized society as its means. It no longer provides equality *before* law or protects the individual liberties, individual interests or class interests, since it does not need to do so when classes and individuals as such are dissolved in community.

The immediate fraternity of *Volksgemeinschaft* resembles the immediate unity of family. There is no alienation in the family, either. This micro-community lacks the principle of a free, independent, and self-subsistent individuality. The unity of the family is immediately given, and hence does not rest in the harmonization of contradictory private interests. The fascist idea of community is thus based on the expansion of the family logic into the domain of civil society. The “ancient” domain penetrates into the modern domain and molts it into brotherhood. *Volksgemeinschaft* means that the family domain is not limited by the domain of civil society and the demarcation between them is abolished.

As a consequence, the state itself collapses into *Volksgemeinschaft* and is indistinguishable from it. Since the already harmonized and organic collectivity does not need to be mediated,

harmonized, and re-presented. The “alienated”, “bureaucratic” state molts into *Volksstaat*, a community of brothers, sisters, and friends, racially pure or not. Either way, the alienated political *re*-presentation collapses into what is present, that is the fascist community or the nation. It comes as no surprise that Hitler’s voice does not *re-present* the interest of Aryan *Volksgemeinschaft*. If it did, there would be a space for deliberation whether it corresponds to the interest of the community, or not. Instead of re-presenting the community, *Führer*’s voice rather directly and immediately expresses the fascist community itself.

Having nothing to “do” in terms of domestic policy, nothing to mediate and harmonize, nothing to rely on, *Volksstaat* suffers from boredom. Harmonized inner contradictions have to be counterbalanced by an external contradiction or domination (Aly 2006, 28). Only international policy can save *Volksstaat* from boredom: either contingent adventurism of Mussolini’s, or an existential war of Hitler’s.

The latter is derived from the fact that, despite being harmonized, the racially pure *Volksgemeinschaft* is still exposed to the oppression of racially impure enemies. Since they are in principle everywhere, within and without state’s borders, as the figure of the Jew, domestic policy that searches for enemies of the state smoothly crosses state’s borders. The figure of the universal enemy allows to “systematically” overcome the *idleness* implied in the notion of harmonized *Volksgemeinschaft*, then, waging a war is an inevitable or logical consequence.

It is quite telling that Hitler feared dissipation of Nazism’s élan (Kershaw 2000, 342) in the autumn 1940 when “Britain posed no threat to Germany’s continental domination, but crushing France had failed to compel Britain’s surrender” (Kotkin 2018, 814). Hitler’s army adjutant, Major Gerhard Engel, observed that a “visibly depressed” *Führer* gave the “impression that at the moment he does not know how things should proceed” (citing Kotkin 2018, 815).

This is symptomatic: either idle boredom or a war, either Fascism or Nazism, if I may differentiate them in this way. “In war Nazism came to its own” (Kershaw 2000, 233). By waging war, *Volksgemeinschaft* directly interferes into foreign policy without any mediation or limitation and colonizes the outside, racially impure world. In Nazi war, foreign policy directly expresses domestic policy, the outside reflects the inside without mediation. The Nazi war is no longer “the continuation of (international) policy by other means” but rather it *is* the only means of the international policy. A function of the state as a mediator between its inside (i.e. domestic policy) and its outside (i.e. foreign policy) is suspended. The “interior” (policy) empties itself out into the “exterior” (one) entirely, thus nothing is left in the “interior”. Hitler made us soldiers, stated one propagandist handbill.² A war thereby becomes a total war, an existential war, *die Vernichtungskrieg*. That this “third world war” (Später 2015) was aiming at Jewish Bolshevism also makes sense since the Soviet state was an embodiment of what rotted its inside, the soul of *Volksgemeinschaft*, “the soul of nation” (Churchill), what is “the radical negation of the modern West” (Kundera 1984, 37).

² The Archive of Security Services, Alexander’s Archive – Fond: 325 Roll 70.

The “Eternal Peace” of Communism

Foreign policy is a fate for the communist state too. Yet, in contrast to a total war of Nazism, the communist ideology or communism represents rather the ideology of a “total peace”. Justifying its anti-capitalist economy, the communist state elevates itself above the international sphere of foreign relations. It looks down upon this sphere among the “normal” (capitalist) states from above, analogically to the state which stands above the domain of civil society. The communist state relates to its outside in the same fashion as the “normal” state to its inside. International relations to the other capitalist states function for the communist state as substitute for domestic policy. Contrary to the Nazi *externalization* or ventilation of domestic policy onto foreign policy, the communist ideology rather *internalizes* foreign relations, or – which is the same – is at pains to understand foreign policy in terms of domestic policy.

Reducing the state to the capitalist state, the Soviet communism illustratively speaks of the *encirclement* by the (western) capitalist states, which, firstly, perfectly fits into the old Russia’s mentality, secondly, this international dimension of the state, underestimated already by Marx, explains why the communist revolution took place not in the capitalist state, but in the feudalist one that lacks properly developed self-relation.

The capitalist danger from outside doesn’t stop at the state’s borders and penetrates into domestic affairs as its vital *raison d’être*. Mere political adversaries are automatically perceived as bourgeoisie agents from outside.

Encircled by the capitalist states, “the policy of a socialist government consists of using the contradiction between imperialists [...] in order to expand the position of socialism whenever opportunity arises,” Zhdanov stated in November 1940 (quoting Kotkin 2018, 819). “Stalin’s policy resembled British appeasement in that he was driven by the blinding desire to avoid war at all costs” (Ibid, 905).

Speaking of the capitalist state, communism conflates the state with the principle of civil society, and hence the state loses its sovereignty and no longer functions as a limitation of the domain of civil society. As Fascism does not limit the domain of the family by the domain of civil society, communism does not limit the domain of civil society by the state. In both cases, the state collapses, albeit for totally different reasons.

Based on Marx’s teaching, communism envisages the state as the capitalist state that mediates, justifies, and defends the interests of civil society and ignores the class contradictions within it. This state safeguards individual liberties embedded in civil society, yet, from the communist perspective, they are still impoverished.

Without the state, freedom would evolve and become more multifarious, but, within the state, the potential of freedom is trampled down and reduced to the single freedom of business: “free trade, free selling and buying” (Marx 1976, 499).

The domain where individual freedom flourishes, on the one hand, but, is not yet properly developed, on the other, defines the domain which was baptized by Hegel as civil society. Marx basically adopts this double meaning of civil society and refers to freedom in capitalism

as a “formal freedom”, which, as freedom, precludes any identification of capitalism with slavery.

The capitalist state is thus the state that instrumentally defends this diminished freedom, and thereby simultaneously hinders an unfolding or evolution of freedom into “real freedom”.

Contrary to Hegel, Marx does not “speculatively” recognize the state as the domain of “real freedom” that has already overcome the impoverished freedom. Marx’s “critical” wisdom teaches that the state obfuscates and thus serves the mutually contradictory class interests which are imbedded in civil society, nevertheless, one can easily turn this wisdom against itself and ask whether this wisdom by itself does not obfuscate the higher recognition of the state as the real freedom and an end in itself.

Marx, therefore, comprehends the state only one-sidedly, subjectively, from below, as a repressive defense of the limited “formal” freedom and a safeguard against the unlimited “real” freedom, freedom of communism.

Bypassing the speculative idea of the state as the genuine actualization of individual freedom, Marx’s revolutionary jump over Rodhus becomes inevitable, namely the jump beyond the realm of what is on behalf of future freedom which is not yet present. Or, the second option, Marx reduces the freedom to this jump over Rodhus itself:

Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. (Marx & Engels 1976, 49)

Although freedom is understood as a movement, as a real and tangible objective practice, and not an imagined future state of affairs, it is still reduced to a means for achieving this future freedom that has not yet come. Without a vision of a future state of affairs, nothing would initiate the real freedom of movement.

In this respect, the collapse of the Soviet Union is quite telling. Since it happened precisely when Gorbachev began to reform the system and restarted the movement by introducing again a certain vision for the future after it had been intentionally forgotten during Brezhnev’s motionless era of stagnation. As Sergei Prozorov argued, Gorbachev’s perestroika failed for the very same reason as did Russia’s transition to democracy (Prozorov 2008). Both reforms failed and failed *as* movements that instrumentalize the present and subordinate it to a certain vision of the future which was supposed to initiate a movement.

According to Marx’s writings, the communist society is a kind of civil society which is totally free because the (capitalist) state as supreme oppressor withered away. However, according to historical reality, communism is a state without civil society. Usurping the state and then employing it in overcoming capitalist contradictions led to the total collapse of civil society in the communist state.

How could it succeed in prolonging its life for so long without its inside alias civil society, without having something to mediate and harmonize? As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the contradictory relations among capitalist states served the USSR as a vital substitute for the absence of its own inner contradictions. The communist state represents an

upside-down state. It does not ventilate its inside into the outside, as Nazism, since the outside world comprising of the capitalist states stands for its inside.

In a certain way it makes sense that after the “successful” collectivization had annihilated the rest of the free enterprise in the countryside, mass terror followed. The foreign agents of imperialism suddenly had to appear everywhere in order to substitute the lack of civil society.

This turnover of the idea of communism into a total state should be understood not as an unfortunate historical accident. Otherwise, the noble idea of communism remains intact. Its essential defect, I would argue, lies in its ignorance of international dimension of the state.

Ignoring the irreducibility of the state to its self-relation (i.e. its relation to the specific class, nation or individuals), communism can aim to domesticate, instrumentalize, and, finally, let the state wither away on behalf of accomplishing an imagined freedom the state oppresses.

When the state does not wither away “voluntarily” on its own accord, it has to be seized and forced to wither away *via* abolishing civil society or capitalism. This endeavor reflects the inability to comprehend freedom as already objectively actualized in the state or, rather, *as* the state. The feudal and other “bad” states are rather an expression of this cognitive inability to grasp the freedom as already present and thus they cannot disprove this understanding of freedom. The more ignored and poorly conceptualized the state was in Marx’s writings, the more hypertrophied it became and made thus visible what was lacking in those writings.

Conclusion

While communism of “total peace” instrumentalizes the state with the intention of overcoming the inner contradictions of capital and, then, uses the state for deterring foreign capitalist states, and while the Nazi ideology of a “total war” instrumentalizes the state for immediate ventilation of the nation *via* waging war, liberal ideology does the same domestication and instrumentalizes the state, yet it does so in the name of preserving freedom inscribed in civil society.

While the Nazi ideology instrumentalizes the state in the name of an existential war and the communist ideology on behalf of an eternal peace with the other capitalist states, liberal ideology does the same instrumentalization in the name of domestic needs and civic freedom. While both totalitarian ideologies, in their respective ways, sacrifice state’s self-relation to its relation to the other states, liberal ideology rather does the opposite, because such sacrifice would amount to a suspension of individual freedoms inscribed in civil society.

In their respective ways, all three ideologies fail to come to terms with the fact that the state is both. Its sovereignty is twofold. The state has not only its immediate actuality as an individual state that relates to itself (*inneres Staatsrecht*), since the state is the Idea (*Idee*) that is “unsatisfied” with this mere self-relation and hence “passes over into the relation to the other states” (*äußeres Staatsrecht*) (Hegel 2008, 234, § 259).

In this context, the totalitarian states appear not as arbitrary deviations from the “normal” states. They are rather the dark side of the “normal” liberal state. The dark side of the utilization of the state and its “usurpation” as an instrument for particular or domestic needs. Hegel criticizes this state “based on need” as the “external state” (*äußere Staat*). In this way

“the understanding [*Verstand*] envisages“ the state (Hegel 2008, 181). This instrumentalization or particularization of the state is necessarily at the expense of foreign policy, because, in the relation to the other states, the state appears not as an instrument but as the sovereign.

If the state is confused with civil society, and if its specific end is laid down as the security and protection of property and personal freedom, then *the interest of individuals as such* becomes the ultimate end of their association, and it follows that membership of the state is something optional. But the state’s relation to the individual is quite different from this. Since the state is objective spirit, it is only as one of its members that the individual himself has objectivity, truth, and ethical life. Unification as such is itself the true content and aim, and the individual’s destiny is to live a universal life. (Hegel 2008, 228)

Totalitarianism, then, is to be understood as the dark side of the state that is “confused with civil society”. The totalitarian state, as a particular and historical shape of the state, is based on principally the same confusion, be it with class or nation. Taken seriously, totalitarianism disproves the very idea that the primary end of the state is “the security and protection of property and personal freedom”. Forcing humanity to assume the anti-totalitarian stance, totalitarianism renders obsolete the knowing of the state on which it is based. Since it is based on idea of domestication of the state as an instrument, this knowing is thereby obsolete, yet *only* in itself, not for us. Therefore, we must venture to derive this meaning from totalitarianism for us, for today, for sacrificing this day for tomorrow (cf. Matějčková 2018, 335).

For instance, Arendt’s line that “the state was partly transformed from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation” (Arendt 1973, 230) encourages us to ponder whether the ultimate and “transcendental” origin of totalitarianism lies just in this knowledge of the state as “an instrument of the law”. Since this knowledge makes that transformation of state into an instrument of nation, or class, possible. Yet:

History and experience teach that peoples generally have not learned from history. (Hegel 2011, 138)

It is so because people generally refuse “to eliminate consideration of anything contingent” in history (Hegel 2011, 157). They satisfy themselves with knowledge that everything that has happened in history happened by chance and that chance amounts to external necessity. Ergo, for instance, totalitarianism is pure evil and as pure evil it happened by pure chance and, at the same time, arose from the particular historical conditions or “origins” that are coextensive with external necessity.

For [this reason – TK] the sole intent of philosophical history is to eliminate consideration of anything contingent and to know everything as engendered by the concept. Chance is external necessity, which indeed comes from causes, but from causes that themselves are only external conditions. (Hegel 2011, 157)

So, we learn from history when we eliminate consideration of anything contingent and thereby external necessity as well. To eliminate both we have to turn history into something *for us*, into meaning, which is for us. To turn it into meaning we have no other choice than to experience our own notions, concepts, and knowledge at work in history and thus let history

endanger our knowledge. Only then, the “true primacy of the particular” is attained (cf. Adorno 1973: 313).

I have argued that our ordinary knowing of the state as an instrument is to be endangered and relinquished in order to eliminate totalitarianism from human history as something contingent. However, it necessarily remains a contingent event as far as we get stuck in the paradigm of analyzing the origins in Hannah Arendt’s fashion. Then, in the last instance, we learn nothing from the history of totalitarianism, since we don’t know what concrete knowing of the state we should relinquish. Recalling Hegel’s notion of experience for the last time, it teaches that learning from experience or history is about relinquishing knowing and notions rather than accumulating them.

Although totalitarianism “merely” gives our mundane knowing of the state back to us upside-down, and we thus get back what we imposed onto the state, and although “the devil [symbolized in totalitarianism] speaks the truth much oftener than he’s deemed. He has an ignorant audience” (Lord Byron), the liberal audience.

Imposing our knowing onto the state, which *automatically* instrumentalizes it, ignores Hegel’s basic warnings that “philosophy in any case always comes on the scene too late to give” instructions what the world ought to be (Hegel 2008, 16). For this very reason:

As a work of philosophy, [*the Philosophy of Right*] must be removed as far as possible from any attempt to construct a *state as it ought to be*. The instruction which it may contain cannot consist in teaching the state what it ought to be; it can only show how the state, the ethical universe, should be understood. (Hegel 2008, 15)

Coming too late, the only clue that we or philosophy have is history of the states. For the incredible suffering that history of the totalitarian states had brought about, the sentence that “history and experience teach that peoples generally have not learned from history” should force us into *confessing* that we have been wrong about the state. Is not such confession a strange logic illuminating why that which is unforgivable is *therefore* the only thing that can be forgiven (cf. Comay 2010, 126)? Does not such confession “brush history against the grain” (cf. Benjamin 2007, 257)?

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