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The Origins of Ideology

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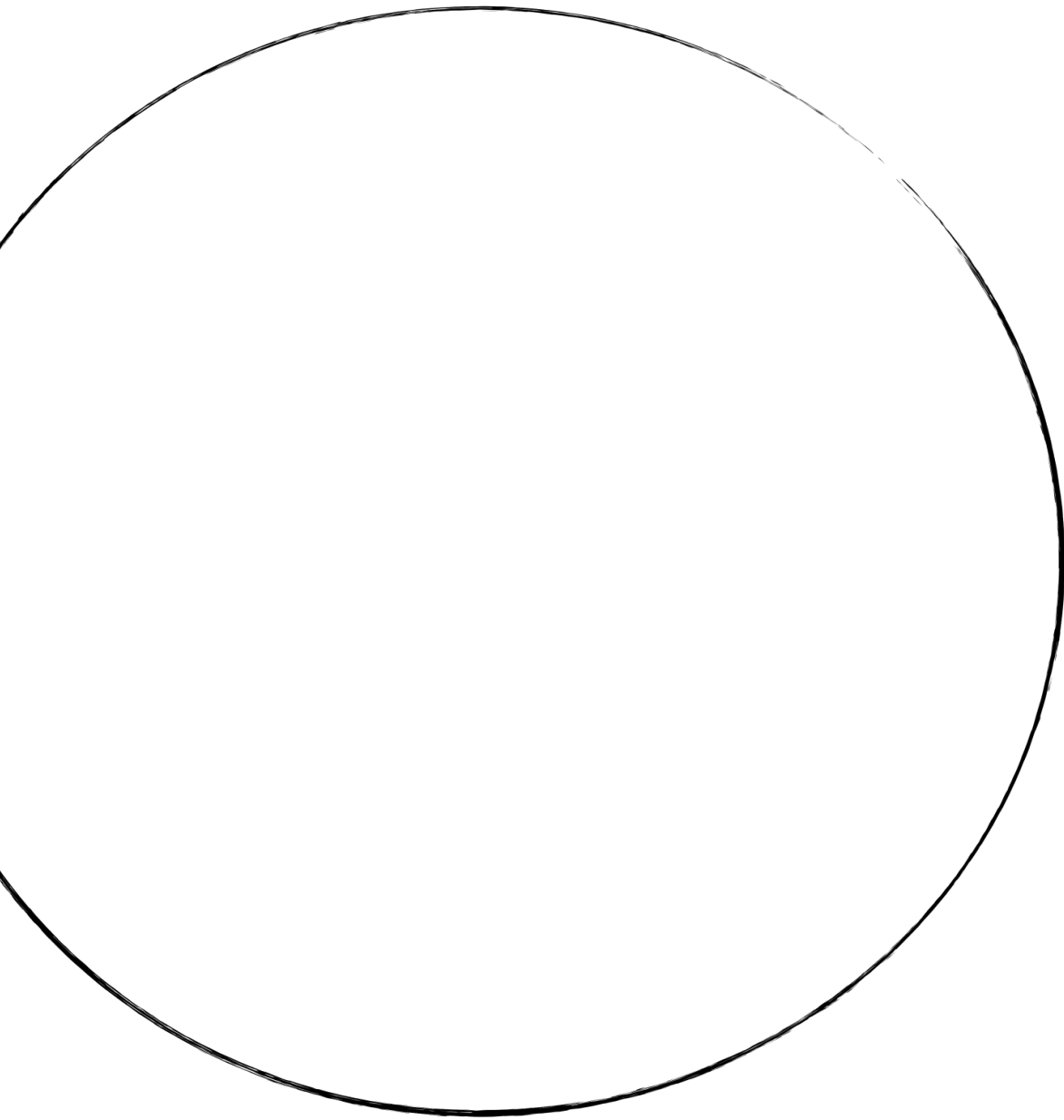
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The Origins of Ideology

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Eve Campbell

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2024



The Origins of Ideology

Eve Campbell

To My Mother,

*Thank you for understanding, supporting, and challenging me.
We are one and the same, and I couldn't be more proud of that.*

Acknowledgements

Dad, thank you for showing me what it means to be kind, for providing me with the opportunities and support you never had. You worked all day, then drove my friends and me three hours to hockey practice, six times a week, for ten years, and never missed a single game.

Kieva, thank you for being the best sister I could ever ask for.

Roger, thank you for guiding me throughout this project. I would not be where I am today without you. You have truly taught me what it means to think critically and push boundaries, while staying true to myself.

Thank you to all my teachers at Bard for everything you have taught me and for the ways you have supported me.

Thanks to all the friends I have made here. To my chosen roommate, Leyli, and to Maeve, Reese, Hawa, and Mike—I love you guys. An extra thanks to Deb and Dave for always supporting me and feeding me every time you visit.

Lastly, thank you, Johnsonville, for letting me use your spare room as an office. I wouldn't have finished this without that space.

Contents

Preface	1
Chapter One: The Dominant Tradition of Ideology	7
<i>I: The Origins of the Term</i>	13
<i>II: The Riddle of History</i>	17
Chapter Two: The Unprecedented Nature of Ideology	25
<i>I: What is Ideology?</i>	28
<i>II: Ideology – ism</i>	33
Chapter Three: The Political Weaponization of Ideology	44
<i>I: The Purpose of Antisemitism</i>	44
<i>II: Ideas, Opinions, Prejudices – isms</i>	49
<i>III: Navigating Ideology: The Importance of Making Distinctions</i>	61
<i>IV: The Politics of Terror</i>	68
Conclusion	79
Bibliography	93

Preface

We don't talk and listen to one another anymore, and on the rare occasions we do, it feels empty and at times very false. Since COVID-19, social media has turned into a vacuum for friendships and, increasingly, a space for political action and the rise of cancel culture. Between the ease of posting and commenting online, we rush to align with whatever movement we see to be just. One day it's this, and the next day it's that. Somehow, amidst all these movements, we have drawn loud but arbitrary lines. We have become thoughtless and unkind, not only disregarding different opinions and facts, but other human beings.

It seems as if the art of argument has disappeared, replaced by ad hominem attacks and demagoguery, and as a result, our world grows increasingly divided. Nearly four years ago, we witnessed an assault on our Capitol — a total denial of facts, disdain for the law, and demonization of opponents. Even those on the receiving end have started to retreat into opposing corners, fighting fire with fire. College campuses grow increasingly loud each day, and bitterly press themselves against the very institutions that gave them their voice. One side speaks in one manner, and the other in another, yet their arguments sound the same. Everything is deemed unjust, and all power corrupt. Yet in the end, this leads to nowhere, unless we fully commit, and even that ultimately leads to nowhere.

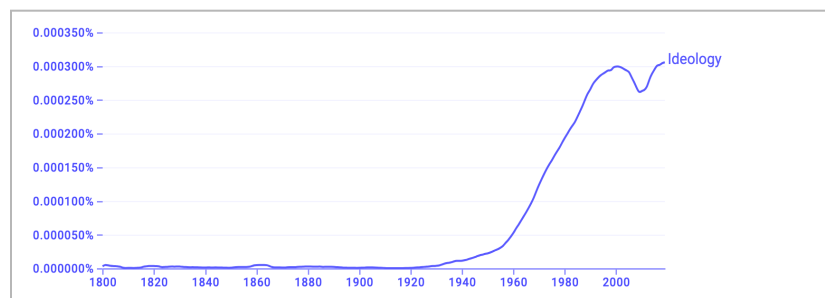
When I started thinking about what I wanted to do for my senior project, I didn't have a clue, but I knew that whatever it was, it needed to address the contrarian worldviews and subsequent polarization that plagues every aspect of modern society. As I looked around, I saw how both the far-right and far-left—normal people and my classmates alike—constantly oversimplify reality, manipulate facts, disregard alternative perspectives, and speak in what appear to be simplified truths. With guidance from my advisor, I soon began to realize that something deeper was at play: our world is marked not merely by polarization, but by an abstract understanding of reality driven by ideologies that divide us. This project is an attempt to understand the nature of ideologies, examine their purpose and application, and delve into the paradoxes inherent in our critique of them.

The term 'ideology' is pervasive, yet elusive. In academic discussions, 'ideology' is analyzed more neutrally as a system of beliefs that shape individuals' perspectives on the world. For instance, Oxford Dictionary defines ideology as the following: “Any wide-ranging system of beliefs, ways of thought, and categories that provide the foundation of programmes of political and social action.”¹ However, it seems as if in everyday discourse, our use of the term carries negative connotations; we use it pejoratively to dismiss or criticize opposing views. For instance phrases like “the dangerous ideology of the far-right threatens our progress” or “the socialist ideology of the left aims to dismantle our economic freedom.” Both sides decry the 'ideologies' of their opponents, not merely dismissing a set of beliefs but attempting to undermine what they perceive as fundamentally flawed visions of society. In other words, ideology is wielded like a weapon by its users and even its critics.

¹ “Ideology, n. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary.” https://www.oed.com/dictionary/ideology_n.

Another example of the stark differences between the general concept of ideology and its practical applications can be seen in how the term 'ideology' is used in media and public speeches, often as a weapon. Critics of environmentalism, for instance, may label it 'green ideology' to imply extremism. In contrast, scholars analyze the term more constructively, exploring its role in social cohesion and identity formation. For example, the ideological underpinnings of American patriotism are frequently examined to understand national solidarity. In the first chapter of this project, we will explore the continuities and differences among various interpretations of the nature, function, and role of ideology, as initially outlined by Karl Marx in *The German Ideology*. This exploration will provide a foundation for understanding how ideologies have been conceptualized and analyzed within their dominant traditions, which continue to influence contemporary thought.

It is important to note that ideology is a relatively recent phenomenon. This makes sense when you consider the origins and uses of the term throughout history.² This shows the



frequency of the term

"ideology" in written texts over time, from around 1800 to the present. The use of the term remains relatively low and stable until about the mid-20th century, where there is a sharp increase, peaking around the late 20th century before slightly declining and stabilizing again in the early 21st century.

This relates to the second and third chapters that address the central question of my thesis: *what are the origins of ideology as a pseudo-science, and how do they contribute to*

² “Google Books Ngram Viewer.” https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Ideology&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=en-2019&smoothing=3.

contemporary politics and social discourse today? Once I have outlined the dominant tradition of ideology, I will turn to the concept of ideology as a recent phenomenon outlined by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. This definition will serve as the foundation for my analysis of ideology throughout the thesis, as I go into the numerous distinctions between ‘regular -isms’ and ‘fully fledged ideologies.’

The dissemination of ideologies carries an inherent danger: the belief that the 'end justifies the means.' This is often articulated through promises of a 'bright future' or assurances of 'pain today for freedom tomorrow.' However, although theories are designed to guide practical actions, aligning them perfectly in real-world applications proves challenging. Often, there is a noticeable divide between the theoretical frameworks and their practical execution.

In our world, we are surrounded by a multitude of ideologies, including religion, capitalism, liberalism, racism, communism, and progressivism, each shaping our perceptions and interactions. However, it is important to note that only two of these ideologies have ever achieved a level of totality, fully dominating the societal landscape to an extent that they expose the intrinsic nature and full potential of ideological systems. These total ideologies serve as a lens through which the capabilities and risks of all ideological frameworks can be examined.

Moreover, the spectrum of ideologies, from capitalism and communism to Darwinism and creationism, and from views on abortion to militarism and pacifism, showcases the dynamic nature of ideological discourse. Each ideology inevitably sparks the creation of a counter-ideology, forming a dialectic that drives societal evolution and debate. For instance, the assertive nature of liberalism is often met with the principles of conservatism, just as the principles of militarism are challenged by pacifist views. This interplay highlights the fundamental conflict and balance within ideological interactions, demonstrating how every

ideology not only proposes a distinct worldview but also invites opposition, which in turn fuels a broader dialogue on values and beliefs. This dialogue often leads to further oversimplifications of reality and exacerbates the many conflicts inherent in our world. More often than not, we replace one ideology with another, resulting in our increased alienation from the world and from each other.

By delving deep into the study of ideologies, we can uncover the fundamental forces that sculpt societal divisions and forge individual convictions. This exploration allows us to see beyond the surface of political slogans and media sound bites to the core values and assumptions that underpin various social and political movements that mark the modern age. In a world where polarization is increasingly visible, the importance of understanding these ideological undercurrents becomes even more pronounced. It equips us with the tools to engage more thoughtfully in debates, recognize the complexities of issues, and perhaps find common ground in seemingly disparate viewpoints.

The overarching question of the project is *why ideology*. What shortcuts does it provide? What drives us to replace reality with abstract ideas? In our current climate, accusations of being an 'ideologue' are commonplace, perhaps symptomatic of the deep polarization engulfing our discussions. Maybe this is just an arbitrary and latent aspect of polarization. Welcome to the culture wars.

But I ultimately believe the issue runs deeper than mere name-calling. What compels us to elevate mere mortals to the status of gods or reduce them to the level of vermin? The answer goes beyond mere animosity. It is ideology that shapes our perceptions, turning our biases into sweeping, sometimes perilous, generalizations. Ideology not only persuades and polarizes us but also sustains itself by perpetually presenting solutions that appear straightforward — solutions

that insulate us from the full spectrum of human emotions, from the depths of pain to the peaks of joy — the world and its many nuances.

CHAPTER ONE

The Dominant Tradition of Ideology

“Ideological commitment is not first and foremost a matter of moral choice but of the taking of sides in a struggle between embattled groups.”

— Fredric Jameson³

From an outside perspective, ideology may appear as a symbol of sociology or as a fixed area of study. Defined as a noun, an ideology is a worldview or a system that encapsulates a dominant opinion, an overarching theory, or idea that characterizes a wide range of ideas, beliefs, and values.

For instance, capitalism, exemplified in the United States and many of its Western counterparts, is an ideology that advocates for the efficiency of free markets, emphasizing private ownership and profit generation while linking success to individual merit and hard work.⁴

Meanwhile, the ideology of nationalism is rooted in the belief that a shared language, culture, or

³ George Aichele et al., *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* (Yale University Press, 1995), 227, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1dr3804>.

⁴ Sarwat Jahan, and Ahmed Saber Mahmud, “What is Capitalism?” *International Monetary Fund*. June 2015, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2015). www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2015/06/basics.htm#:~:text=Capitalism%20is%20often%20thought%20of,motive%20to%20make%20a%20profit.

ethnicity justifies a separate nation-state. It revolves around the perpetuation of a national narrative that highlights its achievements, struggles, and virtues to shape a collective memory and identity.⁵ Even religions embody their own ideologies by offering explanations for the origins of the universe, the purpose of life, and the existence of the divine or supernatural.

What I think insofar as I am a capitalist, a Catholic, or an American nationalist — could all be calculated under the tapestry of ideology. Furthermore, by engaging in this process, we may observe how ideology plays an important role in the relationship between individuals beliefs and how a society functions. For instance, as a devoted American nationalist, I may prioritize the core principles of American citizenship, opting to formulate policies centered on providing green cards or asylum to those in need. On the flip side, I could very well consider immigration as a potential threat to national identity, prompting me to contemplate actions like border closures or immigration limitations.

As a capitalist I might prioritize policies aimed at deregulating industries and reducing government intervention in the economy. Conversely, I may worry about income inequality, seeing capitalism as widening social gaps, and support measures like wealth redistribution. Ultimately, the beliefs I hold and the various ways I may interpret them, as well as the extent to which I adhere to them, influences how I act in the world, both positively and negatively.

Thus, if we utilize ideology as a tool or starting point for understanding the dynamic interplay between belief systems and the functioning of society, we may be able to root out the good from the bad, and by doing so, we possess the key to figuring out the correct way to orient ourselves in the world. But what if there's something more going on here, something much worse than living in a world with some bad parts, what if ideology tricks us and deceives us?

⁵ Hans Kohn, "Nationalism | Definition, History, Examples, Principles, & Facts | Britannica," March 29, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nationalism>.

What if everything we believe is actually false?

For Karl Marx, what we think, believe, and know to be true, is not actually what is. What one may believe insofar that they are a capitalist, a Catholic, or an American nationalist, is all one big lie. Whether we deem ecclesiastical Catholicism better for humanity than the secular realm of capitalism is inconsequential, because all ideologies, in whatever form, represent false consciousness. And there is nothing more detrimental to humanity than living life through falsehoods. These are the ideas or “truths,” Marx and Engels outlined in *The German Ideology* in 1845, where the term “ideology” first appeared in the Marxist tradition. The term on one hand stayed within the normative framework, “the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness,” all that “men say, imagine, conceive,” however they went a step (many steps) further than this.⁶

Our conception of reality, in every scope, for Marx and Engels, are erroneous. In a letter Engels wrote on behalf of himself and Marx to Franz Mehring in 1893 stated, “Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness.”⁷ Ideologies are carried out by “the thinker,” who is unaware of the true motives driving his thoughts and actions. Ideology is equivalent to a distortion — a falsehood.

However it is not so much what I think as a devoted capitalist, nationalist, or Catholic, but what I think and how I think as someone under the structures of capitalism (in Marx’s case), nationalism, or Catholicism — is false. We, as thinkers, have failed to recognize that our

⁶ Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to The Critique of Political Economy*, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 1998), 42.

⁷ Engels, Friedrich. “Letter to F. Mehring.” *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Selected Works in Two Volumes, Volume II. Moscow*. Foreign Languages Publishing House (1949), 451. It is important to note that Marx never explicitly used the term “false consciousness,” rather it was inferred and solidified as a term by first by Engels, and then later added upon by the Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukás to mean “false-class consciousness” in his book *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). Ultimately, both adaptations encapsulate Marx’s overarching stance on ideology as a representation of falsehood, and have been so strictly embraced by those who follow a Marxist tradition, that these revisions are almost always discerned as Marx’s own words.

thoughts are not ours alone, but rather “thought material which he[we] accepts without examination.” This is an “old story” for Engles: we ignore the fictitious power of the ideologists “because we deny an independent historical development to the various ideological spheres which play a part in history we also deny them any effect upon history.”⁸

All ideas, beliefs, and values must be studied through the lens of historical materialism,⁹ because all historical developments and human progress emerge as a result of various elements, primarily that of “economic facts.”¹⁰ If we wish to understand what ideology is and how it functions, it must be done so through the light of historical materialism. By doing so, we see that our understanding of events and phenomena, facts and historical ‘truths,’ are not ours alone or reality itself, but products of ideology.

The reality is for Engles and Marx is that we ignore the fact that our very perceptions are products of our unjust economic conditions. The point of *The German Ideology* lies in illustrating to us that by disregarding empirical reality, we reinforce existing beliefs and subsequent structures, rather than challenging them. Engles provides multiple examples of limitations, for instance, when Luther and Calvin challenged the authority of the Catholic Church, these events were interpreted as intellectual breakthroughs within the realm of theology or philosophy. Rather than challenging the real material conditions, we merely challenged ideas with ideas, and there can be no new or radical ideas if the material conditions stay as they are.

Throughout history we have failed to recognize that “the class which has the means of production material production at its disposal has control at the same over the means of mental production.”¹¹ On one hand, as exemplified in the example above, Engles within a Marxist

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “Historical Materialism | Definition, Marx, Examples, Dialectical Materialism, & Facts | Britannica,” accessed April 30, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/historical-materialism>.

¹⁰ Engles, “Letter to F. Mehring,” 451.

¹¹ *The German Ideology*, 68.

tradition, critiques the intellectual idealism that asserts the autonomy of ideas. Moreover, this is a means of challenging the existing ways we have failed to critique capitalism, in order to declare unequivocally: that the economic structures of society, specifically the ownership of the means of production — shape the dominant ideologies.¹² In the Marxist critique of capitalism, the bourgeoisie own and control the means of production (such as factories, land, and capital), while the proletariat sell their labor in order to survive. For Marx, this economic arrangement creates a fundamental power imbalance, where the bourgeoisie wield significant power and influence over the means of production.¹³

Those who own the means of production, own the ideas of history and society. For Marx, capitalist societies allow for unjust and unprecedented levels of expropriation. But in order to achieve this under the facade of the free-market, capitalist ideology must serve a very specific purpose. Marx writes, “it is compelled ... to present its interests as the common interests of all members of society ... it has to give its ideas the form of universality.”¹⁴ The ideology of the dominant class, is an illusion that poses as something eternal and final. It leads people to perceive intellectual and capitalist victories as timeless truths, rather than products of historical contexts with specific functions and material conditions. In the Marxist tradition, ideologies masquerade as universal truths in order to perpetuate the cycle of exploitation, where one class (the proletariat) works from 9 to 5 and sells their labor for low wages. As a result this presupposes the representation and narrative of “false-class consciousness.” The term “false”

¹² This is closely connected to Marx’s notion of the superstructure (ideology), which was later developed in *Capital Vol. I* (1867), a term that encompasses various institutions such as the state, religion, education, media, and culture, which Marx believed are shaped by and serve the interests of the ruling class. These institutions help maintain the existing social order and legitimize the economic relations established by the base. The base, or the mode of production, forms the foundation of society and includes the means of production.

¹³ *The German Ideology*, 3-10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, .68.

represents the distorted perceptions and experiences of individuals who lack power, particularly the “class” that is divorced from the means of production within capitalist societies.

The purpose of *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels write, “to ridicule and discredit the philosophical struggle with the shadows of reality, which appeals to the dream muddled German nation.”¹⁵ The purpose is to uncloak and unveil misconceptions of the German middle class that merely mirror the “wretchedness of the real conditions in Germany.”¹⁶ To highlight the pervasive nature and power of ideology in order to make us aware of the underlying motives from above that dominate our beliefs.

Consequently, Post-Marxian interpretations, whether critiquing capitalism or any other -ism, have been dominated by the notion that ideology blurs the line between reality and falsehood, in order to perpetuate the status quo of the dominant class. To flatten the surface between two contradictory forces, so that one group or class becomes the subject of the manufactured and fabricated dreams of those with power. The dominant tradition of ideology through Marx emerges as a pejorative term aimed at identifying and targeting the ways in which we unthinkingly legitimize power. By uncovering how ideology fosters false consciousness that subjugates those under dominant control — particularly those who wield economic power for Marx — we become aware of the false and unjust conditions we live under.

All critiques within the Marxist tradition of ideology unveil three key aspects of the struggle inherent in meaning production: they elucidate the intricate relationship between meaning production and modes of production; they reveal the intricate dynamics of power (based on their specific social positions) relations that shape meaning; and establish their own meaning in order to affect those in their specific social position.

¹⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁶ Ibid.

In the end, every aspect of their critique juxtapose falsehood with reality, dominating with dominated, as call to action. If all meaning is fabricated, the imperative lies in disempowering through revolution as the sole avenue to reveal reality. In the Marxist tradition it means to live truly and completely in the unfettered communist utopia, or in anything other critique by the way of some other -ism. The concept of ideology in the Marxist tradition serves as a tool for critiquing and unveiling ideologies themselves, in order to liberate us and inspire us to rebel against “imaginary beings” and the “rule of concepts.”¹⁷

However, hypocrisy exists here. More often than not, when we attempt to unmask and dismantle power, we fail to recognize our own bias and agendas inherent in our views. In our attempt to unveil and reveal reality, we overlook the fact that we too supplant one ideology for another — an idea for an idea, a class for a class. By critiquing ideology through the idea of the class-struggle and historical materialism, Marxism aims to cultivate a comprehensive social praxis and consciousness. But in this worldview, everything is an ideology, except for the communist utopia of course. Why? Because it is more ‘just.’

I: The Origins of the Term

The notion that ideology is synonymous with false consciousness — is the dominant way we have understood ideology since Karl Marx. However, Marx was not its initial coiner, rather it was the French philosopher, Antonie Destutt de Tracy who introduced the term in the years

¹⁷ Preface to *The German Ideology*, p. 30.

leading up to the French Revolution to describe his own “science of ideas.”¹⁸ The etymology reflects this very notion. The term “idea: originates from the Greek “idein,” meaning “to see” or “to perceive,” while the suffix “-logy” derives from the Greek “-logia,” indicating “the study of” or “branch of knowledge” — collectively simplifying the study or science of ideas.¹⁹

Destutt de Tracy introduced the term publicly for the first time during a lecture titled “Mémoire sur la faculté de penser,” presented to the Institut de France in 1796.²⁰ Tracy proposed ideology as an empirical science against the backdrop of metaphysical and ontological inquiries that dominated France during the Enlightenment era. Before, human knowledge had predominantly been a by-product of metaphysical abstractions, this for Tracy lacked the empirical foundation necessary to legitimize knowledge. Whereas, his vision of a “science of ideas” stood firmly in a sensationalist tradition, meaning all knowledge of “ideas” would come from direct experience, such as perception, memory, judgment, and will.²¹

It has often been recounted that ideology was merely a neutral term for an empirical practice that held very little political content. However this very understanding ignores its intentions. Emmet Kennedy writes, “Ideology” was, in the minds of founders, more than the Greek translation of “science des idées.”²² Ideology was meant not only to be “positive” but to be useful. The word “positive” during the eighteenth century was used to mean “exact” and “scientific,” which meant that through this sensualist approach, one could not only analyze the consequences of ideas, but also to discern truth from falsehood, and distinguish between the

¹⁸ It is important to note, that Tracy coined the term while confined in a jail cell, during a period of intense political upheaval leading up to the end of the French Revolution. This was an era marked by significant political turmoil, notably the Insurrection of August 10th, which resulted in the fall of the Lafayette Monarchy. This event triggered a wave of political repression and further instability throughout France.

¹⁹ “Antoine-Louis-Claude, Comte Destutt de Tracy | Britannica,” <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Antoine-Louis-Claude-Comte-Destutt-de-Tracy>.

²⁰ Emmet Kennedy, “‘Ideology’ from Destutt De Tracy to Marx,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 3 (July 1979): 354, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2709242>.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 354.

²² *Ibid.*, 358.

good and the bad.²³ Furthermore, Tracy envisioned ideology as not only a science of ideas but as the preeminent science from which all others would derive; “placing ideology squarely in its seat as the new queen.”²⁴ Tracy's aspiration was to create a hierarchical structure of knowledge, with ideology occupying the highest position, guiding and informing the development of other scientific disciplines. For instance, if ideology was elevated to a position of primacy, it could influence students with correct ideas, potentially shielding them from past moral and metaphysical errors. Ideology through its positivist approach could transform its findings into a “theory of moral and political sciences,” thus rescuing the revolution.²⁵

At the time of its implementation, Napoleon had initially shown interest in ideology as he searched for new constitutional ideas, since Tracy and his followers wielded significant political influence in France at the time. However, as his regime faced challenges, Napoleon ridiculed Tracy and the ideological concepts as pretentious, abstract, and detached from “the real world.”²⁶ He swiftly reversed his stance and derogatorily denounced them as “ideologues.”²⁷ It's important to understand that Napoleon used the term to advance his own political agendas, this is a key aspect of ideology that we will explore in the subsequent sections.

This notable shift in attitude at the time of its conception contributed significantly to the negative connotation associated with the term “ideology,” a stigma that still persists to this day. Napoleon's dismissal of ideology found resonance in subsequent critiques, one of which was exemplified by John Adams' characterization of ideology as the “science of idiocy,” since “such

²³ Maurice Cranston, “Ideology | Nature, History, & Significance | Britannica,” February 22, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ideology-society>.

²⁴ Kennedy, 356.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 354.

²⁶ H. M. Drucker, “Marx's Concept of Ideology,” *Philosophy* 47, no. 180 (1972): 152–61, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3750102>.

²⁷ Kennedy, 364.

utopian expectations were illusions.”²⁸ As a result of its changing connotations, the term "ideology" also came to be applied to various political factions. While initially associated with the liberal republicans in Tracy's circle, it also came to be associated with political factions and used to describe rival political groups espousing competing abstract ideologies. Thus, "ideology" became a label not only for specific sets of ideas but also for the political movements and factions associated with them.²⁹

Within a few short years of its introduction in 1796, the term "ideology" underwent a remarkable transformation. Initially conceived as a science of ideas, it soon became synonymous with a utopian illusion that was used by different political factions to attack threatening ideals; a notion that was later embraced by Karl Marx half a century later.

The next section will explore Marx's conception of ideology and the role it plays in society. It is important to note that Marx's exploration of ideology lacks a systematic treatment, with his insights dispersed across various writings. In order to grasp Marx's concept of ideology, we must ferret around two fundamental questions. Firstly, we ask “how are ideas formed,” exploring how ideas emerge within the context of material reality, paving the way for the emergence of ideologies. Secondly, we will probe into the nature of ideology itself, “what is ideology,” in order to identify features that render certain ideas ideological.

²⁸ “John Adams | Biography, Political Party, Children, Presidency, & Facts | Britannica,” April 13, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Adams-president-of-United-States>.

²⁹ “Ideology - Sociology, Knowledge, Beliefs | Britannica,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ideology-society/The-sociology-of-knowledge>.

II: The Riddle of History

In the opening line of the preface to *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels write, “Hitherto men have always formed wrong ideas about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be.”³⁰ They argued that these mistaken beliefs were the “kernel of the modern Young-Hegelian Philosophy.”³¹ Here, Marx and Engels are critiquing the idealism they encountered during their time as former members of the Young-Hegelians. For instance, Hegel’s idealism asserted that reality was fundamentally mental or spiritual in nature, and that the material world was ultimately shaped by ideas or the mind. One of the key tenets of Hegel’s idealism was the concept of *geist*³² or “Absolute Spirit,” which represents the ultimate reality or absolute truth. According to Hegel, *geist* manifests itself through a process of self-realization or self-development, known as dialectics.³³ This dialectical process sought to understand truth or

³⁰ *The German Ideology*, 29.

³¹ The Young-Hegelians were a group of German leftist intellectuals who employed Hegel’s idealism in order to advocate for a more progressive view on society. While Marx and Engels were originally members of the group, they ultimately split from the group and Hegel’s idealism in order to develop their own methods of materialism that would later become the foundation of Marxism.

³² A term in Hegelian philosophy which doesn’t translate exactly into English but means “spirit” or “mind,” referring to the collective consciousness of a society or historical period. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807).

³³ This was borrowed from the Ancient Greek philosophy of dialects that served as methodological approach involving the dynamic interplay between opposing perspectives or ideas in order to achieve a higher truth or resolution. Perhaps, one of the most quintessential examples of this occurred in Plato’s *Republic*, when Plato illustrated dialectical movements through a back-and-forth exchange between Socrates and Glaucon. While both variations engaged in contradiction, Plato focused on Socrates and his interlocutors — people — while Hegel centered his dialogue around the subject matter — ideas. For Hegel, this ideal of man or a “normal man” (in Marx’s words), was profoundly influenced by an experience of “alienation.” This was a direct product of the radical changes Europe had undergone in the 19th century. Science swept through every street, religion was dead – God given-rights were replaced by the ‘Rights of Man’ — capitalism had emerged victorious. Alienation was used to describe the effects of industrialization, the term itself translates into two distinct German words: *Entfremdung* (estrangement) and *Entäußerung* (externalization). For Hegel, industrialization led to alienation by disrupting traditional forms of labor, fostering social isolation, perpetuating exploitative work conditions, and eroding the meaning and purpose of work. Essentially, industrialization led to a sense of disconnection and estrangement among individuals, separating them not only from themselves but also from their world, society, and even their own humanity. The concept of alienation aimed to comprehend the intricate relationship between the human spirit (*geist*) and its interaction with society. For Hegel, alienation was intricately woven to his dialectical method; if alienation arises when individuals experience a disconnect from themselves and their surroundings, it leads to disunity. Thus dialectics serve as a tool

development through *aufhebung*: sublimation or the overcoming of contradictions. For Hegel, ideas were not just passive reflections of reality but active forces driving historical change.³⁴ In this view, the clash and resolution of contradictory ideas propelled the movement of history, thus, the dialectical process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis were fundamental in understanding the dynamic unfolding of human history.³⁵

However, by positing the independent existence of ideas, thought, and consciousness, “German philosophers merely fought against phrases rather than coming to terms with the real world.”³⁶ Thus this philosophy obscured reality and embraced a concealed reality, and adopted what Marx and Engels called an ideology. They argued that “in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*.” Like a *camera obscura*, our perceptions of reality present an inverted portrayal, where what we perceive as true is actually a distortion of the genuine circumstances and truths of our existence.³⁷

Like a *camera obscura*, we live in a box, in which light only ever enters through a small hole, and projects inverted images back at us. Just like the retina of our eyes reverses the images our eyes perceive. There is no reflection theory of truth, everything is not what it seems. This is an inescapable reality for Marx. Marx writes “there is no specific difference between German

for transcending this separation by reconciling and smoothing over conflicting forces or ideas. By acknowledging and resolving the inherent contradictions of alienation, individuals have the chance at attaining higher levels of self-awareness and social cohesion. In this sense, human beings and their ideas serve as catalysts for change.

³⁴ McTaggart, J. Ellis. “Hegel’s Treatment of the Categories of the Idea.” *Mind*, vol. 9, no. 34, 1900, 145–83. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2247565>.

³⁵ The process begins with a thesis: a foundational idea or state of being, however, this isn’t stagnant; it encounters opposition, leading to the emergence of an antithesis: a contradiction or negation of the initial idea. From this clash a synthesis arises, it is not a mere compromise but rather a new perspective that possesses the ability to transcend contradiction, leading to a higher truth. Likewise, the “reflection theory of truth” that was prominent during the Enlightenment, posited that the mind functions as a mirror, reflecting truth as a direct result of one’s beliefs and engagement with the world. In both contexts, truth is viewed as a fluid process, molded by the dynamic interplay between one’s consciousness and external environment.

³⁶ Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions 95 (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5.

³⁷ A *camera obscura* is an optical device that consists of a darkened chamber with a small aperture, projecting inverted images of the external scene onto the opposite surface.

idealism and the ideology of all the other nations.”³⁸ Marx’s conception of ideology in this regard is negative as he rejects and critiques the idealistic fantasies of the Young Hegelians. The Young Hegelians, Marx writes, “merely imitates in a philosophic form the conceptions of the German middle class ... only mirrors the wretchedness of the real conditions in Germany.”³⁹ In this passage, Marx addresses the first question posed in the introduction, “how are ideas formed?” Our ideas are constructed by a process of reflection and mirroring of the surrounding social and economic conditions. By critiquing the idealism of the Young Hegelians, arguing that their philosophical conceptions merely imitate the beliefs and interests of the German middle class, Marx answers the second question posited, “what is ideology?”

For Marx, these ideas, that lack depth and rigor, serve as reflections of the wretched conditions we are living under. Marx is suggesting that our ideas are not products of independence, and even philosophical inquiry is not exempt from this influence, rather they emerge from the social and material realities in which we are situated. Thus, the formation of ideas is influenced by the broader social context and reflects the prevailing class interests and struggles. Marx undertakes three key tasks here, elucidating the various facets of ideology and his method for comprehending, challenging, and ultimately realizing the false conditions of our existence.

1. Ideas are materially rooted, thus we can only understand their formation by assessing our real material conditions.
2. By engaging with the material world, we see how ideas and subsequently ideologies reflect false consciousness. Furthermore, by recognizing that ideology mirrors false consciousness, particularly in the context of unjust material conditions that govern our lives, we illuminate or unveil how ideologies serve to reinforce the status quo and uphold the interests of the

³⁸ *The German Ideology*, 30.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

ruling class. This acknowledgement underscores the specific role ideologies play within Marxist critique.

3. By engaging with material reality, we have the opportunity to combat these ideologies and challenge the ways in which we uncritically legitimize power. While the second and third aspects carry negative and pejorative connotations, the first and last are positively rooted in the potential for transformative change. It is also important to note that all the aspects outlined above, though presented separately for classification, must be viewed as interconnected. This includes both the negative and positive aspects.

Within the realm of the first aspect, Marx addresses how ideas are formed and subsequently establishes the task and methodology of historical materialism in tackling this inquiry.⁴⁰ In the “Theses on Feuerbach,” which was written a year prior to *The German Ideology* and served as its basis, Marx’s critique of old materialism lays the groundwork for understanding ideology by highlighting the shortcomings of traditional approaches to understanding reality.⁴¹

For Marx, old materialism, primarily Ludwig Feuerbach, treated “reality” and “sensuousness” as objects of contemplation. — like the idealism of the Young Hegelians, he too treats reality through abstract concepts.⁴² For instance, as outlined in *Theses VI*, Marx criticizes Feuerbach for failing to recognize that the essence of humanity is not an abstract concept inherent in each individual, but rather emerges from the ensemble of social relations.⁴³ Marx

⁴⁰ Historical materialism is a theory and methodology that understands human history as the result of material conditions and economic factors. It posits that the mode of production forms the basis for social relations and ideologies, driving historical development. By examining the material conditions of society, historical materialism seeks to uncover the underlying forces that shape social change and class struggle.

⁴¹ The “Theses on Feuerbach” in the spring of 1845, writing after having been exiled from both Germany and subsequently Paris for their involvement in ‘radical political activities.’ The Theses were a collection of eleven philosophical notes critiquing the old materialism of Ludwig Feuerbach *The German Ideology*, which was written during the fall of 1845 and completed approximately a year after the *Theses*. It is important to note that neither work was published during Marx and Engels’ lifetimes and remained unpublished until 1932, when they were finally released by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow. Additionally, many current publications present the *Theses* as the opening chapter of *The German Ideology*, rather than existing as separate texts, which provides insight into how Marx and Engels intended their works to be read and understood. The two works focused on the history of theory and critiquing it, signifying the culmination of a period of development of Marx’s maturing thought — his transition from idealism to materialism.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 572.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 573.

contends that Feuerbach's failure stems from his reluctance to engage with the historical process and instead abstracts the essence of man as a static concept. Feuerbach reduces the essence of man to a mere "species," neglecting the dynamic and interconnected nature of social relations that shape human existence. By focusing solely on isolated individuals and neglecting the historical and social context, Feuerbach overlooks the complex interplay between individuals and society in defining human essence.

In a similar fashion, in *Theses VII*, Marx rebukes Feuerbach for failing to recognize that religion is "itself a social product." Marx emphasizes that religious sentiments, akin to any other beliefs and values, "belong(s) to a particular form of society."⁴⁴ Marx underscores that religious sentiments, like other beliefs and values, are shaped by the societal context in which they arise, and highlights the ways in which ideas are formed. Furthermore, by emphasizing the dependence of religious ideas on specific societal structures, Marx paves the way for understanding ideology.

Understanding how ideas are formed is important for understanding ideology because it reveals the social and material conditions that influence the development of beliefs and values. While ideology is not explicitly mentioned here or anywhere in the *Theses*, it is implicitly referenced through Marx's critique of Feuerbach's understanding of religion. Marx argues that religion is a social product, meaning it is shaped by and reflects the specific societal structures from which it emerges. This notion suggests that religious beliefs and values are not innate or transcendent but are instead constructed within a particular social context. By highlighting religion as a product of society, Marx implies that it functions as an ideology—a set of beliefs and values that serve to justify and maintain existing social relations and power dynamics. Therefore, understanding religion as a social product inherently connects it to the broader

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 574.

concept of ideology, emphasizing its role in shaping and perpetuating social norms and structures.

In essence, grasping the process of idea formation is crucial for comprehending ideology, as it unveils the societal and material contexts that shape the evolution of convictions and principles. In the context of the question "how are ideas formed," historical materialism emphasizes the dialectical relationship between material conditions and human consciousness. It posits that the economic base of society, consisting of the means of production and the relations of production, fundamentally shapes the social and ideological. Ideas are not formed in isolation but are influenced by the prevailing material conditions of society. The first point, regarding the formation of ideas through the lens of historical materialism as a means to grasp reality, inherently leads to an understanding of the second point: the recognition that ideologies embody false consciousness.

To the second point, by analyzing the material world and its social relations, Marx uncovered how ideologies emerge as reflections of prevailing power structures. For instance, in capitalist societies, the means of production, such as factories and machinery, are owned by capitalists. Meanwhile, workers sell their labor to capitalists in exchange for wages. This economic relationship places capitalists in a position of power, as they control the means of generating wealth, while workers depend on capitalists for employment and income. As a result, capitalists have the ability to dictate the terms of labor, including wages and working conditions, which often prioritize profit maximization over the well-being of workers.

For Marx, ideas and ideology reflect the unjust material conditions in the foundation, giving rise to a distorted consciousness. Marx writes, "Your very ideas are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property, just as your jurisprudence is

but the will of your class made into a law for all, a will whose essential character and direction are determined by the economic conditions of existence of your class.”⁴⁵ Marx underscores the intimate connection between ideas, ideology, and the underlying economic conditions of society, often referred to as the "base" in Marxist theory. He argues that ideas and ideologies are not abstract or independent creations but rather emerge from and reflect the material realities of the economic base, particularly in capitalist societies.

The economic base, characterized by bourgeois production and property relations, shapes the prevailing ideology of society, which Marx coined the “superstructure.” Marx infamously wrote, “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.”⁴⁶ Those who own the means of production in the base, have the influence and power to control the ideas or ideology in the superstructure. These ideas are not neutral and serve a very specific purpose for Marx. For Marx, the legal system, or jurisprudence, is a prime example of how the ruling class imposes its will on society through ideology. Laws and regulations are not impartial expressions of justice but rather instruments used to perpetuate the dominance of the bourgeoisie and maintain the existing social order. The legal system reflects and reinforces the economic conditions that benefit the capitalist class, thereby creating a false consciousness among the proletariat and other oppressed classes.⁴⁷

Marx writes, “For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the

⁴⁵Ibid., 27.

⁴⁶ Ibid., .67.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 27-33.

form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones.”⁴⁸ He contended that the ideas propagated by the ruling class are not merely reflective of their own interests but are presented as universal truths that benefit all members of society. This universality of ideas serves to conceal the inherent contradictions and inequalities of the capitalist system, thereby maintaining the domination of the ruling class.

Lastly, Marx’s definition of ideology serves as a tool to uncover the ways in which we unthinkingly legitimize power, with the aim of raising our consciousness to effect change in the world. In the final line of the “Theses on Feuerbach,” Marx writes, “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”⁴⁹ To make us aware of the false reality we are living in, so that one day we may experience reality through the light of communism. Marx writes, “Communism is the riddle of history solved and knows itself to be this solution.”⁵⁰ Communism represents the true resolution of the historical contradictions and conflicts inherent in capitalist society. A vision of a future society free from the constraints of ideological exploitation — a critical examination with positive ends.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁹ *The German Ideology*, “The Theses on Feuerbach,” (571), Marx and Engels wrote “Theses on Feuerbach” in the spring of 1845, writing after being exiled from both Germany and subsequently Paris for their involvement in ‘radical political activities.’ (Forward from *GI*, vii). The *Theses* were a collection of eleven philosophical notes critiquing the old materialism of Ludwig Feuerbach. This would later serve as the basis for their larger work, *The German Ideology*, which was written during the fall of 1845 and completed approximately a year after the *Theses*. It is important to note that neither work was published during Marx and Engels’ lifetimes and remained unpublished until 1932, when they were finally released by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow. Additionally, many current publications present the *Theses* as the opening chapter of *The German Ideology* rather than existing as separate texts, which provides insight into how Marx and Engels intended their works to be read and understood. The two works focused on the history of theory and critiquing it, signifying the culmination of a period of development of Marx’s maturing thought — his transition from idealism to materialism.

⁵⁰ “Marx’s Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>.

CHAPTER TWO

The Unprecedented Nature of Ideology

When Hannah Arendt began writing *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1944, her initial focus centered around the elements of Nazism, ultimately viewing “antisemitism” as an expression of “race-imperialism.”⁵¹ It wasn't until 1947 that she conceived a final section of the book, dedicated to totalitarianism, in light of her recent revelations that linked Nazism and the USSR under the umbrella of total-domination. In her rush to publish *Origins* in 1951 and convey to her readers the palpability of totalitarianism, Arendt fell short in constructing a conclusive argument that underscored her thesis on the unprecedented nature of totalitarianism.⁵² So, in 1958 Arendt published a second addition of *Origins* and in the preface addressed the many shortcomings of her book: “there were certain insights of a strictly theoretical nature, closely connected with my analysis of the elements of total domination, which I did not possess when I finished the original manuscript.”⁵³ The most notable revision being the addition of chapter thirteen, “Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government,” which serves as the theoretical glue in its attempts to understand the principles of totalitarianism in tandem with its phenomenal reality. This, for

⁵¹ Roger Berkowitz, “Chapter Two: Totalitarianism: Ideology, Terror, and Loneliness,” 3.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2017), xi.

Arendt, was an attempt to rethink the origins and elements of totalitarianism that “marked the crisis of our times.”

One of the most significant aspects in the second edition is the prominent role Arendt gives ideology. For Arendt, we can’t even begin to understand the unprecedented nature of totalitarianism without acknowledging the power of ideas. Those who instigate or follow policies that result in large-scale murder must be motivated by ideological conviction.

For Arendt, ideology is a recent phenomena for two main reasons. Firstly, the origins of ideology are directly related to the “tremendous” intellectual shift that occurred in the middle of the 19th century that consisted of interpreting everything as being a stage in some larger development.⁵⁴ For Arendt, the unprecedented nature of ideology is a direct result of the Scientific Revolution and mass industrialization.

Three years after Arendt published *Origins*, she wrote *The Human Condition*, where she characterized the modern age through three key developments: the discovery of America, the Protestant Reformation, and the invention of the telescope.⁵⁵ Out of the three events, Arendt explained that while the invention of the telescope might have appeared inconsequential at the time of its conception, it had the most impact on the contemporary world. Arendt writes, “He [Galileo] put within the grasp of earth-bound creature and its body-bound senses what had seemed forever beyond his reach, at best opened to the uncertainties of speculation and imagination.”⁵⁶ The telescope taught us two things for Arendt, it showcased the boundless potentials of human capabilities, and it revealed the fallibility of human senses.

In the preface to the first edition of *Origins*, Arendt writes, “It is as though mankind had divided itself between those who believe in human omnipotence (who think that everything is

⁵⁴ Ibid., 608-609.

⁵⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 250–60.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 260.

possible if one knows how to organize masses for it) and those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives.”⁵⁷ The notion of progress and doom, two opposing forces perpetually oscillating back and forth, are two sides of the same coin. If the modern age can be characterized by the pervasive ideas of progress and utopian dreams — these ideals serve as the bedrock upon which ideologies take root and flourish.

Secondly, ideologies were only fully realized through the totalitarian regimes of Hitler and Stalin, alongside the Jim Crow era in the United States. However, Arendt only names “two great” ideologies of the twentieth century — Darwinism and Marxism — employed distinct explanations of the dominance of Aryans and the proletariat, side by side with the persecution of the Jews and the bourgeoisie. Considering the two ideologies, Arendt provides us with a theoretical account of the totalitarian elements inherent in all ideological thinking:

- (a) ideologies detach themselves from the realities of lived experiences and instead rely on logical-oversimplified explanations for the world;
- (b) they are always concerned with controlling and predicting the progress of history;
- (c) ideological thinking insists upon a ‘truer reality,’ that is hidden beyond the observable world.

It’s important to note that ideologies themselves have no real power since they are nothing more than logical ideas. This means that we must attempt to understand them by considering the various contexts in which they have been employed, particularly in light of Arendt’s analysis of the role and function of ideology in totalitarianism.

⁵⁷ *Origins.*, xi.

- (a) ideologies are first and foremost political weapons;
- (b) they are politically and socially persuasive, which means they cater to some aspects of reality and lived experiences;
- (c) all ideologies present themselves as pseudo-scientific claims, purporting to unravel all the mysteries of the universe.

While Arendt acknowledges the existence of other ideologies, such as capitalism, she ultimately distinguishes between, what we could call ‘regular-isms’ and ‘fully-fledged ideologies’ or ‘ideologies’ and ‘totalitarian ideologies.’ While the latter inherently have winners and losers as well as foundational principles governing their establishments; what unites Darwinism and Marxism under the unprecedented tapestry of totalitarian ideology, is the conviction that their respective theoretical path toward a racial or class-based utopia, hinges upon an unwavering commitment to ideological purity. Thus in order to understand the dangers of ideology in a world marked by a plethora of ideologies, we must make distinctions.

I: What is Ideology?

In the added chapter, “Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government,” Arendt delineates three fundamental totalitarian characteristics inherent in *all* ideological-thinking.⁵⁸ First, ideologies are always concerned with progress and motion. Born out of the Scientific Revolution, ideologies too, can be characterized by the “the refusal to view or accept anything ‘as it is.’”⁵⁹ All ideologies, for Arendt, are always concerned with arranging society to actualize

⁵⁸ Ibid., 618.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 609.

their idea into a living reality, thus they invariably gravitate towards mobilization and action in the name of progress and the insistence on a ‘truer’ reality.

Racism and Marxism — the “two great” ideologies Arendt identifies — Darwin's idea of the development of nature, that life evolves according to the principle of ‘survival of the fittest,’ leading to propagation of advantageous traits over generations, was later adopted by the Nazi’s — and Marxism, the notion that historical progress hinges upon the perpetual class struggle, until one emerges victorious, became the guiding principle of Bolshevism.⁶⁰ The notion that races and classes are in continual adaptation and struggle, in nature and history, implies a dynamic and evolving process of societal change.

Both ideologies claimed to offer total explanations that focused solely on the element of motion oriented towards history, meaning they were always concerned with what could or should occur, in the name of nature or history as a means of legitimizing their claims. Even Nazism, which was rooted in Darwin's law of the ‘survival of the fittest,’ used natural principles as historical laws to shape species and societies into something they fundamentally weren't under the guise of inevitability.⁶¹ For Arendt, Darwinism is fundamentally analogous to Marx’s historical approach, because both created a theoretical conflict, the Aryans or Jews, and the proletariat or bourgeoisie, as the driving force behind historical change.

Both ideologies believed (or said that they believed) that we were living in a false reality, in order to drive change. Unveiling that one race was ‘unfit to live’ or one class was ‘unfit to rule,’ may purport itself as the embodiment of truth, but the reality of its cause was that it exploited these notions as a tool to advance their own utopian fantasy. The term "progress" means a forward movement towards a destination (race-society and communist utopia), which

⁶⁰ Ibid., 608.

⁶¹ Ibid., 608.

implies that motion and subsequent action were inherent in both the class or race struggle. The idea that one class or race was fit to die, centered itself around the inevitability of evolution as means for supplanting capitalism with communism or an inferior race for a superior race, in the name of progress and ‘truth.’

This brings us directly to Arendt’s second point, ideological thinking is “independent of all experience” and “insists on a ‘truer’ reality concealed behind all perceptible things.”⁶² It is the belief that reality, the world around us, cannot be fully perceived through our five senses alone. Instead, ideological-thinking introduces and nurtures a "sixth sense," acting as a direct conduit or revelation of reality itself. Ideological thinking, much like scientific progress, constructs a framework through which we can comprehend the world, not ‘as it is’ but ‘as it should be.’ Because this narrative, like a telescope, “looks upon all factuality as fabricated” it has the ability to dismiss normative distinctions between true and false, or right and wrong.⁶³ This grants it the freedom to shape the world according to its own vision, as it deems the existing reality as inherently flawed. With boundaries blurred, there are no constraints to impede its perpetual motion.

All ideologies suggest that we are living under a “false consciousness” because we are influenced by the dominance of the ruling class or the evil Jewish nature. It is an ideological call to action, meaning the proletariat must rise up against the bourgeoisie, and the Aryan against the Jew. Not because they have experienced injustice or direct harm, but because the theoretical framework dictates so. For Marx, if our experiences and understandings are falsified by those in power, we must rise up against unjust power to see the truth, but the notion that reality can only be revealed in another world, is the antithesis of reality. There is no other world. Understanding

⁶² Ibid., 618.

⁶³ Ibid., 603.

reality and the world requires moving beyond oversimplified worldviews. In this regard, all ideological thinking bears resemblance to Marx's concept of "false consciousness," but this time, Marx is not outside of his own framework.

Thirdly, since ideologies themselves are detached from reality, this means they have no power to actually change the true nature of the world, therefore they must attach themselves onto a specific train of thought. Racism is not merely the idea of race, rather, it attaches itself to ideological thinking surrounding the concept of race.

Arendt writes, "ideology is quite literally what its name indicates: "it is the logic of an idea." ⁶⁴ The term itself, Arendt argues, implies that "ideas" can be treated as subjects of study, likening it to the ways in which animals are studied in zoology — the suffix "-logy" suggests a body of scientific statements made on the subject. Arendt further articulates this pseudo-scientific characteristic by contrasting Deism with theology, in the treatment of God. ⁶⁵ While theology acknowledges God through divine revelation drawn from contextual bodies, such as religious texts and traditions; on the contrary, Deism merely masquerades itself as taking part in this same enterprise — it is nothing more than a pseudo-philosophy that employs the idea of God as a tool for explaining the world in a "scientific" manner in order to legitimize its claims.

What this shows is that all ideologies attach themselves to a specific train of thought, since ideology is "the logic of an idea." The term "logic" refers to the formal system of principles and rules governing reason, whereby conclusions are drawn from a set of premises rather than from experience, meaning or context.⁶⁶ Likewise, to how Deism begins with the idea of God — ideologies begin from an axiomatically accepted premise or idea that reduces

⁶⁴ Ibid., 616.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 615.

⁶⁶ "Logic | Definition, Types & Uses | Britannica," February 24, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/logic>.

everything else from that starting point.⁶⁷ Communism proposes that reality can only be comprehended through the idea of the class-struggle and the lens of historical materialism, regardless of any other empirical or rational notions that may say otherwise. This argument rests on the idea that we are inherently shaped by the ideologies of the ruling class. However this premise is axiomatically accepted and remains steadfast throughout the argument, because any contrary evidence would harm the communist revolution. Ultimately, however unjust the exploitation of capitalism is, we cannot understand it through one singular idea. Even when studying ideologies such as racism and class struggle, we can acknowledge the axiomatically accepted premises inherent in them, however if we stop at this point, we overlook other underlying elements and risk falling into the same narrow minded thinking as these ideologies.

For Arendt, ideologies are pseudo-scientific claims. Their significance does not lie in their ideas, but in the logical framework they establish. Ideologies claim to offer total explanations of historical events and social phenomena, focusing solely on the element of motion and history. Like logic, they are completely independent of experience, insisting instead that there is an inevitable hidden reality, in hopes of changing the world according to their ideological assertions.⁶⁸ Motion is always indicative of its logical idea, which is why Marx writes “the point is to change it.” If the aim is to transform the world, they must commit themselves rigorously to the idea, which is why Arendt renders this inclination to a pseudo-science, because genuine scientific methodology adjusts hypotheses in response to contradiction. Ideologies adhere to axiomatic premises and deduce conclusions regardless of evidence, in order to immerse themselves in the whirlwind of motion and progress in hopes of solving all the “riddles of the universe.” This is exemplified by Marx’s infamous statement: “Communism is the riddle of

⁶⁷ *Origins*, p. 618.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 618-19.

history solved and knows itself to be this solution." These three elements of ideological thinking are totalitarian for Arendt because they seek total explanations and solutions for all the nuances of life, and seek to conform reality into one understanding and way of life.

For now, the significance of this distinction lies in Arendt's definition of ideology and its relation to totalitarianism. Arendt considers these three elements of ideological thinking as totalitarian because they strive for comprehensive explanations and solutions to all facets of existence, aiming to impose a singular (total) understanding and way of life onto reality. While Arendt delineates the essence of ideology through three distinct characteristics that provide insight into how ideologies function and interact with the world through logic and motion, Arendt does not end here. However, for the sake of clarification, let's merge these elements into a comprehensive definition of ideology, irrespective of the ways in which they have been utilized by totalitarian regimes.

II: Ideologies - isms

Arendt writes that there are "three specifically totalitarian elements that are peculiar to all ideological thinking."⁶⁹ Does this mean that *all* ideologies or ideological thinking are inherently totalitarian? Or could this also mean that there are other aspects of ideological thinking that aren't totalitarian?

⁶⁹ Ibid., 618.

In the second section of the chapter focused on ideology, Arendt begins with the compound phrase, “ideologies – isms.”⁷⁰ Although Arendt through the entirety of *Origins* makes a point to distinguish that there have only been “two great” ideologies, Darwinism and Marxism, this claim suggests a different perspective. Ideology, represented by “-ism,” highlights that there are more ideologies than just the two, -isms such as, feminism, capitalism, conservatism, nationalism, anarchism, liberalism, and progressivism, the list goes on and on. It is easy to see how these are all political ideologies or movements attached to their own set of belief systems. However, before fully incorporating these under the web of ideology, let's attempt to make some distinctions, based off of the language Arendt uses when discussing ideology and totalitarianism.

When discussing ideology within the context of totalitarian regimes, Arendt asserts that there have only been “two great” ideologies⁷¹ — considered “great” due to their ascent to the pinnacle of totalitarianism. Additionally, she underscores the fact that ideologies are solely logical constructs, which means they must attach themselves to tangible elements, such as political regimes and institutions. In this regard, the ideological thinking of both Darwinism and Marxism, proved to display sufficient totalitarian traits to reach that level. This is demonstrated by her choice of language; she refrains from directly naming the two dominant ideologies as Nazism or Bolshevism, instead referring to them as the “programs of Nazism or Bolshevism.”⁷² Furthermore, she says things like, “when the Nazis talked about the law of nature or when the Bolsheviks talk about the law of history,”⁷³ or “the fanatical adoption by the Bolsheviks.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Ibid., 615.

⁷¹ Ibid., 620.

⁷² Ibid., 295.

⁷³ Ibid., 608.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 308.

Communism and Marxism are political and economic theories which the Bolsheviks adopted as the form of government after the revolution.⁷⁵ It may seem as if they are one and the same, both communists, however one was a political theory that only became fully-realized once it was embraced. Similarly the Nazi party was the political movement of National-Socialism that adopted Darwinism as their guiding principles. This highlights that ideologies come into existence when they are used. Furthermore, there are certain ideologies that prove to be more efficient in the effort to reach total-domination.

Ideology, signified by "-ism," means that every -ism, spanning from feminism to anti-feminism, racism to anti-racism, is an ideology. In this regard, ideology is more pervasive than Marx's notion of ideology as "false consciousness" as a result of capitalism. While Marx confines ideology to the dichotomy of dominant class versus oppressed class, which can be inferred as well as the dominant race versus oppressed race, or the colonizer versus colonized — a perspective that many of us hold today — Arendt would categorize all forms of thinking as ideological in this sense. However there is a distinction to be made between theoretical doctrines and ideologies, alongside regular -isms and fully-fledged ideologies. For instance, standing alone capitalism, progressivism, and conservatism are all theoretical doctrines and ideas, which means that they can only become ideologies (not necessarily fully-fledged) when they are used and implemented, such as in the United States.

The very space between the word "ideology" and the suffix "-ism," implies that there is a distinction between the two that lies in their usage and connotations. Broadly speaking, "ideology" typically refers to a comprehensive system of ideas, beliefs, and values that inform a

⁷⁵ It's important to note that Arendt uses both communism and Marxism, and racism and Darwinism interchangeably, 617.

particular worldview or set of principles, that can transform into practical applications.⁷⁶ However, for Arendt, the term “ideology” refers specifically to Darwinism and Marxism due to the manner in which they have been employed and elevated into a fully-fledged ideology. In this regard, I define all ideologies, both regular -isms and fully-fledged ideologies as more than theoretical accounts and ideas, they must be implemented and then we can distinguish between them in relation to totalitarianism. This does not mean that we can’t be wary of ideological thinking and regular -isms transforming into totalitarian ideologies, however it is important to make a distinction between ideas and reality, in terms of practical application in attempts to view the world ‘as it is.’

On the other hand, “-ism” typically functions as a suffix that turns nouns into actions, which indicates both adherence to and advocacy for a particular doctrine, theory, or belief system.⁷⁷ So to this extent -ism can mean the transformation of ideology into reality, and logic to practical application. However, whether it be the two-fully fledged ideologies above, or ideological thinking adhering to the three totalitarian elements, of which -isms can fully represent, there is a crucial distinction: -isms can also encompass specific ideas and principles that have been actively applied. If -isms, omnipresent as they are, have the capacity to self-restrict, it permits less movement, a fundamental trait shared by all ideologies and totalitarianism.

Regardless of the language differences outlined above, this does little to establish a clear distinction between regular -isms and fully-fledged ideologies. It’s important to recognize that when Arendt wrote *Origins*, she aimed to underscore the profound impact of two totalitarian

⁷⁶ “Ideology, n. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary,” https://www.oed.com/dictionary/ideology_n.

⁷⁷ “Ism - Advanced Search Results in Entries | Oxford English Dictionary,” <https://www.oed.com/search/advanced/Entries?q=ism&sortOption=Frequency&tl=true>.

movements that plagued the 20th century, and added the additional thirteenth chapter to highlight the pivotal role ideology played in their total-domination. She wrote a book on the origins of totalitarianism, not ideology. While throughout the book Arendt still addresses the significance and unprecedented nature of ideology that underscores totalitarianism, Arendt nonetheless acknowledges that not all ideologies are totalitarian.

Let's consider the ideology of feminism for a second. Broadly speaking, on one hand we could argue that feminism, whether it be one hundred years ago, today or tomorrow, understands the world and the role of women through the lens of patriarchy, sexism, and gender roles. Therefore it adheres to a strict ideological way of thinking. If we take into account the different ideas and practical implications of feminism throughout history further distinctions can be made. First wave feminism focused on securing legal rights, particularly suffrage, for women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Since it directly addressed legal rights of equality, such as voting, first wave feminism confined itself to specific political interests.⁷⁸ It took an idea and hope and turned it into a reality, thus transforming in a regular -ism, not as the guiding framework of all politics, but represented by legal institutions, which renders it an ideology in a literal sense. Whereas third wave feminism took a more intersectional and diverse approach to feminism, emphasizing individual empowerment, inclusivity, and addressing issues beyond gender, such as the #MeToo movement. On one hand, the movement had practical aims and interests, such as policy changes at the institutional and legislative levels. However, it is a movement rather than ideology, that at times employs ideological thinking insofar that it addresses all social conflicts with women as a deep-seated representation of sexism, outside of experiences and specific

⁷⁸ "Feminism | Definition, History, Types, Waves, Examples, & Facts | Britannica," April 19, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism>.

political issues. So long as feminism takes on the narrative that everything is sexist, and divides the world between women and men, even when granted political equality, it thinks ideologically.

What about liberalism? Is it "-ism," it surely has more practical power in the world than feminism. Does it adhere to logical consistency? On one hand, liberalism addresses the nature of individual liberty and advocates for positive laws that foster stability. Conversely, some liberals, such as John Stuart Mill, attempt to rationalize their beliefs pseudo-scientifically, as seen in utilitarian doctrines, which aim to maximize happiness and minimize pain.⁷⁹ Unlike genuine scientific inquiry, which adjusts theories based on new evidence, this approach lacks flexibility. Furthermore, by recognizing that any "-ism" can manifest as an ideology, Arendt leaves the door open to critiquing ideologies that could possibly become totalitarianism. Nonetheless, she still distinguishes the two, thereby allowing more room and time to reflect upon and address ideologies that might not pose the same danger.

Yet, these distinctions don't offer much ground to differentiate between mere -isms and fully-fledged ideologies. Although the theoretical framework for understanding ideology proves valuable across different epochs, Arendt underscores the most critical aspect of ideology that lies in its political weaponization.

First and foremost, Arendt defines ideology as a political weapon. She writes, "Every full-fledged ideology has been created, continued and improved as a political weapon and not as a theoretical doctrine."⁸⁰ Ideologies, while often crafted by intellectuals, do not typically

⁷⁹John Stuart Mill and George Sher, *Utilitarianism*, 2nd ed (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, 2001), 38.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

originate from a pursuit of their own intellectual curiosity and desire to understand. Rather, they are either developed and designed, or taken and used, to carry out very specific political ends. The idea of the class-struggle was used to fuel the movement that was necessary for the proletariat to challenge the bourgeoisie and establish a classless society. Likewise, the idea of racial superiority served as a catalyst for the Nazis to establish a racially homogenous society and justify the final solution. In both instances, whether the notion of class-struggle or racism, these ideas were used as political weapons to justify the establishment of violent regimes that operated outside of traditional social and political constraints.

This is the key difference for Arendt, more so than the totalitarian elements of ideological thinking. It provides us with the ground to distinguish between mere -isms and fully-fledged ideologies. Ideologies are nothing more than the logic of an idea; their utility lies in the capacity when wielded to be the absolute truth, they can be weaponized to achieve political objectives in unforeseeable manners.

Secondly, the efficacy of ideologies does not stem from their purported “scientific” rigor, as they might claim. Rather, their persuasive power lies in their ability to appeal to individuals’ experiences, desires, and immediate political needs. Arendt writes, “The tremendous power of persuasion inherent in the main ideologies of our times is not accidental. Persuasion is not possible without appeal to either experiences or desires, in other words to immediate political needs.”⁸¹ In Germany and across Europe, racial tensions persisted long before and subsequently after the emancipation of the Jews in the middle of the 18th century. Despite the Nazi’s “stringent logicity,” these ideologies initially gained political traction due to the relevance of ongoing social tensions and debates, such as the enduring ‘Jewish Question.’ Similarly, the Bolshevik movement emerged amidst the transition from feudalism to capitalism, reflecting

⁸¹ Ibid., 207-208.

genuine societal conflicts between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Though the ideas behind these ideologies are in themselves arbitrary, their political appeal stems from the ways in which they address and cater to societal conflicts, rendering them persuasive to the masses.

Furthermore, Arendt writes, “Their scientific aspect is secondary and arises first from the desire to provide watertight arguments.”⁸² The use of “scientific” methodology or rhetoric is always secondary, meaning that the pursuit of scientific validation within ideologies is always driven by the desire to fortify their persuasive power rather than a genuine quest for empirical truth. The scientific aspect always corroborates and attaches itself to the idea in order to enable and justify political ends. Arendt addresses how the term “race” is not utilized to foster genuine scientific interest, but rather serves as a conceptual tool for interpreting historical events in terms of “becoming” and “perishing.”⁸³ This conceptualization acts as a narrative device to rationalize and justify shifts in society and power dynamics. For instance, the development of Nazi racial experiments did not originate from scientific inquiry into race theories; instead, the ideology of racial superiority preexisted. Subsequently, the scientific aspect was employed to bolster and expand upon its claims and objectives.

Arendt and Marx both explore the concept of ideology as a tool of political leverage, yet their approaches reveal distinct perspectives. Marx views ideology primarily as a mechanism of control wielded by the ruling class to maintain dominance over the proletariat. He argues that ideologies serve to perpetuate the status quo by obscuring the real economic and social conditions that disadvantage the working class. According to Marx, by unmasking these conditions, the proletariat can recognize their true plight and mobilize to overthrow their oppressors, revealing the truth through their collective action. In contrast, Arendt sees the use of

⁸² Ibid., 208.

⁸³ Ibid., 616.

ideology as more adaptable and grounded in real societal dynamics. She acknowledges that ideologies can arise from genuine social and racial tensions, such as those between Jews and aristocrats, which are not strictly ideological until they are exploited to serve political ends. For Arendt, the deployment of ideology is not merely a fixed tool of suppression but a malleable strategy that can be utilized by various groups to achieve power and manipulate public perception. While Marx provides a more static and structural analysis focusing on the economic bases of ideological manipulation, Arendt offers a dynamic view that considers the evolving nature of power relations and the contextual emergence of ideologies. This difference highlights Marx's focus on a predetermined class struggle and Arendt's attention to the fluidity of ideological use in diverse political scenarios.

Furthermore, defining ideology as a pseudo-science plays a critical role in reshaping our understanding of ideology, particularly by highlighting its relatively recent emergence. This perspective allows us to differentiate ideology from mere -isms, such as liberalism, which traditionally is viewed simply as a political ideology promoting liberty. By examining the pseudo-scientific elements of ideology, we gain insights into more complex ideologies like utilitarianism. This distinction within ideological categorization helps liberate certain aspects of liberalism from negative perceptions or unjust discredit. Furthermore, exploring pseudo-science broadens our comprehension of the expansive nature of ideology itself.

Another aspect Arendt adds to our understanding of ideology lies in her acknowledgement of their persuasive power. Ideologies don't materialize from nowhere; they are ignited by specific experiences that, over time, can diverge significantly from reality, morphing into justifications that seem disconnected from the truth. This is what makes them so compelling. Additionally, the logical structure of racist arguments—their ability to homogenize diverse

elements into a coherent narrative—enhances their persuasiveness. The 'naturalization' of these ideas, making them appear inherent or inevitable, also serves as a powerful political tool.

As previously underscored above, we can delineate the three characteristics of ideology, that they are always oriented towards progress and movement, against reality, and are axiomatically accepted logical ideas, as the essence or definition of ideology, detached from its association with the dominant ideologies of the twentieth century. This approach allows us to employ Arendt's comprehensive definition as a guide to comprehending ideologies beyond totalitarianism, with a more theoretically grounded perspective. However, sticking within this theoretical framework of ideology, that is broader and more inclusive of all ideologies, doesn't fully allow us to acknowledge the innate dangers in some ideologies compared to others. In light of this, we will make distinctions between, opinions and prejudices, mere -isms and fully-fledged ideologies, alongside ideologies that have greater totalitarian potentialities compared to others.

By focussing on the two fully developed ideologies, we have identified three other facets of ideology that have been illuminated by Arendt's account of the origins of totalitarianism. To summarize these aspects, ideologies function as political instruments that serve as tools for justifying violent political agendas. Secondly, they possess persuasive qualities that influence individuals and societies to adopt certain beliefs or behaviors. Thirdly, they contain pseudo-scientific claims that offer explanations and justifications of violence (this is also connected to the nature of ideology), however this serves as secondary to their political utility. It's worth noting that Arendt does not explicitly delineate the persuasive element separately; rather, she intertwines it with the political instrumentalization and pseudo-scientific dimension. However, for the sake of clarity, we can conceptualize them as three distinct aspects of ideology, interconnected yet structured hierarchically. In the following chapter we will explore the different facets of ideology, exemplified by totalitarian regimes, to understand how ideologies

come to power and operate once they attain political dominance. Having covered Marxism in chapter one, the next chapter will address the origins of racism as an ideology, especially since it is a more relevant topic to contemporary issues and experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

The Political Weaponization of ideology

I: The Purpose of Antisemitism

In the first volume of *Origins*, Arendt articulates how antisemitism, as a particular form of racism and secular ideology, came to play such an outsized role in the rise of totalitarianism. She questions the significance attributed to such a small and seemingly insignificant group of people like the Jews; how and why they come to play such an important role in a war, totalitarianism, and the eventual operation of death camps. It is an attempt to understand how something so foreign, something that slices through every tradition, something so utterly contrary to common sense, became possible. In the preface to the first edition, Arendt writes, “Never has our future been more unpredictable, never have we depended so much on political forces that cannot be trusted to follow the rules of common sense and self-interest — forces that look like sheer insanity.”⁸⁴

Antisemitism and totalitarianism are completely anti-common sense. Why would anyone choose to exchange peace for war? To expend vast amounts of energy, resources, and human

⁸⁴ Ibid., xi.

lives to kill six million individuals that are a seemingly insignificant group? It defies all logic. It's madness. Arendt writes, "an ideology which has to persuade and mobilize people cannot choose its victim arbitrarily."⁸⁵ In order for ideologies to become successful, to ascend to the zenith of totalitarianism, and to be effectively weaponized, which is always their aim (and most important element), they must first be persuasive. Regardless of the logic inherent in their nature, they nonetheless appeal to some aspect of "common sense," or rather some common feeling and experience. And it is an uncomfortable reality to unravel the 'why' and the 'how' of something that never should have happened in the first place.

For Arendt, antisemitism is not merely hatred of Jews, something that is eternal or culturally given, but something that is politically weaponized and extrapolated from the world. Arendt writes, "anti-Jewish feeling acquires political relevance only when it can combine with a major political issue, or when Jewish group interests come into open conflict with those of a major class in society."⁸⁶ First and foremost antisemitism for Arendt is a political weapon that is larger than anti-Jewish feelings, most of which had been around for centuries but had never before the 20th century resulted in murder for murders sake.

In the era of Pharaoh, while Jews experienced enslavement and discrimination under rulers, however this animosity primarily stemmed from religious and social prejudices, and economic factors; regardless of the immorality of their prejudices, their claims were not yet ideological, and economic factors tended to perpetuate and influence these systems. Likewise, in feudal Europe, anti-Jewish hostility was predominantly fueled by religious distinction and social

⁸⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 36.

discrimination, and religion was not yet a full brethren of ideology, furthermore political dimensions had not yet pervaded the monarchical rule of feudal order and born in nobility.⁸⁷

In order for anti-Jewish feeling to become politically relevant it must “combine with a major political issue.” In order to understand this claim, Arendt turns to history and Jewish function within the state. Since the era of feudalism, Jews had consistently played significant and distinct roles within governmental and social structures. Marginalized and living on the outskirts of feudal society, Jews often gravitated towards financial activities, seizing whatever opportunities they could, by lending money to monarchs and nobles.

During the late 17th and early 18th centuries in Europe, as the old feudal order started to decline and pave the way for the early emergence of the nation-state and the onset of capitalism, Jews were able to leverage their financial expertise from the old world into the new by positioning themselves as valuable assets for nascent nation-states.⁸⁸ As a result a significant number of wealthy bankers served as court Jews across Europe in the 17th century and were given even greater titles in the early 18th century. Arendt writes, “the privileges of the court Jews had indeed an obvious similarity to the rights and liberties of the nobility.”⁸⁹ However, this newfound equality through the nation-state did not adhere to contemporary standards; rather, it was characterized by disparate treatment rooted in the utility Jews provided to states across Europe. Consequently, Jews were not confined to national boundaries but rather could transcend them, operating on an international scale.

This arrangement was mutually beneficial for both parties: the Jews maintained their unique identity, so assimilation was not a problem for either party; moreover they preserved their

⁸⁷ While Arendt never explicitly says that religion is an ideology, one could infer how religious extremism that results in terrorism and violence could be, especially in correlation to Deism and pseudo-philosophical explanations Arendt outlines in “Ideology and Terror.” However, claims like this must be made purely in the secular realm.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

privileged status and the states benefited from their financial support. However, it is essential to note that not all Jews belonged to the affluent banking class, only a select few were able to obtain this backwards equality, while the majority of poorer Jews remained marginalized and despaired. Nonetheless, all Jews would later wreak the consequences of this arrangement.

After the French Revolution, the rise of the nation-state, and equalization of citizenship across Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century a political contradiction existed: “at the same time and in the same countries, emancipation meant equality and privileges.”⁹⁰ Arendt calls this the “equivocalities of emancipation,” meaning that there were inherent ambiguities and contradictions that existed within the process of granting citizenship to Jews. Somehow something that was supposed to be automatically granted (equality), became something that was earned (privileges.) Arendt writes, “Deeper, older, and more fateful contradictions are hidden behind the abstract and palpable inconsistency that Jews received their citizenship from governments which in the process of centuries had made nationality a prerequisite for citizenship and homogeneity of population the outstanding characteristic of the body politic.”⁹¹ The underlying premise of this new political order was always meant to be equality under the condition of nationality, but the reality was Jews were connected to the state as a non-national people. Socially, it was deemed a preposterous idea that a group of individuals could receive greater privileges than those who were nationals — a people who had no intention of ever assimilating. The nation-states used the Jews to their advantage, just like the Jews used the nation-state to their own advantage, and in between were the middle-class nationals who came to resent the state and the Jews, who were seen as the embodiment of this evil predicament through their association with the state.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 13.

The second aspect of antisemitism for Arendt emerges “when Jewish group interests come into open conflict with those of a major class in society.” While anti-Jewish feelings may have gained political relevance because of the paradox of equality, this process coincided with the emergence of a class-based society. The underlying premise of this new political order meant the removal of privileges held by the old ruling classes in order to extend the protection of privileges afforded to the oppressed class. However, this process coincided with the emergence of a class-based society, and restructured nationals along economic and social lines, ultimately mirroring the same inequality inherent in the previous regime.⁹²

In addressing what Arendt calls “early antisemitism” she provides us with a law, “each class of society which came into conflict with the state as such became anti-semitic because the only social group which seemed to represent the state were Jews.”⁹³ Since Jews, that in actuality only made up a small minority of the Jewish population with these privileges, were bankers and nobility they came to be associated with the state's power and embodiment of the inequality, of all ills within the political and social structures. For instance, as the old nobility began to lose their power within the state due to the erosion of their privileges within the rise of equality. As the Jews continued to gain new privileges, they became the focus of the aristocracy's resentment, and seen as a direct threat to their own diminishing power and influence, thereby fueling the politicization of antisemitism. Anti-jewish sentiments thereby acquired political relevance when it intersected with major political issues, and their position and relationship with the state, came into open conflict with other classes, which mobilized anti-Jewish sentiments and this rhetoric became a strategic tool for various social classes as they positioned themselves against the state.

⁹² Ibid., 12.

⁹³ Ibid., 25.

Modern antisemitism, as a fully-fledged ideology, only emerged during the late 19th century, in response to the financial scandals in which Jews were not directly involved. However, due to societal perceptions dating back to early antisemitism, Jews were still falsely assumed to occupy influential positions. As small shop owners, particularly from the petty bourgeoisie class, faced financial difficulties arising from these scandals, they sought someone to blame and turned to Jews. This resentment toward the Jewish community became a volatile element within society and a convenient political weapon.⁹⁴

Antisemitism is always used as a rhetorical tool and political weapon. There are real world tensions and conflicts that exist between a state and its constituents that are not arbitrary. On one hand there was a reason it was the Jews, although their power and position was greatly heightened for political narratives. On the other hand, it is arbitrary, it could have been the Jews who weaponized the position of the nobility. Ideological weaponization is not confined to the dominant class in the Marxist sense, anyone can use an ideology.

II: Ideas, Opinions, and Prejudices — isms

For many, it seems inconceivable and absurd to suggest that racism is a modern phenomenon that only became fully realized under the Nazi regime as well as the Jim Crow era in the United States. While Arendt acknowledges that racism's influence and potency extended far beyond the continent of Europe and the hands of Nazi's, she underscores that racism can function as an

⁹⁴ Ibid., 9-15.

ideology within specific contexts without necessarily becoming totalitarian. However, this does not imply that the ideological thinking that interprets history as the “natural flight of races” lacks totalitarian elements.⁹⁵

If racism is a recent phenomena that only emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century, how do we possibly begin to conceptualize the racialized thinking and differences that permeated the past? What about the violent pogroms that targeted Jews in Eastern Europe during the Middle Ages? How about the Atlantic Slave Trade, was it devoid of racism? Or the mass killings of indigenous people and the forcible seizure of their land — were these not manifestations of racism? Throughout history, the world has been plagued by hate, injustice, violence, and narrow opinions and theories — which by no means are good and do deserve their own acknowledgement — however, only a select few have developed into fully-fledged ideologies, with racism being one of them. While many opinions and ideas exist, Arendt makes a clear distinction between prejudice, opinions, or ideas and ideology.

For instance, if I harbor a bias towards another individual, that constitutes an opinion. Similarly, if one subscribes to the notion that all white people are superior, that qualifies as an idea. However, when such bias or belief in superiority becomes intertwined with a broader overarching concept or theoretical doctrine claiming to provide solutions to all the "riddles in the universe," it may present a more ideologically cohesive narrative, but it does not inherently become ideology. Arendt defines ideologies as "systems based upon a single opinion that proved strong enough to attract and persuade a majority of people and broad enough to lead them through the various situations of an average modern life."⁹⁶ Only a select few opinions have

⁹⁵ Ibid., 618.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 207.

transitioned into fully developed ideologies, with racism being one of them—an ideological tool justifying political agendas.

In “Race-Thinking Before Racism,” Arendt discusses *race-thinking* or *race-opinions* to acknowledge the significance of race before the nineteenth century, while simultaneously separating it from *racism* as a political tool of imperialism. While racism appears to be a temporal phenomena, evolving from *race-thinking* — *racism* is ultimately an epoch for Arendt, which means they need different classifications, understandings, and subsequent responses. She distinguishes between *race-thinking*, which refers to the “pseudo-scientific” and “anthropological” study of racial hierarchies and origins, and *racism*, which she describes as an ideology used to justify the political agendas of imperialist powers.⁹⁷ While both organize themselves around perceived racial differences, often supported by pseudo-scientific claims, *racism* goes beyond mere intellectual exploration.⁹⁸

When distinguishing between *ideas* and *ideological-thinking*, or *regular -isms* and *full-fledged ideologies*, it is necessary, regardless of our moral convictions on the matter, to examine if the ideas have been translated into political theories or actions. Furthermore it is essential to examine the intentions behind different ideas and ideologies, the resulting consequences, and whether the consequences significantly differ from one another. It is important to note, that this doesn’t mean that all ideologies are totalitarian or that all ideologies end with totalitarianism, rather each ideology, within the framework Arendt provides, can be characterized as they appear, rather than what they resemble.

Arendt provides numerous examples of these differences, for instance, as in the case of race-thinking, Arendt sites the French aristocrat Boulainvillers, who prior to the French

⁹⁷ *Origins*, footnote six, 208.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

Revolution, developed a theory that categorized the people of France along racial lines, that in many regards are reminiscent of the pseudo-scientific claims of Darwinism. Boulainvillers divided France into two distinct groups: the Franks, whom he labeled as “strangers and barbarians,” and the “Gauls” of Germanic origin, who he labeled as the true “Frenchman.”⁹⁹ His theory posited that since the Germanic peoples, who were not necessarily native to France (stringently speaking), had conquered the Franks, and became the ruling aristocracy. From this historical event, Boulainvillers, argued that the superiority of Germanic peoples over the Franks stemmed from their strength and ability to conquer, thereby asserting their right to rule according to the principle of the “might makes right” doctrine, prevalent during the 17th century,¹⁰⁰ which later evolved into the concept of “survival of the fittest.”¹⁰¹

How then, does this differ from Nazi race theories? They seem remarkably similar. However, Boulainvillers’ theory was centered around the concept of French nationality and origin; it was defined by borders, rather than biological race and unity beyond preconceived borders. Arendt writes, “Boulainvillers’ theory, however, still deals with peoples and not with races; it bases the right of the superior people on a historical deed, conquest, and not on a physical fact—although the historical deed already has a certain influence on the natural qualities of the conquered people.”¹⁰² Furthermore, Boulainvillers anchored his concept in historical events, maintaining a strong orientation towards history, which seems similar to Marx’s idea of the class-struggle and the history of progress.

Boulainvillers’ idea, drawn from historical events, was then employed as a fundamental principle of organization, driven by the aspiration for progress through the establishment of

⁹⁹ Ibid., 212.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 212.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 209.

¹⁰² Ibid., 212 - 213.

acknowledged "Gaul" superiority. On one hand, the "right" doctrine was attached to the "natural qualities" of history, which could seemingly lead to unending progress, since it lacked checks and balances because everything was deemed necessary and natural. However, its natural qualities were confined to specific historical events and locality, thus it ultimately lacked the ambition and dynamic movement inherent in all ideological-thinking. For example, Marx based his theoretical framework on historical materialism, but his vision for the proletariat's future was not embedded in a past idea or event. Rather, the context historical materialism provided suggested that current conditions were unjust and false, and by acknowledging this Marx anticipated that the proletariat would realize their true nature and potential through revolution. Unlike the Gauls, who had experienced conquest, the proletariat's understanding was purely theoretical and logical. While Marx interpreted all history as the class-struggle, Boulainvillers' never interpreted all history as the "natural flight of races," or claimed to solve all the "riddles of the universe," beyond the borders and experiences of France.

However, couldn't we simply encompass this within the framework of ideology, while acknowledging that in this particular case, racism had not yet developed into a full-fledged ideology? This approach seems particularly rational given Arendt's assertion that everything can be considered an ideology (-ism). Nevertheless, there are important distinctions to be drawn here, especially concerning the language Arendt employs. First and foremost, Arendt never utilizes the suffix "-ism" in reference to race-thinking. This suggests a notable distinction from racism as an ideology, which is typically characterized by its theoretical frameworks and logical underpinnings. The presence of "-ism" often signifies a systematic or doctrinal belief system built upon theoretical principles and logical reasoning. In omitting this suffix when discussing

race-thinking, Arendt implies that it lacked the formalized, theoretical structure inherent in all ideologies.

Yet, could we not argue that there exists a distinct relationship between race-thinking and ideological-thinking? The use of the "-logical" suffix in ideological-thinking symbolizes that there is an inborn logic that is separated from lived experience. Arendt writes ideological-thinking not idea-thinking — a comprehensive worldview not a process of exploration. While "race" in race-thinking and "idea" in ideological-thinking, both describe abstract concepts that are often open-ended, the key distinction lies in the absence of the suffix "-ism" in race-thinking, indicating that it is not fully developed into a formalized ideology like racism. Another significant distinction lies in the origins of race-thinking, which stem from lived experiences and societal conflicts, implying the presence of inherent truths or genuine convictions behind its assertions. Whereas, the Nazis, Arendt writes, “did not so much believe in the truth of racism as desire to change the world into a race reality.”¹⁰³ Likewise the Bolshevik ideology proclaiming the inevitable demise of social classes was not a tangible reality, but rather a construct that needed to be actualized. In both cases the function of ideology serves as a tool to transform mere opinions of race or class consciousness into a new reality.

Furthermore, the distinction between the two lies in their success, utility, and weaponization. Boulainvilliers did not weaponize his ideas or employ them to justify violence or discrimination. Instead, they remained largely theoretical and did not translate into concrete actions that could be categorized as racism. This example is significant because it underscores that even if racial ideas share a similar logic or pseudo-scientific basis, what distinguishes one from becoming an ideology over another is its ability to persuade and attract the masses. Race

¹⁰³ Ibid., 600.

opinions, for Arendt were “still judged by the yardstick of political reason.”¹⁰⁴ During this period, there existed an understanding of humanity that was protected by political institutions, and as a result, race-thinking lacked the necessary appeal to be politically weaponized on a significant scale and to evolve into a full-fledged ideology.

If we look at the development of race-thinking to racism there is a shift that happens: people no longer believe in the unity of the human species and the idea of mankind. Furthermore, if we examine the history of slavery in the United States, and take the widely accepted narrative that “America was built on racism,” we merge race-thinking with racism, and as a result fail to recognize the fundamental tenets behind ideology: the power of logical persuasion as a means to settle real political conflicts.

This opinion suggests that the institution of slavery, was developed as a manifestation of racism, and not the other way around, underscores and perpetuates Marx’s notion of ideology. It mirrors his belief, that the dominant class (in the case of the United States), composed of white intellectuals like the founding fathers, supplanted their racism onto the world, and everyone else, lived and lives under the false pretenses of the Constitution. It depicts racism in the United States as something eternal: an unjust power from above that can only disappear in the next world. This worldview fails to recognize that racism, like all other ideologies, are a result of real conditions, experiences, and desires.

For Arendt, the emergence of slavery in the United States did not coincide with racism. American slavery, Arendt writes, “though established on a strict racial basis, did not make the slave-holding peoples race-conscious before the 19th century.”¹⁰⁵ Although the reality and implementation of slavery was embedded in opinions of difference, it had not yet been fully

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 206

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

conceptualized as a definitive idea. Race-thinking, whether viewed negatively or positively at the time, had not yet emerged as a coherent framework and understanding attached to the world of difference. Instead, it remained a latent aspect of society, noticed and imagined, but not fully conceptualized, examined, or deemed necessary to justify.

This lack of race-consciousness suggests that ideas of right and wrong, or true and false, regarding racial difference and hierarchy were not fully formed and actively considered by slaveholders during this earlier period. While for Marx, consciousness is only attributed to those with power, and unconsciousness to those who are ruled by the ideas of said power. There is a clear and deliberate line drawn between true and false, and subsequently the oppressed and the oppressor. In Marx's framework, the bourgeoisie actively instilled their ideology in the proletariat to exploit them, which constituted a deliberate and conscious act. The proletariat's awareness only arises through Marx's recognition of ideology, regardless of its accuracy or inaccuracy; this emphasizes that by introducing an idea that posits what is false, it creates the space to understand what is true, and the same could be said for what is conscious. However, we cannot categorize this race-thinking as "false-consciousness" in the Marxist sense, if it had not yet been brought into the world conceptually. Nor can we interpret it as a racialized argument of falsely naturalized racial slavery, if the concept of racism and subsequent justification had not yet entered the fold.

The claim that race-thinking was not conscious until the twentieth century makes even more sense when one considers that both the terms "racism" and "anti-racism"¹⁰⁶ (though to a lesser extent) came into the fold during the 1940s, only experiencing a significant surge during the 1960s and 1970s. This timeframe underscores the utilization of racism by both the Nazis and

¹⁰⁶ "Google Books Ngram Viewer," https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=anti-racism&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=en-2019&smoothing=3.

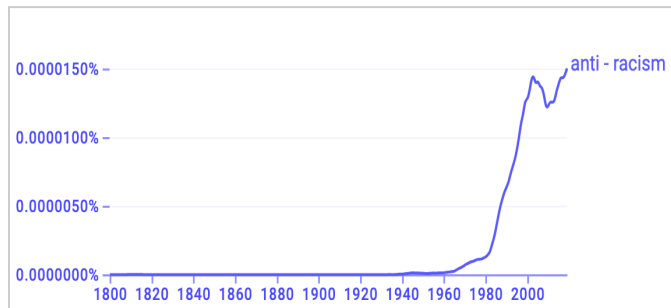
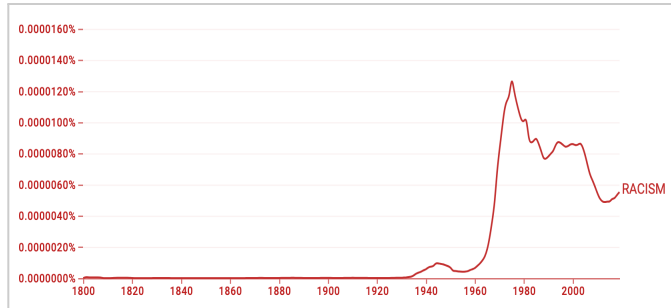
white supremacists during the Jim Crow era, as well as the adoption of its counterpart, although not explicitly by the Civil Rights movement.

Importantly, the emergence of the two terms are not meant to imply that racism only exists once recognized or addressed by those who are oppressed, in the Marxist sense.

Rather, in an interview much later, Arendt says, "If you look at the history of revolutions, you will see that it was never the oppressed and degraded themselves who led the way, but those who were not

oppressed and not degraded but could not bear it that others were."¹⁰⁷ This underscores that comprehending racism or any ideology does not begin with recognizing the false consciousness of the oppressed, although this may be acknowledged later. Instead, it primarily involves understanding the intentions of the conscious actors who employ the ideology. Moreover, the mention of the different epochs in which the terms "racism" and "anti-racism" gained prominence serves only to demonstrate their presence and to recognize that their utilization or confrontation was purposeful and conscious.

The distinction for Arendt, lies in the fact that during the eighteenth century "American slave-holders themselves considered it a temporary institution and wanted to abolish it gradually. Most of them probably would have said with Jefferson: "I tremble when I think that God is just."¹⁰⁸ Given that race was not yet a conceptualized term, neither for racism or its counterpart,



¹⁰⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic*, A Harvest Book 219 (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 204.

¹⁰⁸ *Origins*, 231.

the imperative for abolition had not yet emerged. Yet, regardless of this, there still existed a vision and understanding of unity among men, represented by the founding fathers potentiality to align with Jefferson, which ultimately led to the belief that it was not intended to be permanent.

While slavery contradicted the fundamental principles of the United States, it persisted because the founding fathers needed to secure enough votes for ratification. It was rationalized based on necessity, rather than conscious pseudo-scientific claims. Additionally, slavery, though morally reprehensible, served a specific economic purpose. It fulfilled a longstanding desire to free oneself from the fetters of labor, that required no other justification outside of the contempt for labor. It was rooted in economic interests and the sine qua non institutional structures, still unjust and exploitative, but did not yet embody the ideology of supremacy.

For Arendt, ideologies emerged amid significant political upheaval and the decline of the nation-state, a trend that had become evident in the years leading up to the Civil War. Race-thinking in the United States transformed into racism, when racial tensions came in open conflict with practical political issues and interests. A result of the two fold contradiction inherent in the abolition: on one hand, it didn't prioritize or reinforce the "Rights of Man" in a way that practically and politically attempted to resolve existing racial tensions, and on the other hand, this newfound declaration of equality didn't align with the prevailing social norms at the time. It was a theoretical promise that didn't match reality as it was after the Civil War, and as a consequence race-based interests came into open conflict with the state.

The removal of the structures that upheld slavery accentuated existing racial disparities and differences because the guarantee of racial hierarchy and superiority, which had been maintained through the institution of slavery, could no longer exist in the same manner. When slavery was abolished, it disrupted this established order, but it didn't erase the deep-seated racial

divisions that had been ingrained in society for generations. Instead, it brought these divisions to the forefront as formerly enslaved individuals sought to assert their rights and claim their place in society. This upheaval challenged existing power dynamics and threatened the privileges of those who had benefited from slavery. Slavery had created a sense of protection based on distinctions between races economically and subsequently enabled the overarching demarcation between “us” and “them.”

In the absence of slavery, racialized differences lacked an authoritative defense, creating “fertile soil for the various naturalistic doctrines” as racial tensions clashed openly with the contradictions of equality and the emancipated individuals seen to be associated with the nation-state state.¹⁰⁹ Those in opposition, adopted and developed pseudo-scientific racial theories, as a political weapon to justify the continuation and preservation of racial hierarchy, exploitations, and discrimination.

Although there was never any truth behind the law of nature, the idea itself was not arbitrary. They used existing racial tensions as weapons to further their own political interests and agendas. In this sense the idea itself is arbitrary, because all that matters is using existing beliefs and opinions, in whatever form, to one's own advantage. However, the palpability of race-thinking and the surrounding conflicts were very real, which rendered racism persuasive and appealing to a significant majority. Thereby allowing them to amass political influence and fabricate the world to match their desires under the guise of an idea.

In this regard, the ideas used by the dominant class are imposed upon others to foster a “false consciousness” or unreality that serve to reconcile the contradictions between two opposing forces for the sake of exploitation. This seemingly represents the prototypical Marxist interpretation of ideology exemplified by his contemporary Terry Eagleton: “ideas which help to

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 231.

legitimate a dominant political power; {and/or} false ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power.”¹¹⁰ By acknowledging the idea of the race-conflict or the class-struggle through the lens of ideology — we reveal the unjust power of racism and capitalism in the name of some higher truth. Like Marx, ideologies for Arendt are used to fabricate reality for specific political ends, but her use of the term is not in the name of progress.

In all ideological critiquing the importance lies in naming the unjust power, such as capitalism through the bright light of unconsciousness and total domination for the sake of communism and consciousness, similarly to the interdependence between racism and anti-racism. Ideologies are revealed by other ideologies (this is only a half truth). Likewise to the role of the bourgeoisie in Marxist critique, for Arendt, racism is a conscious effort to blur the lines between right and wrong, or true and false. It operates as an illusion, that eventually assumes a false consciousness insofar that it is independent of experience, among its users and eventually those subjected to its influence. However it was never real. Even unconscious race-thinking that plagued the eighteenth century had some understanding of the unity of mankind, not through its counterpart, but a moral obligation and feeling.¹¹¹ All ideologies pose as reality for the time being, until they are recognized for what they are and represent; not in opposition to their equivalent, but by their underlying purpose that conceals the real world and all its conflicts from which it springs.

The idea of the class-struggle is analogous to the idea of racial superiority or racial inferiority, because all understand the world from an axiomatically accepted premise that is used

¹¹⁰ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London ; New York: Verso, 1991), 1.

¹¹¹ In the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant posits that moral obligation stems from the categorical imperative, which is the paramount moral principle. This imperative dictates that we should act in accordance with maxims that could be universally applied without contradiction. Kant contends that moral duties are independent of desires, consequences, or external influences, instead originating solely from reason. Immanuel Kant, Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, and Lara Denis, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Broadview Editions (Peterborough, Ont. ; Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2005).

to split the world into clearly defined roles: those who oppress and those who are oppressed — permanently. All ideologies and their counterparts, view the world from an idea that purports to represent the inevitable laws of nature or history as a means of resolving the inevitable ‘war of all against all’¹¹² — in the next world. Ideologies throw us into the “process of nature or history for the sake of accelerating movement; as such, they can only be executioners or victims of its inherent law.”¹¹³ All ideologies, anti-ideologies, and ideological-thinking understand the world through the juxtaposition between false and real, good and bad, and dominating and dominated because it offers a convenient shortcut for action. By presenting themselves as unequivocal promises of life or death, ideologies bypass the nuances of life and the challenges of political and social organization in a world of plurality.

As a result, the world, history and nature becomes tangible; and nothing appears to be too large, taxing, or impossible — the idea possesses the “riddle to the universe” — and all that remains is for us to choose the right side of history. There we stand, captivated by the ‘bright light of shipwreck,’¹¹⁴ failing to see that all ideologies are half truths, and that reality exists in this world and not the next.

III: Navigating Ideology: The Importance of Making Distinctions

In many regards, the half truth of ideology symbolized by the differences and similarities between ideas, opinions, and prejudices and fully-fledged ideologies, can be challenging and

¹¹² Thomas Hobbes and E. M. Curley, *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1994), 79.

¹¹³ *Origins*, 615.

¹¹⁴ George Oppen, *Of Being Numerous*, ([Place of publication not identified]: W W Norton, 1965), 113.

uncomfortable to grasp or agree with. Isn't it irresponsible to consider things bad or dangerous only if they are fully developed? Doesn't it matter just as much that race-thinking still perpetuates discrimination, othering, and hierarchy? While it may not have manifested in death-camps at the time, it still remained and remains morally wrong.

Furthermore, does this distinction even matter, if later imperialists and Nazi's adopted race-thinking and turned it into an ideology? If there is innate boundlessness to our ideas, once let loose in the world — taken and improved — aren't the consequences one and the same? Why not treat them as they *could* be?

However, regardless of the significance race-thinking provided for imperialism and Nazism, Arendt writes, "Imperialists would have necessitated the invention of racism as the only possible "ex- planation" and excuse for its deeds, even if no race-thinking had ever existed in the civilized world."¹¹⁵ Does this really even matter? What if we can only recognize ideologies once they are fully formed? If so, how will we ever be able to identify or prevent them before they reach an unimaginable and unbearable point? The Jews, for instance, didn't perceive the unprecedented dangers in Europe until it was too late, often believing that it was temporary by the yardstick of reason. In the contemporary world, three years ago in the United States, *Roe v. Wade* was struck down, and now, each day the headlines in the news read another state's ban, and horror stories of women affected by the undoing of precedent. What if this is our interwar period of the 1920's, and soon 1933 approaches? We are armed with the knowledge of the past — but do we argue out of fear, or is history repeating itself?

In a footnote addressing the ways in which we often blur the lines between *race-thinking* and *racism*, Arendt writes, "this *quid pro quo* was partly the result of the zeal of students who wanted to put down every single instance in which race has been mentioned. Thereby they

¹¹⁵ *Origins*, 239.

mistook relatively harmless authors, for whom explanation by race was a possible and sometimes fascinating opinion, for full-fledged racists.”¹¹⁶ Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Arendt observed that race-thinking was often mistaken for racism, creating a mentality of *this for that*. Many students were adamant about addressing and condemning any mention of race, which led them to equate all references of race with racism; a parallel and pattern that permeates our thinking today. Consequently, they inaccurately labeled "relatively harmless" authors or intellectuals like Boulainvillers and other race-thinkers, despite the fact that these individuals merely considered race as a potential factor rather than its weaponization. By seeking to encompass all race-related concepts under the umbrella of racism, we inadvertently conflate the many nuances of race, from all walks of life, to the broader and more problematic notion of racism in the 20th century. Just as we failed to recognize the inherent dangers of newly forming racism a hundred years ago, we continue to mischaracterize the world ‘as it is’ today, and leave open the possibility of blinding ourselves to the emergence of new ideologies.

Race-thinking, as outlined by Arendt, is built by differences experienced in the world, that can develop and organize itself economically, socially, and politically. However, it lacks a specific power because it tends to develop itself and provide meaning in an arbitrary manner, insofar that it doesn’t claim to obey “strictly” and “unequivocally” the laws of nature and history in which everything is supposed to spring. In context of intellectuals who developed doctrines rooted in *race-thinking*, Arendt writes, “There is an abyss between the men of brilliant and facile conceptions and men of brutal deeds and active bestiality which no intellectual explanation is able to bridge.”¹¹⁷ For Arendt, there is a difference between intellectual prowess and those who

¹¹⁶*Origins.*, 208.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

engage in violence; a fundamental gap exists between these two groups of people, that not even intellectual reasoning or explanation can overcome.

For Arendt, the difference lies in the fact that ideas, while being clever or ingenious, romantic or practical, (good or bad), are arbitrary. They lack a worldview, a passion, and most importantly they lack a key conflict or people in which they can ‘rescue’ for their own political gain. Arendt writes, “What totalitarian rule needs to guide the behavior of its subjects is a preparation to fit each of them equally well for the role of executioner and the role of victim. This two-sided preparation, the substitute for a principle of action, is the ideology.”¹¹⁸ The crossroads where mere –isms and ideological thinking transforms into fully-fledged ideologies — is that a conflict becomes pervasive in such a way that it has been reduced to two sides. There are facile conceptions — and — ideologies. Racism or any other ideology, offers a substitution of one way of life for another, in the name of progress, and not doom. It’s not arbitrary. These intellectuals, scientists, and leaders, for Arendt, succumb to the “ideas” way of life; they willingly sacrifice empirical science and reality, for two-sides of the same coin.

Ideas are ideas, and there are many.

Ideologies take an idea, oversimplify it, and present it as the all-encompassing answer to the world and its many nuances.

Ideologies force you to choose.

Many willingly jumped to the side of the Nazis, while some surrendered to the Nazis under force, facing a life-or-death ultimatum. Among them were those who eventually embraced the cause out of the “banality of evil,” perhaps to belong or appease their consciences, which is not dissimilar.¹¹⁹ And then there were those who ignored and retreated from reality completely.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 615.

¹¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Classics (New York, N.Y: Penguin Books, 2006).

For ideologies to become totalitarian,¹²⁰ they must accomplish two tasks: they must persuade the masses and subsequently acquire enough power to weaponize the idea for political gain. To garner sufficient momentum for persuasion, the idea must first hold political and social relevance, which means it caters to peoples experiences. Second, once the idea has enough support, both theoretically and literally (as represented by the regime), it creates a substantial divide between two opposing entities. Capitalism or Communism. Aryans or Jews. Life or Death. Once it finally has gained political control, it has the power and logical-momentum to transcend the need for experiential validation. The final stage is total: reality is sacrificed for the idea. It has reached the height of totality.

For Arendt, unconscious or conscious (not yet weaponized) *race-thinking*, anti-Jewish sentiments, and race-based slavery (economically justified), would be on one side of the spectrum, however was slavery and Jew hatred not violent? What could have justified that, if not racism? Was violence then arbitrary? The fact is, no matter how horrible slavery or early anti-semitism was, it didn't need to be justified by race. Race had not yet entered or at least dominated the social and political sphere, people were widely unconscious. On one hand, it is very easy to see how violence is a product of racialized superiority, and could have been justified by the hands of violent oppressors. However, it's important to note that whether that violence is deemed racist or arbitrary is a matter of personal opinion, both are valid, and ultimately it is not a key aspect for understanding the phenomena of ideology.

Rather, slavery was justified on economic grounds, by the ideology of capitalism and the ratification of the Constitution, and anti-Jewish sentiments on religious grounds, not racism,

¹²⁰ While there have only been two fully-fledged ideologies, racism in the United States is still an example or representation of this. Although it never reached the height of totalitarianism, the ideological thinking behind racism is indicative of three key totalitarian elements, which doesn't mean it cannot surpass the legal-democratic institutions, like the Nazis did.

which was developed as a result. The justification of slavery within a capitalist framework was primarily economic, and it persisted for approximately 250 years until it was brought to an end by the Civil War, ultimately leading to the development of racism. Which was then adopted by capitalists, but these capitalists were no longer capitalists, but racists. Despite the emergence of racist capitalists and the overarching income inequality inherent in capitalism, capitalism's guiding principle of ever-expanding accumulation is not racially based. While there can be 'racist capitalists' or 'racial capitalism,' an adjective that modifies the noun, it can also just be capitalism, but it cannot be capitalism without the free-market or private ownership — capitalism cannot be capitalism without its idea. In contrast, Nazi racism was deeply intertwined with Darwinism, so much so that the ideology and movement are homogeneously tied to one another, that even today anti-Jewish sentiments appear in the form of anti-semitism. However, the end of Nazi ideology, which also culminated from war, could not exist without antisemitism. It built itself so tightly upon an axiomatically accepted premise, that any attempt to separate the two would undermine the core tenets of the movement and delegitimize its power.

Capitalism, anti-semitism, and racism exist today, alongside their predecessors, but they are not totalitarian ideologies or movements. Maybe we can characterize our racialized prejudices and 'systemic racism' as part of that -ism for the sake of simplicity, but we need to acknowledge and be conscious of how we are employing the term and why. We must reflect on whether our usage is casual, influenced by experiences in the world, or deeply rooted in historical context. If we find ourselves employing the term abstractly and forcefully, aiming to unveil the mysteries and injustices of the universe, we must be cautious. While this approach may not yet constitute an ideology, it embodies the type of ideological thinking that has the potential to evolve into one. People who think and talk in abstractions and follow narrativized

movements, whether we characterize it as a noble cause or not, is inconsequential. Ultimately all it does is foster a tendency in our thinking that opposes nuanced understanding of the world, and it was this lack of nuance that led many individuals, no different than us, to embrace Nazism and Bolshevism.

Consider, for example, if the Mega movement or progressive leftism were to amass enough power to ascend to the zenith of totalitarianism, most of their adherents would not perceive their totalitarian inclinations. Ironically, it's more probable for some on the right to acknowledge this tendency yet remain indifferent, in contrast to some on the far-left who are more entrenched in logical justifications of black and white morality. "Eat the rich," they say, mirroring the very unjust logic they oppose.

We need to ask ourselves if this distinction is important?

Arendt's distinctions regarding the totalizing nature of totalitarian ideology is immensely significant. Understanding these distinctions, even if we cannot completely eliminate the paradox, enables us to recognize that while we may sometimes replace one ideology with another, it doesn't necessarily result in totalitarianism. By acknowledging the ways in which certain ideologies deduce everything from a single premise more than others, or how specific ideas become crucial during shifts in power dynamics, we can avoid viewing the world all as if we are living in an all-encompassing nature of ideologies and the perpetual conflict between them.

In the last line of "Race-thinking Before Racism," Arendt writes, "the very existence of an opinion which could boast of a certain tradition served to hide the destructive forces of the new doctrine."¹²¹ Arendt's statement underscores the importance of distinction, especially when things are cloaked under the guise of tradition. If we take Arendt's claim seriously, we can see

¹²¹ Ibid., 240.

how the mere existence of an opinion backed by tradition can create a sense of legitimacy and acceptance, making it easier for new and potentially dangerous doctrines to gain traction — unnoticed.

IV: The Politics of Terror

The central claim of *Origins* for Arendt, is that totalitarianism is a novel form of government, not because of Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia, rather three key developments. First, the emergence of terror as a mechanism to eradicate human freedom across both the public and the private realms — a total domination inherent in the term itself. Arendt acknowledges that the denial of freedom itself is not a novel concept, and is of no "primary importance for understanding the peculiar nature of totalitarianism."¹²² She underscores this claim by comparing it to tyranny. Even in tyranny, whose essence is lawlessness and terror its instrument, there exists limitations to the regime's total domination. Despite the pervasive fear of tyrannical rule among its subjects, men still retain the capacity to privately engage in independent thought and discourse, thus allowing for the possibility of dissent.

Terror, Arendt writes, is the "essence of totalitarianism."¹²³ It is only in totalitarianism that total-domination in its purest form is possible. In tyranny terror manifests itself externally through blatant disregard for established laws. Conversely, totalitarianism is inherently lawful.

¹²² Hannah Arendt, Papers: Speeches and Writings File, 1923-1975; Essays and lectures; "The Great Tradition and the Nature of Totalitarianism," lecture, *New School for Social Research*, New York, N.Y., 1953

¹²³ *Origins.*, 612.

Even if totalitarian regimes gain political power, Arendt contends that they have not yet “conquered the earth.” Something is missing, they still need some other “guide for the behavior of its citizens in public affairs.”¹²⁴ How, then, is total-terror achieved both externally and internally? If the essence of tyranny is lawlessness and terror its instrument, what then is its instrument of totalitarian terror?

Second, totalitarianism introduces an entirely novel principle: ideology. If terror is the essence of totalitarian rule, ideology serves as its driving force. This for Arendt is the only thing that can possibly account for the actions that inspired such a break from tradition, created such an — abyss — that allowed murder for murders sake. Death Camps.

If tyranny used terror as a means to abolish laws — totalitarianism by contrast used terror to execute them. Totalitarianism differs from tyranny insofar that it is essentially and perversely lawful. It promises to be the embodiment of law: “It claims to obey strictly and unequivocally those laws of Nature or History from which all positive laws have always been supposed to spring.”¹²⁵ In conventional legal systems, such as those based on positive laws, like the “Rights of Man,” nature and history serve as sources of stability and authority, by providing a framework in which laws are formulated and enforced.

Whereas totalitarianism deviates from traditional laws. Instead of establishing its own set of laws, it asserts itself as the guardian of natural and historical laws, and equates law with humanity. For instance, in *The German Ideology*, Marx writes, “In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven.”¹²⁶ On one hand, Marx’s intention was to highlight that while the Young Hegelians started with abstract ideas (*geist*) and applied them to the world, in contrast, he, aided by

¹²⁴ Ibid., 614.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 606.

¹²⁶ *The German Ideology*, 42.

historical materialism, began with earthly conditions (labor) and realized the idea (class struggle). On the other hand, through this process, Marx envisioned the ideal — what he terms “heaven” — as the communist utopia.

In contrast, Arendt writes, “That Hegelian dialectics should provide a wonderful instrument for always being right, because they permit the interpretations of all defeats as the beginning of victory, is obvious.”¹²⁷ For Arendt, Hegelian dialectics can be exploited to justify and rationalize one’s own position, even in the face of defeat.¹²⁸ By suggesting that contradictions and conflicts are catalysts for the emergence of new ideas and resolutions, it views setbacks or defeats within the framework of a broader dialectical process. Thus individuals or groups can sustain the conviction that their eventual triumph is inevitable. Arendt goes on to compare this to the German Communists’ response to Hitler’s rise to power in 1933, she writes, “the German Communists for nearly two years refused to recognize that Hitler's victory had been a defeat for the German Communist Party.”¹²⁹ The essence lies in the fact that, for Arendt, Hegel and Marx are one and the same: they employed oversimplified concepts and understood the past, present, and future through their own theoretical lens. In this sense, they both traversed from abstract ideas (heaven) to concrete reality (earth) and back to “heaven,” or rather the realm of progress and fulfillment.

Furthermore Arendt goes on to mention how Marxism and Darwinism are one and the same,¹³⁰ recalling what Engles wrote about Marx:

¹²⁷ *Origins*, “Totalitarianism in Movement,” footnote 22, 356.

¹²⁸ According to Hegelian dialectics, ideas and concepts evolve through a process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, where contradictions lead to new understandings and resolutions. The phrase implies that individuals or groups can interpret any setback or defeat as merely the initial stage of an inevitable triumph. By framing challenges or failures within the dialectical framework, they can maintain the belief that their goals will ultimately be achieved through the synthesis of opposing forces. Thus, Hegelian dialectics can serve as a tool for rationalizing setbacks and maintaining a sense of optimism or confidence in the face of adversity.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 356.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 608.

“It was Marx who had first discovered the great law of motion of history, the law according to which all historical struggles, whether they proceed in the political, religious, philosophical or some other ideological domain, are in fact only the more or less clear expression of struggles of social classes, and that the existence and thereby the collisions, too, between these classes are in turn conditioned by the degree of development of their economic position, by the mode of their production and of their exchange determined by it. This law, which has the same significance for history as the law of the transformation of energy has for natural science.”¹³¹

For Marx, everything can be understood as reflections of the underlying class struggle. Just as the law of energy transformation is central to the understanding of natural phenomena (“the riddles of the universe”), the law of historical development is necessary for grasping historical processes (“the key to history”). Hegelianism, Darwinism, and Marxism (outside of totalitarian regimes), are all oversimplified theoretical doctrines, and in that regard they fail to see the world as it is, and adopt what Arendt terms an “ideology.” Standing alone, they are not totalitarian ideologies, however the ideas inherent in them possess the potentialities to become so.

The reason Arendt specifically names Hitler and Stalin as "ideologists of the greatest importance," is not because they introduced any novel ideas — they had none — but because of their innovative approach of infusing the rigorous logic inherent to all ideological reasoning throughout their regimes. Arendt writes, “What distinguished these new totalitarian ideologists from their predecessors was that it was no longer primarily the "idea" of the ideology—the struggle of classes and the exploitation of the workers or the struggle of races and the care for Germanic peoples—which appealed to them, but the logical process which could be developed from it.”¹³²

¹³¹ “Preface to The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte by Engels 1885,” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1885/prefaces/18th-brumaire.htm>.

¹³² *Origins.*, 620.

Hitler and Stalin saw themselves not as just or wise rulers, but as executors of historical or natural laws. By claiming to be enforcers of a dynamic law through an unequivocal movement, they could transform their ideas into a living reality. Therefore A could always equal B, or you needed A, B, and C in order to get to Z. The extreme implementation resulted in policies where concepts like a ‘dying class’ being condemned to death and the extermination of races deemed ‘unfit to live’ were deduced directly from their ideologies. Their significance as "ideologists" lay not in their contributions to the content of their ideologies but in their utilization of ideological reasoning as a political weapon.¹³³ They proved that by strictly following an idea — anything was permissible. In the initial stages of Nazi Germany, Jews were segregated, confined to ghettos, forced to wear yellow stars, and deprived of fundamental freedoms and rights. And then there was — murder for murders sake.

Arendt writes, “In the interpretation of totalitarianism, all laws have become laws of movement.”¹³⁴ While positive laws of nature and history are sources of stability and authority, totalitarianism greatly differs. They are the embodiment of law itself, thus the laws are always laws of movement. In other words, if totalitarianism equates itself to law, the movements of totalitarianism set the law in motion. If the law is true, and totalitarianism is the embodiment of law, whatever its actions may be, appears to be lawful.

It is the totalitarian loophole, a lawlike mobility that comes from the erosion of all normative and civilized standards. While tyranny arbitrarily disregards laws and ethical norms, totalitarianism professes to pursue a grander purpose: “to establish the rule of justice on earth.”¹³⁵ In tyranny, murder can still be seen as wrong, as the tyrant acts for the sake of himself. However, in totalitarianism, Hitler justified the extermination of Jews as a means to uphold the perceived

¹³³ Ibid., 620.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 608.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 606.

natural superiority of the Aryan race. Here, the law of movement blurs the line between right and wrong; where law once symbolized justice, the idea now reigns supreme, dictating what is deemed just or unjust by the ideology of movement. Everything is now measured by its contribution to a larger mission. It represents the most radical denial of freedom and human spontaneity, by “elimin[at]ing individuals for the sake of the species, sacrific[ing] the “parts” for the ‘whole.’”¹³⁶

Arendt writes, “Terror is the realization of the law of movement.”¹³⁷ It is the inexorable march of totalitarianism that instills such a terror, ending all human opposition, politically and socially by an ideological movement. While tyranny and totalitarianism share in their use of terror; the former leaves behind something novel, ideology. In tyranny, terror creates a “lawless, fenceless wilderness of fear and suspicion,” but men still share the lived experience of lawlessness.¹³⁸ While totalitarianism possesses the capability to “set the desert itself in motion, to let loose a sand storm that could cover all parts of the inhabited earth.”¹³⁹ In comparison, the desert of tyranny, meager as it may be, is more of a safeguard for freedom, “it still provides some room for the fear-guided movements and suspicion ridden actions of its inhabitants.”¹⁴⁰ By following “suprahuman laws,” totalitarianism “can do away with petty legality.” While it can defy mundane, day-to-day, conventional legal norms, and in that sense might appear “lawless.” However, when totalitarianism disregards law, it does so for the sake of its overarching ideological agenda, rather than an arbitrary whim.

Totalitarianism becomes total when the law of movement is realized externally and internally. By taking ideologies (laws of movement) “dead seriously,”¹⁴¹ the Nazi regime

¹³⁶ Ibid., 611.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 610.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 628.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 628.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 612.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 617.

propagated a fear-based worldview that Germany was under attack from both internal and external enemies, such as Jews, communists, and other perceived racial and political enemies. For instance, “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion” was an infamous antisemitic text that spread false claims about Jews and advanced the idea of a Jewish conspiracy aimed at world domination. However, it was a fabricated work, likely created by Russian officials who sought to discredit their political opponents and deflect public discontent onto the Jewish population, which was later picked up by the Nazi regime.¹⁴² Another notable example of this was Henry Ford’s publication of the “The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem” in *The Dearborn Independent*, which was translated into twelve different languages throughout North America and Europe in order to propagate anti-semitic beliefs. In the aftermath of World War I, Germany experienced a notable surge in anti-Jewish sentiment, fueled by the widespread acceptance of the “stab-in-the-back” myth, that attributed Germany’s defeat in the war to Jewish Germans, socialists, and communists. Moreover, following Hitler's rise to power in 1933, German universities, which traditionally vested authority in professors, saw a shift as Nazi directives empowered students with an unprecedented level of influence. This change sparked movements such as the "Action against the Un-German Spirit," which resulted in events like book burnings.¹⁴³

If the essence of totalitarianism is terror, it instills such a fear in those who diverge from the prescribed ideology, that people all-together forfeit their individuality for the sake of the movement. Once the regime comes to power, they use the idea both theoretically and literally to create a substantial divide between two opposition forces. For Stalin it was the bourgeoisie or

¹⁴² “Protocols of the Elders of Zion | Summary & Facts | Britannica,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Protocols-of-the-Elders-of-Zion>.

¹⁴³ “Book Burnings in Germany, 1933 | American Experience | PBS,” <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goebbels-burnings/>.

proletariat. For Hitler it was the Aryans or the Jews. They divided their worlds with the magical wand of ideology, until one class was labeled a ‘dying class’ and one race deemed ‘unfit to live’ — a ‘primitive’ enemy. Assisted by propaganda, they unveiled (fabricated) the unjust power behind the bourgeoisie and the Jewish people from an axiomatically accepted premise, that they themselves did not create. It was more than just the sheer terror of force, such as secret police and military. It was the fear of one’s neighbor, ready to denounce non-conformity at any moment. Individuals were sacrificed for the cause, driven by an internal dread of being marginalized, overlooked, or worse. It was the pervasive terror of impending doom if one did not act fastly.

It was the politics of terror: ideology served as the tool to rationalize and justify unfathomable policies, while the realization of the law of movement solidified support and suppressed all external and internal opposition. Total-domination was complete by the means-end principle of terror, and suddenly the world started to progress in the very ways its ideology had promised, without a second thought.

There is a question that still plagues Arendt in the second addition of *Origins* that is the prime subject of the chapter: Is totalitarianism a form of modern government, or is it a new form of politics itself?¹⁴⁴ Arendt writes, “If there is a basic experience which finds its political expression in totalitarian domination, then, in view of the novelty of the totalitarian form of government, this must be an experience which, for whatever reason, has never before served as the foundation of body politic and whose general mood – although it may be familiar in every other respect — never before has pervaded, and directed the handling of, public affairs.”¹⁴⁵ If it is true, if

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 604-605.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 605.

totalitarianism is unprecedented, what is the experience that allows for a government whose essence is terror and “principle of action” ideology?¹⁴⁶

Lastly for Arendt, the emergence of ideology and terror as the core elements of totalitarian rule, is not a spontaneous occurrence, but one that comes out of a specific environment. She identifies this environment as one marked by profound loneliness. A modern phenomenon unlike any other form of isolation.

The term “loneliness” is relatively new to the English language. One of its earliest appearances can be found in William Shakespeare’s tragedy *Hamlet*. In a scene Polonius advises Ophelia: “Read on this book, that show of such an exercise may colour your loneliness.”¹⁴⁷ Here, he suggests that she read from a prayer book in order to conceal her solitude, highlighting the absence of companionship rather than a longing for social interaction. The famous line “To be or not to be” from *Hamlet* underscores the idea that loneliness can be influenced by one’s own choices and circumstances — an action rather than an inevitable feeling.

In 1585 the term was defined as such: “Want of society or company; the condition of being alone or solitary; solitariness, loneness.”¹⁴⁸ However, Arendt asserts that “Loneliness is not solitude.”¹⁴⁹ Rather she suggests that, “loneliness shows itself most sharply in the company of others.”¹⁵⁰ Solitude, on the other hand, requires being alone. It can be a choice, insofar as I, as a poet or philosopher, seek out solitude to create or to think. Nonetheless, Arendt acknowledges that solitude can transition into loneliness when I disconnect from the world of humanity, and in

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 623.

¹⁴⁷ Amelia Worsley, “Ophelia’s Loneliness,” *ELH* 82, no. 2 (2015): 523, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24477796>.

¹⁴⁸ “Loneliness, n. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary,” https://www.oed.com/dictionary/loneliness_n.

¹⁴⁹ *Origins.*, 625.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 625.

doing so, take away part of my own essence.¹⁵¹ If the essence of the human condition is plurality, living in solitude, whether by choice or circumstance, diminishes my innate humanness.¹⁵²

For Arendt, the term “loneliness” started to emerge in the 19th century to describe the feeling of not being understood within the world of men.¹⁵³ The definition from 1814, underscores this: “The feeling of being alone; the sense of solitude; dejection arising from want of companionship or society.”¹⁵⁴ It's akin to feeling like a fish in a big pond and experiencing a sense of not belonging or being “othered.” This sentiment aligns with concepts like “alienation,” as conceptualized by Hegel and later adopted by Marx. Amidst the backdrop of modernity, including the industrial revolution and the waning influence of religion in the secular realm, the modern world was characterized by profound feelings of loneliness.

Then, in the 20th century, amidst the rise of totalitarianism, Arendt saw loneliness through a different lens. For her, it could be something that could be done (an action) and something that was experienced (a feeling). To the former, there was a rapid shift in politics, such as the diminishing influence of the nation-state and class structures, which caused individuals to feel isolated from their own political institutions.¹⁵⁵ The erosion of political institutions gave rise to mass mobilization, replacing traditional party-politics with movements centered around shared feelings of atomization. People were burdened by feelings of rootlessness, isolation, and unending loneliness. They perceived themselves as irrelevant to society which created enough fertile ground for totalitarian regimes to exploit their atomization by offering them a sense of purpose.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 626.

¹⁵² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 7.

¹⁵³ *Origins.*, 626.

¹⁵⁴ *OED.*

¹⁵⁵ It's important to note that isolation is a political term for Arendt, while loneliness is a social term. *Origins*, 624.

Arendt writes, “What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the ever-growing masses of our century.”¹⁵⁶ Mass loneliness characterized by the collapse of political institutions, uprootedness, and isolation lays the common ground for ideology. When taken ‘dead seriously,’ the logic categorizes individuals into ‘executioners’ or ‘victims,’ ‘winners’ or ‘losers,’ ‘chosen’ or ‘unchosen.’ It offers them a sense of belonging in a rootless world. Loneliness to un-loneliness by the hands of logic. And the terror of becoming something far worse than rootless, maybe a Jew, a capitalist, or any other *convenient* group they have chosen. But the reality is, the ‘enemy’ could have been a Jew yesterday and a Gypsy tomorrow, but you wouldn’t notice the difference. The illusion of the law of nature or history, embodied by the regime, hinges on an axiomatically accepted premise, offering a framework to deduce yesterday, today, and tomorrow under its logic. Stability and reality are sacrificed for nothing more than the logic of an idea.

Ultimately, though Hitler and Stalin are dead, totalitarianism did not die with its great leaders. While there may be a shortage of totalitarian leaders today, there is no shortage of ideologies. The “true predicaments of our time:”¹⁵⁷ is that mass loneliness is the experience that lays the ground for total-domination and we have left the door wide open.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 627.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 604.

Conclusion

The popular understandings of ideology, exemplified by the Marxist critique of capitalism, reject the notion that all ideologies are total or superimposed, in terms of violent totalitarian regimes. Furthermore, if we take Arendt's claim seriously, that there have only been two ideologies, can't we infer that ideology ended with totalitarianism?

If that is the case, what then do we coin the ideas of the far-right and far-left? If their ideas are defamed as ideologies, doesn't the end of ideology offer them an easy out? 'We are pragmatic or radical, but not ideological.' If ideologies are only realized when superimposed by the 'iron band of terror,' conservatism, capitalism, liberalism, and any other -ism can be deemed 'non-ideological.' However, Marx, regardless of the use behind employing the term 'ideology' as a means for supplanting capitalism with communism — to some extent it makes sense that our surroundings influence our ideas. We are all products of our upbringing. While capitalism may keep us working from 9 to 5, can't we still congregate in public and private?

Yet for Marx, consciousness is primarily a characteristic of those in power, while those who are governed are typically unconscious, influenced by the dominant ideas of the ruling class. He nonetheless draws a distinct line between right and wrong, or truth and falsehood, reflecting

the entrenched positions of oppressor and oppressed. Ultimately, any theoretical account that splits the world in half — is total.

Ultimately, Arendt contends that “all ideologies contain totalitarian elements.”¹⁵⁸ But if all ideologies are inherently totalitarian, why wait until they gather enough power to ascend to the height of totalitarianism? That doesn’t seem very rational or sensible. If we treat them as they could become, we could save lives and protect people from unimaginable pain. Yet ideologies are nothing more than logical ideas, maybe facile and brilliant, but they have no power, no ground upon which they can stand. Ideologies, Arendt writes, “are fully developed only by totalitarian movements.”¹⁵⁹ When ideologies, like racism and communism, are attached to totalitarian movements, they become actualized and amplified, which “creates the deceptive impression that only racism and communism are totalitarian in character.”¹⁶⁰

If ideologies are realized through totalitarian movements stemming from political and social upheaval, then understanding this process is crucial today. We often don't recognize when ideology permeates both public and private spheres until it's too late. Therefore, it's essential to identify the critical moments when social and political forces coalesce into movements before crystallizing into ideologies. Totalitarianism in the 20th century didn't emerge suddenly but evolved gradually through a series of movements. Today, we see similar patterns with movements such as Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo movement, and the Pro-Palestine movement. While not every political stance or belief qualifies as a fully fledged ideology, there's a tendency to interpret them as part of a broader ideological narrative or hidden agenda.

To differentiate when ideologies might turn totalitarian and understand the broader scope of ideological emergence and consolidation, we need to pinpoint the pivotal moments when

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 618.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

various social and political currents morph into movements and then into fully fledged ideologies. Taking Hannah Arendt's insights seriously means highlighting the mechanisms and moments that potentially breed totalitarian movements.

While it is crucial to distinguish between regular -isms and fully-fledged ideologies, especially to maintain open dialogue in situations where ideologies have not yet taken a definitive shape, we must be cautious about viewing contemporary issues solely through the lens of historical parallels. Nevertheless, the frequent comparisons to the political dynamics of the 20th century underline the importance of these distinctions in today's political discourse.

What then, were the social and political unrests that facilitated a fully-fledged ideological ascent? Arendt writes, “NAZISM AND BOLSHEVISM owe more to Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism (respectively) than to any other ideology or political movement.”¹⁶¹

In “Continental Imperialism: the Pan-Movements,” Arendt divides the chapter into three key parts: *Tribal Nationalism*, *The Inheritance of Lawlessness*, *Party and Movement*, (Pan, Lawlessness, and Movement). First, the term “pan,” means all encompassing. It involves all members of a group everywhere.”¹⁶² In the late 19th century, pan-movements sought to unite *all* Germans and *all* Slavs, not just in Germany and Russia, but *all* Germans and *all* Slavs, everywhere. Like a feeling, pan-movements encompassed a tribal-nationalist ideology or rather “mood” that transcended the traditional concepts of the nation-state. It sought to unite people of similar “folk,” under the cohesive tapestry of an “enlarged tribal consciousness,” positioned against the boundaries of the nation-state.¹⁶³

Second, if “pan” sought to unite people of a similar “folk,” it was always positioned against the boundaries and interests of the nation-state, and in that sense it was lawless.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 290.

¹⁶² Ibid., 291.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 292.

Motivated by a disdain for law and bureaucracy, their objectives were to dismantle the existing state apparatus and replace it with a lawless and anarchic system. Despite their outward appearance of organization, these movements lacked a coherent plan beyond seeking power. They perceived bureaucracy and law as unjust and corrupt, and their aim was to expose and challenge the oppressive power structures above them.¹⁶⁴ If we connect this for a second back to Marx's definition and use of the term "ideology," a parallel exists: unveiling unjust power for the sake of a movement, however in Marxism the movement towards a communist utopia was spearheaded by an axiomatically accepted premise. Whereas, movements remain arbitrary, so sling they must sling themselves into a whirlwind of constant motion, but as soon as they stop, it becomes completely irrelevant.¹⁶⁵

If the pan-movements positioned themselves against the nation-state and law, there are parallels that can be drawn today. For instance, the MAGA movement, that resulted in an event like the January 6th Capital riot, serves as quintessential examples of a prevailing sentiment steeped in profound mistrust of bureaucracy. While the movement may resemble some forms of ideological thinking insofar as they refused to accept all empirical evidence contrary to their opinion that the election was stolen, they lacked a single idea, and rather oriented themselves by a general mood of distrust and disdain.

These movements are not oriented towards reforming or creating new institutions, rather they advocate for the dismantling of the state apparatus altogether. They view the deep state as a parasitic entity serving the interests of a privileged few rather than the broader populace. By targeting the deep state, these movements seek to remove legal constraints and bureaucratic control, ultimately aiming to establish a system free from institutional corruption and oppression.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 293-295.

¹⁶⁵ Occupy Wall Street is a perfect example of a contemporary movement that lost its momentum.

Thirdly, likewise to its lawless character, the term "movement" stands in contrast to interest-based politics and the pursuit of specific policy objectives. Instead, movements function as dynamic and fluid entities propelled by a collective mood and consciousness. They reject the rigid structure of party politics and advocate for continuous movement and evolution.¹⁶⁶

The mere existence of these movements sheds light on a deep-seated desire for progress that often transcends reality, which lay the groundwork for ideologies like Nazism and Bolshevism. The idea of progress, whether in theory, science, or social movements, lays the foundation for ideology. Ideology promises progress, albeit an elusive one, as progress is a perpetual journey rather than a destination. The ultimate goal is the realization of a utopian society, envisioned as a counterforce to existing power structures and falsehoods. Whether we prioritize tangible political actions or subscribe to an ideology or movement, while one may be totalitarian and the other not, the result is the same: we immerse ourselves in something intangible that stands in opposition to reality, a shared understanding of the world, and action as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

A notable shift occurs in Arendt's examination of the elements of totalitarianism, reflecting her understanding of ideology as a fundamental aspect contributing to the achievement of total-domination reached by these regimes. In the first edition, Arendt uses the term "movement" (to describe the Nazi and Bolshevik regimes and the preceding, Pan-German and Pan-Slavic movements), denotes an "amorphous organization" driven by a "pseudo-spiritual" ideal, whose political objectives reject institutional constraints. In the second edition, Arendt realizes that the term "movement" in its relation to both totalitarian regimes (not its predecessor), as an inherently dynamic entity that continually propels itself forward along a path outlined by its ideology.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 306.

For Arendt, movements are always characterized by a “general mood than a clearly defined aim.”¹⁶⁷ Unlike the nation-state, characterized by political parties attached to specific interests, such as economics and policies like voting or abortion rights, Pan-Movements attach themselves to a “mood,” that in a sense becomes moving. But why substitute economic interests, policies, or guaranteed political rights, for a “general mood”? What security could a “mood” possibly even provide?

For Arendt, Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism emerged in response to feelings of rootlessness. The term “rootlessness” means “the feeling of having nowhere that you really think of as home, or as the place [community] where you belong.” What happened from the late 18th century to the 19th century, especially during the interwar periods, that led to widespread feelings of rootlessness, and what Arendt later coined as “loneliness”?

For instance, alongside the Scientific Revolution emerged Darwin’s theory of evolution, which suggested that man was akin to animal. For thousands of years it was believed that man was created in the image of God — suddenly disappeared. God was dead. While the Enlightenment and Positivist movements of the 18th century attempted to find meaning in innovative ways, none proved expansive enough to supplant the role of God. Contributing to the absence of both world and individual meaning, the Industrial Revolution left workers feeling disempowered as they were compelled to sell their labor merely to subsist, focusing on the production of commodities and necessities rather than pursuing deeper meaning. Moreover, the God-given rights during the old feudal order, which provided a sense of enduring security, were replaced by the "Rights of Man." However, a paradox emerged within the declaration of these rights: while equality was promised, it remained elusive. Certain groups and individuals that

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 294.

were not German or Slavic, were granted rights based on privileges rather than nationality, something that could be earned over those who were actually German or Slavic.

Another crucial period that contributes to our understanding of how these circumstances unfolded is the interwar periods. In the aftermath of World War I, Germany faced severe repercussions: they were held responsible for the entire conflict, their territory was divided by the Great Powers, the Treaty of Versailles imposed unfair terms upon them, and they were burdened with immense debt. Despite these historical events not directly correlating with present discussions, they are instrumental in comprehending the origins of subsequent movements and ideologies.

The sense of loss, humiliation, and economic hardship experienced by Germany during this time fostered feelings of atomization, rootlessness, and loneliness among its populace. These sentiments provided fertile ground for the emergence of various movements and ideologies. Whether it be a movement, an ideology, or a movement that evolves into an ideology, they all stem from these underlying feelings of disconnection and disillusionment. It became evident that embracing a tribal-consciousness and aligning oneself with a collective movement offered individuals a stronger sense of belonging and security than the abstract promises of the "Rights of Man," which, despite their existence, were widely seen as ineffective. In contrast, belonging to a movement provided a tangible and *immediate* sense of purpose and community, allowing it to transcend mere political interests or geographical boundaries.

Thus these movements structured themselves around a "pseudo-mystical consciousness," that revolved around the idea of a divine, chosen, or transcendent unity among the tribe, over and at the cost of the liberal notion of human dignity.¹⁶⁸ Arendt calls this phenomena "pseudo-mystical" because Pan-Movements sought to unite people of a similar "folk" that in

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 226.

reality weren't similar at all. Germans in Germany and Germans in Austria or Poland, were not one in the same, however prevalent feelings and sentiments across Europe enabled them to perceive themselves as a unified people. By adopting a tribal-consciousness individuals could push away deep-seated feelings of atomization through their participation in a movement. Thus reality was sacrificed for a "mood".

For Arendt, movements such as "Germanized Central Europe" or "Russianized Eastern and Southern Europe" were not merely geopolitical propositions but potent symbols invoking notions of a broader racial and cultural unity. These concepts encompassed ideas of "Germanic peoples" beyond the borders of the Reich and "minor Slavonic brethren" outside the realm of Holy Russia. By referencing terms like "holy Russia" or the "Holy Roman Empire", these movements tapped into deep-seated religious beliefs and historical narratives, imbuing their ideologies with a "pseudo-mystical" aura akin to the naturalization of a superior race. Arendt calls this phenomena "pseudo-mystical" because Pan-Movements sought to unite people of a similar "folk" that in reality weren't similar at all. Germans in Germany and Germans in Austria or Poland, were not one in the same, however prevalent feelings and sentiments across Europe enabled them to perceive themselves as a unified people. By adopting a tribal-consciousness individuals could push away deep-seated feelings of atomization through their participation in a movement. Thus reality was sacrificed for a "mood" — structured stability for feelings.¹⁶⁹¹⁷⁰

In this regard, Arendt writes, "Continental imperialism ... started with a much closer affinity to race concepts, enthusiastically absorbed the tradition of race-thinking, and relied very little on specific experiences."¹⁷¹ While overseas imperialism drew upon race-concepts derived

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 303-304.

¹⁷⁰ It's important to recognize that although these pan-movements may not have had a clearly defined ideology from an axiomatic standpoint, they still enveloped themselves in pseudo-mystical narratives. Like all ideologies, they oriented themselves against reality by adopting these narratives.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 223.

from actual colonial experiences, continental imperialism embraced a broader notion of race-thinking, centered around the idea of all Germans and all Slavs. An expansive concept of a unified people and collective sentiment that could serve as a potent and “convenient political weapon,” as a means of rallying support across the continent.¹⁷²

Who exactly were these people? For Arendt, in contrast to imperialism in which bureaucratic representative primarily took the initiative, these movements relied solely on the “mob” that was guided by a particular group of intellectuals, Like Boulainvilliers and other intellectuals of race-thinking, who lacked an aspiration for global domination, however the Pan-intellectuals, possessed the skills necessary for organizing and mobilizing the masses. Movements like the MAGA movement, spearheaded by figures such as Trump, embody a pervasive skepticism towards established power structures and governmental institutions. Rather than adhering to a specific ideological framework, they coalesce around a collective mood of discontent. Trump effectively mobilizes segments of the population, often rural and blue-collar workers, who identify as the epitome of “true patriots” or the “real American people”. This mood-driven movement primarily aims to confront what is perceived as the undue influence of the deep state.

Arendt suggests that the ideological underpinnings of such movements often lead to totalitarian outcomes when they gain sufficient power, as was the case with Nazism and Bolshevism. These ideologies, while initially appearing as movements centered around cultural and racial unity, evolved into oppressive regimes that sought total control over both public and private life.

Today, similar patterns can be observed in various global movements that, while not explicitly totalitarian, still share characteristics with the pan-movements of the past. These

¹⁷² Ibid.

modern movements often rally against perceived corruption and the loss of cultural or national identity, driven by a deep mistrust of traditional political structures and elites. They too can become enveloped in a kind of "pseudo-mystical" narrative that emphasizes a return to a supposed golden age or a reclamation of lost purity, which can quickly escalate into radicalism if not critically examined and checked.

Two months into my project, war erupted in the Middle East, and the world again became divided. Oversimplified ideologies resurfaced: on one side, some argue that Israel is merely a victim; on the other, others depict them as Zionist oppressors and colonizers. It's a tragedy for both sides, and the reality is that each holds its own truths. However, over the last six months, the entire world has become enmeshed in ideological convictions. This highlights the dangers of ideologies, not only in fostering polarization but also in leading to war and death.

We must recognize the power of words and ideas when attempting to understand the world and all its differences. More often than not, we fall prey to abstract theories and phrases, and instead of pausing to think, we immerse ourselves in a whirlwind of action. We underestimate the power of terms like 'racism' and 'zionism', overlooking the fact that these words carry ideological undertones and we refuse to acknowledge the usefulness in employing these terms. We are no different from those we oppose, we too wish to unveil some perceived injustice from above and invoke worlds with ideological undertones to inspire action through emotion and logic.

We must not ignore that the day after October 7th, before Israel had really responded, people were already protesting. A couple of days later, some started using the term 'genocide.' Today, universities throughout the United States are protesting and setting up encampments. While some extremists shout slogans like 'kill all Zionists', I recognize that a large majority of

people are protesting in response to the humanitarian crisis, believing this constitutes genocide. Although I disagree and think proving genocide requires proving intent—a difficult task to accomplish until after the fact—I have the utmost respect and admiration for those who are actively protesting in the streets for a cause they believe in. However, I cannot overlook the antagonistic atmosphere and the fact that many of my fellow classmates, despite their loud voices, refuse to educate themselves. True belief in a cause requires education and effort, and their lack of engagement is apparent. This semester, two relevant courses were offered: ‘The Jewish Question in History’ and ‘Keywords of Our Times: Israel and Palestine’. Notably, none of the students protesting on October 8th are enrolled in these classes, which speaks volumes about the ideological convictions that characterize our era.

We cannot ignore the fact that immediately upon the outbreak of war, people began labeling it as genocide. We often fail to recognize that our interest in and understanding of the conflict in the Middle East are shaped by the powerful influence of prevailing ideas. It is crucial to examine the motivations behind using charged terms like 'genocide,' 'antisemitism' or 'zionism.' Such language forces us to make choices without a second glance, and that is a very dangerous game we are playing.

But what if it could escalate into genocide? Why is it important to make these distinctions? What if we only recognize ideologies when they are fully formed? How can we identify or prevent them before it's too late? The Jews didn't realize it at the time; they thought it was temporary. Now, armed with historical knowledge, we might be able to anticipate such occurrences. Or can we? Many of us still behave as if events are unfolding in the same old patterns—arguing out of fear, using ideology derogatorily to assert something to the world, to protect ourselves, or to combat perceived ideological injustices. Yet, we also fail to take

experiences at face value, driven by fear, hate, morality, or other influences—both approaches have their own dangers. We can learn from history and try to predict the future, and sometimes we must wait, try to understand, and engage in discussion, but it can also be too late. At times, spontaneity might be preferable to clinging to theoretical doctrines.

Why does this distinction matter? Because if we understand everything as being a fully fledged ideology, it is seen as wrong, unreal, and a threat to someone or something, necessitating immediate action and opposition. But what if it's a racist prejudice that seeks to separate itself from the rest of the United States, establish its own community, and live away from those who don't fit their narrative or image? Or if it manifests as discrimination in social settings, openly expressing disgust towards others? While uncomfortable, it may not be dangerous to the extent that it dominates the entire political and social sphere, stripping away political rights that make us all human and equal. Recognizing this difference allows us to address it differently. Similarly, critics who wield ideologies promoting a "war of all against all" adopt similar tactics. If we realize it's not there yet, we have a better chance of addressing it. Sometimes, we may not know how or be unable to address it, which is why we invoke the term ideology. But in doing so, we are no different—choosing what is morally more pleasing to us does not make us better if our actions, steps, rationalities, understandings, and connections fall short.

During a lecture at Berkeley in 1953, Arendt contended that there was an escalating tendency to dismiss theory in preference for mere opinions and ideologies. “Many,” she said, “think they can dispense with theory altogether, which of course only means that they want their own theory, underlying their own statements, to be accepted as gospel truth.”

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