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Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem

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Hannah Arendt on the Totalitarian Sublime and Its Promise of Freedom

Michael Halberstam

Hannah Arendt's critics have frequently seen a political aestheticism at work in her writings that fails to take account of historical fact and political reality. "Arendt is an aesthete," one such critic suggested, "*elle n'aime que les trains qui partent.*" This charge, intended to be substantive, consigns Arendt's political philosophy to the tradition of Romantic German thought that has been variously understood as a politics of cultural despair (Fritz Stern), as the aesthetic ideology (Terry Eagleton), as the quest for the aesthetic state (Josef Chytry), or as a metaphysical, irrationalist approach to politics that proceeds from ideas to social and political reality, rather than the other way around (Isaiah Berlin). Isaiah Berlin once remarked rather scathingly that Arendt "produces no arguments, no evidence of serious philosophical or historical thought. It is all a stream of metaphysical associations."[1] The charge that Arendt's work reflects the peculiarly antipolitical substitution of nonpolitical concerns for political ones characteristic of the German tradition from Schiller to Heidegger and beyond squarely calls into question Arendt's central claim of contributing to the rediscovery and rehabilitation of politics.

In reading Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* and especially her final chapter, "Ideology and Terror," it seems hard to disagree with Berlin's remark that her work is excessively speculative or even mystical. Arendt writes metaphorically that under totalitarian rule, "the essence of government itself has become motion."[2] Totalitarianism destroys "the space between men . . . pressing men against each other. In totali-

tarianism a "radical evil" surfaces that is inherent in modern politics. "Something seems to be involved in modern politics that actually should never be involved in politics as we used to understand it, namely all or nothing." The totalitarian subject is one who has lost "the very capacity for experience." "Total terror, the essence of totalitarian government, exists neither for nor against men. It is supposed to provide the forces of nature or history with an incomparable instrument to accelerate their movement."[3]

Placed at the end of *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* the essay "Ideology and Terror" presents what appears to be a confusing theory of ideology.[4] Moreover, it makes terror the essence of totalitarian rule in what is now frequently regarded as an empirically unfounded comparison between the everyday life of the ethnic German under the National Socialist regime and the experience of the Soviet citizen under the Stalinist terror. Historians agree that the average ethnic German was not terrorized by the constant threat of deportation and death, as was even the most powerful Russian party member during Stalin's rule in the mid-1930s.[5] Such doubts about the actual levels of threat experienced by the ethnic German population under National Socialism raise suspicions that the terror thesis—and with it, the comparative concept of totalitarianism—constitutes an apologetic for crimes committed under the Nazi regime. The terror thesis, it is argued, falsely presents the German population as passive sufferers, rather than willing participants in the murderous political cult of German nationalist supremacy. George Mosse, for example, argues that the terror thesis is "a new version of the older occupation theory," suggesting "a confrontation of leader and people" that did not, in fact, take place—at least not in the comprehensive way suggested.[6] Is Arendt's theory of totalitarianism then also "altogether worthless," as the headline to a recent article in *Die Zeit* suggested regarding her Eichmann book?

Arendt's model of totalitarianism, to be sure, must be reexamined in light of recent historical scholarship.[7] This may well raise problems with her basic conclusions.[8] At the same time, the terror thesis cannot, in my view, be so unequivocally rejected as some of the arguments suggest.[9] Moreover, as Friedrich Pohlman argues, Arendt's account of totalitarianism should be understood as a model or an ideal type, "as a theoretical construct that attempts to highlight tendencies inherent in these systems so that the real dictatorships represent only an approximation of the model."[10] Arendt's theory "ultimately aims at a *philosophical and anthropological attempt to define totalitarianism.*"[11] While there was

no rule of "total terror" permeating all levels and groups of German society throughout Hitler's reign, conceiving National Socialism as a regime of "total terror" is intended to mark a basic tendency of the system and to characterize the experience of living within it. Such an account may still be rejected as fundamentally misleading. However, some philosophical and historical reflection on the idea of terror can give us greater appreciation for Arendt's insights and render her thesis richer than expected.

When Arendt speaks of terror as the ruling principle of totalitarianism, she does not merely refer to levels of actual threat experienced by the population or to the actions of a secret police. Arendt's phenomenological thesis is that the experience of terror describes the *mood* of totalitarianism. In other words, terror accounts for the way in which the totalitarian subject stands in the world. Her description sheds light on the flight from reality on the part of totalitarian movements, their displacement of ordinary judgment and common sense, their self-destructiveness, their strange appeal, and their connection with modern emancipatory social movements.

Whether Arendt's model can stand up to criticism or be helpful to contemporary historical understanding is a question we must finally leave for historians to judge. In order to understand it, however, I suggest we do need to turn to aesthetic categories—categories that prominently figure in the German tradition of political and cultural criticism. Karl Marx once remarked that the essence of Hegel's philosophy was to be found in Hegel's aesthetics, and that he, Marx, sought to wrest these insights from the still waters of aesthetic theory and introduce their explosive potential into politics.[12] Arendt appreciated the political relevance of the aesthetic in her analysis of totalitarianism.

First, some general hermeneutical remarks about Arendt's approach are in order. Despite Arendt's continuous insistence that she was no philosopher and did not wish to build a system of political philosophy,[13] we understand her poorly if we take her unwillingness to systematize as a nontheoretical stance. It is instead the result of a highly theoretical position and stems from her profound philosophical appreciation of the problematic relation between theory and practice and of the relation between conceptual representation and sensible apprehension—an approach that emerged out of her studies with Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger.[14] In defending Arendt against her critics, some have tried to defuse the complexities and the theory-laden quality of Arendt's approach in an attempt to bring her into the Anglo-American mainstream. "As far as

explicit commitments go," writes Margaret Canovan, "[Arendt's] . . . intention was often the phenomenological one of trying to be true to experience."[15] Canovan's remark can be misleading, if we take "experience" to mean what a narrowly positivist empirical social science takes it to be. The attempt to minimize Arendt's departure from a straightforward descriptive empiricism misses the specific character of what I take to be Arendt's aesthetic approach to politics. Being true to experience, for Arendt, means articulating a self-world relationship, a certain way of standing in the world, that appears against a historical background and includes an attention to spiritual self-understandings. When reading Arendt, we have to recognize that her statements about her own work have to be reviewed cautiously. Arendt persistently positions herself within the particular political and historical context of European intellectual politics that is suffused with the rhetoric of German Idealism—as is, of course, Marxist theory. She frequently draws on sources she does not explicitly adduce and gives readings that draw from a particular tradition while cutting against or inflecting it at the same time. Dana Villa's analysis of Arendt's complicated and often less than explicit relationship to Heidegger's philosophy well exemplifies this feature of her work.[16] With the dedication to Heidegger left off of *The Human Condition,* for example, we have little indication that the philosophical impetus for this work dates back to Heidegger's lectures on Aristotle that Arendt attended during the summer of 1924.

Arendt's "Ideology and Terror" and its thesis about the essence of totalitarianism have to be understood in light of these interpretive caveats. The essay speaks quite philosophically to the conditions for the possibility of experience in general. The capacity of totalitarian regimes to construct a fictitious world through ideology and terror raises the problem of the nature of reality and our proper access to it. Arendt's thesis, which I will try to reconstruct here, is that the experience of terror is descriptive of the mood of totalitarianism—in other words, that terror shapes the extreme self-world relationship of the subject under totalitarianism. In "Ideology and Terror," Arendt advances a thesis that draws on a variety of influential sources of political and cultural criticism in the German tradition that also frame her analysis of totalitarian movements and regimes. Her refusal to highlight these sources while simultaneously drawing on them in her analysis of ideology might be seen as an expression of her unwillingness to buy into the Idealist claims of a tradition that posits history as something taking place in the realm of ideas alone,

even though she recognized the significance of these sources for understanding the *cultural* phenomenon that totalitarianism represents.

HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF THE WILL

Arendt's account of totalitarianism recalls Hegel's famous section "Terror and Absolute Freedom" in *The Phenomenology of Spirit,* where Hegel provides an analysis of the terror unleashed by the Jacobins during the French Revolution. Others have noted the significance of Hegel's analysis for understanding the political terror of the twentieth century. "Hegel's study of Terror," writes Charles Taylor, "touches a question that has a relevance beyond his time. The Stalinist terror had some of the same properties as those which Hegel singled out in the Jacobin one: liquidation become banal, the fastening on intentions and other subjective deviations, the self-feeding destructiveness."[17] According to Hegel, the destructive fury of the revolutionary terror has a logic. The terror is an unintended consequence of the attempt to base the state on an altogether unprecedented foundation: on absolute freedom. "The modern aspiration to remake the world entirely according to the prescriptions of rational will is [what Hegel calls] the aspiration to 'absolute freedom,'" writes Taylor.[18] Hegel views the French Revolution as the first attempt at establishing human (social) existence on a nonarbitrary foundation, on the foundation of Spirit (*Geist*). This vision of society as a human construct turns man into "a creative god who resides completely in his works; these works are the terrestrial city."[19] The manifestation of absolute freedom as terror, however, shows the indispensability of traditional institutions and norms as the setting within which reason does its work.[20]

The dynamic of absolute freedom reflects Rousseau's idea of the general will. According to Rousseau, the social contract that constitutes a general will gives expression to the sovereignty of the people. It realizes the demand for an absolute self-determination, for an absolute freedom from all other-determination, whether it be natural, cultural, historical, or religious.[21] In Rousseau's own famous justification, "in giving himself to all, each person gives himself to no one. And since there is no associate over whom he does not acquire the same right that he would grant others over himself, he gains that equivalent of everything he loses, along with a greater amount of force to preserve what he has."[22]

We might equally recall Immanuel Kant's later rendering of this same

Enlightenment project of constructing civil society on the basis of reason alone in his "Idea for a Universal History."[23] There, Kant expresses the demand for absolute freedom to the same effect, only in a slightly different language: Nature, according to Kant, has willed that man fully develop out of himself through his own reason whatever exceeds the purely material aspect of his life, that he live, in other words, "entirely in his own work." For Kant, as for Rousseau, "human nature" proceeds to the development of a "second nature" (Kant) that "produces a moral and collective body" (Rousseau) that arises when a person, through a voluntary act, takes up a common standpoint, the standpoint of all, and contracts with others to place himself or herself under the laws of a common association that accords an equal voice to every person.[24] When in society, we henceforth act *as if* we were all united in an all-encompassing collective project.

According to Hegel, the ideal of absolute freedom as expressed by the social contract is a genuine achievement of historical self-consciousness. In understanding themselves in such terms, individuals raise themselves in their existence to the level of the universal, to the level of thought. But this ideal fails in that it is too abstract.[25] The general will does not provide positive content to collective projects or specify concrete purposes. The social contract as such does not motivate any particular course of action. Moreover, where the social world is understood as "the work of men"(Vico) and taken in every aspect as a creation of each and every one of its individual members—for only in this way can each person be bound voluntarily to this new order of freedom—all that genuinely differentiates society into separate parts with separate wills, such as, for example, different classes or groups with different purposes, has to be seen as a challenge to the new order. The ideal of absolute freedom militates against the differentiation of society and the plurality of human existences or wills, and so, ultimately, against individual separateness that might find expression in civil liberties, or against preexisting differences that might have been protected by established group privileges.

Although the state is identified with the general will—the absolute freedom of the will of the people—this nevertheless does not suffice for it to act, for as we have said, the general will takes up within itself only the negative freedom from all determination that is not self-imposed. The ideal of freedom as the self-assertion of an unconstrained will can issue forth in concrete state action where the state in fact has a concrete will, a concrete personality endowed with the capacity for action. "Just as the

individual self-consciousness does not find itself in this *universal work* of absolute freedom *qua* existent Substance," writes Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit,*

> so little does it find itself in the *deeds* proper and *individual* actions of the will of this freedom. Before the universal can perform a deed it must concentrate itself into the One of individuality and put at the head an individual self-consciousness; for the universal will is only an *actual* will in a self, which is a One. But thereby all other individuals are excluded from the entirety of this deed and have only a limited share in it, so that the deed would not be a deed of the *actual universal* self-consciousness. Universal freedom, therefore, can produce neither a positive work nor a deed; there is left for it only *negative* action; it is merely the *fury* of destruction.[26]

Where the general will is applied directly and without mediation to the actions of a state, a single individual becomes its stand-in. The free will of the leader becomes the concrete representative of the will to absolute freedom. As the incarnation of the general will, the leader can be limited neither by existing conditions nor by other subordinate wills.

Arendt describes the logic of totalitarian state action in terms very similar to Hegel's. Totalitarian terror is connected to the exhilarating belief that everything is possible. This fantasy of transcending the limits of the possible is at least partially realized in a monstrous, twisted manner by totalitarian movements. Radical change, even the complete transformation of society, is indeed possible where consequences don't matter, where vast resources are indiscriminately applied in order to make propaganda predictions come out right, and where predictions can always be realized by a mad and perverse willingness to take "the destructive way out of all impasses."[27] "It is one of Hannah Arendt's fundamental insights," writes Pohlmann, "that totalitarian societies are by no means to be understood as systems of authority that are totally subject to consistent norms. They are rather *contrivances for destroying normative order,* which means that they disable the *basic conditions for human socialization processes.*"[28]

Like Hegel, Arendt connects the modern aspiration toward progress and human emancipation to the state terror. In the preface to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* she writes that "Progress and Doom are two sides of the same medal." What gets indicted here is not political freedom, but the demand that a notion of freedom conceived metaphysically in terms of the unboundedness of human will can serve as the basis for a conception of political freedom. Arendt's development

of her critique of this conception of freedom in the essay "What Is Freedom?" is profoundly related to her analysis of totalitarianism. "That the faculty of will and will-power in and by itself," she writes in that essay, "unconnected with any other faculties, is an essentially nonpolitical and even anti-political capacity is perhaps nowhere else so manifest as in the absurdities to which Rousseau was driven and in the curious cheerfulness with which he accepted them. Politically, this identification of freedom with sovereignty is perhaps the most pernicious and dangerous consequence of the philosophical equation of freedom and free will."[29]

The irony of history—and this potentially offensive thesis of Arendt's must be faced up to on pain of dismissal—is that totalitarianism springs from the same soil as the modern conception of freedom. Totalitarian movements participate in a dynamic of modernization the flip side of which constitutes a disintegration of traditional social structures and institutions. The process of structural disintegration subjects individuals to homogenizing pressures that both "press individuals together" and at the same time "isolate." That is, they "massify" and "atomize" the population, setting the stage for the rise of totalitarian movements. Totalitarian movements perpetuate and exacerbate the lawlessness of revolutionary social transformation. Totalitarian regimes "retain terror as a power functioning outside of the law."[30] Laws stabilize society and fix social relations within certain institutional and normative parameters. By contrast, totalitarianism thrives on keeping the movement of disintegration going.

Arendt's indebtedness to Hegel's account of the French revolutionary terror is not surprising.[31] The highly abstract and speculative story Hegel tells has its roots in the culturally conservative German critique of the French Enlightenment. But it also incorporates elements of a religion-based critique of the modern philosophy of man. In a 1951 letter to Jaspers, Arendt speaks of "the radical evil of totalitarianism." "What radical evil really is I don't know," she writes to Jaspers,

> but it seems to me it somehow has to do with the following phenomenon: making human beings as human beings superfluous. This happens as soon as all unpredictability—which, in human beings, is the equivalent of spontaneity—is eliminated. And all this in turn arises from—or, better, goes along with—the delusion of the omnipotence (not simply with the lust for power) of an individual man. If an individual man *qua* man were omnipotent, then there is in fact no reason why men in the plural should exist at all—just as in monotheism it is only God's impotence that makes him ONE. So, in this same way, the omnipotence of an individual man would make men superfluous.[32]

Although Arendt is not advancing a theological position, she, like Hegel, nevertheless draws on the perspective afforded by a theologically rooted critique of modernity. Her exchange with the philosopher Eric Voegelin is illuminating in this regard. In his review of *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Voegelin had expressed his sympathy with aspects of Arendt's analysis: "The spiritual disease of agnosticism is the peculiar problem of the modern masses," he wrote, "and man-made paradises and man-made hells are its symptoms and the masses have the disease whether they are in their paradise or in their hell." [33] Voegelin, however, also had criticized Arendt for failing to follow through on these insights.

> The author, thus, is aware of the problem; but, oddly enough, the knowledge does not affect her treatment of the materials. If the spiritual disease is the decisive feature that distinguishes modern masses from those of earlier centuries, then one would expect the study of totalitarianism not to be delimited by the institutional breakdown of national societies and the growth of socially superfluous masses, but rather by the genesis of the spiritual disease, especially since the response to the institutional breakdown clearly bears the marks of the disease. Then the origins of totalitarianism would not have to be sought primarily in the fate of the national state and attendant social and economic changes since the eighteenth century, but rather in the rise of immanentist sectarianism since the high Middle Ages; and the totalitarian movements would not be simply revolutionary movements of functionally dislocated people, but immanentist creed movements in which mediaeval heresies have come to their fruition.[34]

While Arendt insists on the phenomenological and sociological strand in her historical analysis, Voegelin is right in seeing in her account of the logic of totalitarianism certain elements of the Catholic critique of modernity and of a Romantic secularization of properly religious experiences. In her exchange with Voegelin, Arendt explicitly disavowed a secularization thesis, a historical account of totalitarianism that fails to perceive what is new about this form of government and understands it in essentialist terms.[35] Totalitarianism, Arendt seems to be persistently inveighing, has little to do with the "religious feeling without a religion," that Freud is so deeply suspicious of in his most political essay *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929). Upon closer examination, however, we find that Arendt's reflections on totalitarian terror and ideology are deeply concerned with the question of spiritual feeling, or *Geistesgefühl,* which Immanuel Kant already had set out to critique in his treatment of the sublime in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* and in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment.*[36]

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SUBLIME, ITS HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

"The entirely new and unprecedented forms of totalitarian organization and course of action," writes Arendt in a crucial passage of "Ideology and Terror,"

> must rest on one of the few basic experiences which men can have whenever they live together, and are concerned with public affairs. 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 a 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.[37]

According to Arendt, the paradoxical nature of totalitarianism and the "basic experience" it rests upon is the experience of a "loss of the very capacity for experience."[38] It is the experience of an utter loss of world. The spontaneity of the human being is destroyed. The person is reduced to a bundle of reactions and is radically divested of its capacity for action. Arendt describes the loss of all intersubjectivity and capacity to communicate, the radical isolation and loneliness of the totalitarian subject, but also the way in which the pain of the "ice-cold reasoning" and the "mighty tentacle of dialectics" that "seizes you as in a vice grip" give rise to a peculiar elation of transcending the chaotic situation wrought by the regime of terror in its dislocation and destruction of all social stability.

When Arendt speaks of terror as the essence of totalitarianism and connects the terror of totalitarian rule to the worldlessness of the totalitarian subject, she is drawing upon a type of experience that is well articulated in the realm of aesthetics. Her account suggests that what enters the theater of politics is an experience that has its proper origins in a different sphere. The political relevance of this experience, the experience of the sublime, was already recognized by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful.* Burke introduces the sublime in its familiar relationship with terror and gives it a place in aesthetics alongside that of the beautiful as a "positive pain" that gives enjoyment.

> No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with re-

> gard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror, be endued with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on any thing as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous. There are many animals, who though far from being large, are yet capable of raising ideas of the sublime, because they are considered as objects of terror. As serpents and poisonous animals of almost all kinds. And to things of great dimensions, if we annex an adventitious idea of terror, they become without comparison greater. A level plain of a vast extent on land, is certainly no mean idea; the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean; but can it ever fill the mind with any thing so great as the ocean itself? This is owing to several causes, but it is owing to none more than this, that the ocean is an object of no small terror. Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime.[39]

Burke's complete description of the sublime goes on to delineate most of the elements familiar to us. The sublime is a passion that has us experience a "positive pain." Solitude encourages this passion, whereas beauty is the "passion which belongs to society." A certain aesthetic distance from the danger encountered makes possible the enjoyment of the terrible. And yet, the specter of death itself gives rise to the passion of the sublime. "Vast power" is sublime. Shapelessness and obscurity contribute to the sublime. While the experience of beauty is of a "sensible perfection," and of "clear" but "confused" sensible ideas (according to Alexander Baumgarten), the sublime is taken to be heightened by "dark, uncertain, confused," and "obscure" representations. Burke explains the sublime in naturalistic terms, as "an unnatural tension of the nerves."[40]

The sublime designates a certain mood or sensibility that first got named in the early seventeenth century in connection with the awe and terror inspired by nature. Henry More voices the rapture that the conception of infinite space elicited in the seventeenth century:

> Wherefore with leave th' infinite I'll sing
> Of Time, of Space: or without leave; I'm brent
> And all my spirits move with pleasant trembeling.
> With eagre rage, my heart for joy doth spring.[41]

Encouraged by the new cosmology's transition from the closed world to the infinite universe, the experience of nature's immensity became increasingly invested in the popular imagination with attributes reserved for God. Shaftesbury draws directly on Nicholas of Cusa's idea of the finite world as an "*explicatio* or unfolding of the divine essence" in his view of the natural world as an unfolding of divine mind itself. "The 'Abyss of SPACE,' experienced ecstatically, becomes 'the Seat of thy extensive being.'" In the sublime experience of the immensity of space, di-

vine infinity itself was thought to have become visible in the natural world. One Elizabeth Carter, for example, in a letter of 1762, remarks: "I am afraid I shall miss my church tomorrow, but the sea is to me a sermon and prayers, and at once doctrine and devotion."[42]

By the time Burke was writing in the eighteenth century, the sublime had firmly established itself as an aesthetic category in Britain and Germany and became one of the central experiences claimed by every side in the contest for a new philosophy of man. Not just nature, but raw and unschooled human genius, insofar as it cannot be rationally comprehended in its infinite power to create, was said to inspire the passion of the sublime. The human creative genius became the exemplar of the new man. In this way, the sublime came to serve as a foundational experience, not just for the Romantic vision, but also in a somewhat tempered manner in Kant's critical philosophy.

Unlike Burke, Kant does not understand the sublime merely as a subjective feeling that is to be explained psychologically.[43] The sublime has a transcendental significance, for it recommends to the subject an overall relationship to sensibility on the level of sensibility itself. Kant's account of the movement of the sublime feeling is as rich as any Romantic's.[44] While the experience of beauty is an experience in which the subject feels a harmony within itself and with the object of experience, the sublime is the experience of a dislocation with regard to what presents itself to the senses. Kant emphasizes the peculiar freedom that the sublime experience gives rise to, despite the violence it does to our lower faculties of sensibility and imagination. It is the experience of an unburdening of the self from the cares and concerns of the everyday. "Nature," he writes, "is not judged to be sublime in our aesthetical judgments in so far as it excites fear, but because it calls up that power in us (which is not nature) of regarding as small the things we *care about* (goods, health, and life)." In the movement of the sublime, the subject undergoes a humiliation of the imagination and the faculties of sense, is cast back upon the self and referred to its own rational capacity to grasp the infinite, supersensible purposiveness that gives meaning to the unity of nature and of self and world. It is a movement of sensibility that does violence to the very capacity for grasping the world on the level of sensibility.

The object that occasions the movement of the sublime is monstrous, colossal, shapeless, formless, overflows the bounds of the imagination, and fails to be grasped in sensible intuition because it resists an empirical synthesis. The experience is merely occasioned by the object. It is not really an experience of an object at all, as Burke would have it.[45] Kant

construes it as a reflective experience in which the inability of sense and imagination to grasp what presents itself gives a peculiar pleasure, for it makes the subject aware of its existence, even as it stands apart from the world of the senses. The subject is both repelled and attracted by the experience. The inadequacy of sensibility to grasp the object gives way to a movement of transcendence wherein the subject identifies itself with the infinite.

Arendt's characterization of the peculiar disinterestedness of the totalitarian subject, even in its own life, and of the paradoxical "experience of loss of the capacity for experience" takes up the moments of this complex reflective experience in which Kant and much of the German tradition after him attempt to locate the transcendence of the subject toward its own capacity for experiencing the infinite, the absolute, the idea, an experience or capacity associated with the freedom of the will.

For Kant, as for the German tradition, the experience of the sublime is the locus of the self in which the self experiences its own transcendence over the everyday. Kant is well aware of the danger of this moment. That is precisely why he engages in a critique of taste that deploys this spiritual feeling in an uncritical manner. Already in his early essay on the beautiful and the sublime, he had transformed the notion of the sublime and grounded it in the feeling of human moral worth. And in the *Critique of Judgment,* this concern is at issue, as well. "This pure, elevating, merely negative presentation of morality," he writes against Hamman and Herder in the *Critique of Judgment,* "brings with it, on the other hand, no danger of *fanaticism,* which *is a belief in our capacity of seeing something beyond all bounds of sensibility,* i.e. of dreaming in accordance with fundamental propositions (or of going mad with reason); and this is so just because this presentation is merely negative. For the *inscrutableness of the idea of freedom* quite cuts it off from any positive presentation."[46] In other words, Kant's claim is that the experience of the sublime, when understood as a reflective experience, reveals our capacity for transcendence, but not any incarnation of spirit here on earth. "That was not a line pursued by the British aestheticians, or a tack taken by the Germans of the *Sturm und Drang.* While they stressed wonder and awe, and even developed complex psychological accounts of the experience, they first of all found the ground for such an experience in the objects of nature, and second, if they related it to subjectivity, found the relation not in human moral grandeur, but rather in human genius and creativity."[47]

Arendt's critique of the modern conception of freedom is directed at

precisely this identification of freedom with the experience of sublime transcendence, with an otherworldly freedom that cannot be the basis for political action, an experience that instead unhinges judgment and the modalities of an "enlarged capacity" of thought that arise when projecting oneself toward others in the realm of concrete human affairs. "Inwardness as a place of absolute freedom within one's own self," she writes in "What Is Freedom?" was discovered "in late antiquity by those who had no place of their own in the world and hence lacked a worldly condition which, from early antiquity to almost the middle of the nineteenth century, was unanimously held to be a prerequisite for freedom."[48] Modernity, according to Arendt, falsely identifies political freedom with the (inward) freedom of the will. While Arendt agrees with Kant's great "insight that freedom is no more ascertainable to the inner sense and within the field of inner experience than it is to the senses with which we know and understand the world," she rejects his solution to the problem of freedom, since it takes the subject of freedom out of the world altogether. Consistent with the philosophical tradition's articulation of the experience of the sublime, Arendt suggests that this existential stance—fostered under totalitarianism by a comprehensive upending of social structures and norms backed by the threat of police terror—destroys the subject's capacity for distinguishing between fiction and reality.[49]

THE STATE AS THE SUBLIME OBJECT

Our master narrative, which traces the migration of divine attributes to nature, to the sovereign individual, and finally to an association with the expectations and attitudes toward the sovereignty of the modern state—a secularization of sorts carried forward by the spiritual and cultural role accorded to the experience of the sublime—might sound far too abstract to serve as a frame for what Arendt calls her phenomenal approach, which, as she is fond of repeating, starts from facts and events, instead of historical essences. As we have seen, Arendt vehemently rejected a straightforward secularization thesis. Nevertheless, her analysis of totalitarianism undoubtedly seizes upon the career of the *Geistesgefühl* of the sublime within the modern tradition, implicates the disclosive power accorded to this mood, and explores its significance for the intrinsic relationship between totalitarian ideology and totalitarian terror.

In her criticism of the existential tradition, Arendt persistently challenges its privileging of this standpoint as a vantage from which the

identity of the self or of the community should be constructed. Not just Kant, but Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Heidegger, and Sartre[50] all relate the most profound self-experience to the sublime movement of feeling, which encourages a radical leave-taking from the cares and concerns of the everyday—a leave-taking from "the burden of our time"—and a desperate projection toward some as yet still merely imagined extraordinary existence, which for lack of a controlling power can momentarily find its concrete expression only in the comprehensive destruction of its own prevailing situation.[51] Such identities display a "peculiar cheerfulness" that makes them suspect and renders them beyond the reach of conventional ethics—ethics that, although oppressive, nevertheless may at times provide limits of last resort when basic social arrangements and institutions have broken down. We should note, of course, that each of these thinkers was also characteristically self-conscious and critical of identities authorized by this type of comprehensive dislocation alone.[52]

In her strongest passage against Heidegger's philosophy, in the essay "What Is Existential Philosophy?" that was published in 1947 at the same time that she was writing *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Arendt rehearses precisely the kind of criticism she applies to the "radical evil" of totalitarianism in the letter to Jaspers: "Heidegger's conception of Dasein," Arendt argues, "puts man in the place of God."[53] In a footnote to her discussion of Heidegger, Arendt explains Heidegger's foray into National Socialism by pointing to his affinity with the Romantics: "[Heidegger's] entire mode of behavior [during the Third Reich]," she writes,

> has such exact parallels in German Romanticism that one can hardly believe them to result from the sheer coincidence of a purely personal failure of character. Heidegger is really (let us hope) the last Romantic—an immensely talented Friedrich Schlegel or Adam Müller, as it were, whose complete lack of responsibility is attributable to a spiritual playfulness that stems in part from delusions of genius and in part from despair.[54]

To be sure, Arendt distances Heidegger from totalitarianism by this remark, because she insists on a distinction between early nineteenth-century ideologies and the character and significance of totalitarian ideology. At the same time, this move reiterates the connection between the wholesale privileging of a certain existential stance or self-world relationship and the disastrous course of twentieth-century politics.

Adam Müller's nationalist political tract *The Idea of the State* (1809), in which he developed the representative Romantic theory of politics,[55] displays striking similarities with Arendt's characterization of totalitar-

ian ideology. Müller's first political work, composed, like Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy,* during a Franco-Prussian war, figures the state as a sublime object and puts forth many of the elements of totalitarian ideology. The National Socialists explicitly claimed Müller's political tract as their heritage. In a review essay published in two parts in the *Kölner Zeitung* in 1932, Hannah Arendt addresses the "Adam Müller Renaissance" spurred by the German nationalist revival. "When National Socialism relates itself to Adam Müller," writes Arendt, "it intends more specifically his theory of man in the 'community' [*Gemeinschaft*]. Müller's concept of the community is indeed irridescent [*schillernd*], part biological, part historical, part religious."[56]

Müller demands that we reject the dead, abstract, and legalistic concepts of the French Enlightenment's theory of the individual and its relationship to the state. He seeks to return "movement" and "life" to the state. The state is to be understood naturally and organically and, most importantly, as idea.[57] Müller urges a holy marriage of the individual with the state in which all opposition is dissolved into a higher unity. Though he pays homage to the citizen's individuality or authenticity (*Eigenheit;* Heidegger uses *eigen, eigentlich* for "authentic"), this authenticity expresses itself in the subordination / coordination of the individual into the organism of the whole (*Einordnung in den Organismus des Ganzen*), "which brings the citizen into more universal relations and thereby places his own individuality on firmer, securer, freer ground."[58]

The state gets invested with all the attributes of the sublime experience. It is originary. There is nothing outside the state, and it is boundless and comprehends all changes in forms of government. Müller explicitly acknowledges the religious origins of the experiences he invokes: "The state rests entirely within itself. It originates independently of human arbitrariness and invention, immediately and contemporaneously with man, where man originates, namely from nature, or, as the ancients said, from God."[59]

Müller's state is in perpetual motion, fusing individuals into an organic whole that is itself the unmediated life of the idea. It is in war that the bourgeois differentiation of society into different spheres reveals itself as bankrupt. How can such a state act? How can it "stand for a single Man" when its existence is at stake?[60] "The state," he writes, "is the totality of all human affairs and their synthesis into an organic whole. If we cut even the most insignificant part of the human nature off from this connection forever, if we separate the human character in any aspect

from that of the citizen (*vom bürgerlichen*), we can no longer experience / feel [*empfinden*] the state as a form of life or as idea."[61] This idea is nothing but the natural development of the state in its organic form. The state is not a contract made by men but is a force of nature itself.

The elements of Müller's theory of the state enter into Arendt's account of ideology: totalitarian ideology, which elides the efficacy of human judgment and describes history, including totalitarianism's own accession to power, as an inexorable logic inherent in history or nature itself, represents a heightening of these moments. "An ideology," writes Arendt in "Ideology and Terror,"

> is quite literally what its name indicates: it is the logic of an idea. Its subject matter is history, to which the idea is applied; the result of this application is not a body of statements about something that *is*, but the unfolding of a process which is in constant change. The ideology treats the course of events as though it followed the same "law" as the logical exposition of its "idea."[62]

The "idea" of an ideology is not Platonic in the sense that it provides a sort of regulative ideal. Totalitarian ideology treats history as the unfolding of "a movement which is the consequence of the idea itself and needs no outside factor to set it into motion."[63] The fanaticism Kant fears, namely, of an identification of the (symbolic) object occasioning the sublime movement of reflection with the absolute itself, is exactly what Müller proposes and what Arendt portrays as occurring under totalitarian rule. Every action of the totalitarian state becomes not just a reference toward a higher law, but the embodiment of the absolute law of nature / history, of movement / life itself.[64]

The National Socialists clearly saw their own sensibilities reflected in Adam Müller's theory of the state. Arendt, however, questions such an unambiguous relegation of Müller to the canon of National Socialist thinkers. Her reasons are illuminating, since they display the already familiar concern with the concretization of the absolute characteristic of a politics of the sublime. Müller was finally a Catholic, and as such he still held to the ultimately transcendent nature and authority of religious practice and prescription. "What Müller intends as a Catholic," Arendt explains, "is intended nonreligiously, naturalistically by National Socialism." He did not entirely divorce his quasi-religious veneration of the state from religious traditions and institutions, as the National Socialists did. As a result, Müller's state could still be fallible. It had to live up to an ideal that it did not automatically embody.[65] Moreover, Müller's positions, as Arendt argues, have to be understood within their histori-

cal context. They were first of all strategic. Müller sought first of all to sanctify the existing order—the waning aristocratic class to which he so desperately sought to be admitted—a project entirely at odds with the totalitarian evacuation of tradition. These distinguishing features of Müller's political engagement invited the Nazi "constitutional lawyer" Carl Schmitt's most virulent scorn.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that Arendt's account of totalitarianism subtly (or surreptitiously, if one prefers) draws on an aesthetic category that has helped define the German tradition of thought, its philosophical anthropology, and its aesthetic approach to politics. Arendt figures the totalitarian sensibility as a species of the sublime. The notion of "terror" is therefore used ambiguously in Arendt's theory. It designates the literal terrorization of society by the totalitarian machinery for making war on its own population by the secret police, the system of special tribunals, political prisons, concentration camps, and so forth. At the same time "terror" designates synechdochically a complex sensibility of existential dislocation that, according to Arendt, affects the population broadly under totalitarian rule.[66] "Terror, in the sense we were speaking of it," she writes in one of her unpublished essays, "is not so much something which people may fear, but a way of life."[67] Arendt's suggestion, which illuminates the peculiar mixture of terrible coercion and enthusiastic cooperation that characterizes the popular response to totalitarian rule, is that these two senses and experiences of terror conspire. This aspect of Arendt's account of totalitarianism is offered from within the tradition of German philosophical anthropology and also from within the tradition of nationalist feeling.[68]

The connections argued for here are frequently only implicit in Arendt's work. She does not use the word "sublime" in her theory of totalitarian terror. The intuitive cogency of Arendt's account, however, significantly depends upon the rich connections she makes, at a sophisticated philosophical level, with an intellectual history that has profoundly shaped European politics during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The question we may raise is whether entering into the debate about totalitarianism on the grounds of this intellectual tradition, which, it seems to me, Arendt does, is itself corrupting, as Isaiah Berlin suggests. We might recall the debate between the Jesuit and revolutionary Marxist Naphta and the humanist Settembrini in Thomas Mann's *Magic*

Mountain, which Arendt read together with Heidegger in 1924.[69] Something peculiar happens as soon as a protagonist enters the infectious atmosphere of the magic mountaintop at Davos. The air itself is infectious, and once engaged in the cure, all participants become sick. Even the down-to-earth engineer Castorp begins to be seduced by the magnetic rhetoric of the radical revolutionary Naphta, and the humanist Settembrini has few resources to stay the ship.

MICHAEL HALBERSTAM, "HANNAH ARENDT ON THE TOTALITARIAN SUBLIME"

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1. See Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (London: P. Halban, 1992), pp. 82–83: "she produces no arguments, no evidence of serious philosophical or historical thought. It is all a stream of metaphysical associations." Quoted by Seyla Benhabib in *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996).

2. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), p. 466. Also, p. 465: "Terror is the realization of the law of movement; its chief aim is to make it possible for the force of nature or of history to race freely through mankind, unhindered by any spontaneous human action."

3. Ibid., pp. 478, 459, 470, 303, 474, 476, 466.

4. The first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* appeared in 1948. Arendt added the essay "Ideology and Terror" to the 1958 revised edition.

5. "Whereas in Germany itself—though it was very different in the occupied territories—there was a certain horrific predictability to the terror, so that non-targeted groups were relatively safe as long as they kept out of trouble and retained a low profile, the very unpredictability of Stalinist terror meant that no one could feel safe. By the later 1930's Stalin had turned the terror against the party, the army high command, economic managers, the members of his own Politburo, and even the secret police itself." Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin,

"Afterthoughts," in *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison,* edited by Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 355. See also Dan Diner, "Nationalsozialismus und Stalinismus," in *Kreisläufe* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1995), p. 67: "Under Stalinism fear was pervasive—a genuine regime of terror . . . Stalin's rule was totalitarian in the highest degree—a characterization that cannot validly be applied to National Socialism in the same way."

6. George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 4.

7. For a comparative analysis, see *Stalinism and Nazism,* edited by Kershaw and Lewin. For a reassessment of the totalitarian paradigm, see *The Totalitarian Paradigm after the End of Communism,* edited by Achim Siegel (Amsterdam: Rodophi, 1998).

8. To mention just one, anti-Semitism and racism, which she makes one of the elements of totalitarianism's genesis, though they did drive National Socialism, weren't essential parts of Bolshevik ideology. For a reconsideration of Arendt's theory of totalitarianism, see Friedrich Pohlmann, "The 'Seeds of Destruction' in Totalitarian Systems: An Interpretation of the Unity of Hannah Arendt's Political Philosophy," in Siegel, *The Totalitarian Paradigm.*

9. Clearly the periodization of Soviet and Nazi rule is important to Arendt's totalitarianism thesis. Arendt's model applies best to Nazi rule between 1939 and 1945 in Germany and to Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union between 1929 and his death in 1953. Both regimes brought periods of relative civil peace after their accession to power. The National Socialists did make war on their population, on the "enemy within" (as did Stalin against the peasants and many others). The distinction between "ethnic Germans" and non-ethnic Germans is somewhat artificial. To a certain degree, it relies on Nazi racial distinctions. Jews and Communists were Germans (and, often enough, nationalists!) too. They were part of the mainstream of German society. "Germans," like "Frenchmen," identified themselves regionally and locally before nationalism. See Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses,* for the nationalization of Germany, and Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1976), for the case of France. In mid-1933, 11 percent of all practicing German physicians were Jews. Jews still made up more than 16 percent of all practicing lawyers. They were citizens, culture bearers, employers, employees, fiduciaries, and neighbors. Saul Friedlander's *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998) quickly communicates the sense of utter bewilderment that must strike any observer of the "system of terror" put into action during the accession to power in 1933 (p. 17). Accordingly, while Kershaw and Lewin insist that Hitler did not rule by terror, they do not, of course, deny that terror pervaded the system or that its comparative analysis is no longer of interest to historians (*Stalinism and Nazism,* pp. 8–9).

10. Friedrich Pohlmann, "The 'Seeds of Destruction,'" p. 227.

11. Ibid., p. 229.

12. "For a month he was absorbed in the histories of ancient and modern art in order to gather evidence to demonstrate the basically revolutionary and disruptive character of Hegel's fundamental categories; like the young Russian rad-

icals of this period he looked upon them as being, in Herzen's phrase, 'The algebra of revolution.' 'Too frightened to apply them openly,' wrote Herzen, 'in the storm-tossed ocean of politics, the old philosopher set them afloat in the tranquil inland lake of aesthetic theory.'" Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 76. See also Louis Dupré, *Marx's Social Critique of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 262: "Marx's early aesthetic reflections set up an ideal of cultural integration that gradually came to dominate his entire work." On the relevance of the aesthetic for the conservative revolutionaries in Germany see, for example, Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (1961; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). See also Joseph Chytry, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

13. Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 5.

14. See, for example, Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). See also my *Totalitarianism and the Modern Conception of Politics,* chapter 7.

15. Canovan, *Hannah Arendt,* p. 3.

16. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger.*

17. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 187.

18. Ibid., p. 403.

19. Jean Hyppolite, *The Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit,* translated by Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 454.

20. I am indebted to Joe Rouse for this way of putting things.

21. "What emerges . . . is of course the demand for 'absolute freedom' from all previous restrictions and cultural restraints. What Hegel describes here is a kind of contextless freedom, a nihilistic yearning for oblivion or a 'freedom of the void' which is often associated with the modern desire for revolution and total emancipation." Steven Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 87.

22. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract,* in *Social Contract,* introduced by Ernest Barker (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 181. For a feminist critique of the social contract, see Carol Pateman, "The Fraternal Social Contract," in *Contemporary Political Philosophy,* edited by Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit (London: Blackwell, 1996). Feminist critiques of the social contract generally begin with Hegel's critical insight into the formalism and abstraction of the idea of the social contract.

23. Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings,* edited by Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 41–54.

24. Hegel would stress the retreat from politics and into the self that characterizes Kant's moral philosophy. Taylor, *Hegel,* pp. 187–88.

25. "Sein Zweck ist der allgemeine Zweck, seine Sprache das allgemeine Gesetz, sein Werk das allgemeine Werk." G. W. F. Hegel, *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952), p. 416, *The Phenomenology of Spirit,* p. 357.

26. Ibid., p. 359. Fichte was regarded as a supporter of the Jacobin policies of Robespierre. On this see Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism,* p. 85. And Hegel has Fichte's version of idealism in mind when he addresses the Jacobin reign of terror. Fichte advocated a "police state" and was explicit about carrying the perspective of the theoretical subject into the realm of practical affairs: "To subject all irrational nature to himself, to rule over it without restraint and according to his own laws is the ultimate end of man; which *ultimate end* is perfectly unattainable. . . . But he may and should constantly approach nearer to it—and thus the *unceasing approximation* to this end is his true *vocation* as man." Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of the Scholar,* in *The Popular Works,* translated by William Smith (London: John Chapman, 1848) 1:183, cited by Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism,* p. 83.

27. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* p. 341: "Totalitarianism uses violence not so much to frighten people . . . as to realize constantly its ideological doctrines and its practical lies. Totalitarianism will not be satisfied to assert, in the face of contrary facts, that unemployment does not exist; it will abolish unemployment as part of its propaganda, and in the end eliminate the unemployed."

28. Pohlmann, "The 'Seeds of Destruction,'" pp. 234–35.

29. Arendt, "What Is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking, 1968), p. 164.

30. Arendt, "Mankind and Terror," in *Essays in Understanding,* edited by Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), p. 300.

31. Arendt does, however, want to distinguish sharply between revolutionary politics and totalitarian politics. She argues that revolutionary politics culminates in a new constitution of liberty, that is, in a new legal code, whereas totalitarianism engages in "permanent revolution." But this is not how Hegel reads the French Revolution.

32. Arendt to Jaspers, March 4, 1951, in *Correspondence 1926–1969,* edited by Lotte Köhler and Hans Saner, translated by Robert Kimber and Rita Kimber (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p. 166, cited by Steven Aschheim, *Culture and Catastrophe* (New York: NYU Press, 1996), p. 110.

33. Eric Voegelin, "A Review of *The Origins of Totalitarianism,*" *Review of Politics* (January 1953): 63–98.

34. Ibid., p. 74.

35. See especially her essay "Religion and Politics" in *Essays in Understanding* for her rejection of a secularization thesis.

36. "A correct estimation of the role of the 'Analytic of the Sublime' in the *Third Critique* must find its function not simply in completing the architectonic articulation of aesthetic judgments but much more in demonstrating a connection between aesthetic experience in general and the ultimate nature of the self. Kant confirmed this point by terming his consideration of the sublime a *Kritik des Geistesgefühls,* a critique of spiritual feeling [Kant, *First Introduction to the Third Critique* §12:54 (A.A. 20:250)] . . . the sublime was the aesthetic experience which par excellence symbolized the moral dimension of human existence." John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 278–79.

37. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 461.

38. Ibid., p. 474.

39. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, edited by James T. Boulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), p. 58.

40. Ibid., pp. 39–43, 64, and part 2, section 3.

41. Cited by Ernest Tuveson, *The Imagination as a Source of Grace* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 59.

42. Ibid., pp. 61, 58.

43. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), §28, 100–101.

44. "Bold overhanging, and as it were threatening rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such like—these exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might. But the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided only that we are in security; and we willingly call these objects sublime, because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature. Now, in the immensity of nature and in the insufficiency of our faculties to take in a standard proportionate to the aesthetical estimation of the magnitude of its *realm*, we find our own limitation, although at the same time in our rational faculty we find a different, nonsensuous standard, which has that infinity itself under it as a unity, in comparison with which everything in nature is small, and thus in our mind we find a superiority to nature even in its immensity. And so also the irresistibility of its might, while making us recognize our own [physical] impotence, considered as beings of nature, discloses to us a faculty of judging independently of and a superiority over nature, on which is based a kind of self-preservation entirely different from that which can be attacked and brought into danger by external nature. Thus humanity in our person remains unhumiliated, though the individual might have to submit to this dominion. In this way nature is not judged to be sublime in our aesthetical judgments in so far as it excites fear, but because it calls up that power in us (which is not nature) of regarding as small the things we *care about* (goods, health, and life), and of regarding its might (to which we are no doubt subjected in respect of these things) as nevertheless without any dominion over us and our personality to which we must bow where our highest fundamental propositions, and their assertion or abandonment, are concerned. Therefore nature is here called sublime merely because it elevates the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make felt the proper sublimity of its destination, in comparison with nature itself." Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §28, A 104–5. Italics indicate my changes in the translation. Kant uses the same word, *Sorge, besorgt sein*, that Heidegger uses in *Being and Time*. This is not coincidental. Heidegger's leave taking from care in the "resolute anticipation of death" (*Entschlossenheit*) of the second half

of *Being and Time* is explicitly making use of the experience of the sublime and its history in the German tradition.

45. Burke, *Enquiry*, p. 57: "In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other."

46. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §29, 116.

47. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, p. 277.

48. Arendt, "What Is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future*, p. 147.

49. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche uses the experience of sublime terror precisely in this manner to level all distinctions between reality and appearances in the "Apollinian" world, that is, in our everyday social and perceptual experience. He later repudiated the work as the product of, among other things, "an illness contracted at the front."

50. Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy;* Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling;* Kant, *Critique of Judgment;* Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment;* Heidegger, *Being and Time;* Sartre, *Being and Nothingness.*

51. The original title of Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was *The Burden of Our Time* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1951).

52. See, e.g., Nietzsche's attempt at a self-criticism in the preface to later editions of *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *The Case of Wagner*, in his chapter "On Those Who Are Sublime" in *Zarathustra*, and in many other writings.

53. Arendt, "What Is Existentialism?" in *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 176–77: "The fascination that the idea of nothingness has held for modern philosophy does not necessarily suggest a nihilistic bias in that philosophy. If we consider the problem of nothingness in our context of a philosophy in revolt against philosophy as pure contemplation and if we see it as an attempt to make us the master of Being and thus enable us to pose the philosophical questions that will enable us to progress immediately to action, the idea that Being is really nothingness is of inestimable value. Proceeding from this idea, man can imagine that he stands in the same relationship to Being as the Creator stood before creating the world, which, as we know, was created *ex nihilo*. Then too, designating Being as nothingness brings with it the attempt to put behind us the definition of Being as what is given and to regard human actions not just as god-like but as divine. This is the reason—though it is not one Heidegger admits to—why in his philosophy nothingness suddenly becomes active and begins to nihilate [*nichten*]. Nothing tries, as it were, to destroy the givenness of Being and nihilatingly [*nichtend*] to usurp Being's place. If Being, which I have not created, is the business of a being that I am not and do not know, then nothingness is perhaps the truly free domain of man. Since I cannot be a world-creating being it could perhaps be my role to be a world-destroying being."

54. Ibid., p. 187.

55. Adam Müller, "Von der Idee des Staates" (1809), in *Deutsche Vergangenheit und deutscher Staat*, edited by Paul Kluckhohn (Leipzig: Philip Reclam, 1935), pp. 200–226.

56. "Adam Müller Rennaissance" in *Kölnische Zeitung*, nos. 502 and 510 (September 9 and September 17, 1932).

57. "Den Staat als ein durchaus lebendiges Ganzes und in der Bewegung [als

Idee] gefasst." Kluckhohn, "Einleitung," in *Deutsche Vergangenheit und deutscher Staat,* pp. 20, 212–13. See Müller, "Von der Idee des Staates," pp. 212 ff.

58. Adam Müller, "Vorlesungen über die deutsche Wissenschaft und Literatur," cited by Kluckhohn, "Einführung," *Deutsche Vergangenheit und deutscher Staat,* p. 20.

59. Müller, "Von der Idee des Staates," p. 212: "Der Staat ruht ganz in sich; unabhängig von menschlicher Willkür und Erfindung, kommt er unmittelbar und zugleich mit dem Menschen daher, wo der Mensch kommt, aus der Natur: aus Gott, sagten die Alten."

60. Similar arguments were made by antiliberals during the 1920s such as Carl Schmitt. See Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1993), especially chapter 1. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, Schmitt launched a vociferous critique of Adam Müller and other Romantics in *Political Romanticism* (1925), translated by Guy Oakes (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986). Schmitt especially seizes on Müller's opportunism and hypocrisy. Müller changed his theoretical allegiances according to his political fortunes. He also offered the Prussian minister Hardenberg his services as a secret journalistic provocateur for the Prussian state. Hardenberg turned him down. Schmitt's own political opportunism matches Müller's in every respect, except that Schmitt was more successful. Still condemning the Nazi Party in a book published in 1932, he quickly acceded to Hitler's request in 1933 to establish the constitutional legitimacy of the National Socialist state retroactively. Arendt is likely to have read Schmitt's book on Romanticism. Her essay appears to draw on it.

61. Müller, "Von der Idee des Staates," p. 214: "*Der Staat ist die Totalität* der menschlichen Angelegenheiten, ihre Verbindung zu einem lebendigen Ganzen. Schneiden wir auch nur das unbedeutendste Teil des menschlichen Wesens aus diesem Zusammenhange für immer heraus, trennen wir den menschlichen Charakter auch nur an irgendeiner Stelle vom bürgerlichen, so können wir den Staat als Lebenserscheinung oder als Idee worauf es hier ankommt, nicht mehr empfinden."

62. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* p. 469.

63. Ibid., p. 469.

64. Arendt's turn to Montesquieu as a resource for political thinking also is in direct opposition to Müller's rejection of Montesquieu as the representative of the mistaken bourgeois differentiation of the state into different spheres. See Müller, "Von der Idee des Staates," pp. 220–21.

65. A similar defense of Hegel's quasi-messianism is provided by Shlomo Avineri: while "Hegel's vision of the state [as the sublime march of the spirit of world history on earth] invests it with the positive role of being itself the embodiment of man's self-consciousness . . . this, however, also reflects the potentially critical attitude Hegel develops against the state. The state embodies man's highest relationship to other human beings yet this function of the state is conditional, not absolute. In order to qualify for such a role, the state has to reflect the individual's self-consciousness." *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 181.

66. Commentators take issue with precisely this conflation of the experience

of victims on the one hand and perpetrators and bystanders on the other. In *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York: Vintage, 1997), Daniel Goldhagen, for example, argues that "contrary to Arendt's assertions, the perpetrators were not such atomized, lonely beings [as Arendt claims]. They decidedly belonged to their world and had plenty of opportunities, which they obviously used, to discuss and reflect upon their exploits" (p. 581, n. 23). Kant and those who follow his analysis of the sublime regard an aesthetic distance to the threat, that is, a removal from immediate threat, as a condition of its functioning as an aesthetic experience. It is such aesthetic distance that makes possible the experience of a threat to one's existence as a source of delight. On this reading, the bystanders would be the ones to experience the "loss of world" as sublime.

67. Arendt, "On the Nature of Totalitarianism," in *Essays in Understanding*, p. 357.

68. George Mosse describes the significance of the sublime for nationalism and for an emerging tradition of political religion in Europe from an objectivating point of view: "Ernst Moritz Arndt, the poet of German unity, said in 1814 that Christian prayer should accompany national festivals, but even when such obvious linkage vanished the national cult retained not only the forms of Christian liturgy intact, but also the ideal of beauty: the 'beauty of holiness' which was exemplified by Christian churches. This tradition, fused with classicism, led to such artistic forms as could inspire political action. Both in the French Revolution and in Pietism, the ideal of inner-directed creative activity had already pushed outward into the political realm. The artistic and the political had fused." *Nationalization of the Masses*, p. 15. See Isaiah Berlin, "A Remarkable Decade," in *Russian Thinkers* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), p. 119, for some of the factors that contributed to the tremendous influence of German Romanticism on the birth of the Russian intelligentsia. Admittedly, this essay leaves unexplored the connections that would need to be made in order to show that aesthetic categories are relevant in the Russian case.

69. It is well known that Thomas Mann based the figure of the Romantic, revolutionary Marxist Naphta on Georg Lukács, whom Mann met in 1922. Lukács, who was later to become a Stalinist, was then in exile for his participation in the 1919 revolution in Hungary. Mann was one of the first to anticipate the totalitarian paradigm in his fusion of reactionary and communist sensibilities in the figure of Naphta. See István Hermann's "Introduction" to Judith-Marcus Tar, *Thomas Mann und Grygory Lucács* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1982).