

The Review Of Politics

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Authority in the Twentieth Century

Author(s): Hannah Arendt

Source: *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Oct., 1956), pp. 403-417

Published by: Cambridge University Press for the University of Notre Dame du lac on behalf of Review of Politics

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1404647>

Accessed: 24/10/2008 02:58

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Authority in the Twentieth Century

by Hannah Arendt

I

THE RISE of fascist, communist and totalitarian movements and the development of the two totalitarian regimes, Stalin's after 1929 and Hitler's after 1938, took place against a background of a more or less general, more or less dramatic breakdown of all traditional authorities. Nowhere was this breakdown the direct result of the regimes or movements themselves, but it seemed as though totalitarianism, in the form of regimes as well as of movements, was best fitted to take advantage of a general political and social atmosphere in which the validity of authority itself was radically doubted.

The most extreme manifestation of this climate which, with minor geographical and chronological exceptions, has been the atmosphere of our century since its inception, is the gradual breakdown of the one form of authority which exists in all historically known societies, the authority of parents over children, of teachers over pupils and, generally of the elders over the young. Even the least "authoritarian" forms of government have always accepted this kind of "authority" as a matter of course. It has always seemed to be required as much by natural needs, the helplessness of the child, as by political necessity, the continuity of an established civilization which can be assured only if those who are newcomers by birth are guided through a pre-established world into which they are born as strangers. Because of its simple and elementary character, this form of a strictly limited authority has, throughout the history of political thought, been used and abused as a model for very different and much less limited authoritarian systems.¹

¹ The first to use this argument seems to be Aristotle, when in his *Politics* he wished to demonstrate that "every political community is composed of those who rule and those who are ruled" (1332b12). There he said: "Nature herself has provided the distinction . . . (between) the younger and the older ones, of whom she fitted the ones to be ruled and the others to rule" (1332b36).

It seems that ours is the first century in which this argument no longer carries an overwhelming weight of plausibility and it announced its anti-authoritarian spirit nowhere more radically than when it promised the emancipation of youth as an oppressed class and called itself the "century of the child." I cannot here follow the implications of this early self-interpretation which are manifold, nor am I now interested in the various schools of "progressive education" where this principle found its realization. But it may be worth noting that the anti-authoritarian position has been driven to the extreme of education without authority only in the United States, the most egalitarian and the least tradition-bound country of the West, where precisely the results of this radical experiment are now, more than any other single political or social factor, leading to a re-evaluation of the very concept of authority. Neo-Conservatism, which has won a surprisingly large following in recent years, is primarily cultural and educational, and not political or social, in outlook; it appeals to a mood and concern which are direct results of the elimination of authority from the relationship between young and old, teacher and pupil, parents and children.

I mentioned this strangest, but in other respects least interesting, aspect of the problem of authority in our world only because it shows to what extremes the general decline of authority could go, even to the neglect of obvious natural necessities. For this indicates how very unlikely it is that we shall find in our century the rise of authentic authoritarian forms of government and, hence, how careful we must be lest we mistake tyrannical forms of government, which rule by order and decree, for authoritarian structures. Our century, it is true, has seen quite a number of new variations of tyranny and dictatorship, among which we must count the fascist and early communist types of one-party systems. But these differ as much in institutional structure, type of organization and political content from authoritarian bodies as they differ from totalitarian domination. Unless we define authority without regard to its historical and verbal content, and identify it with arbitrary orders and total abolition of freedom, that is, with political realities always thought to be its very opposite, we shall find it hard indeed to understand why not only journalists but even political scientists can speak of a "rise of authoritarian forms of government in the twentieth century." The most one

can say is that up to now one authentically authoritarian institution has managed to survive the onslaught of the modern age, the Catholic Church, which of course has long ceased to be a body politic, properly speaking.

Tyrannies and authoritarian forms of government are very old, the first going back to Greek antiquity and the other having its origin in the spirit of the Roman Republic. Only totalitarian domination is new, as new as the word itself and the claim to *total*, and not only political, domination. Our knowledge of it is still very limited, the only variety open to our inquiries being the Hitler regime, for which documentary material has become available in recent years. No doubt this limitation tempts us to examine the newest body politic in our history with conceptual tools which apply to or are derived from more familiar experiences, but by such identification—with tyranny on one hand and with authoritarianism on the other—we lose sight of precisely those characteristics and institutions which belong to this and no other phenomenon.

The identification of totalitarianism with authoritarianism occurs most frequently among liberal writers. They start from the assumption that “the constancy of progress . . . in the direction of organized and assured freedom is the characteristic fact of modern history”² and look upon each deviation from this course as a reactionary process leading in the opposite direction. This makes them overlook the differences in principle between the restriction of freedom in authoritarian regimes, the abolition of political freedom in tyrannies and dictatorships, and the total elimination of spontaneity itself, that is, of the most general and most elementary manifestation of human freedom, at which only totalitarian regimes aim by means of their various methods of conditioning; for terror and concentration-camps are meant not so much to frighten as to condition people. The liberal writer, concerned with history and the progress of freedom rather than with forms of government, sees only differences in degree here, and ignores that authoritarian government committed to the restriction of liberty remains tied to the freedom it limits to the extent that it would lose its very substance if it abolished it altogether, that is, would change into tyranny. The same is true for the distinction between legitimate

² The formulation is Lord Acton's in his “Inaugural Lecture on the ‘Study of History’” reprinted in *Essays on Freedom and Power* (New York, 1955), p. 35.

and illegitimate power on which all authoritarian government hinges. The liberal writer is apt to pay little attention to it because of his conviction that all power corrupts and that the constancy of progress requires constant loss of power, no matter what its origin may be.

Behind the liberal identification of totalitarianism with authoritarianism, and the concomitant inclination to see "totalitarian" trends in every authoritarian limitation of freedom, lies an older confusion of authority with tyranny, and of legitimate power with violence. The difference between tyranny and authoritarian government has always been that the tyrant rules in accordance with his own will and interest, and even the most draconic authoritarian government is bound by laws. Its acts are tested by a code which either was not made by man at all, as in the case of the law of nature or God's Commandments or the Platonic ideas, or at least not by those actually in power. The source of authority in authoritarian government is always a force external and superior to its own power; it is always this source, this external force which transcends the political realm, from which the authorities derive their "authority," that is, their legitimacy, and against which their power can be checked.

Modern spokesmen of authority, who, even in the short intervals when public opinion provides a favorable climate for neo-Conservatism, remain well aware that theirs is an almost lost cause, are of course eager to point to this distinction between tyranny and authority. Where the liberal writer sees an essentially assured progress in the direction of freedom, which is only temporarily interrupted by some dark forces of the past, the Conservative sees a process of doom which started with the dwindling of authority, so that freedom, after it lost the restricting limitations which protected its boundaries, became helpless, defenseless and bound to be destroyed. (It is hardly fair to say that only liberal political thought is primarily interested in freedom; there is hardly a school of political thought in our history which is not centered around the idea of freedom, much as the concept of liberty may vary with different writers and in different political circumstances. The only exception of any consequence to this statement seems to me to be the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, who, of course, is anything but a Conservative.) Tyranny and totalitarianism are again identified, except that now totalitarian government,

if it is not directly identified with democracy, is seen as its almost inevitable result, that is, the result of the disappearance of all traditionally recognized authorities. Yet the differences between tyranny and dictatorship on one side, and totalitarian domination on the other, are no less distinct than those between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. The proverbial quiet of the cemetery with which tyrants, from the rulers of ancient city-states to modern dictators, have covered their countries once they have suppressed all organized opposition and destroyed all actual enemies, has never yet been enjoyed by people living under a totalitarian regime.

Modern one-party-dictatorships resemble tyrannies to the extent that their rule rests on parties, and not movements. It is true, though, that already in the case of most fascist dictatorships, it was a movement which brought the dictator into power; but the point is that the movement was frozen into a party after the seizure of power. The very articulate and often repeated criticism the Nazis voiced against Mussolini and Italian fascism, as well as their no less articulate admiration for Stalin and the Bolshevism of the Stalinist era, center around this vital difference between a party dictatorship and a totalitarian movement, or, to use their own language, between the dictatorial head of a normal state and a "world revolutionary." The totalitarian form of domination depends entirely upon the fact that a movement, and not a party, has taken power, that the rulers are chiefly concerned with keeping the movement moving, and preventing its "degeneration" into a party, so that instead of the tyrant's brutal determination and the dictator's demagogic ability to keep himself in power at all costs, we find the totalitarian leader's single-minded attention directed to the acceleration of the movement itself. This is the significance of the purges of the Stalin-regime, as it is of Hitler's "selection process which should never be permitted to come to an end." Its outstanding characteristic was that it could function only as an extermination process.³ (*Auslese- and Ausmerzungsprozess* in Nazi parlance meant the same thing.)

Closely connected with this characteristic is the apparently senseless use of terror in totalitarian regimes, which distinguishes them most conspicuously from modern as well as past dictatorships

³ This formulation occurs frequently in Nazi literature. We quote here from Heinrich Himmler, "Die Schutzstaffel als antibolschewistische Kampforganisation." *Schriften aus dem Schwarzen Korps*, No. 3, 1936.

and tyrannies. Terror is no longer a means to frighten and suppress opponents, but, on the contrary, increases with the decrease of opposition, reaches its climax when opposition no longer exists and directs its full fury not so much against the enemies of the regime as against people who are innocent even from the viewpoint of the persecutor. Only the category of "objective or potential enemies," that is, people who have committed no crimes but share certain objective characteristics which at any moment can be decided to be "criminal," is capable of providing enough human material for "purges" or "exterminations" to keep the movement in constant acceleration.

In contradistinction to dictatorships, whose notions of freedom are much less sophisticated, the totalitarian leader justifies all his measures with the argument that they are necessary for freedom. He is not against freedom, not even for a limitation of it. The trouble is only that his concept of freedom is radically different from that of the non-totalitarian world. It is the historical process of world revolution, or the natural process of race selection that has to be "liberated" through purges and extermination. As in certain seventeenth century philosophers, freedom is here understood to be a movement unrestrained by external force or impediment, something like the free flow of water in a river. The unpredictable initiative of men, even if they should decide to support this movement, is as great an impediment to the free-flowing process as laws, traditions or stable institutions of any sort, even the most tyrannical. A whole school of legal theorists in Nazi Germany tried their best to prove that the very concept of law was so directly in conflict with the political content of a movement as such that even the most revolutionary new legislation would eventually prove to be a hindrance to the movement.⁴ And one need only read carefully certain speeches of Stalin to realize that he had arrived at very similar conclusions.⁵

All the dialectical niceties in discussions of the concept of free-

⁴ The most interesting item in this literature is Theodor Maunz, *Gestalt und Recht der Polizei* (Hamburg, 1943). Mr. Maunz is one of the very small number of legal experts in the Third Reich who had fully succeeded in cleansing himself of the "prejudice" that the notion of Law has a certain connection with the concept of justice. His is the best conceptualization of Nazi "legal" practice.

⁵ Quite characteristic is the speech of Stalin on the occasion of the publication of the Soviet Constitution of 1936.

dom between the dialectical materialists who are prepared to defend the horrors of the Bolshevik system for the sake of history, and their anti-totalitarian opponents, rest ultimately on a simple and non-dialectical misunderstanding: what they have in mind when they talk about freedom is the freedom of a process, which apparently needs to be liberated from the meddlesome interfering activities of men, and what we have in mind is freedom of people, whose movements need protection by fixed and stable boundaries of laws, constitutions and institutions.

The task of the totalitarian ruler—to clear the way for the processes of History or Nature and to sweep from the path of his movement the unpredictable spontaneity of human beings—demands much more radical measures than the mere transformation of laws into decrees, which is characteristic of all bureaucratic forms of tyranny, where government and due process of law are replaced by administration and anonymous decision. By the same token, it is only superficially correct to see in the movement's blind devotion to the leader a kind of order-obedience relationship as in an army, a relationship which is occasionally carried into political-civil affairs, as in the case of a military dictatorship. The Nazis, who especially in later years developed a surprisingly precise terminology, proclaimed that the highest law in Germany is the *will*, not the order, of the Fuehrer.⁶

What swings the movement into motion and keeps it that way is this ever-changing "will," whose outward manifestations—orders, decrees, ordinances—are so unstable that they are not even officially published and brought to the notice of those whose very

⁶ For the principle: "*Der Wille des Fuehrers ist oberstes Gesetz*," see for instance Otto Gauweiler, *Rechtseinrichtungen und Rechtsaufgaben der Bewegung* (1939), p. 10. Also, Werner Best, *Die Deutsche Polizei* (1941), p. 21: "Der Wille der Fuehrung, gleich in welcher Form er zum Ausdruck gelangt . . . , schafft Recht und aendert bisher geltendes Recht ab." There exist numerous documents which show clearly that there could be a great difference between an order and the will of the Fuehrer. See for instance PS 3063 of the Nuremberg Documents which reports on the pogroms of November 1938: The order to the SA-men in charge of the pogroms demanded that they carry their pistols, but the implication was that "every SA-man should know now what he must do . . . , that Jewish blood should flow, that according to the *will* of the leadership the life of a Jew did not matter." (My italics.) A reliable Nazi was not the one who obeyed unquestioningly the orders of Hitler, but who was able to discern Hitler's "will" behind these orders. Needless to say that this "will" was always more radical than the orders. In the formulation of Hans Frank, *Technik des Staates* (Munich, 1940): "Der kategorische Imperativ des Handelns im Dritten Reich lautet: Handle so, dass der Fuehrer, wenn er von Deinem Handeln Kenntnis haette, dieses Handeln billigen wuerde."

life depends upon obeying them.⁷ The motivation for this extraordinary behavior, which indeed far outstrips the most arbitrary whims of tyrants, who at least knew they had to express and make public their "will" in order to be obeyed, is not so much fear of opposition or concern for conspiratorial secrecy as it is a well-calculated, conscious misgiving that even such a draconic and "revolutionary" decree as the one with which Hitler started the second World War—namely to kill all incurably ill people—could by its very publication become a stabilizing factor and hinder the further development and radicalization of the movement: for example, in this instance the introduction of a national Health Bill by which in his plans for the postwar period Hitler intended to remove even those in whose family one member with an incurable lung or heart disease could be found.⁸

Differences of so decisive a nature must manifest themselves in the whole apparatus of rule and the very structure of the body politic. Such distinctions can be valid only if they can be carried down to the level of technical forms of administration and organization. For brevity's sake, it may be permitted to sum up the technical-structural differences between authoritarian, tyrannical and totalitarian government in the image of three different representative models. As an image for authoritarian government, I propose the shape of the pyramid, which is well known in traditional political thought. The pyramid is indeed a particularly fitting image for a governmental structure whose source of authority lies outside itself, but whose center of power is located at the top, from which authority and power is filtered down to the base in such a way that each successive layer possesses some, but less authority than the one above it, and where precisely because of this careful filtering process all layers from top to bottom are not only firmly integrated into the whole, but are

⁷ The most famous of these decrees is of course the ordinance with which Hitler started the second World War and which, on September 1, 1939, ordered "allen unheilbar Kranken den Gnadentod zu gewahren."—But there exist a great many similar decrees, from 1933 onwards, which were valid law in the Third Reich and yet were never published. They were collected by Martin Bormann during the war into 5 large volumes under the title *Verfügungen, Anordnungen, Bekanntgaben*, indicating in the Preface: "Nur fuer interne Parteiarbeit bestimmt und als geheim zu behandeln." A set of the first four volumes is in the Archives of the Hoover Library at Stanford, Cal.

⁸ For this plan of Hitler for the post-war period, see Nuremberg documents published in Vol. 8 of *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (Washington, 1946), pp. 175 ff.

interrelated like converging rays whose common focal point is the top of the pyramid as well as the transcending source of authority above it. This image, it is true, can be used only for the Christian type of authoritarian rule as it developed through and under the constant influence of the Church during the Middle Ages, when the focal point above and beyond the earthly pyramid provided the necessary point of reference for the Christian type of equality, the strictly hierarchical structure of life on earth notwithstanding. The Roman understanding of political authority, where the source of authority lay exclusively in the past, in the foundation of Rome and the greatness of ancestors, leads into institutional structures whose shape would require a different kind of image; but that is of no great importance in our context. In any event, an authoritarian form of government with its hierarchical structure is the least egalitarian of all forms; it incorporates inequality and distinction as its all-permeating principles.

All political theories concerning tyranny agree that it belongs strictly among the egalitarian forms of government; the tyrant is the ruler who rules as one against all, and the "all" he oppresses are all equal, namely equally powerless. If we stick to the image of the pyramid, it is as though all intervening layers between top and bottom were destroyed, so that the top remains suspended, supported only by the proverbial bayonets, over a mass of carefully isolated, disintegrated and completely equal individuals. Classical political theory used to rule the tyrant out of mankind altogether, to call him a "wolf in human shape" (Plato), because of this position of One against all, in which he had put himself and which sharply distinguished his rule, the rule of One, which Plato still calls indiscriminately *mon-archy* or tyranny, from various forms of kingship or *basileia*.

In contradistinction to both tyrannical and authoritarian regimes, the proper image of totalitarian rule and organization seems to me to be the structure of the onion, in whose center, in a kind of empty space, the leader is located; whatever he does: whether he integrates the body politic as in an authoritarian hierarchy, or oppresses his subjects like a tyrant, he does it from within, and not from without or above. All the extraordinarily manifold parts of the movement: the front organizations, the various professional societies, the party-membership, the party hierarchy, the elite formations and police groups, are related in such a way that each

forms the façade in one direction and the center in the other, that is, plays the role of normal outside world for one layer and the role of radical extremism for another. The civilian members of Himmler's General SS, for example, represented a rather philistine facade of normality to the SS Leader Corps, and at the same time could be trusted to be ideologically more trustworthy and extreme than the ordinary member of the NSDAP.

The same is true for the relationship between sympathizer and party member, between party member and party officer or *Saman*, between the *Gauleiter* and a member of the secret police, etc.⁹ The great advantage of this system is that the movement provides for each of its layers, even under conditions of totalitarian rule, the fiction of a normal world along with a consciousness of being different from and more radical than it. Thus, the sympathizers of the front organizations, whose convictions differ only in intensity from those of the party membership, surround the whole movement and provide a deceptive façade of normality to the outside world because of their lack of fanaticism and extremism while, at the same time, they represent the normal world to the totalitarian movement whose members come to believe that their convictions differ only in degree from those of other people, so that they need never be aware of the abyss which separates their own world from that which actually surrounds it. The onion structure makes the system organizationally shock-proof against the factuality of the real world.

The second advantage of this type of organization is that it permits a kind of double-talk of great importance to the relationship between totalitarian regimes and the outside, non-totalitarian world. In close correspondence with the dual role of each layer—to act as façade in one direction and as interior center in the other—stands the curious fact that the same official pronouncements frequently can be understood either as mere propaganda or as serious indoctrination. Hitler's violently nationalistic speeches, for instance, which he used to address to his officer corps, were meant as indoctrination for the officers of the *Wehrmacht*; within the higher Nazi hierarchy, however, where the

⁹ Only a detailed description and analysis of the very original organizational structure of totalitarian movements could justify the use of the onion-image. I must refer to the chapter on "Totalitarian Organization" in my book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1951).

slogan of "Right is what is good for the German people" had even officially been replaced by "Right is what is good for the Movement,"¹⁰ they were nothing but propaganda for an outside world not yet "mature" enough to understand the true aims of the movement.

It would lead us too far afield to show how this particular structure is connected with the fact: that totalitarian rule is based on a movement in the word's most literal significance, that the movement is international in scope, that the rise to power in one country does not mean that the totalitarian ruler cuts himself loose from the interest or goal of the movement as a whole, and that, consequently, the country in which he happens to seize power is much less the seat and source of his personal power than the headquarters for the movement itself.

II

It is obvious that these reflections and descriptions are based on the conviction of the importance of making distinctions. To stress such a conviction seems to be a gratuitous truism in view of the fact that, at least as far as I know, nobody has yet openly stated that distinctions are nonsense. There exists, however, a silent agreement in most discussions among political and social scientists that we can ignore distinctions and proceed on the assumption that everything can eventually be called anything else, and that distinctions are meaningful only to the extent that each of us has the right "to define his terms." Yet does not this curious right, which we have come to grant as soon as we deal with matters of importance—as though it were actually the same as the right to one's own opinion—already indicate that such terms as tyranny, authority, totalitarianism have simply lost their common meaning, or that we have ceased to live in a common world where the words we have in common possess an unquestionable meaningfulness, so that short of being condemned to live verbally in an altogether meaningless world we grant each other the right to retreat into our own worlds of meaning and demand only that each of us remain consistent

¹⁰ The formulation: "Recht ist was der Bewegung nuetzt" appears very early, see for instance *Dienstvorschrift fuer die P.O. des NSDAP*, 1932, p. 38, which preceded the later *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP* that carries the same sentence among the "duties of party-members" in all its editions.

within his own, private terminology? If, under these circumstances, we assure ourselves that we still understand each other, we do not mean that together we understand a world common to us all, but that we understand the consistency of arguing and reasoning, of the process of argumentation in its sheer formality.

However that may be, to proceed under the implicit assumption that distinctions are not important or, better, that in the social-political-historical realm, that is, in the sphere of human affairs, things do not possess that distinctness which traditional metaphysics used to call their "otherness" (their *alteritas*) has become the hallmark of a great many theories in the social, political and historical sciences. Among these, two seem to me to deserve special mention because they touch the subject under discussion in an especially significant manner.

I mentioned the first when I described the liberal and the conservative theories: liberalism, we saw, measures a process of receding freedom, and conservatism measures a process of receding authority; both call the expected end-result totalitarianism and see totalitarian trends wherever either one or the other is present. No doubt, both can produce excellent documentation for their findings. Who would deny the serious threats to freedom from all sides since the beginning of the century, and the rise of all kinds of tyranny at least since the end of the first World War? Who can deny, on the other side, that disappearance of practically all traditionally established authorities has been one of the most spectacular characteristics of the modern world? It seems as though one has only to fix his glance on either of these two phenomena to justify a theory of progress or a theory of doom according to his own taste or, as the phrase goes, according to his own "scale of values." If we look upon the conflicting statements of conservatives and liberals with impartial eyes, we can easily see that the truth is equally distributed between them and that we are in fact confronted with a simultaneous recession of both freedom and authority in the modern world. As far as these processes are concerned, one can even say that the numerous oscillations in public opinion, which for more than a hundred and fifty years has swung at regular intervals from one extreme to the other, from a liberal mood to a conservative one and back to a more liberal again, at times attempting to reassert authority and at others to reassert freedom, have resulted only in further undermining both, confusing the

issues, blurring the distinctive lines between authority and freedom, and eventually destroying the political meaning of both.

Both liberalism and conservatism were born in this climate of violently oscillating public opinion and they are tied together, not only because each would lose its very substance without the presence of its opponent in the field of theory and ideology, but because both are primarily concerned with restoration, with restoring either freedom or authority or the relationship between both to its traditional position. It is in this sense that they form the two sides of the same coin, just as their progress-or-doom ideologies are but the two sides where the historical process, as process, can be understood, if one assumes, as both do, that historical processes have definable directions and a predictable end.

It is, moreover, in the nature of the very image in which History is usually conceived, as process or stream or development, that everything can change into everything else, that distinctions become meaningless because they are obsolete, submerged, as it were, by the historical stream, the moment they are pronounced. From this viewpoint, liberalism and conservatism present themselves as the political philosophies which correspond to the much more general and comprehensive philosophy of history of the nineteenth century. In form and content, they are the political expression of the history-consciousness of the last stage of the modern age. Their inability to distinguish, theoretically justified by the concepts of history and process, progress or doom, testifies to an age in which certain notions, clear in their distinctness to all previous centuries, have begun to lose their clarity and plausibility because they have lost their meaning in the public-political reality—without altogether losing their significance.

The second and more recent theory implicitly challenging the importance of making distinctions is, especially in the social sciences, the almost universal functionalization of all concepts and ideas. Here, as in the example quoted above, liberalism and conservatism differ not in method, viewpoint and approach, but only in emphasis and evaluation. A convenient instance may be provided by the widespread conviction in the free world today that Communism is a new "religion," notwithstanding its avowed atheism, because it fulfills socially, psychologically and "emotionally" the same function traditional religion fulfilled and still fulfills in the free world. The concern of the social sciences does not lie in

what Bolshevism as ideology or as form of government is, nor in what its spokesmen have to say for themselves; that is not the interest of the social sciences, and many social scientists believe they can do without the study of what the historical sciences call the sources themselves. Their concern is only with functions, and whatever fulfills the same function can, according to this view, be called the same. It is as though I had the right to call the heel of my shoe a hammer because I, like most women, use it to drive nails into the wall.

Obviously one can draw quite different conclusions from such equations. Thus, it would be characteristic of conservatism to insist that after all a heel is not a hammer, but that the use of the heel as a substitute for the hammer proves that hammers are indispensable. In other words, they will find in the fact that atheism can fulfill the same function as religion the best proof that religion is necessary, and recommend the return to true religion as the only way to counter a "heresy." The argument is weak of course; if it is only a question of function and how a thing works, the adherents of "false religion" can make as good a case for using theirs as I can for using my heel, which does not work so badly either. The liberals, on the contrary, view the same phenomena as a bad case of treason to the cause of secularism and believe that only "true secularism" can cure us of the pernicious influence of both false and true religion on politics. But these conflicting recommendations at the address of free society to return to true religion and become more religious, or to rid ourselves of institutional religion (especially of Catholicism with its constant challenge to secularism) hardly conceal the opponents' agreement on one point: that whatever fulfills the function of a religion, is a religion.

The same argument is frequently used with respect to authority: if violence fulfills the same function as authority, namely makes people obey, then violence is authority. Here again we find those who counsel a return to authority because they think only a reintroduction of the order-obedience relationship can master the problems of a mass society, and those who believe that a mass society can rule itself like any other social body. Again both parties agree on the one essential point: authority is whatever makes people obey. All those who call modern dictatorships "authoritarian" or mistake totalitarianism for an authoritarian structure, implicitly have

equated violence with authority, and this includes those conservatives who explain the rise of dictatorships in our century by the need to find a surrogate for authority. The crux of the argument is always the same: everything is related to a functional context, and the use of violence is taken to demonstrate that no society can exist except in an authoritarian framework.

The dangers of these equations, as I see them, lie not only in the confusion of political issues and in the blurring of the distinctive lines which separate totalitarianism from all other forms of government. I do not believe that atheism is a substitute for or can fulfill the same function as a religion any more than I believe that violence can become a substitute for authority. But if we follow the recommendations of the conservatives who at this particular moment have a rather good chance of being heard, I am quite convinced that we shall not find it hard to produce such substitutes, that we shall use violence and pretend to have restored authority or that our rediscovery of the functional usefulness of religion will produce a substitute-religion—as though our civilization were not already sufficiently cluttered up with all sorts of pseudo-things and nonsense.

Compared with these theories, the distinctions between tyrannical, authoritarian and totalitarian systems which we proposed are unhistorical, if one understands by history not the historical space in which certain forms of government appeared as recognizable entities, but the historical process in which everything can always change into something else, and they are antifunctional insofar as the content of the phenomenon is taken to determine both the nature of the political body and its function in society, and not vice-versa. Politically speaking, they have a tendency to assume that in the modern world authority has disappeared almost to the vanishing point, and this in the so-called authoritarian systems no less than in the free world, and that freedom, that is, the freedom of movement of human beings, is threatened everywhere, even in free societies, but abolished radically only in totalitarian systems, and not even in tyrannies and dictatorships.