IN ORDER TO fight totalitarianism, one need understand only one thing: Totalitarianism is the most radical denial of freedom. Yet this denial of freedom is common to all tyrannies and is of no primary importance for understanding the peculiar nature of totalitarianism. Nonetheless, whoever cannot be mobilized when freedom is threatened will not be mobilized at all. Even moral admonitions, the outcry against crimes unprecedented in history and not foreseen in the Ten Commandments will remain of little avail. The very existence of totalitarian movements in the non-totalitarian world, that is, the appeal totalitarianism exerts on those who have all the information before them and who are warned against it day in and day out, bears eloquent witness to the breakdown of the whole structure of morality, the whole body of commands and prohibitions which had traditionally translated and embodied the fundamental ideas of freedom and justice into terms of social relationships and political institutions.

Still, many people doubt that this breakdown is a reality. They are inclined to think some accident has happened after which one's duty is

See the headnote to the preceding essay and the Introduction to this volume for
to restore the old order, appeal to the old knowledge of right and wrong, mobilize the old instincts for order and safety. They label anyone who thinks and speaks otherwise a "prophet of doom" whose gloominess threatens to darken the sun rising over good and evil for all of eternity.

The fact of the matter is that the "prophets of doom," the historical pessimists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from Burckhard to Spengler, were put out of business by the actuality of catastrophes the size and horror of which no one ever foresaw. Certain developments, however, apparently could have been and were predicted. Though these predictions hardly ever occurred in the nineteenth century, they can be found in the eighteenth century, and were overlooked because nothing seemed to justify them. It is worthwhile, for instance, to learn what Kant, in 1793, had to say about the "balance of power" as a solution to the conflicts rising from the European nation-state system: "The so-called balance of powers in Europe is like Swift's house which was built in such perfect harmony with all laws of equilibrium that, when a bird sat down on it, it immediately collapsed—a mere phantasm."* The balance achieved by the system of nation-states was not a mere phantasm, but it did collapse exactly as Kant predicted. In the words of a modern historian: "The iron test of the balance of power lies in the very thing it is designed to stave off—war" (Hajo Holborn, The Political Collapse of Europe, 1951).

More sweeping in outlook and yet closer to reality is another eighteenth-century author, who is usually not counted among the "prophets of doom" and who is as serene, as sober, and even less disturbed (the French Revolution had not yet taken place) than Kant. There is hardly an event of any importance in our recent history that would not fit into the scheme of Montesquieu's apprehensions.

Montesquieu was the last to inquire into the nature of government; that is, to ask what makes it what it is ("sa nature est ce qui le fait être tel," L'Esprit des Lois, Book III, ch. 1). But Montesquieu added to this a second and entirely original question: What makes a government act as it acts? He thus discovered that each government has not only its "particular structure" but also a particular "principle" which sets it in motion. Political science has now discarded both questions because they

*On the Common Saying: That may be true in theory but does not apply to practice.
—Ed.
are, in a way, pre-scientific. They refer to preliminary understanding which expresses itself only in giving names: this is a republic, this is a monarchy, this is a tyranny. Still, they start the dialogue of true understanding by asking: What is it that makes a state recognizable as a republic, a monarchy, or a tyranny? After giving the traditional answer to the traditional question—affirming that a republic is a constitutional government with the sovereign power in the hands of the people; a monarchy, a lawful government with sovereign power in the hands of one man; and a tyranny, a lawless government where power is exercised by one man according to his arbitrary will—Montesquieu adds that in a republic the principle of action is virtue, which, psychologically, he equates with love of equality; in a monarchy, the principle of action is honor, whose psychological expression is a passion for distinction; and in a tyranny, the principle of action is fear.

It is striking and strange that Montesquieu, who is famous chiefly for his discovery and articulation of the division of powers into the executive, legislative, and judiciary, defines governments as though power is necessarily sovereign and indivisible. Curiously enough, it was Kant, and not Montesquieu, who redefined the structure of governments according to Montesquieu's own principles.

In his Perpetual Peace, Kant introduces a distinction between "forms of domination" (Formen der Beherrschung) and forms of government. The forms of domination are distinguished solely according to the locus of power: All states in which the prince has undivided sovereign power are called autocracies; if the power is in the hands of the nobility, the form of domination is aristocracy; and if the people wield absolute power, domination comes about in the form of democracy. Kant's point is that all these forms of domination (as the word "domination" itself indicates) are, strictly speaking, illegal. Constitutional or lawful government is established through the division of power so that the same body (or man) does not make the laws, execute them, and then sit in judgment on itself. According to this new principle, which comes from Montesquieu and which found unequivocal expression in the Constitution of the United States, Kant indicated two basic structures of government: republican government, based on the division of powers, even if a prince is at the head of the state; and despotic government, where the powers of legislation, execution, and judgment are not separated. In the concrete political sense, power is needed and incorporated in the possession of
the means of violence for the execution of laws. Where, therefore, the executive power is not separated from and controlled by legislative and judicial powers, the source of law can no longer be reason and consideration, but becomes power itself. That form of government for which the dictum "Might Is Right" rings true is despotic—and this holds regardless of all other circumstances: a democracy ruled by majority decisions but unchecked by law is just as despotic as an autocracy.

It is true that even Kant's distinction is no longer quite satisfactory. Its chief weakness is that behind the relationship of law and power lies the assumption that the source of law is human reason (still in the sense of the lumen naturale) and the source of power is human will. Both assumptions are questionable on historical as well as philosophical grounds. We cannot discuss these difficulties here, nor do we need to. For our purpose, which is to isolate the nature of a new and unprecedented form of government, it may be wise to appeal first to the traditional—though no longer traditionally accepted—criteria. In searching for the nature of totalitarian government, its "structure," in Montesquieu's words, we shall also use Kant's distinction between forms of domination and forms of government, as well as between constitutional (in his words, "republican") and despotic government.

Montesquieu's discovery that each form of government has its own innate principle which sets it into motion and guides all its actions is of great relevance. Not only was this motivating principle closely connected to historical experience (honor obviously being the principle of medieval monarchy, based on nobility, as virtue was the principle of the Roman Republic), but as a principle of motion it introduced history and historical process into structures of government which, as the Greeks had originally discovered and defined them, were conceived as unmoved and unmovable. Before Montesquieu's discovery, the only principle of change connected with forms of government was change for the worse, the perversion that would transform an aristocracy (the government of the best) into an oligarchy (the government of a clique for the interest of the clique), or overturn a democracy that had degenerated into ochlocracy (mob rule) into tyranny.

Montesquieu's moving and guiding principles—virtue, honor, fear—are principles insofar as they rule both the actions of the government and the actions of the governed. Fear in a tyranny is not only the subjects' fear of the tyrant, but the tyrant's fear of his subjects as well. Fear.
honor, and virtue are not merely psychological motives, but the very criteria according to which all public life is led and judged. Just as it is the pride of a citizen in a republic not to dominate his fellow-citizens in public matters, so it is the pride of a subject in a monarchy to distinguish himself and be publicly honored. In establishing these principles, Montesquieu was not suggesting that all people behave at all times according to the principles of the government under which they happen to live, or that people in republics do not know what honor is, or people in a monarchy what virtue is. Nor does he speak of "ideal types." He analyzes the public life of citizens, not people's private lives, and discovers that in this public life—that is, in the sphere where all men act together concerning things that are of equal concern to each—action is determined by certain principles. If these principles are no longer heeded and the specific criteria of behavior are no longer held valid, the political institutions themselves are jeopardized.

Beneath Montesquieu's distinction between the nature of government (that which makes it what it is) and its moving or guiding principle (that which sets it into motion through actions) lies another difference, a problem which has plagued political thought since its beginning, and which Montesquieu indicates, but does not solve, by his distinction between man as a citizen (a member of a public order) and man insofar as he is an individual. In case of conquest, for instance, "the citizen may perish and the man survive" ("le citoyen peut périr, et l'homme rester," L'Esprit des Lois, Book X, ch. 3.). This problem is usually dealt with in modern political thought as the distinction between public and private life, or the sphere of politics and the sphere of society; and its troublesome aspect is conventionally found in a pretended double standard of morality.

In modern political thought—insofar as its central predicaments are dictated by Machiavelli's discovery of power as the center of all political life, and of power-relations as the supreme laws of political action—the problem of the individual and the citizen has been complicated and overshadowed by the dilemma between legality as the center of domestic constitutional government and arbitrary sovereignty as the natural condition in the field of international relations. It seems, then, that we are confronted with two sets of duplicity in judging right or wrong in actions—the double standard originating in the simultaneous status of man as both citizen and individual, and the double standard originating in the differentiation between foreign and domestic politics. Both problems
are pertinent to our effort to understand the nature of totalitarianism, since totalitarian governments claim to have solved them both. The distinction between and the dilemma of foreign and domestic politics are solved by the claim to global rule. This claim is then substantiated by treating each conquered country, in complete disregard of its own law, as an erstwhile transgressor of totalitarian law and by punishing its inhabitants according to laws administered retroactively. In other words, the claim to global rule is identical to the claim establishing a new and universally valid law on earth. In consequence, all foreign politics are, to the totalitarian mind, disguised domestic politics, and all foreign wars are, in fact, civil wars. The distinction between and the dilemma of citizen and individual, meanwhile, with the concomitant perplexities of the dichotomy between public and personal life, are eliminated by the totalitarian claim to the total domination of man.

To Montesquieu, only the dilemma of the citizen and the individual was a real political problem. The conflict between domestic and foreign politics, as a conflict between law and power, exists only so long as one maintains that power is indivisible and sovereign. Montesquieu as well as Kant held that only division of powers can guarantee the rule of law, and that a world federation would eventually solve the conflicts of sovereignty. An eminently practical step toward the identification of foreign and domestic politics was taken in Article VI of the United States Constitution, which, in perfect spiritual agreement with Montesquieu, provides that, together with the Constitution and constitutionally enacted laws, "all treaties made . . . under authority of the United States, shall be the supreme law of the land."

The distinction between the citizen and the individual becomes a problem as soon as we become aware of the discrepancy between public life, in which I am a citizen like all other citizens, and personal life, in which I am an individual unlike anybody else. Equality before the law is not only the distinguishing feature of modern republics, but also, in a deeper sense, prevails in constitutional governments as such, in that all people living under a constitution must equally receive from it what is rightfully theirs. The law in all constitutional forms of government determines and provides suum cuique: through it everybody comes into his own.

The rule of suum cuique, however, never extends to all spheres of life. There is no suum cuique which could be determined and handed to
individuals in their personal lives. The very fact that in all free societies everything is permitted which is not explicitly prohibited reveals the situation clearly: The law defines the boundaries of personal life but cannot touch what goes on within them. In this respect, the law fulfills two functions: it regulates the public-political sphere in which men act in concert as equals and where they have a common destiny, while, at the same time, it circumscribes the space in which our individual destinies unfold—destinies which are so dissimilar that no two biographies will ever read alike. The law in its sublime generality can never foresee and provide the suum which everybody receives in his irrevocable uniqueness. Laws, once they are established, are always applied according to precedents; the trouble with the deeds and events of personal life is that this life is destroyed in its very essence as soon as it is judged by standards of comparison or in light of precedents. One could define philistinism, and explain its deadening effect upon the creativity of human life, as the attempt, through a moralizing transformation of customs into general “laws” of behavior equally valid for all, to judge by precedents what by definition defies all precedent.

The trouble, obviously, with this discrepancy between public and personal life, between man as citizen and man as individual, is not only that laws can never be used to guide and judge actions in personal life, but also that the very standards of right and wrong in the two spheres are not the same and are often even in conflict. That such conflicts—ranging from the man who breaks traffic laws because his wife is dying to the central theme of Antigone—are always regarded as insoluble, and that such “lawbreakers” are almost invariably depicted by the great tragedians as acting according to a “higher law,” reveals the depth of Western man’s experience of the calamity of citizenship even in the best body politic. Strangely enough, even his philosophers have deserted him in this particular experience and done their best to evade the issue by elevating civil law to a level of unambiguous universality which it never in fact possesses. Kant’s famous categorical imperative—“Act in such a way that the maxim of your action could become a universal law”—indeed strikes to the root of the matter in that it is the quintessence of the claim that the law makes upon us. This rigid morality, however, disregards sympathy and inclination; moreover, it becomes a real source for wrongdoing in all cases where no universal law, not even the imagined law of pure reason, can determine what is right in a particular case.
Even in the personal sphere, where no universal laws can ever de-
termine unequivocally what is right and what is wrong, man’s actions
are not completely arbitrary. Here he is guided not by laws, under which
cases can be subsumed, but by principles—such as loyalty, honor, virtue,
faith—which, as it were, map out certain directions. Montesquieu never
asked himself if these principles might not have, in themselves, some
cognitive power of judging or even creating what is right and wrong.
But what he discovered when he added to the traditionally defined struc-
ture of government a moving principle which alone makes men act, rulers
and ruled alike, was that law and power-relations in any given form of
polity can define only the boundaries within which an entirely different,
non-public, sphere of life exists. And it is this non-public sphere from
which the sources of action and motion, as distinguished from the sta-
bilizing, structural forces of law and power, spring. Hedged in by law
and power, and occasionally overwhelming them, lie the origins of motion
and action.

Montesquieu saw, as others had before him, that these principles of
action and their standards of right and wrong varied widely in different
countries at different times. More important, he discovered that each
structure of government, manifesting itself in law and power, had its
own correlative principle according to which men living within that
structure would act. Only this, incidentally, gave him, and those his-
torians who came after him, the tools to describe the peculiar unity of
each culture. Since there was an obvious, historically patent correpon-
dence between the principle of honor and the structure of monarchy,
between virtue and republicanism, and between fear (understood not as
a psychological emotion but as a principle of action) and tyranny, then
there must be some underlying ground from which both man as an
individual and man as a citizen sprang. In other words, Montesquieu
found that there was more to the dilemma of the personal and the public
spheres than discrepancy and conflict, even though they might conflict.

The phenomenon of correspondence between the different spheres
of life and the miracle of the unities of cultures and periods despite
discrepancies and contingencies indicates that at the bottom of each
cultural or historical entity lies a common ground which is both fund-
dament and source, basis and origin. Montesquieu defines the common
ground in which the laws of a monarchy are rooted, and from which the
actions of its subjects spring, as distinction; and he identifies honor, the
supreme guiding principle in a monarchy, with a corresponding love of distinction. The fundamental experience upon which monarchies and, we may add, all hierarchical forms of government are founded is the experience, inherent in the human condition, that men are distinguished, that is, different from each other by birth. Yet we all know that directly opposing this and with no less insistent validity rises the opposite experience, the experience of the inherent equality of all men, "born equal" and distinguished only by social status. This equality—insofar as it is not an equality before God, an infinitely superior Being before whom all distinctions and differences become negligible—has always meant not only that all men, regardless of their differences, are equally valuable, but also that nature has granted to each an equal amount of power. The fundamental experience upon which republican laws are founded and from which the action of its citizens springs is the experience of living together with and belonging to a group of equally powerful men. The laws which regulate the lives of republican citizens do not serve distinction, but, rather, restrict the power of each that room may remain for the power of his fellow. The common ground of republican law and action is thus the insight that human power is not primarily limited by some superior power, God or Nature, but by the powers of one's equals. And the joy that springs from that insight, the "love of equality" which is virtue, comes from the experience that only because this is so, only because there is equality of power, is man not alone. For to be alone means to be without equals: "One is one and all alone and ever more shall be so," runs the old English nursery rhyme, daring to suggest what to the human mind can only be the supreme tragedy of God.

Montesquieu failed to indicate the common ground of structure and action in tyrannies; we may therefore be permitted to fill in this gap in light of his own discoveries. Fear, the inspiring principle of action in tyranny, is fundamentally connected to that anxiety which we experience in situations of complete loneliness. This anxiety reveals the other side of equality and corresponds to the joy of sharing the world with our equals. The dependence and interdependence which we need in order to realize our power (the amount of strength which is strictly our own) becomes a source of despair whenever, in complete loneliness, we realize that one man alone has no power at all but is always overwhelmed and defeated by superior power. If one man alone had sufficient strength to match his power with the power of nature and circumstance, he would
not be in need of company. Virtue is happy to pay the price of limited power for the blessing of being together with other men; fear is the despair over the individual impotence of those who, for whatever reason, have refused to "act in concert." There is no virtue, no love of equality of power, which has not to overcome this anxiety of helplessness, for there is no human life which is not vulnerable to utter helplessness, without recourse to action, if only in the face of death. Fear as a principle of action is in some sense a contradiction in terms, because fear is precisely despair over the impossibility of action. Fear, as distinct from the principles of virtue and honor, has no self-transcending power and is therefore truly anti-political. Fear as a principle of action can only be destructive or, in the words of Montesquieu, "self-corrupting." Tyranny is therefore the only form of government which bears germs of its destruction within itself. External circumstances cause the decline of other forms of government; tyrannies, on the contrary, owe their existence and survival to such external circumstances as prevent their self-corruption (L'Esprit des Lois, Book VIII, ch. 10).

Thus the common ground upon which lawlessness can be erected and from which fear springs is the impotence all men feel who are radically isolated. One man against all others does not experience equality of power among men, but only the overwhelming, combined power of all others against his own. It is the great advantage of monarchy, or of any hierarchical government, that individuals whose "distinction" defines their social and political status never confront an undistinguished and undistinguishable "all others" against whom they can only summon their own absolute minority of one. It is the specific danger of all forms of government based on equality that the moment the structure of lawfulness—within whose framework the experience of equal power receives its meaning and direction—breaks down or is transformed, the powers among equal men cancel each other out and what is left is the experience of absolute impotence. Out of the conviction of one's own impotence and the fear of the power of all others comes the will to dominate, which is the will of the tyrant. Just as virtue is love of the equality of power, so fear is actually the will to, or, in its perverted form, lust for, power. Concretely and politically speaking, there is no other will to power but the will to dominate. For power itself in its true sense can never be possessed by one man alone; power comes, as it were, mysteriously into being whenever men act "in concert" and disannuls.
Before we proceed, it may be well to admit that we are at least aware of a basic difficulty in this approach. To the modern mind there is perhaps nothing more baffling in Montesquieu's definitions than that he takes at face value the self-interpretations and self-understandings of the governments themselves. That he does not seek ulterior motives behind the confirmations of virtue in a republic, honor in a monarchy, or fear in a tyranny seems all the more surprising in an author who admittedly was the first to observe the great influence of "objective" factors, such as climatic, social, and other circumstances, on the formation of strictly political institutions.

These three forms of government—monarchy, republicanism, and tyranny—are authentic because the grounds on which their structures are built (the distinction of each, equality of all, and impotence) and from which their principles of motion spring are authentic elements of the human condition and are reflected in primary human experiences. The question with which we shall now approach totalitarianism is whether or not this unprecedented form of government can lay claim to an equally authentic, albeit until now hidden, ground of the human condition on earth, a ground which may reveal itself only under circumstances of a global unity of humanity—circumstances certainly as unprecedented as totalitarianism itself.

II

Before we proceed, it may be well to admit that we are at least aware of a basic difficulty in this approach. To the modern mind there is perhaps nothing more baffling in Montesquieu's definitions than that he takes at face value the self-interpretations and self-understandings of the governments themselves. That he does not seek ulterior motives behind the confirmations of virtue in a republic, honor in a monarchy, or fear in a tyranny seems all the more surprising in an author who admittedly was the first to observe the great influence of "objective" factors, such as climatic, social, and other circumstances, on the formation of strictly political institutions.

However, in this as in other matters, true understanding has hardly any choice. The sources talk and what they reveal is the self-understanding as well as the self-interpretation of people who act and who believe they know what they are doing. If we deny them this capacity and pretend that we know better and can tell them what their real "motives" are or which real "trends" they objectively represent—no matter what they themselves think—we have robbed them of the very faculty of speech, insofar as speech makes sense. If, for instance, Hitler time and again called Jews the negative center of world history, and in
support of his opinion designed factories to liquidate all people of Jewish origin, it is nonsensical to declare that anti-Semitism was not great relevant to the construction of his totalitarian regime, or that he merely suffered an unfortunate prejudice. The task of the social scientist is to find the historical and political background of anti-Semitism, but under no circumstances to conclude that Jews are only stand-ins for the petit bourgeoisie or that anti-Semitism is a surrogate for an Oedipus complex or whatnot. Cases in which people consciously tell lies and, to remain with our example, pretend to hate Jews while in fact they want to murder the bourgeoisie, are very rare and easily detectable. In all other cases self-understanding and self-interpretation are the very foundation of all analysis and understanding.

Therefore, in trying to understand the nature of totalitarianism, we shall ask in good faith the traditional questions regarding the nature of this form of government and the principle which sets it in motion. Since the rise of the scientific approach in the humanities, that is, with the development of modern historicism, sociology, and economics, such questions have no longer been considered likely to further understanding. Kant, in fact, was the last to think along these lines of traditional political philosophy. Yet while our standards for scientific accuracy have constantly grown and are higher today than at any previous time, our standards and criteria for true understanding seem to have no less constantly declined. With the introduction of completely alien and frequently nonsensical categories of evaluation into the social sciences, they have reached an all-time low. Scientific accuracy does not permit any understanding which goes beyond the narrow limits of sheer factuality, and it has paid a heavy price for this arrogance, since the wild superstitions of the twentieth century, clothed in humbug scientism, began to supplement its deficiencies. Today the need to understand has grown desperate and plays havoc with the standards not only of understanding but of pure scientific accuracy and intellectual honesty as well.

Totalitarian government is unprecedented because it defies comparison. It has exploded the very alternative on which definitions of the nature of government have relied since the beginning of Western political thought—the alternative between lawful, constitutional or republican government, on the one hand, and lawless, arbitrary, or tyrannical government on the other. Totalitarian rule is "lawless" insofar as it defies positive law; yet it is not arbitrary insofar as it obeys with strict loy
and executes with precise compulsion the laws of History or Nature. It is the monstrous, yet seemingly unanswerable claim of totalitarian rule that, far from being "lawless," it goes straight to the sources of authority from which all positive laws—based on "natural law," or on customs and tradition, or on the historical event of divine revelation—receive their ultimate legitimation. What appears lawless to the non-totalitarian world would, on the strength of being inspired by the sources themselves, constitute a higher form of legitimacy, one that can do away with the petty legality of positive laws which can never produce justice in any single, concrete, and therefore unpredictable case, but can only prevent injustice. Totalitarian lawfulness, executing the laws of Nature or History, does not bother to translate them into standards of right and wrong for individual human beings, but applies them directly to the "species," to mankind. The laws of Nature or History, if properly executed, are expected to produce as their end a single "Mankind," and it is this expectation that lies behind the claim to global rule of all totalitarian governments. Humanity, or, rather, the human species, is regarded as the active carrier of these laws while the rest of the universe is only passively determined by them.

At this point a fundamental difference between the totalitarian and all other conceptions of law comes to light. It is true that Nature or History, as the source of authority for positive laws, could traditionally reveal itself to man, be it as the lumen naturale in natural law or as the voice of conscience in historically revealed religious law. This, however, hardly made human beings walking embodiments of these laws. On the contrary, these laws remained distinct—as the authority which demanded obedience—from the actions of men. Compared to the sources of authority, the positive laws of men were considered to be changing and changeable in accordance with circumstance. Nonetheless, these laws were more permanent than the ever and rapidly changing actions of men, and they received this relative permanence from what was, in mortal terms, the timeless presence of their authoritative sources.

In the totalitarian interpretation, all laws become, instead, laws of movement. Nature and History are no longer stabilizing sources of authority for laws governing the actions of mortal men, but are themselves movements. Their laws, therefore, though one might need intelligence to perceive or understand them, have nothing to do with reason or permanence. At the base of the Nazis' belief in race laws lies Darwin's
idea of man as a more or less accidental product of natural development—a development which does not necessarily stop with the species of human beings such as we know it. At the base of the Bolsheviks belief in class lies the Marxian notion of men as the product of a gigantic historical process racing toward the end of historical time—that is, a process that tends to abolish itself. The very term "law" has changed in meaning; from denoting the framework of stability within which human actions were supposed to, and were permitted to, take place, it has become the very expression of these motions themselves.

The ideologies of racism and dialectical materialism that transform Nature and History from the firm soil supporting human life and action into supra-gigantic forces whose movements race through humanity dragging every individual willy-nilly with them—either riding atop their triumphant car or crushed under its wheels—may be various and complicated: still, it is surprising to see how, for all practical political purposes, these ideologies always result in the same "law" of elimination of individuals for the sake of the process or progress of the species. From the elimination of harmful or superfluous individuals, the result of natural or historical movement rises like the phoenix from its own ashes but unlike the fabulous bird, this mankind which is the end and at the same time the embodiment of the movement of either History or Nature requires permanent sacrifices, the permanent elimination of hostile or parasitic or unhealthy classes or races in order to enter upon its bloody eternity.

Just as positive laws in constitutional government are needed to translate and realize the immutable ius naturale or the eternal Commandments of God or sempiternal customs and traditions of history, so terror is needed to realize, to translate into living reality, the laws of movement of History or Nature. And just as positive laws that define transgressions in any given society are independent of them, such that their absence does not render the laws superfluous but on the contrary constitutes their most perfect rule, so, too, terror in totalitarian government, ceasing to be a means for the suppression of political opposition, becomes independent of it and rules supreme when opposition no longer stands in its way.

If law, therefore, is the essence of constitutional or republican government, then terror is the essence of totalitarian government. Laws were established to be boundary lines: one of the ultimate
Plato's invocation of Zeus as the God of boundaries, at Laws, 843a) and to remain static, enabling men to move within them; under totalitarian conditions, on the contrary, every means is taken to "stabilize" men, to make them static, in order to prevent any unforeseen, free, or spontaneous acts that might hinder freely racing terror. The law of movement itself, Nature or History, singles out the foes of mankind and no free action of mere men is permitted to interfere with it. Guilt and innocence become meaningless categories; "guilty" is he who stands in the path of terror, that is, who willingly or unwillingly hinders the movement of Nature or History. The rulers, consequently, do not apply laws, but execute such movement in accordance with its inherent law; they claim to be neither just nor wise, but to know "scientifically."

Terror freezes men in order to clear the way for the movement of Nature or History. It eliminates individuals for the sake of the species; it sacrifices men for the sake of mankind—not only those who eventually become the victims of terror, but in fact all men insofar as this movement, with its own beginning and its own end, can only be hindered by the new beginning and the individual end which the life of each man actually is. With each new birth, a new beginning is born into the world, and a new world has potentially come into being. The stability of laws, erecting the boundaries and the channels of communication between men who live together and act in concert, hedges in this new beginning and assures, at the same time, its freedom; laws assure the potentiality of something entirely new and the pre-existence of a common world, the reality of some transcending continuity which absorbs all origins and is nourished by them. Terror first razes these boundaries of man-made law, but not for the sake of some arbitrary tyrannical will, nor for the sake of the despotic power of one man against all, nor, least of all, for the sake of a war of all against all. Terror substitutes for the boundaries and channels of communication between individual men an iron band which presses them all so tightly together that it is as though they were melded into each other, as though they were only one man. Terror, the obedient servant of Nature or History and the omnipresent executor of their predestined movement, fabricates the oneness of all men by abolishing the boundaries of law which provide the living space for the freedom of each individual. Totalitarian terror does not curtail all liberties or abolish certain essential freedoms, nor does it, at least to our
limited knowledge, succeed in eradicating the love of freedom from the hearts of men; it simply and mercilessly presses men, such as they are, against each other so that the very space of free action—and this is the reality of freedom—disappears.

Terror exists neither for nor against men; it exists to provide the movement of Nature or History with an incomparable instrument of acceleration. If the undeniable automatism of historical or natural happenings is understood as the stream of necessity, whose meaning is identical to its law of movement and therefore quite independent of any event—which, on the contrary, can only be considered as a superficial and transitory outburst of the deep, permanent law—then the equally undeniable freedom of men, which is identical with the fact that each man is a new beginning and in that sense begins the world anew, can only be regarded as an irrelevant and arbitrary interference with higher forces. These forces, to be sure, could not be definitively deflected by such ridiculous powerlessness, yet they might still be hindered and prevented from reaching full realization. Mankind, when organized in such a way that it marches with the movement of Nature or History, as if all men were only one man, accelerates the automatic movement of Nature or History to a speed which it could never reach alone. Practically speaking, this means that terror in all cases executes on the spot the death sentences which Nature has already pronounced on unfit races and individuals or which History has declared for dying classes and institutions, without waiting for the slower and less efficient elimination which would presumably be brought about anyhow.

In a perfect totalitarian government, where all individuals have become exemplars of the species, where all action has been transformed into acceleration, and every deed into the execution of death sentences—that is, under conditions in which terror as the essence of government is perfectly sheltered from the disturbing and irrelevant interference of human wishes and needs—no principle of action in Montesquieu's sense is necessary. Montesquieu needed principles of action because for him the essence of constitutional government, lawfulness and distribution of power, was basically stable: It could only negatively set up limitations on actions, not positively establish their principles. Since the greatness, but also the perplexity, of all laws in free societies is that they only indicate what one should not do, and never what one
should do, political action and historical movement in constitutional government remain free and unpredictable, conforming to, but never inspired by, its essence.

Under totalitarian conditions, this essence has itself become movement—totalitarian government is only insofar as it is kept in constant motion. As long as totalitarian rule has not conquered the whole earth and, with the iron band of terror, melded all individual men into one mankind, terror in its double function as the essence of the government and the principle—not of action, but of motion—cannot be fully realized. To add to this a principle of action, such as fear, would be contradictory. For even fear is still (according to Montesquieu) a principle of action and as such unpredictable in its consequences. Fear is always connected with isolation—which can be either its result or its origin—and the concomitant experiences of impotence and helplessness. The space freedom needs for its realization is transformed into a desert when the arbitrariness of tyrants destroys the boundaries of laws that hedge in and guarantee to each the realm of freedom. Fear is the principle of human movements in this desert of neighborlessness and loneliness; as such, however, it is still a principle which guides the actions of individual men, who therefore retain a minimal, fearful contact with other men. The desert in which these individual, fearfully atomized men move retains an image, though a distorted one, of that space which human freedom needs.

The close relationship of totalitarian governments to despotc rule is very obvious indeed and extends to almost all areas of government. The totalitarian abolition of classes and of those groups in the population out of which true distinction, as opposed to the arbitrarily created distinctions of orders and stripes, could emerge cannot but remind us of the ancient tale of the Greek tyrant who, in order to introduce a fellow-tyrant to the arts of tyranny, led him out of town to a wheat field and there cut all halms down to equal size. The fact, indeed, that a travesty of equality prevails under all despotic governments has led many good people into the error of believing that from equality springs tyranny or dictatorship, just as the neo-conservativism of our time stems from the radical abolition of all hierarchical and traditional authoritarian factors occurring in all forms of despotism. If we read about the economic despoliation policies so characteristic of short-term efficiency and long-term inefficiency in totalitarian economics, we cannot but remember the
old anecdote with which Montesquieu characterized despotic government: The savages of Louisiana, wanting to harvest ripe fruits, simply cut the fruit trees down, because that was quicker and easier (L’Esprit des Lois, Book I, ch. 13). Moreover, terror, torture, and the spy system which hunts for secret and dangerous thoughts have always been mainstays of tyrannies; and it is not surprising that some tyrants even knew the terrifying use that can be made of the human inclination to forget and the human horror of being forgotten. Prisons under despotic rulers, in Asia as well as in Europe, were frequently called places of oblivion, and frequently the family and friends of the man condemned to a living death in oblivion were warned that they would be punished for even mentioning his name.

The twentieth century has made us forget many horrors of the past, but there is no doubt that totalitarian dictators could attend, if they needed instruction, a long-established school where all means of violence and slyness for the purpose of the domination of man by man have been taught and evaluated. Totalitarian use of violence and especially of terror, however, is distinct from this, not because it so far transcends past limits, and not merely because one cannot very well call the organized and mechanized regular extermination of whole groups or whole peoples “murder” or even “mass murder,” but because its chief characteristic is the very opposite of all police and spy terror of the past. All the similarities between totalitarian and traditional forms of tyranny, however striking they may be, are similarities of technique, and apply only to the initial stages of totalitarian rule. Regimes become truly totalitarian only when they have left behind their revolutionary phase and the techniques needed for the seizure and the consolidation of power—without of course ever abandoning them, should the need arise again.

A much more tempting reason for the student of totalitarianism to equate this form of government with tyranny pure and simple—and the only similarity which has a direct bearing on the specific content of each—is that totalitarian and tyrannical rule both concentrate all power in the hands of one man, who uses this power in such a way that he makes all other men absolutely and radically impotent. If, moreover, we remember the insane desire of the Roman emperor Nero, who is reported by ancient legend to have wished that the whole of mankind might have only one head, we cannot help being reminded of our present-day experiences with the so-called Führer principle, which is...
to the same, or perhaps even greater, extent as by Hitler, and which
operates on the assumption not just that only one will survives among a
dominated population but also that only one mind suffices to take care
of all human activities in general. Yet it is also at this point of closest
resemblance between totalitarian and tyrannical rule that the decisive
difference emerges most clearly. In his insanity, Nero wished to be
confronted with only one head so that the tranquillity of his rule would
never be threatened again by any new opposition: he wanted to behead
mankind, as it were, once and for all, though he knew that this was
impossible. The totalitarian dictator, on the contrary, feels himself the
one and only head of the whole human race; he is concerned with
opposition only insofar as it must be wiped out before he can even begin
his rule of total domination. His ultimate purpose is not the tranquillity
of his own rule, but the imitation—in the case of Hitler—or the inter-
pretation—in the case of Stalin—of the laws of Nature or of History.
But these are laws of movement, as we have seen, which require constant
motion, making the mere leisurely enjoyment of the fruits of domination,
the time-honored joys of tyrannical rule (which at the same time were
the limits beyond which the tyrant had no interest in exerting his power),
impossible by definition. The totalitarian dictator, in sharp distinc-
don from the tyrant, does not believe that he is a free agent with the power
to execute his arbitrary will, but, instead, the executioner of laws higher
than himself. The Hegelian definition of Freedom as insight into and
conforming to "necessity" has here found a new and terrifying realiza-
tion. For the imitation or interpretation of these laws, the totalitarian
ruler feels that only one man is required and that all other persons, all
other minds as well as wills, are strictly superfluous. This conviction
would be utterly absurd if we were to assume that in some fit of meg-
alomania totalitarian rulers believed they had accumulated and monop-
olized all possible capacities of the human mind and the human will,
i.e., if we were to believe that they actually think themselves infallible.
The totalitarian ruler, in short, is not a tyrant and can be understood
only by first understanding the nature of totalitarianism.

Still, if totalitarian rule has little in common with the tyrannies of
the past, it has even less to do with certain modern forms of dictatorship
out of which it developed and with which it has been frequently confused.
One-party dictatorships, of either the fascist or communist type, are not
totalitarian. Neither Lenin nor Mussolini was a totalitarian dictator, nor
even knew what totalitarianism really meant. Lenin's was a revolutionary one-party dictatorship whose power lay chiefly in the party bureaucracy, which Tito tries to replicate today. Mussolini was chiefly a nationalist and, in contrast to the Nazis, a true worshiper of the State, with strong imperialist inclinations; if the Italian army had been better, he probably would have ended as an ordinary military dictator, just as Franco, who emerged from the military hierarchy, tries to be in Spain, with the help given and the constraint imposed by the Catholic Church. In totalitarian states, neither army nor church nor bureaucracy was ever in a position to wield or to restrain power; all executive power is in the hands of the secret police (or the élite formations which, as the instance of Nazi Germany and the history of the Bolshevik party show, are sooner or later incorporated into the police). No group or institution in the country is left intact, not just because they have to "co-ordinate" with the regime in power and outwardly support it—which of course is bad enough—but because in the long run they are literally not supposed to survive. The chess players in the Soviet Union who one beautiful day were informed that chess for chess's sake was a thing of the past are a case in point. It was in the same spirit that Himmler emphasized to the SS that no task existed which a real Nazi could perform for its own sake.

In addition to equating totalitarian rule with tyranny, and confusing it with other modern forms of dictatorship and, particularly, of one-party dictatorship, there remains a third way to try to make totalitarianism seem more harmless and less unprecedented or less relevant for modern political problems: the explanation of totalitarian rule in either Germany or Russia by historical or other causes relevant only to that specific country. Against this kind of argumentation stands, of course, the truly terrifying propaganda success both movements have had outside their home countries in spite of very powerful and very informative counter-propaganda from the most respectable and respected sources. No information on concentration camps in Soviet Russia or death factories in Auschwitz deterred the numerous fellow-travelers which both regimes knew how to attract. Yet even if we leave this aspect of attraction undiscussed, there is a more serious argument against this explanation: the curious fact that Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia started from historical, economic, ideological, and cultural circumstances in many respects almost diametrically opposed, yet still arrived at certain results which are structurally identical. This is easily overlooked because these
identical structures reveal themselves only in fully developed totalitarian rule. Not only was this point reached at different times in Germany and in Russia, but different fields of political and other activity were seized at different moments as well. To this difficulty must be added another historical circumstance. Soviet Russia embarked upon the road to totalitarianism only around 1930 and Germany only after 1938. Up to those points, both countries, though already containing a great number of totalitarian elements, could still be regarded as one-party dictatorships. Russia became fully totalitarian only after the Moscow Trials, i.e., shortly before the war, and Germany only during the first years of the war. Nazi Germany in particular never had time to realize completely its evil potential, which can nevertheless be inferred by studying minutes from Hitler’s headquarters and other such documents. The picture is further confused by the fact that very few people in the Nazi hierarchy were entirely aware of Hitler’s and Bormann’s plans. Soviet Russia, though much more advanced in its totalitarian rule, offers very little documentary source material, so that each concrete point always and necessarily remains disputable even though we know enough to arrive at correct over-all estimates and conclusions.

Totalitarianism as we know it today in its Bolshevik and Nazi versions developed out of one-party dictatorships which, like other tyrannies, used terror as a means to establish a desert of neighborlessness and loneliness. Yet when the well-known tranquillity of the cemetery had been obtained, totalitarianism was not satisfied, but turned the instrument of terror at once and with increased vigor into an objective law of movement. Fear, moreover, becomes pointless when the selection of victims is completely free from all reference to an individual’s actions or thoughts. Fear, though certainly the all-pervasive mood in totalitarian countries, is no longer a principle of action and can no longer serve as a guide to specific deeds. Totalitarian tyranny is unprecedented in that it melds people together in the desert of isolation and atomization and then introduces a gigantic motion into the tranquillity of the cemetery.

No guiding principle of action taken from the realm of human action—such as virtue, honor, fear—is needed or could be used to set into motion a body politic whose essence is motion implemented by terror. In its stead, totalitarianism relies upon a new principle, which, as such, dispenses with human action as free deeds altogether and substitutes for the very desire and will to action a craving and need for insight into
the laws of movement according to which the terror functions. Human beings, caught or thrown into the process of Nature or History for the sake of accelerating its movement, can become only the executioners or the victims of its inherent law. According to this law, they may today be those who eliminate the "unfit races and individuals" or the "dying classes and decadent peoples" and tomorrow be those who, for the same reasons, must themselves be sacrificed. What totalitarian rule therefore needs, instead of a principle of action, is a means to prepare individuals equally well for the role of executioner and the role of victim. This two-sided preparation, the substitute for a principle of action, is ideology.

III

Ideologies by themselves are as little totalitarian and their use as little restricted to totalitarian propaganda as terror by itself is restricted to totalitarian rule. As we have all learned to our sorrow, it does not matter whether this ideology is as stupid and barren of authentic spiritual content as racism or whether it is as saturated with the best of our tradition as socialism. Only in the hands of the new type of totalitarian governments do ideologies become the driving motor of political action, and this in the double sense that ideologies determine the political actions of the ruler and make these actions tolerable to the ruled population. I call all ideologies in this context isms that pretend to have found the key explanation for all the mysteries of life and the world. Thus racism or anti-Semitism is not an ideology, but merely an irresponsible opinion, as long as it restricts itself to praising Aryans and hating Jews; it becomes an ideology only when it pretends to explain the whole course of history as being secretly maneuvered by the Jews, or covertly subject to an eternal race struggle, race mixture, or whatnot. Socialism, similarly, is not an ideology properly speaking as long as it describes class struggles, preaches justice for the underprivileged, and fights for an improvement or revolutionary change of society. Socialism—or communism—becomes an ideology only when it pretends that all history is a struggle of classes, that the proletariat is bound by eternal laws to win this struggle, that a classless society will then come about, and that the state, finally, will wither away. In other words, ideologies are not a substitute for a principle of action.
life and world that claim to explain everything, past and future, without further concurrence with actual experience.

This last point is crucial. This arrogant emancipation from reality and experience, more than any actual content, foreshadows the connection between ideology and terror. This connection not only makes terror an all-embracing characteristic of totalitarian rule, in the sense that it is directed equally against all members of the population, regardless of their guilt or innocence, but also is the very condition for its permanence. Insofar as ideological thinking is independent of existing reality, it looks upon all factuality as fabricated, and therefore no longer knows any reliable criterion for distinguishing truth from falsehood. If it is untrue, said Das Schwarze Korps, for instance, that all Jews are beggars without passports, we shall change facts in such a way as to make this statement true. That a man by the name of Trotsky was ever the head of the Red Army will cease to be true when the Bolsheviks have the global power to change all history texts—and so forth. The point here is that the ideological consistency reducing everything to one all-dominating factor is always in conflict with the inconsistency of the world, on the one hand, and the unpredictability of human actions, on the other. Terror is needed in order to make the world consistent and keep it that way; to dominate human beings to the point where they lose, with their spontaneity, the specifically human unpredictability of thought and action.

Such ideologies were fully developed before anybody ever heard the word or conceived the notion of totalitarianism. That their very claim to totality made them almost predestined to play a role in totalitarianism is easy to see. What is less easy to understand, partly because their tenets have been the subject of dreary discussions for centuries in the case of racism, and for many decades in the case of socialism, is what made them such supreme principles and motors of action. As a matter of fact, the only new device the totalitarian rulers invented or discovered in using these ideologies was translating a general outlook into a singular principle ruling over all activities. Neither Stalin nor Hitler added a single new thought, respectively, to socialism or racism; yet only in their hands did these ideologies become deadly serious.

It is at this point that the problem of the role of ideologies in totalitarianism receives its full meaning. What is novel in the ideological
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propaganda of totalitarian movements even before they seize power is the immediate transformation of ideological content into living reality through instruments of totalitarian organization. The Nazi movement, far from organizing people who happened to believe in racism, organized them according to objective race criteria, so that race ideology was no longer a matter of mere opinion or argument or even fanaticism, but constituted the actual living reality, first of the Nazi movement, and then of Nazi Germany, where the amount of one’s food, the choice of one’s profession, and the woman one married depended upon one’s racial physiognomy and ancestry. The Nazis, as distinguished from other racists, did not so much believe in the truth of racism as desire to change the world into a race reality.

A similar change in the role of ideology took place when Stalin replaced the revolutionary socialist dictatorship in the Soviet Union with a full-fledged totalitarian regime. Socialist ideology shared with all other isms the claim to have found the solution to all the riddles of the universe and to be able to introduce the best system into the political affairs of mankind. The fact that new classes sprang up in Soviet Russia after the October Revolution was of course a blow to socialist theory, according to which the violent upheaval should have been followed by a gradual dying out of class structures. When Stalin embarked upon his murderous purge policies to establish a classless society through the regular extermination of all social layers that might develop into classes, he realized, albeit in an unexpected form, the ideological socialist belief about dying classes. The result is the same: Soviet Russia is as much a classless society as Nazi Germany was a racially determined society. What had been mere ideological opinion before became the lived content of reality. The connection between totalitarianism and all other isms is that totalitarianism can use any of the others as an organizational principle and try to change the whole texture of reality according to its tenets.

The two great obstacles on the road to such transformation are the unpredictability, the fundamental unreliability, of man, on the one hand, and the curious inconsistency of the human world, on the other. Precisely because ideologies by themselves are matters of opinion rather than of truth, the human freedom to change one’s mind is a great and pertinent danger. No mere oppression, therefore, but the total and reliable domination of man is necessary if he is to fit into the ideologically determined, fantastic world of totalitarianism. Total domination as such is quite
independent of the actual content of any given ideology; no matter which ideology one may choose, no matter if one decides to transform the world and man according to the tenets of racism or socialism or any other ism, total domination will always be required. This is why two systems so different from each other in actual content, in origins and objective circumstances, could in the end build almost identical administrative and terror machineries.

For the totalitarian experiment of changing the world according to an ideology, total domination of the inhabitants of one country is not enough. The existence, and not so much the hostility, of any non-totalitarian country is a direct threat to the consistency of the ideological claim. If it is true that the socialist or communist system of the Soviet Union is superior to all other systems, then it follows that under no other system can such a fine thing as a subway really be built. For a time, therefore, Soviet schools used to teach their children that there is no other subway in the world except the subway in Moscow. The Second World War put a halt to such obvious absurdities, but this will only be temporary. For the consistency of the claim demands that in the end no other subway survive except a subway under totalitarian rule: either all others have to be destroyed or the countries where they operate have to be brought under totalitarian domination. The claim to global conquest, inherent in the Communist concept of World Revolution, as it was in the Nazi concept of a master race, is no mere threat born of lust for power or mad overestimation of one's own forces. The real danger is the fact that the factitious, topsy-turvy world of a totalitarian regime cannot survive for any length of time if the entire outside world does not adopt a similar system, allowing all of reality to become a consistent whole, threatened neither by the subjective unpredictability of man nor by the contingent quality of the human world which always leaves some space open for accident.

It is an open and sometimes hotly debated question whether the totalitarian ruler himself or his immediate subordinates believe, along with his mass of adherents and subjects, in the superstitions of the respective ideologies. Since the tenets in question are so obviously stupid and vulgar, those who tend to answer this question affirmatively are also inclined to deny the almost unquestionable qualities and gifts of men like Hitler and Stalin. On the other hand, those who tend to answer this question negatively, believing that the phenomenal deceptiveness of
both men is sufficient proof of their cold and detached cynicism, are also inclined to deny the curious incalculability of totalitarian politics, which so obviously violates all rules of self-interest and common sense. In a world used to calculating actions and reactions by these yardsticks, such incalculability becomes a public danger.

Why should lust for power, which from the beginning of recorded history has been considered the political and social sin par excellence, suddenly transcend all previously known limitations of self-interest and utility and attempt not simply to dominate men as they are, but also to change their very nature; not only to kill innocent and harmless bystanders, but to do this even when such murder is an obstacle, rather than an advantage, to the accumulation of power? If we refuse to be caught by mere phrases and their associations and look behind them at the actual phenomena, it appears that total domination, as practiced every day by a totalitarian regime, is separated from all other forms of domination by an abyss which no psychological explanation such as “lust for power” is able to bridge.

This curious neglect of obvious self-interest in totalitarian rule has frequently impressed people as a kind of mistaken idealism. And this impression has some kernel of truth, if we understand by idealism only absence of selfishness and common-sense motives. The selflessness of totalitarian rulers perhaps characterizes itself best through the curious fact that none was ever particularly eager to find a successor among his own children. (It is a noteworthy experience for the student of tyrannies to come across a variation which is not plagued by the ever-present worry of the classical usurper.)

Total domination for totalitarian regimes is never an end in itself. In this respect the totalitarian ruler is more “enlightened” and closer to the wishes and desires of the masses who support him—frequently even in the face of patent disaster—than his predecessors, the power politicians who no longer played the game for the sake of national interest but as a game of power for power’s sake. Total domination, despite its frightful attack on the physical existence of people as well as on the nature of man, can play the seemingly old game of tyranny with such unprecedented murderous efficiency because it is used only as a means to an end.

I think that Hitler believed as unquestioningly in race struggle and racial superiority (though not necessarily in the racial superiority of the
German people) as Stalin believes in class struggle and the classless society (though not necessarily in world revolution). However, in view of the particular qualities of totalitarian regimes, which might be established according to any arbitrary opinion enlarged into a Weltanschauung, it would be quite possible for totalitarian rulers or the men immediately surrounding them not to believe in the actual content of their preaching; it sometimes seems as though the new generation, educated under conditions of totalitarian rule, somehow has lost even the ability to distinguish between such believing and non-believing. If that were the case, the actual aim of totalitarian rule would have to a large extent been achieved: the abolition of convictions as a too unreliable support for the system; and the demonstration that this system, in distinction from all others, has made man, insofar as he is a being of spontaneous thought and action, superfluous.

Underlying these beliefs or non-beliefs, these “idealistc” convictions or cynical calculations, is another belief, of an entirely different quality, which, indeed, is shared by all totalitarian rulers, as well as by people thinking and acting along totalitarian lines, whether or not they know it. This is the belief in the omnipotence of man and at the same time of the superfluity of men; it is the belief that everything is permitted and, much more terrible, that everything is possible. Under this condition, the question of the original truth or falsehood of the ideologies loses its relevance. If Western philosophy has maintained that reality is truth—for this is of course the ontological basis of the *aequatio rei et intellectus*—then totalitarianism has concluded from this that we can fabricate truth insofar as we can fabricate reality; that we do not have to wait until reality unveils itself and shows us its true face, but can bring into being a reality whose structures will be known to us from the beginning because the whole thing is our product. In other words, it is the underlying conviction of any totalitarian transformation of ideology into reality that it will become true whether it is true or not. Because of this totalitarian relationship to reality, the very concept of truth has lost its meaning. The lies of totalitarian movements, invented for the moment, as well as the forgeries committed by totalitarian regimes, are secondary to this fundamental attitude that excludes the very distinction between truth and falsehood.

It is for this end, that is, for the consistency of a lying world order, rather than for the sake of power or any other humanly understandable
sinfulness, that totalitarianism requires total domination and global rule and is prepared to commit crimes which are unprecedented in the long and sinful history of mankind.*

The operation Hitler and Stalin performed on their respective ideologies was simply to take them dead seriously, and that meant driving their pretentious implications to that extreme of logical consequence where they would look, to the normal eye, preposterously absurd. If you believe in earnest that the bourgeoisie is not simply antagonistic to the interests of the worker, but is dying, then evidently you are permitted to kill all bourgeois. If you take literally the dictum that the Jews, far from merely being the enemies of other people, are actually vermin, created as vermin by nature and therefore predestined to suffer the same fate as lice and bedbugs, then you have established a perfect argument for their extermination. This stringent logicality as an inspiration of action permeates the whole structure of totalitarian movements and totalitarian governments. The most persuasive argument, of which Hitler and Stalin were equally fond, is to insist that whoever says A must necessarily also say B and C and finally end with the last letter of the alphabet. Everything which stands in the way of this kind of reasoning—reality, experience, and the daily network of human relationships and interdependence—is overruled. Even the advice of common self-interest shares this fate in extreme cases, as was proved over and over again by the way Hitler conducted his war. Mere logic, which starts from one single accepted premise—what Hitler used to call his supreme gift of “ice-cold reasoning”—remains always the ultimate guiding principle.

We may say, then, that in totalitarian governments, Montesquieu’s principle of action is replaced by ideology. Though up till now we have been confronted with only two types of totalitarianism, each started from an ideological belief whose appeal to large masses of people had already been demonstrated and both of which were therefore thought to be highly appropriate to inspire action, to set the masses in motion. Yet, if we look closer at what is really happening, or has been happening during the last thirty years, to these masses and their individual members, we shall discover the disconcerting ease with which so many changed from a red

*This and the preceding ten paragraphs are from the manuscript entitled “Ideology and Pravazanda.” —Fd.
shirt into a brown, and if that did not work out, into a red shirt again, only to take on the brown again after a little while. These changes—and they are more numerous than we usually admit in our eagerness and hope to see people, after one bad experience, give up shirt-wearing altogether—seem to indicate that it is not even the ideologies, with their demonstrable content, which set people into action, but the logicality of their reasoning all by itself and almost independent of content. This would mean that after ideologies have taught people to emancipate themselves from real experience and the shock of reality by luring them into a fool’s paradise where everything is known a priori, the next step will lead them, if it has not already done so, away from the content of their paradise; not to make them any wiser, but to mislead them further into the wilderness of mere abstract logical deductions and conclusions. It is no longer race or the establishment of a society based on race that is the “ideal” which appeals, nor class or the establishment of a classless society, but the murderous network of pure logical operations in which one is caught once one accepts either of them. It is as though these shirt-changers console themselves with the thought that no matter what content they accept—no matter which kind of eternal law they decide to believe in—once they have taken this initial step, nothing can ever happen to them anymore, and they are saved.

Saved from what? Maybe we can find the answer if we look once more at the nature of totalitarianism, that is, at its essence of terror and at its principle of logicality, which in combination add up to its nature. It has been frequently said, and it is perfectly true, that the most horrible aspect of terror is that it has the power to bind together completely isolated individuals and that by so doing it isolates these individuals even further. Hitler as well as Stalin may have learned from all the historical examples of tyranny that any group of people joined together by some common interest is the supreme threat to total domination. Only isolated individuals can be dominated totally. Hitler was able to build his organization on the firm ground of an already atomized society which he then artificially atomized even further; Stalin needed the bloody extermination of the peasants, the uprooting of the workers, the repeated purges of the administrative machinery and the party bureaucracy in order to achieve the same results. By the terms “atomized society” and “isolated individuals” we mean a state of affairs where people live together without having anything in common, without sharing some visible tangible realm
of the world. Just as the inhabitants of an apartment house form a group
on the basis of their sharing this particular building, so we, on the
strength of the political and legal institutions that provide our general
living together with all the normal channels of communication, become
a social group, a society, a people, a nation and so forth. And just as
the apartment dwellers will become isolated from each other if for some
reason their building is taken away from them, so the collapse of our
institutions—the ever-increasing political and physical homelessness and
spiritual and social rootlessness—is the one gigantic mass destiny of our
time in which we all participate, though to very differing degrees of
intensity and misery.

Terror, in the sense we were speaking of it, is not so much something
which people may fear, but a way of life which takes the utter impotence
of the individual for granted and provides for him either victory or death,
a career or an end in a concentration camp, completely independent of
his own actions or merits. Terror fits the situation of these ever-growing
masses to perfection, no matter if these masses are the result of decaying
societies or of calculated policies.

But terror by itself is not enough—it fits but it does not inspire. If
we observe from this perspective the curious logicality of the ideologies
in totalitarian movements, we understand better why this combination
can be so supremely valuable. If it were true that there are eternal laws
ruling supreme over all things human and demanding of each human
being only total conformity, then freedom would be only a mockery, some
snare luring one away from the right path; then homelessness would be
only a fantasy, an imagined thing, which could be cured by the decision
to conform to some recognizable universal law. And then—last not
least—not the concert of human minds, but only one man would be
needed to understand these laws and to build humanity in such a way
as to conform to them under all changing circumstances. The “knowl-
edge” of one alone would suffice, and the plurality of human gifts or
insights or initiatives would be simply superfluous. Human contact would
not matter; only the preservation of a perfect functionality within the
framework established by the one initiated into the “wisdom” of the law
would matter.

Logicality is what appeals to isolated human beings, for man—in
complete solitude, without any contact with his fellow-men and therefore
without any real possibility of experience, has nothing else to see.
back on but the most abstract rules of reasoning. The intimate connection between logicality and isolation was stressed in Martin Luther’s little-known interpretation of the biblical passage that says that God created Man, male and female, because “it is not good for man to be alone.” Luther says: “A lonely man always deduces one thing from another and carries everything to its worst conclusion” ("Warum die Einsamkeit zu fliehen?" in Erbauliche Schriften).

Logicality, mere reasoning without regard for facts and experience, is the true vice of solitude. But the vices of solitude grow only out of the despair of loneliness. Now, when human contacts have been severed—either through the collapse of our common home, or through the growing expansion of mere functionality whereby the substance, the real matter of human relationships, is slowly eaten away, or through the catastrophic developments of revolutions that themselves resulted from previous collapses—loneliness in such a world is no longer a psychological matter to be handled with such beautiful and meaningless terms as “introvert” or “extrovert.” Loneliness, as the concomitant of homelessness and uprootedness, is, humanly speaking, the very disease of our time. To be sure, you may still see people—but they get to be fewer and fewer—who cling to each other as if in midair, without the help of established channels of communication provided by a commonly inhabited world, in order to escape together the curse of becoming inhuman in a society where everybody seems to be superfluous and is so perceived by their fellow-men. But what do these acrobatic performances prove against the despair growing all around us, which we ignore whenever we merely denounce or call people who fall for totalitarian propaganda stupid or wicked or ill informed? These people are nothing of the sort. They have only escaped the despair of loneliness by becoming addicted to the vices of solitude.

Solitude and loneliness are not the same. In solitude we are never alone, but are together with ourselves. In solitude we are always two-in-one; we become one whole individual, in the richness as well as the limitations of definite characteristics, through and only through the company of others. For our individuality, insofar as it is one—unchangeable and unmistakable—we depend entirely on other people. Solitude in which one has the company of oneself need not give up contact with others, and is not outside human company altogether; on the contrary, it prepares us for certain outstanding forms of human rapport, such as
friendship and love, that is, for all rapport which transcends the established channels of human communication. If one can endure solitude, bear one's own company, then chances are that one can bear and be prepared for the companionship of others; whoever cannot bear any other person usually will not be able to endure his own self.

The great grace of companionship is that it redeems the two-in-one by making it individual. As individuals we need each other and become lonely if through some physical or some political accident we are robbed of company or companionship. Loneliness develops when man does not find companionship to save him from the dual nature of his solitude, or when man as an individual, in constant need of others for his individuality, is deserted or separated from others. In the latter case, he is all alone, forsaken even by the company of himself.

The great metaphysical questions—the quest for God, freedom, and immortality (as in Kant) or about man and world, being and nothingness, life and death—are always asked in solitude, when man is alone with himself and therefore potentially together with everybody. The very fact that man, for the time being, is deflected from his individuality enables him to ask timeless questions that transcend the questions asked, in different ways, by every individual. But no such questions are asked in loneliness, when man as an individual is deserted even by his own self and lost in the chaos of people. The despair of loneliness is its very dumbness, admitting no dialogue.

Solitude is not loneliness, but can easily become loneliness and can even more easily be confused with it. Nothing is more difficult and rarer than people who, out of the desperate need of loneliness, find the strength to escape into solitude, into company with themselves, thereby mending the broken ties which link them to other men. This is what happened in one happy moment to Nietzsche, when he concluded his great and desperate poem of loneliness with the words: “Mittags war, da wurde eins zu zwei, und Zarathustra ging an mir vorbei” (“Sils-Maria,” Die Froliche Wissenschaft). *

The danger in solitude is of losing one's own self, so that, instead of being together with everybody, one is literally deserted by everybody. This has been the professional risk of the philosopher, who, because of

*"It was noon, one became two, and I was done with Zarathustra." Arendt quotes from memory. — Ed
his quest for truth and his concern with questions we call metaphysical (which are actually the only questions of concern to everybody), needs solitude, the being together with his own self and therefore with everybody, as a kind of working condition. As the inherent risk of solitude, loneliness is, therefore, a professional danger for philosophers, which, incidentally, seems to be one of the reasons that philosophers cannot be trusted with politics or a political philosophy. Not only do they have one supreme interest which they seldom divulge—to be left alone, to have their solitude guaranteed and freed from all possible disturbances, such as the disturbance of the fulfillment of one's duty as a citizen—but this interest has naturally led them to sympathize with tyrannies where action is not expected of citizens. Their experience in solitude has given them extraordinary insight into all those relationships which cannot be realized without this being alone with one's own self, but has led them to forget the perhaps even more primary relationships between men and the realm they constitute, springing simply from the fact of human plurality.

We said at the beginning of these reflections that we shall be satisfied with having understood the essence or nature of political phenomena which determine the whole innermost structure of entire eras only if we succeed in analyzing them as signs of the danger of general trends that concern and eventually may threaten all societies—not just those countries where they have already been victorious or are on the point of becoming victorious. The danger totalitarianism lays bare before our eyes—and this danger, by definition, will not be overcome merely by victory over totalitarian governments—springs from rootlessness and homelessness and could be called the danger of loneliness and superfluity. Both loneliness and superfluity are, of course, symptoms of mass society, but their true significance is not thereby exhausted. Dehumanization is implied in both and, though reaching its most horrible consequences in concentration camps, exists prior to their establishment. Loneliness as we know it in an atomized society is indeed, as I tried to show by the quotation from the Bible and its interpretation by Luther, contrary to the basic requirements of the human condition. Even the experience of the merely materially and sensually given world depends, in the last analysis, upon the fact that not one man but men in the plural inhabit the earth. . . .