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## The lost treasure of the revolution

*Hannah Arendt, totalitarianism, and the revolutions in central Europe: 1956, 1968, 1989*

Hannah Arendt's writings on the 1956 Hungary uprising might give the impression that it was the first velvet revolution in central and eastern Europe. In other words, Arendt wrote about a revolution that had not yet taken place. Despite this misjudgement, Arendt's theoretical insights into the relationship between power and violence are more than ever relevant to an understanding of both the uprising itself and the role of the public memory of it after 1989.

Fifty years after 1956 offers a particularly propitious opportunity to engage with the thought of Hannah Arendt. 1956, this veritable "year of Europe",<sup>1</sup> marked the first major crises of the Soviet empire and triggered a re-examination of Arendt's thinking about the nature of totalitarianism and politics. While Arendt did not write much about the 1956 uprising in Hungary and even less about the Prague Spring of 1968, her insights into the relationship between power and violence and the possibility of revolutionary change are relevant to both these revolutionary upheavals and even more so to the final demise of communism in 1989. At any rate, it can be safely assumed that Arendt would have approved of this unorthodox approach, because she was also interested in political history in a particular way that was irritating both to historians and political theorists. Most historians found her accounts distorted (as she seemed more interested in ideas than "pure facts"), while many political theorists were often confused by her refusal to draw a sharp distinction between analytical and normative statements; between descriptions of "what is" and what "ought to be".

Arendt was both fascinated and troubled by revolutions. She was fascinated because they helped her to understand all the key problems of the political realm. Revolutions were those magic moments in human history that showed that men and women, when acting in concert, were able to transcend the limits of their biological existence and pursue ideals of freedom. Only by acting politically could humans live up to their potential. Revolutions, by making possible and intensifying this kind of political life, were crucial for the full realization of human potential. Revolutions were the crucial events of modern history because they marked "the birth or the rebirth of an authentically political realm".<sup>2</sup> What Arendt found troubling about revolutions was the fact that they were all too often exceedingly bloody affairs. And where there is blood, where there is violence, there is little space left for politics. This might seem a strange proposition considering that politics is mostly about conflicts, and therefore also about violent conflicts, but for Arendt this is not the case, or better said, this *should not* be the case. The paradox of revolutions is that they are bound to fail in their attempt to create conditions for liberty to the extent

that they rely on violence. Arendt was convinced that no power can ever emerge "out of the barrel of the gun".<sup>3</sup> In fact, according to Arendt, "power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent".<sup>4</sup>

Arendt was also acutely aware of the fact that revolutions often led to disastrous outcomes. In fact, well before Arendt wrote her major work *On Revolutions*, she examined the outcomes of revolutionary movements that aimed at the elimination of liberty. It is worth remembering that both totalitarian rules, Nazism and Stalinism, were results of radical revolutionary projects pursued by totalitarian movements. This was one of the original insights of Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*.<sup>5</sup>

It is not surprising that there are aspects of this classic study of totalitarianism that appear no longer relevant or that are plainly wrong. The insinuation that the rise of totalitarianism is in some ways connected with the disenchantment of the European bourgeoisie that sought an escape from its pitiful, mundane existence and was hence ready to accept the "heroic" goals of a totalitarian movement seems far-fetched.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the middle-classes were all too often driven by narrow, selfish concerns does not explain their willingness to succumb to the lure of Nazi ideology. Furthermore, this explanation is not applicable to Russia, where, as Arendt acknowledged, an atomized society had to be first created by the totalitarian movement, rather than being a precondition for its emergence.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Arendt's scepticism towards the emerging human rights movement in international affairs seems out of place today.<sup>8</sup> The list of Arendt's misjudgments could be extended.<sup>9</sup> What is more remarkable than these shortcomings is how many of Arendt's insights retained their relevance, even after the collapse of communism. Her attention to the role of ideology in these regimes, for example, that has been criticized by the revisionist school of Soviet history, has been borne out by a number of recent studies based on archival research — whether in the area of high politics,<sup>10</sup> or at the level of ordinary citizens.<sup>11</sup>

### **Totalitarianism as model**

The critics of the totalitarian paradigm stressed time and again that it is unhelpful to study history through the lenses of contemporary political concerns, or with the aim of judging the moral worth of particular actions. Hence the revisionist school of Soviet history that emerged in the 1970s (and became the dominant orthodoxy in the Western historical scholarship in the 1980s) sought to "rescue" Soviet and eastern European history from ideologically driven disputes of the Cold War by focusing on social history, or more specifically the study of ordinary lives of people living in extraordinary times.<sup>12</sup> The scholars subscribing to this approach also resisted the implication that there were no fundamental differences between Nazism and Stalinism, between the Bolshevik and National Socialist revolutionary projects.<sup>13</sup>

Like the smoker who claims there is nothing easier than giving up smoking because he had done it so many times, the theories of totalitarianism were repeatedly declared dead, or irrelevant, only to be reborn and endowed with new vigour. One could describe the current resurgence of the concept as a "third wave" of thinking about totalitarianism. The first wave in such categorization coincided with the rise of revisionism in Soviet history in the West in the 1970s and 1980s; it was largely ignored by the dissident intellectuals in the East, who found inspiration in the totalitarian paradigm articulated by the likes of Arendt, Albert Camus, and George Orwell. The second wave followed the demise of the Soviet Empire in 1989–1991, after

which large sections of Western academia, including historians, became interested in the concept (partly thanks to the growing influence of central and eastern European intellectuals upon western European discourse). Finally, the third way emerged after 9/11, that for many marked the beginning of a new kind of war: the ambiguously labelled "war on terror" was conceived of as a war against a "new kind of totalitarianism"<sup>14</sup> anchored in the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism.

The other common criticism levelled against the theorists of totalitarianism is to say that they underestimated the internal dynamics of totalitarian regimes.<sup>15</sup> It is often said that these theories were unhelpful in explaining the possibility of changes from within such systems, or that they assumed that once totalitarian control is exercised, it can never be effectively challenged. If there ever was a truly totalitarian regime, one could surmise, it would be impossible for it to be defeated from within; its demise would have been inconceivable.

### **Writing against reckless despair: Natality and the possibility of freedom**

It is understandable, that when Arendt wrote *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (the preface to the first edition was only completed in the summer of 1950) she was indeed rather pessimistic about the possibilities of challenges arising from within these societies. But she was not without hope.<sup>16</sup> In fact, she was convinced that even totalitarian regimes cannot "establish a permanent world. Totalitarian domination, like tyranny, bears the germs of its own destruction".<sup>17</sup> Hence, while the threat of totalitarianism will always remain with us, it will *also* always remain possible to think of, and act towards, new beginnings. In other words, the aspiration of a totalitarian state to gain absolute control of the whole population through their atomisation cannot be ever fully realised. The possibility of the new beginning is an intrinsic part of the human condition:

Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom. *Initium ut esset homo creatus est* — "that a beginning be made man was created" said Augustine. This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed everyman.<sup>18</sup>

These are the concluding remarks of the chapter "Ideology and terror" that was written after the first edition of the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, but well before anyone could have expected the outbreak of the Hungarian uprising of 1956.<sup>19</sup>

Arendt's understanding of politics is decisively influenced by her study of totalitarianism. One of the fundamental concerns of her political theory is the question how to preserve the realm of the political, which is the only place that allows people to act as free citizens. Having identified Nazism and Stalinism as radically new types of political regimes that aimed at the total destruction of liberty and the elimination of any political space, Arendt sought to recover the notion of freedom by studying its emergence in ancient Greece. For Greeks, it was self-evident that to be free is not just to be free from constraints (the negative freedom of modern liberalism), but to be able to initiate something new. As Arendt put it:

Perhaps the best illustration within the arena of Greek politics that freedom of action is the same thing as starting anew and beginning something is that the word *archein* means both to

begin and to lead.<sup>20</sup>

Owing to the possibility of freedom, which is ensured through the capacity of each man for new beginning, history can never be fully stripped of contingency. Political power can emerge in the most unlikely circumstances, even under severely oppressive regimes. It is this kind of freedom and this kind of power, the origins of which Arendt located in ancient Greece, that was re-enacted in modern times in revolutions, or similar events in which people acted in concert in order to achieve ambitious political goals. An important aspect of political power so conceived is that it should be free of violence.

The 1956 revolution in Hungary clearly exposed the limitations of the Soviet totalitarian project, or any other political regime sustained primarily by violent means. However, the event might have unwittingly exposed also the limits to the concept of power as the opposite of violence. There can be little doubt that the 1956 revolution in Hungary, like many other revolutions in the past, was not entirely free of violence. This is the reason for Arendt's preoccupation with revolutionary councils, which she saw as representing the kind of cooperative power that emerged spontaneously in times of political crisis and could effectively defy hierarchical structures of the ruling regime without using hierarchical structures themselves. For Arendt, "the rise of the councils, not the restoration of parties, was the clear sign of a true upsurge of democracy against dictatorship, of freedom against tyranny".<sup>21</sup> Yet, as a number of studies demonstrated, the actual reality of the revolutionary councils — whether it was in the Paris Commune of 1871, in Russia in 1905 and 1917, or in Hungary in 1956 — might have been rather removed from Arendt's idealised vision.<sup>22</sup> Particularly her claim that the workers councils were primarily interested in political emancipation rather than the improvement of their basic material predicament, in other words that their goals were primarily political rather than economic, seems problematic.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, just as Arendt's ideas about council democracy proved a fruitful source of inspiration for normative democratic theory,<sup>24</sup> her writings about revolutions might tell us more about how the revolutions ought to have been rather than how they were.

In fact, it seems that Arendt never ceased to write about a revolution that never was. Her famous book *On Revolution* celebrates the American Revolution of 1776 and attempts to rescue it from the shadow of its better-known "sister" — the French Revolution of 1789. Her main argument echoes Tocqueville in suggesting that the American revolutionaries were significantly more successful than their French counterparts in paving the ground for liberty under the rule of law because they were less radical both in their demands and in their methods. The American revolutionaries were remarkable in their restraint, which resulted in conspicuously low levels of violence.<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly, this view has been challenged by historians, who tend to argue that the American Revolution cannot be separated from the American Civil War — and hence gave rise to more bloodletting than Arendt would have us believe. Arendt's account of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 is somewhat similar. In fact, reading Arendt one might be forgiven for gaining the impression that *this* was the first velvet revolution in central and eastern Europe.<sup>26</sup> Arendt stressed the extent to which the masses on the street behaved in an orderly fashion:

In its positive significance, the outstanding feature of the uprising was that no chaos resulted from the actions of people without leadership and without previously formulated programme. First, there was no looting, no trespassing of property, among a multitude whose standard of life had been

miserable and whose hunger for merchandise notorious. There were no crimes against life either, for the few instances of public hanging of AVH officers were conducted with remarkable restraint and discrimination.<sup>27</sup>

Arendt was right to highlight the surprisingly orderly nature of these revolutionary upheavals.<sup>28</sup> But she is probably going too far when implying that the instances of lynch-justice were not all that regrettable, because they were not as widespread and indiscriminate as one might have expected. Once again, I suspect that Arendt writes more about the kind of revolution that would have been desirable, rather than the one that occurred in Hungary in 1956. In some ways, Arendt commenting on the Hungarian uprising had to face a dilemma similar to the one Immanuel Kant faced in relation to the French Revolution. How is it possible to endorse, or even to be enthusiastic about the aims of the revolutionaries, yet reject their means as illegitimate? One possible way to get out of this quandary is to take the perspective of a disinterested spectator. Kant found it gratifying that the event pleased many outside observers and he considered this development to be an encouraging sign of moral progress. This was roughly the argumentation of the *Strife of Faculties*, where Kant applauded the French Revolution despite the fact that he consistently argued that civil disobedience could never be legitimate. "Such a phenomenon in human history", noted Kant approvingly, "is *not to be forgotten*".<sup>29</sup> The tightrope that Arendt walks is not all that different: how is it possible to celebrate revolutions as the magic moments of politics, given that they often involve violence, which marks a relapse into the pre-political realm? It might be easier to do so, once these events are turned into stories that people can talk about, contesting their meaning and publicly remembering them in an appropriate fashion.<sup>30</sup> In this way, even violent events can be transferred into the realm of politics, in which language is the most suitable medium of action.

### **Politics as public memory -- Kant, Jaspers, Arendt: 1956 "*not to be forgotten*"**

Genuine political actions are to be celebrated not only for their potential to change societies for the better, but also because they enable individuals to excel in their most humane faculty — to live up to their unique potential for freedom. To put it in more dramatic terms, as Arendt did in relation to the leaders of the American Revolution, the immortality of modern man can only be acquired through noble political actions.<sup>31</sup> Hence, at least as important as the event itself is the role the event plays in the public imagination of a political community; how it is maintained in public memory and how it serves as a point of reference for future actions. In a letter to Arendt, Karl Jaspers invoked Kant in his immediate response to the Hungarian events in remarking that such a phenomenon was "not to be forgotten".<sup>32</sup> A year later, Arendt wrote about the Hungarian Revolution as, "a true event whose stature will not depend upon victory or defeat; its greatness is secure in the tragedy it enacted. For [...] who can doubt the solidity of this remembrance?"<sup>33</sup>

Arendt's assessment of the importance of remembering 1956 proved remarkably prescient, even though its wisdom was only revealed much later than most people would have hoped for. In her early response, Arendt might have underestimated the capacity and willingness of the post-1956 regime to suppress public memory, yet she understood that this enforced silence was crucial for the maintenance of the regime. As a compelling recent study by István Rév has demonstrated, the political history of Hungary after 1956 can

be written as a kind of " history of perception" of that singularly important event.<sup>34</sup> Just as the suppression of the memory of 1956 was instrumental in maintaining the communist order in Hungary, the public commemoration of the event, which was the reburial of Imre Nagy on 16 June 1989, amounted to the unmaking of the regime. Finally, after the implosion of the communist regime in 1989, the meaning of 1956 was open to contestation in which political actors were at last free to take different position, often articulating their contemporary political programmes through their relations to that historic event.

At any rate, the Hungarian political system in the immediate aftermath of 1956 displayed more elements of totalitarian rule than Arendt may have realized. For, it is in the nature of such rule that it can turn arguments into hard facts. Thus, the Kádár-led communist leaders not only declared that the event was *not* a popular uprising, rather a counterrevolution, in other words a non-event; they also ensured its "non-existence" by eradicating it from public memory. As Rév poignantly observed:

Nontalk was an important tool of retelling history. In the official Communist chronology certain dates, events, and persons lost intelligibility; they ceased to make sense. Once a topic had become appropriated by official history writing, it lost its historicity. [...] From being taboo, historical events and actors sank into the realm of non-existence, transformed into non-events, non-problems, non-persons.<sup>35</sup>

Seeing in this perspective, the physical destruction of the main popular hero of 1956, Imre Nagy, served as a "vindication" of a particular interpretation of that event. Just as in Stalinist times the number of executed victims of purges meant to prove the relentless vigilance of the party, rather than the existence of counterrevolutionary threats, the execution of Imre Nagy in 1958 was the final piece of evidence for the official Hungarian historiography that maintained that 1956 was a counterrevolution and Nagy a traitor. This is the key to understanding the paradox of the so-called "goulash communism" that emerged in Hungary after the partial liberalisation of the regime in the early 1960s. On the surface, Kádár's Hungary appeared rather liberal politically and economically, especially in comparison with other countries of the Soviet Empire, but the regime was nevertheless based on intimidation. János Kádár had the authority of a murderer. Despite the suppression of public memory, many people would have known about his responsibility for the judicial murder of his main competitor, but no one was to be allowed ever to mention it. It is rather telling then that the first freely elected parliament attempted to legislate for the "codification" of public memory by proclaiming in its very first sitting on May 1990:

October 23, the day of the outbreak of the Revolution of 1956 and the beginning of the fight for freedom, and also the day of the proclamation of the Hungarian Republic in 1989, shall henceforth be a national holiday.<sup>36</sup>

A more recent attempt at institutionalization of public memory was the creation of the controversial museum "The House of Terror" in 2002 that sought to present a particular and rather one-sided vision of 1956.<sup>37</sup> Whether any piece of legislation, or a museum in a democratic polity can "codify the historical significance" of an event may be doubted. Moreover, the link between 1956 and 1989 is not as straightforward as this new narrative would

suggest. What is missing in this rather simplistic account is the role that the changing international situation played in the eventual demise of communism in 1989; particularly the role of the Soviet Union. This brings me to the second aspect of Arendt's early assessment of the meaning of the 1956 Revolution: its repercussions throughout the Soviet empire.

### Limits of Soviet imperialism

Arendt astutely anticipated challenges to the Soviet empire emerging at its fringes, in other words from the recently incorporated countries of central Europe. She also identified the link between the commitment of the Soviet Union to maintain its empire and its willingness to maintain its political regime in the heartland. (The British faced exactly the opposite dilemma — the only way their empire could have been preserved was by jettisoning their own political system.<sup>38</sup>) Once the regime wavered in its determination to preserve the empire, its very existence in the heartland was undermined, as Mikhail Gorbachev had to learn a few decades later. It is worth remembering that the most radical aspects of Gorbachev's policies of Glasnost and Perestroika were initially in the field of external relations; of particular relevance here is the renouncement of Brezhnev's doctrine of limited sovereignty of the countries of the Eastern bloc.

Arendt was also proven right in many respects about the relation between power and violence in the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe that followed after the failure of 1956. One may well argue that their success depended to a large extent on the degree to which they came closer to the "Arendtian model" of revolutions. Both the reluctant revolutionaries and the powers that be learned their own lessons about the dynamics of political power and limitations of a regime based purely on the threat of violence. The non-violent revolutions of 1989 were made possible by the fact that even the rulers in Moscow led by Gorbachev accepted this Arendtian lesson.

One of the surprising recent findings from the archives is that even Khrushchev and Kádár were aware of these limitations already back in 1956, at least to some extent. In fact, in the discussions that preceded the military suppression of the uprising, Kádár explicitly warned his Soviet counterparts against the invasion not only on the basis of the fact that this "would be destructive and lead to bloodshed", but also because of the follow up political consequences. "The morale of the communists will be reduced to zero" and "the authority of the socialist countries will be eroded", predicted Kádár.<sup>39</sup> While Kádár managed to "disprove" his prediction to some extent by virtually arresting development in Hungary for about four decades, in hindsight these very four decades can be seen as being characterised by the ongoing, protracted crisis of legitimacy of the communist rule in central and eastern Europe. The milestones of this long-lasting legitimacy crisis are well known: the events of 1956 in Hungary and Poland were followed by the Prague Spring of 1968 and the emergence of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, which were in turn followed by the rise of Solidarity in Poland. The unifying factor of all these events was the determination of the main actors to prevent another violent revolution like that of 1956.

The fact that the Prague Spring of 1968 came closer to the Arendtian model of non-violent power in action meant that it posed an even more serious challenge to the Soviet rule than Hungary in 1956. In terms of executing the military operation, the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia was much easier and less costly in human lives than the suppression of the Hungarian uprising.

However, in terms of the aspiration to restore some degree of political legitimacy to the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, this proved significantly more challenging. According to Gene Sharp, Czechoslovakia in 1968–69 offered one of the most impressive examples of "civilian struggle for national defense purposes". Even though they were ultimately defeated, "for eight months, the Czechs and Slovaks prevented the Russians from achieving their political objective — a regime responsive to Soviet wishes".<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the suppression of the Prague Spring, even more than the 1956 invasion of Hungary, also had the unintended consequence of de-legitimising communist ideology in the West. For Arendt, the Soviet-led intervention of Czechoslovakia was a sign of weakness; it marked the further decline of the Soviet empire. As she observed:

Rule by sheer violence comes into play where power is being lost; it is precisely the shrinking power of the Russian government, internally and externally, that became manifest in its <sup>3</sup>solution<sup>2</sup> of the Czechoslovak problem. [...] To substitute violence for power can bring victory, but the price is very high; for it is not only paid by the vanquished, it is also paid by the victor in terms of his own power.<sup>41</sup>

In fact, no lesser figure than Mikhail Gorbachev identified the experience of the Prague Spring as that event which showed him the limitations of violence as a source of political power.<sup>42</sup> This partly explains the puzzle of "the guns that didn't smoke"<sup>43</sup> in 1989, when the disintegration of the Soviet empire was *not* resisted by military means. While the Soviet Union still had the military capacity to prevent these developments from happening, its leaders no longer shared the conviction of their predecessors that their power could be maintained by violence.

Yet, it is worth remembering that the success of the non-violent revolution in Central Europe was to a large extent predicated not on Gorbachev's wisdom, but rather on his willingness to accept the consequences of his misjudgement. In fact, it may well be argued that the peaceful collapse of communism was made possible by a series of fatal misjudgements of the communist elites, mirrored by a more sophisticated strategy of non-violent political opposition. Just as Marxism might have contributed to the survival of liberal democracy (and its concomitant capitalist economic system) by predicting its imminent collapse, the widespread belief in the invincibility of the communist system of power might have been an important factor in its eventual demise in 1989. As Rév surmised:

Had the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party foreseen the consequences of Gorbachev's election to the post of secretary general of the party, he most probably would not have been elected (he would probably have been immediately shot instead), and this in turn might have given a completely different twist to the history of the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup>

The fact that hardly anyone could anticipate the collapse of communism might partly explain its non-violent nature. Both the communist elites and the opposition movements were determined to avoid another confrontation like the one in 1956 in Hungary, but their aims were radically different. Gorbachev and his reformist counterparts in Poland and Hungary believed that by renouncing violence they would strengthen their political positions and ultimately secure the future of the political regime they strived to preserve — socialism. For the



opposition movements, on the other hand, the aim was to create ever more space for authentic politics that were, at least since the defeat of the Prague Spring, increasingly articulated without any reference to Marxism or socialism. While the communist elites might have learned the negative "Arendtian" lesson about the limitations of power based on violence, they underestimated the challenges of gaining political power by "acting in concert", allowing inadvertently for the success of the opposition movements.

### Concluding remarks: The future of 1956

Fifty years after the Hungarian uprising, its meaning and its relationship to the more recent post-communist developments in Hungary and Europe at large remains contested. This is not surprising. As Arendt wrote, quoting Faulkner, "the past is never dead, it is not even past".<sup>45</sup> One may well say in hindsight, that people like János Kádár fooled themselves when thinking that they could fully determine the future by controlling the past. The attempt at the suppression of public memory of 1956, that entailed the judicial murder of its main protagonist, Imré Nagy, backfired once the reform communists tried to reinvent themselves as social democrats. In the meantime, it was Nagy who became a perfect democrat — the decades of suppression and demonization of his public memory notwithstanding (or rather, on the contrary, *thanks* to the decades of demonization). In some ways, he might have become even more popular after his death than he ever could have been had he stayed alive — for nothing could prevent people with radically different political persuasions claiming him as their hero. After 1989, anti-communists, reform communists, liberals and even conservatives could all claim that the aims of 1956, the aims of Imré Nagy, were really their aims.

But 1989 was and could not have been just a repeat of 1956. Even Arendt might have been disappointed by the postcommunist developments in Hungary and central and eastern Europe at large. While the 1989 revolutions vindicated Arendt and her belief in the possibility of new beginnings coupled with the conception of cooperative power, they did not bring about a new form of council democracy (the dissident rhetoric of anti-politics and the initial enthusiasm for the concept of civil society notwithstanding). Does it mean that the legacy of 1956 will fade?<sup>46</sup> On the fiftieth anniversary of the revolution, there are no signs of this happening. Yet, it would be ironic if the celebration of 1956 imparted more damage on its legacy than the forty years of enforced silence. To avert the narrow instrumentalization of 1956, like the one attempted in the "House of Terror", it is useful to remind oneself of the open-ended nature of all genuinely political projects, including our attempts at understanding revolutions. "The lost treasure of revolution",<sup>47</sup> to use Arendt's unforgettable phrase, may never be found, but this should not prevent us from trying.

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1 Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, "1956 – Ein europäisches Jahr", *Merkur* 60:6(2006).

2 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 319.

3 Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1969), 53.

4 *Ibid.*, 56.

5 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Books, 1958).

6 As Robert Pippin asked rhetorically, "is this so, or is Arendt, in a bizarre irony, simply assuming the totalitarian premise: that a life without a transcendent, heroic, or noble purpose would be 'unbearably' petty...?" See Robert B. Pippin, "Hannah Arendt and the Bourgeois Origins of Totalitarian Evil", In Alan D. Schrift, ed., *Modernity and the Problem of Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

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- "Stalin had first to create artificially that atomized society which had been prepared for the Nazis in Germany by historical circumstances." Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 318. Cf. Pippin, "The Bourgeois Origins of Totalitarian Evil", 151.
- <sup>8</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 298–300. For a perceptive discussion of Arendt as a defender of human rights agenda see Jeffrey Isaac, "Hannah Arendt on Human Rights and the Limits of Exposure, or Why Noam Chomsky Is Wrong About the Meaning of Kosovo", *Social Research* 69:2(2002).
- <sup>9</sup> However, the ex post facto sneering at political misjudgements can be a tiresome endeavour. See, for example, Walter Laqueur, "The Arendt Cult: Hannah Arendt as Political Commentator", *Journal of Contemporary History* 33:4(1998).
- <sup>10</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Know Now: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 290–91, Stephen Kotkin, "The State — Is It Us? Memoirs, Archives, and Kremlinologists", *The Russian Review* 61:1(2002).
- <sup>11</sup> Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 11–12.
- <sup>12</sup> See the special issue of *The Russian Review* with the leading article by Sheila Fitzpatrick, "New Perspectives on Stalinism", *The Russian Review* 45:4(1986). For a critical response, see e.g. Robert Conquest, "Revising Stalin's Russia", *The Russian Review* 46:4(1987).
- <sup>13</sup> This proposition was particularly problematic in the German context. The left-wing intellectuals were keen to preserve the concept of revolution as embodying noble and progressive ideals. But just as it is no longer a taboo to compare Stalinism with Nazism, it also became possible to discuss the concept of a "revolution from the Right." See, for example, Karl Dietrich Bracher, "The Janus Face of the French Revolution Today: On Understanding Modern Revolution", In *Turning Points in Modern Times: Essays on German and European History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 36, 39–40.
- <sup>14</sup> Tony Corn, "Der Vierte Weltkrieg", *Merkur* 60:4(2006): 285. This line of argumentation was not limited to "Neocons" like Paul Berman, but was advanced also by a number of influential leftwing intellectuals. Consider, e.g. Peter Beinart, *The Good Fight: Why Liberals — and Only Liberals — Can Win the War on Terror and Make America Great Again* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 2003), Agnes Heller, "911, or Modernity and Terror", *Constellations* 9:1(2002), Adam Michnik, "We, the Traitors", *World Press Review*, June 2003.
- <sup>15</sup> "The implicit assumption of Arendt, Orwell, and other such writers is that totalitarianism is a society which has achieved a kind of stasis," observed Irving Howe, "Communism Now", *Partisan Review* 23:4(1956): 526.
- <sup>16</sup> As she states in the preface, "this book has been written against a background of both reckless optimism and reckless despair". Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, vii.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.
- <sup>19</sup> However, it is worthwhile noting that the original article was somewhat less optimistic than the chapter added to the 1958 edition of *The Origins*. Cf. Hannah Arendt, "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government", *The Review of Politics* 15:3(1953): 327.
- <sup>20</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics* edited by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books), 126.
- <sup>21</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 501. Cf. Arendt, *Vita Activa*, 211, Lotte Köhler and Hans Saner, eds., *Hannah Arendt Karl Jaspers Briefwechsel 1926–1969* (München: Piper, 1985), 343.
- <sup>22</sup> John Medearis, "Lost or Obscured? How V. I. Lenin, Joseph Schumpeter and Hannah Arendt Misunderstood the Council Movement", *Polity* 36:3(2004).
- <sup>23</sup> John F. Sitton, "Hannah Arendt's Argument for Council Democracy", *Polity* 20:1(1987): 97–98.
- <sup>24</sup> See for example, *Ibid.* Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Oases in the Desert: Hannah Arendt on Democratic Politics", *American Political Science Review* 88:1(1994), Patchen Markell, "The Rule of the People: Arendt, Arché, and Democracy", *American Political Science Review* 100:1(2006).
- <sup>25</sup> For more recent restatements of this argument see Irving Kristol, "The American Revolution as a Successful Revolution", In Irving Kristol, ed., *America's Continuing Revolution* (Doubleday, Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1976), Susan Dunn, *Sister Revolutions: French Lightning, American Light* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999).
- <sup>26</sup> This very much corresponds with the spirit of the initial reports about the dramatic events in Hungary. The Time magazine stressed the largely non-violent character of the revolution: "Unarmed, unorganised, unaided from outside, not even fully aware at first of what might be involved in their deeds, the Hungarian people rolled back the tide of

- Communism." "Hungary: In Six Historic Days, a Magic Chemistry of Courage, Anger and Desperation", *Time*, 5 November 1956, 20. Not surprisingly, the mood of the follow-up article is markedly less optimistic. "Hungary: The Five Days of Freedom", *Time*, 12 November 1956.
- 27 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 497.
- 28 This resonates with Bibó's assessment: "In spite of it being unprepared, unorganized, and taking place in reaction to acts of irrational bloodshed, the revolution showed itself to be surprisingly sober, humane, and moderate in nature." István Bibó, "The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Scandal and Hope", In Károly Nagy, ed., *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination: Selected Writings* (Boulder: Atlantic Research and Publications, Highland Lakes, 1991), 332.
- 29 Lewis W. Beck, "Kant and the Right of Revolution", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32:3(1971), 419. See also Chris Suprenant, "A Reconciliation of Kant's Views on Revolution", *Interpretation: a Journal of Political Philosophy* 30:2(2005).
- 30 "What saves the affairs of mortal men from their inherent futility is nothing but this incessant talk about them, which in turn remains futile unless certain concepts, certain guideposts for future remembrance, and even for sheer reference, arise out of it." Arendt, *On Revolution*, 220.
- 31 According to Arendt, Jefferson saw "in public, political happiness an image of eternal bliss." Consequently, it was clear "that no one could be called happy without his share in public happiness, that no one could be called free without his experience in public freedom, and that no one could be called either happy or free without participating, and having a share, in public power." *Ibid.*, 131, 255. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 8.
- 32 Köhler and Saner, eds., *Hannah Arendt Karl Jaspers Briefwechsel 1926–1969*, 340.
- 33 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 480.
- 34 István Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-Communism, Cultural Memory in the Present*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- 35 *Ibid.*, 31–32.
- 36 György Litván, ed., *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), x.
- 37 For an excellent critique of the exhibition see Rév, *Retroactive Justice*.
- 38 "Imperialism could have been a success if the nation-state had been willing to pay the price, to commit suicide and transform itself into a tyranny. It is one of the glories of Europe, and especially of Great Britain, that she preferred to liquidate the empire." Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 504. See also Arendt, *On Violence*, 54.
- 39 Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, and János M. Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002), 339. See also Mark Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings", *Journal of Contemporary History* 33:2(1998).
- 40 Gene Sharp, *Making Europe Unconquerable: The Potential of Civilian-Based Deterrence and Defence* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1985), 47.
- 41 Arendt, *On Violence*, 53.
- 42 Gorbachev agreed with his Czech friend and interlocutor, Zdenek Mlynar, that "violence never provides a lasting solution". As Mlynar put it, "the Soviet tanks in August 1968, from the point of view of long-term developments, achieved exactly the opposite result of what those who sent them said they wanted to achieve. And so, to try to hold together the "socialist camp" in 1989 with the use of force would undoubtedly not have "saved socialism". Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev and Zdenek Mlynar, *Conversations with Gorbachev: On Perestroika, the Prague Spring, and the Crossroads of Socialism* (2002), 128–9.
- 43 Andrew Bennet, "The Guns That Didn't Smoke: Ideas and the Soviet Non-Use of Force in 1989", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7:2(2005).
- 44 Rév, *Retroactive Justice*, 306.
- 45 Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 10.
- 46 "After June 16, 1989, when communism received its death sentence, the legacy of 1956, as the first anti-totalitarian, anti-communist, but not procapitalist, revolution faded away as well." András Bozóki, "The Hungarian Roundtable Talks of 1989 in a Central European Comparison", In Béla K. Király and Lee W. Congdon, ed., *The Ideas of the Hungarian Revolution Suppressed and Victorious 1956–1999* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2003), 256.
- 47 Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 5.

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