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Hannah Arendt and the Problem of Democratic Revolution

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

John Louis LeJeune

Committee in charge:

Professor Tracy B. Strong, Chair
Professor Harvey Goldman
Professor Gerry Mackie
Professor Richard Madsen
Professor Philip Roeder

2014

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my aunt,

Melanie Maria LeJeune (1965-2013),

who was a mother to all,

and to Wang Ke,

of two!

Epigraph

The ceaseless, senseless demand for original scholarship in a number of fields, where only erudition is now possible, has led either to sheer irrelevancy, the famous knowing of more and more about less and less, or to the development of pseudo-scholarship which actually destroys its object.

Hannah Arendt

1972

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The number of schools I've attended in one form or another over the past fifteen years has been a running joke in my family—UCSD, Bard College, National Taiwan Normal University, Marquette University, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Boston University, the State University of West Georgia, and even a few summer semesters at the University of Florida and Central Florida Community College. And maybe it's the Hegel talking, but looking back it all seems essential to whatever this dissertation is, and whoever I've become in the process. The debts I've accrued are of course enormous, and I can't possibly do them justice here.

But if you're reading this with anticipation you should probably expect a letter—or in Ke's case a *really* big gift—sometime soon.

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Large portions of “Chapter III: The Problem of Revolutionary Leadership” were previously published in the article “Hannah Arendt’s Revolutionary Leadership,” *HannahArendt.net*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2013), pp. 1-25. An altered version of “Chapter IV: Egypt’s Leaderless Revolution” will be published in a tentatively titled article called “Picking up Power: Hannah Arendt and Egypt’s Leaderless Revolution,” in *Political Theory and the Arab Spring*, ed. Brian Mello and Glenn Mackin, Bloomsbury, anticipated publication 2015.

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“Revolution,” *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*. Michael T. Gibbons, Ed. Indianapolis: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.

“Genital Mutilation,” *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*. Michael T. Gibbons, Ed. Indianapolis: Wiley Blackwell, 2014.

“Hannah Arendt’s Revolutionary Leadership,” *HannahArendt.net*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2013), pp. 1-25.

with Gerry Mackie, “Social Dynamics of Abandonment of Harmful Practices: A new look at the theory.” *Innocenti Working Paper 2009-06*, Special Series on Social Norms and Harmful Practices, UNICEF Innocenti Research Center, Florence, May 2009.

Abstract of the Dissertation

Hannah Arendt and the Problem of Democratic Revolution

by

John Louis Lejeune

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, San Diego, 2014

Professor Tracy Strong, Chair

In 2011 the wave of revolutionary upheavals in the Arab world and the ‘Occupy’ protests in the industrialized West together resurrected important questions about the nature and morality of revolution that had faded from view following the benign, non-violent “liberal revolutions” of 1989 in Eastern Europe. In the troubled aftermath of 2011 and the chaos that followed the “Arab Spring,” however, the novel alliance between political liberalism and democratic revolution witnessed over the last quarter century has suddenly become doubtful.

The 2011 revolts produced new models of revolution, including “leaderless” revolution, that built upon the mythology of “velvet” revolution inspired by 1989. And in response to 1989 and 2011 scholars and activists alike have often turned to the political theory of Hannah Arendt either to bolster their normative political aspirations or to account for surprising revolutionary events. This dissertation contests many of these appropriations—most notably those which use Arendt to condone “leaderless” models of revolution and “horizontalist” principles of “non-representation” in revolutionary contexts. I argue that such appropriations not only misunderstand Arendt’s theory of non-violent power, but their application in practice has undermined real projects of revolutionary democracy on the ground.

In response to this I clarify Arendt’s sociological understanding of political power and the foundations of political order, and place Arendt in conversation with major sociologists of her time. I also argue that Arendt’s revolutionary theory is inspired principally by Lenin, who provides the model for Arendt of “real revolutionary” leadership. I then show how Arendt’s sociological analysis of power and leadership illuminates the democratic failures of the recent Egyptian revolution, where revolutionaries confused *force* with *power*, and where the absence of responsible leadership created the opportunity for continued military dictatorship.

Chapter I: Revolutionary Narrative and the Twentieth Century

Wisdom is a virtue of old age, and it seems to come only to those who,
when young, were neither wise nor prudent.
-Hannah Arendt¹

As long as the domestic situation was normal and peaceful...
theoretical ambiguity was certainly not an issue.
-Carl Schmitt²

See how his shoulder-blades are now his chest.
Because he aspired to see too far ahead
he looks behind and treads a backward path.
-Dante's Virgil in Hell³

1. A CENTURY PASSED

The “short twentieth century” lasted from 1914 to the end of the Soviet era⁴ and was one of the most grotesquely violent periods in human history. It was a century whose brutal “physiognomy” (as Hannah Arendt called it) was determined by a relentless series of wars and revolutions in circumstances that often rendered the two indistinguishable. It was an era steered along hazardous ideological fault lines in which inherited nineteenth century ideologies—communism and capitalism,

¹ Hannah Arendt, “Isak Dinesen: 1885-1963,” *Men in Dark Times*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968, pp. 95-109.

² Carl Schmitt, *Legality and Legitimacy*. John McCormick ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004 [1932], p. 23.

³ Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno* XX, 37-9. Trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander. New York: Random House, 2000.

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes; A History of the World, 1914-1991*. New York: Vintage, 1996, p. ix.

nationalism and imperialism, liberalism and democracy—fashioned new and dynamic combinations and assumed novel political forms. And whether seized by charismatic personalities and radicalized in national and pan-national mass movements, or simply pursued to their logical political ends, especially ironic were the politics of *liberalism* and *democracy*: For if in one instance the toiling masses, long hidden from public view and excluded from political participation by a property-centric liberalism, were at last emancipated by democracy, elevated by democratic revolution, and protected by the principles of welfare liberalism; in other instances these same masses turned against liberal democracy and embraced warlike and lawless revolutionary movements. While the Anglo-Saxon polities like Great Britain and the United States achieved a stability and long-term consolidation of industrialized liberal democracy (albeit where violence had previously cleared the path to such modernization⁵)—elsewhere on the Continent and around the world new ideologies like fascism (and communism) and novel political systems like totalitarianism crystallized elements of liberal modernity into expansive political behemoths⁶ and revealed the terrifying potential not only of modern mass democracy, but of borderless capital and expansionist post-industrial liberalism.⁷

Such were the costs and unintended consequences of both the material growth of capitalism and the ideological innovations of liberalism and democracy

⁵ Barrington Moore, Jr. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993 [1967].

⁶ Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism 1933-1944*. New York: Harper, 1944.

⁷ See esp. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Schocken, 2004 [1951].

that, together, came to define the “dual revolution”⁸ of the nineteenth century that so enraptured philosophers of liberal-historical progress. Nietzsche saw these developments early and clearly. He saw the merging of (a) the enormous material capacity wrought by the Industrial Revolution with (b) the long decline of traditional values and authority structures wrought by the Enlightenment, and he prophesized a new era not only of “great politics,” but of what he called *Geisterkrieg*, or *ideological war*: “The concept of politics has been completely subsumed in a *Geisterkrieg*,” wrote Nietzsche, “all understandings of power have been blown up into the air—there will be wars the likes of which none has ever been on earth.”⁹

The twentieth century would not disappoint. The Great War of 1914-1918 inserted *total war* into the modern lexicon as a structural fact of politics, and compelled acknowledgement of the hell through which even the most responsible champions of freedom must be willing to tread. Indeed, if in World War I this came as a surprise, World War II saw this acknowledgement fully realized among the freedom fighters. The imperial European and Japanese fascists lost the Second World War to a democracy-led coalition whose leading power, the United States,

⁸ The term is Eric Hobsbawm’s, who described “the revolution which broke out between 1789 and 1848”— or “the greatest transformation in human history since the remote times when men invented agriculture and metallurgy, writing, the city and the state”— as a “dual revolution” involving, on one hand, a transformation in political discourse that saw new ideas about rights and autonomy, dignity and equality challenge and even undermine traditional foundations of political order and authority (Thus modern revolution was born!); and on the other hand a material transformation, as prodigious advances in technology and productivity catalyzed the industrial revolution, which in turn brought sweeping social, economic, and demographic changes, rapid urbanization, and the rise of global capitalism, liberal imperialism, and rational diplomacy. See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*. New York: Vintage, 1996 [1962], p. 1-4 and *passim*.

⁹ Quoted in Tracy Strong, *Politics Without Vision: Thinking Without a Bannister in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, p. 2.

saw fit cause to drop two atomic bombs on Japanese civilians in the name of freedom. In its wake, the third great war of the twentieth century—a “cold war” between communist East and capitalist West in which sound foreign policy (i.e. mutual deterrence, or “mutually assured destruction”) threatened to destroy the earth in the name of freedom—seemed to end with a whimper. Soviet communism collapsed suddenly, relatively peacefully, and with great enthusiasm between 1989 and 1991. But viewed in total, the war was hardly “cold”—the soft landing of 1991 was preceded by decades of communist-inspired revolutions and liberal capitalist-supported coups and dictatorships on one hand, and a long series of failed revolutions, violent political suppression, and Cold War-proxy wars and civil wars, waged visibly throughout the decolonizing “third world” and with especially disastrous results in places like Afghanistan and Vietnam, on the other. The Cold War was incredibly violent, even if its end was not.

If the twentieth century had taught humanity anything, then, it was that the triumphs of revolutionary freedom, no less than the tragedies of wars, were inescapably determined by “that violence which is currently believed to be their common denominator.”¹⁰ Wars and revolutions were inextricably bound, practically indistinguishable, and freedom came with a physical cost and a moral burden—the cost of suffering violence for freedom’s sake; and the burden of delivering violence on freedom’s behalf. Such was the gravity of responsibility thrust upon political man

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” in *Crises of the Republic*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, pp. 103-198, p. 105. The article was first published in the February 27, 1969 *New York Review of Books* and modified (with fewer section breaks, lengthy additions, and interesting deletions) for publication in *Crises*. See also Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 2006 [1963], p. 1.

by the terrible events of the twentieth century. The history of freedom was a history of violence, at once a call to action and a call for prudence—a first order problem of political judgment.

1989 changed everything. In a matter of months the extraordinary political events of 1989 rendered the events of the twentieth century obsolete; and in the quarter century that followed—aided by the traumatic events of September 11, 2001—the short twentieth century all but vanished from mainstream political consciousness. A veritable chasm now divides the post-Marxist, post-9/11 present from the twentieth century, largely because of two sudden and unexpected *events*—the Revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union by the end of 1991; and the September 11 attacks—and their political fallout. 1989 and 9/11/01 each ruptured Western historical consciousness in a unique way, constituting breaks not only from but with the past; and the practical consequences of this shift in thinking have been substantial. In recent years much attention has been paid to the impact of 9/11 on Western (and especially American) foreign policy and the expanding security state. Here I focus elsewhere. I argue that the lasting effects of 1989, especially manifest in liberal democratic and revolutionary thought, may prove more decisive in the twenty-first century.

Below I discuss the transformation of mainstream liberal and democratic political thought—one might say “consciousness”—from the nineteenth and twentieth century until today. This discussion is highly stylized, but important because ideas affect how people act, and the philosophy of liberalism remains the

dominant political philosophy of our times, in popular discourse no less than academic circles. At the heart of this discussion I place the historically tense relation between both *liberalism and democracy* and *liberalism and revolution* in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and the relaxation of these tensions in the quarter century since the Revolutions of 1989. This slackening, I argue, has come with palpable costs—empirical misunderstanding and practical misjudgments that have followed from negligent conceptual stretching over time. But recent events—the catastrophic fallout of the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions, and the ideological impetus of Occupy-style movements in 2011—have resurrected the old normative tensions and conceptual distinctions—between liberalism and democracy, liberalism and revolution, and revolution and civil disobedience—and brought them back into relief. And the disturbing aftermath of these events, especially in the Arab world, has shown why recovering these distinctions is essential for responsibly navigating the politics of democracy and revolution in the twenty-first century.

2. RUPTURES IN TIME

The normative contours of liberal democratic politics in the twenty-first century, like those of the post-Napoleonic conservatism of the nineteenth century, and the post-Weimar liberalism of the mid-to-late twentieth, are largely determined by recent memory and world-historical events. In the West, our understanding of the world is shaped at once by a post-Marxist and post-9/11 consciousness. And at first glance the latter appears decisive, as the 9/11 terror attacks have had two

prominent and seemingly irreversible effects on liberal politics domestically and internationally. On one hand, 9/11 has galvanized (initially) and legitimated (in the long run) a novel and permanent global “war on terror” pursued on a variety of fronts—via old-fashioned boots on the ground as waged by U.S.-led coalitions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and general acquiescence to the United States’ increasing reliance on summary use of intercontinental drone strikes. At the same time, at home 9/11 has inspired the *legitimation* over the long term (as opposed to *justification* in the short term) of an extraordinary expansion of the liberal security state, a process that Giorgio Agamben recently described as nothing short of regime change—a generalized “state of exception”¹¹—in the United States and elsewhere, and which the Obama administration has done little to stem. Given these trends, one reasonably posits the post-9/11 effect on hegemonic, liberal political consciousness—liberal understanding of what is *prudent* and *legitimate*—as decisive.

But this account of the factors shaping twenty-first century liberalism offers only a partial picture. For post-9/11 liberalism is itself shaped decisively by another historical event-cum-historical narrative in recent memory—namely, the narrative of post-1989 liberal triumphalism, from which the confidence and self-assuredness behind these post-9/11 changes have derived.¹² As leader of the free world the

¹¹ Giorgio Agamben. *State of Exception*. Trans. Kevin Attell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

¹² Barbara J. Falk. “1989 and Post-Cold War Policymaking; Were the ‘Wrong’ Lessons Learned from the Fall of Communism?” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (September 2009), pp. 291-313.

American case is indicative: Behind both the Bush administration's brazen democratizing mission in Iraq, and the Obama administration's brassy assurances to the American public that an unprecedentedly thick regime of anti-terrorist government spying and information gathering bears no serious risk of abuse or constitutional breakdown, is a similar faith in the inherent—we might (channeling Hegel) say the *historically revealed*—virtues or Truth of modern liberal democracy. As the story goes, the Western powers won the Cold War not simply because they were *militarily stronger*—the Cold War did not end with fighting after all—but because they were morally and *ideologically correct*. And the brunt of Western strength stemmed from the interconnection between the two, between strength and ideology. The Western victory proved that political legitimacy—liberal democratic *values*—was the world's greatest source of political *strength*; that right and might were inextricably intertwined, with the latter following from the former; and thus, paradoxically, that strength itself was the measure of American legitimacy—for if might did not make right, but the other way around, then the former was at least (now that the Cold War was resolved) a reliable indicator of the latter.

It followed further that the use of American might to solve political problems—of applied liberal *force* as a determining factor on the ground—was legitimate precisely because of its source—because history has shown that *its* violence, being a manifestation of historically vindicated and legitimate power, is conducive of expanding the field of legitimate power in the future. At home liberal democratic institutions—now understood principally in legal and procedural terms,

and in abstraction from the people themselves and *their* character and *their* values¹³—are appreciated, vindicated, and promoted around the world because they—the abstract *institutions* themselves—“work.” And because they work, it follows that liberal democratic intent, even in the curtailment of liberty, constitutes sufficient grounds for confidence. Since *History* has proven their superiority, there is little need to second-guess or glance critically upon ourselves.¹⁴

If this is true—if *History* has answered the major political questions of our time—then little impetus exists to ask the incisive existential questions that crisis once thrust upon liberal theorists throughout the war torn twentieth century. Scars of the twentieth century remain, but most wounds have healed. And after two World Wars, a Cold War, and more than a half-century’s struggle against fascism and communism—call it a seventy-five year interruption of enlightened liberalism’s rectilinear march towards peace, prosperity, and hegemony that peaked ephemerally in the late nineteenth century¹⁵—the global political regime has returned to its post-Napoleonic senses.

Ours is the age of a stronger and more integrated political order than even the Congress of Vienna could have imagined. The fated triumph of freedom over tyranny,

¹³ One notes in passing the stark contrast in the standard way political scientists study political institutions today—as given procedural “rules and roles” in which rational actors maximize utility—in contrast to earlier generations (see e.g. Samuel Huntington, Seymour Martin Lipset, Chalmers Johnson, etc.) which took the sociological problem of legitimacy and political values seriously. The failure of America’s democratic initiative in Iraq went far towards vindicating Huntington-style cultural analysis of political institutions, but was hardly a paradigm shifter.

¹⁴ Cf. Harvey Mansfield, “Self-Interest Rightly Understood,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Feb. 1995), pp. 48-66, p. 48.

¹⁵ See Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace*. New York: Anchor Books, 1995, esp. Ch. 2 “The First World War 1914-1918,” pp. 80-231, esp. pg. 81, 83.

the non-apocalyptic and benign end of the Cold War, the proliferation of free democratic institutions around the world, the astounding advances in communications and global commerce in the twenty-first century—all of this the indubitable testimony of History—have positively acquitted the twentieth century, redeemed its wars and revolutions, and cast new light on “that violence” they were once presumed to have in common.

This narrative lends comfort to contemporary liberalism, and its very pomp seems justified by the circumstance of liberalism’s definitive triumph over communism twenty-five years ago, a triumph which followed the joint victory of democracy and communism over fascism some forty years earlier. This narrative endures not only despite the challenges to liberal hegemony posed most recently by global terror networks and radical ideologies, but even in reaction to them. The spawn of new enemies has only strengthened liberal resolve, and this is important because to the extent that the ideology of liberal triumph and self-assurance remains salient among political actors—be they powerful elites in government or collective bodies at the grassroots—political action will proceed according to the political assumptions, normative approaches, and conceptual frameworks that are part and parcel of this hegemonic narrative, a narrative based on a *dual-principle of rectilinear historical progress and liberal individualism.*

What does it mean for a political system to have a *principle*? Montesquieu called the “principle”¹⁶ of government “the spring which gives motion” to government, or “that by which [government] is made to act,” that which “sets the watch going.”¹⁷ A principle encompasses both a motive to act and source of energy. Its motive can be conservative—as in monarchies principled by *honor*—or revolutionary, as when principled actors seek radical change in the name of *freedom*. And as I discuss below, the overarching principle of hegemonic liberal democratic politics in a post-1989 world has been one of *rectilinear progress* (or *historical validation*) combined with the *self-interest* attached to *liberal individualism*. This combination has inspired a new era of liberal wars and revolutions, and given credence to what Eric Voegelin called a tendency towards “permanent revolution” even in the seemingly moderate liberal ideals of “change” and “progress.”¹⁸

At this stage of the discussion Professor Voegelin’s appearance is important, if only to recall the important substantive critiques of liberalism—even among friends of liberalism—that ran counter to this triumphalist historical narrative long

¹⁶ Hannah Arendt admired Montesquieu’s political theory especially for this term. She writes that Montesquieu “saw that there must be more to governments than law and power to explain the actual and constant actions of the citizens living within the walls of law, as well as the performances of bodies politic themselves...[and] accordingly, introduced three *principles* of action.” Principle explains impetus, motive, and momentum. See Hannah Arendt, “Montesquieu’s Revision of the Tradition,” in *The Promise of Politics*. Jerome Kohn, ed. New York: Schocken Books, 2005, pp. 63-69, p. 64-65, emphasis added.

¹⁷ In contrast a government’s *nature* is what Montesquieu called its “particular structure,” or “that by which it is constituted.” Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*. London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1914; from Montesquieu’s Preface and Book III.1.

¹⁸ Eric Voegelin, “Liberalism and Its History,” *The Review of Politics*. Vol. 36, No. 4 (Oct. 1974), pp. 504-520. Trans. from German by Mary and Keith Algozin.

before the heady days of the post-Cold War era. What were the bases of these critiques, many written at a time of great trauma for liberal democrats? Does the character of liberal-democratic-capitalism's hegemonic status today respond in any way, or sufficiently, to the prudential concerns raised by critics then?

Earlier in the twentieth century a major crisis in liberal thought emerged, first, in the decades immediately following the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the Allied victory in World War II. The most important critique of liberalism of this period highlighted explicitly what, according to conservatives, was always implicit in an emerging neo-Hegelian tendency, especially among American liberal democrats and social scientists, to praise that regime (namely *their* regime) to which 'history' had most recently granted triumph—namely, an insidious form of value relativism that saw 'truth' as historically and contextually determined, combined with a self-contradicting democratic agnosticism, such that even openly anti-democratic parties like the Nazis were allowed to run for office, that deprived the liberal regime of an authoritative backbone. Political philosophers like Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, friends of liberalism if only for fear of the worst,¹⁹ asked whether, absent a solid cultural foundation in moral truth, grounded either in religion, political mythology, or perhaps a political philosophy propounding a teleological theory of human nature, liberal democracy would not have the moral

¹⁹ See esp. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965 [1953]; Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987 [1952].

capacity to defend itself from those who would destroy it. Such weakness, they argued, was widely recognized in the last days of Weimar but to no avail.²⁰

A parallel criticism concerned a perceived inability of liberal democratic institutions to satisfy elemental human needs—not only the implacable *desire* for pleasure and material satisfaction characteristic of (unphilosophical) modern man, but also the *spirit* that seeks honor and meaning in the world—in a manner that would be satisfying and politically viable in the long run.²¹ A new search for meaning—which followed from the absence of traditional authority in modern states and the general decline of Christian morality in the West—and the potential it raised for destroying liberal peace from within, had already been diagnosed by Nietzsche a generation or so before, indeed just prior to the nationalist conflagration that triggered the outbreak of World War I,²² and remained no less a concern in the wake of the charismatic destruction of the Weimar Republic. The liberal Weimar regime had lacked both of these elements—the moral and philosophical foundations of a strong constitution, and the material and spiritual capacity to satisfy its

²⁰ Often cited in this context is the work of Carl Schmitt; see e.g. Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988 [1923].

²¹ See the Strauss-Kojève debate in Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny* (Xenophon). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1961].

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Modern Library, 2000; esp. Third Essay, esp. Aphorism 28 and the famous last line of the work: “And, to say once again in conclusion what I said at the beginning: man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will at all.” On nationalism and the outbreak of World War I, see Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*. New York: Mariner, 2000.

citizens²³ —and collapsed. And as a result of this crisis and its horrible aftermath, a schism especially in American political science developed in the mid-20th century as influential German Jewish and other European émigrés, including Strauss and Voegelin, warned a largely incredulous audience that similar moral and political deficits could, in the long run, also threaten the United States.²⁴

For many of these émigré critics and their students the definitive conflicts of the twentieth century, first between liberalism and fascism and later between liberalism and communism, had long helped conceal whatever moral and political deficits might have otherwise beset existing liberal democratic institutions. But dangerously, this cover was suddenly removed by the collapse of the U.S.S.R. Thus Allan Bloom, Strauss's most influential student, wrote later in 1989 that "fifty years of opposition to fascism and communism provided us with clear moral and political goals...We took our orientation from the evil we faced, and it brought out the best in us. The threat from outside disciplined us inside while protecting us from too much depressing reflection on ourselves."²⁵ But danger now looms: "It appears that the world has been made safe for reason as understood by the market, and we are moving toward a global common market the only goal of which is to minister to

²³ On the pre-war intellectual elite in Germany (and the subsequent "alliance between the mob and the elite") who "went to war with an exultant hope that everything they knew, the whole culture and texture of life, might go down in its 'storms of steel,'" see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harvest, 1973, p. 327-331.

²⁴ See the work of John G. Gunnell, especially, "American Political Science, Liberalism, and the Invention of Political Theory," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (March 1988), pp. 71-87; "Encounters of the Third Kind: the Alienation of Political Theory in American Political Science," *American Journal of Political Science* (August 1981), pp. 440-461; and most thoroughly, *The Descent of Political Theory: The Genealogy of an American Vocation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

²⁵ Allan Bloom, from "Responses to Fukuyama," *The National Interest*, Summer 1989.

men's bodily needs and whims. The world has been demystified, and at the end of history all the struggles and all the higher dedications and myths turn out to have served only to satisfy the demands of man's original animality." Would this do? Would an animating principle of *self-interest* be sufficient to sustain liberal peace and democracy in the twenty-first century? Bloom was most pessimistic about the spiritual deficits of liberal capitalism: "Communism was a mad extension of liberal rationalism, and everyone has seen that it neither works nor is desirable. And, although fascism was defeated on the battlefield, its dark possibilities were not seen through to the end. If an alternative is sought there is nowhere else to seek it. I would suggest that fascism has a future, if not the future."

Bloom was not alone in criticizing the *principle* of liberal democratic self-interest following the Soviet collapse. Harvey Mansfield called the collapse of communism "an occasion to rethink our bourgeois liberalism...which has surprised everyone, favorable or not, with its success. In particular it is time to have another look at *self-interest*."²⁶ Darrell Dobbs in turn urged liberal enthusiasts to glance backwards at communism and the timeless insights of its greatest champions, if only to diagnose more clearly liberalism's own pathologies.²⁷ And famously, Francis Fukuyama argued that liberal democracy in fact *does* satisfy, more than any regime we know of, not only the *desiring* needs of the soul through capitalist economic development, but also the *spiritual* needs (our *thymos*) through the mutual

²⁶ Harvey Mansfield, "Self-Interest Rightly Understood," p. 48.

²⁷ Darrell Dobbs, "Socratic Communism," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (May 2000), pp. 491-510.

recognition of democratic peers²⁸—although in the end, Fukuyama’s Nietzschean pessimism towards liberalism’s spiritual vacuity, which he describes with several allusions to the war enthusiasm that helped end the last great liberal epoch in 1914,²⁹ accords provocatively well with Bloom’s.

Still, by 1989 this worried appraisal of self-interest as an animating principle of a newly hegemonic, global liberal world order formed only part of the conservative critique of liberalism to emerge after the collapse of communism, although its other part linked modern liberal critics in a similar way to their mid-twentieth century forebears. Specifically, conservatives also expressed concern with what appeared to be liberal enthusiasts’ naïve, neo-Hegelian faith in the crass testimony of *History*. From the latter perspective it was *victory* itself—be it through war and violence over fascism in World War II or through non-violent political and economic strength between 1989 and 1991—that had established liberalism’s normative priority and legitimacy, even if in a manner hardly distinguishable from a more primitive moral philosophy of “might makes right.” As Irving Kristol wrote in 1989:

Now Mr. Fukuyama arrives to tell us that, after almost two centuries, the job has been done and that the United States of America is the incarnation we have all been waiting for. [] I don't believe a word of it, but we are all neo-Hegelians now to such a degree that his quite brilliant analysis is not easy to reject or refute. In truth, it is quite

²⁸ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, Summer 1989; Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press, 2006 [1992].

²⁹ See Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, op cit., which is Fukuyama’s principle source on the liberal malaise-cum-war enthusiasm of the late-19th and early 20th century. Fukuyama’s pessimism in this regard has led *him* to be called a fascist; see e.g. Shadia Drury, “The end of history and the new world order,” *International Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Winter 1992/1993), pp. 80-99.

persuasive. To reject Hegel out of hand means to cut oneself loose from one's intellectual moorings, and to feel lost at sea. Everything certainly appears to be going Mr. Fukuyama's (and Hegel's) way. Our American civilization does indeed seem to be 'the wave of the future' while the various forms of anti-liberalism and anti-capitalism (whether Marxist or neo-Marxist, fascist or neo-fascist) do indeed look passé. I agree that they are in fact passé. What I cannot believe is that we represent 'the wave of the future,' as distinct from a temporary hegemony. I put no stock in 'waves of the future,' which I take to be mirages provoked by a neo-Hegelian fever of the political imagination.³⁰

Dobbs warns of the same neo-Hegelian fallacy:

Might does not make right. The worldly triumph of an ideology does not imply that it is a prescription for the best political order. Such a triumph does not even establish one's superiority to rivals committed to the workings of 'History' as the highest authority. Worldly success is, after all, notoriously transitory. So we cannot presume upon the future. Our Marxist colleagues may have the last laugh.³¹

These critiques of liberal democratic neo-Hegelianism highlighted the need to examine the moral and political foundations of liberal democracy philosophically and theoretically, rather than just normatively and positively. The dangers of triumphalism in the wake of 1989 were not only an overreliance on the fickle testimony of history to assess the moral and political virtues of liberal democracy, but a dangerous obscuring of the natural tensions—between liberalism and democracy, liberalism and revolution—that had previously established the parameters of liberal prudence.

³⁰ Irving Kristol, from "Responses to Fukuyama," *The National Interest*, Summer 1989.

³¹ Dobbs, "Socratic Communism," p. 491.

3. LIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Ours is not the first great age of liberalism. And if our current liberal epoch was initiated by a moment of global triumph in 1989, it is worth considering how the last was prepared, and obliterated, by catastrophe: “The beginning is more than half of the whole,” wrote Polybius—perhaps, then, it is useful to compare what 1815 and 1989 began, and ended.

The ascent of nineteenth century liberalism began in the aftermath of the chaos and bloodletting unleashed by the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, a disruption that cast a billowing cloud over European politics for the next hundred years. After Waterloo finally put a stop to Napoleon’s great escapades, the intervening century from 1815 to 1914 was one in which the conservative modes of a soon-to-be hegemonic *liberalism*—the philosophy of law, property, and order—and the more radical modes of upstart *democracy*—the philosophy of spontaneity, egalitarianism, and self-determination—found few harmonious chords. To the contrary, the memory of Napoleon gave a rising class of liberal reformers and old-time conservative monarchists a powerful incentive to align against the lower-class democrats; and the Revolutions of 1830 and especially 1848, hardly a turning point in this regard,³² only exposed the underlying fissure between liberal and democratic

³² Engels, in his 1891 Introduction to Marx’s *The Civil War in France*, put it bluntly: After the defeat of the June workers’ revolt there “followed a blood-bath among the defenseless prisoners, the like of which has not been seen since the days of the civil wars which ushered in the downfall of the Roman republic. It was the first time that the bourgeoisie showed to what insane cruelties of revenge it will be goaded the moment the proletariat dares to take its stand against the bourgeoisie as a separate class, with its own interests and demands. And yet 1848 was only child’s play compared with the frenzy of the bourgeoisie in 1871.” Friedrich Engels, “Introduction” (pp. 526-537, p. 528) to Karl Marx, “The Civil War in France,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Robert C. Tucker, ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1972, pp. 526-576.

elements living under monarchies across Europe,³³ where ironically, the closest one came to a successful alliance between liberals and the masses was the French election of Louis Napoleon! The European reaction won out in 1848 precisely because of this fissure between middle class liberals and working class democrats, and from 1848 through the early twentieth century, European politics was shaped by a liberal-conservative alliance³⁴ that, in turn, consolidated a super-national

³³ Historian Roger Price describes the motivation of nineteenth century European liberals in 1848, specifically the growing *bourgeois* middle class that stood front at center of the revolutions that swept the continent, as “[including] the end of arbitrary government through a reduction in the power of such traditional institutions as the monarchy and church, a wider sharing of political power by means of the development of parliamentary government, together with guarantees of individual freedom and the rule of law.” These same liberals, however, “generally rejected democracy and the sovereignty of the people which were thought likely to produce anarchy, in favor of rule by those with the real, that is propertied, stake in society, which it was assumed would guarantee rational and responsible behavior. They most certainly were not advocates of political change by means of revolution.” The Revolutions of 1848 in the end foundered largely because the preponderant elements of European society, including the bourgeois class in places like France and the German states, were not willing to place the basic institutions of liberal property in jeopardy when the revolutions against ancient privilege threatened to turn merely “political” revolution into democratic chaos. Thus in Berlin as Friedrich Wilhelm made reactionary moves to restore his authority, “Protest demonstrations in the provinces and calls for a tax strike had little impact. Most middle-class liberals were desperately anxious to avoid acts which might encourage mass revolt.”; and in Paris, “Above all else...the effect of the June Days was to heighten social fear. The initial cry of triumph at the ‘victory gained by the cause of order, of the family, of humanity, of civilization’ (*Journal de Débats*, 1 July) was followed by demands from conservatives and many erstwhile moderate republicans for thoroughgoing political reaction.” See Roger Price, *The Revolutions of 1848*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, Intl., 1990, p. 21, 92, 63, and 43-93 *passim*. For a similar story in Austria, see Barbara Jeleovich, *Modern Austria: Empire and Republic, 1815-1986*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 43-50.

³⁴ Thus even while the franchise was expanding throughout Europe, measures were taken to mitigate its real political effects. As Walter Lippman wrote apropos, before 1914 “the full force of the coming enfranchisement, emancipation, and secularization of the whole population had not yet worked its consequences. Governments still had authority and power, which were independent of the assemblies and the electorates. They still drew upon the traditional sources of authority—upon prescription, hereditary prerogative, and consecration. [] Yet the need to protect the executive and judicial powers from the representative assemblies and from mass opinion has long been understood. Many expedients have been devised to soften, to neutralize, to check and to balance the pressure of parties, factions, lobbies, sects...[including] constitutional restrictions upon the assembly...[and] ‘by a division of the whole power of the people,’ to weaken it.” Walter Lippman, *The Essential Lippman: Political Philosophy for Liberal Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963, p. 236-7. Lippman quotes James Bryce.

regime inherited from the Congress of Vienna (1814-15) that was itself resolved to maintain the stability and independence of Europe's great monarchic powers and keep the peace among them via a rational and institutionalized system of diplomacy.³⁵ Nowhere was the reality of this super-national, conservative, anti-democratic regime more apparent than in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, which ended ironically, and immediately after a war of French aggression, with Franco-Prussian *cooperation* in the brutal suppression of the French democrats and the Paris Commune.

It subsequently took a century of sustained diplomatic success in this conservative setting—a delightful pattern of diplomats starting *and* stopping wars seemingly at will—for the conservative-liberal prudence that followed from the Napoleonic Wars to self-destruct via its own self-confidence. A long history of diplomatic success transfigured into a Promethean orientation towards politics which understood wars as “politics by other means”—in other words while preferably avoided, wars were no less subject to the will and calculation of man than the negotiated balances of power that preserved the peace in the meantime. And since wars can be diplomatically controlled, so the reasoning went, they are hardly to become catastrophic affairs.

³⁵ On building the Concert of Europe, see esp. Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812-1822*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000. Kagan (*Origins of War*, p. 83) writes that while the Concert of Europe was principally “designed to maintain the independence of the leading states more than to preserve the peace...the one purpose was generally supportive of the other, and between 1815 and 1914 Europe was far more peaceful than it had been for centuries.” Wars persisted of course, but always with the sense that the course of war was in man's own hands; that rational diplomacy could end wars at an instant.

And so it came to pass, that by 1914 the *existence*—let alone failure of the German Schlieffen Plan became the ironic legacy of Metternich's and Bismarck's century of prior diplomatic success. The failure of diplomacy that followed, the inhumane and pointless stalemate of the trenches, the trauma of the Great War, and the general disillusionment with so-called liberal "progress" that overtook Europe afterwards, subsequently marked the end of a century of ascendant liberal politics.

Fast forward now to 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall: It would take seventy-five years to restore the general level of confidence in liberal ideals and institutions that had accrued prior to 1914; and this seemed to happen as if in one fell swoop, as the Revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe ushered a new era of liberal dominance in the most dramatic and carnivalesque of fashions. But was *this* beginning at all similar to that of 1815? If not, why would this difference matter?

In marked contrast to 1815-1914, this new era of liberal hegemony and self-assurance *started* on a grand note of self-confidence occasioned by extraordinary political events. And as a consequence, whereas the pre-1815 catastrophe consolidated an often tense, but nonetheless decisive alliance between monarchic conservatism and bourgeois liberalism for some generations to come (Compare the outbreak of the 1848 revolutions with their eventual resolution.), the events of 1989 ushered a far more congenial understanding of the relationship between liberalism and democracy, and liberal democracy and revolution. Now it was anti-revolutionary conservatism—and not mass democracy—that was the odd-man out.

The connection between origin and outcome in these cases was hardly coincidental. For if the post-revolutionary statesmen of Metternich's generation saw themselves as anti-Napoleonic heroes³⁶ bent on alleviating the dynamic pressures on domestic politics and international relations raised by emerging *mass* energies—specifically *nationalist* and *democratic* energies—then after the Soviet collapse Western liberals adopted a far more sanguine approach—one that celebrated, even aspired to appropriate rather than merely conciliate, the colossal forces of nationalism and democracy that were sweeping across Eastern Europe and the world.³⁷ In other words, the revolutionary advances of 1989 had demonstrated that the solutions to once-perpetually feared problems of governance—among them the stress to existing political institutions of expanding demands and participation from below—lie first in exploiting the economic strengths of liberal capitalism to placate mass *desire*, and second, in exploiting the political institutions of democratic representation to channel democratic energies and restive nationalist *spirits*. If by 1989 liberal democracy had bested communism because it was economically and politically stronger, then now was not the time to attenuate this democratic source

³⁶ Historian Gregor Dallas wrote of Metternich that, "Totally vain, [Metternich] might just as well have entitled the memoirs he eventually left behind *The History of Me and the World* because, as he never tired of pointing out, the destiny of both marched together." Cited in Tom Holmberg's review of Clemons von Metternich, *Metternich: The Autobiography, 1773-1815*. Welwyn Garden City, UK: Ravenhall, 2004. Posted at www.napoleon-series.org.

³⁷ In language that would have baffled before 1989, Bruce Ackerman saw in 1992 a "constitutional moment" that "can shape the terms of political development [in Europe] for a long time to come." "The challenge for liberals," wrote Ackerman, "is to *organize a mass movement* for a federal Europe before retrograde nationalism spirals out of control. The choice is between nationalist reassertion and federalist construction." Bruce Ackerman, *The Future of Liberal Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 3, 40, emphasis added.

of momentum. It was time to unleash and harness the energy of the masses for liberal democratic ends.

But from a historical perspective this situation was wholly strange to liberal thought. From the outset the events of 1989-1991 appeared to have turned the old lessons of 1789 and the Napoleonic Wars upside-down. The moral of 1989-1991 was not, as in 1815, the ancient wisdom that wars and revolutions constitute awesome and characteristically unpredictable events of grave consequence³⁸; nor that revolutions represent a potential threat to world order and the balances of power that secure global peace.³⁹ The lesson was instead that a new and dynamic phenomenon, so-called *liberal revolution*—otherwise known as non-violent, velvet, “people-power” revolution, or radical change with liberal democratic intent—may actually be the most reliable, efficacious, and normatively preferable way of pursuing the perennial ends of freedom, peace, and prosperity. This was a liberalism with a difference—revolutionary liberalism, democratic liberalism, the liberalism of the masses—suddenly without contradiction.

And perhaps not coincidentally, the legacy of liberal political philosophy since 1989 has hardly been one of risk aversion at the prospect of revolution, or a conservative disposition towards war for liberal democratic ends. To the contrary, liberal powers have sponsored liberal wars and revolutions around the world: from

³⁸ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Trans. Rex Warner, New York: Penguin, 1972, esp. Book I, *passim*.

³⁹ On why revolutions within states lead to war among states, see Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War*. Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1997.

the enthusiasm surrounding the democratic transformation of Eastern Europe in the years after 1989, to the neo-Trotskyist narrative justifying the second U.S. war in Iraq,⁴⁰ to the warm embrace and military support of the anti-authoritarian revolutions of the “Arab Spring,”⁴¹ liberal democratic polities and pundits have shown no lack of Promethean spirit.⁴² The postmortem of 1989-1991 saw a scrambling of experts to explain how virtually no one saw the Soviet collapse coming⁴³—a brief victory for humility. But this crisis of understanding dissolved

⁴⁰ In a November 2003 speech President George Bush portrayed the war in Iraq as the latest front in the “global democratic revolution” currently led by the United States, and part of a larger “2,500 year old story of democracy.” Reported in Fred Barbash, “Bush: Iraq Part of ‘Global Democratic Revolution,’” *Washington Post* online. Thursday, November 6, 2003.

⁴¹ In May 2011 British Foreign Secretary William Hague proffered that “The eruption of democracy movements across the Middle East and North Africa is, even in its early stages, the most important development of the early 21st century, with potential consequences, in my view, greater than either 9/11 or the global financial crisis in 2008.” If the forces behind the “Arab Spring” were successful, this would lead to “the greatest advance for human rights and freedom since the end of the Cold War.” A month earlier in Washington U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, “For the first time in decades, there is a real opportunity for lasting change [in the Middle East and North Africa], a real opportunity for people to have their voices heard and their priorities addressed.” Hague quoted by Raphael G. Satter, “UK: Arab democracy risings may be bigger than 9/11: British foreign minister says Arab democracy movement could prove bigger than Sept. 11 attacks,” Associated Press, May 4, 2011; Clinton quoted from “Hillary Rodham Clinton’s Remarks at the Gala Dinner Celebrating the U.S.-Islamic World Forum,” Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., April 12, 2011; in Gideon Rose ed., *The New Arab Revolt: What Happened, What it Means, and What Comes Next.* New York: Council on Foreign Affairs, 2011, pp. 467-79, p. 468.

See also “Remarks by President Barack Obama in Address to the Nation on Libya” (March 28, 2011), and “Joint Statement by Nicholas Sarkozy and David Cameron on Libya” (March 28, 2011), both also collected in *The New Arab Revolt*, pp. 444-454 and 455-457.

⁴² On Prometheus and modern revolution, see Tracy Strong, “On Revolution, Politics and Learning from the Past: A Review Essay,” *Polity* (Winter, 1979), pp. 303-317.

⁴³ On the controversy stirred by the failure of U.S. intelligence in this regard, see minutes from the November 4, 1991 Senate Committee meeting to discuss the nomination of Robert Gates for Director of the CIA. There Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-New York), among the few to have forecast the collapse some years in advance, expostulated at length on the degree to which the “CIA failed in its single, overriding defining mission, to chart the course of Soviet affairs.” A transcript can be found at: https://www.fas.org/irp/congress/1991_cr/s911104-gates2.htm. See also Timur Kuran, “Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989,” *World Politics*, vol. 44, No. 1 (Oct. 1991), pp. 7-48, esp. p. 7-13; Timur Kuran, “Sparks and Prairie Fires: A Theory of

quickly in light of a new folk wisdom surrounding liberal democratic cultural, economic, and military superiority. Liberalism, normatively purged of its crass nineteenth century embrace of imperialism, now shook the hand of mass democracy and revolution on one hand, and of wars of liberation on the other. Initially the American coalition's awe-inspiring military display in operation Desert Storm, where intercontinental military operations were executed with computer-like precision, and the moral leadership of successful NATO intervention in Kosovo only hardened beliefs that American-style liberalism now had not only legitimate *right*, but indomitable *might* on its side, and that this coincidence—of democratic power and unchallengeable military strength—at this historical juncture, was anything but fortuitous. Indeed, a once-perpetual glance at the awful wars and revolutions of the twentieth century had given way to a forward-looking and enthusiastic embrace of momentous, man-made political change.

4. WARS, REVOLUTIONS, AND REACTIONS

The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 constituted a radical break from the revolutionary pessimism of the twentieth century, and an implicit turning away from the models of conservative liberal prudence initially observed during the post-Napoleonic nineteenth. But the predicament raised by this

Unanticipated Revolution," *Public Choice*, Vol. 61 (1989), pp. 41-74; and Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, pp. 3-12, esp. p. 7-9. Kuran's industry on this topic continues in Timur Kuran, "The Inevitability of Future Revolutionary Surprises," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 100, No. 6 (May, 1995), pp. 1528-1551; cf. Jack A. Goldstone, "Predicting Revolutions: Why We Could (and Should) Have Foreseen the Revolutions of 1989-1991 in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe," *Contention*, Vol. 2, pp. 127-152.

dual-movement was complex. Morally speaking, there remained the problem of what to *do* about the awful events of the twentieth century: How should they be remembered, what did they *mean*, and what do they continue to say about *us*? Practically speaking, there remained the problem of what these events could and ought to teach us: In a world fundamentally transformed, do the wars and revolutions of the twentieth century still warrant our attention? What is there to learn from an era *before* the contemporary liberal triumph that promised an end of global wars; indeed *before* a fully developed global-liberal-democratic-capitalism, and before full consciousness that Truth on earth had fully developed?⁴⁴ And finally, what was one to make of the benign rapprochement between liberalism, democracy, and revolution in our times? Was this unlikely alliance sustainable in the long run, or was it only a matter of time until the old contradictions reared their head? Had the Idea developed fully after all?

George Kateb and Tracy Strong have recently tackled the first problem directly. Kateb calls the twentieth century the “morally worst century so far,” and Strong writes that “A conservative estimate gives 155 million deaths in the wars of the twentieth century, 43 million deaths in genocides, 87 million deaths from

⁴⁴ See especially Margaret Macmillan, “1914 and 2014: should we be worried?” *International Affairs*. Vol. 90, No. 1 (2014), pp. 59-70, p. 60: Macmillan asks rhetorically, “We are different, though—aren’t we? We in the twenty-first century would not be capable of such folly. We know the potential costs of war. We have built a strong international order. Our leaders have plenty of experience in managing crises and bringing about international accord. Our nations and societies are too intertwined, too aware of the benefits of peace, and much too rational to do anything as foolish as that world of 1914.” Prudently, however, Macmillan writes, “Perhaps we should not be quite so sure. The parallels between 1914 and 2014, while not exact—they never are in history—are unsettling. We too live in a time of rapid globalization; we have, still, a faith in progress and the ability of science and reason to solve problems...and we too think that large-scale war is impossible. The anniversary of 1914 is a good moment to think again about how complacency, the wrong decisions or sheer accident can result in sudden catastrophe.”

famine. And we are not counting those maimed in body and spirit.”⁴⁵ And both question the “adequacy of the canon [of political theory]...to take in and comprehend the awful events” of the twentieth century.⁴⁶ Kateb asks if these events—world wars, genocides, the evils of totalitarianism—can be made “intelligible, if not expectable or predictable”—a question of moral interpretation and scientific explanation.⁴⁷ Strong in turn wonders if the “exponential growth of technological capabilities” has undermined our basic presumptions about the political world—the integrity of historical facts, our confidence in common sense, and “the promise that intentional and conscious human activity might be adequate to our times.”⁴⁸

But the enduring political crisis of our times, writes Strong, was born a century ago, during the “frightening pointlessness of the Battle of Verdun [in World War I], where, during ten months in 1916, more than three-quarters of a million casualties were incurred in a struggle over a front line that never varied much more than two miles.” In retrospect, then, “One might say that World War I marks the beginning of the full recognition that Western men and women lived increasingly in a time ‘after utopia’ when the prospect of the rule of rationality over human affairs

⁴⁵ George Kateb, *Human Dignity*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2011, p. 85; cited in Tracy Strong, *Politics Without Vision: Thinking Without a Bannister in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, p. 326.

⁴⁶ Passage from George Kateb, “The Adequacy of the Canon,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (August 2002), pp. 482-505, p. 482; see again Strong, *Politics Without Vision*, p. 326.

⁴⁷ Kateb, “The Adequacy of the Canon,” p. 482.

⁴⁸ Strong, *Politics Without Vision*, p. 326.

seemed to fade, persisting only as a mocking smile that reminded one of earlier hopes.”⁴⁹ An “enlightened” faith in the rationality of politics—in the calculability of wars and revolutions, in the best laid Schlieffen plans, in the forward movement of history—all of this was shattered in a matter of ten months.⁵⁰ Was it all restored in 1989? If so, was this a cause to celebrate?

For both Kateb and Strong, one senses an uneasiness with the nonchalant manner in which the events of the “morally worst century” have been, if not whitewashed and forgotten, then reconciled in the political present and purged of their critical depth and existential urgency. Certainly a *shadow* of the lessons of the twentieth century remains in the so-called “liberalism of fear,” the rejection of utopian politics and all-encompassing “systems” (like fascism or Marxian communism) in modern liberal politics, which Judith Shklar insightfully calls “a party of memory rather than a party of hope.”⁵¹ And contemporary liberalism is certainly, in this respect, characteristically non-utopian and vanilla, legalistic and procedural—one might say *boring*—as opposed to the revolutionary twentieth century ideologies of fascism and communism, which embraced a pursuit of meaning and fulfillment (if not also happiness) through revolutionary politics and

⁴⁹ Strong, *Politics Without Vision*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ By 1917 *that* baton of faith had been seized by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, for whom the political crisis of the First World War, which rendered the opening for communism’s rise to international power, had been foreseen. See e.g. Lenin, “The Symptoms of a Revolutionary Situation” (1915), *The Lenin Anthology*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975, pp. 275-277.

⁵¹ See Judith Shklar’s discussion of modern liberalism’s “intellectual modesty” and its relation to “tradition” in “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*. Ed. Stanley Hoffman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 3-20, esp. pg. 8-9.

decisive political *action*. But as a narrowly conservative characterization of contemporary liberalism, the “liberalism of fear” also represents only a partial account—and this particularly, I want to suggest, if one distinguishes between what comparativist Patrick O’Neil has usefully called *political ideology* and *political attitudes*.⁵²

O’Neil’s distinction, though quite simplifying, is analytically useful. He calls political *ideology* those ideas which concern the good and potentially utopian in politics, or the best regime. He calls political *attitude* one’s orientation towards political change, ranging from reactionary to conservative on one end to liberal and revolutionary on the other.⁵³ In this scheme one can in theory consistently remain a revolutionary (or reactionary) in attitudinal terms, embracing radical political change, while also rejecting utopianism. And it is this combination, I want to suggest—moderate and even conservative liberal *ideology* on one hand, combined with radical *attitudes* towards change on the other—that has most characteristically defined revolutionary liberalism since 1989. If this combination is hard to see it is because, for some time, the events of the twentieth century had concealed this

⁵² Patrick H. O’Neil, *Essentials of Comparative Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2012. This distinction mirrors that of Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. Trans. Barbara and Robert North. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967 [Fr. 1951], pg. 230: “In fact the sociological distinction between ‘radical’ and ‘conservative’ temperaments should be complemented by a second distinction contrasting the ‘extremist’ temperament with the ‘moderate’; each is complementary to the other, for there are extremist conservatives and moderate conservatives, extremist radicals and moderate radicals (e.g. Jacobins and Girondins).”

⁵³ Thus both *reactionary* and *revolutionary* attitudes embrace radical political change in the present, while liberals and conservative share a more moderate disposition. The difference between the reactionary and revolutionary is that while the former takes its ideological orientation from a glorified model from the past, the latter embraces new institutions or “progressive” social and political change.

distinction—between ideology and attitudes—as throughout the century liberal responses to radical-revolutionary ideologies were uniformly conservative on *both* the ideological and attitudinal fronts. That is to say, throughout the twentieth century the memory and fear of revolutionary totalitarianism not only quashed definitively any latent or inchoate elements of “positive liberty”⁵⁴ or utopian innovations in modern liberal ideology (hence Shklar’s liberalism of fear), but also reinforced liberal aversion to revolutionary change of any kind and, by extension, the instabilities occasioned by radical democratic participation more generally.

The result was that throughout the twentieth century, and much like the nineteenth, liberalism was distinctly anti-revolutionary and, in some respects, anti-democratic.⁵⁵ By the end of this period the most notorious representative of this *attitude* towards revolutionary change was the so-called “Kirkpatrick thesis” based on Jeane Kirkpatrick’s distinction between “totalitarian” systems and “traditional autocracies,” and which gained notoriety based on its implications for American foreign policy.⁵⁶ Kirkpatrick is an especially important figure to consider as one

⁵⁴ See classically, Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*. London, Random House, 1997, pp. 191-242. For an alternative, more “positive” liberalism, see Benjamin Constant, “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns” (1819) in *Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 309-328. Constant implores moderns to not abandon politics in the pursuit of individual pleasure, and writes, “[I]s it so true that happiness of whatever sort is mankind’s only aim? If it were, we would be moving along a narrow path to a rather low destination.”

⁵⁵ Ackerman in *The Future of Liberal Revolution* called 1989 the “return of revolutionary democratic liberalism” after a century of Marxist-Leninist monopolization of the term “revolution.” His point is that liberalism and revolution had been alienated for a century.

The general point is not to ignore the fact that liberal democratic states, not least the United States, supported various revolutionary movements from time to time; it is only to highlight a conservative bias.

nears the end of the Cold War. Her ideas played a key role in the foreign policy of the Reagan administration, and her influential political attitude was a culmination—a representative work—of broader trends in academic political science.

“[T]he history of this century,” Kirkpatrick wrote in 1979, “provides no grounds for expecting that *radical totalitarian* regimes will transform themselves.” Conversely, “Since many *traditional autocracies* permit limited contestation and participation, it is not impossible that U.S. policy could effectively encourage this process of liberalization and democratization[.]” The decisive point for Kirkpatrick is that U.S. interests lie in stabilizing potentially friendly, if nonetheless authoritarian, allies rather than risk the unpredictable and probably irreversible outcomes of mass-democratic revolutions, especially communist or Islamic (i.e. totalitarian) revolutions, in these same states. Revolutions are unpredictable and irreversible events, and as catastrophes they are like forces of nature and the worst of all possible worlds. Stable dictators are not—they are predictable, rational, manipulable, and reform-able.

In the process Kirkpatrick blames both the success of Khomeini’s Islamic revolution in Iran and the fall of Anastasio Somoza to Marxist Sandinistas in Nicaragua on President Carter’s tacit support of the revolutionary masses in these states. Carter’s acts are indicative, says Kirkpatrick, of a naïve overconfidence, a “full-blown philosophy of history which includes, as philosophies of history always do, a theory of social change, or, as it is currently called, a doctrine of modernization

⁵⁶ Kirkpatrick’s 1979 article came to the attention of Ronald Reagan, who appointed Kirkpatrick as his campaign foreign policy advisor and later Ambassador to the UN.

[...] Like most other philosophies of history that have appeared in the West since the 18th century, the Carter administration's doctrine predicts progress (in the form of modernization for all societies) and a happy ending (in the form of a world community of developed, autonomous nations)."⁵⁷

That Kirkpatrick saw fit to denounce the political philosophy of the Carter administration, including Carter's esteemed Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, does testify to a diversity of opinion in academic and American foreign policy circles at the time—and indeed, Kirkpatrick herself wrote that “no other idea holds greater sway in the mind of educated Americans than the belief that it is possible to

⁵⁷ Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships and Double Standards,” *Commentary*, November 1979, emphases added. It may be instructive to compare Kirkpatrick's ‘model’ of U.S. response to revolutions abroad in the late 1970s, to that of the Western powers in the wake of the Arab Spring Revolutions of 2011, substituting relevant contemporary ideologies for ‘Marxist’ as appropriate. Indeed, after initial prevarication among the Western powers, then active support (at times moral, at times military) of the revolutionaries in places like Egypt and Libya, and after the subsequent military suppression of the post-revolutionary, democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (to say nothing of the humanitarian crisis that is the Syrian civil war), both the ideological and attitudinal undertones of Kirkpatrick's thesis are provocative indeed:

“The pattern is familiar enough: an established autocracy with a record of friendship with the U.S. is attacked by insurgents, some of whose leaders have long ties to the Communist movement, and most of whose arms are of Soviet, Chinese, or Czechoslovak origin. The ‘Marxist’ presence is ignored and/or minorities minimized by American officials and by the elite media on the ground that U.S. support for the dictator gives the rebels little other choice but to seek aid ‘elsewhere.’ Violence spreads and American officials wonder aloud about the viability of a regime that ‘lacks the support of its own people.’ The absence of an opposition party is deplored and civil-rights violations are reviewed. Liberal columnists question the morality of continuing aid to a ‘rightist dictatorship’...Requests for help from the beleaguered autocrat go unheeded, and the argument is increasingly voiced that ties should be established with rebel leaders ‘before it is too late.’ The President, delaying U.S. aid, appoints a special emissary who confirms the deterioration of the government position and its diminished capacity to control the situation and recommends various measures for ‘strengthening’ and ‘liberalizing’ the regime, all of which involve diluting its power...

As the situation worsens, the President assures the world that the U.S. desires only that the ‘people choose their own form of government’; he blocks delivery of all arms to the government and undertakes negotiations to establish a ‘broadly based’ coalition headed by a ‘moderate’ critic of the regime who, once elevated will move quickly to seek a ‘political settlement’ of the conflict. Should the incumbent autocrat prove resistant to American demands that he step aside, he will be readily overwhelmed by the military strength of his opponents.”

democratize governments, anytime, anywhere, under any circumstances[.]” On the whole, however, a survey of influential literature in the post-WW II era suggests that Kirkpatrick’s liberal aversion to mass-based politics, be it revolutionary politics abroad, or radical politics at home, was closer to the mainstream. Here one finds an aversion to not only radical *attitudes* towards change, but to *ideology* that expands democratic participation beyond the comfort zone of traditional liberal theory.

First and as already discussed, liberal reaction against mass democratic participation in the twentieth century came in one initial wave in response to the traumatic collapse of the German Weimar republic, after which for some time the words *totalitarianism*, *masses*, and *mass democracy* were inextricably linked. As Sheri Berman writes, “During the 1950s and 1960s social scientists such as William Kornhauser and Hannah Arendt helped turn the concept of ‘mass society’ into a powerful theory for explaining the disintegration of democracy and the rise of totalitarianism in Europe.”⁵⁸ Ideologically as well, radical democracy and totalitarianism shared an intellectual DNA,⁵⁹ and these distasteful connections between democracy and totalitarianism only increased the normative distance between democracy and liberalism in a manner reminiscent of the 19th century: “Voters,” wrote Joseph Schumpeter as early as 1942, “must understand that once they have elected an individual, political action is his business and not theirs. This

⁵⁸ Sheri Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic,” *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (1997), pp. 401-429.

⁵⁹ Jacob Talmon’s *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, for example, traces the origins of modern totalitarianism to the entry of *the will* into political discourse and its association with mass plebiscitary democracy during the French Enlightenment. J.L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*. Britain: Secker & Warburg, 1960.

means that they must refrain from instructing him about what he is to do.”⁶⁰ Too much democracy is the end of liberal democracy. Gerry Mackie writes that Schumpeter’s highly influential redefinition of democracy “stripped democracy of all ethical content,” and “shorn of its dark origins [to preserve elite domination in the unwelcome socialist democracies of the future], became canonical in postwar American political science.”⁶¹

A second wave of reaction in the social sciences against democratic participation corresponded much later with (a) the escalation of mass political action, violence, and civil disobedience in the 1960s at home, and (b) the proliferation of violent, communist, and guerrilla-style revolutions in the Third World abroad, with which the more radical democrats at home often sympathized. The revolutionary sixties focused special attention in the social sciences on the problem of “political order,” not only as a normative imperative prior to democratic participation, but one in many ways antagonistic to it. Perhaps most famously, in 1968 Samuel Huntington wrote in *Political Order in Changing Societies* that, “The most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government. The differences between democracy and dictatorship are less than the differences between those countries whose politics embodies consensus, community, legitimacy, organization, effectiveness,

⁶⁰ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy*, Third. Ed. New York: Harper, 2008 [1942], p. 295.

⁶¹ Gerry Mackie, “Schumpeter’s Leadership Democracy,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2009), pp. 128-153, p. 128-9.

stability, and those countries whose politics is deficient in these qualities. Communist totalitarian states and Western liberal states both belong generally in the category of effective rather than debile political systems.”⁶² Thus the most important characteristic of a government was its level of *institutionalization*, and political order in developing states depended crucially on containing the rate of the expansion of political participation (or channeling it through political parties) so as not to overwhelm the absorptive capacity of existing political institutions. Elsewhere Huntington collaborated with experts from Western Europe and Japan to argue that the greatest risk facing not just developing countries, but advanced liberal democracies as well, was the problem of “too much democracy,” since in recent years “the operation of the democratic process generated a breakdown of traditional means of social control, a delegitimation of authority, and overload of demands on government.”⁶³

Huntington was far from alone. Citing canonical works and scattered articles by such giants within the discipline as Huntington, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, and Martin Lipset among others, Donal Cruise O’Brien in 1972 pointed to the “erosion of liberal political values in America over the past decade” as reflected among political scientists, during which “the previously unquestioned political ideal

⁶² Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006 [1968], p. 1.

⁶³ Michael Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki. *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*. New York: New York University Press, 1975, p. 8. Ironically, the chief architect of the larger Trilateral Commission which commissioned this project—Zbigniew Brzezinski—would later draw the ire of Kirkpatrick for the Carter administration’s revolutionary recklessness just a few years later.

of ‘democracy’ is in the process of being replaced by another ideal, that of ‘order.’”⁶⁴ In a similar vein, in 1973 Sheldon Wolin argued that trends in political science increasingly reflected American domestic interests in quelling mass political activity, and foreign policy interests in stable (i.e. non-revolutionary) processes of “modernization.” This anti-democratic attitude was especially apparent in the study of *revolutions*. Modern social science has become a “science of order,” said Wolin, speaking a “language of order,” and therefore, “Because revolution is an attack on the existing order and a radical challenge to its values, suppositions, and constitutive principles, there is no neutral language available to talk about revolution, no language except that of revolution or of order. Order is a political conception, replete with values and constitutive principles. Hence the analysis of revolution from the viewpoint of a science of order is a truly symbolic act.”⁶⁵ Thus, says Wolin, revolutions today are described in all varieties of negative and pathological terms—as a “species of mental illness,”⁶⁶ a functional “disequilibrium”⁶⁷ of the social system, or as internecine warfare (civil war, internal war, insurgency, etc.).⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Donal Cruise O’Brien, “Modernization, Order, and the Erosion of a Democratic Ideal: American Political Science 1960-70,” *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1972), pp. 351-378, p. 351.

⁶⁵ Sheldon Wolin, “The Politics of the Study of Revolution,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 5 No. 3 (Apr. 1973), pp. 343-358, p. 352.

⁶⁶ Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965 [1938] famously describes revolution as several stages of a “fever.”

⁶⁷ Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 2nd ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982 [1966].

⁶⁸ Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harper and Row, 1999 [1968].

In the decade and a half between Wolin's 1973 article and the fall of the Berlin Wall little had changed. Indeed if anything, the Kirkpatrick thesis's direct influence on American foreign policy and the rise of state-centric institutional theory (or "bringing the state back in"⁶⁹) to a dominant position in political science only reinforced the priority of political order on the contemporary research agenda. On the eve of 1989 the dominant strands of liberal thought and political theory were not only anti-utopian in ideological terms, but anti-revolutionary in their attitudes towards change, and lukewarm at best towards a more radical democratic participation in modern and modernizing societies. Liberalism, democracy, and revolution were hardly on friendly terms.

5. THE BIRTH OF LIBERAL REVOLUTION

Wolin bemoaned the conflation of war and revolution in a liberal polity that legitimated democratic deficits among its own people, and where genuine democratic participation and genuine power of the people were at best ephemeral. Certainly there must be space for a form of radical change *between* the unfortunate alternatives of violent civil war on one hand, and tedious, incomplete social reform on the other. After all, one need not be an ideological fanatic to find hope in the idea of revolution, nor a resentful meanie to be disgusted with hypocritical, ineffectual programs of democratic reform. Nor, for that matter, must one categorically reject violence to be serious about freedom—perhaps the contrary. And yet here was the

⁶⁹ Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, ed. *Bringing the State Back In*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

conundrum that had beset liberalism's relationship with democracy and revolution for two centuries—how to square the *circle* (as it were) between the most radical democratic participation and the most liberal rule of law.

A reconciliation of some sort would not have been unprecedented. Long before the excesses of the twentieth century, revolution and republicanism, even revolution and old-fashioned English liberalism, had joined forces gloriously.⁷⁰ The Glorious Revolution of 1688 cemented revolution's normative cache even among conservatives bent on preserving ancient rights and liberties. And a century later the American revolutionaries, even while engaged in a revolutionary war, recognized a difference between their war of liberation from the British and the revolutionary project of founding a republic⁷¹: "We mutually pledge" said the colonists, affirming that their united war of liberation, and their existing polity of independently constituted but mutually vouchsafed political bodies, in its war with the British hardly constituted the *stasis* or *civil war* once described by Thomas Hobbes. Revolution needn't equal chaos. And even during the twentieth century the cause of revolutions remained the same as ever—the cause freedom versus

⁷⁰ John LeJeune, "Revolution," *Blackwell's Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, Michael Gibbons, ed. New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2014 offers a general survey.

⁷¹ Hannah Arendt calls the American Revolution the only "successful" modern revolution, indeed the "only one" that "founded a completely new body politic without violence and with the help of a constitution," precisely because of this. "It seems certain," she says, "that the relatively nonviolent character of the American Revolution, where violence was more or less restricted to regular warfare, is an important factor in this success," where success here means "the surprising stability [in America] of a political structure under the onslaught of the most vehement and shattering social instability." Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin, 1993, pp. 91-141, p. 140.

tyranny,⁷² whether that tyranny lie in the rule of man or the constraints of nature—even if some revolutions became deformed and tyrannical in the process.⁷³ Morally, where not also prudentially, there was always much to speak for revolution, even among conservative liberals.

At the same time, however, revolution's history in the twentieth century more than warranted its destructive reputation and the repulsion this inspired. Revolutions between 1914 and 1989 *did* typically resemble, precipitate, or overlap with wars. And throughout the century wars and revolutions *had* gone hand-in-hand. As Hannah Arendt wrote in 1963:

To be sure, the interrelatedness of wars and revolutions as such is not a novel phenomenon; it is as old as revolutions themselves, which either were preceded and accompanied by a war of liberation like the American Revolution, or led into wars of defense like the French Revolution. But in our own century there has arisen, in addition to such instances, an altogether different type of event in which it is as though even the fury of war was merely the prelude, a preparatory stage to the violence unleashed by revolution...or where, on the contrary, a world war appears like the consequences of revolution, a kind of civil war raging all over the earth as even the Second World War was considered[.]⁷⁴

No wonder that social scientists saw little difference between *war* and *revolution*.

⁷² Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 1.

⁷³ On the eve of 1989, then, attitudes in the United States were especially paradoxical. The idea of revolution was always present in American political institutions, but the moral and political arguments for and against revolution lacked serious engagement. As Harvey Mansfield wrote in 1976, "Somewhere amidst the uneasy self-congratulation of the American Bicentennial there ought to be concern for the right of revolution—that principle by which and on which this country was founded. How does it stand today? It has, first of all, nearly disappeared as a subject of political discourse in America...Almost everyone admires the men who made the American Revolution. But the sum of the current opinion...is to distrust them for their naiveté." Harvey Mansfield, "The Right of Revolution," *Daedalus*, Vol. 105, No. 4 (Fall, 1976), pp. 151-162, p. 151.

⁷⁴ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 2006 [1963], p. 7.

Then came the Revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe and a story that is well known: In a single year a wave of political revolutions (many of them ultimately negotiated at “round table” style meetings of old regime and civil society representatives⁷⁵) liberated and (with the possible exception of Romania) effectively democratized all six of the Soviet Union’s western satellites—Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, and Romania—and all with relatively little bloodshed and a conscious effort by Eastern European dissidents to eschew the ideological radicalism and class-based violence that had hitherto characterized revolution in the twentieth century.⁷⁶ In the process, from the ashes of European communism and total revolution emerged a new model of revolution and, as it turned out, a new era of liberal democratic revolution over the next quarter century. The Revolutions of 1989 had, indeed, squared the liberal-democratic-revolutionary circle—had carved a novel space for revolution *within* a liberal “repertoire of contention”⁷⁷ that had been unavailable since at least (and then only very briefly) the first phase of Europe’s 1848 “Spring of Nations,” if not the American Revolution before that.⁷⁸ Considered as a phenomenon, *revolution* was

⁷⁵ See Jon Elster, ed., *The Roundtable Talks and the Breakdown of Communism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

⁷⁶ Of the vast literature of the 1989 revolutions, the two best accounts I know of (the first a first-person journalistic narrative; the second a more standard academic history) are Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague*. New York: Vintage, 1999; and Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

⁷⁷ Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

⁷⁸ On the positive relationship between the Revolutions of 1989 and the American Revolution, see Stefan Auer, “The Paradoxes of the Revolutions of 1989 in Central Europe,” *Critical Horizons*, Vol. 5,

suddenly distanced from its recent past steeped in war and violence, and associated instead with successful campaigns of strategic non-violence. Scholars now linked revolution *as an idea* with what Bruce Ackerman called the “return of revolutionary democratic liberalism” after a century of Marxist-Leninism appropriation.⁷⁹ And within a few years the idea of “liberal” or “non-violent revolution” was more than a benign possibility, a novelty—it was an international norm.

What exactly *was* this new model of revolution? Timothy Garton Ash, “Painting with a deliberately broad brush” captures the basic elements by distinguishing between two ideal-types of revolution, the old “1789-style” and new “1989-style”:

The 1789 ideal type is violent, utopian, professedly class-based, and characterized by a progressive radicalization, culminating in terror. A revolution is not a dinner party, Mao Zedong famously observed, and he went on: ‘A Revolution is an uprising, an act of violence whereby one class overthrows another’...The 1989 ideal type, by contrast, is non-violent, anti-utopian, based not on a single class but on broad social coalitions, and characterized by the application of mass social pressure—‘people power’—to bring the current powerholders to negotiate. It culminates not in terror but in compromise. If the totem of 1789-type revolution is the guillotine, that of 1989 is the round table.⁸⁰

No. 1 (2004): 361-390; and Dick Howard, “Keeping the Republic: Reading Arendt’s *On Revolution* after the Fall of the Wall,” *Democratija* 9 (Summer 2007), pp. 122-140. On the same point, Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 2006) is largely an argument that any non-Jacobin model of revolution had been wiped out of popular consciousness as early as the French Revolution, notwithstanding that occasional spontaneous “political” or “council revolutions” could be found every so often to offer a transient glimpse at something beyond the Jacobin model. Crane Brinton’s once highly-influential *The Anatomy of Revolution*, illustrates Arendt’s point: The “stage theory” Brinton adopts is obviously modeled after the French Revolution, while other revolutions—the long English Revolution, Russian Revolution, and the American Revolution—are occasionally molded to fit this rigid model.

⁷⁹ Bruce Ackerman, *The Future of Liberal Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Timothy Garton Ash, “Velvet Revolution: The Prospects,” *The New York Review of Books*, December 3, 2009. Treading the same path Robert S. Snyder distinguished between “social revolutions” and

If modern revolutions were classically and mythically violent,⁸¹ the “1989-type” represented more than a new method, but a new non-violent *mythology* of revolution.⁸² Here was revolution with a twist, comingled paradoxically with constitutionalism and legality.⁸³ As Stephen Auer wrote some years later, “To the extent that the 1989 revolutions in Central Europe were successful in creating conditions for liberty, they undermined the pre-existing notions of revolution.” For if traditionally “violence has been at the center of revolutionary politics,” then “Since 1989 this logic seems to have changed irrevocably. Revolutions are now no longer what they used to be...[but instead] strange even ‘conservative’ revolutions...In their appearance, they resembled a rock-concert or a carnival...Yet the political and societal impact of these revolutions was far more radical than a narrow focus on

“liberal revolutions” and argues that while the former are unlikely in the future, liberal revolutions are substantially more likely to continue as more autocracies fall to liberal democracy. See Robert S. Snyder, “The End of Revolution?” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 5-28.

⁸¹ All of the most influential definitions of revolution prior to 1989 either entailed or implied violence. Samuel Huntington called revolution “a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies.” Theda Skocpol distinguished between “social revolutions” and “political revolutions”: “Social revolutions” (e.g. the French, Russian, Mexican, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cuban, and Iranian revolutions), which correspond to the classical model of revolution, are “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures...accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below” and “intense sociopolitical conflicts.” (“Political revolutions,” says Skocpol, “transform state structures but not social structures, and they are not necessarily accomplished through class conflict.”). Chalmers Johnson wrote that “Revolutionary change is a special kind of social change, one that involves the intrusion of violence into civil social relations.” See Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006 [1968], p. 264; Theda Skocpol. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 4-5; Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 2nd ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982 [1966], p. 1.

⁸² Eric Selbin has recently theorized the important role revolutionary myths play in both inspiring and directing revolutionary activities in *Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance: The Power of Story*. New York: Zed Books, 2010.

⁸³ See esp. Andrew Arato, *Civil Society, Constitution, Legitimacy*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.

elite change might suggest. Intensive mass-mobilization utterly transformed...societies and created political constellations far more conducive to freedom than was the case before.”⁸⁴ Jack Goldstone in 2001 called it “striking” that “in several recent revolutions—in the Philippines in 1986, in South Africa in 1990, in Eastern European nations in 1989-1991—the sudden collapse of the old regime has led directly to new democracies, often against strong expectations of reversion to dictatorship.”⁸⁵ Academic articles proliferated that asked whether or not this new revolutionary model undermined existing concepts of revolution, even whether it spelt the end of modern revolution as we know it.⁸⁶ And in succeeding decades political actors were inspired to follow the lead of these early velvet revolutionaries.

What was learned from 1989? How did the example of 1989 inspire others? Among other things, the precipitous success of non-violent revolutions in 1989 seemed to reveal previously hidden facts about the weakness of autocratic political systems. For decades the Soviet system was widely considered among the most stable regime types on earth, even on par with the United States. It had survived stiff

⁸⁴ Stefan Auer, “Violence and the End of Revolution After 1989,” *Thesis Eleven* 97:6 (2009), pp. 6-25, p. 6-7. In these passages Auer draws parallels between the Revolutions of 1989 and the 2003 Georgian Rose Revolution and 2004 Ukrainian Orange Revolution.

⁸⁵ Jack A. Goldstone, “Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, No. 4 (2001), pp. 139-87, p. 168.

⁸⁶ See e.g. Robert H. Dix, “Eastern Europe’s Implications for Revolutionary Theory,” *Polity*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, pp. 227-242; Robert S. Snyder, “The End of Revolution?” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 5-28; Stefan Auer, “Violence and the End of Revolution After 1989,” op. cit. For an exhaustive review of this literature see Krishan Kumar, *1989: Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, esp. “Ch. 4: The 1989 Revolutions and the Idea of Revolution.” Kumar’s book is an especially comprehensive resource on the political theory of 1989. Another subtle discussion is Andrew Arato, “Interpreting 1989,” *Social Research*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (Fall 1993), pp. 609-646.

resistance on multiple occasions, as between the end of World War II and 1989 most of the satellites had seen one if not several failed attempts at popular revolution from below or radical reform from above.⁸⁷ The prompt quashing of organized dissent had always testified to the system's strength. Now, however, as the walls came tumbling down country by country, long-entrenched beliefs of Soviet (or "totalitarian") stability were obliterated, and a new knowledge emerged that "totalitarian" regimes that *appeared* strong were in fact politically weak. Their visible strength was a mere façade, their institutions more prone to decay rather than strengthen over time.⁸⁸ And their debilitating weaknesses, like an Achilles heel, needed only the right provocation at the right moment to be fatally exposed.⁸⁹ If seriously challenged by mass "people power," one could expect these naturally "illegitimate" autocracies to collapse like a house of cards. And if "people power" could so easily overwhelm the moral and political resources of any despotic state,

⁸⁷ The most notable revolts include those in East Germany in 1953; Hungary in 1956; Poland in 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, and 1980-81; and Czechoslovakia in 1968. These ranged substantially in character, however; from bottom-up revolutionary protests that were violently suppressed (Germany 1953; Hungary 1956), to abortive top-down attempts at radical reform within the party (Czechoslovakia 1968); to protracted but eventually quashed negotiations with the government (Poland 1980-81).

⁸⁸ Kuran uses a Schelling tipping point model to explain how a regime that looks extremely strong can crumble quickly via a cascade effect, once a sufficient number of heroes change enough of others' expectations to set the cascade in motion. See Timur Kuran, "Now out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolutions of 1989," *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (1991), pp. 7-48; incidentally, this article contains a useful literature review of Western surprise at the Soviet collapse, including Jeane Kirkpatrick among others.

⁸⁹ This is the central thesis of Gene Sharp's influential, step-by-step handbook *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2012). The book is said to have been consulted by Egyptian rebels as early as 2005, and Sharp has been touted as "the man now credited with the strategy behind the toppling of the Egyptian government." Sharp's work has also been associated with the Otpor movement that helped oust Milosevic in Serbia, Ukraine's "Orange Revolution," and opposition movements in Thailand and Indonesia, among other cases. See "Gene Sharp: Author of the nonviolent revolution rulebook" (BBC.com, February 21, 2011) by Ruaridh Arrow, director of the documentary film *Gene Sharp: How to Start a Revolution*.

then non-violence would be the most strategic choice, and violence would be not only unnecessary, but counterproductive.⁹⁰

Narratives of this sort (to say nothing of rapidly changing relationships between periphery states and the Soviet metropole) seemed to be confirmed by a steady stream of new liberal revolutions after 1989 in Eastern Europe. As early as 1992 Stephen Holmes wrote that “Throughout the post-Communist world, from the Baltics to Albania, and now in Russia itself, we are observing radical waves of change that look so far like *liberal* revolution. The strangeness of the notion suggests the unprecedentedness of the change. But how else to describe the ground-up reorganizations occurring, with varying degrees of haste and success, across the post-Leninist world? Is liberal revolution not the most significant fact of contemporary political life?”⁹¹ And over the next two decades, moreover, “1989-style” revolution became more than influential—it became fashionable. As Garton Ash summarizes:

⁹⁰ Indicatively, Hannah Arendt’s novel opposition of “power” to “violence” appeared increasingly in political science journals. “All political institutions are manifestations and materializations of power,” Arendt wrote in *On Violence*: “they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them.” Cf. Gene Sharp, *op cit.*, p. 28-9.: “The principle is simple. Dictators require the assistance of the people they rule, without which they cannot secure and maintain the sources of political power...All of these sources...depend on acceptance of the regime, on the submission and obedience of the population, and on the cooperation of innumerable people and the many institutions of the society. These are not guaranteed.”

See Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 140. Articles in conversation with Arendt on this topic (especially after 1989) are endless. An influential early article is Jürgen Habermas, “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power,” *Social Research*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring 1977), pp. 3-24; and a useful and quite critical article is Keith Breen, “Violence and power: A critique of Hannah Arendt on the ‘political,’” *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 343-372. On Arendt and the fragility of “totalitarian” regimes, see esp. Friedrich Pohlmann, “The ‘Seeds of Destruction’ in Totalitarian Systems: An Interpretation of the Unity in Hannah Arendt’s Political Philosophy,” in *The Totalitarian Paradigm after the End of Communism: Towards a Theoretical Assessment*. Ed. Achim Siegel. Atlanta: Rodopi B.V., 1998 (1994).

⁹¹ Stephen Holmes, “The Scowl of Minerva,” *The New Republic*, March 23, 1992, pp. 27-33, p. 27.

In the twenty years since 1989 dramatic events in places including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, South Africa, Chile, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, and Burma were tagged with variants of adjective + revolution. Thus we have read about singing (Baltic states), peaceful, negotiated (South Africa, Chile), rose (Georgia), orange (Ukraine), color (widely used-post orange), cedar (Lebanon), tulip (Kyrgyzstan), electoral (generic), saffron (Burma), and...in Iran, green revolution. Often, as in the Czechoslovak case the catchy labeling has been popularized through the interplay of foreign journalists and political activists in the countries concerned.⁹²

The conceptual stretching of “1989-style” or “velvet revolution” eventually meant that *revolution* was being used to describe a wide variety of events: everything from military initiated coups with acquired popular support (as in Portugal in 1974, though named well before 1989), to mass protests to overturn fraudulent election results (as in Ukraine 2004-5 and Georgia 2003),⁹³ to more protracted examples of civic organization and negotiation over time (a decade in Solidarity’s case) resulting in round table negotiations (e.g. Poland and Hungary 1989),⁹⁴ regime crisis generated by spontaneous mass demonstrations, followed by negotiations (Czechoslovakia 1989), and little more than a purging of the ruling party based on a combination of initiative from above and below (Bulgaria and Romania 1989).

⁹² Garton Ash, “Velvet Revolution: The Prospects.”

⁹³ Scholars have identified a distinct “wave” of democratization in the post-communist “electoral revolutions,” or “color revolutions,” in Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan between 1998-2005. Bunce and Wolchik (2006) also include the cases of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania between 1996-7 in this group. See the Special Edition of the *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (January 2009) – Debating the Color Revolutions; and the Special Issue of *Communist and Post Communist Studies* on “Democratic Revolutions in Postcommunist States, Vol. 39, No. 3 (September 2006), esp. Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, “International Diffusion and Postcommunist Electoral Revolutions,” pp. 283-304.

⁹⁴ See esp. Jon Elster, ed., *The Roundtable Talks and the Breakdown of Communism*; and Arato, *Civil Society, Constitution, Legitimacy*.

Notwithstanding these differences, the “velvet” (or “color,” “flower,” or “1989-type”) paradigm of revolution that linked these episodes after 1989 became synonymous with non-violence, democracy, political rather than class-based goals, and successful democratic movements. It appeared that velvet revolution, as a non-violent revolutionary program, not only worked, but did so in a quite reliable way against dictatorships. In the process this model and its stylish narrative also became normatively chic among Western journalists, social scientists, and political actors themselves.⁹⁵ The mythology of 1989-style revolution reached a point where “color revolutionaries” even started hiring branding experts: NPR reports that in Ukraine in 2004-5 activists “met with foreign marketers about coming up with a brand. Before it was the Orange Revolution, it was called the Chestnut Revolution[.]” Similarly, Kazakhstan’s Tulip Revolution (2005) “started out being called the Pink Revolution, the Lemon Revolution, the Silk Revolution, the Daffodil Revolution.”⁹⁶

Thus, what began in 1989 as a paradoxical mix of reform *and* revolution (Garton Ash coined the term *refolution*) over time came to include virtually any process in which mass non-violent action led to a non-institutionalized political

⁹⁵ Interestingly, controversy exists regarding the extent to which the “Jasmine” label reflects local understanding of events in Tunisia in early 2011, as opposed to its being imposed by the Western media to fit a preconceived narrative. In a January 28 National Public Radio report a Tunisian writer credited the French media with coining the name, but also said that “We live inside, and for me it’s just a Tunisian revolution. It’s our revolution, Tunisia, not Jasmine or something else.” The jasmine is Tunisia’s national flower, and the label has also been attached to the events that brought President Ben Ali to power in 1987, and protest movements in Syria in 2005 and Pakistan in 2007.

⁹⁶ “Twitter Revolution?": It’s the Media Coining the Name,” January 28, 2011 at <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/28/133293523/Name-That-Revolution>; for more examples see Jeremy Singer-Vine, “Garden Party or Uprising?: How’d the Jasmine Revolution get its name? And how about the Rose, Orange, and Tulip Revolutions?” Slate.com. January 20, 2011.

outcome. And what began as a serious analytical and theoretical problem in 1989—*What is revolution? Is revolution still a problem for liberal order? Do these cases constitute ‘transition’ or ‘revolution’? Why does this distinction matter?*⁹⁷—was reduced to a mythology ripe for popular consumption and mobilization, and a carnival stimulus to action. Where the sublime sweep of the French revolution once cost Louis XVI his head, in Ukraine a so-called Orange “Revolution” only removed Viktor Yanukovich from office until he was *actually* elected as President in 2010.⁹⁸

These labels served important tactical functions for activists, among them to “unify fractious groups and win international attention and support.”⁹⁹ But as a paradigm of revolution they also simplified matters on the ground by focusing narrowly on the moral and political ethic of the opposition, and *not* on the structural and institutional factors that render non-violent revolutions more or less likely to succeed. Put differently, the idea of “1989-type” or “velvet revolution” came increasingly to be analyzed in terms of the agency and intent of the revolutionary actors: It was the actors—the revolutionaries themselves—who determined the

⁹⁷ An attitude that Kumar (2001, p. 129) attributes to Gale Stokes is typical: “Stokes, like many others, though convinced of a revolutionary occurrence in 1989, remains uncertain as to what precisely constitutes its revolutionary character.”

⁹⁸ Interestingly, by 2014 the legacy of “color revolution” in Ukraine was hardly one of sound political reconciliation or foundation. In February of that year Yanukovich’s legitimate election was nullified by yet another revolutionary movement.

⁹⁹ Noting that “Revolutions with sweet-sounding names have become the norm in recent years,” a correspondent from *The Economist* says of such names that “It’s outsiders connecting them in sort of a, I don’t want to say lazy, but just shy of lazy shorthand.” The report points out that “Lazy shorthand...can have real effects on the ground. Once a name catches on, activists use it to unify fractious groups and win international attention and support.” This can be true across borders as well as within, as witnessed in the abortive attempt at “Jasmine Revolution” in China in February 2011. See “Twitter Revolution? It’s the Media Coining the Name,” *National Public Radio*, January 28, 2011. Accessed at npr.org/2011/.../Name-That-Revolution, May 5, 2011.

course of the revolution and its success or failure. This agent-centered paradigm contrasted sharply with the Eastern European “anti-politics” of the 1970s and 1980s which, heeding unfavorable conditions on the ground, sought temporary gains in “civil society” rather than head-on confrontation with a strong regime. By contrast, the current non-violent paradigm takes for granted that authoritarian regimes are structurally weak and destined to lose against democratic power. The first key to toppling autocracies is for protestors to overcome the barrier of fear that keeps them isolated, a fear that compels acquiescence in a manner that *appears* like consent, but beneath the veneer is quite the opposite; and then to coordinate mass protests and demonstrations that will inevitably cripple the weak regime in power.

In fact, however, authoritarian regimes vary in structure and strength. They vary in available treasure, such as access to natural resource monopolies that can assuage popular demands and fund security forces; they vary in the loyalty of police and military forces to the ruling regime; and they vary in terms of real legitimacy and primordial loyalties found among the population (e.g. religious or tribal).¹⁰⁰ The societies they govern, moreover, also vary in terms of the underlying social tensions—class-based, ethnic, or religious—which social unrest or a breakdown of basic political order threaten to unleash at full antagonistic strength. Even in the event of a successful toppling of the old regime, why would one assume the political

¹⁰⁰ A brief but prescient account of this point with respect to cases of the Arab Spring is Cameron Brown, “Domino Theory,” *The Jerusalem Post* (online), February 6, 2011; see also Thomas Carothers, “The ‘Jasmine Revolution’ in Tunisia: Not Just Another Color,” Commentary, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 19, 2011.

opposition—united initially only in their negation of the old regime—to cooperate in the founding of a *new* political constitution?

Such confidence in the benign historical destiny of velvet revolution was presumptive at minimum, gravely dangerous at worst. How did it get this far?

6. DEMOCRACY AND ORTHODOXY

In a world facing the perennial specter of world war and nuclear holocaust, 1989 came like a miracle, and the spirit of the times was more than a little carnivalesque.¹⁰¹ And as with all genuine miracles—where seeing *is* believing—the Revolutions of 1989 transformed beliefs and orthodoxies seemingly overnight. It was what Aristide Zolberg might have called a “moment of madness,” a “[moment] of political enthusiasm when ‘all is possible.’”¹⁰² And enthusiasm for democratic revolution ran especially high.

At the same time events cast an optimistic gloss on the long-form story of the twentieth century. Even prior to 1989, some imagined the democratic transitions and revolutions of our time as *the* pivotal step towards the dream of cosmopolitan

¹⁰¹ David Hasselhoff’s New Year’s Eve concert at the Berlin Wall suffices to make my point. However, see also Elzbieta Matynia, “1989 and the Politics of Democratic Performativity,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*. Vol. 22 (2009), pp. 263-272, which opens with Matynia criticizing the “widespread impression” among those “mesmerized by the telegenic carnival taking place atop the Berlin Wall” that the 1989 collapse of Communism was somehow a “miracle” that “[happened] overnight.” Matynia can take solace that not all, even in Germany, were so impressed. Someone in the crowd, presumably a German citizen who couldn’t bear to hear “Looking for Freedom” yet another time, hurled a lit firework at Hasselhoff while he sang and nearly killed him.

¹⁰² Aristide Zolberg, “Moments of Madness,” *Politics & Society*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 1972, pp. 183-207, p. 184.

world peace.¹⁰³ The Owl of Minerva spreads its wings at dusk, said Hegel—and wasn't it Solon himself, that great-great-grandfather of Athenian *democracy*, who told Croesus that famous tale about Cleobis and Biton?¹⁰⁴

Of course not all were converted to the new orthodoxy, in theory or praxis. A legion of international relations scholars warned that the unsettling of Cold War bipolarity might cause an unstable multi-polarity reminiscent of conditions prior to the two World Wars.¹⁰⁵ Elsewhere Samuel Huntington argued that the repaired fissure in the Western Enlightenment project would conjure a new problem, a “clash of civilizations” where intra-state violence reflected cultural rather than traditional political-ideological fissures.¹⁰⁶ Ken Jowitt called the post-1989 world a

¹⁰³ Of the period and especially influential were Michael W. Doyle's "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12 (Summer 1983) and (Fall 1983), pp. 205-235 and 323-353 respectively. See also Doyle's "Liberalism and World Politics," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80 (December 1986), pp. 1151-1169. See also Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press, 2006 [1992], though Fukuyama's thesis cites long-term ideological rather than structural change; and James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, "A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era," *International Organization*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 467-491, who predict that "the collapse of communism will continue to move the world closer to an international order governed politically by collective action among the great powers rather than by balance-of-power politics. Conflicts between the great powers will still be common, but they will be played out in boardrooms and courtrooms, not on battlefields or in command and control centers." Note: The language here is strikingly close to that of European diplomacy prior to WWI.

¹⁰⁴ Herodotus, *Histories*, New York: Penguin, 2003, Book 1, Ch. 31.

¹⁰⁵ See e.g. Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organizations*, Vol. 44 (Spring 1990), pp. 137-68; and John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15 (Summer 1990), pp. 5-56. These also cited in Goldgeier and McFaul op. cit., p. 467, nt. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 22-29; Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Touchstone, 1997 [1996]. Cf. Fukuyama (1992), "Ch. 21 The Thymotic Origins of Work," esp, p. 234, "[T]he persistence in these differences [in the wealth and poverty of nations and the 'irrational' forms of *thymos* that influence work behavior] may mean that international life will be seen

“Genesis environment,” a world “without form and void,” and highlighted the violent potential of nationalist zeal and animosity amidst a disrupted regional equilibrium in Eastern Europe and the Balkans.¹⁰⁷ Locally as well, there was reason to wonder if the new dynamic-duo of democratic participation and enthusiastic nationalism might be less pliable to liberal aims than originally hoped—in a state like post-Mao China with rising national pride,¹⁰⁸ in post-communist states where ethno-nationalist concerns dominated the public sphere prior to independence,¹⁰⁹ and in weak states where nationalist demands threatened to outrun state capacity,¹¹⁰

increasingly as a competition not between rival ideologies—since most economically successful states will be organized along similar lines—but between different cultures.”

¹⁰⁷ Ken Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 307, 262 (Cf. Genesis 1:1-2). Yugoslavia quickly became the poster-child for this argument. Fukuyama’s response to the problem of nationalism constitutes one of the most interesting chapters (25: “National Interests”) of the book—he concedes that nationalism may continue to be a source of violence and instability in newly democratized and modernizing states in the short term, but argues that a combination of liberal security, integration into international markets, and post-War international norms both against imperialism and in favor of self-determination, will mitigate the sources of nationalist aggression in the long run—that national identity, much like religion in the West after the wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, will “fade away as a political force” (p. 271).

¹⁰⁸ On the question of Chinese nationalism and its tension with (liberal) democracy see Suisheng Zhao, “‘We are Patriots First and Democrats Second’: The Rise of Chinese Nationalism in the 1990s,” in Edward Friedman and Barrett L. McCormick, *What of China Doesn’t Democratize?: Implications for War and Peace*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000; Edward Friedman, “A Democratic Chinese Nationalism?” in Jonathan Unger, ed. *Chinese Nationalism*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996; and more recently, He Baogang, “Why is Establishing Democracy So Difficult in China?” *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Fall 2003), pp. 71-92.

¹⁰⁹ On the priority of nationalism in explaining the Soviet collapse, see Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. A condensed version of this argument is Mark R. Beissinger, “How the Impossible Becomes Inevitable: The Public Sphere and the Collapse of Soviet Communism,” at *Transformations of the Public Sphere: 20th Anniversary of the Fall of the Wall*, accessed at <http://publicsphere.ssrc.org/20th-anniversary-of-the-fall-of-the-wall/>. See also Phil Roeder, “Peoples and States after 1989: The Political Costs of Incomplete National Revolutions,” *Slavic Review* Vol. 58, No. 4 (Winter 1999), pp. 854-882. Ten years after 1989 Roeder (p. 855) writes that “the evidence from postcommunist states tells us that democracy is unlikely to survive in ethnically plural societies.”

nationalist energies might crowd out genuine democratic demands, or democratic populism could subvert basic liberal norms. In Samuel Huntington's terms, rash global democratic enthusiasm may have the ironic, and ultimately counterproductive effect of creating "debile" political systems where free and democratic ones are envisioned.

But despite such concerns, the dominant post-1989 narrative particularly among liberal theorists stressed the opposite tendency—namely, the emancipatory potential of mass democratic movements and non-violent revolutionary programs. Pundits celebrated with new vigor the ideals of mass democratic participation and the development of a vibrant *civil society*. The combination of an old democratic idea, and these new democratic revolutions, did not recreate the disruptive "mass movements" of the past. They had not produced violent totalitarian regimes that massacred class enemies. Instead they were organic and mass-based, bottom-up democratic political movements that had breached the "iron curtain" and toppled a seemingly impregnable communist "totalitarianism"¹¹¹ in Eastern Europe, and made

¹¹⁰ Jack Snyder, "Containing Post-Soviet Nationalism: International Substitutes for Impotent States," published by The National Council for Soviet and East European Research, July 6, 1992; see also Jack Snyder, "Nationalism and the Crisis of the post-Soviet state," in Michael E. Brown, ed. *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 79-102.

¹¹¹ This popular depiction of events simplifies dramatically, omitting the pivotal role of elite decision making in Moscow and among its Warsaw Pact allies. Most important was the "Gorbachev effect"—Gorbachev's overt signal to Russia's allies that Moscow would no longer intervene in their internal affairs (the so-called "Sinatra doctrine"). Moreover Krishan Kumar writes that "The evidence for direct (indirect is self-evident) Soviet involvement in the deposition of East European leaders is not always clear or complete, but overall appears pretty conclusive," and "Even if the 'Gorbachev factor' is discounted, for purposes of argument, the extent to which the 1989 revolutions remained an affair of competing elites, rather than of mass popular uprisings, is still remarkable." See Krishan Kumar, "The Revolutions of 1989: Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Jun., 1992), pp. 309-56, esp. nt. 50 for case by case analysis. See also Krishan Kumar, 1989:

tremendous strides towards consolidating liberal constitutional democracies elsewhere in the world. Even where neo-Marxist ideas remained salient (as most notably in Poland in 1989), triumphant parties abandoned their potentially radical or neo-Marxist roots, embraced capitalism, and adopted Western parliamentary institutions. The democratic ideals of the French Revolution were alive and well, only informed by two centuries of hindsight.¹¹²

Scholars often situated these events within a broader historical and teleological—i.e. neo-Hegelian—narrative. Seyla Benhabib, for example, described the “demise of authoritarian communism and the worldwide retreat of Marxist theory” as a “post-totalitarian moment.”¹¹³ And no thesis was more emblematic—none better captured the ascendant folk wisdom, the zeitgeist of the immediate post-Soviet decade—than Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis, a landmark of contemporary political theory that generated a maelstrom of critical response upon its publication, and whose thesis the author himself may not have believed.

Fukuyama was prescient. He saw the writing on the wall as early as summer 1989, when it was only apparent that Poland (and not every Soviet satellite) would end communist rule by year’s end:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological

Revolutionary Ideas and Ideals. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, Ch. 4, nt. 98 for several sources that attribute minimal importance to mass involvement in 1989.

¹¹² On the return of French democratic ideals see, Francois Furet, “From 1789 to 1917 & 1989: Looking Back at Revolutionary Traditions,” *Encounter*, September 1990, pp. 3-6.

¹¹³ Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1996, p. xxx-xxxii.

evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. This is not to say that there will no longer be events to fill the pages of *Foreign Affairs*'s yearly summaries of international relations, for the victory of liberalism has occurred primarily in the realm of ideas or consciousness and is as yet incomplete in the real or material world. But there are powerful reasons for believing that it is the ideal that will govern the material world in the long run.¹¹⁴

Fukuyama published this statement in summer 1989, and between then and December 1991 the Soviet Union would dissolve entirely and the anti-communist momentum would carry into Albania and Yugoslavia as well. Communist Asia remained stubborn, but even failed experiments like China's Tiananmen demonstrations seemed further evidence that, by the time of Fukuyama's 1992 sequel,¹¹⁵ the decisive turn towards "the victory of liberalism...in the real or material world" had arrived. The real was *accelerating* towards the rational.

Fukuyama's ambitious thesis caused an immediate scandal,¹¹⁶ although what immediately drew the attention was asinine.¹¹⁷ For "what I suggested had come to

¹¹⁴ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?"

¹¹⁵ The final draft of *The End of History* appears to have been written just prior to the U.S.S.R.'s dissolution, a point also made by Theodore H. Von Laue, "From Fukuyama to Reality: A Critical Essay," in Timothy Burns, ed. *After History?: Francis Fukuyama and His Critics*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994, pp. 23-37, p. 23.

¹¹⁶ See esp. the immediate responses in *The National Interest*, Summer 1989; and Timothy Burns, ed. (1994).

¹¹⁷ "After seeing the gallons of ink that have been spilled over "The End of History?," Fukuyama wrote with annoyance, "I have come to realize that my real accomplishment has been to produce a uniquely universal consensus, not on the current status of liberalism, but on the fact that I was wrong and that history has not in fact ended...it is quite obvious that many commentators have not bothered to read the article itself[.]" Francis Fukuyama, "A Reply to My Critics," *The National Interest*, Fall 1989. Elsewhere Fukuyama writes that, "A colleague of mine who is working for the Agency for International Development in Bangladesh sent me what is probably the ultimate form of this critique: a local Dhaka columnist denounced the idea of the end of history because a Bangladeshi had been bumped off a British Airways flight (this evidently showed that racism still existed in the world)." See

an end was not the occurrence of events, even large and grave events,” said Fukuyama, “but History: that is, history understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process, when taking into account the experience of all peoples in all times.”¹¹⁸ He did not pin the “end of history” to any particular event like the end of the Cold War, but described a more protracted, “evolutionary process” through which “modern liberal democracy” and “technologically driven capitalism” had together come to best their twentieth century political and economic competitors, and explained why this process was “neither random nor unintelligible, even if it did not proceed in a straight line.” Ironically, Fukuyama’s *End of History*—though not *the Last Man*—articulated what he knew the preponderance of his audience thought, including his critics. It was why their best critique required an *ad absurdum* misreading turned straw-man—they *believed* his thesis, even more than he did.

More serious resistance to Fukuyama would emerge, however, from the political left and right. To some this popular narrative of the new global revolution—of the coming together of liberalism and democracy in the project of liberal revolution—was not so much inaccurate as it was a political ruse. Political theorists on the left hammered Fukuyama and the entire liberal narrative on normative and ideological grounds. They agreed with Fukuyama that, in principle, 1989 was a successful, benign *liberal* revolution, and that there were obvious reasons to celebrate the collapse of European communism. But they also argued that

Francis Fukuyama, “Reflections on *The End of History*, Five years Later,” in Timothy Burns, ed. (1994), pp. 239-258, p. 240.

¹¹⁸ Fukuyama, *The End of History*, p. xii.

1989 was a tragic revolution, an aborted *democratic* revolution and liberal coup, in which novel forms of participatory civil society and bottom-up organization—like Poland’s Solidarity or Czechoslovakia’s Civic Forum—which had driven the peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe, were in the post-revolutionary phase peremptorily supplanted, in top-down fashion, by bourgeois liberal institutions and capitalist economic programs.¹¹⁹ In their eyes this new alliance between liberalism and democracy was a sham, and 1989 proved that authentic democracy was in fact in our times *only* fugitive.¹²⁰ While hardly nostalgic for Soviet communism, Jürgen Habermas bemoaned 1989’s “total lack of ideas that are either innovative or oriented towards the future.”¹²¹ And Jeffrey Isaac protested at length that “There is surely a range of possible interpretations of 1989...[but] a powerful consensus has taken shape on behalf of an avowedly liberal interpretation,” one “both politically and morally flawed...because it marginalizes and/or ignores important forms of politics that were practiced by the Central European democratic oppositions...[and] in doing so it prematurely forecloses some very complex questions about the

¹¹⁹ See e.g. Paul Blokker, “Dissidence, Republicanism, and Democratic Change,” *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (May 2011), pp. 219-243 and “Democracy Through the Lens of 1989: Liberal Triumph or Radical Turn?” *International Journal of Political Culture and Society*, Vol. 22 (2009), pp. 273-290. These concerns overlap with reflections on the decline of Eastern European civil society in the aftermath of 1989. See e.g. Gideon Baker, *Civil Society and Democratic Theory: Alternative Voices*. London: Routledge: London, 2002; and Daniel N. Nelson, “Civil Society Endangered,” *Social Research*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer 1996), pp. 345-368. Cf. G.M. Tamas, “A Disquisition on Civil society,” *Social Research*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Summer 1994), pp. 205-222, which argues (p. 215) to the contrary, and pejoratively, that “the central myth of 1989 is civil society.”

¹²⁰ Sheldon S. Wolin. “Fugitive Democracy,” *Constellations*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1994), pp. 11-25.

¹²¹ Jürgen Habermas, “What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left,” *New Left Review*, No. 183 (September/October 1990), p. 5.

meanings and legacies of 1989, thereby precluding certain important avenues of political action.”¹²²

Closer to the center Ralf Dahrendorf seemed more optimistic: “unequivocally,” he said, “socialism is dead.”¹²³ But the liberal narrative was also wrong. The theorist of the moment was *not* Fukuyama (nor his intellectual father Kojève or grandpa Hegel), but Karl Popper. 1989 did not crown the systemic virtues of liberalism or capitalism, but manifest the basic human desire for an “open” rather than “closed society.”¹²⁴ After decades of bipolar stasis, a new disruption to the global political order meant “open spaces for infinite possible futures, some of which compete with each other,” and the newly liberated in Eastern Europe knew better than anyone: “The road to freedom is not a road from one system to another...The battle of systems is an illiberal aberration...[I]f capitalism is a system, then it needs to be fought as hard as communism had to be fought. All systems mean serfdom[.]”¹²⁵

And finally, a much different critique of Fukuyama’s narrative, already discussed at length, came from further to the right. Suppose capitalism and liberal

¹²² Jeffrey Isaac, “The Meanings of 1989,” *Social Research*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer 1996), pp. 291-344, p. 292-3.

¹²³ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*. Transaction Publishers, 2004 [1990], p. 42. For a thorough review of left-leaning malaise and other responses to the Revolutions of 1989 see Krishan Kumar, “The Revolutions of 1989: Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Jun., 1992), pp. 309-56.

¹²⁴ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013 [1945].

¹²⁵ Dahrendorf, *Reflections*, p. 41.

democracy *have* defeated communism—what do “victory” and “defeat” ultimately *mean*? Was it not the same evidence of success—the “stability,” “institutionalization,” so-called “legitimacy” of the Soviet Union—that had previously fooled the entire world?¹²⁶ Why believe so adamantly in liberalism’s success when it might be just as ephemeral? If anything was learned from 1989, was it not the inherent *unpredictability* of human affairs, the intrinsic fragility of even the most stable of institutions and empires?

This critique from the right raised an important question: if there were suddenly such a strong neo-Hegelian faith in liberal democracy and liberal revolution, where did it come from? To leap over the kinds of basic challenges raised by conservative critics—indeed, to turn a miraculous political event into a neo-Hegelian orthodoxy, particularly in the wake of such a horrible century as the twentieth—required more than *just* a miraculous moment. It required the combination of a miracle in the here and now—an *event* to convince the heart—and a compelling empirical pattern in the long run—a *narrative* to convince the head. And 1989 had both.

¹²⁶ Especially notorious in this regard was the intelligence failure of the United States CIA, whose “overriding defining mission,” according to then-Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, was precisely “to chart the course of Soviet affairs.” In a December 21, 1986 editorial for *The New York Times* (“Reagan’s Doctrine and the Iran Issue”) Senator Moynihan had predicted the impending collapse of Soviet communism; and based in part on the CIA’s performance, in 1991 and 1995 he unsuccessfully introduced bills to abolish it.

Book-length studies have tried to explain the failure of Western intelligence to anticipate the Soviet collapse. See e.g. David Arbel and Ran Edelist. *Western Intelligence and the Collapse of the Soviet Union 1980-1990: Ten Years that did not Shake the World*. London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003; but c.f. Bruce D. Berkowitz and Jeffrey T. Richelson, “The CIA Vindicated: the Soviet collapse was Predicted,” *The National Interest* (Fall 1995).

The Revolutions of 1989 crowned a much larger wave of global democratization, what Samuel Huntington called the “third wave” of democratization, that began in Southern Europe in the early 1970s and spread in the 1980s to much of Latin America, parts of East Asia, and finally the Soviet bloc.¹²⁷ The historical trend had been on liberal *democracy’s* side some years prior to 1989. But as Perry Anderson and Timothy Garton Ash observe, it was only 1989 that linked these “scattered episodes” into one coherent movement, a grand narrative of liberal democratic *revolution*.¹²⁸ While 1989 did not “invent” velvet revolution,¹²⁹ it “*established* the model, in the sense that, being such a giant, world-changing event, or set of events, 1989 becomes the historical reference point for this kind of change; and in the sense that there does seem to have been a lot more new-style revolution around since 1989, and less of the old-fashioned kind.”¹³⁰ In tandem this long *pattern* of global democratization, combined with the miraculous *events* of 1989, inspired a new kind of liberal faith and orthodoxy, a new modernization narrative

¹²⁷ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993 [1991]. The definitive analysis of the early phase of democratic transitions is Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

¹²⁸ Perry Anderson, “The Ends of History,” from *A Zone of Engagement*, New York: Verso, 1992, pp. 279-375, p. 351.

¹²⁹ Earlier examples include the “failed emancipation attempts” in Eastern Europe earlier in the century (East Germany 1953, Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, Poland 1970-71 and 1980-81) as well as Chile 1988, the Philippines “people power” revolution of 1983-6, Portugal’s “revolution of the carnations” in 1974-5, and also “the seminal example of Gandhi in India.” Timothy Garton Ash, “Velvet Revolution: The Prospects,” *New York Review of Books*. Vol. 56, No. 13, December 3, 2009.

¹³⁰ Timothy Garton Ash. “Velvet Revolution: The Prospects,” *New York Review of Books*. Vol. 56, No. 13, December 3, 2009.

that contrasted sharply with the incumbent, democracy-wary and revolution-averse narrative propounded with special emphasis in the wake of the radical 1960s.

This combination had a decisive effect on liberal democratic thought and revolutionary ideology in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. It established a new folk paradigm of managed, revolutionary democratic change and in the process helped blur the old distinctions in democratic theory between protracted political *transition* on one hand, and unbridled political *revolution* on the other. And this in turn constituted a radical shift in liberal-democratic thought. Notably, the “third wave” of democratization commenced on the heels of the revolutionary sixties during which this distinction between *transition* and *revolution* had become especially salient. Liberals feared revolutionary change. But the nature of much of the early third wave and its success—being protracted democratic transitions (rather than revolutions) in states throughout Southern Europe, South America, and East Asia; and these in turn being grounded in the gradual expansion of democratic participation in “civil society”—helped to gradually attenuate the pessimistic, anti-democratic narratives inspired by the revolutionary sixties, while at the same time acknowledging the normative concerns of Huntington-style institutionalists, Parsonian structural-functionalists, and even Kirkpatrick-styled conservatives. Slow at first, over two decades a series of successful and relatively non-violent democratic transitions that began in Southern Europe in the early 1970s slowly repaired the fissure between liberalism and democracy, democratic

participation and political order, that had become a staple of twentieth century liberalism, linking these ideas via the concept of *civil society*.¹³¹

By the late 1980's, then, liberalism had become inured to the idea of civil society and *mass based democratic transitions*. But still, a more dramatic step was necessary to convince liberalism to embrace full blown *revolution*. 1989 was that step. In popular perception at least, the Revolutions of 1989 were not merely gradual *transitions*, but full blown, mass-based *revolutions*. 1989, as if revealing a long-hidden truth, showed that not only protracted *democratic transitions*, but *mass-based revolutionary movements* might also found and consolidate new liberal democracies, all without degenerating into totalitarian or class-based violence. History had moved beyond that stage of naïveté. Liberal revolutions in the here and now could render people free and save much time and suffering.

But did it matter that, in places like Poland and Hungary and Czechoslovakia, civil society groups had been organizing and agitating many years *before* the revolutions; and that despite their spontaneous appearances to outside observers, these democratic transitions, and negotiations, had long been prepared by an active and organized civil society? Did it matter that the 1989 revolutions themselves bore many of the characteristics of political transitions, rather than old-style revolutions? Did it matter that the structural weaknesses of the metropole U.S.S.R, which made

¹³¹ The literature is massive. See e.g. Gideon Baker (2002); O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986), "Part 4: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies"; and Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, "Civil Society and Social Theory," *Thesis Eleven*, Vol. 21 (1988), pp. 40-64. Perhaps most thoroughly on the "revival" of civil society discourse in theory and practice in the context of the democratic third wave, see Cohen and Arato's *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994, esp. "Ch. 1: The Contemporary Revival of Civil Society," pp. 3-82, and Part III: "The Reconstruction of Civil Society," pp. 343-604.

the sweeping changes of 1989-1991 possible, had applied similarly to all cases, multiplying one unique revolutionary situation into many? In sum, was this new alliance between liberalism, democracy, and revolution sustainable, or an illusion?

7. HOME TO ROOST: ARAB SPRING, OCCUPY, AND REVOLUTIONARY ACTION

The colossal wave of revolutionary upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East that began in Tunisia in December 2010 and quickly spread to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco, Jordan, Algeria, Oman, and a host of other Arabic speaking countries over the next several months¹³² — the so-called “Arab Spring”—resurrected a host of questions about the nature and prudence of revolution whose salience had diminished considerably since the Revolutions of 1989. And from the beginning of the Arab revolts a preponderance of Western response—in popular, academic, and political circles—reflected the neo-Hegelian revolutionary-democratic narrative inspired by 1989 and bolstered over the next two decades.¹³³

At first this was understandable—for the successful revolts in Tunisia and Egypt that initiated the “Arab Spring,” and the incredible manner in which they succeeded, *did* summon images of the great “liberal revolutions” of the past quarter century. They *were* miraculous, and they *were* inspirational, and they *did* topple

¹³² A useful collection of early reports, analyses, and documents through June 2011, including anticipatory articles from years prior, is Gideon Rose, ed. *The New Arab Revolt: What Happened, What it Means, and What Comes Next.* New York: Council on Foreign Affairs, 2011.

¹³³ Western labeling of Tunisia’s “Jasmine Revolution” was indicative of this connection between the Arab revolutions and the 1989-style model. See Jeremy Singer-Vine, “Garden Party or Uprising?: How’d the Jasmine Revolution get its name? And how about the Rose, Orange, and Tulip Revolutions?” *Slate.com*. January 20, 2011.

long-entrenched dictators. Non-violent tactics, including sustained mass demonstrations (followed by “occupations”) in capital city squares, and union-organized mass strikes (including white collar and professional organizations) that set local economies at a standstill, led to the ouster of Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt—after *decades* of stable authoritarian rule¹³⁴—in just 28 and 18 days, respectively, and with minimal bloodshed.¹³⁵ As revolutionary protests then spread throughout North Africa and the Middle East, comparisons to 1989 naturally emerged, as well as comparisons with the 1848 “Spring of Nations.”¹³⁶ The term “Arab Spring” was normative from the get-go.¹³⁷ It joined the Arab revolts happily

¹³⁴ Prior to 2011 the Arab world constituted the one region in which theories about the natural “weakness” of authoritarian regimes did not hold. As late as January 2010 Larry Diamond bluntly asked, “Why are there no Arab democracies?”, writing that if during the “third wave” “democracy ceased being a mostly Western phenomenon and ‘went global,’” then “The continuing absence of even a single democratic regime in the Arab world is a striking anomaly.” The Middle East was the only region in the world without a “critical mass” of democracies, and the broader Arab world the only “cultural realm” without “significant democratic presence.” Over time one even observed a complaisance within academia to the fact—a movement away from *wondering if* and towards *explaining what*. As Gideon Rose reports, if a question of the “third wave” had been whether democracy or revolution might transform the Arab authoritarian regimes, then “eventually their very obduracy became the story,” and instead “a generation of scholarship emerged to explain the phenomenon of ‘authoritarian persistence’ in the region.” Larry Diamond, “Why Are There No Arab Democracies?” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 21, No. 1, January 2010, pp. 93-104, p. 93; Gideon Rose, “Introduction,” *The New Arab Revolt: What Happened, What it Means, and What Comes Next.* New York: Council on Foreign Affairs, 2011, pp. xii-xvi, p. xii. Cf. F. Gregory Game III, “Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, Issue 4 (July/August 2011), pp. 81-90, esp. the opening section on “The Myth of Authoritarian Stability.”

¹³⁵ “Minimal” is a loose term. The UN reports that the Tunisian Revolution caused 219 deaths, approximately two-thirds from revolutionary clashes, and one-third during prison fires and riots. In Egypt, an Amnesty International report claims that as many as 800 people were killed in sporadic fighting and repression in the 18-days prior to Mubarak’s resignation. This information is reported, respectively, in “Tunisia protests against Ben Ali left 200 dead, says UN,” posted on bbc.com February 1, 2011, and Lateef Mungin, “Amnesty: Egypt far from justice over unrest that killed more than 800,” at CNN.com May 19, 2011.

¹³⁶ Some argue that 1968 was the more relevant “comparative frame.” See Michael D. Kennedy, “Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and Historical Frames: 2011, 1989, 1968,” *Jadaliyya*, Oct. 11, 2011.

with the “1989-style” revolutions of recent memory, and the Arab Spring was widely recognized as “the most important political event since the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe.”¹³⁸ And if constructive debate proliferated regarding the extent to which comparing the two revolutionary waves was useful,¹³⁹ the notion that the Arab Spring continued the non-violent tradition, and progressive historical *movement*, inherited from the Revolutions of 1989 was preeminent. Seyla Benhabib described the Arab revolutionaries as “joining the contemporary world” and praised their non-violent revolutionary movement as a “modern,” or “mass democratic resistance movement.”¹⁴⁰ Or as one reporter in early 2011 caustically put it, in an “optimistic scenario, 1989 and 2011 are two chapters of the same story, which

¹³⁷ Spontaneous remarks can be telling: “Let me go back to the Arab Spring and....*whatever it is now...*” asked Charlie Rose of Henry Kissinger in an August 6, 2012 broadcast. Ironically, some months earlier it was Rose being cautioned by a Saudi diplomat about *his* matter-of-fact use of the term.

¹³⁸ Chrystia Freeland, “Lessons from Central Europe for the Arab Spring,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2011. Former U.S. National Security Advisor Gen. James Jones used the same language in an interview with Charlie Rose televised November 29, 2011 on PBS, and at the 2011 Cohen lecture (November 17) at the University of Maine. Other examples are easily found.

¹³⁹ Compare the tone of Jean-Marie Guéhenno, “The Arab Spring is 2011, Not 1989,” *The New York Times* (reprints), April 21, 2011, and Gareth Jones and Gabriela Baczynska, “Solidarity in the Arab Spring: Leaders from the former Eastern bloc are sharing their experience of revolution with reformers in North Africa,” Reuters Special Report, June 2011. I note in passing the awkwardness of this title – revolutionaries guiding reformers – as indicative of the problems discussed so far in this paper. See also Marc Morjé Howard, “Similarities and Differences between Eastern Europe in 1989 and the Middle East in 2011,” available at <http://themonkeycage.org/blog/2011/05/30/similarities-and-differences-between-eastern-europe-in-1989-and-the-middle-east-in-2011>; cited in another informative article, Lucan Way, “Comparing the Arab Revolts: The Lessons of 1989,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (October 2011), pp. 13-23.

¹⁴⁰ Seyla Benhabib, “The Power and Paradox of Revolutions,” *Reset: Dialogues on Civilization*, October 13, 2011; published at <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000021780>. Cf. Andrew Poe, “Enthusiasm and the Metaphor of Revolution,” *Law, Culture, and the Humanities*, published online March 6, 2013, which criticizes Benhabib’s language of “joining.”

connect in a self-congratulatory way the political appeal of democracy and the transformative power of entrepreneurship and new technologies.”¹⁴¹

Revolutionary gusto reached beyond the Arab world. The Arab Spring revolutions inspired other mass political movements in Europe, America, East Asia, and elsewhere. Frustrated, disaffected Westerners were catalyzed by the Arab protestors’ democratic enthusiasm, non-violent tactics, and (especially young peoples’) innovative use of social networking and communications technologies to mobilize and coordinate. Soon they were emulating their North African and Middle Eastern counterparts in the streets, first in Spain where, in response to 21% unemployment and harsh austerity measures:

On May 15 (2011), tens of thousands marched to Madrid’s Puerta del Sol plaza, along with tens of thousands more in dozens of other cities, united by slogans like ‘We are not goods in the hands of politicians and bankers.’ They were frustrated by unemployment, a lack of opportunity and politics headed nowhere. They called themselves Los Indignados, the Outraged. Spain’s one-day march turned into a months-long self-governing encampment – one of the new defining characteristics of 2011’s brand of communal resistance. Throughout the country, about 6 million out of a population of 46 million participated in Indignados.¹⁴²

Throughout the year demonstrators in Spain, Jerusalem, London, New York and elsewhere patterned themselves conspicuously after the Arab Spring revolutions—most obviously via the tactic of non-violent public encampment (or “occupation”) but also, as for example reported by the BBC from Spain, in “another echo of the

¹⁴¹ Jean-Marie Guéhenno, “The Arab Spring is 2011, Not 1989,” *The New York Times* (reprints), April 21, 2011.

¹⁴² Kurt Anderson, “The Protestor,” *Time Magazine*, December 14, 2011.

Cairo rallies...the Spanish protestors have set up citizens' committees to handle communications, food, cleaning, protest actions and legal matters."¹⁴³

The Arab revolutions, aided by social media and the effective use of technology to create mass mobilization, also introduced a democratic innovation—one might say a democratic radicalization—to a suddenly outmoded “liberal” model of revolution. The liberal model of 1989, which introduced the “round table” to revolutions during negotiations between old regime representatives and the political opposition, was itself predicated on the effective *representation* of civil society opposition groups, as well as effective *leadership* of these groups when difficult decisions were required. But the 2011 revolutionaries, in Egypt, New York, and elsewhere, evoking the post-1989 criticisms of liberal revolution from the left, rejected this vertical model of representation out of hand, as a violation of the participatory spirit of democratic revolution. Thus, months after *Los Indignados*, the ‘Occupy’ movement would extend the pattern of Tahrir Square mimesis spectacularly to embrace the Square’s patented “leaderless” model. As Michael Scherer reports, the movement began when “the editors of the Vancouver-based, anticonsumerist magazine *Adbusters*...called for a Tahrir Square ‘moment’ on Sept. 17, in lower Manhattan, a protest against ‘corporate rule’ announced in a tweet that ended #occupywallstreet.”¹⁴⁴ On its website Occupy Wall Street declared itself a “leaderless resistance movement” actively “using the revolutionary Arab Spring

¹⁴³ “Spanish youth rally in Madrid echoes Egypt protests,” May 18, 2011, www.bbc.co.uk.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Scherer, “Introduction: Taking it to the Streets,” in *What is Occupy?* New York: Time Books, 2011, pp. 5-12, p. 5-6, italics added.

tactic to achieve our ends and encourage the use of nonviolence to maximize the safety of all participants.”

Western emulation of the Arab revolutions was in one sense tactical, in another sense moral; and on the surface this commonality seemed to trump any real differences in political attitudes among them. Thus, as Benhabib related in a February 2011 commentary: “In Madison, Wisconsin, where public sector workers are fighting against losing their collective bargaining rights, their resistance is entering its second week...The photo of a poster being held by an Egyptian demonstrator is making the rounds on the internet. The poster reads: ‘Egypt supports Wisconsin workers: One World, One Pain!’ A Wisconsinite writes, ‘We love you. Thanks for the support and congrats on your victory!’”¹⁴⁵

But obvious differences there were, and foremost among them was that while the Arab Spring protests involved calls for revolution and extraordinary regime change (non-violent or otherwise), the Western *Indignados* or ‘Occupy’ movements (broadly construed) supported what amounted to non-revolutionary social movements that, notwithstanding the occasional dissolution of an unpopular parliament, or early sacking of a Prime Minister, hardly disrupted the normal functioning of politics. Indeed, among the great stories of 2011 was the irony of observing professedly revolutionary and non-revolutionary movements engaged so closely and harmoniously, for as *Time’s* year-end retrospective observed, “The

¹⁴⁵ Seyla Benhabib, “The Arab Spring: Religion, Revolution and the Public Sphere,” published by the Social Science Research Council Public Sphere Forum, February 24, 2011.

stakes are very different in different places...The protestors in the Middle East and North Africa are literally dying to get political systems that roughly resemble the ones that seem intolerably undemocratic to protestors in Madrid, Athens, London, and New York City.”¹⁴⁶ But what *did* link participants closely was, if not their distinct political goals, then a shared frustration with crony capitalism and a bureaucratically ossified, socially unequal form of liberalism, be it of a liberal democratic or authoritarian sort. Protestors also shared a radically democratic spirit and enthusiasm for political participation. Immanuel Wallerstein, somewhere to the left of Benhabib, called this spirit a “1968 current...against vertical decision-making and in favor of horizontal decision making: participatory and therefore popular,” a spirit “deeply influenced by the concept of non-violent resistance, whether in the version of satyagraha developed by Mahatma Gandhi or that pursued by Martin Luther King...[or] Henry David Thoreau.”¹⁴⁷

But an unavoidable question remained—what did it actually *mean* that revolutionary and non-revolutionary movements so closely embraced one another not only in theory, but in practice? For as Kant recognized long ago, a *sympathy* with political ideals—a matter of political or revolutionary *ideology*—and a *judgment* of revolutionary action—a matter of attitudes concerning the pace, direction, and method of political change—are not equivalent.¹⁴⁸ One easily sees how Wisconsin

¹⁴⁶ Kurt Anderson, “The Protestor,” *Time Magazine*, December 14, 2011.

¹⁴⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein, “The contradictions of the Arab Spring: The spirit of 1968 flows through Arab Spring and Occupy movement - as its counter-current,” Nov. 14, 2011. [Ajjazeera.com](http://ajjazeera.com).

workers might sympathize with Egyptian protestors against institutionalized social inequality and liberal or neo-liberal forms of cronyism and corruption. But it is not obvious that what they are *doing* is the same or equally prudent, for in terms of what they are *doing* the critical distinction is not only between “violence” and “non-violence,” but also between *revolution*—which denies the legitimacy of the existing ruling regime and insists that it abdicate—and *civil disobedience*, which simply refuses to obey. A serious engagement of Wisconsin with Egypt, and of Egypt with Wisconsin, would require a more serious consideration of both the dangers of mass-based revolution and, for that matter, the limits of mass-based reform movements.

Once this point is taken seriously, the fallacy undergirding the alliance-in-praxis between the “Occupy” protestors and the “Arab Spring” revolutionaries (most notably in Egypt) becomes clear: in this alliance—and Wallerstein’s mention of Thoreau and King is especially revealing here—acts of “non-violent *revolution*” are treated as morally and politically equivalent to acts of “non-violent *civil disobedience*,” simply by virtue of their common rejection of violence. And yet, if we take the political implications of the word *revolution* seriously, there is all the moral

¹⁴⁸ In the *Contest of the Faculties* Kant wrote that though the French Revolution “may be so filled with misery and atrocities that no right-thinking man would ever decide to make the same experiment again at such a price,” still it “has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators...a *sympathy* which borders almost on enthusiasm,” *enthusiasm* being the emotion “with which men embrace the cause of goodness,” and “which is always directed exclusively towards the *ideal*, particularly towards that which is purely moral (such as the concept of right)[.]” The ideals of liberty, freedom, and equality extolled by the French revolutionaries convinced Kant that “mankind is improving” over the course of history. And yet, this remarkable fact notwithstanding, Kant also understood men to have no moral or political *right to revolution*, because “revolution under an already existing constitution means the destruction of all relationships governed by civil right, and thus of right altogether.” To engage in revolution, argued Kant, is internally contradictory from a republican standpoint. By necessitating a new social contract built entirely from scratch, revolution’s sedition recreates the worst-case state of nature. Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, Hans Reiss, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 181-2 (*Contest of the Faculties*) and p. 162 (*Metaphysics of Morals*).

and ethical difference in the world between them. A non-violent revolutionary—in speech and act (to the extent they are distinguishable)—is *doing* something different with respect to the law and with respect to the problem of political order than is a civil disobedient. And the consequences of the former may be far less predictable, and far more dangerous and destabilizing, than the latter.

In the first months of 2011 this problem—the difference between acts of revolution and acts of civil disobedience—was easy to ignore; and all things considered, Tunisia and Egypt had seemed easy. And indicatively, Benhabib expressed frustration in late February 2011 at liberal prevarication towards the democratic revolt in Egypt:

Why are we not celebrating this? Why are we so incapable of seeing that Al-Qaeda will end up in the dustbin of history?...What about Islamist movements in these countries? It is remarkable how many commentators already pretend to know the outcome of these political processes: they give all credit behind the scenes to the Islamist groups and none to the demonstrators. They are convinced that these revolutions will be hijacked and transformed into theocracies. These are...deeply anti-political speculations of weary elites, who have forgotten the civic republican contentiousness out of which their own democracies once emerged. In Egypt as well as Tunisia, hard negotiations and confrontations will now start among the many groups who participated in the revolution. And the number of young men and women who are still guarding their public spheres in these countries...shows that they are quite aware that respect for the past suffering and resistance of members of the older generation of Muslim Brothers, may 'hijack' their revolution.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Benhabib, "The Arab Spring: Religion, Revolution, and the Public Sphere," op cit. Jonathan Schell makes a similar point, that "nothing so far in the conduct of the Egyptians in the streets compels us to foresee such a turn of events," so "For now we must express solidarity [with the Egyptians]." Jonathan Schell, "The Revolutionary Moment," *The Nation*. February 3, 2011.

But by mid-to-late 2011, as the first wave of relatively peaceful successes in North Africa gave way to brutal repression, threats of total chaos, and/or civil war in places like Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, it was a problem that much of the Arab world, and the West as well, were compelled to face squarely. In Libya by the end of February, for example, a revolutionary organization called the National Transitional Council emerged as an alternate and apparently legitimate representative body of the Libyan people. Soon thereafter, however, political order in Libya progressively degenerated, and the attempt at peaceful revolution devolved into a civil war and humanitarian crisis in which Gaddafi's forces appeared to hold a brutal upper hand prior to NATO intervention.¹⁵⁰ The situation in places like Yemen, Mali, and especially Syria, also deteriorated precipitously.¹⁵¹ Syria's civil war—which began with a series of non-violent but revolutionary actions—has until today been especially brutal, protracted, chaotic, and plagued by sectarian violence, with more than 160,000 deaths¹⁵²; and today radical Islamic factions like ISIS, hostile to both the Assad regime and Western opposition partners, are extending their territorial purchase in Syria and Iraq while exercising a tyranny far more terrifying and

¹⁵⁰ For a useful selection of commentaries on NATO and U.S. intervention in Libya, both pre- and post-intervention, see the collection of thirteen newspaper, journalistic, and *Foreign Affairs* articles in the section "Intervention in Libya" in Gideon Rose, ed. *The New Arab Revolt* (2011), pp. 247-318.

¹⁵¹ Germany abstained from voting on UN Security Council Resolution 1973 authorizing a no-fly zone over Libya, for which the German government was informally accused of not supporting the Arab Spring and "abandoning Western consensus." For a concise but informative discussion of Germany's approach to the issue, see Felix Berenskoetter, "Caught between Kosovo and Iraq: Understanding Germany's Abstention on Libya," *IDEASToday*, Issue 08.11, June 2011 (Published by London School of Economics and Politics), p. 10-12. Accessed at: <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/ideasToday/08/full.pdf>. Incidentally, in December 2011 the German Bundestag set aside 100 billion euros in its 2012-13 budget for 'Arab Spring countries.'

¹⁵² Barbara Surk, "Death Toll in Syria's War Tops 160,000: Activists," Huffington Post (online), May 19, 2014.

murderous than anything witnessed under Assad.¹⁵³ In sum, revolutions of all kinds—be they velvet or violent—remain as unpredictable as ever—as susceptible to stasis and civil war as they are to peaceful and democratic transition. Where does this leave liberal democratic revolutionary thought in the twenty-first century?

On May 19, 2011 President Barack Obama delivered a national speech outlining the American response to the “Arab Spring” in North Africa and the Middle East. The President’s immediate concern was the civil war in Libya,¹⁵⁴ which he situated within a larger historical narrative: “[T]he events of the past six months,” said the President, “show us that strategies of repression and diversion won't work anymore,” that “A new generation has emerged. And their voices tell us that change cannot be denied...[T]hrough the moral force of non-violence, the people of the region have achieved more change in six months than terrorists have accomplished in decades.” The President’s speech marked the second full month of UN sanctioned, NATO sponsored military intervention in Libya, where the “moral force of non-violence” had apparently shown limited effectiveness.

Also notable about this speech was the President’s own adoption of a neo-Hegelian “end of history” narrative to explain and predict the course of events. And as part and parcel of this narrative the President exuded a certain confidence—gave

¹⁵³ Ben Wedeman, “CNN Exclusive: Videos show brutality of radical group ISIS in Syria,” February 17, 2014. Posted at: <http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/17/world/meast/syria-isis-leader-videos/>.

¹⁵⁴ All quotes from the speech from: “Transcript: Obama’s Speech about the Arab World,” accessed at <http://www.npr.org/2011/05/19/136466323/transcript-obamas-speech-about-the-arab-world?ps=rs>.

his unequivocal *assurance*—of liberal democracy’s (and with it liberal revolution’s) fated success in the Arab world: “Of course,” said President Obama, “change of this magnitude does not come easily. In our day and age...people expect the transformation of the region to be resolved in a matter of weeks. But it will be years before this story reaches its end...In some places, change will be swift; in others, gradual. And as we have seen, calls for change may give way to fierce contests for power.” In the meantime American foreign policy “will focus on what kind of political effort is necessary to pressure Qaddafi, while also supporting a transition to the future that the Libyan people deserve – because while our military mission is narrowly focused on saving lives, we continue to pursue the broader goal of a Libya that belongs not to a dictator, but to its people...But it should be clear to those around Qaddafi, and to every Libyan, that *history is not on Qaddafi’s side*. With the time and space that we have provided for the Libyan people, they will be able to determine their own destiny, and this is how it should be.” Similar remarks addressed an escalating human crisis in Syria: “The Syrian people have shown their courage in demanding a transition to democracy. President Assad now has a choice: he can lead that transition, or get out of the way.”

The point of this discussion is not to fault the President for his inability to predict the course of events, nor to cast a Kirkpatrick-like critique of his moral and military support for revolutionary democrats. It is rather to highlight the most decisive weakness not only of the Obama administration’s foreign policy rhetoric in this regard, but indeed of the popular rhetoric of revolution that has accompanied

the rise of liberal revolution as a model of action since 1989—namely, the widespread inability, or perhaps unwillingness, of professedly non-violent actors and velvet revolutionary enthusiasts to embrace, acknowledge, or even recognize the full moral and ethical burden of revolution itself—a burden which includes the potential for violence and chaos (be they unintended or not) that necessarily accompanies actions of a revolutionary character (be they non-violent or not). After all, what does it mean to say that Assad *must go*? If we are serious, it must mean that he *must go*; and if he *must go*, what obligations does *that* entail...if we are serious?

The President is as aware of this as anybody, and avoids the issue like the plague: strangely, in a speech about an event as colossal as the Arab Spring, the word “revolution” appears only twice, and in both instances the President *blames* the onset of revolution on the despotic leaders which the revolutionaries seek to depose.¹⁵⁵ The Arab Spring protestors did not *will* a revolution, says the President, and did not *will* to be revolutionaries; they were *compelled* to do so by political circumstance, compelled to act by their own dictators. Instead the President uses the word “transition” (in the context of “democratic transition” or “transition to democracy”) no less than ten times in the speech, and “reform” thirteen times: “Let me be specific,” says President Obama, “*First, it will be the policy of the United States to promote reform across the region, and to support transitions to democracy.*” And

¹⁵⁵ “The story of this Revolution, and the ones that followed, should not have come as a surprise. The nations of the Middle East and North Africa won their independence long ago, but in too many places their people did not. In too many countries, power has been concentrated in the hands of the few.” Later President Obama says, “Just as democratic revolutions can be triggered by a lack of individual opportunity, successful democratic transitions depend upon an expansion of growth and broad-based prosperity.”

thus “*in the months ahead, America must use all our influence to encourage reform in the region,*” and “*must support positive change in the region...through our efforts to advance economic development for nations that transition to democracy.*”

But to support the Libyan opposition—and the Syrian, the Tunisian, the Egyptian, the Yemeni, and others throughout the region during the so-called Arab Spring—is hardly to support *transition*. It is to support *revolution*, be it “non-violent” revolution or otherwise, if only because *that* is what “the people” themselves demanded. And if the Arab Spring has proven anything, it is that the phenomenon of revolution, stripped bare of the “liberal” adornments that have done as much to obscure as enlighten our understanding of both its positive meaning and dangerous possibilities over the past two decades, remains as unpredictable and uncontrollable as the colossal forces of nature to which prudent scholars from Alexis de Tocqueville to Crane Brinton have compared it.

For his part, the closest President Obama comes to acknowledging his administration’s support of *revolution* is his normative praise of the “*moral force of non-violence.*” The question is then: Why can’t the President openly support the idea of non-violent *revolution*, and openly embrace the positive principles of revolutionary participation? Was it not the *revolutionary* spirit of these events—the *revolutionary spirit* of Tahrir Square—that so inspired the President and the world? It certainly was not the *spirit* of transition! And why does the President recall the “*transitions* in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall,” but not the *revolutions* of 1989 that preceded them? Which was it—the spirit of revolution in

1989, or the spirit of transition—that so elevated souls around the globe and inspired future liberal revolutionaries to action in the several decades since? And why, finally, can't the President simply call a revolutionary act or movement simply what it is? Why is it so hard to acknowledge that some revolutionary acts—even non-violent ones—set off a series of events that lead to wars and brutal civil wars; that revolution remains a potentially tragic event; and that as such, *all potential revolutionaries bear this tragic burden of political judgment and moral responsibility, no matter their original intent?* Is it because, notwithstanding hegemonic liberalism's novel embrace of democracy and revolution after 1989, our democratic culture remains ill-equipped to understand, let alone acknowledge, both the triumph *and* moral tragedy that a genuine championing of freedom entails?

The physiognomy of the twenty-first century may well, like that of the twentieth, be determined by a series of wars and revolutions. And our best hope under these circumstances is that those involved are not only capable of acting, but mature enough to both acknowledge and bear the burden of responsibility for their actions—for acts of revolution, no less than acts of civil disobedience; for acts of violence, no less than acts of non-violence. All of these acts may find plausible justifications at one point or another. But if the twentieth century has taught us anything, it is at minimum to ground our political judgments in something *other* than a deterministic philosophy of history, and to respect the reality of human agency and the burden of its responsibility. In light of this burden it behooves us

also, in Hannah Arendt's simple but profound words, to occasionally stop acting in this world and "think what we are doing."¹⁵⁶

The remainder of this dissertation is an attempt, through an excursion into the political theory of Hannah Arendt and the problem of modern revolution, to do just that, with the hope that if to stop and "think what we are doing" is one legacy of the tragedy of the Arab Spring, then not all will have been in vain.

8. HANNAH ARENDT AND THE STUDY OF REVOLUTION

Since her death in 1975 Hannah Arendt's popularity has soared among political theorists, and with it has the enormous volume of secondary literature on her writings. Her posthumous fame has even spawned controversy and backlash: where Seyla Benhabib celebrated an "Arendt renaissance" some years ago,¹⁵⁷ Walter Laqueur mocked a "Hannah Arendt cult."¹⁵⁸ The interesting problem is *why* Arendt has garnered so much interest, and what her colossal stature suggests about political culture and contemporary political understanding. My contention is that the most prolific areas of recent Arendt scholarship—and indeed, the most consequential engagements with her work over the past 25 years (to the extent that political actors have cited Arendt as inspiration, and her writings have been linked to transformative political events)—are directly attributable to the sudden collapse

¹⁵⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958], p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ See "Introduction: Why Hannah Arendt?" in Benhabib's *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, pp. xxiii-xxxviii.

¹⁵⁸ Walter Laqueur, "The Arendt Cult: Hannah Arendt as Political Commentator," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Oct., 1998), pp. 483-496.

of European communism and the post-1989 liberal-democratic-revolutionary narrative I have described. The supply of Arendtian political analysis—analysis of such varied worldly political phenomena as revolution, civil society, democratic practice, political power, and even constitutional law—has skyrocketed since 1989.¹⁵⁹ And after 1989 scholars and activists alike have appropriated Arendt's thought in high volume, and often quite crassly, to support various social, revolutionary, or democratic causes.

All this happened because 1989 and its sequel vindicated at least two central aspects of Arendt's political thought at a time of otherwise great bewilderment. These were her highly unorthodox and oft-lambasted writings on (a) the nature of *political power*, its foundation in democratic practice, and its opposition to violence; and (b) the meaning of *revolution*, its extrication from radical ideology and friendship with modern democracy, and its non-violent potential to succeed. Arendt's political theory, it seemed, truly anticipated the power of people in the streets in 1989 vis-à-vis their totalitarian rulers, and it foresaw the transformative revolutionary potential of non-violent mass movements. At a moment of great surprise, when the whole world was caught off guard by world-historical events in Eastern Europe and sure of the long-term strength of the Soviet Union, Arendt's strange political theory emerged as the most prescient, the most capable of absorbing the novelty and unpredictability of what had just happened. It was thus

¹⁵⁹ The turn to Arendt's understanding of law has happened only recently, but suggests that scholars are now taking her ideas about political institutions more seriously. See Marco Goldoni and Christopher McCorkindale, ed. *Hannah Arendt and the Law*. Portland: Hart Publishing, 2012.

that Seyla Benhabib wrote the following of Arendt and the “post-totalitarian moment” suddenly christened by 1989:

It is as if the revolutions of 1989 in the heart of Europe have placed [Arendt's] analyses of revolutions, but unfortunately also her diagnosis of the darker sides of totalitarianism, once more on the world historical agenda. When in the joyous last days of 1989 the communist regimes of central and eastern Europe started to topple like a house of cards, and in country after country citizens' initiatives and forums, with varying degrees of success, began to 'do politics,' the categories of Arendt's analyses of revolutions came alive again.¹⁶⁰

And elsewhere Benhabib is more explicit:

[I]n her political and philosophical reflections on Rosa Luxemburg, on the Kronstadt rebellion, and on the Hungarian Revolt in 1956, Arendt noted certain features of 'revolutionary experience' in these societies which, if anything, have been proven completely right by recent developments in Poland, Hungary Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Romania. In these societies people appear to have discovered the 'lost treasure of revolutionary tradition' by creating spontaneously and by 'action in concert,' a power strong enough to topple tyrants like Ceausescu, and lasting enough to create a 'public space' of action and deliberation...¹⁶¹

Arendt's ideas, said Margaret Canovan in 1992, have “taken on a new relevance. One example is her thirty-year-old account of the way in which totalitarian movements construct a fictitious ideological world, which foreshadowed the analysis of communist regimes by dissident intellectuals in the years before the East European revolutions. Another is to be found in those

¹⁶⁰ Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, p. xxxi. Benhabib also roots the “Arendt renaissance” in the post-1989 decline of Marxist theory and the space this created for a new critical theory, and in the rise of identity politics (including the politics of gender, nationalism and identity), and Arendt's problematic relationship to feminist thought.

¹⁶¹ Seyla Benhabib, “Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative,” in Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, eds. *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, pp. 111-137, p. 132, nt. 9.

revolutions themselves, which seemed to offer some confirmation of her claim that power is less a matter of weapons and resources than of people acting in concert.”¹⁶²

Nor has Arendt’s status as *the* revolutionary theorist of our times waned in recent years. Over the last two decades few political theorists have been as frequently or positively associated with the idea of “non-violent revolution”¹⁶³ or “liberal revolution,”¹⁶⁴ and specifically with the “Revolutions of 1989” in Central and Eastern Europe,¹⁶⁵ and other non-violent “color revolutions” of the later 20th and early 21st century,¹⁶⁶ to say nothing of the 2011 Arab Spring,¹⁶⁷ than Hannah Arendt.

¹⁶² Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 1-2.

¹⁶³ Arendt is clearly outshined only by Gandhi, and in the context of 1989 only (perhaps) by a core of prominent dissident Central and Eastern European intellectuals including Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron in Poland, Vaclav Havel in the former Czechoslovakia, and George Konrad in Hungary. Useful comparisons of Arendt’s and Gandhi’s thought include Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Violence, and the Will of the People*. New York: Henry Hold and Company, 2003, pp. 101-231; and Gail M. Presby, “Hannah Arendt on Power, Consent, and Coercion: Some Parallels to Gandhi,” *The Acorn* (Fall-Winter 1992-1993), pp. 24-32.

¹⁶⁴ Introducing his monograph on the rebirth of “liberal revolution,” Bruce Ackerman writes that prior to 1989 “Only Hannah Arendt raised a powerful protest against [the Marxist-Leninist] usurpation” of the concept of revolution in the 20th century. Ackerman, *The Future of Liberal Revolution*, p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ See e.g. Stefan Auer, “Violence and the End of Revolution After 1989,” *Thesis Eleven*, No. 97 (May 2009), pp. 6-25; Stefan Auer, “The Paradoxes of the Revolutions of 1989 in Central Europe,” *Critical Horizons*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2004), pp. 361-390; Dick Howard, “Keeping the Republic: Reading Arendt’s On Revolution after the Fall of the Wall,” *Democratija* 9 (Summer 2007), pp. 122-140; and Timothy Garton Ash, “Velvet Revolution: The Prospects,” *New York Review of Books*. Vol. 56, No. 13, December 3, 2009.

¹⁶⁶ See e.g. Jonathan Schell, “Introduction,” in Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 2006: xi-xxix; and Stefan Auer, “Power and Violence: 1989, Ukraine, and the Idea of Revolution Free of Violence,” *Osteuropa*, Vol. 55, No. 9 (2005): 3-19. The journal *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, published in German by the Hannah Arendt Institute in Dresden, recently devoted an issue (Vol. 5, No. 1, 2008) to “Color Revolutions in Eurasia.”

Jonathan Schell is the most zealous Arendtian in this regard: Introducing a recent edition of Arendt's *On Revolution*, Schell labels virtually every (even remotely) "revolutionary" transition to democracy since the beginning of the democratic "third wave" (beginning with the democratization of Greece, Portugal, and Spain in the mid-1970s and up to the post-Soviet "color revolutions") as an "Arendtian Revolution." At his most grandiloquent, Schell even argues that the aborted Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which Arendt celebrated as a spontaneous outbreak of freedom and democratic power in the face of seemingly impregnable totalitarianism, "suggests a new periodization for the wave of democratic revolutions of the late twentieth century"—we ought to say the "third wave" began in 1956 instead of 1974.¹⁶⁸ Within this broad revolutionary embrace Arendt has also emerged as a preeminent theorist of revolutionary action and extraordinary

¹⁶⁷ See Patchen Markell, "Power, Arrest, Dispersal," *HA: The Journal of the Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities at Bard College*. Volume I (2013), pp. 171-3; Patchen Markell, "The Moment has Passed: Power After Arendt," in *Radical Future Pasts: Untimely Essays in Political Theory*, forthcoming from University of Kentucky Press, 2014; Jonathan Schell, "The Revolutionary Moment," *The Nation*. February 3, 2011; Andrew Arato, "The Return of Revolutions," March 7, 2011, posted at www.deliberatelyconsidered.com; R. L. Soto, "Barack Obama's Arendtian Arab Spring," posted at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/94146549/R-L-Sotos-Obama-s-Arendtian-Arab-Spring>; Hamid Dabashi, "Revolution: The pursuit of public happiness-Can using Hannah Arendt's prism of viewing the American Revolution help us understand the Arab spring?" <http://www.aljazeera.com>, June 18, 2012; Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," accessible at <http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>; and Seyla Benhabib, "The Arab Spring: Religion, Revolution and the Public Sphere," published by the Social Science Research Council Public Sphere Forum, February 24, 2011. HannahArendt.net's 2013 edition (Vol. 7, No. 1) was titled "Revolutionary Spirit" and included several articles on Hannah Arendt and the Arab Spring.

¹⁶⁸ Schell, "Introduction," op. cit. p. 21. See Hannah Arendt, "Totalitarian Imperialism: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Feb., 1958), pp. 5-43. This essay appeared as an Epilogue in the 1958 edition of Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, but was later excised.

political founding,¹⁶⁹ and a prominent voice more generally in democratic theory, including normative discourse on democratic “civil society” and the “people power” of social movements and civil resistance.¹⁷⁰

This embrace of Arendt stands in marked contrast to the pre-1989 reception of her political and revolutionary ideas. Especially prior to 1989, Arendt’s theories of power and revolution were critically panned by historians, sociologists, and political theorists. Much of this criticism continues, of course, but prior to 1989 there was far less by way of response. Arendt’s more descriptively political writings, including *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951] and *On Revolution* [1963], and essays like “On Violence” and particular sections of *The Human Condition* [1958] that dealt with political institutions—were and are roundly criticized for being either too poetic or too philosophical to describe empirical events,¹⁷¹ for lacking

¹⁶⁹ On political founding see Bonnie Honig, “Declarations of Independence: Arendt and Derrida on the Problem of Founding a Republic,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (Mar., 1991), pp. 97-113; Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics and the Extraordinary*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, esp. Ch. 7-9; and Angelica Maria Bernal, *The Concept of Founding*. Doctoral Dissertation, Yale University, 2008, esp. Ch. 3.

¹⁷⁰ See e.g. William Smith, “Reclaiming the Revolutionary Spirit: Arendt on Civil Disobedience,” *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2010), pp. 149-166; and April Carter, “People Power and Protest: The Literature on Civil Resistance in Historical Context,” in Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, eds. *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 25-42, esp. p. 31-32.

¹⁷¹ A year after *On Revolution*’s publication George Lichtheim wrote that Arendt’s comparison of the great American and French Revolutions “shows an inclination to discuss political topics in philosophical terms, and vice versa, until the distinction between metaphysics and politics is lost or dimmed in a twilight zone where it no longer seems to matter whether we are dealing with actual events, contemporary beliefs about these events, or subsequent reflections upon them by thinkers motivated by convictions and interests quite foreign to the participants.” Her analysis proceeds in a “metaphysical heaven” rather than “the profane earth on which ordinary mortals dwell.” A. James Gregor lambastes Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism* on the grounds that she proceeds “without empirical research of any sort—other than a careful reading of history and some ‘representative’

historical rigor and veracity,¹⁷² and for exhibiting a tendency to submerge empirical data and analysis beneath a nebulous deluge of historical speculation and metaphysical abstraction.¹⁷³ Arendt's distinction between *power* and *violence*, said Charles Tilly in 1978, is "a distinction in political philosophy" rather than "a guide to observation of acting people."¹⁷⁴ Her distinction between *liberation* and *revolution* proffers "not a structural but a moral analysis of the relationship between state and society,"¹⁷⁵ one "impossible to use in the analysis of actual revolutions" due to "a certain lack of interest in mere fact" and "preference for metaphysical construct or

literature." Her account provides little more than "a great deal of literary and speculative fill." She does not "pretend to be in a position to predict events," but claims vacuously to help us "understand" them, which amounts to gathering many "simple stupidities." George Lichtheim, "Two Revolutions," in *The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays*, New York: Random House, 1967, pp. 115-122, p. 117-118, first passages also cited in Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics and the Extraordinary*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 188-89; and A. James Gregor, *Interpretations of Fascism*. Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press, 1974, p. 101-2, 104, cited in David Luban, "Explaining Dark Times: Hannah Arendt's Theory of Theory," in Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, eds. *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, pp. 79-109, p. 101.

¹⁷² Focusing on *On Revolution*: Robert Nisbet, in one typical criticism, writes that the book drastically understates class conflict and internal violence in the American Revolution. William Scheuerman calls Arendt's American and French revolutions polarized, inaccurate ideal-types where, quite simply, "the Americans avoid all the miserable mistakes committed by their French brothers and sisters." And John Medearis says that Arendt's normative interest in the "the revolutionary tradition and its lost treasure" leads her to transform the limited political aims of 20th century revolutionary councils into her own broad republican ones. And she characteristically ignores the symbiotic relationship these councils envisioned between "social" and "political" questions. See Robert Nisbet, "Hannah Arendt and the American Revolution," *Social Research* 44:1 (1977: Spring), pp. 63-79; William E. Scheuerman, "Revolutions and Constitutions: Hannah Arendt's Challenge to Carl Schmitt," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 10 (1997), pp. 141-161; and John Medearis, "Lost or Obscured? How V. I. Lenin, Joseph Schumpeter, and Hannah Arendt Misunderstood the Council Movement," *Polity*, Vol. 36, No. 3, April 2004, pp. 447-476.

¹⁷³ Thus it has been argued that Arendt does well "to think" about revolution but "falls short of articulating the event." Dick Howard, "Keeping the Republic: Reading Arendt's *On Revolution* after the Fall of the Wall," *Democratya* 9 (Summer 2007), pp. 122-140, p. 124.

¹⁷⁴ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978, p. 175-176.

¹⁷⁵ Michael S. Kimmel, *Revolution: A Sociological Interpretation*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, p. 8.

poetic feeling over reality.”¹⁷⁶ If “Arendt had the best philosophical training of her time, having studied with Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger,” she “was certainly not trained as a historian.”¹⁷⁷ Even Dagmar Barnouw, elsewhere called a “tenacious and loyal defender of Arendt,”¹⁷⁸ called *On Revolution* a “political fiction about men as political actors engaged in the unconstrained presentation of speech acts.” And “Arendt’s discourse,” Barnouw says, “is not narrative historiography. She is aware—and makes her readers aware—of the fictional dimension of narration and of the model/example of fiction. A model is presented to the reader for consideration, and in this act of presentation the author is present as the one who is interested in this specific model and who shows herself trying to engage the reader’s interest.”¹⁷⁹

Arendt’s brand of political theory, her stylized narratives of extraordinary events like European totalitarianism, or exemplary events like the American,

¹⁷⁶ Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Hannah Arendt on Revolution,” in *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1973, pp. 201-208. Cited in Kalyvas (2008), p. 188-189. For more (and more recent) examples of such criticism and other reactions to Arendt’s writings on revolution, see Kalyvas (2008), pp. 187-193.

¹⁷⁷ Richard H. King, “Hannah Arendt and the Concept of Revolution in the 1960s,” *New Formations: Hannah Arendt ‘After Modernity’* (Special Issue). Vol. 71 (2011), pp. 30-45, p. 35. Lichtheim, op. cit., p. 119-120, for example, writes that *On Revolution* proceeds with “a minimum of historical reference and a maximum of emphasis on the thought process of those concerned (notably the professional ideologists among them).” Noting the lack of attention Arendt pays to the role of Protestantism in shaping the course of the American Revolution, Lichtheim caustically remarks that “a political philosopher who wields so ruthless a scalpel in dissecting the smallest logical flaw in the writings of Rousseau or the speeches of Robespierre might have been expected to cast a little light on so large and important a theme.” On the historical inaccuracies in Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism*, see A. James Gregor op. cit, nt. 11.

¹⁷⁸ Mark Shechner, “Visible Spaces: Hannah Arendt and the German-Jewish Experience by Dagmar Barnouw” (Review Essay). *Modern Philology*. Vol. 90, No. 4 (May 1993), pp. 562-567, p. 567.

¹⁷⁹ Dagmar Barnouw, “Speech Regained: Hannah Arendt and the American Revolution.” *Clio* Vol. 15, No. 2 (1986), pp. 137-152, p. 138, 140.

French, and Hungarian revolutions,¹⁸⁰ all of which relied on highly idiosyncratic choices of evidence, and interpretations of that evidence bound to baffle all but the few proselytes patient enough to absorb her original and eccentric analytical vocabulary, obviously “was not the kind of vocation that American behavioral political science of the 1950s and 1960s would have recognized as its own,”¹⁸¹ and Arendt herself frequently attacked social science methods for reasons ranging from the simplistic use of ideal types and unworldly (i.e. lacking “common sense”) application of formal models, to normative problems stemming from conceptual ossification, moral detachment, and the underlying desire—a career aspiration—of behavioral social scientists for people to actually *behave*.¹⁸² David Luban says

¹⁸⁰ A rich literature surrounds Arendt’s “old fashioned storytelling,” both sympathetic and critical. The nuance of this literature (beyond the present scope of argument) is impressive, parsing the difference in Arendt’s methodology between “fiction” and “storytelling,” “storytelling” and “ideology,” “truth” and “fact,” “storytelling” and “theory,” “remembrance” and “redemption,” and even “storytelling” and “narrative.” See David Luban, “Explaining Dark Times: Hannah Arendt’s Theory of Theory,” in Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, eds. *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, pp. 79-109; George Kateb, “Ideology and Storytelling,” *Social Research*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 321-357; Seyla Benhabib, “Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative,” in Hinchman and Hinchman op. cit., pp. 111-137; Annabel Herzog, “Illuminating inheritance: Benjamin’s influence on Arendt’s personal storytelling,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 26, No. 5, pp. 1-27; Kai Evers, “The Holes of Oblivion: Arendt and Benjamin on Storytelling in the Age of Totalitarian Destruction,” *Telos* 132 (2005), pp. 109-120; Lisa Disch, “More Truth than Fact: Storytelling as Critical Understanding in the Writings of Hannah Arendt,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Nov. 1993), pp. 665-694; Judith Shklar, “Rethinking the Past,” *Social Research*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring 1977), pp. 80-90; Melvyn A. Hill, “The Fictions of Mankind and the Stories of Men,” in Melvyn A. Hill, ed. *Hannah Arendt: Recovery of the Public World*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979, pp. 275-300; Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, “Hannah Arendt’s Storytelling,” *Social Research*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring 1977), pp. 183-190; Lynn R. Wilkinson, “Hannah Arendt on Isak Dinesen: Between Storytelling and Theory,” *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Winter 2004), pp. 77-98.

¹⁸¹ Peter Baehr, “Identifying the Unprecedented: Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Critique of Sociology,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 67, No. 6 (Dec., 2002), pp. 804-831, p. 804.

¹⁸² Arendt compares the vocation of the social scientist who relishes the successful prediction of human behavior (with whatever percentile of certainty gets one published), with that of tyrants: disciplined, perfectly predictable humans, is this not the tyrant’s highest aspiration?

On Arendt’s critique of the social science and its relation to her broader political theory, see Baehr, “Identifying the Unprecedented”; and Philip Walsh, “Hannah Arendt, Sociology and Political

bluntly, that “the gap that separates [Arendt’s] work from what has come to be the practice of political science in America is a function of a deep difference in methods and goals,” and that, “It is difficult even to raise the issue of who is right...the question is whether enough ground is shared between [a social science approach] and Arendt’s to generate an interesting debate.”¹⁸³

This striking contrast, between the mutual acrimony between Arendt and the social sciences in and around her lifetime, and the post-1989 stature of her writings on power, totalitarianism, and revolution—precisely those phenomena which her writings were most accused of misreporting, misrepresenting, and misunderstanding during her lifetime—marks an exciting point of entry into Hannah Arendt’s political works, and through her works, the revolutionary events that are currently shaping the twenty-first century.

This is especially true because the majority of those gravitating towards Arendt after 1989 have not been social scientists proper, but social and political theorists who either (a) steer their research towards Arendt’s noble but hardly “scientific” project of “understanding” the “meaning” of political phenomena, like power and revolution, or (b) approach Arendt’s work with specific and predetermined normative purposes. The latter has been especially salient among scholars approaching Arendt from the left, who appropriate Arendt’s political theory in the context of particular democratic projects. Fewer scholars, however,

Modernity,” *Journal of Classical Sociology*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2008), pp. 344-366. A useful starting point in Arendt’s own work is Hannah Arendt, “Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps,” *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jan. 1950), pp. 49-64.

¹⁸³ Luban, “Explaining Dark Times,” p. 79, 101.

have engaged Arendt on equal terms with social science in a manner that tackles concrete political and institutional problems,¹⁸⁴ and the questions left to be seriously asked of Arendt are myriad: How does Arendt's political theory help us understand how politics *works*, how extraordinary political events happen, and how revolutionary projects succeed or fail?¹⁸⁵ What are the basic patterns, or *mechanisms*, contained in Arendt's political concepts, that lurk behind her description of political institutions and party systems, and behind her narratives of extraordinary political events?¹⁸⁶ In sum, what is Arendt's political theory of democracy and democratic revolution? How do they work and how do they happen?

The remainder of this dissertation tackles these questions directly. It treats Arendt as a serious political theorist in the classical tradition which understands political theory and descriptive political science as not alienated, but mutually engaged; and it proceeds as follows:

¹⁸⁴ Though see Peter Baehr, *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Social Sciences*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010; and Vicky Iakovou, "Totalitarianism as a Non-State: On Hannah Arendt's Debt to Franz Neumann," *European Journal of Political Theory*. Vol. 8, No. 4 (2009), pp. 429-447. Most of this work addresses the mid-twentieth century problem of "mass movements" and the totalitarian state, and traces an older and largely abandoned literature. Andrew Arato's work (cited throughout the dissertation) is an important exception to contemporary trends. Arato's work engages Arendt's writings on revolution, civil society, dictatorship, and political institutions seriously from the standpoint of social and sociological theory, including where Arato is highly critical.

¹⁸⁵ Another application with an unusual amount of detail and precision in its comparison of Arendt's own political "models" with facts and institutions on the ground is Gail M. Presby, "Challenges of Founding a New Government in Iraq," *Constellations*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2005), pp. 521-541.

¹⁸⁶ I use Jon Elster's term deliberately. Elster defines causal mechanisms as "frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns that are triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences," that "allow us to explain, but not to predict." Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 36. The absence of prediction is important here, because Arendt rejects out of hand any deterministic understanding of human behavior. The most fundamental element of the human condition, writes Arendt, is *natality*: "the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting." Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pg. 9.

“Chapter 2: Power and Political Order” examines how Arendt’s novel concepts of *power*, *plurality*, and *action in concert* establish her understanding of the constitutive elements of political order and the preconditions for revolutionary change. Here I place Arendt in brief but meaningful conversation with influential social scientists like Robert Dahl and Talcott Parsons, as well as political philosophers Martin Heidegger and Jürgen Habermas. In the finest detail, I show how Heidegger’s philological influence on Arendt’s concept of *the political* translates into a theory of power that both overlaps and challenges influential sociological analyses of political order of the past half-century.

“Chapter 3: The Problem of Revolutionary Leadership,” continues to challenge recent appropriations of Arendt in the context of 2011’s “Arab Spring” and “Occupy” movements that use her theory to vindicate “leaderless revolution” and the radically democratic “principles of non-representation.” To the contrary, Arendt finds representation absolutely necessary in modern revolutionary contexts to establish political plurality and build political worlds. Unable to speak to plurality, Arendt exposes “horizontalist” approaches to political action as politically impotent. The chapter’s final sections detail Arendt’s sociological account of “revolutionary situations”—which I argue derives largely from Marx, Engels, and Lenin—and her ideal of revolutionary statesmanship when such situations arise. Against normative associations of Arendt with “leaderless” revolutions, I show how Arendt describes a genuine revolutionary situation as requiring responsible leaders—“real revolutionaries” like Lenin—to “pick up power” to consolidate revolutionary

change. I close the chapter with closer examination of Lenin's revolutionary tactics and strategy as described in Arendt's writing, and explain why Arendt greatly appreciates the former, but ultimately rejects the latter.

"Chapter 4: Egypt's Leaderless Revolution" applies the analysis of Arendt's political theory in Chapters 2 and 3 to explain the triumphs and tragedies of the Egyptian revolution that began on January 25, 2011 and whose legacy—democracy or dictatorship—remains an open question as of mid-2014. To date Egypt's revolution has failed to produce a free, legitimate, and inclusive constitution because, first, both its decimated civil society, and its undifferentiated revolutionary movement lacked the *plural* character necessary to facilitate legitimate representation and constitutional agreements that would link politically, through promises, agreements, and forgiveness, the various partisans—secular, liberal, military, even old regime—in its deeply divided society. Second, Egypt's revolution saw no spontaneous development of anything resembling Arendt's revolutionary councils, and there was little attempt to develop representative bodies during the upheaval. Instead, revolutionaries on the ground basked in its *mass movement* character, becoming an undifferentiated mass of *force* that might reliably beget *liberation*, but is hardly suited for a post-liberation process of *constitution*. Third and finally, when revolutionary power was "lying in the streets," ready to be "picked up" by a legitimate representative of the Egyptian revolution's democratic principle, no "real revolutionary" in Egypt, including the most likely candidates Mohamed El Baradei or Wael Ghonim, was willing to grab it—to "assume responsibility for the

revolution” at the moment of crisis, when the “revolutionary situation” left all possibilities open, and when one principled action, by one legitimate actor, might have made all the difference.

Finally, “Chapter 5: Freedom and Utopia: Liberalism, Revolution, and Violence” returns full circle to Chapter 1 to discuss the pathologies of liberalism that the extraordinary events of 2011 revealed. I argue that since the mid-19th century liberal modernity has witnessed several cycles of *prosperity-ennui-crisis-thermidor*, and that the revolutionary events of 2011 fit snugly within this pattern. To explain these cycles I discuss certain moral and existential pathologies of modern liberalism, and how Arendt’s “utopian” vision of “revolutionary councils” responds to them. Arendt called the councils “the only democratic alternative we know to the party system, and the principles on which they are based stand in sharp opposition to the principles of the party system in many respects.”¹⁸⁷ In modern revolutions Arendt saw the councils’ spontaneous development as the hopeful, if to date abortive “germs of a new form of government,”¹⁸⁸ and the councils she proposes are not simply for normative democratic purposes, but to address the problem of ennui and “organic” violence that has become a recurring staple of modern liberal societies.

¹⁸⁷ Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism,” pg. 30.

¹⁸⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 241.

Chapter II:

Power and Political Order

The differences between democracy and dictatorship are less than the differences between those countries whose politics embodies consensus, community, legitimacy, organization, effectiveness, stability, and those countries whose politics is deficient in those qualities. Communist totalitarian states and Western liberal states both belong generally in the category of effective rather than debile political systems.

—Samuel Huntington (1968)¹⁸⁹

In a head-on clash between violence and power, the outcome is hardly in doubt. If Gandhi's enormously powerful and successful strategy of nonviolent resistance had met with a different enemy—Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, even prewar Japan, instead of England—the outcome would not have been decolonization, but massacre and submission.

—Hannah Arendt (1969)¹⁹⁰

So a sword was brought before the king. And the king said, 'Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.' Then the woman whose son was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son, 'Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means slay it.' But the other said, 'it shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it.'

1 Kings 3:24-26

¹⁸⁹ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁹⁰ Hannah Arendt, "On Violence," in *Crises of the Republic*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, pp. 103-198, p. 152 (passage also in the 1969 version).

9. A Sociological Concept

“Power” is widely recognized as the unifying concept of Hannah Arendt’s political thought. Keith Breen calls it “no overstatement to argue that the different currents of [Arendt’s] thought are united by a sustained attempt to distinguish violence from power and to resurrect an alternative concept of ‘the political.’”¹⁹¹ Hauke Brunkhorst calls power “the heart of [Arendt’s] political thought,”¹⁹² and Leo Penta describes “Arendt’s radical notion of power” as “central to her normative reconceptualization of the political by means of the notion of action.”¹⁹³ Margaret Canovan gives “power” pride of place in a discussion of Arendt’s “political concepts” that includes such heavyweights as “freedom,” “consent,” and “authority.”¹⁹⁴ And few secondary pieces have garnered as rich a critical discourse as Jürgen Habermas’s critique of Hannah Arendt’s “communications concept of power.”¹⁹⁵

Power’s ubiquity in Arendtian discourse flows from its normative versatility.

Arendt’s distinction between “power” and “violence” is highly unorthodox, and as

¹⁹¹ Keith Breen, “Violence and Power: A Critique of Hannah Arendt on the ‘political.’” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. Vol. 33, No. 3 (2007), pp. 343-372, p. 344.

¹⁹² Hauke Brunkhorst, “The Productivity of Power: Hannah Arendt’s Renewal of the Classical Concept of Politics,” Trans. Vanessa Lemm. *Revista de Ciencia Política*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2006), pp. 125-136, p. 126.

¹⁹³ Leo J. Penta, “Hannah Arendt: On Power,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Vol. 10, No. 3 (1996), pp. 210-229, p. 210.

¹⁹⁴ Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1995.

¹⁹⁵ Jürgen Habermas, “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power,” *Social Research*, 44:1 (1977: Spring), pp. 3-24. See also David Luban, “On Habermas on Arendt on Power,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. Vol. 6 (1979), pp. 80-95; Margaret Canovan, “A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt,” *Political Theory* Vol. 11, No.1 (February 1983), pp. 105-116; Dana Villa, “Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action,” *Political Theory*. Vol. 20, No. 2, May 1992, pp. 274-308; and Toru Mori, “Plurality in ‘acting in concert,’” *Archiv für Rechtsund Sozialphilosophie*. Vol. 89, No. 4 (2003), pp. 538-550.

we will see, often interpreted as a celebration of mass-based social movements and radically democratic politics. By “power” Arendt evokes what we today fashionably call democratic, even revolutionary “people power,”¹⁹⁶ and approached from this perspective it readily assumes a normative guise. Arendt’s distinction between power and violence, for example—her strange depiction of them as opposites—often becomes a framework for judging political phenomena rather than descriptively examining them: Arendt “[refuses] to draw a sharp distinction between analytical and normative statements,”¹⁹⁷ writes Auer; and her descriptions of events are virtually impossible to measure or operationalize, leading Charles Tilly to call her distinction between *power* and *violence* “a distinction in political philosophy” rather than “a guide to observation of acting people.”¹⁹⁸

Arendt scholars, including those sympathetic with her enterprise, have often accepted and even embraced Tilly’s assessment. Seyla Benhabib, for example, who in one breath extols Arendt as a “thinker of human culture and institutions, political parties and movements,” in another argues that Arendt’s “phenomenological essentialism frequently leads her to conflate conceptual distinctions with social processes, ontological analyses with institutional and historical distinctions.” As a result “a systematic argument connecting political legitimacy, in its democratic or

¹⁹⁶ Rowena B. Azada and Ranilo B. Hermida. “‘People Power’ Revolution: Perspectives from Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas,” *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture*. Vol. 5, No. 1 (2001), pp. 85-149.

¹⁹⁷ Stefen Auer, “The lost treasure of revolution: Hannah Arendt, totalitarianism, and the revolutions in central Europe: 1956, 1968, 1989,” *Eurozine*, 10-25-2006 (English). Originally published in *Osteuropa*, Vol. 56, No. 9 (Sept 2006), pp. 85-97 (German).

¹⁹⁸ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978, p. 175-176.

liberal forms, and the public sphere could not be culled from Arendt's theory. Instead, her thoughts on the public realm often were left mired in a romantic invocation of the power that emerges whenever and wherever the people are united together through mutual promises."¹⁹⁹ Dana Villa in turn contests what he calls the "colonization" of Arendt's political theory by scholars like Habermas, who read Arendt with concrete institutional agendas. Arendt's "primary contribution to political theory," writes Villa, is not "her rescue of the intersubjective essence of political action—action as 'acting together, acting in concert,'" nor a revitalization of a particular form of participatory or deliberative democracy. It is instead "the radical rethinking of the nature of action and the political," a reintroduction to the richness of life derived from acting and performing in public.²⁰⁰ If power contributes to this normative goal, its contribution derives from the exemplary nature of performance itself—the power of great deeds alone to inspire. Arendt is not "the theorist of legitimation"—of political organization and institutions—but "the theorist of political action," of fluid spontaneity and "the shining glory of great deeds."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1996, p. 124 and 202.

²⁰⁰ Dana R. Villa, "Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action," *Political Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (May 1992), pp. 274-308, p. 274-5.

²⁰¹ Villa cited in Toru Mori, "Plurality in 'acting in concert,'" p. 548, and some of the specific language is Mori's. Mori cites Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 1996 p. 52-79; and Dana R. Villa, "Postmodernism and the Public Sphere," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Sep. 1992), pp. 712-721, p. 712. I have trouble tracing the first citation; Mori may be referring to Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, Ch. 3 "Arendt, Nietzsche, and the 'Aestheticization' of Political Action," pp. 80-109.

Not all, however, are satisfied with these purely normative or philosophical readings of Arendt's political theory. At a most general level, for example, Jeffrey Isaac objects that "What is missing from Villa's account, like most accounts of Arendt, is political experience...[W]e can only begin to comprehend what she seeks in the name of politics if we consider what she presented as exemplary forms of political action in the modern world." After all, Arendt's "model of action was...an effort to understand *how* the dreams of modern ideologues had produced nightmares and *how* it might be possible to *reconstitute* human dignity and freedom in a world laid waste by such nightmares."²⁰² Others push further and argue that the concept of power establishes not only Arendt's normative orientation towards political action, but her coherent and systematic understanding of the workings of politics, including the problem of political order and the strength of political institutions. The earliest major critique of Arendt's work from this perspective appeared in Steven Lukes's widely influential *Power: a Radical View*,²⁰³ where Lukes highlighted similarities between Arendt's "non-violent" and Talcott Parson's "functionalist" accounts of power—both being examples of "power to" rather than "power over"—ultimately dismissing both as "out of line with the central meanings

²⁰² Jeffrey Isaac, "Situating Hannah Arendt on Action and Politics," *Political Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (August 1993), pp. 534-540, p. 536, 539, emphasis added.

²⁰³ Steven Lukes, *Power: a Radical View*. London: Macmillan, 1993 [1974], esp. p. 26-33. An expanded edition was published in 2004.

of ‘power’ as they are traditionally understood and with the concerns that have always centrally preoccupied students of power.”²⁰⁴

A few years later, in the 1977 article “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power,” Jürgen Habermas pursued the same line as Lukes, placing Arendt’s writings on “power” in conversation with those of Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, and himself. Scholars like David Luban and Margaret Canovan subsequently challenged Habermas’s account of Arendt’s account of the origins of political institutions and the source of their vitality or weakness, stability or instability.²⁰⁵ More recently Keith Breen has written an insightful critique of Arendt as an institutional theorist,²⁰⁶ and interest in Arendt and law is just beginning to grow.²⁰⁷

With rare exception, however, the substantive conversation between Arendt’s work and sociological theories of power and political order lasted barely a decade and was abandoned several decades ago.²⁰⁸ Two tendencies contributed to this. First, prominent sociologists like Lukes, Tilly, and others found little use for

²⁰⁴ Steven Lukes, *Power*, p. 31.

²⁰⁵ Habermas, “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power,” op. cit.; Luban, “On Habermas on Arendt on Power,” op. cit.; Margaret Canovan, “A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 11, No.1 (February 1983), pp. 105-116,

²⁰⁶ Breen, “Violence and Power,” op. cit.

²⁰⁷ Jeremy Waldron, “Arendt’s constitutional politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*. Ed. Dana Villa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 201-219; Marco Goldoni and Christopher McCorkindale, eds. *Hannah Arendt and the Law*. Portland: Hart Publishing, 2012.

²⁰⁸ Although see Patchen Markell, “The Moment has Passed: Power After Arendt,” in *Radical Future Pasts: Untimely Essays in Political Theory*, forthcoming from University of Kentucky Press, 2014, which briefly considers the “power” debates of the 1960s and 1970s summarized in Lukes’s *Power*.

Arendt's brand of political theory. Arendt and social scientists spoke two different languages and their respective approaches to the study of political phenomena were too far apart. And Arendt's own stiff criticisms of social science methodology did little to bridge the gap. Second, political theorists, much like comparativists and sociologists, came to fully embrace the distinction between the positive, "scientific" enterprise of social scientists, and the "normative," value-laden project of political theorists, accepting what had become a de facto division of labor.²⁰⁹ Thus even those who took Arendt's social or institutional theory seriously, like Margaret Canovan, engaged in conversations increasingly isolated from those of sociologists and political scientists,²¹⁰ including where Arendt's work was used to examine concrete historical events.²¹¹

The remainder of this chapter traces the contours of Arendt's theory of power and political order beside an older discourse between her and sociologists. Building upon contemporary debates in political theory surrounding Arendt's concept of power, the next two sections pursue three tasks: to (a) clarify the meaning of *action in concert* in Arendt's work, as well as highlight the crucial role of

²⁰⁹ A useful analysis of this separation is Ian Shapiro, "Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or What's Wrong with Political Science and What to Do about It," *Political Theory*. Vol. 30, No. 4 (August 2002), pp. 596-619. On pg. 597 Shapiro writes that: "The specialization that has divided political philosophy from the rest of political science had been aided and abetted by the separation of normative from empirical political theory, with political philosophers declaring a monopoly over the former while abandoning the enterprise of 'positive' political theory to other political scientists...A result is that normative theorists spend too much time commenting on one another, as if they were themselves the appropriate objects of study."

²¹⁰ See e.g. Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1995, "Ch. 5: A New Republicanism."

²¹¹ See e.g. Karin Fry, "Hannah Arendt and the War in Iraq," *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Fall 2011), pp. 41-51.

gathering—the combination of separation and togetherness that is the basis of political *plurality*—in facilitating a lasting and legitimate political order; (b) distinguish, more finely than Lukes and Habermas, the dynamic elements of Arendtian *power in action* as distinct from Parsons’s *functionalist* concept that likens a political system to currency; and (c) generally understand the factors that sustain or disrupt political order, including democratic order, in Arendt’s political theory.

This inquiry is important for a wide scope of reasons: scholarly, descriptive, comparative, and even methodological. First, as already suggested, the concept of *power* unifies Arendt’s thought—it forms the most seamless bridge between the more abstract political-philosophical project of *The Human Condition* and the *Between Past and Future* essays, and the more concrete historical and sociological arguments of such works as *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *On Revolution*, and the *Crises of the Republic* essays. A synthetic understanding of Arendt’s work as a whole—her system—requires a firm grasp of power.

Second, Lukes’s and Habermas’s engagement with Arendt was an active one, a live debate upon which matters of great importance once rode. Despite her harsh words, Arendt also understood *herself* to be engaged in these great “power” debates of the 1960s and 1970s. In the second part of her 1969/1972 reflections “On Violence,” for example, Arendt challenges directly Weber’s widely accepted notion of “power” while engaging the likes of Bertrand de Jouvenel, C. Wright Mills, and Alexander Passerin d’Entrèves on power and the state.²¹² The line separating

²¹² Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” in *Crises of the Republic*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, pp. 103-198; see esp. p. 134-41.

political sociology from political theory was not nearly as solid in Arendt's time as it is in ours.

Third, Arendt's "theory" brand of sociology tackles a crucial weakness in the positive social sciences—namely the difficulty of accounting for the *meaning* of actions and the *morale* or *legitimacy* of institutions using the instruments of positive social science. As Daniel Chirot wrote on the heels of the unanticipated Soviet collapse, "[M]any of us who study social change must be reminded that we barely know how to study moral perceptions and legitimacy. We have become so busy studying material changes, which are, after all, more easily measured and perceived, that we do not know where to look to sense the moral pulse of key classes and intellectuals."²¹³ Arendt's theory of power, I argue, is a brave attempt to account for the moral element of positive political action, one which helps us to intuitively distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate, strong and weak political institutions that to the naked eye appear behaviorally the same.²¹⁴

²¹³ Daniel Chirot, "What happened in Eastern Europe in 1989?" *Praxis International*, Vol. 10, No. 3/4 (Oct. 1990 and Jan. 1991), pp. 278-305, p. 297.

²¹⁴ This weakness of positive social science is often apparent in attempts to operationalize ideas like "legitimacy" and "institutionalization." In a representative study, for example, Robert Jackman associates the "political capacity" of states with two key factors: *institutionalization* and *legitimacy*. Jackman measures "institutionalization" most decisively in terms of "organizational age." He in turn measures legitimacy, the consent of the governed, using such proxy variables as state use of physical force, security expenditures, and the size of the armed forces. We thus return problematically to Huntington's assessment of the political sameness of democratic and dictatorial regimes, the U.S. and U.S.S.R., with respect to legitimacy and institutionalization (see this chapter's opening quote)—and with it the shocking surprise of the Soviet collapse—as well as a recognition of the antagonism of power and violence which Arendt so keenly highlighted, only here with "measurable" proxy variables in place of serious ontological analysis that bears directly on the nature of the phenomena themselves. See Robert W. Jackman, *Power Without Force: The Political Capacity of Nation-States*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993; and Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Oct. 1991), pp. 7-48.

Fourth and finally, notwithstanding Arendt's aversion to the methods of contemporary social science, we remain faithful to her spirit by focusing implicitly and throughout on what Jon Elster calls "causal mechanisms,"²¹⁵ or "frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns that are triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences" in her work, which in turn "allow us to explain, but not to predict."²¹⁶ An awareness of recurring causal mechanisms does not secure predictions, but it remains an important source of wisdom and prudence. And the "scientific" goal of Arendt's unorthodox political vocabulary is precisely to reveal the kinds of causal patterns and mechanisms, conceptual and empirical relationships which, in our inherited and ossified political language, might otherwise remained hidden.

10. CONCERT AND THE GATHERING

Let us begin by quoting Hannah Arendt's most cited definitions of *power* and *violence* from her 1958 opus *The Human Condition* and the long-essay "On Violence." Because these passages are front and center of any discussion of Arendtian power, they are worth quoting at length as a point of reference. First, in *The Human Condition* Arendt writes of power:

²¹⁵ My search for mechanisms in Arendt's work adopts the approach of Jon Elster, *Alexis de Tocqueville, the First Social Scientist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

²¹⁶ Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 36. For a very similar approach to reading Tocqueville, Trotsky, Neil Smelser, and Richard Bendix, see Arthur Stinchcombe, *Theoretical Methods in Social History*. New York: Academic Press, 1978.

Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities. [] Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence. The word itself, its Greek equivalent *dynamis*, like the Latin *potentia*...or the German *Macht*...indicates its 'potential' character. Power is always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measureable, and reliable entity like force or strength. While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse...[P]ower is to an astonishing degree independent of material factors, either of numbers or means. A comparatively small but well-organized group of men can rule almost indefinitely over large and populous empires, and it is not infrequent in history that small and poor countries get the better of great and rich nations...Popular revolt against materially strong rulers...may engender an almost irresistible power even if it foregoes the use of violence in the face of materially vastly superior forces. To call this 'passive resistance' is certainly an ironic idea: it is one of the most active and efficient ways of action ever devised, because it cannot be countered by fighting, where there may be defeat or victory, but only by a mass slaughter in which even the victor is defeated, cheated of his prize, since nobody can rule over dead men.²¹⁷

She then says of *violence*:

Under the conditions of human life, the only alternative to power is not strength—which is helpless against power—but force, which indeed one man alone can exert against his fellow men and of which one or a few can possess a monopoly by acquiring the means of violence. But while violence can destroy power, it can never become a substitute for it. From this results the by no means infrequent political combination of force and powerlessness, an array of impotent forces that spend themselves, often spectacularly and vehemently but in utter futility, leaving behind neither monuments nor stories, hardly enough memory to enter into history at all. In historical experience and traditional theory, this combination, even if it is not recognized as such, is known as tyranny, and the time-honored fear of this form of government is not exclusively inspired by its cruelty, which—as the long series of benevolent tyrants and enlightened despots attests—is

²¹⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]. p. 200-201.

not among its inevitable features, but by the impotence and futility to which it condemns its rulers as well as the ruled.²¹⁸

In the essay “On Violence” Arendt calls power and violence “opposites”:

Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is ‘in power’ we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with (*potestas in populo*, without a people or group there is no power), disappears, ‘his power’ also vanishes. [...] Violence...is distinguished by its instrumental character...It is perhaps not superfluous to add that these distinctions, by no means arbitrary, hardly ever correspond to watertight compartments in the real world...Moreover, nothing, as we shall see, is more common than the combination of violence and power, nothing less frequent than to find them in their pure and therefore extreme form [...] To sum up: politically speaking...Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course ends in power’s disappearance...Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it.²¹⁹

And finally of *institutions* Arendt writes the following in *On Violence*:

It is the people’s support that lends power to the institutions of a country, and this support is but the continuation of the consent that brought the laws into existence to begin with...All political institutions are manifestations of power; they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them. This is what Madison meant when he said ‘all governments rest on opinion,’ a word no less true for the various forms of monarchy than for democracies.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 202.

²¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 143, 145-6, 155.

²²⁰ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 140.

For many years academic discourse about Arendt's concept of *power* and its relation to what she calls *action*—the public performance of words and deeds—has centered on two distinct models relating power to action and public space that run parallel in her work: “I argue,” writes Maurizio Passerin D’Entreves in a standard summary, “that insofar as Arendt was unable to integrate the *expressive* and *communicative* models of action, she was bound to present two distinct and opposed conceptions of the public sphere. I also argue that the tension between the two models of action was responsible for Arendt’s vacillation between an *agonal* and a *participatory* conception of citizenship.”²²¹ D’Entreves contrasts these two models (which he elsewhere calls “dramaturgical” and “discursive,” respectively) as follows: “According to the first conception, the public sphere is a dramatic setting for the performance of noble deeds and the utterance of memorable words, that is to say, for the display of the excellence of political actors. According to the second conception, the public sphere is a discursive space that arises whenever people act together in concert, establish relations of equality and solidarity, and engage in collective deliberation through the medium of speech and persuasion.”²²² Seyla Benhabib likewise separates Arendt’s “agonal” and “associative” public space,

²²¹ Maurizio Passerin D’Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*. New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 19, italics added.

²²² Maurizio Passerin D’Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*. New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 18.

arguing that Arendt's "sharp differentiation between these two models needs to be softened."²²³

We will return to Arendt's theory of "public space" and the political "space of appearances" later. At present, however, we focus on the stakes. On one hand, scholars have debated the *normative* implications of these two distinct facets of Arendtian power, each usually favoring one facet over the other. Benhabib, for example, sees Arendt's concept of "associative" power as marking hidden political possibilities for excluded or otherwise marginalized social groups. For if, as Arendt posits, "power" is something that arises *de novo* from the mere act of a group's getting together, then Arendt's theory is an inspiration not only to marginalized groups in a hegemonic-liberal-capitalist-bourgeois-masculine society, but also to average citizens for whom genuine political participation is effectively closed in a modern polity of "party machines" and centralized bureaucracy. In sum, the "associative" model of power reminds us that "there also is a sphere of politics

²²³ Seyla Benhabib, "Feminist theory and Hannah Arendt's concept of public space," *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1993), pp. 97-114, 103. And p. 102: "According to the 'agonistic' view, the public realm represents that space of appearances in which moral and political greatness, heroism, and preeminence are revealed, displayed, shared with others. This is a competitive space, in which one competes for recognition, precedence and acclaim. The agonal space is based on competition rather than collaboration; it individuates those who participate in it and sets them apart from others; it is exclusive in that it presupposes strong criteria of belonging and loyalty from its participants. [] By contrast, according to the 'associational' view such a public space emerges whenever and wherever, in Arendt's words, 'men act together in concert.' On this model, public space is the space 'where freedom can appear...A private dining room in which people gather to hear a *Samizdat* or in which dissidents meet with foreigners can become a public space; just as a field or a forest can also become a public space if they are the object and the location of an 'action in concert,' of a demonstration to stop the construction of a highway or a military air-base, for example." Later Benhabib changed her language to "agonal" vs. "narrative" models of action. See her *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, p. 125 and *passim*.

See also Toru Mori, "Plurality in 'acting in concert,'" *Archiv für Rechtsund Sozialphilosophie*. Vol. 89, No. 4 (2003), pp. 538-550.

which exhausts itself neither in the bureaucratic administration of needs nor in the clientelistic pressing forward of claims within established institutional mechanisms.”²²⁴

Contemporary citizens have been fooled into locating the entirety of “political power” in a modern bureaucratic state from which they are alienated. Against this, Arendt reminds us that power emerges spontaneously among us *whenever* and *wherever* we create political spaces between ourselves and act in concert, including action in concert waged *against* the state. In this vein, and drawing on communist-era civil society theorists in Eastern Europe, Jeffrey Isaac imagines Arendtian power—action in concert and the spontaneous creation of political spaces—as a “parallel polis” that “does not compete for power” or “aim...to replace the powers that be,” but aims “rather under this power—or beside it—to create a structure that respects other laws and in which the voice of the ruling power is heard only as an insignificant echo from a world that is organized in an entirely different way.”²²⁵ In Isaac’s depiction Arendtian associative power has an “insurgent character,” a “rebellious politics of civil society” that “distinguishes it from liberal constitutionalism.”²²⁶ It exists outside of the state, pushing against it.

²²⁴ Benhabib, “Feminist theory and Hannah Arendt’s concept of public space,” p. 111.

²²⁵ Jeffrey Isaac, “Oases in the Desert: Hannah Arendt on Democratic Politics,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Mar., 1994), pp. 156-168, p. 163; quoting Ivan Jirous, in turn quoted in Vaclav Benda, et. al, “Parallel Polis: or, An Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe: An Inquiry,” in *Social Research* 55 (1988), pp. 211-246, 227.

²²⁶ Jeffrey Isaac, “Civil Society and the Spirit of Revolt,” *Dissent* (Summer 1993), pp.356-361, p. 357-8. See also Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Some take their appreciation of *associative* power so far as to crowd out the other half of Arendt's two-pronged scheme. For example, because hegemonic norms can preclude the full involvement of minority or historically marginalized groups in public spaces, Benhabib rejects the "competitive space" model of Arendtian politics, or Arendt's "agonistic model" which is "at odds with the sociological reality of modernity, as well as with modern political struggles for justice."²²⁷ To celebrate the competitive, virtuosity aspect of political action is ultimately to privilege the judgmental standards of socially and culturally privileged groups. But Dana Villa argues the opposite, that the agonistic element of Arendt's political theory—her aesthetic appreciation of public performance and virtuosity—is actually *more* essential than "association" to her normative theory of action and power.²²⁸ In Villa's reading, the public space of appearances rendered available by group association merely sets the stage for *agon*, or open competition, within that space in which men distinguish themselves in words and deeds; and in which their action and performatives are either followed or rejected, remembered or forgotten. That society might reject one's performance or action is a risk one has to take, for to *compel* acceptance would no longer constitute a political process. And "power" in this sense—the sense of the *agon*—derives not from communication and agreement among many, as in the associative model, and cannot derive from the insistence that

²²⁷ Seyla Benhabib, "Feminist theory and Hannah Arendt's concept of public space," p. 110.

²²⁸ Dana Villa. "Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action," *Political Theory*. Vol. 20, No. 2, May 1992, pp. 274-308.

others equally accept or acknowledge the actions of everyone—rather, it springs only from the exemplary words and deeds of the actor himself, and their inherent ability to compel, persuade, or inspire others.²²⁹

These two models—one cooperative and stressing within-group equality, the other competitive and celebrating virtuosity and inequality—can seem naturally hostile and contradictory. And yet they are not: they are bound by an expression which Arendt uses over and over and over again in her discussions of both kinds of power—namely “action in concert”: To wit, while associative power understands citizens to be “acting in concert” as a group with common interests, power in the *agon* also gathers citizens “in concert,” but now around the speech and actions of other citizens whom they collectively watch and judge. And peering *beneath* Arendt’s strange language—back to its foundation in her studies of and with Heidegger—we find that the two are not only not at odds, but mutually constitutive of *the political* itself in strangely revealing ways.

Consider first the Greek word *polis*, which we translate today as *city* and from which our modern concept of *the political* derives.²³⁰ Arendt’s understanding of the

²²⁹ Villa does not quite go so far in connecting performance to power. As an example of what I mean, though, one might think of how Martin Luther King, Jr.’s civil rights movement thrust him into the public space of appearances—and once he was there, his speeches and actions compelled others to join and follow him. King’s power was not the kind that could have *required* acceptance from others—rather, his words and deeds were exemplary, authoritative and inspirational in themselves; and thus, in the competition of the *agon* it was King who won; for it is him, and not his detractors, who is remembered today in a statue in Washington, D.C.

For clarifying this point (and I believe providing the example) I thank Roger Berkowitz.

²³⁰ Cf. Hannah Arendt, “Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940,” Trans. Harry Zohn, in *Men in Dark Times*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968, pp. 153-206, p. 204: “Any period to which its own past has

polis is no doubt inspired by her teacher, Martin Heidegger, who traced its own roots to the more ancient Greek word *polos*: “What is the *polis*?” asked Heidegger in his *Parmenides*, “The word itself puts us on the right course...*Polis* is the *polos*, the pole, the place around which everything appearing to the Greeks as a being turns in a peculiar way. The pole is the place around which all beings turn and precisely in such a way that in the domain of this place beings show their turning and their condition.”²³¹ The imagery of *polos* is intuitive to us—one might think of the *polar* ice caps and their spinning, gravitational pull; or the flag *pole* that displays an emblem for all to see, and around which we gather to see it (the taller the pole, the larger the gathering!). The *pole* in turn reveals the original nature of politics—as a circular activity, an activity around a central gravitational axis; that is, as a gathering of people *around* some-one or some-thing, each looking at the same *thing* while seeing it from a different and unique perspective.²³²

become as questionable as it has to us must eventually come against the phenomenon of language, for in it the past is contained ineradicably, thwarting all attempts to get rid of it once and for all. The Greek *polis* will continue to exist at the bottom of our political existence—that is, at the bottom of the sea—for as long as we use the word ‘politics’...[I]n the final analysis all problems are linguistic problems.”

²³¹ Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*. Trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 89.

²³² This analysis helps us better understand Honig’s criticism of Benhabib for “Privileging the associative model of individuals acting with each other in concert,” which “deprives feminism of a much-needed appreciation of the necessarily agonistic dimension of all action in concert, in which politically engaged individuals act *and* struggle both with *and* against each other.” Bonnie Honig, “Towards an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, Bonnie Honig, ed. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 135-166, p. 156.

If I read Honig correctly, this is to suggest that the two models of “action in concert” dovetail when the competitive political actor—viewed in concert by all, and vying for public approval—speaks or acts with regard to a public issue, or public *thing*, whose concern is also viewed, shared, and judged by all. At this moment both the *actor* and the *public thing* are present simultaneously in the space of appearances.

And here too Arendt was surely influenced by Heidegger, who in his essay “The Thing” wrote, quite tellingly, that “the Old High German word *thing* means a gathering, and specifically a gathering to deliberate on a matter under discussion, a contested matter.”²³³ Moreover says Heidegger, the word “*thing* or *dinc*...is suited as no other word to translate properly the Roman word *res*, that which is pertinent, which has a bearing,” as in *res publica*, which moderns translate as *republic* but means “not the state, but that which, known to everyone, concerns everybody and is therefore deliberated in public.” This in turn is precisely how Arendt understands the “public realm” and the distinctly *political* relations within it. It is first and foremost a *gathering* “in concert” around a *pole*—that is, a public *thing*—in which all are interested, to which all are pulled, and about which all are able to judge.

The following language from *The Human Condition* displays these Heideggerian roots in full. It establishes the link, in Arendt’s concept of *the political*, between the concept of “gathering” and the gravitational *pole* as they prepare “action in concert”:

[T]o live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common as a table is located between

Cf. George Kateb’s plausible characterization of Arendtian politics as a “game.” Kateb calls “games...perhaps the closest analogy to Arendt’s notion of action, we see that a game may be played for its own sake—that is, for the exhilaration of the play itself—though we are ordinarily obliged to try to win and not just feel good playing...We can go on to say that the content of any game is itself.” Just as one plays chess not only to win, but because the beauty of chess is something we both share an interest in, so is our concerted participation in politics—even in opposition—based on a mutual interest in freedom and public action. George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil*. Rowman and Allanheld, 1984, p. 16.

²³³ Quotes in this paragraph from Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Perennial Classics, 2001, pp. 163-80, p. 172-3, 179.

those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.

The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.²³⁴

Here Arendt's famous metaphor of the "table"—a jab at Plato?—stands in for the *pole* of the public realm—the *thing* around which people gather, which Arendt also calls the *inter-est* (or "interest") of those who compose a group: "[Men's] worldly interests constitute, in the word's most literal significance, something which *inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together. Most action and speech is concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people[.]"²³⁵

One of the stunning elements of this description is how literally Arendt can approach the *thingness* of the *pole* or *inter-est* that gathers. No such *inter-est* is more important or encompassing, for example, than the *res publica*; and Arendt at her most demonstrative celebrates the American Constitution as specifically "a written document, an enduring objective thing, which, to be sure, one could approach from many different angles and upon which one could impose many different

²³⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 52-3; Cf. John LeJeune, "Transformation of the Intangible," Hannah Arendt Center blog, June 17, 2013.

²³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 182.

interpretations, which one could change and amend in accordance with circumstances, but which nevertheless was never a subjective state of mind, like the will.”²³⁶ This Constitution which gathers, which relates those who share an interest, but separates them also as rights-bearing individuals—“has remained a tangible worldly entity of greater durability than elections or public-opinion polls.”²³⁷ Indeed, American students each year trek by the thousands to Washington D.C. to actually *see* the Declaration of Independence with their own eyes.

11. POTENTIAL AND PLURALITY

Framing politics in this way may seem an overly theoretical way of approaching political interaction. But it delineates the two problems surrounding *power* which Arendt’s conceptual novelty must tackle if it is to contribute to any practical study of politics. The first problem concerns *associative power* and the basis upon which stable and consensual political decisions, enacted by or on behalf of groups of people “acting in concert,” might ever be reached. More plainly, it is the problem of political *legitimacy*, or the moral foundations of political order and institutional dynamism—the ability for institutions to achieve things positively and withstand negative setbacks. The second problem concerns *gathering* itself as a precondition of politics: in a modern bureaucratic polity, what makes a sustained

²³⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 148; see also *op. cit.* p. 156. Jeremy Waldron makes the same point, citing the same passages, in his “Arendt’s constitutional politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*. Ed. Dana Villa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 201-219, p. 204.

²³⁷ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 148.

gathering around a public thing, a *res publica*, possible? What conditions hinder the gathering of citizens, and with what political consequences?

In this section I approach these questions with a view principally towards the problem of democratic political order, although what we learn by the end, about institutional strength and weakness, will relate to non-democratic systems as well.²³⁸ And as it turns out, the two aspects of Arendtian power just discussed—the *associative* and the *agonistic*—again dovetail with debates that were waged in the social sciences around the time Arendt was writing. Most important was the so-called “power debate” of the 1960s, which is summarized concisely in Steven Lukes’s landmark study *Power: A Radical View*.²³⁹ This extended debate, which involved scholars like Robert Dahl, Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, Talcott Parsons and others, touched “a number of issues—methodological, theoretical and political,” where “Among the methodological issues are the limits of behaviorism, the role of values in explanation, and methodological individualism,” and “Among the theoretical issues are questions about the limits or bias of pluralism, about false consciousness and about real interests.”²⁴⁰ The political stakes centered on what political scientists, following Robert Dahl,²⁴¹ called democratic *pluralism*, and

²³⁸ There is a temptation to veer into the origins and preconditions of totalitarianism, but this road has been traveled many times, and is at least slightly orthogonal to my interests here.

²³⁹ Steven Lukes, *Power: a Radical View*. London: Macmillan, 1993 [1974].

²⁴⁰ Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, p. 10.

²⁴¹ Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?: Democracy and Power in an American City*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961; Robert A. Dahl, “The Concept of Power,” *Behavioral Science*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (July 1957), pp. 201-15.

whether genuine pluralism—generally understood as the effective influence of a diverse array of political groups on public policy—is measurable in behavioral terms.

Dahl thought so, and in *Who Governs?* his method of measuring power was to:

...determine for each [public policy] decision which participants had initiated alternatives that were finally adopted, had vetoed alternatives initiated by others, or had proposed alternatives that were turned down. These actions were then tabulated as individual 'successes' or 'defeats.' The participants with the greatest proportion of successes out of the total number of successes were then considered to be the most influential.²⁴²

The culmination of Dahl's school of thought—measuring group power in terms of outcomes and influence—was C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite*, which located political power solely in the upper echelons of military and political society, and entirely outside the hands of the common citizen. Lukes objected to Dahl's behaviorist method on the grounds that its narrow focus on policy outcomes ignored not only the agenda-setting powers that determine which decisions are contestable to begin with, but more importantly, it ignored how ideology and normative social systems shape individual desires even behind actors' backs: "The radical," writes Lukes, "maintains that men's wants may themselves be a product of a system which works against their interests, and, in such cases, relates the latter to what they would want and prefer, were they able to make the choice."²⁴³

²⁴² Robert Dahl, *Who Governs?*, p. 336; cited in Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, p. 12.

²⁴³ Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, p. 34.

Lukes, to his credit, gives Hannah Arendt's concept of power a serious hearing in Chapter 5 of *Power* ("The Underlying Concept of Power"), but ultimately dismisses her analysis as "out of line with the central meanings of 'power' as traditionally understood and with the concerns that have always centrally preoccupied students of power." In the simplest terms, Arendt focuses on "power to,' ignoring 'power over.' Thus power indicates a 'capacity,' a 'facility,' an 'ability,' not a relationship. Accordingly, the conflictual aspect of power—the fact that it is exercised *over* people—disappears altogether from view."²⁴⁴

Two responses to Lukes are worth pursuing: First, from an *associative* standpoint Arendtian power is indeed a kind of "power to" and a "capacity"; but it is hardly bereft of political relationships because it *depends* on them; and rather than ignoring the phenomenon of "power over," it directly challenges a narrow concept of power that reduces power to the coercive capacity of the modern state, and in so doing overestimates the state's capacity and misunderstands its nature. Arendtian power *presupposes* a certain kind of political relationship among men from which the power among them derives—namely a relationship of peer *equality* and common *interest*—that is stabilized by agreements. These agreements in turn, and the action in concert they facilitate, establish clearly what it is that modern states can and cannot monopolize—while they may be able to monopolize certain capacities of violence, as Weber pointed out, states *cannot* monopolize power itself, including power directed by action in concert against the state, so long as men in

²⁴⁴ Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, p. 31.

society are able to join together and communicate. The only way for states to monopolize power is to destroy all action in concert through violence and terror.

Second, Arendt's power does, as Lukes says, jettison the traditional idea of power as something exercised *over* people (what she calls *rule*), but not to the exclusion of political conflict, and not at all to bypass serious analysis of political order and the state: To the contrary, Arendt's point is to show—through a conflictual model that includes everything from competition in the *agon* to the tensions promoted by constitutional separation of powers—how political relationships are reinforced and political power maintained through sustained political contest; how political conflict (among different groups and representatives with their own respective *interest* and “power to”) and political order can be mutually reinforcing; how the “power to” injected into the state by political participation and through agonistic competition enhances political stability and state capacity. Agonistic competition structured around a public thing, always holding some *thing* in common—such as a principle, constitution, or goal—is a gathering, an action in concert, and is the key to a free, stable, and powerful state.

At the level of a political system, the idea of “power to” represents the capacity of that system to command and inspire actions and sacrifices from its citizens in a reliable way that suggests that such decisions are legitimate with the population. Citizens pay taxes and mobilize for war, for example, without serious need for coercion when they recognize these demands to be legitimate. The more legitimacy a system possesses, then, the more dynamic action it can request and

receive from its citizens. By this understanding “power” is not a “zero-sum” game in politics—not simply a division of finite spoils, or a winner-take-all struggle over who will “rule”—but rather something that is “produced” or “available” in more or less quantity, a capacity that legitimate states have. For Talcott Parsons the effective analogy to a social system’s power is an economic system’s wealth:

There is obviously a distributive aspect of wealth and it is in a sense true that the wealth of one person or group by definition cannot also be possessed by another group. Thus the *distribution* of wealth is, in the nature of the case, a focus of conflicts of interest in society. But what of the positive functions of wealth and the conditions of its production? It has become fully established that the wealth available for distribution can only come about through the processes of production, and that these processes require the ‘co-operation’ or integration of a variety of different agencies...[E]ven apart from the question of what share each gets, the fact that there should be wealth to divide, and how much, cannot be taken for granted as a given...Very similar things can be said about power in a political sense.²⁴⁵

In Parsons’s scheme “power” and “legitimacy” are used more or less interchangeably. Elsewhere he compares power to “credit”—political systems possess the capacity for “power-enhancement as strictly parallel to economic investment,” as when leaders make novel, persuasive, sometimes even extraordinary appeals to the public which, if plausible in the short run, generate (or rely on) short term “credit” and the capacity to act, but also require that the public “cash in” within reasonable time to maintain this credibility and legitimacy. That is to say, if “power-credit has been extended too far, without the necessary

²⁴⁵ Talcott Parsons, “The Distribution of Power in American Society,” *World Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Oct, 1957), pp. 123-143, p. 139-40.

organizational basis for fulfillment of expectations having been laid," this will result in "less than a full level of performance."²⁴⁶

Both Lukes and Jürgen Habermas draw useful parallels between Parsons' account of "power to" and its dynamic non-zero sum character. Indeed, what it most characteristic about Arendtian power, and most inspiring to many, is its ever present potential for spontaneous generation among any group of people who act in concert and establish a political space between them. In this vein Habermas draws an implicit analogy between Parsons' analogies of "wealth" or "credit" and the power produced through communication—collective decisions reached in concert through rational speech. Habermas says that he "learned from H. Arendt how to approach a theory of communicative action,"²⁴⁷ for "The fundamental phenomenon of power [for Arendt] is...the formation of a *common* will in a communication directed to reaching agreement." Power is generated by "unifying speech" and is "communicatively produced." Through speech people come to realize "common convictions," the power of which "originates in the fact that those involved are oriented to reaching agreement and not primarily to their respective individual success. It is based on the fact that they do not use language 'perlocutionarily,' merely to instigate other subjects to a desired behavior, but 'illocutionary,' that is, for the noncoercive establishment of intersubjective relations." In other words, for

²⁴⁶ Talcott Parsons, "On the Concept of Power," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 107, No. 3 (June 1963), pp. 232-262, p. 255-6.

²⁴⁷ Jürgen Habermas, "On the German-Jewish Heritage," *Telos* 44 (Summer 1980), p. 128; cited in Margaret Canovan, "A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt," *Political Theory* Vol. 11, No.1 (February 1983), pp. pp. 105-116, p. 107.

Habermas Arendtian power manifests in the “strength of a consensus” cemented by the “rational validity that is immanent in speech,” brought about by “unconstrained communication.”²⁴⁸ In other words, honesty and rational speech generate new power, new transformative potential, and enhanced political capacity.

Margaret Canovan rejects the tenor of Habermas’s reading. She says Habermas “[reads] his own ideas back into [Arendt’s] books, in the process missing or distorting much of what she wanted to say,”²⁴⁹ which is most apparent in his suggestion that Arendt, in the end, regrettably abandons “her own concept of praxis, which is grounded in the rationality of practical judgment,” in favor of “the contract theory of natural law.”²⁵⁰ For Habermas, Arendt’s normative turn to the salience of “opinion” in the political realm, rather than rational or Platonic “Truth” (For if political questions are a matter of knowledge, why have politics at all, rather than experts?²⁵¹), abandoned her core insight that rational knowledge, acquired through communication, generates power.

But Canovan argues that Arendt made this move to *promises* and *covenant*—which did not, as Habermas assumes, have anything to do with natural law—quite deliberately. Arendt sees men in the world “certainly acting together, but not out of

²⁴⁸ Jürgen Habermas, “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power,” *Social Research*, 44:1 (1977: Spring), pp. 3-24, p. 4-6.

²⁴⁹ Margaret Canovan, “A Case of Distorted Communication,” p. 107.

²⁵⁰ Habermas, “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power,” p. 24.

²⁵¹ See esp. Hannah Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics,” *Social Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 73-103; and Margaret Canovan, “Socrates of Heidegger? Hannah Arendt’s Reflections on Philosophy and Politics,” *Social Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 135-165.

anything as stable as a common will based on rational consensus.” Like Villa, Canovan believes that “Because Habermas is himself preoccupied with *discussion*, he misses Arendt’s concern with *action*.”²⁵² What men share when they act in concert “is not convictions that are identical inside all their individual minds, but a common world of institutions that is outside them and that all support by their actions. This is why Arendt used what Habermas calls the ‘antiquated’ notion of ‘contracts,’ or mutual agreement, to support political institutions.”²⁵³ “Action in concert” represents a common project, a common world, a *res publica*, a thing around which people gather, that pulls them together gravitationally even while they remain separate and contentious. In one sense, at least, this helps us understand the difference in character between the fluid masses of the French Revolution, unable to establish *anything* durable with the force they generated, in contrast with the American revolutionaries, who through the simple mechanism of promising, as for example in the Declaration of Independence, immediately established a common world, a *res publica* in utero between them:

Even before the Revolution, while they were still British subjects, the Americans had been ‘organized in self-governing bodies.’ And since they were already accustomed to moving freely within that shared political world, it was easier for them to join together to build a new federated world of the republic, while at the same time remaining plural and having the scope for debates between different opinions. The outcome was a constitution that was, in Arendt’s words, a ‘tangible worldly reality,’ an ‘objective thing’ of exceptional durability. [] In France, by contrast, there was no organized or constituted People. Once the monarchy was displaced, there was no shared

²⁵² Margaret Canovan, “A Case of Distorted Communication,” p. 109.

²⁵³ Margaret Canovan, “A Case of Distorted Communication,” p. 110, 112.

political world already there. Early attempts to build one were derailed by the presence in the streets of a *non-People*—ironically known as *le people*—the starving Parisian multitude.²⁵⁴

At least two conclusions follow. First, whereas Parsons's functionalist account of political legitimacy—while quite illuminating of certain political mechanisms of power generation and loss—leaves us unable to judge political power based on any evidence other than positive outcomes, i.e. after the fact, Arendt's positive "power to" offers a structural-institutional basis for hypothesizing the actual (or at least relative) political power of any political system at any point in time by pointing to its source. Her hypothesis is that a political system in which citizens do each of the following—(a) *act* in public (*Action* here corresponds to *leadership credit* in Parsons's scheme—it is what potentially moves others to join or follow something new. *Action inputs* energy and capacity into the political system.); (b) form distinct and *plural* groups of association with representable *interests* and *representatives*; and (c) through these groups (and via their representatives) both *compete with one another* and *make and keep promises with one another*—is bound to be more powerful, dynamic, and stable than one which lacks these things. Conversely, the negative lesson—which determines when political systems are weak—applies not only to (1) authoritarian regimes which limit the political activity of their citizens in total; but also, and perhaps surprisingly, to (2) liberal bureaucratic regimes which limit public participation to voting once every few years, and centralized states that lack meaningful social and political differentiation

²⁵⁴ Margaret Canovan, "The People, the Masses, and the Mobilization of Power: The Paradoxes of Hannah Arendt's 'Populism,'" *Social Research*, vol. 69, No. 2 (summer 2002), pp. 403-422, p. 411-2.

(i.e. *plural* interaction) beyond an isolated long-distance relation to “the state”; as well as (3) dynamic popular movements which display the force potential to destroy a world, but no world building capacity in themselves.²⁵⁵ In sum, one can assess the “power” of any political or constitutional regime—its *political* capacity and ability to build and stabilize a political world—by looking for four things preferably in combination: *action, plurality, contestation, and promises.*

The second conclusion worth stressing is, as Arendt opens *The Human Condition*, *plurality's* pivotal status as “*the condition*—not only the *condition sine qua non*, but the *condition per quam*—of all political life.” The *plurality* of individuals—the gathering of separate but connected people (initially one might say of *individual bodies*) around a gravitational *pole*, a public *thing* or shared *interest*—is the necessary condition for any genuine form of public *action*; for there is no “public” without it. At the same time, and more broadly speaking now, the *plurality* of *groups*, now of *constituted bodies*, is in turn the *sine qua non*, even the *condition per quam*(!) of any stable political world beyond the public space between present individuals—like a city, state, or republic.

Corresponding to these *individual* and *group* senses of *plurality*, Arendt offers two very different opposites of it: First, under tyranny *plurality* vanishes among individuals given the simple absence of human beings from togetherness and public visibility. Under tyranny, Arendt reminds us, human activity is limited to the

²⁵⁵ Setting the problem of totalitarian movements aside, Arendt’s three paradigmatic examples of each case are the Hungarian communist regime in 1956, the French Gaullist regime in 1968, and the French Revolutionary movement of 1789.

isolation of privacy. But second, and in a much different context, the opposite of *plurality* is what Arendt calls *movement*—which occurs when the masses do enter the streets and demand to be seen, and yet remain *formless*, without *bounds*, without *distinction*. Movements characteristically eschew the strictures of commitment, promises, and limitations. In lieu of “tangible advantages” and “immediate interest” that might compromise its *movement* character and plant it in place, *movements* respond to abstract “ideology” and amorphous “moods.”²⁵⁶ Movements generate incredible force—as the French Revolution and Nazi totalitarianism demonstrate. But as the same examples demonstrate, *movement* cannot and will not build a world. The formless masses flow like a blob—lacking the *space* even between *individuals*, let alone *groups*, that would make promising, inter-est and world-building possible.

On the surface, of course, revolutionary political *movements* often look like *power*—one might even call them *people power*, as we often do. But “people power” absent genuine *plurality* is not power, but force. “This feeling of power that arises from acting together is absolutely not wrong in itself,” said Arendt in 1964, “it’s a general human feeling. But it’s not good, either. It’s simply neutral. It’s something that’s simply a phenomenon, a general human phenomenon that needs to be described as such.”²⁵⁷ But power without limits or opposition threatens to decay into mere force. And force without plurality can topple leaders and destroy cities, but it is helpless to build a common world or a polity of enduring freedom. It fails to

²⁵⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, esp. “Ch. 8: Continental Imperialism: The Pan Movements,” pp. 222-266, quotes from p. 225.

²⁵⁷ Hannah Arendt, “Eichmann was Outrageously Stupid,” in *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*. Brooklyn: Melville House, 2013, pp. 39-65, p. 43-44.

realize what Arendt first learned from Montesquieu, and later from John Adams—that to build a political world, “Power must be opposed to power, force to force, strength to strength, interest to interest, as well as reason to reason, eloquence to eloquence, and passion to passion.”²⁵⁸

And here, in this idea of “power opposed to power,” we return finally to the other face of Arendt’s theory of power, that of competition and *agonism*, where Arendt’s thesis is not dissimilar from that of Machiavelli’s account of constructive class conflict—power opposed to power—in stabilizing the Roman Republic in Book IV of the *Discourses on Livy*:

I say that to me it appears that those who damn the tumults between the nobles and the plebs blame those things that were the first cause of keeping Rome free...They do not consider that in every republic are two diverse humors, that of the people and that of the great, and that all the laws that are made in favor of freedom arise from their disunion...[T]he tumults in Rome rarely engendered exile and very rarely blood...If anyone said the modes were extraordinary and almost wild, to see the people together crying out against the Senate, the Senate against the people, running tumultuously through the streets, closing shops, the whole plebs leaving Rome—all of which things frighten whoever does no other than read of them—I say that every city ought to have its modes with which the people can vent its ambition, and especially those cities that wish to avail themselves of the people in important things.²⁵⁹

The Roman Republic’s secret was that precisely in acting in competition with one another the different branches of Rome’s ancient political system—and via this the different classes of Roman society—were acting in the plural, acting in concert;

²⁵⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 145-6.

²⁵⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 16-17.

because in defending their own political rights they incidentally defended that one *inter est* which they all had in common, which had gathered them all together in the first place—namely, the Roman Constitution, the *public thing*, the *res publica*.

Chapter III:

Hannah Arendt's Revolutionary Leadership

A dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."

Luke 22:24-27

[A]n ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility are not absolute antitheses but are mutually complementary, and only when taken together do they constitute the authentic human being who *is capable* of having a 'vocation for politics.'

--Max Weber²⁶⁰

12. THE YEAR OF THE PROTESTOR²⁶¹

Rather than choose a particular person of the year, *Time Magazine* called 2011 the "Year of the Protestor."²⁶² The choice was both obvious and revealing. Beginning in Tunisia in December 2010, and fueled by widespread economic frustration and political disaffection felt throughout the authoritarian states of

²⁶⁰ Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *The Vocation Lectures*, Tracy Strong and David Owen, ed. Indianapolis, Hackett, 2004, pp. 32-94, p. 92.

²⁶¹ Large parts of this chapter are previously published in John LeJeune, "Hannah Arendt's Revolutionary Leadership," *HannahArendt.net*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2013), pp. 1-25.

²⁶² Kurt Anderson, "The Protestor," *Time Magazine*, December 14, 2011.

North Africa and the Middle East, by the end of 2011 a colossal wave of revolutionary protests had shaken, in one form or another, virtually every state in the Arab world. And by summer 2011 mass-based resistance movements—typically more radically democratic than revolutionary (traditionally understood), but born of similar socioeconomic frustrations and democratic aspirations—broke out in cities throughout the liberal-industrialized West. From the occupiers of Egypt’s Tahrir Square, to *Los Indignados* in Madrid, to public sector workers in Madison and the global *Occupy* movement in North America, Europe, Asia and elsewhere, 2011 saw a “global spirit of protest” not witnessed since the spirit of 1968.²⁶³

Although the Arab Spring began in Tunisia, Egypt’s Tahrir Square came to symbolize both the spirit and tactics of the revolutionary moment.²⁶⁴ And Tahrir Square’s symbolic importance helped forge an unlikely alliance between the Arab revolutions and the Western democratic protests.²⁶⁵ As *Time* reported, “The stakes

²⁶³ Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Contradictions of the Arab Spring,” posted at www.aljazeera.com, November 14, 2011.

²⁶⁴ On tactics and strategy see Gene Sharp’s *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2012). The book is said to have been consulted by Egyptian rebels as early as 2005, and Sharp has been touted as “the man now credited with the strategy behind the toppling of the Egyptian government.” Quote from “Gene Sharp: Author of the nonviolent revolution rulebook,” by Ruairidh Arrow, director of the documentary film *Gene Sharp: How to Start a Revolution*. On the 2011 tactic of “bodies in alliance” in a struggle to constitute political space, see Judith Butler, “Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street,” accessible at <http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>. For an alternative to understanding the 2011 protests as a series of *moments*, but rather as potential *beginnings* (or continuations) of something new and *enduring*, see Patchen Markell, “The Moment has Passed: Power After Arendt,” in *Radical Future Pasts: Untimely Essays in Political Theory*, forthcoming from University of Kentucky Press, 2014.

²⁶⁵ Michael Scherer writes that *Occupy* began when “the editors of the Vancouver-based, anticonsumerist magazine *Adbusters*...called for a Tahrir Square ‘moment’ on Sept. 17, in lower Manhattan[.]” On its website *Occupy Wall Street* declared itself “using the revolutionary Arab Spring tactic to achieve our ends and encourage the use of nonviolence to maximize the safety of all participants.” Some months earlier Spain’s *Los Indignados* had already adopted these tactics, where

are very different in different places...The protestors in the Middle East and North Africa are literally dying to get political systems that roughly resemble the ones that seem intolerably undemocratic to protestors in Madrid, Athens, London, and New York City.”²⁶⁶ But connecting these movements was a shared frustration with normal politics that—whether in liberal capitalist or authoritarian contexts—reeked of cronyism, corruption, and gross socio-political inequality.²⁶⁷ Accordingly, on the ground revolutionary sloganeering often resembled that of the 1960s New Left, as protestors challenged existing authority structures using democratic tactics bent specifically “against vertical decision-making and in favor of horizontal decision making: participatory and therefore popular.”²⁶⁸

the BBC reports that in “another echo of the Cairo rallies...the Spanish protestors have set up citizens’ committees to handle communications, food, cleaning, protest actions and legal matters.”

In *spirit* too, sympathy was palpable, as indicated in a famous February 2011 photo of an Egyptian poster reading “Egypt supports Wisconsin workers: One World, One Pain!” Wisconsin workers responded, with one poster reading “Walk like an Egyptian!!!” See Michael Scherer, “Introduction: Taking it to the Streets,” in *What is Occupy?* New York: Time Books, 2011, pp. 5-12, p. 5-6; “Spanish youth rally in Madrid echoes Egypt protests,” May 18, 2011, www.bbc.co.uk; and Seyla Benhabib, “The Arab Spring: Religion, Revolution and the Public Sphere,” published by the Social Science Research Council Public Sphere Forum, February 24, 2011.

²⁶⁶ Kurt Anderson, “The Protestor.”

²⁶⁷ Hardt and Negri link the 2011 protests in a “common global struggle.” See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration*. Hardt and Negri, 2012, e.g. pg. 4: “Each of these struggles is singular and oriented toward specific local conditions. The first thing to notice, though, is that they did, in fact, speak to one another. The Egyptians, of course, clearly moved down paths traveled by the Tunisians and adopted their slogans, but the occupiers of Puerta del Sol also thought of their struggle as carrying on the experiences of those in Tahrir. In turn, the eyes of those in Athens and Tel Aviv were focused on the experiences of Madrid and Cairo. The Wall Street occupiers had them all in view, translating, for instance, the struggle against the tyrant into a struggle against the tyranny of finance. You may think they were just deluded and forgot or ignored the differences in their situations and demands. We believe, however, that they have a clearer vision than those outside the struggle, and they can hold together without contradiction their singular conditions and local battles with the common global struggle.”

²⁶⁸ Wallerstein, “The Contradictions of the Arab Spring,” only highlights Tunisia and Egypt in this regard and says “To be sure, there was not much of a true ‘1968 current’ in Libya.” But see also Hardt and Negri, *Declarations*.

2011 in the process became the year of the so-called “Facebook-” and “Twitter Revolution.” Social media sites and mobile communication devices first catalyzed, and then facilitated the revolutionary mobilization of bodies in the streets to staggering, in some cases overwhelming, effect. Protestors used social media platforms to publicize local grievances, build information networks, and coordinate decentralized mass action in real time. Indicative of technology’s role was Tawakkol Karman, the Yemeni activist for women’s rights and democracy who became the first Arab woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, who specifically thanked “the rapid and astonishing development of information technology and the communications revolution” in her Nobel Lecture.²⁶⁹

Here it was ironic that, as one July 2011 commentary observed, “the recent protest ignitions seem to have occurred *without recognizable leaders*.” But this was a natural effect of diffuse mobilization tactics that relied less on authoritative decision and more on spontaneous diffusion and coordination. Thus after the rapid success of Tunisia and Egypt, “The rest of the region followed as scenes of demonstrators and fleeing dictators went out over al Jazeera and social-media networks...Activists used Facebook, Twitter, and other sites to communicate plans for civic action, at times playing cat-and-mouse games with officials[.]”²⁷⁰ This diffuse and leaderless mobilization model was, in sum, remarkably effective at generating spontaneous

²⁶⁹ Tawakkol Karmen, “Noble Lecture,” Oslo, December 10, 2011; posted at <http://www.nobelprize.org>. Cited in R.L. Soto, “Barack Obama’s Arendtian Arab Spring,” posted at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/94146549/R-L-Sotos-Obama-s-Arendtian-Arab-Spring>.

²⁷⁰ Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, “The Role of Digital Media,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 2011, p. 35-48, p. 43, emphasis added.

mass action and, in Tunisia and Egypt at least, helping bring about regime change—after decades of stable authoritarian rule—in a matter of weeks.²⁷¹

Throughout the Arab Spring, but especially prominent in the case of Egypt, the leaderless model was not only tactically effective, but normatively touted amongst protestors, theorists, and many in the media. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argued that “These movements are powerful not despite their lack of leaders but because of it. They are organized horizontally as multitudes, and their insistence on democracy at all levels is more than a virtue but a key to their power.”²⁷² Concerning Egypt, a Huffington Post editorial published the day of Hosni Mubarak’s resignation rebuked those who, by merely broaching the topic of post-revolutionary *leadership*, “revealed the same type of inter-generational misunderstandings that cost Hosni Mubarak his presidency.” The writers affirmed that in fact “The revolution was successful because it had no leaders, only coordinators of bottom up energy,” and that “One of the first celebrities to emerge from the uprising, Wael

²⁷¹ While most attention has focused on the *moment* of mass mobilization, social media and communications technologies may also be important for the long-term sustainability of principled movements that are initially suppressed. In Egypt, for example, the 2011 Revolution was preceded by several years of Internet activism by the April 6 Movement, the Campaign for the Support of El Baradei, and others (Thus one Egypt scholar has called the January 25 revolution “a coronation of the state of political and social activism that began in 2004 with the establishment of *Kifaya*” [the Egyptian movement for Change]). In this sense the revolutionary movement represented both a new beginning mobilized online, and the continuation of something that had long been sustained through decentralized networks. On the long-term “sustainability of the #Occupy movements in a posteviction phase,” see Jeffrey S. Juris, “Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation,” *American Ethnologist*. Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 259-79. The quoted passage is from Emad El-Din Shahin, “The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square,” *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, Vol. 3 (2012), pp. 46-69, p. 54.

²⁷² Hardt and Negri, *Declaration*, p. 107.

Ghonim, made this point as emphatically as he could to CNN in the midst of the celebrations. ‘I am not a leader. The leaders are in Tahrir Square.’”²⁷³

Not only the “spirit of Tahrir” square, but the tactics of it inspired millions of protestors around the world; and within months of the Egyptian masses’ successful toppling of Hosni Mubarak’s dictatorship, “leaderlessness” again took global center stage, this time in the global-*Occupy* movement that adopted the “revolutionary Arab Spring tactic” and defined itself as a “leaderless resistance movement.” As if to hammer the point various local Occupy groups applied the principle *ad absurdum* in spite of what some members deemed a lack of common sense.²⁷⁴

Thus *Time’s* choice of “Year of the Protestor”—of the anonymous protestor—as Person of the Year also reflected, albeit subtly, the anti-leadership ethic of the year’s most influential resistance movements. In the Arab world in particular, “The lack of individual leaders made it hard for authorities to know whom to arrest,”²⁷⁵ and the combined technical savvy of youth protestors and efficiency of diffuse mobilization and coordination techniques via social media accomplished, in mere weeks, what might otherwise have taken more traditional, protracted models of

²⁷³ Michael Hais and Morley Winograd, “Victory for Egypt’s Leaderless Revolution,” Huffington Post, February 11, 2011.

²⁷⁴ Gitlin tells how in November 2011 Occupy Denver elected a border collie dog as its leader. He also tells how “when a committee in Occupy Philadelphia proposed formation of a negotiating committee made up of rotating members of a working group,” one frustrated member expressed that “a sizeable portion of the [General Assembly] sniffs vanguardism, and proposes instead that the city [government leaders] come down to the GA—an amendment so insane that I begin to doubt the capacity of my fellow assemblymen and women to govern themselves.” Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation: The Roots, the Spirit, and the Promise of Occupy Wall Street*. New York: Harper Collins, 2012, p. 100-101.

²⁷⁵ Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, “The Role of Digital Media,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 2011, p. 35-48, p. 43.

grassroots resistance years. At the same time, “leaderlessness” in all events spoke to a radically democratic ideal born of political frustration with liberal and neo-liberal party politics, to say nothing of capitalist inequality, and a profound enthusiasm for genuine political freedom and social and political equality.

In this approach there was both much to inspire and much to wonder about, not least involving the extent to which this ideal of “leaderless” resistance, or revolution, constituted a viable model of political action and freedom in the long run. Reasonable concern stemmed not only from the challenge this model posed to traditional understanding of revolution and political organization (and the conservative reaction that follows from unfamiliarity), but also from the way in which “leaderlessness” has interacted with technology to, on one hand, posit an altogether new and “disembodied” form of public sphere,²⁷⁶ and on the other hand, establish a “model” form of mass resistance that is at once spontaneous and decentralized, but also coordinated: a massive energy that bursts forth like a flash mob,²⁷⁷ but is less violent, more organized, and more internally political than a riot.

Mobs do not sit still. Mobs *move*, *demolish*, and *disperse*. They come and go in a spontaneous rush of action and emotion, and have little concern with establishing an enduring political space. Conversely, the recent “leaderless” movements have

²⁷⁶ As one illustration of this problem, see Judith Butler, “Bodies in Alliance”: “Although some may wager that the exercise of rights now takes place quite at the expense of bodies in the street, that twitter and other virtual technologies have led to a disembodiment of the public sphere, I disagree. The media requires those bodies on the street to have an event, even as the street requires the media to exist in a global arena...Not only must someone’s hand tap and send, but somebody’s body is on the line if that tapping and sending gets traced.”

²⁷⁷ Josh Halliday, “London riots: how Blackberry Messenger played a key role,” at www.theguardian.com, August 8, 2011.

also appeared *en masse*, but acted much differently. Instead of quickly dispersing, they have stuck around to “occupy” public spaces and generate what Hannah Arendt called a public “space of appearances” shared by equal citizens. In a genuine space of appearances, wrote Arendt, individuals act and speak in full view of each other. They act on principle and speak to freedom, justice, injustice, and what ought to be done. They act, hoping others will recognize and respond to them, even follow them. They hope future actors will remember their actions and bestow glory upon them. For the “occupiers” of 2011 it was precisely their “occupation” of “occupied” space—in New York’s Zuccotti Park, Cairo’s Tahrir Square, Madrid’s Puerta del Sol, and elsewhere—that established something like an Arendtian “space of appearances” between them—a physical space linking all to all while preserving the individuality of each, and in which action and speech displayed within this space (what others using Arendt’s language have called “action in concert”) were used to generate political power. *Space* itself—actual physical terrain—was utilized as a political symbol.²⁷⁸ And this focus on “space” not only established a literal physical border around the “movement,” but gave a graspable political form to it. The Arendtian resonance of all this was not lost on observers and participants.

In a trend that the discussion below continues to develop, the 2011 Arab Spring and Occupy movements established Hannah Arendt *once again* as the timely political theorist of a global revolutionary-democratic moment. In discussions of

²⁷⁸ On the symbolic, tactical, and political importance of “space” in the Arab Spring protests, see Jillian Schwedler, “Spatial Dynamics of the Arab Uprisings,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April 2013), pp. 230-234.

“occupation,” “leaderlessness,” and the extraordinary possibilities of “social media,” scholars and activists alike turned to Arendt appreciatively for normative support and insight into novel and seemingly unprecedented political phenomena. R. L. Soto’s recent remarks on “Barack Obama’s Arendtian Arab Spring” are indicative: “Arendt’s significance as the preeminent theorist of participatory freedom...becomes clearer...as her political phenomenology, written over 50 years ago, preternaturally anticipates the revolutionary implications of contemporary social media. A half century before anyone was ‘friended’ or sent a ‘tweet,’ Arendt explains the ‘boundless’ dynamics of popular power manifest in virtual reality, the intangible ‘web’ of human relations, ‘the space of appearances.’”²⁷⁹

But I argue below that notwithstanding the considerable gains to be had by turning to Arendt during these extraordinary times, and notwithstanding the enthusiasm Arendt undoubtedly would have shared with many of the 2011 political movements, it may be misleading to wrap Arendt so snugly and normatively around the brazen norms of “leaderlessness” and “people power” that have gripped our times, at least without more clearly thinking what these phenomena are and what we are doing with them. Upon inspection Arendt’s response may be more critical, and thereby revealing, than first meets the eye.

Consider the problem of technology just raised: Throughout *The Human Condition* Arendt draws attention to the unanticipated effects of new technology on human activities, and at one point she focuses specifically on technology’s rule over

²⁷⁹ R.L. Soto, “Barack Obama’s Arendtian Arab Spring”; citing phrases from various pages of Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, Ch. V. Action.

the human activity of *fabrication*. Fabrication is man's activity of *making things*, of *building a tangible world* in which men are to live, and filling it with the tangible objects he wants to exist within in. With respect to fabrication today, the question of technology "is not so much whether we are the masters or the slaves of our machines, but whether machines still serve the world and its things, or if, on the contrary, they and the automatic motion of their processes have begun to rule and even destroy world and things."²⁸⁰ At first humans built machines to build the things they wanted; now, it seems, humans tailor their wants and desires, their decisions about what to produce and do and how, around the efficient capacities of machines themselves. Technology determines production at the expense of free agency.

The same problem exists between technology and what Arendt calls *action*. Action is political activity which we engage in publicly and within both the physical dimensions and temporal continuity of the built human world. To act is to "take an initiative, to begin...to set something in motion,"²⁸¹ "to appear in the world" before others, to show one's "excellence" or "virtuosity"²⁸²; it is tantamount to *freedom*, and the source of what Arendt calls "public happiness." How might technologies like social media, and web-based human interaction, affect *action* and the meaning we

²⁸⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 151. Recent anxieties over the fate of the old-fashioned "book" and book culture in an era of electronic text represent a case in point. See e.g. Sven Birkert, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*. Winchester, MA: Faher and Faher, 2006 [1994]; Christine Rosen, "People of the Screen," *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology & Society*, No. 22, Fall 2008, pp. 20-32; Jonathan Brent, "Daydreamings and the Book," *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (April 2012), pp. 209-212.

²⁸¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 177.

²⁸² Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Penguin, 1993, pp. 143-171, p. 153-4.

ascribe to politics? How do technologies structure our understanding of the political and its possibilities? How, if at all, does technology “rule” action and politics both behind our backs and within our open embrace, and with what consequences?²⁸³

In this vein, scholars have rejected the notion that communications technologies have meaningfully shaped the preferences of protestors or the character of their resistance, positing that “In each country, people have used digital media to build a political response to a local experience of unjust rule. They were not inspired by Facebook; they were inspired by the real tragedies *documented* on Facebook.”²⁸⁴ About Egypt in particular, Hais and Winograd refute the suggestion that an absence of leadership consequent to social media mobilization entails a lack of revolutionary organization, boldly comparing Egypt’s 2011 revolution to an institutionalized electoral process: “In the same way that the 2008 Obama campaign used a social media site to provide a way for millions of its American millennial generation supporters to organize the on-the-ground voter interactions that

²⁸³ Consider for example the potential implications of global networking technologies for increasing the salience of transnational political movements which support (and protest) causes that do not recognize or depend on national borders. An increased capacity to mobilize and coordinate transnationally for such causes may go far towards addressing problems of global justice that Westphalian political norms have failed to. At the same time, however, the crowding out, even depreciation of political causes attached to the territorial nation-state may have unintended side effects of its own. It is not without such concern that Arendt, for example, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* highlighted the fateful “decline of the nation-state” and “irreparable decay of the party system” and their replacement by ideological “movements” in Continental Europe in the late-19th and 20th century; nor that she, like Kant, was deeply pessimistic about the creation of a unitary (as opposed to federal) global state. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973, esp. “Ch. 8: “Continental Imperialism: the Pan-Movements,” pp. 222-266; and pg. 142 nt. 38; and Hannah Arendt, “Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?” in *Men in Dark Times*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968, pp. 81-94.

²⁸⁴ Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, “The Role of Digital Media,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 2011, p. 35-48, p. 48.

propelled it to victory, these young Egyptians knew both the value and the limitations of social networking technology to effect huge social change.”²⁸⁵

But the question of leadership in a context of decentralized mass mobilization and revolution cannot be dismissed so hastily—not the least of course in Egypt. If “leaderlessness” has become a normative principle and a matter of popular practice, what have been its implications on the ground? To what extent, if any, have the absence of leadership and of legitimate political representation during revolutionary situations contributed to the more problematic revolutionary legacies of 2011? If at the heart of the “leaderless” movement of 2011 stood Egypt, which since February 2011 has been witness to constitutional instability, a failed democracy, and disturbing episodes of political violence,²⁸⁶ then to what extent, we should ask, has the absence of revolutionary leadership and representation

²⁸⁵ Michael Hais and Morley Winograd, “Victory for Egypt’s Leaderless Revolution,” Huffington Post, February 11, 2011.

²⁸⁶ In early 2011 after Mubarak’s ouster, the fallout left unclear to most observers what authority would fill the vacuum left in the dictator’s wake and unite a suddenly fragmented country. The revolution itself was determined by force of arms—a military coup that, despite the initial support of the people, lacked a clear basis of long-term legitimacy. Outcries against military rule arose almost immediately, and by the revolution’s second anniversary the process of assembling a legitimate *constitutional committee*, let alone drafting and ratifying a new and legitimate constitution, had proven to be illusive amongst a divided civil society, continued mass demonstrations, and a perpetually scrambling and blurry concatenation of executive-judicial-military government. The political situation bordered on chaos, including clashes between protestors and security forces at the entrance of the Presidential palace on February 1, 2013. At the time a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations offered the following diagnosis: “The continued attacks suggest a real breakdown in central power, we’re coming close to that...None of the political forces have control over the people in the streets.” In late June, mass protests called for the ouster of democratically elected President Mohamed Morsi, and on July 3, 2013 the military responded to these demands via a military coup. This was followed, in turn, by mass protests among Morsi supporters, a significant portion being members or supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, and a military crackdown on August 14 in which somewhere around 1,000 people (reports vary considerably) were killed and thousands wounded. The quoted passage is from Ben Wedeman, “Protestors attack presidential palace in Cairo, one person dies in clashes,” Cnn.com, February 2, 2013.

contributed to the instability of Egyptian democracy and the perpetuation of military rule in the years immediately following the January 25 Revolution?

13. REPRESENTATION AND RES PUBLICA

In thinking through these problems, we do well to revisit Hannah Arendt's political theory. And as highlighted throughout this dissertation, from the beginning of the Arab Spring and Occupy protests, no political theorist was more widely and enthusiastically employed, by scholars and political actors alike, to help not only understand, but also celebrate these events.²⁸⁷ Especially telling were Arendtian analysis of these revolutionary events in real time, which often did both at once:

On February 3, 2011, for example, eight days prior to Mubarak's resignation, Jonathan Schell in *The Nation* cited passages from Arendt's *On Violence* to depict the imminent collapse of authoritarian power in Egypt, writing that when "A people long overawed by state violence throws off fear, and in a flash begins to act courageously...In Hannah Arendt's words, "The situation changes abruptly. Not only is the rebellion not put down but the arms themselves change hands—sometimes, as in the Hungarian revolution, within a few hours...The sudden dramatic breakdown of power that ushers in revolution reveals in a flash how civil obedience—to laws, to rulers, to institutions—is but the outward manifestation of

²⁸⁷ In addition to works already cited, see also the Hannah Arendt Center at Bard's "Quote of the Week" catalog found at www.bard.edu/hannaharendtcenter, where many scholars have discussed Arendt's political theory in relation to Occupy and the Arab Spring. Examples include Jeffrey Champlin, "The Weakening of Power Through Violence," October 11, 2011; Roger Berkowitz, "The Spirit of Revolution," November 14, 2011; Kathleen B. Jones, "On Revolution," July 8, 2013.

support and consent.'... By January, Egypt had clearly arrived at this moment." On the future of Egyptian politics, Schell again used distinctly Arendtian language: "Power is disintegrating. It is in the streets. Someone will pick it up."²⁸⁸

A month later, after a "revolutionary rupture linked to a coup" and a "type of situation...[that has] almost always given rise to revolutionary or military dictatorship,"²⁸⁹ with the Egyptian Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) in power (Did *they* pick it up?) and uncertainty hovering about its next move, Andrew Arato's measured response highlighted Arendt's distinction between "*liberation* or the removal of authorities, and *constitution*, or the construction of a new, free regime." Wrote Arato: "In line with what we are seeing in Egypt, [Arendt] thought that liberation proceeds often, but constitution very seldom. There is however a constituent process in Egypt and it is instructive to see why as it is currently organized it falls under Arendt's strictures."²⁹⁰

Finally in April 2012 Chad Kautzer, a philosophy professor and member of Occupy Denver's Education Committee and Foreclosure Resistance Coalition, gave a talk using Hannah Arendt to "make explicit principles that I see operating in Occupy," particularly "her notion of the sociality of action and speech and also her

²⁸⁸ Schell, "The Revolutionary Moment."

²⁸⁹ Andrew Arato, "Egypt's Transformation: Revolution, Coup, Regime Change, or All of the above?" February 12, 2011, posted at www.comparativeconstitutions.org.

²⁹⁰ Arato, "The Return of Revolutions." March 7, 2011. Cf. also Kathleen B. Jones, "On Revolution," July 8, 2013, *op. cit.*, published 5 days after elected President Morsi's ouster: "Clearly, in Arendtian terms, the rebellion started in 2011 had not yet resulted in the 'truly revolutionary element' in constitution-making, which lies not in the creation of limited government, but in the act of a people (here Arendt quotes Thomas Paine) 'constituting a government.'"

notion of an associative form of power or democratic power.” In his talk Kautzer explains Occupy’s explicit “principle of non-representation” in favor of “horizontalism,” and ends by comparing Occupy’s modern “polis” or “space of appearances” to Arendt’s lauded but ephemeral council system, citing her famous remark that “if you ask me now what prospect [a council state] has of being realized, then I must say to you: Very slight, if at all. And yet perhaps, after all—in the wake of the next revolution.”²⁹¹

As Kautzer’s revealing talk (discussed below) and the above-cited articles reflect, it has been *power*, *political foundation*, and *democratic freedom*—as manifest in revolutionary protests, public occupations, “horizontal” assemblies, and “leaderless” movements—that have defined popular Arendtian discourse in the 2011 revolutionary context. Here I want to challenge two appropriations of Arendt that have emerged during these events—first, the normative appropriation of Arendt’s political theory to unequivocally endorse willful revolutionary campaigns grounded in “people power”; and second, the use of Arendt to validate the idea of “leaderless revolution” in the revolutions of 2011. Against these appropriations, I highlight that Arendt does *not* believe that revolutions can be “made” even by people power, for, “Revolutions, as a rule, are not made but happen,”²⁹² and they are

²⁹¹ Final quote from Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” in *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 199-233, p. 233. The talk was posted on YouTube on April 7, 2012 under the title “Arendt, Occupy and the Challenge to Political Liberalism”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLuZYM3r6hI>. Let me thank Professor Kautzer for making this presentation publicly available and my engagement with it possible.

²⁹² Hannah Arendt, “Comment by Hannah Arendt on ‘The Uses of Revolution’ by Adam Ulam,” in Richard Pipes, ed. *Revolutionary Russia*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969, pp.440-449, p. 441.

only possible in “revolutionary situations” whose circumstances are largely out of human control. Subsequently, when “revolutionary situations” do emerge, Arendt explains why in modern revolutions both *representation* and *leadership*—as opposed to *mass movement* and *leaderlessness*—are necessary both to (a) complete the process of *liberation* by “picking up power” when the old regime is weak and (b) begin the process of *constitution*—of reifying power and political *plurality* into legitimate political institutions and a constitution of *freedom*. Hardly glorifying “leaderlessness,” Arendt exposes leaderless-idealism as both practically impotent and politically irresponsible. I argue, in sum, that recent depictions of Arendtian-style democratic power as fundamentally against “leadership” and “representation” is a debilitating misreading of her thought that, theoretically speaking, conflates her ideas of the *space of appearances* and the *polis*, and embraces the very pathologies of Greek politics that Arendt, in her turn to Rome, sought to avoid²⁹³; and which practically speaking, threatens to sabotage the same revolutionary movements these scholars champion.

The rest of this section debunks the common and fateful misreading of “Arendt-contra-representation” recently witnessed in association with Occupy and the Arab Spring. The following two sections discuss Arendt’s practical and normative theory of revolutionary leadership.

²⁹³ My discussion of Arendt’s turn to Rome draws much from Jacques Taminiaux, “Athens and Rome,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*. Ed. Dana Villa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 165-177, esp. p. 171-177.

Recall the passage in *On Violence* where Arendt writes famously that “Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert...it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is ‘in power’ we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name.”²⁹⁴ Even more to the point, “Popular revolt against materially strong rulers...may engender an almost irresistible power even if it forgoes the use of violence in the face of materially vastly superior forces...[I]t is one of the most active and efficient ways of action ever devised, because it cannot be countered by fighting[.]”²⁹⁵

Understandably, radical democrats and revolutionary enthusiasts have grasped onto this language to give normative force and descriptive clarity, if not a little oomph, to grassroots democratic movements. A recent presentation by Occupy Denver’s Chad Kautzer is indicative of this move. Using Arendt’s words to describe the Occupy movement’s *modus operandi*, Kautzer says:

“The *polis*,” writes Arendt, “is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be.” The physical and spatial components of the polis are essential. The polis is not abstract. It “can find its proper location almost anytime and anywhere...(but) it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being,” says Arendt. The polis dissipates when people disperse or when they’re no longer acting and speaking in common cause...Arendt’s idea here is that the polis emerges when people congregate and speak and act together, towards some common cause. And it disperses when those people disperse...so

²⁹⁴ Hannah Arendt, ‘On Violence,’ p. 143. See also Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Section 28: “Power and the Space of Appearances,” pp. 199-207.

²⁹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1998), p. 200-201.

there is no building, there is no law, there is no container to somehow hold the power or practices of the polis. It is fully in the moment of participation, it is only actualized then; and when people disperse, so does the polis...Arendt has a very, I would say very beautiful understanding of power that's connected to this idea of the polis. The kind of power produced by the polis, which I'm saying here obviously is what Occupy is, cannot be stored up or saved or alienated in order to transfer.²⁹⁶

Here Kautzer suggests that Arendt's unique notion of *power* applies *strictly* to the "physical" (or "not abstract") space of appearances that exists between face-to-face acting and speaking persons. But close reading of the text belies this characterization. Consider the opening sentence of the above-quoted passage: In his citing of Arendt, Kautzer conspicuously omits Arendt's words that contradict his ensuing statement that "The physical and spatial components of the polis are essential. The polis is not abstract." Placing only the omitted words in italics, Arendt's *complete* sentence says the following: "The polis, *properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location*; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be." Arendt further elaborates: "'Wherever you go, you will be a polis': these famous words became not merely the watchword of Greek colonization, they expressed the conviction that action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost anytime and anywhere."²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Chad Kautzer, "Arendt, Occupy and the Challenge to Political Liberalism," citing from Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198-9. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLuZYM3r6hI>; specifically from 16:00 to 19:00.

Thus, contrary to Kautzer's representation, Arendt's Greek *polis* is conceptually distinct from the physical *space of appearances*. For if the latter naturally "disappears with the dispersal of men,"²⁹⁸ the *polis* developed precisely in response to this problem of transience. Its purpose, Arendt says, was to "make permanent the space of action"²⁹⁹ in a twofold manner: to "multiply the occasions to win 'immortal fame,'"—that is, "to enable men to do permanently...what otherwise had been possible only as an extraordinary and infrequent enterprise for which they had to leave their households"; and "to offer a remedy for the futility of action and speech; for the chances that a deed deserving fame would not be forgotten[.]"³⁰⁰

When Kautzer says that for Arendt "there is no building, there is no law, there is no container to somehow hold the power or practices of the polis," he implicitly conflates the *polis*, *public realm*, and *space of appearances*, terms that Arendt differentiates with intent. This is important for Kautzer, because it helps establish his subsequent claim that Arendt's political theory adds normative and theoretical weight to Occupy's *principle of non-representation*: Thus he says, "The kind of power produced by the polis, which I'm saying here obviously is what Occupy is, cannot be stored up or saved or alienated in order to transfer."

²⁹⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198.

²⁹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 199.

²⁹⁹ "It is as though the wall of the *polis* and the boundaries of the law were drawn around an already existing public space which, however, without such stabilizing protection could not endure, could not survive the moment of action and speech itself." Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198.

³⁰⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 197; and pg. 198: "Not historically, of course, but speaking metaphorically and theoretically, it is as though the men who returned from the Trojan War had wished to make permanent the space of action which had arisen from their deeds and sufferings, to prevent its perishing with their dispersal and return to their isolated homesteads."

But this conclusion cannot hold. As we have discussed in Chapter 2, Arendt does not write that power exists *only* at the moment of gathering in the physical space of appearances; nor does she dissociate power from parliamentary representation. To the contrary, the meaningful existence of a larger *public realm* which links people politically beyond the narrow confines of a face-to-face space of appearances requires that power be reified into groups with interests, and these interests into legitimate laws and political institutions; that plural individuals and plural groups share a *pole*, a public *thing* around which they might potentially gather and continue the political process already begun: Yes, “Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert,” Arendt writes in *On Violence*, “but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together.” Legitimacy, in turn, then “bases itself on an appeal to the past,”³⁰¹ and legitimate laws and institutions are “manifestations and materializations of power; they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them.”³⁰² Thus power manifests in a worldly way not only when people physically gather face-to-face—to the contrary, this initial gathering becomes the basis of an appeal to the past upon which future agreements, institutions and constitutions might be built. In this way, then, a particular moment of power *becomes* a truly shared *thing*—a *res publica*—around which a broader public can gather both here and there, today and tomorrow. The power of this gathering and its *principle of action*—etched metaphorically into

³⁰¹ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 151.

³⁰² Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 140.

memory, represented by delegates, made literally into tangible things,³⁰³ and manifest visibly in worldly institutions—is “what keeps the public realm, the *potential* space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence.”³⁰⁴ It is an imminent source of future gathering.

In the long run, subsequently, a viable and singular *public realm*, beneath which the generation of many distinct but mutually-related (one might say *plural*) spaces of appearances is perpetually possible, requires a viable *polis* or *constitution*—i.e. a fence of laws³⁰⁵—to offer security and give meaning to action by embedding it in a political history linking the present to the past and extending today’s action into the future.³⁰⁶ And while the *polis* may have been fit for this task in ancient times, having been “physically secured by the wall around the city *and*

³⁰³ “The great significance attributed, on both sides of the Atlantic, to the constitutions as written documents testifies to their elementary objective, worldly character perhaps more than anything else.” Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (2006), p. 156.

³⁰⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 200, emphasis added.

³⁰⁵ Arendt uses this language of “fence” or “hedge” to describe the law at various places. See e.g. Hannah Arendt, “The Great Tradition I: Law and Power.” *Social Research*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (Fall 2007), pp. 713-726, p. 717: “The fence of the law was needed for the city-state because only here people lived together in such a way that space itself was no longer a sufficient guarantee for assuring each of them his freedom of movement.”

³⁰⁶ Roy Tsao compares the English and German editions of *The Human Condition* and finds a key addition to the latter that sheds light on Arendt’s understanding of the important difference between Greek and Roman political attitudes towards time. Tsao translates the following from the German version of Section 27: The Greek Solution: “The organization of the polis, founded and secured in its physical condition by means of the city wall, and in its spiritual character by means of the law...is in essence a kind of organized remembrance, in which, however—*unlike in what we, following the Romans, understand as memory*—the past is not to be remembered through the continuity of time as the past, with the awareness of temporal distance, but instead *is to be directly maintained in a perpetual present, in a temporally unchanged form.*” The resemblance here between the Greek conception of time, and Occupy’s narrow focus on power in the present, is uncanny. Roy T. Tsao, “Arendt Against Athens: Rereading the Human Condition,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (February 2002), pp. 97-123, p. 114, Tsao’s italics.

physiognomically guaranteed by its laws,”³⁰⁷ Arendt is skeptical that Greek thought can ground such a project today, for “the Greeks,” she says, “in distinction from all later developments, did not count legislating among the political activities...To them, the laws, like the wall around the city, were not results of action but products of making.”³⁰⁸ It was the Romans, Arendt says, and not the Greeks, who were “perhaps the most political people we have known”³⁰⁹—for it was Rome whose “political genius” was “legislation and foundation.”³¹⁰ Where the Greek word for law, *nomos*, combined “law and hedge,” the Roman word for law, *lex*, “has an entirely different meaning; it indicates a formal relationship between people[.]”³¹¹ Roman law embraced a spirit of alliance and the use of promises and covenants to create durable relationships and a common world. Not only covenant, but the law itself related men to one another. In Rome one no longer encountered only a *polis* of remembrance in which law served only to secure action’s requisite space for isolated individuals, but rather a *res publica*—a public thing—manifest in the law itself, that stood *between* men, relating and separating them at the same time,

³⁰⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198, emphasis added. See also p. 194, “Before men began to act, a definite space had to be secured and a structure built where all subsequent actions could take place, the space being the public realm of the *polis* and its structure the law.”

³⁰⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 194.

³⁰⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 7.

³¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 195.

³¹¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 63, nt. 62. See also Taminiaux, “Athens and Rome,” p. 172.

around which they gathered and “acted in concert.” Law was a public thing for which all citizens were responsible—to judge, protect, and augment.

In light of Arendt’s turn to Rome, then, at stake in the freedom exercised in the public realm is not simply the continuous, physical being together of bodies in a public space. It is the securing of a public realm within which the words and deeds of political actors achieve real meaning and audience, and real influence and permanence. And if deeds and words are to have this effect on citizens gathered—if getting together is to be political rather than ephemeral—then citizens must in turn be related to one another—both connected and separated—by some *thing* that gathers them. One struggles to find this *thing*, or *interest*, or source of durable *gathering* in the space of appearances defined by such radically non-representational movements as Occupy which, when refusing in principle to define their group *inter-est* to others, suggest only that they have none.

What would make Occupy truly political, Arendt suggests to us, and thus a more *powerful* body as well, is the introduction of the *promise*—the most elementary source of gathering into the future hitherto known to political man, and the source of law among them—into the space of appearances. Absent *promises* the “occupiers” of any park or square, despite being present together, remain politically isolated. They have no political relationship, no interest—*they* as a *they* do not exist. But Arendt writes that “those who ‘covenant and combine themselves together’ [only] lose, by virtue of reciprocation, their isolation,” and “Such an alliance gathers

together the isolated strength of the allied partners and binds them unto a new power structure by virtue of ‘free and sincere promises.’”³¹²

Promises have the potential to not only make durable the transient gathering of men which initially depends on bodies and the physical space of appearances—they not only make these individuals into a group with palpable interest—they also in the process, and through the possibility of representation, allow the group to engage meaningfully and *powerfully* with the larger political world, to build a world with other political actors and groups. Arendt thus highlights how ‘occupiers’ throughout the world, from New York to Cairo, would be infinitely more *powerful*, and their power in the world more stable and enduring, if they were both willing and able to make promises, both among themselves with other groups with interests in the world:

The power of stabilization inherent in the faculty of making promises has been known throughout our tradition. We may trace it back to the Roman legal system, the inviolability of agreements and treaties (*pacta sunt servanda*); or we may see its discoverer in Abraham, the man from Ur, whose whole story, as the Bible tells us, shows such a passionate drive towards making covenants that it is as though he departed from his country for no other reason than to try out the power of mutual promise in the wilderness of the world, until eventually god himself agreed to make a Covenant with him. At any rate, the great variety of contract theories since the Romans attests to the fact that the power of making promises has occupied the center of political thought over the centuries.³¹³

The promise, like the *polis*, is needed precisely because the physical space of appearances that exists between men cannot exist (and men cannot exist physically

³¹² Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 161-162.

³¹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 243-244.

in it) in perpetuity. And if given these constraints men are somehow to remain *gathered*, and their political relationships are not simply to pass—even after Mayor Bloomberg orders the clearing of Zuccotti Park and bodies disperse—this must be done through the making and keeping of promises—or alliance, or agreement, or constitution—a public *thing* which gathers them in perpetuity after the bodies exit.

Among groups bound together by promises, and whose promises in turn manifest their political power, Arendt is clear that this power *can* be represented without being alienated, for “When we say of somebody that he is ‘in power’ we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name.” “In all republics with representative governments,” Arendt writes, “power resides in the people. That means that the people empower certain individuals to represent them, to act in their name. When we talk about loss of power, that signifies that the people have withdrawn their consent from what their representatives, the empowered elected officials, do.”³¹⁴ And she settles the question decisively when she describes her beloved council state as a pyramidal structure which “begins from below, continues upward, and finally leads to a parliament.”³¹⁵ Representation allows the public realm—and through promises the public *thing*, the *res publica*—to gather people politically beyond a single, physical space of appearances. It allows people and plural groups across a country to gather in ways other than face-to-face. Those who reject representation on principle, however, cannot share a *public thing* any larger than their own public park. Under

³¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” p. 223.

³¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” p. 232.

modern conditions not only can such parties not share in a republic—but when a more genuinely democratic republic is potentially on the horizon, when opportunity knocks and the authorities which suppress political participation and radical political change are found to be weak and vulnerable—such parties find themselves at a loss for what to do, impotent to convert the “revolutionary situation” into a freer, stable, and more democratic “revolutionary outcome.”

14. PICKING UP POWER I: REVOLUTIONARY SITUATIONS AND REAL REVOLUTIONARIES

This section tackles—finally—Arendt’s political theory of revolutions—how they happen, why they happen, and why they fail.³¹⁶ If Occupy’s dual rejection of *representation* and delimited group *interest* ultimately sabotaged its political power potential beyond anything other than an ephemeral space of appearances, what then does one make of the “leaderless” ethos of the Arab Spring, and its effect on *those* revolutions, which have set an entire region ablaze? In Chapter 4 I tackle this problem directly in Egypt, where a revolutionary *movement* has to date toppled one dictator and one democratically elected president, and installed in power another military strong man; and where Arendt’s political theory, I argue, illuminates with exceptional clarity how the “leaderless” ethos catastrophically sabotaged Egypt’s democratic aspirations.

³¹⁶ Although I bracket serious discussion of Arendt’s “revolutionary council model” until Chapter 5.

Suffice it to say that Arendt's political theory has not generally pleased social scientists. As reported earlier, Michael Kimmel calls her distinction between *liberation* and *revolution* "not a structural but a moral analysis of the relationship between state and society;"³¹⁷ and Eric Hobsbawm calls her writings "impossible to use in the analysis of actual revolutions" due to "a certain lack of interest in mere fact" and "preference for metaphysical construct or poetic feeling over reality."³¹⁸ In Hobsbawm's reading Arendt seems more interested in telling a meaningful story than seriously analyzing facts on the ground. And some aspects of this critique are fair. When Arendt insists, for example, that "Only where the pathos of novelty is present and where novelty is connected with the idea of freedom can we speak of revolution,"³¹⁹ she is indeed spectacularly impossible to operationalize: How does one observe, let alone measure, a *pathos of novelty*?

But others could be more generous: Consider Kimmel's earlier remarks in light of the extraordinary events of the Arab Spring. Tunisia, Egypt, Libya—all were *liberated* from dictators in 2011, but does it make any sense today to call them by the same word *revolution*? Post-*liberation*, their outcomes have varied considerably, ranging from democratic *revolution* in Tunisia, to *military coup* in Egypt, and *civil war* in Libya. Arendt accentuates these distinctions to remind us that the springs of

³¹⁷ Michael S. Kimmel, *Revolution: A Sociological Interpretation*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, p. 8.

³¹⁸ Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Hannah Arendt on Revolution," in *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1973, pp. 201-208. Cited in Kalyvas (2008): 188-189. For more (and more recent) examples of such criticism and other reactions to Arendt's writings on revolution, see Kalyvas (2008), pp. 187-193.

³¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 24.

liberation and *revolution* may not be the same—that liberation produces any number of outcomes other than revolution, and it behooves students of revolution to determine why some revolutions succeed, others fail, and others—as in Lenin’s Russia—end up “deformed.”

For our purposes, it is simply worth saying that, at a most basic level, Arendt’s descriptive account of what revolution is—including her finer distinctions between revolutions, coups, and civil wars, to say nothing of “social” and “political” revolutions³²⁰—accords comfortably well with popular social science. *On Revolution* offers the closest thing to a straightforward definition in her work:

Only where this pathos of novelty is present and where novelty is connected with the idea of freedom are we entitled to speak of revolution. This means of course that revolutions are more than successful insurrections and that we are not justified in calling every *coup d’état* a revolution or even in detecting one in each civil war. Oppressed people have often risen in rebellion...*Coup d’état* and palace revolution, where power changes hands from one man to another, from one clique to another, depending on the form of government in which the *coup d’état* occurs, have been less feared because the change they bring is circumscribed to the sphere of government and carries a minimum of unquiet to the people at large...All these phenomena have in common with revolution that they are brought about by violence, and this is the reason why they are so frequently identified with it. But violence is no more adequate to describe the phenomenon of revolution than change; only where change occurs in the sense of a new beginning, where violence is used to constitute an altogether different form of government, to bring about the formation of a new body politic, where the liberation from oppression aims at least at the constitution of freedom can we speak of revolution.³²¹

³²⁰ Theda Skocpol’s distinction between “social” and “political” revolutions, which adopts much of Arendt’s basis for distinction, has since become canonical.

³²¹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 24-5.

This basic terminology is intuitive to the social scientist; but the richness of Arendt's idiosyncrasy also drips onto the margins.

The first and most striking aspect of Arendt's sociological theory of political revolutions—at a time when scholars and journalists alike widely champion “people power” as the non-violent antidote to entrenched dictatorships; and manuals proliferate to detail non-violent revolutions step-by-step³²²; and Arendt herself may be the most popular theorist of non-violent revolution at the moment—is to read Arendt at several points seeming to contradict the very premise upon which all of this non-violent optimism is based. For if one thesis consistently shoots through Arendt's writings on revolution, it is that revolution cannot be “made” in a world of modern centralized states—cannot be forced or determined by revolutionary agitation (violent, non-violent, or otherwise) because of the organizational, military, and security capacities wielded by modern states: “The fact is that the gap between state-owned means of violence and what people can muster by themselves—from beer bottles to Molotov cocktails and guns—has always been so enormous that technical improvements make hardly any difference.”³²³ “No revolution can succeed where the loyalty of the armed forces, police and army, is intact. This is not only so today because of the nature of the weapons, this has always been true. The armed

³²² See Gene Sharp's highly influential *From Dictatorship to Democracy* London: Serpent's Tail, 2012.

³²³ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 147. In a rare but very important moment in her revolutionary writings, Arendt here immediately qualifies the point. We return to the passage below.

uprising never occurred except when the army joined (or could reasonably be expected to join) the rebels.”³²⁴

Step-by-step or conspiratorial programs are bound to produce futility exercises—and this, Arendt says, until the regime itself suffers from internal collapse or decay, independent of any revolutionary movement: “The role the professional revolutionists played in all modern revolutions is great and significant enough,” Arendt writes, “but it did not consist in the preparation of revolutions. [The professional revolutionists] watched and analysed the progressing disintegration in state and society; they hardly did, or were in a position to do, much to advance and direct it...The outbreak of most revolutions has surprised the revolutionist groups and parties no less than all others, and there exists hardly a revolution whose outbreak could be blamed on their activities.”³²⁵

On this point Lenin’s Bolsheviks were the obvious test case, the case most likely to debunk Arendt’s intuition—Lenin, about whom the Menshevik Pavel Axelrod once said “there is not another man who for twenty-four hours of the day is taken up with the revolution, who has no thoughts but thoughts of revolution, and who even in his sleep, dreams of nothing but revolution”³²⁶ But “Not even Lenin’s party of professional revolutionists would ever have been able to ‘make’ a revolution,” Arendt says, “the best they could do was to be around, or to hurry

³²⁴ Hannah Arendt, “Revolutions—Spurious and Genuine,” *HannahArendt.net*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (November 2013), pp. 1-5, p. 4.

³²⁵ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 251.

³²⁶ Quoted in Robert C. Tucker, “Preface,” *The Lenin Anthology*, Robert C. Tucker, ed., New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975, pp. xi-xiv, p. xi.

home, at the right moment, that is, at the moment of collapse.”³²⁷ Arendt repeats the point to exhaustion, and it is arguably her most consistent statement on the character of modern revolution.³²⁸ Under what conditions, then, is revolution possible?

They are, Arendt says, “not the result of conspiracies or the propaganda of revolutionary parties but the almost automatic outcome of processes of disintegration in the powers-that-be, of their loss of authority[.]”³²⁹ In other words, the conditions that make revolutions happen are either endemic or exogenous—that is to say, institutional or structural, but in any event beyond the control of men on the ground. And she calls those who subsequently lead revolutions after the ruling regime has “disintegrated...the consequences but never the causes of the downfall of political authority.”³³⁰ And because Arendt scatters such obstinate language throughout her writings on revolution, its tone can strike one as incredibly pessimistic given her reputation. And then, as a miracle from nowhere, few

³²⁷ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 251-2.

³²⁸ See e.g. Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” in *Crises of the Republic*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972, pp. 103-198, p. 147: “Textbook instructions on ‘how to make a revolution’ in a step-by-step progression from dissent to conspiracy, from resistance to armed uprising, are all based on a mistaken notion that revolutions are ‘made.’”; and op. cit. p. 114. Similar language is also found at Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” p. 206; Hannah Arendt, “Rosa Luxemburg,” in *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1968, pp. 33-56, p. 53; and Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 106-7. Also in the recently published notes: “Revolution and the Idea of Force” (1963) and “Revolutions—Spurious and Genuine” (1964), both in HannahArendt.net, Vol. 7, No. 1 (November 2013).

³²⁹ Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 443.

³³⁰ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 107.

moments in Arendt's work are as magical as when the regime finally *does* disintegrate. In a famous passage in *On Violence* Arendt describes this magical scene:

[B]ut this superiority [of government violence] lasts only as long as the power structure of the government is intact—that is, as long as commands are obeyed and the army or police forces are prepared to use their weapons. When this is no longer the case, the situation changes abruptly. Not only is the rebellion not put down, but the arms themselves change hands—sometimes, as in the Hungarian revolution, within a few hours...Only after this has happened can one speak of an 'armed uprising,' which often does not take place at all or occurs when it is no longer necessary. Where commands are no longer obeyed, the means of violence are of no use[.]³³¹

Today this passage reigns as Arendt's most influential statement—alongside her opposition of power and violence—on the nature of revolution: a vindication of “people power” and the transformative power of non-violent resistance. After all, revolutions are ushered in this example not by violent revolt, and by hardly any struggle at all. Instead revolution is triggered by a “sudden breakdown of power,” provoked as much (and as simply) by the general breakdown of “civil obedience”³³² as any violent taking of arms. Such moments, it now seems, reveal the age old problem of revolutionary violence to be a red herring—for to say that government rests on violence is to make a circular argument—all government, even a government which wields violence, rests on *consent*.³³³ And when that consent is withdrawn, so too will be the powers that oppress.

³³¹ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 147-8. See also Arendt's glorious account of the Hungarian Revolution in Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Feb., 1958), pp. 5-43.

³³² Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 148.

The juxtaposition of these two arguments—the absolute dependence of revolution on state collapse; and the apparent independence of state collapse from the use or non-use of violence against it—is certainly ironic. It places Arendt in interesting conversation with scholars like Theda Skocpol and Charles Tilly. Skocpol famously argued that revolution depended on the confluence of a variety of structural factors necessary to weaken a centralized state—most notably fiscal crisis at the center, and central weakness vis-à-vis the tax collecting aristocracy, but also uncontrollable revolts in the countryside, to bring these tensions to a head. “Revolutions are not made,” argued Skocpol, “they come.”³³⁴ But where Skocpol relies principally on fiscal weakness of states—ignoring completely and deliberately any analysis of morale or political ideas—Arendt takes the opposite tack, asking what structural or institutional conditions render a state *morally*, rather than fiscally weak. And Tilly, as we will see, shares with Arendt a focus on the requisite conditions for “revolutionary situations,” which in turn may or may not lead to transformative “revolutionary outcomes.”³³⁵ But whereas Tilly’s model strongly emphasizes high levels of mobilization and prior organization as requisite to

³³³ Arendt’s marginal note in “Revolutions—Spurious and Genuine”: “all gvt. [government] Rests on Obedience = Consent, Story of czar as autocrat”; typed beside the statement “Most important is the breakdown of authority prior to the revolution.” In passing, it is worth asking whether or to what extent the way technology is making more and more violence capable of being wielded by fewer and fewer people is challenging Arendt’s assumption that even violence requires consent. Indeed, it often seems that the more that technologies of violence and surveillance advance, the less consent there is needed to use it.

³³⁴ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, & China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 17, quoting Wendell Phillips.

³³⁵ Charles Tilly *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978, “Ch. 7: Revolution and Rebellion,” pp. 189-222.

consolidating a “revolutionary outcome,” Arendt’s idea is far simpler: Neither a party, nor organization, nor even a cabal is needed, she says. Incredibly, the “revolutionary situation” needs only one courageous, legitimate, and strategically positioned *person to act*.

All of these approaches—Skocpol’s, Tilly’s, and not the least Arendt’s—are inspired by the revolutionary tradition of Marx, Engels, Trotsky, and ultimately Lenin. Skocpol’s Marxist roots are well known, and Tilly cites Trotsky directly. But few have made this connection between Arendt and Lenin. I offer evidence below, however, that Marx, Engels, and especially Lenin exerted *the* decisive influence on Arendt’s revolutionary thought—even as she eventually diverged from them, and him, in important ways.

First, in *On Violence* Arendt acknowledges *directly* her Marxist roots by quoting Engels on the oft-mentioned point concerning state capacity and revolutionary conditions: It was Engels who said that “revolutions are not made intentionally and arbitrarily, but...were always and everywhere the necessary result of circumstances entirely independent of the will and guidance of particular parties and whole classes.”³³⁶ Arendt then follows Lenin—directly—in depicting the “revolutionary situation” that, while it cannot be created, can at least be prepared for in the hopes of consolidating a “revolutionary outcome.” Close examination of Arendt’s writing—though she does not cite Lenin directly (as was one of her

³³⁶ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 114, quoting Engels.

tendencies with him; either leaving his influence implicit or quoting him without a source)—shows her echoing him almost verbatim on this point. The most important piece in this regard is Lenin's 1915 article on "The Collapse of the Second International," important now to quote at considerable length:

To the Marxist it is indisputable that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation; furthermore, it is not every revolutionary situation that leads to revolution. What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we indicate the following three major symptoms: (1) when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the 'upper classes,' a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for 'the lower classes not to want' to live in the old way; it is also necessary that 'the upper classes should be unable' to live in the old way; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in "peace time," but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis *and by the "upper classes" themselves* into independent historical action.

Without these objective changes, which are independent of the will, not only of individual groups and parties but even of individual classes, a revolution, as a general rule, is impossible. The totality of all these objective changes is called a revolutionary situation. Such a situation existed in 1905 in Russia, and in all revolutionary periods in the West; it also existed in Germany in the sixties of the last century, and in Russia in 1859-61 and 1879-80, although no revolution occurred in these instances. Why was that? It was because it is not every revolutionary situation that gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change, namely, the ability of the revolutionary *class* to take revolutionary mass action *strong* enough to break (or dislocate) the old government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, 'falls', if it is not toppled over.

Such are the Marxist views on revolution, views that have been developed many, many times, have been accepted as indisputable by all Marxists, and for us, Russians, were corroborated in a particularly striking fashion by the experience of 1905.³³⁷

Lenin, like Arendt, looked at the overwhelming force wielded by modern centralized states and acknowledged his own party's incapacity to topple the state while the regime remained in good health. A successful revolution would thus require, Lenin concluded, a major crisis that would severely wound the regime and reveal its weaknesses to the revolutionary class and party. This explains Lenin's practical obsession, years in advance of 1917, with the prospect of European wars. The catastrophe of an imperialist war that was inevitably coming seemed the most plausible opportunity for a "revolutionary situation" to arise and to strike.

Arendt did not align with Lenin in welcoming world historical catastrophes to overturn unfree or politically stunted regimes. Nor did she feel it necessary. In a 1970 interview she remarked that, "The loss of power and authority by all the great powers is clearly visible, even though it is accompanied by an immense accumulation of the means of violence in the hands of the governments, but the increase in weapons cannot compensate for the loss of power."³³⁸ Instead—given the lack of genuine plurality represented by modern "machine parties," the absence of political action and participation in elite dominated democracies and autocracies, and the boredom and ennui of centrally run bureaucratic regimes—most regimes in the world, liberal capitalist no less than authoritarian, were certainly weaker

³³⁷ V.I. Lenin, "The Collapse of the Second International" [1915], *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 21. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974, pp. 205-259, posted at www.marxists.org.

³³⁸ Hannah Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution," p. 205.

underneath than appearances suggested. Indeed, by this 1970 interview the 1968 French May Days had already come to symbolize both this global phenomenon of regime powerlessness, and its unfulfilled revolutionary promise.

In these circumstances the practical problem for the serious revolutionary was two-fold. The first concerned how to properly gauge the revolutionary situation in these circumstances—how to know whether or not it was actually there—whether the regime was simply hanging on, perpetually on the verge of collapse if only it were pushed. This, Arendt said, could be known only through “testing” the revolutionary situation—but importantly—this could be done just as easily through non-violent activities—strikes, marches, sit-ins, other forms of mass protest—as through violent ones. Because the question of violence or non-violence contributed nothing at all to *determining* the revolutionary situation—there was little reason in most cases to entertain anything other than non-violent action to *reveal* it.

This does not mean the regime will fail, for there is nothing automatic about its collapse. The “test” of the revolutionary situation will frequently turn up negative for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the call for action may not be answered by the masses—one’s attempt to *act*, to *begin* something, and inspire collective action may simply not take off, and no challenge to the regime or real regime “test” will develop. Alternatively, the regime itself may actually pass the test—the regime may not disintegrate. Its security forces, armed forces, even large numbers of the

population may remain solid against mass protest, revealing no genuine revolutionary situation.³³⁹

However on some occasions—as in Hungary in 1956, and certainly in France 1968, when the workers aligned with the students, the entire country (factories, schools, and the state authorities included) reached a veritable state of paralysis, and Francois Mitterrand on May 28 went so far as to say “In France since 3 May 1968, the state no longer exists”³⁴⁰—a true “revolutionary situation” *is* revealed. What is there to do then?

Arendt said in the same 1970 interview:

At the moment one prerequisite for a coming revolution is lacking: a group of real revolutionaries. Just what the students on the left would most like to be—revolutionaries—that is just what they are not. Nor are they organized as revolutionaries: they have no inkling of what power means, and if power were lying in the street and they knew it was lying there, they are certainly the last to be ready to stoop down and pick it up. That is precisely what revolutionaries do. Revolutionaries do not make revolutions! The revolutionaries are those who know when power is lying in the street and when they can pick it up. Armed uprising has never yet led to revolution. [] Nevertheless, what could pave the way for a revolution, in the sense of preparing the revolutionaries, is a real analysis of the existing situation such as used to be made in earlier times.³⁴¹

³³⁹ Cf. also Arendt’s thoughts with those of Jack Goldstone on the “sultanistic” regimes that fell during the Arab Spring: “The degree of a sultan’s weakness is often visible only in retrospect. Although it is easy to identify states with high levels of corruption, unemployment, and personalist rule, the extent to which elites oppose the regime and the likelihood that the military will defect often becomes apparent only once large-scale protests have begun. After all, the elite and military officers have every reason to hide their true feelings until a crucial moment arises, and it is impossible to know which provocation will lead to mass, rather than local, mobilization. The rapid unraveling of sultanistic regimes thus often comes as a shock.” Jack Goldstone, “Understanding the Revolutions of 2011,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, Issue 3 (May/June 2011), pp. 8-16.

³⁴⁰ Julian Jackson, “De Gaulle and May 1968,” in *De Gaulle and Twentieth Century France*. Hugh Gough and John Horne, eds. New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 125-146, p. 125.

³⁴¹ Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” p. 206.

The pivotal phrase is “picking up power” that is “lying in the streets.” Arendt used the phrase as early as 1963 in *On Revolution*, and similar language also appears in her lecture notes from the period.³⁴² But only after attending a 1967 Harvard conference commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution did she crystallize her thoughts into an analysis of Lenin as the greatest historical exemplar of what she here calls a “real revolutionary.” For all of his political flaws—discussed in detail in the next section—Arendt never wavered in her praise of Lenin’s revolutionary acumen—his uncanny ability to gauge “when power is lying in the street” and when he can “stoop down and pick it up”³⁴³—as well as his unassailable moral courage, his willingness—which Arendt observed in de Gaulle in 1968 (rather than the rebellious French students), and Lenin himself showed in 1917—to “seize power” when it is lying there, and “assume responsibility for the revolution after it had happened.”³⁴⁴ As is clear in the long passage above—And who else could she possibly mean by “real analysis of the situation”?—Arendt sorely wishes the student protestors had far more of Lenin’s skill, grit, and spirit

³⁴² Hannah Arendt, “Revolution and the Idea of Force” (1963), p. 1; Hannah Arendt, “Revolutions-Spurious and Genuine” (1963), p. 4. Though Cf. Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism,” p. 8 (quoting a UN Commission: “It was unique in history that the Hungarian revolution had no leaders. It was not organized; it was not centrally dictated. The will for freedom was the moving force in every action.” This did not mean that leaders were not subsequently needed, for far from having completed the revolution, the question was now “how to institutionalize a freedom which was already an accomplished fact” (p. 26).

³⁴³ Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” p. 206.

³⁴⁴ On de Gaulle, see Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 149; on Lenin, see Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 444.

A survey of Arendt's commentary on Lenin, much of it in a short review of Adam Ulam's contribution to the Harvard conference, shows that Lenin's virtues as a "real revolutionary" were two-fold: First was his ability to, indeed, "conduct real analysis of the existing situation,"³⁴⁵ including well in advance of "fortuitous" events on the ground, and respond to circumstances realistically rather than fancifully or idealistically. To the point: He anticipated the "revolutionary situation" that world war would provoke well in advance, and wrote about it obsessively.³⁴⁶ He also showed patience in the meantime by preparing the Bolsheviks to seize power when the opportunity arose, but not attempting or entertaining anything like a serious revolutionary conspiracy prior to that. Then in 1917, Lenin again showed incredible patience and discipline after the February revolution by *not* supporting a premature Bolshevik seizure of power—not, for example, supporting Bolshevik involvement in the abortive July Days uprisings.³⁴⁷ And when the time was *finally* ripe for the

³⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution," p. 206.

³⁴⁶ "I think that it was this insight, not to be found in Marxism, that gave [Lenin] the necessary confidence for the *s'engage et puis on voit*. He had been *prepared* where others were not." Arendt, "Comment on Ulam," p. 347.

³⁴⁷ Gregory Zinoviev of the Bolshevik Central Committee recalled the following in 1918: "You know the part played by Lenin in the July days of 1917. For him the question of the necessity of the seizure of power by the proletariat had been settled from the first moment of our revolution, and the question was only about the choice of a suitable opportunity. In the July days our entire Central Committee was opposed to the immediate seizure of power, Lenin was of the same opinion. But when on July 16 the wave of popular revolt rose high, Lenin became alert, and here, upstairs in the refreshment room of the Tauride Palace, a small conference took place at which Trotsky, Lenin, and myself were present. Lenin laughingly asked us, 'Shall we not attempt now?' and added: 'No, it would not do to take power now, as nothing will come out of it, the soldiers at the front being largely on the other side would come as the dupes of the Lieber-Dans to massacre the Petrograd workers.'" See "Speech to the Petrograd Soviet by Gregory Zinoviev Celebrating Lenin's Recovery from Wounds Received in the Attempt Made on his Life on August 30, 1918," <http://www.marxists.org/archive/zinoviev/works/1918/lenin/ch17.htm>

Bolsheviks to seize power, he initiated the October coup, which succeeded with hardly any bloodshed.³⁴⁸

Second, Lenin's status as a "real revolutionary" is also defined by his singular willingness, seeing power lying in the streets, "'to pick it up' *and* to keep it—which is only another way of saying that Lenin was the only man willing to assume responsibility for the revolution after it had happened and without the help of anybody[.]"³⁴⁹ Here Arendt praises Lenin in a surprising way: for having the moral strength and personal integrity to claim responsibility for *whatever* happened to the revolution after his seizure of power. What Lenin effectively told the people of the revolutionary classes was—"Look to me! I will *represent* you, and I will respond to you! I will bear the burden of completing your—our—revolution! And if we fail, if I fail, I will bear the responsibility for that too!"³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ On this see Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003, Ch. 6: "The Mass Minority in Action: France and Russia," p. 164-185. On Lenin's exceptional sense of timing, particularly in the aftermath of the Kornilov revolt, see Dietrich Geyer, "The Bolshevik Insurrection in Petrograd," in Richard Pipes, ed. *Revolutionary Russia: A Symposium*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969, pp. 209-228.

³⁴⁹ Hannah Arendt, "Comment on Ulam," p. 444.

³⁵⁰ Hannah Arendt, "Comment on Ulam," p. 443. A key to deciphering Arendt's connection of "assuming responsibility" with "ascendency over...opponents" might be found in Rosa Luxemburg's 1918 essay on the Russian Revolution, which Arendt read closely when preparing her Luxemburg essay. Here Luxemburg supports the Bolsheviks' October coup: "The same, they say, applies to revolution: first let's become a 'majority.' The true dialectic of revolutions, however, stands this wisdom of parliamentary moles on its head: not through a majority to revolutionary tactics, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority – that is the way the road runs. [] Only a party which knows how to lead, that is, to advance things, wins support in stormy times. The determination with which, at the decisive moment, Lenin and his comrades offered the only solution which could advance things ('all power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry'), transformed them almost overnight from a persecuted, slandered, outlawed minority whose leader had to hide like Marat in cellars, into the absolute master of the situation." Rosa Luxemburg, "The Russian Revolution," in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, pp. 365-395, p. 374-5.

In some sense what Lenin did was incredibly simple—he *acted!*: “What, then, is the explanation of Lenin’s ascendancy over all his opponents inside as well as outside his party?...Mr. Ulam said—in his splendid book about Lenin, *The Bolsheviks*—that the Bolsheviks did not ‘seize power, but picked it up.’ And this is entirely right—except it was Lenin who did it rather than the party.”³⁵¹ Not anyone can pick up power in a revolutionary situation—for the power is *in the streets*, and the streets will only recognize a leader who is legitimate in their eyes, one who can legitimately *represent* the revolution. But he who *can* legitimately represent the power in the streets must also *act*—act on behalf of the revolution, and offer himself in loud and unequivocal words to the revolution—in order to pick that power up.

When Arendt attributes to Lenin, and not the Bolsheviks, the *act* of picking up the power, she claims stunningly that the October revolution was *not* won when the Bolsheviks stormed the Winter Palace, but rather, when Lenin saw power lying in the streets, offered to re-present them, and turned a mass movement into a revolution. Such is the power of action, and such is the power of words when word and deed have not parted company.

³⁵¹ Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 443-444. Cf. Oskar Anweiler, “The Political Ideology of the Leaders of the Petrograd Soviet in the Spring of 1917,” in *Revolutionary Russia*, op. cit, pp. 145-163 on the hesitance of Petrograd Soviet leaders, “frightened of the burden of power,” to assume the responsibility for government in February 1917, handing it to the Duma and playing a supervisory role as “controlling organ of the revolutionary democracy” (p. 152), until “Only Lenin’s unconditional fight against the Provisional Government put an end to this attempt at a common policy by the ‘revolutionary democracy’” (p. 159).

15. LENIN, LUXEMBURG, AND REVOLUTIONARY STATESMANSHIP

It is perhaps noteworthy that Lenin, unlike Hitler and Stalin, has not yet found his definitive biographer, although he was not merely a 'better' but an incomparably simpler man; it may be because his role in twentieth-century history is so much more equivocal and difficult to understand.

—Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*³⁵²

It was a stroke of genius...to choose the life of Rosa Luxemburg, the most unlikely candidate, as a proper subject for a genre that seems suitable only for the lives of great statesmen and other persons of the world. She certainly was nothing of the kind...For it was precisely success—success even in her own world of revolutionaries—which was withheld from Rosa Luxemburg in her life, death, and after death. Can it be that the failure of all her efforts as far as official recognition is concerned is somehow connected with the dismal failure of revolution in our century?

—Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg 1871-1919"³⁵³

And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. And he saw that he had not won out against him and he touched his hip-socket and Jacob's hip socket was wrenched as he wrestled with him. And he said, 'Let me go, for dawn is breaking.' And he said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'

-Genesis 32:24-26³⁵⁴

³⁵² Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 55.

³⁵³ Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 34. In a footnote beginning on the previous page, Arendt deplores the fact that Hitler and Stalin (whom she calls "non-persons") actually *do* have "definitive" biographies, and writes that history is better served by their "less well documented and factually incomplete" biographies. A different formulation of this point occurs in Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973)—Cf. Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 33-34, nt. 1, and Arendt, *Origins*, p. xxix; see also *Origins*, p. 306, nt. 4; and Hannah Arendt, "At Table with Hitler," in *Essays in Understanding*, New York: Schocken, 1994, pp. 285-296.

³⁵⁴ Robert Alter, trans. *Genesis*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997, p. 180-1.

In her review of J.P. Nettl's two volume "definitive biography" of Rosa Luxemburg, Hannah Arendt writes that "The definitive biography, English-style, is among the most admirable genres of historiography," because it "tells more, and more vividly, about the historical period in question than all but the most outstanding history books." If in "other biographies, history is...treated as the inevitable background of a famous person's life span," then in "definitive biographies" it is "as though the colorless light of historical time were forced through and refracted by the prism of a great character so that in the resulting spectrum a complete unity of life and world is achieved. This may be why it has become the classical genre for the lives of great statesmen."³⁵⁵ Of Nettl's own work, Arendt writes that "I know no book that sheds more light on the crucial period of European socialism from the last decades of the nineteenth century to the fateful day in January 1919 when Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the two leaders of the *Spartakusbund*...were murdered in Berlin[.]"³⁵⁶

No wonder, then, that it matters to Arendt that Lenin's volume—the definitive biography of the most important revolutionary statesman of the twentieth century—has *not* been written. But why, specifically, would Arendt draw our attention to this? What does Arendt think Lenin's "definitive biography" would reveal about revolution and the twentieth century?³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵ Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 33.

³⁵⁶ Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 34-5.

³⁵⁷ The closest approximation appears to be Adam B. Ulam's *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia*. New York: Macmillan, 1965, which Arendt,

Arendt's struggle with Lenin is one of the recurring yet habitually unresolved problems running throughout her political work. And as the second passage that opens this section anticipates, there is hardly a moment in Arendt's writings on Lenin that is not ambivalent. But precisely because of this, his case may be the most defining of Arendt's later political works, the key to unraveling her deepest understanding, *and* her deepest uncertainty in judging modern revolutions and revolutionary actions.

What did Arendt write about Lenin? She writes that Lenin had "great gifts as a statesman" and "great instincts for statesmanship," but also that, at pivotal moments, these succumbed to his "Marxist training and ideological convictions."³⁵⁸ Lenin's relation to the revolutionary state and revolutionary council system was "more complicated [than Marx's]," Arendt writes, but "Still, it was Lenin who emasculated the *soviets* and gave all power to the party."³⁵⁹ Lenin "had great talent for organization and leadership," but he was not obviously superior to the forgotten Marxist Leo Jogiches(!).³⁶⁰ And while Lenin's "one-party dictatorship" upon dissolving Russia's Constituent Assembly in January 1918 was clearly an anti-political "form of domination," unlike tyranny, whose binding principle is fear,³⁶¹ it

actively no-selling Ulam's focus on the Bolshevik party, called a "splendid book about Lenin." Hannah Arendt, "Comment on Ulam," p. 443.

³⁵⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 56; see also Hannah Arendt, *Origins*, p. 319.

³⁵⁹ Hannah Arendt, "On Violence," p. 124, nt. 38.

³⁶⁰ Jogiches, who only "failed [in Germany in 1918] where Lenin succeeded [in Russia in 1917]...as much a consequence of circumstances...as of lesser stature." Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 46.

was dictated by a statesmanlike understanding of political power sustained by plural political associations and social and political differentiation.³⁶²

Arendt's tendency, despite what often appears like prevarication, is to give Lenin categorically more credit than not only Stalin, but also Marx, to whom his deviations from a sound political statesmanship are usually attributed. And on at least one point Arendt's credit was unequivocal: "Wars and revolutions—," she opens *On Revolution*, "as though events had only hurried to fulfil Lenin's early prediction—have thus far determined the physiognomy of the twentieth century...[and] still constitute its two central political issues."³⁶³ The significance of this one theme to Arendt can hardly be overstated. It runs like a refrain throughout her work, and both its frequency and placement betray a special importance.³⁶⁴ It

³⁶¹ See esp. Hannah Arendt, "Montesquieu's Revision of the Tradition," in *The Promise of Politics*. Jerome Kohn, ed. New York: Schocken Books, 2005, pp. 63-69.

³⁶² Arendt writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that to consolidate the October Revolution Lenin "seized at once upon all the possible differentiations, social, national, professional, that might bring some structure into the population, and he seemed convinced that in such stratification lay the salvation of the revolution. He legalized the anarchic expropriation of the landowners by the rural masses...tried to strengthen the working class by encouraging independent trade unions. He tolerated the timid appearance of a new middle class which resulted from the NEP...[and] introduced further distinguishing features by organizing, and sometimes inventing, as many nationalities as possible[.]" Hannah Arendt, *Origins*, p. 318-319.

Andrew Arato ("Dictatorship Before and After Totalitarianism," *Social Research*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 473-503) offers a rich discussion of Arendt's concepts of "dictatorship" (attached to Lenin) and "totalitarianism" (attached to Hitler and Stalin), and (p. 475) criticizes strongly Arendt's characterization of Lenin's policies prior to and during the New Economic Policy, which "either did not mean what Arendt thinks (the trade union policy), were reversed by Lenin himself (the consequences of the land reform during War Communism), were understood as necessary and temporary concessions to be reversed later (the NEP and especially private trade), or were seen by Lenin as hated side effects of inevitable statist policies (the rise of a bureaucracy)." On Arendt and Lenin see also Robert C. Mayer, "Hannah Arendt, Leninism, & the Disappearance of Authority," *Polity*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Spring 1992), pp. 399-416.

³⁶³ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 1.

appears in almost identical language in the first lines of *On Violence*,³⁶⁵ the first paragraph of the concluding section of *Introduction into Politics*,³⁶⁶ and later in Arendt's "Comment" on Adam Ulam's "The Uses of Revolution," a paper presented at a Harvard conference commemorating the Russian Revolution's fiftieth anniversary.³⁶⁷

A telling moment to explain this theme—the connection it makes between *wars and revolutions* and its broader significance for Arendt—occurs in Arendt's "Comment on Ulam" (see next paragraph). There and on several other occasions Arendt highlights that under modern conditions of war—dated to the national mobilization and technological capacities unleashed in the Franco-Prussian war in 1870-71 (to say nothing later of course of World War I)—“we almost automatically expect that no government, and no state or form of government, will be strong enough to survive a defeat in war.”³⁶⁸ And we already know that given the capacities

³⁶⁴ Speculatively, Cf. Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 204-6, where Arendt favorably quotes Plato, Polybius, and James Harrington on the pivotal importance of “the beginning,” albeit in a different context than a book, essay, or section of an essay.

³⁶⁵ “These reflections were provoked by the events and debates of the last few years as seen against the background of the twentieth century, which has become indeed, as Lenin predicted, a century of wars and revolutions, hence a century of that violence which is currently believed to be their common denominator.” Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 105.

³⁶⁶ “The age of wars and revolutions which Lenin predicted for this century and in which we are in fact living has, indeed on an unprecedented scale, made what happens in politics a basic factor in the personal fate of all people.” The section is called *Does Politics Still have any Meaning at All?* See Hannah Arendt, “Introduction into Politics,” in *The Promise of Politics*, pp. 93-200, p. 191. This essay was written in spurts some years before *On Revolution* but published posthumously. See Jerome Kohn's Introduction to the same volume, esp. pp. xvi-xix.

³⁶⁷ Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 444. The same language attaching Lenin to wars and revolutions appears parenthetically in Hannah Arendt, “Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought,” *Social Research*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 273-319, p. 290-1.

³⁶⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 5.

of violence commanded today by modern states, revolutionary situations are “not made intentionally and arbitrarily, but...were always and everywhere the necessary result of circumstances entirely independent of the will and guidance of particular parties and whole classes.”³⁶⁹

It was Lenin, Arendt writes, who first connected these two conditions of modern politics—of *modern wars between modern states*, and *revolutionary situations wrought by catastrophe*. From here it was natural to see in revolutionary situations the possibility of picking up power; and from there, the need to begin preparing *now* should the situation ever suddenly arise. Thus soon after the outbreak of World War I Lenin “began to think of the twentieth century as a ‘century of wars *and* revolutions,’”³⁷⁰ where Arendt’s own emphasis stresses that Lenin, “alone among the revolutionaries, understood the modern *interconnection* between war and revolution”—or what was “the lesson of the first Russian Revolution of 1905, and perhaps of the French Commune as well, when defeat in war had touched off events in which the weakness of the regime, which otherwise might have lived on for considerable periods, suddenly stood exposed.”³⁷¹ Armed with this

³⁶⁹ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 114, quoting Engels.

³⁷⁰ Arendt does not provide her source. Interestingly, Arendt gives Lenin much less credit for his analysis of *imperialism*, to which he attributed this war-prone state of affairs. In *Origins* Lenin barely appears in “Part II: Imperialism,” and when he does, Arendt conspicuously ranks his *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) beneath Rosa Luxemburg’s *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913). Hannah Arendt, *Origins*, p. 148 (nt. 45).

³⁷¹ Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 444, emphasis added. See indicatively, Lenin’s remarks in “Socialism and War” (1915): “The [Basle] Manifesto openly declares that war is dangerous to ‘governments’ (all of them without exception), notes their fear of ‘a proletarian revolution,’ and very definitely points to the example set by the Commune of 1871, and by October-December 1905, i.e., *to the examples of revolution and civil war*. Thus, the Basle Manifesto lays down, precisely for the

understanding, indeed one “not found in Marxism,” Lenin “hoped for revolutions in all defeated countries in Europe,” and “began very early to associate the notion of a ‘world war’ with that of a world revolution.” He “was, I believe, the only one in his own group who welcomed the war without any qualifications.”³⁷²

Lenin’s 1916 critique of Rosa Luxemburg’s *Junius Pamphlet*, for example, posits a program using *world war* as a catalyst of *civil war* quite bluntly: “Junius quite rightly says that a revolution cannot be ‘made.’ Revolution was on the order of the day in the 1914-16 period, it was hidden in the depths of the war, was *emerging* out of the war. This should have been ‘*proclaimed*’ in the name of the revolutionary class, and *its* program should have been fearlessly and fully announced; socialism is impossible in a time of war without civil war against the arch-reactionary, criminal bourgeoisie[.]” Lenin proceeds to outline several basic measures to follow “in line with the maturing revolution” (including, ironically, voting *against* war credits), and writes conclusively that “the success of *all* these steps *inevitably* leads to civil war.”³⁷³

Arendt’s recalls this insight of Lenin repeatedly in many works, and nowhere more telling than towards the end of her “Rosa Luxemburg” essay, where Arendt contrasts Lenin’s discernment of events with Luxemburg’s in just these terms:

present war, the tactics of the workers’ revolutionary struggle on an international scale against their governments, the tactics of proletarian revolution.” in *The Lenin Anthology*, Robert C. Tucker, ed., New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1975, pp. 183-195, p. 190-191.

³⁷² Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 444.

³⁷³ V.I. Lenin, “On the Junius Pamphlet,” in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, Ed. Mary-Alice Waters. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970, pp. 428-439, p. 438, emphasis in original. See also Rosa Luxemburg, “The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy,” in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, pp. 257-331.

There were, however, two aspects of the 1905 prelude which entirely escaped [Rosa Luxemburg]. There was, after all, the surprising fact that the revolution had broken out not only in a non-industrialized, backward country, but in a territory where no strong socialist movement with mass support existed at all. And there was, second, the equally undeniable fact that the revolution had been the consequence of the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. These were the two facts Lenin never forgot and from which he drew two conclusions. First, one did not need a large organization; a small, tightly organized group with a leader who knew what he wanted was enough to pick up the power once the authority of the old regime had been swept away...And second, since revolutions were not 'made' but the result of circumstances and events beyond anybody's power, wars were welcome.³⁷⁴

Here Arendt gives not only substantial positive credit to Leninist principles of revolutionary organization; she also praises what in the 1953 essay "Understanding Communism" she tellingly calls his revolutionary *tactics*. Citing "to my knowledge, the best analytical history of Bolshevism," Arendt records "An unbroken line of thought and political attitude [that] runs from Marx to Lenin to Stalin. Marx is the discoverer and formulator of a theory which Lenin translated into practical terms and which Stalin put into effect. Strategy (Marx) is followed by the development of tactical means (Lenin) and ends with the development of a preconceived plan (Stalin). [...] There is no doubt that Lenin understood himself as a mere tactician, faithfully applying the revolutionary strategy of Marx to changing and changed circumstances."³⁷⁵ These statements are surely an apology for Lenin, for in Arendt's unique vocabulary the distance separating "faithfully applying

³⁷⁴ Hannah Arendt, "Rosa Luxemburg," p. 53.

³⁷⁵ Hannah Arendt, "Understanding Communism" (1953), in *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 363-367, p. 363-4, 365.

revolutionary strategy,” and “development of a preconceived plan,” is profound. It means that whatever Lenin’s political error, it was *not* “the substitution of making for acting,” or the pursuit of “a utopian political system...construed in accordance with a model by somebody who has mastered the techniques of human affairs,”³⁷⁶ and within which (and for whom) humans can be broken for political ends like eggs for an omelet. This distinguished Lenin both morally and politically from Stalin.³⁷⁷

Instead, Lenin’s political failure was what Arendt in *On Revolution* calls a “surrender of political freedom to economic necessity” that began immediately after the October Revolution. But even this criticism is qualified:

It has become customary to view all these surrenders, and especially the last one through Lenin, as foregone conclusions, chiefly because we find it difficult to judge any of these men, and again most of all Lenin, in their own right...Yet even Lenin, despite his dogmatic Marxism, might perhaps have been capable of avoiding the surrender; it was after all the same man who once, when asked to state in one sentence the essence and aims of the October Revolution, gave the curious and long-forgotten formula: ‘Electrification plus *soviets*.’ This answer is remarkable for what it omits: the role of the party, on one side, the building of socialism on the other. In their stead, we are given an entirely un-Marxist separation of economics and politics, a differentiation between electrification as the solution to Russia’s social question, and the *soviet* system as her new body politic that had emerged during the revolution outside all parties...*This was one of the not infrequent instances when Lenin’s gifts as a statesman overruled his Marxist training and ideological convictions.*³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 227.

³⁷⁷ Hannah Arendt, “The Eggs Speak Up,” in *Essays in Understanding*, pp. 270-284, p. 275-77. See also Hannah Arendt, “Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought,” p. 276 on “the decisive transformation by Stalin of both Marxism and Leninism into a totalitarian ideology”; and for the same in more detail, Hannah Arendt, *Origins*, p. 318-323. On the distinction between Lenin and Stalin Arendt thought her views against the “mainstream of Western thought” which “believed in an unbroken continuity of Soviet Russian history from October 1917 until Stalin’s heath.” Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 441.

At times, as it does here, Arendt's political judgment of Lenin paints a Janus face—one-half reflecting his "gifts as a statesman," the other half accenting his "Marxist training and ideological convictions." Lenin's statesmanship shines in his post-October project of Soviet state-building and social and political "stratification," his attempt to establish various forms of "differentiation" (social, national, and professional) within the Soviet state,³⁷⁹ and his willingness to reverse his own errors, and compromise when necessary.³⁸⁰ Meanwhile his "Marxist training" drove the Bolsheviks' dictatorial turn following the October coup, as between 1918-21 Lenin "dissolved the Constituent Assembly, emasculated the soviets, and liquidated the Kronstadt rebellion." Here, Arendt says, "precisely the Marxist in Lenin [rather than the statesman]...prevailed."³⁸¹ The *soviets*, which should have remained a distinctly political organ, were now called upon to solve Russia's "social question."

Arendt writes—one might say grants—that Lenin pursued revolutionary dictatorship not for political reasons, but rather to tackle social and economic exigencies. With the NEP, for example, Lenin pursued capitalist measures despite

³⁷⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 55-56, emphasis added.

³⁷⁹ Again, for a critique of Arendt's characterization of Lenin's War Communism and NEP policies, see Andrew Arato, "Dictatorship Before and After Totalitarianism," *Social Research*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 473-503.

³⁸⁰ See e.g. Lenin's final article, "Better Fewer, But Better" (*Lenin Anthology*, op. cit. pp. 734-746) and its scathing criticism (p. 735) of "Our...deplorable, not to say wretched" state apparatus and call to "show sound skepticism for too rapid progress, for boastfulness." On the need for learning, adaptation, and compromise (when necessary) by revolutionary parties, see Lenin's "Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder" (*Lenin Anthology*, op. cit. pp. 550-618, esp. "VIII: No Compromises?" p. 587-596): "[P]olitical leaders of the revolutionary class are absolutely useless if they are incapable of 'changing tack, or offering conciliation and compromise' in order to take evasive action in a patently disadvantageous battle."

³⁸¹ Hannah Arendt, "Comment on Ulam," p. 445.

rigorous ideological objections within his Party, and “probably surrendered his earlier position [on the separation of economics and politics] for economic rather than political reasons, less for the sake of the party’s power than for the sake of electrification.”³⁸² The *soviets*, these “new institutions of freedom,” were “sacrificed” by Lenin for the sake of liberation—liberation not from tyrants, but from poverty—for “He was convinced that an incompetent people in a backward country would be unable to conquer poverty under conditions of political freedom, unable, at any rate, to defeat poverty and found freedom simultaneously.”³⁸³

In this fashion, then, Arendt redeemed Lenin’s revolutionary project at the same time as she pinpointed its unfortunate mistakes from the perspective of republican revolutionary statesmanship; and this at a time when few in the Western world were either willing or prepared to give Lenin such credit. Elsewhere she places Lenin provocatively in the company of Machiavelli, Robespierre, *and the American Founding Fathers* in the pantheon of “great revolutionaries,” statesmen who “wished nothing more passionately than to initiate a new order of things.”³⁸⁴ What did all of them share? They were each, Arendt suggests, a *beginner*, an *actor*, a

³⁸² Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 56.

³⁸³ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 56. Years earlier in *Origins* Arendt practically absolved Lenin from culpability for the political consequences of War Communism on similar grounds: “There is no doubt that Lenin suffered his greatest defeat when, with the outbreak of the civil war, the supreme power that he originally planned to concentrate in the Soviets definitely passed into the hands of the party bureaucracy[.]” And even *that* polity, she argues, was such that by the time of the New Economic Policy in 1921, “Agriculture could still be developed on a collective, co-operative, or private basis, and the national economy was still free to follow a socialist, state-capitalist, or free-enterprise pattern. None of these alternatives would have automatically destroyed the new structure of the country.” Hannah Arendt, *Origins*, p. 319.

³⁸⁴ Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?” in *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin, 1993, pp. 91-141, p. 141.

representative (or theoretician) of the human condition of *natality* and the power of *principled* action, and a reminder that *responsible* action can, in and of itself, establish the preconditions—but only the preconditions—of a new order of freedom in the world.³⁸⁵ While Lenin understood clearly the power of action and the revolutionary nature of new beginnings—these were his revolutionary *tactics*—his tragedy was to have, in responsibly facing up to Russia’s “social question,” misunderstood the nature of political foundation and the political limits of violent beginnings. Arendt remembers Lenin—and helps us to remember Lenin—as the twentieth century’s greatest exemplar of the “real revolutionary” and the power of responsible action. But she also remembers Lenin as the twentieth century’s most tragically mistaken revolutionary founder—not only of Russia’s own revolution, but of a Bolshevik-communist movement that inspired violent revolutions around the world. And it was this violent beginning of the global Communist revolution—the violent beginning of a new and successful revolutionary idea,³⁸⁶ and thus a violent founding of a new *revolutionary movement*³⁸⁷—that set the stage for a century of violence in which wars and revolutions were practically indistinguishable.

³⁸⁵ On Arendt’s relation to Machiavelli as it regards political founding and violence, see Faisal Baluch, “Arendt’s Machiavellian Moment,” *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2014), pp. 154-177.

³⁸⁶ Cf. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 205: “The way the beginner starts whatever he intends to do lays down the law of action for those who have joined him in order to partake in the enterprise and to bring about its accomplishment. As such, the principle inspires the deeds that are to follow and remains apparent as long as the action lasts.”

³⁸⁷ Hannah Arendt, “Comment on Ulam,” p. 442: “Whatever Lenin had done, he could, being a Marxist, justify it by believing that he had laid the foundations for a long process, and to ‘project his dream into the future’ was not against the letter or the spirit of Marxism.”

This explains why, in the last analysis, it is not *Lenin*, but *Rosa Luxemburg* on whom Arendt unequivocally hangs her revolutionary hat—Luxemburg, whose own revolutionary attempt in 1919 failed disastrously for herself, the Spartacus League, and the German communist revolution, and who was hardly loath to condone revolutionary violence. On its face, Arendt’s judgment of Luxemburg vis-à-vis Lenin is puzzling, for as Georg Lukács points out in his incisive analysis of Luxemburg’s 1918 critique of Lenin’s Russian Revolution, “Rosa Luxemburg does not deny the necessity of violence in connection with the Russian Revolution. She declares: ‘Socialism presupposes a series of acts of violence—against property, etc.’ And later, in the Spartacus Programme it is recognized that ‘the violence of the bourgeois counter-revolution must be opposed by the revolutionary violence of the proletariat.’”³⁸⁸ Throughout her critique of Lenin, Luxemburg rejects moderation in times of revolution in terms that explicitly justify violence: “The ‘golden mean,’” she says, “cannot be maintained in any revolution,” so that “without the uprising of the ‘immoderate’ Jacobins, even the first, timid and halfhearted achievements of the Girondin phase would soon have been buried under the ruins of the revolution...[T]he real alternative to Jacobin dictatorship...[was] restoration of the Bourbons!” and “The party of Lenin was the only one which grasped the mandate

³⁸⁸ Georg Lukács, “Critical Observations on Rosa Luxemburg’s ‘Critique of the Russian Revolution,’” in *History and Class Consciousness*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971, pp. 272-294, p.277-278. See also Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution,” in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, Mary Alice Waters, ed. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970, pp. 365-395.

and duty of a truly revolutionary party...Only a party which knows how to lead, that is, to advance things, wins support in stormy times.”³⁸⁹

But two crucial differences steer Arendt’s judgment away from Lenin and towards Luxemburg. First, says Arendt, Luxemburg unlike Lenin “refused categorically, from beginning to end, to see in war anything but the most terrible disaster, no matter what its eventual outcome[.]” Recall from the same essay that it was Lenin’s great acumen, and not Luxemburg’s, to see in wars the great possibility of revolutionary situations. Now, it seems, Luxemburg’s obliviousness was hardly a weakness, but a sign of character, of great political judgment to not even *consider* the possibility. And second, “with respect to the issue of organization, she did not believe in a victory in which the people at large had no part and no voice...she ‘was far more afraid of a deformed revolution than an unsuccessful one’—this was, in fact, ‘the major difference between her’ and the Bolsheviks.”³⁹⁰ And “[H]aven’t events proved her right? Isn’t the history of the Soviet Union one long demonstration of the frightful dangers of ‘deformed revolutions’?...Wasn’t it true that Lenin was ‘completely mistaken’ in the means he employed, that the only way to salvation was the ‘school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion,’ and that terror ‘demoralized’ everybody and destroyed everything?”³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution,” p. 374.

³⁹⁰ Hannah Arendt, “Rosa Luxemburg,” p. 53.

³⁹¹ Hannah Arendt, “Rosa Luxemburg,” p. 53-4.

Given what we know about the degree to which Arendt faults Stalin, rather than Lenin, for the turn towards totalitarian terror in the Soviet Union, Arendt's criticism of Lenin here is at least curious: What is really at stake in her rejection of Lenin's welcoming of war for tactical purposes? What did Arendt admire in Luxemburg's, rather than Lenin's, revolutionary organization? And what does it mean for Rosa Luxemburg to have been "right," as opposed to Lenin? In what way is the "school of public life itself" the "only way to salvation"?³⁹² At the heart of these problems, I want to suggest, is a contrast Arendt posits between Lenin's superior revolutionary *tactics*, and Luxemburg's superior revolutionary *strategy* respecting the use of *violence*—and the moral and political priority Arendt affords the latter in the project of revolutionary foundation.

Any approach to Arendtian revolutionary "strategy" must begin at her now-familiar distinction between *power* and *violence*. "Power," we recall, "needs no justification...what it does need is legitimacy"; whereas "Violence can be justifiable, but it will never be legitimate."³⁹³ Here in the context of Lenin and Luxemburg, two things are notable about the First World War: First, the War displayed a "hitherto unknown scale" of violence—total war; and second, this unprecedented violence

³⁹² For a very insightful discussion around this latter question, see Sidonia Blättler and Irene M. Marti, "Rosa Luxemburg and Hannah Arendt: Against the Destruction of Political Spheres of Freedom," Trans. Senem Saner. *Hypatia*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 88-101. Useful comparison can also be found in Paul Mattick, "Luxemburg versus Lenin," (1935) in *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*, Merlin Press, 1978; Max Schachtman, "Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg," *New Internationalist*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (March 1935), pp. 30-64; Walter Held, "The German Left and Bolshevism," *New Internationalist* (February 1939); and Walter Held, "Once Again Lenin and Luxemburg," *Fourth Internationalist*, June 1940, pp. 47-52.

³⁹³ Hannah Arendt, "On Violence," p. 151.

“was justified and propagated”³⁹⁴ by all parties involved. The moral implication of these two facts together is absolutely devastating for twentieth century politics—for if the violence of WWI *was* justifiable, and justifiable in the name of *freedom*, then the moral precedent of the First World War was that, in practice, *anything*—even the most abhorrent and inconceivable violence—is justifiable in the name of *freedom*.³⁹⁵

This was precisely the door that Lenin opened and exploited. Although Lenin did not condone the “imperialist” war in itself, and indeed agreed with Luxemburg that, “The ‘epoch of imperialism’ made the present war an imperialist one and it inevitably engenders new imperialist wars (until the triumph of socialism),” he also thought this “by no means precludes national wars on the part of, say, small (annexed or nationally-oppressed) countries *against* the imperialist powers, just as it does not preclude large-scale national movements in Eastern Europe.”³⁹⁶ And to iterate, “the success of *all* these steps [‘in line with the maturing revolution’] *inevitably* leads to civil war.”

In the “Junius Pamphlet” Luxemburg had argued to the contrary that “In the era of the unleashing of this imperialism [through wars], national wars are no longer possible,”³⁹⁷ and a standard interpretation of this dispute centers on Lenin’s

³⁹⁴ Blättler and Marti (2005), p. 97.

³⁹⁵ The point sheds light on Arendt’s political anxieties over the atomic bomb—if *this* responsibility is the burden of modern politics, is it any wonder that most people seek freedom outside of politics?

³⁹⁶ Lenin, “On the Junius Pamphlet,” p. 433.

³⁹⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, “The Junius Pamphlet,” p. 329.

and Luxemburg's differing views on the relation between national wars, class struggle, and the immediate possibility of a European proletarian revolution.³⁹⁸ But Luxemburg's objection drives much deeper. "The final goal of socialism," she writes, "will be realized by the international proletariat only if it makes the issue 'war against war' the guiding line of its practical policy; and on condition that it deploys all its forces and shows itself ready, by its courage to the point of extreme sacrifice, to do this." And "The activity of the proletariat of all countries as a class, in peace time as in wartime, must be geared to the fight against imperialism and war as its supreme goal." The class struggle is both "against imperialism *and* against war."³⁹⁹

Ironically, then, what made for Lenin's greatest gift as a leader also made him exceptionally dangerous as a revolutionary. For Lenin's willingness to even entertain *world war*, and to actively provoke *civil war*, as a *means* to a revolutionary *end*—that end being revolutionary freedom⁴⁰⁰—meant that no boundary remained to distinguish the *political essence of revolution* from the *violent nature of war*. War

³⁹⁸ See, e.g. Mattick, "Luxemburg versus Lenin," esp. the section "On the National Question."

³⁹⁹ Rosa Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet," p. 330-1, emphasis added. Here Luxemburg's laws of revolution echo the laws of war enumerated by Kant in *Perpetual Peace* precisely so that a better peace may be possible in the end. On this point Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Ed. Ronald Beiner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 75, where Arendt modifies Kant's statement in *Perpetual Peace* that "No state shall, during war, permit such acts of hostility which would make mutual confidence in the subsequent peace impossible," to construct what she calls a "categorical imperative for action"—"Always act on the maxim through which [an] original compact [dictated by mankind] can be actualized into a general law." This is as close as Arendt ever comes to dictating a categorical moral law for all forms of action, including but not limited to revolution. (Though cf. Arendt's concession to Platonic "yardsticks" in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 442, "Thus the fear of concentration camps and the resulting insight into the nature of total domination might serve to invalidate all obsolete political differentiations from right to left and to introduce beside and above them the politically most important yardstick for judging events in our time, namely: whether they serve totalitarian domination or not.")

⁴⁰⁰ Provocatively, in *On Revolution* (p. 1) Arendt calls freedom "the only cause left" to justify war and revolutions under conditions of modern technologies of violence.

itself—world war, national war, civil war—become an inextricable part of the revolution, an acceptable means of inciting the revolution. And subsequently for the twentieth century, the enthusiasm generated by the success of the Bolshevik revolution meant that the political line that once distinguished *revolution* from *war* had been shattered into oblivion,⁴⁰¹ and would remain in hiding until the miraculous events of 1989. If the twentieth century became, as Lenin predicted, a century of wars *and* revolutions, in which violence was believed to be their common denominator, it was in part because Lenin himself, through the brilliance of his tactics and the inspiration of his achievement, obliterated the distinction between them.

It was Rosa Luxemburg's genius to have seen the insidious long-term effects of any form of politically justified violence which would not only blur the line between wars and revolutions, but in the process destroy the very *idea* of revolution as a distinctly political phenomenon. Luxemburg believed that "wars of liberation" sowed in themselves "the seeds of new conflicts" and deformity, for any "justifiable" use of violence—either at the point of foundation, or to consolidate the revolution—sets a spiraling precedent for more violence, and this at the long-term expense of speech, persuasion, and political power.⁴⁰² And yet Luxemburg for her part hardly

⁴⁰¹ Cf. Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan*. Trans. G.L. Ulmen. New York: Telos, 2007, pp. 48-58 on the transition in partisan revolutionary theory "From Clausewitz to Lenin," e.g. p. 51: "From a fundamental consideration of [Lenin's] quotations, marginalia, underscoring, and exclamation points [in his reading of Clausewitz], it is possible to develop the new theory of absolute war and absolute enmity that has determined the age of revolutionary war[.]"

⁴⁰² Cf. Arendt's otherwise inconspicuous quote of Polybius in *On Revolution*: "The beginning is not merely half of the whole but reaches out towards the end." Arendt, *On Revolution*, pg. 205.

rejected the use of revolutionary violence in the name of freedom. She, like Arendt, acknowledged that power might wield violence for political purposes, that violence might indeed be justifiable in the name of freedom, and that in practice, violence and revolution often go hand in hand. How does one square all this?

Here we might profitably turn to Arendt's paradoxical interpretation of the American Revolution. Arendt calls it the only "successful" modern revolution, the "only one" that "founded a completely new body politic without violence and with the help of a constitution." "It seems certain," she says, "that the relatively nonviolent character of the American Revolution, where violence was more or less restricted to regular warfare, is an important factor in this success,"⁴⁰³ where success here means "the surprising stability [in America] of a political structure under the onslaught of the most vehement and shattering social instability."⁴⁰⁴

Without ignoring the violence of the American Revolutionary War—and by all accounts Arendt justifies power's use of violence on this occasion—Arendt appreciates that the American Founders, unlike Lenin's Bolsheviks, distinguished from the outset between the *politics of revolution*—the "unanimous Declaration" and "[mutual] pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor" by the colonies and their representatives⁴⁰⁵—and the *war of liberation*, fought to make free self-government possible. The Founders' genius was to separate power and

⁴⁰³ Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 140.

⁴⁰⁴ Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 140.

⁴⁰⁵ *Declaration of Independence* (1776), http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

violence, war and revolution, conceptually, even as in practice they overlapped substantially. Having been maintained even amidst the violent process of liberation, these distinctions were subsequently ingrained, built-in through a trial of fire, into the “*spirit* of American laws” at the moment of founding.⁴⁰⁶ And thus, where in “deformed” revolutions like the Bolshevik Revolution the brutal suppression of dissent followed directly and necessarily from a constitutional inability to distinguish between political acts of protest and violent acts of civil war; in America, two centuries after the revolution, Arendt found the one state where even “civil disobedience” might find a snug constitutional home.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁶ This point challenges Baluch’s conclusion that Arendt ultimately cannot escape the intrusion of violence into the project of political founding, as she drew from Machiavelli. In the American Revolution in particular (and setting aside Rome, which as Baluch suggests is a more problematic case) the acts of political foundation—be it the signing of the Declaration or the ratification of the Constitution, were clearly distinguishable from the violence necessary for liberation from the British.

In the same article Baluch (p. 165) mentions Arendt’s call for a ‘Jewish army’ during the Second World War, which would constitute the ‘beginning of Jewish politics,’ as another example of the ultimate inseparability of violence from founding in Arendt’s work. However, Baluch’s own insightful commentary at the Hannah Arendt Center Blog (“Politics and Violence: Arendt on the Idea of a Jewish Army, June 23, 2014) refines his earlier analysis usefully, I think, towards a clearer ontological separation of violence from politics in Arendt’s account. There Baluch writes that “Arendt...goes beyond the Machiavellian recognition of the necessity of violence. What ultimately allows her to view the creation of a Jewish army as the beginning of Jewish politics is the very act of creating the army...The creation of the Jewish army, as Arendt conceives of it, is an act aimed not primarily at creating a force to inflict violence. Rather, the very act of getting together an army allows Arendt to wonder whether the creation of the army might mean the beginning of a Jewish politics. She writes that the idea of a ‘Jewish army is not utopian if the Jews of all countries demand it and are prepared to volunteer for it.’ Arendt’s principle aim in her article on the creation of the Jewish army is to ensure broad participation in the army. The creation of a broad based Jewish army would be the beginning of Jewish politics because it would be an act of power rather than violence. Arendt’s article calls on the Jewish people to act in concert and assert their power.”

See Faisal Baluch, “Arendt’s Machiavellian Moment,” *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2014), pp. 154-177; Faisal Baluch, “Politics and Violence: Arendt on the Idea of a Jewish Army,” Hannah Arendt Center Blog, June 23, 2014; and Hannah Arendt, “The Jewish Army—The Beginning of Jewish Politics?” [November 14, 1941], in *The Jewish Writings*, Ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman. New York: Schocken Books, 2007, pp. 136-139.

⁴⁰⁷ Hannah Arendt, “Civil Disobedience,” in *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 49-102, esp. p. 99-102.

Portions of this Chapter III were previously published in the article “Hannah Arendt’s Revolutionary Leadership,” *HannahArendt.net*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2013), pp. 1-25.

Chapter IV:

Egypt's Leaderless Revolution

In certain respects, a revolution is a miracle. If we had been told in 1917 that we would hold out in three years of war against the whole world, that, as a result of the war, two million Russian landowners, capitalists and their children would find themselves abroad, and that we would turn out to be the victors, no one of us would have believed it...But just because of the miracle we lost the habit of taking the long view of things. That is why all of us now have to limp along.
—Lenin, 1921⁴⁰⁸

No nation had ever before embarked on so resolute an attempt as that of the French in 1789 to break with the past, to make, as it were, a scission in their life line and to create an unbridgeable gulf between all they had hitherto been and all they now aspired to be...[T]hey spared no pains in their endeavor to obliterate their former selves. [...] I am convinced that though they had no inkling of this, they took over from the old regime not only most of its customs, conventions, and modes of thought, but even those very ideas which prompted our revolutionaries to destroy it; that, in fact, though nothing was further from their intentions, they used the debris of the old order for building up the new.
—Tocqueville, 1856⁴⁰⁹

Now Sarai Abram's wife had born him no children, and she had an Egyptian slavegirl named Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, 'Look, pray, the LORD has kept me from bearing children. Pray, come to bed with my slavegirl. Perhaps I shall be built up through her.'
—Genesis 1:16⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁸ V.I. Lenin, "Speech at a Plenary Meeting of The Moscow Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies," February 28, 1921. *Collected Works*, 1st English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Volume 32, pgs. 147-159; published at www.marxist.org. On Lenin and 'miracles' see Roland Boer, *Lenin, Religion, and Theology*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

⁴⁰⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville. *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*. Trans. Stuart Gilbert. New York; Anchor, 1983, p. vii.

⁴¹⁰ Robert Alter trans. *Genesis*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997, p. 67.

16. The Election of Irony

On March 26, 2014 Egyptian army chief and minister of defense Abdel Fattah El-Sisi announced his resignation from the Egyptian military and government, and his intent to run for the Egyptian presidency in a free election to be held sometime before mid-July.⁴¹¹ “Today,” said Sisi in a televised address, “I stand before you for the last time in military uniform, after deciding to end my service as defense minister and commander of the armed forces...With all modesty, I nominate myself for the presidency of Egypt.”⁴¹² Egyptian law mandated that Sisi relinquish his military position before running, and the announcement came days before a March 30 deadline for citizens to submit their candidacy to Egypt’s Presidential Elections Committee, the judicial body in charge of overseeing the electoral process.⁴¹³ What was one to make of Sisi’s self-proclaimed “modesty”? Three years removed from the internationally ballyhooed January 25 Revolution, what had become of Egypt’s budding, post-revolutionary democracy?

This would be Egypt’s second presidential election in as many years, just one year after General Sisi commanded the ouster of Mohamed Morsi, Egypt’s first democratically elected president and its only civilian head of state since becoming a

⁴¹¹ The first round of elections was eventually held on May 26-28, 2014.

⁴¹² “‘In all modesty’: Sisi announces candidacy for Egypt’s presidential elections,” *The Express Tribune with the International New York Times*, published March 27, 2014 at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/687881/in-all-modesty-sisi-announces-candidacy-for-egypts-presidential-elections/>.

⁴¹³ “Egyptian presidential election process to kick off March 30,” published online by *Al Bawaba* on March 23, 2014 at www.albawaba.com.

republic in 1952.⁴¹⁴ At his ouster Morsi was arrested on charges of prison escape during the January 25 Revolution, plus fraud and inciting political chaos during his presidency. At present he awaits trial.⁴¹⁵ Meanwhile Sisi, the strongman who commanded the popular coup, was expected to win Egypt's next presidential election in a popular landslide. In enthusiastic language, political analyst Ahmed El-Tonsi described Sisi as Egypt's next "charismatic leader" whose popularity derived from his heroic action to save Egyptian democracy from the tyranny of Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood:

[Sisi] has been enjoying considerable admiration from broad societal sectors across Egypt. These sectors vary in their social background, age, gender and even political orientation. Perhaps the first time Al-Sisi emerged on the political scene was on 3 July last year when he announced the transitional roadmap. However, his emergence as a potential national savior took place somewhat earlier...His speech in late June [2012, insisting that Morsi respond to popular demands in the street] was overwhelmingly welcomed by Egyptians, who interpreted Al-Sisi's words of solidarity with the people as being an endorsement of their demand to see the ousting of Morsi...This development added more momentum to the mass movement and marked the emergence of Al-Sisi as a popular leader. [] Part of Al-Sisi's charisma emanated from the profound popularity of the army as an institution...Throughout the 30 June Revolution, Al-Sisi made the Egyptians not only feel secure but also enabled them to feel victorious in ousting the regime led by Morsi. This sense of achievement made many Egyptians feel emotionally attached to Al-Sisi, and as a result he emerged as the leader of the victorious, yet previously leaderless, masses who for months had longed for his endorsement of their objectives.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ The country's four previous presidents—Muhammad Naguib (1952-3), Gamal Abdel Nasser (1953-70), Anwar Sadat (1970-1981), and Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011)—were all decorated military men.

⁴¹⁵ Kimakra Nealy, "Mohamed Morsi: Egypt's Ousted President Court Trials Postponed," *guardianlv.com*, July 6, 2014.

⁴¹⁶ Ahmed El-Tonsi, "Egypt's Charismatic Leader," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, March 27, 2014.

Tonsi writes without irony that “Thus far, Al-Sisi has responded positively to the calls of the masses on at least two occasions – on June 30 last year and in his accepting to stand in the presidential elections. In both cases, and specifically in accepting the invitation to stand, he has been left with no other choice but to comply with the masses’ will.” “And “some charismatic leaders,” writes Tonsi with obvious allusion to Nasser, “have been the founding fathers of their states or even nations.”⁴¹⁷

Not all were sanguine. To many, Sisi’s victory would only consolidate the Egyptian revolution’s full cyclical return to where it started—a faux-democracy run by a military-dominated bureaucracy—an authoritarian regime.⁴¹⁸ And indicatively, in January 2014 American University Professor of History Khaled Fahmy asked, “Is Egypt back where it was in 2011?”⁴¹⁹ What had the revolution *actually* achieved?

⁴¹⁷ Ahmed El-Tonsi, “Egypt’s Charismatic Leader,” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, March 27, 2014.

⁴¹⁸ This was the popular concept of political revolution until the late 18th century. See esp. Thomas Hobbes’s description of the English Civil War in the *Behemoth or the Long Parliament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), which he completed in 1668 (published in 1682), nearly two decades after *Leviathan* (1651) and less than one decade after the Restoration of the Crown upon Charles II in 1660. The text is an extended dialog in which “A” and “B” reflect on the series of events linking the violent end of Charles I’s reign to his son Charles II’s restoration. The word “revolution” appears only once in the text (p. 204), and appropriately near the end, to signify a bloody and destructive, but ultimately circular process of return to the same:

B: ...I have seen in this revolution a circular motion of the sovereign power through two usurpers, from the late King to this his son. For (leaving out the power of the council of officers, which was but temporary, and not otherwise owned by them but in trust) it moved from King Charles I to the Long Parliament; from thence to the Rump; from the Rump to Oliver Cromwell; and then back again from Richard Cromwell to the Rump; thence to the Long Parliament; and thence to King Charles II, where long may it remain.

A: Amen. And may he have as often as there shall be need such a general.

⁴¹⁹ Khaled Fahmy, “Is Egypt back where it was in 2011?” posted at CNN.com, January 14, 2014. See also, and a year apart: Khaled M. Abou El Fadl, “The Perils of a ‘People’s Coup,’” *The New York Times* (online), July 7, 2013; and John L. Esposito (Professor of Religion and International Affairs at

Egypt's economy had regressed considerably since the revolution,⁴²⁰ and the summary killing and arrest of hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood supporters—to say nothing of the ousting and arrest of their popularly elected President—had divided Egyptian society more fundamentally and passionately than even under the Mubarak regime. “Economically and politically,” wrote Fahmy, “A political solution is desperately needed,” but “one that el-Sisi and his henchmen seem singularly incapable of offering. Egypt thus appears to be back where it was in 2011 when its revolution erupted. A military dictatorship seems to be reestablishing itself, and the notorious security forces appear to be back in business, with a vengeance.” Then Fahmy wrote something astonishing: “Still, as someone who took to the streets in 2011 against Mubarak, and again in 2012 and 2013 against Morsy, I am willing to take to the streets once more against this new military dictatorship that is poised to impose itself with a civilian veneer.”⁴²¹

Professor Fahmy represents an important and representative voice of Egypt's revolution, being at once a prominent intellectual with a commanding grip on Egypt's history, an observer of the revolution and political events on the ground, and an active participant, if not informal spokesperson, of whatever the “people's revolution” of Egypt was and is. In a December 2013 interview with the International Peace Institute, Fahmy said that “The challenges [for the revolution]

Georgetown University), “Egyptian Reform: A Coup and Presidential Election to Restore Authoritarianism?” HuffingtonPost.com, June 26, 2014. Similar commentaries exist in abundance.

⁴²⁰ Fahmy (“Is Egypt back where it was in 2011?”) reports that overall growth rates plummeted from 7.2% before the revolution to 2.1% in 2012-13; unemployment rose from 8.4% to 12.2%, and poverty rates worsened from 19.6% in 2010 to 25.2% in 2013.

⁴²¹ Khaled Fahmy, “Is Egypt back where it was in 2011?” posted at CNN.com, January 14, 2014.

are huge because the old regime has not collapsed—if anything, it has managed to position itself—but I think the genie is out of the bottle. I don't think it is possible to revert back to the situation before January 2011." And when asked if the Egyptian revolution had "failed," Fahmy responded that "No, the Egyptian revolution has just started...And what has happened in 2011 onwards is a bursting of energies in the country at large, and among the youth in particular."⁴²² Most importantly Fahmy said, beyond ousting Mubarak and Morsi, the revolution has succeeded in creating *itself*—what Fahmy in a separate interview called a "third faction" in Egyptian politics—standing beside the old regime military, security, bureaucratic, and judiciary forces on one hand, and the Islamist factions led by the Muslim Brotherhood on the other—a new third faction "which is the revolution."⁴²³

"The revolution" had already to its credit the overthrow of one authoritarian leader *and* one democratically elected president. What then was its relationship to democracy? What message had been delivered in June 2013? "You failed, then we reject you," wrote Fahmy. "Not failed because of the economy. We can wait four years and vote you out. But you failed the revolution, and we will not tolerate this."⁴²⁴ What exactly does "the revolution" want? "[W]e want to transform the very nature of the institutions of the state," including "[t]he position of the army in the

⁴²² Quoted in José Vericat, "Egypt Revolution Stumbles, but the 'Genie is Out of the Bottle': Interview with Khaled Fahmy," posted at theglobalobservatory.org, January 14, 2014.

⁴²³ "Khaled Fahmy: Sisi is 'Much More Dangerous,'" www.pbs.org (Frontline), September 17, 2013.

⁴²⁴ "Khaled Fahmy: Sisi is 'Much More Dangerous,'" www.pbs.org (Frontline), September 17, 2013.

economy and society.” The revolution wants “this military to serve us rather than to serve itself...The big question is: how do we make these states serve us?”⁴²⁵

Whether one sees the world from Tonsi’s or Fahmy’s point of view, the rise to power of a military strongman was not the outcome envisioned by the millions of Egyptian protestors who took to the streets, occupied Tahrir Square, defied the hated Egyptian security regime, and risked life and limb in the name of bread, freedom, social justice, and dignity between January 25 and February 11, 2011.⁴²⁶ Quite the contrary, central in the minds of Egyptian dissidents, and this for many years,⁴²⁷ was the idea of a new kind of politics in Egypt, one that guaranteed basic political freedoms like freedom of the press, freedom of association, and free democratic elections, and all of which demonstrated a clear deference of military

⁴²⁵ Quoted in José Vericat, “Egypt Revolution Stumbles, but the ‘Genie is Out of the Bottle’: Interview with Khaled Fahmy,” posted at theglobalobservatory.org, January 14, 2014.

⁴²⁶ A detailed account of the brave and strategic interaction between young protestors and Egypt’s security regime, especially during the first unpredictable days of protest, is Mona El-Ghobashy, “The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution,” *Middle East Report*, Vol. 41 (Spring 2011).

⁴²⁷ The revolution was recognized as the culmination of a variety of activist movements, ranging from issue-based social movements to more explicitly democratic ones, that had organized sporadically over the last decade. Thus Eman El-Din Shahin called the January 25 revolution “the coronation of the state of political and social activism that began in 2004” with the establishment of such groups as Kifaya (which in response to rumors that President Hosni Mubarak was setting the stage for his son to take over, began in August 2004 to campaign for the lifting of permanent martial law and “No extension for Mubarak, no heredity succession”), the April 6 Movement (described as “the first cyber protest movement in Egypt”) that demonstrated solidarity between youth activists and an increasingly agitated and politicized Egyptian labor movement, and the “Popular Campaign for the Support of El Baradei” (another online-based group), which raised over one million signatures in support of El Baradei to challenge Mubarak in the 2011 elections. Emad El-Din Shahin, “The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square,” *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, Vol. 3 (2012), pp. 46-69, esp. p. 52-59.

force to civilian authority.⁴²⁸ Indeed three years prior in 2011 the Egyptian revolution had assumed *de facto* moral leadership of a global democratic movement—at times a radically democratic movement—that swept across not only the Arab world, but much of the industrialized, “Occupying” West as well.⁴²⁹ It was the “spirit of Tahrir square”—anti-authoritarian and egalitarian, inclusive of all Egyptians whether on the Square or not, and with outstretched arms to the world⁴³⁰—that had garnered such sympathy and emulation worldwide⁴³¹: “If the

⁴²⁸ Two important documents in this regard are, first, “El Baradei’s Seven Demands for Change,” published on March 2, 2010 by the National Coalition for Change, an association led by Mohammed El Baradei that included a wide coalition of members including political figures, media figures, and representatives from various political parties, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the April 6 Movement. The demands were: 1. Terminating the state of emergency; 2. Granting complete supervision of elections to the judiciary; 3. Granting domestic and international civil society the right to monitor the elections; 4. Granting equal time in the media for all candidates running for office; 5. Granting expatriate Egyptian citizens the right and ability to vote; 6. Guaranteeing the right to run for president without arbitrary restrictions, and setting a two-term limit; and 7. Voting with the national identity card.

The second is a statement of directions, aims, demands, and philosophy of the January 25 protests, organized on the *Kullena Khaled Said (We Are All Khaled Said)* Facebook page, and posted anonymously by Google executive and page administrator Wael Ghonim. Demands were initially not for revolution (Although notably the line “Beloved people of Tunisia...The revolution sun will not set” does appear.), but for “Bread...Freedom...Human dignity,” specifically “Addressing the poverty problem...Annuling the emergency law...Firing Minister of Interior Habib el-Adly...[and] Placing a two-term limit on the presidency.” As events developed, of course, preferences adapted and demands escalated. For both documents, see Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater than the People in Power, A Memoir*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012, p. 44 and 164-169, respectively.

⁴²⁹ See Kurt Anderson, “The Protestor,” *Time Magazine*, December 14, 2011.

⁴³⁰ Wrote one protestor from the Square on February 5, 2011: “If we, the pro-democracy movement, win this battle, the spirit that pervades Tahrir Square will pervade the country. In the square, every shade of the political spectrum is represented. The left is here, and the liberals. The Muslim Brotherhood is with us too, comprising an estimated 5% to 7% of the people at the square. The demonstrators reveal the rich and complex texture of Egyptian society. We need the Mubarak regime to leave. We need the military to secure a space for us to reform our constitution and have free and fair elections that result in a government that will run the country to the benefit of all us Egyptians — and our friends.” Ahdaf Soueif, “The spirit of Tahrir Square,” *Los Angeles Times* (op-ed), February 5, 2011.

world has a heart,” wrote Jonathan Schell on February 3, 2011, a week before Mubarak’s forced resignation, “it now beats for Egypt...Their courage and sacrifice have given new life to the spirit of the nonviolent democratic resistance to dictatorship symbolized in the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.”⁴³² Tunisia’s “Jasmine Revolution” catalyzed Egypt, but Egypt catalyzed the region and the world. This revolution was different, more dramatic and charismatic—it was the regional tipping point of the so-called “Arab Spring.” Seyla Benhabib called the Arab revolts “modern” because “they aim at constitutional reform, securing human rights, increasing transparency and accountability, ending the crony capitalism of corrupt elites,”⁴³³ and because “they revolted to join the contemporary world.”⁴³⁴ Others used a transcendent language of awakening and revelation to capture the combination of local transformation and universal principle at work in Egypt: Writing for *The Nation* in late 2011, for example, Rami G. Khouri (like many others) called the Arab revolts “nothing less than the *awakening*, throughout the Arab world, of several phenomena that are critical for stable statehood: the citizen, the

⁴³¹ Most indicative was the professed ethic of the global Occupy movement. As Michael Scherer reports, the movement began when “the editors of the Vancouver-based, anticonsumerist magazine *Adbusters*...called for a Tahrir Square ‘moment’ on Sept. 17, in lower Manhattan, a protest against ‘corporate rule’ announced in a tweet that ended #occupywallstreet.” On its website Occupy Wall Street declared itself a “leaderless resistance movement” actively “using the revolutionary Arab Spring tactic to achieve our ends and encourage the use of nonviolence to maximize the safety of all participants.” See Michael Scherer, “Introduction: Taking it to the Streets,” in *What is Occupy?* New York: Time Books, 2011, pp. 5-12, p. 5-6, italics added.

⁴³² Jonathan Schell, “The Revolutionary Moment,” *The Nation*. February 3, 2011.

⁴³³ Seyla Benhabib, “The Arab Spring: Religion, Revolution and the Public Sphere,” published by the Social Science Research Council Public Sphere Forum, February 24, 2011.

⁴³⁴ Seyla Benhabib, “The Power and Paradox of Revolutions,” *Reset: Dialogues on Civilization*, October 13, 2011; published at <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000021780>.

citizenry, legitimacy of authority, a commitment to social justice, genuine politics, national self-determination and, ultimately, true sovereignty.”⁴³⁵ “The genius of the Egyptian revolution,” wrote Mona El-Ghobashy, “is its methodical restoration of the public weal. The uprising restored the meaning of politics, if by that term is understood the making of collective claims on government. It revalued the people, revealing them in all their complexity[.]”⁴³⁶ Wael Ghonim, one of the revolution’s symbolic democratic faces, contrasts in his revolutionary memoir Egyptians’ “breaking the psychological barrier of fear” after decades of docility with their newfound “zeal and enthusiasm for the cause” in “our battle for democracy.”⁴³⁷

And at first it seemed the Egyptians *had* won the battle—*had* toppled the Mubarak regime on February 11, 2011 after Mubarak’s three decades at the helm, and *had* begun a process of political decision-making via legitimate democratic processes. Voting began almost immediately, and based on sheer count of the number of free electoral processes conducted at the national level between February 2011 and March 2014, the naïve observer might have pegged Egypt the most democratic country in the world. But the reality, of course, was more complicated.

⁴³⁵ Rami G. Khouri, “The Arab Awakening,” *The Nation* (online), September 12, 2011, emphasis added. See also e.g. Esam Al-Amin, *The Arab Awakening Unveiled: Understanding Transformations and Revolutions in the Middle East*. Washington, D.C.: American Educational Trust, 2013.

⁴³⁶ Mona El-Ghobashy, “The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution,” *Middle East Report*, Vol. 41 (Spring 2011).

⁴³⁷ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, p. 47.

Strangely, after Mubarak's departure extraordinary electoral processes of all kinds—constitutional, legislative, and executive—had been so many as to defy normal routinization, and so prone to unbalanced political outcomes as to routinely alienate large swathes of the Egyptian people.⁴³⁸ In the process electoral outcomes were hardly respected, and electoral procedures failed to establish an independent legitimacy of their own, regardless of outcome. In sum over a three year period Egypt saw many *elections*, but it had not developed a coherent and legitimate *electoral system*. Meanwhile, this non-stop balloting process occurred both during and following what became a protracted, sixteen-month rule by Egypt's Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) following Mubarak's February 2011 ouster, and during which Egyptians "accused the ruling council of army generals of betraying the revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak," and compared the conciliatory speeches of Egypt's interim government to "one of these tricks of the old government" to stay in power.⁴³⁹ As early as mid-2011 large anti-military protests produced "scenes reminiscent of the 18-day uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak...[as] civilian-run popular committees commanded all entrances and exits

⁴³⁸ As Nathan Brown recently recounted in detail, "During the almost thirty months between 11 February 2011, when Mubarak was forced to resign, and 3 July 2013, when the military deposed and detained his elected successor Morsi...each step along the path of democracy ended with the opposing segments of Egyptian society driven farther apart. Egyptians were called to the polls over and over—for a total of five national elections or referenda, some with multiple rounds—but every vote led to differences being redefined and magnified rather than managed or resolved." Brown ultimately concludes that "[T]here were deep problems that repeatedly summoning voters to the polls could not overcome. Although elections were not the cause of the country's political woes, voting threw the growing fissures in the Egyptian body politic into stark relief and sometimes aggravated them." Nathan J. Brown, "Egypt's Failed Transition," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (October 2013), pp. 45-58, p. 46, 45.

⁴³⁹ Jack Shenker, "Protests spread in Egypt as discontent with military rule grows," *theguardian.com*, July 10, 2011.

to Tahrir Square,"⁴⁴⁰ and they eventually pushed the military to expedite the constitutional and electoral process, albeit not without power-play moves to secure its own long term influence.⁴⁴¹ Egypt's balloting process eventually included a March 2011 referendum on constitutional amendments (cynically drafted by a military-vetted committee to secure their vested interests); several rounds of elections in late 2011 and early 2012 for the lower and upper houses of parliament; the May 2012 election of Egypt's first post-revolutionary president (eventually the Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi); a December 2012 referendum on a new Egyptian constitution; and, following Morsi's ouster, a January 2014 referendum on yet another Egyptian constitution.⁴⁴²

Excepting the latter (which remains in effect as of August 2014), none of these outcomes lasted more than a year, as one by one their results—generally dominated by Islamist parties, and favoring the well-organized Muslim Brotherhood—were undone either by judicial action backed by the military, or by

⁴⁴⁰ Jack Shenker, "Friday prayers in Egypt erupt into angry protest at military rulers," theguardian.com, July 8, 2011.

⁴⁴¹ Public reaction to the military's June 2012 dissolution of the elected parliament is revealing of general attitudes towards democracy at one phase of the revolution. Realizing that Mohamed Morsi (representing the party-proxy of the Muslim Brotherhood, and being the only Islamist candidate in the runoff) would win, the military leadership dissolved the Islamist-majority parliament and assumed legislative power on questionable legal grounds (The ruling came officially from the Supreme Constitutional Court.), a move designed to preemptively cut out the president's feet. Meanwhile, a broad coalition of "Islamist, secular and youth groups," including noted Egyptian activist Wael Ghonim, voiced support for Morsi and the "legitimacy" of the popular elections, Ghonim saying he would not accept that "democracy be killed because it is not bringing to power those whom we agree with." "Egypt anti-military protestors fill Tahrir Square," www.bbc.com, June 22, 2012.

⁴⁴² This summary of Egypt's electoral politics follows Nathan J. Brown, "Egypt's Failed Transition," p. 46-50.

military action backed by the streets.⁴⁴³ The military's dissolution of Egypt's elected parliament in June 2012, for example, was designed to undercut Morsi's presidential power, and this was met with even more street protests. But the most dramatic event occurred in June 2013 when the military, led by General Sisi and supported by millions in petition and on the streets (14 million by some estimates), forcibly ousted President Morsi, the "first elected leader in Egypt's 5,000-year recorded history,"⁴⁴⁴ barely a year into his first term. Morsi himself was arrested, and the ouster was followed by a severe and sustained crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood leaders and supporters that included summary trials with hundreds sentenced to death at a time⁴⁴⁵ and, perhaps most disturbingly, the violent crackdown on pro-

⁴⁴³ (a) The March 2011 constitutional amendments were undermined when, in Brown's words, Egypt's military generals, "hiding behind the cloak of what they called 'revolutionary legitimacy'...opted to write a new, temporary 'constitutional declaration' that inserted the clauses voters had approved into a forest of other articles on how the state would be run during the transition. That document was issued by military fiat, thus setting the dangerous precedent of insisting that the constitution was whatever those in power said it was." Nathan J. Brown, "Egypt's Failed Transition," p. 47. (b) On the eve of Egypt's presidential election, Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court declared parliamentary elections unconstitutional and disbanded the lower house of parliament. In collaboration with the military, this move was designed to oust the Islamists and undermine Morsi's power should he be elected. (c) In July 2013 President Morsi was ousted in a military coup supported by millions of Egyptian protestors. (d) The December 2012 constitutional referendum, although it passed, was boycotted by large swathes of the Egyptian population, many of them non-Islamists who opposed the Islamist dominated 100-member constitution drafting committee (which in turn had been selected by the now half-dissolved Egyptian parliament). Voter turnout for the constitutional referendum was 33 percent.

⁴⁴⁴ Shaimaa Fayed and Yasmine Saleh. "Millions flood Egypt's streets to demand Mursi quit," *Reuters.com*, June 30, 2013. Military estimates were that 14 million people participated in the June anti-Morsi demonstration, although more than one reporter deemed this estimate "implausibly high."

⁴⁴⁵ "Egyptian Court Confirms Death Penalty for Muslim Brotherhood Defendants," *The New York Times* (online), June 21, 2014.

Morsi demonstrators on August 14, 2013 which left more than thirteen hundred protestors dead.⁴⁴⁶

At this point frustration in Egypt with the general ineffectiveness of electoral institutions was palpable: “[A]fter six different popular elections,” wrote UCLA Professor of Law Khaled Abou El Fadl following Morsi’s ouster, “Egyptian intellectuals seem to be hopelessly chaotic in their understanding of what legitimacy is, and how one goes about acquiring it in a democratic system.”⁴⁴⁷ The forceful abrogation of a free presidential election, the July “military coup,” wrote El Fadl, “even if it came in response to widespread grievances, is a fatal blow to the Egyptian Revolution,” because “regardless of how polarizing the discourse might have become, respecting the process was the only guarantor that there would be a non-violent and reliable way to challenge power, hold officials accountable, and establish legitimacy.”⁴⁴⁸ “Using civil disobedience to bring down Mr. Morsi would have been a longer and harder road, but in the long term it would have created a precedent for noncoercive political change that Egypt badly needs,”⁴⁴⁹ whereas, “Violence and forced military interventions de-legitimize the very logic of a civil order.”⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁶ The Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights estimates that 1,360 individuals, most of them civilians, were killed during the August 14 crackdown on pro-Morsi demonstrators, with another 1,734 citizens arrested. Statistics reported in Azmi Bishara, “Revolution against Revolution, the Street against the People, and Counter-Revolution,” research paper published by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, September 2013, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁷ Khaled Abou El Fadl, “The collapse of legitimacy: How Egypt’s secular intelligentsia betrayed the revolution,” posted at ABC News (Australia), July 11, 2013.

⁴⁴⁸ Khaled Abou El Fadl, “The collapse of legitimacy: How Egypt’s secular intelligentsia betrayed the revolution,” posted at ABC News (Australia), July 11, 2013.

⁴⁴⁹ Khaled M Abou El Fadl, “The Perils of a ‘People’s Coup,’” *The New York Times*, July 7, 2013.

University of Toronto Law Professor Mohammed Fadel agreed in part: “Even if liberals were right about Morsi’s and the Muslim Brotherhood’s intentions [to subvert secular liberal democracy], the only rational *democratic* strategy would have been to insist on parliamentary elections,” either through a two-thirds majority in upcoming parliamentary elections that would facilitate impeachment, a less drastic no-confidence vote in Parliament, or by simply waiting for the regular 2016 presidential election.⁴⁵¹

Both within and outside of Egypt, however, opinions about Morsi’s ouster and the military’s role in it—bracketing of course the outrage of Brotherhood supporters themselves—were more typically mixed, if not supportive among liberals and democrats. No less a figure than Nobel Peace winner Mohamed El Baradei, former Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Egypt’s most high-profile liberal political figure—once pegged to be Egypt’s first democratically elected president—supported Sisi’s July move to oust Morsi, even appealing to the West for support and “[defending] the widening arrests of Mr. Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood allies and the shutdown of Islamist television networks[.]”⁴⁵² Said El Baradei in an interview published on August 2, 2013:

⁴⁵⁰ Khaled Abou El Fadl, “The collapse of legitimacy: How Egypt’s secular intelligentsia betrayed the revolution,” posted at ABC News (Australia), July 11, 2013.

“This time, the military agreed with the protestors. But next time, when protestors call for something that isn’t in the army’s interest, they will meet a very different fate. Today they are called ‘the people’; tomorrow they will be labeled seditious saboteurs.” Khaled M Abou El Fadl, “The Perils of a ‘People’s Coup,’” *The New York Times*, July 7, 2013.

⁴⁵¹ Mohammed Fadel, “What Killed Egyptian Democracy? (Opening the Debate)” *Boston Review* (online), January 21, 2014.

In a democracy, when you get 20 million people in the street, you resign. Unfortunately, we don't have a process of recall or impeachment like you [Americans] have. It was a popular uprising rejecting Mr. Morsi's continuing in power. Unfortunately, people had to call on the army to intervene. The army had to intervene because short of that, we would have ended up in a civil war. People went to the street on the 30th of June and were not psychologically ready to go home until Morsi left office. Either it would have continued, with all the bloodshed that would have come of it, or Mr. Morsi had to leave. [...] They had no choice, the army...It's their national duty to protect national security.⁴⁵³

Time and again, said others, Morsi and his Brotherhood partners had demonstrated their intent to subvert Egypt's weak and inchoate democratic institutions to consolidate an illiberal regime based on Sharia law—some comparing the Brotherhood to the Nazis in this regard⁴⁵⁴—and this necessitated extraordinary measures. “[A]s tragic—and even heartless—as this might seem,” said Raymond Stock, a liberal observer at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, “it would be better to have...civil conflict now than to wait until the Islamists are better armed and prepared...Luckily, the cost of keeping them out may not in fact be civil war.”⁴⁵⁵ Micheline Ishay, a Professor of Human Rights at the University of Denver, wrote that whereas liberals in Egypt had sought “a democracy that guarantees universal rights,” instead “the Brotherhood [was] committed to creating an Islamic state” of

⁴⁵² David D. Kirkpatrick, “Prominent Egyptian Liberal Says He Sought West’s Support for Uprising,” *The New York Times* (online), July 4, 2013.

⁴⁵³ Lally Weymouth, “An Interview with Mohamed ElBaradei, who hopes for reconciliation in Egypt,” *The Washington Post* (online), August 2, 2013.

⁴⁵⁴ As discussed in Khaled Fahmy, “Weimar Republic or 18 Brumaire?” *AhramOnline*, March 16, 2013.

⁴⁵⁵ Raymond Stock, “Complete the Islamists’ Defeat,” Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Notes, July 2013.

Sharia law, one whose “incompatibility...with democratic governance is clearest in the context of women’s rights.”⁴⁵⁶ Finally and more telling were the rich ironies on the ground. Sara Khorshid, a Cairo journalist and Tahrir protestor who in a June 2012 *New York Times* op-ed decried the military and Supreme Court maneuvers to render the newly elected Morsi “a toothless figurehead under the thumb of an authoritarian military council,”⁴⁵⁷ one year later supported the same military council’s overthrow of the same toothless president by extra-constitutional means: “Make no mistake: there is no democracy under military rule,” wrote Khorshid: “Yet I supported the June 30 protests knowing that military rule was imminent, because Mr. Morsi’s rule had not been democratic, either.” Khorshid continued: “The presidential election, conducted without clear legal framework, was not enough to make Mr. Morsi’s rule democratic. Despite Mr. Morsi’s constant claims that someone was undermining his efforts, his actions always seemed aimed at extending the Muslim Brotherhood’s domination of state institutions...Am I certain that this second round will lead Egypt to true democracy? No. But whoever rules Egypt next will be aware of the fate of rulers who lose the faith and support of the Egyptians. We are back at square one. We have paid a high price for it the past two and a half years, but democracy is worth it.”⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ Micheline Ishay, “What Killed Egyptian Democracy? (Reply to Mohammad Fadel),” *Boston Review* (online), January 21, 2014.

⁴⁵⁷ Sara Khorshid, “The Betrayal of Egypt’s Revolution,” *The New York Times* (online), June 18, 2012.

⁴⁵⁸ Sara Khorshid, “A Coup, but Backed by the People,” *The New York Times* (online), July 4, 2013.

The circumstances of Morsi's ousting from power—as distinguished from the brutal suppression of the Brotherhood that followed—and the long term political consequences of the Sisi “soft-coup”—what some have called a “corrective revolution”⁴⁵⁹ to restore a pre-Morsi path to democracy—have since become a major topic of debates that cannot be resolved here. Morsi's election occurred in “what was said to be Egypt's freest democratic elections,”⁴⁶⁰ and for many in Egypt “[t]he announcement of the president was supposed to be the end of Egypt's post-uprising transition to democracy.”⁴⁶¹ But this did not happen. Suffice it to say that parties on all sides acknowledge several mistakes made by Morsi that bred suspicion and opposition at a time when Egypt's fragile democracy, built upon a history of social and political divisions, required something approaching consensus if democratic institutions were to gain credibility. In office “The Brotherhood's behavior ranged from high-handed to extremely heavy-handed,” writes Nathan Brown, “The problem was not that the Brotherhood was antidemocratic but that its conception of democracy was shallow and often illiberal; further, Egypt had no rules of accepted democratic behavior.” Egypt's authoritarian legacy left a cloud of distrust hovering over democratic institutions, where “Everyone was suspicious that democratic promises were worth little (they had been made and ignored so

⁴⁵⁹ Lesch asks the question, but summarizes the thinking of many who reject the term “coup” and associate Sisi's actions more positively with the January 25 Revolution's initial goals. Ann. M. Lesch, “A Second, Corrective Revolution?” *Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Notes*, July 2013.

⁴⁶⁰ Adel Darwish, “Egypt: How the ‘Arab Spring’ turned into a summer of discontent,” *New African* (August/September 2013), pp. 14-18, p. 14.

⁴⁶¹ Joshua Davidovich and the Associated Press. “Mohammed Morsi Declared Egypt's first democratically elected president,” in *The Times of Israel*. June 25, 2012. www.timesofisrael.com.

often in the past), and that democratic procedures were nothing but traps destined to end up helping only one's rivals."⁴⁶²

Morsi did little to assuage such fears, and the decisive rupture with liberals and youths came in November 2012. As Lesch summarizes at good length:

In line with [his] pledge, Morsi initially appointed a technocratic cabinet. However, the liberal/left and revolutionaries became increasingly disaffected, concerned that the dominant discourse and the drafts of the constitution led Egypt down the road to a Shari'a-based state under a centralized presidential system. Then, on November 22, Morsi issued a startling decree: He took all power into his hands, fired the prosecutor-general, made the president immune from judicial oversight, and immunized the upper house of parliament and the constituent assembly from dissolution by court order. By asserting dictatorial powers, Morsi abruptly canceled his legitimacy as the first civilian elected president in Egypt's history. He then rammed a divisive constitution through the constituent assembly, endorsed by referendum in which only 30 percent of the electorate voted; decreed a restrictive labor law; and empowered the extremist upper house to legislate on hot-button issues such as NGO's, the right to protest, and the judiciary. Each time he changed ministers, he added members of the Brotherhood...He also appointed an increasing number of Brothers as governors[.]⁴⁶³

This was accompanied by failed economic policies and acute resource shortages around the time of the June 2013 protests. Thus, argues Lesch, "No one should have been surprised that millions of Egyptians signed the *tamarod* (rebel) petition that called for immediate presidential elections or that a third of the adult population took to the streets at the end of June, shouting "we are revolutionaries, not infidels"

⁴⁶² Nathan Brown, "Egypt's Failed Transition," p. 50, 53.

⁴⁶³ Ann Lesch, "A Second, Corrective Revolution?"

and expressing their determination to restore the Jan25 revolution to its initial goals.”⁴⁶⁴

The June 2013 “restorative revolution” succeeded—Morsi was out, and the once reviled military was back in. But what *really* remained of the January 25 revolution and its initial goals? Several months after Morsi’s July 3 ouster, the results of a University of Michigan study⁴⁶⁵ showed signs of growing ambiguity in Egyptian attitudes towards democracy. It found Egyptians “far more likely to support military rule of law than people in many other countries in the Middle East,” though also “more likely than other Middle Easterners to see the Arab Spring as motivated by a desire for freedom and democracy.” And “although Egyptians supported military rule when they were asked to rate whether it was good or bad, they backed democracy when asked to choose between rule of the people and rule by a strong leader.” Curiously, more than seven out of ten Egyptians said it was good to have army rule, though less than five percent said it was “very good to have a strong head of government,” and eighty-four percent agreed that democracy was a “very good political system.”⁴⁶⁶ Then as the 2014 presidential election approached, a Washington-based Pew poll showed further drift away from the revolutionary democratic ideals of 2011. It showed that “enthusiasm for democracy among

⁴⁶⁴ Ann Lesch, “A Second, Corrective Revolution?”

⁴⁶⁵ This study was published on the eve of the January 2014 constitutional referendum.

⁴⁶⁶ Richard Allen Greene, “Military rule popular with Egyptians, study finds ahead of vote on constitution,” published at cnn.com, January 14, 2014.

Egyptians is slipping, and that stability and a strong leader are becoming greater priorities...that 54 percent of Egyptians prioritized stability above democracy.”⁴⁶⁷

To democratic observers these numbers cast a dubious, authoritarian shadow over the presidential election. It appeared that in Egypt “disillusion” had crowded out democracy,⁴⁶⁸ and on Election Day a Reuters report put it bluntly:

[W]hy would the same Egyptians who ousted Hosni Mubarak now clamor for another authoritarian military man to take power, rather than support a more inclusive democratic process? Is the clock being turned back? Few observers outside Egypt understand the reason for Sisi’s popularity, which is based largely on the desire for security. Many Egyptians feel that the country has become chaotic: if forced to choose between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military, they prefer the military...[F]or pro-Sisi Egyptians, a vote for their candidate is a vote against chaos — until, one hopes, forward-thinking revolutionary groups, together with allies in civil society, can offer an alternative.⁴⁶⁹

Sisi’s rise to power *did* have a genuine populist element. Sisi claimed to represent the broad masses of people—to represent the revolutionary masses—and on July 3, 2013 there were reasonable claims that he did!⁴⁷⁰ Ironically Sisi, a military strong

⁴⁶⁷ Stephen Kalin and Shadia Nasralia, “Egyptians choose peace over democracy,” *IOL News*, May 26, 2014; Tom Dale, “Egypt Presidential election: disillusionment as important as policies or image with Abdel Fattah al-Sisi expected to win vote with ease,” *The Independent*, Tuesday, May 27, 2014.

⁴⁶⁸ Tom Dale, “Egypt Presidential election: disillusionment as important as policies or image with Abdel Fattah al-Sisi expected to win vote with ease,” *The Independent*, Tuesday, May 27, 2014.

⁴⁶⁹ Sarah Eltantawi, “Why Egyptians vote for Sisi,” *Reuters*, Thursday, May 29, 2014.

⁴⁷⁰ As Khaled Fahmy said, “[It] would be a mistake to believe that this outcome is the result only of army manipulation, intimidation and threats. There are millions of Egyptians who are willingly standing behind General Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi...Three years into the revolution, they are tired of the political instability, lack of security and deteriorating economic conditions. In el-Sisi they see a savior whom they believe is the only one capable of lifting the country out of crisis. [] Still others have become suspicious of the revolutionary youth whom they accuse of being inexperienced, irresponsible and untrustworthy. But most have been so frightened by the Muslim Brotherhood’s brief rule and what they see as its dangerous, undemocratic maverick politics that they decided to give up essential liberty and purchase a little temporary safety.” Khaled Fahmy, “Is Egypt back where it was in 2011?” posted at CNN.com, January 14, 2014.

man, had come to embody the revolutionary goals of what began as a “leaderless” Egyptian revolution.

Perhaps Sisi’s nomination would bring stability and legitimacy to the electoral process. After all, by acknowledging the courts and renouncing his high-profile military and ministerial positions, Sisi demonstrated nationally the subordination of his own personal authority, and that of the Egyptian military, to the Egyptian judiciary and constitution—to rule of law. Egypt, common sense would suggest, could not possibly be a military dictatorship if its highest commander was subject to law. And in addition to respecting the Egyptian courts, Sisi’s announcement recognized the Egyptian people as the supreme, sovereign power in Egyptian politics. Since early 2011, Sisi acknowledged, the people’s revolution in the streets had proven decisive in determining Egypt’s political future. Egyptians had awakened to reject authoritarianism and demand the rule of people power. There was no turning back the clock, and this was as it should be. Effectively joining this movement, Sisi proffered himself as a populist hero, a representative of the popular will, a protector of the revolution against its enemies, one who served only at its behest. Months earlier, state media reported that Sisi would run for President only “if the Egyptian people wanted him to”⁴⁷¹; and in various forums—including mass public rallies on the military’s (and by proxy, Sisi’s) behalf, called for by Sisi—“the people” had come out and loudly spoken.⁴⁷² Having now decided to run, Sisi’s appeal

⁴⁷¹ Yousuf Basil, Jethro Mullen, and Michael Martinez. “At least 49 dead in Egypt as throngs commemorate revolution,” reported at CNN.com, January 26, 2014.

to the masses only highlighted the military's subordination to popular will throughout the revolution. Although between February 2011 and March 2014 the military ousted two sitting presidents, one of them democratically elected, it never acted despotically or unilaterally, but always in accordance with the people: "These recent years of our nation's history," said Sisi, "have conclusively shown that no one can become president of Egypt against the will of the people or short of their support. Never can anyone force Egyptians to vote for a president they do not want...Only your support will grant me this great honor."⁴⁷³

How credible were Sisi's claims of popular sovereignty? Less than three weeks earlier, interim President Adly Mansour, himself handpicked by Sisi, passed a law immunizing the Presidential Elections Committee to appeals from other judicial bodies, effectively cleaving Egypt's regular judiciary from presidential politics, and making Sisi's deference to the courts highly questionable (As it would turn out, unilateral action by the Presidential Elections Committee on Sisi's behalf would become a visible element of electoral manipulation in May 2014.). Moreover, before resigning Sisi hedged his bets considerably vis-à-vis the military and the masses. First, weeks in advance Sisi orchestrated "notable changes in the [military] ranks" to

⁴⁷² Three weeks after the military's July 3, 2013 ouster of President Mohamed Morsi, Sisi called publicly for "honest Egyptians to take to the streets" on Friday, July 26 "to reveal their will and authorize the army and police with a mandate and an order to do whatever is necessary to stop bloodshed." Hundreds of thousands turned out in support of Sisi and the military, only to be challenged by a comparably large number of Morsi supporters. By Saturday at least 72 pro-Morsi demonstrators had been killed by security forces. See Wael Nawara, "Egypt's Crowd Democracy," *Al-Monitor.com*, July 26, 2013; and Kareem Fahim and Mayy El Sheikh, "Crackdown in Egypt Kills Islamists as They Protest," *The New York Times* (online), July 27, 2013.

⁴⁷³ Mohammed Tawfeeq and Marie-Louise Gumuchian, "Egypt's El-Sisi to resign, paving way for presidential bid," published at cnn.com, March 26, 2014.

protect his long-term influence within the military. As reported in *The New York Times*:

Perhaps mindful of the military's history of unseating presidents—including Hosni Mubarak in 2011 and [Mohamed] Morsi in 2013—Mr. Sisi has sought for the last few weeks to leave his stamp on the armed forces by reshuffling the top officers. He had already handpicked his successor as defense minister, his deputy chief of staff, Gen. Sedki Sobhi...[and] pushed aside...Gen. Ahmed Wasfi, a charismatic and outspoken officer who had shown the potential to develop his own popular following.

Within the military there was plenty reason to assume Sisi's influence would stick. Egypt's military is a corporate body controlling as much as one-fourth of the Egyptian economy, and their concern with politics is attached to these interests, of which Sisi is not only a reliable guarantor, but as former Director of Military Intelligence, well positioned to supervise. The military's support rendered the election little more than a formality: "Several would-be candidates have declined to enter the presidential race, arguing that the support of military and security services all but guaranteed Mr. Sisi's election."⁴⁷⁴

At the same time, in recent months Sisi had flexed his political muscle against those same "Egyptian people" to whom he was nominally subordinate, rendering the integrity of "people power" that backed him at least dubious. His most vocal opponents—the leaders, members, and associates of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood—had been silenced brutally by Sisi's order through censorship, imprisonment, or

⁴⁷⁴ David D. Kirkpatrick, "General Who Led Takeover of Egypt to Run for President," *The New York Times*. March 26, 2014.

death.⁴⁷⁵ The Brotherhood was criminalized as a “terrorist” organization, and its members excluded from the democratic process. With dripping irony Sisi declared at his self-nomination, “Any Egyptian, *who is not indicted under the law that we all follow*, is an equal partner in building the future,” for “We all—the sons and daughters of Egypt—are in the same boat...with no scores to settle[.]”⁴⁷⁶

Brotherhood suppression was accompanied by measures to criminalize political dissent. In November 2013 Egypt’s interim president issued a controversial bill—the interim government’s “first major legislative act,” as reported by Human Rights Watch, which “shows that its goal is to sharply restrict peaceful assembly and to let security shut down protests at will.” The law “effectively grants security officials discretion to ban any protest on very vague grounds...and sets heavy prison sentences for vague offenses such as attempting to ‘influence the course of justice.’” It also “gives the Interior Ministry the right to ban any meeting ‘of a public nature’ of more than 10 people in a public place, including meetings related to electoral campaigning.”⁴⁷⁷ As a result “dozens of young activists who were instrumental in the 2011 revolution—but who continue to be critical of the military,” for example

⁴⁷⁵ Kirkpatrick reports that “The Muslim Brotherhood, which dominated the previous elections, has been decimated. Since [previously elected president Mohamed) Morsi’s ouster, security forces have killed more than a thousand of its supporters in the streets, jailed many thousands of others, and silenced almost all of the sympathetic news media.” David D. Kirkpatrick, “General Who Led Takeover of Egypt to Run for President,” *The New York Times*. March 26, 2014.

⁴⁷⁶ David D. Kirkpatrick, “General Who Led Takeover of Egypt to Run for President,” *The New York Times*. March 26, 2014.

⁴⁷⁷ “Egypt: Deeply Restrictive New Assembly Law,” published by *Human Rights Watch*, November 26, 2013.

members of the April 6 Movement, “are now behind bars.”⁴⁷⁸ Even “As Mr. Sisi was preparing his announcement,” Kirkpatrick reports, “security forces used tear gas and birdshot to break up the latest student demonstrations that flared up at Cairo University and other campuses across the country,” so that “[by] early evening, at least one student...had been killed and more than a dozen were injured[.]”⁴⁷⁹

Was the revolution over? Had it failed? Was there no room for revolutionary optimism in Sisi’s imminent election?

This was, after all, to be a *democratic* presidential election in Egypt. And an extraordinary enforcement of political stability, cast in the wake of years of political chaos and violence—was this not *precisely* what a fledgling young democracy needed? After all, Egypt’s fragile-democracy problem was nothing novel. Young democracies are notoriously unstable,⁴⁸⁰ in large part because suddenly empowered democratic elites—like Morsi—and suddenly created institutional roles—like the office of a democratically elected president—may lack the broad-based personal and institutional credibility to withstand the kind of short-term poor performance and mass disaffection likely to follow the unfavorable circumstances that precipitate revolutions, and the unreasonable expectations that follow them. Credibility of this

⁴⁷⁸ Khaled Fahmy, “Is Egypt back where it was in 2011?” posted at CNN.com, January 14, 2014.

⁴⁷⁹ David D. Kirkpatrick, “General Who Led Takeover of Egypt to Run for President,” *The New York Times*. March 26, 2014.

⁴⁸⁰ See Ethan B. Kapstein and Nathan Converse. *The Fate of Young Democracies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

sort, where rules and roles become trusted and valued in and of themselves—become *legitimate* and *institutionalized*—takes time to develop that they may simply not have.

“Institutionalization is the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability,”⁴⁸¹ writes Huntington. But what, other than time and success, is to bring this value and stability? The problem has been called a “catch 22” for young democracies: “Without credibility,” writes Burk, “it is difficult for leaders to be accepted as legitimate,” because “Time is required to build credibility as a ground on which legitimacy rests. But without legitimacy, there is no time to build credibility.”⁴⁸² And how this dilemma is resolved can spell the difference between post-revolutionary dictatorship and democracy. Thus Huntington writes, “Men may, of course, have order without liberty, but they cannot have liberty without order. Authority has to exist before it can be limited, and it is authority that is in scarce supply in those modernizing countries where government is at the mercy of

⁴⁸¹ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006 [1968], p. 12.

⁴⁸² James Burk. “Review: *The Fate of Young Democracies*. Ethan B. Kapstein and Nathan Converse. *The Fate of Young Democracies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.” *Contemporary Sociology*. Vol. 39, No. 2 (March 2010), pp. 170-1, p. 170. Several factors render this problem especially acute. The first three involve “initial conditions” in democratizing countries. The structural integrity of democratic institutions is challenged to the extent that (a) democratic institutions are created *de novo* over the political desert of a closed authoritarian regime, and thus lack a strong cultural or historical foundation; (2) democratic leaders (especially in modernizing countries) face difficult short-term decisions, often involving the economy, with wildly unpredictable outcomes that cause widespread pain and panic, all in the face of rising expectations; and (3) post-authoritarian democratic societies require political reconciliation of intense and historically ingrained antagonisms, including with members and beneficiaries of the old regime. Fourth and finally, (4) *revolutionary change*, as distinct from gradual or *transitional* change, tends to exacerbate the pressure of (1), (2), and (3).

alienated intellectuals, rambunctious colonels, and rioting students.”⁴⁸³ Caught in this dilemma, political elites can pursue different paths. Some, “to circumvent the issue, [pursue] short term populist programs at the expense of long-term economic well-being,” as happened throughout a democratizing Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁸⁴ Others will be tempted by violence, to merge democratic populism with violence towards the opposition—calling the latter “traitors,” “enemies,” or the recent trend, “terrorists”—blurring if not crossing the line between a functional liberal democracy and a populist or party dictatorship. The challenge facing young democracies is to achieve stability while avoiding these authoritarian outcomes.

Perhaps Egypt’s answer lay in a popular leader with the credibility or “charisma” to hold democratic institutions together through these initial tough times and allow them time to gather independent value. Morsi’s downfall was instructive in this regard—a combination of foreseeable social and economic crises, young democratic institutions, and a head of state lacking the popular credibility to hold it together. Huntington argues that one key threshold for the institutionalization of political democracy—the credible belief that adept decision-makers will replace inept ones at predictable electoral intervals—is two successful transfers of power.⁴⁸⁵ But if so, this surely requires that at least *one* elected

⁴⁸³ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006 [1968], p. 7-8.

⁴⁸⁴ James Burk. “Review: *The Fate of Young Democracies*. Ethan B. Kapstein and Nathan Converse. *The Fate of Young Democracies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.” *Contemporary Sociology*. Vol. 39, No. 2 (March 2010), pp. 170-1, p. 170. See esp. Terry Lynn Karl, “Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Oct. 1990), pp. 1-21.

president be legitimate, and serve at least *one* full term before leaving office. Perhaps this is Sisi, since when difficult decisions *will* need to be made during the fragile first years of post-revolutionary democracy, it is ironic but plausible that the viability of *impersonal* institutions in the long run will hinge on the credibility—even “charisma”—of the most *personal* of representatives, the head of state, in the short run.⁴⁸⁶

And initially indeed, signs that Sisi would follow this model appeared promising. Following Morsi’s ouster, Sisi and his generals took active steps to facilitate the creation of a transitional government with all the accoutrements, if not the qualified reality, of constitutional respect and plurality in anticipation of an imminent constituent-constitutional process. This began with a constitutionally prescribed turnover of the interim Egyptian presidency to Chief Justice Adly Mansour; and it was followed by the creation of a “national unity interim government” inclusive of women, Christians, and prominent socialists and liberals, including El Baradei—a symbol of Egyptian liberalism—among others.⁴⁸⁷ These actions helped buttress the liberal narrative, supported by El Baradei, that the July coup did not subvert the revolution, but was necessary to enable its completion. In

⁴⁸⁵ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993 [1991], p. 266-268.

⁴⁸⁶ Ken Jowitt makes a similar argument in Weberian terms about Leninist regimes, whereby to consolidate the revolution the personal “charisma” of revolutionary leaders must be transferred to the impersonal institution of “the party.” That Lenin understood this was his revolutionary genius: “For Lenin, the Party is hero—not the individual leader. The fact that Lenin possessed personal charisma is not as significant as the way in which he defined charisma and related it to the organization he created.” Ken Jowitt. *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 7.

⁴⁸⁷ The Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters, being “terrorists,” were of course excluded.

the meantime Sisi himself, as head of the military and Egypt's defense minister, and architect of Egypt's interim government, by his decisive response to the masses' revolutionary demands and anti-Islamists sentiment, emerged as "the most influential figure in an interim administration that has governed since [Morsi's ouster]."488

On the precipice of a new Egyptian presidency, then, Sisi's candidacy was more than a little perplexing. It had all the elements of an imminent populist dictatorship—the anticipation of an overwhelming electoral victory; the rise of a strong-man military figure to power; and a popular call for order above democracy in a country having recently faced years of democratic debacle punctuated by violence. But it also bore a strange resemblance to a populist democracy. Sisi's takeover of the country had been a popular one—under Sisi, the army's moves were orchestrated to reflect the so-called "will of the people." He was going to win the presidential election in a landslide comparable to Louis Napoleon's. The Muslim Brotherhood was suppressed, yes, but even *people's* movements have enemies.

As it happened, between May 26-28, 2014, an estimated 25 million Egyptian citizens marched again to the presidential polls. And as expected, Sisi won the election via an overwhelming majority, winning 97% of the popular vote. But many things were striking, if not downright paradoxical, about these results.

⁴⁸⁸ Tom Perry and Mahmoud Mourad, "Egypt's Sisi to run for president, vows to tackle militancy." Reuters, March 26, 2014.

One stunning aspect was the extent to which Sisi voters hardly understood their actions to be democratic. As one representative voter, a 43-year old woman and pharmacist named Rasha Hazem, was quoted in *The New York Times* on the first election day, “We need a bit of dictatorship...Too much spoiling created a little bit of wildness in the people and it isn’t good.” Hazem also said that Egyptian youths should stop “spending all their time protesting and creating all this noise.” The same report quoted another middle class Egyptian explaining that “Egypt now needs a harsh leader, a leader disciplined enough to make Egypt walk on dough without messing it up,” and a contractor from an impoverished neighborhood who either projected or hoped (the article leaves it unclear) that Sisi “will always be president...Much longer than eight years.” Egyptians chose “stability over freedoms,”⁴⁸⁹ wrote one reporter, but others saw this only as short term, and Sisi as a transitional figure. Said one 62-year old voter, “With Sisi, the country will stabilize. Democracy is a nice thing. We go there step by step, we move towards it step by step.”⁴⁹⁰ Another said, “I agree with Sisi that Egypt is not yet ready for democracy...There is a lot of ignorance and illiteracy. A lot of people don’t know what democracy is. They use their freedom in a bad way.”⁴⁹¹

Still for many reasons the plebiscite failed to convince *as a plebiscite*. The election was preceded by a massive media and propaganda campaign on Sisi’s

⁴⁸⁹ Stephen Kalin and Shadia Nasralia, “Egyptians choose peace over democracy,” *IOL News*, May 26, 2014.

⁴⁹⁰ Stephen Kalin and Shadia Nasralia, “Egyptians choose peace over democracy,” *IOL News*, May 26, 2014.

⁴⁹¹ Stephen Kalin and Shadia Nasralia, “Egyptians choose peace over democracy,” *IOL News*, May 26, 2014.

behalf, and as already noted, as a result “Several other potential candidates decided not to run, saying the race was slanted overwhelmingly in favor of Mr. Sisi as the candidate of the security forces and business elite.”⁴⁹² And public enthusiasm failed to meet the hype: In a panicked effort to get the vote out, the military declared Tuesday, May 27 (the second day of voting) a public holiday and waved train fares. Then the justice ministry opened the polls for an extra day, and threatened to fine those who did not vote.⁴⁹³

Sisi eventually garnered far more votes than Morsi, but the total number of voters fell short of the 80% of the voting-eligible population he had been insisting on. Some attributed this to voter fatigue, others to Sisi’s escalation of anti-Islamist violence and attempt to temper high demands. As a Reuters report put it: “Sisi’s supporters see him as a decisive figure who can steer Egypt out of three years of turmoil. He became a hero to many by removing Mursi...But the Islamist opposition sees him as the mastermind of a bloody coup, and a broad crackdown on dissent has alienated others. Trying to lower-sky-high expectations in the run-up to the election Sisi had stressed the need for austerity and self-sacrifice, a message that cost him some support and drew some ridicule of a nation of 85 million steeped in poverty.”⁴⁹⁴ Sisi’s charisma apparently went only so far. And if it remained to be

⁴⁹² The report continues, “On Monday, [Sisi] faced only one opponent, Hamdeen Sabahi, who represents the same broadly Nasserite political tradition as Mr. Sisi but with far less fame, financial backing or cheering from the state and private news media.” David D. Kirkpatrick, “Voting Opens in Egyptian Election Lacking Suspense,” *The New York Times* (online), May 26, 2014.

⁴⁹³ Maggie Fick and Stephen Kalin, “Egypt Extends Presidential Election to Help Sisi,” Reuters, May 27, 2014.

seen how far it would take Egyptian democracy, few on the outside were holding their breath.

A strongman president; a manipulated plebiscite; summary trials; violence against Brotherhood “terrorists,” the same “terrorists” who once joined the revolutionary festival in Tahrir Square; persecution of peaceful groups, like the April 6 Movement, whose years of activism prepared the January 25 Revolution; laws criminalizing basic political activity—in sum, a democratic revolution turned completely on its head, pushed forward at each turn by Egyptian “people power,” the so-called “will of the people.”

What had become of Egypt’s democratic revolution? How had a wildly popular and “leaderless” revolution transformed into a 97% plebiscite for “strong man” dictatorship? Where had the “spirit of Tahrir Square” stumbled, and how did its principle dissipate so ironically? Was there ever a serious alternative to this outcome, a serious chance for a stable and genuinely inclusive democracy?

17. Picking Up Power II: Movement and the Crisis of Egyptian Leadership

Building on our discussion of Arendt’s work in Chapters 2 and 3, this section details how Hannah Arendt’s political theory helps us understand the Egyptian revolution’s failure to found a lasting constitution of freedom. Specifically, we find two interacting patterns illuminated by Arendt’s concepts: (a) the political impotence of the revolution’s *movement* character—*force* not *power*; and (b) the

⁴⁹⁴ Maggie Fick and Stephen Kalin, “Egypt Extends Presidential Election to Help Sisi,” Reuters, May 27, 2014.

absence of *real revolutionaries* to *pick up power* when the proto-revolutionary situation was revealed.

From early in the Egyptian revolution Hannah Arendt scholars were ubiquitous, often using her language in their analysis of events: Writing on February 4, 2011 Elizabeth Young-Bruehl called Egypt's revolution an "Arendtian moment,' in the sense that it is her understanding, shared by many others, of revolution, of action, of the power that comes from people acting together, that is being demonstrated in the Egyptian demonstrations and the possibilities they contain."⁴⁹⁵ "The courageous crowds of the Arab world," wrote Seyla Benhabib on February 24, 2011, "from Tunis to Tahrir Square, from Yemen to Bahrain and now to Benghazi and Tripoli, have won our hearts and minds...What we have witnessed is truly revolutionary, in the sense that a new order of freedom – a *novo ordo saeculorum* – is emerging transnationally in the Arab world." In the process "In Egypt as well as Tunisia, hard negotiations and confrontations will now start among the many groups who participate in the revolution." Benhabib dismissed those who feared a radical Islamist hijacking: "What about Islamist movements and parties in these countries? It is remarkable how many commentators already pretend to know the outcome of these political processes. They are convinced that these revolutions will be hijacked and turned into theocracies," but "it is not inevitable, nor even likely,

⁴⁹⁵ Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, "A Preface," HannahArendt.net, Vol. 7, No. 1 (November 2013), p. 1-4, p. 1.

that fundamentalist Muslim parties will transform Tunisia or Egypt into theocracies.”⁴⁹⁶

In a similar vein Jonathan Schell on February 3, 2011 wrote in *The Nation* that, “If the world has a heart, it now beats for Egypt...Their courage and sacrifice have given new life to the spirit of the nonviolent democratic resistance to dictatorship symbolized in the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.” Like Benhabib, Schell drew happy parallels between the spirit of Tahrir and the Revolutions of 1989. He also foresaw the inevitably ‘hard negotiations and confrontations’ destined to arise in the post-Mubarak, post-liberation phase of the revolution: “The foundation of a new order of things,” wrote Schell, “is of course a notoriously difficult business. Everyone knows the course of revolution is zigzag and that the final outcome may be unwelcome.”⁴⁹⁷

In their short pieces both writers evoke the words of Hannah Arendt. The phrase *Novus ordo saeculorum*, Latin for “New order of the ages (or the world),” and upon which Benhabib explicitly draws,⁴⁹⁸ appears in the title of the fifth chapter of Arendt’s *On Revolution*, a chapter that specifically tackles the difficulties of revolutionary founding, and where Arendt explains at length how the Americans, unique among modern revolutionaries, successfully established a lasting and living political constitution among themselves as a *plurality*. It was, she says, a revolution

⁴⁹⁶ Seyla Benhabib. “The Arab Spring: Religion, Revolution and the Public Sphere,” published by the Social Science Research Council Public Sphere Forum, February 24, 2011.

⁴⁹⁷ Jonathan Schell, “The Revolutionary Moment,” *The Nation*, February 3, 2011.

⁴⁹⁸ Benhabib discusses Arendt’s idea of “*novus ordo saeculorum*” in *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996, p. 157 and *passim*.

whose “greatest innovation in politics as such was the consistent abolition of sovereignty within the body politic.”⁴⁹⁹ Schell in turn mentions Arendt directly and cites the Latin phrase indirectly (the “foundation of a new order of things”). He then adds Arendtian language that is now familiar: “Power is disintegrating. It is in the streets. Someone will pick it up. A new structure will form, for good or ill...[T]he time of decision approaches. At this writing two great armies, the Egyptian people and Egyptian army, coexist uneasily in the country’s streets and squares.”⁵⁰⁰

Although Schell wrote during the first phase of the revolution between January 25 and February 11, 2011, and Benhabib after Mubarak’s ouster, both broached the same immediate problem—namely, whether or not Egypt’s “revolutionary situation” would result in a “revolutionary outcome”—a new order of things—and if so, what kind? Here Andrew Arato, another prominent Arendt scholar, wrote several brief but incisive ‘Arendtian’ analyses of the situation. On February 12, 2011 Arato posted that “Many recognize...that [after Mubarak’s ouster yesterday] the task is half done at best: after *liberation* comes the hard task of creating free, democratic institutions. Was Egypt’s *liberation* part of a genuine *revolution*?”⁵⁰¹ Arato then asked a question few others had asked to that point,

⁴⁹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 144.

⁵⁰⁰ Jonathan Schell, “The Revolutionary Moment,” *The Nation*, February 3, 2011.

⁵⁰¹ Andrew Arato, “Egypt’s Transformation: Revolution, Coup, Regime Change, or All of the above?” posted at www.comparativeconstitutions.org, February 12, 2011, emphasis added. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 20: “[L]iberation has always loomed large [in revolution]...and the foundation of freedom has always been uncertain, if not altogether futile.”

especially those focused narrowly on the non-violent character of the revolution and its relation to the post-1989 narrative of global liberal revolution:

Are the events in Egypt a revolution in the sense of 1789, 1917, [or] 1979 involving the violent overthrow of old regimes, and the replacement of one sovereign authority by the organized forces of another[?] Or is it instead like the peaceful, velvet, self-limiting, negotiated revolutions of 1989-1990 in Central Europe or 1990s South Africa, where negotiations between old and new forces produced constitutional democratic outcomes? This is hard to say, because while the impressive non-violence and self-discipline of the democratic movement belongs to the self-limiting version, the military coup that actually put an end to Mubarak's government fits in more with the classical version. Indeed, classical revolutions are always linked to coups—whatever their popular character.⁵⁰²

What made the Egyptian revolution especially confusing was that it showed elements of both the classic, violent *seizure of power* model, and the new non-violent *velvet* model. What would this combination of *seizure* and *non-violence* mean on the ground?

In Egypt the urgency of the question was two-fold. First “Historically,” wrote Arato, “such situations have almost always given rise to revolutionary or military dictatorship[.]”⁵⁰³ And while Egypt's army initially enjoyed great popularity at the

⁵⁰² Andrew Arato, “Egypt's Transformation: Revolution, Coup, Regime Change, or All of the above?” posted at www.comparativeconstitutions.org, February 12, 2011.

⁵⁰³ Andrew Arato, “Andrew Arato on ‘Egypt's Transformation: Revolution, Coup, Regime Change, or All of the above?’” posted at www.comparativeconstitutions.org, February 12, 2011. Arato added, however, that in Egypt “We should not expect this inevitably to occur under the watchful eyes of this very great movement and its sophisticated groups, as well as the wider world that has now become deeply interested in Egyptian democracy.”

moment of Mubarak's toppling,⁵⁰⁴ the risks of this situation were quickly apparent to most Egyptians. The military coup effectively "[established] the military as the controlling power over the nature, timing and forms of participation of the transition,"⁵⁰⁵ and the military—as opposed to the masses of Egyptian people—entered the fray of revolution with most of its vested interests already intact. Optimistically, democratic enthusiasts hoped their actions to be “a case of mass action playing a ‘prior, instigator rule’ ...for a form of revolution from above,” rather than something far more conservative or reactionary, an “intra-regime coup.”⁵⁰⁶ But prospects for the former were dubious as the military had a great deal invested, both politically and economically, in the legal and bureaucratic apparatus of the old regime—for one, it controlled at least one quarter (and up to forty percent) of Egypt's economy; and as Martini and Taylor wrote in an early analysis that holds up today:

Many of the iconic images from Egypt's revolution depict the Egyptian military supporting the uprising of Tahrir Square. As soldiers joined demonstrators and allowed them to scrawl ‘Mubarak Leave’ on the sides of their tanks, the protestors became convinced that the military would protect the revolution and move Egypt toward democracy. The Egyptian army's top commanders pledged to do just that...[But] Above all, the generals are determined to preserve stability and protect their privileged position...As a result, the SCAF is eager to hand power over to an elected government—but only to preserve its own power and perks, not out of some deep-seated belief in

⁵⁰⁴ A poll conducted between March and October [2011] found that 90% of Egyptians had confidence in the military.” Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring: Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, p. 118.

⁵⁰⁵ Andrew Arato, “Andrew Arato on ‘Egypt's Transformation: Revolution, Coup, Regime Change, or All of the above?’” posted at www.comparativeconstitutions.org, February 12, 2011.

⁵⁰⁶ Ewan Stein, “Revolution or Coup? Egypt's Fraught Transition,” *Survival*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (August/September 2012), pp. 45-66, p. 45-6.

democracy. [] Indeed, the SCAF's endorsement of democracy has been tepid at best. The generals have tried 7,000 people, including bloggers, journalists, and protestors, in closed military trials since the revolution.⁵⁰⁷

Ominously, although the military eventually sided with the protestors, its sudden abandonment of Mubarak after decades of friendship betrayed a tendency to seek and desert allies according to its own immediate interests.⁵⁰⁸ To wit, even during the revolution the military prevaricated to the end, "waited for some time before it finally decided which side to take," as during the so-called "Battle of the Camel" on February 2, when unarmed protestors were attacked by Mubarak supporters carrying swords, clubs, and machetes, and the military remained neutral amidst the violence. This led many to predict that the military would use its new political power conservatively, subverting the revolution if it had to; that it "took a position that served its own interests as a military establishment. In choosing not to fire at the unarmed protestors and instead of letting Mubarak go, the military took control of the revolution and managed the transition process, thus ensuring its continued influence over the country's politics."⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁷ Jeff Martini and Julie Taylor, "Commanding Democracy in Egypt," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, Issue 5 (Sep./Oct. 2011), pp. 127-137.

⁵⁰⁸ The following summarizes the military's calculations: "[T]he break between the generals and Mubarak was not so sudden. Over the past decade, the regime had begun to balance its reliance on the armed forces by cultivating a class of crony capitalists. The generals felt their influence slipping away as Mubarak disregarded their economic interests, ignored their advice on ministerial appointments, and organized a campaign to transfer power to his son against their wishes. Although the military did not seek to overthrow Mubarak, this year's [2011] demonstrations gave it an opportunity to restore its central position." Jeff Martini and Julie Taylor, "Commanding Democracy in Egypt," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, Issue 5 (Sep./Oct. 2011), pp. 127-137.

⁵⁰⁹ Emad El-Din Shahin, "The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square," *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, Vol. 3 (2012), pp. 46-69, p. 66-7.

A second problem in Egypt centered on the viability of democratic cooperation and institutions in any event. Even while the vast majority of Egyptian society shared a status of political non-entity under Mubarak's regime, Egypt remained an intensely divided society beneath this suppression—divided politically between secularists and Islamists on one hand, and divided religiously between radical Islamists and a large minority of Coptic Christians (around 10% of Egypt's population) on the other. Importantly, the social foundations of division, and the psychological foundations of suspicion, were long laid by the Mubarak regime. Mubarak became partners with the West by violently targeting political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood; and this in turn accustomed Egypt's secularists to a political regime both hostile to and fearful of political Islam. Decades of political isolation also meant that democratic habits of the heart—not least the one involving democratic trust—were missing in Egypt.⁵¹⁰ Ironically, however, it was precisely the organizational strength and capacity that suppression demanded if the group were to survive—and which the Brotherhood developed while under attack—that made it the most powerful and organized (and thus even more suspicious) political group to rise after Mubarak's ouster⁵¹¹; while the rest of political civil society, albeit with

⁵¹⁰ In a truly astonishing result, a Population Council survey of Egyptian "Young People" aged 15-29, published in January 2011 *on the eve of the January 25 Revolution*, showed that only 9.7% of those surveyed believed that people can be trusted. The other 90.3 responded that one "must be very careful" when dealing with others. Safaa El-Kogali and Caroline Krafft, "Chapter 7: Social Issues, Values, and Civic Engagement," in *Survey of Young People in Egypt: Final Report*. Cairo: Population Council, January 2011, pp. 131-145, p. 143.

⁵¹¹ On the Muslim Brotherhood's recruitment and organization, see Eric Trager, "The Unbreakable Muslim Brotherhood," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 5 (September/October 2011), pp. 114-126.

notable exceptions,⁵¹² had been decimated by decades of personalistic authoritarian rule.

During the Egyptian revolution and especially in Tahrir Square, the underlying fissures in Egyptian society dissipated in view of a unifying and principled cause—bread, freedom, social justice, and *Mubarak must go!*—in sum, *The People Want!*, a universal affirmation of the democratic principle proclaimed throughout the Arab world.⁵¹³ This unity was especially evident when Muslim Brothers joined the second wave of mass protests in Tahrir Square on January 28, a symbolic moment that showed *all* Egyptians had overcome fear, and *all* had assumed ownership of the revolution. And months afterwards, by all indications the unifying principle of democracy was strong. We have already mentioned the united series of anti-military protests that preceded the June 2012 presidential election:

⁵¹² In the years immediately preceding the 2011 revolution the Egyptian labor movement had begun to establish independent forms of organization—starting in 2007 among real-estate tax collectors, by 2008 including the Textile Workers’ League that emerged out of the April 6 Mahalla textile strike supported by the online “April 6 Movement,” and culminating in 2009 with the creation of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions. However, these organizations were still in development as the revolution began and their sphere of influence was more in the courts than on the streets. Or put differently, labor organization in Egypt was far less advanced politically on the eve of revolution than it had been in Tunisia, where the UGTT played an especially critical role. That being said, by February 9 about 300,000 Egyptian workers were on strike. See Mai Taha, “The Egyptian revolution in and out of the juridical space: an inquiry into labour law and the workers’ movement in Egypt,” *International Journal of Law in Context*. Vol. 10, Issue 2 (June 2014), pp. 177-194. We will say more about Egypt’s online “civil society” presently.

⁵¹³ Achcar cites this demand as the binding thread of all the 2011 Arab revolts: “‘The people want!’ This proclamation has been and still is omnipresent in the protracted uprising that has been rocking the Arabic-speaking region since the Tunisian episode began in Sidi Bouzid on 17 December 2010. In every imaginable variant and every imaginable tone, it has served as the prelude to all sorts of demands, from the now famous revolutionary slogan, ‘The people want to overthrow the regime!’, to highly diverse calls of a comic nature—exemplified by the demonstrator in Cairo’s Tahrir Square who held high a sign reading: ‘The people want a president who doesn’t dye his hair.’” Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*. Trans. G.M. Goshgarian. London: Saqi, 2013, p. 13.

Here liberal and democratic demonstrators, including prominent activist and Google executive Wael Ghonim, stood firmly beside Morsi and the Brotherhood against the military's dissolution of parliament, and in anticipation of Morsi's electoral victory.

But the principle of democracy—or at least electoral democracy—could not withstand the post-election fallout. With Morsi, the Brotherhood, and several other Islamist parties now in power, deep-seated suspicions rapidly converted into fierce accusations and political divisions. Writing in retrospect, Abdel-Fattah Mady in early 2013 called the Morsi presidency a “historic chance to form and lead...[a] national coalition or alliance between the different political parties”—what Mady calls a “democratic, historical block” providing much needed legitimacy at the moment of constitutional founding.⁵¹⁴ But this was not to be. From the beginning of Morsi's term as president his own personal standing, and with it the standing of the presidential office, suffered from both a questionable basis of legitimacy, and a palpable position of weakness vis-à-vis the Egyptian military.

Regarding electoral legitimacy, signs were immediate that the election results might be less than stable in the long run. In an election of 50.9 million registered voters, Morsi won a presidential runoff by 680,000 votes⁵¹⁵—an innocuous number perhaps in long-established democracies, but a precarious one in

⁵¹⁴ Abdel-Fattah Mady, “Popular Discontent, Revolution, and Democratization in Egypt and the Globalizing World,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, Vol. 20, Issue 1 (2013), pp. 313-337, p. 336. For the latter passage Mady cites Ali Khalifa Alk-uwari and Abdelfattah Mady, “The Concept of Historical, Democratic Block” in *Towards a Historical, Democratic Block in the Arab Countries*. Alk-uwari and Mady, eds. (2010), pp. 37-64 (no publisher provided).

⁵¹⁵ Adel Darwish, “Egypt: How the ‘Arab Spring’ turned into a summer of discontent,” *New African* (August/September 2013), pp. 14-18, p. 17.

a divided electorate where both a protracted constitutional process had yet to be resolved, and broader underlying disagreement over the spirit of Egyptian politics—secular or religious, liberal or conservative—heightened the stakes considerably. Even the anti-military protests of 2011 and 2012 (liberal supporters notwithstanding) often had a partisan, distinctly Islamic if not radically Islamic tenor.⁵¹⁶ And in the end many who voted for Morsi did so without enthusiasm, voting only for a “lesser of two evils” after early runoff results pitted Morsi against the former prime minister, military man, and Mubarak loyalist Ahmed Shafiq.

Throughout the electoral process left-leaning and secular liberal Egyptians, lacking political organization, and lacking with it electoral representation and political power, typically found themselves on the outs. As Trager reports:

The protestors who led Egypt’s revolt last January were young, liberal, and linked-in. They were the bloggers who first proposed the demonstrations against Hosni Mubarak on Twitter; the Facebook-based activists who invited their ‘friends’ to protest...Their determination, punctuated by the speed of their triumph, fueled optimism that the long-awaited Arab Spring had finally sprung—that the Middle East would no longer be an autocratic exception in an increasingly democratic world. [] The political transition following the revolt, however, has dulled this optimism. The iconic youths of Tahrir Square are now deeply divided among nearly a dozen, often indistinguishable political parties, almost all of which are either too new to be known or too discredited by their cooperation with the previous regime. Concentrated within the small percentage of Internet-using, politically literate Egyptians, their numbers are surprisingly small. [] Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood, which

⁵¹⁶ See e.g. “50,000 protestors flock to Egypt’s Tahrir Square,” *The Telegraph* (online), November 18, 2011: “Except for the preponderance of bearded men and veiled women typical of strict Islamists, the mass rally recalled the 18-day, largely secular uprising centered in Tahrir that toppled autocratic President Hosni Mubarak on Feb. 11.” The report mentions different Islamist groups using their own loudspeaker systems, but no liberal groups. On other occasions more limited demonstrations went further and openly demanded an Islamist state; see “Islamist protestors demand state under Islamic law,” *Egypt Independent* (online), July 22, 2011.

largely avoided the limelight during the revolt, is seizing the political momentum.⁵¹⁷

The stakes of this imbalance were exacerbated by the early attachment of post-Mubarak parliamentary elections to the selectorate for Egypt's constituent assembly. Liberals were not only losing parliamentary elections; they were also losing the constitution, as committees of Islamist representatives, selected by a democratically elected, majority Islamist parliament, were chosen to write it.⁵¹⁸ And then when a final presidential runoff was finally held, only the Islamists and old-regime loyalists had a genuinely representative choice. Enthusiasm was not widespread: when Morsi edged out Shafiq the total votes *cast* represented only 51% of Egypt's eligible voting population.

Nathan Brown recently called “the greatest cost of the Morsi presidency—that, at least for a time, it has left behind an Egypt in which the very idea of democracy has lost much of its meaning and all of its luster.”⁵¹⁹ I cannot reliably speculate about Morsi's or the Brotherhoods intentions while in office.⁵²⁰ What is

⁵¹⁷ Eric Trager, “The Unbreakable Muslim Brotherhood,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 5 (September/October 2011), pp. 114-126.

⁵¹⁸ Among the most cynical articles (pre-coup) referencing Islamist success and its supposed betrayal of the youth's revolutionary ethos is Ligia Istrate, “The Revolution begun in Tahrir Square was not *tahrir*. Egypt in the XXIth century,” *The Scientific Journal of Humanistic Studies*. Vol. 5, No. 5, pp. 115-126.

⁵¹⁹ Nathan Brown, “Egypt's Failed Transition,” p. 58.

⁵²⁰ Although Brown writes that, “The problem was not that the Brotherhood was antidemocratic but that its conception of democracy was shallow and often illiberal; further, Egypt had no rules for democratic behavior.” “In short, Islamists plausibly charged non-Islamists with refusing to accept adverse election results, while non-Islamists plausibly charged Islamists with using those same election results to undermine the development of healthy democratic life.” Nathan Brown, “Egypt's Failed Transition,” p. 50-51.

decisive for our purposes, however, is that the structures of power in Egypt, when Morsi took office, created a high likelihood of implosion given the underlying fissures in Egyptian society. As the democratically elected leader of Egypt, Morsi reasonably expected to wield *some* effective influence over Egyptian policy. But this was not the case, as each step of the way the Egyptian military and bureaucracy undermined his authority and that of parliament. Morsi in turn spent much of his time aggressively trying to reverse these steps⁵²¹ and pushing Egypt's democracy towards a tragic impasse where "Non-Islamists felt their fears of Islamist majoritarianism deepening, and "Islamists discovered that their parliamentary majority meant little because the military had taken care in the constitutional declaration to ensure that the new parliament would have no power to oversee the cabinet or pass legislation without the generals' approval."⁵²² Making matters worse, the Egyptian bureaucracy, predominantly holdovers from the Mubarak era, actively sabotaged the Morsi government through propaganda, political obstacles, and underperformance.⁵²³

⁵²¹ To recall: "Just as the presidential voting was beginning, the military also sprang a new constitutional declaration that robbed the presidency of significant power and carved out a strong role for the military in the constitution-writing process then underway." Nathan Brown, "Egypt's Failed Transition," p. 47.

⁵²² Nathan Brown, "Egypt's Failed Transition," p. 47.

⁵²³ Azmi Bishara writes that Morsi "was placed in charge of a state over which he had no actual power and a state apparatus that did not cooperate with him, but was actively resisting his policies and initiatives...At every turn, when one of these organizations would fail in hampering the president, another would come to the fore in order to continue the battle until the judiciary became the last line of defense, annulling the legislations of the elected parliament and the decrees of the elected president." Azmi Bishara. "Revolution against Revolution, the Street against the People, and Counter-Revolution," research paper published by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, September 2013, p. 23.

Morsi responded with drastic measures, including the controversial November 2012 attempt to pass a presidential decree that effectively, if only temporarily, gave the president dictatorial powers: “The president can issue any decision or measure to protect the revolution,” said an official statement, “The constitutional declarations, decisions and laws issued by the president are final and not subject to appeal.”⁵²⁴ Liberals responded swiftly and stiffly: Mohamed El Baradei wrote that “Morsi today usurped all state powers and appointed himself Egypt’s new pharaoh...A major blow to the revolution that could have dire consequences.” In a joint news conference with El Baradei, the head of the Lawyers syndicate called Morsi’s actions a “coup against legitimacy.” As protestors gathered outside Egypt’s interior ministry, some expressed anger at Morsi’s “attacking the judiciary’s independence,” agreeing that Egypt needed “judicial reform...but granting the president absolute power and immunity is not the way to do it.”⁵²⁵

One must ask what satisfactory alternatives Morsi had, other than doing nothing, and whether any less drastic “reform” of the judiciary was a viable option? Attached to this controversial decree, for example, Morsi’s first act was to remove

Joseph Massad describes a “media-whipped hysteria” against Morsi, including “the media and pundits...speaking about Mursi as the new ‘Hitler’ and the MB as the ‘Nazi Party.’ [...] Everywhere Mursi turned, the Mubarakists put obstacles in his way. The government bureaucracy refused to cooperate with him, the judges fought him every step of the way, and the police refused to redeploy in the streets. The Mubarakist bourgeoisie...fabricated an energy crisis causing massive shortages in fuel and electricity, which miraculously disappeared upon Mursi’s removal from power.” Joseph Massad, “Mubarakism without Mubarak: The Struggle for Egypt,” *Counterpunch*, Weekend Edition, July 12-14, 2013.

⁵²⁴ Richard Spencer and Magdy Samaan, “Mohammed Morsi grants himself sweeping new powers in wake of Gaza,” *The Telegraph* (online), November 22, 2012.

⁵²⁵ All as reported in Richard Spencer and Magdy Samaan, “Mohammed Morsi grants himself sweeping new powers in wake of Gaza,” *The Telegraph* (online), November 22, 2012.

from office the country's chief prosecutor, Abdel-Maguid Mahmoud, who had systematically failed to win convictions against those allegedly responsible for the shooting deaths of Egyptian protestors between January 25 and February 11, 2011. Mahmoud was known as a holdover of the Mubarak regime, and his summary ouster was one attempt to wrest power from the old regime bureaucracy and Morsi's most credible "measure to protect the revolution." Moreover, throughout the constitutional process, the Egyptian judiciary had on several occasions shown its willingness to work with the military to roadblock the constitutional process on ad hoc grounds. If the revolution wanted a constitution, this may have seemed to Morsi the only way forward within the bounds of its current electoral democracy.

Such was the situation in Egypt, then and throughout the revolution—that a (a) heightened level of political suspicion, alongside (b) weak democratic norms, and (c) an entrenched old regime bureaucracy and judiciary, combined to render the same facts subject to various different, and even completely opposed narratives. Depending on perspective, the same action might be interpreted as advancing Egypt's revolution, or subverting Egypt's post-revolutionary democracy.⁵²⁶ In the wake of Morsi's ouster Fadl highlights the strange irony of this situation, that "In the name of democracy, Islamists won elections[,] and in the name of democracy the

⁵²⁶ On the struggle over the political narrative of the January 25/February 11 revolution, for example, here regarding the "democracy protecting" role of the military, see Hesham Sallam, "The Egyptian Revolution and the Politics of Histories," *PS: Political Science & Politics*. April 2013, pp. 248-258.

secular intelligentsia continued to rely on the repressive state as their guarantor against the reactionary Islamist forces.”⁵²⁷

In November 2012 Morsi may have been better advised to pursue a broader political coalition—Islamist, secular, and Christian—to exert political pressure against the military and the old Mubarakist bureaucracy. This would have built trust among Egypt’s different democratic factions and compelled the military to justify its political intervention on grounds other than preventing civil war and chaos. But a coalition government would also have required that the revolutionary democracy—the people in the streets and their various internal factions—put forward legitimate representatives to be a part of the Morsi government; and who were those representatives? Who among them was both *willing* and *able* to credibly represent those groups alongside Morsi? The failure in recent elections of parties other than the Islamists to send a substantial number of representatives to Parliament suggested there were few, if any, who could legitimately play this role.

In any event, by 2013 all signs including those in the streets suggested that that moment had long passed—and in June 2013 the liberals, El Baradei among them, in supporting Sisi’s coup would raise new questions about the meaning of Egyptian democracy and a term liberals had only recently used with such palpable disdain towards Morsi—“new pharaoh.”

⁵²⁷ Khaled Abou El Fadl, “The collapse of legitimacy: How Egypt’s secular intelligentsia betrayed the revolution,” posted at ABC News (Australia), July 11, 2013.

The difficulty here is that revolution as we know it in the modern age has always been concerned with both liberation and freedom. And since liberation, whose fruits are absence of restraint and possession of ‘the power of locomotion,’ is indeed a condition of freedom—nobody would ever be able to arrive at a place where freedom rules if he could not move without restraint—it is frequently very difficult to say where the mere desire for liberation, to be free from oppression, ends, and the desire for freedom and the political way of life begins.

—Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*⁵²⁸

Was another path available to the Egyptian revolution; a path towards inclusive, legitimate constitution of freedom? Hannah Arendt’s work focuses our attention on two endemic factors that have turned the Egyptian revolution away from a constitutional democratic republic, and towards a disquieting state of “permanent liberation.” These factors are (a) the absence of a “real revolutionary” to “pick up power” in the name of revolutionary freedom and democracy at the decisive “revolutionary moment”⁵²⁹; and (b) the revolution’s *movement* character and corresponding absence of *plurality*—i.e. the salience of *force* rather than *power* throughout the revolutionary process.

This *leaderless-movement-revolution’s* anti-institutional, anti-constitutional, and anti-political pathologies were in turn exacerbated by two concurrent structural factors: namely (c) Egypt’s long authoritarian legacy, which decimated the conditions for *plural* or “round table” negotiations as happened in 1989; and (d) the

⁵²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 2006, p. 23.

⁵²⁹ Elizabeth Young-Bruehl (“A Preface,” op. cit., p. 2), arguably the most important academic writer on Arendt ever, dismisses this thesis matter-of-factly: “I wish that she were with us, for example, to shake her head in amazement at the news commentators and pundits who are worrying that the Egyptians are engaging in a ‘leaderless revolution.’ No, no, I can almost hear her saying, a revolution is not led, certainly not ruled; the people do not follow a leader.”

revolution's "social media" origins (and corresponding "leaderless" mobilization tactic) which, while a highly effective means of creating *force* for liberation (i.e. ousting leaders), lacked political strategy and dictated the revolution's boundless and unconstrained "movement" character.

Perhaps the most important innovation of Egypt's January 25 Revolution was the radically democratic, "leaderless" model of revolt that was later emulated (to no real advantage) by global 'Occupy.' In an exceptionally lucid critique of the failure of political leadership in Egypt's revolution, Nathan Brown writes that in February 2011:

The most basic problem was the huge amount of political control that fell into the hands of the military high command for no other reason than that the high command claimed it and no one else could come up with a timely alternative. The soundest idea heard was a call for a presidency council capable of compelling the main political forces (assuming that they could be identified and could manage their differences) to move forward by consensus. But revolutionary groups did not unify around this notion until it was too late.⁵³⁰

Brown's description of "political control" that "fell into the hands of the military" is oddly passive; it recalls Arendt's description of a "revolutionary situation"⁵³¹ waiting for the "real revolutionary"—someone like Lenin with the tactical acumen, political legitimacy, and personal courage "to know when power is lying in the street and when they can pick it up."⁵³² But the only party both willing and able to do so was the military—and later, perhaps, the Brotherhood.

⁵³⁰ Nathan Brown, "Egypt's Failed Transition," p. 54.

⁵³¹ This, recall, was just Schell's description of the situation.

How would one characterize the military's actions on February 11? Had they "acted" in a revolutionary sense? How did their actions relate to the *principle* of the revolution, and the *power* in the streets? Had they merely filled a vacuum, usurped a political role? Recall our earlier discussion of the implicit moral difference in Arendt's theory—which becomes a de facto descriptive difference in practice—between a "revolution" and a "coup": A coup, a mere transfer of power for power's sake neither *begins* something new which others may continue, nor *continues* what others (here those in the streets) have started, since there is no revolutionary or political *principle* animating the action. Had the military's actions looked like a coup, they could not have "picked up the power," for it is only by *representing* the power in the streets that they are able to "pick it up"—otherwise the people in the streets, we can presume, would never have stood for it.

This is why the military insisted from early on—and Sisi continues to insist until today—that their actions were and are *revolutionary*, that they *joined* the revolution, or at least *responded* to it—that seeing a potential revolutionary situation in the streets, they *assumed responsibility* for it on and behalf of it. And indeed, this is what they did! They grabbed the power in the streets—a clear mandate from the people to do something, to *act*—and their actions said *Yes! We will act! We will seize this power in the streets, this mandate available to us, we will use it for political purposes! We will suffer the burden of the consequences! Put it on our shoulders! We will use this power for good!* By this understanding, I would argue,

⁵³² Hannah Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution," p. 206.

the military *did* pick up power when it was in the streets, and their timing was simply impeccable. They knew that Mubarak's time as a "legitimate" ruler was finished and that, at a decisive moment, the people would be willing for them to step in and take the reins. The alternative was to continue to back Mubarak, clear the Square violently, and do so at the cost of destroying their public prestige and reducing Egyptian politics to an almost pure rule of violence. Instead they waited until frustration so boiled over with Mubarak that something *had* to be done, as well as until it was clear—to them and those on the streets—that no other legitimate representative of the people had the ability to get Egypt out of this crisis. When it was clear that Egypt had no other viable leaders, who could blame the military?

The question that follows is this: If the events of January 25-28—and certainly the events of February 2—revealed the "objective" conditions of a revolutionary situation in Egypt to the people, why was it that no one—except of course the military—was both able and willing to assume responsibility for the revolution? How did the revolution fall into the military's lap? The first answer, I want to suggest, lies in revolution's social media origins. The Arab revolts were often called "Facebook Revolutions" or "Twitter Revolutions" in light of the high visibility of social media in their early mobilization phase. And today debates flourish regarding the real importance of social media in places like Tunisia and Egypt, with many studies tempering the distortions of reality and exaggerations of what happened initially caused by social media's novel cachet.⁵³³

⁵³³ A recent poll study by Robert Brym et. al., for example, argues that in Egypt in 2011 social media played a "secondary role" to television as a means of spreading news of the protests, and that "A

However, while these tempering assessments of the mobilizing effect of social media may be true descriptively and on the scale of the revolution as a whole, for *understanding* the revolution in Egypt—what it *meant* and how it developed over time—these longer-term surveys are something of a red herring. For the singular importance of Facebook, Twitter, and other decentralized social media as a catalyst for the January 25 Revolution was not only their sustained capacity to physically move bodies, but also their decisive normative influence *as a beginning* of the revolution, whose principle “is not merely half of the whole but reaches out towards the end”⁵³⁴—specifically their moral influence on the revolution’s technology inspired, radically democratic leaderless principle.

The January 25 Revolution began online. It was announced several weeks in advance, and then campaigned and coordinated (with other online activists) by Wael Ghonim, a young Google executive who since 2010 had anonymously managed two of Egypt’s most popular websites: the official Facebook page of Mohamed El Baradei, and the Facebook page “We Are All Khaled Said.”⁵³⁵ In early 2010 Ghonim created El Baradei’s page independently and later received his imprimatur; and

variety of social-structural factors were more important than patterns of media usage were in distinguishing demonstrators from sympathetic onlookers.” Robert Brym, Melissa Godbout, Andreas Hoffbauer, Gabe Menard and Tony Huiquan Zhang, “Social Media in the 2011 Egyptian Uprising,” *The British Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 65, No. 2 (June 2014), pp. 266- 292, p. 282, 271.

⁵³⁴ Arendt quotes this line in *On Revolution*, pg. 205. In this vein it is no coincidence that the revolution has come to be called the “January 25 Revolution,” marking the day it started (and was suppressed), rather than the “February 11 Revolution,” for when Mubarak was toppled. The revolution was defined by the principle of its beginning.

⁵³⁵ On Ghonim’s involvement with the January 25 Revolution, see Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater than the People in Power, A Memoir*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

thanks to Ghonim the latter's internet profile skyrocketed, making El Baradei the most followed Egyptian on Twitter.⁵³⁶ Soon thereafter Ghonim created the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook page that had a far greater social impact.

Khaled Said was an Egyptian youth who in June 2010 died in a brutal police attack for allegedly having video on his phone implicating Egyptian police in illicit drug activity. Said's death was just the latest in a long stream of abuses that, in Ghonim's words, had made "State Security officers and Central Security men...the most despised segments of society."⁵³⁷ Ghonim posted the gruesome images of Said's beaten face, and through his website facilitated public discussion and sharing of videos and other images. Through the website he also organized protest gatherings against Egypt's security regime, coordinating these demonstrations in a decentralized manner by announcing dates, locations, and pledges to attend. To persuade others to join, those attending would instantly post photos of themselves and others at the demonstrations. This method proved remarkably successful: the website's first announced "Silent Stand" on Khaled Said's behalf gathered thousands of anonymous protestors in locations throughout Egypt, and ultimately helped compel Egyptian authorities to arrest his two suspected killers. These actions, publicly displayed and efficacious, changed the psychology of many Egyptians towards politics, protest, and the perceived possibilities for change. By September of

⁵³⁶ Also supporting El Baradei was the "El Baradei Group" on Facebook, which in January 2011 had over 300,000 members. Emad El-Din Shahin, "The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square," *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, Vol. 3 (2012), pp. 46-69, p. 61.

⁵³⁷ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, p. 121.

2010 “We Are All Khaled Said” had over 250,000 members⁵³⁸; by January 2011, 400,000.⁵³⁹

Then in early 2011 two factors conspired to make the January 25 Revolution happen. First was the coming of the annual National Police Day holiday in Egypt on January 25, a perfect occasion to call the masses to action to protest Khaled Said and a host of other victims. In December 2010 Ghonim posted on the Khaled Said page a call for mass rallies throughout Egypt in an event ironically called “Celebrating Egyptian Police Day – January 25.” He then worked with other online activists and grassroots organizations to fill the streets, coordinating with “ultra” soccer fans, the April 6 Movement, and enthusiastic groups of lawyer, doctors, and university professors.

Amidst all this, another exogenous shock added revolutionary leverage to the proceedings: the sudden toppling of Tunisia’s Ben Ali on January 14. As Ghonim writes, “By January 14, I started to believe that we could be the second Arab nation to rid itself of its dictator...The only thing that separated Egyptians from a revolution was our lack of self-confidence and our exaggerated perception of the regime’s strength. Yet after what happened in Tunisia, I thought the Egyptian masses might finally get the message and break the psychological barrier of fear.”⁵⁴⁰ Ghonim writes that at this point “it became necessary to completely reposition the

⁵³⁸ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, p. 113.

⁵³⁹ Emad El-Din Shahin, “The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square,” *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, Vol. 3 (2012), pp. 46-69, p. 61.

⁵⁴⁰ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, p. 133.

event. I found myself unable to resist the word *revolution*.” He changed the event title to “January 25: Revolution Against Torture, Poverty, Corruption, and Unemployment,” and now “was ready to face any and all consequences.”⁵⁴¹ “Some [page] members mocked the idea of a ‘revolution’ that was predetermined in terms of time and place,” but “The way I saw it, however, bringing together large groups of people that were hard to control could potentially lead to the revolution for which we were so hungry.”⁵⁴²

The response on January 25 was magical.⁵⁴³ Although the initial protests on January 25, including an attempted occupation of Tahrir Square, were dispersed by the Egyptian police by early morning, numbers in the streets were so massive that a second protest was called for three days later on January 28, 2011. And on this day two major events happened that changed the course of the revolution irrevocably. First, members of the Muslim Brotherhood unexpectedly joined in the protests where they had balked on January 25; and second, Mubarak’s security regime abandoned the attempt to disperse Tahrir Square and left the streets. Here began the permanent occupation of Tahrir Square.

This palpable shift in power and morale between January 25 and 28 signaled clearly that Mubarak was losing his grip. In the meantime the military, when asked by Mubarak to step in, moved tanks into Cairo but maintained a neutral stance. If all

⁵⁴¹ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, p. 137.

⁵⁴² Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, p. 145.

⁵⁴³ The best account of the Egyptian streets between January 25-28 is Mona El-Ghobashy, “The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution,” *Middle East Report*, Vol. 41 (Spring 2011).

this were indeed a “test” of the “revolutionary situation,” the situation seemed quite ripe. And yet at precisely this moment the revolution faced a serious practical problem—if “Mubarak must go,” then *who* or *what* comes next? What revolutionary outcome would embrace and manifest the “spirit of Tahrir Square”? How might this ‘spirit’ continue to animate Egyptian politics after the revolution? How would we get from here to there? None of these questions had clear answers, and at this point the revolution faced two problems that would obstruct its consolidation into an inclusive Egyptian republic:

First—and this distinguished the Egyptian revolt in a critical way from the non-violent Revolutions of 1989 to which it was initially often compared—there was no clear basis for a negotiated political transition in Egypt, as there was in 1989. With the exception of the Islamists parties, Egyptian civil society had no coherent system of organized political bodies, no legitimate representatives of the country’s potentially differentiated political interests. It was unclear who if anyone could legitimately represent Egyptian society in any capacity—be they latent civil society groups, or the revolution as a whole—at anything like a “round table.”

But ironically, while this was a serious practical political problem, leaders on the ground celebrated it. Throughout his revolutionary memoir, for example, Wael Ghonim gloats at the revolution’s mass, undifferentiated character: “It was a revolution without a leader and an organized body,” he writes, and “the glory of the Jan25 revolution was that the invitation did not originate from any political body or organization.” The Khaled Said page was “not influenced by any political party,

group, movement, or organization,” and on January 26 “I continued to rally support for the revolution through my posts on Facebook” knowing that “The mob was now in charge, whether it was rational or not.”⁵⁴⁴

On this point Ghonim’s perspective was hardly unique. And here Gilbert Achcar’s description of the Arab world’s 2011 revolutionary principle as the *opposite* of the American Revolution’s is especially telling: “In contrast to the proclamations adopted by representative assemblies, such as ‘*We the people*’ in the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America, here, the will of the people is expressed without intermediary chanted at lung-splitting volumes by immense throngs[.]”⁵⁴⁵ This was the real meaning of “The people want...” in Egypt, as in all of the Arab revolutions.

Also revealing are the words of activist-professor Khaled Fahmy, already cited above, whose clear analysis and clairvoyant predictions of Egyptian politics have been second to none. In a September 2013 interview after Morsi’s ouster, Fahmy observed:

[W]hat makes Egypt unique is that we also have a third faction, which is the revolution. This is the result of the fact that the revolution of January/February 2011 that was youth-led managed to topple the regime but did not manage to end up in power. So when the elections were run, parliamentary and presidential, they did not win. The people who won were the people who were poised to win, which is the Islamists, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists. [] We ended up with a very peculiar situation whereby the old regime had not really completely disappeared, the new regime is not revolutionary and does not really believe in the revolution as such, and the

⁵⁴⁴ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, p. 139, 157, 165, 189.

⁵⁴⁵ Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*. Trans. G.M. Goshgarian. London: Saqi, 2013, p. 13-14.

revolution that managed to make this political opening is disaffected and bewildered and out in the streets again.⁵⁴⁶

Fahmy stands unified with the party of revolution, and expresses open willingness to hit the streets again should Sisi abuse his power. But in this brief statement, however perspicacious, one observes two politically crippling tendencies from one of “the revolution’s” most articulate representatives: First is Fahmy’s normative embrace of “the revolution” itself as a source of legitimacy, and this in language (following Achcar) likening “the revolution” to a singular, unified “general will.” But it was precisely this tendency, which Arendt observed in Robespierre, and Tocqueville observed in the entire French approach to the Great Revolution, which has always rendered revolution as not a genuinely political attempt to found a new and inclusive republic—a *res public*, a *constitution*, a *thing* around which diverse people and groups gather—but rather a winner-take-all struggle for control over the Egyptian state. Instead of an Egyptian *gathering*—a politically inclusive and pluralistic polity—“the revolution” wants ownership of the country, a monopoly of legitimate violence over the territory.

But this is not the stuff of political resolution or reconciliation in a historically divided society. Indeed, nowhere in Fahmy’s account does the possibility of a political resolution of Egypt’s constitutional crisis, one negotiated among many different interested parties—of secularists, Islamists, Christians, liberals, socialists, etc. around a table—emerge. An acceptable outcome merely hinges on what “the revolution,” which simply by fiat legitimately represents the Egyptian nation,

⁵⁴⁶ “Khaled Fahmy: Sisi is ‘Much More Dangerous,’” www.pbs.org (Frontline), September 17, 2013.

dictates at any point in time. The logical extension of this reasoning leads to perpetual instability, the rejection of what Fahmy pejoratively calls “ballotocracy” that must always and ultimately give way to true “democracy.” Fahmy writes that:

[T]he most important difference setting both perspectives apart [of Western media and many Egyptian citizens] is the West's prioritising of stability over freedom, and the very narrow definition it has of democracy, a definition that limits it to voting, and one which Amr Ezzat brilliantly described by his neologism ‘ballotocracy.’ For while many Western journalists accepted, mostly unwittingly, the Brotherhood's own belief that the revolution had ended after we cast our ballots in the parliamentary then the presidential elections that were soon followed by the referendum on the constitution, a large faction of Egyptians believed, by contrast, that the revolution did not erupt only to hold elections or to bring in new faces to the political scene, but to change the rules of the entire political game. [...] And since the revolution has not yet succeeded in establishing these new rules, these journalists need to buckle up and brace themselves for what will surely be a long and bumpy ride. Our revolution is still in its very early stages.⁵⁴⁷

But in the absence of credible leadership and representation, in times of crisis the result may at best follow the unstable model of the now-famous Tamarod protestors, whose anti-regime petition campaign catalyzed the June anti-Morsi protests, and whose astonishing number of collected signatures against Morsi actually tripled the number of votes that put Morsi into office!⁵⁴⁸ The Tamarod petition was viewed by the crowd as definitive evidence that Morsi had lost legitimacy, and thus that he too must go. *Ipsa facto* the legitimacy of the streets

⁵⁴⁷ Khaled Fahmy, “The Muslim Brotherhood and the West: Western media misunderstood the Brotherhood and underestimated Egyptians' desire for democracy and social justice,” *Ahram Online*, September 3, 2013.

⁵⁴⁸ Adel Darwish, “Egypt: How the ‘Arab Spring’ turned into a summer of discontent,” *New African* (August/September 2013), pp. 14-18, p. 16.

trumps that of institutional democratic procedures, and thus during the so-called “corrective revolution” of June 2013, Ann Lesch quotes the Tamarud rebels shouting “we are revolutionaries, not infidels” and “expressing their determination to restore the January 25 revolution to its initial goals.”⁵⁴⁹

But as in February 2011, this mass mobilization movement was successful at generating force to topple a ruler—i.e. as a show of force—but showed little capacity to “pick up power” on behalf of the revolution or revolutionary principle it was defending. Nathan Brown observes this clear pattern: “By showing disdain for politics and ceding control to the military, those who pulled off the revolution revealed that they lack a common understanding of how to overcome authoritarianism’s malign legacies. In June 2013, a new Egyptian revolutionary movement made precisely the same mistake, effectively allowing the military to seize the reins once again.”⁵⁵⁰ These groups meanwhile “decry ‘ballotocracy’ as mindlessly majoritarian but have shown themselves to be even more ruthlessly majoritarian than the Muslim Brotherhood when they can outmobilize their foes in street demonstrations.”⁵⁵¹

Bishara observes the same—the deleterious effect in Egypt of the absence of political plurality and the political impotence of a leaderless, mass-based revolution in its wake: “[I]n the absence of organized political forces that are keen to preserve

⁵⁴⁹ Ann M. Lesch, “A Second, Corrective Revolution?” Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Notes, July 2013.

⁵⁵⁰ Nathan Brown, “Egypt’s Failed Transition,” p. 58.

⁵⁵¹ Nathan Brown, “Egypt’s Failed Transition,” p. 58.

the values of the revolution, the remnants of the Mubarak regime shielded themselves from the revolution by using the very slogans of the revolution and appealing to its inexperienced youth...Devoid of an organized revolution followed by a revolutionary organization capable of preserving its gains and pursuing its goals, many of the revolution's supporters were contained, and the fates of its young leaders varied[.]”⁵⁵²

In response to Fahmy, then, we do well to recall Arendt's description of power and violence from Section 10 above, and the “by no means infrequent political combination of force and powerlessness, an array of impotent forces that spend themselves, often spectacularly and vehemently but in utter futility, leaving behind neither monuments nor stories, hardly enough memory to enter into history at all.” And while in the enthusiasm of the moment this “crowd democracy” may look like political democracy, “In historical experience and traditional theory, this combination [of force and powerlessness], even if it is not recognized as such, is known as tyranny, and the time-honored fear of this form of government is not exclusively inspired by its cruelty, which—as the long series of benevolent tyrants and enlightened despots attests—is not among its inevitable features, but by the impotence and futility to which it condemns its rulers as well as the ruled.”⁵⁵³

⁵⁵² Azmi Bishara, “Revolution against Revolution, the Street against the People, and Counter-Revolution,” research paper published by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, September 2013, p. 15. See also Abdel-Fattah Mady, “Popular Discontent, Revolution, and Democratization in Egypt and the Globalizing World,” p. 333.

⁵⁵³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 202.

Perhaps contrary to what Hannah Arendt might have imagined, representative political “councils” did not arise in the Egyptian revolution,⁵⁵⁴ and there was never a clear situation of “dual power” paving the way for a revolutionary transfer.⁵⁵⁵ But in lieu of this, there is also evidence to suggest that a different conclusion of Egypt’s “revolutionary situation,” one more obviously in favor of an inclusive and legitimate Egyptian democracy, remained viable until immediately prior to the army’s coup. One might even call it a missed opportunity: The rough model Egypt might have followed but didn’t was that of the 1986 Philippine “People Power” revolution, in which the military ouster of dictator-President Ferdinand Marcos was followed by the popularly supported civilian presidency of Corazon Aquino—who indeed “picked up the power” when it was lying in the street and had the clear popular mandate to do so.

Who might have played this role in Egypt? One person who comes to mind is Wael Ghonim, who after his arrest, release, and public appearance on international

⁵⁵⁴ The closest example appears to have been local “Popular Committees” that emerged in the absence of Egyptian security forces and mostly for mutual protection and, in some cases, to provide public services. Some of these organizations even established bottom up federal structures up to the national level. But most tapered off after the return of regular security to the streets, and their scope was generally limited to what Arendt calls “social” issues. See Jennifer Ann Bremer, “Leadership and Collective Action in Egypt’s Popular Committees: Emergence of Authentic Civic Activism in the Absence of the State,” *International Journal of Not-for-Profit-Law*. Vol. 13, No. 4 (December 2011), pp. 70-92.

⁵⁵⁵ Nasser Abourahme’s statement that “Under Brotherhood rule there were more than 9,000 protests—this is not sedition, it is a kind of dual power,” misunderstand the nature of dual power which, as Tilly (following Amann, following Trotsky) reminds us is when “more than one ‘power bloc’ regarded as legitimate and sovereign by some of a country’s people emerges.” The problem in Egypt was precisely that the democratic crowds had not coalesced into anything like a “power bloc” to replace the existing regime. Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978, p. 191; and Nasser Abourahme, “‘The street’ and ‘the slum’: Political form and urban life in Egypt’s revolt,” *City*, Vol. 17, No. 6 (2013), pp. 716-728, p. 720.

news, to say nothing of his charismatic return to Tahrir Square, became a symbol of the revolution in Egypt and worldwide. Ghonim's memoir recounts the massive attention he received following his release from prison, and his sudden and un-aspired-to role as de facto representative of the Square, communicating directly with Mubarak representatives and the SCAF. He writes of this period:

My interview with Mona al-Shazly spread quickly, thanks to the Internet and social networking sites. Many international media sources, including CNN and the *Guardian*, translated it as well. Numerous journalists tried to portray me as the revolution's champion – my story fit the image. Someone even created a Facebook page called 'I Nominate Wael Ghonim to Speak on Behalf of Egypt's Protestors.' The page drew about 250,000 members in forty-eight hours but I did not like being promoted as an icon. I thought it was likely to do more harm than good. While the media may have found in my emotional interview just the right dramatic scene for a big story, I continued to remind myself that I was not a hero. The heroes were those brave young men and women who had risked their lives for their country and ended up either martyred or severely injured by Mubarak's brutal regime.⁵⁵⁶

Ghonim did not believe that the revolution had or might credibly have something like a "leader," although upon his release he tacitly assumed this representative role. Just prior to the SCAF's ouster of Mubarak, one of Ghonim's most important acts was to publish a set of basic democratic demands directed to the SCAF that included getting rid of Mubarak. In retrospect this was effective at drawing the military out—however, it also represented a missed opportunity for Ghonim, as a representative of the revolution, to demand *prior to the military takeover* that Mubarak be replaced by a ruling coalition that may or may not have included himself. By not doing so he allowed the military to seize the political initiative by ousting Mubarak, because that

⁵⁵⁶ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, p. 262.

was the only *immediate* political demand made of them. Had Ghonim made the political demands of the revolution more concrete, the military may have felt bound to appease the Square with a more democratic and representative political solution.

The more obvious candidate to have possibly “picked up power” is Mohamed El Baradei. Although less personally charismatic than Ghonim, El Baradei’s ascent to the height of Egyptian democratic politics had long been viewed with anticipation, both online and in the Western press. Moreover, he was the one person whose legitimacy with the people had been openly expressed not only by youth via the highly trafficked Facebook page to “Nominate El Baradei for President,” but also various internet and grassroots opposition groups associated with El Baradei’s National Association for Change, as well as—and this perhaps rings most important—the Muslim Brotherhood, who so trusted El Baradei as to authorize him during the January-February upheaval to negotiate on their behalf⁵⁵⁷—to say nothing of the United States and the entire liberal democratic world. If any political figure had the credibility to stand in Tahrir Square, declare the democratic direction of the revolution, and then offer to lead it—“picking up power” by assuming responsibility for the revolution, whatever would happen next—it was El Baradei. But he had to do this *before* the military took power—when the revolutionary situation was ripe and power was lying in the streets for *him* to coalesce into a representative body with recognized political interests—recognizing that the military at that point could *only* have credibly ousted Mubarak and nothing else—that once

⁵⁵⁷ Robert Naiman, “Political Opposition to Mubarak’s Autocratic Regime Settles on Mohamed El Baradei to Negotiate Egypt’s Future,” published at *AlterNet* (online), January 30, 2011.

he had spoken, and *declared the revolution!* on behalf of the Egyptian people, the military's own heroism and credibility—indeed its own long term interests—would have depended on not only ousting Mubarak, but subsequently handing El Baradei the reins. Here—and reasonably—the military could have demanded certain concessions from El Baradei (i.e. “the revolution”) in return for their revolutionary alliance. But the real political leverage—the political power—would have all been in El Baradei's hands. Absent good faith negotiations with El Baradei on behalf of Egyptian democracy, the military would have faced the daunting task of clearing the Square violently, solely and transparently on their own (or Mubarak's) behalf, and destroying any credibility with the Egyptian people for generations to come. But El Baradei did not pick up the power. And whether for lack of recognition of the situation, or plain failure to act, he left power lying in the streets.

**18. THINKING WITH ARENDT:
MODERN REVOLUTION AND THE ARAB SPRING**

I must warn you against the impression that mine is
the final word on nonviolence.
—Mahatma Gandhi⁵⁵⁸

How can I tell them that what we are actually hoping
for is bloodshed, the moment when the
Government is ready to brazenly butcher the
people? I feel that only when the square is awash
with blood will the people of China open their
eyes.
—Chai Ling⁵⁵⁹

WORK? Why, cert'nly it would work, like rats-a-
fighting. But it's too blame' simple; there ain't
nothing TO it. What's the good of a plan that ain't
no more trouble than that? It's as mild as goose-
milk. Why, Huck, it wouldn't make no more talk
than breaking into a soap factory.
—Tom Sawyer⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁸ Quoted in Mark Shepard, *Gandhi Today: A Report on Mahatma Gandhi's Successors*. Simple Productions: Arcata: CA, 1987, p. xiii.

⁵⁵⁹ Student leader of the High Command of Tiananmen Square during the 1989 protests. The quote is from an interview with American journalist Phillip Cunningham five days before the June 4 military crackdown and is printed in Tang Tsou, "The Tiananmen Tragedy: The State-Society Relationship, Choices, and Mechanisms in Historical Perspective," in Jon Elster, ed., *The Roundtable Talks and the Breakdown of Communism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996: 213-240, p. 239 (nt. 43).

Tsou's judgment of Ling's judgment is scathing. Noting Chai's suggestion after the fact that the Chinese word translated above as "hoping for" could also (and presumably more accurately in her case) be translated as "to wait for, to expect, and to anticipate," Tsou defiantly quotes Chai in the original interview saying "It is very difficult for me to tell my fellow students that we must use our blood to arouse the people." For a vivid account of the politics of Tiananmen Square during the protests, see the 1995 PBS documentary *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*.

⁵⁶⁰ From Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), Chapter XXXIV.

Despite grand conclusions that the age of modern revolution had ended with the fall of the U.S.S.R., or that moderate “liberal revolutions” would replace the classical model, “great revolution” with all its colossal force and uncertain consequences remains with us; and liberal hegemony has hardly determined the fate of contemporary revolutionary movements. Indeed quite to the contrary, the Arab revolutions have brought into relief what are, at a level far simpler than Samuel Huntington anticipated,⁵⁶¹ the two enduring ideological clashes of our times—namely, the clash of the *secular* versus the *sacred*, and beside it of *political liberalism* versus *political theology*—long after the sacred ethos and political theology were presumed outmoded.

Nor have recent democratic revolutions snugly adhered to the modish “velvet” or “non-violent” models so lauded in the celestial wake of 1989.⁵⁶² Again to the contrary of popular thought, revolutionary 2011 and particularly the Arab Spring have restored revolution’s world-historical credentials, and this from two widely contrasting perspectives—from its miraculous and surprising, enthused democratic beginnings on one hand; to its bloody and chaotic, terrible and

⁵⁶¹ Cf. Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 22-29; Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Touchstone, 1997 [1996].

⁵⁶² See e.g. Robert S. Snyder, “The End of Revolution?” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 5-28. For a variety of reasons, including (1) the global spread of democracy and (2) spread of market-based economics, (3) the increase in the middle classes and (4) rise of transnationalism, and the (5) decline of colonial and neo-patrimonial regimes, as well as of (6) large peasant classes and (7) great power conflict as well, Snyder (p. 5) argues that “although revolutions have been frequent and important in the past, they are unlikely to happen in the future”—although notably, this prediction applies mainly to “great” or “social” revolutions. Conversely, Snyder (pg. 7) argues that “liberal revolutions” of the 1989 type, which promote “individualism, decentralization, political moderation, pacific international relations, market-based economics, and political liberty,” may not have ended just yet.

catastrophic fallout on the other—on a sublime scale reminiscent of the great waves of 1789, 1830, 1848, 1917-1919, 1968, and 1989. In sum, 2011 showed that revolution and revolutionary waves—as distinct from wars even when umbilically tied to them—may yet determine what Arendt called the “physiognomy” of the twenty-first century—its political and physical appearance—for some time to come.

Arendt predicted as much in *On Revolution*, where she wrote that “[I]f we don’t perish altogether, it seems more than likely that revolution, in distinction to war, will stay with us into the foreseeable future,” even if revolution, like war, remains “not even conceivable outside the domain of violence.” Thus, said Arendt, “In the contest that divides the world today and in which so much is at stake, those will probably win who understand revolution, while those who still put their faith in power politics in the traditional sense of the term and, therefore, in war as the last resort of all foreign policy may well discover in a not too distant future that they have become masters in a rather useless and obsolete trade.”⁵⁶³

Arendt’s reasoning here is as follows. First, she argues, nuclear weapons have prompted “a radical change in the very nature of war through the introduction of the deterrent as the guiding principle in the armament race.”⁵⁶⁴ Including but also in addition to nuclear weapons, the incredible capacities of violence now wielded by modern states—by the late nineteenth century the machinegun alone had changed everything—has made total warfare among great powers, and the risk of unforeseen

⁵⁶³ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 8.

⁵⁶⁴ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 6.

consequences from such warfare, an insane proposition on its face.⁵⁶⁵ With full engagement in war seemingly out of the question, in the mid-to-late twentieth century the world's great powers responded via a cynical form of alliance diplomacy and proxy wars—the propping of communist and anti-communist autocrats (depending on which sides were involved) on one hand, and the support of revolutionary movements and guerilla movements abroad, always in the name of *freedom*, on the other. In places like Afghanistan and Vietnam revolution became a proxy for war—violence justified by revolutionary ends—even as it assumed war's violent character. But this was in the long run to assist Lenin in devastating the idea of revolution, to conflate revolution with war and violence, and to render unavailable to political modernity a concept of radically transformative politics divorced from war and grounded instead in political speech and plurality.

1989 restored to modernity a vision of revolution divorced from violence; and for a quarter century in its wake, liberal revolutionary discourse has basked in the ebullient glow of what seemed to be a solved historical problem—the problem of democratic revolution. Liberal revolution was the apotheosis of modern democratic revolution, and in a twist on Sorel, the liberal revolution became the

⁵⁶⁵ “It is as though the nuclear armament race has turned into some sort of tentative warfare in which the opponents demonstrate to each other the destructiveness of their weapons in their possession; and while it is always possible that this deadly game of ifs and whens may suddenly turn into the real thing, it is by no means inconceivable that one day victory and defeat may end a war that never exploded into reality. Is this sheer fantasy? I think not. Potentially, at least, we were confronted with this kind of hypothetical warfare the very moment the atom bomb made its first appearance.” Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 6-7. See also Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” p. 230: “War has, so to speak, become a luxury which only the small nations can still afford, and they only so long as they are not drawn into the spheres of influence of the great powers and do not possess nuclear weapons themselves.”

next great revolutionary myth to inspire political action around the world—the myth of the “velvet,” or “color,” or “flower” revolution,⁵⁶⁶ its believers the progeny of 1989, and its progeny the unlikely inheritance of the “glorious” tradition and glorious myth of 1688.⁵⁶⁷

But 2011 also showed that 1989, while gifting political modernity a new myth and model of revolution that was negotiated, “round table,” and grounded firmly in speech rather than violence, hardly solved the political problem lying beneath these revolutions—namely, the problem of *getting* to that round table, and *agreeing* to a legitimate constitution, and *forgiving* others their transgressions. Whereas the Revolutions of 1989 displayed a consciousness of the critical importance of genuine *plurality* in the fashioning of post-revolutionary constitutions and institutions, this in turn facilitated by *representatives of organized political power*, the case of Egypt has shown to punishing effect the extent to which the “velvet” model we inherit today has decayed into a model of mere force instead of

⁵⁶⁶ For a recent treatment on the role of such revolutionary myths as they shape political behavior, see Eric Selbin, *Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance: The Power of Story*. New York: Zed, 2010. Interestingly, Selbin does not include the “velvet” revolution among the major myths of our times that he tackles.

⁵⁶⁷ On the Glorious Revolution as a precursor of the 1989 model, see Jonathan Schell’s somewhat overstated account in *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People*. New York: Holt, 2003, pp. 145-156: “The failure of prophecy [of civil war] was hardly Locke’s alone. It was as universal as the failure in our day to predict the nonviolent fall of the Soviet Union...The failure of theory to come to grips with the nonviolence of 1689 left both the Whigs and Tories without adequate terms to account for what had happened. [...] A theory of nonviolent revolution was missing but something close to the fact of it was present.” Cf. Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, whose revisionist study argues (p. 7) that “Though we have come to view the Glorious Revolution as bloodless, aristocratic, and consensual, the actual event was none of those things. The Revolution of 1688-89 was, of course, less bloody than the violent revolutions of the twentieth century, but the English endured a scale of violence against property and persons similar to that of the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. English men and women throughout the country threatened one another, destroyed each other’s property, and killed and maimed one another throughout the revolutionary period.”

power—a model of liberation but not revolution—in which an *ethic of non-violence* serves to absolve revolutionary actors from a *responsibility for revolution*.

If anything, 2011 and the Arab Spring have reminded liberal democrats what they had forgotten over a quarter century of sustained revolutionary success—that revolutions are both *awe-some* and *awe-ful* for much the same reason; that if what links wars and revolutions is not necessarily the *violence* once assumed to be their common denominator, it is nonetheless the exacerbated *potential* for violence, chaos, and political futility that, “human nature being what it is,”⁵⁶⁸ is possible, if not also likely to emerge under such fluid conditions that unleash human passions, provoke primal fears, and threaten those with much to lose from radical change.

In this important respect 2011 also belied a new liberal Manicheanism, palpable in the neo-Hegelian, liberal revolutionary narratives in the aftermath of 1989, that painted liberal revolutionary movements and their entrenched governments in broad white and black strokes—as a unified movement of objective “good,” versus a monolithic and oppressive “evil”; as a non-violent and just “people power,” confronting a violent and arbitrary government “force”; as a liberal political “modernity” challenging a despotic praetorian “reaction.” As these contrasts suggest, by the early 21st century the victory of neo-liberal good over reactionary evil had grown so predictable in revolutionary situations as to be thought inevitable, something historically determined.⁵⁶⁹ But 2011 obliterated these simplistic

⁵⁶⁸ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Trans. Rex Warner, New York: Penguin, 1972, I.22.

narratives, and brought into stark relief the fact that revolutionary situations today, much like the classic revolutions of the past, continue to involve a wide range of parties—from old regime loyalists and conservatives, to moderate and liberal reformers, to other radicals—be they *radical* democrats, *radical* Islamists, or something else—bent on social and cultural transformation of a more sweeping kind; to say nothing, of course, of the old regime faction itself—and all of whose conflicting interests, if not culturally and historically inscribed hostilities to boot, require a genuinely *political* resolution, if not also an active moral reconciliation, if an inclusive and democratic republic is to be founded.⁵⁷⁰

Few anticipated the epic scope of the nominally non-violent and democratic beginnings of the Arab revolts that swept across North Africa and the Middle East in 2011; but many more, like British Foreign Secretary William Hague, were subsequently quick to affirm their world-historical significance, their potential to mark “the greatest advance for human rights and freedom since the end of the Cold War.”⁵⁷¹ Perhaps because of these high hopes, fewer still anticipated the massive

⁵⁶⁹ Since 1989, of course, not all attempts at “people power,” or “1989-style” revolution have succeeded (e.g. Iran’s 2009 “Green Revolution” or Burma’s 2007 “Saffron Revolution”)—nor did they in 1989 (i.e. China), nor was the revolutionary fallout of 1989 nearly as peaceful as is often depicted (e.g. Romania)—but all so-called “non-violent,” “velvet,” or “people power” revolutions that have arisen in years since—from the post-Soviet “color (electoral) revolutions” in the early 2000s, to the Arab Spring revolutions (e.g. Tunisia’s so-called “Jasmine Revolution”)—have done so in the ineluctable shadow of the Eastern European Revolutions of 1989.

⁵⁷⁰ To enable “velvet revolution,” writes Timothy Garton Ash, “[A]bsent both the catharsis of revolutionary purging (that orgiastic moment as the king’s severed head is held aloft) and retroactive sanctions of criminal justice, it becomes all the more important to make public, symbolic, honest reckoning with your country’s difficult past. This alone can establish a bright line between bad past and better future. This is why I have argued that the essential complement to a velvet revolution is a truth commission.” Timothy Garton Ash. “Velvet Revolution: The Prospects,” *The New York Review of Books*, December 3, 2009.

amount of violence and regional instability these events might trigger. Then, of course, all hell broke loose: In places like Libya, Yemen, Mali, Syria, and Iraq, revolutionary gusto quickly succumbed to harsher political realities—the brutality of civil war; the fear of life under fractured and failed states; the cruelty of stoked sectarian passions. If one were “lucky,” as a majority in Egypt were, a fugitive moment of democracy merely ushered a new boss, same as the old boss.⁵⁷² But in any event, the Arab Spring blurred once again (and without Lenin) the fine line between revolution and civil war, and in the meantime revolution’s credulous liberal champions struggled for clear political answers. The liberal honeymoon with revolution was over, and after all that had transpired as a consequence of ostensibly non-violent, democratic revolutionary movements,⁵⁷³ liberal enthusiasts who faced the world squarely could no longer indulge the naïve assumption of the benign

⁵⁷¹ Quoted and reported by Raphael G. Satter, “UK: Arab democracy risings may be bigger than 9/11: British foreign minister says Arab democracy movement could prove bigger than Sept. 11 attacks,” Associated Press, May 4, 2011.

⁵⁷² Tunisia, whose post-revolutionary democracy has been relatively stable, is the one clear success story.

⁵⁷³ A July 16 CNN.com headline is sadly indicative of the Arab Spring catastrophe: “How did this happen? Iraq, Syria, Gaza, and Libya all in flames”: “Exactly what horror they face,” writes Holly Yan, “depends on which border they live within. Syria, Iraq, Gaza, Israel and Libya. Each with its unique crisis, but all now unified in a heightened sense of anxiety as years of conflict come to a head.” In Syria, “Three years of civil war have left much of the country in shambles. While regime helicopters drop barrel bombs on opposition neighborhoods, dissidents say, the government maintains its stance that it’s only fighting terrorists. As if the civil war wasn’t enough, the radical Sunni group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria is using this opportunity to carve its own swathe of territory from the Iraq border to deep inside Syria. The United Nations says more than 150,000 people have been killed in the past three years. But at this point, many have stopped counting.” In Libya, “Nearly three years after Libyan rebels overthrew a longtime dictator, the country is no closer to lasting stability. The civil war that culminated in Moammar Gadhafi’s 2011 death has given way to warring militias fighting over Tripoli’s international airport...The chaos in the capital is so dire now that officials are considering asking for international troops—even though the government is virtually powerless and has very little influence on what’s happening on the ground. Not only is government weak, but militias actually outnumber and outgun its security forces.”

predictability of revolutionary processes or historical movement; and new revolutionary actors, not least those of a peaceful democratic bent, could no longer countenance the blithe illusion that the frontiers of moral responsibility ended where the unpredictable consequences of one's actions, indeed one's *revolution*, began. In sum, 2011 resurrected a problem always present, but hitherto lost to post-1989 velvet revolutionaries and their velvet pundits in the public sphere, whose embrace of "revolutionary *non-violence*" had long crowded out a more difficult and morally complex problem of *thinking what we are doing* when we engage in *revolution action* itself, non-violent or not. For as sure as violence is not peace, and revolution is not reform, neither is mere civil disobedience a call for revolution, nor a call for revolution mere civil disobedience.⁵⁷⁴

I know of no clearer example of this characteristic, post-1989 obliviousness to the problem of moral responsibility in revolution, or one's own responsibility for revolutionary actions, be they non-violent or not, than the closing pages of Wael Ghonim's *Revolution 2.0*. Here Ghonim, certainly the most important Internet activist in coordinating the January 25 protests that began the Egyptian revolution, and who during these events called for "revolution" explicitly (And whose physical courage in political action—let's be clear—far surpasses anything I might profess to have ever found in myself.)—writes on the final page: "It has been jokingly said that

⁵⁷⁴ Here it is worth noting that the same physical act may have entirely different meanings based on how it is defined in speech by the actor, or how it is interpreted by observers, not least of them the government. A non-violent sit-in or strike movement, for example, that demands the ousting of a political leader or denies the legitimacy of government, may have far different political implications—in theory and on the ground—than one which protests policy but does not challenge the legitimacy or integrity of the law.

no snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible, and when it comes to Jan25, I couldn't agree more. This was the Revolution 2.0 model: no one was *the* hero because *everyone* was a hero.”⁵⁷⁵ Ghonim was right—no one was the hero; but only because in a sea of anonymous protestors, in the streets and online, no one possibly in a position to do so—not least Ghonim himself—was willing to politically *assume responsibility* for the revolution after it happened. And in Egypt's anti-authoritarian, anti-militaristic revolution of 2011, it was ironic that Nasser would best diagnose the liability that so held the revolution back—it was “a role in search of a hero.”⁵⁷⁶

Hannah Arendt's tense admiration for Lenin derived from precisely the opposite quality: his indomitable sense of responsibility, and his willingness to bear all that this required from him, physically and morally. It was an accidental testimony of Lenin's healthy conscience that he earned his communist bones editing a pamphlet called *Iskra*, or *The Spark*—for he who lights the spark must surely acknowledge—where Lenin, of course, would embrace with cheer—*some* responsibility for the fire. In years since 1989 the revolutionary spark had rarely if ever built into an uncontrollable fire, and because of this the problem of moral responsibility had readily dissolved. After 2011, however, all democratic revolutionaries now face the question—call it the “question of the spark”—in the klieg light of what now can no longer be denied—namely, that even the most

⁵⁷⁵ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, p. 294.

⁵⁷⁶ Gamal Abdul Nasser, *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution*. Public Affairs Press, Washington D.C., 1955, p. 87.

adamantly non-violent revolutionary bears a certain indelible mark—if not that of Cain who slew Abel, or more aptly of Romulus who slew Remus and founded Rome, then at least of Prometheus, who laid not a finger on Pandora, but nonetheless started a chain of events that led to her fateful indiscretions.

For all of these reasons, not least the inherent unpredictability of man and human affairs—Arendt insisted on the direct relation between *action* and *responsibility*. Indeed, to *assume responsibility*—whether for one’s own action, or for some *thing* or circumstance of the world—is built into her idea of what it means to *act* at all. For if “Power,” as Arendt wrote, “is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty...[and] not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities,”⁵⁷⁷ and *action* is what “goes on directly between men,” and “corresponds to the human condition of plurality”⁵⁷⁸—then to *act* is precisely to place one’s self and one’s actions before the bright light of the public—to submit one’s self to their judgment, and thereby assume responsibility for those actions. But those actions in turn—indeed action itself—is precisely that through which man assumes responsibility for the world. What it means to act, Arendt thus says, is first and foremost to allow one’s self to be judged.

It is no coincidence for Hannah Arendt that *responsibility* shares a common Latin root (*respondere*) with *respond*—for to assume responsibility for any action or event is also to *respond* to it. One’s response may take many forms. It may be to negate or destroy the thing; it may be to preserve or remember it; it may even be to

⁵⁷⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 200.

⁵⁷⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 7.

pick it up and advance.⁵⁷⁹ But if so, our discussion begets yet another difficult question: How then, does one responsibly *respond* to a world not only in which social iniquity and brutal oppression continue in tyrannical regimes around the world, and liberal modernity itself struggles to overcome widespread social alienation, political estrangement, and institutionalized corruption; but also a world in which—benign intentions notwithstanding—*action* itself, being inextricably

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. Markell, Patchen. "Power, Arrest, Dispersal," *HA: The Journal of the Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities at Bard College*. Volume I (2013), pp. 171-3, p. 172: "If we really want to look at events like the demonstrations in Tahrir Square or the Occupy movement through an Arendtian lens, then our first step should be to stop talking about them as though they were simply moments...[O]ne of the most striking things about the demonstrations in Tahrir Square, after all, was simply that they continued, even when many observers thought, whether with hope or with fear, that they were sure to dissipate[.]" This gets at the heart of the meaning of democratic politics for Arendt—of democracy as *actions* that constitute *beginnings* which others may or may not sustain—but I disagree with Markell that thinking in Arendtian terms subsequently requires that we "stop talking...as though the challenge were to find a way of prolonging or institutionalizing [these moments] without sacrificing their radical, disruptive force," and this because "Such representations falsely collapse the duration of these events into an instant, and falsely suppose that their power lay in their momentariness."

As I have tried to argue, Arendt seems clearly concerned about the task of reifying revolutionary power into political institutions in a way that not only prevents power from dissipating, but facilitates continuous and concrete augmentation of an original moment of initiative. Thus, for example, her strong emphasis on the importance of constitutional *amendment*, or *augmentation*, in the American model, which allows citizens today to pick up and continue a process begun by others, albeit in ways that are not predetermined beforehand. On this topic see also Patchen Markell, "The Rule of the People: Arendt, *Archê*, and Democracy," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 100, No. 1 (February 2006), pp. 1-14, where Markell argues (p. 7) that "On Arendt's understanding...the term 'beginning' points to a kind of novelty that can also be present in moments that satisfy our expectations, follow existing patterns, or continue observable regularities, but which comes into view only from a stance of practical engagement with events...[N]othing about beginning requires a break with the terms of an existing order, or resistance to regularity as such." At the same time (p. 13) "If, as Arendt suggests, [Jefferson's] ward system represents an unfollowed route that might have helped to preserve political freedom, this is neither because the wards would have institutionalized popular sovereignty nor because they would have generated rebelliousness, but because they would have organized political experience so as to sustain the same kind of attunement to events that had drawn the revolutionaries into action, and along its path." Markell's analysis here seems truer to Arendt's intentions, insofar as a theoretical analysis of *beginnings*, or *action* in politics and their salience, dovetails with analysis of the political institutions ("organized political experience") that render *action*, *beginning*, and "sustained attunement" more or less salient.

On Arendt and the relation between beginnings, amendments, and "sustained attunement" (to borrow Markell's useful term)—or in Arendt's words, "foundation, augmentation, and conservation" whose interrelation "might well have been the most important single notion which the men of the [American] revolution adopted," see Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, "Ch. 5: Foundation II: *Novus Ordo Saeclorum*," esp. p. 192-199.

bound to the human condition of natality and the inherent unpredictability of human affairs,⁵⁸⁰ is by its own nature—in its very essence—the opening of a Pandora’s box?⁵⁸¹

In tackling these questions Hannah Arendt does not tell us what to do or how to act. She does not even offer authoritative grounds for deciding. Instead she invites her readers to something quite novel in the political theory of metaphysics and authority—namely, to simply *think* about the world itself; to *think what we are doing* in situations of crisis and moral ambiguity; to *think what we are doing* when novelty is inevitable in the world so long as the human condition of natality maintains; to *think what we are doing* in the situation of moral uncertainty characteristic of a political modernity that, since Hobbes if not Machiavelli, and certainly after the

⁵⁸⁰ “Nativity” stands among the most jargon-y terms in the Arendt lexicon, but is rather straightforward. By it she means both the spontaneity which distinguishes human action from robotic behavior, and the novelty of human creation and activity as opposed to the cyclical return of the same characteristic of nature. The goal of totalitarian terror, for example, is to eliminate all human spontaneity, to render men fully predictable—which is in effect to eliminate the human condition of natality. For what it’s worth, Arendt located the same desire in behavioral social scientists.

⁵⁸¹ This is one theme of the brief but remarkable Section 26 of *The Human Condition* called “The Frailty of Human Affairs” (pp. 188-92, p. 190-1 cited): “Because the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a ‘doer’ but always and at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin, and the story that an act starts is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings. These consequences are boundless, because action, though it may proceed from nowhere, so to speak, acts into a medium where every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of new processes...Yet while the various limitations and boundaries we find in every body politic may offer some protection against the inherent boundlessness of action, they are altogether helpless to offset its second outstanding character: its inherent unpredictability.” This problem, of suffering action’s boundlessness and unpredictability, is why Arendt begins the “Action” chapter of *The Human Condition* (pg. 175) by preparing us to shoulder its moral burden, quoting Isak Dineson: “All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.”

unprecedented shock of twentieth century totalitarianism, is “neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition.”⁵⁸²

But this crisis of tradition and authority, Arendt suggests, while dangerous, brings with it a great possibility of redemption, for it has left man, finally, free to *judge* and *think* for himself, and to use his *imagination* to, as Maurizio Passerin D’Entrèves has summarized, “view [novel] things in their proper perspective and to judge them without the benefit of a pre-given rule or universal.”⁵⁸³ And this act of *thinking*, Arendt believed, is not only sufficient, but necessary for men to live free, moral, and autonomous lives in a human world that is, hopefully, one always of gradual yet perpetual change,⁵⁸⁴ a world “without bannisters.”⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸² Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Education,” in *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin, 1993, pp. 173-196, p. 192, 195.

⁵⁸³ Maurizio Passerin D’Entrèves, “Hannah Arendt’s theory of Judgment,” in *Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*. Dana Villa, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 245-260, p. 247.

⁵⁸⁴ See esp. Hannah Arendt. “Civil Disobedience,” in *Crises of the Republic*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, pp. 49-102, p. 77-81: “[I]t is likely that without this interrelated condition of natality and mortality, which guarantees change and makes the rule of wisdom impossible, the human race would have become extinct long ago of unbearable boredom...Man’s urge for change and his need for stability have always balanced and checked each other, and our current vocabulary, which distinguishes between two factions, the progressives and the conservatives, indicates a state of affairs in which this balance has been thrown out of order.” Arendt’s “This Crisis in Education,” op. cit., is largely about the kind of education which conduces a kind of being in the world that protects the stability of the world while also embracing unanticipated kinds of change.

⁵⁸⁵ “Even though we have lost yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume the particular, a being whose essence is a beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality.” Hannah Arendt, “Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding),” in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*. Ed. Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1994, pp. 307-327, p. 321.

See also Tracy Strong, *Politics Without Vision: Thinking Without a Bannister in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, “Ch. 8: Without a Bannister: Hannah Arendt and Roads Not Taken,” pp. 325-369; and Richard J. Bernstein, “Arendt on Thinking,” in *Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, op. cit, pp. 277-292.

Late in life Arendt tackled the problem of moral and practical judgment more directly in a famous engagement with Immanuel Kant.⁵⁸⁶ Even here, however, Arendt rejected a Platonic turn to absolute moral authority, or the authority of *knowledge*, and instead embraced a far more ambiguous and political interpretation of Kantian *taste*. It was an aesthetic approach to judgment that pinned man's hope of living well in the world not on an authoritative standard, but on a *process* of thinking. So long as we continue to think, Arendt argued, and think with an "enlarged mentality" whereby we habitually stand in the shoes of another, a "setting-right [of the world] remains actually possible, even though it can, of course, never be assured."⁵⁸⁷

In this dissertation I have tried to spell out the ways in which Hannah Arendt's political theory prepares us to face the challenges of democratic revolution in the twenty-first century—how it prepares us to *think* about the nature of revolution, and to *think what we are doing* when we revolt. Through an analysis of *power, plurality, and the political* (Ch. 2: Power and Political Order), *leadership and responsibility* (Ch. 3: The Problem of Revolutionary Leadership), and the concrete application of Egypt (Ch. 4: Egypt's Leaderless Revolution), I have argued that Arendt's work, though ignored by social scientists and hardly deterministic or predictive in a traditional sense, offers novel conceptual tools to examine the moral,

⁵⁸⁶ See esp. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Ed. Ronald Beiner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, and Ronald Beiner's insightful *Interpretive Essay* in the same volume.

⁵⁸⁷ Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Education," pg. 192.

political, and descriptive features of revolutions. I hope also to have demonstrated the methodology behind her conceptual novelty—Arendt plays with words *precisely to provoke us to think*—and concrete application of these terms in political analysis.

And finally, I have tried to show throughout this dissertation that it is hardly a coincidence that, for many of the same reasons that Hannah Arendt's stature rose for her analysis of power and revolution with the fall of European communism and the rise of non-violent models of political resistance after 1989, she has also been positively associated with the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements of 2011. But as should now be clear both in the general context of 2011, and the specific context Egypt, the Revolutions of 2011 exhibited significant differences from the Revolutions of 1989—differences that Arendt would have been acutely aware of and, there is good reason to believe, quick to point out.

The most important difference concerns the phenomenon of *power* and its relation to political organization and political leadership. The fact of the matter is that *political power* in most of the Eastern European revolutions, as opposed to Occupy and our case study Egypt, *did* have responsible leadership—leaders like Lech Walesa in Poland and Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia, or other representatives of various civil society organizations in Hungary—who *represented power legitimately* through organizations like Polish Solidarity, Czech Civic Forum and Slovak Public Against Violence, and the various party and civil society representatives that formed Hungary's Oppositional Round Table, and who were in fact *willing* to pick up the power (even when they had to negotiate with, and for it)

when it was lying on the streets. The Eastern Revolutions, in sum, and unlike the Egyptian leaders, benefitted from an understanding, developed over years of “anti-political” activity, that the grounding of a vibrant polity and powerful civil society is not the movement of the masses, but the institution of plurality—and that the fate of revolutions hinges on the ability of civil society representatives to make binding agreements amongst each other and with the old regime elements. This played a huge role in making relatively smooth, negotiated, non-violent, and democratic revolution possible in Eastern Europe.

The moral and strategic willingness of legitimate revolutionary actors to assume responsibility for revolutionary change—and its positive effect on the stability of post-revolutionary democratic institutions—was especially visible in places like Poland and Czechoslovakia, where leading dissident figures each became the first Presidents elected by popular vote. As representatives of power, their public persona forged an important link in the transition from power in the streets to constitutional foundations of democracy, as well as a reserve of legitimacy in difficult times: Their personal prestige as representatives of the universal *principle* of their respective revolutions protected democratic processes during, for example, an especially painful market transition in Poland (compare the effects of short-term economic crises in Egypt in mid-2013), and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia (the so-called “Velvet Divorce” of the Czech Republic and Slovakia) in January 1993.

No less importantly, prior to 1989 these leaders recognized (like Lenin in 1917, and as Walesa did even before the December 1981 crackdown, which he

desperately tried to avoid through moderation and conciliation) when “sovereign” power (as distinct from non-state political power) was *not* lying in the streets to be picked up. Popular Eastern European dissident ideas like “antipolitics,” Adam Michnik’s “new evolutionism,” and Václav Benda’s “parallel polis”⁵⁸⁸ reflected an understanding among dissidents, in the wake of a series of failed revolutionary episodes (most recently in Poland in 1980-81 and Czechoslovakia in 1968), that the “revolutionary situation” was not *yet* ripe, and that “In a head-on clash between violence and power, the outcome is hardly in doubt.” These leaders not only rejected, but understood violence—that “while the results of [all] men’s actions are beyond the actors’ control, violence harbors within itself an additional element of arbitrariness,” for “nowhere does Fortuna, good or ill luck play a more fateful role in human affairs than on the battlefield.”⁵⁸⁹ And like Arendt (and Luxemburg), they understood that, for themselves as much as the existing authorities, “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.”⁵⁹⁰ And rather than attempt to “make” a revolution through force and violence, dissident

⁵⁸⁸ For discussion of these ideas in relation to Arendt, see Jeffrey Isaac’s, “Oases in the Desert: Hannah Arendt on Democratic Politics,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Mar., 1994), pp. 156-168; and “The Meanings of 1989,” *Social Research*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer 1996), pp. 291-344. See also Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*. Trans. Maya Latynski. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985; and Václav Benda et. al., “Parallel Polis, or An Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe: An Inquiry,” *Social Research*, Vol. 55, No. 1/2, Central and East European Social Research—Part 2 (Spring/Summer 1988), pp. 211-246.

⁵⁸⁹ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 106.

⁵⁹⁰ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” pg. 152. See esp. Vaclav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*. New York: Vintage, 1992, pp. 125-214.

leaders employed a long-term strategy centered not on the problem of *sovereignty*, but on the expansion of *the political*—of political activity, political education, and coordinated actions designed at different points to expand public participation, “test” the “revolutionary situation,” and gauge the proper moment to act. When the situation finally ripened in 1989 dissident leaders, organizations, and their legitimate representatives were—like Lenin—both willing and prepared to seize upon it, but here in a manner which maintained recognition of the relationship between lasting political power and genuine political plurality—which meant *even including the old regime!*⁵⁹¹ This understanding, and these legitimate leaders, I have argued, were tragically absent in Egypt and in other movements like Occupy, whose rapid mobilization through social media successfully convened masses of people—thousands in some cases, and millions in others—but which in the end amounted to spontaneous “negative coalitions” with the *force* to disrupt, and in some cases

⁵⁹¹ This argument begets serious questions about how to interpret Arendt’s glorification of the failed 1956 Hungarian Revolution in the Epilogue to the second edition of her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, which she later removed because, in her words, it had “become obsolete in many details.” Did the Hungarians try to “make” a revolution? Or did they seize upon a true “revolutionary situation”? Why did she insert, and later remove, the Epilogue from *Origins*?

In a recent talk delivered to the Hannah Arendt Center at Bard College, the late Christopher Hitchens suggested that the reasons Arendt removed the Epilogue (as recounted by Roger Berkowitz) “had to do with the antisemitism of many of the Hungarian revolutionaries. As she became aware of the dark side of the revolution, she rethought her initial optimism, and simply withdrew the epilogue.” Here I would only add that, in light of Arendt’s insistence that revolutions are not “made,” and that a “real revolutionary” must conduct “real analysis of the existing situation,” the Hungarian Revolution (in light of the real threat of Soviet intervention at the time) may have posed thornier problems for Arendt than at first appeared. See Roger Berkowitz, “Christopher Hitchens on Antisemitism,” posted at <http://www.hannaharendtcenter.org/?tag=hungarian-revolution>.

overthrow sitting governments, but lacked the genuine *power, plurality,* and leadership to build a better political world.⁵⁹²

“In our times,” writes John McGowan, “politics has been asked to carry so great a burden because politics has also been the site of the greatest evils.”⁵⁹³ We are not surprised today by the violence committed by evil and, after Arendt, merely thoughtless or idiotic people like Eichmann. But the scale of violence enabled by modern technology and attached even to “legitimate” political decisions, grotesquely manifest in the wars and revolutions of the twentieth century, prompts a more difficult question—of who among *us* that is “conversant with the basic political experience of our times are capable of bearing the burden of risks” that have become part and parcel of modern politics?⁵⁹⁴ When seriousness in politics means risking the burden of total war, who wants in?

In this vein, in the posthumous essay “Introduction *into* Politics,” Arendt refers ironically to “those people who, as best they can, go about the business of

⁵⁹² See esp. Mark R. Beissinger, “The Semblance of Democratic Revolution: Coalitions in Ukraine’s Orange Revolution,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 107, No. 3 (August 2013), pp. 574-592, which presciently argues (p. 574) based on Ukraine’s experience that “postrevolutionary instability may be built into urban civic revolutions due to their reliance on a rapidly convened negative coalition of hundreds of thousands, distinguished by fractured elites, lack of consensus over fundamental policy issues, and weak commitment to democratic ends.”

⁵⁹³ John McGowan, “Must Politics Be Violent? Arendt’s Utopian Vision,” in Craig Calhoun and John McGowan, eds. *Hannah Arendt & the Meaning of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 263-296, p. 270.

⁵⁹⁴ Hannah Arendt, “Introduction *into* Politics,” p. 192.

government and regulate human affairs between catastrophes...like the horseman who rode across Lake Constance[.]” These horsemen are the rational experts and delusional politicians of our time, those only “capable of bearing the burden of risks about which they know as little as the rider knew about the state of the frozen lake under his horse’s feet.” They are the “problem solvers” and “image-makers” who are “rational,” “eager to find formulas, preferably expressed in pseudo-mathematical language...eager to discover *laws* by which to explain and predict political and historical facts as though they were...necessary.”⁵⁹⁵ Arendt summons the story of Lake Constance in the context of Lenin’s now familiar insight that “Wars and revolutions, not the functioning of parliamentary governments and democratic party apparatuses, have shaped the basic political experiences of the twentieth century,” and this such that, “To ignore them” and “the hard realities that such incursions have visited on our world and to which we can still bear witness every day” is “tantamount to not living in the world in which in fact we live.”⁵⁹⁶ And she uses the story to thrust upon us the most important ethical question of our time in a world of such catastrophic potential—namely whether *we*, as potential actors in the world, can not only bear the burden of responsibility for modern politics, but do so without turning away from its hard realities either through ready formulas or false ideological narratives.

⁵⁹⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers,” in *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 1-47, p. 11.

⁵⁹⁶ Where not otherwise cited, quotes in this paragraph are from Arendt, “Introduction *into* Politics,” p. 191-192.

The problem is one all actors, to say nothing of revolutionaries, must face. And in Arendt's writings no one understood better, or dealt with it more responsibly, than the Americans of 1774-89, who in their revolution faced squarely the problem of violence and liberation, long prior to that of political constitution. "It may be a truism to say that liberation and freedom are not the same," wrote Arendt in *On Revolution*, "that even the intention of liberating is not identical with the desire for freedom," and "Yet if these truisms are frequently forgotten, it is because liberation [and the violence and instability this entails] has always loomed large and the foundation of freedom has always been uncertain, if not altogether futile."⁵⁹⁷ But the "difficulty in drawing the line between liberation and freedom in any set of historical circumstances does not mean that liberation and freedom are the same," and it was the Americans, first among modern revolutionaries who discovered, in their spontaneous organization of power amidst the hard struggle for liberation, what Arendt called the "speech-making and decision-taking, the oratory and the business, the thinking and the persuading"—in sum, "the actual doing"—which "proved necessary to...independent government and the foundation of a new body politic."⁵⁹⁸ This *doing* by the American, this *acting*, did not shy from violence, but recognized responsibly that the "justification" of it "constitutes its political limitation," that violence marks the point where political speech and political

⁵⁹⁷ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 19-20.

⁵⁹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 23-4.

solutions have ended.⁵⁹⁹ Thus quite stunningly, Arendt calls the American Revolution the only “successful” modern revolution, the “only one” that “founded a completely new body politic without violence and with the help of a constitution.” “It seems certain,” she says, “that the relatively nonviolent character of the American Revolution, where violence was more or less restricted to regular warfare, is an important factor in this success.”⁶⁰⁰

Arendt’s American case sheds light in this regard not only on the Arab Spring, but on the general problem of violence and constitution in democratic revolutions in our contemporary world of modern nation-states. It was the remarkable *fortune* of the Americans, Arendt reminds us, to have begun their revolt with an existing *plurality* of independent states—of already constituted and comparably strong political bodies—thus avoiding the Tocquevillian trap of a history and culture of centralized sovereignty and internecine struggle over the “general will” that characterized the French and so many modern revolutions since. In America, by contrast, “The constituted body itself was already an innovation born out of the necessities and the ingeniousness of those Europeans who had decided to leave the Old World not only in order to colonize a new continent but also for the purpose of establishing a new world order.” Arendt traces this American tradition back to the Mayflower Compact. Thus, “The conflict of the colonies with king and Parliament in England dissolved nothing more than the charters granted the colonists and those

⁵⁹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 9.

⁶⁰⁰ Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?” p. 140.

privileges they enjoyed by virtue of being Englishmen; it deprived the country of its governors, but not of its legislative assemblies, and the people, while renouncing their allegiance to a king, felt by no means released from their numerous compacts, agreements, mutual promises, and ‘consociations.’[sic]⁶⁰¹

Thus from the outset a circumstance of strong political plurality was built into the American Revolution. But the subsequent genius of the American revolutionaries—albeit much by accident—was to have (a) sought to unite their individually constituted powers amidst the process of liberation, (b) recognized the world-building, founding capacity of mutual promises and agreements during the revolution, and (c) embraced various models of representation (as during the Committees of Correspondence and the Constitutional Convention) which made such unified, mutual agreements possible while maintaining their plural character. In the American case, all these factors were necessary to render their successful transition from liberation to constitution.

The difference between the fortune of America in this regard, as well as the relatively advanced civil societies (all things considered) of the Eastern European states on the eve of 1989, and the circumstance typically facing revolutionary actors who confront authoritarian regimes today (stunted civil society; a formidable coercive state apparatus), is reason enough for revolutionary enthusiasts, even velvet ones, to pause and think what they are doing. And as new technologies like social media have increased the pace of revolutionary events and the ability of mass

⁶⁰¹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 172-3.

movements to spontaneously topple regimes, part of *thinking* these phenomena is to stop for a moment and ask whether recent, enthusiastic associations of social media mobilization with a so-called “democratic fourth wave”⁶⁰² actually confuses the mobilization of democratic *force* for the constitution of democratic *politics*; confuses democratic masses with genuine political plurality; and confuses the forces of liberation with the foundations of freedom. It is this kind of thinking, pursued in these terms—whatever one concludes, and whatever one does about it—that Hannah Arendt’s thought makes available to us.

So to approach the end of our journey on an apposite cliché, what *is* to be done? Arendt begins the “Action” chapter of *The Human Condition* by preparing us to shoulder action’s moral burden by quoting Isak Dineson: “All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.”⁶⁰³ To engage in politics one must prepare for sorrow; for such is the nature of human actions to be unbounded and unpredictable, and such is the nature of our world that the responsibility for these consequences is potentially unbearable. But the alternative to sorrow is far worse for the world. For as the liberal narrative of revolution after 1989 demonstrated, the passage’s meaning can be turned on its head—stories and narratives, when designed to obscure and distract from reality, can also *release* us

⁶⁰² For a sophisticated analysis that focuses rather narrowly on the elements of liberation (as opposed to freedom), see e.g. Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, *Democracy’s Fourth Wave?: Digital Media and the Arab Spring*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁶⁰³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 175.

from the tragedy and sorrow of action, and liberate us blithely from responsibility. It can fool us into exaggerating our control over events, or ignoring our responsibility for that which we could not control.

There is accordingly a virtue in our sorrow, an acknowledgment of the enormous burden of political responsibility we face in a world in which the political atrocities witnessed in the twentieth century are possible and, apparently, justifiable. And ironically, it is precisely *that* which should compel us to act, and to take responsibility for the world. Because the fateful consequence of not doing so is that we cede the initiative—the willingness to act—to those who *do* choose to act, and *do* pick up the power—if only because their own thoughtlessness, selfishness, or immature rejection of reality relieves their burden of conscience.

On the heels of 1989, what a tragedy it would be if, in a world where reasonable hope exists that the inextricability of revolutions from wars and violence might come to an end—where “non-violent” revolution may indeed prove possible in many circumstances—the burden of responsibility *still* proved too much to bear when the cards are down and power is lying in the streets. Our most recent history, however, from America’s war in Iraq, to the violent revolutionary fallout in Libya, Mali, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, suggests that the question is moot—that the relationship between war and revolution remains as inextricable and unpredictable as ever. If so, then all the more reason to be wary of mass movements that sabotage any chance we have to build a world, and all the more reason to be wary of

revolutionary programs that conduce or trivialize the absence of genuine political responsibility.

As we do this, Hannah Arendt's political theory prepares each of us—reactionaries and revolutionaries, conservatives and liberals—to approach the many crises of our times with decisive action and clear thinking. For it is only this combination—of word *and* deed, action *and* thought—and the strange combination of public happiness *and* private sorrow that responsible action entails—that makes for mature democratic citizenship.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰⁴ An altered version of this Chapter IV will be published in a tentatively titled article called "Picking up Power: Hannah Arendt and Egypt's Leaderless Revolution," in *Political Theory and the Arab Spring*, ed. Brian Mello and Glenn Mackin, Bloomsbury, anticipated publication 2015.

Chapter V:

Freedom and Utopia: Liberalism, Revolution, and Violence

Marx did not indulge in utopias; he expected the *experience* of the mass movement to provide the reply to the question as to the specific forms this organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class would assume and as to the exact manner in which this organisation would be combined with the most complete, most consistent 'winning of the battle of democracy.'
-V.I. Lenin, 1917⁶⁰⁵

As Cato, then, concluded every speech with the words, 'Carthago delenda est,' so do I every opinion, with the injunction, 'divide the counties into wards.' Begin them only for a single purpose; they will soon show for what others they are the best instruments.
—Thomas Jefferson, February 2, 1816⁶⁰⁶

Grey, dear friend, is all theory,
And green the golden tree of life.
—Mephistopheles⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁵ V.I. Lenin, "The State and Revolution," in *The Lenin Anthology*, Robert C. Tucker, ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1972, pp. 311-398, p. 338.

⁶⁰⁶ Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Joseph C. Cabell," February 2, 1816.

⁶⁰⁷ Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, *Faust, Part 1*, Trans. A. S. Kline (www.poetryintranslation.com), line 2038-9.

19. UTOPIA AND THE LIBERAL CYCLE

Thirty years before Francis Fukuyama declared the “end of history” on the cusp of global liberal hegemony, Daniel Bell announced the “end of ideology” to a generation of disillusioned post-war democrats⁶⁰⁸: “Ours, a ‘twice-born’ generation,” wrote Bell in 1960, “finds its wisdom in pessimism, evil, tragedy, and despair...[in] sober, matter-of-fact, ‘mature’ acceptance of the complexities of politics and existence.”⁶⁰⁹ The brutality of the twentieth century had worn idealism thin: “For the radical intellectual who had articulated the revolutionary impulses of the past century and a half,” wrote Bell, “the rise of fascism and racial imperialism...the tragic self-immolation of a revolutionary generation that had proclaimed the finer ideals of man; destructive war of a breadth and scale hitherto unknown; the bureaucratized murder of millions [...] the Moscow Trials, the Nazi-Soviet Pact...the suppression of the Hungarian workers”—all together “meant an end to chiliastic hopes...and to ideology,” for “out of all this history, one simple fact emerges...the old ideologies have lost their ‘truth’ and power to persuade.”⁶¹⁰

Bell’s thesis broached a well-worn concern among Western intellectuals by the mid-1950s,⁶¹¹ and the title was probably lifted from a 1955 article by Edward

⁶⁰⁸ The early portions of this section mirror loosely the more detailed account in Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy*. New York: Basic Books, 1999, p. 1-9.

⁶⁰⁹ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. New York: Free Press, 1962 [1960], p. 300.

⁶¹⁰ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p. 393, 402.

⁶¹¹ Also of the period and the same cloth, see esp. Judith Shklar, *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

Shils summarizing a Milan conference on “The Future of Freedom” that Bell attended.⁶¹² At the time democratic freedom was certainly alive in the West—a democracy-led coalition had recently won a World War with communism’s help, after all—but it was also noticeably *grey*, one might say “exhausted,” from these same trials and tribulations.⁶¹³ Mass-based totalitarianism in Germany, and party-based totalitarianism in the U.S.S.R., had deeply scarred democratic ideologues; and this, combined with two World Wars propelled by the unleashing of passionate mass ideologies (nationalist, imperialist, fascist, or otherwise), had led Western liberal *and* social democrats alike to reject all-encompassing ideological systems and the revolutionary programs they entailed. Bell’s own experience reflected that of a traumatized generation: “fear of mass action, of emotions in politics and of the politics of passions and hatreds...these have framed my views throughout my life.”⁶¹⁴

In lieu of mass action and political emotions, intellectuals instead embraced a staunch moral and political *skepticism*. In a watershed moment in contemporary political philosophy, Isaiah Berlin argued that in modern times a prudent

⁶¹² Edward Shils, “The End of Ideology?” *Encounter*, Vol. 5 (November 1955), pp. 52-58. Hannah Arendt also attended the conference, and Shils (p. 53) offers one of the strangest compliments of her work I have ever read: “[A]nd there were still others [papers],” he writes, “like Miss Hannah Arendt’s ‘The Rise and Development of Totalitarianism and Authoritarian Forms of Government in the 20th Century,’ which intrigued by a fascinating obscurity and the rumble of profundity.”

See also Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960, “Ch. 13: The End of Ideology?” pp. 403-417. Here Lipset, who also attended the conference, takes Shils’s article as a jumping off point.

⁶¹³ Cf. Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p. 402.

⁶¹⁴ Daniel Bell, “The End of Ideology Revisited (Part 1),” *Government and Opposition*, vol. 23, No. 2 (April 1988), pp. 131-150, p. 136.

understanding of liberty champions a “negative” *freedom from*, rather than “positive” *freedom to*.⁶¹⁵ And thus, Barber writes, as early as the 1940s:

Postwar defenders of liberalism took totalitarianism as their point of departure in a spirited defense of ‘negative liberty’ against social democracy’s ‘positive liberty’ for which Isaiah Berlin’s *Two Concepts of Liberty* [1958] became an almost overnight canonical text. At the same moment, an epistemology rooted in skepticism and fallibility championed by Karl Popper in his *Poverty of Historicism* (1944) and *The Open Society and its Enemies* (first published in 1945) became an essential methodological redoubt for social scientists taking on both fascism and communism.⁶¹⁶

Judith Shklar later called postwar liberalism a “liberalism of fear,” an anti-utopian “party of memory rather than a party of hope.”⁶¹⁷ And the exhaustion with politics extended well beyond parochial liberalism to a wider spectrum of democratic thought: Most dramatic by the mid-1950s was the similarly grey conservatism, and lack of transformative political criticism or creativity, found even among the so-called “radical” and “counter-culture” parties on the left. As Bell observed:

Few serious minds believe any longer that one can set down ‘blueprints’ and through ‘social engineering’ bring about a new utopia of social harmony. At the same time, the older ‘counter-beliefs’ have lost their intellectual force as well. Few ‘classic’ liberals insist that the State should play no role in the economy, and few serious

⁶¹⁵ Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*. London, Random House, 1997, pp. 191-242.

⁶¹⁶ Benjamin Barber, “The Politics of Political Science: ‘Value-Free’ Theory and the Wolin-Strauss Dust-Up of 1963,” *American Political Science Review*. Vol. 100, No. 4 (November 2006), pp. 539-545, p. 540. See also Isaiah Berlin. “Two Concepts of Liberty,” op. cit.; Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013 [1945]; and Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*. London: Routledge, 1944.

⁶¹⁷ Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*. Ed. Stanley Hoffman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 3-20, esp. pg. 8-9.

conservatives, at least in England and on the Continent, believe that the Welfare State is 'the road to serfdom.' In the Western world, therefore, there is today a rough consensus among intellectuals on political issues: the acceptance of a Welfare State; the desirability of decentralized power; a system of mixed economy and of political pluralism.⁶¹⁸

Hodges summarized Bell's argument in 1967: "Where the socialists are the moderates and the conservatives accept the Welfare State, there is no longer a role for ideological thinking...If anything, the increasing conformity and political apathy of American voters suggests a strengthening of consensus."⁶¹⁹ Hodges criticized Bell on the grounds that the pattern he observed, far from a neutral *end* of ideology, actually revealed the closed domination of *one* ideology, *one* approach in the West to understanding and responding to the facts of the world. Yet in the end Hodges reached a similar conclusion as Bell—that if ideology itself is not dead, ideological *controversy* certainly is⁶²⁰—that the Great Debate is over, and among Western intellectuals on the left, right, and center, a moderate form of Welfare State

⁶¹⁸ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p. 402-3. Bell's allusion to Hayek is especially interesting (or amusing, depending on your perspective) in light of Lipset's account of the aforementioned 1955 conference in Milan, where Hayek, isolated from the group and pleading as if to a collective brick wall, "On the last day of the week-long conference...in a closing speech, attacked the delegates for preparing to bury freedom instead of saving it. He alone was disturbed by the general temper. What bothered him was the general agreement among the delegates, regardless of political belief, that the traditional issues separating the left and right had declined to comparative insignificance...The ideological issues dividing left and right had been reduced to a little more or a little less government ownership and economic planning. No one seemed to believe that it really made much difference which political party controlled the domestic policies of individual nations." Lipset, *Political Man*, p. 404-5.

⁶¹⁹ Donald Clark Hodges, "The End of 'The End of Ideology,'" *Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (April 1967), pp. 135-46, p. 141.

⁶²⁰ "That ideological controversy is in the process of disappearing is one thing," wrote Hodges, "that this statement entails the decline of ideology is something different," because the relevant question is "whether this [contemporary] consensus signifies the decline of ideology or rather *the triumph of one ideology over all its rivals.*" Donald Clark Hodges, "The End of 'The End of Ideology,'" p. 135, emphasis added.

capitalism has become the only game in town. Not only was there “a very widespread feeling that there was no longer any need to justify ourselves *vis-à-vis* the Communist critique,” but also a unifying “discovery that over the past thirty years the extremes of ‘right’ and ‘left’ had disclosed identities which were much more impressive than their differences[.]”⁶²¹

Bell, Shils, Lipset, and others saw in the “end of ideology” a trend towards, if not full global *hegemony* (That discussion would come thirty years later.), then certainly ideological *homogeneity* in the democratic West. And to some, including Lipset, this was a monumental victory for the liberal regime, a reason to celebrate, even while it left much work to be done to corral in the revolutionary Third World.⁶²² To others like Bell and Shils, however, this homogeneity raised serious concerns for the future of democracy and democratic order. For one, what pathologies did “a very widespread feeling that there was no longer any need to justify ourselves” entail? Was this a sign of robust legitimacy? Or did the strength of liberal democracy depend somehow, morally and functionally, on the rigorous clash of competing views *vis-à-vis* competitors that had been lost? What role did a contentious public sphere, the capacity for serious self-criticism, and real ideological

⁶²¹ Edward Shils, “The End of Ideology?”, p. 54, 53.

⁶²² Lipset, *Political Man*, p. 416-417 argues that a healthy ideological complaisance at home should be accompanied, for the sake of spreading liberal democracy, by an active courtship of revolutionary movements abroad: “Today Western leaders must communicate and work with non-Communist revolutionaries in the Orient and Africa at the same time that they accept the fact that serious ideological controversies have ended at home.” For practical reasons they must also not “demand that such leaders [in Asia and Africa] adapt their politics to Western images of responsible behavior.” Lipset, unlike Bell (see below), does not anticipate the boomerang effect that an embrace of revolutionary ideologies abroad might have at home.

diversity in the “marketplace of ideas” play in democratic functioning?⁶²³ Furthermore, if all “basic” political problems were solved, and politics was indeed “changing into administration as the manager and expert take over in government as well as in business,”⁶²⁴ what remained for politics itself to *do*?⁶²⁵ Fight wars and divide the spoils? If so-called “political” problems were truly reducible to the methods of technocrats and bureaucratic experts, what did this say about the meaning of democracy, the reason for having democratic institutions at all?

A related concern was normative in more epic proportions: Must the catastrophic fall of *ideology*, Bell asked—ideology being “the conversion of ideas into social levers,” or the full and unequivocal “commitment to the consequences of ideas” in the material world⁶²⁶—necessarily destroy *utopia* with it? Utopia—to have *some* vision of a better world—is different from old-style ideology, or to obstinately and obsessively adhere to that vision, immediate consequences be damned. And the aspirations of utopian thinking are not necessarily fanatical, but something that all

⁶²³ The classic statement is John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978, Ch. 2: Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion: “In politics, again, it is almost a commonplace, that a party of order or stability, and a party of progress or reform, are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life; until the one or the other shall have so enlarged its mental grasp as to be a party equally of order and of progress, knowing and distinguishing what is fit to be preserved from what ought to be swept away. Each of these modes of thinking derives its utility from the deficiencies of the other; but it is in a great measure the opposition of the other that keeps each within the limits of reason and sanity.”

⁶²⁴ Lipset, *Political Man*, pg. 414.

⁶²⁵ Cf. Lipset, *Political Man*, p. 415: “In a larger sense, the domestic controversies within the advanced democratic countries have become comparable to struggles within American party primary elections. Like all nomination contests, they are fought to determine who will lead the party, in this case the democratic camp, in the larger political struggle in the world[.]”

⁶²⁶ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p. 400.

“men need—as they have always needed—some vision of their potential, some manner of fusing passion with intelligence.”⁶²⁷ A vision of utopia makes available to man that which is best in him, insofar as he acknowledges his political nature and need to live in a world with others in order to live well.⁶²⁸

So even “if ideology...is an irretrievably fallen word,” wrote Bell, utopia need not be so long as we hearken the cruel lessons of the twentieth century. The party of memory and the party of hope are not mutually exclusive, but symbiotic; for the responsible way to pursue hope—“some Utopian or revolutionary *end*”—is precisely to *remember*: Remember to eschew the “degrading *means*” made of humans by totalitarian regimes, and its disgusting consequences; remember with Thomas Jefferson that “the present belongs to the living,” and the living cannot be slaughtered on the altar of the future; and remember, finally, to hold sacred those “verities,” the “verities of free speech, free press, the right of opposition and of free inquiry,”⁶²⁹ that we know today are the foundation of basic freedom and dignity in any polity. Through memory, though tragic in retrospect, the twentieth century may finally render genuine utopia possible, for its catastrophic legacy has prepared man to aspire to the great and the beautiful, the novel and unprecedented, prudently and responsibly in the world.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁷ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p. 405

⁶²⁸ See classically, Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*. Trans. Peter L. Phillips Simpson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997, Book 1, Part 2.

⁶²⁹ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p. 406.

Finally, this normative apprehension with the end of ideology dovetailed with a third and more dangerous concern—namely, the problem of spiritual unfulfillment, mass ennui and meaninglessness, in a modern age of post-enlightenment secularization, technocratic-rationalization, cultural urbanization, and bureaucratization.⁶³¹ If all political issues are essentially technocratic, and all sources of political accomplishment (or efficacy) essentially bureaucratic, and all paths to meaningful political participation blocked by these same technocrats and bureaucrats, then not only does the charisma or enthusiasm of political existence wither into oblivion, but an unfulfilled yearning naturally develops for something of meaning to take its place. Bell's concern was especially marked towards the post-war boomer generation, the youths. The "younger intellectuals," he wrote in 1960, are even now engaged in a "restless search for a new intellectual radicalism,"

⁶³⁰ Cf. "Arendt and the Political: Roger Berkowitz and Tracy Strong in conversation with Babette Babich," posted by Babette Babich at youtube.com, beginning at 35:00, where Berkowitz says: "Arendt, whenever she talks about reconciliation, always begins with Hegel...But what she says is that Hegel no longer applies, because we live at a time in which we can no longer believe in the rationality of the *is*, we no longer are rationalists in that sense...And so we have to think reconciliation, post-Hegelian; we have to think what it means to reconcile reality when reality means the Holocaust, when reality means totalitarianism, when reality means your best friend was a Nazi, your lover, was a Nazi. How do you *love the world?*...Over and over again in her judgments, she frames her judgments of, not, 'Is Eichmann good or bad?', not 'Is Heidegger good or bad?', not 'Is the Holocaust good or bad?', but 'Can I love a world in which someone like Eichmann was in it? Can I love a world in which someone like Heidegger was in it? Can I love a world in which the Holocaust happened?' And interestingly enough her power of love is pretty large, because the only one of those that she says you can't love is Eichmann...You can love a world in which the Holocaust happened...because in the end the Holocaust wakes us up to the threat of totalitarianism, homelessness, and rootlessness in our times. That doesn't mean it's justified. That doesn't mean it's good. But she says, it doesn't ruin our world; in fact it may make our world better in the end, because if we understand it, if we *think* and comprehend the Holocaust, and thus we are able to resist it, we may actually become deeper and more thoughtful people."

⁶³¹ See Jorg Kustermans and Erik Ringmar. "Modernity, Boredom, and War: A Suggestive Essay," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 37 (2011), pp. 1775-1792.

because for them, as for everybody, “Politics offers little excitement.” And in their “search for a ‘cause,’ there is a deep, desperate, almost pathetic anger.”⁶³²

Bell, of course, was not the first to highlight the political salience of an indomitable human desire for “self-expression” and “self-definition”⁶³³ in a modern secular world. Nor was he the first to anticipate the destructive potential of this mass phenomenon driven by the social and material changes wrought by the “dual revolution,”⁶³⁴ since the late eighteenth century, of urbanization and industrialization (and eventually the emancipation of labor; or of mass man who had long since left, or in some cases been driven off, his traditional rural space), and political centralization and secularization (and with it the alienation of these same masses from politics at the same time as science and capitalism were undermining the traditional belief systems that once held the world together). This was Nietzsche’s great insight in the prelude to World War I, for “The basic fact of the human will,” he wrote in 1887, is its “*horror vacui*,” its fear of emptiness. And above all else the human, all too human will “*needs a goal*”—something to explain its

⁶³² Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p. 404. Some years later Ernest Gellner would call the desperate search for cause the student movement’s “totality”: “It stands for ‘total commitment.’ This [the protest movement] contrasts with the partial, humdrum, moral and intellectual compromises of ordinary society. Compromise is treason. Any structure, intellectual or social, is likewise treason...What could this mean? Presumably, it implies that any tentative exploration of ideas, the entertaining of suppositions for the purpose of exploring their soundness, is *out*. Sexual experimentation is perfectly permissible—but intellectual experimentation, exploration, tentativeness, anything short of ‘commitment,’ are viewed with a neo-Victorian prudery.” Ernest Gellner, “Myth, Ideology, Revolution,” *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 40, Issue 4 (1969), pp. 472-484, p. 472.

⁶³³ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p. 405.

⁶³⁴ The term is Eric Hobsbawm’s. See Hobsbawm’s *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*. New York: Vintage, 1996 [1962].

suffering, and to give its life and death meaning. And squarely facing this horror, it would “rather will *nothingness* than *not* will.”⁶³⁵

For Nietzsche this *horror vacui* is the extremely dangerous precondition of nihilism on a catastrophically mass scale—for the acute fear of emptiness, combined with suffering in the absence of meaning, can produce any number of desperate responses. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for example, Nietzsche describes the *ascetic ideal* of Christian morality as one instantiation of this *horror vacui*: Through actively *willing* their suffering—*willing* self-denial and *willing* self-renunciation—rather than passively suffering it, both the weak (who have little else to affirm) and the strong (who might have more to offer, but are outnumbered) can at least draw some meaning and self-definition. And this option was widely available in the heyday of Christian true belief. But in the absence of a genuine Christianity—following the “death of God” who was killed by science and buried by technology—and amidst a general decline of traditional beliefs in an age of liberal capitalism and urbanization, and of shallow reason and insipid rationality, a response far more dangerous looms. For when the old charismatic idols die, what will come to fill their void? Less than a generation before World War I, Nietzsche predicted:

[W]e shall have upheavals, a convulsion of earthquakes, a moving of mountains and valleys, the like of which has never been dreamed of. The concept of politics will have merged entirely with a war of spirits; all power structures of the old society will have been exploded—all of them are based on lies: there will be wars the like of which have never

⁶³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo*. Walter Kaufmann, ed. New York: Vintage, 1989, p. 96- 97.

yet been seen on earth. It is only beginning with me that the earth knows *great politics*.⁶³⁶

War and violence will accompany the search for new idols, who seek through *Geisterkrieg* the worldly confirmation once reserved for Rapture. And in our worst nightmares, absent the rise of new and meaningful values or, at worst, new and persuasive idols, the raw ecstasy of war and violence—that “boyish rapture that leads to a cult, to an apotheosis of war”⁶³⁷—is all that remains to fill the void.

If not yet a problem of *Geisterkrieg* proportions, by the mid-twentieth century it was clear in any event that citizens of liberal democracy could hardly seek spiritual fulfillment in ordinary politics, and the temptation to find *something* was mounting. If quoting a Swedish journalist Lipset heartily agreed with Bell that “Politics is now boring,”⁶³⁸ Shils in the same vein warned his peers to resist the great “temptation—which can never die out completely among intellectuals—to construct new ideologies, as rigid, as eager for consistency and for universal observance as those which have been now transcended.”⁶³⁹ It remained to be seen from whence this fulfillment of spirit—this need for charisma, were it truly derived from our nature—would come; if not from *religion* in a secularized world; if not from *tradition* where reverence for the past had eroded; if not from *politics* where

⁶³⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Walter Kaufmann, ed. New York: Vintage, 1989, p. 327.

⁶³⁷ Walter Benjamin, “Review Essay: Theories of German Fascism: On the Collection of Essays *War and Warrior*, Edited by Ernst Jünger,” *New German Critique*, No. 17 (Spring 1979), pp. 120-128, p. 121.

⁶³⁸ Lipset, *Political Man*, p. 406.

⁶³⁹ Edward Shils, “The End of Ideology?”, p 57.

ideology was dead and democracy had decayed into rational planning and bureaucracy, then from where?

In lieu of these alternatives, the answer in intellectual circles inevitably returned to the problem of politics; and specifically towards the politics of the extraordinary⁶⁴⁰ as an alternative to the normal bureaucratic dross. Extraordinary politics can adopt many forms of action, violent and non-violent, but is characterized most by an enthusiastic irruption of normal political routine—the interjection of action, spontaneity, even the revolutionary into the everyday. And here Bell’s narrative was prescient, anticipating in utero both the New Left political explosion of the 1960s, and the particular inspiration it would draw from violent liberation struggles throughout the Third World. Already by the late-1950s, he said, revolutions abroad offered a litmus test of the political and cultural mood of the times, not least the boomer generation: “It is in the attitudes towards Cuba and the new States in Africa that the meaning of intellectual maturity, and of the end of ideology, will be tested,” he wrote. “For among the ‘new Left,’ there is an alarming readiness to create a *tabula rasa*, to accept the word ‘Revolution’ as an absolution for outrages, to justify the suppression of civil rights and opposition—in short, to erase the lessons of the last forty years with an emotional alacrity that is astounding.”⁶⁴¹ One year later Frantz Fanon published *The Wretched of the Earth*, a

⁶⁴⁰ I borrow this language from Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁶⁴¹ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p. 405.

paean to colonial resistance and the “cleansing force” of revolutionary violence.⁶⁴² And ironically, it was among the colonizers themselves that *Wretched* became the most influential political text of the 1960s.

Our brief survey of intellectual discourse on freedom and democracy at the turn of the 1960s highlights one of the oft-theorized but scientifically evasive theories of modern politics—the connection between liberal politics and political ennui; political ennui and mass alienation; mass alienation and the explosion of extraordinary politics; extraordinary politics and the lure of violence. This movement, grounded in a human yearning for meaning—emerged as an observed phenomenon in the mid-19th century, although an extensive literature only begins to trace the phenomenon in the exalted spiritual march towards World War I. Modris Ecksteins’s *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, for example, offers a vivid excursion into European culture and society near the turn of the century, and attributes the outbreak of World War I in large part to the mass appeal of aggressive nationalism throughout Europe in response to the meaninglessness of nineteenth century bourgeois individualism and the boredom of liberal peace.⁶⁴³ Using primary sources of the period (journals, memoirs, etc.), Eric J. Reed documents the motivation of WWI middle-class volunteers, many of whose

⁶⁴² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961], p. 51 and 249.

⁶⁴³ Modris Eksteins. *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*. New York: Mariner, 2000. See also Rolan N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982.

“conception of the social experience of war” was “as an experience of ‘community’ which, because it lay outside the domain of economic interest, would sweep aside all ‘artificial’ social distinctions of class.” Quoting one first-person account, what drew many to war was, “Liberation. Liberation from bourgeois narrowness and pettiness...from all that we—consciously or unconsciously—felt as the saturation, the stuffy air, the petrification of our world.”⁶⁴⁴ When the war was over, a post-war journalist called German nationalism of even *that* period a “Heroism out of Boredom.”⁶⁴⁵

In an influential 1972 article, Aristide Zolberg traces a similar phenomenon—of modern boredom triggering an underlying human yearning for meaning and the extraordinary—further back in the 19th century, to as early as 1848. Comparing the French contexts of 1848, 1871, the 1936 Popular Front, 1940s Resistance, and the 1968 May Days, Zolberg points to “a political phenomenon” reflected in all these movements and “shared to a greater or lesser extent by all modern societies”—a phenomenon he calls “moments of madness” when “the wall between the instrumental and the expressive collapses,” or “moments of political enthusiasm when ‘all is possible.’”⁶⁴⁶ The enthusiasm of the general strike that

⁶⁴⁴ Eric J. Reed, “Class and Disillusionment in World War I,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Dec. 1978), pp. 680-699, p. 682, 685.

⁶⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Review Essay: Theories of German Fascism: On the Collection of Essays *War and Warrior*, Edited by Ernst Jünger,” *New German Critique*, No. 17 (Spring 1979), pp. 120-128, p. 126.

⁶⁴⁶ Aristide Zolberg. “Moments of Madness,” *Politics & Society*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 1972, pp. 183-20, p. 182-3.

followed the Popular Front's stunning 1936 electoral victory is indicative, and here Zolberg quotes Bertrand de Jouvenel's observations at length:

The beginnings of all revolutions demonstrate that Jean-Jacques Rousseau was right. Nothing puts man in a better mood than to escape the boredom of his routine and the laziness of his obligations. He laughs, he walks around, and you think he is naturally good. For three days I went from factory to factory...I didn't see a single case of brutality...of damage to a single machine. The 'sit-down strike' is a protracted picnic...Amidst this camp life, a sort of warmth arises, a human contact which is never useless between the one who commands and those who carry out his orders. But the boss in most cases stayed at home.⁶⁴⁷

Zolberg compiles a series of accounts of the "festival" atmosphere and "good nature" of the Paris Commune,⁶⁴⁸ "intense moments of festive joy, when an immense outpouring of speech, sometimes verging on violence, coexists with an extraordinarily peaceful disposition," as in February 1848, and the "great festival of youthful solidarity, the great syncretic game of revolution" among the French students of 1968, when concurrently "the factories were again turned into joyous bivouacs in the name of participation."⁶⁴⁹

To explain the root causes of these events and to link them, Zolberg uses "boredom" no less than fifteen times. "Boredom," he says, "is perhaps the best thread to guide us through the labyrinth," especially but not exclusively among the youth. For if 1968 was caused in part by "the dullness of routinized Gaullism," then

⁶⁴⁷ Quoted in Aristide Zolberg. "Moments of Madness," p. 187-8.

⁶⁴⁸ Aristide Zolberg, "Moments of Madness," p. 188-9.

⁶⁴⁹ Aristide Zolberg, "Moments of Madness," p. 188-9, 196, 198, 197. In the second-to-last quoted passage (p. 198), Zolberg is quoting Edgar Morin.

no less was “Engagement through participation in the Resistance...one way *out* of boredom and *into* a better life, and it was the spirit of those who refused to be bored which transformed Paris in August 1944, as it had brought joy into the factories in 1936.” Then citing Tocqueville’s first hand observations, Zolberg argues further that “1848...was the first revolution against boredom,” and more importantly, that this commonality in French revolutionary history reveals a *generalizable tendency* within modernity, that “the boredom of daily life is the form which alienation takes in contemporary societies.”⁶⁵⁰

Let us now fast forward to 1989. In the wake of the stunning collapse of European communism, and what appeared to be an imminent consolidation of the hegemonic rise of liberal-capitalism, if not liberal democracy throughout the world (China and the Arab world would presumably join the movement soon.), it was no coincidence that Francis Fukuyama, surveying the broad political landscape—in a book called *The End of the History and the Last Man* that referenced Nietzsche directly; and in a final chapter called “Immense Wars of the Spirit” that referenced Nietzsche directly—devoted three of the final nine footnotes to Ecksteins’s *Rites of Spring* (and two, of course, to Nietzsche).⁶⁵¹ Earlier in the book Fukuyama, drawing on Plato’s three-part division of the soul, argued that the average human soul has two basic spiritual needs—one being the fulfillment of desire (or the belly), the

⁶⁵⁰ Aristide Zolberg, “Moments of Madness,” p. 199. Zolberg attributes this point to Henri Lefèbvre in the latter’s account of the Paris Commune.

⁶⁵¹ Francis Fukuyama. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press, 2006 [1992].

other the satisfaction of *thymos*, spirit or passion. In modern liberal democracies capitalism satisfies our selfish *desires* through the mass production of TVs, trinkets, and baubles—in a word, consumer society. And presumably, as Fukuyama drew from Alexandre Kojève’s reading of Hegel,⁶⁵² it also satisfies the *spirit* through the equal esteem and *recognition* felt in a democratic society in which everyone’s vote and interests merit equal importance and consideration. *Isonomy*, equality before the law among our peers, satisfies the animated, spirit part of the soul—or at least quells its anger and resentment.

But Fukuyama, even while he made this argument in the strongest possible terms, was not convinced by it. For to placate the soul’s anger through *isonomy*, through a basic liberal framework of legal and procedural *rights*, is hardly to satisfy it or engage it positively with something meaningful.⁶⁵³ And what remains in the absence of spiritual satisfaction—its salience now the virtual monopoly of the political realm in the absence of religion or tradition—is what Tibor Scotovsky calls a “joyless economy”:

To know what motivates us, what our needs are, and which unsatisfied need explains the disappointment even of the affluent among us is necessary for fully understanding why our youth and the

⁶⁵² Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

⁶⁵³ “Romantic attractions, and more particularly romantic aversions, to liberalism are immediate, affective, and sometimes aesthetic...From the perspective I call romantic, certain qualities of liberalism stand out...Liberalism is legalistic. It values regularity, impersonality, and impartiality; preoccupied with securing expectations, it inhibits spontaneity and self-expression...In short, liberalism does not take individuality, spontaneity, and expressivity into account. Its political society is cold, contractual, and unlovely—without emotional or aesthetic appeal.” Nancy L. Rosenblum, *Another Liberalism: Romanticism and the Reconstruction of Liberal Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 1-2. The responses to liberalism’s spiritual vacuum that Rosenblum describes include “romantic militarism,” “law of the heart,” and “anti-politics.”

unemployed poor turn so easily to drugs, why violence is on the rise, and even helps to explain the deterioration of the environment. [] The disappointment I am referring to is boredom: people's need to keep busy and their failure to find the right stimulus to keep them busy. As Blaise Pascal, the French catholic philosopher and scientist put it in his *Pensées* 350 years ago: 'I have discovered that all human evil stems from one fact alone. Man's inability to sit still.' [] Boredom creates no problem for hard-working men and women whose labor leaves them no time to sit still long enough to relax, get rested, and start fidgeting. The problem only plagues people with leisure—more leisure than they know what to do with...Violence seems to be men's instinctive outlet for their pent-up energies; and overcoming it with danger, especially danger they feel confident in overcoming, makes it all the more exciting and satisfying.⁶⁵⁴

In the article that brought him fame, Fukuyama expressed his hopes and fears of the joyless economy bluntly:

The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual care taking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed. Such nostalgia, in fact, will continue to fuel competition and conflict even in the post historical world for some time to come. Even though I recognize its inevitability, I have the most ambivalent feelings for the civilization that has been created in Europe since 1945, with its north Atlantic and Asian offshoots. Perhaps this very prospect of centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵⁴ Tibor Scotovsky, *The Joyless Economy: The Psychology of Human Satisfaction*, revised edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1976], p. vi-vii.

⁶⁵⁵ Francis Fukuyama. "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, Summer 1989.

As Fukuyama acknowledged (and his cursory readers failed to grasp), even if history to date had revealed a certain explicable trajectory, the *end* of history had not in Truth come. Deep down men like Fukuyama—and not only men like him—will continue to yearn for the *meaning* and *passionate engagement* with the world that bourgeois liberal society cannot give them. But unlike Fukuyama, whose spirited part of the soul—the realm of the guardians—is soundly aligned with the philosophical part and thereby tempered (thus Fukuyama’s reluctant embrace of liberalism in the end); in less philosophical souls the rabid and greedy, selfish and unconstrained elements will align with *thymos* instead, crowding out the philosopher and his prudent constraints. In this alliance, where the greedy part dominates there will be the lure of insatiable consumption and sensory input—sex, drugs, and rock and roll; but where the spirit dominates, there will be violence and war, revolution and conquest for their own sake. The Hegelian narrative may compel us today, but it is an illusion in the long run so long as human nature, its wants and passions, remain unchanged.

What did all this amount to—the end of ideology and the end of history, the revolutionary sixties and the revolutionary fallout of 1989? Even a cursory observation of history, it seems, reveals a pattern—that in the move from the “end of ideology” narrative of the late 1950s, to the “end of history” narrative Fukuyama proffered and its aftermath, there was *a cyclical return, a continuation of a preexisting cycle of modernity, of the rise and fall of the liberal regime—of liberal flourishing and prosperity, followed by liberal malaise and discontent, followed by an*

*extraordinary reaction against bourgeois emptiness, followed by a thermidor and liberal retrenchment*⁶⁵⁶—that began, if we follow Zolberg, as early as the mid-19th century in the revolutions and reactions of 1848, and continued through the events of World War I, the revolutionary 1960s, and now as well perhaps, the anti-liberal, “Occupy”-defined revolutionary wave of 2011 after 1989.

The language typically used to describe the most recent extraordinary outburst in global Occupy (and Egypt’s “spirit of Tahrir Square” as well) is telling in this regard: In his enthusiastic account of the American Occupy movement, for example, Todd Gitlin writes that, “[A]s the encampments endured and grew, a demoralized left shook itself, stood up, and found to its amazement not only that it existed but that it *radiated energy*, and that energy, in the social world as in the material world, made things happen...*It produced its own satisfactions, since as William Blake understood, ‘Energy is Eternal Delight.’*”⁶⁵⁷ Roger Berkowitz wrote that “The protestors are enjoying themselves. For some critics, this is evidence of the lack of seriousness of the protestors and evidence that they are spoiled and naïve elites with nothing better to do with their time. But what is wrong with bringing joy into politics?”⁶⁵⁸ The Occupiers did more than protest liberal cronyism and capitalist

⁶⁵⁶ It is useful to compare this thesis with Albert O. Hirschman’s *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, which traces cyclical patterns of preference change in modern consumer societies in terms of our satisfaction, disappointment, and proclivities towards different private and public activities—specifically from private consumption, to public participation, to private consumption, to public participation, and so forth.

⁶⁵⁷ Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation: The Roots, the Spirit, and the Promise of Occupy Wall Street*. New York: Harper Collins, 2012, p. 46-47, emphasis added.

⁶⁵⁸ Roger Berkowitz, “The Politics of Anti-Political Protest: What to Make of OWS,” *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas: Arguments blog* (online), October 20, 2011.

inequality. They demonstrated the joys of action and political participation: “Many were the ways in which the movement could come to feel that its primary achievement was itself—a sort of collective narcissism.”⁶⁵⁹ “They acted. At a time when most everyone else was stuck in their daily routines[.]”⁶⁶⁰

This all begets serious long term questions about the nature and stability of modern political liberalism. Can stable liberal democracy, “surely the most decent of contemporary polities if not the best regime simply,”⁶⁶¹ accommodate the kind enthusiastic political engagement so often found lacking in it?⁶⁶² Do these liberal cycles reveal a meaningful pattern, or causal mechanism, or are they merely historical coincidence? Are so-called “moments of madness”—what people seem to desire in these moments of crisis—in their very nature fugitive events? Does modern political liberalism have the capacity to incorporate such moments while *not* succumbing to the destructive ideological passions, and behemoth mass movements of the past?

⁶⁵⁹ Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation*, p. 94.

⁶⁶⁰ Roger Berkowitz, “The Politics of Anti-Political Protest: What to Make of OWS,” *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas: Arguments blog* (online), October 20, 2011.

⁶⁶¹ Darrell Dobbs, “Socratic Communism,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (May 2000), pp. 491-510, p. 492.

⁶⁶² I take this problem to be one inspiration behind Andrew Poe’s recent dissertation on the concept of “enthusiasm” in the context of political and national attachments. Poe argues that a clear distinction between the political emotion of “enthusiasm” towards the good, versus the chaotic (“swarming”) and destructive emotion of “fanaticism,” reveals an important potential bridge between political liberalism and passionate political engagement. Andrew Poe, *The Sources and Limits of Enthusiasm*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2010.

Zolberg asks what I think the decisive question of “moments of madness”:
“Are they moments when politics bursts its bounds to invade all of life, or on the contrary, are they moments when political animals transcend their fate?”⁶⁶³ In other words, are they moments when man *qua* political man fully realizes himself; or are they moments when individuals and groups rise *above* the political in a manner that is ultimately unsustainable if the political is to survive? Sheldon Wolin, one of the influential democratic theorists of our time, ironically says yes to both. He concedes that genuine “Democracy in the late modern world cannot be a complete political system” given “the modern choice of the [modernizing] State as the fixed center of political life and the corollary conception of politics as continuous activity organized around a single dominating objective, control of or influence over the State apparatus.” He also concedes that under these circumstances an institution of radical democracy is not even preferable, that “given the awesome potentialities of modern forms of power and what they exact of the social and natural world, [democracy as a complete political system] ought not to be hoped or striven for.” Instead, direct democracy as the instantiation of *the political* and of shared democratic enthusiasm is and ought to be “fugitive”: “Democracy needs to be reconceived as something other than a form of government,” writes Wolin, “as a mode of being...doomed to succeed only temporarily, but...a recurrent possibility as long as memory of the political survives...Democracy is a political moment, perhaps the political moment, when the political is remembered and recreated. Democracy is

⁶⁶³ Aristide Zolberg, “Moments of Madness,” p. 183.

a rebellious moment that may assume revolutionary, destructive proportions, or may not.”⁶⁶⁴

Hannah Arendt offered a different alternative—one no less “fugitive” historically, but one hardly as compromising as Wolin’s. She agrees with Zolberg and Wolin that today “only seldom—in times of crisis or revolution” does *freedom*—the experience of *the political* in public participation and action in concert—“become the direct aim of political action.” But this is a dire problem, for public freedom is precisely “the reason that men live together in political organization at all,” and “The *raison d’être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action.”⁶⁶⁵ The dominance of *political economy* in our understanding of what politics is—beginning in the late 18th century with the published works of Adam Smith, and later in the political economy of James Mill⁶⁶⁶—and its characterization of politics as the problem of “who gets what, when, and how,”⁶⁶⁷ has occluded our vision of this essential reason for politics and that which political existence alone makes available to man—namely, the experience of what Arendt calls “public happiness,”⁶⁶⁸ the

⁶⁶⁴ Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” *Constellations*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1994), pp. 11-25, p. 23.

⁶⁶⁵ Hannah Arendt. “What is Freedom?” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Penguin, 1993, pp. 143-171, p. 146.

⁶⁶⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*: On Smith and Mill see p. 42 nt. 35, and p. 33 nt. 24. On the general phenomenon of “political economy” see pg. 29: “We therefore find it difficult to realize that according to ancient thought on these matters, the very term ‘political economy’ would have been a contradiction in terms: whatever was ‘economic,’ related to the life of the individual and the survival of the species, was a non-political, household affair by definition.”

⁶⁶⁷ Harold Dwight Lasswell, “Politics: Who Gets What, When and How,” New York: Whittlesey House, 1936.

exhilaration from public participation, including its risks, which most until today have only experienced in combusive moments of crisis.

Arendt does not see this historical pattern of liberal peace, boredom, crisis, and Thermidor as necessary—nor does she imagine that extreme outcomes—wars and perpetual revolutions—are the only alternatives we have. Instead she hoped, through her beloved “council system,” that “public happiness” might one day, “perhaps, after all, in the wake of the next revolution,”⁶⁶⁹ be available to all. These councils, she writes, were the “feeble germs of a new form of government,” and “Under modern conditions, the councils are the only democratic alternative we know to the party system.”⁶⁷⁰

20. POLITICAL COUNCILS AND THE LURE OF VIOLENCE

If 1989 marked the twilight of Marxism as a viable political ideology, it seemed also to mark the end of serious engagement with Marxist political praxis. And in this respect, it was ironic that the attention drawn to Arendt by the fall of European communism between 1989 and 1991 simultaneously obscured her serious encounter with the thinker who was her principal interlocutor at precisely

⁶⁶⁸ On revolution, the political, and “public happiness,” see also Hannah Arendt *On Revolution*, “Ch. 3: The Pursuit of Happiness,” pp. 106-131; and Hannah Arendt, “Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Penguin, 1993, pp. 3-15.

⁶⁶⁹ Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” in *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 199-233, p. 233.

⁶⁷⁰ Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism,” p. 30.

these revolutionary moments—namely Karl Marx himself.⁶⁷¹ By her own admission Arendt's engagement with Marx never achieved its full potential in print, but Marx remained a central preoccupation throughout her career. The same year that *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) was published Arendt submitted a book proposal to the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation called *Totalitarian Elements in Marxism* in which, as Jerome Kohn reports, she said:

The most serious gap in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is the lack of an adequate historical and conceptual analysis of the ideological background of Bolshevism. This omission was deliberate...[Because] The shocking originality of totalitarianism, the fact that its ideologies and methods of governing were entirely unprecedented and that its causes defied proper explanation in the usual historical terms, is easily overlooked if one lays too much stress on the only element that has behind it a respectable tradition and whose critical discussion requires a criticism of some of the chief tenets of Western political philosophy: Marxism.⁶⁷²

The project later expanded and changed to *Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought*. Rather than narrowly tackle the problem of Marx's relation to Bolshevism and totalitarianism Arendt, as Kohn describes, "realized that Marx not only stood firmly in that tradition [of philosophic and political thought], but also with him that tradition had come full circle: in an extremely complicated way it had come back to its origins and thus, as she said later, 'culminated and found its end.'"⁶⁷³ The project would now encompass a much wider critique of the Western

⁶⁷¹ Although see the recently published monograph by Tama Weisman, *Hannah Arendt and Karl Marx: On Totalitarianism and the Tradition of Western Political Thought*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Publishers, 2014.

⁶⁷² Jerome Kohn, "Introduction," *Social Research*, Vol. 69, No. 2: Special Issue on Hannah Arendt's "The Origins of Totalitarianism": Fifty Years Later (Summer 2002), pp. v-xv, p. v.

tradition of political philosophy; and it was never completed—instead, and perhaps fittingly, scattered parts of the unfinished work form a unifying, connecting thread in her three most important political works post-*Origins*—*The Human Condition*, *On Revolution*, and *Between Past and Future*.⁶⁷⁴ Other polished sections of the Marx manuscripts have recently appeared in print.⁶⁷⁵ And yet a sustained inquiry into Arendt's encounter with Marx—and specifically his theory of revolutionary political *praxis*—has not blossomed.

This is especially surprising given the affinity between Arendt's revolutionary *council model*, a popular leitmotif in her writing about which many have written either with glory or disdain, and Marx's famous depiction of the Paris Commune revolutionary council in *The Civil War in France* (1871). Beside the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and Thomas Jefferson's "ward republic," the Commune was Arendt's prototypical revolutionary council, for it "resembled in an amazing fashion Jefferson's ward system."⁶⁷⁶ And for Marx the Commune was the first—if ultimately

⁶⁷³ Jerome Kohn, "Introduction," *Social Research*, Vol. 69, No. 2: Special Issue on Hannah Arendt's "The Origins of Totalitarianism": Fifty Years Later (Summer 2002), pp. v-xv, p. vi.

⁶⁷⁴ See Jerome Kohn, "Introduction," *Social Research*, Vol. 69, No. 2: Special Issue on Hannah Arendt's "The Origins of Totalitarianism": Fifty Years Later (Summer 2002), pp. v-xv, p. v-vi. Kohn notes elsewhere that the essay "Tradition and the Modern Age" in the *Between Past and Future* collection comes directly from her Marx lecture manuscripts. Jerome Kohn, "Guest Editor's Introduction," *Social Research*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (Fall 2007), pp. xiii-xxi, nt. 3.

⁶⁷⁵ Hannah Arendt, "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought," *Social Research*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 273-319; Hannah Arendt, "The Great Tradition I: Law and Power," *Social Research*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (Fall 2007), pp. 713-726; Hannah Arendt, "The Great Tradition II: Ruling and Being Ruled," *Social Research*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (Winter 2007), pp. 941-954; several pieces were also collected in Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*. Jerome Kohn, ed. New York: Schocken Books, 2005.

⁶⁷⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 248.

aborted—manifestation of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” that would someday pave the way to communism.

Still, Marx and Arendt differed mightily on how to interpret the event. Arendt called Marx’s response to 1871 a “failure of the revolutionary tradition to give any serious thought to the only new form of government born out of revolution.”⁶⁷⁷ Marx could not see in the Commune the spontaneous generation of legitimate *power*, or *public freedom*, for the good it was in itself. Instead, blinded by the centrality of the social question in his theory of history, and unable to view that history in anything other than class terms, the councils were for Marx a force to be appropriated by the workers’ party for socialist ends, and abandoned when the state withered. Neither Marx, nor Lenin for that matter, recognized the councils as legitimate institutions in themselves, nor the activities within them as good in themselves, as distinct from class and party goals.

And yet notwithstanding these differences of interpretation, it is important to highlight what links Marx and Arendt in their conceptualization of the council idea and the specific problem of modernity it addressed—specifically, the problem of the *emancipation of labor* that began in earnest in the nineteenth century, and promised a full development in the twentieth. Marx, of course, looked forward to this emancipation with great anticipation—it was the end goal of his revolution. But Arendt showed far more trepidation, even aversion it seemed, at the prospect of the

⁶⁷⁷ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 250.

masses entering the political scene.⁶⁷⁸ This was strange coming from the same theorist whose resurrection of the Greek *polis* had inspired radical democrats around the world. What explained the difference?

Marx and Arendt certainly agreed on one thing—that “the advent of automation,” the prodigious offspring of capitalism, “in a few decades probably will empty the factories and liberate mankind from its oldest and most natural burden, the burden of laboring and the bondage to necessity,” that it “seems as though scientific progress and technical developments had..[achieved] something about which all former ages dreamed but which none had been able to realize.”⁶⁷⁹ But where this solution to the timeless labor problem represented (eventually) an unmitigated forward movement in man’s history for Marx, it raised a paradoxical problem for Arendt, for: “The modern age has carried with it the theoretical glorification of labor and has resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a laboring society. The fulfillment of the wish, therefore...comes at a moment when it can only be self-defeating. It is a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor, and this society does no longer know of those other higher or more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won.”⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁸ The most concentrated study of the “serious inconsistency [that] lies between what may for the sake of brevity be called Arendt’s elitist and her democratic aspects,” (p. 5) including her “contemptuous view of labor” (p. 11) is Margaret Canovan, “The Contradictions of Hannah Arendt’s Political Thought,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Feb. 1978), pp. 5-26.

⁶⁷⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pg. 4.

⁶⁸⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 4-5.

By “glorification of labor” Arendt means the cultural premium placed not only on value-adding and productive activity, but on the moral and political equality of all who labor, and thus the *value standards* of those who merely labor and consume. In the process, the consumerist values of mass society crowd out those nobler, richer, and more sturdy values—like courage, honor, virtue, and glory—which once were most revered in the political sphere. A laboring society is, one might say, for Arendt a society without *principles* upon which to act. And the political sphere itself is devalued into a utilitarian, *political economy* function: “Within this society, which is egalitarian because this is labor’s way of making men live together, there is no class left, no aristocracy of either a political or spiritual nature from which a restoration of the other capacities of man could start anew...What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is, with the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse.”⁶⁸¹

Mass society *labors*, and it *consumes* in an insatiable biological cycle. It:

...wants not culture but entertainment, and the wares offered by the entertainment industry are indeed consumed by society just like any other consumer goods. The products needed for entertainment serve the life process of society...to while away time, and the vacant time which is whiled away is not leisure time, strictly speaking—time, that is, in which we are free *from* all cares and activities necessitated by the life process and therefore free *for* the world and its culture—it is rather left over time, which is still biological in nature...which entertainment is supposed to fill[.]⁶⁸²

⁶⁸¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 5.

⁶⁸² Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Culture,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Penguin, 1993, p. 197-226, p. 205.

A laboring society is thus a consumer society whose satiation through perpetual consumption—or in lieu of that, violence or some other form of base stimulation—is its only cure for boredom, for it lacks cultural access to thoughtful leisure or principled action to fill the time. And here Arendt makes a stunning claim—namely that Marx and the philosophical tradition attached in his wake to both (a) the glorification of labor (i.e. social and political equality) and (b) the emancipation of humanity from labor as a product of the Industrial Revolution, have severed the traditional connection between freedom and speech, and freedom and the political.⁶⁸³ Modern laboring man has lost not only his capacity for action and leisure, but even his aspiration to them, his understanding of what they are and why they might be valuable. He has no satisfying activity other than consumption and destruction. In this sense Marx's diagnosis of modern society was all too correct.

The meaning of this point comes through in Arendt's comparison of Marx's utopian communist society with the Athenian democratic *polis*:

[I]f utopia means that this society has no *topos*, no geographical and historical place on earth, it is certainly not utopian; its geographical *topos* is Athens and its place in history is the fifth century before Christ. In Marx's future society the state has withered away; there is no longer any distinction between rulers and ruled and rulership no longer exists. This corresponds to life in the ancient Greek city-state...Only there do we find an almost complete leisure society in which the time and energy required for making a living were, so to speak, squeezed in between the much more important activities of *agorein*, walking and talking in the market place, of going to the gymnasium, of attending meetings or the theater, or of judging conflicts between citizens.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸³ Hannah Arendt, "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought," p. 294.

⁶⁸⁴ Hannah Arendt, "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought, p. 292-293.

But Arendt, as we have just seen, denies that Marx's laborers, once the state *has* withered away, have any ability or impetus to enjoy real leisure or to act politically; because all that is culturally and materially available to them—to their social and political consciousness, we might say—are the products of labor and the activity of labor and consumption. It is for the same reason presumably that revolution and violence, rather than revolution and freedom, went hand in hand in Marx's model. The laboring society is familiar with violence and fabrication through its laboring activity. It is also familiar with labor and consumption as a general lifestyle. But it is not at all familiar with the joys of action and the experience of public happiness.

Reading this, it is interesting to mark how closely Marx's *description* of the Commune's "dictatorship of the proletariat" approaches something like a council direct democracy, while in the end for Arendt it is anything but:

Like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible, and revocable...[T]he Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet...The rural communes of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents...[U]niversal suffrage was to serve the people[.]⁶⁸⁵

Marx hopes these institutions of political participation will wither away over time.

The class who made the Commune has no intrinsic use for politics—it merely seeks a classless society. But Arendt, contra Marx, argues that those very participatory

⁶⁸⁵ Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France" [1871], in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Robert C. Tucker, ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1972, pp. 526-576, p. 555.

institutions were in principal the chief goal of the revolution, the end in itself, which Marx simply cannot see because of his narrow focus on party and class.

This makes it all the more interesting that elsewhere Arendt not only recognized the labor movement's great political achievements, but celebrated them in the most glowing terms, and identified labor as the true vanguard of revolutionary possibilities in our times: "Striking is the sudden and frequently extraordinarily productive role which the labor movement has played in modern politics," she writes in *The Human Condition*, "From the revolutions of 1848 to the Hungarian revolution of 1956, the European working class, by virtue of being the only organized and hence the leading section of the people, has written one of the most glorious and probably the most promising chapter of recent history."⁶⁸⁶ Moreover "the people's revolutions, for more than a hundred years now, have come forth, albeit never successfully, with another form of new government: the system of people's councils to take the place of the Continental party system[.]"⁶⁸⁷

Arendt's championing of the revolutionary council system was, depending on one's perspective, among the most inspiring moments of her work, or the most ridiculous. Margaret Canovan wrote that "for most of Arendt's readers her views [on

⁶⁸⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 216. Canovan's ("The Contradictions," p. 13) description of this passage as "[bearing] all the signs of an afterthought" is a bit uncharitable—might it be that the strange tension between Arendt's glorious depiction of workers in this section, with her less enthusiastic tone towards labor throughout the rest of the book, bears within it precisely the key to understanding what political action is all about? Hardly an afterthought, might this irony have been deliberate?

⁶⁸⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 216.

the council system] are something of an embarrassment, a curiously unrealistic commitment in someone who laid particular stress on realism in politics.”⁶⁸⁸ Benhabib called Arendt’s model “flawed, because more often than not, it seems to fly in the face of the realities of the modern world.”⁶⁸⁹ John Sitton called the councils “one of the few topics in her work not taken seriously by critics.”⁶⁹⁰ And to some extent Arendt was in on the joke: “[Y]ou know I have this romantic sympathy with the council system,”⁶⁹¹ she said to Hans Morgenthau at a 1972 conference on her work.

But in any event, if one can ascribe a concrete political ideal—a *utopia*—to Arendt’s theory, it is certainly the revolutionary *council system* that she described often, but in frustratingly limited detail, at several places in her work—most notably the sixth chapter of *On Revolution*,⁶⁹² the Epilogue to the 1958 edition of *On the Origins of Totalitarianism*,⁶⁹³ a 1970 interview in *Crises of the Republic*⁶⁹⁴, and other

⁶⁸⁸ Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Thought*, p. 237.

⁶⁸⁹ Seyla Benhabib, “The Embattled Public Sphere: Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Beyond,” in *Reasoning Practically*, Ed. Edna Ullmann-Margalit. New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 165; cited in Matteo Bortolini, “Hannah Arendt, Council Democracy and (Far) Beyond, A Radical View,” Draft presented at the European University Institute, 5/19/2003

⁶⁹⁰ John F. Sitton, “Hannah Arendt’s Argument for Council Democracy,” *Polity*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1987), pp. 80-100.

⁶⁹¹ Hannah Arendt, “On Hannah Arendt,” in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*. Ed. Melvyn A. Hill. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979, pp. 301-339, p. 327.

⁶⁹² Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, “Ch. 6: The Revolutionary Tradition and its Lost Treasure,” pp. 207-273.

⁶⁹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Meridian, 1958, “Ch. 14: Epilogue: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution,” pp. 480-510; first published in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Feb., 1958), pp. 5-43. The Epilogue was removed from subsequent editions of *Origins*.

obscure and provocative places.⁶⁹⁵ And much of Arendt's description of the council system comes through the recitation of exemplars that recall Zolberg's "moments of madness." Generally speaking, she writes:

If we leave aside the February Revolution of 1848 in Paris, where a *commission pour les travailleurs*, set up by the government itself, was almost exclusively concerned with questions of social legislation, the main dates of appearance of these organs of action and germs of a new state are...the year 1870, when the French capital under siege by the Prussian army 'spontaneously reorganized itself into a miniature federal body,' which then formed the nucleus for the Parisian Commune government in the spring of 1871; the year 1905, when the wave of spontaneous strikes in Russia suddenly developed...*soviets*...the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia...the years 1918 and 1919 in Germany...(and) the autumn of 1956...the Hungarian Revolution."⁶⁹⁶

These cases saw a dramatic, spontaneous explosion of political enthusiasm and political action, the extraordinariness of which the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was Arendt's favorite case. There again, against an entrenched and oppressive communist regime:

An unarmed and essentially harmless student demonstration grew from a few thousand suddenly and spontaneously into a huge crowd which took it upon itself to carry out one of the students' demands...the following day, some students went to the Radio Building to persuade the station to broadcast the sixteen points of their manifesto. A large crowd immediately gathered...(when) the police guarding the building, tried to disperse the crowd with a few

⁶⁹⁴ Hannah Arendt, "Thoughts on Politics and Revolution," in *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 199-233.

⁶⁹⁵ See e.g. Hannah Arendt, "To Save the Jewish Homeland" [1948], in *The Jewish Writings*, Ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman. New York: Schocken Books, 2007, pp. 388-401, where Arendt lists five "objective factors [which] should be axiomatic" and mark "the only way of saving the reality of the Jewish homeland." Among the five Arendt includes: "Local self-government and mixed Jewish-Arab municipal and rural councils, on a small scale and as numerous as possible, are the only realistic political measures that can eventually lead to the political emancipation of Palestine. It is still not too late" (p. 401).

⁶⁹⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 253-254.

shots, the revolution broke out. The masses attacked the police and acquired their first weapons. The workers...left the factories and joined the crowd...the army...sided with the revolution. What had started as a student demonstration had become an armed uprising in less than twenty-four hours.⁶⁹⁷

The Hungarian revolt had revealed a revolutionary situation—in Hungary at least. And within two days there was a “swift disintegration of the whole power structure—party, army, and governmental offices.” And then:

The outstanding feature of the uprising was that no chaos resulted from the actions of people without leadership and without a previously formulated program...Instead of mob rule there appeared immediately, almost simultaneously with the uprising itself, the Revolutionary and Workers’ Councils, that is, the same organization for which more than a hundred years now has emerged whenever the people have been permitted for a few days, or a few weeks or months, to follow their own political devices without a government (or party program) imposed from above.⁶⁹⁸

The councils’ “stubborn re-emergence for more than a century could not be more spontaneous and less influenced by outside interest or theory,”⁶⁹⁹ wrote Arendt. And in *On Revolution* she traces this fragmented tradition as far back as the July 1789 “municipal revolution”⁷⁰⁰ in Paris and the “great number of spontaneously formed clubs and societies” which arose independently of them.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁷ Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Feb., 1958), pp. 5-43, p. 26.

⁶⁹⁸ Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism,” p. 28.

⁶⁹⁹ Hannah Arendt, “Totalitarian Imperialism,” p. 30.

⁷⁰⁰ See Henry E. Bourne, “Municipal Politics in Paris in 1789,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1906), pp. 263-286; and the most influential general account of popular action in France between 1789-1793, Peter Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution 1789-1793*. Trans. N.F. Dryhurst. St. Petersburg, FL: Red and Black Pub., 2010.

The council system, whose structure Arendt left quite nebulous, represented “a completely different principle of organization, which begins from below, continues upward, and finally leads to a parliament.” The councils, Arendt wrote:

[E]ven if they begin very small—as neighborhood councils, professional councils, councils within factories, apartment houses, and so on...The councils say: We want to participate, we want to debate, we want to make our voices heard in public, and we want to have the possibility to determine the political course of the country. Since the country is too big for all of us to come together and determine our fate, we need a number of public spaces within it. The booth in which we deposit our ballots is too small, for this booth has room only for one. The parties are completely unsuitable; there we are, most of us, nothing but the manipulated electorate. But if only ten of us are sitting around a table, each expressing his opinion, each hearing the opinion of others, then a rational formation of opinion can take place through the exchange of opinions. There, too, it will become clear which one of us is best suited to present our view before the next higher council, where in turn our view will be clarified through the influence of other views, revised, or proved wrong.”⁷⁰²

However organized at the bottom, Arendt assumed the councils would take a pyramidal shape, in which very local “elementary republics,” established “wherever people lived or worked together,” and in which individuals simply self-selected to participate, would get together and make binding decisions about local issues. For issues that concerned more than these councils, they would delegate representatives from among themselves, revocable at any time, to represent them at a higher level of organization, and so forth up to the level of a national “parliament.”⁷⁰³ This system, Arendt believes, “would spell the end of general

⁷⁰¹ On this aspect of the French Revolution and its subversion, see Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 231-4.

⁷⁰² Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” p. 232-3

suffrage as we understand it today,” since real participation—and a more responsible relation to the decisions of politics—would take the place of periodic and morally alienated voting.⁷⁰⁴

Arendt never lost hope in the possibility of council government arising: “[I]f you ask me now what prospect [a council state] has of being realized, then I must say to you: Very slight, if at all. And yet perhaps, after all—in the wake of the next revolution.”⁷⁰⁵ And her optimism was in part due to the their spontaneous recurrence in revolutionary situations throughout the past two hundred years, and the pivotal role of human agents in undermining them—in other words, she saw no evidence yet that the councils *themselves* could not work as a political system, were acting humans to give them a chance. At least one fall of the councils, for example, was easily avoidable—in America, where the Founders simply “[failed] to incorporate the township and town-hall meeting into the Constitution,” and their “failure to incorporate it into either the federal or the state constitutions was ‘one of the tragic oversights of post-revolutionary political development.’”⁷⁰⁶

The American case may instruct in a simpler way than scholars have suggested, and Arendt’s point seems to be this—whether for those in revolutionary situations who want the councils to endure, or those in existing republics who want to expand real political participation—the most important step is to *write the*

⁷⁰³ Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” p. 232.

⁷⁰⁴ See esp. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 269-71.

⁷⁰⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” in *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 199-233, p. 233.

⁷⁰⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 110, 227, citing Lewis Mumford in the final line.

councils into the constitution! That Arendt saw the constitutional expansion of direct participation as a real opportunity, even in long-lasting republics, is evident in her proposal late in life for a constitutional amendment in America to recognize the legitimacy of civil-disobedient protestors—to insert civil disobedience into the normal functioning of politics in lieu of councils.⁷⁰⁷ Such measures would not only expand the possibilities of political participation in the republic, but would in the process *empower* republican institutions by injecting political action directly into the political system, and by expanding the depth of political plurality and the reach of the public thing—the *res publica* itself.

At this point most arguments sympathetic with Arendt’s celebration of the council system converge on the normative and egalitarian virtues of expanded democratic participation and the fulfillment of the promise of democracy. Others, like Matteo Bortolini, take a wider structural view and cite the councils as Arendt’s attempt to replace the sovereign state and its alienating pathologies with a less alienating and more localized federal structure.⁷⁰⁸ Andreas Kalyvas, with an eye on political experience, calls the councils Arendt’s “attempt to theorize the institutionalization of the extraordinary.”⁷⁰⁹ Democracy, participation, and experience—all three of these elements are important for Arendt, and they converge

⁷⁰⁷ Hannah Arendt, “Civil Disobedience,” in *Crises of the Republic*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, pp. 49-102, p. 101.

⁷⁰⁸ Matteo Bortolini. “Hannah Arendt, Council Democracy and (Far) Beyond, A Radical View,” Draft presented at the European University Institute, 5/19/2003, p. 13.

⁷⁰⁹ Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, p. 255.

in her vision of “public happiness” and the joys to be had by virtue of the risk and exhilaration of political participation: on one hand the warm feeling of community that derives from *associative* power; on another hand the nervous thrill of *agonistic* competition and the risk of failure; and all this in the realm where *action’s* stakes are greatest, where one is potentially responsible for decisions affecting life and death.

And here—and what is often overlooked about Arendt’s celebration of political experience and the public happiness and satisfaction that it brings—Arendt’s normative priority of political participation dovetails with her hopeful but frightened concern with the future of political order, the problem of political violence, and the “next revolution” as she witnessed it in the 1960s, where she saw first-hand (again) the potentially destructive and a-political consequences of the combination of rational bureaucracy, liberal boredom, laborers without labor, and alienation from politics as they simultaneously burst onto the global political scene. In this sense, I argue here in conclusion, Arendt’s writings on politics and violence responded directly to the problem of liberal emptiness, mass malaise, and the lure of violence that beset authors like Daniel Bell in 1960, Francis Fukuyama in 1989, and which remains—from Occupy to ISIS—of central political concern today.

Amidst the troubled times of the late 1960s Arendt’s immediate concern was the lure of violence at a time when politics was meaningless, unbelievable, and inaccessible. A key contributor to this alienation was the structural fact of political centralization and the increased bureaucratization of political decisions and parties that rendered meaningful political participation inaccessible to the average person,

and politics itself little more than a nihilistic struggle for spoils with little left of it to inspire or galvanize enthusiasm: “Whatever the administrative advantages and disadvantages of centralization may be, its political result is always the same: monopolization of power causes the drying up or oozing away of all authentic power sources in the country.”⁷¹⁰ Given the bureaucratic routine that politics had become, and the systematic rejection by machine party politics of anything new or principled, anything that challenged the system, it was no wonder that youth and others took so readily to the works of writers like Franz Fanon, who celebrated violence as if it were a biological function, a necessity through which the alienated and oppressed, in the very act of violence and the collective mission of rebellion, finally achieved a resilient meaning and purposeful community in their lives.

Finally—to come back to Sorel’s and Pareto’s earlier denunciation of the system as such—the greater the bureaucratization of public life, the greater will be the attraction of violence. In a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one can argue, to whom one can present grievances, on whom the pressures of power can be exerted. Bureaucracy is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act...The crucial feature in the student rebellions around the world is that they are directed everywhere against the ruling bureaucracy.⁷¹¹ [...]

[W]e do not know where these developments will lead us, but we know, or should know, that every decrease in power is an open invitation to violence—if only because those who hold power and feel it slipping from their hands, *be they the government or be they the governed*, have always found it difficult to resist the temptation to substitute violence for it.⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” pg. 182.

⁷¹¹ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 178.

⁷¹² Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 184, italics added.

Here was another instance of crisis in the modern liberal cycle—destined in the short term for an escalation of radical, unpredictable, and ultimately destructive violence (if not in France, then certainly in America where Arendt watched it), but also in the long term for a conservative reaction, a Thermidor of intellectual discourse and political measures to limit genuine popular political participation for at least a generation to come.

In the moment Arendt's concern was also more personal and more tragic⁷¹³: For what was revealed in France in 1968 if not a “revolutionary situation”? And what had the students *really* wanted other than more freedom and less alienation, more participation and less bureaucracy? Why hadn't it happened? Here perhaps was Arendt's last best chance to see her beloved council model—or any genuinely participatory model of politics that challenged the rule of bureaucratic “machine parties”—reveal to the world a more meaningful, satisfying, and *practical* model of expanding, institutionalizing, and constitutionalizing public happiness. But an extended absence from politics had stunted the most important of all senses in the students—one which Lenin and de Gaulle had in spades—namely, the *political sense*, and with it the sense of political responsibility and the consciousness of political plurality that might have saved the revolution. Indeed, it is a sense whose general absence may, ironically, represent the chief political crisis of *our* times as well:

⁷¹³ That Arendt, who was a friend of Daniel Cohn-Bendit's parents, sympathized with the French students was clear. On June 27, 1968 she wrote a short letter to Cohn-Bendit praising his actions and offering money should he need it. The letter is printed in Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, p. 412.

We have recently witnessed how it did not take more than the relatively harmless, essentially nonviolent French students' rebellion to reveal the vulnerability of the whole political system, which rapidly disintegrated before the astonished eyes of the young rebels. Unknowingly they had tested it; they intended only to challenge the ossified university system, and down came the system of governmental power, together with that of the huge party bureaucracies—*“une sorte de désintégration de toutes les hiérarchies.”* It was a textbook case of a revolutionary situation that did not develop into a revolution because there was nobody, least of all the students, prepared to seize power and the responsibility that goes with it. Nobody except, of course, de Gaulle.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, “On Violence,” p. 148-9.

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