

## 2. The State of Research

The first section will introduce the approach of the book, namely its focus on the importance of totality as a concept. This part will also introduce the term “totalism” and some of the key works used throughout the work, including the approaches undertaken by Erikson and Lifton, both of which will be reviewed in more detail during the subsequent chapter on totalism. Thus, rather than focusing on the concept of totalitarianism itself, or on the structural features of totalitarian regimes – yet acknowledging the importance of both – the book’s focus will be on the concept of totality and on totalist worldviews and ideologies.

The second section will briefly present several of the most important classic theories on totalitarianism, starting with the evolution of the term in the 1920s, yet also with a focus on the way in which the authors associated religious features and motifs to what they saw as totalitarian ideologies and movements. The most important authors treated here will be Waldemar Gurian, Hannah Arendt and Carl J. Friedrich. Underlying Friedrich’s use of terms such as “totalist”, “totalism” and “totalitarian” will be of particular importance for this work and will thus be treated at some length in its own section.

The subsequent section will then deal with the impact made by terms such as political religion or secular religion in theories on totalitarianism. Thus, whether speaking of totalitarianism, of secular religion, or political religion, pointing out the major strengths and weaknesses of such theories will be instrumental in contributing to the approach ultimately chosen by this book. Due to the nature and breadth of his work, the final section will also have a special focus on Eric Voegelin’s writings, including his understanding of Gnosticism, immanentizing eschatological thought and its relationship to modernity and totalitarianism.

### 2.1 The Uses of Totality

As a philosophical concept, the roots of totality run deep in European culture. Nevertheless, for an idea which can be counted among the pillars of the greater Abrahamic world, the systematic treatment of totality, alongside its potential impact and uses has so far remained under-researched.<sup>3</sup> This is also the case when one approaches the concept of totality in a political sense – and even more so when one deals with the term “totalism”, which, although born from the same root word, never approached the fame and widespread use of “totalitarianism”. It is then no surprise that totality is a constant companion in writings on totalitarian regimes, even if the concept itself often takes a back seat to other issues, such as the structure and organisation of the regimes in question.

Such an affirmation necessarily invites the following point on the topic of totalitarianism. The approach towards 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianism throughout the rest of the book is linked, first and foremost, to the way in which the book’s main goals are to be pursued. These goals are focussed on developing a new perspective on the origins and

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<sup>3</sup> One notable exception in this case is the outstanding work by Martin Jay on the concept of totality in the works of Marxist intellectuals, which remains perhaps the greatest endeavour focusing on the subject to this date. See Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality. The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

dynamic of totalitarianism as a system of thought, whilst proposing a possible taxonomy according to the overall direction of its ideological aims. As a result, this work does not intend to serve primarily as a critique or a restructuring of theories associated with the totalitarianism school in general. Furthermore, the work does not focus on the structural features of regimes, even though it does not aim to minimize their importance. Thus, while several classic theories on totalitarianism – the term’s somewhat arduous and complicated history notwithstanding – possess many merits, the focus of this work will deal mostly with the concepts of totality and totalitarianism, and their impact and influence in the emergence and evolution of totalist movements.

The book argues that approaching such factors by focussing only on classic perspectives on totalitarianism, including the political religion school, would lead to a conceptual problem on the issue at hand. This problem can be defined as the existence of a blind spot when it comes to cognitive-emotional aspects, or what can be seen as a crucial preliminary step in the formation of a totalistic system in general, including its possible totalitarian phase. The nature of this blind spot is firstly tied to the limits of classic theories of totalitarianism in conceptualising the roots of the emotional fascination and, for lack of a better term, the dynamism which fuels individual drive towards the accomplishment of totalistic principles.

This blind spot is particularly evident in approaches which focus foremost on the form and function of a group or ideology rather than taking into account the fundamental ideas which enable their emergence and offer them vitality. After all, the importance and attraction of totality for an individual or group level is essential for tracing both the origins of totalist ideologies and movements, as well as their possible evolution into totalist ideocracies. Moreover, understanding the intellectual and historical roots of such totalizing perspectives can, in turn, complement the debates on processes of what is usually termed radicalisation<sup>4</sup>, militancy, or even other essentially contested concepts such as terrorism.

Yet another problem is the fact that the vast majority of the relevant literature uses totalitarianism and totalitarianism interchangeably, despite the differences which come to ultimately separate them. In this respect, as it will be made clear throughout the work, one must be prepared to distinguish between totalitarianism and totalitarianism. One issue found in several interpretations of totalitarianism is a somewhat excessive focus on the regime mechanisms – as seen for instance in Franz Neumann’s *Behemoth*, or in Friedrich and Brzezinski’s *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*.<sup>5</sup> This leads to a secondary or even marginal attention given to the potential fascination and attraction offered by a totalist worldview. It is important to note here that most theories of totalitarianism tend to approach only briefly or superficially the possible appeal of totalist ideologies. For instance, Hannah Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism*<sup>6</sup> does not take into consideration the apparently religious features – and the intense experiences these generated – which other contemporaries and authors see as

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<sup>4</sup> The use of the term *radical* or *radicalisation*, while widespread, has given birth to various interpretations, some more detailed, and occasionally more narrow, or context-dependent than others. Among the foremost approaches from the latter category is the understanding of radicalism as primarily a product of the tension at the heart of modernity itself – a fact which, while intriguing, seems to disregard the long line of premodern movements which can be called radical. Thus, Roger Griffin defines radicalisation as “a psychodynamic process of extraordinary intensity, transforming someone who initially feels powerless and irrelevant in the face of an alien culture or a tyrannical state, or else hopelessly adrift on the boundless ocean of absurdity or decadence, into a fanatical devotee of a cause.” Roger Griffin, *Terrorist’s Creed. Fanatical Violence and the Human Need for Meaning* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 8. Similar to its stance on the term *extremism*, this work mostly avoids using the word *radicalism*, focussing instead on the idea of totality and the concept of totalitarianism.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich’s interpretation of totalitarianism shall be approached in more detail in the following section.

<sup>6</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Hartcourt Brace, 1979). Arendt’s approach shall be approached in more detail in the next section.

permeating the ritual and political symbolism of totalitarian regimes.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Arendt concentrates on features such as logicity, terror and total control.

By contrast, a series of authors sought to explain both the nature and the success of 20<sup>th</sup> century autocratic regimes by pointing to their strong religious features and motifs – at least as they saw it. Such perspectives often followed the idea that such regimes functioned as “sacralised politics” or “secular religions”, which essentially filled the void left in European society by a sustained process of secularisation, offering meaning, hope, and salvation. The process of secularisation was particularly important for the complex culture wars which dominated the internal affairs of states such as the German Kaiserreich. Thus, the very concept has been defined by Herman Lübbe as “ideational and political” (*Ideenpolitisch*) in nature, a philosophy which decisively influenced the politics of the state.<sup>8</sup> Throughout this work, the importance of this secularisation process will be linked to its impact on the influence of eschatological thought, yet focussed more on political utopianism. In this case, special attention is offered to the debate between the approaches undertaken by Karl Löwith<sup>9</sup> and Hans Blumenberg.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, schools of thought which have focussed on the concept of political religion – or which make extensive use of religious terminology – have also dealt with the potential fascination provided by such systems, particularly by pointing out its ritualistic dimension. Nevertheless, the problem arguably persists even when one turns to terms such as “political religion” – and to religious terminology in general. This is ultimately the case since, as it shall be pointed out in a special section of the method chapter, despite its conceptual strengths, the political religion school of thought possesses its own important analytical limitations and drawbacks.

As the concept of totality is far older than the modern concept of totalitarianism, this only reinforced the necessity of an approach which sought to identify its modern, as well as premodern roots and impact. It must also be mentioned here that, despite its undeniable importance and impact, the origins and appeal of such phenomena should not be sought *only* during a “nomic crisis”, to use Roger Griffin’s expression, and certainly not only due to the apparent impact of modernity.<sup>11</sup> The deeper cultural and historical contexts must also be considered, including the degree of tolerance towards ambiguity and the prevalence of cultural models which can be depicted as totalist in their aims. Furthermore, understanding the formation of a system of thought built on totality can, in turn, contribute to the archaeology of totalist heterodoxies, and of ideocratic polities and their possible totalitarian phases. In this respect, research traditions focussed on the history of ideas, such as those championed by Voegelin and Talmon, can offer great insight in the origins and possible fascination offered by totalizing perspectives – even if these authors remain, perhaps, too attached to religious analogies.

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<sup>7</sup> The extent to which this was ultimately true is open to debate, however, it is understandable that the overall effect was described in religious terms, firstly due to the wide spread of religious terminology in secular contexts and the persistent influence of the Christian cultural substratum.

<sup>8</sup> See Hermann Lübbe, *Säkularisierung: Geschichte eines ideenpolitischen Begriffs* (Munich: Karl Alber 1975).

<sup>9</sup> See Löwith, *Meaning in History, The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

<sup>10</sup> See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> This can be exemplified by Mahdism, which has manifested since the early centuries of Islam, in polities which were typically not only untouched by modernity, but also hardly touched by any sort of European presence, militarily or otherwise. Even the famous Sudanese Mahdist movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century cannot be defined as a response to modernity as much as a response to the perceived weakness, or degeneration of pure Islam, thus being part of the ancient *mujaddid* tradition, namely, the rejuvenating of the faith.

To reiterate, rather than focusing on the concept of totalitarianism or on the structural features of totalitarian regimes, the book's focus will be on the concept of totality itself and on totalistic systems and ideologies. This is important to note, since the prevalence of totality is the forerunner and probably most important building block for any potential totalitarian project. Such a perspective is not meant to ignore or to contest the overall merits of the theories which deal with totalitarianism. Indeed, the authors who lived at the time of the great totalitarian experiments approached the concept of totality time and again in their works. Nevertheless, they typically devoted more effort to describing and analysing the practical aspects of totalitarian government, its policies and structure.

Thus, such theories must remain limited in approaching the potential appeal which totality as an idea can represent, as well as the dynamism which it may help generate in certain contexts.<sup>12</sup> An important exception to this is to be found in schools of thought approaching totalitarianism – and, crucially, the totalist ideologies possessed by various movements – from a psychological perspective. In this case, the most important examples can be found in the works of Erik H. Erikson<sup>13</sup> and Robert J. Lifton<sup>14</sup>, with both making use of a term which is very important for this work's purposes: totalism. Nevertheless, as it will be discussed in later sections, the way in which Erikson and Lifton make use of this fundamental concept can also be somewhat prone to vagueness. The potential problem is only intensified by Lifton's own definition of totalitarianism merely as "political totalism"<sup>15</sup>, a definition which, it can be argued, has a limited conceptual use at best.

As a result, it is essential that one should analyse the importance of totality in individual worldviews and to understand its role in the formation and evolution of charismatic, totalist movements. As it shall be seen throughout later chapters, a fruitful path to understanding both the origins and possible transformations of totalist ideologies and totalist movements can also be found by making use of research from fields such as neurobiology (Wexler)<sup>16</sup>, sociology (Eisenstadt)<sup>17</sup> and psychology (Erikson, Lifton), rather than relying only on the classic theories on totalitarianism and on the political religion school – even when taking into account the seminal contributions made by authors such as Eric Voegelin<sup>18</sup> and Jacob Leib Talmon.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The benefits and limitations of two key concepts – totalitarianism and political religion – will be discussed in the following sections.

<sup>13</sup> See Erik Homburger Erikson, "Wholeness and Totality: A Psychiatric Contribution", in Carl J. Friedrich ed., *Totalitarianism* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964) 156-171; "The Problem of Ego Identity", *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 4 (1956): 56-121; *Identity, youth, and crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968).

<sup>14</sup> See Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Preface to the University of North Carolina Edition 1989).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 446.

<sup>16</sup> See Bruce E. Wexler, *Brain and Culture. Neurobiology, Ideology and Social Change* (Cambridge: The MIT Press 2006).

<sup>17</sup> See S.N. Eisenstadt, *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism and Revolution, The Jacobin Dimension of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). In turn, Martin Riesebrodt divides "fundamentalism" according to its desire to withdraw from the world (*Fundamentalismus der Weltflucht*) or to subject the world to its principles (*Fundamentalismus der Weltbeherrschung*). See Martin Riesebrodt, *Fundamentalismus als patriarchalische Protestbewegung: amerikanische Protestanten (1910-28) und iranische Schiiten (1961-79) im Vergleich* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990) 20-21.

<sup>18</sup> See Eric Voegelin, "The Political Religions"; "The New Science of Politics" and "Science, Politics and Gnosticism", in Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint* vol. 5 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Manfred Henningsen ed, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> See Jacob Leib Talmon, *Die Geschichte der totalitären Demokratie Band I. Die Ursprünge der totalitären Demokratie*, Uwe Backes in collaboration with Silke Isaak and Annett Zingler eds. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2013); Talmon, *Die Geschichte der totalitären Demokratie Band II. Politischer Messianismus. Die romantische Phase*, Uwe Backes in collaboration with Silke Isaak and Annett Zingler eds. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2013); Talmon, *Die Geschichte der totalitären Demokratie Band III. Der Mythos*

For instance, despite its abstract categorization, Eisenstadt's work on premodern and early modern heterodoxies is very useful due to its ability to describe the intellectual similarities uniting them. Furthermore, Eisenstadt rightly points to the importance of totalizing projects, a fact which has not gone unnoticed with respect to applicability, as encountered, for instance, in Roger Griffin's book on the metapolitical motivations of terrorism.<sup>20</sup> Thus, even as they pursued different political or spiritual aims, such movements remained defined by a desire for a totalistic reconstruction of the world according to their doctrinal core, and a low tolerance for ambiguity.

The usefulness of such an approach is also made apparent, for example, when looking at Wexler's work dealing with the workings of the brain and ideology – specifically, the imperative of an individual to maintain a concordance between external structures and internal, neurocognitive structures, as well as the resistance offered in the face of contradictions. Moreover, the research done by Roger Griffin into palingenetic<sup>21</sup> ultranationalism as well as the emergence and the legitimization strategies used by ideocracies<sup>22</sup> – including what this work calls totalist heterodoxies – has been extremely valuable throughout various sections of the book.

In various incarnations, the idea of totality or the striving for totality has long been part of human culture. In this respect, it is not surprising that the term “totality” in the political sense greatly predates the concept of totalitarianism, found, for instance, in a Hegelian context<sup>23</sup>, or in the vision of a “total revolution”, which can already be encountered during the French Revolution<sup>24</sup> as well as in the writings of Karl Marx.<sup>25</sup> This enables Abbot Gleason to write in his conceptual analysis of totalitarianism that there is “some overlap between ‘totality,’ grasping/understanding the world as an integral whole, and ‘totalitarian’, making it a whole, especially in the work of philosophers who are the students of Hegel and Marx.”<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, in a socio-political sense, it was the term “totalitarian” which became most widely used and recognized when associated with the rise and nature of the Bolshevik,

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*der Nation und die Vision der Revolution: Die Ursprünge ideologischer Polarisierung im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, Uwe Backes in collaboration with Silke Isaak and Annett Zingler eds. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> See for instance Griffin, *Terrorist's Creed*, 111-136.

<sup>21</sup> In his well-known *Nature of Fascism*, Griffin makes use of “palingenesis” for the first time in order to describe what he considers to be the essential myth of Fascism: “(...) fascism is best defined as a revolutionary form of nationalism, one which sets out to be a political, social and ethical revolution, welding the ‘people’ into a dynamic national community under new elites infused with new heroic values. The core myth which inspires this project is that only a populist, trans-class movement of purifying, cathartic national rebirth (palingenesis) can stem the tide of decadence.” Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) xii.

<sup>22</sup> See Roger Griffin, “The Legitimizing Role of Palingenetic Myth in Ideocracies”, in Uwe Backes and Steffen Kailitz eds., *Ideokratie. Legitimation – Kooptation – Repression* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2014).

<sup>23</sup> The relationship between the total and Hegelianism was considered essential by many scholars. To give only one example, Waldemar Gurian thought it possible that Mussolini had taken the term “totalitarianism” from Hegel's understanding of the organic unity of the people. Waldemar Gurian, “The Totalitarian State”, *The Review of Politics*, 40/4 Fortieth Anniversary Issue (1978): 514-527. Also see Yirmiyahu Yovel, “Totalitarianism and Totality. A Response to Michael Walzer”, in Yehoshua Arieli and Nathan Rotenstreich eds., *Totalitarian Democracy and After* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2002) 193-196.

<sup>24</sup> See James H. Billington: *Fire in the Minds of Men. Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers, 1980) 78.

<sup>25</sup> “Meanwhile, the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution.” Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* in Marx, *Collected Writings. Revised Edition*, David McLellan ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000) 232.

<sup>26</sup> Abbot Gleason, *Totalitarianism. The Inner History of the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 9. Thus, when it came to society itself, the importance of totality was particularly salient in Marxian and Hegelian works, whether in an idealist perspective in the former, or a materialist understanding in the latter. See David D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe. Understanding the Poverty of Great Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006) 70.

Fascist and National Socialist regimes. Indeed, as the long 19<sup>th</sup> century ended in the catastrophe of the Great War, the idea of the total as a political reality was quickly linked with Bolshevism, the war's most dynamic and terrifying progeny.

Thus, one of the earliest recorded uses of the word "totalism" – possibly the very first – is found in a phrase employed by Alfons Paquet, a correspondent for the "Frankfurter Zeitung". In his book, *Im kommunistischen Rußland (In Communist Russia)*, published in 1919, Paquet describes how the fallen Russian empire transformed into a group of republics and how "Lenin's revolutionary totalism" attempted to create an ideological cement between those republics and the new "people's states", which the government in St. Petersburg wished to see arise throughout Europe and Asia.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Paquet did not approach the term in a systematic fashion; after all, he apparently never revisited the term. Thus, his use of the word points merely to an intuitive use of a descriptive term derived out of the word "total".

In 1926, the word "totalism" can also be found in the work of Theodor Geiger, who, in his *Die Masse und Ihre Aktion*, writes of the "totalism of the masses" (*Totalismus der Masse*).<sup>28</sup> In Geiger's analysis, the term is associated – aside from homogeneity and violence – with a revolutionary process marked by a mission to redeem the world (*Welterlösungsmission*).<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Geiger's dialogue with Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy would lead to the phrase "totalistic revolution" (*totalistische Revolution*).<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, one would have to wait for Erikson's work in the 1950s before the concept of totalism would be consistently used in a theoretical framework, even if in a different manner from its beginnings in Europe.<sup>31</sup>

Taken as a whole, a majority of the works on totalitarianism deal mostly with the praxis of totalitarianism, as well as with the structural dimension and organization of such regimes. In comparison, there have been fewer works concentrating on philosophical and especially on psychological theories on totalitarianism. Regarding the latter type, *The Authoritarian Personality*<sup>32</sup> still remains by far the most famous, albeit greatly diminished in the influence it once enjoyed. Two important early critics of the *Authoritarian Personality* were Edward Shils and Hans Eysenck, who wrote that the theory simply associated authoritarianism with conservative political beliefs – and thus had a clear ideological agenda – an argument which was later continued by Milton Rokeach, who sought to uncover a "general" rather than a "political" authoritarianism.<sup>33</sup> Such positions were in turn disputed, also on essentially ideological grounds.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the overall view on *The Authoritarian*

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<sup>27</sup> "Das zentralistisch geordnete Imperium der Vergangenheit verwandelte sich zunächst in eine lose Gruppe von Republiken. Aber der revolutionäre Totalismus Lenins sucht bereits zwischen diesen Republiken und den neuen Volkstaaten, die die Petersburger Regierung in ganz Europa und Asien entstehen sehen möchte, den ideologischen Kitt zu bilden." Alfons Paquet, *Im kommunistischen Rußland. Briefe aus Moskau* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1919) 111.

<sup>28</sup> See Theodor Geiger, *Die Masse und Ihre Aktion: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie der Revolutionen* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1967).

<sup>29</sup> See *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>30</sup> See Hans J. Lietzmann, *Politikwissenschaft im "Zeitalter der Diktaturen": Die Entwicklung der Totalismusstheorie Carl Joachim Friedrichs* (Leske and Budrich: Opladen, 1999) 169.

<sup>31</sup> For instance, one of the very few uses of the term "totalism" before Erikson's contribution is found in a 1949 master thesis on Thomas Hobbes, which, as the title shows, uses the term interchangeably with totalitarianism. See Melville Kirzon, *Elements of totalitarianism in the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes; a study of the rise of totalism as an ideological force* (M.A. Thesis, Washington, 1949).

<sup>32</sup> See Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Norton, 1950).

<sup>33</sup> See William F. Stone, Gerda Lederer, and Richard Christie, "Introduction: Strength and Weakness", in Stone, Lederer and Christie eds., *Strength and Weakness. The Authoritarian Personality Today* (New York: Springer, 1993) 3-21.

<sup>34</sup> Stone himself is sceptical of left-wing authoritarianism, asserting the following: "The existence of regimes that proclaim leftist ideology while engaging in authoritarian governance may indeed by [sic] 'obvious from even the

*Personality* has never regained even part of its early popularity, to the point where some authors see it today as thoroughly discredited.<sup>35</sup>

By contrast, the work of Erik H. Erikson, while less well-known, can ultimately be considered far more useful in its potential, since Erikson never limited himself to a so called authoritarian personality which essentially came to embody right-wing characteristics. Indeed, as Dick Anthony points out, Erikson's concept of totalism "broadens the concept of authoritarianism from Fascist to Communist types of totalitarianism, and to other types of totalitarian influence as well."<sup>36</sup> As already mentioned, Erikson can be considered the first researcher which consistently uses and defines the concept of totalism as a fundamental part of a theoretical framework. He sees totalism primarily – but not solely – as a psychological predisposition for an individual to "convert" to what he calls a "totalitarian ideology"<sup>37</sup>, a predisposition born out of an individual tendency to "split" the world and the inner self into "totally good" or "totally bad" categories.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, whilst recognizing the useful heuristically suggestive nature of the term, some authors have pointed to its somewhat vague usage.<sup>39</sup> In any case, Erikson could also see totalism, in Anthony's description, as denoting "an all-encompassing belief system that conceptualizes the world in terms of a comprehensive set of evaluative polarities, with a central duality such as 'Aryan/non-Aryan' or 'capitalist/communist', which renders subordinate and auxiliary polarities compelling."<sup>40</sup> The use of the concept of totalism would carry over in Lifton's work, which contributed greatly to its later popularization.

Lifton himself, whilst defining "ideological totalism" as the interaction of "immoderate ideology with equally immoderate character traits"<sup>41</sup>, associated the term with mindsets, ideologies and organizations. Most importantly, Lifton writes that some potential form of all-or-nothing emotional alignment exists within everyone, a fact which, he argues, can have an effect on ideologies. The more sweeping in its content and the more ambitious in its claims, the greater the chance for its adherents to carry it in a totalistic direction, whether this takes place in a religion, a political movement, or even in a scientific organization.<sup>42</sup>

Erikson and Lifton's understanding of totalism will be approached in more detail during the following chapter. For now, it is important to note here the following. While taking into account the primary meanings of totalism in Erikson's or Lifton's approach, this book

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most casual observation,' but it is neither obvious nor correct to make the several inferential leaps required to translate this observation into evidence that authoritarian personality traits are as common among leftists as among rightists. The casual claim of authoritarian leftist governments as evidence for the latter claim is a non sequitur that has been committed since the time of Shils. As to why so many competent social scientists have glibly acceded to this reasoning, we will not here offer an explanation, although both the 'centrist bias' (Stone, 1980) and the anticommunism of social scientists seem to play a part." Stone, "Authoritarianism: Left and Right", in Stone, Lederer and Christie eds., *Strength and Weakness*, 155.

<sup>35</sup> Aside from its methodological, procedural, and substantive errors, John Levi Martin argues that *The Authoritarian Personality* should be seen as an example of intrinsic bias arising from the choice of methodological assumptions. See John Levi Martin, "The Authoritarian Personality, 50 Years Later: What Lessons Are There for Political Psychology", *Political Psychology*, 22/1 (2001): 1-26.

<sup>36</sup> Dick Anthony, "Tactical Ambiguity and Brainwashing Formulations: Science or Pseudo Science" in Thomas Robbins, Benjamin David Zablocki eds., *Misunderstanding Cults. Searching for Objectivity in a Controversial Field* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 243.

<sup>37</sup> Erikson, "Wholeness and Totality", 159.

<sup>38</sup> See *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>39</sup> See Dick Anthony, Thomas Robbins and Steven Barrie-Anthony "Cult and Anticult Totalism: Reciprocal Escalation and Violence", in Jeffrey Kaplan ed., *Millennial Violence: Past present and future* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2002) 214.

<sup>40</sup> This division of the world can be understood as a more general manifestation of the concept of splitting. Dick Anthony, *Misunderstanding Cults*, 67.

<sup>41</sup> Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, 419.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

will consistently use the term to point to its value as an all-encompassing system of thought – a perspective which, after all, is also present in the writings of these authors, even if somewhat unevenly and ambiguously at times. Aside from a few authors directly influenced by Erikson and Lifton, the term totalism makes few if any appearances in works which directly deal with totalitarianism. As an example, David D. Roberts mentions totalism several times throughout his work on totalitarianism, but without ever defining the term, or mentioning either Erikson's or Lifton's approach on totalism, despite the fact that he is familiar with Lifton's work on National Socialist doctors.<sup>43</sup>

While taking into account its psychoanalytical dimension (Erikson and Lifton), totalism should not be understood merely as the predisposition of an individual to adhere to the systemic requirements of a totalist ideology, but also as a system of thought which holds totality at its centre and which, conversely, moves away from plurality or even attempts to exclude it completely. The concept of totalism, when treated in the wider scope of totality and totalitarianism, should be seen here as an all-encompassing belief system, marked by a clear division of the world, typically into categories associated with purity and truth. At the same time, this worldview may form the ideological bedrock of a movement whose fundamental goals are the pursuit and implementations of the laws and principles defined by their totalist doctrinal core. Throughout the book, such movements will be called totalist.

Lastly, the differentiation between totalism and totalitarianism can be particularly useful if applied to the ideal development path of such movements. One can ultimately describe this ideal development path of a successful totalist movement in three major steps: 1) Heterodoxy 2) Hegemony 3) Ideocracy. Such a trajectory can be said to represent the fundamentally successful story of any totalistic system, from its emergence as a minor group to a stage when it may successfully conquer political power – either peacefully or through violence – in its host society.

Several important questions remain to be addressed. Why do totalist movements appear to thrive more in certain cultures but less in others – and to what extent can this be determined by cultural factors such as an eschatological mindset or political utopianism, or by neurobiological imperatives? Why and how was the idea of totality, more or less, split from religion and appear in secular manifestations in the European case? What are the hallmarks of a totalist worldview and what part do they play in the process of crossing the totality threshold? What are the main differences separating the renovative, utopian and “hybrid” totalist types? Throughout this book, one will seek to offer at least partial answers to such questions.

## 2.2 The Concept of Totalitarianism

In contrast to the long history of the concept of totality, the term “totalitarian” is a recent development, even as it has generated several schools of thought.<sup>44</sup> It was used for the first time in a theoretical framework by Luigi Sturzo, an Italian priest, sociologist and

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<sup>43</sup> Roberts mostly uses the word totalism in the concluding chapter of his book. See Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe*, 468-482.

<sup>44</sup> See Marc-Pierre Möll, *Gesellschaft und totalitäre Ordnung, eine theoriegeschichtliche Auseinandersetzung mit dem Totalitarismus* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998); Eckhard Jesse ed., *Totalitarismus im 20. Jahrhundert. Eine Bilanz der Internationale Forschung* (Nomos: Baden-Baden, 1999).

politician, as well as a staunch opponent of the Fascist regime.<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that Sturzo's use of the term "totalitarian" seems to have actually been used almost six months before<sup>46</sup> the famous 1923 article written by Giovanni Amendola, which is typically mentioned as having pioneered the term.<sup>47</sup> Amendola himself described the fascist state as a *sistema totalitario* in comparison to the democratic *sistema maggioritario*. Soon enough, the term would move from the negative connotations it possessed in the eyes of the opposition to being used by the Fascists themselves, ultimately spreading beyond Italy's borders.

In the Weimar Republic, the idea of the *total* would leave its mark on the work of various authors throughout the 1920s and 1930s. As already mentioned, Theodor Geiger describes the "totalism" of the masses, whereas Ernst Jünger writes of the "total mobilisation" (*Die totale Mobilmachung*) which is the key in any modern conflict,<sup>48</sup> while, later on, Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy uses the term "total revolution" (*Totalrevolution*).<sup>49</sup> By 1933, marking the collapse of the Weimar Republic, Carl Schmitt would articulate his influential vision of a "total state" (*totaler Staat*),<sup>50</sup> whereas Erich Ludendorff later wrote of the "total war" (*totaler Krieg*).<sup>51</sup>

Alongside the increasing influence of non-democratic social models, the popularisation of totalitarianism theories beyond the European continent can also be linked to the work and activities of émigrés, such as Waldemar Gurian, Voegelin or Arendt. Indeed, totality functioned as an important, even central, feature in the newly established ideocratic regimes in Russia and Italy. Of course, there were differences in the intensity with which each regime pursued totality, as is portrayed, for instance, by Gurian in his writings on the Bolshevik state.

Gurian himself was a seminal figure in approaching totalitarianism in the German space and important early on for the discussion of the term. As Heinz Hürten points out, he played a part in recognizing the parallels between Bolshevism and Fascism, while also helping form a terminology that attempted to capture the nature of these new regimes.<sup>52</sup> For instance, he would write that the Fascist state was considerably less "total" than the Bolshevik one.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Gurian never formulated a concept of totalitarianism in a sense of academic schools, but preferred to offer philosophical interpretations.<sup>54</sup>

It is important to note here that Gurian gradually moved from the concept of totalitarianism to that of political religion, which ultimately suited his own religious worldview and his character. Indeed, the concept of political religion and the religious element predominates in his understanding of the modern autocratic regimes arising in the

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<sup>45</sup> Norbert Kapferer, "Totalitarismus", in Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer eds., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 10 (Basel: Schwabe, 1998) 1297.

<sup>46</sup> See Uwe Backes, „Luigi Sturzo: Begründer und früher Wegbereiter des Totalitarismuskonzepts“, in Frank Schale/Ellen Thümmel eds., *Den totalitären Staat denken* (Reihe Staatsverständnisse, edited by Rüdiger Voigt), (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2015).

<sup>47</sup> See Jens Petersen, "The history of the concept of Totalitarianism in Italy", Hans Maier ed., *Totalitarianism and Political Religions. Volume 1: Concepts for the comparisons of dictatorships* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 6.

<sup>48</sup> See Ernst Jünger, "Die totale Mobilmachung", in Ernst Jünger ed., *Krieg und Krieger*. (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1930) 9-30.

<sup>49</sup> See Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, *Die europäischen Revolutionen und der Charakter der Nationen* (Jena: Eugen-Diederichs-Verlag, 1931).

<sup>50</sup> See Carl Schmitt, *State, Movement, People. The Triadic Structure of the Political Unity*, ed. and trans. Simona Drăghici (Corvallis: Plutarch Press, 2001).

<sup>51</sup> See Erich Ludendorff, *Der totale Krieg* (München: Ludendorff's Verlag, 1935).

<sup>52</sup> See Hein Hürten, "Waldemar Gurian and the development of the concept of totalitarianism", in Hans Maier ed., *Totalitarianism and Political Religions. Volume 1*, 40.

<sup>53</sup> See Waldemar Gurian, *Der Bolschewismus, Einführung in Geschichte und Lehre* (Freiburg: Herder, 1931) VI.

<sup>54</sup> Hürten, "Waldemar Gurian and the development of the concept of totalitarianism", 48.

20<sup>th</sup> century. In one of his later essays, *Totalitarian Religions*, he writes on the absolute, total nature of such regimes:

The totalitarian movements which have arisen since World War I are fundamentally religious movements. They aim not at changes of political and social institutions, but at the reshaping of the nature of man and society. They claim to have the true and obligatory knowledge about life and its aims. They emphasize that they are based on doctrines which describe and determine totally and completely the existence and activities of men and society. (...) The pretense of having the true doctrine gives to the totalitarian movements their basic character. They are intolerant. They aim at the extirpation of all other doctrines and philosophies. They cannot tolerate any limitation of their claims and their power. Totalitarian movements cannot conceive of realms of life outside and beyond their control; they cannot accept the fact that there are other doctrines or institutions with the right to remain independent, having a dignity and a validity of their own. That they do accept for a time, as long as power considerations demand it, the existence of other groups and other doctrines does not mean that they abandon their aim of absolute domination of making all other doctrines disappear.<sup>55</sup>

One may recognize in his description the importance played by a stark division of the world between ideological truth and untruth, as described by other authors, notably Eric Voegelin.<sup>56</sup> Gurian insists that totalitarian movements cannot be interpreted as a distinctive form of authoritarian rule, since “authoritarian regimes do not claim to bring a new faith, an all-embracing doctrine determining the whole of life”.<sup>57</sup> In interacting with Hannah Arendt’s own writings on totalitarianism, Gurian later argued that “the totalitarian masters shape the world according to their doctrine”.<sup>58</sup> Thus, a vicious circle appears, with the doctrine justifying absolute domination of the totalitarian elite and the doctrine itself being proven true by the absolute domination and the replacement of “God’s order” by “a man-made order, the artificial order required by the doctrine and created by the power exercised in its name.”<sup>59</sup> All in all, Gurian can be considered one of the foremost representatives of conservative or religious thinkers, who were among the first to draw attention to the distinct nature of the new regimes, with Voegelin’s writings being among the most ambitious in scope, as it shall be seen later on.

The concept of totalitarianism would thus grow in importance throughout the 1930s, with the first scientific symposium on the totalitarian state – organized by the American Philosophical Society – taking place in November 1939. The war itself could only contribute to an increased interest in the debates surrounding the term, with National Socialism in particular being singled out as its representative, even though an ex-Communist – but still leftist – intellectual like Franz Borkenau could make a point of calling both the Third Reich and the Soviet Union totalitarian.<sup>60</sup>

Yet for others during the war, the focus on National Socialism remained the most prominent, for instance, in the works of leftist writers such as Ernst Fraenkel<sup>61</sup> and Franz Neumann.<sup>62</sup> If both insisted on the relationship between capitalism and National Socialism, it was Neumann’s work which has been described as “the only one of the wartime texts that

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<sup>55</sup> Waldemar Gurian, “Totalitarian Religions”, *The Review of Politics*, 14/1 (1952): 3-4.

<sup>56</sup> This shall be approached in more detail in later sections.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> See Franz Borkenau, *The Totalitarian Enemy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940).

<sup>61</sup> Ernst Fraenkel, *The Dual State. A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship*, trans. E. A. Shils in collaboration with Edith Lowenstein and Klaus Knorr (Clark: The Lawbook Exchange, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> See Franz Neumann, *Behemoth. The Structure and Practice of National Socialism 1933-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009).

attempted systematically to consider several other theoretical approaches to the Nazi order and to provide a corrective to their perceived weaknesses.”<sup>63</sup> Significantly, Neumann’s own approach argued that, like the mythical Behemoth, National Socialism was defined by chaos and lawlessness, rather than by a consistent ideology or coherent structure.<sup>64</sup>

The end of the war, whilst leading to the collapse of Italian Fascism and German National Socialism, ensured the expansion of the Soviet Union and made clear the open competition between its system and that of American dominated Western Europe. Henceforth, the term “totalitarian” would be associated exclusively with negative connotations, gradually linking National Socialism and Soviet Communism in their opposition to the democratic world.<sup>65</sup> It was at this onset of this struggle between the two blocks, that Karl Popper published *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Written during the war, and expanding on themes explored in *The Poverty of Historicism*,<sup>66</sup> the book was an attack on the nature and claims of historicism<sup>67</sup>, portraying key figures of the Western philosophical tradition, such as Plato, Hegel and Marx, as forerunners to modern totalitarianism. For Popper, totalitarianism is merely the latest incarnation of “reactionary movements”, which are trying to overthrow civilization and return it to tribalism.<sup>68</sup> For instance, when writing about Plato, Popper claims that behind his very definition of justice one can discover the demand for a totalitarian class rule<sup>69</sup> and that totalitarianism is also linked to his ethics.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, he sees Hegel as being nothing less than “the father of modern historicism and totalitarianism”<sup>71</sup>, arguing that nearly all important ideas of modern totalitarianism are “directly inherited from Hegel”.<sup>72</sup> By contrast, he repeatedly calls Marx a prophet – albeit a false one – whose vision is weighed down by the most developed and purest form of historicism.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, Popper’s own method in pursuing these claims has been

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<sup>63</sup> William David Jones, *The Lost Debate: German Socialist Intellectuals and Totalitarianism* (Urbana and Chicago: Illinois University Press, 1999) 149.

<sup>64</sup> See Neumann, *Behemoth*, 467-470.

<sup>65</sup> Their relationship to totality was not the only connection between National Socialism and Communism. Indeed, the rival ideologies could sometimes share a number of adherents which moved from one to the other. See Samuel Goodfellow, “From Communism to Nazism: The Transformation of Alsatian Communists”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27/2 (1992): 231-258.

<sup>66</sup> First published as an article in 1944, the paper would later appear in book form a decade later. See Karl R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1957).

<sup>67</sup> “They claim that everybody tries to use his brains to predict impending events; that it is certainly legitimate for a strategist to try to foresee the outcome of a battle; and that the boundaries between such predictions and more sweeping historical prophecies are fluid. (...) They also believe that they have discovered laws of history which enable them to prophesy the course of historical events. The various social philosophies which raise claims of this kind, I have grouped together under the name *historicism*.” Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies, Volume I, The Spell of Plato* (London: Routledge, 1947) 3.

<sup>68</sup> “(...) what we call nowadays totalitarianism belongs to these movements, which are just as old or just as young as our civilization.” Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies, Volume I*, 1. It is noteworthy, that Popper associates this stage with the idea of the *closed society*: “It is one of the characteristic features of the magical attitude of a primitive tribal or ‘closed’ society that it lives in a charmed circle of unchanging taboos, of laws and customs which are felt to be as inevitable as the rising of the sun, or the cycle of the seasons, or similar obvious regularities of nature. And it is only after this magical ‘closed society’ has actually broken down that a theoretical understanding of the difference between ‘nature’ and ‘society’ can develop.” Ibid., 49.

<sup>69</sup> See Ibid., 78.

<sup>70</sup> “But we must also realize that those who, deceived by the identification and by high-sounding words, exalt Plato’s reputation as teacher of morals and announce to the world that his ethics is the nearest approach to Christianity before Christ, are preparing the way for totalitarianism and especially for totalitarian, anti-Christian interpretation of Christianity. And this is dangerous thing, for there have been times when Christianity was dominated by totalitarian ideas.” Ibid., 91.

<sup>71</sup> Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies, Volume II, The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath* (London: Routledge, 1947) 20.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>73</sup> See Ibid., 77-78.

criticized by Walter Kaufmann as being similar to that of the totalitarian schools he so emphatically rejects.<sup>74</sup> Other reservations aside, Kaufmann also points to Popper's narrow vision of totalitarianism when the latter turns Hegel into a "missing link" between Plato and modern totalitarianism, while claiming that most of the modern totalitarians are aware of their debt to Hegel.<sup>75</sup> Thus, although his work has certainly not been without its critics, Popper's attack on historicism and totalitarianism had an enduring legacy, a part of the efforts made by predominantly German émigrés both before and after the war.<sup>76</sup>

Although spanning a wide political spectrum, these scholars were united to an extent by their writings on totalitarianism, a term which they greatly influenced through their research and led to a variety of approaches. Most importantly for the present work however, after an "apogee of acceptance" during the 1940s in the United States, the concept of totalitarianism experienced a renewal which "restored greater significance to one of its central meanings: the Hegelian stress on 'totality'."<sup>77</sup> The work of one such émigré, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* has been often called the classic approach to the concept. Despite ultimately being criticized by many for her interpretation of totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt's book greatly influenced the debate on the concept throughout following decades.

One of the most significant features of Arendt's work is that totalitarianism is seen as a new, distinctly modern phenomenon – rather than with premodern or early modern roots – born of modern crises and catastrophes, its essence found in what she sees as total domination and terror.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, her approach has been criticized for overstating the overall power which the leaders of the totalitarian states were able to acquire in reality and their ability to penetrate and transform the mindset of the populace.<sup>79</sup> Arendt does not understand totalitarianism as replacing a transcendent belief system,<sup>80</sup> concentrating instead on what she sees as the logical system and the "supersense" derived out of its ideology:

While the totalitarian regimes are thus resolutely and cynically emptying the world of the only thing that makes sense to the utilitarian expectations of common sense, they impose upon it at the same time a kind of supersense which the ideologies actually always meant when they pretended to have found the key to history or the solution to the riddles of the universe. Over and above the senselessness of totalitarian society is enthroned the ridiculous supersense of its ideological superstition. Ideologies are harmless, uncritical, and arbitrary opinions only as long as they are not believed in seriously. Once their claim to total validity is taken literally they become the nuclei of logical systems in which, as in the systems of paranoiacs, everything follows comprehensibly and even compulsorily once the first premise is accepted. The insanity of such systems lies not only in their first

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<sup>74</sup> Walter A. Kaufmann, "The Hegel Myth and its Method", in John Steward ed., *Hegel Myths and Legends* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996) 83.

<sup>75</sup> "Seeing that the context indicates a reference to Nazism, and that all the totalitarians cited in this chapter are fascists, not communists, Popper only shows his ignorance of this particular form of totalitarianism. Hegel is rarely cited in Nazi literature and, when he is referred to, it is usually by way of disapproval. Rosenberg, in *Der Mythos des Zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, mentions, and denounces, Hegel twice." Ibid., 86.

<sup>76</sup> On the influence of these intellectuals during the post-war era see Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century. German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, 94.

<sup>78</sup> "Yet as long as totalitarian rule has not conquered the earth and with the iron band of terror made each single man a part of one mankind, terror in its double function as essence of government and principle, not of action, but of motion, cannot be fully realized." Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 467.

<sup>79</sup> For instance, for the sociologist David Riesman, this is an important part his objections to Arendt's exaggerated portrayal of totalitarian omnipotence and its capacity to transform human nature. See Peter Baehr *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism and the Social Sciences* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) 45-53.

<sup>80</sup> Indeed, she never uses terms such as "political religion" or "secular religion" throughout her work. See Brigitte Gess, "The conceptions of totalitarianism of Raymond Aron and Hannah Arendt", in Maier ed., *Totalitarianism and Political Religions. Volume I*, 219.

premise but in the very logicity with which they are constructed. The curious logicity of all isms, their simple-minded trust in the salvation value of stubborn devotion without regard for specific, varying factors, already harbours the first germs of totalitarian contempt for reality and factuality.<sup>81</sup>

More recently, Arendt's interpretation of totalitarianism and the relationship between ideology and the one-party state has been criticized by Emilio Gentile as not corresponding to historical reality. Moreover, Gentile rightly points out that despite the instrumental nature of ideas in totalitarian regimes, ideology itself had a central role in Fascism, National Socialism and Communism and, especially in the former two, domestic and foreign policy consistently reflected their ideological tenets.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, as Peter Baehr has shown, Arendt's approach avoids taking into account how religious features or expressions could "permeate totalitarian discourse" and the way in which they were recognized as such by their contemporaries.<sup>83</sup> Arendt's view is thus in stark opposition to authors such as Eric Voegelin, Raymond Aron, Jacob Talmon or Jules Monnerot, who repeatedly pointed to what they saw as the (quasi)religious features influencing or linked to the various aspects of modern ideocratic regimes.<sup>84</sup> Despite their limits, such perspectives were important in their interpretation and analysis of totalitarianism and its legitimization strategies, as argued by the authors depicted in the next section.

Yet another émigré would be Karl Wittfogel, a former Marxist turned anti-Communist, and author of the erudite, albeit controversial *Oriental Despotism*. By using the Marxian writings on the "Asiatic mode of production", Wittfogel likens Communist rule to the great, premodern, slave-owning "hydraulic empires" – where the regulation of water was the paramount activity for the survival and prosperity of the polity in question.<sup>85</sup> For Wittfogel, the hydraulic society – and implicitly, total power – is found in "a state stronger than society", which has a debilitating effect on possible nongovernmental forces.<sup>86</sup>

This is enabled, Wittfogel argues, by the interaction between the military faction, the bureaucracy, and the religion of the hydraulic empire.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, Wittfogel's thesis is certainly open to criticism, whether in its treatment of China<sup>88</sup> or in its ideological eagerness to name Communist totalitarianism a more despotic variant of premodern hydraulic

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<sup>81</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 457-458.

<sup>82</sup> See Emilio Gentile, "Total and Totalitarian Ideologies", in Michael Freeden, Lyman Tower Sargent, Marc Stears eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 69-70.

<sup>83</sup> Peter Baehr, *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism and the Social Sciences*, 112. Furthermore, this ultimately fit with her claim that totalitarianism was the product of a complete break with the past and foreign from Western tradition. See *Ibid.*, 117-118.

<sup>84</sup> While Aron's own objections were ignored, she did briefly interact with Monnerot on the theory of secular religion. See *Ibid.*, 93-123. She also sparred more extensively – but always respectfully – over a series of letters with Voegelin.

<sup>85</sup> "A large quantity of water can be channelled and kept within bounds only by the use of mass labor; and this mass labor must be coordinated, disciplined, and led." Karl August Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism. A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967) 18.

<sup>86</sup> "The hydraulic state is a genuinely managerial state. This fact has far-reaching societal implications. As manager of hydraulic and other mammoth constructions, the hydraulic state prevents the nongovernmental forces of society from crystallizing into independent bodies strong enough to counterbalance and control the political machine." *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>87</sup> "Different from the society of feudal Europe, in which the majority of all military leaders (the feudal barons) were but loosely and conditionally linked to their sovereigns, and in which the dominant religion was independent of the secular government, the army of hydraulic society was an integral part of the agromanagement bureaucracy, and the dominant religion was closely attached to the state. It was this formidable concentration of vital functions which gave the hydraulic government its genuinely despotic (total) power." *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>88</sup> See Wolfram Eberhard, *Conquerors and Rulers. Social Forces in Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 1970) 53-88.

societies.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, one element found in Wittfogel's analysis remains particularly relevant to the work at hand, that is, the idea of total power in a premodern context. It is thus that one must turn to what is often called the standard text on totalitarianism, namely, Carl J. Friedrich's and Zbigniew Brzezinski's *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*.

## 2.3 Carl J. Friedrich: "Total", "Totalist", "Totalitarian"

Friedrich's work follows an approach which seeks to compare the structural similarities between the regimes in Italy, Germany and Russia in an ostensibly neutral, value-free way. In contrast to Arendt, this approach argues for an origin of totalitarianism steeped in Western tradition, with totalitarianism being "rooted in the totality of Western ideas"<sup>90</sup> albeit distorting it.<sup>91</sup> Most importantly, the second edition of the book takes into account the importance of the term "totalism", even if does so in a very brief manner. Firstly, the text points out that a tendency towards totality has long been part of human culture, since "such ideologically motivated concern for the whole of man, such intent upon total control, has been characteristic of other regimes in the past, notably theocratic ones such as the Puritans' or the Moslems'."<sup>92</sup>

However, Friedrich argues that the innovation of totalitarian regimes lies in its means, which are modern<sup>93</sup> rather than its overall aims, which are far older. In his own words, a totalitarian dictatorship is "a system of autocratic rule for realizing totalist intentions under modern technical and political conditions".<sup>94</sup> Thus, Friedrich rebuffs any attempt to call totalitarian the works of individuals who stress the importance of total control, as well as historical examples of autocracies and societies which had pursued the same principle of total control or total power before the modern era.<sup>95</sup> After mentioning several examples which he does not consider totalitarian, such as Plato, Sparta, "the medieval monastery" or "much 'primitive' government", Friedrich concludes:

What is really the specific difference, the innovation of the totalitarian regimes, is the organization and methods developed and employed with the aid of modern technical devices in an

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<sup>89</sup> See for instance, Eisenstadt's persistent criticism of Wittfogel's "monolithic" interpretation of Oriental societies: S. N. Eisenstadt, "The Study of Oriental Despotisms as Systems of Total Power", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 17 (1958): 435-46.

<sup>90</sup> Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969) 105.

<sup>91</sup> "(...) the roots of totalitarian ideologies, both communist and fascist, are actually intertwined with the entire intellectual heritage of Western man and that all specific links should be seen, not in terms of causation – of this or that thinker or group of thinkers being "responsible for" the totalitarian ideologies – but as strands of a complex and variegated tapestry. However, the specific totalitarian ingredient – the employment, even glorification, of violence for the realization of the goals that the ideology posits is largely absent from the thought of those whose ideas these ideologies have utilized and, in utilizing them, distorted." *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>93</sup> Moreover, Friedrich sees totalitarian dictatorships as born only "in the context of mass democracy and modern technology." *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>94</sup> Carl J. Friedrich, "The Evolving Theory and Practice of Totalitarian Regimes" in Carl J. Friedrich, Michael Curtis, and Benjamin R. Barber eds., *Totalitarianism in Perspective. Three Views* (New York: Praeger, 1969) 136.

<sup>95</sup> See *Ibid.*, 16-17.

effort to resuscitate such total control in the service of an ideologically motivated movement, dedicated to the total destruction and reconstruction of a mass society. It seems therefore highly desirable to use the term “totalism” to distinguish the much more general phenomenon just sketched, as has recently been proposed by a careful analyst of the methods of Chinese thought control.<sup>96</sup>

Despite coming to such conclusions, Friedrich ultimately remains uninterested in the origins of totalitarian systems, focussing on the forms and structures of the regimes themselves. This is distinguishable in the famous checklist which attempts to identify the fundamental features common to totalitarian regimes, putting forth the argument that totalitarian dictatorships are “basically alike” (which also means they are not “*wholly alike*”).<sup>97</sup> The six interrelated traits of this approach are “an ideology, a single party typically led by one man, a terroristic police, a communications monopoly, a weapons monopoly, and a centrally directed economy.”<sup>98</sup> Whilst this approach has been criticized from a variety of quarters, it is the first feature that is of special interest for this work.<sup>99</sup> The “ideology” feature is detailed as follows:

An elaborate ideology, consisting of an official body of doctrine covering all vital aspects of man’s existence to which everyone living in that society is supposed to adhere, at least passively; this ideology is characteristically focused and projected toward a perfect final state of mankind – that is to say, it contains a chiliastic claim, based upon a radical rejection of the existing society with conquest of the world for the new one.<sup>100</sup>

In spite of some severe – at times politicized – criticism and debates regarding his list of features and analysis (which he modified over time)<sup>101</sup>, Friedrich consistently focuses on the “totalist” character of ideologies associated with totalitarianism. He does this even more clearly in another work, where he presents a modified version of the totalitarian checklist, with the first feature now being “a totalist” ideology.<sup>102</sup> It is essential in this respect that Friedrich draws attention to the totalistic nature of the ideology, along with his differentiation between totalism and totalitarianism on historical grounds.

In any case, it is primarily this differentiation between what Friedrich understands as (essentially premodern) “totalism” and modern totalitarianism, which allows him to call the latter “a system of rule for realizing totalist intentions under modern political and technical conditions, as a novel type of autocracy.”<sup>103</sup> As Hans J. Lietzmann shows, these “totalist intentions”, aided by modern technology and the specificities of a modern, industrialised

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 17. Robert J. Lifton is the analyst of thought control methods mentioned here.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>99</sup> It is important to note that Brzezinski did not collaborate with Friedrich on the second edition and ultimately moved away from the concept of totalitarianism, despite continuing to defend it throughout the 1950’s and 1960s. See Jones, *The Lost Debate*, note 6, 224.

<sup>100</sup> Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 22.

<sup>101</sup> For an extended discussion of Friedrich’s approach, including its strengths and weaknesses see Lietzmann, *Politikwissenschaft im "Zeitalter der Diktaturen"*. Also see Achim Siegel, “Carl Joachim Friedrich’s Concept of Totalitarian Dictatorship: A Reinterpretation, in Achim Siegel ed., *The Totalitarian Paradigm After the End of Communism. Toward a Theoretical Reassessment* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998) 273-302. Siegel argues that Friedrich’s approach can stand up to the severe criticism it has been subjected since the 1960s. However, this would be possible only if Friedrich’s concept is interpreted as “a functionalistic approach that idealizes the phenomenon of totalitarianism in varying degrees of abstraction”. Ibid., 297.

<sup>102</sup> See Friedrich, “The Evolving Theory and Practice of Totalitarian Regimes”, 126.

<sup>103</sup> Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 17. This phrase has occasionally been misquoted as “a system of rules” instead of the original “a system of rule”. For instance, see Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, note 33, 248.

society, are at the core of Friedrich's understanding of the totalitarian enterprise, and the direct road to the praxis of totalitarianism.<sup>104</sup>

One could attempt to dispute this in the same manner as Simon Tormey, who has also focussed on the importance of a "totalist" ideology for Friedrich's overall argument. First of all, Tormey rightly interprets Friedrich's analysis as giving pride of place to the "totalist ideology", since many of the traits otherwise associated with totalitarianism can be found in other systems.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, he has (altogether understandable) doubts on the applicability of the "totalitarian ideology" as revolutionary, although the arguments he uses in support of his position are perhaps less than convincing. For instance, he points out that National Socialism, albeit revolutionary in its heterodox stage, actually suppressed its revolutionary "socialist" wing, and that Hitler himself focussed on achieving and maintaining his dominance, while, Tormey argues, relinquishing the more revolutionary elements of his own ideology.<sup>106</sup>

The questionable nature<sup>107</sup> of this last claim aside, Tormey is prepared to consider the "ideology" American Revolution as "totalising"<sup>108</sup>, whilst – somewhat perplexingly – denying this quality to the National Socialist state, since, in his view, Hitler's vision of an orderly, racially purified Germany did not ultimately lead to a total reconstruction of society.<sup>109</sup> Yet, Tormey seems to neglect the fact that, even as newly hegemonic movements in Italy and Germany were, at times, forced to compromise for pragmatic reasons, the ideologies of the regimes in question remained totalistic in essence.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See Lietzmann, *Politikwissenschaft im „Zeitalter der Diktaturen“*, 157.

<sup>105</sup> "Only the 'totalist ideology' seems to be missing from other systems that might be regarded as near relatives of totalitarian states. The most important characteristic of totalitarian regimes is that they are uncompromisingly radical. For the totalitarian elite the ideology is not just a mere device to secure compliance or to cement together the members of the ruling class. The ideology forms the very *raison d'être* of the system. It explains why these people are in power and what they are in power to achieve. It explains why there are concentration camps, Gulags and executions, why the regime wants a monopoly over every aspect of social, political and economic life, and why it seeks to expand indefinitely. It is therefore the totalist ideology that is the key feature of totalitarian systems." Simon Tormey, *Making Sense of Tyranny: Interpretations of Totalitarianism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 82-83.

<sup>106</sup> See Tormey, *Making Sense of Tyranny*, 91-92.

<sup>107</sup> Despite his flexibility in pursuit of power and ability for such tactical political coups as the Night of the Long Knives, Hitler nonetheless stayed true to his main views throughout his adult life. On this, Ian Kershaw writes: "It would be a serious error to underestimate the ideological driving-force of Hitler's few central ideas. He was no mere propagandist or 'unprincipled opportunist'. He was indeed both a masterly propagandist and an ideologue. There was no contradiction between the two. (...) Hitler himself was flexible, even indifferent, towards ideological issues which could obsess his followers. Opponents at the time, and many later commentators, frequently underestimated the dynamism of Nazi ideology because of its diffuseness, and because of the cynicism of Nazi propaganda. Ideology was often regarded as no more than a cloak for power-ambitions and tyranny. This was to misinterpret the driving-force of Hitler's own basic ideas, few and crude as they were. And it is to misunderstand the ways those basic ideas came to function within the Nazi Party then, after 1933, within the Nazi state. What mattered for Hitler was indeed the road to power. He was prepared to sacrifice most principles for that. But some – and those were for him the ones that counted – were not only unchangeable. They formed the essence of what he understood by power itself. Opportunism was always itself ultimately shaped by the core ideas that determined his notion of power." Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936 Hubris* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1999) 252-253.

<sup>108</sup> He identifies the following problem: "The American revolutionaries were quite self-conscious in their desire to sweep away what they regarded as the old and the moribund and to institute entirely new practices for what they considered to be a New Age. It is not too difficult to argue, in the terms offered by Friedrich and Brzezinski, that this new ideology was 'totalising'; but do we want to say that because it was totalising it was at the same totalitarian? Were these the first tentative steps on the road to the Gulag?" Tormey, *Making Sense of Tyranny*, 85.

<sup>109</sup> See Tormey, *Making Sense of Tyranny*, 92.

<sup>110</sup> Such compromises include, for instance, the frozen conflict of the National Socialists with the Christian churches, or the admittedly rocky *modus vivendi* of the Italian Fascists with the Catholic Church. Friedrich himself writes on the subject as follows: "The tendency of isolated fragments of the preceding state of society to

Nevertheless, Tormey rightly shows that the subtext of Friedrich's analysis means attacking revolutionary theories in general.<sup>111</sup> This is a conclusion he shares with Lietzmann, as seen in his analysis of Friedrich's "destruction-reconstruction-syndrome".<sup>112</sup> Friedrich understands totalitarian dictatorships as radical, revolutionary movements, which are marked by "the declared intention to create a 'new man'".<sup>113</sup> In a chapter titled *The Nature of Total Ideology* he argues that the "totalitarian ideology" is "concerned with total destruction and total reconstruction, involving typically an ideological acceptance of violence as the only practicable means for such total deconstruction."<sup>114</sup>

The problem that arises is that throughout his book Friedrich uses the terms "totalist", "total" and "totalitarian" (but apparently not "totalism") to refer to the same tendency towards revolutionary destruction and reconstruction. Thus, it is natural that he should criticize what he sees as the "chiliastic" nature of such ideologies, warning of their inherent danger to pluralist, democratic systems. At the same time, Friedrich's automatic association of totalist ideologies with the practices of totalitarianism itself – seen as an essentially revolutionary process necessarily implying total destruction and reconstruction – can be considered problematic, at least to an extent. As Tormey points out, what Friedrich – erroneously – insists on "is that since any call for the radical transformation of social institutions and structures is 'totalist', it must at the same time be totalitarian."<sup>115</sup>

This is made clear especially if one accepts to move beyond Friedrich's understanding of totalism, this step being made all the more necessary by the comparably more sophisticated analyses and, for good or ill, the empirical evidence employed in Erikson's and Lifton's works. Even so, this work will attempt to use the "totalism" of the latter two in a manner which will bring it closer to the focus and goals of the former. It is important to note that Friedrich's understanding of totalism, like his entire theory on totalitarianism, was decisively shaped by the sociological debates on revolutions during the 1920s.<sup>116</sup> While both Erikson's and Lifton's works were known to him, even if this did not alter his basic conviction about the novelty of totalitarianism as a form of autocracy<sup>117</sup> and, it is likely, his older understanding of the concept of totalism.

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survive has been a significant sources of misinterpretation of the fascist totalitarian society, especially in the case of Italy." Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 21.

<sup>111</sup> See Tormey, *Making Sense of Tyranny*, 83.

<sup>112</sup> See Lietzmann, *Politikwissenschaft im „Zeitalter der Diktaturen“*, 163-172.

<sup>113</sup> Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 17. Friedrich's argument on the revolutionary new man, which must serve as a renewer of mankind is similar to those found in the works of Friedrich Feder and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. See Lietzmann, *Politikwissenschaft im „Zeitalter der Diktaturen“* 168-169.

<sup>114</sup> Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 88. Interestingly, the use of political violence was consistently traced back to Machiavelli by a number of revolutionaries, particularly in the Russian case. As E.A. Rees points out: "A peculiar sub-theme that emerges is the affinity between Machiavellism and Jesuitical practices, and the close interest shown by Russian socialists in Campanella's ideas. (...) The rise of revolutionary Machiavellism also reflected the central dilemma of change in Russia in the nineteenth century; the apparent impossibility of effecting peaceful change; the intransigence of the authorities and the propertied classes; the isolation of the revolutionaries themselves and the difficult task of rousing the masses. But revolutionary Machiavellism was not simply a political manual of how to win and hold power, it was also infused with a quasireligious socialist vision of the transformation of mankind." E.A. Rees, *Political Thought from Machiavelli to Stalin. Revolutionary Machiavellism* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 92.

<sup>115</sup> Tormey, *Making Sense of Tyranny*, 96.

<sup>116</sup> Lietzmann argues that Geiger's "totalism" is part of Friedrich's analysis and conceptualisation, which also makes use Rosenstock-Huessy's "*Totalrevolution*" and Alfred Vierkandt's theory on revolution, which led to his focus on destruction and reconstruction. See *Politikwissenschaft im „Zeitalter der Diktaturen“*, 298. Curiously, Lietzmann does not mention Erikson or Lifton throughout his book.

<sup>117</sup> After all, Erikson's "Wholeness and Totality" was presented in 1953, at a conference on totalitarianism where Friedrich participated, as well as being published later, with Friedrich as editor. As already shown previously,

As it shall be shown throughout the book, immanentizing eschatological thought and the evolution of political utopianism proved decisive in influencing or shaping various aspects of modernity, including the totalist groups which flourished alongside it. Despite this, totalitarianism is not always focussed on a utopian, revolutionary political vision, with the opposite being the case at times.<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, it need not automatically lead to political activism or militancy for that matter, with totalitarianism also being possible in a quietist context. After all, the ideal of totality can easily be focussed on a transcendent context which promotes complete withdrawal from the world of men, rather than its active reshaping and domination. Thus, despite the possibility of the contrary, totalist ideologies need not *necessarily* translate into totalitarian practices. Having said this, the totalistic tendency to eschew plurality in favour of totality, as well as rejecting competing interpretations of its ideological truth implies, in turn, its own risks, long before the chances that a totalitarian phase might actually manifest on a state level.

Moreover, totalitarianism is mostly encountered in charismatic heterodoxies, rather than fully fledged polities. The reason for this is based on the sheer difficulties facing totalist, charismatic heterodoxies in most societies, ranging from political suppression to financial hardship, or cultural enmity. Thus, many such groups cannot successfully pursue political hegemony, whereas the quietist variants do not pursue it at all, at least temporarily. Finally, it is typically the evolution of the former into a hegemonic mass movement able to organize the latter into an ideocratic system that makes the existence of totalitarianism on a state level possible to begin with.<sup>119</sup>

This ideal development path, ranging from heterodoxy, to hegemony, and finally to ideocracy, shall be approached in more detail in its corresponding section. This will include a proposed interpretation of totalitarianism as a dynamic *process*, a possible phase in the evolution of an ideocratic polity, rather than a static system of government. The benefits of this approach – or what this work sees as an improved applicability and flexibility, whilst complementing other theories – will be discussed in the same section.

Lastly, while Friedrich never truly explains his view on the origins of totalitarianism, he is equally silent on the origins of “totalist intentions” or on the concept of totalitarianism on the whole for that matter. The question remains not only on the origins of these totalist intentions, but also on their structure and dynamics, even if one accepts Friedrich’s somewhat easy use of the words “utopian” and “chiliasm” in connection with such features.<sup>120</sup> Friedrich’s use of religious terminology points to a specific tendency encountered throughout the literature on totalitarianism. Even if only a few authors placed religious concepts at the very centre of their

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Friedrich refers to Lifton’s work when he proposes to use totalitarianism to differentiate between premodern authoritarian examples and modern, revolutionary autocracies.

<sup>118</sup> A totalist ideology may easily focus primarily on the renovation of what is seen as a Golden Age or a longed-for perfect community. Even as the political impact itself manifests in the future of the totalist movement, the movement’s ultimate aims – and often even the means used – are centred on a conscious imitation (and interpretation) of the past, being measured accordingly. This type shall be called “renovative”.

<sup>119</sup> Barring the imposition of the ideology by an outside force, for instance as exemplified by the Soviet Union’s policy along its periphery and its extensive support for potential ideologically friendly allies around the globe.

<sup>120</sup> “(...) totalitarian ideology consists of an official doctrine that radically rejects the existing society in terms of a chiliastic proposal for a new one. It contains strongly utopian elements, some kind of notion of a paradise on earth. This utopian and chiliastic outlook of totalitarian ideologies gives them a pseudo-religious quality. In fact, they often elicit their less critical followers a depth of conviction and a fervor of devotion usually found only among persons inspired by a transcendent faith. (...) In place of the more or less sane platforms of regular political parties, critical of the existing state of affairs in a limited way, totalitarian ideologies are perversion of such programs. They substitute faith for reason, magic exhortation for knowledge and criticism. And yet it must be recognized that there are enough of these same elements in the operations of democratic parties to attest to the relation between them and their perverted descendants, the totalitarian movements.” Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 25-26.

work, the use of such powerful imagery to explain the nature of Bolshevism, Fascism, or National Socialism makes an important appearance in many other approaches to the subject, as the next section shows.

## 2.4 Totality and the Impact of Religious Terminology

Before dealing with the interaction between religious terminology and totalitarianism, it is important to emphasize, if only briefly, the importance and impact which the Christian substratum ultimately had on the political developments in Europe. Indeed, religious or otherwise hybrid terms have been consistently used in order to describe a wide variety of ideologies and movements, as well as their nature and role, both in premodern or modern contexts.<sup>121</sup>

Thus, when it comes to many authors of the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, one should also look to the research tradition they inherited, which operated with concepts still influenced on a core level by the powerful Christian substratum. To this, one must add the part played by concepts which had been steeped in religious meaning and used in religious contexts, but which were steadily removed from their origins and increasingly depicted in secular contexts. Originally religious terms, such as “enthusiasm”<sup>122</sup> or “fanaticism”<sup>123</sup> – which were often intertwined – may be considered pertinent examples in this regard.

Historically, the Latin terms *fanaticus* (holy fervour, religious enthusiasm) and *fanum* (holy place, temple) were attached a pejorative meaning when describing foreign cults during Roman times, while attaining a fully negative meaning during the Christian era. For Christian authors, the *fanatici* were either pagan priests or worshippers of pagan gods, a meaning which only changed during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, given new impetus by the Reform and the rise of new religious heterodoxies.<sup>124</sup> Throughout 18<sup>th</sup> century France, fanaticism was associated with obscurantism and blind faith, yet Rousseau could find positive features in the term, since, in his view, fanaticism could mean a powerful passion, which, if properly channelled, could help man forget egoism and benefit the individual and society, whereas atheism would mean a reduction to private interests.<sup>125</sup>

In a momentous twist, the French Revolution could be seen as leading to the destruction of fanaticism, with the Jacobins showing distrust towards “the fanaticism of immoral men”<sup>126</sup> and being, themselves, remembered as fanatics by later generations. Thus, throughout the following centuries, the concept underwent a transformation, departing from

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<sup>121</sup> For a more recent approach in this style see Peter Bernholz, “Ideocracy and Totalitarianism: A Formal Analysis Incorporating Ideology”, *Public Choice*, 108/2 (2001): 33-75. In this often fascinating article, Bernholz ultimately ties the success of a totalitarian regime to the presence of “believers” and makes references to structures such as the Church and Inquisition when he is dealing with totalitarianism.

<sup>122</sup> On the possible implications of the term “enthusiasm” see Michael Heyd, “The Reaction to Enthusiasm in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. From Antistructure to Structure”, *Religion*, 15/3 (1985): 279-289.

<sup>123</sup> See for instance Dominique Colas, *Civil Society and Fanaticism. Conjoined Histories*, trans. Amy Jacobs (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism. On the Uses of an Idea* (London and New York: Verso, 2010).

<sup>124</sup> See Robert Spaemann “Fanatisch, Fanatismus”, in Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer eds., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Volume 2 (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1972) 904-905.

<sup>125</sup> J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile* (Paris, 1951) 386, cf. *Ibid.*, 906.

<sup>126</sup> Marc Bouloiseau, *The Jacobin Republic 1792-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 92.

its original religious roots. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, it would no longer represent a certain view in conviction in particular, but rather a state of mind and the manner in which one's convictions were represented.<sup>127</sup> Finally, perhaps the most dramatic change can be found in the positive understanding of the term during the National Socialist regime, when it was associated with tenaciousness, courage and total dedication.<sup>128</sup>

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, a number of authors – such as Adolf Keller<sup>129</sup>, Nikolai Berdyaev<sup>130</sup>, Waldemar Gurian, Eric Voegelin or Emilio Gentile<sup>131</sup> to name but a few<sup>132</sup> – have stressed what they understood as the religious features and motifs present in totalitarianism, although they did not always focus on the conceptual usefulness of such an approach. Writing in the mid-1920s, with both the Russian and Italian regimes consolidated, Carl Christian Bry could see Communism and Fascism as two “disguised religions” (*verkappte Religionen*) which spring from the same roots, even as they are inimical towards one another.<sup>133</sup> Before moving on, it is noteworthy that a number of authors from different backgrounds and research traditions also moved beyond or away from Christianity when associating religious features and totality with modern ideocratic regimes. Their solution was to ultimately point to its great Abrahamic rival, Islam.

Thus, authors such Bertrand Russel could write in 1920 that Bolshevism shared the traits of the French Revolution with those of early Islam.<sup>134</sup> The Marxian portrayal of Communism as a historical inevitability – while fitting with the “Oriental traits in the Russian character” – is seen by Russel to produce „a state of mind not unlike that of the early successors of Mahomet.”<sup>135</sup> In a similar tone, Raymond Aron argues that Communism “is likened to a religion of salvation and compared with Islam, whose armies laid the infidel low and whose ideas conquered men’s souls.”<sup>136</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Spaemann, “Fanatisch, Fanatismus”: in Ritter and Gründer, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1972) 906.

<sup>128</sup> See Cornelia Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des National-Sozialismus* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000) 226-229.

<sup>129</sup> See Adolf Keller, *Religion and revolution: problems of contemporary Christianity on the European scene* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1934).

<sup>130</sup> As a Christian existentialist, Berdyaev could easily interpret the Russian revolution and the implementation of the Communist ideocracy through religious imagery and religious analogies. See Nikolai Berdyaev, *Wahrheit und Lüge des Kommunismus* (Holle: Darmstadt, 1953).

<sup>131</sup> Together with “political religion”, Gentile makes use of “sacralization of politics” to explain the totalistic tendencies and transformations which engulfed Italian society after the Great War: “The war itself, which was lived as a ‘great regenerating experience’, contributed to the ‘sacralization of politics’. With the myths, rituals and symbols which were born in the trenches, it provided a greater amount of material for the construction of a national religion. The symbolism of death and resurrection, the commitment to the nation, the mysticism of blood and sacrifice, the cult of heroes and martyrs, the ‘communion’ of camaraderie - all contributed to the spreading of the myth amongst soldiers that politics was a total experience which had to renew all forms of existence. Politics could not return to the banal forms of everyday life, but had to perpetuate the heroic impetuosity of the war and the mystical sense of a national community.” Emilio Gentile, “Fascism as a Political Religion”; *Journal of Contemporary History*, 25/2-3 (1990): 233.

<sup>132</sup> For a more detailed overview on political religion see Maier ed., *Totalitarianism and Political Religions. Volume I*; Hans Maier and Michael Schäffer eds., *Totalitarianism and Political Religions. Volume II: Concepts for the comparisons of dictatorships*, trans. Jodi Bruhn (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); Maier ed., *Totalitarianism and Political Religions. Volume III*.

<sup>133</sup> Carl Christian Bry, *Verkappte Religionen* (Gotha: Leopold Klotz, 1925) 15.

<sup>134</sup> See Bertrand Russel, *The Theory and Practice of Bolshevism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1921) 5.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. Russel continues his argument: “Opposition is crushed without mercy (...) Since all the evils are due to private property, the evils of the Bolshevik régime while it has to fight private property will automatically cease as soon as it has succeeded. These views are the familiar consequences of fanatical belief.” *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>136</sup> Raymond Aron, “The Expansion of Stalinism”, in Yair Reiner ed., *The Dawn of Universal History: Selected Essays from a Witness to the Twentieth Century*, trans. Barbara Bray, (New York: Basic Books, 2002) 225, cf. Baehr, Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism and the Social Sciences*, 98.

Furthermore, in discussing Calvin's *Institutes*, Voegelin associates the term "Koran" with a type of literature which "would serve the double purpose of a guide to the right reading of Scripture and of an authentic formulation of truth that would make recourse to earlier literature unnecessary."<sup>137</sup> According to Voegelin, Calvin's work is "the first deliberately created Gnostic Koran."<sup>138</sup> At the same time, Voegelin sees a prehistory of the genus, categorizing several premodern and modern works accordingly, which includes calling Marxian works the "Koran of the faithful", in turn augmented by the patristic literature of Leninism-Stalinism.<sup>139</sup> Finally, in his *Sociology and Psychology of Communism*, Jules Monnerot identifies Communism as nothing less than the "twentieth-century Islam".<sup>140</sup> Thus, Monnerot sees Communist Russia as an "Islam" on the march, a secular religion and universal state defined by total will to power, temporary borders and the boundless ambition to establish its dominance over rival systems.<sup>141</sup>

Similarly to the Communist or Fascist cases, National Socialism would also come to be associated with religious or pseudoreligious features, as Uriel Tal has shown.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, such interpretations were already present during the early years of the National Socialist movement. Thus, several authors pointed to what they saw as its mystique, messianism and fanatical faith, as done by the Franciscan Eberhard Schlund in his aptly titled *Neugermanisches Heidentum in heutigen Deutschland*. In a manner not dissimilar to Voegelin, Schlund sees National Socialism as the fulfilment of a long running process which goes back far into the history of European Christendom. However, rather than seeing its origins in ancient inner-worldly political religions or Gnosticism, the Franciscan philosopher insists on an old struggle between the followers of Christ and the followers of Wotan – a struggle which he sees poised to move into the open once again.<sup>143</sup>

In a similar manner, the Protestant pastor Richard Karwehl uses the concept of "political messianism" (*Politisches Messiasium*) to describe the National Socialist movement.<sup>144</sup> Arguing that National Socialism is "a secularized eschatology",<sup>145</sup> Karwehl believes that "Jewish messianism is replaced and surpassed by Germanic messianism."<sup>146</sup> Considering his background and overall approach, it is only natural that Karwehl intensifies his use of religious terminology, associating original sin with the „sin against blood”

<sup>137</sup> Eric Voegelin, "The New Science of Politics", in Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 200-201.

<sup>138</sup> The idea of truth is essential in this description: "A man who can write such a Koran, a man who can break with the intellectual tradition of mankind because he lives in the faith that a new truth and a new world begin with him, must be in a peculiar pneumopathological state." Ibid., 201.

<sup>139</sup> "In the early phases of Western gnostic sectarianism, the place of a Koran was taken by the works of Scotus Eriugena and Dionysius Areopagita; and in the Joachitic movement the works of Joachim of Fire played this role under the title of *Evangelium aeternum*. In later Western history, in the period of secularization, new Korans were produced with every wave of the movement. In the eighteenth century, Diderot and D'Alembert claimed koranic function for the *Encyclopédie française* as the comprehensive presentation of all human knowledge worth preserving. (...) In the nineteenth century, Auguste Comte created his own work as the Koran for the positivistic future of mankind but generously supplemented it by his list of the one hundred great books – an idea that still has retained its appeal. In the Communist movement, finally, the works of Karl Marx have become the Koran of the faithful, supplemented by the patristic literature of Leninism-Stalinism." Ibid., 201-202.

<sup>140</sup> This is how Monnerot titles his first chapter. Moreover, he asserts that "Russia is to communism what the Abbasid Empire was to Islam. This is only an analogy, but a necessary one." See Jules Monnerot, *Sociology and psychology of Communism*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953) 20.

<sup>141</sup> See Monnerot, *Sociology and psychology of Communism*, 18-22.

<sup>142</sup> See Uriel Tal, *Religion, Politics and Ideology in The Third Reich. Selected Essays. In Memoriam by Saul Friedländer* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) reference 1, 36-37.

<sup>143</sup> P. Erhard Schlund, *Neugermanisches Heidentum im heutigen Deutschland* (München: Dr. Franz A. Pfeiffer, 1924) 8-9.

<sup>144</sup> See Richard Karwehl, "Politisches Messiasium. Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Nationalsozialismus", *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 9 (1931): 519-543.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 539.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 540

(*Blutschande*), whereas the exile from Paradise means the corruption and the diminishment of the race through this violation of the blood.<sup>147</sup> Finally, the program of the party is „immutable and infallible like the dogma of the Church”, with the Kingdom of God (das Reich Gottes) being replaced by the Third Reich.<sup>148</sup> Neumann’s *Behemoth*, a work profoundly marked by his Marxist worldview, and primarily focussed on the structural aspect of National Socialist rule, argues that it is magic<sup>149</sup> itself which becomes the major concern of National Socialist culture.<sup>150</sup>

Romano Guardini’s work, *Der Heilbringer* (1946) deals with what he identified as the religious dimension of fundamental terms for National Socialism, such as blood, soil and race.<sup>151</sup> Such perspectives can be encountered in a number of other writings on National Socialism, which focus on its supposed adoption or distortion of a Christian heritage and the importance of belief, as found, for instance, in the work of Victor Klemperer.<sup>152</sup> In a similar vein, Klaus Vondung has argued that National Socialism possessed rites which could be described as religious in nature, thus manifesting as a political religion.<sup>153</sup> In his works, Vondung points to the way in which, in his view, National Socialism attempted to alter and manipulate social reality through “magic”.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch has argued that the National Socialist worldview could not have been possible without the German Christian cultural tradition.<sup>155</sup> Finally, while acknowledging the limitations of the term political religion for the National Socialist case, Richard Steigmann-Gall writes that the movement can be seen as a form of “religious politics”.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>147</sup> See Karwehl, “Politisches Messiasstum”, 540.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 540.

<sup>149</sup> “The National Socialist ideology is constantly shifting. It has certain magical beliefs – leadership adoration, the supremacy of the master race – but its ideology is not laid down in a series of categorical and dogmatic pronouncements.” Neumann, *Behemoth*, 39.

<sup>150</sup> “National Socialist propaganda is thus the expression of the same two phenomena that appear in every aspect of the regime: the destruction of whatever remnants of spontaneity are left and the incorporation of the population into a super-machine. The super-machine is allegedly driven by an irresistible force of nature, by providence, or by any foreign nation – leading to the ultimate victory of Germany. Magic becomes the major concern of National Socialist culture. The world can be manipulated by techniques and formulas; in fact, if properly used these techniques and words automatically change things. And the secret is in the possession of the National Socialist leadership. Magical ceremonies are celebrated on many occasions, reminiscent of the practices of primitive tribes. The annual induction of the Hitler youth into the party is the equivalent of primitive initiation rites. The words used at mass meetings carry in themselves means for changing nature and society. The touching of the blood flag of Munich and being touched by the Leader are thaumaturgical practices.” *Ibid.*, 439.

<sup>151</sup> See Romano Guardini, *Der Heilbringer in Mythos, Offenbarung, und Politik* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1979).

<sup>152</sup> See Victor Klemperer, *Lingua Tertii Imperii. Notizbuch eines Philologen* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1947) 161-184.

<sup>153</sup> See Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation. Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971). Vondung understands “political religion” in the Voegelinian sense of differentiating between supra-worldly religions (Abrahamic religions) and inner-worldly religions. See Vondung, “‘Religious faith’ in National Socialism”, in Maier ed., *Totalitarianism and Political Religions. Volume II*, 6.

<sup>154</sup> Vondung subscribes to Voegelin’s definition of magic as “the expansion of the will to power from the realm of phenomena to that of substance or the attempt to operate in the realm of substance pragmatically as if it were the realm of phenomena”. Eric Voegelin, *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, John H. Hallowell, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975) 301, cf. Vondung, “Spiritual Revolution and Magic: Speculation and Political Action in National Socialism”, *Modern Age*, 23/4 (1979) 397.

<sup>155</sup> See Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch, *Die politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus. Die religiösen Dimensionen der NS-Ideologie in den Schriften von Dietrich Eckart, Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg und Adolf Hitler* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2002).

<sup>156</sup> Steigmann-Gall points out that political religion theory is essentially a return to the arguments made by previous generations of scholars, who stressed that National Socialism was a “replacement faith” in a secularising environment. See Richard Steigmann-Gall, “Nazism and the Revival of Political Religion Theory”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 5/3 (2004): 376-396.

Thus, the concepts of political religions, secular religions – or some other form of term describing a religious nature – have made an important impact in studies on totalitarianism since the very onset of the debate, as it has already been seen in Gurian's case. At the same time, such concepts have made a return in the works of researchers such as Emilio Gentile, John Gray,<sup>157</sup> or Michael Burleigh.<sup>158</sup> Such perspectives have also been aided by Cohn's work on medieval heterodoxies, by Griffin's theory on palingenesis in Fascism, as well as by the writings of authors such as Eric Voegelin or Raymond Aron. Along with Jacob Talmon, Aron's approach emphasizes the importance of such perspectives, as it will be shown in the following paragraphs.

From early on in his writings, Raymond Aron focuses precisely on the apparent religious features which many of his contemporaries and later authors associated with regimes such as Bolshevism or National Socialism. Moreover, his later work specifically points to the importance of the ideology in the attempts made by such regimes to fundamentally – and, it should be added, in a totalistic manner – reconstruct reality according to its tenets. Aron can be counted among the early scholars who made use of the concept of totalitarianism, something which was no doubt aided by his experience working as a teacher in Germany during the early 1930s, where he witnessed the rise of National Socialism. Nevertheless, Aron went on to integrate the Italian, Russian regimes as well in his writings on totalitarianism. For Aron's early work, an essential factor in understanding Fascism and National Socialism was to be found in what made the charismatic legitimacy of the leaders possible, since these leaders behaved in the manner of deities proscribing sets of rules in their societies.<sup>159</sup>

Throughout his writings, Aron's analysis of totalitarianism is marked by religious terminology or by features which can be associated or compared to religion – Aron rarely uses the term political religion (*religions politiques*), whilst mostly preferring secular religion (*religions séculières*) after 1941.<sup>160</sup> As Kjeldahl points out, Aron favoured a dynamic use of the concept of totalitarianism, so that he might understand the ideologies, the regimes and the international conflicts of his century, including the term secular religion as a distinctive feature of totalitarian regimes.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, while already used during the war, the concept of secular religion would come to play a truly central part in Aron's post-war *Opium of the Intellectuals*<sup>162</sup>, where he discusses the nature of Communism, including its soteriological claims and similarity to religious features.<sup>163</sup> Despite some similarities in their use of religious

<sup>157</sup> See John Gray, *Black Mass. How Religion Led the World into Crisis* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2007).

<sup>158</sup> See Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers. The Clash of Religion and Politics in Europe from the French Revolution to the Great War* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006).

<sup>159</sup> Aron points to the impact on the origin of Fascism in the influence of the sociologist Vilfredo Pareto. See Trine M. Kjeldahl "Defence of a Concept: Raymond Aron and Totalitarianism", 126-127.

<sup>160</sup> Raymond makes use of „political religion“ for the first time in a 1939 review. See Raymond Aron, "L'ère des Tyrannies d'Élie Halévy, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 46/2 (1939): 306. Also see Hans Otto Seitschek, "Raymond Aron's Konzept der 'politischen Religionen'. Ein eigener Weg der Totalitarismuskritik", in Peter J. Opitz ed., *Voegeliniana. Occasional Papers*, 75 (2009): 17-18.

<sup>161</sup> Kjeldahl, "Defence of a Concept: Raymond Aron and Totalitarianism", 138.

<sup>162</sup> See Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011) 265-294.

<sup>163</sup> "The Communists (...) seek to connect each episode in their development to the total course of history, and history itself to a philosophy of nature; there is nothing they do not know, they are never wrong, and the art of the dialectic enables them to harmonise any aspect of the Soviet reality with a doctrine that can be twisted in any direction. The combination of prophetism and scholasticism produces sentiments analogous to those of religious believers. Faith in the proletariat and in history, charity for those who suffer today and who tomorrow will inherit the earth, hope that the future will bring the advent of the classless society – the theological virtues reappear in a new guise. But this faith is attached not so much to a history as to a Church whose links with the Messiah have become gradually loosened; (...) It is the psychology of a sect rather than of a universal Church. The militant is persuaded that he belongs to a small number of elect who are charged with the salvation of all." *Ibid.*, 269. Also see Raymond Aron, *Democracy and Totalitarianism*, trans. Valence Ionescu (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968).

terms for their analysis of totalitarianism, Aron's comparative approach to modern movements and his liberal critique of totalitarianism must be differentiated from Voegelin's own analysis, which starts from the unity between secular politics and religion in Antiquity.<sup>164</sup>

Although his research mostly touched on the modern period, the interaction between religion and politics in Antiquity was also considered by Jacob Leib Talmon, who argued that one could not speak of a difference between private and public spheres during this time.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, despite the existence of grey areas, a notable transformation can be said to have occurred in this respect with the Christian division between Church and State. The relationship between religious features and the political dimension is stressed by Talmon through his concept of "political messianism". Together with „totalitarian democracy“, it would be part of the mainstay of his writings, which were historical, as well as philosophically oriented.<sup>166</sup>

Similarly to researchers such as Norman Cohn and Eric Voegelin, Talmon repeatedly looks to the past in order to understand the great transformations and events which made 20<sup>th</sup> century ideocracies possible. Despite this similarity, notable differences remain. Voegelin seeks the origins of totalitarian thought as far back as the Antiquity, associating them with what he understands as Gnosticism, while Cohn focuses his efforts on the developments occurring between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>167</sup> Conversely, even though he is aware of the importance of the great medieval heterodoxies, Talmon insists on the 18th century as the breeding ground of what eventually became totalitarian thought.

Thus, the first part in his trilogy on the development of totalitarian democracy deals with the differentiation of the former from liberal democracy, with Talmon pointing to their common 18<sup>th</sup> century roots.<sup>168</sup> At the very beginning of his *Origins of the Totalitarian Democracy*, Talmon argues that the century and a half separating his time from that of the French Revolution appears as a systematic preparation for the clash between "empirical and liberal democracy" and "totalitarian messianic democracy".<sup>169</sup> The decline of religious authority is understood by Talmon to mean the rapid replacement of religious ethics by secular social ethics, leaving the state alone to function as the source of morals, a fundamental development at a time when politics were considered indistinguishable from ethics.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Hans Maier, "Political Religion: a Concept and its Limitations", trans. Jodi Bruhn, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8/1 (2007): 10.

<sup>165</sup> Talmon, *Die Geschichte der Totalitären Demokratie Band II*, 231. Talmon's view is questionable at least to an extent, since the Romans clearly distinguished between *publicus* and *privatus*, a distinction with important political and legal ramifications (*Ius publicum/Ius privatum*). However, this distinction left room for grey areas or various changes, notably in the case of the *ager publicus* (public land), usually acquired through conquest. While the *ager publicus* theoretically belonged to the state, it was often owned by, or leased to private individuals. See Saskia T. Roselaar, *Public Land in the Roman Republic. A Social and Economic History of the Ager Publicus in Italy, 396-89 BC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>166</sup> For an overview of Talmon's central concepts see Hans Otto Seitschek, *Politischer Messianismus: Totalitarismuskritik und philosophische Geschichtsschreibung im Anschluss an Jacob Leib Talmon* (Ferdinand Schöningh: Paderborn, 2005).

<sup>167</sup> See Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Revised and Expanded Edition 1970). However, one must point out that Cohn's own perspective changed in time, with the first and second editions of his book bearing the subtitle "Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements".

<sup>168</sup> See *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 35. This is important for the concept of political messianism, which was born, he argues, firstly out of an ethical and political impulse, rather than an economic one. See *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>170</sup> See *Ibid.*, 40.

Talmon's totalitarian democracy emerges from a fixed world order, as well as from the existence of a sole truth, both of which compel obedience in order to become attainable.<sup>171</sup> The idea of a sole truth along with the soteriological dimension implied by the idea and achievement of totality lies at the core of the totalitarian democratic school:

The totalitarian democratic school, on the other hand, is based upon the assumption of a sole and exclusive truth in politics. It may be called political Messianism in the sense that it postulates a preordained, harmonious and perfect scheme of things, to which men are irresistibly driven, and at which they are bound to arrive. It recognizes ultimately only one plane of existence, the political. It widens the scope of politics to embrace the whole of human existence. It treats all human thought and action as having social significance, and therefore as falling within the orbit of political action. Its political ideas are not a set of pragmatic precepts or a body of devices applicable to a special branch of human endeavour. They are an integral part of an all-embracing and coherent philosophy. Politics is defined as the art of applying this philosophy to the organization of society, and the final purpose of politics is only achieved when this philosophy reigns supreme over all fields of life.<sup>172</sup>

Just as importantly, both liberal and totalitarian schools see freedom as the foremost good<sup>173</sup>, even if the path to achieving it differs greatly. In other words, while liberal democracy sees freedom in spontaneity and the absence of coercion, the totalitarian version considers freedom possible only when an absolute collective goal is striven for and is achieved.<sup>174</sup> Thus, it can be said that Talmon accurately describes one of the main features of a totalistic system, namely its typical approach to freedom from a collectivistic standpoint. Indeed, as it shall be seen throughout this book, the concept of freedom in a totalist worldview must be understood as the complete and "voluntary" submission of an individual to the systemic principles of the totalist movement, thus attaining, in effect, a state of perfect purity and truth. Talmon's words are particularly relevant in this regard:

The very idea of an enclosed system from which all evil and unhappiness is exterminated is totalitarian. The assumption that such an order of things is possible and even inexorable is to proclaim the demand that a ruling system embody this perfection in order to force acknowledgement and subordination from its citizens and brand opposition as vice or corruption.<sup>175</sup>

Through its focus on the importance of purity in a system dominated by the idea of totality, the previous paragraph can be considered similar to the approach taken by this book. As following chapters will show, if the opposing forces are to be associated with impurity and untruth, then the proponents and ideology of the totalistic system may easily – even necessarily – possess the opposite traits, at least in the self-conception of the movement.

Nevertheless, whereas Talmon's approach to the prerequisites of totalitarianism is superbly researched as well as thoughtful, it is, nevertheless, not without its limits. Firstly, Talmon is, perhaps, too quick in understating the role of totalist, medieval, religious heterodoxies for the origins of modernity and totalitarianism. Talmon writes that medieval heterodoxies cannot be associated with modern political messianism due to their focus on serving God instead of serving Man, for, as he argues, obedience to God was the condition of human freedom. Accordingly, this would ultimately lead to different results in comparison to

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<sup>171</sup> See Hans Otto Seitschek, "Eschatological interpretations: Vondung, Talmon", in Maier ed., *Totalitarianism and Political Religion. Volume III*, 166.

<sup>172</sup> Talmon, *Die Geschichte der totalitären Demokratie Band I*, 36-37.

<sup>173</sup> See *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>174</sup> See *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

what Talmon calls the modern “absolute beliefs”.<sup>176</sup> Significantly, and somewhat surprisingly, Talmon argues that such heterodoxies were not able to overcome their vision of a society of saints to a plane which was exclusively transcendental.<sup>177</sup> In fact, as it will be established throughout following chapters, the existence of immanentizing eschatological thought – together with the achievable political utopia – played its part in the development of modernity itself and of the totalist movements.

Secondly, one other potential issue is encountered in his liberal use of religious terminology to describe what had been essentially secular phenomena, even as religion usually remained influential in the political, social and cultural wars, which accompanied tremendous changes in European society from the French Revolution onwards. To take one important example, after describing the 18<sup>th</sup> century thinkers as “prophets of liberty and the rights of man”, Talmon can continue as follows:

(...) the inevitable equation of liberty with virtue and reason was the most cherished article of their faith. When the eighteenth-century secular religion came face to face with this conflict, the result was the great schism. Liberal democracy flinched from the spectre of force, and fell back upon the trial-and-error philosophy. Totalitarian Messianism hardened into an exclusive doctrine represented by a vanguard of the enlightened, who justified themselves in the use of coercion against those who refused to be free and virtuous.<sup>178</sup>

To reiterate, the influence posed by several aspects of Christianity in the origins of European modernity and totalist movements is as undeniable as it is deep. However, while the presence of features and motifs which could *appear* religious to contemporaries formed by the Christian cultural substratum, this does not mean that they must necessarily be considered religious in nature themselves.<sup>179</sup> Nevertheless, although his argument is tied to the intellectuals of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Talmon rightly points here to what can be considered a crucial feature common to totalist movements. The feature in question is the existence of “a vanguard of enlightened” with an “exclusive doctrine”. With respect to such a vision, one finds a similarity to Voegelin’s portrayal of the origins of the modern world and totalitarianism, a process spearheaded by groups of Elect which claimed possession of truth and unique insight – or what he would call Gnostics. It is to this important concept that the next sections turns.

## 2.5 Eric Voegelin. Gnosticism and Immanentization

Eric Voegelin was one of the most original thinkers to make use (if only temporarily) of political religion, a concept which must be bound together with his attempt at interpreting modernity through what he understood as “gnosis”. Furthermore, his work is important due to his insight in pointing out to the varied theological origins of modernity, with the immanentizing dimension of eschatological thought being among the most important.

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<sup>176</sup> See Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>177</sup> See Ibid., 49. One must note here that Talmon’s unpublished dissertation, *The Doctrine of Poverty in its Religious, Social and Political Aspects as illustrated by some XII-XIII century movements* (1943) makes no mention of Joachim of Fiore. See Seitschek, *Politischer Messianismus*, 92.

<sup>178</sup> Talmon, *Die Geschichte der totalitären Demokratie Band I*, 42-43.

<sup>179</sup> This argument will be revisited in the section on method and terminology.

Already in his early work, Voegelin writes of the political religions which the new “satanic” regimes had created in their quest for an immanent – and imminent – paradise. Yet, according to Voegelin, this was by no means a product of modernity itself, but rather the culmination of a process with roots stretching far into the Occidental past. For Voegelin, the “inner-worldly political religions” had already made their mark well before what is normally considered the beginning of modernity, as seen for instance in his somewhat overpowering description of the medieval Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II as a “heathen God-man”.<sup>180</sup>

Thus, Voegelin is an author for whom transcendence, political religion together with what he calls Gnosticism, represent key themes. The relationship he sees between religion and the state was understood to have deep roots. These roots are traced on a background which suggests the connection between the immanentizing, eschatological medieval heterodoxies and the movements of modernity which enabled the rise of totalitarian regimes. In this respect, Calabrian abbot Joachim of Fiore would rightly be a fundamental figure for Voegelin, who links his writings with “the transformation that significantly influenced the ecclesiastical dynamics of the ecclesia and its inner-worldly splinter groups”.<sup>181</sup> Although Voegelin was certainly right to single out Joachim and his *Tertius Status* in the transformation of eschatological thought – meaning a departure from Augustinian transcendence and its tendency towards immanence – the Calabrian abbot and his work cannot be characterised as Gnostic in nature, nor can there any Gnostic influences be detected in his writings.<sup>182</sup>

Voegelin sees in the Christian apocalypse of the empire and the symbolism of the late Middle Ages nothing less than “the historical basis for the apocalyptic dynamics in modern political religions”.<sup>183</sup> As he would later write in *The New Science of Politics*, Joachim’s influence – whether real, reinterpreted or imagined – would apparently surface well into the modern era:

In his Trinitarian eschatology Joachim created the aggregate of symbols that govern the self-interpretation of modern political society to this day. The first of these symbols is the conception of history as a sequence of three ages, of which the third age is intelligibly the final Third Realm. As variations of this symbol are recognizable the humanistic and encyclopedist periodization of history into ancient, medieval, and modern history; Turgot’s and Comte’s theory of a sequence of theological, metaphysical, and scientific phases; Hegel’s dialectic of the three stages of freedom and self-reflective spiritual fulfilment; the Marxian dialectic of the three stages of primitive communism, class society, and final communism; and, finally, the national-socialist symbol of the Third Realm – though this is a special case requiring further attention.<sup>184</sup>

The importance of Joachim’s system alongside the influence his followers, the Joachimists or Joachites (or even pseudo-Joachites) will be approached in the following

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<sup>180</sup> It is worth noting here that Voegelin interprets Frederick’s gesture and the events which followed as the rise of the first inner-worldly political religion. “Following the conquest of Jerusalem and his self-elevation as the Messiah-king, the emperor speaks as an autocrat, a heathen God-man. The ancient *Justicia* becomes the declared state virtue; her cult the state religion; the people are forced into service; and the triumphal arch at Capua is erected as an altar. The pope declares the emperor an antichrist. The first inner-worldly political religion had been established on the soil of the Christian ecclesia.” Voegelin, “Political Religions”, 49-50.

<sup>181</sup> Voegelin, “The Political Religions”, 50.

<sup>182</sup> Joachim of Fiore’s influence or that of his (pseudo) descendants will be treated in more detail throughout the rest of the book. On Voegelin’s interpretation of Joachim of Fiore, see Matthias Riedl, “Modernity as the Immanentization of the Eschaton: A Critical Re-Evaluation of Eric Voegelin’s *Gnosis-Thesis*”, in Paul Caringella, Wayne Cristaudo and Glenn Hughes eds., *Revolutions: Finished and Unfinished. From Primal to Final* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) 86-90.

<sup>183</sup> Voegelin, “The Political Religions”, 51.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

chapter.<sup>185</sup> What is most important to note for now is the fact that, for Voegelin, the success of secularization<sup>186</sup> meant a tremendous upheaval: “When God is invisible behind the world, the concepts of the world will become new gods; when the symbols of transcendent religiosity are banned, new symbols develop from the inner-worldly language of science to take their place. Like the Christian ecclesia, the inner-worldly community has its apocalypse, too; yet the new apocalypics insist that the symbols they create are scientific judgements.”<sup>187</sup>

Thus, in a letter to Hannah Arendt, Voegelin could confidently argue that “the total movements” (*Die totalen Bewegungen*) must be placed in the context of a decline of Christian Civilization, with the continuum of its destructive power stretching to the medieval sectarian movements, at least as far back as the 11<sup>th</sup> century. For Voegelin, this is an old idea made accomplishable by the collapse of institutional obstacles and by the social realization of ideas such as changing human nature, or replacing the divine with man.<sup>188</sup> It is worth noting that Voegelin was not overly fond of the concept of political religion since he found it too vague.<sup>189</sup> Thus, already after 1939, Voegelin moved away from the concept, choosing to gradually focus on an interpretation of modernity through what he defined as “gnosis”.

According to Voegelin, the idea of *gnosis* and its political implications, although distinguishable during Antiquity, can also be considered essential for understanding the very soul of modernity.<sup>190</sup> In Voegelin’s understanding (which does not make use of the Nag-Hammadi manuscripts), *gnosis* functions as the gift of truth or special insight gained by an elite. He sees this as a powerful undercurrent, repeatedly resurfacing in Western history and representing the essence of modernity.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, in *The New Science of Politics* Voegelin argues that modernity can be seen as a continuous evolution, culminating in the triumph of “modern Gnosticism” over the “civilizational tradition deriving from the Mediterranean

<sup>185</sup> A number of researchers on Joachim distinguish between Joachimist and Joachite. Joachimism can thus be understood as describing followers who fully respected the ideas of Joachim of Fiore. By contrast, the latter term implies the ideas and writings which were influenced by the Calabrian abbot, without necessarily being fully compatible with his thought. Indeed, the Joachites stand out due to the way in which they reinterpreted the original Joachimist ideas, combining them with other apocalyptic themes. See Fabio Troncarelli, “Early Joachimism and Early Franciscanism: Manuscript Evidence of a Common Destiny”, *Franciscan Studies*, 69 (2011) 141-151.

<sup>186</sup> “The new age of Joachim would bring an increase of fulfilment within history, but the increase would not be due to an immanent eruption; it would come through a new transcendental irruption. The idea of a radically immanent fulfilment grew rather slowly, in a long process that roughly maybe called ‘from humanism to enlightenment’; only in the eighteenth century, with the idea of progress, had the increase of meaning in history become a completely intramundane phenomenon, without transcendental irruptions. This second phase of immanentization shall be called ‘secularization’.” Voegelin, “The New Science of Politics”, 185.

<sup>187</sup> Eric Voegelin, “The Political Religions”, 60.

<sup>188</sup> Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin, *Disput über Totalitarismus*, Texte und Briefe, herausgegeben vom Hannah-Arendt-Institut für Totalitarismusforschung in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Voegelin-Zentrum für Politik, Kultur und Religion der LMU München (Dresden: V&R unipress, 2015) 32.

<sup>189</sup> It is interesting to note that Voegelin never mentions Carl Schmitt’s *political theology*, despite the – apparent – similarity between the two concepts. See Thierry Gontier, From “Political Theology” to “Political Religion”: Eric Voegelin and Carl Schmitt, *The Review of Politics*, 1 (2013): 25-43.

<sup>190</sup> Several authors have pointed to Voegelin’s understanding of the concept of *gnosis*. See Hans Otto Seitschek, “Excursus. Eric Voegelin’s concept of ‘gnosis’”, in Maier ed., *Totalitarianism and Political Religions. Volume III*, 214-221; Eugene Webb, “Voegelin’s Gnosticism Reconsidered”, *Political Science Review*, 34 (2005): 48-76. Riedl, “Modernity as the Immanentization of the Eschaton”, 80-107. Also see Glenn Hughes, *Transcendence and History: The Search for Ultimacy from Ancient Societies to Postmodernity* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2003).

<sup>191</sup> “A line of gradual transformation connects medieval with contemporary Gnosticism. And the transformation is so gradual, indeed, that it would be difficult to decide whether contemporary phenomena should be classified as Christian because they are intelligibly an outgrowth of Christian heresies of the Middle Ages or whether medieval phenomena should be classified as anti-Christian because they are intelligibly the origin of modern anti-Christianism. The best course will be to drop such questions and to recognize the essence of modernity as the growth of Gnosticism.” Voegelin, “The New Science of Politics”, 190

discoveries of anthropological and soteriological truth.”<sup>192</sup> Gnostic politics, he believes, must be understood as a deep spiritual malaise,<sup>193</sup> while “gnostic” movements such as Positivism, Communism and National Socialism are “the cannibalistic fruits of a corrupt liberal society.”<sup>194</sup> Thus, when faced with such claims, an explanation of Voegelin’s understanding of Gnosticism becomes all the more necessary.

Voegelin’s early view of Gnosticism was influenced by the work of Hans Jonas, namely the first volume of *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* which was published in 1934.<sup>195</sup> Together with *Gnosis*, Jonas’ later work, *The Gnostic Religion* has remained an influential text, despite its limitations and not being able to make proper use of the Nag Hammadi primary sources. Jonas points to the existence of a “dualistic-anticosmic spirit” as a fundamental trait of gnostic thought.<sup>196</sup> Besides this work, Voegelin also mentions writers such as Eugène de Faye, Simone Pétrement and Hans Söderberg, arguing that “The exploration of gnosis is so rapidly advancing that only a study of the principal works of the last generation will mediate an understanding of its dimension.”<sup>197</sup> Furthermore, Matthias Riedl has argued that Voegelin’s early formation of his theory on Gnosis was decisively influenced by Hans Urs von Balthasar’s introduction to Irenaeus of Lyon.<sup>198</sup> Intriguingly, as Riedl points out, Balthasar’s description of Gnosis as a mythical counterpart to the Christian soteriological truth and as a recurring phenomenon of Western thought is similar to Voegelin’s own approach.<sup>199</sup>

It is also important to note that Voegelin ultimately moved away from his early perspective on ancient Gnosticism, recognizing that it had often overlapped with apocalyptic traditions. Thus, his view on ancient Gnosticism gradually changed during the four decades separating *The Political Religions* and *The Ecumenic Age* – and it was only in the latter work that he portrayed it in a more convincing manner.<sup>200</sup> Needless to say – especially after the

<sup>192</sup> See *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>193</sup> “The essence of gnostic politics must be interpreted as a spiritual sickness, as a *nosos* in Plato’s and Schelling’s sense of the term: a disturbance in the life of the spirit as distinct from mental illness in the sense of a psychopathology.” Eric Voegelin, “Gnostic Politics”, in Voegelin, *Published Essays 1940-1952*, Ellis Sandoz ed. (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000) 226.

<sup>194</sup> See Voegelin, “Gnostic Politics”, 232-233.

<sup>195</sup> See Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist. Erster Teil. Die Mythologische Gnosis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1988).

<sup>196</sup> “The cardinal feature of gnostic thought is the radical dualism that governs the relation of [true] God and world, and correspondingly that of man and world. The deity is absolutely transmundane, *its nature alien to that of the universe*, which it neither created nor governs and to which it is the complete antithesis: to the divine realm of light, self-contained and remote, the cosmos is opposed as the realm of darkness. The world is the work of lowly powers which though they may mediately be descended from Him do not know the true God and obstruct the knowledge of Him in the cosmos over which they rule. (...) The transcendent God Himself is hidden from all creatures and is unknowable by natural concepts.” Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion. The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011) 42-43.

<sup>197</sup> Voegelin, “The New Science of Politics”, note 25, 188-189.

<sup>198</sup> Riedl, “Modernity as the Immanentization of the Eschaton”, 81-82.

<sup>199</sup> “Gnosis emerges anew in all moments of the occidental intellectual development where man, tired of the existence in faith, ludicrously attempts to take possession of this faith. He aims to replace the redemption by God, who descends to “ordinariness” (“*Gewöhnlichkeit*”), by the self-redemption of man, who strives upward, out of “ordinariness”. The encounter between the word of God and the myth – which first occurred in the second Christian century and then again and again ever since – is therefore the actual core, the dramatic knot of occidental, even universal history. Myth seeks the ascent of man; the word of God seeks the descent of God. Myth seeks power; the word of God seeks the acknowledgment of powerlessness. Myth seeks knowledge; the word of God seeks faith.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Irenäus: Geduld des Reifens. Die christliche Antwort auf den gnostischen Mythos des zweiten Jahrhunderts* (Klosterberg und Basel: Benno Schwabe and Co., 1943) 13f. cf. Riedl, “Modernity as the Immanentization of the Eschaton”, 82.

<sup>200</sup> See Eric Voegelin, “The Ecumenic Age”, in Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin. Volume 17: Order and History. Volume IV. The Ecumenic Age*, Michael Franz ed., (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

discovery and the greatly belated publication of the extraordinary Nag Hammadi library<sup>201</sup> – research on the subject has undergone dramatic, fundamental changes throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>202</sup> Thus, Voegelin’s early heresiological approach to Gnosticism was made all the more problematic due to great advances in specialist literature. To begin with, the term “Gnosticism” itself has a modern origin, apparently being used for the first time in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, Voegelin’s use of the term “gnostic” can be tied to a wide number of possible meanings, which points to its imprecise use and to the fact that it confuses rather than clarifies the discussion. A good exemplification of this fact can be found in the following paragraph:

Gnosis may be primarily intellectual and assume the form of speculative penetration of the mystery of creation and existence, as, for instance, in the contemplative Gnosis of Hegel or Schelling. Or it may be primarily emotional and assume the form of an indwelling of divine substance in the human soul, as for instance, in paraclitic sectarian leaders. Or it may be primarily volitional and assume the form of activist redemption of man and society, as in the instance of revolutionary activists like Comte, Marx, or Hitler. These gnostic experiences, in the amplitude of their variety, are the core of the re-divinization of society, for the men who fall into these experiences divinize themselves by substituting more massive modes of participation in divinity for faith in the Christian sense. A clear understanding of these experiences as the active core of immanentist eschatology is necessary, because otherwise the inner logic of the Western political development from medieval immanentism through humanism, enlightenment, progressivism, liberalism, positivism, into Marxism will be obscured.<sup>204</sup>

Such claims are made possible by Voegelin’s most important error, namely, the confusion of Gnosticism with immanent eschatological thought. After all, one of Voegelin’s most famous and influential ideas is associated with the context of immanentization: “The attempt at constructing an eidos of history will lead into the fallacious immanentization of the Christian eschaton.”<sup>205</sup> The opposite nature of these two perspectives is made clear when one takes into account that Gnosticism, while certainly revolutionary<sup>206</sup>, is nonetheless fundamentally *transcendentalizing* instead of *immanentizing* in its aims.<sup>207</sup>

Thus, although rich and insightful, Voegelin’s writings on modernity, gnosis, and totalitarianism remain marked by limitations and inconsistencies, a fact which he himself eventually came to admit. Nevertheless, Voegelin is indeed correct to point to the rise of immanentizing eschatological thought, and to the importance it possesses in understanding the nature of at least some totalist heterodoxies and the ideocracies they may strive for.

<sup>201</sup> See Marvin Meyer ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures. The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).

<sup>202</sup> For more recent perspectives on Gnosticism see Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, translation edited by Robert McLachlan Wilson (Harper San Francisco 1987); Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Cosmology and Fate in Gnosticism and Graeco-Roman Antiquity. Under Pitiless Skies* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013). Also, for an argument that “Gnosticism” has brought more confusion than clarification (although accepting the usefulness of the term “gnostic”) see Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”. An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996).

<sup>203</sup> Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”*, 7.

<sup>204</sup> Voegelin, “The New Science of Politics”, 189. Also see *Ibid.*, 191-192.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>206</sup> For a discussion of Jonas’ and Voegelin’s understanding of the revolutionary character of Gnosticism see Riedl, “Modernity as the Immanentization of the Eschaton”, 100-106. Also see Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 64-65.

<sup>207</sup> “The whole world view of late antiquity, with its idea of the power of fate (Greek *heimarmenē*) which dominates the gods, the world and men, is here as it were bracketed together and marked with a negative sign. It becomes a prison from which there is no escape, unless the liberating act of the transcendent God and his helpers opens up a way on which man (strictly only a small part of man, namely the divine spark) can escape. Here the gnostic doctrine of redemption (soteriology) has its roots.” *Ibid.*, 58.

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