Diagnosing the Crisis of Modernity: Historical Thought in the Midcentury United States

By

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Introduction

This is a study of the relationship between mass society criticism and the theorization of modern historical time, primarily amongst American intellectuals in the first half of the 20th century. Both of these were once important active topics and both have fallen into conditions of relative intellectual obscurity. While not forgotten, they have been supplanted by other trends in social thought. The first of them, mass society criticism, was a primary thread in modern intellectual history, starting at the end of the 18th century at the earliest, and the end of the 19th at the latest. The basic concern for mass society thinkers was the breakdown of social bonds. These connected with concerns about deskilling, the expansion of bureaucracy, the loss of community, mass media, and urbanization. These concerns predominated amongst no particular group, whether it be conservatives, liberals, romantic antimodernists or workingman's democrats. This is not a dissertation about mass society critics in general; it is about the crossing of this thread with another thread in a manner that was critically important for thought in the first half of the last century. The latter thread was that modern social thought is peculiarly oriented towards its own history, and that at the turn of the last century historical conditions were so unstable that critical thinking about history itself was center stage. This is a study of the idea that modern time concepts, like progress, have a history. If one reads and tries to comprehend midcentury discourse about historical time today, what one finds is that historical thinkers were mostly discussing topics that were in some way related to mass society criticism. The lynchpin between these two was the intellectual history of various forms of disorientation.

Starting at the end of the 19th century, and then precipitously with First World War, the classical modernity of the 19th century had a very fast unravelling. 19th century modernity had,

for all its turbulence, ultimately produced expanded and democratic, or democratizing, civic spheres as well as vast empires, and the synthesis of premodern and early modern conceptions of virtue, post-enlightenment social progress and technological domination was coherent before the extraordinary rupture that came with the War. With the First World War, modern, Western civilization, as it was known to those intellectuals, suddenly was destroyed, antimodern themes and doubts about the effects of technological domination of nature entered into the fore, an optimists about scientific progress in a democratic society had to fast confront disturbing new developments both in the malleability and ignorance of their own people and in the emergence of totalitarianism internationally. This study focuses on their next moves after this rupture, which consisted very frequently in trying to conceptualize what kind of time they were in, and more importantly conceptualize new kinds of classes, like the managers, and new kinds of social order, like totalitarianism. A central character in this study is the social scientist, who figured both as a main character in its narrative, primarily in the person of Walter Lippmann, and as a primary object of concern for critics, like Christopher Lasch. This dissertation describes how critics of mass society and of the modern managed society both needed to develop a new critical vocabulary, often drawing on or reinventing much older sources, to critique the character of modernity.

The three arguments contained herein, and their relative novelty against the current literature, are roughly as follows. Firstly, that midcentury American political thought can be best understood as being primarily concerned with history, that the discursive field academic studies, of op-eds or of religious jeremiads was concerned with the experience of modern history. In order to understand this, it is necessary to utilize intellectual tools better known to historians of other centuries and other continents in order to disclose the temporal orientation of midcentury

American thought. Secondly, that to understand the motivating concerns and primary topics of this historical discourse it is necessary to understand the enduring importance of mass society criticism and of republicanism, both of which were refurbished in a frightening and unstable modern world. Thirdly, that discourse about suggestibility, propaganda and crowds was a primary topic of this discourse about modern experiences of historical time and was an extension of these earlier republican themes. Such an interpretation allows us to see connections between authors severed by contemporary boundaries in the literature, as well as understand some developments in the history of social thought that impinge upon the disciplinary histories of the social sciences and on contemporary science studies, but are best understood within a different context.

This study takes a queue from the fact that sociologists of mass control were often socialists or progressives, or that they outgrew this view in exactly this time period. This study is organized around the notion that the next intellectual development for American as well as European thinkers, in many critical cases, was to search for a spiritual critique of modernity that could save modern society, if not democracy, from the rational programs of opinion management and eugenics, and that this search conjoined the theorization of totalitarianism and the post-war return to religion, scripture and myth. The latter of these intellectual developments was the very genesis of the temporality literature that this study is attempting to advance so as to help displace in 20th century Americanist historiography.

This study maintains that to understand both inter-war and post-war political thought one must understand the problems of amnesia, expectation and confusion that came with the experience of a radical historical break. It focuses more specifically on intellectuals, mostly American, who within this were self-aware about this historical disorientation and attempted to

diagnose it. Such an approach has some merits, foremost among them being that it helps to highlight both continuities in time as well as the unity of many popular topics of discourse. Of particular interest will be Ortega y Gassett, Lewis Mumford, James Bunrham, Reinhold Niebuhr, Walter Lippmann, Hannah Arendt and Christopher Lasch, a varied group of intellectuals held together by their attempts to comprehend and explain the experience of modern history during the first half of the last century. They, and the peripheral intellectuals mentioned throughout, are also chosen on the basis of their connection in a dense web of inter-citation and reference.

The discourse on historical time that predominated in the last century had a set of furniture that filled its proverbial room. The furniture was predominantly a discourse, and a set of concepts that formed the vocabulary of that discourse, about new forms of social dysfunction or political evil that were difficult to express in the available historical idiom, and about the fears that new classes, or a singular new class, was coming into being that was particularly pernicious or degenerative. This discourse was, as such, a two-sided discourse about firstly deception, manipulation and compulsion as distinctly modern maladies and secondly about the character of new modern social types. The plurality of historical metaphors and new concepts from this era can be comprehended through indexing this discourse to these topics.

One organizing feature of this study is that it focuses on the place of mass society criticism in modern social thought with particular attention to how it framed responses to modern totalitarian movements in the first half of the twentieth century. On account of this, its choice of intellectuals up for inclusion has idiosyncrasies if one regards it by the standards of the normal historiographical categories—Left, liberal, conservative, and so on. What is more important than participating in genealogies of our current ideologies is recovering elements of a now-unpopular line of critique that conjoined critique of mass society and critique of modern historical myth.

That different strata of history move at different paces, more slowly or more quickly, and set the preconditions for individual human action is hardly a new idea; in fact, the articulation of such an idea was particular to the era being studied. The Annales School's preoccupation with long-duration history and their emphasis on the hard limits of human agency in altering the course of history were themselves repudiations of historical attitudes common in their day.[1] What undergirded this period of the 20th century was deep social and political upheaval that this study will not attempt to attribute to any particular human agency; vast forces—demographic, technological and otherwise—were at play, and no conspiracy of interests seems to have been credibly powerful enough to harness or control such a transformation.

The history of concepts is its own stratum of history, with its own internal logic and peculiar relations with other strata of history. Other developments in history generally go either far faster or far slower than the development of history captured in language. This study deals with the history of concepts and ideas as a history with an internal logic and meaning capable of driving the history of thought forward of its own accord, without necessarily treating history of thought or culture as being purely epiphenomenal to material developments. What this means by extension is that this study treats ideas as being both capable of propelling their own forward movement through the dialectical extension of their own prior logic, and additionally as having real analytical characteristics desirable or undesirable for understanding new things.[2] The result

[1] For an entrée into the historical attitudes of the Annales School see: Fernand Braudel, translated by Sarah Matthews, *On History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[2] This has been an object of extraordinary controversy amongst, for example, French interpreters, most notably Foucault. Foucault's two methods—archaelogy and genealogy—both are approaches to studying the structure of the field of discourse in a way that is radically nominalistic about all things. This study, even though it is a study of concepts in discourse, is *not* such a way. This will all be written on the notion that there *is* an outside of language, but that the thinkers in question were struggling with finding the right mean by which to do it. It is because of this that the works of Hans Blumenburg and Paul Ricouer, both discussed in chapter 2, are useful in that they point towards mechanisms for interpretation of metaphor that allow us to see how language can point towards basic

is that the entire study presumes that intellectuals in the 20th century were in the shadow of the 19th century, that the internal logic of the ideas of the latter chapters mostly build on those of the prior, and that additionally intellectuals may have thought or said some things because they thought they were true, that they were sometimes right, and that sometimes the recognition of the shape of events intrudes into the history of thought as an external element. It is a history of concepts during which thinkers were self-aware that the history of thought was not moving as the same speed as the history of anything else, and during which some of them consequently attempted to theorize precisely this.

And why are the intellectuals in this study not treated as neoliberals? The histories of ideologies have been an active cluster for decades, in particular the intellectual history of Cold War Liberalism. The same as been true of the reinvention of midcentury conservatism.[3] Within a broader framework of "neoliberalism" these two often have extensive overlap, although some, like Quinn Slobodian's *The Globalists* opts for a new master-concept to find unity in these views.[4] These literatures are only capable, however, of casting a sufficiently wide net in their coverage to talk more broadly about midcentury non-Communist and non-Fascist intellectuals if they engage in contortions about their definition of such things as "neoliberal." This study looks

qualia of experience, can do the work of conceptualization, or can point towards values in ways that more straightforward discuss cannot access.

[3] Two exemplary cases in the history of conservatism are Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009) and Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) in that they both begin with far too great an expectation that conservatism was dead and also in the process of further dying and have a substantial explanandum in the very survival of the ideology at all, a fact reflected in the story they tell about discontinuities and continuities in the movement. The reinvention of liberalism in the Cold War has a similar point of departure, without which it is not clear that the category would be so capacious or that it would be "neo." The literature is here too voluminous to list, but the most important and influential works are without question Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79,* edited by Michel Senellart and translated by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Additionally, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[4] Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

for a common denominator that allows midcentury intellectuals to be intelligible as interlocutors whose discourse bears fruit in new concepts.

A key term of art in this study is "neo-republican." This term has been adopted for lack of any better. Neo-liberalism has been much-discussed, mostly in a discourse predicated on the expectation that liberalism was supposed to have died in the 20th century. This study does not fully developed the view, held by its author and to be elaborated elsewhere, that the middle of the last century was a "neo-republican moment," even though such a view almost certainly lies implicitly in the text, a fact originally unplanned at the beginning its composition. Nonetheless, this study does programmatically describe many thinkers, as well as portions of their various analyses and arguments, and being neo-republican. What is meant by this is that they were concerned with the development of what, in prior centuries, had been called a virtuous citizenry. What made elements of their thought "neo" republican was that they were thinking in a new and modern idiom—for discussing human nature, for making moral claims or discussing historical events. In this new idiom, they redeveloped lines of thinking concerning the relationship between the just polity and the cultivation of the individual citizen.

The history of history and the history of ideology have a robust overlap, and this fact should be better represented in the literature. This study is adjacent to the study of midcentury ideology precisely because it is a history of historical thought. The affinity of these projects is the major insight of the temporality literature, and in Americanist literature was an insight almost brought into the discipline fully with J.G.A. Pococks' extraordinary influence on the literature on 18th and 19th republicanism, an influence that sadly did not seem to permeate into contemporary studies of the 20th century. This insight consisted in noting precisely that the birth of modern political ideology—as we would today call it colloquially—took place coming out of the

Renaissance at the moment when premodern orientation towards historical time became a modern orientation towards historical time. [5] However, this insight has been carried into the 20th century historiography only scantly. The above historians of midcentury global liberalism, or historians of the League of Nations or the United Nations, are attuned to how these projects were only possible within a social imaginary wherein the next eon of world history could be shaped through post-imperial political action.[6] However, moving from global to national historiographies, one finds less awareness in the Americanist national historiography.

The itinerary for this study selected is not arbitrary; it is midcentury historical thought. Instead of being an intellectual history of neoliberalism it is a study of a cluster of intellectuals concerned with theorization of their place in history, who broadly cited and responded to one another, ending with Christopher Lasch. This is for two reasons. The first is that the majority of the other figures in this study were figures to whom he was responding, and the latter being that he was a final articulation of a cluster of ideas that have been since that point on the wane. This cluster of ideas are underlying component pieces of various ideologies, including conservative, liberal and non-Marxist Left ideologies, and their coherence is attested to by the dense web of interlocutors on these conjoined topics in the first half of the last century, the two primary ideas being, roughly, the criticism of mass society and the criticism of historical myth. Some of the thinkers in this study are definitively neo-liberals if there really is such a thing: most importantly Lippmann. Lasch ultimately attempted to endorse the populist tradition, which in his day he saw

[5] Discussion of Pocock's work is to some degree in chapter 1, to a much greater degree the substantial topic of chapter 2 is engagement with precisely this temporality literature—the details can be found there.
[6] Susan Pederson, Mark Mazower and Adom Getachew all show an attentiveness to the fact that grandiosity or foreshortening of possible futures structured the global political sphere of the 20th century. See: Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

as dormant, although it has received since then an acrimonious resuscitation in American politics. This resuscitation has happened not at all amongst the American intelligentsia, a factor that seems to have unfairly diminished Lasch's appeal to many current readers. Arendt was not easily categorized with regards to 20th century ideologies, and while the core of her politico-philosophical stance could be characterized reasonably as something like "neo-republican" (a category appropriate to essentially all thinkers discussed herein) in some broader sense her thought does not neatly fit at all into a characterization like "conservative," "neo-liberal," or perhaps least of all "populist."

This dissertation is almost entirely about pessimistic neo-republicans, and so by virtue of that fact John Dewey has been pushed to the margins of the study, even though he covered such similar grounds in many ways. His views on human nature, on education, his reaction to the Soviet Union, the explicit and implicit historical framing that permeated his work and structured his reaction to historical events, are all in some sense thoroughly "neo-republican," but by virtue of their optimism have a very different logic and ultimate conclusion from other authors assessed here.

The peripheral place of Marxism in the organization of this study is one of its largest problems. The Marxists constitute possibly the most advanced and systematic school of modern historical thought with a clearly articulated plot structure, anthropology, characterization and concept structure used for discussing social and political events—why their exclusion? Marxist intellectual history would constitute its own study in its entirety, and it would be such a significant undertaking that it would have to be its own study. The most successful part of the Marxist project seems to have been its historical framing and vocabulary, a fact that only some

thinkers have noticed in such terms.[7] This study is oriented towards the intellectual history of everyone else, from which there is a spread of samples including thinkers more left-wing, liberal and conservative, religious and non-religious.

Marxism is nonetheless a critical interlocutor for all involved in this study, owing to its outsized influence in the 20th century. The victory of the Marxist historical scheme and vocabulary is precisely what makes the study of its history too large for this study and, in many regards, not particularly interesting on the grounds of too profound familiarity. Such a study would have an entirely different scope as a genealogy of the present rather than as the excavation of a minority report about something that was once ascendant and is now in the state of occultation. The reason that the ascent of the Marxist historical architectonics is so hard to get around is that it is the point of demarcation for much of the historical analytics of categories like "Cold War Liberalism," which come generally with an in-built analytics about how the world had a pre-ordained history that involved, amongst other things, the prophecy of the falling away of capitalism and liberalism both in the 20th century. The analytics that relegate everything between Fascism and Soviet Marxism to being an historical aberrance in need of constant over-determined analysis has its roots in an arbitrary expectation of 19th and 20th century partisans and is, today, of less and less value.

The other even greater source of historical thought than Marxism is in Abrahamic religion. It is similarly unavoidable that a program of studying the history of historical thought in the 20th century as to avoid Marxism. Rather than relegating religious history to its own autonomous zone, the narrative contained herein explains how religious thinkers were in the mix

[7] See in particular the work of Augusto Del Noce: Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity,* translated and edited by Carlo Lancellotti, (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

as theorists of historical time, Niebuhr and Lasch both being Christian thinkers whose secular historical projects are only comprehensible inside of the confines of a thoroughly non-religious discourse. Taking them seriously as participants in this historical discourse avoids an important and common pitfall, which is structuring an intellectual history with unstated parameters of exclusion on some notion that religion is incomprehensible only to then derive from the intellectual history a narrative that has programmatic distortions through this omission.

In order to include religious thinkers in the history of historical thought requires additionally some hermeneutical infrastructure not commonly practiced by historians of social science in particular. The temporality literature, as well as the hermeneutics of metaphor and narrative, allow access to a larger framework wherein social scientists, religious thinkers, ideological partisans, social critics or whomever else can be comprehended as being part of a larger discourse about the experience of modernity—a scholarly and analytical approach that is outlined in chapter 2. This framing allows us to understand work that is putatively empirical, just as well as it allows us to understand participants in that same discourse that are practicing various forms of philosophico-history or utilizing historical discourse as a metaphorical framework for discussing the progress of modernity.

Just as this analysis passes partially through the history of religious thinkers, it does so to a far greater degree for social scientists. It covers some developments in the theory of propaganda, the sociology of crowds, and the development of psychology. The basic orientation towards these topics is that of an intellectual history of the historical presumptions embedded in the optimism about the prospect of scientific expertise.

This study is not primarily a history of science in either the sense that it is not primarily a history of the disclosure of a new truth, and it is even less so a study of knowledge production or

the study of the circulation of scientific facts.[8] The primary dimensions of the study are concept-historical. Like many concept histories, it is concerned with a shift it conceptualizations that is not neatly linked to a causes and effects in the plane of social history.[9] However, like items being fitted into boxes, reality external to the domain of representation does demand that concepts be reasonably appropriate to them, and so the assessment of many topics, in particular in chapters 3 and 4, presume that there is reality beyond discourse, contrary to the views of some advanced hermeneuts. Reality external to the dialectical extension of thought in historical time does exist and intrude into the history of thought, and so the total elimination of historical context, human nature, or genuine insight or error in the history of thought is an unavoidable part of a coherent story of the conceptual novelties of this era.

Instead of being a history of science, it is a history of thinkers, many of whom had a noteworthy relationship with socially-scientific expertise, sometimes as a practitioner and often as a critic. The reasons of this differentiation are important. Historical thought permeates the modern age, and it is adjacent to almost all aspects of political ideology in public life, it is adjacent to the social sciences, and it informs the actions of historical actors. It has also been squeezed out, not entirely so, by either historiography of professional historians on the one hand, and studies of ideologies and social scientists on the others. This study will attempt to explain a thread in the history of 20th century American thought that does not cleanly fit into the currently-popular neo-liberal or neo-conservative labels that are organizing categories in the 20th century

[8] The work of Bruno Latour is notably the genesis point for important developments in the field of science and technology studies, critical useful to scholars of the history of laboratory science as well as the governmental expertise. This study does not study those; it studies discourse about the expert as a social type, and such does not draw methodologically from that intellectual tradition.

[9] An argument for the impossibility of connecting the causal structure of social history to that of conceptual history can be found in: Reinhart Kosselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, translated and edited by Todd Samuel Presner, *et al* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 20-38.

literature, and only partially for their appropriateness. To some degree fascination with these two neo-labels dates to the 20th century, and more narrowly even to the second half of it. If we are to avoid presentism, it is desirable to either outgrow—or at least develop self-awareness about—these preoccupations.

However, the social sciences are an important topic with which some portions of the dissertation intersect. Firstly, the concepts studied here relate to the architecture of Cold War thought to some degree, in particular thinking about totalitarianism. This is no coincidence. The literature on Cold War social science has often been a literature that is in truth a literature on the development of the state and its relationship with research funding, often in a conspiratorial mode. The issue is often that the elephant in the room in the Cold War literature is the presence of various temporal schemes—say progress or revolution, for example—that undergirded many of the most important social science projects, in particular the applied ones enlisted in modernization abroad or social engineering at home.[10] At its best, contributors to this field have been attentive to precisely the kind of historical distortions built into Cold War social science in by virtue of its ideological character.[11] At its worst, the literature presumes the progressive, regenerative, or chiliastic framing that 20th century thinkers themselves often bought into, and then uses the ideological struggles of the 20th century as a sociological scapegoat to describe the

[10] Joy Rohde, *Armed with Expertise : The Militarization of American Social Research during the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013) is an excellent example of a tradition in this vein that descends from Noam Chomsky *et al*, *The Cold War & the University: Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years* (New York: New Press, 1997). These types of arguments are widespread even when they aren't the primary argument of the book, and are instead merely a framing device for certain subsections of argument. Examples can be found in: Philip Mirowski, *Machine Dreams: Economics Becomes a Cyborg Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) or at multiple points in Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell, *Uncertain Empire American History and the Idea of the Cold War.* (Oxoford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[11] Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Michael E. Latham, *Modernization As Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation-Building"* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) are both attuned to the temporal problems of implicit in Cold War defense planning and social science.

deformation of the state towards malevolent ends.[12] This study aims to specifically bridge from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th in order to help develop a better itinerary for talking about 20th century topics.

Much more important is the itinerary for the history of social thought and social science that has been attuned to the basic problem of the history of the conceptualization of human nature. Many such studies either explicitly or implicitly adjacent to histories of conceptualization of citizenship and practices of political prognostication.[13] This study outlines the history whereby many midcentury intellectuals were disturbed by current goings-on in the social sciences as well as authoritarian social movements, and leapt into action to find for new sources of virtue to save the polity. This panic, seen clearly in the work of Walter Lippmann, is an important turning point in 20th century thought, and so it is the volta that separates the middle chapter's engagement with midcentury propaganda studies from the latter chapters which deal with the emergence of new political concepts appropriate to the critique of the political aspirations common in the first half of the century. The extension of totalitarianism discourse from propaganda discourse is entirely a continuity, other than the fact that theorists who discussed their participation in propaganda efforts from the First War were, by the Second War theorizing dystopian political forms that were emerging from it.

The other term of art that bears considerable load in this study is "modernity." This term is taken to mean, generally, the world in which we live after Copernicus and Galileo, and more generally the victory of the new science and its myriad implications for the world, most of them

[12] The paradigmatic example is, today: Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking, 2017).
[13] Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008)

still now only partially comprehended. It is an admittedly regrettable elision, but this study uses "modern" to refer firstly to an implicit sense of time used to frame social action and discourse—generally one that entails a break from legitimacy rooted in the past—uses it secondly to refer to the machine domination of nature and mechanical time discipline, as well as their effects in society—new communications, bureaucracy, profound urbanization, &c—and thirdly uses it to refer to a broad set of philosophical trends that have dominated for the last few centuries largely as a implication of the victory of the new science. Amongst these philosophical trends are almost certainly the trend away from metaphysics, the trends towards both skepticism and nominalism, and finally a spirit of rejection or antipathy towards argument through authority, in particular the authority of revelation. Hopefully this cursory account of what is meant by calling something modern is satisfactory to the suspicious reader, imprecise and varied as it is.

The first chapter—The Historical Culture of the 20th Century—gives a general characterization for how 19th century reactions to social dislocation and 19th century republicanism combined in the intellectual framework of mass society criticism, an intellectual framework popular or dominant for the better part of a century on both sides of the Atlantic, and one which is now in disrepair. It also describes how the extraordinary instability of historical experience became a primary topic with public intellectuals and how the infrastructure provided by mass society criticism was integral to how they responded to their times. They participated in a sphere of historical commentary aimed at comprehending their contemporary world. It will show how some of the era's popular but now neglected thinkers, like Ortega y Gassett or Lewis Mumford, can be better comprehended by American historians through treating them as broadly popular historical commentators.

The second chapter—A 20th Century Saddle Period—looks at some of the radically divergent responses to comprehending contemporary history, including scriptural allegory or the repurposing of the Marxist historical architectonics for new ends, as well as some radical conclusions, including the view that history is not comprehensible to the finite mind of man. It argues that the way to find unity in such a varied discourse is to look not just at how intellectuals are discussing the experience of historical time, but to look at how intellectuals grasped for a vocabulary for discussing new social types, and how they grasped additionally for a stable anthropology that could be implicit in their criticism.

The third chapter—The Modern Science of Mass Domination—explains how a primary zone of these intellectual developments was with public intellectuals, including psychologists, sociologists, journalists and propagandists became preoccupied with theories of propaganda and mass persuasion at precisely this historical moment. It argues that large portions of this era's intellectual impulses can be explained better by treating these intellectuals as historical commentators on politics and mass society than as social scientists by a strict definition of social science. Concomitant with this claim is the claim that the intellectual history of the era is more interesting for the fact that contemporary social scientists were surprised at what they found once they started studying human nature than for the fact that those thinkers were in a real sense covering new grounds. It concludes by showing how this view helps to explain the intellectual unity of the life's work of some key intellectuals, like Walter Lippmann, who over this span moved through being a young socialist, a pessimistic elitist and then from there felt the need to rediscover a new source of vitality for liberalism not just after the emergence of totalitarianism but as an internal development in his own reaction interwar liberal views about the nature of human society.

The fourth chapter—Continuities in the Theory of Totalitarianism—argues that the theory of totalitarianism and the attendant emergence of totalitarianism as a popular concept came at a moment of broad novelty in conceptualizations, alongside the garrison state and others. It argues that this proliferation of novel concepts can be best comprehended in a zone of historical conceptual novelty, and that it additionally was comprehensible only within a scheme of historical thinkers regarding political modernity in its totality. It additionally focuses on the central influence of mass society criticism on the development of explanations of totalitarianism.

The fifth—Chrisopher Lasch and the Progressives—is an attempt to situate Christopher Lasch in the intellectual history of the United States. The chapter argues that broad pessimism about the deterioration of society, and with it civic virtue, was widespread in the second half of the last century, and that mass society criticism had waning purchase in this era. It lays out how these conditions, as well as responses to intellectuals from the prior chapters, help to understand the historical-critical corpus of Christopher Lasch.

Chapter 1

The Historical Culture of the 20th Century

The premise underlying this study—that the manner in which to best approach key topics in history of social thought in the mid-twentieth century is by treating them as problems of historical thought under the condition of radical conceptual instability—requires some initial explanation. Two approaches to explicating the work of intellectuals, both popular, would assess social theorists either primarily as actors participating in historical processes wherein their theories are products of their circumstances and traditions, or as a thinkers more or less participating in the progress of modern thought and breaking new intellectual ground with new insights that, once had, possess an essential value that transcends the context within which they intellectual first wrote or spoke. Radically historicizing the history of thought, in particular in a manner that makes "context" an over-determining force in one's analysis, has rightfully come up for criticism for its excesses as a hermeneutical approach.[14]

Studying intellectuals theorizing their context requires that one be, at least at a minimum, a contextualist of a kind. Because the intellectuals were keen to theorize the historical conditions under which they were working, it is impossible to take the latter approach fully and truly, even

[14] For a most prominent critic of the entire historicist/antihistoricist split, see: Felski, Rita. ""Context Stinks!"." *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011): 573-591. This account takes its route to overcome the dichotomy between text and context from the theorization of temporality. In this regard, Kosselleck's earlier "perspectival" is more convincing, in part because it has a more thorough safeguard against presentism, and in part because it does not elide "contextualization" *per se* with the radical conceptual moves open to some prominent historicists. One of the common dangers of the text/context discourse is the elision of a phenomenon (a text) with a precondition for its phenomenality itself (a concept). Reinhart Kosselleck, Keith Tribe trans. *Futures Past: On The Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) 128-151.

if their thought was on many points incisive. If one wants to understand thinkers who were self-theorizing the effects of mass society and propaganda as part of both their social critique and also part of their practice of critical self-reflection, then one must start with the historical conditions in which they lived. How else could one then assess if there were deeper insights that the intellectuals had gleaned true enough that their truth transcended its original context? If they did not transcend their time, history of their thought is not history of social science and is merely a history of social commentary, then the history of this confusion would be of great interest in its own right as well, at least to historians of the 20th century.

If this is not a history of social scientists then it must be a history of intellectuals more broadly—and indeed it is! Therefrom extends a line of historiography that for a time preoccupied the discipline of American history for decades before sliding into desuetude. This problem is the problem of the intellectual as a social type.[15] Modern intellectuals don't know who exactly we are, or what we are doing, and the problem of the social history of the intellectual troubled our minds for some time. It also troubled the minds of the intellectuals in this study, who were not certain who they were. This problem emerges, for example, with interwar discourse on the newsman, the ad man, the social-scientific expert, and the propagandist, and the relationship between these new social roles and modern political power, *ie* technocrat or party apparatchik.

Secondly, now that it is clear that the intellectuals are the object of the study, the second obvious question is why not to yoke them to primarily the history of either social science or the history of parties and ideologies. The issue in this regard stems from the problem that the late 19th and early 20th centuries were an historical cauldron from which the basic vocabulary and

[15] The key historiographical thread here, for Americanists, is that from Hofstadter to Lasch. This problem was a, if not the, primary locus in both of their respective oeuvres, and more attention to both will be allocated in chapters 2 and 5.

itinerary of 20th century ideology emerged. There is an insight from the early-modern Republicanism literature—Pocock is discussed and in more depth later—which is that Republicanism is foundationally modern in how it serves for moderns as the orienting historical architectonics for political action as well as constitutional thought. Studying the intellectuals first as theorists of their times first, and then studying how their thought fit with the partisan landscape of the 20th century on as a second-order concern, reveals both continuities and discontinuities between the end of the 19th century and the end of the 20th.

This chapter will begin substantially before the 20th century and will lay out the important intellectual-historical antecedents to 20th century American social and political thought on this study's larger topics. It will then explain how the intellectuals, in the middle of the last century, saw themselves in a singularly-novel historical crisis that ramified the very possibility of historical discourse. It will then proceed to a methodological discussion of how to read these intellectuals, so as to set the foundations for later chapters focusing on specific concepts or intellectuals. The two analytical challenges to be explored are how to read intellectuals who are theorists of history, and how to read their mixed allegorical modes of narrative. The first of these problems is both an opportunity and a source of difficult—the thinkers helpfully provide a theoretics to later historians by *just explicitly telling the reader* how to interpret historical context, but this in turn begs the question of what kinds of historical conditions require that one theorize method in history, or serve as a precondition for theorizing history in the manner that these intellectuals did. The second problem comes from the mobility of their use of allegory—literary and philosophical allegory, references to scripture or science fiction could all appear alongside allegorical use of the past as modes that the intellectuals used to talk about the difficult philosophical implications of being modern.

Such an approach is schematic, and runs the risk of generalizations across intellectuals' works that are either too narrow or too shallow. However, without an organized approach, the varied topics and methods of the intellectuals seem too disparate to be brought together into one analysis. The intellectuals wrote extensively on many topics; studies of propaganda or crowd psychology, studies of modern art, or philosophical reflection on the impact of Galileo might appear to be the purview of aesthetes or psychologists, but they were bound together in the works of wide-ranging intellectuals engaging in discourse about modernity itself. Some of these intellectuals used science fiction, some used interpretation of scripture, reference to myth or literature, and many used history itself as allegorical systems to talk about the experience of modernity. As such, if one wants to take a specific topic—say propaganda—and understand what the intellectuals were talking about when they talked about the propagandist and his or her place in modern mass societies one must start by understanding what the locus of their historical problem was and what outer bounds demarcated their discourse. From there it is possible to understand the degree to which they were really concerned with propaganda, per se, in the most literal of sense, and the degree to which this discourse was either a subset of a larger discourse or was some sort of allegorical stand-in for another object of inquiry.

It might seem obvious in hindsight which immediate historical events were being discussed; the urgency of the Great Depression or the rise of Fascism was not lost on anyone. However, the thinkers of the period cast about for a historical vocabulary that they could use to ask different types of questions at different levels, sometimes concrete questions about human nature, sometimes more obtuse questions about modernity itself. Central in this discourse was uncertainty about whether the political turmoil of their era was like some known catastrophe of recorded history, or whether they were in new and hitherto unknown historical region outcome

of which would be unknown. Extending from this question, growing certainty that the type of time in which they found themselves was new and unprecedented had unclear implications. The extraordinary instability of their time meant that their questions about history were complex. Additionally, the embrace of cutting-edge trends in modern thought by the intellectuals made their task even more confused as it meant that they lacked a clear set of historical referents that they could use as points of comparison.

This meant that the task of the intellectuals was to figure out what kind of times they were living in, and to find a way of discussing it that was not itself bound parochially to the biases of its own era. If one considers Jose Ortega y Gassett's discussion of "generations" one finds a key preoccupation of his intellectual generation writ large: the search for a fundamental vocabulary that could be used to describe the reality of historical process beyond the tumult of the age. His work *Man and Crisis* develops a theory of historical generations, and in doing so provides a clue to the historian of the age about how the historically-minded intellectual thought that they ought to be studied. In fact, his status as an interwar intellectual *phenom* in the sphere of public discourse between the wars indicates much about the times more generally. This work was originally given as lectures in 1933 and 1934, and was only published, first in Spanish and then in English after the war, but its continued appeal during the 1950s and 1960s speaks to the durability of the book's themes and the connections they had with the experience of 20th-century history. Ortega spells out the connections—that a fixed anthropology would be necessary in an era of such intense instability, he allegorically related his own era to both the Renaissance and to the depth of the Middle Ages, and he directly linked this theory to the question of how to interpret the impact of the First World War on his generation:

> "What I ask of historians is only that they take seriously what they do, what in fact they practice; and in place of constructing history without taking account of what they are doing,

> they take care to construct it deliberately, starting with a more rigorous idea of the general structure which our life has and which operates identically in all places at all times. When one tries to understand a confused, a crisis period—such as the Renaissance—one must start from a clear and precise concept of what life is and what are the functions that make it up. Because this has not been done vigorously and thoroughly, the Renaissance has not been understood, nor have men understood what an historic crisis is. It is therefore essential that we set forth in brief a diagram of human life.[16]

This brief diagram of human life was somewhat unusual—Ortega's philosophical mode was proto-existentialist, while most of his peers turned to positivistic social science, generally psychology, as their means of establishing a stable anthropology that they could use to study their own time. However, Ortega demonstrates his own peculiar insight: he indicates that a generation is the people who are politically active whose ages are between their thirties and sixties, indicating that the acceleration of historical time was an historical experience that Ortega felt the need to study with particular precision. He also provides an account of why historical crises occur, disagreeing explicitly with the view that World War I is the source of a world-historic crisis. Instead, historical crises emerge from the moment at which a coherent vision of the world plays out its possibilities but does not reemerge in a new view for a new generation, leaving a historic void that makes the world unthinkable. This type of crisis is, for Ortega, an explanation of a type of crisis different from mere wars or famines, comprehensible in the normal scheme of things.

While this work says little about English-language discourse in the first half of the twentieth century, his other, earlier work was widely read. His *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930) was wildly popular before the War, and again provides a self-diagnosis of the age wherein an age-old problem—democracy becoming the rule of the rabble—was now far more dangerous on

[16] Jose Ortega y Gassett, *Man and Crisis*, Translated by Milford Adams (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958) 19.

account of the character of modern mass society.[17] There was more than one reason for its popularity in the United States, and understanding the main currents of the intellectual life of the era help to explain its popularity.

Ortega was, by training, a philosopher, a student of Edmund Husserl, and in this regard he was the same as many of the public intellectuals widely read and discussed in the era—a commentator on history who was by no accounts an historian.[18] He was a thinker trying to provide for his readers a philosophical basis for understanding history in general so as to be able to orient oneself in the present. In this regard he was like many popular thinkers of the era whether they were also emigres spreading a German philosophical tradition, like Hannah Arendt or the first-Generation Frankfurt-School thinkers, or American, like Walter Lippmann. The red thread that led through the eclectic interwar discourses in which they participated was an attempted diagnosis of the historical conditions in contemporary modernity. The historiography has not brought thinkers such as these together in part because professional historians have often overlooked history that is not part of the professional discipline of history and in part because historians have been too reticent to consider the historicality of their own preoccupation with history. If one can study the preoccupation with history as something that itself has a history, then new genealogies become clear.

Lippmann was not unique in this discourse, just as Gassett was not. In the United States Lippmann was writing at the same time as a bevy of social commentators working on similar topics. This included Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays working on propaganda, post-war sociologists like Harold Lasswell or C. Wright Mills theorizing modern political power and communications,

[17] Jose Ortega y Gassett, *The Revolt of the Masses,* authorized anonymous translation (New York: W. W. Norton, 1930)

[18] Many ideas in *the Revolt of the* Masses are an interpretation of the implications of Husserl's views in *The Crisis of the European Sciences*.

and numerous social critics discussing the relationship between contemporary culture and modern technics, like Lewis Mumford. Many of these intellectuals shared an important generational feature: that the First World War served as a decisive break between their naive youth and their later intellectual career. Many of these intellectuals shared also a thoroughgoing self-theorization of their own status as public intellectuals. They were keenly self-aware about how the modern division of labor and modern technology had destroyed the old Bourgeois public sphere and created a new class of dedicated thinkers, and within that a class of dedicated newspaper men and propagandists who served as an existential threat to the fundamentally 19th-century, Bourgeois world from which they hailed. This breakdown and nascent reorganization of social forms was repeatedly characterized by Lippmann with colorful metaphor—he would often reference the sense that society's self-awareness had become more acute since the First World War by describing society as being like a person who had become self-conscious about their breathing and could not cease to think of it, or when he was more dire he would make references to the "acids of modernity" disintegrating social relations.[19] It is no surprise then that place of cultural criticism grew not just in importance, but also in scope. The rapid transformation of culture was linked with the transformation of global politics as well as that the transformation of the cityscape, and the modern city was itself a nexus for the profound social and political changes to which the intellectuals were responding.

[19] The "acids of modernity" was a favorite phrase of Lippmann's, which he used in a number of places including as a chapter title in Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1929) 48-62.

The End of Classical Modernity

Making sense of the profound import of the First World War for this generation requires a closer look. A general loss of innocence or a sense of disillusion are often referenced by scholars looking back on the impact of the war, but casting in sharp features what the import of the War was for that generation is illusive. One of its primary implications, as has been noted by Michael Addas, was that it heralded the end of a certain degree of Chauvinism, for certitude in Western dominance of the global, for trust of technology, ultimately for certainty that the process of the 19th century was a progressive process. Theretofore Westerners had, on the whole, functioned under the presumption that modern technological domination of nature was good and that this good authorized the transformation of the world by capital and a small cohort of imperial states. The carnage of World War I sowed doubt both about the beneficence of modern technology and also about the West's ethical or political authority derived from that technology.[20]

This characterization of events, while true, fails to capture the types of conceptual problems created by this loss of progressive certainty. Addas points towards certain features—the beginning of the loss of certainty about Western superiority over the world, as well as the loss of faith in technology as a source of social good—as key implications of the experience of the War. However, the direct and immediate experience of the interwar decades was turmoil about how modern technology in its destructive capacity spelled doom for the political and social aspirations of the 19th or 18th centuries. This was not just a loss of faith in Western empires, relative to the rest of the world, but also a moment of profound doubt about the viability of Western political thought at home. Shaken faith in technology came from many things—

[20] Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance*. (Ichaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

eugenics, the atomic bomb, and for some people this faith was never shaken. The debate that raged was about the legitimacy of the technological age and about whether optimism or pessimism about technology was warranted, and for many the faith in technology persisted. The intense futurism of the Fascists or the Bolsheviks, as well as many interwar Progressives and Cold War liberals, that for many World War I did not break through to those most enchanted by the technological domination of the world. On the contrary, it broke down their faith in Western civilization as it had previously existed, and called for the existence of a new technological order. This same faith in the capacity for man to control his destiny through technological domination of nature was also one of the key ideas that loomed over interwar historical discourse, sometimes as a habit of mind for the intellectuals, and sometimes as an object of critique that they saw amongst their peers.

Addas' magisterial synthesis, focused as it is on the use of technology as specifically a measure of domination, and covering multiple centuries, should be expected to cruise past some details about a specific decade. There was, however, an additional dimension to 19th century discourse about technology that Addas does not deal with in depth. The extension of technological domination of nature was seen by many within the Western world as ambiguous in its effects—in particular, the history of the technological world was often yoked to stories of moral decline and the attenuation of social bonds. These melancholic themes permeated the late 19th and early 20th century, were primary problems of classical sociology, and were the main bread and butter of classical mass society theory. What's more, the history of technics was often yoked to the history of concerns about moral decay, or about nihilism, often on account of concern about what would happen when reason was reorganized onto a strictly instrumental basis oriented towards using power to dominate the world. One way in which this story was

squared with a story of civilizational supremacy was through melancholic reflection about what would happen when either the "lower" classes or races obtained the technologies that they had not themselves have invented, and whose science was of no genuine interest to them. A version of this concern, sometimes more subtle and sometimes more conceited, was important for the Germans. A profound and subtle concern about the reorganization of the mind of the modern world towards a form of science modelled off of technological dominance of nature can be found in Husserl's famous *Crisis*, while an alternate account of this same phenomenon, reconciled in the latter case with ideologies of racial supremacy, can be found programmatically pursued in the work of Spengler.[21]

Whether it be a spiritual discourse about orientation towards technological domination, imperial chuauvanism, or hedonistic optimism, as was often the case with 19th-century progressives who believed only that technology would lead singularly to greater ease, the primary concern from the late 19th century onward was the implication of technical domination of nature for social and political relations in the modern world. This discourse was substantially about whether the technological reorganization of the world was a sign that the world was unready for these technologies—because if so the world had to be readied for them by reorganizing its institutions and ways of life—or whether the technological age had more profoundly morbid features. World War I, alongside other events at the end of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th century, served as a wakeup call for the intellectuals. However, to doubt that the technological age had a progressive bent meant both multiple special topics and a few big questions. The special topics were varied, but they tended to organize around some

[21] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy,* translator and edited by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970); Oswald Spengler. *Routledge Revivals: Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life.* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

primary preoccupations. One thought, contrary to progressive optimism, was that if human nature is unchanged, but technology is reorganizing and extending our ability to dominate things inside of nature, then surely the social and political implications of the technological age would be despotic. Another thought, equally important to the intellectuals that follow, was that the disturbing effects of technology had actually been derived from a change in modern man's orientation toward the world, perhaps tempted by technological power or scientific hubris, a change wherein all thought had been bent to dominating nature and all healthy limits on human aspiration had been rejected.

From this sprang various topics that only to a contemporary itinerary might seem divorced from one another; the technical perfection of mass persuasion, the alienation that came with mass society, the effects of dependency on specialization in industrial labor, the transformation of the modern cityscape, and the rhetorical features of modern ideas—namely those about technological progress—insofar as ideas about progress would serve as the new authorizing myth for new forms of empire. This meant that the conceptual instability of the era was intense—and so a stable anthropology was necessary. Whether it was through psychology generally, or through the study of communication in particular, the intellectuals turned to social sciences that could provide a stable account of human nature relative to which they could talk about the rapid changes overcoming society, and do so without indebtedness to concepts associated with a fast dying past.

One feature of this discourse to which historians must be attentive was how its participants took ancient or early-modern philosophers as stand-ins for their age or for historical

movements.[22] The intellectuals tried to diagnose their own historical predicament through diagnosing characteristics modernity, and this meant discussing ancient doctrines while also treating the ancient philosophers as interlocutors. Treating ancient authors as interlocutors was certainly not new to the twentieth century—Petrarch systematically addressed the ancients directly about the gulf that separated their different ages of the world.[23] Discussion of thinkers of past ages (either specifically named ones, like Galileo, or types of characters, like "puritans") became a way for moderns to ask whether the type of time that they were in was just another golden age or whether a decisive break between past and future had already transpired. Previous ages had already pushed to the fore the question of whether the modern West was superseding any known limit or whether it was just participating in another cycle of rise and fall, and previous ages had already pushed moderns to ask whether they were rebelling against the past or vindicating it, particularly with regard to the Hellenic or Abrahamic past. While these themes had haunted 18th and 19th century moderns, it seemed increasingly clear in the 20th that the conditions in which they lived were unprecedented. Ortega was unequivocal on this point not just in the *Revolt of the Masses* but also elsewhere—he put forth allegorical comparisons to the past alongside an insistence that in the 20th century they had achieved a new "historical level." The spatial metaphor was a complex one—echoing Nietzsche, as well as earlier criticism of modern mass society like Argentine philosopher Jose Ingeneiros' 1913 *The Mediocre Man*—Ortega referred to both the "height of the times" and also to a great "levelling" in *Masses*. On the one hand, modern technical domination of nature had made society quantifiably larger and more

[22] As opposed to dismissing these historical invocation as bad scholarship without mining them for meaning in some other way. A spectacular example from this period is: Walter Lippmann, *American Inquisitors; a Commentary on Dayton and Chicago* (New York: Macmillan, 1928).
[23] Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch's Letters to Classical Authors*, translated by Mario Emilio Costenza. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910).

dynamic, but at the same time there are had been a great mediocratization of society driven by malformed features in modern thought—a levelling in Nietzschian terms.[24]

For highly educated and scientifically-minded intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century, whose view of the progress of modernity over backwardness and religion was a deep part of their self-conception, the point of demarcation for modernity was Galileo, who took on a singularly important role in Ortega's narration of the emergence of modernity.[25] This account of modernity, as conceived, did not primarily take Galileo or any of the great early modern scientists as interlocutors on topics of the natural world. The discussion of Galileo was a way of dating the beginning of modernity not just to the Renaissance but also to hitch modernity to scientific comprehension of nature. This conception of modernity implicitly presumed that modernity began with the Copernican Shift, and that a break from medieval religion—a stand-in for world-historical backwardness—was an essential characteristic of the modern. That is not to say that their view of themselves was necessarily accurate—their scorching commitment to progress and abandonment of religion in the name vindicating both the Athenian golden age and the Enlightenment all seem much more like the French Philosophes than Galileo.[26]

Mass Society and the Legacy of Republicanism

Outside of progress in modern technics, the other substantial antecedent for this discourse was in the historical architectonics of republicanism, the origins for which also point towards the

[24] *The Revolt of the Masses*, 19-28 for the mixed spatial metaphors. The only widely available English translation of *The Mediocre Man* is Carlos E. Picone's self-published volume.
[25] *Man and Crisis*, cited above, was originally entitled *En Torno a Galileo.*
[26] The most lucid and succinct account of how this generation thought about modernity is given in Stephen Toulmin's preface to his 1990 *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990)

Renaissance. J. G. A. Pocock's landmark histories of modern political thought trace the development of the modern preoccupation with history back all the way to ancient discourse about the ideal polity. Sources from the Athenian Golden Age had begun to theorize, already, an ideal polity, one which would not suffer the turmoil experienced by ancient democracies, and had theorized virtue, which had its roots in divine revelation. This created a serious philosophical problem because the comprehension of the problem of changing regimes (aristocracy to democracy, democracy to tyranny, &c) required the comprehension of how a people could become more or less virtuous in time, which required that historical processes and events be subjected to a metaphysical analysis. This preoccupation ran parallel to the Abrahamic preoccupation with the relationship between revelation and history, and in the Renaissance philosophical investigation of history returned to the fore after many centuries, during which time the problems of political power were largely relegated to being the domain of pagan virtue and the merely temporal and finite power of kings. Pocock's histories were path breaking when they were written, and to date remain the most important work for indicating a critical path forward—that the architecture of modern political thought is organized around historical questions that continue to permeate modern political discourse. The origins of these themes, modern though they may be, lay in substantially premodern religious and philosophical discourse.[27]

One of the central characteristics of the American response to the modern age was to theorize the relationship with first nature as a source of Republican virtue. Through being subject to the wild and natural necessities of life without luxuries, free from the effects of the division of

[27] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 1-90. See also: J. G. A Pocock, *Language, Politics and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

labor (dependency) and with minds turned towards God—the ultimate source of true wisdom the could serve as a wellspring of more genuine virtue—Americans thought they had found a way to safeguard their virtue where the Europeans had failed to do so. However, there were some issues, many of them acute, that began appearing, and many of them early. Three of the perennial problems were that American society was never quite so righteous as anyone had hoped (a problem that emerged early and has been a recurrent theme), another was the United States could never function without masses of unfree laborers that threatened the covenant between autonomous citizens, and the third being that there was only so much land, and time, before the United States would run out of untrammeled wilderness that could serve to safeguard the rugged virtues of the citizens against decadence. Over the course of the 19th century it became more and more an issue that the technological age seemed to lean constantly towards destroying all premodern social forms, even the family, and deskilling labor, and that the ultimate telos of this process was not at all a society of self-governing Christians. By contrast, it served to pull people into cities where they found themselves alienated and awash in vice, and it undermined virtue through increasing dependency on capitalist employment.[28]

The impact of modern technology on the division of labor was enduringly a topic of serious alarm. From Adam Smith onward, Anglo thinkers had already become comfortable with the notion that dependency on the market was a form of dependency on nature insofar as no single authority was capable of dominating market participants politically through consolidating

[28] The literature on Republicanism in the United States is voluminous. For a survey, see: Rodgers, Daniel T. "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept." *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (1992): 11–38. Rodgers' work on labor, social reformers' response to urbanization and the inheritance of the program of founding the New Jerusalem has not coincidentally spanned these three key disciplinary core topics that connect the 19th and 20th centuries, at least within the horizon of 19th century Republicanism or 20th century Progressivism. The Americanist literatures on these topics are too extensive to list here. For the other disciplinary classic on the topic of the citizen's virtue and its relationship with first nature, one should return to Frederic Jackson Turner's classic work, as either a primary or secondary source.

monopolistic controls over markets. However, the progress of the 19th century took already-existing problems, like the deskilling effects of modern industrial production and the tendency for modern markets to be dominating by a small cohort of firms with imperial privileges, and pushed them to new extremes. Industrial accidents challenged Protestant trust in the pursuit of personal perfection through commitment to the work ethic, and pushed workers to collective responses to the capitalist marketplace.[29]

There were also a broader and deeper transformation, the responses to which were more ambiguous, as were their causes. Most intense of these were the transformation of the family form and the relationship that this had with the expansion of capitalist market relations. Attendant transformations to the personal ethos and personal relations of individuals proceeded in a manner that was directly parallel; the growth of bureaucracy and the increased importance of administration for the extensive power of the modern state and global capital both required the insinuation of new authority structures into daily life that further displaced traditional social bonds. Again, the intellectuals were ambivalent—they had already embraced intense naturalism as part of a world view optimistic about both man's nature and about the proximity of man to nature. The attendant optimism about the dysregulation of the sex drive and the erosion of the Bourgeois family structure associated with complex civilization again characterized their work up to a point, beyond which they again discovered causes for ambivalence about the purely salutary character of unmediated human nature.[30]

[29] Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[30] Lippmann glides through a discussion of female political emancipation in his famous *Drift and Mastery*. However, the most telling indicators about his ambivalent feelings come from his biography—Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980).

Nowhere were these problems—fears about mass democracy and fears about the morbid effects of technics—seen more clearly than in the growth of the modern city, and the reactions that this new urban life prompted amongst concerned commentators. The city was a site of all of the above issues, and more. It was crowded and industrial, thronging with alienated and displaced farmers venturing in with immigrants, immigrants and emancipated slaves who lacked the self-provision necessary for citizenship (at least citizenship without being weak to the seduction of the demagogue) and it replaced dependency on first nature with dependency on mutual parasitism. However, the city took all of these concerns and underlined their connection with other modern problems. In the obliteration of the traditional spaces of life, the city created an experience of amnesia, and with the massive populations concentrated together in a scale virtually unseen before modernity, the city prompted the contemplation of frightening prospects about the continuation of civilization itself.[31]

One of the primary concerns of intellectuals was the effects that these new, swollen cities and their attenuated social bonds had on the possibility of creating or defending the ideal polity. This concern became a concern with the metropolis, the "great society," the "large societies," or with the "*Grosstädte"*—as Simmel called it, a singularly insightful thinker whose concerns ran parallel to American concerns, but whose work was sadly not substantially known or responded to by these American thinkers. However, classical sociology's concern with mass society, industrialization and cities did have an impact in the United States—on Lippmann through his mentor Graham Wallas, on Lewis Mumford through his mentor Patrick Geddes, and later through émigré German thinkers who had been influenced by German sociology, including the work of Max Weber.

[31] Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

Equally important to urbanization was bureaucracy—the experience in government bureaucracy in World War I, and the experience in the corporate world would prove decisive in the intellectual development of many social thinkers and public commentators, particularly for theorists of propaganda and public opinion. Similarly important was the efficiency of the factory floor and top-down production management, which trammeled the Republican aspiration for independent citizens but also enticed with its extraordinary dynamism and efficiency. Among the multiple responses to urbanization and industrial management was the response by the labor Left, which was the home, at least during developmental years, of many of the era's intellectuals. The problem of the Left was to some degree to confront the consequences of the modern industrial division of labor and to find a workable program of political self-rule. However, it had other tendencies, including naïve optimism about man's nature and a sanguine view of the consolidated power associated with the machine age. This latter preoccupation was less radical than socialist, and it went hand-in-hand with the disastrous optimism of the early 20th century, with the aestheticism of the of the New York intellectual scene and with New York's predilection for continental intellectual developments. The last of these was key: the young intellectuals of the late-19th and early 20th were attempting to square American intellectual developments and American political experience with a view of modernity exported from Europe, a view of modernity that had different genealogies.

More important than any other European influence in this regard was the intellectual shadow cast by Karl Marx, towards whom the intellectuals had an ambiguous attitude. While most of the intellectuals outgrew some form of youthful Marxism, Marx remained the great modern thinker who set the itinerary for the 20th century historical imaginary at a global scale. However, neither his materials, nor his emphasis on the dialectical development of historical

forms were taken up systematically by the intellectuals. The greatest inheritance was in thinking about class—but modelled off of thinking about the Bourgeoisie more than the Proletariat. Only some of these thinkers were concerned about the class characterized by an authentic relationship with their own labor. They instead inherited a theoretical concern with analyzing the new class that would dominate power relations in the new era they were entering. This concern with the new class—generally technical, bureaucratic or propagandistic in its character—was an extension of earlier concerns not just in how this new class had a special import in an historical architectonics that explained the origins and fate of the modern world, but also in that the new class's specialized role in their corrupt society was imputed to be in some way without virtue even as visions of virtue receded from the imaginations of the intellectuals.[32]

The teleologies that provided a coherent narrative to the 19th century, about the spread of civilization, technical progress, the approach of the millennium or the democratic emancipation of the masses, all fast became disturbed when the aforementioned transformations seemed to indicate that the millennium was at hand, as seemed to be the case of many adherents to the social gospel, or when these same transformations challenged their optimistic view. When the great ruptures of the World Wars, and a host of frightening new technologies arrived in the 20th century, it is not a surprise that the only explanations seemed to be that the end times had finally come or that they never world. Mumford astutely linked this orientation towards the utopia with the experience of the war:

> "Utopia is the World War, carried on in a big way, long after the fighting is done. Everyone is registered; everyone takes intelligence tests; everyone is

[32] Virtue falling out of favor as a primary concept in political thought as a cataclysmic in its implications and has in many quarters been underappreciated. See: Alasdair McIntyre, *Beyond Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) is the most important and sophisticated work on the trend. The shift in concern from the virtues of the many to the virtues of the modernist aristocrat as a locus of inquiry for erstwhile Marxists is a key theme of this generation. Worthy of careful consideration is James Burnham, *The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom* (New York: The John Day Company, 1943).

> shown his place; everyone gets food; everyone is entitled to shelter; and young females who belong to Old Families may talk to and flirt with desirable males in uniform without being suspected of performing anything besides a patriotic duty. Everyone is better off than before; because each gives his all to the country. The workman is better off than before; he gets fifteen dollars a day instead of three; the financier is better off than before: he gets fifteen millions instead of one. At the top of society is a corps of trained intellects, consisting of college professors, ex-news paper men, pragmatic philosophers, real estate brokers and transatlantic cardsharps who see that everything is done for the greatest good of the whole. Everyone has a stake in the country; whether it is a big stake or a little one depends upon how much you love your country, and whom you know."[33]

This critical account of the present, for Mumford, was associated both with pathological machine domination of nature, the worship of raw power, and with a critical account of the idea of progress as an ideology:

> "This simplistic formula for Progress created the overriding imperative that the very victims of the power complex meekly accepted: one must go with the tide, ride the wave of the future—or, more vulgarly keep moving. The meaning of life was reduced to accelerating movement and change, and nothing else remained. Behold the ultimate religion of our seemingly rational age—the Myth of the Machine!"[34]

Mumford was not the only one to connect the utopian fantasies of the machine age with the experience of the First World War—Lippmann's theorization of mass society was closely connected with his formative experience in wartime propaganda. However, different thinkers varied in the manner in which they attributed the change in the complexion of political life to technical breakthrough, and they varied in the level of optimism or pessimism that they saw as extending from the profound historical breach that had just transpired. James Burnham's famous 1941 *The Managerial Revolution* bluntly blamed technological progress writ large as the direct and undertheorized origin for a new, despotic age—not a sophisticated view of the origins of the crisis, but more importantly not a view reconcilable with faith in technological progress.[35] The initial passages of Lippmann's 1929 *A Preface to Morals* captured so many of the themes of his

[33] Lewis Mumford, "Fashions Change in Utopia," *New Republic* (June 16, 1926_: 14-15.
[34] Lewis Mumford, *My Works and Days: A Personal Chronicle* (New York: Harcourt, 1979) 9.
[35] James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World* (New York: Day, 2941).

era, and shows more subtlety about the origins and dimensions of the crisis, including the key role not directly of technology, but of optimism about man's newfound ability to do as he pleases:

> "The modern age has been rich both in prophecies that men would at last inherit the kingdoms of this world, and in complaints at the kind of world they inherited. Thus Petrarch, who was an early victim of modernity, came to feel that he would 'have preferred to be born in any other period' than his own; he tells that he sought an escape by imagining that he lived in some other age. The nineteenth century, which begat us, was forever blowing the trumpets of freedom and providing asylums in which its most sensitive children could take refuge. Wordsworth fled to an imaginary Greece, and William Morris to the Middle Ages. A few tried imaginary India. A few equally imaginary China. Many fled to Bohemia, to Utopia, to the Golden West, and to the Latin Quarter…"[36]

There are many tell-tale marks of Lippmann's generation in this passage: the undefined affix of "modern" that denotes only that moderns are victims of "modernity," the rapid disillusionment with the nature of man experienced by both a "civilization" and a "generation" in historical time at roughly the dawn of the 20th century, and the robust usage of historical, philosophical and literary figures in a rich allegorical mode. This disillusionment with the 20th century is then directly linked with a new problem in the next paragraph—that political emancipation is not going to plan, and that the attempt to emancipate man was a "false prophecy," a neo-religious belief about which the intellectuals were suddenly very concerned, and one that they wanted to historicize:

> "They had all been disappointed by the failure of a great prophecy. The theme of this prophecy had been that man is a beautiful soul who in the course of history had somehow become enslaved *Scepters, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes of reason wrongs, glozed by ignorance* and they believed with Shelley that when "the loathsome mask has fallen" man, exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king over himself would be "free from guilt or pain."[37]

[36] Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals*, 5-6.
[37] Ibid.

In the last analysis, the political problems of the 20th century were distinctly new, in a way, but also a return of the old. Democracy falling to man's ravenous and ever-growing desire is a vision directly from Plato's Republic and its indictment of democracy—democracy allows the large mass of men to become habituated to accepting no limits.

The other theme in these passages, and this would be a programmatic problem for Lippmann's peers in the following decades, was the chimerical property of human nature. The specific dimension of this problem was the question of man's goodness—the problem that had extended since at least the quarrel. Modern optimism about man's ability to use science to overcome backwardness and expand human freedom ran directly counter to the pessimism of mass society critics. This meant that many intellectuals who were avowed modernists committed to some form of mass emancipation had to find a way to square this progressive or revolutionary project with their pessimism about mass society. The crux of the issue, in this case, was that for some the collapse of the 19th century's Western Civilization was a possibility of emancipation from the oppression of the past, and for others it was the next threshold of disintegration through which civilization itself would come to a dire end. However, this dichotomy would be nothing more than the classic dichotomy of progressives and conservatives. What was peculiar was the interest in how views of human nature were directly linked with historical myth. Lippmann's concern in this passage is echoed elsewhere; if human nature is good, then you need a story whereby all of human history is a vast oppressive weight blocking this goodness from being apparent, because no evidence from any human society in any time period demonstrates this innate goodness. It was through this problem that the period was characterized by both a proliferation of studies attempting to "discover" human nature alongside an interest in history, and in particular interest in what role historical myth played in society.

This intellectual development went hand-in-hand with the breakdown of the conceptual order of the 19th century and the destabilization of the special place that the Bourgeoisie had taken in 19th-century social thought. The sense of dynamic change and instability of the 19th century was harnessed and controlled, at least to an extent, by the vigor of the Bourgeoisie and by the empires that increasingly dominated the century. In the United States it was Roosevelt, not Bismarck, Disraeli or Napoleon, who was the personage associated with the 19th-century imperial project of unifying the promise of modern progress with authority drawn from continuity with classical Western sources. This period of modern imperial dominance served as the backdrop for the formative experience for many of the intellectuals. Lippmann to his dying day continued to talk about Roosevelt as the only political leader by whom he had been swept away—an imperial nostalgia that spoke volumes both about Lippmann and about his generation more broadly.[38] This generation was one that was still educated in both Latin and Greek, and so the breakdown of the old imperial order starting with the First World War caused them to experience not just a sense of decline, but also the sense that what they knew the West to be, the world as they knew it at all, was in a state of increasing fracture as technical advancement, Abrahamic religion and classical learning all became increasingly detached from each other—a disintegration often parsed as the end of the belief in progress. This intellectual and cultural detachment, connected so closely the violent political instability of the times, gave the era an apocalyptic mood. Lewis Mumford, when reflecting back on his life and experiences, captured the mood after the First World War:

> "Much of the work in a civilized community rests upon the assumption that the show is good for a long run. The drama of the present tends to move in a given direction only when it receives the double impact of the past and the future; and if the past be too frightful for

[38] Lippmann's unfinished final book— Walter Lippmann Papers (MS 326). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. Series 6, box 223, 326 and 327. *Unpublished manuscript: The Ungovernability of Man*.

> remembrance or the future too cloudy for anticipation, the present ceases to move in any particular direction, and teeters fitfully about from point to point."[39]

This divorce between optimism about technical science from the hegemonic forces of the 19th century—the Atlantic imperial power structures, the liberalism of the bourgeoisie and Christianity—was nowhere more apparent than in the existence of the Soviet Union, the existence of which pushed critical issues of 19th century thought to the fore. Questions about the Soviet Union would fast become a stand-in for questions about the modern condition, and would prompt questions as well about various personages associated with the frightening aspects of modern life—the manager, the inquisitor, the French Enlightenment philosophe, or historical man. The Soviets also served, in real material terms, as a looming presence that permeated interwar social and political discourse. Without being explicitly mentioned, their presence still permeated any discussion of mass politics or revolution in the present, and lurked as well behind historical questions about the French Revolution.

One of the primary features of the discourse was not just uncertainty about past and future, but also a sense of the need to come to grips with reality about one's own optimism. Writers addressing their audience with the right persona of historical insight could reassure readers that the author could see beyond the tumult of the age. The other feature was the sense that the intellectuals were self-aware about being moderns and their writing was often stylistically affected to fit with some kind of persona that situated the thinker in relation to modernity. Some intellectuals wrote in a manner that was self-consciously technical or socially-scientific. However, many publically-facing intellectuals had to come to grips with rhetorical complexity of their situation. Some, like Arendt, explicitly commented on the fact that the loss of historical continuity in intellectual discourse had left intellectuals reasoning "without

[39] Mumford, *My Works and Days*, 33.

bannisters." Most intellectuals were self-aware about the stance they took in public and so their form of address coincided with their view not just of the modern world but of their own place with in it. This took the form of publicists being publicists for the mastery of publicity itself, as in the case of Edward Bernays or Ivy Lee—although it also took other forms. Lippmann styled his public form of address in such a way that he made himself a stand-in for various historical trends—he portrayed himself as alternately behind the proverbial curtain while also being on the side of the youth and of progress, and in his writing he would oscillate between apologetics on behalf of progressive naïfs and affectedly cold realism aimed at explaining the reality of power politics to the average American. In this manner the sense of historical forces at play in modern society permeated not just political, philosophical or cultural commentary, but also permeated and helped to constitute the style and persona of the modern intellectual.

The intellectuals were partial to some form of modern progress and to some form of emancipation for human nature against the strictures of the past, but both Lippmann and Mumford still looked at the breakdown of civilization, as they knew it, as the cause for deep and profound worry. Lippmann in particular extended these themes to theorize a key issue; he was more aware than his contemporaries of the transformation of public discourse by modern communication technology. Lippmann was acutely aware that the old bourgeois world had contained the newspaper as a vector by which "omnicompetent" citizens—men who owned land and had virtue that extended from their autonomy from the division of labor—and that this form of citizen was being left behind as the press shifted to being professionalized. This was associated with none of the adulation that is today associated with the assessment of journalists; the newspaper man was, to Lippmann's mind, no different from the propagandist—a corrupting element on the body politic who fabricated consent and specialized in psychological

manipulation—and the newspaper man was connected with a historical transformation that could not be reversed and that was fast leaving behind anyone who did not find a place in a bureaucratized world of technical specialization and the resulting dependency.[40]

Lewis Mumford was similarly ambivalent, and his place as a public intellectual is demonstrative insofar as his public persona was again unified by an attempt to diagnose what was wrong with modern history. A liberal aesthete from the New York scene, Mumford also reserved deep uneasiness about the progress of the modern world. In his more colorful language that aligned closely with his Ruskinite sentimentality, he accused the moderns of being "machine cultists." Nostalgia for the rural home, the undeveloped shores of New Jersey and the still-wooded beer gardens of an older New York City permeated much of his commentary, and in his scathing account of the transformations of the late 19th century the introduction of mass media, in particular newspapers, were part of the alienated social fabric particular to a society where people related to one another and the world as highly mediated abstractions. For Ruskin this was parsed through his relation with aesthetics and urban architecture. He tellingly narrates, in an essay putatively focused on Steiglitz's photography, a story about how New York City was once a full of trees and beer gardens, how Broadway was like Unter den Linden, a city of poets and artists, one that Whitman called a city for "the most loyal lovers and friends" and that the progress of industrialization in the second half of the 19th century, as well as the 20th, had destroyed this city, and it was gone forever.[41] While the view of New York City at the beginning of the 19th century may have been far too sanguine, it still indexes Mumford's own sense of

[40] This is a through-line of almost all of Lippmann's corpus, but see in particular his coverage in his famous earlier works. This is true to some degree of *Drift and Mastery*, and more programmatically of *The Phantom Public*.
[41] Lewis Mumford, *Mumford on Modern Art in the 1930s*, edited by Robert Wojtowicz editor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) 39-50.

alienation in a machine age—alienation from society as well as from nature in a combination that seemed to be pathological, destructive and spiritually blind:

> "Very late in my own development, I discovered what any number of more gifted minds should have discovered long before; namely, that the basic ideology which pervaded the Western mind at the beginning of the century was only a scientifically dressed- up justification for the immemorial practices of the ruling—historically attested in Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Peru, and, indeed, wherever the archetypal mega machine was in control. The dominant institutions of our time, far from being new, were all in the thrall of a myth that was at least five thousand years old. Only one value was acknowledged, and that one was taken for granted: the reality of power in all its forms, from sun power to military power, from manpower to steam power, from cannon power to money power, from machine power and computer power to sex power. This simplistic formula for Progress created the overriding imperative that the very victims of the power complex meekly accepted: one must go with the tide, ride the wave of the future or, more vulgarly, keep moving. The meaning of life was reduced to accelerating movement and change, and nothing else remained. Behold the ultimate religion of our seemingly rational age - the Myth of the Machine! Bigger and bigger, more and more, farther and farther, faster and faster became ends in themselves, as expressions of godlike power; and empires, nations, trusts, corporations, institutions, and power-hungry individuals were all directed to the same blank destination. The going was the goal—a defensible doc trine for colliding atoms or falling bodies, but not for men."[42]

However, what characterized his style as a critic was that rather than bringing with him a background as a formally trained artist or architect, he instead used his various columns and books as a way of historically diagnosing the decomposition of the world that he knew and loved. Much of his work, as an art critic for the New Yorker, as an historian of technics, as an architectural critic, or as a theorist of urban planning, projects out onto his various objects of critique a general sense of loss and destruction associated with the technological world that he inhabited, as well as his schematic view of the development of technics as a motor for historical development.

The question of how we should historicize the stance of the modern social or cultural critic, or inquire after the metatheoretical grounds that might be able to serve as the basis for

[42] Lewis Mumford, *Findings and Keepings, 1914-1936: Analects for an Autobiography* (New York: Harcourt, 1975) 9.

social criticism, is no small topic. On the contrary—it is a major topic for modern intellectual history, and attracted extraordinary attention from many of the 20th century's most incisive and subtle intellects. This is most notably from the aptly-named "critical theorists," but not from them alone.[43] While the history of criticism is not the primary object of inquiry here, there are two issues here that are revelatory.

Firstly, the public audience for "criticism" aimed not just narrowly at art or architecture but more generally at what it historical represented indicates that we should read Mumford, and many of his peers, as part of a history of historical commentary and social criticism, rather than more strictly as part of the history of art criticism per se. It is on the latter of these grounds that he is open to specific criticism of his technical aptitude and his fame seems to outreach his abilities.

Secondly, the problem of the history of the critic is in part a history of how the modern social critique is not specifically institutionally embedded and the domain of his or her judgment is not specifically demarcated. In this regard, the problem of the history and theory of criticism overlaps broadly with the problem of historicizing "the public"—although these two problems are very far from concomitant—and with the problem of historicizing with the problem of historicizing "the intellectual"—a social type who is again not concomitant with the critic but who shares in common his or her underspecified social position and the limitless of his or her ability to drag any element of society before the spotlight of reason and demand answers.

It is in this last aspect that a major problem nexus emerges for the intellectuals who inherited the 19th century's problems, whose intellectual scene was permeated by the problems

[43] For a fascinating later neo-republican (and like many works on the topic, partially Biblical or Torahic in its point of reference) account of the social critic, see: Michael Walzer. *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

of mass society theory, who inherited extreme optimism and pessimism about modern progress, who had an ambiguous relationship with Marx, and who had, in certain extreme cases, to reinvent or defend the republic for an era that seemed to cultivate confused and insolent slavishness amongst its would-be citizens. Namely, that the extraordinary character of the early 20th century generated a problem wherein thinkers had to historicize social knowledge, and the social position of the knower, in order to make sense of how distinctly modern forms of social knowledge were either genuine scientific breakthroughs or whether they were merely visions from the minds of displaced and disoriented knowers. Moreover, the prospect of either the prior or the latter had dire implications for a large mass of society that was not just itself confused and deskilled, but was also now being studied and potentially re-engineered by this new stratum of confused and power-hungry knowers. By parsing how the intellectual problems of the 19th century became those of the 20th, it is possible to parse the specific conceptual contours of the intellectuals' discourse when they began to mount a criticism not just of modernity but of themselves.

Chapter 2

A 20th Century Saddle Period

Understanding the historical culture of the twentieth century requires overcoming interpretive challenges. However, signposts pointing to the nature of these challenges as well as the tools by which to overcome them are found throughout the era: intellectuals from the middle of the last century provided their own analyses of their own times, they admonished readers about how to interpret history, and they provided analyses of historicality itself, analyses that bore enormous relevance. The foregoing century had been characterized by the extraordinary expansion of mass media, the bureaucratic state, industrialization, urbanization and with these the breakdown of the old social mores. These created profound challenges for the conceptual logic of 19th century social and political thought that 20th century intellectuals inherited. There were disagreements here so fundamental that they would strain the outer parameters of commensurable discourse: notably, whether history was comprehensible and pliable to human rationality or whether man had to reconcile himself to the tasked assigned to him by God. The juxtaposition of a Marxist or post-Marxist historical explanation, and an attendant political strategy for world conflict, alongside a system of religious metaphors pertaining to Hebrew Biblical history would not be obvious to a historiographer today. Such a juxtaposition is necessary to understand fundamental dimensions of the historical thought of the 20th century, particularly at such a perilous and disorienting moment as the 1920s and '30s.

This chapter will primarily discuss two entirely different authors—Reinhold Niebuhr and James Burnham, and will do so if for no other reason than to clarify why this study is not a study

of Cold War Liberalism—a misguided moniker the usage of which might lead one to expect some unity in the views of these two authors beyond their distrust of Communism. The problem is their orientation towards history: Niebuhr's thought touches upon fundamental problems of orientation towards history in modern life, rather than evincing conventional 20th century attitudes towards history and its weight on modern politics. Niebuhr is not commonly treated amongst historical thinkers, if at all today amongst scholars outside of religion, even though he was broadly read, influential, and the problem of modern historical orientation is the through-line of very close to his entire corpus. His influence will be notably acute in chapter 5. Burnham, an entirely different thinker, was working within the intellectual world that descended from dialectical materialism. The architectonics of his thought will bear much closer similarity to the thought in chapters 3 and 4. The basic dimensions of comparison point towards a problem obvious in an era such as theirs: the basic questions concerning the comprehensibility of history at all.

The ultimate aim of this chapter will be to get clear what midcentury social critics were talking about when they discussed the movement of contemporary historical events on the presumption that they *were* capable of comprehending history. It will show how midcentury social critics utilized an array of historical allusions, metaphors and allegories to approach a central problem: how to understand the breakdown and reorganization of society within living memory.

If our objective is to understand how intellectuals approached this basic historical problem, then we must start with the most central cluster of historical ideas—those concerning classes, causes and ages. Without a concern about classes there are no elites, no conspiracies, no forces in movement. It would be a world of empires with static societies. It would also be a

world with no characters, and with no problems pertaining to inequalities in competencies, knowledge or power. All of the melodrama of historical thought was essentially about these inequalities, and how they played out in parasitism or compulsion.

More importantly, classes often took the form as a metaphorical device through characterization of a social type, and this was particularly important as a fundamental component for discussing causation. For some, "technology" was acceptable as an explanation without much more rumination, and for some, as we will discuss, no coherent or comprehensible explanation for the movement of the ages was sought after or thought possible. However, for many, history needed villains, and so the characterization of the primary agents of history was critically important. In an important twist, the intellectuals did not consistently find that the villains of modern history were any other than themselves.

Ages are also important. Without ages of the world there is no progress, no medieval backwardness, and no revolution. Without ages, there are no breaks beyond which ethical norms of political prospects promise to be essentially different. Without ages, there is no way to serve or resist the future, both of which are profound tools for drawing legitimacy and establishing a mandate. There would be no way discuss or comprehend a coherent narrative structure of contemporary events; there would be no way to discuss how things before World War I effected those after. Without classes and ages being as real and impactful in people's minds than the sun and the moon, the 20th century would not have been the 20th century.

In order to understand the prism of classes and ages constitute we should start with a specific example. James Burnham, in his influential 1941 *Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World*, says that it is not the proletariat or the bourgeoisie who are the revolutionary class who will come to dominate the 20th century, but it is instead the managerial

class. Reflecting on the ongoing war, he has this to say to guide his readers through comprehending current events:

> "We are not in a position to understand the central historical meaning of the first two world wars of the twentieth century. We might put it, oversimplifying but not distorting, in this way: The war of 1914 was the last great war of capitalist society; the war of 1939 is the first great war of managerial society. Thus both wars are transitional in character, are wars of the transition period between capitalist and managerial society. In both wars we find both capitalist and managerial elements, with the former predominant in the war of 1914, the latter immensely increased in the war of 1939."[44]

And so what was this managerial society? The managerial society was conceptually different from prolaterian or bourgeois society. The prolateriat drew the meaning of their name from Latin antiquity, and the bourgeois from late medieval and early modern European civic and economic life, notably with the extraordinary confusion generated by the fact that the German words used by Marx for bourgeois and citizen were the same. The managers were a social type that referred to themselves, or more properly to a new form of human life that didn't have an agreeable historical referent. The managers were new in that they were post-political and had no defined relationship with the means of production, unlike the prolateriat and the bourgeoisie—the genesis of a truly superfluous class oriented towards only depoliticized mediation.

What is additionally important about Burnham is that he had such a clear sense to his mind that the world was organized cleanly into ages, providing him with an architectonics derived originally from the Marxists—he was originally a Trotskyite—that he could then provide to the New Conservatives in the latter half of the century. The itinerary that was important for Burnham was that he could strategize about interceding in the plane of the movement of history itself. History was, in turn, a movement of epochs that had some essential relationship in time, relative to past and future and progress or retrogression, and in this fact he necessarily had to

[44] James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World* (London: Lume Books, 2021) 164.

reveal much about a programmatic historiology. It was an historiology that entailed, for example, that ages are not measures of natural time relative, say, to dynasties of kings, about which there would be characterizations. An age was a conceptualization to understand the movement of the world, a type of temporal concept that has since the emergence of "modernity" been commonplace, but which is nonetheless interpretively dense and in its implications potentially explosive.

With such a broad range of topics as historical time itself, often approached by authors of the era with a panoply of literary and metaphorical devices, it is necessary to take stock of both the core topics and the toolkit that historical thinkers used to discuss them. This was not a discourse of academic historians pursuing positive knowledge that could confirm the facticity of specific published claims about the past—it was a broadly and deeply metaphorical discourse about the meaning of modern history, about the experience of rapidly transforming social relations and about the metaphysical dimensions of power, freedom and domination. To understand this discourse requires that the intellectuals be examined with care and attention as to what of their discourse was a literal discourse—about their peers, about sexual relations between men and women, about the Bolsheviks or about the First or Second War—and what of their discourse carried metaphorical meaning about broad or deep philosophical issues, or serves as a metaphorical stand-in of one historical event for another. It also requires attentiveness to other parallel allegories that refer to history—like science fiction, or interpretation of the Old Testament.

The literature on temporality has been itself a product of this period of historical and philosophical self-reflection.[45] The basic problems of this literature are the problems of the

[45] Its origins lay in the Annales School's disagreements with their totalitarian peers about whether the fate of macro-history could be altered through revolutionary violence, and with the works of thinkers outlined in this

modern experience of historical time and how modern thought and action are framed relative to past experience and future expectation. No single thinker has been as critically as important in theorizing this thematic turn as Reinhardt Kosselleck. Kosselleck was a German historian who came of age in this era and devoted his life to understanding it. While investigating the terror and destruction of the French Revolution, he coined the term *sattelzeit*, or *saddle period*, to refer to the period after one era has ended and its ideas about past and future have been outmoded, but a new era and its new ideas have not yet come to fill the void. In theorizing the late 18th and early 19th centuries he described a phenomenon that emerged from deep historical instability, so deep that lived experience seemed to provide living historical actors with no referent relative to which understanding the future seemed possible. Under these conditions, all futures begin to seem equally plausible.[46]

The literature on temporality is but one more approach to the problem of metahistory, and it is adjacent to the histories of social and political philosophy, as well as to the histories of modern political ideologies by virtue of their orienting historical content. The older literature on metahistory was built on the study of metaphor and the study of narrative—the prior embedded in the later—dealing with it often using the same hermeneutical tools used for the interpretation of scripture.[47] The literature on temporality has been, in broad strokes, a literature on the

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chapter doing hermeneutics of modern political views, generally most important in German historiography. Since then it has become a narrow thematic cluster, sometimes eclectic, that often deals with the history of aesthetic movements and the history of temporal presumptions social science or governance, such as: Michael Gubser, *Time's Visible Surface: Alois Riegl and the Discourse on History and Temporality in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006); Stephen Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*: 1880-1918 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Jamie Pietruska, *Looking Forward: Prediction and Uncertainty in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[46] For entry points into Koslleck's thinking on experience and expectation in modern history, see: Reinhart Kosselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts,* translated by Todd Samuel Presner, *et al* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 154-169; Reinhart Kosselleck, *Futures Past: On The Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) 255-274.

[47] Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language,* translated by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (New York: Routledge, 2004); Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 1,*

narrative structures particular to modernity after the loss or transformation of religion. For Kosselleck and his fellow concept historians, this was wedded to the history of concepts because the study of the historical development of concepts was the study of the semantic content that populated the distinctly modern narrative orientation of the authors. Taking a que from these theorists, the necessary object of discussion is the cluster of concepts that fit within the narrative structure that intellectuals were using to understand themselves and their times. Some abstract, philosophical and legal concepts may be more obvious as objects of historicization, but the bevvy of related characters used as main characters and set pieces in the stories told by historical thinkers were where, in substance, the bulk of the action transpired.

It should be no surprise that this description fits with many features of the early 20th century, and also that it mirrors many of the observations that Kosselleck's contemporaries made about their own time. The radical instability of the period had many effects, one of which was radical uncertainty, and with that new vistas of historical inquiry and futurist prognostication. One feature that Kosselleck was keen on tracking down was the history of moderns believing that time was accelerating—the origins of which were to be found, in Kosselleck's estimation, in Martin Luther's interpretation of Revelations.[48] The constant groping for historical metaphor, the popular science fiction populated with apocalyptic or utopian themes, and the instability of the symbols of political power were all symptoms of an era where a stable sense of time had collapsed. This feature of the age—the manipulation of ideas about past and future as a means by which to conjure social power—would be a recurring topic of interest for the intellectuals. This concern, that the conceptual fabric of public discourse was eroding, was commented upon

translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 2,* translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[48] Kosselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 245.

explicitly and in such terms by Ortega when he talked about the experience of living in a "crisis era," and was regarded grimly by Mumford as part of the disillusion of 20th-century politics:

> Unfortunately, if we continue to act upon the premises that have increasingly automated all human activities, there will be no stopping point before the ultimate terminus: total destruction. Already, languages show signs of slithering into incoherence and confusion, with vocabularies so limited and a semantic structure so primitive that beside them the most elementary tribal language must count as a delicate work of art. H. G. Wells' dire prediction that 'mind is at the end of its tether' can no longer be lightly dismissed as mere senile despair, as it could be in 1945."[49]

The issue of great difficulty was finding terms with which to capture the operative dimensions of the historical transformation that surrounded them at the most granular level. This was central to Ortega's reflections on the first half of the 20th century as they are presented in *Man and Crisis.* In his attempt to theorize the basic dimensions of historical experience, he theorized the generation, the human lifespan, as the fundamental unit, and in so doing registered yet another dimension of the same problem that preoccupied the minds of his peers; human nature was not changing but the speed and size of society was, and the result was a parallax for which they needed novel historical vocabulary. Many other intellectuals turned to either psychological theory, studies of the average citizen's intelligence or knowledge, or in some other way to theories of communication, as these could provide a stable anthropology relative to which contemporary historical experience could be indexed.

Disappointment and Paranoia in Modern Historical Thought

The goodness of man's nature was one complex conceptual structure often explored through historical discourse, and it was one that had been central for centuries. Discussions of Edenic

[49] Lewis Mumford, *My Works and Days : A Personal Chronicle.* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979) 15.

man, or of man in the Enlightenment state of nature, had gone into and out of vogue for centuries, both with the French Enlightenment philosophes and with the new American Adam of the 19th century. Closer to his true origins and unalienated through participation in history, modern man's place in historical time was in a sense more primitive—more unsullied by the failures of history or the conceptual torpor of the middle ages, and more authentically himself. This kind of optimism about human nature chagrinned or enticed intellectuals; Mumford talked at length about how only Melville and Dostoevsky saw the true evil in the heart of modern man, and Lippmann recurrently referenced Nietzsche when he would ask rhetorically whether we really believe that all of the new overmen will be beautiful artists and dancers.[50]

The belief in the goodness of man's nature had also, since its entrance into the 18th century mainstream, had profound implications for history. How could one possibly study history, or participate in contemporary society, and square the empirical evidence with a sanguine view of human nature? Niebuhr was on these points damning—in his *Nature and Destiny of Man* he focused on how the naive belief in man's good nature, or some hideious overestimation of man's power to control things in the world, necessarily requires a conspiratorial and paranoid view of this-worldly history whereby the overwhelming evidence about man's wicked nature could be jettisoned as just more evidence of the corruption of history by conspiratorial forces.[51] This line of argument, like Kosselleck's similar dialectic of experience and expectation, was a response to the imaginary of the totalitarians, and attempted to explain not just the modern proclivity for grandiose historical planning, but also for paranoia and for an

[50] Mumford, *My Works and Days,* 5. Lippmann found dancers illustrative: Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New York: TIME, 1964) 15. Also, Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1993) 28-29.
[51] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, Volume I* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) 96-99.

over-eager quest to jettison millennia of knowledge in the pursuit of a malformed social empiricism.

Niebuhr's account of interests and the self-deception in modern politics, in both *Nature and Destiny* and elsewhere—as *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*—pivoted his arguments on account of human nature that was, by his own admission, in partial agreement with Marx, whom he saw as much more sophisticated than either underdeveloped enlightenment optimism or naturalistic pessimism. Niebuhr saw that Marx's critique of bourgeois liberalism was rooted in a much more sophisticated account of man in that it presumed that man is creative, aspires to the good, but is marred by some deep form of feebleness, and so in self-deception disguises private interests as the good, so that such selflessness can be redirected towards a primordial egoism that permeates society. Niebuhr's rejoinder to Marx was the generalization of this critique to humanity writ large, and this self-deception to a general condition of society, and in so doing to aim his social and political critiques towards an entirely different plane than that of modern historical thinkers concerned with an effective insight and strategy for exposing and defeating temporal foes.[52]

Paranoia about temporal foes was central to so many intellectuals of the era, as well as to the public. Richard Hofstadter's *Paranoid Style in American History* fit as a social type and their place in modern American society. There is more to say about his characterization of the intellectual in chapter 5, but his views on paranoia in politics were in the same vein as Niebuhr's; Hofstadter saw the paranoid style as being tied up with undue expectation and self-regard. He also saw it as ineffectual; the paranoia ever present in politics was and is a problem that flares up from time to time, but is ultimately a force associated with political lunatics best relegated to the

[52] Ibid, 35.

margins.[53] However, try as he might to dismiss the paranoiacs to the margins, there was no getting around the key role of malevolent forces in modern history. As has been discussed at great length, often by critics of modernity, moderns attribute to this-worldly actors what premoderns associated with spiritual actors, substituting a global cabal that is supposed to literally exist for demonic actors who exist only allegorically.[54] While this view may give premodernity too much credit for when in fact it too was marred by purges, witch-hunts, inquisitions and fool-hardy attempts to enter the millennium, generally built on literal attribution of evil to earthly scapegoats, it is still astute to point out that moderns have secularized the sources of historical evil, blaming corruption not on evil spiritual forces at play in people's minds but instead on a concrete cabal who puppeteer history—and expect to find these puppet masters lurking in smoke-filled rooms. This insight into the modern historical imaginary, and the central place that it holds for conspiracies and cabals, is unsurprisingly one that was acutely relevant to 20th century intellectuals; half of the world seemed to have turned itself inside out looking to uproot vast insidious plots against the proper course of history.

Even John Dewey, far from pessimistic moralist, maintained similar suspicions about paranoia in politics. Focusing on Rousseau's sunny view of the general will, Dewey maintained that conspiratorial view of the state had its roots in treating the demands of the public as being essentially blameless. The commonality consisted precisely in the fact that the belief in human goodness and competency left an inexplicable remainder, the key difference being that Dewey's concern was much more about cognition and competency standing in the way of comprehending affairs of state, as opposed to being concerned with moral turpitude.[55]

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[53] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963).
[54] The greatest proponent of this critique in modern American intellectual history is Eric Voeglin.
[55] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1954) in particular the chapter on the Discovery of the State: 37-74.

When reading 20th century intellectuals, it is necessary as an extension to pay close attention to what they lay forth as the causal structure of historic mishap. Firstly, many intellectuals themselves were then, as now, weak to modes of explanation that attributed agency to a temporal cabal. As Niebuhr saw, this amounted to essentially a form of scapegoating—a sign of bad conscience, the transcendence of which was in his account of original sin and—importantly for this chapter—a view of finite man's proper orientation towards participation in the plane of this-worldly action. While this study will not talk at length about the details of the most important 20th century conspiracy theories (for example, Jews and Antisemitism), it is key to explore the relationship embedded in historical thinkers between narrative villains, an implicit anthropology and the larger story about the movements of the age. If bureaucrats, managers, propagandists, party bosses, or some other distinctly modern group were singled out by the intellectuals as critically important embodiments and agents of modern historical dysfunction, the careful reader would be attentive to the meaning conveyed in the architecture of the conceptualization of such an historical actor. Is this new group plotting and scheming in private in the mind of the intellectual or is their existence as a new class the consequence of an inexorable historical process that the intellectual laments? This question could reveal the core historical complaint of many intellectuals, particularly when discourse about groups can double up as a metaphorical discourse about the progress of modernity itself.

Historical References Literal and Metaphorical

For 20th century intellectuals this panoply of historical referents helped to capture deep shifts in experience. Whether it be new social conditions or social types emergent with the breakdown of

the 19th century social order, or a new perception of historical time associated with a rapidly reoriented view of man's nature and place in history, intellectuals needed concepts and techniques appropriate to describing their historical conditions. They employed a variety of characterizations, some of which were metaphorical—often metonymic—and some of which were literal. At the plane of narrative structure they again used metaphor—but herein lay increasingly dire problems. Historical narrative as spiritual allegory was an ancient practice, but without any shared stable metaphysics, values, psychology or anthropology in common, the basic vocabulary of historical discourse was frayed, and the results were myriad approaches.

The most pervasive and important historical referents were those that surrounded class, like the famous and aforementioned bourgeoisie and proletariat. The difficulties of conceiving of such a thing as a class cannot be underestimated. Too much has been written to be summarized here about the sociology and metaphysics of a class in specifically the Marxian mode—this study is specifically about non-Marxist historical thought, focusing primarily on pessimistic neo-republicans.[56] The general problem persists. The interpretive difficulty in this context is to understand the fact that intellectuals seemed to be grasping for a new conceptual vocabulary used to talk about social types broadly speaking. In order to understand this discourse requires that we develop a hermeneutics for historical metaphor, as this discourse on social types wasn't just a complex system of literal discourse about real social transformation: it was also a system of metaphor and historical reference embedded in a plot structure about the progress of the modern world.

The question of how to study the history of history has been one regarded with keen interest by many academic historians. This should come as no surprise; given the modern

[56] If there is one thing to note about the Marxist structure of narratives and characters is that it is stable and has been for some time, which may be one of the primary sources of its enduring appeal to intellectuals.

discipline's preoccupation with historiographical practices, it is a form of disciplinary due diligence for modern historians to have undertaken an even more thorough-going self-assessment of their own practice.[57] However, the concern of such studies is generally a concern with the development of the professional discipline and the quest of modern historians to gain access to accurate positive knowledge about the past. Studies of this sort are ill-suited to the study of historical thought more generally; historical discourse, in the main, operates without the exacting evidentiary standards associated with the modern discipline of history, and so reading philosophers, art critics and political commentators analyze their own times relative to their knowledge of the long dead past requires a different type of meta-historical study. If one reads intellectuals in a manner attentive to their preoccupation with historicality, one finds that this historical discourse functioned in a mode common to philosophy; most reference to history functioned at least partly as allegory. Professional historians are generally loathe to regard allegory as a sophisticated form of history on the premise that it generally entails lazy and inaccurate comparison that lead ultimately to presentism. This may be true, at least to a degree, but the allegorical use of history should still be examined with care, as its use is often still revelatory in some other way.

The theoretical problems of how one reads history have not gone unnoticed by scholars. Hayden White's famous metahistorical theories were the basis for one possible hermeneutics for history.[58] White's theoretical writings were primarily concerned with the super-imposition of value-laden narrative over historical facts; having little faith in the ability to extend from facts to

[57] The most prominant history of history that restricts itself almost solely to the empirical and methodological problems of the discipline is Peter Novack. *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[58] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

value-laden narrative, White concluded instead that history should be read as a prism for the values, and attendant historico-political commitments, of the historian. His project was not without merit, but his systematic typology of historical narratives—wherein he indexed specific narrative arcs like tragedy or comedy to certain political commitments like conservatism or radicalism—has some major limits. While his skepticism about the possibility of scientifically studying the meaning of this-worldly history is well-founded, as is his attentiveness to the deep connection between modern political thought and historical narrative, his typology is empirically flawed (his typology, for example, is not capable of parsing religious objections to the serious study of this-worldly history, nor does it provide the toolkit for assessing secularized elements of religious eschatology in modern history) and does not substantially access many of the deeper philosophical concerns that intellectuals project out onto history by virtue of his preoccupation with attacking the facticity of historical claims. One of his largest shortcomings, though, was in his preoccupation with analysis of narrative over characterization, an issue that leaves modern historical discourse as a proverbially empty room.

The metaphorical dimension of historical discourse requires an approach that is more sensitive to the philosophical concerns of the authors and less alarmed by the deep and profound empirical problems that historians face. Hans Blumenburg's work is in this area illuminating. Yet another intellectual responding to midcentury historical myth—responding to his experience of the Third Reich—Blumenburg developed an account of the place of myth that was simultaneously non-Romantic and also avoided the pitfalls of enlightened and rational optimism. He focused on how metaphorical mechanics are central to the human ability to comprehend and survive the world, and that myth's temporal function was traditionally to provide a stable index outside of the vicissitudes of historical time. Blumenburg was acutely aware that metaphor was

also a primary mode of philosophical inquiry and was the only grounds on which fundamental existential qualia could be discussed. However, in this lay also a great peril, in that these allegorical devices can be mistaken, and in time always are, for being literal discourse—the great examples being those of a light outside of a cave or an architect of the world, both of which degenerated into objects of cult worship over the course of classical antiquity.[59]

The most important, and varied, building-block of historical discourse was the character. This was a basic unit without which social criticism or historical thought would quickly lose its structure. The varied characterizations also seem to point towards a general lack of any fixity to the sense of social ontology found amongst at least non-Marxist historical thinkers. Characterizations mixed metonymic references to social processes, historical analogy and sometimes slippery spiritual metaphors pertaining to ineffables like a deep sense of historical loss surrounding prewar European civilization. The problems become most acute when these characters are taken most literally—the best analytical categories for empirical research are seldom the literary characters used to express meaning within a narrative structure.

The great historical narratives of the modern world—those of progress or apocalyptic retrogression—have the same type of danger: literal belief in the plausibility of the wrong aspects of historical narrative taken as a coherent plan of political action. However, narratives of progress, peril and decline can still be parsed for their philosophical concerns. The metaphorical use of history refers ultimately to philosophical questions about the meaning of the world, about the things that happen in it, and the ends towards which the deeds are done. The historical discourse of the last century worked over a set of themes—the eclipse of all other thought by instrumental reason, the uprootedness of modern social existence, modern man's attenuated

[59] Hans Blumenburg, Robert M. Wallace translator, *Work on Myth* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 1985).

relation with nature—in a set allegories, some of which operated at the level of commentary about contemporary society, some of which operated through discourse about the early modern period, about the founding of civilization itself, or discussion of specific historical personages who could be used as the basis for discussing the whole through the part.

The very prospect that history would be any other than an empirical survey of the world and the precondition for a strategic discourse about it was in itself a presumption, one caught by only some thinkers. Niebuhr was deeply engaged with the place of prophetic and historical elements in Abrahamic religion precisely as a response to the historical mythos that dominated the 20th century mind. He was also an interlocutor for progressives and social reformers who were earnestly committed towards a scheme of action meaningful only within the context of a specifically modern historical sense. He attempted to explain the place of the individual in the scheme of historical time, and admonished his 20th century readers that they should be attenteive to the fact that the very structure of the Hebrew Bible was itself an allegorical lesson to man about the limits of his finite comprehension of the totality of human history or his place therein. By embedding the future in the past, the prophetic history of the New and Old Testaments allowed man to be oriented towards his true destiny. Finite histories of this-worldly affairs, like histories of nations or classes, weren't of *no* value to Niebuhr's mind—Burnham attracted a singular footnote for pointing out that a ruling class need have no distinct relationship with ownership of the mode of production—but they were of limited value and only to the finite mind, they did not transcend to a plane of deeper significance, and they fed off the atavistic pride articulated in the nation state.[60]

[60] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York: Charles Sribner's Sons, 1949). For Burnham's citation, see footnote 11 of chapter 3 in *Children of Light and Children of Darkness.*

Most obviously, some discourse was literal, although it is hard for humans to transcend the metaphorical dimensions of language fully. Sometimes this was simple or clear; sometimes the rabble is just the rabble and sometimes capitalists are just capitalists. However, the slippage between these modes of historical discourse was significant. This was particularly the case when dealing with social categories whose names had an in-built historical referent. Take, for example, Walter Lippmann's description of contemporary American society, prompted by the Scopes trial, as being like an inquisition.[61] This might be an imprecise way to talk about the Scopes trial—a real thing about which he was really concerned—but we as historians can learn about Lippmann's comprehension of himself as well about the nature of his concern by learning about how he parsed lived experience through the mobilization of historical categories.

Not all lucid discourse about intellectuals' present was literal. Particularly important in the toolkit of historical thinkers and historians alike was to push analysis of their own time into a prior history that they could use as a systematic allegory. Perry Miller—describing how the Puritans came to understand that they had deceived themselves about how Europe would want them to return and show how to run the church and build a righteous society—and that they ultimately found themselves "alone with America"—pointing his reader towards an analysis of the United States after the Second World War.[62] This technique of programmatic self-allegory is effective in part because of the parallels between past and present that emerge for innumerable reasons, and is key for interpreting the narrative structure and choices of characters when reading historical thinkers.

[61] Walter Lippmann, *American Inquisitors; a Commentary on Dayton and Chicago* (New York: Macmillan, 1928)
[62] Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1993) 1-15.

New Concepts for a New Age

James Burnham's account is scrupulously not a conspiracy theory—his intellectual background was originally as a doctrinaire Marxist, and so the story he tells about the domination of the age by the managers turns out to be a story scrupulously constructed such that there is no cosmic conspiracy. Underlying shifts in technics have led to a new era characterized by a new class, meaning in essence that the domination of a new age by a new class means in substance a shift in how power operates over and above any particular historical actors. So why narrate this story as the ascendance of a new class who need to be battled, rather than narrate this as the beginning of an age of technical domination that permeates all aspects of society? He does this at some points, but later totalitarianism theorists would avoid the attribution of the new age to a malevolent group, while still being able to make rich use of characterization—like Orwell's characterization of the party apparatchiks and state bureaucrats capable of thriving in the world of 1984. But Burnham, despite his protestations that his account was purely one of profound and all-encompassing structural change, still dealt with the "the managers" as a personified enemy class, not just in writing but in his programmatic political involvement.

This polyvalent discourse on social types can only be comprehended as a discourse also about historical time. If there are new social types, then they must be new to a new era—or if there is a new era there must be new social types particular to it. The second main dimension of historical meaning in 20th century intellectual discourse was temporal—progress, apocalypse, revolution. In order to understanding 20th century intellectual discourse we don't just need to be able to understand discourse on social types (more broadly) or classes (more narrowly), we need to also understand references to the city on the hill, the utopia, the ancient world, the middle

ages, the utopia or the post-apocalypse. Then we can begin to understand what is entailed in a discourse on a new social type, and what would be new about it. What kind of age would necessarily be created if there were such a thing as a new classes?

There are three major problems that a theorist of the new class would have to confront. Firstly, does a conspiracy of this-worldly actors rule history? If not, what does it mean for a class to dominate an age? Secondly, what could change that would alter the basic ontology of power so radically so as to create such a possibility? Thirdly, if one resists this class, what is one resisting if one is resisting the progress of historical time?

Burnham, like many of his peers, was aware that the historical vocabulary of his era was metaphorical, and often slippery. His account of the class war waged by the managerial class was one in which inexorable historical processes were propelling social revolution over and above the agency of any specific political actor. However, Burnham still explained contemporary historical events, like the First and Second World Wars, as being the final and calamitous acts of the class war of the managers, similarly demarcating the First World War as the beginning of a new age of bureaucratic or mechanical domination in much the same way as Mumford or Lippmann.

Unlike many commentators, including most notably George Orwell, James Burnham did not so programmatically develop the idea that the control of historical narrative, most notably control of past and future and conceptions of progress or retrogression between them, would be the nature of the ideologies that characterized this age, instead dismissing ideology as mere "rationalization" of whatever new economic order would come into being. However, even though he was inattentive to the subtleties of his peers' historical accounts, he was clear about

articulating that what lay behind the historical metaphor of the struggle of classes was a deep reorganization of bonds of power that was reshaping the political arena fundamentally.

Burnham was also not unusual in that he saw this new managerial age as a time of extraordinary peril. On the one hand he followed Pareto in thinking that a far-seeing and virtuous elite drawn from a pool of real merit could steer the modern age. In this regard he was not unusual in his generation. More noteworthy is the account of the new and perilous class and the type of crisis that they represent, and in this regard the telling comparison is with Max Weber.

In Weber's account, the crisis of modernity comes from man's capacity for rationality extending to dominate the lifeworld to a greater and greater degree. This process created similarly a new roster of social types, most importantly those of the bureaucrat and the social scientist. Weber is in agreement that we must reconcile ourselves to bureaucracy, recruit and train bureaucrats properly, and proper social science has a key role in the world of the future. However, Weber's account begins to differ both obviously and subtly. Critically, the prospect of an age dominated by the bureaucrats is in many ways an impossibility, mainly because the bureaucrats *prima facie* could not conceivably do such a thing. Bureaucrats, being as they are experts in the value-neutral instrumental rationalization of things, are incapable of charismatic authority. Instead, their authority is deferred to them. An age characterized by bureaucrats is not an age dominated by them; it is one with attenuated bonds of authority. Weber's account is a truer and more pure form of neo-republican mass society criticism wherein the successes of modernity have also caused the breakdown of social bonds which has in turn undermined the possibility of the republican as an aspirational political form for moderns.[63]

[63] This is a major problem in the work of Max Weber, see in general the second volume of economy and society, and in particular chapter 13: Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, Volume 2,* translated and edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 1111-1157

Burnham's account is in this regard different. The managers in *The Managerial Revolution* are in many ways without specific character. They are not even characterized, *per se*, in the way that the man without qualities is, or in the way that Dostoevsky's civil servant is in *Notes from the Underground*. They aren't as richly characterized as a social type—as are the progressives, educators and the social workers in the work of Christopher Lasch (covered in chapter 5) nor are they as richly developed as the prolateriat or bourgeois. The managers seem to be in essence just experts in compulsion whose primary characteristics are merely their insubstantial stance with regards to ownership of the means of production and the lack of any character itself. An age characterized by managers is, in Burnham's view, "totalitarian." This would be an age permeated by propaganda, by modern bureaucracy, and with pure management and compulsion experts whose power would be constituted through their relationship those technologies. It is necessarily an age characterized by politics in which the ruling class are defined relative to their pure compulsion, rather than through their relationship with the means of production. It is in Burnham's mind an age characterized not by rulers who are characterized by the relationship with production, *ie* not capitalism or some form of left-wing democracy, but instead an age of domination. [64]

One conceptual feature of the possibility of a new elite is that many intellectuals, like Burnham, granted that they did have some form of insight—a form of rational power to dominate nature, an accurate account of social ontology, competencies and capacities of control, or some such feature that would normally be qualifying for competency. It is in this regard that a reader of this discourse must be attentive. Whoever the new class may be, it is still always the case that this new class has to have some special insight into the workings of the world that could serve as

[64] *The Managerial Revolution,* 141-159.

the wellspring for their power, and it is also the case they always had a double in the masses. This means that they, in every rendition, have a special connection with the movement of history. To be for or against the new class means generally to be for or against the progress of modernity and the character of the age.

What does it mean to resist the structure of an age? Burnham ultimately settled for endorsing that we (by which he meant him and his set) ought to become the managers ourselves and take responsibility for our position. This turns out to be a strange resolution to the class war with which Burnham claimed to be "metaphorically" concerned. To resist one's time is an old aspiration—the pious are supposed to be untimely, and if living through an age of darkness to resist that dark age. However, there is something peculiar about this orientation, and it is an orientation that would recur in many intellectuals of the era, which is that the progress of reason in history, rather than being the progress of providence in a dark world, is recast in the character of the villain. Such a development indicates the development of some form of antimodernism—the managers have true scientific insight *and* they are the future, and it is on the basis of these facts that secular and modern intellectuals like Burnham began to turn against them.

These social categories, often subtle or suggestive in their historical meaning, served as the framework for discussing what type of historical transformation was ongoing in the present, and were mobilized in concert to give an account of a new and odious form of modern political order that discussants saw as coming into being, but which they struggled to discuss without an in-tact social vocabulary. There was more than one attempted synthesis of a new category for political evil—the garrison state, the managerial society, and more than anything else "totalitarianism." The last of these took on the most robust conceptual development, and it served as a stand-in for the technological age generally. This category was not entirely

allegorical—there were actual, self-professed totalitarians to be theorized. However, this discourse had depth and complexity because it was the extension of older discourses about the experience of modernity, and so theorizing the origins of totalitarianism was an extension of a larger discourse about the modern condition.

This long-term shift towards discussing totalitarianism, or other novel categories like the *free* and *unfree* worlds, over the course of the first half of the century has been discussed by scholars.[65] It was in a semantic field with other categories used to comprehend contemporary historical phenomena; the free and unfree worlds, the dictator, or fascism were all stand-ins for an enigmatic and frightening historical transformation that contemporary commentators struggled to characterize. To some degree this discourse was prompted by the self-theorization of totalitarians as the final stage of human history, and a thoroughgoing theorization of totalitarianism would be a lively topic in the 1940s and 1950s (the topic of chapter 4), but its antecedents were to be found already in the troubled historical analyses of the forgoing decades. These analyses were free-floating and interchangeable with regards to whether they were critiques of modernity in general, critiques of the Soviet Union or critiques of some other specific polity or political party; general critiques of modernity might be critiques of the Soviet Union or the progress of industrial modernity in the U.S., and specific critiques of the Soviets or American progressives could double as general ambivalence about the type of life being engendered by modernity.

This reorganization of historico-political vocabulary centered on two primary issues; the first was the emergence of totalitarianism in the power vacuum after the First World War, and the second was the breakdown of time concepts that was concomitant with the era's radical

[65] Louis Menand, *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

changes. These together led to the extension of 19th century social science and social criticism into a new vocabulary for parsing the rapid and frightening historical transformations that were ongoing. However, in the 19th century, despite the social and economic changes of the century, there seemed to be an ancient lexicon of social and historical categories that intellectuals could use to comprehend current events. However, hopes and fears about the true novelty of contemporary lived experience broke into the fore. The intellectuals asked whether they were in a post-imperial age, or whether this was a naiveté, and contemporary powers could only be understood relative to ancient despotism or as something far more dire and outside of any previous historical experience. Most prominent amongst these were the analytical devices used by intellectuals to try to pierce past the haze of naïve optimism or ideological fervor to assess reality as it existed—done largely through allegorical devices like comparison to premodern empires—as well as the new concepts used to describe and analyze political evil.

This last task was to a substantial degree the most elusive and created the greatest problems. Modern presumptions about the goodness of man served as the point of departure for a broad discourse about the failures of interwar democracy. As had already been the case thus far in modernity, conspiratorial histories of malevolent forces were necessary to square a sanguine view of man with empirical evidence about his character—otherwise some other theoretical basis was necessary for explaining the behaviors of mass society in a way that could be squared with the presumptions deeply engrained in American political culture about the competencies of the citizen. This opened a period of inquiry about the true nature of man and of political control, which extended 19th century discourse on modernity into the 20th to form a new discourse about new forms of political evil that would have a new lexicon comprehensible to the mass public in an age of amnesiacs. The intellectuals participating therein would then engage in a thorough-

going self-theorization focusing on the social role of the intellectual or the expert as well as the place of propaganda in modern political domination.

Chapter 3

The Modern Science of Mass Domination

If the period after World War I was an era of historical uncertainty, and it was one in which even the vocabulary of politico-historical discourse itself was uncertain, then there would need to be something to talk about—the basic furniture of politics like classes, rulers or types of state. More important is that this new age was a scientific age, and this meant in turn that human nature would finally be known. Was mankind actually the rational, self-governing race envisioned by the Enlightenment? These decades showed that the answer was "no," but it was nonetheless a critical intellectual period that bridged from the old order as it existed before the First World War into the emergence after the Second War of many intellectual trends known well to this day. A key discourse of the period in particular was about the masses, media control and the experts who could wield this new mass media in the era of mass politics so as to direct the masses to their proper ends.

This account heretofore covers very similar ground to the touchstone history of American social science: Dorothy Ross' 1990 *The Origins of American Social Science*.[66] In it she argues that American social science had its roots in the early-modern republican tradition, that the problem of modern society was the problem of the origin of social science, and that the American branch of social science was originally structured deeply by exceptionalist ideology. In the latter half of the 19th century, as American society confronted great problems that challenged the structure of 19th century republicanism, and in this environment progressive and

[66] Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

historicist alternatives entered into American social science as an important challenge. Her most important claim for this study, though, is that the fixation on dehistorized human nature gained its impetus from the scene of confusion after the First World War—a view with which this study broadly agrees.

However, this account is in direct disagreement with hers at many key points, and ultimately finds its post-war terminus elsewhere. Her version of the story relies on a reading of early modern republicans as being the first point at which historical causation was studied at all and she characterizes the Machiavellian moment as connected with a blameless historical project which was then corrupted by exceptionalism, rather than characterizing republicanism as hinging on a history of virtue that persevered as a continued problem from late in the middle ages deep into modernity, and that brought with it at every point difficult problems of historical interpretation as well as ideas about a special polity and the special character it would have to possess. Furthermore, her account of the origins of sociology is as blameless as Machiavelli, despite its connections with the excesses of the French Revolution and of 19th century empires, and in her account sociology lacks a society to study. The main problem of modern sociology was the study of urban crisis, anomie and social disintegration, and only in an optimistic and mostly American strain was a sociology aimed at converting the masses into a new and enfranchised working class that was capable of virtually being a members of the bourgeoisie when acting collectively. Such an unconditionally sanguine view of modern progress in social knowledge, corrupted only by American exceptionalism, sets out the basic foundations of a story that are suspect from the outset.

From this, Ross ends up with two problems when accounting for this specific interwar discourse on the discovery of human nature. Firstly, there is the problem of how to explain

pessimism's presence, and often pessimism's victory. Ross's account can only deal with the emergence and triumph of pessimism as the triumph of a conspiracy against progress. This study does not treat this pessimism as in some way a villainous force in a battle with optimism about progress; it only follows the path of development whereby the inversion between optimism and pessimism is comprehensible as an entirely explicable element internal to the development of modern thought.

Secondly, there is in her study a major lacuna left by the fact that this was mostly not a discourse *comprised* of social scientists who were competent to act as experts that could fix social ills. It was instead a discourse *about* experts who claimed to be socially-scientific, who were seen often with extraordinary ambivalence by their peers, and a discourse that was only one-half populated by social scientists, while the other half of the discourse was historical, religious or literary. This study makes sense of interwar socially-scientific controversies by approaching them as having not much of a purely scientific genesis or resolution *per se*, and instead as being a sociopolitical discourse about social engineering and expertise in the age of bureaucracy and mass-media. It is because of this that ultimately this study couches these developments within a larger discourse in both topic and in time, and sees their terminus in the theorization of modern political evil. Ross is left with a story about missed opportunity for progress dashed against the rocks by midcentury developments in social science that she sees as insufficiently "historicist," when the earlier trends for which she is nostalgic are happily mischaracterized.

One of the key features of this discourse was that its most prominent figures brought forth an array of historical categories that cut through progressive optimism. Many of the characters discussed and adopted by contemporary thinkers, like the positivistic social scientist

and the jaded realist, were ways to describe contemporary political events and social changes while retaining a rhetorical and analytical distance from the profound progressive optimism that suffused much of the era's thinking. The optimism implicit in socially-scientific aspirations to fix modern society was in many ways generational—and the First World War had heightened both the anticipation and the doubts. The resulting character of many of this period's intelligentsia was not just that they positioned themselves as being far-seeing, jaded and scientific, but that they additionally utilized a pastiche of historical referents to index the operation of power.

A primary issue in this conversation was crowds and crowd psychology. This discourse was substantially just one part of a larger contemporary discourse on the nature of modernity as it was being experienced. The discourse on the propagandist as a new type of social expert, specifically, was an historical discourse on modern political domination and how it would differ from political domination before modernity. The work of Edward Bernays is here demonstrative.

Many of his more famous peers of the era had a longer view of modernity, its character, and how mass domination would have to be reinvented—or at least covered over with a new layer of paint—lest civilization would crumble. Some men of that generation were practitioners of propaganda in a way that dwarfed any of his achievements. Bernays set his sights low: to sell the new mass psychology as a new profession. While he promised a new mass psychology, it should be made clear that he, like his peers, were all discussing something altogether different; they were discussing the idea that modern conditions had fundamentally altered the power relations that comprise a polity, and that the implications for this were unclear and potentially dire. Bernays is illuminating because they show how one narrow stratum of interwar discourse—that on propaganda and advertising—was actually just a point of access to a larger historical discourse on the extremely unstable and confusing times in which they lived. His pitch was that

modern progress had allowed us to understand man's inner state so thoroughly and scientifically that we could perfect the harnessing of his irrational group behaviors, and that the consequence of this would be the birth of a new profession that would serve as a kind of technician for the control of society, alongside other professions like doctors and lawyers and architects.

Theorists of propaganda have always attracted conspiracy theory from anyone keen to explain the social world through mass brainwashing. This is not helped by some theorists of propaganda who have invited this behavior—Bernays even promulgated the view that propagandists had powerful forces at their disposal to control the masses—and this attitude has carried over into the critical literature on the origins of propaganda. This common impulse is taken to an extreme by Corey Wimberly's recent *How Propaganda Became Public Relations*, a Foucauldian analysis of the subject. Like other critics of propaganda in modern society—Noam Chomsky being by far the most famous—Wimberly presumes like many denizens of the 20th century that the industrial order changed society so deeply that a new form of adjustment truly was necessary for mankind to a new age, and then on the basis of this needs propagandists to have insinuated their influence far and wide beyond the recognition of most observers.[67] Being a Foucauldian, he takes this one step further and attacks the grim view of human nature buried in propaganda theorists, rather than rejecting the grim view in favor of Enlightenment optimism as the Chomskies of the world generally would.[68] However, being so closely connected to a 20th century intellectual and political legacy means that they share many presumptions with 20th century intellectuals and as such miss a key component of how propaganda discourse emerged and how it connected with other intellectual topics of the day. If the 20th century was not, in fact,

[67] Cory Wimberly, *How Propaganda Became Public Relations: Foucault and the Corporate Government of the Public* (New York: Routledge, 2020).
[68] Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

a radical break wherein all laws, norms and expectations were void, and instead this experience of confusion, terror and optimism was a distinctly 20th century experience worthy of study, then propaganda theorists are cast in a new light. Suddenly, they were not inventing a new practice; they were returning to confront reality again after having thought that now, this time, history would be different.

Edward Bernays, cousin of Sigmund Freud, was the most avid booster of propaganda in his day. Involved with a wide variety of marketing and state information campaigns, Bernays set out to be a propagandist for propaganda and found for himself an intellectual legacy comparable to his uncle's key place in psychology. In Bernays' pitch for this new class of propagandist, public opinion is put forth as having been theorized since time immemorial, and the great political thinkers from antiquity from the classical ages to modernity had all recognized the importance of controlling it through a subtle art not easily pliable to a written treatise. His promise was that this object will now be manageable, not just as an object in the polity but as a specific domain of scientific knowledge with an autonomous *logos* that secretly had lain as the organizational principle behind political life through the foregoing eons. The key insight, as with Freud, would be dispassion; it would only on the basis of a dispassion about human irrationality and psychological malleability that such a science would prove finally within reach.

There are some alarming conclusions to Bernays' view of modern propaganda, that if pursued will point towards not just to some shortcomings in his reasoning—on the basis of which he failed to achieve that same esteemed position as his peers, or as Freud—but will also elucidate the degree to which his peers were strewn throughout the humanists, social scientists, opinion writers and political elites, united by their attempt to theorize how modern historical

conditions had modified the operation of political power. First was Bernays' conclusion that somehow we had been *naïve* about human rationality before modern opinion experts.

> "No serious sociologist any longer believes that the voice of the people expresses any divine or specially wise and lofty ideal. The voice of the people expresses the mind of the people, and that mind is made up for it by the group leaders in whom it believes and by those persons who understand the manipulation of public opinion. It is composed of inherited prejudiced and symbols and clichés and verbal formulas supplied to them by their leaders."[69]

It was perhaps true of a small and effete stratum of progressive intellectuals that they were so optimistic about the voice of the people, but the net total of Western political thought to date was most certainly *not* built on optimism about the ability of the large mass of people to govern, nor had the new empires of modernity been built on such an optimism either. The modern republic had been built only in some instances on undiluted optimism, but it had historically brought with it deep agonies pertaining to the real condition of the people or the necessity of exclusion to keep the people pure. If anything, it is Bernays' optimism about the malleability of the masses that was a break, not his pessimism. What was novel was the view of mankind as malleable and controllable; Bernays' propaganda on behalf of propagandists was built largely on promulgating exactly the kind of story about conspiratorial powers normally discussed amongst the paranoid, it was built on psychological theories about mass man's malleability to subconscious suggestion, and most importantly it was built on a radical reorientation towards viewing every institution and stratum of society as a potential target of strategic manipulation.

The last of these three movements in Bernays' work—the opening of new strata of civil society to the strategies of manipulation practiced by the propagandist—is most peculiar and significant. If the art of propaganda was, as he suggested, to be primarily an exercise in manipulating local officials and press editors like pieces on a chessboard, then surely his broader

[69] Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*. (New York: Ig Publishing, 2005) 109.

aspirations were for propagandists to be an essential component of the new elite for the new age. There was no social science breakthrough here as such; his aspiration for every government to have public information departments was in essence an aspiration to found political implements of elite control of society, a self-assured and hierarchical sort of political view from which he did not shy away. What historical peculiarities would allow intellectuals under such a circumstance to determine that they needed new concepts for discussing the brass tacks of social domination, and that of all things they would conceive of the new class of social controllers as being a professional guild of scientific experts? Why push for conceptual novelty as Benrays did rather than just using older concepts like aristocracy and rumor? Take the following:

> "The political leader of today should be a leader as finely versed in the technique of propaganda as in political economy and civics. If he remains merely the reflection of the average intelligence in his community, he might as well go out of politics. If one is dealing with a democracy in which the herd and the group follow those whom they recognize as leaders, why should not the young men training for leadership be trained in in its technique as well as in idealism?"[70]

On account of what would Bernays think that previous generations of political leaders *didn't* have techniques of political domination?

As argued in previous chapters, much is illuminated by considering these intellectuals in the context of a 20th century saddle period, and Bernays' optimism about a break from the past is no exception. However, there are some obvious objections; for example, why wasn't the response to the changes of the era just the resurgence of millenarian religion? Firstly, the revival of apocalyptic religion was not rare in the era: it was common. In previous centuries of modernity, however, apocalyptic religion was often the primary reference for eras of apocalyptic peril. Earlier even in modernity, the peril of entering modernity was often expressed through the core millenarian metaphorical device: the prospect of the foundation of the New Jerusalem. In

[70] Ibid, 126.

this age, as in some previous times in modernity, it was not just that there was apocalyptic difficulty and uncertainty; there was this difficulty and uncertainty and in addition to all of that there was something more; the abandonment of concepts adequate to prior ages, resulting in a period of true confusion. The most obvious coherent explanation seems to be that the fabric of social life really did change so much more intensely and quickly than ever before, and even the credibility of religion for being a zone of response to these changes was inadequate to express the tenor of events.

One great irony of this confusion was that it gave warrant in the minds of many bright young aspirants to wear the trappings of modern social science as was associated with far-seeing and assuredly rational men at the helm of their civilization, in that somehow by having thrown without preparation into the cold dark of space that they were now better equipped than ever to lead humanity. This preparation that they possessed was opposed of course to the backwardness and ignorance of the middle-ages, wherein at the very least one might be able to say that they thought that they had founded the New Jerusalem and this might be comprehensible to one's peers. However, the choice to treat the break from the old world as the cause to additionally break with older patterns of thought was a very important one. Lippmann, for example, circled the question of abandoning both old mores and religion itself over the course of his life's work.[71] Meanwhile, Lippmann talked recurrently about how the public could only conceive of public affairs through dealing in stereotypes, and combined these ultimately into a critique, discussed below, of a new and emergent political myth specific to the machine age.

The mid-century preoccupation with publicity was essentially an annex of this discourse on the new age. Bernays is here informative; he was quite clear that his views were essentially

[71] His most programmatic work on this topic is Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New York: Time, 1964).

elitist and that modern mass society needed guidance towards efficient behaviors that people would not find on their own, but needed to bill propaganda as the true means by which democracy could be made to work through connecting people towards their proper ends normally beyond their own comprehension. "Only through the wise use of propaganda will our government, considered as the continuous administrative organ of the people, be able to maintain that intimate relationship with the public which is necessary in a democracy."[72]

Closely related to this democratic age was that it was in many ways an age of optimism. This age of optimism was an age of disappointed expectations. William Miller's Great Disappointment was a quintessentially modern experience, and no object of disappointment has been so disappointing to moderns as humankind. Various modern schemes are predicated on the rationality and goodness of human nature, and relative to this standard humans have always fallen short. When this optimism was disabused, something needed to take its place. It is at this point that conspiracy theory enters into the mainstream of American politics and society; the witch hunt is a key device in American culture precisely for expressing the presence of the paranoia because of the self-identification with Puritan righteousness or a special historical destiny. What goes unappreciated in this fact is that this is the precise place where this same structure of belief enters into modern social science; for social knowledge to have been obscure to us before modernity means that modern social science must give us the tools to overcome empirical knowledge of society. Without this, both lived experience and that vast reservoir of ancient and medieval history from the world over would create great problems for modern political optimism in much the same manner as the French peasantry.

[72] Bernays, *Propaganda*, 126.

Comte is here instructive, as his main problem is in overcoming religion itself as both the type of social knowledge that he wants to replace with sociological authority while he at the same time theorized it as the source of the obscurity that had doomed prior ages of the world. While "religion" in the case of Comte possess many subtle properties that elevate it above conspiracy theory, it still requires that much of premodern knowledge be treated as essentially obscure so as to make it possible for the modern social scientist to overcome this obscurity. Comte is willing to grant that religion has a use and communicates some meaning, but his interpretation of religion, its use and its meaning is in adjusting people to survival in a different age of the world that has been since outmoded, requiring in the process creative misreading of religious doctrine and history generally. However, without this, how could he contend that we as moderns stand to use our pristine and clear reason to know our world, engage in discourse and self-govern when all empirical evidence arrayed before him seemed to indicate otherwise? [73]

This optimism came into American politics in many forms and through various means. Andrew Jewett has charted the history of the tradition in American politics that viewed the mass expansion of science as ideal for the expansion of democratic participation, a tradition long symbolized in the figure of John Dewey.[74] This tradition did not just undergo an external assault from religion or a transformation because of Cold War institutionalization; some of its key practitioners had to alter their views very deeply after they entered onto a new plane of modernity at which they could see the mass man more clearly.

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[73] Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte: Volume 1*, translated by Harriet Martineau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961).

[74] Andrew Jewett, *Science, Democracy, and the American University: From the Civil War to the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Conceptual distortions closely associated with optimism about human nature took many forms, and just one of them was that once thinkers were optimistic about human nature, the problem of rumor becomes larger than life. Before modernity, the problem is easily thinkable; that crowds have a mind of their own, that people gossip, that they are ignorant, that they have little regard for the truth, they panic. In the modern age it is not so simple, because it is necessary for modern thinkers to explain why *the people* in a democratic age are not behaving as they should. If the people are irrational, ignorant and impressionable and if they lose their minds in groups, then why are we optimistic about their self-rule? This problem took two forms, that of the crowd and that of propaganda. These two concepts were alternately ways to reconceptualize the people so that thinkers could circumvent undesirable evidence about their nature.

However, in the early 20th century various problems emerged. Take, for instance, the controversy surrounding Lewis Terman's flawed initial designs for IQ testing. During the First World War, modern states gained access to extraordinary bureaucratic management with which they could get access to new regularized data. This was epochal in multiple regards, including in the development of modern propaganda practices, and also for the beginning of a process that continued apace through the middle of the century; the rediscovery of the staggering backwardness and malevolence that permeates essentially all human societies. These first IQ tests attempted to rank intelligence by age or grade level, which opened the possibility for the shocking discovery that the people were in aggregate nowhere near as intelligent as the normative presumption built into the measure. While this was an easy fix for IQ testing, it was just the beginning of a century of disappointments further exacerbated through the opening up of

public opinion polling.[75] The new age was supposed to have been an enlightened one wherein science would be used in governance, but this enlightenment had allowed the scientific experts to know the people, and this knowledge could not be accommodated within an Enlightenment framework. The options were varied, and one of them was thoroughgoingly elitist pessimism.

It would be an error to claim that these developments were entirely an extension of cultural memory and its erasure, or of the dialectical development of earlier moments in modern thought; the condition for these developments was also technological and institutional. New mathematical tools *were* available to social scientists; from the calculus of infinitesimals the modern study of statistics and probably was possible, and from this the usage of these tools to study populations in new ways. However, more importantly for these key developments in sociology and psychology, there were modern states and corporate bureaucracies that could aggregate information about large masses of citizens in ways theretofore rarely attempted. The growth of new educational systems at the end of the nineteenth century and the general interpolation of large masses of young men into the survive of the state in World War I gave social scientists written information about competencies and attitudes amongst the common man that their forebears could not have accessed.

These new statistical tools for knowing about the people created extraordinary new possibilities for disappointment. Disappointment was not a new theme in the history of social science. Social scientists had struggled since the time of at least Comte to deal with the fact that the rational mind of the Enlightenment didn't seem to be identifiably present in any age of the world or any group of people. However, with the advent of mass polling and intelligence testing

[75] The most programmatic, detail-oriented and even-handed historian on this topic is John Carson, *The Measure of Merit: Talents, Intelligence, and Inequality in the French and American Republics, 1750-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

it came to pass that optimistic, progressively-minded social scientists discovered new vistas of bleakness.

Pessimistic Sociology

The sociology of the 19th century was not wholly optimistic. From early on sociologists were concerned with bureaucracy and alienation—Durkheim's theory of anomie being the most important singular event in this line of development—and with the loss of traditional community.[76] Some took aim more programmatically at naive idealism of the age, even if still within the framework of post-Enlightenment commitments to some form of emancipatory liberalism of leftism; Thorstein Veblen being of particular significance in his ability to break through the naive utilitarianism of contemporary social reformers by disclosing the true utility of most of society's consumption.[77] Finally, there was elitist pessimism, and critically important in this regard were Gustave Le Bon in the middle of the 19th century and Pareto at the turn of the 20th.

Gustave Le Bon was an aristocratic sociologist whose work studying crowds was a key development in the history of modern pessimism. Taking democratic and revolutionary optimism about the general will and turning it on his head, Le Bon described the many as being impulsive and suggestible, and indicted a broad array of civic institutions as being organs primarily of mass hysteria. In doing this, Le Bon articulated an important idea that would be important in the course of the 20th century; that the criticism of the many could take place on the basis of criticizing the experiences of mass society. Le Bon rejected the effects of the crowd on the

[76] Emile Durkheim, *Suicide,* translated by John Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1997).
[77] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leasure Class* (New York: Penguin, 1994).

individual; that individuals may be competent, courageous, disinterested, or possess whatever other virtues are necessary for public life, but that the crowd in aggregate does not.[78]

Such a development is of a piece with multiple developments in modern social thought, including with fundamental developments in modern conservatism; this critique is directly adjacent to, and fully compatible with, Burke's lamentation about the breakdown of the little platoons. It was also apiece with fundamental themes in the burgeoning domain of sociology. Originally born of Enlightenment optimism about how modern knowers could supplant religion with rational and scientific insight and guidance, the experience of modern society itself had proven to be a key topic for early sociology that inspired none of that optimism. Like Durkheim's studies that implicated social anomie as a driving factor in disturbing modern social trends like the spread of suicide, Le Bon's study associated frightening social and political phenomena not with the backwardness that sociology was supposed to displace but with the experience of the modern crowd.

The elitism of Vilfredo Pareto was more thoroughly pessimistic than Le Bon's conservative rejection of the crowd. Pareto, important for inaugurating discourse about "elites" as such, and also for demarcating more clearly than any other late 19th century intellectual the development of elitist liberalism, was of extraordinary influence on elitist pessimists like Bernays. Pareto's elitism was significant because it denied that even amongst the workers there was a superior few, and that additionally the superior few needed the inferior many not at all, and that the few were not just better suited to political leadership but were in fact also the wellspring of all productivity. The many were pure dead weight. What's more, he articulated this within a modern idiom, and reframed modern progress as being not progress towards egalitarian

[78] Gustave le Bon, *The Crowd,* translated by Robert Merton (New York: The Viking Press, 1960).

emancipation but instead the true assertion of the superiority of the few, and the few not as the sclerotic elites of old but now the few as the apogee of modern scientific efficiency.

Bernays, like other propaganda theorists of his era—Ivy Lee, a young Walter Lippmann—dropped the optimism about the individual characterizing earlier pessimistic sociology and synthesized a truly dim view of the many and their collective psychology. Bernays was unequivocal; humans are not rational. Practicing a style of showmanship when discussing his clever psychological trickery that sounded at times like conspiracy theory and at times like more sophisticated practice of the school of suspicion, Bernays promised that everyone, even the elected leaders, are in the clutches of a true cabal of far-seeing propagandists, and that the individual, even the precious Bourgeois who owns land and participates in civic life, is utterly susceptible to various forms of manipulation by cabal in which he proudly advertised membership. This evolution in thinking is remarkable, because of its style, its account of human nature, and its prognosis.

Firstly, Bernays claimed to be showing the reader a means by which to look beyond the curtain into a secret world of true power brokers sometimes beyond even elected officials. Entirely artless in his striving to establish the propagandist as the ultimate technic guild responsible for dominating modern society, Bernays claimed that the propagandist could manipulate even the officials elected and appointed, that they could suggest things to voters, to readers in the privacy of their own home, and that part of the genius of the modern propagandist was the targeting of leadership rather than the many. Bernays' view was that the large mass of people could never really wield power, and then as a way to sell propaganda to the public told them that his special art gave him access to a secret world of causation that lay behind the dysfunction of public civic life.

In Bernays' telling, the propagandist did not just target elites, but did so in a manner possible only because of man's irrationality and susceptibility. Bernays's views was that mass democracy had been a major blow the few by the many, but it was ultimately totally untenable in a highly technical and specialized society wherein people had no way of assessing any of the entailments of modern commerce of production. Because of this, the propagandist would be an adjustor who would help benevolently with the masses being led by their proper leaders towards their proper ends in a modern and complex society. This was in turn possible because the masses and leaders alike were not the rational creatures of the Enlightenment, propelled like efficient machines to respond to stimuli, but were now known to be truly irrational creatures incapable of knowing their own hearts, driven more than anything else by subconscious emotions and the pathological orientation towards mimicry.[79] The only way for the few to guide the many now was the hire the propagandists and use them not just to shape the attitudes of the many, but to strategically target and manipulate the institutional leaders of society with campaigns of persuasion and pressure so as to corral them and their constituencies towards the right ends.

The prognosis here was in turn quite different from the 19th century theorists of crowd psychology, who were generally critics of the spiritually debasing effects of mass society. The prognosis was for Bernays merely that the few had to fight back against the many, who are incurable dolts, and that now they could do it through propaganda, restoring the world to its proper hierarchy. This would turn out to be a pivotal moment, as this would be a voice singularly in favor of propaganda who saw it as no threat at all, who was absolutely shameless in his self-regard as a propagandist, and who attempted to sell to the public a secretive, true political order previously normally imagined by conspiracy theorists.

[79] Bernays, *Propaganda*, 73-82.

This development was less an extension of Freudian psychology than of Wilfred Trotter. Despite Bernays' highly publicized connection with Freud and his aspirations to leave such a comparable imprint on a novel field, the influence of Freud and his preoccupation with the complex neuroses specific to modern society, his complex and subtle, often ironic and dissembling moralism, and his literary preoccupation with irrational and counter-enlightenment unknowables, particularly dreams, are all essentially absent from Bernays' psychology. Wilfred Trotter, coming from a background in physiognomy, was more important for Bernays. Trotter provided an account of mass man in crowds that was built on an account of humans as a form of essentially social animal overwhelmingly dominated by herd instincts in groups.[80] This crowd psychology in the hands of Bernays was a final key piece of his theorization of propaganda. Leaving behind Le Bon's spiritual concern about what the crowd does to the individual, Bernays instead attacked every level of human character and propounded a view of humans in which even in private away from the presence of the crowd they are still dominated by social desires that made them easy to influence.

When Nietzsche remarked that insanity is rare in the individual and common in groups he may not have been wrong, but nonetheless this idea has had a diverse path through being sincere insight, being a means by which to bracket the unthinkable, and in the hands of the public relations theorist a means by which to provide propaganda on behalf of propaganda. If we were not now modern enough to know the true psyche of the masses, then there would have been no break from premodern management of rumor or premodern ideas about governance, but if we were modern enough to manage the crowd then we were modern enough that the age of the

[80] Wilfred Trotter. "Instinct and its Bearing on the Psychology of Civilised Man." *The Sociological Review*, issue *a1*, volume 3, (1908): 227-248. Wilfred Trotter. "Sociological Application of the Psychology of Herd Instinct." *The Sociological Review*, issue *a2*, volume 1, (1909): 36-54.

omnicompetent citizen was now over and we knew mankind's nature too well to go along with the French Enlightenment's sunny views. To overcome this problem in this way is to be purely optimistic about social science's ability to disclose new truths about the crowd, and then to bracket optimism about the rational and good citizen of the Enlightenment from the crowd. For Bernays, the solution to this problem was not either radical or conservative communitarianism, to be for solidarity, cultural cohesion, the restoration of the little platoons, because his concern wasn't that the crowd was breaking down the individual. He was just eager to be a booster for a new professional guild that could keep a steady hand on the tiller in the new age beyond the omnicompetent citizen. However, in selling his wares in a democratic society, he was forced to preserve some trapping of belief in the omnicompetent citizen of the Enlightenment republic, an act achievable through severing the analysis of the individual from the analysis of the crowd.

The Good Society and its Other

No other American intellectual confronted these issues on such grand stage as Walter Lippmann. Born at the end of the 19th century, Lippmann's formative life experiences were from the late 19th century—the old trans-Atlantic Bourgeois experience—as an assimilated Jew in Harvard with the aura of both alienation and optimism common at the end of the fin-de-siècle—and as a liberal who both fell in love with the managed society during the First World War and then with horror fled from it in the 1930s. What unified Lippmann's life trajectory was that he started as a progressive muckraker and as a propagandist during the First World War, and then arose thereafter in the public eye as a professional liberal newsman. What set Lippmann apart was that he united multiple intellectual threads common in the era, and he did it in public as an opinion

writer, meaning that when he theorized how propaganda and mass media transformed modern political life he did so as a self-styled self-theorist explaining to the public his own craft and his own ambivalence about it.

More important for understanding Lippmann than anything else is understanding the form of address that he used when constructing his imagined audience and narrating, both implicitly and explicitly, their relationship with each other. Lippmann spent his entire publishing career stylistically self-conscious about his audience. In his first book, *Drift and Mastery*, he already he was already positioning himself as being able to explain to the "adults" what the "young people" were going on about, and explaining to the "young people" what the "adults" were talking about.[81] This did not just preface the kind of generational discourse common in the second half of the century; in organizing his audience thusly, Lippmann positioned himself as both the far-seeing realist capable of dealing with the tumult of historical change, while also positioning himself as capable explaining it to his young peers. This would be the beginning of the voice that would mature across his life, that of a man who is weary with insight into the reality of great power politics and whose somber responsibility is to explain the workings of great power to a naïve public. He did this recurrently, not just with positioning himself relative to the public as a man who has access to power, but he also positioned himself relative to the American public as a man who understands the rest of the world.

There are two things to make of such a maneuver, both in general and in particular. Starting with the general, there is the question of why Lippmann saw fit to position himself in this way as a general question about intellectuals in a turbulent time. Lippmann, like his peers, spent his life scrounging around for new vocabulary for talking in public about history, society

[81] This is most clear in his earlier work. Read, for example, introduction to Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015) 15-19.

and politics—what were the new conditions that entailed a new form of public speech? This gets to the specific question about Lippmann; what was his answer to this question when he theorized himself? Lippmann postured always as a sort of adjuster who explained modern, technocratic politics to a mass society incapable of understanding the machinery of their governance despite the fact that they were still supposed to be citizens. It is here that Lippmann theorized the breakdown in the "omnicompetent citizen" presumed by 18th and 19th century political thinkers, and gestured towards his sense of how the modern age had left such a citizen behind, and critically grasped that with this change civil society had shifted away from being a discourse between the bourgeois and had become a zone of expertise for propagandists. He was not the only thinker to notice such a transformation, but he noticed it comparatively early and with unique insights specific to being a theorist-practitioner as both a premier journalist and also as a member of the first generation of modern propagandists.

While Lippmann's *Phantom Public* remains to this day his most widely read work, his most ambitious would come later. His *Phantom Public* had been a critique of a wide variety of democratic, progressive and left-wing political beliefs about the democratic polity. This early work was not as severe as that of Bernays, but it nonetheless expressed both the belief that far-seeing leaders were necessary for channeling mass energies towards their proper ends, and also deep skepticism about whether the public could transcend dealing in stereotypes as their main means of relating to the forces historical that buffet them.[82] However, as the decades wore on, Lippmann increasingly redeveloped for his readers, in a new historical idiom, various defenses of older liberal, democratic, republican and broadly religious ideas about politics and ethics over the course of many works. Ultimately, his 1937 *The Good Society*, broadly influential in the

[82] This is skepticism is most acutely and thoroughly expressed in Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

development of neo-liberalism, marked the point at which he embarked fully in theorizing how the modern mass-society had become a distinctly modern villain, and then give an historical account of both liberalism and its other.

In *The Good Society,* Lippmann attempted to provide a history of liberalism, a history of "collectivism," a repudiation of his technocratic peers as well as his own earlier pessimism, and finally provide an historical analysis of modern despotism. Much of what he did here was important for post-war neo-liberals specifically, in particular his attempt to resuscitate interest in natural right doctrine amongst modern, post-progressive liberals in the 20th century. It is the architecture of the last of his preoccupations in this work that is important here, which is the analysis of the historical conditions that led to the emergence of collectivism:

> "The dissolution of faith had been under way for generations, but in 1914 there took place a catastrophic unsettlement of the human routine. The system of the world's peace was shattered; the economy which was the condition of its prosperity was dislocated. A thousand matters once left to routine and taken for granted became questions of life or death. In the darkness there was a need for light. Amid overwhelming circumstances there was a desperate need for leading. In the disorder, as men became more bewildered in their spirits, they became more credulous in their opinions and more anxiously compulsive in their actions. Only the scientists seemed to know what they were doing. Only governments seemed to have the power to act. The conditions could not have been more favorable to the reception of myth. Science had become the only human enterprise which all men looked upon as successful. Society was broken and unruly. The need for authority was acute, yet the authority of custom, tradition, and religion was lost. In their extremity men hastened to entrust to government, which can at least act decisively and impressively, the burden of shaping their destiny."[83]

The ultimate outcome of this modern historical confusion was the emergence of a new, modern form of ancient tyranny. The emergence of such a thing required of Lippmann both historical vocabulary—talking about collectivists, comparing modern statism to ancient slavery—and also a concrete diagnosis of this new mass domination.

[83] Walter Lippmann, *The Good Society* (Surrey: Billing and Sons Ltd, Guildford and Esher, 1943) 24.

It is not entirely clear the degree to which the scientists and the government are supposed to be metaphorical stand-ins for a dysregulated spiritual orientation, generally. In this reading, which seems particularly obvious with the above passage's starkly religious overtones, promethean drives towards positive knowledge and the domination of nature through raw power filled were what filled the hole left by the "loss of faith." In one reading, Lippmann was like millennia of political thought going to at least Plato employing a double analysis of both the individual citizen and the polity that serve as allegories as one another. Even if Lippmann's views were strictly literal, it was still certainly the disorientating effects of mass society that were to blame:

> "It has been said that the authors of the constitution were not democrats, and their warnings against the irrational power of the formless mass are cited as evidence. But to credit this is to misunderstand their genius. They did not identify the power of the masses with democracy. They were able to see that the essential problem is to organize this power so that it may function as a democracy. That is why they made a lasting contribution to political thought and so great a mark on the history of mankind. Had they been "democrats" in the sense which their confused critics have in mind, the ensuing turmoil and impotence would have made America, not the land of promise, but a gigantic Macedonia."[84]

In either view modern society had resulted in brutish orientation towards scientific domination and dysregulated and disoriented non-citizens incapable of participating in a free society as members of a polity. In order to steal a march against the new elitism, he needed to attack the desirability and efficiency of this new elite and their far-seeing science of mass domination.

The line that he took was that it is degenerative for people to have their problems obviated for them, even if the solutions available to a social engineer are in some sense optimal. In this regard, the argument resuscitated various older themes from a democratic age in the history of American republicanism, and combined them with Kantian argument against the usage of people as means rather than ends. It also varied from favorite arguments of post-war

[84] Ibid, 252.

neoliberals in that their critique was often against the inefficiency of central planning by the part cabal relative to localized planning of market actors, or against the morbid incentives and ultimate inefficiencies of command economies regardless of scale—arguments that are in both cases within the bounds of concerns about industrial efficiency at the scale of the society as a whole, and as such arguments internal to the value and aims of socialist thought.

Lippmann's pessimism about non-propagandized mass democracy had a rejoinder from John Dewey. If the masses, if not the bourgeoisie as well, could only relate to abstractions and stereotypes arranged for them by propagandists, and modern mass society was beyond comprehension to a normal mind, then Dewey had to save democracy by making the democratic state essentially incomprehensible to normal people by nature. Dewey, through making affairs of state into affairs of harmonizing second-order and third-order conflicts of interest, was capable of defending democracy. This was achieved through defining civic engagement at a sufficiently low level of competency that it could survive such pessimism. Combined with a doctrine that the public had to have leaders and had to be made up of citizens properly educated and enmeshed in social bonds, Dewey was capable of saving the public and its democratic control of the state without relying on illusions about untutored human nature.[85]

In this regard, Lippmann's work was part of more than one important intellectual thread that continued through into the second half of the 20th century—firstly in that he was a theorist-participant in the burgeoning area of propaganda, and then how he participated in the first generation of neoliberal political discourse.[86] One of the many ways that he is indicative is how he participated in theorizing the inverse of his "good society," already referred to at points as

[85] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1954).
[86] For coverage of Lippmann's relationship with the first generation of neoliberals, as the current appellation is commonly used, see: Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists, The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberlism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018) 76-79.

being "totalitarian," and which was itself something very much similar to the varied dystopias of his peers.[87] Lippmann theorized that the great minds of his day had reinvented the ancient defense of slavery, and in so doing embarked on his critique of this "slave society" that was parallel in many ways to the "serfdom" and "totalitarianism" found in the thought of a variety of other thinkers. In Lippmann's view, modern social thinkers had embraced the view that people would be better off if their problems were solved for them by more intelligent men, and then intelligence is essentially only instrumental rationality, and so the total compulsion of all others by a small cabal of engineers would obviate people's problems and ultimately be a form of paternalistic domination that was good for the dominated.[88]

This development in Lippmann's thought would be a marker of things to come; that there is a new trend in modern society and politics, that it is the rebirth of something at least as evil as ancient forms of tyranny, that it is connected in some way with the dehumanization and disorientation of a mass mediated society and finally that it was an outgrowth of the modern orientation towards instrumental rationality. Lippmann already, at this point, also indicates a route out, one that would also prove popular; that he mounts an argument wherein it is best to let people govern themselves, even if they are stupid. Many of these themes would be central in theories of totalitarianism in the coming decades, and Lippmann's preoccupation with how propaganda is an integral part of a new political catastrophe that has consumer the modern Western world would be echoed in post-war years by thinkers from Jacques Ellul to Noam Chomsky.

Why the change of heart? This is hard to say; his earlier work was broadly technocratic, and pessimistic generally about the possibility of the many to ever potentially stay informed in a

[87]Lippmann, *The Good Society*, 9.
[88] Ibid, 383-389.

modern society—what could prompt such a change in direction? This is speculative, even with knowledge of his biography, but when looking more broadly at his generation it seems that at the latest the National Socialists in Germany and eugenics more broadly were enough to awaken anyone from their faith in courageous and centralized, scientifically-informed domination of society. Meanwhile, Lippmann did seem to have mounting concerns over the course of his life with many things that had left him untroubled in his earlier years, concerns about the failures of mass democracy, about extravagant optimism about human emancipation, about top-down social management, about the rise of European authoritarianism, including a long disillusionment with many elements of the political Left.[89] What is key firstly is that he reoriented to the problem of totalitarianism, dealing with it generally under the name collectivism, and he did so at roughly the same as many of his peers. What is key secondly is that his evolution exemplifies so clearly the development of mid-century liberal thinking in that he began as a pessimistic technocrat after the First War, and through the internal evolution of his own thinking, historically indexed so clearly to the political events of the 30s, had to answer his own earlier charges against the public in order to defend against the excesses of what had seemed to his younger mind to be the grim way of the future. His answer was like many of his peers, which was to reconceptualize both virtue and tyranny for the modern age, and in so doing provide not just a critique of the managed society, but additionally a modern account of the individual and their proper development through self-governance.

[89] Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980) chapters 3-18.

Chapter 4

Continuities in the Theory of Totalitarianism

It should come as no surprise that amongst intellectuals concerned with modern politics' relationship with historical time there was self-awareness about the engineering of new concepts. Such was the case in the middle of the last century, in particular amongst German intellectuals, and in particular within that amongst the exiles who fled the National Socialists. These intellectuals were influential in the English-language speaking world, and they were interested more than anything else in understanding the rise of new, authoritarian movements. For this they needed new concepts—totalitarianism being the most robust. It was also a concept of concepts. Modernity already had the modern masses, had managers and advertisers and propagandists, and had seen the emergence of the generic and underspecified elites and intellectuals. It was also the case that the modern political intellectuals had centuries of development of conceptualization of the interplay of interests. With totalitarianism, and the era of new concepts that went alongside it, like the military-industrial complex, modernity now increasingly had a new vocabulary for entire political systems and power structures particular to mass, bureaucratic societies. However, these concepts should give readers pause: in such a profusion there is still some unity, and that unity is often based on longer continuities.

The theory of totalitarianism came alongside the theorization of other parallel systems, like the garrison state, and understanding their emergence is critical for understanding the development of the historical vocabulary used in the 20th century. The conceptual problem that came with theorizing totalitarianism was twofold. The first of them was that mass society

rendered conceptualizations of tyranny and despotism inadequate to describe a phenomenon that extended so far beyond any individual. The second is that even the theory of tyranny rested always on an implicit anthropology, and that mass society criticism did even more so, and that any such stable account of human nature was in flux. What resulted was that older historical vocabulary was not necessarily adequate to the task, and that any attempt to theorize totalitarianism would require engaging with some fundamental account of human nature or social ontology. For different intellectuals this would mean different things depending on their prior commitments, and for many of them it entailed a discussion of history that included a story about modernity's inner spiritual or psychological state, expressed sometimes literally and sometimes metaphorically.

There have been a number of approaches to studying the intellectual history of reactions to the rise of totalitarianism as well as to the very concept itself. Firstly, in a manner that is most gainful empirically, there have been attempts to provide well-researched critical appraisals, as is the case with David Engerman's 2006 study of John Dewey's reaction to the Soviet Union.[90] Some studies have attempted to synthesize this literature into programmatic surveys of reactions to dictatorship or authoritarianism in this era, as is the case with Ben Alpers' study *Dictators, Democracy and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy*.[91] This approach, as a larger scheme of synthesis, places too much weight on the contingencies of initial reaction and probes not deeply enough into long-duration continuities that created the underlying structure of reception. Others have, in turn, probed at specific philosophical dimensions of this

[90] David C. Engerman. "John Dewey and the Soviet Union: Pragmatism Meets Revolution." *Modern Intellectual History* 3, volume 1 (2006):33-63.
[91] Benjamin L. Alpers. *Dictators, Democracy and American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy: 1920s-1950s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

reaction, as is the case of Edward A. Purcell's *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value*—an analytically tight study of how reactions to the political disasters of the early 20th century were organized around a long-running and fundamental debate about the normative foundations of modern liberal democracy.[92] Most illuminating of all are the literatures like this last one that focus on core ideas, like crisis, utopia, and temporality, many of which are far afield from 20th century U.S. historiography, but which nonetheless can provide important guideposts for how to contextualize modern historical experience.[93] What has not gone explicated is specifically the continuities that connected the field of new historical concepts for used for theorizing the rise of the new Soviets and National Socialists with a longer and broader field of historical concepts that includes the conceptualization of mass society and the conceptualization of distinctly modern new classes.

That this continuity could find a form of fulfillment in this period is itself only possible because of real continuities in both the theorist and the object of theory. Intellectuals of the era went back in time, for example to the French Revolution, for the historical material that they would analyze. The reason that this maneuver was so intellectually gainful was that for centuries thinkers and their object of criticism had developed a special affinity; both emerged out of 18th and 19th century modern politics, both as responses to mass society, both with mandates embedded within perilous time schemes, albeit with disagreeing visions of the masses and their political possibility. It is only on the basis of that affinity that the analysis of the totalitarians could be so well suited to them.

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[92] Edward Purcell, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973).

[93] Klaus Vondung, *Die Apokalypse in Deutschland* (Munich: DTC, 1988) is an exemplary study in the German case. The literature on the 19th century United States also has some such studies, often with a much stronger emphasis on the religious dimensions of utopian or millenarian time schemes. Donald E. Pitzer, editor, *America's Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997) is particularly excellent for its broad coverage.

The concept of totalitarianism was timely first of all because the totalitarians announced themselves as such. The idea that Fascism had to be a "total" politics, a phrase pulled from Mussolini's speeches and analyzed by Arendt, was not at all insignificant. Mussolini was a programmatic experimenter in avant-garde revolutionary ideology. Soviets, National Socialists and Fascists all defined themselves through their futurity, and the National Socialists in particular were alarming for their emergence in one of the most advanced countries. Theorists and critics of totalitarianism, first and foremost, agreed with their object of analysis that there was a novelty to this new political form, and that this novelty possessed a world-historic significance. Totalitarians took their total mandate from the future, proclaimed that this was their age, and their critics agreed at least in part. They agreed that totalitarianism was at least futuristic, if not world-historic, and what they disagreed on was the ultimate significance of that fact in the scheme of history.

It was timely again because it was one of multiple concepts that could fill the void left by pre-modern tyranny. Tyranny, a concept with reference to the ancient world, did not necessarily have to be swept away, as many ancient concept persevered. However, its referent to an unjust ruler gave way to concepts that referred increasingly to dynamics of power or structures of interest, and that referred programmatically to entire systems of society. As the 20th century would drag on, new concepts for tyranny would stick precisely because they gave a vocabulary for discussing an enemy of the North-Atlantic liberal democracies. Totalitarianism in particular was one that developed first from political discourse internal to Italy, wherein it was used first as a term of approbation, then was adopted in Fascist theorization of the total state, and only after being adopted by in Germany came to be developed by American critics afraid of newly

regimented mass politics and their relationship with propaganda.[94] This was in some ways a novelty, as the political theory of foregoing decades had in the liberal countries developed in a direction increasingly preoccupied with management, propaganda and eugenics. Critique of totalitarianism served as the next dialectical development beyond this.

A primary source of new conceptualizations was the same paradox of optimism and pessimism that had inaugurated a new age of social science for studying mankind. If humanity was now in a progressive age of enlightenment and emancipation for all of humanity, then why were new and hideous forms of despotism emerging, sometimes amongst the most technologically-advanced countries? However, there were additionally real reasons that these new regimes seemed distinctly different from premodern despotism and so frayed the conceptual fabric based on historical experience from foregoing millennia. All of these movements commanded the power of modern states, with modern policing and warmaking capacities and with modern bureaucracies. They did seem to be substantially different, and the same historical conditions for their emergence had sent intellectuals down the path of treating them as novel and attempting to conceptualize them as such.

No single author was as important as Hannah Arendt in theorizing totalitarianism. In her 1951 *Origins of Totalitarianism,* Arendt attempted to make sense of how totalitarianism could be the outcome of the dialectical extension of European history theretofore, but would be left in doing so with a story that lacked the revolutionary or progressive coherency possessed by so many modern historians. The problems caused by this incoherence were felt from the very beginning by social scientists who wanted an ideal type of a totalitarian state, only to find a text

[94] Alpers' coverage of the adoption of the term in the United States is excellent, in particular is coverage of the precise origins of the term in the interwar Italy, its usage by German, and its ultimate theorization in the United States: Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy and American Public Culture,* 59-128.

that was complex, irregular, and often preoccupied with the spiritual elements of European progress into darkness. This lack of historical comprehensibility was not lost on Arendt, whose life work included repeated returns to the problem of politics in modern historical time.

The internal problems within *Origins* are nowhere so acute as in its variance in historical vocabulary, for example, the emergence of "elites" as an author's category in its third and final act, as though Pareto had entered and exited the action on stage to bequeath the narrative with its newest concept.[95] In order to comprehend the narrative—one that has been broadly editorialized since its publication, it's necessary to understand the manner in which it is an attempt to bring both previously-existing modes of historical thinking to bear on a phenomenon that was not amenable to them and a text that uses a scattergun of new concepts that varied in their usage over the course of the book.

The problem was two-fold: that modern thinkers were now without banisters, and that additionally totalitarianism had a different character to premodern tyranny. Without reference to ancient texts, norms, or any other form of stabilizing character to intellectual discourse, the intellectuals were groping, and groping here to understand totalitarianism. Totalitarianism was distinctly *not* ancient tyranny; tyranny was built on a vigorous individual who achieved and displayed his triumphs to perpetuate domination over the polis, while modern totalitarianism had, in Arendt's view, no genuine tyrants.[96] No individual person could possibly have any agency

[95] Take, for example, chapter five of *Origins,* in which "the bourgeois" is the primary character. By the end of ten, by comparison, we have an alliance of "the elite" and "the mob," and also "the philistine" as an entirely new character.

[96] This is most programmatically explicated in chapter twelve or *Origins*, wherein Arendt differentiates totalitarianism from classical tyranny, dictatorship and imperialism primarily through explicating the manner in which totalitarian political organization is based off an amorphous and ever-shifting political organization that makes for total absence of rules or norms in the aim of crushing man's freedom and grinding down their character. The consequence of this is that the leader is dominant in propaganda in all aspects of life, but has no real way of penetrating their will into society. "That totalitarianism differs essentially from other forms of political oppression known to us as despotism, tyranny and dictatorship," is at the top of chapter thirteen.

amongst the raw mass of superfluous people necessary for totalitarianism to emerge. Totalitarianism had cults surrounding individuals, but this was an artifact of the key place of propaganda in modern totalitarian movements. Totalitarianism was modern demagoguery possible at a new scope and scale, with a level of acuteness possible only with mass society, modern media and bureaucracy. It was a pathological phenomenon so overbearing that no individual could actually, in truth, have power over it, and no vigorous despot could achieve it through his efforts.

What Was Totalitarianism?

Like any concept, totalitarianism had to both include and exclude, and totalitarianism was supposed to be the common denominator between the the Bolsheviks and the National Socialists. Given that triad, it could not be explained through recourse to a critique of either the Fascist Right or the Communist Left. It was additionally both an ideology and a stage of economic and political development, welded together into a form that seemed to explain lived experience, even if it meant that it was unclear what totalitarianism *was*. The basic dimensions of the concept, as well as its lack of stability, are fundamental to Arendt's *Origins,* wherein she is scrupulous to note that the concept does not fully include the Italian Fascists and specifically functions as a manner of understanding specifically Stalinism and Hitlerism. Such a movement is comprehensible most clearly if we understand that the mass society criticism more obviously heaped upon Communism had to be extended to National Socialism.[97]

[97] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976) 305-326, with particular attention to the footnotes.

From the beginning it put the concept on somewhat uneven footing that the primary self-described "totalitarian" was Mussolini, as it was primarily used to refer to the Soviets and establish their essential similarity to the National Socialists. This was the smallest of the problems, but it was a problem nonetheless. Much more important were the exclusions of the 19th century empires and the United States. So central to the critique of totalitarianism were mass society criticism, and so integral to the history of totalitarianism was the story of its genesis in 19th century race politics and imperialism, that a scrupulous description was necessary for where American republicanism went right and European republicanism went wrong despite how unnerving American society and culture were to critics of mass society.

Her engagement with history was figurative in exactly this way. Take, for example, her famous *On Revolution*, within which she juxtaposes the American and French Revolutions. Historiography of the American Revolution is generally not oriented to the question of the comparative charity and compassion of the founding fathers; the story she tells is one about how charity and compassion are unworkable political emotions, and she uses the French Revolution for a device through which she can discuss this.[98]

Arendt's account of the origins of totalitarianism are, first and foremost, a story about origins in only a specific sense; the book is specifically a genealogy of totalitarianism told through its development out of the logic of the prior century of European history. In this telling, it is the nationalism of the Bourgeoisie, a great leveling force that homogenized Europe, that became fixated on antisemitism because of the place that Jews held as a special interest who could not be reduced into this new form of mass society. Additionally, the malformed character of the Bourgeois profit motive as private rather than public in the 19th century led to the

[98] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 2006).

degeneration of citizens into the bourgeoisie and ultimately the apolitical pursuit of profit in a depoliticized state that engaged in imperialism beyond its borders. Ultimately, the continental empires of Germany and Russia suffered imperial collapse internal to the core workings of the European imperial core. Europe, rather than suffering at the hands of a Caesar who brought legions across the Rubicon from far-flung empires, was instead suffered at the hands of a mass phenomenon that returned back into Europe through the finally and totally degenerated mass politics of totalitarianism, itself a synthesis of continental imperialism and pan-German or pan-Slavic nationalism.

There are too many peculiarities of Arendt's analysis to be counted, but main amongst them is the conceptual instability that permeates all sections of the book. First and most obvious amongst them is the place of the Jews as a primary figure in the book's cast of characters. Sometimes the Jews are the Jews and her story is about antisemitism. Sometimes they are a metaphor for the Europeanness of Europe before its homogenization during the era of nationalism. Sometimes for aristocratic patrician classes before their liquidation. Sometimes for the legacy of Abrahamic religion within the inner life of European man. Such variance is partially excused by Arendt pointing out that the Jews took on a similarly abstract and metaphorical property for mass-movement anti-Semites who had never actually met a Jewish financier from Vienna or any such thing. It is built on this that she draws out one of her many subtle insights of the book, which is that the blame allocated to abstract or metaphorical forces in political myth can never be justly allocated to individuals, opening the door to hideous vengeance against parties incapable of defending themselves. It is in this that the resentment towards the Jews in their privileged position to the state is a precursor to the practice of show

trails and insinuated incrimination against the entire polity under totalitarianism.[99] The characterizations of other groups have similar instabilities, however. As previously mentioned, "elites" emerge only late in the text; at other points there are citizens, the bourgeois, the masses, there are the intellectuals and the avant-garde of Paris—France at multiple points enters the narrative as "the nation state par-excellence."

What is most peculiar of all is how the book has no unified sense of how the social world coheres or how history is caused, let alone consistency in its characters. Hegel's dialectical story is one about the extension of reason's self-comprehension in world-historical time, and Marx's is about a mechanical extension of material conditions of production, and both are essentially progressive. Arendt's choice to narrate totalitarianism as an internal development of European civilization makes it coherent within the genre of philosophico-historical writing that she has inherited, but there is no progress in the story. What is left over are peculiarities; the totalitarians are propagandists who learn from American ad-men but there is no technological novelty to their propaganda, and the masses are generated purely out of the break-up of the old empires and the failure of nationalism to integrate stateless people, and not at all from industrial deskilling. In the end we get finally a glimpse of man's nature, even just minimally, as an essentially creative being, but unlike Marx's proletarian revolutionary he can strive only vainly to leave his imprint on history because as a member of the masses he is too radically disembedded from society for his interests to be articulated in political action worthy of the name.

[99] See the first section of *Origins*, in particular the end of chapter three. The final chapters on functioning totalitarianism have multiple components in a complex argument about the role of antisemitism in totalitarian ideology, as well as how fear of guilty is insinuated into the relationships and habits of a propagandized mass man—the important piece being the establishment of a new form of justice that acts upon mankind itself rather than individuals, which generalizes this key characteristic of mob vengeance from the era of nationalist antisemitism.

This argument, taken in at a very general level, had some noteworthy features. First was that it was almost wholly consonant, and self-awarely so, with Marxist accounts of the incipient crisis of capitalist empire, albeit with a key modification: radical pessimism about the efficacy of the masses as a political force. Marxists had historically had to overcome criticisms of mass democracy, and arguments for either agrarian or bourgeois democracy, through demonstrating scrupulously the same thing that many French Revolutionaries did, which was that the ideal citizen of the Republic was not being eradicated by urbanization or industrial deskilling, but that these processes had opened the door to a new and more radically democratic class whose material conditions and habits would orient them more properly towards political participation.

The problems with this view were myriad already in the second half of the 19th century, when a sense of disturbance about mass society, urban squalor and social disintegration were almost universally shared by political elites, intellectuals, and in the voting constituencies of democratic societies. To deal with this issue and recast the excesses of industrialization as progress Marx needed to reinvent the proletariat through the division of the lumpenproletariat—exactly the creature that mass society critics feared—and the proletariat as such—who like the true Scotsman would be defined by their transcendence of their condition. If Marx had *not* been optimistic about the lumpenproletariat, then he would have been a mass society critic, and then from this the revolution presaged by Marxist thought would be, by extension, totalitarianism as theorized in the 20th century. Capitalist empire would still create its own gravediggers, nationalism would still be a stillborn and destructive answer to revolutionary modernity, modern technology would still vaporize all social bonds and premodern beliefs, the modern world to date would still catastrophically die in a fiery World War, but now it would no longer be the entrance into a new utopian age and instead be an unconditional disaster unknown to premodern societies.

For Arendt, the analysis of the totalitarians was found in the inversion of their crisis orientation. The essence of the disagreement was about the plot of 19th century history, and the choice to interpret events as a comedy and not a tragedy was not just the reflection of values, affects or dispositions of authors expressing pessimism or optimism. The key disagreement was a substantial disagreement that hinged on the capacities of the characters involved, and this was a disagreement about human nature and the structure of human society. If humanity were such a way, then the lumpenproletariat's emergence out of mass society would be a "comedy," but there would be no happy ending if the proletariat was by nature, by the very fact of their dislocated social standing, incapable of participating in politics.

The proletarian position was not the same for all authors. For Walter Lippmann, the proletarian position in fascism was the same place that the rabble took on in classical demagoguery; his description of the proletariat blamed their precariousness and dependency as the fault that led them to being both desperate and malleable to elite interests.[100] However, Arendt's criticism was a more thorough rejoinder to the totalitarians. By criticizing the masses for being unable to articulate interests or exercise political will, she responded to the notion that the masses engaged in a truer politics that was more *total*. In this account, the totalitarian mind saw the total mandate of politics as touching upon all things because they were not members of a pre-political society that prepared them for having articulated interests within a finite sphere of politics, and so when they set about expanding politics to consume all things in an attempt to enforce their will on the world, they were in fact advancing a form of "antipolitics" that destroyed the fundamental social preconditions for political participation. The engorgement of politics into consuming all aspects of the lifeworld was a recurring concern for Arendt, and to

[100] Walter Lippmann, *The Method of Freedom* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), 91-97.

give a robust account of the split between politics and prepolitical society would be of great difficulty and would be the generative problem for much of her work, one that would essentially rest on a robust account of human nature and the structure of human society.[101]

Walter Lippmann's response was his split *A Preface to Politics* and *A Preface to Morals*. *A Preface to Politics* was, in 1914, one of Lippmann's earlier works, and was generated by his same earlier concerns about how best to adapt liberalism to a bureaucratic and industrial age.[102] In it he is blithely dismissive of moralism and positions himself as an educator to his young, progressively-minded peers as a voice capable of explaining the true horizon of politics in the interplay of interests. *A Preface to Morals,* in 1929, is part of his same reaction to totalitarianism a *The Good Society*, discussed in the prior chapter, and articulates much of what had been either lacking or implicit in his earlier work: an account of the world view and personal ethics necessary as a precondition for participation in political life.[103] The book, admonishing that modern men and women have to accept that they do not have promethean powers of the world, have to accept that they must change themselves to accommodate the world and one another rather than demanding that the world change to meet them. This admonishment is partially consonant with Arendt's indictment of the totalitarian mind and its belief in its total power to reforge human nature. It is also consonant with a conservative and religious indictment of modern social life important to Christopher Lasch's work, discussed in the next chapter.

Arendt was not the only programmatic theorist of totalitarianism. Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzeznski had a competing account of totalitarianism, more important in the intellectual history of social scientific study of totalitarian regimes in the Cold War, but without

[101] She most advances a programmatic account of the relationship between politics and prepolitical social conditions in Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
[102] Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics* (New York: M. Kennerley, 1913).
[103] Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New York: Macmillan, 1929).

the broader philosophical and literary reception—a work that programmatically theorized a model of development for a one-party autocratic state that monopolized mass media and instrumentalized terror. This text was critically different from Arendt's in more ways than one, but central among them was the choice to deal with totalitarians as a party and to establish that it was, in fact, a form of dictatorship not so radically alien from those of previous millennia. Nonetheless, there was still a distinctly modern character to this state, and it was still dependent on pathological social conditions and oscillating into and out of greater and lesser extremity.[104] It shared also with Arendt's conceptualization a certain ambiguity, as the total character of totalitarianism came from the ideas that brought forth revolutionary zeal, but the typology was one that described the course and causes of a real form of state takeover and function. A problem maybe for social scientists with certain methodological inclinations, but also an indication as to how much theory of totalitarianism was specific to a certain milieu; the main problem at the core of the diagnosis of totalitarianism was how a new form of raw power related to the inner state of the partisan.

Odd again here was Arendt, whose analysis of totalitarianism absolutely insisted that totalitarianism was a "movement," which is by her description something beyond even a party, let alone a state.[105] A party is an instrument of interests bundled together in the practice of politics, and the totalitarian movements, in Arendt's eyes, sought to supersede parties as part of their antipolitical project. However, intellectual study of social movements have been almost disconnected from older political concerns about factions and partisanship, and historians interested in them have been primarily interested in the micro-mechanics of political action. In

[104] Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzeznski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1965).
[105] *Origins 311-312* for a clean articulation, but Arendt honors the semantic distinction throughout her writings, referring almost always to "totalitarian movements" and essentially never to "totalitarian parties."

this conceptual reshuffle, older concerns about the deleterious effects of faction and party have faded into oblivion, and characterizations of totalitarianism, or various sibling conceptualizations like authoritarianism, have coalesced almost wholly around the fear of the state as a concrete enemy or around the inchoate fear of unstructured social movements or cultural developments that are seen by critics as polluting society in nebulous and general ways.

The other concept to critically emerge at this point, the inverse of totalitarianism, was liberal democracy. Not so pertinent to this study, it was the concept scoped to fit the United States, France and the United Kingdom, as well as others—non-Prussian, Western-facing Germany—now that the Soviet Union existed. The Communists were themselves a kind of Republican, and so the legacy of 19th century parliamentary expansion in the United Kingdom, as well as the classical triad of democracy, aristocracy and monarchy, were inversely organized into liberal democracy. To some degree the same problems emerged here. There has been recent scholarship on Cold-War attempts at theorizing the open-mindedness of the free world as an inverse to the theorization of the authoritarian personality.[106] However, the debates internal to the Cold War Free World found their melodrama elsewhere; in the right of liberalism to protect citizens against the often oppressive and exclusionary pre-political conditions that undergird the civic sphere, or the irrational and premodern elements in the private spiritual life of the citizen that serve as a precondition for civic virtue in public life.

[106] Jamie Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

The Epistemology of Mass Society

The authoritarian personality was an idea of the times in that it was part of an attempt to study and define the frightening deficiencies in human nature that had allowed for totalitarianism to emerge in advanced societies, in defiance of enlightenment optimism about progress and rationality. Much more important for social science was the study of conformity: the next object of analysis beyond propaganda. The study of obedience to authority and compliance with real or perceived group norms were the next steps taken by the influential psychologist Solomon. Asch.[107] After him, Stanley Milgram continued these experiments, most famously in experiments that demonstrated the pliability of test subjects even in the face of human suffering or death.[108] The implications were at once darker than those from between the wars and also less so. The evidence about the pliability of the citizen was not heartening in the slightest, but the energy was no longer dedicated to theorizing, and then being a booster for, distinctly modern forms of mass psychological domination.

If critics of totalitarianism, over the decades, could not settle on whether the villain of 20th century history was the state, elites, bourgeoisie, party or movement, they could agree that the masses were deranged, and that the intellectuals probably were too. From this fact, there was an effervescence of interest in criticism of the inner state of modern man, under the effect of propaganda, amongst the crowd, hardened within a steel carapace, broken out of proper social hierarchy or unmoored from wholesome spiritual limits imposed by the premodern forces of

[107] Solomon Asch. "Studies of Independence and Conformity: I. A Minority of One Against a Unanimous Majority." *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied, 70*, volume 9 (1956): 1–70.
[108] Stanley Milgram. "Behavioral Study of Obedience." *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 67*, volume 4 (1963): 371–378.

religion and necessity. This interest was not unique to theorizing totalitarianism, but this moment was an important one shaping the views and expectations that would predominate afterward.

The problem that opened up was one that had its roots going back at least as far as Burke and Tocqueville—that mass society created the conditions for a misbegotten Revolution in France—but the critics of totalitarianism needed to mount a more sophisticated philosophical attack than previously. Previously, discussion of institutional structures, habits of civic participation or ineffable qualities of a people's collective virtue could be called to account for the abstract and discombobulated doctrines of the French Terror. For various reasons, theorists of totalitarianism needed to programmatically explore why it was that specific forms of epistemic pathology were associated with specific forms of social disintegration.

The most obvious object of diagnosis was the large masses of dislocated people—the "superfluous" people of Arendt's tale. Almost uniquely amongst midcentury theorists, Hannah Arendt gets closest to an indictment of resentment in a Nietzschean mode, a line of critique that had gone out of style with the death of Spengler and the rise of the National Socialists. The point of differentiation between thinkers would be to how to link a critique of an inner state with the vast underclasses of modern industrial society, as Orwell did, although in his tale the proles are almost wholly outside of a system of political domination that in truth cannot penetrate deep into society. Orwell's vision had almost nobody outside of the party and apparatchiks—real society outside of the grip of the party has almost wholly disintegrated, with the proles being the last human remainder. The inner state with which Orwell was concerned was the party functionary more than the prole; the prole still had life in them even if they generally seemed to be beneath any real impression of articulateness in the eyes of the apparatchiks. What is important here is that the truest domination was for those at the top, internalized into the bureaucracies of the state

and party with no ability to think beyond the lines determined by the party. Of much greater interest to many critics were the bourgeoisie; the class who were supposed to have been the middle-class citizens of the modern republic. In Arendt's *Origins*, the bourgeois is already a malformed pseudo-citizen and is, beyond that, already living with one foot in the grave.[109] However, after totalitarianism has emerged in the final act of *Origins*, it is the mass man whose superfluous character is the basis of the movement. This distinction importantly demarcates an important topic: not all intellectuals followed after Ortega—some were interested in elite alienation.

This gets to a group of much greater interest to midcentury intellectuals: themselves. Such a group had a distinctly modern character, but now there was a new problem, with robust intellectual continuities with older criticisms of the French enlightenment, which was theorizing the intellectuals who had gone along with totalitarianism. Bolshevik modernists, Fascist Futurists or Nazi Existentialists were now all part of a larger indictment of the inner mental state of totalitarianism. For Arendt, there is a mysterious impulse that emerges amongst the intelligentsia towards indulging in crime—distinctly different from Nietzsche's value inversion in that it is a love affair with transgression—and this love affair in turn develops into a love affair between "elites" and "masses" in totalitarianism, in which the elites want to beget a "new form of man" and the masses are "lonely." This critique of alienation and disorientation would persist, as in the case of Raymond Aron and in his 1957 *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, in which it would be a cultic orientation towards messianic history alongside alienation from functioning society that

[109] See in particular chapter 5 of *Origins* for the centroid of her account of the Bourgeoisie and their deficiencies relative to the ideal citizen caste that they were supposed to have been. The clear semantic distinction found, for example between "Jew," "bourgeois" and "citizen" found on page 80, can only be comprehended within the larger argument that the bourgeois is a mass man, and the Jew is a non-reducible remainder left over after homogenization hollows out the sphere of civics leaving it with few citizens, whether they bourgeois, proletarian or some other.

would be key ingredients for the wayward intellectuals who had fallen in love with dogmatic Marxism.[110]

More specific social types were also on trial. The connection between totalitarians, advertisers and propagandists would be robust as would the critique of bureaucracy. The managerial technical elite were conceptually only barely removed from the bureaucrat, himself an object of great controversy. Had the bureaucrat been like Arendt's depiction of Eichmann—paper pushers in an impersonal machine—or had it been the case instead that, as Carl Friedrich had maintained, the professional civil servant and the responsible citizen were capable of holding shut the door holding back civilizational ruin? This problem had already been a primary source of consternation in German intellectual history; one of Max Weber's primary preoccupations was with the efficient but febrile character of a modern society permeated by bureaucrats and with the hardened inner state that bureaucracy cultivated by everyone who lived and worked down below.

However, the inner state of the ideologue had essentially not been unlocked. Some intellectuals had already been oriented towards this problem before the war, like Arendt's mentor Karl Jaspers. The problem for these intellectuals was generally either the disorientation caused by the loss of religion, the persistence of dogmatism even though religion was gone, or a mix of both. Arendt got from Jaspers a concern about how disoriented and dogmatic thinking could become a blocker for experience, a critique only one step from classical ideology criticism. Many thinkers yoked this again to dogmatic orientation towards post-religious historical myth. Mannheim was here both insightful and influential, developing a programmatic social science of utopian ideology that linked its dogmatic spread less to loneliness than to breakdown in social

[110] Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2001).

hierarchy.[111] In this story new epistemological problems are born from social dislocation; strata of society come into first contact and confront real challenges to their traditional world view, which is the precondition for the birth of ideology. This transplant out of European and into American social science proved to be an enduring through-line, extending at least as far as Geertz's *Ideology as a Cultural System*.[112]

This problem would not go away, just as it was not new, but after the war it would become increasingly mobile. Critiques of technological society, of narcissism, of the decline of religion, of the role of television, of crowd behaviors in mass protest movements, of the breakdown of civic bonds would all be landing places for these attempts at conceptualizing the linkage between a concrete social role, or the lack of one, and a disoriented epistemology weak to destructive and self-aggrandizing ideology.

Influential on American intellectuals would be the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, who provided a synthesis of many of these themes, and did so in a way that allowed application beyond the Soviets. The culture industry was an incarnation of mass society, one linked yet again to incipient fascism—but the Frankfurt school provided a broader vision beyond merely the psychology of the fascist; they provided a bracing program of cultural and social critique that combined left-wing elements of the critique of capitalism that had internalized conservative criticisms of mass society and the Enlightenment. This thoroughgoingly negative program that had absorbed every major program of modern social criticism would be extraordinarily influential far beyond interwar study of totalitarian movement.[113] Whereas a

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[111] Karl Mannheim, translated by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, 1936).

[112] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2000) 193-233 as a juxtaposition with 87-125.

[113] This grandest synthesis of counter-Enlightenment myth criticism and mass culture criticism into the Marxist critique of Fascism is without question Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,

strictly Catholic, conservative critique of post-Enlightenment mythic time, like that associated with Erich Voeglin and the adoption by William F Buckley of his phase "immanentize the eschaton," would be pigeonholed into the intellectual history of Christian conservatives, the Frankfurt school would successfully knock down the doors of almost every bastion of pessimistic social criticism.[114]

Parallel Concepts

Totalitarianism was not alone amongst new concepts for political evil, even amongst exile intellectuals. The *Road to Serfdom*, for example, didn't have a term with the same crisp usability as "totalitarianism," but was still evocative and widely read. Like many parallel concepts, it rested heavily on an account of malformed interests in the state. In it, F. A. Hayek developed an account of how essentially *all* state tutelage or direction necessarily leads to dependencies, inefficiencies and morbid interests amongst civil society and state elites that will necessarily always lead on a path towards total domination of society. While influential, and more incisive than, say, Burnham, it didn't proffer to 20th century audiences new concepts or categories to refer to new historical configurations, threatening retrogression to neo-medieval authority instead.[115] Just the names of movements, Fascism or Communism, quickly became epithets capable of displacing historical referents that were sometimes millennia old. What totalitarianism did was

which brings to bear Adorno's program of absolute negativity on the Enlightenment as myth that has in modernity turned reason into an idol.

[114] Eric Voeglin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[115] Friedrich von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944). Hayek additionally developed his own account of how class interests, modern organization and mass society produce a modern class of intellectuals morbidly drawn to socialism: Friedrich von Hayek, "The Intellectuals and Socialism" in *The Intellectuals: A Controversial Portrait*, edited by George de Huszar (Glencoe: the Free Press, 1960) 371-384.

provide a shot in the arm to Anglo-American critics of sometimes the Soviet Union and sometimes social developments in their own country criticized indirectly through criticism of the Soviet Union, and it did this by binding the Soviet Union not just with Germans or Italians but with the idea that modernity itself was up for criticism. There were other conceptualizations, in no way inferior, that proliferated in the same era, albeit from a different provenance.

The military-industrial complex and the garrison state were novel concepts of the same era, and with almost identical semantics. Descending from republican concerns, the military-industrial complex and the garrison state both drew their meaning from critiques of how a permanent soldiering class with improperly-structured interests in the state would lead to tyranny. In the case of the military-industrial complex, the term was also deployed with an essentially modern characteristic: that its definition was a pathological structure of interests. The garrison state, however, was more interesting, in that it was applied to the totalitarian phenomenon, but drew upon an entirely different array of historical referents, like the old professional mercenary armies of yore and their military occupation of the American colonies, to evoke an image of historical evil.

Harold Lasswell, the primary proponent of this critique, was a political scientist influential in the founding of the discipline of communications. Lasswell's life's work ported many of the classic problems of old republican political thought onto a socially-scientific and pragmatic basis appropriate to the age of a modern and progressive industrial society. He inaugurated a program of conceptualizing types of elites and elite power, he was concerned with the operation of propaganda in free societies, he was programmatically preoccupied with theory of communication, and he was concerned about the rise of the "garrison state," his term for a new form of state dominated by "specialists in violence" who would instead of the managers

return us to the state most feared by 19th century republicanism.[116] Many of these topics—like the reorganized study of rhetoric or the study of the structural incentives leading to a permanent warrior class, were all indicators of a modern reorganization of an older republican ethos extended into the 20th century as modern mass democracy. Across a vast corpus of social scientific research, Lasswell synthesized a programmatic account of political psychopathology and its role in despotic, militarized states structured through propaganda.

The course of his work runs parallel to other intellectual interests of the era covered herein. He began his career as a theorist of propaganda in the First World War.[117] From this he moved into then-current clinical psychology, taking up the cutting-edge work of Freud and Jung, and started writing biographies of political characters, like the agitator, the bureaucrat of the part boss that were built on psychoanalytical insights and found many of the same findings: petty emotional drives to authority, cognitive inadequacy to comprehend larger political issues beyond either lived experience or simple stereotypes, scapegoating, and—as in the work of many of his psychological peers—homosexuality.[118] The upshot of this critical account of this everyman was that he threw himself headlong into public education and into the theorization of an account of both politics and democracy that could withstand the empirical findings.[119]

The garrison state's connection with longer connections in political thought were firstly through its evocation of historical experiences of military occupation, in an American context of, for example, the yoke of British soldiers on American colonists; commentators on the garrison

[116] Rodney Muth, Mary M Finley, and Marcia F Muth, *Harold D. Lasswell: An Annotated Bibliography* (New Haven, Conn: New Haven Press, 1990) is an excellent survey of his expansive oeuvre.
[117] Harold Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I* (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1971).
[118] Harold Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1930). The intense preoccupation with homosexuality as being in some sense an authoritarian pathology in the social thought of the 1930s and 1940s is rich topic, but is beyond the scope of this study.
[119] Harold Lasswell, *Political Writings* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1951) contains "The Democratic Character" which includes his mature account of democratic habits and community structures.

state like Raymond Aron drew the connection with the militarist oligarchy of the Spartans. Just as important is that its key feature was thoroughly neorepublican: the concept referred to a degraded citizenry who misaligned interests in the state. It was the reinvention of primeval references to the oriental despotism of the Ottomans, this time focused on the Germans and Russians.

The concept of the garrison state is interesting in that it draws out another theme common to criticisms of corruption or decline in modern society; it refers to the experience of modern society as being characterized increasingly by sheer domination. In this regard, it is a far cry from the critics of totalitarianism who were primarily concerned with ideology, in that its literal content and its metaphorical content both point towards modernity being associated with brute compulsion of things in nature, rather than the association of modernity with disorientation and deception. These themes were not new; for over a century prior William Blake's *Jerusalem* had been central to the historical sense of Tory nationalists:

> "I turn my eyes to the Schools and Universities of Europe,
> And there behold the Loom of Locke, whose Woof rages dire,
> Wash'd by the Water-wheels of Newton: black the cloth
> In heavy wreaths folds over every Nation: cruel Works
> Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic,
> Moving by compulsion each other; not as those in Eden, which,
> Wheel within wheel, in freedom revolve, in harmony and peace."[120]

Alienation and compulsion were not mutually exclusive; there is a blend of these themes—alienation and deception on the one hand and brute compulsion on the other—expressed in both literal social commentary and spiritual allegory—in almost all conceptualizations of modern tyranny. The garrison state as a conceptualization had a different historical referent, comparing past to present in addition to comparing the present to an idealized type of itself. It also came

[120] William Blake, *Jerusalem,* f. 15, ll. 6–20.

from the pen of a progressively-minded American whose mind was not *primarily* preoccupied with the dismal news about mass society.

The garrison state as a concept petered out. Raymond Aron had some interest in it, as did some other social scientists, historians and defense planners.[121] In the eyes of some, nuclear weapons abridged this model of development. In other cases it seemed to intellectuals that domestic political forces blocked its consolidation in the United States. It was also pushed out by competition; it was very similar to the warfare state, in that it was a state that had essentially destructive rather than prosocial ends, drawing upon ancient critical traditions.[122] Interestingly, their doubles in the welfare state and the civilian state were not necessarily parallel concepts. The garrison state didn't have the same evocative power as discussing totalitarianism, and it had even less evocative power than talking about fascism. It was certainly no match for the police state, as in that case the omnipresent surveillance that came with modern media technologies helped to constitute its modern meaning. The primary defining feature of totalitarianism seemed to intuitively be neither the propaganda promulgated by the state nor the public violence of war. Instead, it would be the panoptic vision of the modern state and its ability to use private violence out of sight that would come to characterize memory of these states, confounding totally the philosophical predilections of intellectuals ready to condemn the sins of prior centuries as though they were in fact distinctly modern. Embedded in these distinctions were meanings articulable in a premodern idiom—a state ruled by pathological incentives to war—but now articulated as complexes of maladjusted incentive structure rather than as mere tyranny. It was true even of the

[121] Raymond Aron. "Remarks on Lasswell's "The Garrison State."" *Armed Forces & Society* 5, volume 3 (1979): 347-359; Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Matthew J. Morgan. "The Garrison State Revisited: Civil–Military Implications of Terrorism and Security." *Contemporary Politics* 10, no. 1 (2004): 5–19.
[122] Keith L. Nelson. "The 'Warfare State': History of a Concept." *Pacific Historical Review* 40, volume 2 (1971): 127–43.

popular phrases that they expressed a deeper critique: the nanny state, popular since the 1960s but never amongst the intelligentsia, evokes a line of criticism of modernity popular with both Nietzsche and before him Goethe: "I believe too that mankind will win in the long run, I am only afraid that at the same time the world will be turned into a hospital where everyone is everybody's humane nurse."[123]

Eric Hoffer, not an academic intellectual and by no accounts an historian, cast an even wider net than Lasswell when he characterized the inner motivations and personality of the participants in the totalitarian mass movement. In *The True Believer,* he references and describes an extensive list of characters—like "talkers," whom he found to be exceedingly dangerous when dislocated from a gainful social role—as well as an exceedingly broad spread of emotional causes. *Boredom* featured prominently in his psychology of the true believer. Some parts of his analysis were of a piece with mass society critics, like his account of how the breakdown of tight-knight social bonds, and the failure of people to be fully cultivated into autonomous individuals, combined to create the fertile grounds for mass movements.[124] What was ultimately noteworthy was that his characterization of human nature and of the emotions and personality traits therein was idiosyncratic and original relative to main trends in social thought of the era, almost certainly a credit his non-elite background.

Missing from this conversation was the Pale Criminal. Most important of all in the theorizations of the psychology of mass violence was Nietzsche—or Dostoevsky, as Mumford preferred to talk about—who understood quite clearly that the revolutionary wants to kill, but if they are abashed about this impulse they will instead steal and do so of necessity and then kill of

[123] J. W. Goethe, *Italian Journey,* translated by W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer, (New York: Penguin, 1970) 317.
[124] Eric Hoffer. *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movement* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

necessity for the theft.[125] Such a set of impulses were conceivable only on the basis of an account of man and his nature that was wholly external to the sphere of liberal-democratic political thought, and Dostoevsky would be read in high regard, and Nietzsche saved from the reputational damage caused him by the National Socialists, but conceptualizations of totalitarian man and analyses of totalitarian psychology were within the framework of what was acceptable in a liberal democracy predicated on the notion that all men are born good, rational, happy and nice. The pleasure of the knife remained undertheorized amongst critics of totalitarianism.

The closest that people could get to a biting criticism of human wickedness was in the attempt to analyze specific dictatorial leaders, an intellectually backwards exercise by the standards of mass society critics who had eliminated individuals from mass movements. Diagnoses of Hitler often focused on narcissism, Stalin, paranoia, or Lenin, sociopathic predilection for the logic of the axe. It is here, for example, that Raskolnikov could protrude back into intellectual history. The notion that modern revolutionaries are madmen who love killing, but who need the pretense of theft driven by hardship to justify the killing, is almost inexpressible within the abstract social vocabulary of modern social thought, wherein impersonal, world-historic forces act upon a blank slate of human character that is either bland and malleable or good and rational before the structures of culture turn humans into monsters, the details depending on the specifics of the post-Enlightenment ethos at hand. In such an idiom, such an idea could only be expressed metaphorically in the pale thief, or perhaps in Raskolnikov, but not as a primary component of theorization of totalitarianism's etiology. However, the

[125] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None,* translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1966) 38-39.

theoretics of totalitarianism, and other concepts like it, were systemic, and they in many ways blocked such developments.[126]

What this barrage of new concepts offered was a bevy of analyses, and what that indicates was the presence of an historical question. Theory of history was at a frightening apogee in the history of the modern intelligentsia. Intellectuals, political elites, the general public all were uncertain about the structure of modern history and how to comprehend it. Totalitarianism was the most robust as a philosophico-historical idea, and its sticking power should come as no surprise. Its identity did not solely lie in an historical allusion, an ideal type of development or form of constitution, but in the connection between a system of beliefs and a characterization of modern social life run amok. The most popular authors on this topic, like Arendt, were not popularizers of social science; they were theorists of contemporary history trying to comprehend the meaning of a precise historical moment and its implication for modernity.

As this moment went past the underlying causes for consternation had gone nowhere. The second half of the 20th century would not be a totalitarian one, but it would be one just as radically disrupted by technology, and it would be one additionally characterized by far larger and more superfluous masses. None of the sense of anger about the intellectuals, confusion about the social ontology of the elite or paranoia about the constant presence of advertising and propaganda would subside. The deskilling of workers and the swelling populations of often stateless drifters would achieve even more crushing levels, and globally. The world would also be characterized by ever deeper anomie, alienation and loneliness. These themes would come to

[126] In *Origins*, habituation to criminality is a primary theme of chapters 11 and 12, but taken in context they mostly situate this conditioning within the larger framework of the psychology of the superfluous man and the effects of a propaganda to terrorize, disorient and control the masses.

characterize a new strata of historical commentaries on the experience of a modernity, experiences in which modernity had plateaued and left men and women in variously venal states of undue self-regard, shameless striving, or despair.

Chapter 5

Christopher Lasch and the Progressives

One thinker in the latter half of the 20th century—Christopher Lasch—was a product of the foregoing trends in American social thought, as well as those brought across the Atlantic during and after the Second World War. His work was also focused on mass society, the loss of civic virtue, the place of historical myth in modern society, as well as inquiry into the relationship between technics, compulsion and a bureaucratized society. He additionally cast about for a vocabulary for describing what he saw, although he popularized no term as successful as "totalitarianism." In order to understand the popularity and importance of Lasch's work, it's necessary to review just a little of what had elapsed historically that generated Lasch's response.

The literature on the global 1960s is voluminous—and there is no substantial contribution to it here—but it is necessary to start briefly with the experiences of the 1960s before talking about Lasch's response to them. The literature on Lasch is still nascent. While there has been recent uptake in interest in his work in recent years, this literature has not found the analytical vocabulary for triangulating his work relative to intellectuals and problem topics from previous centuries.[127] This chapter will establish many of the key continuities necessary to understand

[127] There have not been many studies dealing with Lasch outside of disciplinary histogoriography, and the few that do cannot agree on basic categorization. Take the following two engagements with Lasch's work, two of the only such examples outside of disciplinary historiography—tellingly, the prior of deals with his work as a conservative reaction to social permissiveness, and the latter as theory of radical democracy: Richard Kilminster. "Narcissism or Informalization?: Christopher Lasch, Norbert Elias and Social Diagnosis." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, volume 3 (2008): 131–151; Will Barndt, "Populism in America: Christopher Lasch, Bell Hooks, and the Persistence of Democratic Possibility." *Critical Review (New York, N.Y.)* 31, volumes 3–4 (2019): 278–299. The bulk of this engagement has been critical engagement with specifically *The Culture of Narcissism* as source of psychological theory: Jan De Vos, "Christopher Lasch's The Culture of Narcissism: The Failure of a Critique of Psychological Politics." *Theory & Psychology* 20, volume 4 (2010): 528–148. Much stronger are attempts to analyze Lasch's assessment of the social critic or intellectual, even if this project has not furnished a conceptual language that can

Lasch's work; historical myth, metahistorical critique of modernity, mass society criticism, neo-republican conceptualization of civic virtue and corruption, self-theorization of the intelligentsia, and the critique of bureaucratic domination all form a constellation of topics dating back across the prior century and a half that served as the background for Lasch's broadly pessimistic account of social disintegration.

The stagnation of historical time in the twentieth century has been commented upon at great length, and with a lack of clarity befitting the topic. The second half of the 20th century seemed to be, at the time, the victory and defeat of a great many things, but it was not entirely clear *what*. How to internalize the shocks of the National Socialists and the Soviets could be absorbed, to some degree or another, into the ready-made theories of the 19th century—totalitarianism had been adequate to this task. As European colonial system went up in some in the '50s, '60s and '70s—this proved harder to narrate; Lippmann, in his unpublished and radically pessimistic final work, saw a world in total dissolution. He saw "rationalism" as having stripped away all bonds, he saw the United States as an empire being rudderless and without an orienting vision of the future to strive for, he saw technology as dooming most of humanity to being apathetic and useless, and he saw mankind's propensity for violence and ultimately the race war as being the only thing that would save humanity from environmental destruction.[128] As the decades went by and the apocalyptic rupture of the early 20th century started to recede, many Left-leaning critics attempted to understand developments as the optimistically titled "late"

be used to triangulate him in the history of American letters: Thomas Bender. "The Historian as Public Moralist: The Case of Christopher Lasch." *Modern Intellectual History* 9, no. 3 (2012): 733–44. See also: Kevin, Mattson. "The Historian as a Social Critic: Christopher Lasch and the Uses of History." *The History Teacher* 36, volume 3 (2003): 375–96.

[128] Walter Lippmann Papers (MS 326). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. Series 6, box 223, 326 and 327. *Unpublished manuscript: The Ungovernability of Man*.

capitalism, or as some stagnant culture absent a coherent historical metanarrative.[129] Francis Fukuyama, commonly regarded at the time as the premier triumphalist for liberal democracy over the collapse of the Soviet Union was hardly so univocally triumphant—invoking Nietzsche, he too foresaw the possibility of a stagnant future of last men, of malaise, or of a "boredom" so profound so as to spell real doom.[130] In fact, the possibility of any system beyond capitalism seemed to also be slipping away.[131]

Post-war progress had not gone according to plan, and America was in the eyes of many intellectuals the same way that Europe had been after the French Revolution: not a utopia. The critique of the military-industrial complex had many of the same dimensions as the critique of totalitarianism, but quickly there developed a new discourse about civic decline that still centered on propaganda and on the formation of some distinctly modern power elite, but increasingly it focused more on broader institutional and cultural corruption. C. Wright Mills, attempting to inveigh against the machinery of modern society, famously left more questions than answers in attempting to actually define who the power elite were.[132] However, it was through the critique of propaganda and opinion management that discourse on modern mass society primarily developed.

Earlier critiques of mass technological society entered into both the Left and Right as they both took on new forms. For conservatives, figures like Burnham would be central in articulating a programmatic historical critique of the progress of modern society organized

[129] Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, translated by Joris De Bres (New York: Verso, 1999), although he gets the term from Werner Sombart who used it between the wars.
[130] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
[131] The history of the opening and closing of this aperture is: Howard Brick, *Transcending Capitalism: Visions of a New Society in Modern American Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).
[132] C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

around the bureaucratic technical elite. Left-wing syntheses of these conservative criticisms were equally important; distrust of the military industrial as well as elite institutions more generally were important to Left-Wing protest movements from the 1960s onward. In many instances, as in Pierre Bourdeiu's Left-Wing critical accounts of bureaucracy and the intelligentsia, the same intellectual tools employed by 20th century conservatives were central to theorizing the mechanisms of elite cultural domination. Pierre Bourdeiu's account is illuminating precisely because he absorbed conservative criticisms of technocratic expertise in a manner unabashed about conspiratorial elements. Rather than treat the critique of the power elite as a critique really of spiritual decay and loss of civic virtue, Bourdieu instead theorized the precisely forms of disclosure available to a social critic that could be used to identify secret operations of power in our midst used to divide and conquer the people and then dissemble the true structure of the elite. It was on this basis that he then criticized the intelligentsia for embracing materialism and various forms of reductive and anti-intellectual Marxist historical explanations precisely because they exclude from view the forms of psychological and cultural domination that allows the intelligentsia to pursue power in the state from their commanding citadel in Paris.

Part of the difficulty of this era was that it was the passing of a period of such extraordinary historical meaning. Globally, there was the collapse of the Soviet Union, or decolonization—within the United States in particular, there were additional transformations. The expansion of mass society had created broadly inclusive social conditions that had both broken social barriers and also led in part to the triumph of the marketplace and mass media in all aspects of daily life.[133] Some transformations could be narrated as progress—emancipation

[133] The literature on the 1960s is vast and is nonconclusive, as is the literature on any specific one of these topics—the cultural history of the television is perhaps infinite. For a strong, synoptic account of the turmoil and transformation of American society in the 1960s see: David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994). For a hybrid history, sociology and memoir of the 1960s covering very generally

for women or for African Americans. Some could be regarded only with gloom—urban decay and the erosion of working-class conditions. How to parse these transformations alongside global developments was hardly clear.

This did not go unnoticed, just like it did not go unnoticed in earlier decades of the 20th century. Alvin Toeffler's *Future Shock* (1970) was briefly the book of the moment, and spawned future shock as a new term for the social critic of the day. The book was oriented towards trying to overcome the above problem—with so much changing, how could it all make so little sense? How could there be such a feeling of malaise. Toeffler, a self-described futurist, suggested that periods of extraordinary instability could leave people enervated and helpless:

"Much that now strikes us as incomprehensible would be far less so if we took a fresh look at the racing rate of change that makes reality seem, sometimes, like a kaleidoscope run wild. For the acceleration of change does not merely buffet industries or nations. It is a concrete force that reaches deep into our personal lives, compels us to act out our new roles, and and confronts us with the danger of a new and powerfully upsetting psychological disease."[134]

What was striking about Toeffler's account is that he seemed to agree with the victims of this shock—his analysis lists every conceivable technology and social transformation that could have in some way touched upon recent historical events and from them draws no organizing synthesis. It is on a normal day an analytical virtue to sort certain phenomena into certain categories to the exclusion of others, and single out only certain causes and effects as particularly salient, but Toeffler in about four-hundred pages covers absolutely all of them in the role of an

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the background political views and experiences to which Lasch was reacting, a useful account would be: Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1993).

[134] Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970), 19.

encyclopedist and determined, ultimately, that firstly humanity needs "powerful new utopian and anti-utopian concepts" and the after some choppy waters humanity would get past technocracy and find some form of happy ending.[135]

At this point science fictions' relationship with the future too went through a telling alteration. In American Science fiction, it seemed more and more that the social order of the future was no longer quite transparent to those in it; the new social norms and technologies of the future were less and less clearly known to its inhabitants who could, like science fictions' various narrators, less and less clearly articulate their natures, histories and implications. As Stanslaw Lem famously pointed out, with Philip K. Dick something new entered into American science fiction; a level of ambiguity, chaos, and foreboding that permeated both substance and literary style hitherto unknown to the American branch of the genre.[136] This was the beginning of a larger reorientation: American science fiction would become cluttered with a sense of oppressive history.[137] The social world of the future, and its language, would fast become opaque to readers. For Frank Herbert of Eugene Wolf the future would become the middle ages and human domination a primary technology—in Blade Runner and Stalker science fiction would retract towards ailing spiritual inwardness in the face of decrepit futures.[138]

Why had the worry about stagnation replaced the grandiose possibility and peril of prior decades? The inheritors of 19th century republicanism, sometimes optimistic about the promise of politics, sometimes pessimistic about mass society, were in a peculiar position. The mid-

[135] Ibid, 12
[136] Stanislaw Lem, "Philip K. Dick: A Visionary Among the Charlatans," *Science Fiction Studies 5, Volume 2, Part 1 (March 1975)*: https://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/5/lem5art.htm
[137] This term of "clutter" for both sense of historicality and opaqueness in language is taken from Ada Palmer's excellent introduction to Gene Wolfe, *Shadow & Claw* (New York: Tor, 2021), vii-xiii.
[138] *Blade Runner*, director by Ridley Scott (1982; Hollywood: The Ladd Compnay and Hong Kong: Shaw Borthers), film. *Stalker*, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky (1979; Moscow: Mosfilm), film.

century expansion of the state—whether it be through broadened democratization, progressive social welfare, permanent warfare, or totalitarian regimentation of society—was something that they could narrate clearly and that they could use as a prism for their own views. However, as the 20th century went on, historical events became harder to narrate for many one-time optimists.

The representative intellectual in this regard was Christopher Lash. Lasch, like other intellectuals of his generation, had to diagnose how the breakdown of a coherent sense of historical time related to the breakdown of social bonds. This was far from a simple question, because current historical developments, like profound changes in media similarly transformative to those of the prior century, had affected the intellectual in profound ways. Lasch's responses to these issues, while not without its flaws or limits, contained many insights, including a resistance to far-flung historical metaphor or speculation in favor of a more narrow historical focus on his present and its specifically American genealogy. However, entailed in his inward focus on American history, Lasch took an additional move that set him apart from many of his peers, which was that he investigated the progress of modern history through studying the dialectical extension of American history rather than studying the progress of modernity. The result was that he did go beyond fastidious scholarship into a broader historico-philosophical system of metaphor, but when he did so he did it without recourse to the general story about modernity common to most mass society critics.

Lasch was, like Ortega, the son of a newspaper man, and was raised in an environment convivial not just to scholarship or social criticism, but specifically an environment conducive to being a public intellectual. Lasch was programmatically practiced at the publication of his essays in both academic journals and newspapers starting in his youth, and already at a young age he had found his primary topics—his extant juvenalia include, amongst other things, homemade

newspapers and books from his childhood including a fictitious account of an idyllic republic named "Vodala" where men are "brave and free" and "determined to stay the way they are."[139] When he went to school, studying amongst others under Richard Hofstadter he developed a keen interest in American-Soviet relations and specifically in liberal reactions to the Soviet Union.[140] However, for reasons obscure to all but the most imaginative biographer, Lasch did not interpret these early experiences as evidence of a new class of public opinion managers or consent manufacturers, but instead derived from his upbringing a robust commitment to the world of civic institutions that he defended over the course of his life's work as a public intellectual.

He was acutely aware of the inheritance of earlier republican aspirations by the modern labor movement, and his life's work attempted to yoke together an analysis of the decline of the labor movement, and more generally an analysis of social disintegration, with some unusual components. Firstly, he attempted to combine criticism of social disintegration with an analysis of the loss of virtue. In this context, the loss of virtue doubles up as not just habituation to civic life, but also a spiritual orientation on the basis of which upright action is possible. Secondly, he parsed the disintegration of the family form as one the primary forms of the social disintegration, and one caused by both capital and the state. This analytical move returned him to the old affinity between the critique of capitalism and mass society criticism. Finally, Lasch's critique, even of elites, was organized wholly around an internal critique of their spiritual state and its disintegration, and focused almost none at all on new and Machiavellian cabals conspiring against the public just out of sight. This set of characteristic, in particular the last of them, set

[139] [Vodala], Christopher Lasch Papers, D.250, Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, River Campus Libraries, University of Rochester.

[140] His juvenile, undergraduate and graduate work in these topics were extensive, see specifically [American Liberals and the Russian Revolution], Christopher Lasch Papers, D.250, Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, River Campus Libraries, University of Rochester.

him aside from many of his contemporary critics and put him in an ambiguous position relative to the New Left as it came into ascendancy on American campuses.

Lasch's earlier work included intellectual interests in imperialism and he was involved in publicizing a prominent scandal about Cold War CIA tampering in American and European cultural institutions.[141] Of all his interests, it was Lasch's critique of the late 19th century progressives, and interwar liberals, who came to dominate Lasch's thought. In some regards, there are already clues about his later itinerary in his anti-imperial work. In his 1968 essay *The Cultural Cold War*, he mounted a criticism of interwar-liberals-turned-Neo-cons that echoed Orwell's rejection of James Burnham, and signaled Lasch's true discomfort with morbid symptoms permeating the spheres of public opinion and mass culture in the 20th century U.S. His attack was on both what he saw as deficiencies in the new wave of Left activist intellectuals and in apologists of both the American corporate capitalism and empire, deficiencies shared in common between them that would become for decades the object of his inquiry and scorn. Saying of Left activist intellectuals:

> "…they betray, at a deeper level, the same loss of faith which drives others into the service of the men in power—a haunting suspicion that history belongs to men of action, and that men of ideas are powerless in a world that has no use for philosophy. It is precisely this belief that has enabled the same men, in one lifetime, to serve both the Communist party and the CIA in the delusion that they were helping to make history—only to find, in both cases, that all they had made was a lie. But these defeats—the revelation that the man of action, revolutionist or bureaucrat, scorns the philosopher whom he is able to use—have not led the philosopher to conclude that he should not allow himself to be used; they merely reinforce his self-contempt and make him the ready victim of a new political cause.
>
> The despair of intellect is closely related to the despair of democracy. In our time intellectuals are fascinated by conspiracy and intrigue, even as they celebrate the "free marketplace of ideas" (itself an expression that already betrays a tendency to regard ideas

[141] The incident is covered in Francis Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 2013). Interestingly, this book takes its title from a Lasch essay from and about the controversy, but relegates its coverage of his contribution to an endnote.

> as commodities). They long to be on the inside of things; they want to share the secrets ordinary people are not permitted to hear."[142]

The challenges that Lasch saw were already at this point embodied in a new kind of personage who signaled a baleful transformation of the body politic. Whether this figure was a characterization of a new form of personal corruption, or whether Lasch was literally describing the agents that he thought at fault in the American polity, varied from text to text. Either way, he embarked on a program of critique of modernity entirely organized internal to American society and history.

This critique is worth examining, in part because of its novelty and in part because of its popularity at the time. One of the novelties of Lasch's critique, and a point on which Lasch saw beyond some earlier mass society critiques, was that he drew an opposite conclusion to the totalitarian critiques who had fled from Europe. Lasch's account of the "culture of narcissism," as well as his coverage of the "revolt of the elites," cover much of the same ground as critique of totalitarianism or theory of the new class. The key difference, in this analysis, is that Lasch's account of the disorienting effects of modern mass society is that rather than enabling the masses to dream of utopian futures that became apocalyptic in their realization, the effects of mass society were instead too enervating to sustain any civic commitments at all. This belied a difference in view from previous, dystopian critics who saw mass society degenerating mankind to a lower plane of base susceptibility or authoritarian resentment. Where Arendt saw totalitarianism emerging from the masses on the basis of their innate creative impulses, Ortega saw the mass man as a barbaric philistine, and interwar American technocratic thinkers saw mass man as being essentially malleable, Lasch saw mass society as leading down a path towards a false promise of progress from which true progress would have to be saved, a view that rested on

[142] Christopher Lasch, "The Cultural Cold War." *Nation* (11 September 1967). 211-212.

mankind's ability to overcome themselves and participate in self rule if they are capable of internalizing their limits.

Another peculiarity of Lasch's analysis was that he leant virtually no weight at all to technologically deterministic thinking in his explanation of the modern crisis, focusing instead almost wholly on internal spiritual developments within the parameters of American history. Here again, Lasch's account was peculiar, in part because his analysis ultimately focused on an inner maladjustment incompatible with civic virtue. Third, and finally, Lasch theorized how the warped temporal experience of modernity connected with the political decay that he criticized in the United States. Here again, Lasch is peculiar, and there are interpretive difficulties in reading him alongside earlier Neo-Republican critics of mass society. While Lasch was critical of the abuse of the past and future as authorizing myths for moderns, and while he was scrupulous not to grandstand about the Soviet Union or other far-flung topics as a metaphorical stand-in social problems closer to home, Lasch's historical coverage of American history was still characterized by idiosyncrasies that permeated his work. What follows will be an explanation of the key place of modern mass society and the loss of virtue found in *The Culture of Narcissism*. Secondly, there will be an analysis of the peculiarities of Lasch's vision of elite corruption. Thirdly, this chapter will look at Lasch's critique of the time concepts of nostalgia and progress.

The Culture of Narcissism

The background social world to which Lasch was responding was for him a cause for alarm—it was a time of democratic potential, surely, but seemed to him like many others to be primarily a time of disillusion. Many intellectuals had, on the whole, commitments to a virtuous polity of

enfranchised and virtuous citizens—a commitment that had already gone under siege between the wars. For earlier commentators, it was often "civilization" that was under threat from mass society. Now, this endangerment had different targets—the gains of left-wing progress, the gains of modern liberalism, or increasingly the ecosystem of the Earth itself. This reproduced a similar rift seen in the 19th century; conservative distrust of social change, progressive optimism in overcoming social problems, or the reinvention of a social problem as the incipient beginning of a new age of the world. Lasch's views were of the prior kinds. In both the old and new cases, religious commitments were often hidden just out of view, as they were with Lasch, who expressed them in many places, often in the critique of the spiritual dimensions of modern conceptions of progress.

Daniel Bell, in his 1960 *End of Ideology: On the Exhuastion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* wrote off mass society theory as curmudgeonly and disproven by the successes of social democracy, and in his view like that of Fyukuyama in the '90s, deep contestation of the meaning and direction of modern history had essentially been foreclosed by the victory regulated capitalism, social democracy and the liberal state.[143] However, in the '60s like in the '90s, the mood of triumph was belied by a mood of profound discontentment. The culture seemed to be changing in alarming ways, and the transformation of the culture and behavior of the people seemed to go hand-in-hand with a pitter patter of disruptive historical events that had not slowed or become easier for the intellectuals to parse. Bell professed optimism on these points—it was not the case that democratization was leading to some sort of revolt of the underman, it was the case that mass political participation had improved the lives of many, strengthened institutions and habituated a broader swathe of society to participation in public life. His peers seemed not to

[143] Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the* Fifties (Camrbidge: Harvard University Press, 2001) 21-38.

agree, just as they did not agree that serious contestation of the meaning and direction of modern history was essentially foreclosed.

At the nexus between disruptive historical events and disturbing cultural transformations were two related phenomena: the victory of consumer culture and the invasion of mass media into every aspect of the lifeworld. These topics were again broadly up for criticism by contemporary thinkers, in particular the intellectually deleterious effects of television and the environmental damage from the waste of consumer culture. These threads had existed in the earlier 20th century and 19th century, but concern about frightening forms of political power generally surrounded the new communication technologies and concern about deskilling and dependency generally surrounded the new forms of production and consumption. This supposedly post-ideological society was eating away at its own preconditions both in material terms and in terms of raw human material from which its institutions would be built. There were articulations of this sense on the political Left; Noam Chomsky extensively utilized propaganda and mass media as explanations in his various accounts of American political failure. Lasch's work pulled on many on many of these sources, including the work of the Frankfurt School, but was much closer in its sensibility to that of Jacques Ellul, of whom Lasch was a serious reader.[144] This latter mode of propaganda and media criticism focused less on a conspiratorial account of how propaganda serves an all-present authoritarian political structure, and instead built upon personalist intellectual traditions in order to mount a critique of how mass-mediated society is essentially disorienting.[145]

[144] This assessment is based on the extant library of his books still in the possession of the University of Rochester Library.

[145] Ellul's corpus is extensive; an illuminating discussion of the role of personalism in his thought is discussed in: Jacques Ellul and Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Jacques Ellul on Religion, Technology and Politics: Conversations with Patrick Troude-Chastenet*, translator Joan Mendes France (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998). For his general response

The culture of narcissism was Lasch's synthesis of these threads. The culture of narcissism, like totalitarianism, was an attempt to conceptualize forms of broad and pathological social maladjustment and disequilibrium. Like earlier critics of mass society, the culture of narcissism was a diagnosis of the inner life of modern men and women as they existed within a mass-media society and with a form of life stripped of social bonds and institutional responsibility other than perhaps a few firms, the state, a party, or a charismatic personality. Finally, it simultaneously attempts to describe how this social transformation is both a mass phenomenon associated with the erosion of the demos, and also serves as a diagnosis of the dysregulated elites and intellectuals detached from reality and pursuing frightening or impossible political goals.

What makes the culture of narcissism a culture antithetical to civic virtue is its cultivation of people utterly lacking in magnanimity. Civic virtue, since at least classical antiquity, was pivotally associated with the ability to overcome self-interest in the support of just causes, and was also associated centrally with the capacity for self-development whereby citizens could contribute to society in both peace and war. The culture of narcissism is a culture wherein all life-sized role models have been stripped away, the gainful effects of local institutions and the family on the cultivation of responsibility are lost, and people are habituated to striving for wealth, power and fame at a scope available to almost no one. This striving is developed through fixation on mass media, in particular the television and the movies. The narcissist is, on account of their self-love, trapped in a state of self-indulgence, self-hatred and embarrassed expectation, because they and their society never meet the impossible standard that they have set for themselves. The extension of this is an utter inability to engage in personal growth, naive or

to the various topics of this dissertation, in particular the topics and thinkers in chapters 3 and 4, see: Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society,* translated by John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964).

cynical political views, and the embrace of radical self-interest, all of which are untenable as mainstream developments for a culture of democratic citizens.[146]

The culture of narcissism gives an account of both the failures of the people *en masse* and also an account of the failures of elites and intellectuals. It does this through a diagnosis of how their views are warped by their inner states, but it does not give an account mechanically of a new form of power that binds a new elite or a new mass in a new way, unlike many other conceptualizations of this problem. In Lasch's view, it is not just the case that the people cannot go on like this, it is his view that the people have been somewhat resistant to it, and that various bureaucrats, elites, and in particular intellectuals have been particularly weak to this inner vice. It is on account of this that widespread changes being implemented by social welfare experts, educators and various business experts in PR or HR represent a threat to the body politic. In this view it is the case that the middle and upper layers of institutional life have embraced impossible or ill-thought social policies that ultimately undermine the autonomy and competence of the citizens, and are therefore a dire threat to the persistence of democracy.

The intellectual as a social type was one that was critically important for many critics of modern mass society, and was a problem to which Lasch was attuned as a student of Richard Hofstadter. As was the case for other historical thinkers, the modern, progressive intellectual a stand in for other forces in Lasch's work. The historical characters central in the social criticism of modern elite structures are often related in some way towards a metaphorical space of power; the value neutral rationality of the expert serving as means by which to explore pathological compulsion in modern bureaucratic society. Lasch's concern was that the intellectual was

[146] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018). See in particular the preface and the first three chapters for the basic dimensions of Lasch's description of modern life synopsized here.

ineffectual; a bored do-gooder who needed fulfillment in a society that decreasingly gave the educated any social role of real meaning. This diagnosis, found in his *New Radicalism in America*, and throughout much of his later work, like *The Revolt of the Elites*, is a vision of alienation—of elite rather than non-elite *anomie*. [147]

This might stand in direct opposition to many progressive presumptions about the role of education in a modern society, and this is precisely the crux of Lasch's disagreement with the progressives. Rather than presuming that the educated are knowledgeable, technically gifted and therefore fit to administer modern society from above, and rather than presuming that modern society is more and more educated, Lasch argued systematically that modern society was dominated by a feeble elite of bureaucrats (not at all dissimilar to the villainous apparatchiks at the core of the totalitarianism critique) and that the education appropriate to this society made feeble people incapable of participating in robust social relations, and as such made people incapable of being citizens of any polity that wasn't deeply dysregulated.

One element of this feebleness was the breakdown of orientation in historical time. In Lasch's view, the experience of historical time was breaking down, the future held no promise, and the breakdown of the family meant that there was no intergenerational obligation to past or future generations. The sense of breakdown in historical orientation was for Lasch's narcissist even more acute. Because his narcissist was incapable of finding solace in past memories or in the hope for a happy posterity, the narcissist was incapable of facing the difficulties of the world without bitterness or pessimism. This breakdown in the scheme of historical time represents in Lasch's thought the influence of a key triad of critical concepts, which are the experience of

[147] A recurrent theme in his work, but is most clearly developed in Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type* (New York: W. W. Norton & Compnay, 1997) and in Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).

radical historical novelty, the permeation of a mass society by a modern bureaucracy, and the genesis of a new and politically poisonous mental state:

"The 'sense of an ending,' which has given shape to so much twentieth-century literature, now pervades the popular imagination as well. The Nazi holocaust, the threat of nuclear annihilation, the depletion of national resources, well-founded prediction of ecological disaster have fulfilled poetic prophecy, giving concrete historical cubstance to nightmare, or death wish, that avant-garde artists were the first to express…"[148]

And he continues:

"To live in the moment is the prevailing passion—to live for youself, not for your predecessors or posterity. We are fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and stretching into the future. It is the waning of the sense of historical time—in particular, the erosion of any strong concern for posterity—that distinguishes ths spiritual crisis of the seventies from earlier outbreaks of millenarian religion, to which it bears a superficial resmblance."[149]

Lasch yoked his account of the narcissist to a critique of the cadre of social experts whom he depicted as meddling agents vainly committed to the process of reforming and improving society to the effect of its ultimate detriment. It is essentially unclear in Lasch's work what of his account of these experts is supposed to be a coherent sociology of elite groups, what of it puts blame at the feet of the experts for having chosen the wrong course for American society, and what of it is a description of the new social relations internal to an American society that it rapid decline. However, this new elite, as with the various elites of other 20th century social theorists, have in Lasch's account a very clear and unequivocal privileged relation with a distinctly modern and new form of rational social knowledge. This knowledge, on the whole, is psychological knowledge, and Lasch's issue with it is not that it allows for mass psychological domination, but instead that it is a false practice that is dooming its practitioners as well as the society upon whom they practice this new art.

[148] Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism,* 12.
[149] Ibid, 13.

It is here that Lasch picked up the work of Philip Rieff.[150] Lasch needed, like prior critics of the new elite, to give an account of their spiritually malformed character. Lasch got from Rieff an account of the therapeutic—a deep reorganization of man's basic habits and attitudes that directly threatens the religious underpinnings of culture. The therapeutic sensibility in this account is essentially incompatible with civic virtue, as it essentially makes binding arguments about behavior relative to self-interest and makes assessments of man relative to man, and as such cannot be the basis for aspiring towards magnanimity.

What is curious in Lasch's story is that he, like many others, provided a description for how the modern age is increasingly dominated by a new social type. This new social type is like the managers, but his account is not preoccupied in any real sense with the mechanics or their *rule.* Similarly, Lasch provides an account of how a distinctly modern view of society as a domain of technical expertise is specific to this new modern elite, and yet he is critically not so engaged with theorizing the struggle against these technics. The impression that Lasch gives very strongly is that his invective against the elite is an invective against the deterioration of the inner world of elite citizens.

Lasch's account of this new elite is firstly remarkable in that there is no programmatic question of who they are as a class, per se. They are not primarily objectionable for the status as the "owners" of society, their power of compulsion, or their interests, the normal dimensions of a class along the lines of Marxist class criticism or its later re-use against the bureaucratic-technical elite. Lasch's objections are entirely about the breakdown of pre-political social relations. His concern about these new social experts and their disruptive effect on the family and on social reproduction is an objection about the micro-mechanics of the habituation of the

[150] Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006).

members of the polity. As an extension of this, there is no new ruling class for a new age. Lasch, despite his left-wing roots, has vanishingly little to say about ruling classes as such. The continuity that he evinces much more strongly is with the mass society critics than the Marxists. Rather than detecting a new and nefarious class for a new age, he gives the impression that all social transformation is the sign of the breakdown in social relations whereby the rabble might sweep away civilization itself into the bin of oblivion. The progressive intellectuals whom he finds intolerable seem much more to be up for condemnation for being citizens who had drifted away from properly oriented inner virtue than an entirely new nefarious class as such.[151]

The therapeutic held a pivotal position in Lasch's thought in more ways than one. On the one hand, he had an account of how the pathologies of an industrially-advanced, highly-mediated, market-dominated society became profoundly dysregulated and created a form of human life that is, on account of its origin, much the same as the rabble. This time, the rabble has plenty, and the television, and the aspiration to stardom as a replacement for the life-sized role models that were swept away when stable social conditions disintegrated. On the other hand, he gives an account of inner spiritual conditions whereby man abandons virtue, sets out to dominate the world and become ur-totalitarian. The therapeutic functions as the joint between the two—it is both the form of adjustment of man to coexistence with an advanced capitalist society bereft of meaningful social bonds, and it is also the spiritual outlook of all-consuming self-regard.

This larger synthesis is the culture of narcissism: a culture that veers pathologically, but not into the realm of the totalitarian, and only because its would-be totalitarians are spoiled by a

[151] This can be seen most clearly in *The Revolt of the Elites*, in particular in the first two chapters. His critique is almost entirely of the thinking and behavior of citizens, whom he sees as being members of his own polity, and not as a new bloc acting as a new kind of malevolent agency against him.

self-indulgence that takes the form of the therapeutic.[152] It is on account of this that the therapeutic is ambivalent for Lasch, because it is mutually exclusive with civic virtue but is not apocalyptic in its immediate consequences. At various points he even holds out hopefully for the prospect that psychology could be the beginning of the return to self-knowledge. In this manner, Lasch starts from the same problems as the mass-society theorists and their criticism of totalitarianism, but ends with a more ambivalent analysis. This is in part because of Lasch's ambivalent feeling towards psychology itself—that it is both a mechanism for self-reflection whereby one can understand that they have limits opposed by a nature that they cannot choose and it also presents a radically diminished view of man's impulses and capabilities. Because of this, the therapeutic culture, for Lasch, has some limiting effect on the excesses of an advanced society because of how it habituates people to the delimitation of themselves. This recognition is only partial, as the horizon of the therapeutic is still fully within self-actualization, and within that is concerned not with the tutelage or cultivation of something like virtue but is instead concerned primarily with the management of man's finite emotional and cognitive resources.

In Lasch's telling, the modern American is infinite in his striving, but this merely takes the form of his or her expectation of beauty, sex, wealth and power, but is utterly helpless and irresponsible in his or her obligations to kin, community, polity or mankind. In this regard, the nihilistic ambitions are small and venal, and even if these ambitions are morbid in their effect, nothing truly ambitious could ever possibly be asked of the narcissist, because to do so would be an unjust and oppressive burden. In this telling, the story ends with the fading away of the condition for aspirational, progressive politics, not with fascism.

[152] This is seen most clearly in his scathing account of the Weathermen, who are all-but totalitarian revolutionaries save for a key differentiation through which they turn out to be instead aspirational celebrities: Lasch, *The Culture of* Narcissism, 16-17, 33-34.

Progress and Nostalgia

Lasch was particularly aware of how the experience of historical time was a key part of the modern experience. It was a primary feature of the culture of narcissism that it was directly concomitant with the breakdown of a sense of continuum with past and future. However, it is at this point in Lasch's thought that he became both self-reflective in ways that many of his peers were not, and also came up against limits of what he could explain. Rather than providing a clear picture, in which the collapse of social conditions led to the truncation of time, which in turn led to social action becoming unmoored from a meaningful past and future, Lasch ultimately depicted the breakdown of proper orientation toward past and future as purely born of a spiritual crisis internal to the development of specifically American intellectual history. It is, however, in *The True and Only Heaven* that Lasch develops a more thoroughgoing account of how American orientation towards past and future developed within the progression of modern American thought and culture. What did Lasch think about the modern orientation toward historical time, and why did Lasch bracket his analysis so as to deal only with the dialectical extension of American thought? These two questions are both meta-historical questions that reveal key elements of Lasch's thinking and in particular about his commitment to older intellectual habits of mind from the 19th century and earlier that he synthesized anew in a form articulable in the 20th century.

Lasch substantially differentiated himself from many of his peers through his resistance to both historical allegory and his resistance to many of the great emplotments of the modern age—progress and nostalgia. In this regard, his story is quite different from the stories of

dizzying heights, and then dystopian loss, that his peers saw transpiring around him. Lasch's view echoed that of Niebuhr in some regards—Lasch maintained that orientation toward the idyllic past and the better world of the future were arbitrary choices associated with extraordinary dysregulation. The sincere belief that the past could be brought back, or that blinding visions of the good society could serve as a real model of an achievable society, came under attack by Lasch, not in the name of a more empirical and careful history, but instead in the name of an affective choice—hope—a proper orientation towards world history and political action detached fully from historical myth.[153]

Progress and nostalgia are not parallels, however, and so the perils of each are different. Nostalgia constitutes the perversion of the recollection of a lost past—a past wherein loyalty to one's origins remain unattenuated—so that the recollection of the past becomes a haven for resentful fantasies relative to which the present could never compete. Again, Lasch's line on nostalgia paralleled the thinking of Niebuhr, for whom prophetic religion drew its key power from the embedding of the future in the past. Progress, for Lasch, was perilous in an entirely different manner. Insofar as one would be committed to the creation of the good society in some moral sense, there would be no issue—but for moderns the idea of progress had become hollowed out by the pathological domination of nature to satisfy base animal impulses. On strictly utilitarian grounds the idyllic future, in which the world is infinitely plentiful, had fast become a mandate that could not be resisted.

Lasch's historical writings nonetheless betray a sense of historical disappointment and peril, even though he could not admit to nostalgia and avoid being impeached by his own standard. His coverage of the history of the family is telling in this regard; his history of the

[153] Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991)* 40-119.

family is ambivalent insofar as he was strongly committed to the bourgeois family as a progressed and humane form of the family, and yet in his telling the bourgeois family contained within itself contradictions that led to the creation of the rebels that would seek to destroy it just as much as it was destroyed by the advance of modern bureaucracy and the market.[154] What is most striking in his account of the family is not nostalgia, *per se*, but instead Lasch's programmatic approach to the study of history as a form of dialectic.

It is here that Lasch's account of virtue is illuminating. Lasch's story about the wayward fate of virtue in modern America rests solely on an internal development of man's relationship with his own power over nature. From Jonathan Edwards to Ralph Waldo Emerson, true virtue had its source in the acquiescence to the way that things truly are, the consequence of which was both the ability to overcome self interest and embrace death and also the insight into the natural world that makes it pliable to one's will. In this regard, the ancient pagan standard of virtue, magnanimity and power, had its roots in an essentially religious abdication of the self alongside a practical faith in being beyond mere seeming. It was the craze for Nietzsche in the 19th century that Lasch saw as the turning point at which moderns began to believe that power over the world became an expectation, and that Americans increasingly thought that the victories of science meant that we could do anything or be anything and that the world by all rights should be pliable to us, rather than thinking of science as being one part of the reward for the cultivation of virtue.[155] This is a parallel account, different in many ways, from those covered in previous chapters. The downfall was in the 19th century—imperialism, industrialization, mass society, Social Darwinism, the "the brown decades"—but its core was a spiritual crisis wherein the spirit

[154] Christopher Lasch, *Women and the Common Life: Love, Marriage, and Feminism,* edited by Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997).
[155] Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven,* 243-284.

of scientific insight and political emancipation that was supposed to be core to the self-conception of Western modernity evolved into an orientation towards the world, knowledge and action wherein all three were eventually assessed by the standard of physical domination.

This critique of the crisis of modernity—that there was for moderns a maladjusted relationship with domination or control common in the machine age—was consonant with ancient metaphysical wisdom. As early as Parmenides' proem to *The Order of Nature* there was already a primeval articulation of a fundamental idea—that obedience to the good was a precondition to finite knowledge rather than finite knowledge being a warrant for entitlement to being good—that was here resuscitated as the basis for a dialectical story about the loss of modern virtue after the extraordinary successes of modern man to dominate the world through science.[156] In the German branch of this critique this was diagnosed in parallel as a crisis of "European science" by Edmund Husserl—that modern science had led to the instrumental orientation towards the world in which the study of the veil perception was no longer motivated by the devotion to that which lay beyond it, and with this the proper orientation towards desideratum of science had in turn been lost.[157] Philip Rieff cited Martin Buber when he noted that he saw in the modern world only Egypt—a witchcraft cult—and not Jerusalem—the righteous polity.[158] This righteous polity was for Niebuhr the historical index relative to which the confusion of modern history was comprehensible, and he tellingly noted that it was precisely the nature of their relationship with God that was the essence the Israelites' difficulties, and that

[156] David Gallop, *Parmenides of Elea: Fragments* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).
[157] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy,* translated and edited David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
[158] Philip Rieff, *Charisma: The Gift of Grace, and How it Has Been Taken From Us* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007) 14-18.

upon knowledge of their chosenness and expectation of special reward such a privileged relationship would be lost.[159]

Lasch's emphasis on the dialectical extension of these views is what is most peculiar. Lasch, despite the role of narcissism in his account of mass society and its ruinous effects, does very little with technical causes for social transformation. One might think that Lasch would robustly account for how technical developments had led to the radio or television, and how this had led to the lust for fame. While Lasch singles out television to some degree, it is invidious comparison, the elimination of appropriate role models and the lust for being idolized are all parts of Lasch's account of the culture of narcissism. The prospect of scientific progress is still open to us in Lasch's view, if we had just not made the choice to think wrongly about ourselves and the world.

Lasch's underlying political commitments are again here worthy of note. Lasch's critique is entirely within the horizon of American politics and society, even as the basis for his ostensibly left-wing criticisms of consumer society, capitalist relations or imperialism. Not only does Lasch's story about modernity stay closely linked to the internal development of something like "the American mind," but also his social criticism stays broadly within the horizon of the values core to the American political experience. In this regard, he is not like many left-wing critics who take some values, like material self-reliance and acquisitiveness, to be at issue, or like right-wing critics who would want to breach the secular bounds of American political discourse through arguing explicitly for a fideistic basis to any suitable civic culture. The horizon of his critique was entirely an internal critique of American social conditions by the standards of American politics and a critique of the views of American intellectuals and politicians by the

[159] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York: Charles Sribner's Sons, 1949) 103-105.

standard of the values that they themselves professed. In this regard he remained essentially committed to the public life of his polity.

Lasch was not the only latter-day critic to analyze the destruction of civic virtue by mass society. Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* was likewise a critique of how the erosion of institutional bonds and individual competencies by the bureaucracies of the state and capital was to blame for the retreat of American political life.[160] Putnam attempt to convey to American liberals that that their post-war optimism about American social life had been ill-conceived and that Bell's dismissal of mass society critics had been premature. It is not obvious that this critique has been broadly absorbed since that point. Specifically targeted journalistic and public-intellectual complaints, like those that those that are today often heard about loneliness or social media, are generally disconnected in the minds of their authors from any sense of a long continuity in modernity. Richard Sennett connected a similar critique to a history of public life. Focusing on the foreclosure of the public sphere and the effects of capitalist bureaucracy on work and social life, he synthesized foregoing intellectual trends into a critical account of civic dissolution.[161] This critique, focusing on deskilling and specialization, bureaucracy, the foreclosure of the sphere of public life, and the erosion of democratic habits—was a way forward for mass society criticism in the second half of the century as the historical idiom continued to evolve.

The deeper critiques, like that of the intellectual as a social type, and the critique of the modern orientation towards history, have been almost entirely supplanted. Once mainstays of American intellectual life, these topics have been replaced with a return to sincere and non-reflective commitment to apocalyptic, progressive or anti-modern thinking that now broadly

[160] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
[161] Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Faber, 1986).

characterizes the work of both academics and public intellectuals, as does an increasing lack of self-theorization by and of the intelligentsia as active participants in the disintegration of civil society. However, the great shadow of these trends—disappointment and conspiratorial paranoia—remain today in the mainstreams of both political discourse and intellectual life.

Conclusion

A truly conclusive account of the sources of the 20th century's confusion is only possible if one has a truly conclusive account of human nature and the sources of ideas in human history. The great confusion of the 20th century could have been purely the implication of technological progress and its implication for the loss of community and the erosion of social bonds. It least some portion seems to have emerged from an intellectual choice, which was the choice to take advantage of the new age of the world and leap into a new conceptual universe in which premodern parochialism was forgotten. What seems clear is that the ideas that predated this saddle period structured discourse within it quite strongly; the optimism and pessimism of foregoing centuries structured the conversation so robustly that emerging discourse looks more like continuity than rupture, and most of what was replaced was historical referents and concepts that needed to be replaced, and quickly at that.

Importantly, this window started to close, just like the windows into radical possibility associated with early modern instability, or with the revolutions of the enlightenment. Today it is hard to tell whether the aperture is closing still, or whether it has never been wider. Such is the effect of permanent expectation of radical change. To live in the 1960s and 1970s, but forever, is to live in permanent expectation of unforeseen and also in permanent disappointment. There is no question that we expect constant novelty, but does the novelty we expect or that we think we have received even remotely compare to the generations who came of age before the First World War when there were still horses on streets and lived to see atomic weapons, the rise of totalitarianism, decolonization, feminism and the moon landing broadcasted on television? The antediluvian generations who confronted that period lived through a non-period that is today often siloed into decade-long slivers as though that could allow us to understand the temporal

orientation of the antediluvian adults who came barreling into the early Cold War or of the children born and raised with this degree of uncertainty. Of course they were concerned in their social and political discourse with the experience of historical time itself.

What this dissertation has argued for and worked from the premise that there were generations who had such a disorienting and confusing historical experience, and that secondly their social and political discourse had a centrally important place for mass society criticism. Experiences of urbanization, industrialization and the rise of bureaucracy combined with both aristocratic and republican criticisms of large, disinhibited crowds to furnish nineteenth and twentieth century thought with one of their most important traditions. Mass society criticism was conjoined with an incipient critique of the human mind amongst the crowd, as well as over the loss of skills and habits, which would become the foundation for a form of epistemological critique distantly related to ideology criticism. This critique would follow through into twentieth century social science and politics alike, associated in the latter case with a particularly discordant form of melancholic neo-republicanism that would characterize much of mid-century social thought. Importantly, it would also be an important interlocutor for the Marxists, who needed to demonstrate, and thoroughly so, that the masses were secretly the true citizenry and that the experience of conversion into the masses was not a depersonalizing process that left adrift scrounging around in their search for order.

It was within this that optimists about scientific progress and the expansion of democracy ran into profound problems once the character of the people became knowable to social experts. Under the conditions of amnesia induced by a radical break from the past, experts on advertising, propaganda and mass thought delved headlong into learning about the true nature of the people, only to learn things that confounded them utterly. From this point forward it would be necessary

either to embrace a dismal technocratic elitism or confront it with some regenerative account of civic life or virtue that could withstand such a threat. Equally important is that for these thinkers there was now a need for a new idiom to express the concepts previously available to them, foreclosed now because of their new social role as newspaper men and public relations specialists as well as their new audience. They needed new concepts for new forms of aristocracy, for new forms of civic life and virtue, and for various new forms of tyranny that greatly disturbed them.

Totalitarianism was a new concept appropriate to the 1940s and '50s both because it provided a vocabulary for political evil in the void left by the discontinuity with older concepts and also because theorists of totalitarianism were acutely aware of how historical myth had a powerful grip on the minds of the masses. This extraordinary timeliness indicates that to some degree the concept was native to the minds of thinkers who understood their object of analysis—the National Socialists of the Bolsheviks—but indicates even more that understanding the diagnosis in a longer continuity reveals the kinds of explanations preferred by social critics of the era. The disorientation of the intelligentsia as well as the displaced masses, the prominent role of historical myth in motivating superfluous people after economic industrialization and political nationalization, the critical place of depersonalization in the experience of totalitarianism, and the suspicion of modern bureaucracy and technologies of propaganda were all biting criticisms at the end of the nineteenth century, and they all continued to find their marks in many ways in the second half of the twentieth.

These intellectual lines continued into the second half of the twentieth century, becoming key elements in both Left- and Right- social criticism through the 1960s. A critical component of many prominent public intellectuals continued to be preoccupation with the disorienting

experiences of futurity, and even more importantly it was the case that critics of mass mediated society saw the loss of skills, the breakdown of social bonds and the permeation of advertising into all aspects of life as an erosion of the social conditions for democracy, even if it was expressed in a post-virtue idiom. However, the loss of the vocabulary of civic virtue was hard felt, and continuity with the project of nineteenth century democracy remained an important component of the story that many of these intellectuals told about themselves. Above and beyond that it was additionally the case that intellectuals had internalized deeply that mythos about past and future were objects of suspicion in a mass culture that seemed over the course of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s to be still on the precipice of dissolution.

There are a few primary dimensions across which the thinkers in this study vary. One of the manners of their variance was in their orientation towards technics. One of them was in metaphorical dimensions of historical characterization. One of them was in the implicit anthropology foundational to their critique of historical myth. These dimensionalities are critical in interpreting the implicit views and ultimate implications of either a critic of mass society or of historical myth.

Firstly, different intellectuals placed a greater or lesser weight on technics as a direct cause of social dislocation. Technological determinism is an entirely reasonable order of explanation for social changes, but it is importantly the case that for many mass society critics, and for many historical thinkers queasy about modernity, technics was itself just one representative of orientation towards power and compulsion. This is particularly acute of any inheritor of the republican legacy for modern democracy, as the maladjusted orientation towards power and compulsion is necessarily a disqualification from inclusion in civic virtue.

Secondly, there were new characters that emerged as conceptual tools to talk about modern social organization, like the propagandists, progressive intellectual do-gooders or the mass man. This development allowed for literal discourse, for structural-functional analysis, but very importantly for metaphorical mechanisms whereby critics could articulate how modern society was characterized by bureaucratic or psychological domination, or how modern society is built on deep and profound forms of alienation. These characters were often self-theoretic. Intellectuals had to self-theorize their own roles in media or theorize the intelligentsia, and in so doing give an account of how the old discursive sphere and political institutions of bourgeois citizenship had foundered in the 20th century. The emplotments for these characters were themselves used metaphorically, often for self-theorization in ways both obvious and oblique.

Thirdly, there was not so much a consensus about the relationship between historical myth and alienation as a general tendency in analyses. The common view was that modern time concepts were generally post-religious and were most appealing to people disoriented by the breakdown of social bonds. One reoccurring insight was that mass society was increasingly dominated by abstractions, myths, stereotypes and metaphors that the masses related to in their vain attempt to understand the world around them, and that this led them and society as a whole into ruin. However, without a shared implicit anthropology there was no shared psychological diagnosis of this susceptible mind.

Fourthly, there was an effervescence of neo-republican thought. In this new intellectual zone in which human nature was rediscovered, the citizen of the free polity, the corrupt partisan and the tyrannical state were all retheorized on new grounds and with a new lexicon used to refer to them. To some degree these new grounds were the implication of new intellectual trends, to some degree they came from a reassessment of the individual and of the crowd, and to some

degree they were the recognition of new technologies of social control. This ultimately yoked studies of man's spiritual and mental infirmity, theory of liberal democracy, and polemic against new and varied forms of political evil and civic corruption together in a new idiom outside of that seen in the 19th century or earlier.

For no good reasons have the foregoing intellectual trends started to fade into obscurity. Contemporary society remains perilously uncertain about its past future, historical myth is ascendant in public discourse, and the large mass of humans are increasingly lonely, propagandized, deskilled and superfluous. Why, then, has mass society criticism gone out of style, and why is historical myth today something that seems to have less of a history? The simple explanation is that we learned to stop worrying and love the bomb.

There are a few peculiarities of the history of the time scheme of the Marxists that have not been so broadly editorialized. For example, it is the case in some corners that the Marxist framing history of liberalism and its relationship with capitalism has come under fire, including the adoption of this story by free-market conservatives.[162] However, it has not been so broadly discussed how much influence Marx's account of the history modernity has been, not just on the political Left, but also amongst the free-market right-liberals and conservatives through influence of figures like Burnham.

Much more interesting than contemporary political opinion in the United States is the absent zone in contemporary intellectual discourse left behind by any real and concerted historical vision. After the 1960s, some post-Marxist intellectuals embarked on the project of claiming that we had entered into a post-modern phase of history, one within which major time

[162] See, for example: Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism: From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2022).

concepts had collapsed.[163] This has been broadly controversial ever since, in part because of its systematization in literature as a post-60s periodization that corresponds with the closure of the 20th century crisis and beginning of a period characterized by "neoliberalism" and the optimistically-named "late capitalism."[164] It has also been a vexed periodization because every major cultural or intellectual trend diagnosed as being post-modern had been attested to or in the main stream since the turn of the 20th century at the latest. The issue was not, in fact, that there was no framing metanarrative; it was just that Marxist historical architectonics had suffered a lethal wound, and some Parisian intellectuals decided that because they had finally discovered that historical ideas have a history as political myth that this must be news to the rest of the thinking world.

One cannot shake the sense that uncertainty about both the past and the future is increasingly a very strong current in contemporary thought. What is curious is that there is not much sense today that the sense of historical disruption has a history. It is also curious that so many of the things associated with this disruption are today treated as radical novelties as though the sense of novelty that pervades the present were warrant to embrace amnesia. Most curious of all is the absolute credulity found today towards any claim that anything that transpires is an unimaginable crisis, is unprecedented, or that it is an historic first, although first always in a trajectory left presumed and not explicated, and more frustratingly, unprecedented in the historical register of amnesiacs—or a crisis that seems unthinkable because it is contrasted to an optimistic projection cast by a lantern in the past back towards which we don't look.

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[163] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition A Report on Knowledge,* translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[164] The programmatic consolidation of this scheme came from Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durhan, Duke University Press, 2001) and detailed coverage of the history of its emergence is found in Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (New York: Verso, 1998).

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