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Spring 2021

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2/10/2021

Honors Project

The Destructive Draw of Historical Determinism

Conflict and violence are unavoidable facts of human history. While conflicts over access to resources are common in the animal world, conflicts due to ideas seem to be uniquely human. These interpersonal and intergroup struggles occur for many complex reasons, but those that are based on deeply held fundamental beliefs can be the most dangerous due to the force of conviction that drives adherents. The study of these beliefs that drive people to violence requires interactions between many different disciplines, most notably those of the humanities.

Talk about politics and religion covers a massive swath of information found in the field of philosophy. Political science and philosophy are deeply intertwined; in many ways the first documented philosophers were also the first major players in the field of political science. Socrates, through Plato in his *Republic*, sets out to define justice and in doing so lands squarely in the terrain of political philosophy, arguing over the correct way for people to live in relation to one another. Plato uses the model of a city to help him explain his idea of a tripartite soul and spends a large portion of the book discussing his idea of the perfect city and how relations between people and classes within that city would look. Many philosophers, in fact, have devoted books to the way cities and civilizations should run and how people should interact, and it is exactly these prescriptive notions that can make political philosophy and ideology so dangerous when imposed from above.

The term “ideology” is used in a variety of ways, most typically with a negative connotation to denigrate or simplify opposing ideas (Freedman 3). It has also been used to denote

everything from circular systems of self-encouraging belief to a classification of some of the major forms of political belief systems like liberalism, fascism, socialism, etc., to a catchall term for any system of thought. However, for the purposes of this paper, “ideology” will be used in the way most generally accepted in the scholarship since the writings of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Communist political philosopher in the early 20th century. Since his writing, and the clashes of different political philosophies during WWII, in political theory, ideologies are understood as “promoters of non-negotiable principles that sought the status of universal truths” (Freedman 8). In this way, the political nears the religious in its claims. This clashing can be seen most clearly throughout the 20th century in the actions of Nazis, Stalinists, and even McCarthyites who each attempted to intertwine their ideologies with the culture and heritage in which they found themselves, and grew out of, throughout the 20th century. These ideologies set their adherents in opposition to one another on the most basic levels, seeing those that disagreed, not as intellectual challengers with which to engage in good faith arguments, but instead as a civilization ending threat. In weaving themselves with the culture of their host nations, these ideologies--in part-- became political myths.

Political myth can be thought of as a “process of continual work on a basic narrative pattern that changes according to the circumstances” (Bottici et al. 319). The purpose of political myth is to provide a group significance in relation to their political environment in a way that provides a framework that helps make sense of their current position and understanding of future events. The creation of a narrative framework for viewing politics is not merely a scholarly process that is used to think about the world, but also a kind of prescription for how to act in the world. All of these elements found in political myth are also found in religion. In the view of historical determinists, politics and religion share many commonalities aside from those

previously mentioned. Religion, however, insofar as it is organized and claims that morals come from God, vests the authoritative prescriptions it gives in a supreme or divine force. Religious adherents often raise this divestment of moral authority to a cosmic level to put any subsequent pronouncements outside the scope of normal human argumentation. When this logic enters the political realm and begins being forced onto those who do not see legitimacy in the authority of that policy, problems begin to arise that are not easily solved.

One such ideology that intertwines religious elements into political frameworks is historical determinism. Historical determinism can be understood as the idea that future events are predestined, usually by an esoteric or economic force. This is accompanied by the belief that there is a certain group of enlightened people that know what this future outcome will be. These people are also often convinced that it is their duty to help bring about this historical synthesis. While there are different iterations of historical determinism that can be critiqued, this paper will be focusing on some of the most influential. Specifically, the connection between a historical determinism as imagined by Hegel which was then adapted into Marxist-Leninism and later Stalinism; the racial philosophy that motivated Nazism; and the fundamentalist religious apocalypticism that lies behind some versions of Christianity and Islam. This historical determinist viewpoint in these ideologies gives its adherents the belief that they hold the moral high ground, that victory is inevitable, and that their opposition is merely an obstacle to the ideal society that is to come.

Historicism is rooted in the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a German idealist philosopher of the 19th century. Hegel, the father of the philosophy of history, used and helped to bring to prominence a dialectical view of history. Hegel based a large part of his philosophy of history upon the work of Immanuel Kant. Kant, in his 1784 work *Idea for a*

Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View, laid out the idea that there is perhaps a regular movement in history that has a path unwritten by individual actors (Kant 1). In this work, Kant anthropomorphizes “Nature” imbuing it with a sense of agency, to act and guide processes in the world. This aspect of Kant’s work can be tied to the Judeo-Christian tradition, as Kant states that Nature gives man free will, and has created the environment in such a way that it will constantly challenge and drive humanity forward in a teleological sense (Kant 3). Kant is explicitly using religious gesturing to combine traditional notions of providence with the secularized language of nature. The final purpose of this literal force of Nature is the creation of a perfect universal society, which requires the whole of humanity to join together.

From Kant’s perspective, the wars and strife which have ravaged humanity and that continue to rage are steppingstones of frightened groups of people each trying to negotiate better relationships with each other. Kant believes that history evinces mankind becoming more cultured, which he measures through art and science, and becoming slightly more moral, which must come through education as proof that history is guided by Nature. While he declines the possibility of knowledge of the inner processes and the specific ways Nature works in its progressing course, he does see a generalized route to Utopia. The anarchic and harsh state of nature which forces people to unite into nations can also be applied to the state of international relations. Seeing the problem of the security dilemma, the solution offered by Kant in his eighth thesis is revolutionary acts within a state. These revolutionary actions will spur neighboring states to realize the instability will disrupt the liberal order and intervene. This gives the opportunity for outside forces to act as mediators and sets the stage for an international system of governance (Kant 7). Though Kant acts in the world of ideas, this can be read as a dangerous policy prescription.

Advocating for revolution is dangerous, for those revolutionaries and government officials involved and for the political system of the state as a whole, even giving Kant the benefit of the doubt that he is only advocating for revolutionary action against an authoritarian government, not just for provoking chaos or the fuel of creating progress. Kant's stated end goal was the formation of an international system of government that could develop a universal cosmopolitan condition (Kant 7). Kant is making the assumption that revolutionary action within a state will lead to third-party interventionism. This third-party intervention is then supposed to increase the level of democracy in the nation that was going through the revolution. This theory can be formulated into an empirically challengeable question. To get to the heart of the issue, the presence of interstate revolution and a third-party intervention will be granted. The question is: Does third party intervention increase the level of democracy in a country going through internal revolution?

It is important to note that Kant died in 1804; a time before there was any major historical precedent for sovereign states to propose themselves as arbiters for the inner struggles of other states. However, since his death there has indeed been an increase in international institutions, though not exactly following the schematic of revolution that Kant offered. Though two of the major international arbiters, the League of Nations and the United Nations, did arise out of conflict neither arose out of interstate revolution. The League of Nations was formed by the victors of World War One. The League encompassed some of the most powerful nations at the time; however, it was largely unwilling to interfere with the events in other states. Famously, the League was able to stop neither the Japanese invasion of China, nor the rise and aggression of nationalists in Italy, Spain, or Germany. A result of this failure was the Second World War, which then spawned the UN. While the UN remains to this day and has intervened successfully

in a small number of cases, the scope of its failures comes to light much more often than its successes.

Perhaps the most notable failure of the UN was the Rwandan Genocide where the UN is criticized for not intervening enough. The UN's lack of action in Srebrenica and throughout the Bosnian War led to disappointment in the peacekeeper's actions. While specific anecdotes and case studies are important, when judging the merits of an implemented political philosophy it is more useful to use larger data sets.

Since Kant's time, the field of political science has begun more in-depth research on the connections between intervention and democracy. Kant argued that nations would realize that the instability in neighboring countries could negatively affect themselves. Nations would then be led to intervene in the conflicts of their neighbors to reduce the instability. This idea that neighboring nations intervening in conflicts would lead to an increase in stability and a liberal cosmopolitan spirit is not the case. Democratic countries who are likely to care not only about the stability of their neighbors, but also about helping to foster a liberal system face significant problems in international interventions. Democracies by their nature have both large selectorates, which are the people who have power to choose a leader, and large winning coalitions, which are the people whose support is necessary for the leader to win (Buono de Mesquita and Downs 629). This greatly incentivizes democratic leaders to take actions that directly benefit members of their winning coalitions specifically, and members of the larger selectorate generally.

While the loss of treasure and potential blood is easily felt by the selectorate, the selectorate gains very little from the knowledge that some country abroad is now democratic. Democratic leaders must find ways of directly associating foreign intervention with the public good of their nation; a task which is not necessarily easy to do. Democratic leaders must connect

their intervention with a direct good to their constituents. If some connection is made, it can be difficult to ensure the promise of good to the democratic intervener will be fulfilled by the fledgling democratic regime. The difficulty is due to the observation that whoever is elected in the fledgling democracy will need to appeal to their own base of selectorates whose interests are uncertain (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 631). This can be done successfully in some cases like the U.S. intervention in the political system of Germany and Japan after World War Two. There, the goal was to prevent another rise in militaristic fascism which has not gained power in either of those nations since the end of the war. However, in most cases problems of conflicting interest will occur, incentivizing democratic regimes to support friendly but stable autocracies. The UN Security Council, which might be the go-to option in Kant's framework faces similar problems. The need to have agreement between the mix of democratic and non-democratic regimes that occupy the Security Council means there is an even wider array of interests that will need to be met in the new governing system. Autocratic regimes who have less of a selectorate to satiate can be expected to fit stances more precisely to the wants of those intervening. This makes it unlikely that the issues individual democracies have promoting democracy will be overcome when mixed into a collective with non-democratic actors (Voeten 846).

This theory of third-party interventionism lowering the chances of an increase in liberal democracy in comparison to those states that have not experienced third-party intervention can be tested with data on countries which had civil wars, intrastate disputes, militarized interstate disputes, and interstate wars between 1946 and 2001. For the purposes of Bueno de Mesquita and Downs' study third party interveners were any states that made a physical military presence in an area of fighting in any capacity (Bueno de Mesquita and Downs 636). Regarding the UN, "targets of the UN fare no better and generally do worse than would have been expected had they

not suffered an intervention” in a measurement of their levels of democracy, according to Polity, in the period of time tracked until 10 years after the intervention (Bueno de Mesquita and Down 643). Moreover, the study showed that interventions, even by democratic countries, actually reduce the rate of democratization relative to the expected secular trend without intervention. This historical trend severely undermines Kant’s theory of intervention leading to liberal democracy.

Hegel takes Kant’s basic idea of historical trends revealing something more than the mere sum of human action and adds onto it, increasingly emphasizing the conflictual nature of the process. Hegel did not see human beings in a stagnant sense, locked between their split brutish and rational nature as Kant maintained. Hegel had the idea of a dialectic where two sides, called a thesis and antithesis, opposed one another and then clashed until a resolution was found, or one of the sides was destroyed. This conclusion is what he called synthesis. He applied this idea to history in his *Philosophy of History*, where he outlines changes in historical trends over time starting with the Greeks' society being changed by Socrates’ questioning of their societal norms and understandings.

Though Hegel is doing philosophy and history, in a way he is also doing something similar to religion. Hegel’s metaphysics and historical dialectic are both tied to his idea of Spirit (Hegel 126). Absolute Spirit is what Hegel calls the ultimate reality, God, or Freedom. The Spirit can be known through pure reason and thoughtful cognition, as self-consciousness is the subjective form of spirit existing in the world. For the individual, religion is the vector of one's life through which they can get closest to Spirit because religion recognizes the True in its most real, abstract, form. The religion that a group of people have is the fundamental agreement on which they base their governance. In this way, Spirit, for Hegel, also takes an objective form in

the State which “is the Idea of Spirit in the external manifestation of human Will and its Freedom” (Hegel 62). He identifies it as such because the state is the union of the will of all of the individuals that make it up. Because the state is such a powerful entity, it is in the development of the State through history that Spirit can most readily be seen.

Hegel combines these ideas and uses the idea of Spirit as a guiding principle behind the State, which is a collective rather than individual will, to say that different societies with varying religions and forms of governance have National Spirits which each are at different levels of development in and unity with Absolute Spirit. Spirit, on the world stage, acts as the “latent germ of being — a capacity or potentiality striving to realize itself” that he calls the principle of development (Hegel 70). History is a teleological process guided by Spirit that manifests itself through the religion of groups of people collectivized into the State, which through a dialectical process eventually will move towards Freedom. So, the form of Heathenism followed by Roman citizens was necessary for the establishment of the Roman state, though as history and time advanced Heathenism gave way to Christianity, first in its Catholic form then furthered into its Protestant form, each shifting through dialectical clashes.

Hegel’s ideas of a historical dialectic paired with his teleological view of history were extremely influential. They would later be used to change the world when they were taken up by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, mixed with economics, and shifted to fit the materialistic, rather than idealist view of the world that Marx had. In his 1886 article, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Engels openly stated,

“The great basic thought that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of readymade things, but as a complex of processes in which apparently stable, no less than their mind-images in our heads-- the concepts go through uninterrupted change of coming

into being and passing away-- in which in spite of all temporary regressions, a progressive development asserts itself in the end” (Saksena 543).

This is emphasizing Engel’s belief that no matter the setbacks that may occur, progress will win out in the end. Instead of reason through religion being driven by spirit through history, Marx envisioned that it was capital, manifested in class, and how it was produced and distributed within a society that was the way in which development happened throughout history. Though Marx would also claim that the telos of this spirit that drives history was Freedom, he posits that it is those in control of capital, the bourgeoisie, that are acting in opposition to the march of history, Spirit, and trying to maintain their position of dominance over the proletariat class. He saw the dialectic in work through history as Feudalism gave way to Capitalism, which in turn was destined to give way to Communism as more people recognized the position they were in and sought freedom.

When Marx and Engels wrote the first version of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 there were no paradisiacal communist societies. Their prognostications were based on a theory of historical economic progression and what the political response to it would be. In a way they agreed with Kant that cosmopolitanism is coming; however, they saw it being brought about not by an increasing tendency for nations to accept outside governance, but rather through the ever-expanding nature of capitalist need for market. Though exploitative, capitalism has begun to “draw all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization” while undermining traditional national means of production (Marx and Engels 3). This new massive amount of uncontrolled production would inevitably lead to greater and greater commercial crises which would destroy large sections of the productive forces. These destructive forces will be felt most acutely by the proletariat, who is forced to work ever harder in low wage and low skill jobs to keep up with the

machines (Marx and Engels 6). Marx and Engels' see the lives of the lower class becoming consistently worse despite the general increase in capital. The continuation of this trend will mean that the proletariat will long for the status that skilled workers had in the Middle ages and come together to destroy imported goods, machines, and finally the bourgeoisie in revolution. Some enlightened members of the bourgeoisie and the middle class will even assist the proletariat in this revolution, having the ability to see the auspicious historical situation. The lower middle class specifically is likely to help, knowing that they will soon fall into the proletariat anyway. Unlike in the past where revolutions were always championed by some subsection of the bourgeoisie, this revolution, being led by a conscious majority of the oppressed will allow the proletariat to rise together afterwards. Furthermore, with the destruction of the bourgeoisie and the middle class that did not side with the proletariat in the revolution, there will not be class oppression because only the proletariat will remain. "Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (Marx and Engels 9).

This conception is so sure of itself that it is willing to call for the destabilization of systems that have not yet failed. Marx and Engels failed to see the possibility that technological progress would be beneficial to all, not just the bourgeoisie. There was also no mention of the potential for new work created by technological development. In the Marxist view, the life of the proletariat was downhill from around 1900 until they finally managed the end goal of overthrowing the bourgeoisie and establishing a one class society. Additionally, there was no mention in the *Communist Manifesto* about how this new society would ensure that differences in levels of productivity between its own members would not set the stage for the rise of classes once again. If the productivity of a person should be equivalent to the capital they receive, one could reasonably expect that the governing system would have to implement a system that would

go against the personal interests of the top 50% of the population, to maintain an equitable distribution across the class. This would of course require an almost impossible level of power to be held by the government to constrain the most productive members of society. While it is theoretically possible that the entirety of the surviving population could decide to go along with the programs out of an abiding feeling of comradery with the rest of their nation, it seems unlikely.

Revolution, which was the way the that dialectical struggle played out in the Marxist conception of the world, is a difficult process. Though history was on the side of the proletariat and a utopian society of freedom would eventually be reached, capital, and through it, material power, was often in the hands of the bourgeoisie. This caused later political leaders such as Vladimir Lenin to devise ways through which the bourgeoisie can be overthrown in an accelerated manner. This would come most famously in the form of a Vanguard party, which would consist of those epistemologically privileged individuals who are able to perceive reality and recognize their place in history. This group would then set out to mobilize the proletariats into revolutionary action, destabilize the social order, and establish itself as the guiding force within the state (Gray 5). In many cases, the goal of overthrowing the current government of a state through revolutionary action leads to the justification of totalitarian actions on the part of the Vanguard party, perceiving even totalitarianism as a positive step away from the status quo. Vanguardism, specifically, uses their belief in the epistemological superiority of their own group, Elite Theory, a forcing of science to fit the historical orthodoxy of the party, and the demonization of those that disagree with them as fuel for their movement.

This is exactly what happened in the formative example of the vanguard party which grew directly out from Lenin himself, the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks were a communist

vanguard political party founded by Lenin that led the fight against the Russian Republic and seized power in 1917 through Red October. They would eventually shift into the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, most famously led by Stalin. Immediately upon taking power, Lenin and the Bolsheviks showed the deadly potential of their tactics by demonizing and calling for the murder of the Kulaks, resulting in mass food shortages in 1918. Additionally, around 50,000 political enemies were killed in the Red terror of 1918. However, in the USSR, history trudges on and even those who were initially thought to be enlightened no longer held an anointed position. After Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin had control of the levers of power within Russia and set about getting rid of his political opponents, including many powerful communists. This can be most clearly seen in the Great Purge which saw 1.2 million deaths from repression between 1937 and 1938 (Ellman 1163). This rhetoric continues along with the murder and imprisonment of successful farmers under Stalin, culminating in the Holodomor in Ukraine, which caused the loss of around 4 million lives in 1932-1933 (Motyl 2). Historian Robert Conquest estimates the number of excess deaths between 1926-1939 alone ranged from 16-18 million. Gulags, which can be read about in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, functioned as work and death camps which were set up for political dissidents and held around 4.2 million people as of 1946 (Ellman 1153).

Defenders of communism will often argue that the Soviet Union and Maoist China are not accurate representations of Marx's dream. This defense is a version of the "no true Scotsman" fallacy, where instead of changing their hypothesis in the face of failed implementations of communism, they formed an ad hoc defense by denying that the state was really communist. If the Soviet Union, Maoist China, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, Venezuela, and the rest of the failed projects that called themselves

communist were not in fact communist, the burden of proof lies on communism's defenders to show examples of where it has worked. If they then say that it has never been truly instantiated, then they risk playing mere theoretical games. It should be understood that political philosophies must be instantiated to really be able to analyze its consequences.

The Soviet Union that was birthed from Marxist-Leninist philosophy ended up as an authoritarian system that ruled over the second largest number of governmental civilian killings in the 20th century, followed only by Mao in China. The activities of Mao and the rise of the authoritarian Communist Party of China closely followed the ideological development in Russia, with all its problems, and could have been used in the same way to show the practical horrors that follow from the historical deterministic framework. However, for the purpose of this paper, Russia was chosen largely due to it being the home of the underlying ideology. Germany, under the control of the Nazi Party, the third member in the estimated number of deaths of that triumvirate of evil that found itself empowered in the 20th century, shared similar ideas of history to the Soviets.

The stated goal of the Nazi party in Germany was very much in line with historical determinism and the belief that the spirit of a group was always developing towards a utopian end. Unlike the Soviets, who used economics and class as the basis for their claims, the Nazis used a theory of racial supremacy. This is due to the spreading ideologies of German ethnic-superiority and anti-Semitism from thinkers on the right like Wagner, Gobineau, and H.S. Chamberlain. Similar to Hegel, Nazis put a massive emphasis on the importance of the National Spirit, which the Germans called *Volk*, encompassing the shared culture, language, and territory of a group (Hutton 150). The idea of the Volk was further augmented by racial theories of Aryan supremacy, which were made most popular by Arthur de Gobineau in his *Essay on the Inequality*

of Human Races. While Gobineau is not completely sold on the traditional biblical ascriptions for the origins of race as the descendants of Noah, he still takes the Biblical accounts seriously. He takes more issue with the notion that there is no such thing as different races. He explicitly states that the racial types are, “absolutely fixed, hereditary, and permanent, in spite of climate and lapse of time” (Gobineau 120).

Though he admits that not much can be known about the original man which he calls Adamite, he differentiates the secondary types into black, white, and yellow. These are then broken down from their pure originations to still intermingled, but still distinguishable, tertiary types (Gobineau 147). Even from among the secondary types, Gobineau sees no equality. In beauty, strength, and intelligence, he argues that those closest to white are superior (Gobineau 151-153). It is worth noting, given the way Gobineau’s theory will be taken, that Germans rank near the bottom of his list in beauty and strength. The notion of the originals being pure is important to Gobineau’s overall narrative, which is that the intermingling of the types causes a degeneration of humanity and an increase in the disorder of the individual and larger society (Gobineau 25). He pushes this idea so far as to say the civilizations of his time wane in comparison to those ancient civilizations that have fallen like the Egyptian Pharaonic age, Ancient Greece, and the Roman Empire, which according to him, were made up of less degenerate elements (Gobineau 154). Gobineau’s view of Aryans as the purest group of whites from whom all civilization comes, requires a strict segregation to eliminate further degeneration, but not enough to eliminate other races.

Gobineau’s ideas were taken by Houston Stewart Chamberlain and adjusted in his book *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* to fit German ideas of the Volk. This included classifying “Semitic” as its own race instead of as a part of white. Similar to Gobineau,

Chamberlain thought that racial intermingling was the primary cause of the fall of civilizations. Going further, Chamberlain did not stop at claims of superiority and prescriptions of racial segregation. Chamberlain endorsed the destruction of groups that would challenge the superior race. A specific example of this in his writing is his approval of the annihilation of Carthage, which he saw as the ideal Semitic city, by the Romans. It is clear that for Chamberlain, the absolute destruction of Carthage was both inevitable in the face of the superior Roman people, and completely necessary for the progression of humanity (Chamberlain 115).

Gobineau, Chamberlain, and other racial ideologues went to great lengths in their writings to try and legitimize his racial theories using history, linguistics, and the fledgling science of anthropology. During the 1800s into the mid 1900s, theories of racial superiority were common among the intelligentsia. What would today be considered pseudoscience, such as phrenology, was presented as evidence and gross generalizations about the races, was common. There are obvious problems with these narratives, some of which were known and argued at the time. The conflation of racial and language groups is foremost among these problems as Aryan was derived from linguistics not racial anthropology, and some Jews were native German speakers. Another problem was that the German Volk were not of one race according to the anthropologists (Hutton 150). As these problems became clearer, some ideas were dropped and replaced by new ones in order to continue movement toward the ultimate goal. An exemplar of this is the transition from the use of social anthropology and linguistics, due to the aforementioned issues, to eugenics. By 1935, even the words “arisch” and “Arier,” which is what was being translated as Aryan, fell into disuse (Hutton 151). However, pesky problems such as scientific illegitimacy would not stop true believers.

The pretense of scientific racial superiority and the belief in a singular group with the ability to produce civilization, kickstarted calls for radical change. The Nazis thought they knew that the pure Volk would eventually dominate, but believed that the more time that lesser groups were allowed to coexist, the more likely they were to intermingle and corrupt the most noble type. The solution to this problem required vast, uncontested government power to implement.

The Nazis used similar tactics as the Soviets in order to gain this power. After November 1918, the German population became aware of Germany's surrender and the establishment of the Weimar Republic. Despite the defeats that the German army suffered during the war, there were many, including Hitler, that felt humiliated and betrayed by the "November Criminals" who had signed the armistice that ended the war. The German nationalists who felt this way shifted their ire onto the fledgling Weimar Republic and began trying to overthrow it. Hitler began positioning himself as a savior figure that would bring Germany into glory. Political gambling from inside of the Reichstag by high-ranking officials was terribly miscalculated as they attempted to bring the Hitler and his Nazi party under their control. They failed and in 1932, the Nazi Party won the most seats in the Reichstag out of any political party. Hitler outmaneuvered his opponents and was appointed Chancellor of the Reichstag.

From Hitler's seat in power, he began repressing and murdering political opponents. When the Reichstag building burned to the ground in 1933, Hitler said that it was the sign to begin the communist revolution. He played on the fears of the German people and used the fire as the impetus to ramp up the political killings of communists, did away with the constitution, and outlawed most opposing political parties, with just under half of the German population supporting him (Houghton 36). Once he had weeded out the communists and liberals from society, he did the same with his own party, further radicalizing them. All the while, Hitler

framed the situation as if his murders were merely the putting down of rebellions that would have overthrown the government. With his enemies out of the way, he continued flirting with the army and heads of industry until they either supported him or were at the very least, not opposed. When the last bastion of moderation, President Hindenburg, died in 1934, Hitler took up the powers that Hindenburg had previously held and declared himself Fuehrer. At this time, he had around 90% of the vote in Germany and his reign of terror continued largely unopposed. Like Stalin, Hitler turned on those that helped him gain power. In June and July of 1934, Hitler purged the ranks of the S.A. and many powerful former allies including Ernst Roehm and Father Bernhard Stempfle of the Hieronymite order, who previously helped edit *Mein Kampf* (Shirer 223).

Hitler and his Nazi Party, while espousing one of the most abhorrent and violent ideologies that has ever been seen, managed to come to power more or less legitimately in Germany. The activities of the Nazi Party after setting off World War II through their invasion of Poland, would eventually lead to the death of millions, including six million Jews throughout the area that Hitler was able to control as part of the plan to establish a utopia that would last a thousand years. Their belief was that the Aryan race was superior to all others and that it was the destiny of the German people to be the rulers of the world. In order to do this, they had to first get rid of all of those that were impure. They did this both through murder and eugenics, believing in this task so strongly that even in the final years of the war when defeat seemed imminent, precious resources were still being used to carry out their racial cleansing. This was the power of the idea of the Thousand Year Reich. When combined with Hitler's charisma, it enchanted Germany and led to the most destructive war the world had ever seen (Shirer 5).

Calling it the Thousand Year Reich closely mirrors the idea of millenarianism in more overtly religious groups. Millenarianism is the idea that in the future, there will be a fundamental remaking of the world and the social order as prescribed by a certain religion. After this pseudo-apocalypse, a utopia will be established on the earth for believers to enjoy. Millenarianism and other forms of apocalyptic ideologies whether religious or otherwise, can be extremely dangerous because followers can take the idea of a future destruction as permission to take that destruction into their own hands. "Apocalyptic belief systems and millennial visions of the imminent "Last Days" or "End Times" appear to characterize almost all violent religious sects" a fact that is crucial when looking at the practical ramifications of this philosophy (Walliss 14). One important aspect of millenarianism is that salvation and admission into this utopian system is collective. All members of the chosen people will gain access; however, it is also a dualistic vision of the world. This means that those that are not part of the elect have chosen to side with the forces of evil in the world and will either be destroyed in the end times, or need to be destroyed to make way for the coming age. These groups also tend towards a charismatic leader, who marshals the group towards their goals. Being centralized around a single leader also tends to lead groups towards violence due to the instability that reliance on one person brings. These groups often also isolate themselves from the rest of society, either to preserve their own purity, or in an attempt to begin the utopia they believe is coming.

While most millenarianist groups today are fringe, like People's Temple and Aum Shinrikyo, the ideas of communal salvation after a worldwide destruction of the forces of evil are common themes throughout the Abrahamic religions. Two of the main differences between millenarianist groups and more mainstream religious groups is isolation and societal opposition. Isolation from society allows tighter control over the group members by the charismatic leaders

as well as some degree of freedom from the scrutiny of the rest of society. This increases the potential for ideological radicalization. Societal opposition engenders hate and worsens feelings of demonization and difference aimed at “others” (Walliss 30).

While the millenarian form of historical determinism tends not to be extremely widespread, other religious forms are well known. Islam has been the unfortunate source and victim of one of the most shocking examples of historical determinist groups trying to impose their will. In Islam, the holiest site is the Kaaba, located inside the Great Mosque of Mecca, in Saudi Arabia. On a pilgrimage known as the hajj, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, millions of Muslims travel there each year to worship. Certain sects of Islam, believe in a form of historical determinism in which a holy figure called the Mahdi, is destined to appear, destroy the forces of evil, and create a perfect religio-political community, the *umma*, on earth (Sachedina 1). The idea of the Mahdi is similar in form to that of Messianic figures in Jewish and Christian thought. Shiites saw the Mahdi as both a religious and political leader who would be able to correctly interpret and implement the Sharia, in the same way as the Prophet Muhammad, to create the ideal Islamic society. The Mahdi, in Twelver Shi’ism, is the twelfth Imam, which refers to the line of purportedly infallible Imam successors of the Prophet Muhammad, following the lineage of Ali. The Mahdi who is coming is thought by Shi’ites to be Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-A’skari, the hidden twelfth Imam who went into occultation after A.D. 873 to avoid being killed by the Abbasid Dynasty (Sachedina 23). While the Mahdi is in occultation he is not manifest in the world, but interacts through imperfect spokesmen. This concept was incredibly important, to the point that “salvation was impossible if a person failed to recognize the true Imam of his time” (Sachedina 7). Following the lineage of Ali makes notions of the Mahdi a mainly Shia belief, though there are some Sunni groups that hold to this concept as well. The

necessity to recognize and follow the true Imam in order to reach salvation is a massive incentive to be obedient to those who claim the title of Mahdi and exists in both Sunni and Shia variants.

The Wahhab sect of Saudi Arabia is one such Sunni group that believes in the return of the Mahdi and in 1979, a small group of Wahhabi extremists believed they had found the Mahdi in a man named Muhammad Abdullah al-Qahtani. In the hadiths it is said that the Mahdi will look similar to the Prophet Muhammad, have the same name, and be from the tribe of Quraysh (Trofimov 47). The Mahdi will then stand between the Kaaba and Ibrahim's prayer station in the Grand Mosque in Mecca to be accepted by Muslims. Muhammad Abdullah al-Qahtani met the physical, nominal, and tribal requirements; all that was missing was his acceptance. The leader of the group who found the Mahdi was Juhayman al-Otaybi, a former member of the Saudi National Guard, who then joined the Salafi Sect Al-Jamaa al-Salafiya al-Muhtasiba, supported by well-known cleric Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz. While Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz was more mainstream than Juhayman, both were strongly against the modernization of Saudi Arabia, instead wanting increased enforcement of religious law (Hegghammer and Lacroix 105). Juhayman held some specifically violent beliefs about what would happen when the Mahdi returns, such as an army of 70,000 Jews rising up against the Mahdi and being swallowed by the earth, then the Christians and Jews will be slaughtered (Trofimov 47). Juhayman and a group of a few hundred heavily armed followers were convinced of Muhammad Abdullah's blessed status and were eager to begin their chiliastic movement. In order to help Abdullah fulfill the rest of the prophecy, Juhayman and his group made a plan to violently seize control of the Grand Mosque to set off the chain of events that would establish a Islamic Utopia.

On 20 November 1979, the first day of 1400 of the Islamic calendar, Juhayman, Muhammad Abdullah, and around 300 armed men stormed the Grand Mosque in Mecca and

took thousands of Islamic worshippers hostage (Hegghammer and Lacroix 112). With Muhammad Abdullah, their Mahdi, in the correct place, they fortified their positions and waited for the Jewish army to come and be destroyed. This never happened. It was the Saudi government who came to extract the Mahdi and free the hostages. After a two weeklong siege on the mosque by the Saudi government, the proposed Mahdi was dead along with hundreds of others (Trofimov 164). The remainder of Juhayman's group was captured and either imprisoned or executed (Hegghammer and Lacroix 113). There was no divine intervention on behalf of Muhammad Abdullah and the revolution failed horrifically.

In Marxist-Leninism, Nazism, and Millenarianism, a perspective of historical determinism lends itself towards violence and has been responsible for some of the biggest atrocities committed in the last 150 years. These ideas are dangerous because of the way they are able to both capture the imagination of a group of people that are seen as epistemologically privileged and destined for a future utopia, while simultaneously promoting a collectivist mentality that allows the trampling over of innumerable individuals. This gets particularly dangerous when believers take matters of bringing about this eschatological change themselves, as was the case in the three examples given. These dangerous tendencies most readily present themselves in the demonization of other members of society, and a focus on overthrowing the established social order. Out of all the groups that have been mentioned, a commonality is that their predictions have all been wrong. Though they claim history is on their side and that paradise awaits, a close study of history shows that no utopia has come, but rather violent adherents have caused mass suffering before themselves being purged by other members of their group, all destined not for earthly paradise, but for infamy in death.

It is not surprising that all of the groups have been wrong. Aside from the specific problems facing each of the cases given, historical determinism itself has issues. The scale of the proposed social changes, the violence required to force the rest of society to accept the changes, and the dubious methods that have been used for making predictions should all be understood. In each of the cases given success on the part of the revolutionaries would require a complete restructuring of civilization. The complexity that goes into ensuring a functioning society is such that only parts of its working can be understood at once, which is why studies isolate variables in order to know their effect (Popper 127). In trying to understand and mold all of society at one to fit their preconceived notions of the historical ends, historical determinists always run into unintended consequences. This is due to unforeseen interactions between parts of society that are unsettled by the rampant change. For every change made, a ripple effect will occur to social relations, whose change will then ripple again ad infinitum. This would require a similarly infinite knowledge to be able to successfully predict the outcome of, making holistic social change a logical impossibility (Popper 128). To be clear, in each of the examples adherents to historical determinism claim that change is predestined. However, they then attempt to impose themselves onto the social order to accelerate the course of history, which to anyone not convinced that this change is already determined looks like radical change.

Given that historical determinism favors a small in-group of enlightened followers, it requires the ability to clear obstacles and opponents from its path. The violence and control required to force this acceleration worsens the problem of unforeseen events. The death and destruction that results from the violence necessarily makes it more difficult for those implementing policy in accordance with their ideology to correct for anything that goes wrong. This is even more of a problem in the context of the devoted historical determinist who is willing

to sacrifice untold numbers of individuals to reach their ends. Figures like Juhayman, Hitler, and Stalin, so convinced in the merits of their actions are unlikely to admit that anything can go wrong with their plans. So whatever course corrections might be possible in light of the destruction are ignored.

Finally, the predictive methods used to determine where exactly history is going in order to help bring about that change must be scrutinized on an individual level. The impossibility of total knowledge of a society means that a forceful outside authority must be referenced. In Juhayman's case this was God; in Hitler's it is racial superiority preordained by a cosmic force, in Stalin's conception it was economics. Economic interests can surely have an effect on the development and progression of a society. Theoretically so could divine intervention or some disparity in physical or mental ability between racial groups. Crucially, the force of conviction behind the belief in the truth of these assertions allowed disproving evidence to be ignored to disastrous effect.

There is a strange irony in studying the results of actions said to be destined to meet their goals. Stalin watched as millions of workers were killed, starved, or sent to the gulag for not being loyal enough to the state. In order to create the conditions for a pure German Volk, Hitler sent an entire generation of Germans to die in a far-off land. Finally, in order to prove he found the Mahdi and usher in a golden age of Islamic rule, Juhayman desecrated the most holy site of his religion. In each case, the strength of their convictions was so great that they were willing to go to any length to impose their vision of the world on others, no matter who had to die. This is the danger of historical determinism, the combination of a small, epistemologically blessed group of followers, certain they are correct and willing to take extreme measures to accelerate their coming utopia are unable to be reasoned with. The merits of their actions are no longer

open to debate, the only thing that is left to do is to gather the coercive force required to impose their views on those that do not go along willingly.

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