

The Power to Resist: A Study of Dissidence Movements in Eastern Europe

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In a regime in which individuals are completely subjected to the totalizing rule of one person, is resistance possible? According to Hannah Arendt in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the possibility for resistance in the totalitarian regimes of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin is nonexistent due to the arbitrary and unpredictable rule of the Leader and terror-driven ruling tactics. In these regimes, people are completely subjected to the rule of one man who creates an ideology as a cover for his true goal of total domination. Vaclav Havel presents a different view of totalitarian, or post-totalitarian, regimes. Havel focuses on the regime in Czechoslovakia that evolved from the arbitrary, terror-driven rule of Stalin to rule by a collective group of “faceless bureaucrats” who are bound to perpetuate the lie of the government as a worker’s movement while in actuality perpetuating the totalitarian structure. Given the stagnant nature and the binding structure of this regime, people not only have more opportunity to resist than under the regime that Arendt describes, but it is their duty to stand up to the government by exposing the lie of the regime, and living within the truth. This regime was wrapped up in a system of falsehoods that controlled not only the populace but those in power as well. While

both Arendt's and Havel's theories depict totalitarian regime driven by an overarching lie, there is a fundamental difference between the structure of each regimes and the ensuing effects on the populations. Because of this, Arendt and Havel see different possibilities of resistance. Adam Michnik, a Polish journalist and activist under the Polish regime, exemplifies the nature of resistance possible under the regimes that Arendt and Havel describe. In my paper, I will explore the differences in the nature of totalitarianism for Hannah Arendt and Vaclav Havel and use the works of Adam Michnik to show whether resistance in these regimes was possible.

HANNAH ARENDT

Hannah Arendt believes that the nature of totalitarianism is wrapped up in the will of a single leader who, through a complex hierarchical structure, imparts his ideology on the masses. This ideology is often falsified, promoting a sense of unity amongst the public while hiding the Leader's real goal of total domination. The hierarchical power structure of party members and elites helps to disguise the Leader's true motives and organize the populace into a mass of people who abide by the party line of the regime. In order to force cooperation and ensure control, the Leader runs the state by terror, eliminating those who pose a threat to his reign of power. Because of this, Arendt sees very little room for resistance to the Leader. The stringent regime and all-encompassing ideology create a web of lies that restricts freedom and movement.

Arendt's conception of totalitarianism places the Leader of the regime at the center of a hierarchical structure in which the degree of power held by an individual is based on his rank and proximity to the leader in the structure. The Leader is at the center of the movement, protected by a web of elites, party members, and party sympathizers who support and carry out the will of the leader. This hierarchical structure "could be described in terms of a curiously

varying mixture of gullibility and cynicism with which each member depending upon his rank and standing in the movement, is expected to react to the changing lying statements of the leaders and central unchanging ideological fiction of the movement.”¹ The transparency of the Leader’s true motives is less clear for lower ranking members, who are more susceptible to the ideology, buying into the lies and creating a support for those higher up. As one better his rank in the regime, one becomes less gullible and more powerful. At this point in the regime an individual becomes wrapped up in the power structure of the government and his unique ideas are replaced by power.

Party sympathizers form the basis of the front organizations that surround the movement. This is the only group that is “supposed to believe loyally and textually in the Leader’s words...[their] confidence surrounds the movement with an atmosphere of honesty and simple mindedness.”² This group provides a bridge between the masses and the regime, spreading a confidence in the regime and fooling the outside, nontotalitarian world into believing that the regime is legitimate. The second level of the structure is formed by the ordinary party members. While they are still working in jobs outside the totalitarian regime, they adhere to and support the rules of the Leader. The elites form the third level of the hierarchical structure and provide final protection between the leader and the nontotalitarian world. Although they are not supposed to believe the literal truth of the ideological cliches, the sharp separation between the elites and the outside world ultimately ruins their ability to distinguish truth and falsehood. The elite become wrapped up in the movement of the regime and lose touch with reality of the

¹ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 381

² Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 383

outside world, becoming puppets of the Leader.³ Members become infatuated with a sense of power, and continue to abide by the regime. There is no need to compare the lies of the regime with actuality because the newfound power and the trust in the Leader. The party members and elite are attracted to totalitarianism because of the power it promised and it was a way to “express frustration, resentment, and blind hatred.”⁴ By being outside of the persecuted groups, the party members and elite can exert their limited power by subjugating those beneath them. While they do not have the authority of the Leader, by being appointed a higher position they believe they have more power than those who are directly persecuted and continue to support the Leader.

The Leader is the center of the totalitarian movement, without whom, the movement would fail to exist. According to Arendt, “the Leader is irreplaceable because the whole complicated structure of the movement would lose its *raison d’être* without his commands.”⁵ The charismatic quality of the Leader pulls people into his circle and convinces them to support his goals, despite the autocratic and dominating nature of his rule. The Leader must establish an aura of infallibility which convinces party members and elites to abide by his laws. In a totalitarian regime, the Leader is always right and will always be right. The infallibility of his actions is the basis of the structure of the regime, forcing those around him to comply with his ideas and decrees. For example, Joseph Stalin often would blame his own political errors on those who he had planned to persecute.⁶ In 1930, Stalin made a speech before the Central

³ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 385

⁴ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 332.

⁵ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 374

⁶ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 375

Committee of the Communist Party in which he “prepared the physical liquidation of intraparty right and left deviationists,” describing them as “dying classes.”⁷ Stalin prophesied the end of a “dying class” and painted them as useless to society, thus creating a group of undesirable people whom the rest of the party would want to remove. This rhetoric was able to convince the party members that Stalin must be right, and the subsequent purge of the “dying classes” was justified. In doing this, Stalin maintained his position of power by appearing infallible and continued to annihilate those who challenged his power. Because of the ability to impart his will on the party members, making a seemingly infallible system of decrees and judgements, the Leader is absolutely imperative to the structure and organization of the totalitarian movement.

The Leader creates a state of permanent revolution by arbitrary rules and constant changes including purges and liquidation of party factions, creating constant instability. This arbitrary rule ensures the totalizing rule of the will of the Leader by creating a sense of insecurity for everyone else in a totalitarian regime. The shifting party line allows for new groups to be arbitrarily persecuted, creating a common enemy. The upper echelons of the party continue to support this constantly shifting persecution because they are not the enemy of the state and are therefore not persecuted. However, with the ever-changing party line, those in power never have complete security. In order to maintain control of power, the Leader must exercise constant purges to ensure that no official comes close to his position. The rotating and shifting power among elites ensures no revolutions and secures the Leader’s place at the head of the regime. According to Arendt, stability would ruin the totalitarian regime because there would be no room for these constant changes. Stability would create security; in a place of security, people would

⁷ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 349

be able to resist more by being able to predict the movement of the Leader.⁸ But because of the arbitrary nature of the regime, there is no stability and thus there is permanent instability and uneasiness.

In order to achieve total domination, the Leader must derive a system of propaganda to convince the outside world of his legitimate regime and indoctrinate the masses within his influence. The Leader uses propaganda to cover up his true desire of world domination, a factor which Arendt claims is inherent in every totalitarian dictatorship.⁹ Just as the Leader can convince members of the party to obey his will, he can control the masses through a similar system of lies. The success of these lies are contingent on the consistency of the stories and ideas he presents to convince the masses of his legitimate rule. The ideology created out of these successive lies is more important than facts in convincing the masses of the legitimacy of the Leader's rule. Adolph Hitler was successful with his use of propaganda in convincing the German public that the Jews were the enemy with the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion." This publication was sold across Germany and used for the purpose of "denouncing the Jews and arousing the mob to the dangers of Jewish domination."¹⁰ The continued promotion of this pamphlet and the ideas it expressed effectively depicted the Jews as an enemy in Germany. The consistency of the idea permeated the society, appealing to the masses and convincing them that this lie was the reality. The modern masses "don't believe in anything visible, but only in their imaginations, which may be caught by anything that is at once universal and consistent in itself. What convinces the masses are not facts, and not even invented facts, but the consistency of the

⁸ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 384.

⁹ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 351.

¹⁰ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 358

system of which they are presumably a part.”¹¹ Just as the “Protocols of the Elders Zion” promoted falsified accounts of Jewish life in Germany, totalitarian propaganda convinces the masses that invented facts are the reality, making them the center of the totalitarian regime’s policies. Arendt explains that the Leader’s success in his ability to convince the masses is the result of a consistent lie which permeates the entirety of life in a totalitarian regime. By doing this, the Leader is unopposed in his quest to organize the masses to carry out and abide by his will. In creating a lie, the Leader can successfully maintain his regime.

Along with this, a reign of terror to subvert any oppositional activity and subdue the masses is key to implementing the Leader’s regime and controlling all aspects of life. Terror serves to destroy all individuality by creating a mass man in complete support of the Leader and destroying the ability to act against the regime. The Leader rids people of their individuality by implementing and imprisoning them in a system of camps in which inmates are arbitrarily labeled as “objective enemies, not because of any crimes committed against the state, but because they pose a “threat” to the Leader. In Russia, Stalin’s terror was comprised of three types of camps, labor camps in which inmates live in relative freedom and serve limited sentences, concentration camps “in which the human material is exploited and the mortality rate is extremely high,” and annihilation camps where “inmates are systematically wiped out through starvation and neglect.”¹² Once these camp systems are in place, terror rids man of his juridical and moral aspects, allowing for one to be entirely stripped of his individuality. By putting certain groups outside the protection of the “law” through arbitrary selection of “objective enemies,” the totalitarian regime can destroy the juridical person in man, which Arendt considers

¹¹ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 351

¹² Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 443

the necessary first step in a reign of total terror. This rids a human being of natural rights afforded to most people and makes a person stateless in their own country.¹³ By ridding a person of his natural rights, totalitarianism takes away legal freedoms that are essential to the lives of all human beings.

The second step in total domination, according to Arendt, is the destruction of the moral person. This is done by getting rid of human relationships and “making martyrdom... impossible.”¹⁴ By destroying solidarity and forcing people to incriminate each other in order to save themselves, moral judgement is destroyed. Arendt explains, “When a man is faced with the alternative of betraying and thus murdering his friends or of sending his wife and children, for whom he is in every sense responsible, to their death...how his he to decide? The alternative is no longer between good and evil, but between murder and murder.”¹⁵ The totalitarian regimes make it such that individuals cannot stand together. In order to protect oneself, one must turn his back on others. Once the moral person is destroyed, all that is left for total terror to dominate is the individual. Once people are treated this way, their individuality is lost, thus making them both powerless victims and puppets of the mass regime.

According to Arendt, the indoctrination of the ideology and the reign of terror is the basis for the total domination of society:

Total domination, which strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual is possible only if each and every person can be reduced to a never-changing identity of reactions so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other...Totalitarian domination attempts to achieve this goal both through ideological indoctrination of the

¹³ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 451

¹⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 451

¹⁵ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 452

elite formations and through absolute terror in the camps; and the atrocities for which the elite formations are ruthlessly used become, as it were, the practical application of the ideological indoctrination...while the appalling spectacle of the camps themselves is supposed to furnish the “theoretical” verification of the ideology.”¹⁶

When the ideology, coupled with a reign of terror, has taken over, all relationships with reality are ruined.¹⁷ People lose a sense of the outside world and become wrapped up in the totalizing regime. The means of rule by terror become the ends in the circular cycle of total domination. It is a continuous cycle in which the ideology takes complete control of those subscribing to it, making individual thought impossible. People react to the actions of the totalitarian government in a way that is prescribed and predictable. They act as one mass man whose own individual nature is taken away and they subscribe to the ideology of the regime. Arendt believes that “the aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions, but to destroy the capacity to form any.”¹⁸ People lose the ability to form individual ideas because they have been indoctrinated by the Leader’s ideology and forced into compliance with the system. Individuality is lost and people are fully indoctrinated into the regime.

Because of these conditions, Arendt believes that successful resistance is unlikely.

Totalitarianism destroys society, thus isolating people from one another and taking away the space for communication. Arendt explains,

[Totalitarianism] substitutes for the boundaries and channels of communication between individual men and a band of iron which holds them so tightly together that it is though their plurality had disappeared into One Man of gigantic dimensions...By pressing men against each other, total terror destroys the space between them... Totalitarian government does not just curtail liberties or abolish essential freedoms; nor does it...succeed in

¹⁶ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 438.

¹⁷ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 469

¹⁸ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 466

eradicating the love for freedom from the hearts of man. It destroys the one essential prerequisite of all freedom which is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space.”¹⁹

While the regime is entitled to an ever-changing ideology, set in constant motion, the people within the regime are stagnant. People are reduced to being treated as one mass with a similar outlook. Subjects do not have the freedom of movement and individuality, and are isolated from collective discussion and public life, thus limiting their ability for experience and thought. This isolation, which ultimately becomes loneliness, caused by the destruction of the public realm of life, is a result of total terror. Being isolated from one another, men lose the ability to collaborate politically and socially. Because of the lack of communication, man’s ability to act is severely limited. Men cannot form a bond of solidarity if they are forcefully separated from one another, thus isolation limits political action by banning communication. Despite the forced separation, man still has the ability to be together with himself while in isolation. He has his own sanity and thoughts to guide his opinion of right and wrong. Yet, according to Arendt, isolation in a totalitarian regime can lead to loneliness because of the regime’s ability to terrorize and victimize individuals. When total terror takes control, man can be deserted by himself, losing his will to fight, thus moving from isolation into loneliness.²⁰ Loneliness, is when one is convinced he is alone in the world, and therefore, he succumbs to defeat by the regime because there is no hope for resistance. When this has happened, total terror has won, and there is no possibility to resist. Because of the nature of loneliness brought on by isolation and terror, Arendt sees very little hope in resisting the regime.

¹⁹ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 465

²⁰ Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 324 packet

The strength of an individual Leader creates an atmosphere in which no one can come close to challenging his power, making his subjects unaware of their place in society and forcing them into isolation. When people are isolated from one another, they cannot come together and create the solidarity needed in order to oppose the regime. The loss of individuality and solidarity due to the implementation of isolation and fear allows for the Leader to manipulate the system and maintain his power. Thus, Arendt sees the impossibility of resistance and theorizes that the future of opposition is bleak, noting the success of the strict organization of the Leader.

VACLAV HAVEL

Writing in 1979, Vaclav Havel sees totalitarianism in a different light than Arendt. While Havel is living within the same technical structure as Arendt is writing about, the nature of the post-Stalin totalitarian regime has evolved into a stagnant system of lies without a specific dominating leader. Havel sees the strict structure of the regime as the dominating force, not the arbitrary rule of one man and the reign of terror that he promotes. The control of one man has dissipated and the regime has evolved into an entrenched structure and ideology that dictates the actions even those high up in the regime. Because the structure is the most controlling aspect of the post-totalitarian government for Havel, he does not believe that totalitarianism is as wrapped up in one individual's will as Arendt claims. Instead, Havel says the regime is run by "faceless bureaucrats" who are as equally controlled by the ideology and structure as everyone else. Power has become anonymous and depersonalized and is not contingent on the personality of one Leader, as Arendt experiences.²¹ The post-totalitarian government is controlled by the regime type, and everyone is dominated by the system.

²¹ Havel. *Politics and Conscience*.

Havel sees the totalitarian system as a power structure which binds everything together. The entrenched ideology has created a systematic government with very little room for movement. Whereas Arendt sees motion as a key force for the totalitarian regime, Havel believes totalitarianism thrives because of a complete stability due to the stagnant nature of the of the government. In Havel's post-totalitarian regime, the lack of an individual leader rids the regime of the arbitrary quality that it had in the totalitarian regime. Instead, the heads of power continue to maintain their power and position in society by maintaining an entrenched pattern of domination and repression. Controlled by a central ideology, there is a tightly connected system enforcing external stability. Havel says,

The whole power structure could not exist at all if there were not a certain metaphysical order binding all its components together, interconnecting them and subordinating them to a uniform method of accountability...This metaphysical order is fundamental to, and standard throughout the entire power structure; it integrates its communication system and makes possible the internal exchange and transfer of information and instructions.²²

This structure creates a network through which the totalitarian government operates, controlling everyday life. Because of this, it is nearly impossible to act outside of this structure.

The dominant ideology is what perpetuates the structure of the system. Everything in a totalitarian system is built around this ideology, and it serves as a guise for individual thought and experience. In his essay *The Power of the Powerless*, Havel uses a loyal Greengrocer as an example of the prevailing strength of the ideology. A Greengrocer puts up a sign reading "Workers of the World Unite," following the government's directions to do so. He is indifferent to the semantic content of the message and puts the sign up unwittingly. Because the ideology is so entrenched in the world around him, he accepts the slogan at face value. He simply reads the

²² Havel. *The Power of the Powerless*. 135

sign that is proclaiming that the workers of the world should, indeed, unite. That is the message the government pretends to support. The Greengrocer is not aware of the subliminal message that the sign represents, “I, the greengrocer, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace.”²³ The ideology is so embedded that people become indifferent to these underlying ideas. Ideology “offers human beings the illusion of an identity, dignity, and of morality, while making it easier for them to part with them.”²⁴ In this sense, people are supporting the regime by being unaware of the true meaning behind the ideology. Their ignorance perpetuates the lie of the totalitarian regime and continues the strict motion and structure of the system.

The entire system is wrapped up in the lie of the government, so that the government must falsify everything in order to maintain the appearance created by the original lie of the regime. Havel explains,

The working class is enslaved in the name of the working class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available; the use of power to manipulate is called the public control of power, and the arbitrary abuse of power is called observing the legal code; the repression of culture is called its development; the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed; the lack of free expression becomes the highest form of freedom; farcical elections become the highest form of democracy; banning independent thought becomes the most scientific of world views; military occupation becomes fraternal existence. Because the regime is captive to its own lies, it must falsify everything.²⁵

²³ Havel. *The Power of the Powerless*. 132

²⁴ Havel. *The Power of the Powerless*. 134

²⁵ Havel. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 136

Like Arendt, Havel sees through the government's pretense as a workers movement and comments on the fact that the government lie must permeate the entire structure in order to maintain "credibility." This lie controls those within the regime and the subjects of the regime, making everyone captive to the ideology and structure.

In order to survive within the system, individuals must live within the lie. Like the Greengrocer, they blindly accept the ideology of the regime and keep perpetuating the system. People get swept up in the ritual of the regime and allow their own identity to disappear. They become a member of the regime, relinquishing their own individuality for the identity of the mass movement. In this never-ending cycle, all people are victims and supporters of the regime. The more power one has in the regime, the more controlled by it he becomes. Havel claims, "individuals are reduced to little more than tiny cogs in an enormous mechanism and their significance is limited to their function in this mechanism."²⁶ People unwittingly serve the system and perpetuate the ideology, eliminating competition for the regime.

In this aspect, Havel sees a post-totalitarian government as very similar to Arendt's totalitarian government. Arendt and Havel both see ideology as an important, all-encompassing aspect of a totalitarian or post-totalitarian regime and a lie as the fundamental proof of that ideology, but the effects it then has differs for the two theorists. Arendt sees ideology as a tool used by the Leader and elites to convince the masses and outside world of the legitimacy of the regime. It is a lie told for the benefit of those outside the inner circles of the regime and is used to control and dominate the subjects of the regime. For Havel, the lie controls everyone, including the elite echelons of the totalitarian regime. Once a single lie is created, the lies

²⁶ Havel. *The Power of the Powerless*. 186

continue in order to perpetuate the ideology. Thus, the ruling members of the regime are as controlled by the regime as everyone else, and it is the ideology that holds the power in the post-totalitarian regime.

To Havel, the lie is a system by which the government can maintain appearances. It is not capricious, nor is it based on total domination. It is a means to maintain control and subvert the population. This is different from the lie in Arendt's view because it does not have an despotic quality that allows for it to change on a whim. Without a single Leader's personal whims, the lie is more predictable and therefore, easier to resist. Because one knows how the government will act, he can prepare to act in a way that will challenge the regime. When faced with a capricious dictator, one cannot predict what will come next, nor can he act against it. With a single, entrenched lie, it is easy to foresee the consequences of maintaining that lie because they will be the same as they always have been. This key distinction forms the basis for Havel's theory that resistance to post-totalitarianism is, indeed, possible.

Because the entire regime is wrapped up in a single lie, Havel sees a possibility for resistance by living within the truth and refusing to accept the regime's totalizing power. If individuals were to expose the regime for what it is, a dictatorial government, not a worker's movement, the power system would begin to unravel. Even a simple act can expose the system as a lie. If the Greengrocer were to take down the sign, he would not be buying into the ideology, thus exposing the lie of the regime by doing something different.²⁷ Even though he would put his own life and existence in danger by challenging the regime, in this small act, he would call others' attention to the lie of the regime. Havel explains, "the moment someone

²⁷ Havel. *The Power of the Powerless*. 146

breaks through in one place...thus exposing it as a game - everything suddenly appears in a another light and the whole crust seems to be made of a tissue on the point of tearing and disintegrating uncontrollably."²⁸ Once this lie is exposed, it will continue unravelling, thus continuing to challenge the nature of the regime.

Arendt claims that this type of resistance is impossible. In her conception of totalitarianism, the subtle gestures do not occur because there is no space in which they can arise. People are so isolated from one another that their ability to communicate is eradicated. Havel, however, claims that living in the truth is a way in which people can fight this alienation, explaining, "the singular, explosive, incalculable political power of living within the truth resides in the fact that living openly within the truth has an ally, invisible to be sure, but omnipresent: this hidden sphere. It is from this sphere that life lived openly in the truth grows; it is to this sphere that it speaks, and in it that it finds understanding."²⁹ While political organizations are still forbidden in this society, little acts of resistance can bring people together. In taking down the sign the Greengrocer is communicating to others that he is willing to stand up to the regime and call its bluff. Havel does not see the same dire results as does Arendt in resisting the regime. While he notes that the Greengrocer's life would be in jeopardy, he sees it as his duty to dissent and challenge the regime. Havel does not live in fear of the consequences of resistance, but rather accepts them as expected results of necessary action.

These resistance efforts can come from anywhere and are not merely political in nature. Ways of living in the truth extend to rock groups, protests, letters, refusal to vote, and many other non-political attributes of life. In fact, these subtle ways of resistance can lead to bigger acts of

²⁸ Havel. *The Power of the Powerless*. 150

²⁹ Havel. *The Power of the Powerless*. 152

fighting the regime. Spurred by the 1976 arrest of the rock group The Plastic Peoples of the Universe, activists and dissidents organized to write Charter 77, a document criticizing the government's failure to implement human rights provisions as they had agreed to. Charter 77 was, importantly, not a political organization, nor did it have any political ambitions. Charter 77 was simply a call to action. This, along with the arrest of Plastic People of the Universe, promoted a change in attitude for the populous. They saw an attack on their freedoms because the freedoms of others had been taken away.³⁰ While this movement could not have been directly political, it challenged the government enough to make an impact. Havel explains, "everything that does or can have an indirect political effect...everything the post totalitarian system feels threatened by...opposition is every attempt to live within the truth."³¹ Subtle measures are enough to call into question the legitimacy of the regime. Havel believes that every little step chips away at the totalizing power of the ideology of the regime. Thus, even subtle acts of opposition have lasting and important effects.

In order to resist in such a way, people must have a clear sense of moral and individual strength. Havel sees this as a possibility in a post-totalitarian regime, whereas Arendt believes that the totalitarian regime destroys the space for political ideas, morality, and individuality. Standing up to the system is not a self-serving act, and there are large risks that are taken in either scenario. However, Havel maintains that "life is in the process of transforming itself. A better system will not automatically ensure a better life. In fact, the opposite is true, by creating a better life can a better system develop."³² This moral sense of self is key in order to create a

³⁰ Havel. *The Power of the Powerless*. 154

³¹ Havel. *The Power of the Powerless*. 165

³² Havel. *The Power of the Powerless*. 158

sense of solidarity among groups. If people believe in their cause and their own rights, it is more conceivable that groups will come together to fight for their own freedoms. Havel maintains, “Charter 77 would have been unimaginable without that powerful sense of solidarity among widely differing groups, and without the sudden realization that it was impossible to go on waiting any longer, and that the truth had to be spoken loudly and collectively, regardless of the virtual certainty of sanctions and the uncertainty of any tangible results in the immediate future.”³³ When strong individuals come together in an act of solidarity, the fear of retribution is dispersed amongst many as opposed to a single individual. The collective nature of resistance is both empowering because of the support of others and a wise way to protect individuals from the regime. When people come together to defend their morality and individuality, progress is possible.

Arendt does not see this recognition of individuality as possible in a totalitarian regime. To her, the arbitrary power of the Leader in identifying and condemning “objective enemies” strips a person of his moral self. In Havel’s experience, the “faceless bureaucrats” do not have this same power. They are more controlled by the regime than the subjects because they are put in the position of maintaining the lie. Those outside the power center have the opportunity and the duty to expose the lie for what it is, thus giving them power to act in the regime. This is a crucial distinction between the theoretical analysis of Arendt. A leader with arbitrary power, such as the Leader in Arendt’s totalitarian regime, is not as bound by the lie and structure as the group of bureaucrats whose sole job is to maintain the lie and their positions. Thus, the arbitrary ruler who has the capability to constantly change his mind and incriminate a different group of

³³ Havel. *The Power of the Powerless*. 157

people has more room to instill a regime run by terror and lack of stability. The sheer stability of the post-totalitarian regime inhibits this reign of terror and flexibility of the leader.

The lack of stability in Arendt's conception of totalitarianism makes it harder for individuals to resist the regime. Whereas the post-totalitarian regime is built up on one lie that can be easily exposed by living within the truth, the arbitrary decisions and web of lies made by a totalitarian dictator cannot be as easily combatted or exposed. The totalitarian dictator achieves success by isolating subjects from one another, stripping them of their morality and denying them basic human rights. While people are still subjugated in a post-totalitarian regime, the apathy and complacency of the government who exist solely to perpetuate the lie does not destroy the morality of people in the same way. If people discover their own political and social consciousness, as Havel claims is possible, they will come together to fight for human rights. Despite the risks associated with challenging the government, people will find hope in solidarity and challenge the regime.

ADAM MICHNIK

In the 1970's and 1980's, Adam Michnik wrote letters from prison, demonstrating how one can resist a totalitarian regime. Despite the opposition of the strict government and life in isolation, Michnik managed to promote ideas of freedom and independence. Living under the Communist regime in Poland, Michnik spent time floating in and out of jail cells while attempting to live "within the truth" and confront the government. During this time, alternating periods of reform within the totalitarian regime and stricter military rule affected the nature of the government Michnik was resisting. This fluctuating within the regime made it more possible for dissidents to get a foothold in resistance because they were able to point more clearly to the

failures of the regime. While the reformers made moves towards social justice, they were never strong enough to resist the party apparatus, nor were they themselves free of the party line.³⁴ Politicians like Wladyslaw Gomulka³⁵ promised a better future and won society's trust by speaking of "national and democratic aspirations," but, nonetheless, he made the same egregious errors as his predecessors, leaving politics "covered with infamy and contempt."³⁶ When these reform movements struggled, harsher communist governments took over in their place, cracking down on individual freedoms. While the government crackdowns often included military violence, the government had moderated since the Stalinist regime.³⁷ Nor were people as victimized and afraid of opposing the government. In fact, during the military coup of 1981, people found a way to communicate through underground essays or other forms of correspondence, forming the basis of resistance movements. The solidarity in the face of communism was key to Michnik's plan for opposition. In coming together, he believed that the Poles could put pressure on the government. While he knew that there would be a struggle for human rights and democracy, Michnik accepted the long road ahead and advocated a strong,

³⁴ Michnik. *Letters from Prison*. 33.

³⁵ Wladyslaw Gomulka was a worker and trade unionist, and a Communist activist in Poland. As a reformer within the Communist party, he became a prominent political figure in the People's Republic of Poland. In October 1956, after a period of exile and imprisonment, Gomulka regained power by preventing a Soviet intervention in Poland. At the end of his 14 year rule, Gomulka fell into the corruption of the Communist regime, leaving Poland in a devastated position, once again.

³⁶ Michnik. *Letters from Prison*. 27, 138.

³⁷Schell. "Introduction." *Letters from Prison*. xvii

unified Polish people. By promoting these ideas, Michnik and other members of KOR and Solidarity challenged the government to accept the rights of all citizens of Poland.³⁸

Solidarity and open communication are key aspects of Michnik's platform for resistance. He advocates for organizing an underground in which workers are the center of the movement. If workers and other groups come together and form a unified group, they can more successfully resist the regime than they would be able to on their own. Additionally, solidarity disperses responsibility from one person to many people. In doing this, there is less of a risk of retribution to an individual person. Solidarity creates the foundation for a policy of open communication that is key to opposing the exclusive government. Michnik explains that the resistance needs to be open to all Poles. An underground is only successful when "it is able to create forms of action accessible to every single Pole, when it remains an open and tolerant movement, and it remembers that many roads lead to democracy."³⁹ Due to the exclusive nature of the totalitarian government, an open and accepting resistance is the only way to convince those outside of the regime to stand up to the regime. If the underground is exclusive, people are more alienated and apathetic acceptance of the regime is promoted. However, by encouraging universal autonomy, liberty, and trust, the opposition allowed for more people to be involved in resisting the regime. By encouraging a program of transparency and truth, as Havel suggests, Michnik encourages action on a larger scale, creating the solidarity needed to begin to oppose the post-totalitarian regime.

³⁸ KOR, or Workers' Defense Committee, was a social movement started in Poland by Michnik and others who opposed the totalitarian regime. This movement focused on the protection of worker's rights in their daily lives, and challenged the government to recognize these rights through a series of protests and open letters of dissent. This Committee evolved into the social organization Solidarity, which continued to actively oppose the communist government.

³⁹ Michnik. *Letters from Prison*. 54-55.

While Arendt does not see the future of a resistance movement due to the repressive nature of the government, Michnik fights the repressive nature, believing that the resistance can be stronger than the government. Michnik addresses this prior attitude toward the dictatorship, admitting that they “created a type of man unused to freedom and truth and ignorant of dignity and autonomy.”⁴⁰ This is exactly the attitude Arendt sees, and fears, in the totalitarian regime. Arendt believes that subjects of a totalitarian regime are victims who have lost all sense of morality and are trapped by the regime. Michnik admits that this is a possibility, but he fights against this idea of victimization. There has been an impulse within the government for reform and a renunciation of Stalinist terror, that it is possible for Michnik and his compatriots to stand up to repression. Michnik does not believe that all opposition was doomed to fail, as many had before him. He says, “repression has lost its effectiveness. Our imprisonment does not frighten anyone any more, nor will anyone be enslaved by it.”⁴¹ Michnik knew that he would be imprisoned for his actions, but that did not stop him, nor did it stifle the movements challenging the government. Michnik believed, “Poles will stop going behind bars only when they succeed in their struggle for democratic reform of public life. But if they let their independent institutions be destroyed, the whole country will become a prison.”⁴² The revolutionary spirit was alive and well in Poland because of the desire for freedom. This did not stop with the government crackdown, nor were people’s morality and individuality taken away, as Arendt had seen. Instead, people came together to promote individuality and freedom.

⁴⁰ Michnik. *Letters from Prison*. 77.

⁴¹ Michnik. *Letters from Prison*. 77

⁴² Michnik. *Letters from Prison*. 77

The additional support of the Catholic Church was monumental to the promotion of the revolutionary attitude in Poland. The Catholic Church was an institution that “defended the nation’s identity, rights, and values,” providing the Poles with a source of unity and pride.⁴³ The Church worked as a mediator to protect the rights of individuals by providing “defense of those who have been wronged or humiliated, assistance to the persecuted and their families, public defense of truth and concern for social peace.”⁴⁴ The constant support of the Church provided Poles with a powerful ally, thus

The principles of freedom and human rights were the building blocks of KOR and Solidarity. Michnik put pressure on the government by promoting citizens’ awareness of their rights in a nonviolent manner which caused the government to refocus their response. The government was unaccustomed to a nonviolent resistance, and thus, was unprepared in their response. By exerting this pressure, Poland was forced to recognize human rights. The fact that the Polish People’s Republic signed the Helsinki Act and the Convention No. 87 of the International Labor Organization on the freedom of association and the Convention No. 98 on the rights of workers to organize and to negotiate shows that the government recognized, at least on some level the need for human rights for the populace.⁴⁵ These acts also allowed Michnik and other dissidents to work within the legal system and expose the government’s breaking the law. Despite being crushed by the government, peaceful opposition continued to exist in Poland until the fall of the Soviet Union.

⁴³ Michnick. *Letters from Prison*. 46.

⁴⁴ Michnik. *Letters from Prison*. 59

⁴⁵ Milosz. *Letters from Prison*. xiii.

By being a strong social organization, Solidarity challenged the range of power the government had, but did not fight for control of power. This is an important distinction determining the success of these movements. By organizing to resist the government in subtle, non-violent ways, the dissidents challenged the government to respond. Michnik and other leaders of Solidarity refocused the types of resistance necessary to resist the regime. Subtle acts such as gathering to listen to a lecture or publishing an underground newsletter, can reveal the wrongdoings of the government. By advocating the need for an area for subtle resistance, Michnik created space for dissidence. Michnik believed that the Polish dissidents needed to live a life of legality and truth within the regime. By acting as a free community of individuals in the midst of a totalitarian government, the more social autonomy they could gain. Solidarity was the manifestation of Havel's idea of a parallel polis in which an organized group of people could control their own social institutions and exist in a sphere outside of government control. The government was forced to contend with an organized social organization as opposed to an organized group of individuals, making it more difficult for the government to control every aspect of daily life. Because of the establishment of organization which sought to dictate its daily actions, "daily life [became] a vast terrain on which totalitarian can be opposed."⁴⁶ KOR did just this and organized to defend the daily lives of the workers.

Despite the reprisals for opposing the government, Solidarity continued to make sacrifices and promote this form of action. The 1981 military coup outlawed Solidarity and drove the organization underground. Michnik recounts, "Solidarity was pacified with tanks and bayonets; the resistance of factory crews was overcome," noting the physical defeat of the public

⁴⁶ Schnell. *Letters from Prison*. xxvii

organization. However, he continues by saying that the opposition was not destroyed, adding “no one can use a bayonet to wipe fifteen months of freedom from human memory.”⁴⁷ Even though there was less perceivable freedom, the lasting effects of the brief period of liberty continued to permeate the ideas and actions of the opposition.

In writing letters, Michnik could oppose the government in a challenging way to which they could not adequately respond. His letters did not just call for action, but were an action in themselves because he openly criticized the government and pushed it to adhere to its promises. In this way, Michnik defies Arendt’s claim about solitude not being appropriate for political action. Michnik’s political writings are all done when he is in solitude. In fact, he noted that when he was out of prison, he could not write.⁴⁸ When he was by himself, Michnik was the most politically active. These letters called into focus the illegality of the government and challenged them to take control of their situation. He continued to challenge the regime despite his incarceration.

Michnik’s actions model Havel’s ideas of resistance to a totalitarian regime. While still in prison and oppressed, Michnik sees it as his duty to fight for freedoms, no matter what the consequences might be. He is not afraid of reprisals, nor is he a victim, as Arendt sees in her analysis of totalitarianism. Michnik is a strong leader who constantly challenges the regime, making the government respond to his demands. The subtle act of letter writing, coupled with more fervent and persistent action and organization, exemplifies the kind of resistance that Havel says is necessary. By promoting action in the social realm of life through his letters, Michnik advocates living within the truth. Living within the truth is a positive step in resisting the

⁴⁷ Michnik. *Letters from Prison*. 35.

⁴⁸ Schell. *Letters from Prison*. xxi.

totalitarian regime. In taking control of their social lives, people are challenging the government in an indirectly political way and forcing the government to respond. Michnik's organization of an underground society was a successful way in which the opposition could resist the regime.

CONCLUSION

The key distinction in the ability to resist a totalitarian regime for Hannah Arendt and Vaclav Havel is explained by the fundamental difference in the nature of the totalitarian regimes with which they are dealing, making it as though they are almost incomparable. The structure of power is so disparate between the two theories that different theories of resistance are logical and expected. For Arendt, the control of a single individual with the ability to act on his whims is dangerous and at the center of the problems of a totalitarian government. The capricious nature of his rule makes resistance near impossible because one cannot predict his next action. Additionally, the terror-driven tactics of persecution victimize people, ridding them of their individuality and creating a mass of unthinking automatons. When people are reduced to this level, they cannot resist the regime because they do not have the capacity for individual thought that is necessary for the regime.

Havel conceives of the nature of totalitarianism differently from Arendt, and Adam Michnik demonstrates Havel's ideas on how resistance is possible. The entrenched ideology controls those in power as much as it controls those who are subjects of the regime. There is little escaping the lie that is being told because individuals have lost the capacity to distinguish the difference between that lie and reality. Those in power are bound to uphold this lie while subjects are the regimes are bound by the constraints placed on their freedom. However, Havel maintains that the predictability of the regime is exactly what enables resistance. One must

expose the reality of the situation and undermine the government through speaking the truth. While this situation is dangerous, it is possible if people band together to uniformly oppose the regime. Adam Michnik exemplifies this type of resistance in his letter writing and his active work in KOR and Solidarity. He exposes calls into question the legitimacy of the regime and inspires action in every day life. According to Arendt, this type of action would be impossible, but due to the bureaucratic nature of the regime in which Michnik lives, his opposition is successful. Admittedly, there is still violence and terror present in the regimes that Havel and Michnik are describing. Both Michnik and Havel seem to pass over the effects of the violent regimes as if they are inconsequential to their actions. Whether their attitudes towards resistance outweighed the fear of retribution or the terror of the regimes they were under was moderated cannot be determined from their accounts. However, despite the threat of violence, Havel and Michnik believed that opposition was possible and should happen, whatever the cost. This is a key difference in the outlook of the possibility of resistance between Arendt and Havel and Michnik. Because Havel and Michnik believed in the success of resistance, it was possible.

Arendt and Havel perceive totalitarianism in two fundamentally different, making it difficult to compare the nature of resistance in the two regimes. Because of the innate differences in the nature of totalitarianism, there are different factors which lead to successful resistance or total domination. The fundamental nature of the regime is key in determining the possibility of opposition to a totalitarian government.

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