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On Authoritarianism. *A Review Essay*

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On the Government of the Living, by Michel Foucault. Graham Burchell, trans., Arnold I. Davidson, ed. (New York: Picador, 2014), xviii + 365 pp.

Dictators and Democrats: Masses, Elites, and Regime Change, by Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), xxii + 396 pp.

The Notion of Authority (A Brief Presentation), by Alexandre Kojève (New York: Verso, 2014), xxxiv + 107 pp.

The Politics of Authoritarian Rule, by Milan Svolik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), xviii + 228 pp.

Hitler: Ascent 1889–1939, by Volker Ullrich (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), x + 1008 pp.

A product of the nineteenth-century age of "isms," authoritarianism describes a worldview that promotes the establishment of a hierarchical relation whereby one person or group dominates and governs another without recourse to either physical force or persuasion. Authoritarianism is the advocacy of authority as a source or origin that compels voluntary obedience without question. A person has authority if he or she can command someone to do something without having to do anything other than issue a command; which is to say that the person who obeys recognizes the authority of the person who commands as legitimate or correct.[1] The word authority comes from the Latin,

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[1] My definition of authority stems from the work of Alexandre Kojève discussed here, and Hannah Arendt cited below, who both suggest that authority pertains to the capacity to compel obedience freely without recourse to physical force or persuasion, the latter both being signs that the authority of the one in command is no longer recognized as legitimate or correct by the one being commanded. One might view Max Weber as having anticipated this understanding of authority in *Economy and Society* (1922), where he argues, "Every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is, an *interest* (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience." Yet, in "Politics as a Vocation" (1919), Weber does not distinguish physical force from authority quite as clearly as Arendt and Kojève do when he defines the state as having a "right" to use violence. (For Arendt and Kojève, to repeat, recourse to force indicates a failure of

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auctoritas, which Cicero employs to characterize the distinctive influence of the Senate in ancient Rome: "Power is with the people, authority with the Senate."[2] Whereas power (*potestas*) is political and relies on force or persuasion to command obedience, authority enjoys unequivocal obedience as a source beyond the contested realm of politics.

If not through force or persuasion, how does authority command obedience? Wherein lies the basis of authority? One answer can be found in Fyodor Dostoevsky's famed chapter, "The Grand Inquisitor," which appears in part II of his novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). Dostoevsky suggests that the authority of the Grand Inquisitor consists in the noble lie or narrative he tells to justify his regime of domination. In a move lifted straight from Machiavelli and, less directly, from Augustus, who may have inspired *The Prince*, the authoritarian deceives the masses into believing that he ought to rule over them.[3] He does so by telling a narrative or by appealing to one that has already been established to claim his rule as legitimate.[4]

The Grand Inquisitor's narrative consists of two assertions. One is that human beings, while born to be free, want nothing other than to give up their freedom. Since humans cannot tolerate the uncertainty of deciding for themselves what to do, they will readily relinquish their freedom to someone else. Humans prefer the certainty of servitude over the uncertainty of freedom. "There is no more ceaseless or tormenting care for man, as long as he remains free, than to find someone to bow down to as soon as possible," the Grand Inquisitor suggests.[5] The other assertion is that human beings

one's authority or "right" to rule [2]). Another difference among Weber, Arendt, and Kojève lies in their respective approaches. Whereas Weber seeks to develop a theory for the nature of authority, Arendt's historical approach expressly does not. (The matter is more complicated with Kojève, who argues in his Hegel lectures of 1933–1939 that authority arises historically in the context of the master-slave relation, but then a few years later develops a non-historical understanding of authority in *The Notion of Authority*.) See Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 212; Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Allan Bloom, ed., James H. Nichols, Jr., trans. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 3–30 (this is a partial translation of *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* [1947]); and Hannah Arendt, "What Is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 91–141.

[2] *Cum potestas in populo, auctoritas in senatu sit*. Cicero, *De Re Publica De Legibus*, with English translation by Clinton Walker Keyes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 492–93. Translation modified.

[3] As Niccolò Machiavelli instructs, "One must know how to color one's actions and to be a great liar and deceiver. Men are so simple, and so much creatures of circumstance, that the deceiver will always find someone ready to be deceived." *The Prince*, George Bull, trans. (New York: Penguin, 1999), 57. *Il Principe* comes from *princeps*, meaning first, which was the honorific title preferred by Augustus.

[4] While not dealing with Virgil and the issue of narrative, Arendt emphasizes the connection between *auctoritas* and "the sacredness of foundation," in her essay, "What Is Authority?"

[5] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, trans. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), 254.

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desire security or self-preservation. The Grand Inquisitor invokes bread as a symbol of self-interest to advance the claim that humans naturally desire their protection in what can be read as an allusion to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651). "Give man bread and he will bow down to you, for there is nothing more indisputable than bread."[6] In short, the Grand Inquisitor insists that humans have an incorrigible need for authority. Weak, afraid, and timid, humans want to be ruled by a leader who promises to protect them. The Grand Inquisitor makes this foreboding claim to a silent prisoner, a Christ-like figure, who rejects his view of the human as ineluctably inclined toward self-interest and authority. Beckoning humankind to embrace freedom, Christ's message of self-sacrifice and love repudiates the Grand Inquisitor's dark view of the human as selfish and afraid.[7]

This juxtaposition of Christ with the Grand Inquisitor reinforces one of the overarching propositions of Dostoevsky's parable, namely that authoritarianism rests on a myth or narrative purported to be absolutely true. The dictator's authority derives from the narrative he deploys to justify his advantage over others. Europe's most ferocious dictators of the twentieth century understood this point all too well. Stalin adapted the narrative of the Grand Inquisitor, calling on his people to relinquish their freedom to the party-state in return for material security, whereas Hitler gained obedience from Germans by peddling a salvific narrative about restoring German greatness and defending the nation's security against the imagined threat of Judeo-Bolshevism.

In what follows, I explore the central role narrative plays in the emergence and sustenance of authoritarianism by reviewing some recent works on the politics of authoritarian regimes and the notion of authority in political science, history, and philosophy. If each study comes at the relationship between narrative and authoritarianism in different ways, and if some explore it more wittingly than others, taken together they affirm Dostoevsky's insight about the importance of narrative to authority. I will develop this insight more precisely at the end when I discuss Alexandre Kojève and Michel Foucault's philosophical works. As prolegomena to that more general discussion, let me begin with the books in history and political science, since each of them examines particular examples of authoritarianism. I will begin with Volker Ullrich's depiction of Hitler as a master mythmaker who won over millions of Germans with his beguiling capacity to tell the right story to the right audience at the right moment. If there is a dictator who reveals the importance of narrative to authoritarianism, it is Hitler; and, if there is a historical study that captures this crucial aspect of Hitler's ascent to power, it is Ullrich's study.

[6] Ibid., 254.
[7] Ibid., 252.

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I

Volker Ullrich has written not only an outstanding biography of Hitler but one of the most substantial historical works on Nazism to appear in some time. These are, I suppose, lavish words of praise to heap on any book, and all the more so on one that covers a historical era as well-researched as Hitler's Germany. Perhaps my praise can be justified by discussing very briefly the historiography of Nazism. As is well known, the study of Hitler's Germany has long been animated by a debate about the totality of Hitler's power. Whereas some historians view Hitler as a dictator who possessed total power in Nazi Germany, others see him as ruling over a polycratic party-state that took on a life of its own. The former labelled themselves intentionalists for their emphasis on the power of Hitler's ideological intentions to determine Nazi policy, whereas the latter called themselves functionalists in light of their claim that Nazi policy was propelled in ever more radical directions by the agonistic functioning of Hitler's party-state.[8] Yet, despite the differences between these two schools of thought, the tendency has been to view Hitler as a man of limited intellectual and political prowess. Hence, historians have often emphasized factors independent of Hitler as propelling him into power, such as those pertaining to modern Germany's "special path" to modernity; the legacy of the Great War; Weimer's conservative elite; the Weimar constitution; the Great Depression, and so on. In each of these explanations, Hitler plays little more than a cameo role, or no role at all in the case of the enormous literature that grew up around attempts to locate the origins of Nazism in the "illiberalism" of Imperial Germany. This thumbnail sketch of a rich historiography no doubt simplifies matters but perhaps not unfairly so, for one can safely conclude, I think, that historians have tended to be less interested in focusing on Hitler's political capacities in understanding the collapse of Weimar democracy and the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship.

Such is not the case with Ullrich who turns attention on Hitler in a way that has rarely been done hitherto. To be sure, fine biographies of Hitler already exist. But Ullrich captures Hitler's aggressive attempt to overthrow the Weimar Republic and establish an authoritarian regime as few historians have done. Driven by both a rapacious desire for power and an ideological hatred of democracy, Hitler was determined to destroy the Weimar Republic and create a dictatorship. His determination to do so was matched by his political cleverness to carry it out. Contrary to many contemporary observers and historians, Ullrich does not underestimate Hitler's political capacities. Rather, he argues that it was precisely those capacities that allowed Hitler to exploit the conditions given to him by the Weimar Republic—its fragile experiment

[8] For a survey of this debate, see Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 4th ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 81–108.

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with democracy, its conservative elites, its economic weaknesses, its divided political culture. Hitler was certainly dealt a good hand of cards, but unfortunately he played them very well. In less adroit and pugnacious hands, Ullrich suggests, the republic would very likely not have collapsed into the kind of totalitarian dictatorship it did. "Without Hitler, the rise of National Socialism would have been unthinkable" (92).

In Ullrich's portrait, Hitler possessed the clarity to know precisely what he wanted and the audacity to do something to attain it. He wanted to consolidate as much power as possible under his control. This he made clear just a few days after being brought into power by Franz von Papen and Paul von Hindenburg who, in one of the baleful misreads in modern European history, thought that Hitler could be moderated by conservatives like themselves. "In two months, we'll have pushed Hitler so far into a corner that he'll squeak," Papen assured an acquaintance (371–72). In public, Hitler gave Papen reason to hope that he could be moderated. In his first statement as chancellor on 1 February 1933, Hitler invoked the conservative values of restoring Germany's national pride after the humiliating defeat of the Great War and overcoming the class divisions that had fractured the country since Bismarck. He made himself sound like a garden variety conservative, even directing some flattery towards the "honorable Reich president" (415). Yet, two days later, in a private meeting with the commanders of the German army and navy, Hitler outlined a far more radical plan to root out Marxism, build the "sternest, authoritarian state leadership," and eradicate "the cancerous damage of democracy" (416).

Hitler was not interested in moderation. He wanted to create an authoritarian regime that awarded as much power to himself as possible—a goal he rarely admitted as bluntly as he did to Germany's military brass. On the contrary, he often disguised the radicality of his political ambitions through the many stories he crafted to suit the expectations of his various audiences. Either by guile or political feel, Hitler had the capacity to know precisely which conventions and clichés to invoke for a given audience. To the German people on the campaign trail, Hitler appealed to his "audience's religious need for salvation," in Ullrich's apt words, by deploying a narrative of despair and redemption (230). Darkly portraying Weimar Germany as corrupt, feeble, and divided, Hitler promised to unify the German nation and therewith redeem it through an aggressive display of leadership. He turned himself precisely into the "charismatic" leader of a community (*Gemeinde*) that Max Weber described already in 1919.[9] "What we're promising is not an improvement in material conditions for an individual class of people, but rather the multiplication of the strength of the nation since only this will put us on the path to power and to the liberation of the entire people," Hitler said at a political rally in 1930 (230). In this speech, Hitler appeals

[9] Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, 243.

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to the values of unity, fellowship, and authority that Christianity has long embraced as its own.[10] The latter value, authority, has received surprisingly little attention from historians, including Ullrich who does not discuss it at any length. But Hitler's appeal to authority and obedience is central to his entire political persona as a "strongman" (127). Hitler portrayed himself as a "leader" who would guide the German people back to national greatness and protect them from the threating "Jewish Other"—an anti-Semitic fantasy that Hitler and his henchmen propagated to consolidate their authoritarian regime.

To the authorities of the Weimar Republic, Hitler spun a much different story that appealed to their law and order sensibilities. In a court hearing concerning Reichswehr officers who had disobeyed orders from the Defense Ministry against developing contacts with the Nazis, Hitler repeated his often made promise not to "use illegal means" to achieve his political ends—a path he pursued after the failed Beer Hall Putsch in Munich in 1923. "In this constitutional way," he explained, "we will try to achieve decisive majorities in all legislative bodies so that, if we're successful, we can remold the state in a form that corresponds to our ideas" (241). If his audience did not see through his rhetorical appeal to legality, Joseph Goebbels certainly did. "Clever move," he said to one of the officers on trial. "What do the authorities think they can do to us now? They were waiting to make their move. But now we're strictly legal. Legal no matter what" (241). It was clever indeed. Shortly after his testimony, Reich Defense Minister Wilhelm Groener expressed increased willingness to work with the Nazis after hearing about Hitler's commitment to the rule of law.

To the power players of the Weimar Republic on the eve of coming into power and shortly after doing so, Hitler portrayed himself in yet another way, appealing to their aristocratic sensibility of deference to authority. Most tellingly, Hitler gradually won over both Franz von Papen and Paul von Hindenburg. When they first met, Papen said later, Hitler showed none of the "magnetic" personality that had attracted so many Germans; "He behaved politely and modestly," he recalled in his 1952 memoirs (311). As Ullrich astutely argues, this was apparently a role that Hitler played to win over those in power and "lure them into a false sense of security concerning his real intentions" (311). And, indeed, this is how Hitler gained Hindenburg's confidence. As is well known, Hindenburg was initially not enthused about Hitler but he slowly warmed up to him, thanks to prodding from Papen and to an important decision Hitler made in late January 1933. Despite his desire for total control of the government, Hitler relented to the demands of Papen that conservatives like himself have a strong presence in any cabinet that would comprise Hitler as Reich Chancellor. On 28 January, Papen informed

[10] For a brief discussion of the history of authority and Christianity, see Herbert Marcuse, *A Study on Authority*, Joris De Bres, trans. (New York: Verso, 2008), 12–34; originally published in 1936 as *Studien über Autorität und Familie*.

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Hindenburg about this change on Hitler's part, a change that impressed the president as a sign of Hitler's "moderation" (365). Hitler had shown himself to be a serious politician with whom one could work. That Hitler acted modestly and deferentially to both men likely only affirmed their conviction that they could control him.

The "breakthrough" in Hitler and Hindenburg's relationship came on 21 March 1933 in the city of Potsdam when they inaugurated the newly elected Reichstag. For his part, Hindenburg sanctioned the authority of the emerging Nazi regime by saying that it had attained the "constitutional basis for its work" (433), while, for his, Hitler showed respect for his elder's authority. Though Hitler began his remarks with his usual salvific narrative of making Germany great again, he devoted most of his time to praising Hindenburg. "Your wonderful life is a symbol for all of us of the indestructible vitality of our people" (434). This glowing praise had the desired effect of making Hindenburg more comfortable with Hitler. "The old man very happy about Potsdam," Goebbels noted (436). Three days after the propaganda event that Goebbels had organized, Hindenburg told Hamburg's mayor that he now appreciated Hitler's gifts as a politician, and by a year later it was Hindenburg praising Hitler. In a handwritten note to Hitler, Hindenburg expressed his "sincere respect for your passionate work and your great achievements" (872). By this point, Hitler had seized a great deal of political control, in no small part due to his ability to deploy various narratives to advance his "right" to rule.

Among these narratives the ones Hitler told to Germany's ruling elite to consolidate his regime might have been the most consequential. Of course, Hitler's ability to gain voters allowed him to advance his way into power. But, as Milan W. Svolik shows in his important revisionist study on authoritarianism, the establishment of a total dictatorship such as Hitler's Germany requires, first and foremost, gaining control over potential rivals for power in the dictator's inner circle or government. Svolik challenges the conventional wisdom that the greatest threat to an authoritarian regime lies in the power of the people whom the dictator must be ever concerned to control through propaganda and repression.[11] A much greater threat to dictatorial control comes from "traditional elites, prominent party members, or generals in charge of repression" who challenge the dictator's rule through a coup d'état (2). Of 303 authoritarian leaders who lost power between 1946 and 2008 in non-constitutional ways, nearly 70 percent were removed by regime insiders and only 11 percent by a popular uprising (4–5).[12]

[11] Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1968 [1951]) is the classic study of this conventional view of authoritarianism.

[12] By non-constitutional, Svolik means "any type of exit from office that did *not* follow a natural death or a constitutionally mandated process, such as an election, a vote by a ruling body, or a

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With this striking data in hand, Svolik proceeds to discuss the strategies dictators use to maintain control over their underlings who threaten to become rivals. He focuses on two different strategies (aside from the dictator's recourse to physical violence as the "ultimate arbiter" of conflict amid the collapse of his capacity to command obedience without question [2]). The first is the dictator's indiscriminate use of his power to dismiss, publically humiliate, rotate, and reappoint underlings at his whim. The potency of this strategy, Svolik argues, consists in "the arbitrary and public nature of their abrogation." He adds: "rotations, dismissals, or personal attacks come unexpectedly, without an objective rationale, and are accompanied by a campaign of public humiliation." The primary goal of such actions is to "publically signal" the dictator's independence from and power over his administrators (80).

The second strategy dictators commonly use to keep rivals at bay is the creation of a cultish narrative that promotes adoration of the dictator. This strategy has the effect of not only asserting the message that power lies only with one person but also of elevating the "leader" to a god-like position. Svolik gives numerous examples of such deification: the leader of the Dominican Republic from 1930 to 1961, known as His Excellency, the Generalissimo, Doctor Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, Honorable President of the Republic, Benefactor of the Nation, Restorer of the Financial Independence of the Country, and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces was placed equal to God when his government made even churches put up the slogan "God in Heaven, Trujillo on Earth" (80). Much of the same went for the Congo's dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko. As one of his ministers put it, "In all religions, and at all times there are prophets. Why not today? God has sent a great prophet, our prestigious Guide Mobutu—this prophet is our liberator, our Messiah. Our Church is the [Popular Movement of the Revolution]. Its chief is Mobutu, we respect him like one respects the Pope. Our gospel is Mobutuism. This is why crucifixes must be replaced by the image of our Messiah" (81).

Just as Hitler created an image of himself as a messiah, so too have many other authoritarian leaders portrayed themselves as salvific figures, appealing to the enduring power of the messianic narrative in European and global history. This narrative is remarkably similar across authoritarian regimes: it exalts a chosen leader as a great hero of the people who has come to liberate them from their hardships.

hereditary succession." Such changes in leadership plausibly went against the will of the incumbent (4). The examples of the French, Russian, and East European revolutions would seem to contradict this conclusion at first blush. But in each of these cases, popular unrest toppled regimes significantly weakened by economic challenges, war, and/or other factors (e.g., the Chernobyl disaster in the case of the collapse of Soviet Communism).

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What might these hardships be, precisely? In their study on the rise and collapse of democracies since the mid-1970s to the present, Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman examine the role of economic hardships in the reversion of democracies to authoritarian regimes. While they caution against assuming a necessary relationship between weak economies and authoritarianism, they nevertheless suggest in a comparative discussion of Venezuela, Russia, and Turkey that significant economic instability seems to create the conditions for the rise of strongmen. Hugo Chávez, Vladimir Putin, and Recep Erdoğan all emerged from periods of economic instability that swept them into power. Once in office, each were then able to consolidate their grip on power as their nations' economies improved; they exploited economic growth to bring the state apparatus under their control, a move made most blatantly by Chávez, who used the profits from rising oil prices in 2003–2004 to fund a massive welfare program for low-income groups in advance of a referendum on his presidency. In the referendum, he garnered 59 percent of the vote by stylizing himself as a benevolent liberator of the impoverished against elites that had left them behind. Like Chávez, Erdoğan has also posed as a populist to advance his political power, portraying himself as the voice of low-income and religiously conservative Turks who have been neglected by out-of-touch elites.

Such is not the case with Putin, who has appealed to a different if equally conventional tradition—nationalism. In the wake of the humiliating political collapse of Soviet power and the tremendous economic instability of the 1990s, Putin has promised to make Russia powerful again. The basic narrative he invokes centers on restoring Russia to its historically destined role as a salvific counterbalance to Western Europe and the United States. In appealing to traditional notions of Russian identity and pride, Putin has met considerable success and now appears, as Haggard and Kaufman write, in "a better position" to survive challenges to his rule than might be the case in Venezuela and perhaps Turkey (333).

II

In each of these cases, the authoritarian regime functions in the same fundamental manner. The dictator's capacity to command obedience lies in people recognizing his authority. The leader speaks and people voluntarily accept his message or orders without questioning them (the moment the authoritarian has to resort to violence or, very unlikely, discussion among equals he has lost his authority to another authority).[13] This conclusion prompts a basic question:

[13] In the case where a person or group of persons does not recognize the authority of the dictator (in the name of recognizing another authority), then the dictator must recourse to force or terror of some kind; that is, the dictator must inspire fear to compel acquiescence. See Alexandre Kojève, "Tyranny and Wisdom," in Timothy W. Burns and Bryan-Paul Frost, eds., *Philosophy, History,*

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Why is a given authority recognized? The French-Russian philosopher Alexandre Kojève, a polymath who gained fame in the 1930s for his lectures on Hegel, provides one answer in his book, *The Notion of Authority*, which has now appeared in English translation. Written in 1942 in Marseilles, where Kojève lived during the Nazi occupation of France, the book offers an astute definition of authority. The authoritarian act, he suggests, "is distinguished from all other acts by the fact that it does not encounter *opposition* from the person or persons towards whom it is directed. This in turn presupposes both the *possibility* of opposing it and the *conscious* and *voluntary* renunciation of realizing this possibility" (8).

Based on this definition, Kojève identifies four types of authority: that of the father, the master, the leader, and the judge. These types correspond to four "theories" of authority as a source that commands voluntary obedience without question: (1) the divine; (2) the master's recognized superiority in the master and slave relation; (3) wisdom, knowledge, and the possibility of anticipating the future; and (4) equity or justice. The first of these theories is the most unassailable, the other three being open at any time to the possibility of questioning. Authority that derives from the divine is most unassailable because it can act on me without "my having any possibility of reacting on it" (12). When God commands, one *must* obey since one cannot argue, hit, or walk away from God. The possibility of reacting to God is absent.

The type of authority that corresponds to the divine is that of the father whose authority stems from his being the creator or cause of someone or something (a social or political group, for example). In regards to the latter, Kojève returns to the original Latin root of *auctoritas*, *auctor*—the one who originates or creates something—to describe the authority of the father: "The purest case of the Authority of the Father, considered as the 'authority' of the 'cause' over the effect, is perhaps the Authority that an Author (in the broadest sense of the word) has over his Work [*Œuvre*]. (*For example*: the Authority of a leader of a literary, artistic, or other 'school of thought'; the authority of the founder of a 'colony'; the Authority of a Baden-Powell among the scouts—and so on)" (28).

Concrete cases of real authority involve complex combinations of all four types of authority. Kojève illustrates this point by turning to Marshal Pétain, but an even better example might be the Führer who enabled him to come into power. Hitler was master, judge, leader, and father all in one, although I might argue that Germans recognized him largely in his capacity as father and judge: as the creator of a mass movement of the *Volk* and as an arbiter interested in gaining justice for Germany after the terrible wrongs it suffered from having been stabbed in the back by Communists and Jews. Hitler's authority as

and Tyranny: Reexamining the Debate between Leo Strauss and Alexandre Kojève (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 308.

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a "leader" and "master" derived from the central narrative Hitler (with Goebbels' help) created of himself as a god-like, above-party-politics kind of figure who promised to rescue Germany from a post-Versailles system of governance whose authority he and many Germans violently refused to recognize.

Hitler violently asserted one authority to supplant another that he rejected. This violent assertion of one authority over another defines the essence of history according to Kojève, who turns to Hegel's master-slave relation to understand history as constituted by the struggle of one person to gain recognition from another person. History is the vain struggle for recognition. I desire the recognition of my desire by another. This desire for recognition is intrinsically authoritarian insofar as it involves me seeking to assert my desire over another (17). If Kojève himself sought to overcome this conflictual relationship between master and slave through his famous and often misunderstood end of history thesis, one of the chief theorists of Nazism, Carl Schmitt, sought to preserve it through his katechonic interpretation of history as a perpetual cycle of conflict driven by the friend-enemy distinction.[14] Like Hitler, Schmitt affirmed the authoritarian impulse to assert oneself over another.

How might one transcend the conflictual relation of authoritarianism? Among others, this question animates one of the last lectures Michel Foucault delivered at the Collège de France, which has recently been translated as *On the Government of the Living*. While Foucault himself speaks of governmentality, power, and domination rather than authoritarianism per se, this lecture and much of his oeuvre addresses the problem of authority as I have defined it in this essay. Foucault's histories challenge regimes of domination, most famously those pertaining to madness, sexuality, and discipline. In *On the Government of the Living*, Foucault seeks to understand the relationship between relations of power and regimes of truth-telling (or what he calls *véridiction*). He suggests that power and domination rely on an assertion of truth as final or absolutely correct. Foucault turns to truth understood as correctness for two reasons. One is historical. Foucault argues that an assertion of absolute correctness has been the pillar that props up an authoritarian relationship in European history at least since the spread of Christianity, if not earlier.[15] It is not brute force but the assertion of correctness that makes authoritarianism possible. "I

[14] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, George Schwab, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). The *katechon*, from the Greek κατέχον meaning "holding," is a cryptic force described in 2 Thessalonians 2 that precludes the apocalypse from prematurely occurring against God's divine plan. I interpret the *katechon* in Schmitt's thought to mean delaying the end of history (i.e., preserving history as the political struggle between friend and enemy). For a somewhat similar take, see Julia Hell, "*Katechon*: Carl Schmitt's Imperial Theology and the Ruins of the Future," *Germanic Review* 84, 4 (2009): 283–326.

[15] I do not have space here to explain Foucault's historical argument in detail. In *nuce*, he makes a tripartite connection between power, truth, and salvation. See his later works, especially: *On The Government of the Living*; *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*, Fabienne Brion and Bernard E. Harcourt, eds., Stephen W. Sawyer, trans. (Chicago: University

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am right; you are wrong" is the essence of authoritarianism insofar as the authoritarian relationship consists in the issuance of and obedience to a command.

The other is philosophical-political. Foucault suggests that an assertion of correctness tends to conceal the conditions that make a particular practice of truth possible and, thus, the conditions that make a particular kind of authority possible. Correctness conceals the set of rules, axioms, and presuppositions that support any particular veridiction. Put somewhat differently, correctness forgets its own origins.[16] Any regime of truth has a history, according to Foucault. And if it has a history, then any truth is contingent or fragile. No truth or authority is absolute or divine, that is, outside history. From this perspective, Foucault seeks to move beyond the conflictual relation of authoritarianism by insisting on the fragility of any and all forms of authority. "Power has no intrinsic legitimacy," Foucault writes. "All power only ever rests on the contingency and fragility of a history [*histoire*, a story or narrative]" (77).[17] If we all equally come to affirm the fragility of the narratives we tell, letting go of the need to assert them on others, then we can come together as a community around the absence of certainty and correctness.

Let me bring this short essay to a close by returning to Dostoevsky, who offers a different attempt to move out of the Schmittian, conflictual relationship of authoritarianism, an attempt that another great thinker of authoritarianism in the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt, embraced as well. It is suggested by the prisoner to whom the Grand Inquisitor speaks. The prisoner remains silent, refusing to tell a story against that of the Grand Inquisitor. His only action is a kiss—an action that resists the action of asserting oneself over another. The prisoner embraces the Christian concept of love, not only the command to love one's enemy, but love as the overcoming of the self so as to give to others. In her work on Augustine, Arendt recognized the transformative potential of the Christian concept of love.[18] She saw in Christianity a rejection of the Hobbesian creation of community based on self-interest and fear, suggesting that Christianity creates community based on transcending the self to reach out to the other. Love demands that one let go of the selfish inclination to

of Chicago Press, 2014); and *Security, Territory, Population*, Arnold I. Davidson, ed., Graham Burchell, trans. (New York: Picador, 2007).

[16] Hence, the writing of histories (or genealogies) becomes expressly political for Foucault. As he put it, the present condition is "constituted, and thus can be unconstituted, by politics" (*Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, 267). See Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

[17] *Histoire* comes from the Latin *historia* as a translation of the ancient Greek ἱστορία (investigation/account/narrative).

[18] Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); this text is a revised and translated version of her published dissertation, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin: Versuch einer philosophischen Interpretation* (1929).

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conquer and control; it demands that one relinquish the vain desire to elevate oneself above others in a regime of authority and hierarchy.

Vanity is central from Arendt's perspective because the need for authority derives from the need to be recognized as master, as powerful, as great in ostentatious display of one's privileges, possessions, and riches. The need to be great isolates one from others and, thus, it is this very need that love asks one to leave behind. As an antipode to authoritarianism, love perhaps brings out all the more sharply the profound point that Arendt, Dostoevsky, and the authors discussed in this review essay make about authoritarianism: that it is based on and advanced by beguiling narratives of self-exaltation.

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