

The Legacies of Totalitarianism

A Discussion of Aviezer Tucker's *The Legacies of Totalitarianism: A Theoretical Framework*

The Legacies of Totalitarianism: A Theoretical Framework. By Aviezer Tucker. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 272p. \$99.99.

The concept of totalitarianism emerged between the two world wars in twentieth-century Europe to become a central concept of Cold War social science designed to highlight similarities between the Nazi and Soviet regimes and implicitly to contrast these forms of dictatorship with liberal democracy. While in the 1960s and 1970s many critics challenged the concept's Cold War uses as an ideology of "the West," the idea of totalitarianism and later "post-totalitarianism" played important roles in East Central Europe, where they helped dissident intellectuals, academics, and activists both to understand and to challenge Soviet-style communism. The concept of "totalitarianism" remains heavily contested. But whatever one thinks about the concept's social scientific validity, there can be no doubt that it played a crucial role in both the scholarship of communism and the public intellectual debates about the possibilities of post-communism. Aviezer Tucker's *The Legacies of Totalitarianism: A Theoretical Framework* (Cambridge 2015) addresses many of these issues, and so we have invited a range of political scientists to comment on the book and the broader theme denoted by its title.

András Bozóki

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Aviezer Tucker—the author of *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel* (2000) and *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography* (2004)—is one of those political theorists who understand the communist and post-communist political processes of East Central Europe the best. Yet, surprisingly, he uses neither these notions nor the concept of democracy in his recent book. Instead of referring to ideas and ideologies to describe political systems, he is investigating the everyday operations of the oppressive regimes themselves. Tucker returns to Hannah Arendt's classic (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951), but further elaborates and extends her concept of totalitarianism by differentiating *totalitarian* from *late totalitarian* and *post-totalitarian* regimes. Instead of taking the optimistic concept of "post-communist democracies," he carefully analyzes the legacies of totalitarianism, and writes about post-totalitarian regimes.

Unlike several historians and political scientists, Tucker states that totalitarianism in East Central Europe

did not exclusively belong to the 1950s, but existed up until 1989. For him, totalitarianism dominated the eastern part of the European continent for half century. What Václav Havel and other dissidents called post-totalitarianism in the late 1970s and during the 1980s, for Tucker was still the era of late totalitarianism. Tucker thus reconnects the revolutionary and "mature" forms of totalitarianism by claiming that, despite the decline of ideology and the advance of elite change, the structure of the regime remained fundamentally the same. The well-argued conceptual innovation of "late totalitarianism" belongs to the remarkable novelties of the book. Students of fascism and communism have not been using this notion so far.

Tucker also separates late totalitarian systems from right-wing authoritarian regimes or military dictatorships. He rejects the wave approach of Samuel Huntington, an emblematic approach of transitology, by claiming that presenting transitions as "waves" is by no means a theory, only a metaphor. Moreover, as Tucker insists, it is a misleading metaphor because it puts authoritarian and late totalitarian regimes into the same basket, as if they were similar settings, to justify the universalist ambition of transitology. For him, the conflation of late totalitarianism with authoritarianism "to construct autocracy, a conceptual amalgam of all nondemocratic regimes, is too cumbersome" for any serious analytical study (p. 9).

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This distinction helps in separating regimes that exercised *extensive low-intensity oppression* over the whole population (late totalitarianism) from regimes that exercised *narrow but intensive oppression* over a small, politically active section of the population (authoritarianism). Authoritarian regimes based their power on the military, while totalitarian regimes relied on the secret service. Authoritarian regimes separated their illegal action from the law, while totalitarian regimes created fake legislation and a legal profession that was fully politicized.

To make these conceptual distinctions explicit was just the first step in Tucker's discussion of his central topic: the political theory of *post-totalitarianism*. For he believes that path-dependency, that is, the totalitarian legacy, fully shapes the development of post-totalitarian regimes. Not only does he separate post-totalitarian and post-authoritarian societies but he also rejects the overarching ambition of transition studies that aimed at explaining both types of transition with the same conceptual apparatus. He claims that the uniqueness of post-totalitarianism lies in the lack of structures of solidarity, in weak civil society, and in the shallow democratic political culture. Taken together, these factors hindered these regimes' development to democracy.

As Tucker argues, in post-authoritarian regimes, transitions were relatively easier because the oppressive institutions of dictatorship could be separated from "healthy" ones, and the former ones could be kept under close control by the democratic forces. In post-totalitarian regimes, on the other hand, democratic forces were much weaker and unable to cope with the informal power and invisible networks of former secret service officers. The problem for Tucker is not so much whether the post-authoritarian transformations are single transitions while the East European ones are double (or triple) transitions, but the lack of agency in the latter case.

Tucker rejects the special importance attributed to elite pacts and roundtable talks in the post-totalitarian condition, as contrasted to the cases of Southern Europe and Latin America. As he notes, only Poland and Hungary completed their negotiated exit from late totalitarianism before the fall of the Berlin Wall. In these two countries the talks were centered on the question of *what* to do, while in cases which occurred after the collapse of the Wall, negotiators focused on *how* the changes had to be implemented. Indeed, these two late totalitarian cases (Poland, Hungary) resembled most the Spanish or Portuguese transitions, since these were the *least totalitarian* countries in East Central Europe. This phenomenon accidentally underlines the narrative of the transition school, which claimed that there was no negotiated exit possible from totalitarian countries. Negotiated transition requires the internal division of elites which cannot be tolerated in a classic totalitarian system. By the 1980s, Poland looked like a military regime, while Hungary was a sort of aging, non-ideological dictatorship. These countries

fit less to Tucker's statement of post-totalitarian peculiarity. But in all other cases, except East Germany, Tucker is right. Processes of post-totalitarian legislation were much weaker, slower than in any post-authoritarian setting, and they were controlled by a new power coalition of late totalitarian elites and their new friends coming from the former dissident circles. Tucker convincingly elaborates his point with detailed discussion of rough and shallow justice (lustration and retribution) in East-Central Europe.

Tucker does not define the changes of 1989 as revolutions because for him the concept of revolution includes the change of the elites. Since elite discontinuity rarely occurred, due to the survival of secret service networks, a power deal was made among the elite groups which led to post-totalitarianism rather than democracy.

In general, Tucker does not hide his reservations about the optimistic and universalist approaches of the transitology school (even if he does not refer to many of its exponents) and he rather favors the more skeptical, path-dependency and area-specific explanations of scholars as Kenneth Jowitt, Stephen Holmes, Jon Elster, Valerie Bunce, Michael McFaul and others. By rejecting the universalist approaches to social change, Tucker implicitly questions the major liberal narratives of the time, exemplified by Francis Fukuyama.

In defense of the universalist agenda, it is important to note that transformations sprung from the collapse of the Cold War global order without precipitating nuclear war. It is better to include former communists as participants in transition than to accept violent conflict. According to the conventional wisdom of the time, incomplete elite change was the price to pay for peaceful regime change. Transition theories celebrated the non-violent character of transformations from Chile through South Africa to Poland and, most importantly, the non-violent collapse of the Soviet Union. Transitology was widely seen as the procedural completion of universal progress towards a peaceful post-Cold War global setting. In this victorious atmosphere, the differences between post-totalitarian and post-authoritarian transitions seemed to be less significant. Tucker is right in recognizing that we were perhaps too quick to overlook the pre-transition differences which could not be eliminated afterwards. Yet, if one sticks to the path-dependency approach, one should pay at least slight attention to the pre-totalitarian legacies as well. But this was clearly beyond the scope of Tucker's book.

Aviezer Tucker has written an amazingly rich book with countless sharp observations related to both contingent events and more general processes. He displays an insider's knowledge in several aspects of post-totalitarianism and is not afraid taking the pain in correcting several false judgements, myths, and misbeliefs related to post-totalitarian politics (However, I found a factual mistake: József Antall was not a reformed communist leader). As it turns out by the end, this book is much more than an exercise in political philosophy; it is unusually insightful in offering and reinterpreting explanations in comparative sociology and historiography.

Valerie Bunce

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In this empirically rich and analytically rigorous book, Avierzer Tucker brings together insights from political philosophy and findings from social science studies in order to evaluate the impact of the communist past on post-communist transitions in Central and East Europe (and, to a lesser extent, Russia). The overarching argument is that totalitarianism cast a very long shadow, whether we analyze the development after 1989 of public institutions, such as the educational system; issues that capture the core differences between state socialism and capitalist liberal democracy, such as rule of law and property rights; or questions of justice, such as policies associated with rectification and retribution.

The book makes a number of compelling arguments. I highlight three in particular. First, unlike many analysts, Tucker dates the beginning of the transition not in 1989–1990 but, rather, in the last years of communism (which he terms late totalitarianism) when, to borrow from Jacek Tarkowski, apparatchiks began to transform themselves into “entrepreneurchiks.” As Tucker summarizes this dynamic, leaving communism provided the communist elite with a welcome opportunity to solidify their interests by adding rights to the equation. As a result, they were able to dispense with both hierarchy and envy—the primary impediments to their accumulation of property during the last years of state socialism.

Second, much of his analysis rests on the argument that the transition to democracy and especially capitalism required resources that had been seriously depleted because of the totalitarian experience. These deficits were a key problem, for example, in the attempts across the region to address questions of justice, thereby affecting the depth, scope, and roughness of justice. However, the lack of resources was also a problem for staffing political, economic, and public institutions. Personnel appropriate for a liberal order “do not grow on trees” (p. 182).

Finally, Tucker draws insightful philosophical distinctions between liberals and republicans and, in the case of property rights in particular, between radical and conservative, historical, and consequentialist positions (see, especially, the chart on p. 158). These distinctions anchor competing approaches to transformation, and they alert us to the complex choices and their trade-offs when the issue at hand involves dealing with the past and moving from one political-economic regime to another. Chapters 2–5, which feature the strongest arguments and the richest array of evidence in the book, build on such distinctions

and, in the process, remind us of how much we can benefit from combining political theory with empirical evidence.

There are three aspects of this study, however, that I find less compelling. One is the costs associated with the author’s decision at the outset to concentrate on commonalities rather than differences among these regimes, especially during the totalitarian phase. For those of us who worked on state socialism, the differences among these regimes—for example, in the size, cohesion, strategies, successes, and failures of dissident communities; in the extent, form, and targets of repression; in cultural diversity; and in how regimes addressed the region-wide problem of the economic slowdown—were important in and of themselves and, later, gave us the tools we needed to analyze variation in post-communist pathways. Put simply, once regime transition began, we were in a strong position to use these indicators of variation as independent rather than dependent variables.

Second, I am uncomfortable with Tucker’s use of the term *late totalitarianism* to describe the last decades of state socialism. Most of us who worked on these regimes during the communist period did not use the term *totalitarianism* because it was an ideal type. Moreover, it failed more and more as these systems evolved to capture their essential political and economic characteristics—for example, the opening up of many of these economies to the global economy and the declining role of both terror and ideology.

Finally, Tucker’s treatment of the transition is asymmetric. Politics, including such issues as political parties, public opinion, and legislatures, receives scant attention. Every analyst is entitled, of course, to pick and choose his or her issues of interest. That recognized, however, can we understand the issues of central importance to an analyst, such as law and the transition to a market economy, without recognizing the importance of politics? Indeed, I would take this argument one step further. Like the communist experiment, so the liberal experiment was founded on four premises: Resources were scarce, the past was unjust, political and economic change went hand in hand, and, finally, time was of the essence. Politics, in short, was in command.

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Aviezer Tucker ambitiously offers a “political theory of post-totalitarianism.” Despite the normatively loaded and analytical baggage associated with term “totalitarianism” he doggedly defends his terminological choice, narrowing the meaning application to a state where there is “only a single elite with no competition [and] total control over stratification, entrance to the elite” (p. 7). He takes aim at the “transitology” theorists as partisan optimists who “presumed that democratic consolidation is destiny”—an approach more aspirational than analytical. Tucker, following Ken Jowitt, Valerie Bunce and others, focuses on the legacies of the “forcibly homogenizing” Soviet model as generating path dependencies that, more than 25 years since the fall of communism, are in desperate need of theorization and comparison. Tucker does what contemporary political theorists often ignore: engagement in the recent past in a rigorous, structured and yet *not* detached manner, attentive to both peril and possibility while addressing first order questions, such as justice and the right ordering of society.

Regime change offered the former elite the opportunity to align interests with rights—as their relative negative (and naked) liberties were *always* at risk of arbitrary retraction. Such privilege was effectively translated by privatization into ownership and influence. Moreover, constitutional enshrinement of citizenship rights of representation, association, and expression provided no automatic or easy access to the design processes of the new order. This Tucker explains in his chapters on rough justice, retribution, and rectification.

Tucker argues that post-totalitarian justice was scarce, inaccurate, shallow, and, in his terms, rough: necessarily so given the costs and the procedural challenges involved. The reasons why make for depressing reading and reinforce his argument about the impact of Soviet legacies. Judges used to see themselves as civil servants, rather than guardians of their own independence; “reformed” systems remain overburdened with bureaucracy and underfunded, causing delay. Woefully incomplete legal training with scant attention to interpretation and critical thinking was combined with obvious economic motivation to specialize in privatization, restitution, and corporate representation. Only in former East Germany could post-totalitarian justice be deeper and more accurate: after all, West German taxpayers fielded the bill. Various forms of lustration only sloppily met the requirement of retribution, and in the end, historians were

more often employed than lawyers, spending their careers in the blame game. As Tucker points out, they are certainly cheaper in the short term.

Given the electoral success of the regional amalgam of right-wing, illiberal, nationalist, and populist parties, historical output has and continues to be mobilized and manipulated in the service of the politics of the present. Meanwhile, *no* theory of justice can produce fully satisfactory rectification to property theft, let alone crimes involving loss of life, livelihood, imprisonment, or forced labor and their multigenerational consequences on a much wider scale than authoritarian regimes (a generalization surely debatable, given the many and varied cases on both the “authoritarian” and “totalitarian” sides of the nasty government ledger). On privatization, the argument is stronger; every privatization scheme produced outcomes that were zero-sum or negative-sum, resulting in incentive structures to asset-strip, and either concentrate or export capital abroad (or both). Not even a world of cash and a legal culture steeped in procedural fairness would have resolved inherent paradoxes. There were too many winners and losers, all within the larger context of the globalizing logic of capitalism and elite attraction to the neoliberal dictates of the Washington consensus from the 1990s onward. In the end, a major distinguishing feature—both in theory and in practice—for Tucker’s distinction between post-authoritarian and post-totalitarian regimes is the broader (numerically, spatially, temporally) scope of the task involved. Hence, his continual descriptor of choice—rough justice.

The author is to be applauded for the historic sweep of this profoundly interdisciplinary effort, drawing upon, *inter alia*, democratic, rational choice, and legal rights theories, political economy, and of course political and moral philosophy. His work is rich in literary and cultural allusion, persuasive force, and sidebar humor (especially in the footnotes). One of his great strengths is the systematic effort to situate his theory in broader theories of justice, both general (consequentialist versus deontological) and specific (with respect to property rights, for example). Area studies scholars are not, by habit or training, steeped in political theory, and making sense of Tucker’s argument, no matter how one might dispute his evidence or examples, will be an object lesson for many. That can only be a good thing. In a world of major expertise in minor fields and increasingly narrow specialization in micro history, few scholars are brave or crazy enough to undertake such a project. With practical reason: big history and big theory open one to critique from countless angles regarding what has or has not been covered, or in sufficient depth or accuracy. I suspect that will be the case here too.

Tucker’s analysis is most cogent and compelling in discussing the cases he knows best, especially the Czech Republic. His prose tends to overreach with dramatic flourish. Moreover, the argument stands on thinner

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ground when he strays from the main effort to examine the “lure of totalitarianism” for public intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, and Slavoj Žižek. There’s plenty to critique in all three, yet his characterization borders on caricature. He fails to engage them on their own turf, so to speak, within the broader perspectives, debates, and vocabularies within which their work forms a part. The chapter distracts. Finally, although I would like to agree that only dissidents can save us, maybe the object lesson is not to put so much faith in specific individuals. After all, Tucker certainly harbors suspicion of the recurring *trahison des clercs*, as the penultimate chapter makes clear. Although philosophers and engaged citizens alike should argue the advantages of speaking truth to power, it is the essential space independent from the state—civil society—that both makes possible and is constituted by dissent, and that must be safeguarded above all.

Vladimir Tismăneanu

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The concept of totalitarianism has a convoluted, complicated, even uncanny history. Used first by the Mensheviks, by the Italian anti-Fascists, and by refugees from Hitler's Germany as well as occupied Austria, it had a poignantly powerful explanatory force. Later, during the Cold War, it became politically instrumentalized, for better or for worse. Mention should be made of its illuminating use in the writings of Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron, Karl-Dietrich Bracher, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Robert C. Tucker. In the 1970s and 1980s, as Aviezer Tucker shows, Central European critical intellectuals such as Václav Havel, Ágnes Heller, Leszek Kołakowski, Jacek Kuroń, and Adam Michnik, rehabilitated its political and moral relevance.

Now, a few reflections on its meanings. Totalitarianism was based on direct or indirect terror, and the secret police were the instrument bound to maintain the population in a state of universal fear, distrust, and suspicion. Totalitarian regimes yearned for the establishment of "perfect societies" and engaged in endless campaigns to achieve their goals. Totalitarian states were ideological laboratories. Both communism and fascism created their own fanatical bureaucracies that supervised, oriented, and regimented the masses. Ideological activities were regarded as a chain of warfare operations, a "front" with officers, soldiers, allies, and enemies. The Leader was not simply a traditional ruler, a despot in the classical sense, but rather the custodian of truth, a Messiah-like prophet and charismatic guide.¹ Magic, miracle, and mysticism blended in the apparently scientifically founded totalitarian doctrines. These were ideologies shrouded in rationalistic disguise, political religions based on their own sense of original sin, fall, historical torments, and final salvation.

Totalitarianism is seen as a new way of life, the result of an obsessed Leader and Party, backed by the enthusiasm, silence, apathy, and fear of the population. In the absence of ideology, these regimes would have remained traditional tyrannies.² These states were a new way of combating modernity and the perceived cruelty of the liberal world through exclusion, terror, extermination, control, and eternal unity. They waged a crusade meant

to totally destroy the ideologically dehumanized enemy.³ Social engineering was directly connected to the principle of creating a new and better civilization based on ideological precepts. This ideological drive to purify humanity was rooted in the scientific cult of technology and the firm belief that History (always capitalized) had endowed the revolutionary elites (of extreme left or extreme right) with the mission to get rid of the "superfluous populations" (Hannah Arendt's term). Communist and fascist regimes permanently tried to excise the segments of the society that it designated as potentially inimical to their realization of Utopia.

The crux of the matter was that in totalitarianism, the population was organized on criteria of exclusion and disenfranchisement according to the ideological imperatives. These states celebrated their system of terror—complete censorship, a fluid exclusion or inclusion of every citizen, concentration camps, imperialism, and genocide. As Leszek Kołakowski put it, totalitarianism is the work of the Devil in History: "the devil . . . invented ideological states, that is to say, states whose legitimacy is grounded in the fact that their owners are owners of truth. If you oppose such a state or its system, you are an enemy of truth."⁴

Both Leninism and fascism presented themselves as revolutionary breakthroughs to a new sense of life. They preconditioned reconstruction by unleashing destruction. Herein lies the essence of the totalitarian experience of the twentieth century: "the complete rejection of all barriers and all restraints that politics, civilization, morality, religion, natural feelings of compassion, and universal ideas of fraternity have constructed in order to moderate, repress, or sublimate the human potential for individual and collective violence."⁵

Finally, Lenin, Hitler, and Stalin would not have been able to achieve their goals had they not known how to regiment, mobilize, and include large social strata in their efforts. As 1989 shows, totalitarianism cannot exist without the people's consent. Under Lenin, Hitler, and Stalin people were terrorized. But they were mostly convinced, not coerced. Mass mobilization and fear were not mutually exclusive, and millions of ordinary citizens became involved in the bloody dramaturgy of hysteria and persecution.⁶ Their legitimacy was based upon a synthesis between coercion and consent. In this sense, totalitarianism was embodied by the masses, who "gave life and direction to it."⁷ Their project of modernization was inherently one of "homogenizing unambiguity" (according to Jörg Baberowski and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel). Society was structured according to categories such as class, race, nationality, and gender, each of them with specific consequences on the axis of inclusion–exclusion for the individuals to whom they were attributed. Socialization turned into political practice, into the effort to bridge "what one does with what s/he thinks and says about what s/he does."⁸

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Was totalitarianism the ultimate objective of these fanatics' cataclysmic revolution? Because of the execrating and denouncing of liberalism and frantic espousal of the concept of Utopia, it could even be argued that totalitarianism was exactly what the Communists and Fascists were aiming for. Kill and silence, so that the remaining human subjects will be equal, united, enthusiastic, and the same forever. Totalitarianism was, in fact, not a means but the end. This brings me back to Aviezer Tucker's important book. Post-totalitarianism, a concept initially developed by Havel and other East European dissidents, cannot be properly understood without a full realization of what the Bolshevik experiments really represented. In other words, Tucker is right: These are legacies that the new democracies (new to some extent, because soon they will be 30 years old) have been wrestling with: social, cultural, economic, legal, and moral. The ongoing authoritarian wave, which has reached alarming proportions in Hungary and Poland, cannot be disassociated from these legacies, even if its proponents proclaim themselves hard-core, indomitable, pure, and purifying anti-Communists. The anti-Utopian and anti-ideological initial impetus has subsided in favor of new fantasies of redemption that Tucker luminously explores.

As I write these lines, I cannot avoid a sense of deep melancholy reading the telltale title of Tucker's conclusion: "Only Dissidents Can Save Us." In more than one way, at this critical juncture in the history of the liberal democratic or, if you wish, the Enlightenment's project, all friends of an open society have become dissidents. And *The Legacies of Totalitarianism*, with its insightful conceptual framework and admirable historical analyses, definitely helps us realize that words like "truth" and "love" can and ought to be potent political weapons.

Notes

- 1 Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.181.
- 2 Daniel Chirot, *Modern Tyrants: The Power and Prevalence of Evil in Our Age* (New York: Free Press, 1994), pp. 1–24.
- 3 Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- 4 Leszek Kołakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 189.
- 5 Pierre Hassner, "Beyond History and Memory," in *Stalinism and Nazism: History and Memory Compared*, ed. Henri Rousso, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), pp. 283–85.
- 6 Wendy Z. Goldman, *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

- 7 Felix Patrikeeff, "Stalinism, Totalitarian Society and the Politics of 'Perfect Control,'" *Totalitarian Movements and Poitical Religions* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 40.
- 8 Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Politics as Practice: Thoughts on a New Soviet Political History" in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 27–54.

Michael H. Bernhard

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Aviezer Tucker has written a wide-ranging, intelligent book that examines the impact of totalitarianism on the ability to construct liberal post-totalitarian forms of rule. He discusses the ways in which past totalitarian practices have complicated attempts to create post-transition justice, effective market economies, an educated public, and open and rational political discourse in a series of in-depth studies. He concludes with an admirable defense of liberal democracy and the role that dissidence can play in that process.

Despite these strengths, I found myself at odds with Tucker's problematization of totalitarian legacies:

This book presents a political theory of post-totalitarianism, distinct of comparative political, economic, and social developments that followed the end of totalitarianism. . . . I do not attempt to explain the many differences between post-totalitarian countries. Nor will this book discuss global influences on post-totalitarian societies in the period after the end of totalitarianism such as globalization, the vicissitudes of the global economy, and the results of the process of European Union expansion. I do not try to understand why post-totalitarian countries are the way they are a quarter century after the end of totalitarianism, but to theorize the legacies of totalitarianism, how they have been affected by their common totalitarian history, and how these effects force us to rethink basic issues in political theory and philosophy. (pp. 5–6)

I found this troubling because historical experience cannot be labeled a legacy unless “a durable causal relationship” can be demonstrated “between past institutions and policies on subsequent practices and beliefs.”¹ How can one characterize a legacy as general if countries that shared an experience have radically different economic, social, and political trajectories 25 years later?

Tucker acknowledges that there are long-term pre-communist legacies, medium-term communist legacies, and short-term extrication-from-communism legacies. Yet he claims to confine his study only to the second (p. 6). How can one disregard differences in how different countries experienced totalitarianism, the way in which they left it behind, or how subsequent social forces affected their development? If any of them prevent elements from the totalitarian past from instantiating themselves subsequently, the theory cannot distinguish legacies from other causes because of a lack of social scientific control. We are left with no way to separate whether the outcomes we observe are a product of any one of these three legacies, exogenous conditions, or

a complex and contingent outcome of some combination of them.

Tucker distinguishes between a revolutionary stage of totalitarianism, when the system is being built with full coercive and doctrinaire ideological force, and a late totalitarian phase, where the system has become routinized, ideology sterile and less meaningful, and coercion less central to control. This late totalitarian phase is central to my concerns. With coercive uniformity in decline, communist elites and the societies they ruled over engaged in processes of mutual adaptation under a new system of rule. That process of adaptation was not uniform. Differences existed in the ways in which elites secured compliance with different admixtures of consumerism, nationalism, or patrimonialism, and with differing degrees of economic reform and toleration of cultural and intellectual diversity. Each society reacted in unique ways that included admixtures of the opportunistic pursuit of interest, dissimulation of obedience, and outright resistance. Such differences are central to an understanding of the degree to which features of totalitarian rule manifest themselves as post-totalitarian legacies.

Tucker's justification for ignoring this variation is that there is a fundamental commonality across both periods: the elite's ability to block the formation of any counter-elite. While this was an essential facet of the totalitarian project, I do not find his use of it empirically defensible. There was also variation on this score across the Soviet empire in the 1980s. As a frequent visitor to both Poland and Hungary during this period, I find it hard to agree with the proposition that there were not counterelites in place or at least in formation in those countries. In Poland, sedition against the regime had a continuous underground or above-ground presence from 1976 to its demise in 1989. In Hungary, the regime had long tolerated alternative ways of thinking within the confines of the intellectual class both within the regime and in opposition to it. In contrast, in Albania or Romania, such resistance or even alternative ways of thinking was far less openly articulated. This variation is essential in understanding the ways in which these countries exited from communism, and the extent to which remnants of the system were able to persist.

Tucker acknowledges but does not take theoretical account of this diversity when he describes Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, and the Baltics as early post-totalitarian cases; most of southeastern Europe, Georgia, and Ukraine as late totalitarian in his estimation; and Russia as experiencing a restoration under Vladimir Putin (p. 7). It is precisely the countries that he describes as post-totalitarian that were most successful in distancing themselves from the practices of the past. I think it is more useful to think of the divides he acknowledges as representing different post-communist pathways that vary in terms of the impact of totalitarian legacies. Rather than

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homogenizing different totalitarian experiences by ignoring them, it is essential to explore how different varieties of late communism and extraction from it help to explain different legacy patterns. Nor should we ignore the potential causal impact of important exogenous factors (like the role of the European Union, globalization, or Western influence after the Cold War).

In his substantive chapters, Tucker richly describes how communist-era elites were able to convert their political power into economic power via privatization schemes and by maintaining control in the bureaucracy. And he rightly points out that the degree of success in these efforts was a function of the extent to which there was an oppositional counterelite in place to block these efforts. Yet he does not take this important observation far enough. In this regard, the differences in the nature of late communism and of the extraction from it are critical for understanding the extent to which such legacies emerged, as well as their character. Where counterelites had already emerged prior to the end of communism or developed during the extrication process and were able to take power in founding elections, the former elite had to adapt to competitive politics and economic life regulated by real markets. This reduced (but did not fully impede) the elite's ability to convert their positional power into new advantages. Where communist elites remained in power

and claimed the mantle of democratic and market reform, the conversion of elite privilege after communism was much more extensive.

Tucker's lack of concern for variation between cases during late totalitarianism, during regime change, and afterward weakens his theory because it omits these critical determinants of whether post-totalitarian legacies emerge and how significant they are. Such concerns also limit our ability to diagnose the current malaise. While we may well see the Putin phenomenon as a product of totalitarian legacies, it is far less clear if the problems posed by Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński are amenable to that label, or if they are better explained by a combination of the current conditions and more long-term legacies of Polish and Hungarian politics. Despite my reservations about his problematization of the issue of legacies, *The Legacies of Totalitarianism* is original, challenging, passionately argued, and important, and thus deserves a wide audience.

Note

1 Beissinger and Kotkin 2014, p. 7.

Reference

Beissinger, Mark and Stephen Kotkin, eds. 2014. *Historical Legacies of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press.