

ly in these pages, was added to Alexander posthumously.

The disaster of this film began before the shooting started when Stone cast Colin Farrell as Alexander. The mystery of this choice persists throughout. Farrell has no voice, no stature, no command. To think that Richard Burton once played Alexander! I don't remember Robert Rossen's 1956 picture very well, but I remember Burton's voice and address. If Stone had deliberately intended Farrell

as a sort of vernacular Alexander, it might have been possible if the whole work were in that vein (like Pasolini's *Gospel According to St. Matthew*). But Stone surrounds this grubby hero with such classical actors as Anthony Hopkins and Christopher Plummer, who underscore by their quality that Farrell is a booby.

After the three hours—though it seemed longer—I was still bewildered. Stone is a unique and fiery talent. Why did he make this film? ■

Anne Applebaum

How Evil Works

**THE DICTATORS:
HITLER'S GERMANY,
STALIN'S RUSSIA**
By Richard Overy
(W.W. Norton, 849 pp., \$35)

THE STRUCTURE IS somewhat rambling, the thesis is occasionally confused, the Soviet history is weak, and in an era impatient with Heideggerisms the author can seem a little hung up on obscure concepts such as "absolute loneliness." There is certainly none of the Anglo-Saxon clarity evident in Richard Overy's work. And yet, until remarkably recently, Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, written in 1951, was still pretty much the only book available to anyone interested in pursuing a serious comparison of Stalinist communism and German National Socialism. Arendt did not invent the word "totalitarianism"—that distinction belongs to Mussolini—but she did popularize the use of the term as a rough description of the two political systems that dominated Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. She also offered a few early insights into what they had in common.

Arendt innovatively observed, for example, that both European totalitarian regimes ruled not merely through violence, like ordinary dictatorships, but through ideology, education, and propaganda that terrorized people "from within." She noticed that the Communist par-

ties and the National Socialist parties played similar roles within Soviet and Nazi government and culture, and that Stalin and Hitler played similar roles within their parties. She also pointed out that both regimes were obsessed with, and in some way dependent upon, the persecution of "enemies," internal and external. While such observations may now seem obvious, for some forty years that was about as far as any serious comparative analysis ever went.

I am exaggerating, of course: there were others who studied or thought about comparative evil in modernity. But the exceptions notwithstanding, it is generally true that throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and much of the 1980s, most Western scholars were reluctant to dwell too long upon it. Partly this was for practical reasons. Political scientists, always obsessed with the present, grew less interested in dissecting the concept of totalitarianism after Stalin's death. It was not very useful, analytically, to compare Hitler and Khrushchev, let alone Hitler and Jaruzelski. Historians also had trouble both with the very notion of comparison (they always do) and, more importantly, with the lopsided nature of the sources. With every passing year, more research was done on Nazi Germany, more scholarly monographs were published, more lines of investigation were pursued. Meanwhile, scholars of Soviet history, denied access to archives, were still squabbling over whether the views of exiles or the opinions of *Pravda* deserved greater weight. The tiny trickle of often speculative books about the Soviet

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Union could hardly compare with the flood of excellent, well-documented literature about Nazism.

OVER TIME, SOME DEVELOPED philosophical problems with the comparison, too. The German historian Ernst Nolte did probably the greatest damage to the subject when he made an explicit Nazi-Soviet comparison in 1986. The Soviet Gulag, he wrote, was the “logical and factual precedent for the race murder conducted by the National Socialists.” The Holocaust was merely a “rational” response to the Bolshevik threat. Nolte’s outburst, which led to an agonizing historical debate in Germany, had a terrible silencing effect. With few exceptions, most historians who did not want to minimize the significance of the Holocaust tended afterward to shy away from the comparison altogether.

There were also ideological reasons to keep away from the analogy. From the 1930s onward, those on the left who continued to hold up the Soviet experiment as a model studiously avoided the criticism implied by the comparison of Stalin and Hitler, largely because it cast a shadow over their own enterprise. In the 1940s, when Stalin was America’s ally, even many who would not have considered themselves left-wing became equally reluctant to criticize the man who had helped us to defeat Hitler; and even now nobody likes to think that we defeated one mass murderer with the help of another. By the 1980s, the average person’s answer to the question of whether the Soviet Union was or was not an “evil empire”—or at least a state that belonged vaguely in the same category as Hitler’s Germany—probably depended more on his or her feelings about Ronald Reagan than on any actual knowledge of the Soviet Union and its deeds.

Only in the early 1990s, when the Soviet Union ceased to exist, did popular and scholarly attitudes toward Stalinism begin to shift. The first prominent sign of the change was surely Alan Bullock’s double biography, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, which appeared in 1991. In his introduction, Bullock, best known as a historian of Nazi Germany, wrote that his book was inspired by his many trips to Berlin, then deep in Soviet-occupied East Germany. Flying over the Soviet zone always reminded him of the “ironical twist at the end of the war in which Hitler’s view of a Nazi empire in East-

ern Europe and Russia was turned inside out and replaced by the reality of a Soviet empire in Eastern Europe.” The co-existence of two “revolutionary systems of power” that were irreconcilably hostile to each other and yet had so much in common seemed to Bullock the “most striking and novel feature of European history in the first half of the twentieth century.”

As more documents have become available, others have also begun to find the comparison intriguing, even unavoidable. After all, these were two systems of centralized state power that existed on the same continent at the same time. Both emerged directly out of the catastrophe wrought by World War I. Both were led by dictators who ran similar one-party states and harbored similar imperial ambitions. Both used similar metaphors to describe their enemies (“weeds” and “parasites”). Both even favored similar kinds of art and architecture.

Both were also responsible for millions of deaths. But although arguments about numbers are appealing to many, this must never become a contest. There is no meaningful or useful way to compare the suffering that the victims experienced. As Richard Overy writes in the introduction to his important book, any argument about “who killed more” is an empty game: “It is a futile exercise to compare the violence and criminality of the two regimes simply in order to make them appear more like each other, or to try to discover by statistical reconstruction which was the more murderous.” Yet there is something that can be learned from describing and comparing the institutions of the two systems, if the goal is the one that Arendt essentially laid out fifty years ago: to define what, exactly, we mean by “evil” political regimes, and to attempt to explain why they are so popular.

LIKE BULLOCK, OVERY IS A British historian who came to the subject of Hitler and Stalin sideways, through an interest in World War II. Having written a number of books about the Western Allies, he decided several years ago to write a history solely dedicated to the Russian experience of the war, a subject that had been mostly neglected in the West. Having looked at both the German and the Russian military machines and marveled at the parallels, he decided to take the

project one step further.

The result is, in a sense, a rebuttal to the arguments made in the past by those who wanted to explain the fanaticism of either system as the inevitable product of its peculiar history. Prussian militarism, the power of German nationalism, and the unique virulence of German anti-Semitism have all been used to explain the appeal of Nazi ideology. Traditional peasant communes, a legacy of czarist authoritarianism, the passivity allegedly induced by the Russian Orthodox Church, and the influence of the Mongols have all been blamed for the Soviet Union. By simply looking at the historical data, however, Overy shows that straightforward cultural explanations are not enough, and that the similarities between the two regimes ran deeper than the usual clichés.

It is often said, for example, that both regimes rejected traditional religion, and offered forms of “truth” as a replacement. But by looking at what the regimes actually did and said, Overy establishes that their quasi-religious sense of certainty was not at all mystical. It was grounded, rather, in their parallel obsessions with science. “I am a fool for technology,” said Hitler, whose regime at one point employed three hundred thousand engineers. “Technology in the period of reconstruction decides everything,” said Stalin, who himself launched the cult of the proletarian-engineer.

This faith in science was about more than economics. Both societies also believed that science could be used to create perfect human beings, and ultimately a perfect society. In Nazi Germany, this faith in science manifested itself in an elaborate form of forced Darwinism. One of the illustrations in Overy’s learned volume is a chart showing the likely offspring of two different breeds of cattle. It comes from a book on Mendelian genetics, published in Germany in 1936, which warned that cross-breeding produced genetic variation in cattle, and “brings the danger of internal disharmony” among humans too. To avoid this internal disharmony, and to ensure a powerful society, the Germans would have to eliminate impure elements. Infamously, the Nazi obsession with genetics ultimately led to mass murder, first of the mentally ill, then of the Jews, as well as Gypsies, homosexuals, and Slavs.

But the widespread belief in the efficacy of racial science also affected

non-Jewish Germans in unexpectedly profound ways. Nazi Germany transformed the institution of marriage, for example, into another form of service to the state. Women who qualified as “good breeders” received rewards. When war reduced the supply of men, they received even higher praise for producing children out of wedlock. The Darwinian obsession also affected the German occupation of other countries. In 1940, Himmler established a “German Racial Register” in an attempt to define which other Europeans might qualify as ethnically German. Eventually the register would contain the measurements, the photographs, and the medical records of 1.5 million people, all gathered with the aim of identifying and isolating the people who had the greatest potential for Germanization, and expelling or murdering the rest.

CURIOSLY, THE SOVIET UNION’S parallel obsession with human perfectibility began from precisely the opposite intellectual conclusion. Stalin explicitly rejected Darwinism as early as 1906, when he wrote a pamphlet arguing instead for the theories of Lamarck, who insisted that acquired human traits, even physical characteristics, could be passed down from parents to children. In the 1930s, Stalin championed the cause of the Soviet pseudo-scientist Lysenko, whose faked experiments supported Lamarck’s theses. *Homo Sovieticus*, he concluded, was to be created through education and propaganda, not through breeding.

As in Germany, this doctrine subtly informed the Soviet Union’s persecution of its enemies, and the daily lives of its “good” citizens as well. When Stalin first expanded the Soviet Union’s concentration camps in the early 1930s, he simultaneously launched an enormous propaganda campaign trumpeting the transformative power of physical labor. Maxim Gorky himself was sent to lead a group of thirty-six writers on an expedition to the White Sea Canal, one of the first major Gulag construction projects, to document this phenomenon. They produced a breathless, excitable book, in which story after story lauded the criminals and “enemies” who had “re-forged” themselves through hard labor. In one of the book’s photographs, a woman, dressed in a prison uniform, wields a drill with fierce determination. The caption sums up the theme: “In changing

nature, man changes himself.”

Ordinary law-abiding citizens were also objects of this mania for social transformation. Special laws made it difficult for children of intellectuals or “bourgeois capitalists” to attend universities. The revelation that your grandfather had been a merchant was enough to get you fired from a government job. In order to make sure that they did not become alienated from the working class, university students were made to spend their weekends helping the collective farmers bring in the harvest. All the Soviet rhetoric lauding the proletarian society was not simple sloganeering: it affected daily life, sometimes in fundamental ways.

The science itself was very different in Soviet and Nazi society, in other words, but its function was essentially the same. The supposed neutrality and incontrovertibility of scientific doctrine gave both regimes a good part of their intellectual legitimacy. Science, or rather pseudo-science, gave people a moral justification for behavior that had formerly been unthinkable. German concentration-camp guards, convinced that their Jewish prisoners were biologically inferior humans, had few qualms about murdering them. Soviet concentration-camp guards, convinced that their political prisoners were flawed humans who had to be re-educated through hard labor, saw nothing wrong with mistreating them, even if they died in the process.

OVERY’S DOUBLE HISTORY covers more than ideology, of course. Over the course of the book, he also discusses the political structures of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, their economic systems, their armies, and their cultural establishments. Yet in the end, as in his treatment of science, he keeps coming back to ideology, and to the mysterious question of how ideology convinced so many people in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union to collaborate with what would traditionally have been considered amoral regimes. Some people, probably most, cooperated because they were afraid. But others collaborated even when they were under no pressure to do so.

From the standpoint of our own time, their participation is hard to understand. The crudity of Hitler’s genetics, the patent falsity of Lysenko’s experiments, their visions of “world domination”—all

seem ludicrous in hindsight. Recordings of Hitler’s speeches make him appear laughable, hysterical, absurd. Looked at now, Stalin’s kitsch propaganda films seem like parodies. Yet it is clear from archives, from memoirs, from recollections, that very few people were laughing at the time. The propaganda, the education, the parades, the spectacles, the falsified history, the marble statues, the Socialist Realist novels: they worked.

Significant numbers of Germans really did believe that the elimination of the Jews would bring about utopia, that the world would be a better place when Germany ran it, and that it was right to use Slavic *Untermenschen* as slave laborers. Plenty of Soviet citizens believed that central planning, collectivized agriculture, and the re-education of the bourgeoisie would bring about utopia in Russia. If things were not going well, they placed the blame squarely on bourgeois saboteurs or foreign agents. If people were unfairly arrested—well, there was the saw about the omelette and the broken eggs. As Overy puts it, “The dictatorships cannot be understood only as systems of political oppression,” since so many of those who participated in them did so willingly. The hatred and the intensity of the German-Soviet war was itself a product of the fanaticism that both leaders inspired.

SINCE CULTURAL EXPLANATIONS do not quite suffice, it is tempting to trace this strange fanaticism to the particular, unusual circumstances that arose in the first half of the twentieth century, and many scholars and commentators have done so. Both Stalinism and Nazism arose, after all, in the wake of collapsed monarchies, in a period of religious doubt, and at a time when modern capitalism was beginning to reshape the global economy and to alter traditional social hierarchies. Both set themselves up in direct opposition to the bourgeois liberal societies of Europe and North America, which were seen to have failed, spiritually and economically. François Furet pointed out that while both fascism and communism have earlier antecedents—the nostalgia for the more organic societies of the past and the belief in a socialist society of the future have long nineteenth-century intellectual histories—the disruption and the chaos of World War I led to the “extreme radicalization” of both ideas.

Yet when reading Overy's work, and particularly its straightforward description of the institutions of the two regimes, there are so many echoes of other eras and other regimes—even contemporary regimes—that it is impossible not to wonder whether this really was such a unique moment after all. Overy describes, for example, one of the more notorious phenomena of totalitarianism: the thousands of letters that ordinary Germans and Russians sent to their governments, denouncing their neighbors and co-workers for co-habiting with Jews or telling jokes about Stalin. In January 1940, one letter to the local Nazi party office in Eisenach demanded to know “why the Jew Fröhlich ... is still able to share a six-to-seven room apartment,” when so many non-Jews were cramped into smaller spaces. Russian archives document the case of a Gulag prisoner who wrote more than three hundred letters of denunciation even after he had been sentenced.

The notion of a society that made millions of its citizens into informers may seem inimical to us. But was it historically unique? Here is Kanan Makiya describing Iraqi society under the former Baathist regime in his book *The Republic of Fear*:

Writing various reports is an important activity of party members. The most coveted tell on friends and colleagues. ... For the most part, they are routine gossip sheets tailored to what the next man up wants to read. Still, they form the essential backbone in a system designed to suppress storytelling through the elevation of lies, hypocrisy, innuendo, malicious slander, and betrayal. For the system to work the truth value of a report is irrelevant.

The echoes of the 1930s are not lost on Makiya, who explains both that “Stalinism is the ‘original’ Third Worldism that Baathism ... sought to emulate” and that the Baathist notion of leadership was close “in spirit” to the Nazi theory of political authority as well.

But Iraq is not special either. Overy also mentions one of the more absurd aspects of Soviet society, namely the insistence that prisoners in camps, who were often working themselves to death, should listen quietly to the same kinds of propaganda imposed on ordinary citizens. “The Soviet government does not

punish, it reforms” was a classic slogan; a famous sign over the entrance to one of the Vorkuta camps read “Work in the USSR Is a Matter of Honor and Glory.” Germany's labor camps—as opposed to its death camps—also exhorted prisoners to work on behalf of the Fatherland; the sign over the entrance to Auschwitz read “Work Makes You Free.” This impulse to make your enemies celebrate their own repression also has contemporary echoes, as the recent testimony of a North Korean defector, a former camp inmate, illustrates: “The prisoners are instructed to memorize 15 officially designated songs praising Kim Jong Il and sing the songs on the way to work, and while working. They are beaten if they do not sing loud enough and a brief pause in singing is taken as an indication of political discontent. The prisoners must sing the songs as loudly as possible even though they are usually very tired.”

It was not Overy's intention to write a work of moral philosophy, and that is part of his book's power: this is a history, not a treatise on human nature. It treats political and cultural institutions, not ethical questions. Yet the straightforward, matter-of-fact manner in which Overy lays out the structure of two spectacularly horrifying systems cannot help but lead a reader back to questions about human nature and human evil. Over and over again, regimes that claim to have found a formula for truth, regimes that create ostensibly united communities that demonize or murder outsiders, have achieved enormous popularity. Every historian who tries to explain how this happens expands our knowledge of why it happens. This, in the end, is the real value of the Nazi-Soviet comparison, and the real value of this book. It looks ahead as much as it looks back. ■

Cass R. Sunstein

The Rehnquist Revolution

**A COURT DIVIDED:
THE REHNQUIST COURT AND THE
FUTURE OF CONSTITUTIONAL LAW**
By Mark Tushnet
(*W. W. Norton, 384 pp., \$27.95*)

LEARNED HAND, AN INFLUENTIAL federal judge from New York, used to be famous for saying, in the middle of World War II, that “the spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right.” Hand practiced what he preached. A leading apostle of judicial restraint, Hand was reluctant to strike down the decisions of state and federal governments. Sharply critical of the liberal Warren Court, which he thought unduly activist, Hand was a conservative icon, simply because he believed that judges should give the benefit of every doubt to the elected branches of government.

The Supreme Court has long been firmly under conservative control, but it has not been following Learned Hand. Consider a simple fact. In its first seventy-

five years, the Supreme Court struck down only two acts of Congress. In the eighteen years since Ronald Reagan nominated William H. Rehnquist as chief justice, the Court has invalidated more than three dozen. Under Rehnquist, the Court has compiled a record of judicial activism that is, in some ways, without parallel in the nation's history. Its most controversial majority opinions have usually been produced by its two moderate conservatives, Sandra Day O'Connor and Anthony Kennedy, and its three more extreme conservatives, Rehnquist, Antonin Scalia, and Clarence Thomas.

Rehnquist is now extremely ill, and it is widely rumored that he will be leaving the Supreme Court soon. An unfailingly gracious and generous man, Rehnquist must be counted as one of the giants of American law, because he has presided over and greatly contributed to a Supreme Court that has radically revised previous understandings of the Constitution. Since joining the Court as associate justice in 1971, Rehnquist