

BOOK REVIEW

Mihai Murariu, 2017: *Totality, Charisma, Authority: The Origins and Transformations of Totalist Movements*, Wiesbaden: Springer VS, Germany, 325 pages, ISBN: 978-3-658-16322-8

Bahman KHODADADI

Doctoral Candidate in Law, Faculty of Law, Westfälische Wilhelms University
of Münster

Münster/Germany

Bahmankhodadadee@yahoo.com

The book, as stated in its title, discusses three essential concepts – totality, charisma and authority, which the author consistently ties into his exploration of the origins and transformations of various totalist movements. Regarding the overall structure, the author divides the book into four main parts: 1) totality and totalism – theory and concepts, 2) totalism transformed – power, purity, and truth from heterodoxy to ideocracy 3) telos, temporality, totalism, historical and intellectual origins, and 4) The Legion of the Archangel Michael and the “hybrid” totalist type. Broadly speaking, this work covers the emergence, structure and dynamic of totalist ideologies and totalist movements, while also interacting with and building upon specialist literature linked to the study of totalitarianism. Thus, the book is overall a very successful attempt to reconstruct the genealogy of totalism as an ideological and historical force, culminating in its modern manifestations.

Totalism, as a much-mentioned term in this work, is primarily understood by the author as a system of thought which claims to possess an absolute, singular

view of human existence and – in its active, militant variant – pursues the reshaping of public and private spheres in accordance with the “soteriological-simplifying principles” it possesses. The work addresses both theoretical and empirical aspects. While the theoretical part of the book focuses on tracing the intellectual and historical origins of totalist heterodoxies, which are divided into renovative, utopian and “hybrid” ideal types, the empirical part points to the movements which fall under the “hybrid” totalist type by using the example of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, a charismatic, totalist heterodoxy with ideocratic ambitions.

Before proceeding with a more thorough analysis of the four parts, I would like to dwell briefly on the introduction provided by the author. The relatively long introduction, consisting of 55 pages, provides its readers with the state of research and its method and terminology. To be more precise, while the subjects such as the uses of totality, the related but different concept of totalitarianism, and the impact of religious terminology and the limits of “political religion” as a concept are all discussed in this dense section. The detailed introduction paves the way for readers to reach a deeper comprehension of the outline of book, while also making it clear that the book itself is spread widely both in terms of the geographic space it covers, as well as in the timeline it considers. Although very broad, the work nonetheless manages to remain focussed on the important historical aspects, interacting with a number of theories from different fields of research, from political science, to cultural sociology, psychology, and neurobiology.

The first part is an attempt to explain the nature of totality by shedding light on existing relationship between totality, temporality, and the individual. Drawing a border separating between the concept of totality and totalism, the author also embarks on the latter by illuminating the how it relates to notions of ideology and ideocracy. The totalist types, marked by the author as found “between renovative and utopian strands” (p. 93), revolve around historically important issues and currents, including Bolshevism, Fascism, Mahdism and Islamism. Taking the first part of the book as a whole, one can conclude that the importance of totality as an ideal and as an implementation attempt is considered essential by the author, with special attention being given to the

concept of totalism and its differentiation from the concept of totalitarianism. The book thus makes use of its own taxonomy for dealing with the origins, structural features and the development potential of totalist movements. Moreover, the three ideal types of totalism are highly important here, providing, as they do, a useful tool for analysing different types of movements which include different sides of the political spectrum.

Subsequently, "Telos, Temporality, Totalism: Historical and Intellectual Origins" – falling within the scope of part two of the book – is split into three chapters, namely: a) evolving perspectives: eschatology and utopia, b) from the city of God to the city of man, and c) ideology and political revolution. This chapter sees discussions on the nature of the ideal state and Laconiphilia, the importance of the Abrahamic eschaton in cases such as the Hussite movement, as well as the Joachimist theology of history and the impact of (pseudo)Joachite visions on political utopianism. A noteworthy discussion of premodern roots of political utopianism takes place in a section dealing with the political thought of the Byzantine intellectual Gemistos Plethon. Finally, the conclusion discussing the ideology and political revolution brings up the soteriological nature of revolution and nationalism, and of the idea of freedom in the perfect age. In this chapter, the author describes very clearly the change of the transcendent eschatology typical of Augustinian thought into a historical eschatology, as expanded upon by Joachim of Fiore and his successors – who came to influence a number of heterodox groups in the medieval period and, possibly, even beyond. The transition of utopia is also competently discussed, from a primarily theoretical ideal to an increasingly immanent attempt to modify the social and political reality according to a revolutionary design.

In the third part, looking at the transformation of totalism from heterodoxy to ideocracy, Murariu makes a good job in portraying various themes, including charisma and authority structures, virtuous communities and impure enemies, and ideocratic structures. To cover mentioned themes, the author focuses on the importance of charismatic heterodoxies as the first stage in the "ideal development path" (p.87) of totalist movements; this part also argues for the importance of pure-impure and truth-untruth dichotomies, which can be usually be identified in what the author calls the "doctrinal core" (p.19) of a

totalist movement. This is perhaps one of the most important areas of the book, as it deals with the possible structural evolution of totalist movements and can thus be very useful for future research on the topic.

The final part of the book deals with the Legion of the Archangel Michael and the “hybrid” totalist type, revolving around the historical background of the Legion’s formation and the worldview of the movement’s leader, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. This part also includes the identification of the totalist features of the movement, which the author situates as part of a “hybrid” totalist type, since its renovative and utopian features are relatively equal in importance. The author engages critically with the development and implementation of the categories which have been previously established and developed throughout the book. This has significantly contributed to the better understanding of authority and Romanian political tradition – alongside a brief but knowledgeable excursus on imperial Japan (p.263-270). Although in the previous parts of the book one encounters a number of very brief case studies – such as Mahdism or Bolshevism–, Murariu enriches part four by adding a more concerted effort to analyse the ideology of the Romanian interwar movement known as the Legion of the Archangel Michael, with the focus here being on its earliest charismatic stages and on the writings of its founder, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, and one of its most important ideologues, Ion I. Moța.

By and large, the goal of the present work – which has arguably been achieved – is to serve as a bridge for further research on the concept of totality in its ideological, political dimension, as well as its evolution and possible effect on movements springing from Western and non-Western cultures. It is worth mentioning that the considerable number of sources – primary as well as secondary – used by the author provides readers and specialists of all types with a valuable bibliography about complex issues and debates pertaining to totality, charismatic movements, types of authority and their resulting implications. The author's use of both empirical and analytical approaches further improves the value of the book, which makes it an important text to consider in the wider field of political science and beyond.