thinking

togetherness

Andrej Božič (*Ed.*)

THINKING TOGETHERNESS

Phenomenology and Sociality

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Abstract: The aim of the paper is to reconstruct the relationship between Kolnai's criticism of the total state, the embodiments of which were, according to him, both the national-socialist as well as the communist state, and his philosophical apology of the corporate state. The goal of such an endeavor is to contribute to both history of the phenomenological movement as well as to theory of the state by a systematic reconstruction of Kolnai's phenomenology of the state as an unjustly unacknowledged position within the 20th-century political theory.

Keywords: Aurel Kolnai, phenomenology, political theory, totalitarianism, total state.

The interpretation of Aurel Kolnai's political philosophy as a kind of political phenomenology may raise justified objections. It is out of the question that Kolnai could be considered one of the greatest conservative-liberal political thinkers of the twentieth century.[1] His thorough as well as critical assessment

1 Cf. Manent 2004, 207–218.

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of both communism and national socialism, as carried out in the books *Psychoanalysis and Sociology* from 1920[2] and *The War Against the West* from 1938,[3] allows one to place his political analyses among the most significant positions regarding the totalitarian debate. Kolnai's theoretical contributions to the phenomenology of values and emotions, delivered, e.g., in his dissertation *The Ethical Value and Reality* from 1927 or in the article "On Disgust" from 1929,[4] make his membership within the phenomenological movement also by no means debatable. By contrast with these studies, however, in his political writings—conservative-catholic in their outlook—Kolnai did not apply the phenomenological method explicitly. The question, which arises, is, therefore, whether his critique of totalitarianism may be interpreted as a political application of phenomenology or rather as a separate, both practical and theoretical activity.

In order to answer this question, the present paper attempts to undertake a reconstruction of the theoretical background of Kolnai's critique of the total state as a modern political phenomenon. Beside the aforementioned, pioneering study in the area of political psychoanalysis, where he criticized "the centralized, despotic, and mechanical kneading of society" (Kolnai 1922, 168) as an inevitable outcome of anarchist communism, as well as his anti-Nazi compendium, where he dedicated an entire chapter to the national-socialist concept of the state, he also analyzed the problem of the total state in a series of articles.[5] Already in 1933, Kolnai published the paper "The Total State and Civilization," in which he defined both the communist as well as the nationalist totalitarianism as being "basically primitivism" (Kolnai 1933b, 113–116).[6] In the same year, he argued against Carl Schmitt's "concept of the political" in the paper "What is Politics

2 Cf. Kolnai 1920. The first English translation of this text was published in 1922 (cf. Kolnai 1922).
3 Cf. Kolnai 1938.
4 Cf. also Kolnai 2004.
5 Between 1926 and 1934, Kolnai published in the journal *Österreichischer Volkswirt* the articles, such as: "Faschismus und Bolschewismus" (1926), "Rechts und Links in der Politik" (1927), or "Persönlichkeit und Massenherrschaft" (1933/1934).
6 For the English translation, cf. Kolnai 2017, 45–52.

About?",[7] and he continued his polemics in the articles published between 1934 and 1936 in the Viennese journal *The Christian Corporate State* edited by Dietrich von Hildebrand.[8]

The goal of the paper is to reconstruct the historical context and the possible phenomenological meaning of Kolnai's critique of the total state delivered in the cited works. What is aimed at here is to answer the question, whether it is possible to interpret his anti-totalitarian approach as a practical implication of the theoretically legitimate phenomenology of the total state, if not of the state as such. Making this question clear seems to be by no means insignificant, *mutatis mutandis*, also with regard to other, politically diversified, supposedly phenomenological "approaches" to the total state, like those of Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* or Martin Heidegger in his *Rektoratsrede*. The contemporary significance of answering this question consists in a contribution to understanding why Kolnai did not limit his critique of totalitarianism to the communist and national socialist concept of the state. Were there strictly theoretical, phenomenological or rather just political, if not religious reasons that pushed him to extend this critique after the World War II to what he considered the totalitarian qualities of the liberal democracy itself?

Political positivism and phenomenology

The philosophy of Aurel Kolnai has become, at least since the beginning of the century, a topic of intense studies.[9] In 2007, Axel Honneth recalled his "forgotten work" in the "Afterword" to the volume of Kolnai's selected essays considering the emotions, such as disgust, pride, and hatred.[10] The reason why

7 Cf. Kolnai 1933a. For the English translation, cf. Kolnai 2017, 53–84.
8 In the journal *Der Christliche Ständestaat*, Kolnai published nine articles under the pseudonym Dr. A. van Helsing: "Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus" (June 17, 1934), "Marxistisches und Liberalistisches im Nationalsozialismus" (June 24, 1934), "Staatsidee und Staatsform" (August 19, 1934), "Der Mißbrauch des Vitalen" (August 26, 1934), "Othmar Spanns Ganzheitslehre" (November 11, 1934), "Othmar Spanns 'organische' Staatslehre" (November 18, 1934), "Einfallspforten des Nationalismus" (January 27, 1935), "Langbehn und der deutsche Katholizismus" (February 17, 1935), and "Chesterton" (June 28, 1936).
9 Cf. Dunlop 2002 as well as Balázs and Dunlop 2004.
10 Cf. Kolnai 2007.

this work needed to be remembered at all, was, on the one hand, the multiplicity and heterogeneity of Kolnai's research areas[11] and, on the other hand, the fact that it, as a work of "a philosopher of Hungarian-Jewish origin and a Catholic convert" (Backes 2019, 18) did not fit any ready interpretative schemas. Apart from Kolnai's achievements in the domain of the phenomenology of negative emotions,[12] it is also his original, liberal-catholic political philosophy that has been, nevertheless, drawing a growing attention in the recent years.[13] After the publication of the German translation of *The War Against the West* in 2015, there is an increasing interest in the reconstruction of his standpoint in the totalitarian debate, too.[14] The recognition of the contemporary significance of Kolnai's critique of totalitarianism, however, does not spell the recognition of its phenomenological meaning. The isolated attempts at interpreting Kolnai's political philosophy as a "political implication of phenomenology" focus on finding a link between phenomenology and his "anti-totalitarian activism," rather than ask about the possible phenomenological background of his anti-totalitarian theory of the state.[15]

In order to answer the question, to which extent Kolnai's critique of the total state presupposes a kind of phenomenology of the state as its theoretical point of reference, there is no other way as to place this critique in a broader, historical context. What shaped this context in the time of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich was a fundamental theoretical controversy over the normative status of the state within the German political science. The object of this controversy was the possibility to overcome what had been considered to be the crisis of this science, determined by the search for a normative foundation of the state by legal positivism.[16] What this crisis consisted in was a radical theoretical discontinuity between "being" and "should be," reality and ideality, facticity and validity, legality and legitimacy, inherent in the legal

11 Cf. Honneth 2014, 77.
12 Cf. Korsemayer and Smith 2004 as well as Ernst-Wilken 2019.
13 The textual basis for these studies was widened in the last decades by the publication of three volumes containing Kolnai's selected political essays: apart from *Politics, Values, and National Socialism* cited above (2017), cf. also: Kolnai 1995 and 1999a.
14 Cf. Bialas 2019.
15 Cf., for example, Gubser 2019.
16 Cf. Ernst Vollrath's discussion of the concept "Staat" in: Ritter 1998, v. 10, 46.

positivist theory of the state. In order to face this discontinuity, which made any normative legitimization of the state impossible, the main representative of legal positivism at the time of the publication of Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, Georg Jellinek, distinguished between the state as an empirical, i.e., the sociological and historical phenomenon of facticity, and the state as an ideally valid normative legal order.[17] He considered that it is possible to close the gap between these "two sides of the state" by his doctrine of the normativity of the factual, that is, by the skeptical, if not nihilist thesis that the state is normatively legitimized by nothing but the factual being of the state itself.[18]

If we take into consideration Husserl's remark about phenomenologists as "genuine positivists" (Husserl 1983, 39), the theoretical framework of not only Kolnai's, but also of any other political implications of phenomenology seems to be to some extent historically predetermined. The most general criterion of their phenomenological essence turns out to be in this context the criticism against the skeptical relativism of legal positivist theory of the state. What is to be expected would also be a kind of reference to the arguments put by Husserl against the "positivist reduction of the idea of science to mere factual science" and "loss of its meaning for life" (Husserl 1970, 5). According to the current interpretations of Kolnai's political philosophy, his anti-totalitarian activity fulfills these criteria already because of his project to "complete the phenomenology of moral values," to wit, by not only the affirmation of objective ends and moral rules, but also by binding them with practical reality (cf. Kolnai 1927, 4, 12). Apart from the openness for a "world of objective moral values, putatively revealed by phenomenological insight," as an antipositivist premise of Kolnai's anti-totalitarianism thus used to be interpreted also his "insistence on embedding political claims in the bedrock of human experience—the real life of the person" (Gubser 2019, 128).

It is worth mentioning that phenomenology, both transcendental, represented by Edmund Husserl, as well as realistic, developed, e.g., by Max Scheler and Alexander Pfänder, by whom Kolnai was influenced the most,[19] is only one of the approaches theoretically disposed to overcome the crisis

17 Cf. Jellinek 1900.
18 Cf. Lepsius 2019.
19 Cf. Vendrell-Ferran 2018.

of legal positivism in the theory of state. The same can be said about other theoretical standpoints, which formed the so-called anti-positivist turn in social sciences and the humanities of that time. Apart from neo-Kantianism, neo-Hegelianism, and critical theory, influenced by both Marxism and psychoanalysis, are worth a mention in this context also neo-Thomism, hermeneutics, and philosophy of life.[20] In opposition to all these theoretical standpoints among them, which identified the crisis of legal positivism with the irreversible decline of scientific reason as such, Husserl insisted on the "genuineness" of the phenomenological positivism, in order to claim the pure, radical scientificity of his phenomenology. What would be needed in search for the more specific criteria detecting the phenomenological meaning of Kolnai's criticism against the total state is, therefore, to confront his arguments with other antipositivist approaches to the problem of the state's normative foundations defining themselves as being scientific.

In this context, as the theoretically most relevant points of reference for an interpretation of Kolnai's approach to the total state can be considered the "pure theory of law" by Hans Kelsen and the "substantial" theory of law developed by Carl Schmitt.[21] What differentiated the two explicitly scientific critiques of legal positivism, taken as ideal types, was the diametrically opposed standpoint with regard to the relationship of law and state. Both Kelsen and Schmitt, in a sense, equated the state and law, but while Kelsen tended to reduce the state to the logically formal legal order,[22] it was law, which for Schmitt could be actually reduced to the state.[23] Insofar as Kelsen's pure theory of "stateless law" had for its consequence, from the point of view of the legal anti-positivists, the state's theory without state,[24] Schmitt's criticism against the legal positivism thus paved the way to the National Socialist doctrine of the total "state of exception."[25] Apart from Othmar Spann with his study *The True State* from 1921[26] who gave fascism its "first comprehensive philosophical system"

20 Cf. Schürgers 1989, 12.
21 Cf. Vinx 2015.
22 Cf. Kelsen 1911 and 1934.
23 Cf. Schmitt 1922.
24 Cf. Somek 2006.
25 Cf. Schmitt 1921 and 1922.
26 Cf. Spann 1921.

(Polanyi 1935, 362) and Hans Freyer with his book *The State* from 1926 who articulated the concept of the total state in his polemic against the concept of the legal state,[27] it was precisely Carl Schmitt who introduced this fascist term into the political culture of the German right with his articles published during the 1920s and 30s.[28]

Despite Kolnai's only isolated critical remarks about Kelsen's "pure legalism,"[29] the theory of the state and law developed by this "jurist of the century" is an important point of reference for the reconstruction of the theoretical background of Kolnai's supposed phenomenology of the state. The critical legal positivism of Kelsen, starting from the dichotomy of Is and Ought and stating that "the reason for validity of a norm can only be the validity of another norm" (Kelsen 1970, 193), had an essential impact on all political implications of phenomenology, in the first instance on the phenomenology of law.[30] Kelsen attempted to overcome the crisis of legal positivism, endangered by legal nihilism, with a further radicalization of the formal normativism inherent in the aforementioned Jellinek's theory of the "two sides of the state." With reference to Neo-Kantian objectivism in the theory of science, he assumed that the state existed by virtue of its legal order and that it was nothing but the system of norms expressed linguistically in ought-sentences and logically in hypothetical propositions.[31] The phenomenological significance of Kelsen's thesis that the only normative foundation of the state is the constitution, taken as a "basic norm," consisted in provoking critical attempts to overcome its pure formalism. While Kelsen entirely disregarded the question of the content of this norm, the phenomenological "genuine positivists," like Adolf Reinach, Edith Stein, Wilhelm Schapp, Felix Kaufmann, or Fritz Schreier, searched for a kind of "material a priori" of law and legal order.[32]

If such a constructive criticism of Kelsen's legalism can be considered inherent in the political implications of phenomenology, Kolnai's both legal

27 Cf. Freyer 1925.
28 Cf. Schmitt 1999.
29 "Othmar Spann's Theory of Totality" in: Kolnai 2017, 138.
30 Cf. Loidolt 2010, 10 and 129 ff.
31 Cf. Vollrath, "Staat," in: Ritter 1998, 47.
32 Cf. Loidolt 2010, 43 ff.

and political anti-positivism seems to fulfil this criterion in an ambivalent way. While searching for the *a priori* foundation of law in the "humble realism and material richness of the Christian ideas of God, man, morality, knowledge, society etc." (Kolnai 2017, 138), Kolnai, like Scheler, Hildebrand, and many other realistic phenomenologists who converted to Catholicism, surpassed the formalism of legal positivism enhanced by neo-Kantian purity at the cost of the unambiguous scientificity of his approach. Insofar as his critique of both positivist and neo-Kantian ideas of political science did not imply, however, the thesis about the decline of science as such, the theoretical standpoint of Kolnai corresponded with those theories of the state, which searched for its normative foundations in a kind of theology of natural law. In this context, an important light on the difference between theological-political and phenomenological meaning of Kolnai's critique of the total state may be shed especially the analysis of differences between his work and the "political theologian" Carl Schmitt who aimed at overcoming legal positivism by the substantial normativism of his "concept of the political."

The concept of the total state

What makes the historical context of Kolnai's supposed political phenomenology all the more complex is that the question of the normative foundations of the state, apparently purely theoretical before the war, transformed at the time of the Weimar Republic into a radically practical one. The historical trigger of this transformation was that, which was perceived as a "Versailles humiliation" ending the World War I, and the radical break with the well-established tradition of German authoritarianism in favor of the democratic state.[33] The knowledge-constitutive interest of also "purely scientific" attempts to overcome the alleged nihilist implications of legal positivism was, at its core, the search for a theoretical justification of the opposing political standpoints regarding the most schismatic political issue of that time, that is, the legitimacy of the Weimar Republic itself. While the theoretical arguments in favor of legal positivism coincided to a large extent with the political recognition of the

33 Cf. Preuß 1918.

liberal-democratic principles of the Weimar Constitution, legal anti-positivism within the theory of the state was closely interconnected with the conservative or national-socialist revolutionary political standpoints.[34]

Carl Schmitt's critique of both Hans Kelsen's pure legalism and liberal democracy of the Weimar Germany perfectly exemplifies this coincidence and this interconnection. His core argument against them was, paradoxically, that it is nothing but the liberal democratic state, including the Weimar Republic, that is *de facto* total, and that it is nothing but Kelsen's pure formalism that legitimizes theoretically the factual totality of this state. In the article "The Way to the Total State" from 1931 Schmitt pointed to the unavoidable, both sociological and political consequences of the transformation of the authoritarian state into the democratic one. The most fundamental of them consisted in the inevitable, total identification of the state with society. According to him, it was in the first instance the liberal democratic principles of the American–French revolutions and English Radicalism that initiated the simultaneous process of the socialization of the state and, as its reverse, of the politicizing of society. "As it has organized itself into state," Schmitt assumed, "society is in the process of changing from a neutral state of the liberal nineteenth century into a potentially total state." (Schmitt 1999, 10.) In his interpretation of this process, he speaks about "a dialectical evolution which passes through three stages: from the absolute State of the 17th and 18th centuries, over the neutral state of the liberal 19th century, to the total state of the identity between state and society" (ibid.).

Schmitt interpreted the fascist and national-socialist totalitarianism of the 20th century as a socio-political phenomenon, the essence of which was an attempt to take appropriate measures against the change in conceptions about the state, prevalent in the 19th century. While stressing: "There is a total state," he considered this change to be an empirical fact that one does not get rid of with any kind of "shouts of outrage" or "watchwords, such as liberalism, legal state, or whatever names one wishes to give them" (Schmitt 1999, "Further Development of the Total State in Germany," 20 and 22). In his works, since *Dictatorship* from 1921, through *The Political Theology* from 1922, to *The Concept of the Political*

34 Cf. Vollrath, "Staat," in: Ritter 1998, 47.

from 1927, Schmitt pointed at the radical incommensurability between Jellinek's two sides of the 20th-century state, that is, the state taken as a socio-historical phenomenon and the state taken as an ideally valid normative legal order. Insofar as he interpreted the liberal-democratic state from the empirical point of view as a total state and from the normative point of view as a pseudo-legal state, he assumed, that "the most difficult question of today's constitutional law cannot be answered by talking about the 'sovereignty of the parliament'" (Schmitt 1999, "The Way to the Total State," 18).

According to Schmitt, when taking a look at the "true situation" of the Weimar Republic in February 1933, it becomes evident that "against the total state there is only one antidote, a revolution just as total" (Schmitt 1999, 20). The meaning of this revolution had to be, in his interpretation, the transformation of the 20th-century pseudo-state into a genuine state or, so to speak, the conversion of the factual total state "in itself" to the authentic total state "for itself." Schmitt considered the normative foundation of this state and the criterion of its authenticity to be both formal and substantial "concept of the political," which it presupposed.[35] This constitutive condition for the authentic state, the normative concept, the function of which was to mediatize between its two sides and to overcome the dichotomy of Is and Ought, consisted, according to him, in the "specific distinction between friend and enemy" (Schmitt 2007, 26). In Schmitt's theory, "every authentic state was a total state," insofar as the state presupposed this distinction in the sense that it allowed no forces to arise within it, which might be inimical to it.[36] It was total, as he wrote, "in the sense of its quality and of its energy, of what the fascist calls the *stato totalitario*, by which it means primarily that the new means of power belong exclusively to the state and serve the purpose of augmenting its power" (Schmitt 1999, 21).

Despite the circumstance that they both formed the left wing of the Catholic Center in the twentieth century,[37] Kolnai, unlike Schmitt, belonged to those anti-positivist theorists of the state who did not share the hostility towards the liberal-democratic principles of the Weimar Constitution. From the outset, he

35 Cf. Schmitt 2007, 26.
36 Cf. Schmitt 1999, 22.
37 Cf. Backes 2019, 29.

considered the anti-liberal and anti-democratic, populist movements after the World War I in Germany and Austria to be more or less inadequate answers or even rather radical failures in facing the political challenges of the time. Kolnai saw the essence of conservative-revolutionary and national-socialist, violent opposition against the Weimar Republic in "the revolt against the liberty" and "the emancipation of tyranny" (Kolnai 1938, 106 ff.). While criticizing "the paradoxical attitude of shaking off liberty as though it were shaking off oppressive fetters" (ibid., 107), he pointed to the Christian origins of the Western, liberal-democratic institutions. "Whatever shortcomings and blunders of the liberal civilian world may be," he wrote, "it is still incomparably closer to the Christian axioms of spiritual personality […], than is the world of a new Paganism, Daemonism and pan-social Militarism." (Ibid., 109.)

The first circumstance that compelled Kolnai to express his anti-totalitarian political views was his witnessing, as a young student, of the bolshevist revolution and the communist dictatorship in Hungary in 1919.[38] Long before being converted into liberal Catholicism under the influence of Gilbert K. Chesterton,[39] the twenty-year-old Kolnai analyzed, in the book *Psychoanalysis and Sociology*, the mass political movements from the standpoint of Durkheim's positivist sociologism and Freud's psychoanalytical theory of culture. There, he interpreted the anarchist-communist ideology on the basis of both his personal experience and his student readings regarding the psychoanalytical term of "regression." What he understood by that was the "reversion of mental life, in some respects, to a former, or less developed, psychological state," characteristic of not only individual mental disorders, but also social psychosis (Kolnai 1922, 157 ff.). Kolnai justified the explicit liberal political standpoint taken in this book theoretically with reference to, one the one hand, Freud's idea of the emancipatory power of psychoanalysis with regard to human self-awareness and, on the other hand, Durkheim's theory of the evolution of the social solidarity from mechanical to organic one.[40]

38 Cf. Honneth 2014, 77.
39 Cf. Dunlop 2002, 56.
40 Cf. Kolnai 1922, 23.

Kolnai explicitly criticized Schmitt's concept of the total state as well as his concept of the political for the first time in the article "The Total State and Civilisation" from 1927. For the purpose of this critique, he adopted the arguments directed earlier against the anarchist communist concept of classless society and the abolition of the state. Kolnai interpreted both totalitarianisms as an answer to the serious internal defects and crises on the part of the liberal civilization. The essence of National Socialism with this regard was, according to him, aiming at a civilizational renewal by the "return to the Primitive," that is, in his interpretation, by the regression from civilized society to the primitive horde.[41] Kolnai thus saw in the idea of the renewal of the Western civilization by such a return, even if justified to some extent by "the imperfections, mishaps, vices and lethargies of the civil society" (2017, 79), a deceptive and perilous illusion. He pointed out that national-socialist totalitarianism confused the true universalism, towards which all civilization really tends, with a "raw, misunderstood, false universalism […], which is really a contracted nationalistic cult of exclusiveness and mulish Prussian planned organisation" (ibid., 80). The civilization, built on the complex division of labor in society, demanded, in Kolnai's interpretation, an organic solidarity in the sense of tolerance, readiness to come to terms with what is alien, as well as acceptance of the multiplicity of values and needs. What the "heroes of totality" offered as a remedy was instead nothing but, as he wrote, "mechanical resonating to a narrow-minded tribal thinking" and "pseudo-community of a common uniform, for which the foreigner and dissident is simply the 'enemy'" (ibid.).

Among the heroes of the idea of the total state, unable to understand that "there will never be a 'totalitarian' civilisation" (ibid., 81), Kolnai counted first of all Carl Schmitt. To the extent as the national-socialist ideology signified, according to Kolnai, the return to the primitive self-idolization of the tribe, it was from his perspective not by accident that this "National Socialist theorist of the state" and "Göring's Crown Lawyer" (Kolnai 1938, 111), as he wrote, "exalts hostility to the true formative determining factor of the state as such, and the readiness to die for the group to the true political attitude" (Kolnai 2017, 78). In his direct answer to Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*, i.e., in the article

41 Cf. Kolnai 2017, 78.

"What is Politics About?", Kolnai considered the substantial normativism of this concept to be derived in the first instance from the philosophy of life. He interpreted Schmitt's antipositivist theory of the state as a kind of sociology of politics that defined the state not in terms of constitutional law, but in terms of political existence. The concept of the political, formulated by Schmitt with reference to "irrationalists of life and power," such as not only Nietzsche, Klages, Sorel, Pareto, Spengler, and Heidegger, but also Bergson and Scheler,[42] had for its substantial foundation, in Kolnai's interpretation, the principle of "existential antagonism" and for this only reason it also had nothing to do with science. He regarded the tribal nationalism of this totalitarian theory as "self-contradictory," insofar as, from his post-Durkheimian perspective, "no modern nation can be a total tribe" (Kolnai 2017, 81).

Kolnai discussed the theoretical function of Schmitt's concept of the political as a normative foundation of the total state at length in 1938 in *The War Against the West*. In the chapter about the "creative enmity," he criticized this concept firstly for recognizing the struggle of rival centers of power not as an occasional necessity, but as an essential one.[43] Kolnai contested Schmitt's thesis that the political sphere is an original province of life, different from religion, ethics, or utility, governed by its own fundamental and specific laws, by pointing to "a marginal element of sound truth and a central element of obvious perversity in this" (Kolnai 1938, 147). He described the "great discovery of Schmitt," summarized by him in the statement that "the first and original factor of public life is to be found, not in the need for an authoritative regulation of the questions and conflicts arising from the contact and interpenetration of human lives in society, but simply in the phenomenon of collective systems of power hostile to one another," ironically as a "Copernican turn" in the theory of state (ibid., 143). Even if Kolnai was ready to admit that war is the "last argument" of foreign politics, he considered it to be "absurd to suggest that it is the essential—if mostly 'latent'—meaning of the latter" (ibid., 81).

If Kolnai in the articles from 1933 emphasized that "whoever says totality—says war" (Kolnai 2017, 81), in *The War Against the West* he regarded the

42 Cf. Kolnai 2017, 82.
43 Cf. Kolnai 1938, 146.

overrating of war as not "the most monstrous of Schmitt's fancies" (Kolnai 1938, 146). As he wrote, "the establishment of the 'irreducible category' of Friend and Foe is less overtly offensive, and yet contains a stronger trace of barbarism" (ibid.). Considering the contrast between friend and foe to be an "ultimate fact"—specific to the sphere of politics in the same way as the polarities of good and evil, beautiful and ugly, useful and detrimental present themselves as constitutive for the spheres of morality, aesthetics, or economics—, resulted, according to him, in an absurd understanding of not only foreign, but also internal affairs. Kolnai pointed out that there also is only one aspect of home policy, to which Schmitt is ready to grant the real character of politics: the attitude of the state towards the political rebel, the public enemy. According to Schmitt, as he noticed, "the State shows credentials of its character as such, not only by being prepared to fight a foreign state, but also inasmuch as it is willing to exterminate its seditious citizens" (ibid.). Insofar as Schmitt's concept of the political established "'Us' as an ultimate standard of Pro and Contra, an unchecked sovereignty of group egoism and self-worship," this for Kolnai meant neither more nor less than "the grammar of tribal subjectivism couched in the scientific phraseology" (ibid.).

In *The War Against the West*, Kolnai criticized Schmitt's "militant irrationalism" against the background of numerous other totalitarian political theories in Germany. He noticed that among the national-socialist theorists of the total state not only Hegel "with his somewhat circumstantial deification of the state," but also Schmitt with his apparently scientific approach was considered "a long-winded scholastic" (ibid., 125). He commented with schadenfreude upon the criticism against Schmitt's concept of the political from the part of other national-socialist state theorists, such as Ernst Forsthoff or Otto Koellreutter. Kolnai pointed out that especially after his "Jewish connections" were revealed Schmitt ceased to function as a "true interpreter of Hitlerian *völkisch* Germany" (ibid., 143). Despite Schmitt's, as Forsthoff put it, "turning away from the formalistic ideology of the constitutional state which is bound to ignore what is really essential," what Koellreutter reproached him with was his "*un-völkisch* legal formalism—his worship of the State as an abstract unit of power" (ibid., 146). Although Kolnai recognized the theoretical relevance of Schmitt's concept of the total state and admitted that "a trace

of Roman juridical thought and Roman Catholicism still clings to him," he regarded, taking a stand with respect to this criticism, the dissent between the "two luminaries" of National Socialism as "not much more than an academic controversy" (ibid.).

The total state as a phenomenon

To ask about the possible, phenomenological meaning of Kolnai's criticism against the concept of the total state is to ask about the normative foundations of his own political theory. Apart from the early impact of Freud's psychoanalysis and Durkheim's sociologism on his liberal approach to the total state mentioned above, there also exists no controversy over the role played with this regard by his Hungarian-Jewish origin and his Catholic conversion.[44] What these both factors are considered to influence the most is, on the one hand, Kolnai's "egalitarian and emancipatory plea" and, on the other hand, his focus on the "moral-philosophical categorization of a phenomenon" (Backes 2019, 27). Despite the direct influence of Scheler's material ethics of values and Pfänder's theory of emotions on his moral philosophy, the phenomenological dimension of Kolnai's political writings used to be contested due to his clear statement that politics interested him only in its ideological aspect.[45] Backes maintains that "[w]hile familiar with the theories of Marxism and Leninism, he knew much less about the 'phenomenological' practice he vehemently called for as a student of Edmund Husserl" (Backes 2019, 28).

From this perspective, Kolnai's categorization of the total state shows limited affinity to the much more discussed and to the same extent phenomenologically dubious Hannah Arendt's approach to this phenomenon. Kolnai can be described as a "theorist of totalitarianism in the broadest sense *avant la lettre*" (Backes 2019, 26) not only because of his use of this term already in the articles from 1933, but also given his early comparison of Bolshevism and Fascism. Like Arendt and many other contemporary analysts who adopted this term from the translations of the book *Italy and Fascism* by Luigi Sturzo published in 1926,[46] by totalitarianism he

44 Cf. Honneth 2014, Backes 2019, and Gubser 2019, 122.
45 Cf. Kolnai 1999b, 138.
46 Cf. Backes 2019, 26.

meant in the first instance the "critical answer to an existing civilisation" (Kolnai 2017, 45) and, as such, a modern political phenomenon. Although neither Kolnai nor Arendt overlooked the structural similarities of fascist and communist quest for omnipotence and total power,[47] they both also focused on Nazism as the principal "enemy of the West" (Backes 2019, 17).

Unlike Arendt who analyzed the origins of totalitarianism after the Holocaust and stressed the "experience of uprootedness and superfluousness" (Arendt 1976, 475) as a condition of possibility of racial and class exterminations, Kolnai pointed to the "tribal egoism" as the main element of this phenomenon. He wrote that totalitarianism is "basically Primitivism," because:

> […] here a person appears as most subject to the forces of nature and only resistant to them (including alien "humanity") through the most rigid uniformity of his fellow members, a dull, unawoken and prejudiced being, lacking the civilised traits of human autonomy, rationality, versatility and world-openness. (Kolnai 2017, 45.)

While Arendt was inclined to reify totalitarianism to a general phenomenon and treat it as a historical subject with intentions of its own,[48] Kolnai mostly limited himself to the adjectival use of the term "total" or "totalitarian" as an attribute of a state, dictatorship, politics, conception, or (mainly the Schmittian) doctrine of law.[49] In *The War Against the West*, the totalitarian state in this sense meant for him "the renewal of the Tribal State at the stage of industrial civilization, organized by means of the social technique previously developed by the Democratic State with its plurality of parties" (Kolnai 1938, 161).

If Kolnai, like Arendt, discerned the origins of totalitarianism as a new, unprecedented form of government in the modern phenomena of capitalism, liberalism, imperialism, nationalism, and democracy, he applied the term "totalitarian" as a designation exclusive to the various forms of Fascism and Nazism. In his book from 1938, Kolnai explicitly distinguished the totalitarian state from the communist or collectivist state, in which "the governmental

47 Cf. Canovan 2000, 35.
48 Cf. Canovan 2000, 37.
49 Cf. Kolnai 1938, 300.

apparatus of the State affects to regulate all social, or even private, life of the citizens" (ibid.). Neither did he mean by the totalitarian state "that the various groups and trends in national society should acknowledge an impartial 'Whole' of State interests beyond and above them," what he considered to correspond rather to the "ideal" of "patriotic" or "conservative democracy" (ibid.). Kolnai identified the totalitarian state with "One Party State," and defined it as a state, which, firstly, "claims to enforce a Unitarian and obligatory scale of values upon the whole of society" and, secondly, "is politically uniform in colour, i.e., identified with one definite trend or party, and a set of rulers appearing as a closed body outside competition" (ibid.).

What is considered remarkable about Kolnai's approach to the total state is the fact that, in *The War Against the West*, he interpreted Bolshevism as "infinitely more akin to the civilian (*bürgerlich*) idea than is Nazi Anti-Liberalism" (ibid., 20). Despite his extensive criticism also against the "heroes" of the communist totality in *Psychoanalysis and Sociology*, in a comparison between Bolshevism and Italian Fascism in the article from 1926 Kolnai already maintained that the first was "undeniably ideologically linked to the greatest ideals of humanity" (Kolnai 1926, 213). A normative foundation of higher esteem, in which Bolshevism was held in the book from 1938, was the same assumption about the greater proximity of communist state to ethical universalism. Far from the naïve, pro-Soviet romanticism and philo-Bolshevism of his contemporaries,[50] Kolnai justified the "special moral status" granted by him to National Socialism by the statement that in the form of a racial doctrine it broke with the ethical universalism of the West.[51] He interpreted the racial anti-Semitism and national tribalism, specific to this modern form of primitivism, as an expression of the "negation of mankind" and the "intrinsic enmity to Western democratic society" (Kolnai 1938, 495).

In his late memoirs, Kolnai considered the fact that in *The War Against the West* National Socialism and Bolshevism were not treated as doctrines, which are equally (or similarly) anti-Western, to be one of his greatest political errors. Even if the current interpretations are ready to explain this "error" by

50 Cf. Congdon 2001, 54.
51 Cf. Kolnai 1938, 495.

pointing to the complex political circumstances of this time and the fact that the choice between the two doctrines was then for him like "being caught between a rock and a hard place" (Backes 2019, 29), the difference between his criticism against the totalitarian state and collective state seems to require a more insightful examination. What is at stake here is the question about the normative foundations of Kolnai's own pro-Western argumentation. If to the totalitarian concept of the political Kolnai opposed the concept of ethical universalism and the rights of man, the question especially concerns the ultimate foundations of his concept of "humanity." Was it just biographical and ideological—in short, theological-political—or, rather, theoretical-phenomenological arguments, which were fundamental for Kolnai's critique of the total state and totalitarianism?

It is out of the question that both reception of Kolnai's work and his personal explicit statements point in the direction of the first interpretation. The most significant difference between Kolnai's and Arendt's approaches to the phenomenon of the total state consists in his accentuation, as a Roman Catholic, of the Roman, rather that the Greek origins of what he called the West or Western Civilization. In the "charter of the West" drawn up by Kolnai in the introduction to *The War Against the West*, which summarized what he meant by the West as a "spiritual and historical reality," he mentioned as one of the essential traits of the Western civilization the "synthesis between Roman Imperial universalism and Christianity" (Kolnai 1938, 25). What was specific to the perspective, from which in the interwar period Kolnai criticized the concept of the total state, was the assumption about the commensurability between Roman Christianity and the "democratic principle of a constitutional 'opposition,'" which he considered "most peculiarly Western of all social phenomena" (ibid.). He interpreted individual liberty and freedom of organization, on the one hand, as inseparable from analytic thought and from the "iron distinction between 'objective truth' and 'preconceived opinion' imposed by ruling bodies of any kind" (ibid.). On the other hand, insofar as the stress laid on experimental research and the development of the sciences was for Kolnai inseparable from the condemnation of magic, he regarded them too as a consequence of the "rational and modifying influences of Christian theology itself" (ibid.).

The interpretation of Kolnai's approach to the total state as "genuine positivist" and in this sense normatively founded in a realistic phenomenology, nevertheless, seems also not to be without chance to be justified. While defining his method of dealing with the phenomenon of National Socialism, Kolnai stated that it "can be summarized briefly thus: 'Let them explain themselves'" (ibid., 18). The echo of the phenomenological call "back to the things themselves" in this statement, even if distorted, is hard to miss. On the one hand, Kolnai frankly declared the explicit practical motive of his political analyses, which consisted in fighting the fascist concept of the total state. On the other hand, it was precisely because of this practical motive that he, to put it in his own words, has "taken great pains to do the justice to the object" of his enquiry (ibid., 19). As Kolnai wrote, especially when the thing that has to be explained is, as in the case of National Socialism, "more than a 'little' thing, when it is a grand and powerful thing, it is foolish to treat it as 'nothing but' something else, to reduce it to its component parts, and, as it were, explain it away" (ibid., 15). According to him, even if only for the purpose of fighting the totalitarian ideology more effectively, "we had better begin by accepting it as a real, massive, well-founded fact" (ibid.).

However, it is not only this practically motivated attempt at analyzing the phenomenal content of totalitarianism in its entire complexity that allows one to interpret Kolnai's critique of the total state as a kind of phenomenology. It is quite evident that by the non-reductionist approach to this phenomenon he meant dealing with it in accordance with the phenomenological principle of all principles inherent in the scientific investigation of essences.[52] Kolnai admitted that, indeed, "if objectivity means being impartial, neutral or inactive in one's outlook, then I disclaim objectivity" (Kolnai 1938, 19). The standpoint taken by him, nevertheless, can be considered as being genuinely positivist to the extent as it excluded any value relativism, that is, the assumption that "all things are equally good or bad" and that, consequently, also "National Socialism is half-way good and half-way bad" (ibid.). At the same time, he declared: "if objectivity means the faithful presentation of a thing according to its own essence and undistorted by one's own feelings, then I may claim that I have at least made a sincere attempt to be objective" (ibid.).

52 Cf. Husserl 1983, 45.

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