The Origins of Totalitarianism lays out the varieties of ways in which people become superfluous in the modern world, with the culmination of the generation of superfluousness being the totalitarian impulse. By tracing out these lineages of superfluousness, Arendt implicates that the course of modern politics—that is, politics since the French Revolution—leads directly into the totalitarian maw. Indeed, her analysis suggests that totalitarianism, as a form of government, as a psychological condition, is the current against which all further political discussion begins. What is original in her analysis is that totalitarianism is the culmination of humans made superfluous: totalitarianism is the politics of those who have lost their connection to the world. And with this, Arendt warns that the symbiotic nature between humanity and the world is in danger of being permanently ruptured. When humanity becomes superfluous, it is not just we who are in danger: the world itself becomes “unfit for human habitation,” and all people thereby may be made superfluous. Reading Totalitarianism as Arendt intending to outline the determinants that put totalitarianism into power is an error. Rather, what she has achieved is a pointed analysis of the psychological conditioning or “mood”
that permits totalitarianism to emerge as a political possibility. Arendt portrays a genealogy that does not attempt to address the mechanics of the totalitarian acquisition of power, but rather, the grounds and conditions that lead to the totalitarian impulse: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* addresses totalitarianism as an idea.

If there is any one single theme that emerges from those commenting upon political life after Auschwitz, it is the question of how we might contend with a bleakly hopeless political life. Arendt, like others, sees this moment as a break in the Tradition, where “the old certainties, the sense of continuity with the past, above all the sense that inherited ideas and institutions possessed authority, had disappeared, leaving Western culture as ‘a field of ruins,’”¹ where totalitarianism represents “the dissolution of every stable, artificial political structure that had ‘humanized’ life in the West for two centuries.”²

Before we can discuss her remedy—the public sphere—we must first examine *Totalitarianism* as the framework from which her political analyses will derive. That is, we must focus our immediate attention on this problem of the varieties of superfluousness she identifies as distinctly modern phenomena. More specifically, I wish to focus on her interpretation of the existential resentment engendered by superfluousness and political life. Here, ideology becomes significant to our discussion, for, as we shall see, Arendt directly connects existential resentment to ideological thinking. For her, ideologies fuel the distinction of who can claim political rights. For Arendt, ideology becomes a tool that determines belonging in a political community: thinking persons as unique individuals are withdrawn from the picture.

The crux of the reclamation of political life is thus to divorce ourselves from ideological thought. For her, all ideology becomes totalitarian. But we must pay careful attention to her formulation of “ideology” and how it plays a role in both generating and receiving the superfluous of the world. What I shall contend here is that her reading of “ideology” is problematic for the simple