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THE PHILOSOPHICAL EROSION OF AUTHENTIC BELIEF IN IDEOLOGICAL DICTATORSHIPS AND THE FRAGILITY OF INNER CIRCLES

Abstract. This paper explores the philosophical dimensions of ideological dictatorship, focusing on the dynamics that lead to the erosion of genuine belief systems within dictatorships. Drawing on historical examples, the paper examines the process by which the dictator's men, initially ideologically aligned individuals, are marginalized and replaced by opportunists. The subsequent weakening of the regime's ideological foundation has far-reaching consequences, affecting the stability of the dictatorship and its post-dictatorship transition. This paper aims to provide a philosophical framework for understanding the complex relationship between genuine belief, opportunism, and their long-term implications for political regimes.

Keywords: Dictatorship, opportunism, ideology, politics, political philosophy

Introduction

Ideological dictatorship, a phenomenon prevalent in the annals of political history, involves the consolidation of power by leaders who champion a specific ideology in a wide range of political spectrum from right to left. Examples such as Nicolae Ceaușescu, Saddam Hussein, Hafez Assad, Joseph Tito, Francisco Franco, Adolf Hitler, Enver Hoxha, and Todor Zhivkov stand as testaments to the complex relationship between dictators and their inner circles, particularly the dynamic evolution of shared beliefs and power struggles within these circles.

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This paper aims to explore the dynamics of ideological dictatorships, specifically focusing on the evolving relationship between dictators and their inner circles. Understanding this relationship is crucial for unraveling the complexities of political power, the erosion of ideological foundations, and the consequent impact on the stability of authoritarian regimes. In this regard, we aim to contribute to the broader discourse on political philosophy and governance. Specifically, we intend to explore the formation and evolution of the dictator's inner circle, the reasons behind the elimination of original ideological allies, and the subsequent infiltration of opportunistic individuals. In this sense, the current paper will also scrutinize the impact of these dynamics on the dictator's ideology and the vulnerability of the regime in post-dictator scenarios. In the sections that follow, we will look into the complexities of ideological dictatorships, beginning with the formation of the dictator's inner circle and tracing the evolution of power dynamics. We will also explore the emergence of opportunism and its subsequent impact on the ideological foundations of the regime. All in all, in this paper we seek to contribute to the understanding of ideological dictatorships and their implications for political philosophy

The philosophical significance of this inquiry extends far beyond the specific context of authoritarian regimes. It touches upon core questions in political theory: How do belief systems shape and sustain political power? What are the ethical implications of political opportunism? How do we understand the relationship between authentic belief and legitimate governance? By grappling with these questions through the lens of ideological dictatorships, we gain new perspectives on contemporary challenges to democratic governance and the global political order.

This analysis will draw upon a rich tradition of political philosophy, from Machiavelli's pragmatism to Weber's theories of legitimacy, while also engaging with contemporary scholarship on authoritarianism, populism, and democratic decline. By bridging historical case studies with philosophical reflection, we aim to contribute to ongoing debates about the nature of political power, the ethics of leadership, and the future of democracy in an increasingly complex global landscape.

This paper argues that the erosion of authentic belief in ideological dictatorships reveals fundamental tensions between power, ideology,

and governance that have profound implications for our understanding of political legitimacy and authority. By examining the transition from ideological fervor to opportunism within dictatorial regimes, we uncover critical insights into the nature of political power, the role of belief systems in governance, and the ethical dimensions of leadership. This analysis not only sheds light on the internal dynamics of authoritarian regimes but also offers valuable perspectives on contemporary challenges to democratic governance and the global political order.

Related Literature

The study of ideological dictatorships has garnered extensive attention from various disciplines, including political science, history, and economics. While existing literature often explores historical accounts, strategic considerations, and game theory, there is a noticeable gap in philosophical analyses that delve into the erosion of genuine belief within ideological dictatorships. The short literature review presented in this section aims to provide an overview of the existing scholarship while highlighting the need for a philosophical framework to understand the dynamics of belief and opportunism within such political contexts.

Historical analyses of ideological dictatorships frequently focus on specific cases, offering valuable insights into the rise and fall of these regimes. Works such as Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt 1951) and Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (Conquest 1968) provide detailed accounts of totalitarian regimes, emphasizing the consolidation of power and the suppression of dissent. Specifically, Arendt (1951) scrutinizes the rise of totalitarian regimes, emphasizing the manipulation of ideologies for political control, whereas Conquest (1968) provides a detailed account of Stalinist purges, shedding light on the mechanisms of power consolidation. In another related study, Belova and Gregory (2002) provide a valuable historical lens through which to contextualize and corroborate the philosophical arguments presented in this paper on ideological dictatorships. The examination of the Soviet archives offers insights into the transformation of the inner circle of the Soviet stationary bandit, shedding light on the dynamics

between the dictator and the agents within the regime. The notion of opportunistic agents within the Soviet bureaucracy lacking long-term goals resonates with the philosophical exploration of dictators surrounded by opportunists rather than ideologues. Both sources explore the implications of the inner circle's composition on the regime's stability and ideological integrity, drawing parallels between the Soviet case study and the broader philosophical analysis of dictatorships and their evolving dynamics over time. However, these historical analyses often prioritize political events over philosophical reflections on the evolving nature of belief systems.

A substantial body of literature has applied game theory and strategic perspectives to analyze the behavior of dictators and their supporters. The seminal work by Fearon and Laitin (1996), "Explaining Ethnic Conflict", explores the rationalist foundations of conflict, including the strategies employed by authoritarian leaders. While contributing to our understanding of political strategies, this strand of literature tends to underemphasize the deeper philosophical dimensions of belief and authenticity.

Philosophical explorations of political ideology and authenticity offer a promising avenue for understanding the dynamics within ideological dictatorships. Taylor (1991) explores the concept of authenticity, discussing the tension between individual beliefs and societal expectations. This philosophical perspective provides a foundation for examining the genuine commitment to political ideologies and the ethical implications of opportunism.

The literature on ideological dictatorships often explores the role of propaganda and indoctrination in shaping public perception. Works like Ellul (1965) or Huxley (1932) provide critical perspectives on the mechanisms through which belief systems are cultivated and manipulated. However, these analyses primarily focus on external influences rather than the internal dynamics of belief transformation.

The examination of autocratic decision-making processes in the allocation of executive positions within the inner circle, as posited in Francois *et al.* (2014) resonates well with the philosophical analysis presented in this paper on ideological dictatorships. While the cited study focuses on the static and dynamic trade-offs faced by an autocrat, particularly

regarding the political returns and threats associated with granting access to experienced subordinates, my philosophical inquiry delves into the consequences of ideological dilution within the inner circle of dictators. Evidently, both inquiries share a common thread in exploring the impact of loyalty dynamics and the long-term implications for the stability and competence of regimes. The survival concerns discussed in Francois *et al.* (2014) align with the vulnerability of dictators highlighted in the philosophical context, shedding light on how decisions within the inner circle may contribute to the overall political performance and competence of governments.

Similarly, the exploration of authoritarian governance dynamics in Cuttner (2021), offers a pertinent parallel to the philosophical analysis presented in this paper on ideological dictatorships. The fundamental tension identified in the dissertation, regarding how a dictator interacts with powerful elites while mitigating the inherent risks of resources being turned against them, aligns with the examination of ideological dilution within the inner circle of dictators in the philosophical context. The strategies explored in the dissertation, such as purges and the use of the masses, echo the concerns raised in the philosophical discourse regarding the dictators' relationship with their inner circle and the consequences of ideological dilution. Both the cited dissertation as well as the current paper examine the dynamics of maintaining loyalty, consolidating power, and navigating the risks associated with elite allies. The theoretical models and empirical insights from Cuttner (2021) offer valuable perspectives that enrich the understanding of the challenges and strategies inherent in sustaining dictatorial regimes. In another empirical paper, Mahdavi and Ishiyama (2020) offers a compelling perspective that enriches the philosophical arguments presented in this paper on ideological dictatorships. By exploring the evolution of the inner elite in North Korea, the paper provides empirical evidence for the dynamics within authoritarian regimes, aligning with the broader theoretical framework discussed in this philosophical analysis. The focus on elite purging and power-sharing in a real-world context, such as North Korea, substantiates the philosophical assertions regarding the consequences of a dictator being surrounded by opportunistic individuals rather than committed ideologues. The North Korean case study serves

as a tangible example of how inner circles in dictatorships undergo changes over time, impacting the regime's stability and ideological coherence. Consequently, this empirical work complements the theoretical insights provided in the philosophical examination of ideological dictatorships and strengthens the overall understanding of the entangled dynamics within autocratic systems.

Frantz and Stein (2017) provide a valuable empirical perspective that aligns with the philosophical arguments advanced in this paper on ideological dictatorships. While the focus of the former is on institutionalized succession rules, and the current paper investigates the consequences of dictators being surrounded by opportunistic individuals, there is a clear interconnection. The institutionalized succession rules discussed in the mentioned paper, acting as pseudo-democratic mechanisms in authoritarian settings, bear relevance to the dynamics within ideological dictatorships. The examination of succession rules as a tool for dictatorial survival complements the discussion in this philosophical analysis, shedding light on how autocratic leaders navigate internal challenges. By addressing the reduction in elites' incentives for preemptive power-grabbing through force, the paper contributes to the broader understanding of autocratic governance. Integrating insights from both works enhances the comprehension of the multiple strategies employed by dictators to maintain power and the complex nexus between institutional structures and the composition of inner circles.

Kendall-Taylor, Frantz and Wright (2017) provide a pertinent lens through which to contextualize the dynamics explored in this philosophical analysis of ideological dictatorships. The global trend toward personalized politics, as exemplified by leaders like Vladimir Putin of Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, resonates with the examination of ideological dictatorships surrounded by opportunistic individuals. The introduction aptly captures how leaders concentrate power, dismantle institutions, and cultivate inner circles to consolidate authority. The case studies of Russia and Turkey presented in the cited paper align with the philosophical argument that the ideological foundations of these leaders are compromised over time, particularly when surrounded by loyalists who may be more opportunistic than ideologically aligned. The broader trend discussed in the paper, encompassing countries beyond Russia

and Turkey, echoes the concern raised in this analysis about the weakening of dictatorships when surrounded by opportunistic individuals rather than genuine ideologues. Exploring this nexus deepens our understanding of the global landscape of personalized politics and its implications for the endurance of ideological dictatorships.

McGovern (2016) complements the philosophical analysis presented in this paper by researching the strategic considerations of authoritarian leaders in managing their inner circles. Both works converge on the critical theme of the relationship between dictators and their supporters. The dissertation explores the entangled dynamics of how leaders, while reliant on the backing of influential supporters, grapple with the inherent risks of betrayal and coup attempts. This resonates with the philosophical arguments in this paper, particularly regarding the consequences of ideological dictatorship being surrounded by opportunists rather than steadfast ideologues. The concept of purges and the strategic calculations of leaders to secure power find common ground between the two works. Understanding the risks and benefits of manipulating inner circles, as elucidated in the dissertation, enriches the philosophical exploration of how dictatorships evolve and either strengthen or weaken over time, depending on the nature of alliances and betrayals within the ruling elite.

Moreover, Goldring (2020) offers a valuable perspective that aligns with the philosophical examination in this paper, exploring the perplexed motivations behind elite purges by dictators. Both works converge on the theme of purges within the inner circles of autocratic regimes. This dissertation contributes empirical evidence and cross-national analysis to the understanding of why dictators resort to purging elites. This empirical focus complements the more abstract and philosophical analysis presented in this paper, offering concrete insights into the causes of purges. The notion that dictators, driven by concerns about foreign threats and internal stability, decide when and whom to purge resonates with the philosophical arguments in this paper, particularly regarding the vulnerability of dictators when surrounded by opportunistic individuals. Combining the empirical findings from the dissertation with the philosophical insights from this paper enriches the overall understanding of the dynamics within authoritarian regimes and the consequential purges that shape their trajectories.

Recent scholarship has further illuminated the complex dynamics of authoritarian regimes and their implications for democratic governance. Levitsky and Ziblatt's *How Democracies Die* (2018) provides a compelling analysis of how democratic institutions can be eroded from within, often through legal means, mirroring the gradual ideological erosion we observe in dictatorships. Runciman's *How Democracy Ends* (2018) offers a complementary perspective, exploring various scenarios of democratic decline and transformation in the contemporary world. Mounk's *The People vs. Democracy* (2018) examines the rise of illiberal democracy and undemocratic liberalism, concepts that resonate with our analysis of the tension between ideological claims and pragmatic governance in dictatorships. Müller's *What Is Populism?* (2016) provides valuable insights into the ideological underpinnings of populist movements, offering a framework for understanding how authentic grievances can be coopted by opportunistic leaders. These works, along with our analysis of ideological dictatorships, contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges facing political systems in the 21st century, highlighting the delicate balance between ideology, pragmatism, and legitimate governance.

As can be seen from the review of the related literature above, the study of ideological dictatorships has been a multi-dimensional subject, engaging scholars from diverse disciplines. While historical, political, and strategic perspectives have enriched our understanding, a comprehensive literature review reveals the need for a philosophical lens to explore the complicated dynamics of belief, opportunism, and authenticity within these regimes.

Despite the wealth of literature on ideological dictatorships, a notable gap exists in the philosophical examination of belief systems and their transformation over the course of a regime. While historical and strategic analyses shed light on the actions of dictators, they often overlook the profound philosophical questions surrounding the erosion of genuine commitment to ideology. This literature review underscores the need for a philosophical framework to complement existing scholarships. By drawing on philosophical concepts such as authenticity, belief systems, and political ethics, this paper seeks to fill the lacunae in the current literature and provide a clear understanding of the ideological dynamics within dictatorships.

From Authentic Belief to Opportunism

To fully grasp the philosophical implications of ideological erosion in dictatorships, we must engage with core concepts in political philosophy. The nature of political legitimacy, as explored by thinkers from Weber to Rawls, takes on new dimensions when examined through the lens of authoritarian regimes. In these contexts, the traditional sources of legitimacy – legal, traditional, and charismatic—often intertwine with ideological narratives, creating complex webs of justification for power.

The role of ideology in sustaining political power, a theme central to Marx and Gramsci's work, becomes particularly salient in the context of dictatorships. As authentic belief gives way to opportunism, we witness a transformation in the function of ideology from a guiding principle to a tool of manipulation and control. This shift raises profound questions about the relationship between belief and political action, echoing existentialist concerns about authenticity and responsibility in the political sphere.

Moreover, the ethics of political opportunism within these regimes challenge our understanding of moral agency in politics. As Machiavelli famously argued, there may be a disconnect between private morality and political necessity. However, the systematic erosion of ideological commitment in dictatorships pushes this principle to its limits, forcing us to reconsider the ethical boundaries of political pragmatism and the moral responsibilities of leaders.

In the complex world of political philosophy, the dynamics of ideological dictatorships present a compelling subject for exploration. This section endeavors to philosophically dissect the evolution of belief systems within ideological dictatorships, examining the transformation from genuine commitment to opportunistic adherence. My focus here is on the internal dynamics of ideological dictatorships, where authentic belief is gradually supplanted by opportunism, echoing concerns raised about sanctions' unintended consequences.

Similar to the "ordinary oppression" typical of dictatorships outlined Armstrong (2020) ideological dictatorships often have their genesis in a tight-knit group of committed individuals who share a fervent belief in the leader's ideology. This shared commitment forms the bedrock of the regime's cohesion. However, mirroring the "withdrawal of trade" in the

context of economic sanctions, a recurring pattern emerges – the gradual erosion of this ideological unity.

As the dictator consolidates power, there emerges a tendency to marginalize or eliminate the initial allies who once shared the leader's ideological fervor. This process parallels the unintended consequences of sanctions, where the cessation of economic interactions can lead to unexpected outcomes. The unraveling of ideological cohesion within dictatorships reflects the risks associated with wielding power – a theme that resonates with the challenges of proportionality discussed in the provided paper.

The subsequent phase in this ideological metamorphosis witnesses the replacement of the initial comrades by opportunists. This transition, akin to the proposal of "smart sanctions" in Armstrong (2020), signifies a shift from genuine supporters to opportunistic adherents. The dictator's men, once driven by authentic belief, are supplanted by individuals motivated more by personal gain than ideological conviction. The parallels between the erosion of political rights in ordinary oppression and the dilution of authentic ideological commitment in dictatorships highlight the overarching theme of the unintended consequences of power.

The long-term effects of this ideological shift are profound, echoing concerns raised in the previous paper about the potential lasting impact of economic sanctions. When dictators surrounded by opportunists either die or face public disapproval, the regime is left vulnerable. The successors, lacking genuine belief in ideology, may struggle to maintain the coherence of the dictatorship. The echoes of this vulnerability extend beyond the leader's tenure, much like the enduring consequences of sanctions on civilian populations.

To dive into the heart of this phenomenon, a philosophical lens is crucial. Charles Taylor's exploration of authenticity in political ideology becomes particularly relevant. Understanding how authentic commitment gives way to opportunism sheds light on the ethical implications within these dictatorships. Much like the philosophical reflections on the performance and proportionality of sanctions, a deeper examination of authenticity in the context of ideological dictatorships provides a clear understanding of the dynamics at play.

To address the core philosophical question of how opportunism fundamentally damages authentic belief within totalitarian regimes, we must first establish what constitutes “authentic belief” in this context. Drawing from Taylor’s (1991) framework, authentic belief in political ideology represents a coherent internalization of principles that guide both private conviction and public action. It refers to a deep and genuine commitment to certain ideological principles and values that transcend mere instrumental utility or short-term advantage. Such a belief is characterized by intrinsic motivation, consistency between publicly professed principles and private actions, and a willingness to bear personal costs to uphold these principles. It manifests as a consistent commitment to ideological tenets even when adherence carries personal risk or requires sacrifice. Authentic belief is characterized by three essential qualities: internal coherence (logical consistency within the belief system), existential commitment (willingness to act in accordance with beliefs despite potential costs), and critical engagement (ongoing intellectual investment in refining and defending one’s ideological position). In contrast, *opportunism* involves adherence to ideological claims primarily for instrumental purposes such as personal gain, power, or material benefits rather than from intrinsic conviction. Opportunists align superficially with ideological doctrines not because of genuine belief, but because it is strategically advantageous. Hence, their commitment to ideological principles is contingent, superficial, and reversible upon changes in incentives.

The erosion of authentic belief through opportunism follows a distinct philosophical pathway. First, opportunism introduces cognitive dissonance between stated principles and actual behavior. When a dictator permits or rewards opportunistic behavior among inner circle members, this creates a philosophical contradiction between the regime’s proclaimed values and its operational reality. This dissonance gradually undermines the coherence of the belief system itself. As Festinger (1957) demonstrated in his seminal work on cognitive dissonance, such contradictions between belief and action create psychological tension that must be resolved – often through the weakening of the belief rather than the changing of behavior.

Second, opportunism corrupts the epistemological foundation of shared belief. In ideological regimes, shared “truth” forms a crucial bond between the dictator and inner circle. When opportunists simulate ideological commitment while privately holding contrary views, they contaminate the shared epistemic community. As Habermas (1984) argues in his theory of communicative action, genuine social coordination requires participants to make validity claims they honestly believe defensible. When opportunism becomes prevalent, the communicative basis for authentic ideological solidarity dissolves into strategic action aimed at power maintenance rather than authentic belief propagation.

Third, opportunism fundamentally alters the ontological status of the ideology itself. In an environment dominated by opportunists, the ideology transforms from what Searle (1995) would term a “constitutive rule” (defining the identity and purpose of the regime) to a mere “regulative rule” (an instrumental tool for maintaining power). This ontological shift hollows out the ideology’s capacity to generate authentic commitment, reducing it to ceremonial rhetoric rather than a living belief system capable of motivating genuine sacrifice and loyalty.

The philosophical damage inflicted by opportunism extends beyond individual psychology to what Bourdieu (1977) calls the “habitus” – the embodied, internalized dispositions that structure social action. When opportunism pervades a regime’s inner circle, it gradually reshapes the habitus of political participation, normalizing cynicism and strategic calculation where ideological fervor once prevailed. As newer generations enter the political sphere, they encounter a system where authentic belief has been replaced by performative adherence, further accelerating ideological erosion.

This transformation represents what Heidegger might characterize as a shift from “authenticity” to “inauthenticity” in the regime’s relationship to its founding principles. The ideological foundation, once constitutive of the regime’s very identity, becomes merely instrumental – a tool rather than an end. This philosophical debasement inherently weakens the regime by severing its connection to transcendent purpose, reducing political action to mere power maintenance rather than the pursuit of ideological vision.

In conclusion, the unraveling of ideological cohesion within dictatorships, marked by the transition from authentic belief to opportunism, poses significant challenges. Much like the scrutiny of sanctions, the unintended consequences of this internal shift reverberate beyond the immediate political landscape. A philosophical exploration of authenticity becomes pivotal in comprehending the ethical dimensions of this transformation, providing a holistic framework for future analyses of ideological dictatorships.

The Formation and Evolution of the Dictator's Inner Circle

To comprehend the complexities of ideological dictatorships, it is imperative to scrutinize the genesis of the dictator's inner circle. In the early stages, as the dictator ascends to power, there is a deliberate selection of close associates who share a fervent commitment to the ruling ideology. This initial composition is characterized by camaraderie and a collective dedication to the envisioned political and social framework. The dictator's inner circle, at its inception, comprises individuals whose beliefs align closely with the prescribed ideology. These early confidantes often share a history of political collaboration, forming a tight-knit group that serves as the bedrock of the regime. Loyalty to the ideological cause is a defining feature during this phase, fostering a sense of unity among the dictator and their associates. However, this initial harmony within the inner circle is not immune to the turbulence of power dynamics. As the dictator consolidates authority, the relationships within this circle become subject to strategic considerations. Power struggles ensue, and the dictator may choose to eliminate or marginalize original ideological allies, often citing reasons such as concerns over a potential threat to their own rule or a desire to centralize power. The evolution of power dynamics within the inner circle is integral to understanding the subsequent erosion of the dictator's original ideological foundation. The elimination of close associates who genuinely espouse the ideology paves the way for a shift in the composition of the inner circle. This transformation marks the beginning of a critical juncture in the life cycle of ideological dictatorships, setting the stage for the infiltration of opportunistic individuals.

As the ideological dictatorship progresses, the initial unity within the dictator's inner circle undergoes a transformative phase marked by power struggles and strategic maneuvering. The dictator, once surrounded by close allies who shared a genuine commitment to the ruling ideology, finds the dynamics within the inner circle evolving as power becomes increasingly concentrated.

The consolidation of power often prompts the dictator to reassess their relationships with original ideological allies. Reasons for this reassessment vary, ranging from a desire to eliminate potential threats to the regime's stability or concerns about potential challenges to the dictator's rule. This phase sees the departure or marginalization of those individuals who were once essential components of the ideological nucleus.

The elimination of original ideological allies not only alters the composition of the inner circle but also contributes to a broader shift in the ideological landscape of the regime. With the removal of individuals deeply rooted in the dictator's ideology, a void is created, and opportunistic figures may start to gain prominence within the inner circle. Power dynamics within the inner circle become a delicate interplay of loyalty, fear, and strategic alliances. The dictator, having rid themselves of some early ideological confidantes, is now surrounded by individuals whose loyalty may be more situational than principled. This shift in power dynamics lays the groundwork for the entry of opportunists into key positions within the regime.

With the departure or marginalization of original ideological allies, the dictator's inner circle undergoes a significant transformation. This metamorphosis is marked by the infiltration of opportunistic individuals whose primary motivation is not a sincere commitment to the ruling ideology but rather personal gain, be it political, economic, or both.

Opportunists within the inner circle are distinguishable by their pragmatic approach to power. Their allegiance to the dictator's ideology is often nominal, a *façade* that allows them to remain in close proximity to the seat of power. Unlike the initial composition of the inner circle, where shared beliefs were a fundamental bond, opportunists are driven by self-interest and a desire to exploit the regime for personal benefits.

This influx of opportunistic individuals brings about a subtle but profound ideological erosion. The dictator, now surrounded by those who feign alignment with the ruling ideology, witnesses a dilution of

the once-cohesive ideological foundation. The regime, initially propelled by genuine belief, now grapples with a discord between stated ideology and the opportunistic actions of those in key positions.

The impact of opportunism extends beyond the ideological sphere, influencing the decision-making processes within the regime. Opportunistic individuals, driven by self-preservation and personal gain, may engage in internal machinations, further destabilizing the regime. The dictator, reliant on a circle of nominal adherents, finds their hold on power increasingly vulnerable to the unpredictable motivations of opportunistic allies. This section explores the infiltration of opportunism into the dictator's inner circle, emphasizing its implications for the regime's ideological coherence and overall stability. Subsequent sections will explore the consequences of this ideological erosion, both for the dictator's longevity in power and the future of the regime post-dictator.

The entry of opportunists into key positions within the regime heralds a period of ideological erosion. The dictator, once surrounded by genuine adherents to the ruling ideology, now grapples with a distorted representation of their original vision. The departure of true believers weakens the ideological foundation, creating a dissonance between stated principles and the opportunistic actions of those in power. This dissonance extends to both symbolic and practical dimensions of governance. Symbolically, the regime loses its ideological legitimacy as opportunists engage in rhetoric that contradicts their actions. Practically, policies may shift away from the initial ideological framework, driven by the opportunistic motivations of those in influential positions. The dictator, caught in the web of opportunistic alliances, faces challenges in maintaining a cohesive ideological narrative. The erosion of the original ideology not only weakens the dictator's legitimacy but also leaves the regime susceptible to internal dissent and external criticism. The once-unified front of ideological governance begins to fracture.

Effects of the Transition to Opportunism

The transition from authentic belief to opportunism in ideological dictatorships has several effects.

The first consequence underscores a pivotal philosophical concern within ideological dictatorships – the automatic distancing of the dictator from their foundational ideology when surrounded by opportunists. Drawing on the works of existentialist philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, we can posit that the symbiotic relationship between the dictator and ideologues mirrors the authenticity of human existence. Existential authenticity, as elucidated by Sartre, emphasizes the responsibility of individuals to stay true to their chosen values. When a dictator, initially guided by a genuine ideology, succumbs to opportunism, the existential authenticity of their political existence is compromised. This echoes the philosophical exploration of authenticity within political contexts, raising questions about the ethical integrity of leaders who abandon their ideological roots for pragmatic gains.

The second effect is the stagnation of renewal. Building on this, the philosophical resonance lies in the examination of renewal within ideological frameworks. The works of political theorist Hannah Arendt, particularly her reflections on the importance of political action and new beginnings, offer insights. Arendt contends that political life requires constant renewal and the emergence of the new to prevent stagnation. When a dictator is encircled by opportunists, the stagnation of ideological renewal becomes inevitable. Arendt's emphasis on the importance of the unpredictable and the potential for new political beginnings serves as a poignant backdrop to the argument, revealing the philosophical implications of ideological stasis.

The third consequence is about the intricacies of information flow within dictatorships and its connection to vulnerability. Utilizing the philosophical lens of epistemology, particularly the works of philosophers like Karl Popper, we can discern the implications of obstructed information flow. Popper's emphasis on the importance of falsifiability and the need for openness to critique aligns with the argument. When a dictator isolates themselves from ideologues, who might provide critical perspectives, the flow of information becomes distorted. The vulnerability of the dictator to being overthrown is exacerbated by the lack of diverse viewpoints. This resonates with the philosophical imperative of epistemic humility, highlighting the dangers of informational insularity.

The fourth argument introduces a moral dimension to the philosophical inquiry. Drawing on deontological ethical theories, such as Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative, we can explore the ethical responsibility of leaders and their inner circles. Kantian ethics emphasizes the duty to act in accordance with moral principles, regardless of consequences. In the context of ideological dictatorships, the presence of ideologues serves as a moral compass, capable of objecting to unreasonable actions. The absence of such objections when surrounded by opportunists implicates the dictator in ethical transgressions. This aligns with Kant's assertion that individuals, including political leaders, are bound by moral duties, and the failure to adhere to these duties diminishes the ethical standing of their actions, leading to unreasonable actions of dictators.

The fifth and final consequence navigates the transient nature of opportunistic support within ideological dictatorships. Philosophically, this resonates with the existentialist notion of absurdity, as explored by Albert Camus. The opportunists, seeking personal gain, reflect the transient and contingent nature of their allegiance. Camus' philosophy, which grapples with the absurdity of human existence, provides a philosophical backdrop to the argument. In the absence of enduring commitment, the ideological foundation of the dictatorship becomes fragile, akin to the absurdity of seeking meaning in an indifferent universe. This perspective underscores the ephemeral nature of opportunistic alliances and the enduring fragility of ideological dictatorships.

Weaving these philosophical threads together, our analysis elucidates the interconnected vulnerabilities of ideological dictatorships. Existential authenticity, political renewal, epistemic humility, moral duty, and existential absurdity collectively paint a clear picture. This holistic philosophical inquiry not only dissects the consequences of aligning with opportunists but also underscores the enduring relevance of philosophical frameworks in understanding the complex dynamics of political power and ideological commitment.

The philosophical consequence of this transition extends beyond mere political strategy to the realm of collective meaning-making. Drawing on Arendt's (1958) conception of politics as a space of appearance where authentic action manifests, we can see how opportunism fundamentally corrupts this space. When dictatorial regimes transition from authentic

belief to opportunistic adherence, the public sphere is transformed from a domain where ideological commitment might be genuinely enacted into a theatrical space where commitment is merely simulated. This simulation, what Baudrillard (1994) would term a “simulacrum” of ideological governance, destabilizes the regime’s legitimacy at its philosophical core, creating what MacIntyre (1981) identifies as an internal contradiction between the practices of the regime and the virtues ostensibly promoted by its ideology. This contradiction cannot be sustained indefinitely, as it undermines the regime’s capacity to generate moral coherence even among its most devoted adherents.

The vulnerability of the regime becomes increasingly evident as opportunistic infiltration compromises the ideological core. In scenarios where the dictator dies due to natural causes, the regime is left in a precarious state. The successor, surrounded by opportunists, lacks a genuine commitment to the ruling ideology, leading to potential power struggles and a weakened regime.

Public disapproval of the regime amplifies its vulnerability. The opportunistic inner circle, motivated by self-interest, may fail to effectively navigate public dissent, further destabilizing the regime. The regime’s survival becomes contingent on the unpredictable allegiances of those within the opportunistic inner circle.

A Comparative Analysis

Ideological dictatorships have manifested in various forms throughout history, with each leader leaving a distinct imprint on the dynamics between dictators and their inner circles. A comparative analysis of key historical cases from different countries unveils clear patterns and divergences in the evolution of belief systems, power structures, and the vulnerabilities of these regimes.

For example, Francisco Franco’s regime in Spain from 1939 to 1975 was characterized by authoritarian rule with a blend of fascist and conservative ideologies. Initially, Franco’s inner circle comprised ardent ideologues who supported his nationalist cause during the Spanish Civil War. However, as he solidified power, Franco demonstrated a pragmatic

approach. Opportunistic figures, particularly technocrats and military officials, gained prominence. The transition from ideological purity to pragmatism allowed Franco to maintain stability, but it also diluted the fervor of his nationalist ideology. This case illustrates the adaptability of dictators to ensure regime survival by incorporating opportunists while retaining a semblance of ideological coherence

Joseph Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union (1922-1953) epitomizes the Machiavellian dynamics within ideological dictatorships. Stalin initially surrounded himself with ideologues committed to Marxist-Leninist principles, yet his paranoia and consolidation of power led to purges and the elimination of even loyal ideologues. Opportunism in Stalin's inner circle was prevalent, with figures like Lavrentiy Beria exemplifying this trend. Stalin's leadership underscored the brutal consequences of ideological purges and the risks of an inner circle dominated by opportunists. The regime's vulnerability was evident in the power struggles following Stalin's death, revealing the fragility of a dictatorship built on fear and opportunism.

Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime in Romania (1965-1989) reflected a unique blend of cult personality and autocratic rule. Initially surrounded by ideologues, Ceaușescu's inner circle transformed into a family-centric cult. Opportunism took a familial form, with Ceaușescu appointing family members to key positions. The regime's vulnerability became apparent during the 1989 anti-communist uprising when public dissent erupted. Ceaușescu's reliance on familial opportunism contributed to the regime's downfall, emphasizing the perils of nepotism within ideological dictatorships.

Kim Il-sung's regime in North Korea (1948-1994) represents a unique form of dynastic isolationism, where the leader's family became central to the regime's inner circle. Initially, the regime was influenced by Soviet-style communism, and Kim Il-sung was surrounded by ideologues who fought alongside him during the Korean War. However, the regime gradually isolated itself, and opportunism took the form of familial succession. Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un succeeded Kim Il-sung, perpetuating a dynastic rule marked by isolationist policies. The regime's vulnerability lies in its extreme isolation and the dynastic cult, which restricts diverse perspectives and hampers adaptability.

Enver Hoxha's regime in Albania (1944-1985) exemplified isolationist tendencies combined with rigid Marxist-Leninist principles. Initially surrounded by ideologues who were part of the anti-fascist resistance, Hoxha's regime became increasingly isolated. Opportunism was stifled through purges, creating an insular inner circle. The regime's vulnerability lay in its isolationist approach, leading to economic stagnation and a lack of external support. Hoxha's rigid purism, while avoiding opportunism, left the regime susceptible to external pressures.

Todor Zhivkov's regime in Bulgaria (1954-1989) mirrored the Soviet model, aligning closely with Moscow's directives. Zhivkov's inner circle initially consisted of Soviet-backed ideologues, but the regime's vulnerability became apparent during periods of Soviet destalinization. Opportunism within the Bulgarian Communist Party emerged as leaders adapted to changing Soviet policies. Zhivkov's reliance on Soviet support made the regime vulnerable to shifts in the geopolitical landscape, ultimately contributing to its downfall during the late 1980s. Similarly, Erich Honecker's regime in East Germany (1971-1989) exemplifies the stalwart adherence to Soviet-style communism. Honecker's inner circle initially comprised committed ideologues who followed the Soviet model. Opportunism within East Germany was more subtle, involving conformity to Soviet policies rather than explicit power struggles. The regime's vulnerability became apparent during the era of Soviet destalinization and the growing discontent of East German citizens. Honecker's resistance to reform and reliance on outdated ideologies left the regime susceptible to external pressures, leading to its eventual collapse during the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq (1979-2003) provides a compelling case of an ideological dictatorship within regional dynamics. Rooted in pan-Arab nationalism, Saddam initially formed an inner circle with both ideologues and opportunists, reflecting the diverse ethnic and religious landscape of Iraq. However, the Iran-Iraq War and geopolitical shifts in the region prompted purges, reshaping the inner circle. Opportunism became pronounced as the regime sought survival amid external challenges. Saddam's attempt to balance ideological commitment with pragmatic considerations resulted in a vulnerability that manifested in internal strife and external interventions. Hafez Assad's regime in Syria

(1971-2000) offers another lens on regional dynamics within ideological dictatorships. Rooted in Ba'athist ideology, Assad's inner circle initially comprised both ideologues and pragmatists. The regime's stability was maintained through a delicate balance between familial allegiances and political pragmatism. Assad strategically managed the inner circle to navigate regional challenges, including the Lebanese Civil War. The regime's longevity reflected Assad's ability to adapt to changing circumstances while retaining key ideologues. The comparison highlights the nuanced strategies employed by ideological dictatorships in addressing regional complexities.

In conclusion of this section, a comparative analysis of historical cases reveals both patterns and divergences within ideological dictatorships. The transition from ideologues to opportunists reflects the pragmatic adaptability of dictators to ensure regime survival. However, the consequences of opportunism, including ideological dilution, vulnerability to public dissent, and external pressures, highlight the inherent fragility of ideological dictator.

Normative Implications and Contemporary Relevance

The erosion of authentic belief in ideological dictatorships raises profound normative questions about the nature of political leadership and the ethical foundations of governance. It challenges us to reconsider the moral responsibilities of political leaders beyond mere effectiveness or stability. If authentic belief is replaced by opportunism, can a leader's actions ever be truly legitimate, or are they inevitably tainted by bad faith?

This analysis also forces us to confront the ethical limits of political pragmatism. While some degree of compromise may be necessary in governance, the wholesale abandonment of ideological principles for the sake of maintaining power crosses a critical ethical line. It suggests a need for a renewed focus on integrity in political leadership, even – or perhaps especially – in non-democratic contexts.

Furthermore, our findings underscore the importance of authentic belief in legitimate governance. They suggest that political systems, regardless of their specific form, require a degree of genuine commitment to

underlying principles to maintain long-term stability and legitimacy. This has implications not only for how we understand authoritarian regimes but also for how we approach the strengthening of democratic institutions and values in the face of growing global challenges.

The dynamics observed in ideological dictatorships have striking parallels with contemporary challenges to liberal democracy. The rise of populist movements in established democracies, for instance, often mirrors the ideological lifecycle we see in authoritarian regimes. Initially fueled by genuine grievances and beliefs, these movements can evolve into vehicles for opportunistic leaders, raising concerns about the resilience of democratic institutions.

Furthermore, our analysis of ideological erosion in dictatorships provides a valuable framework for understanding the challenges of democracy promotion in foreign policy. The tendency for authentic belief to give way to opportunism suggests that merely exporting democratic institutions may be insufficient; attention must be paid to fostering and maintaining genuine democratic values.

Lastly, the ethical quandaries posed by opportunistic governance in dictatorships have implications for debates surrounding international intervention. As regimes lose ideological coherence and resort to increasingly pragmatic and potentially oppressive measures to maintain power, the international community faces complex decisions about when and how to intervene, balancing concerns of sovereignty with human rights and global stability.

Conclusion

This paper has undertaken a comprehensive exploration of ideological dictatorships, unraveling the complex dynamics within these regimes and their consequential vulnerabilities. The primary focus has been on the evolution of belief systems, the formation of inner circles, the transition to opportunism, and the far-reaching effects of these transformations. By employing a philosophical lens, the paper has ventured into uncharted territory, bridging the gap between historical, political, and philosophical analyses.

The journey began with a vivid portrayal of ideological dictatorships. The introduction laid the foundation, emphasizing the nexus between dictators and their inner circles as a linchpin in understanding the stability and coherence of authoritarian regimes. The literature review shed light on the existing scholarship, identifying gaps and making a case for the philosophical examination of belief systems within ideological dictatorships. The subsequent sections dived into the heart of the matter. From genuine commitment to opportunistic adherence, the paper navigated the complex terrain where ideologies erode, and the dictator's inner circle undergoes transformative phases. The formation, evolution, and infiltration within the inner circle unfolded as critical junctures, contributing to the broader narrative of ideological dictatorships. The spelling of historical cases, from Stalinist purges to Francoist stalwarts, enriched the theoretical framework, offering empirical insights into the vulnerabilities inherent in the dynamics of belief and opportunism. Effects of the transition to opportunism were explored through a philosophical lens, drawing on existential authenticity, political renewal, epistemic humility, moral duty, and existential absurdity. The consequences reverberated beyond political landscapes, questioning the ethical standing of leaders who abandon authentic belief for pragmatic gains and illuminating the fragility of ideological dictatorships.

This paper's contribution lies in its multi-dimensional approach, intertwining historical narratives with philosophical reflections. By examining belief systems and inner circle dynamics through a philosophical lens, the paper expands the discourse on ideological dictatorships.

While this paper has illuminated crucial aspects of ideological dictatorships, it is not without limitations and potential critiques. The philosophical framework, while enriching the analysis, may not fully capture the complexity of geopolitical factors influencing opportunistic behavior. Moreover, the focus on inner circle dynamics, though central to the paper's objectives, may oversimplify the multi-dimensional nature of political power and governance. The paper acknowledges that belief systems and opportunism are just two facets of the broader challenges faced by ideological dictatorships.

Critics may also argue that the model in the current paper oversimplifies the complexities of ideological dictatorships and fails to

account for the diverse array of factors influencing the evolution of inner circle dynamics. However, counterarguments may assert that while no model can capture every nuance of political reality, the proposed framework offers valuable insights into recurring patterns observed in historical and contemporary cases of ideological dictatorships. By focusing on the relationship between power dynamics and opportunism within the inner circle, the model provides a useful analytical tool for understanding the fragility of authoritarian regimes. Critics may also raise concerns about the potential bias inherent in analyzing historical cases through a theoretical lens. They may argue that the model imposes preconceived notions onto complex historical events, leading to oversimplification and reductionism. In response, proponents of the model highlight the importance of theoretical frameworks in organizing and interpreting historical data. While acknowledging the limitations of theoretical constructs, they emphasize the necessity of abstraction in uncovering underlying patterns and dynamics that might otherwise remain obscured. Furthermore, critics may question the applicability of the model to diverse cultural and historical contexts, suggesting that the dynamics of ideological dictatorships vary significantly based on factors such as cultural norms, historical legacies, and external influences. In rebuttal, proponents argue that while contextual factors undoubtedly shape the manifestation of ideological dictatorships, fundamental dynamics such as power struggles and opportunism remain universal themes. The model's strength lies in its ability to identify these underlying dynamics while remaining flexible enough to accommodate contextual nuances.

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