

Coercive Utopianism: Endogenous Models of Cultural Dynamics

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Abstract

Coercive utopianism is one of the more disruptive and destructive processes of the last two centuries. It has not spread in a fixed form, but rather is uniquely generated in each socio-historical context. The focus of the present paper is to identify cultural processes by which coercive utopianism is constituted, and the design and implementation requirements of the computational mechanisms required to model these important cultural processes.

Coercive Utopianism as Framework

The twentieth century was shaped and disrupted by the rise and fall of two families of coercive utopian movements, and the twenty-first century confronts at least one and possibly two more. While the emergence of coercive utopian movements was far from unprecedented (cf., Braunthal 1979; Cohn 1970 [1957]; 1993; Mannheim 1936:55-108; Manuel and Manuel 1979), the global effects of communism and fascism dwarfed the consequences of earlier movements, including their production of multiple large-scale genocides (Rummel 1994; Weitz 2003). Thus, understanding the historical and cultural sources of coercive utopianism is one of the most pressing of social science projects.

As social and historical phenomena, both coercion and utopianism have vast and variegated histories. Coercion manifests itself in war, conquest, domination and the imposition of various types of order throughout history (Hall 1994; Keegan 1993; Keeley 1996; McNeill 1982). Utopian beliefs and movements have sometimes been violent, but have also frequently been mystical, transcendental, evolutionary and/or exemplary. However, it is the combined form of modern coercive utopianism that is the focus of the present paper.

The movements that are the focus of the present discussion are summarized in Table 1. The Jacobin clubs had the shortest existence, from their emergence at the beginning of the French revolution to the fall of Robespierre. Notwithstanding their brevity, however, they served as an inspiration for later movements including, especially, the Bolsheviks.

The initial date of the listed movements is typically the announcement of the principles of the movement [e.g., the *Communist Manifesto* (Marx & Engels 1848), *Ecodefense* (Foreman and Haywood 1987 [1985])]. While political Islamism has many precedents and forerunners, the publication of Sayed Qutb's *Milestones* (1964) provides a natural point at which to mark its modern emergence.

Family	Period	Organizing Concept	Coercive Objectives
Jacobinism	1789-1794	Reason	Idealized rule of rationality
Communism	1848-present	Class	Class dictatorship and equality
Fascism	1919-1975	Race, nation	Racial &/or cultural domination
Islamism	1964-present	Religion	Islamic rule and Sharia law
Ecologism	1985-present	Environment	Protection of environment, including animals

Table 1. Examples of Coercive Utopian Movements

The second date indicates when the movement ceased to hold power in any nation-state. Thus, the final date for fascism is shown as 1975 (the year of Franco's death), even though fascist movements remain in various parts of the world. Communism has no second date because it continues to control (at a minimum) Cuba and North Korea.

Ecologism has never held power in a nation state, so it may appear odd to include it in this listing. However, it is a movement that justifies violence to achieve its goals

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(Arnold 1997; Foreman and Haywood 1987 [1985]), and has begun to stalk and target humans (ADL 2007).¹ The presence of Ecologism in Table 1 is thus intended to provide an example of coercive utopianism that, although still nascent, has the potential to follow the lead of its predecessors.

What appears most striking about Table 1 is the diversity of organizing concepts that have been considered as a justification for coercive strategies. This pattern illustrates the potential of innovative destructive movements to emerge, even while earlier ones remain unresolved. It also highlights the importance of understanding the cultural processes by and through which coercive movements become manifest.

Coercive Utopianism as Concept

Two principles underlie modern coercive utopianism. First, in order that human history can arrive at an idealized state, the relevant population has to be coerced, or else human nature itself must be completely transformed. Second, such a transformation cannot be achieved by some type of adaptive evolution, but must be imposed by a self-organizing elite in the service of the ideals deemed to be compelling.

As indicated, the prototype and progenitor of modern coercive utopianism is the Jacobin movement that arose during the French revolution. As summarized in Table 1, Klosko (2003:92-93) lists six elements of Jacobinism:

J.1	The plan or blueprint of the desired, ideal society
J.2	A low estimation of the potential of the inhabitants of existing society to conform to the dictates of (J.1) on their own
J.3	Belief in the existence of a small group of individuals who understand the blueprint and are strongly committed to its realization
J.4	Support of this minority's seizure of state power to achieve its aims
J.5	Use of the minority controlled state to condition and re-educate the inhabitants of society in accordance with the dictates of (J.1)
J.6	A retrospective theory of representation ²

Table 1. Elements of Jacobinism (Klosko 2003)

However, Klosko's summary definition of Jacobinism only implies (in J.5) one of the critical aspects of coercive utopianism: the tendency to identify and destroy perceived

¹ For more detail on this ecologism strategy, see "Ecoterror and violence: Targeting humans" at: www.adl.org/Learn/Ext_US/Ecoterrorism.asp#TargetingHumans.

² This point suggests that, although at present the population does not accept the ideal, in retrospect they will be grateful that it was imposed upon them. Thus, the coercive elite putatively represents the future views of the oblivious majority.

enemies. Given its support of the terror, this tendency was hardly absent from the Jacobin movement. Its representatives, Robespierre and Saint Just, have been described as pioneers of the concept that terror is the necessary path to utopia (Klosko 2003:118; Manuel and Manuel 1979:567).

In addition to highlighting the role of such repressive targets, it is important to also consider how such scapegoats provide one aspect by which the idealized blueprint is defined. The various nobles, landowners, capitalists, and ethnic, political and lifestyle minorities have repeatedly served as a symbolic reference point for evil, fear and threat even when such targeting has been extremely hypothetical and/or hypocritical.

While this summary provides only a high level overview of the dynamics of coercive utopianism, it does suggest why it is an important social process to understand, and ultimately model. However, although coercive utopianism is an extremal process, it is nonetheless formed through the same social and cultural processes that shape all political phenomena. It is to these processes that we now turn.

Culture, Identity and Collective Discourse

Empirical cultures are often described as being largely coherent (cf., Linton 1956). In contrast, social historian William Sewell (2005, esp. 168-172) describes contemporary culture as: 1) loosely integrated, 2) contradictory, 3) contested, 4) weakly bounded, and 5) thinly coherent. All such 'weaknesses', he writes, must necessarily be overcome, in interaction and in practice. Nonetheless, out of such diffuse cultural material, strong collective identities are recurrently forged, frequently with dramatic consequences. The significance of dynamic, transformative models of culture thus appears inescapable.

The loosely coherent view of culture is consistent with a situated concept of identity (Garfinkel 2006; Smith-Lovin 2003; Stryker 2000). That is, modern identity is increasingly defined by the roles an agent plays, one's relationships to individuals and groups, and the operative cultural context. For modeling purposes, two aspects of situated identity are especially salient. First is the emotional configuration which underlies the effective context. Second is the symbolic representation of the self.

Regarding the first, roles, relationships and cultural objects are not neutral entities that are (always) regarded dispassionately. On the contrary, they are identified with, which means that they carry an emotional attachment for the effective identity. These orientational links cluster, creating intertwined bonds at multiple scales. When there is a transformation of identity, there is a reconfiguration of roles, relationships and cultural objects, and the emotions (and emotional intensity) that bind them to the self, and potentially to each other as well.

The symbolic representation of the self may be regarded as a function of bounded rationality. The self is a complex entity that is no more immediately accessible to the actor

than are other complex entities. Accordingly, a self-concept is symbolized. The active symbol is inherently complex and, thus, will be variously shaped and activated according to circumstance.

Accordingly, from the perspective of this paper, the symbol in question is constituted as a prototypical concept that is radially linked to other possible and probable self-concepts. The latter can be alternatives that are either activated in the flux of shifting circumstances, or else rejected while nonetheless continuing to serve as a reference point.

It should be evident that there is a natural compatibility between situated identities and a thinly coherent concept of culture. Both are more dynamic than their more traditional corresponding concepts, respectively. The challenge inherent in modeling such concepts is to achieve the necessary fluidity while, at the same time, also providing support for the presence of persistent identities and stable cultural configurations in those socio-historical settings in which they naturally occur.

A second issue concerns the interactions and processes through which situated identities and thinly coherent cultures actually influence and shape each other. One process that may play a special role in binding culture and identity, and shaping cultural upheavals, is the emergence and transformation of communities of discourse. The dynamics of collective discourse is clearly relevant to the emergence and evolution of coercive utopianism in its historically specific manifestations.

Several authors show how such discourse processes have transformed cultures over wide areas and long durations (Blommaert 2005; Wuthnow 1989), and/or given rise to a coercive utopian movement in all its intensity (Apter and Saich 1994). It appears to be a reasonable historical hypothesis that the dynamics of discourse actively contributes the processes by which the diffuse elements of culture are repurposed, and reshaped into transformative identities and movements. The resulting process should include the shaping and activation of entrepreneurial cultural roles (Collins 1999), and how public rituals serve to affirm and reinforce participant identification with the movement (Collins 2004).

Endogenous Models of Extremal Movements

What is implied by an endogenous model is that actors are oriented by objects, events and interactions that arise from within model dynamics, as opposed to those that are determined by a designer or analyst. The present overview will draw upon three previously articulated mechanisms: 1) actor orientation is constructed with prototype concepts coupled with associated emotional valences (Mellarkod and Sallach 2004; Sallach 2003; 2006b; Sallach and Mellarkod 2004), 2) actions are formalized as moves in a multigame

(Sallach 2006a), and 3) both are represented by drawing upon an extended semantic data model (Codd 1979), where the enhancements include the incorporation of functions based upon relational algebra (cf., Backus 1978). The contributions of these mechanisms are elaborated below.

Considering key aspects of coercive utopianism, the computational model will necessarily be able to generate the emergence of the idealized blueprint, including endogenously specified elements that will be coercively enforced, and the forms that such coercion will take. In addition, the previously mentioned entrepreneurial roles, and creation, organization and shaping of public rituals are, for each domain, articulated and defined.

In the case of revolutionary Maoism, Apter and Saich (1994) have proposed four key mechanisms. *Retrieval* involves the creation of a mythical past; *projection* is the derivation of an identified future. The authors see *exegetical bonding* as a form of discipline, and *symbolic capital* as a form of power.³ This framework is useful, but nonetheless will benefit from some revision. The goal of these revisions is to generalize the process, and make it more amenable to modeling.

The retrieval/projection pair is quite useful in specifying some elements of the idealized blueprint. We will use the data/function model to instantiate idealized components that constitute the idealized past and future. These components will have emotional valences associated with them, which may vary by group, subgroup and individual. Scholars may wish to recall Mannheim's (1936) insight that the deeper and more mythological the idealized past, and the more distant and hypothetical the idealized future, the more utopian the movement.

Exegetical bonding should be generalized to support a variety of bonding mechanisms. While Marxist hermeneutics was arguably a major focus in Mao's Yan'an, the bonding of a cadre took quite different forms in Moscow and Berlin at the various times. Shared struggle is sometimes a source of bonding. Resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, for example, is frequently cited as a source of bonding for Al-Qaeda and its affiliates (Bergen 2001:41-75; Gunaratna 2002; Kaplan 2001 [1990]).

Accordingly, a model general enough to be useful will need to support diverse forms of bonding. This bonding serves as a source of discipline, as Apter and Saich suggest, but discipline does not exhaust its effects. Bonding provides a source of solidarity as well, thus, forming a foundation for group cohesion in a way that also supports the operations of movement cadre.

Symbolic 'capital' will be represented using comparable techniques to those used for the representation of the symbolic self (above). The power inherent in social capital

³ This framework is said to be applied in three contexts: structural, phenomenological and hermeneutic.

will be viewed as arising from associated emotional valences.

The three-tier (diffuse culture, situated identity and collective discourse) cultural dynamics of this type can be modeled, particularly by drawing upon Argonne's innovative Interpretive Agent research program (Sallach 2003; 2006b). As discussed in the next section, to be developed in greater depth, such modeling will require the creation of custom tools and techniques.

Protifact, Protorole and Prototypocol

In this section, we will consider how endogenous models might be computationally implemented. The section title introduces three neologisms to suggest that systematic representation by prototype concepts provides an effective computational means of representing fluid cultural objects and discourse practices.

Accordingly, a 'protifact' is designed to suggest the computational representation of a cultural object or artifact; a 'protorole' represents a social role in terms of an exemplar composed along multiple dimensions, and a 'prototypocol' defines a structure through which social interaction protocols can be defined. Each of the proposed representations is defined in terms of prototype concepts, in which a particular artifact, role or protocol varies along one or more multiple dimensions.

The data semantics of such prototype concepts can be briefly summarized. A hyperdomain binds a set of value dimensions that are interrelated by potential interaction (and also by non-decomposability). A hyperdomain associated with an entity or an event may contain one or more interaction types that can act upon associated existents. In a spatial context, the prototypical effect of such interaction may change the location of this existent within the relevant hyperdomain.

Each prototype concept must be defined in terms of at least one dimension, and may be defined on multiple dimensions, with the caveat that each dimension be part of the same hyperdomain. Prototypes are defined in terms of: 1) the hyperdomains with which they have a subordinate composition relationship, 2) relationships that influence them, and 3) the hyperdomains within which those interactions are defined. The effect of these dynamics will vary by concept type.

Within this framework, each endogenous prototype will be calibrated relative to its situated setting. Thus, a prototype structures the continuity of conceptual cohesion, while contextual interaction allows for its endogenous calibration. A field of prototypes, such as the examples proposed above, collectively defines subtle interaction processes that challenge conventional techniques of computational modeling.

Fortunately, the accelerating emergence of metaobject protocols and similar forms of metaprogramming (Carlson and

Richardson 2006:333-370; Kiczales, Rivieres, and Bobrow 1991; Konig 2007:174-225). Design details await the development of prototype-based domain-specific languages, such as one defining coercive utopianism, which constitutes the next phase of the interpretive agent research program.

Conclusion

Coercive utopianism is arguably the most disruptive and destructive social process of the last two centuries. Since its emergence in the French revolution, coercive utopianism has metastasized from one geocultural milieu to another. However, it has not spread as constituted, but rather has been generated uniquely in each socio-historical context in which it has arisen. The focus of the present paper is to identify underlying cultural processes through which coercive utopianism is constituted, as well as the computational mechanisms required to model these historically significant processes.

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