

THEORIES OF FASCISM



Begins April 17, Wednesdays at 2pm EST

 *a new online course with the*
**Institute for
Social Ecology**

Register here:
bit.ly/ISE-ToF

Instructor:

[Eric Levi Jacobson](#)

Course Description:

Was the previous US administration fascist? Was it comparable to 20th century European fascism? Upon finding refuge in America, several German-Jewish philosophers sought to understand the terms fascism, authoritarianism and totalitarianism. They focused on morality, participation and subjectivity rather than

the figure of the dictator. They asked if this could happen in America. We will begin with a survey of contemporary debates and then read selections from Adorno/Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), and Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). We will conclude with Benjamin's *Thesis on the Philosophy of History* (1940).

Overview:

Cultural references to fascism, totalitarianism and authoritarianism have emphasized the strong man. We are familiar with Mussolini, Franco, Hitler and onwards to Trump. But where would these authoritarian figures be without their appeal to the masses? What is the concept of the masses - a rather amorphous and ill-defined entity comprised of personal advantage and fear that yields a construct of participation in systems of control and repression? We are familiar with participatory democracy. But what of participatory domination?

Contemporary European philosophy has attempted to throw light on the role of the subject in the object. So too Social Ecology, with its critique of materialism and celebration of subjectivity. How can we reconcile the devolution of subjectivity into fascism? What can be done to address the participatory side of fascism, the new forms of subjectivity in the advancement of a new species of authoritarianism and authoritarian movements of the 21st century?

Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of our time is that both left and right agree that we have entered into a moment in which the threat of fascism is real. Let us take this observation seriously: How did we arrive here? Let us turn back the page and see if there is something that we missed from the observations of the last generation of theorist who attempted to understand fascism during and directly following the closing of the gates of Auschwitz.

WEEKLY LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction to the theories of fascism and contemporary debates

Thematic introduction to the theories and authors of the 1940s and 1950s. What is fascism and how does possibly relate to contemporary debates? We will review the scope of the course followed by individual introductions. Detailed review of the syllabus, course expectations, assessment, and literature review.

Core readings:

Evens, Richard J, "[Why Trump isn't a Fascist](#)" *The New Statesman*, 1/13/2021.

Moyn, Samuel, "[The Trouble With Comparisons](#)" *The New York Review of Books*, 5/19/2020.

Toscano, Alberto, "[The Long Shadow of Radical Fascism](#)," *Boston Review*, 10/28/2020.

Other resources:

Bessner, Daniel, and Udi Greenberg. "The Weimar Analogy: Comparing Trump's America to Fascist Germany Only Fuels Elites' Antidemocratic Fantasies." *Jacobin*, 12/17/2016.

Klion, David and Corey Robin, "Almost the Complete Opposite of Fascism," interview, *Jewish Currents*, 12/4/2020.

Moyn, Samuel, "Allegations of Fascism Distract from the Real Danger," *The Nation*, 1/25-2/1/2021.

Stanley, Jason and David Goodman, "Is Trump Fascist?" Vermont Conversation with David Goodman, Interview with Jason Stanley, 10/19/2020.

Week 2: *Hannah Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism (introduction)*

Core readings:

Hannah Arendt, "Preface" to Volume I: Antisemitism, in *Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 3-9, and "Race-Thinking before Racism," Volume II: Imperialism, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp, 210-241 (Meridian edition: pp. 158-184)

Other resources:

Steven E. Aschheim, "Nazism, Culture, and The Origins of Totalitarianism," Ch. 11, *In Times of Crisis* (2000), pp. 122-136

Richard J. Bernstein, "Antisemitism as Political Ideology," Ch. 2, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, 1996.

Week 3: *Origins of Totalitarianism : fascism as a classless society*

Core readings:

Hannah Arendt, "A Classless Society", Vol. III: Chapter 1, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt, 1951

Other resources:

Margaret Canovan, "Arendt's theory of totalitarianism: a reassessment" in Villa, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, pp. 24-43.

Hannah Arendt (2012)

113 min. feature-length film (biographical drama)

Director: Margarethe von Trotte

Week 4: *Origins of Totalitarianism : Movement, Mass and Participation*

Core readings:

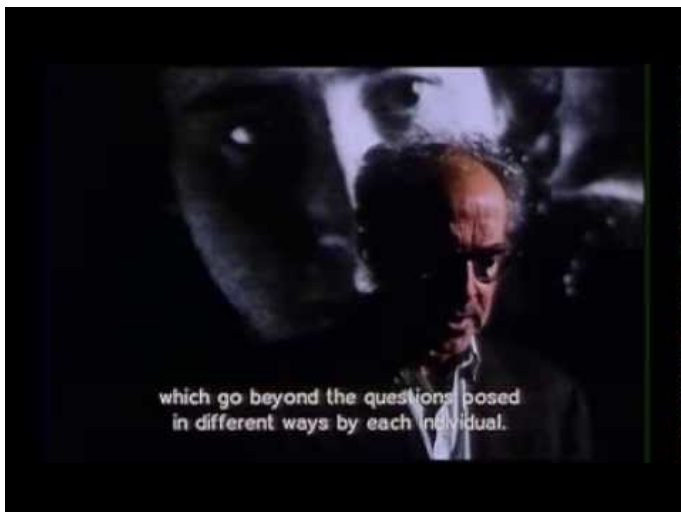
Hannah Arendt, "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government" Vol. III: Chapter 4 in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt, 1951

Other resources:

Hannah Arendt, "The Totalitarian Movement," Vol. 3: Chapter 2, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt, 1951

Jason Stanley, "Is Totalitarianism a New Phenomenon? Reflections on Hannah Arendt's Origins of Totalitarianism," *The Review of Politics*, Spring, 1987, Vol. 49, No. 2, pp. 177-207

Robert Nisbet, "Arendt on Totalitarianism," *The National Interest*, Spring 1992, No. 27, pp. 85-91



Film Short: A passage from Hannah Arendt's *On the Nature of Totalitarianism*, read by director Jean-Luc Goddard

Week 5: *Origins of Totalitarianism, resistance and personal responsibility under dictatorship*

Core readings:

Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship" in *Responsibility and Judgment*, pp. 17-48.

Other resources:



Film: *Hannah Arendt "Zur Person" im Gespräch mit Gunter Gaus (1964)*
60 min. Televised interview in German with English subtitles

Week 6: *The Authoritarian Personality*

Core readings:

Adorno, et al, "Introduction," esp. pp. 1-12, "Politics and Economics in the Review Material", Ch. 17, esp. pp. 658-702, and "Conclusion" Ch.23 in *The Authoritarian Personality*, 1950

Other resources:

Abromeit, John, "The Concept of Pseudo-Conservatism as a Link Between the Authoritarian Personality and Early Critical Theory," *Polity*, volume 54, number 1, January 2022.

Gordon, Peter E, "[The Authoritarian Personality Revisited: Reading Adorno in the age of Trump](#)" *Boundary 2*, 44, no. 2, June 2017, pp. 31-56.

Week 7: *Fascist Propaganda, Antisemitism, Racism*

Core readings:

Theodor Adorno, "Anti-Semitism and Fascist Propaganda" in *The Stars Down to Earth*, Routledge, 1994, pp. 227-240.

Siegfried Kracauer, "Exposé. Mass and Propaganda. An Inquiry into Fascist Propaganda," *Selected Writings on Media, Propaganda, and Political Communication*. Columbia University Press, 2022, 49-55.

Other resources:

Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in Arato, Andrew and Elke Gebhardt, *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Continuum, 1990.

Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment," *Dialectic of Enlightenment, Philosophical Fragments*. Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 137-173.

Hannah Arendt, "Charlie Chaplin: The Suspect," excerpt from the essay "The Jew as Pariah" in: *The Jewish Writings*. Schocken, 2007, pp. 286-288.

Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, International Psychoanalytic Press, 1922.

Week 8: *What is Resistance? On the Concept of History*

Core readings:

Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings, 4: 1938–1940*, Harvard University Press, 2006

Information for those interested in receiving credit from Vermont State University:

Assessments:

Response paper	(10%)
Essay Plan	(20%)
Draft	
End of Course : Final Essay	(70%)

Response paper:

The 8 week term is a short, intensive period of learning. For this reason, it is important to begin at the end of the first week with an initial response paper to start the process of thinking and writing that will lead to a research topic for the essay plan. The response paper is freeform of 2-3 pages on any aspect of the material discussed, on class discussions or any other relevant topic. This is 10% of the course assessment.

Essay plan:

An essay plan of 2-4 pp will be due at the end of week four. The plan should focus on one of the core topics of the course in conjunction with your own interest. The research topic should be supported by primary and secondary material that can be reasonably covered within the timeframe of the term and help lead to draft for the essay plan. This constitutes 20% of the overall assessment.

Draft and Final Submission:

The rough draft of 1000-1500 words will provide an opportunity for feedback and discussion, so that you may improve your final submission due at the end of the course. The final essay should be between 2500-4000 words and follow from the draft. It should include a bibliography and make use of the primary source authors (Adorno, Horkheimer, Arendt, Kracauer, Benjamin) on a topic that follows a theme of your own interest. The draft paper is not assessed, since it will be submitted as part of the final essay and constitute 70% of the final grade.

General expectations and assessment standards:

Your final submission should make reference to one of the primary texts on the course (Adorno, Arendt, Benjamin, Horkheimer, Kracauer, see primary sources above) and demonstrate an understanding of the course readings by citing and referencing these authors. Presenting a few choice citations from the primary sources and being able to understand and present these references in your submission constitutes the basis of quality paper. A suitable bibliography would include the author(s) and secondary sources that would help you understand the readings. Since the purpose of the course is to read the literature on fascism, authoritarianism and totalitarianism from the mid-20th century, the discussion of contemporary news items and events should only serve as a point of departure. Although these topics are also addressed in other fields such as journalism, political science, and film studies, the aim of this course is to focus on ideas, the concepts behind fascism, and the merits, assumptions, flaws, and contradictions of our primary

source authors who sought to understand it. We aim to discuss their ideas in context, to make connections between ideas as intellectual history and as explanations for what we see occurring around ourselves. Ultimately, we aim to review and be able to assess the contemporary relevance of these ideas. Most of all, a quality paper for this course will seek to understand and interpret the mid-20th century literature on fascism in conjunction with your own interests, interpretations, and concerns.

Course Evaluation & Grading:

Students will be assessed according to their participation, papers, and work projects, based on the following evaluation guidelines: the ability to think analytically, express ideas effectively through written and communication, exchange ideas effectively through oral communication, bring innovation to their work, envisage and work independently on a project, and to accept and act on criticism. Good papers take time and come in drafts, so start early and ask a friend or colleague to read it – your final project in particular. Research librarians are an excellent resource to help get you started, as is the VSU writing center. Plagiarism is counterproductive and you’ll get caught. Here are some tips on how to avoid it: <https://www1.chapman.edu/~babbie/plag00.html>.

If you’re stuck or pressed for time ask for help or an extension. Lastly, we recommend checking out this useful short article on active reading strategies that can help you more efficiently identify the main arguments and key evidence in sometimes dense academic texts: <http://blogs.swarthmore.edu/burke/permanent-features-advice-on-academia/how-to-read-in-college/>.

Vermont State University Academic Policies

Grading Policy:

Grades are indicated by letters with a designated “quality point” value assigned to each as follows:

A	4.0	B	3.0
A-	3.7	B-	2.7
B+	3.3	C+	2.3

A grade of **B- or better** must be achieved to count this course toward a graduate degree at VTSU. For questions on transfer pathways, please contact your contact within VTSU’s Department of Education. Additional grading information can be found in the VTSU Graduate Catalog under Academic Policies, Credits & Grading: <https://catalog.vermontstate.edu/content.php?catoid=8&navoid=119>

Academic Honesty Policy

Vermont State University upholds high standards of academic integrity from all community members. Academic integrity encompasses honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and the courage to act on these fundamental values (International Center for Academic Integrity [ICAI], 2021; The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity, 3rd ed.). A student who fails to uphold these values may experience academic consequences including a grade of F, indicating no credit, for assignments or courses, or dismissal from the University. Examples of failure to uphold academic integrity may include using unauthorized aids to complete or enhance academic work, copying another person’s work on exams, quizzes, or assignments, or engaging in other forms of plagiarism. To plagiarize is to use someone else’s

words or ideas without full and proper citation and to present them as one's own. The sharing of VTSU password and login credentials to misrepresent oneself in online learning is a violation of academic integrity. Violations need not be intentional in nature. All members of the VTSU community are expected to investigate and understand their responsibility to act with integrity, and to seek assistance when uncertain. For more information, please see the VTSU Graduate Catalog Academic Integrity Policy: <https://catalog.vermontstate.edu/content.php?catoid=8&navoid=119#academic-integrity>

Use and Ownership of Copyrighted Materials

For information and guidance, faculty and students are referred to the Vermont State Colleges Manual of Policy and Procedures annual disclosure regarding illegal file sharing and the Higher Education Opportunity Act, accessible online at the following address:
<https://www.vsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/VSC-Annual-Notice.pdf>

Accommodations

It is the policy of Vermont State University to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and any other applicable federal and state laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. The university is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to qualified students with disabilities so that no such student shall, by reason of disability, be excluded from participating in or be denied the benefits of services programs or activities at the university. More information is available at <https://vermontstate.edu/academics/student-success/disability-services/>.

Course Drop Policy:

Vermont State University offers courses to educators with the expectation that participants will complete the course. However, the University realizes circumstances arise in one's personal life that may cause disruptions. **The policy for dropping a course is that a participant will notify the instructor in writing of the intent to withdraw from the course. The withdrawal notice should be made within the first week of the course and should include the reason for withdrawing.** After week one, changes in class status will be considered for health, bereavement, and personal or emergency situations only. Those who withdraw without adhering to this policy may receive a failing grade on their transcript and/or be liable for associated course costs.

Please direct any drop requests and questions for this course to the VtSU Center for Schools, cfs@castleton.edu

Transcript Request:

www.castleton.edu/transcripts. Please direct transcript request questions to registrar@vermontstate.edu.