

Political Radicalism: Comparing Communism and Fascism
GVPT 459X

Tyd 1118
Th 2:00pm – 4:45pm
University of Maryland
Fall 2019

Professor Vladimir Tismaneanu
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This course will examine the main similarities and distinctions between communist and fascist radical ideologies, movements, and political systems. The course will highlight the centrality of ideology in totalitarian experiments and the relationship between ideology and terror as underpinnings of the ideocratic despotisms. Class discussions will focus on the main theories regarding the rise, structure, and functioning of the the Stalinist and Nazi dictatorships. We will explore the contemporary implications of totalitarianism. The main historical personalities (charismatic leaders) examined in this course will be Lenin, Stalin, Hitler. We will also discuss other cases such as Mussolini, Mao, Enver Hoxha, Ceausescu, Castro.

Lectures and readings will focus the relationship between the Russian revolutionary tradition and the Bolshevik political culture; the interpretation of communism and fascism as political religions (secular messianisms). We will explore the relationship between totalitarianism and evil.

Requirements

- Students are required to read the assigned readings before each class period. In addition, students are expected to read one newspaper on a daily basis (either Washington Post or New York Times).

- Participation in class discussions is strongly encouraged. Grades will be based on an in class midterm exam, one unannounced quiz, a final take home exam and class participation.
- Extra credit can be earned by preparing a short class presentation on a relevant topic; the time and details must first be approved by the teaching assistant and the professor.

Readings

1. Vladimir Tismaneanu, The Devil in History, paperback
2. Paul Berman, Terror and Liberalism
3. Gregory Claeys, Dystopia
4. Robert Gellately, Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler. The Age of Social Catastrophe

Recommended:

1. George Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution*, paperback
2. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*
3. Francois Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion*.
4. Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*
5. Vassily Grossman, *Life and Fate*
6. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Demons*
7. Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy* (Harvard UP, 2006)
8. John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History* (Knopf, 1997)
9. Eric Weitz, *Genocide: Utopias of Race and State* (Princeton UP, 2003)

Major Themes:

Weeks 1-3

A: Modernity and nihilism: varieties of political radicalism and messianism. The communist experiment and its relation to the socialist utopianism (Dostoyevsky). : The Bolshevik worldview and its implementation. Leni's Manichean political philosophy (the binary logic: *kto-kogo*, who-whom). Lenin's communist dictatorship (revolutionary ideology, revolutionary praxis). The vanguard party and the mystique of the organization. Stalin's rise to power: the Bolshevik police state and the reshaping of society.

Stalinism and its relationship to Leninism. Bolshevism and the intellectuals. The emergence of the Gulag and the „logic” of permanent purge. Bolshevism, internationalism, the Comintern, and the rise of National Socialism.

Tismaneanu, Introduction
 Claeys, Part 1

Weeks 4-5

B: Totalitarianism: A novel form of government? Totalitarianism—a *Weltanschauungstaat* (a state based on a worldview). Hitler and National Socialism: the origins of the Nazi ideology (anti-Semitism, irrationalism, anti-liberalism, racism, integral nationalism, imperialism, anti-Marxism, anti-communism, anti-Christian). What are political religions? The secularization of the sacred and the rise of ideologically-driven mass movements.

Tismaneanu, Chapter 1
 Claeys: Chapter 3
 Gellately Part 1

Suggested

Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy* (Harvard UP, 2006)
 John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History* (Knopf, 1997)

Weeks 6-7

C: The appeals of communism: Political religions and earthly salvation. Intellectuals and the revolutionary illusions. Communism, fascism, and the cult of violence. The appeals of fascism as a revolutionary movement. Party, ideology, and propaganda in Fascist and Communist experiments.

Tismaneanu, Chapter 2
 Claeys, Chapter 4
 Gellately Part II

Week 8:

D: Radical nationalism and communist internationalism. Ideological polarization in the 20th century. The main features of Stalinism. Communism, Fascism, and the intellectuals.

Tismaneanu, Chapter 3
Gellately Part III

Week 9:

E: Comparing utopian-extremist dictatorships. The ideological ingredient and the search for the perfect society. The racial versus the social „perfect” community.

Tismaneanu, Chapter 4
Gellately Part IV

Suggested:

Eric Weitz, *Genocide: Utopias of Race and State* (Princeton UP, 2003)

Weeks 10-11

F: The role of the leader: comparing Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler. The role of the party: comparing the Bolshevik and the Nazi parties. The role of ideology: comparing Leninism and National Socialism. The role of the secret police. Totalitarian states and the economy: major distinctions between Stalinism and Nazism. Communism as heir to Enlightenment, Fascism as heir to counter-enlightenment. Radical evil versus the „banality of evil”. Hitler’s „willing executioners”, Stalin’s hangmen, and the mechanisms of complicity.

Tismaneanu Chapter 5
Claeys, Chapter 7
Gellately Part V

Suggested

Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*

Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*

Weeks 12-13

G. How do totalitarian regimes survive and how do they end? Arendt's theory revisited. De-Stalinization and the Soviet political culture. The corrosive role of Marxist revisionism. Marxism, Communism and the legacies of European humanism. Can we compare communism and fascism? Radical Islam and the new challenges to liberal modernity.

Tismaneanu, Chapter 6 and Conclusions

Claeys, Chapter 7 and Conclusions

Berman, Entire Book

Gellately Part VI and VII

Film presentation and discussion to be announced. Film: „What Our Fathers Did: A Nazi Legacy”