

## **Political Radicalism: Comparative Perspectives on Communism and Fascism**

GVPT459X  
Fall 2017  
Th 2:00-4:45

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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 meanings of Hannah Arendt's classical study of totalitarianism. Other seminal texts to be discussed are related to the impact of German radical nationalism and romantic anti-capitalism on the rise of National Socialism; the relationship between the Russian revolutionary tradition and the Bolshevik political culture; the interpretation of Communism and fascism as political religions (secular messianisms). Class discussions will explore the relationship between totalitarianism and evil.

Students are expected to choose a topic related to the readings and the syllabus and present it for class discussion. The paper will draw from both bot required and recommended readings, as well as other sources. This paper will be the basis for the final exam research paper.

### **Course Requirements**

The reading assignments are an essential component of this course; it is important that you keep up with the readings to best understand the lectures and engage in class discussion. **IMPORTANT:** Please keep in mind that lectures do not duplicate the readings and students are expected to be familiar with notions and information provided by the professor in his presentations.

- A) Two announced quizzes (20 %)
- B) Midterm in class exam (20 %)
- C) Final take home exam (50 %)
- D) Class Participation (10 %)

Students are encouraged to approach TA (Andres Garcia) and discuss possible class short presentations on course-related topic. These presentations will add to the final grade.

## Readings

Required:

1. Fyodor Dostoyevski, *The Demons*
2. Richard Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe*
4. George Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution*
5. Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism*
6. Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*

Recommended:

1. Francois Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion*.
3. Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*
- 4 Richard Crossman, ed., *The God that Failed*
5. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*
6. Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*
7. Vassily Grossman, *Life and Fate*

Major Themes:

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. Gellately and Martin Malia on 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.

Readings:

Malia *The Soviet Tragedy*.  
 Gellately Parts 1-3  
 Dostoyevsky, *The Demons*  
 Furet

B: Totalitarianism: Class discussions on Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Anti-semitism and the crisis of modern society. imperialism and racism. The nature of 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).

Arendt, *The Origins*

Gellately Parts 4-8

Talmon Parts 3-4

Suggested

Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy* (Harvard UP, 2006)

John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History* (Knopf, 1997)

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.

Furet

Mosse

Crossman

Gentile

D: Radical nationalism and communist internationalism. Ideological polarization in the 20th century. Georges Sorel and the birth of fascism. Discussion on Mussolini.

Readings:

Jacob Talmon, Parts 6-9

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

Readings

Malia

Gellately

Suggested:

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

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.

Readings  
Gellately

Suggested

Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*

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

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. Ur-Fascism (Umberto Eco). Bolshevism as a moral problem.

Readings

Arendt, introduction and conclusions

Koestler in Crossman, *God that Failed*

Film presentations and discussions to be announced. Suggested films: *Mephisto* (1981 by Istvan Szabo); *The Circus* (1936, Grigori Alexandrov); *Triumph of the Will* (1934, Leni Riefenstahl); *Downfall...*; *The 41st* (1956, Grigori Chukhrai) or *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957, Mikhail Kalatozov); *Repentance* (Tenghiz Abuladze, 1987)