

# **TOTALITARIANISM**

## **PLPT 3500-002**

Tu/Th 2:00pm-3:15pm on Zoom

Professor Kevin Duong

Office Hours: By appointment on Zoom

“Totalitarianism” is a conceptual lodestar of twentieth century politics. It is meant to name everything that contemporary American and European political culture is not—terroristic, homogenous, authoritarian, ideologically manipulative, and unfree. At the same time, critics have used the concept to describe regimes as different as the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, Communist China, Islamo-fascism, and occasionally even the US itself. What is totalitarianism? This class explores this question by introducing undergraduate students to the history and theory of totalitarianism. We will study specific cases—especially Nazi Germany, Vichy France, Soviet Union, and Mussolini’s Italy—alongside the theoretical frameworks scholars have used to understand these regimes. Students can expect to discuss themes such as violence and ideology, collaboration and resistance, the invention of human rights, and the role of historical memory in contemporary Europe.

### **Required Materials**

The following textbooks will be made available at the bookstore. If you purchase copies of the book elsewhere, please endeavor to acquire the correct edition.

1. Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (Simon & Schuster)
2. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Penguin)
3. Ernst Jünger, *On Pain* (Telos)
4. Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (Chicago)
5. J. Q. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton)

Most of our readings will be posted online on Collab. Our Collab class can be accessed here:

<https://collab.its.virginia.edu/portal/site/7d225a8c-859e-418b-bb7e-6f3c752e702a>

### **Course Objectives and Expectations**

Assignments: In addition to class participation, you will be responsible for a weekly forum post, a midterm assignment, and a final exam. More details on the midterm assignment and final exam will be given as the date approaches.

Attendance: Attendance is crucial for the success of a class, especially a virtual one. The expectation is that students will attend each class and have their cameras on. However, if for any reason circumstances conspire to make it difficult for a student to attend a class or leave their camera on, just let me know – the request will always be accommodated. A student’s participation grade will be in jeopardy if a student has more than 4 unexcused absences.

Class Participation: Please note that participation is a substantial component of the course’s overall evaluation. Students can ensure that they maximally receive participation points by attending class, participating in class discussion, and by showing general attentiveness towards,

including thoughtful responses to, their fellow classmates. If for any reason a student is concerned about their ability to do the above listed, please feel free to discuss the matter with me early in the semester.

Course Evaluation:

In-class Participation	20%
Forum Posts	20%
Midterm Reflection Paper	20%
Final Exam	40%

COVID Grading Note:

As you all may know, there are alternative grading schemes available during COVID. According to the university, “Students have until the Add deadline (Feb. 16) to choose Graded (A-F grades) or the COVID Credit/General Credit/No Credit grading option for their Spring courses in SIS. Students will have an additional opportunity beginning on April 23 until April 30 to change the grading option for each of their courses. The deadline to make any changes to a course grading option is Friday, April 30, at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time.”

**Other Matters:**

Plagiarism: Each student is expected to abide by the code of academic integrity. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with college policies regarding plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity, which will be strictly observed in this class. If work is found to be plagiarized, the student will receive an automatic failing grade in the class, and depending on the situation additional sanctions may be imposed by the college.

Reasonable Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you have a disability that may require assistance or accommodations, or if you have any questions related to any accommodation for testing, note taking, reading, etc., please speak with me as soon as possible. You may also contact the Student Disability Access Center at <https://studenthealth.virginia.edu/sdac-contactus>

## Schedule of Readings

Readings and assignments are to be completed by their corresponding date. ‘Optional’ readings are additional selections that may improve your mastery of the material, but aren’t required.

Readings required with asterisks (\*) are available on our Collab website. Please read the assigned texts in the order they are listed.

### WEEK 1-2: What is Totalitarianism? Literary and Popular Accounts

Many of us today have an idea of what totalitarianism is, even if it is sometimes impressionistic. In the first two weeks of our class, we explore popular perceptions of what totalitarianism is in film and literature. What are the defining features of “totalitarianism” that we pick up in literary and political culture?

**Feb 2:** Introduction

**Feb 4:** 1984 (film)\*

**Feb 9:** Charles de Gaulle, “Russian Menace Like German” in the *New York Times*\*  
Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (pp. 1-146)

**Feb 11:** Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (pp. 147-249)

Optional: Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (pp. 31-50)  
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem*

### WEEK 3-5: The Origins of Totalitarianism: Classical Accounts

“Totalitarianism theory” was a body of theory that emerged in the mid-twentieth century. These foundational texts formalized totalitarianism’s essential features, the better to understand its historical novelty. During these weeks, we’ll move away from popular understandings of totalitarianism to a more intensive study of its classic studies.

**Feb 16:** Friedrich Hayek, *Law, Legislation, Liberty, Vol 1* (pp. 35-54)\*  
Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (pp. 57-90)\*

**Feb 18:** Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, (pp. 100-111, 124-133, 193-209)\*

**Feb 23:** Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (pp. 305-340)\*

**Feb 25:** Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (pp. 291-302, 460-482)

**Mar 2:** **No Class**

**Mar 4:** Claude Lefort, “Totalitarianism Without Stalin,”\* “The Image of the Body and Totalitarianism”\*

Optional: Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Of Totalitarian Dictatorship” in *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*  
David Ciepley, *Liberalism in the Shadow of Totalitarianism*  
Jacob Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*  
Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (pp. 108-120)  
Juan Linz, “Totalitarian Systems” in *Totalitarianism and Authoritarian Regimes*  
Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Totalitarianism and Rationality”

WEEK 6-8: The Political Culture of Totalitarianism

In the classical accounts of totalitarianism, “ideology” holds a special place. That ideology was unique in how it brought together preexisting ideas from the nineteenth century and radicalized them. Foremost among those ideas were the sacred, the cult of the will, and the revolutionary role of technology in an age of “mass society.” During these weeks, we observe different ways totalitarian movements sought to combine these ideas into a persuasive, mass political culture.

- Mar 8:**           **Midterm Reflection Due**
- Mar 9:**           **No Class, Break Day**
- Mar 11:**          Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will* (film)\*  
Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (pp. 15-28, 42-88)\*
- Mar 16:**          Filippo Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” “The Necessity and Beauty of Violence,” “First Futurist Political Manifesto,” “Futurist Patriotism”\*  
Ardengo Soffici, “Fascist Art”\*  
Tullio Crali, “Dancing Flight Over the Enemy” (painting)\*
- Mar 18:**          Bernardo Bertolucci, *The Conformist* (film)\*  
Benjamin Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (pp. 1-11, 44-73)\*
- Mar 23:**          Anatoly Lunacharsky, “Self-Education of the Workers”\*  
Maxim Gorky, “Soviet Literature”\*
- Mar 25:**          Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (pp. ix-xiv, 134-135, 174-211)\*
- Optional:         Richard Taylor, “A ‘Cinema for the Millions’: Soviet Socialist Realism and the Problem of Film Comedy”  
Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (pp. 70-108)  
Sandrine Sanos, *The Aesthetics of Hate: Far-Right Intellectuals, Antisemitism, and Gender in 1930s France*  
Sigmund Neumann, *Permanent Revolution* (pp. 96-117)  
Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*  
Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-1939*

WEEK 9-11: Degeneracy, Violence & Total War

Totalitarian states were engaged in a form of “total war” that manifested the power of the “total state” at home. During these weeks, we investigate how “total war” and the “total state” were conceptualized. What are the links between racism and total war? Do totalitarian states understand the use of political violence differently from other states?

- Mar 30:**         Benito Mussolini, “The Manifesto on Race,”\* “The Racial Laws”\*  
Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (pp. 47-75)\*
- Apr 1:**           Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*,\* “Speech to the National Socialist Women’s

Organization”\*

Heinrich Himmler, “On the Question of Homosexuality”\*

Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (pp. 11-45)\*

**Apr 6:** Ernst Jünger, *On Pain*

Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (pp. 77-99)\*

**Apr 8:** Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1-2, 55-77, 159-189)\*

Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (91-103)\*

**Apr 13:** J.Q. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (pp. 1-82, 124-131)

**Apr 15:** **No Class, Break Day**

Optional: Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*

Arno Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The ‘Final Solution’ in History*  
Geoff Ely, *Nazism as Fascism: Violence, Ideology, and the Ground of Consent in Germany, 1930-1945*

David Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare As We Know It*

Enzo Traverso, “Intellectuals and Anti-Fascism: For a Critical Historicization”

#### WEEK 12-13: What Comes After Totalitarianism?

In many ways, totalitarianism’s real philosophical challenge is raised in its aftermath. Who is responsible? How does a political community come to terms with its past? In these final weeks, we examine the legal trials of collaborators. We also examine political debates over “remembering” the history of totalitarianism.

**Apr 20:** Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (pp. 3-111)

**Apr 22:** Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (pp. 135-150, 206-298)

**Apr 27** Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (pp. ix-91)

**Apr 29:** Alice Kaplan, *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (pp. 143-210, 227-234)

Optional: Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*

Carolyn Dean, *The Frail Social Body*

Joan Scott, “The Politics of Virility”

#### WEEK 14: Totalitarianism Today?

**May 4:** Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (pp. 1-18)\*

Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (pp. 41-68)\*

**May 6:** Review Day

**May 14:** **Final Exam**