

The Human Condition and the Totalitarian Experience

Course description:

The course outlines the classical concept of the totalitarian state, as developed by Hannah Arendt and others, taking Hitler and Stalin as their models. We will then cover some subsequent modifications in the theory of totalitarianism, as a result of historical changes and developments, especially in the Soviet Empire, as well as criticisms of the concept. Here are some of the questions we will be dealing with: What popular attitudes and psychological reactions exist towards totalitarian atrocities such as the Holocaust? Under what psychological conditions are individuals capable of offering resistance, as did the “rescuers” of Jews under Nazi domination? While these phenomena may now appear to be bygone of merely historical interest, the psychological aspects of “totalitarian situations” remain acutely important, even in present-day democratic societies. The massacre in My Lai, the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, the obedience experiments carried out by Stanley Milgram, and other psychological studies provide shocking evidence of how easily average citizens – and by no means only the “authoritarian personalities,” as described by Theodor W. Adorno and Erich Fromm – are in danger of behaving inhumanely in social situations, in which unthinking submission, even to the most questionable authorities, seems to be the easiest way out of stress and insecurity.

Course work/expectations:

The overall grade for the course will depend on short, weekly written tests (50 %), participation in class discussion (15 %), the midterm exam (10 %), a term paper (15 %), and the final exam (10 %).

Course schedule and readings:

What follows are the readings for eleven sessions. Please be sure to have worked through the assignments carefully, prior to each session. At the beginning of each meeting, a short written test will be set covering the assigned reading material. All the texts to be covered are included in a photocopied Reader. Aside from this Reader, there are two pocket books to be analyzed in your research paper, namely Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (London: Vintage 2005; first published in 1940), and Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: HarperCollins 1998; first published in 1932).

1. Introduction to the course, overview of the concept of totalitarianism

“Totalitarianism,” in: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills, London 1986, vol. 16, pp. 106-113

2. The classical “ideal type” of totalitarianism

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York 1955, pp. 301-317;

Karl-Dietrich Bracher, "The Disputed Concept of Totalitarianism," in: Ernest A. Menze (ed.), *Totalitarianism Reconsidered*, Port Washington, N.Y. / London 1981, pp. 11-33.

3. The Mind of Perpetrators and Popular Attitudes towards Atrocities in Totalitarian Society

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, London 1965, pp. 21-35, 135-150;
Ian Kershaw, "German Popular Opinion and the 'Jewish Question', 1939-1945: Some further Reflections," in: Arnold Paucker (ed.), *The Jews in Nazi Germany 1933-1945*, Tübingen 1986, pp. 365-386

4. Individual Resistance to the Holocaust: The Rescuers

Michael Berenbaum / Abraham J. Peck, *The Holocaust and History. The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined*, Bloomington / Indianapolis 1998, Introduction to Part 10 „The Rescuers,“ pp. 649-650;
Nechama Tec, „Reflections on Rescuers“, in: Berenbaum / Peck, *loc. cit.*, pp. 651-662;
Eva Fogelman, „The Rescuer Self,“ *op. cit.*, pp. 663-677;
Samuel P. Oliner, „Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. A Portrait of Moral Courage,“ *op. cit.*, pp. 678-690

5. The Rescuers, continued

Beate Kosmala, "Facing Deportation in Germany, 1941-1945: Jewish and Non-Jewish Responses," in: Beate Kosmala / Feliks Tych (ed.), *Facing the Nazi Genocide: Jews and Non-Jews in Europe*, Berlin 2004

6. Midterm exam

7. The Classical Concept of the "Authoritarian Personality"

Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Daniel J. Levinson, R. Nevitt Sanford *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York / Evanston / London 1950, pp. IX-XII, 1-17, 255-257, 971-976

8. Totalitarian Situations in Free Societies: The My Lai Experience

Seymour M. Hersh, *My Lai 4. A Report on the Massacre and its Aftermath*, New York 1970, pp. XI-XII, 3-89;
Edward M. Opton, „It Never Happened and Besides They Deserved It“, in: N. Sanford and C. Cromston, *Sanctions for Evil*, San Francisco 1971, pp. 49-70;
Philip Zimbardo, "Power turns good soldiers into 'bad apples'," in: *Boston Globe*, May 9th, 2004

9. Totalitarian Situations: The Milgram Experiment

Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, New York 1974, pp. 1-31, 165-168, 179-189

10. More Totalitarian Situations: Threat and Confinement.

Craig Haney, Curtis Banks and Philip Zimbardo, "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," in: *International Journal of Criminology and Penology* 1973, pp. 69-97;

Stephen M. Sales, Threat as a Factor in Authoritarianism: An Analysis of Archival Data," in: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1973, vol. 28, pp. 44-57

11. Psychoanalysis an an Antidote against Totalitarianism? Psychological Roots of Submission

Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart. Autonomy in a Mass Age*, Glencoe 1963, pp. 3-41;

Detlef Oesterreich, "Flight into Security," (paper) Berlin 1998

12. Individual Freedom and the Longing for Submission

Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, New York / Chicago / San Francisco 1964, pp. 3-39, 240-276;

Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?," in: Peter Gay (ed.), *Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West*, New York 1954, I, pp. 1971-76 (reproduced in: Peter Gay, ed., *The Enlightenment: A Comprehensive Anthology*, 1973, pp. 383-390)

13. Final exam