

The Human Condition and the Totalitarian Experience

Dr. Thomas Werneke

Email Address:	info@fubest.fu-berlin.de
Time Slot:	Thursdays, 1:30 p.m.
Language of Instruction:	English
Contact Hours:	45
ECTS Credits:	6

Course Description

The course focuses on the classical concept of the totalitarian state developed by Hannah Arendt and others, which takes Hitler and Stalin as the primary models for this uniquely 20th century political system. We will be covering some of the subsequent modifications in the theory of totalitarianism, insights gained from the close examination of historical changes and developments, especially in the former Soviet Empire. Here are some of the questions we will be dealing with: what are the key elements of totalitarianism? What are the fundamental elements of totalitarian rule? What were the official positions and the popular attitudes toward the rulers and such totalitarian atrocities as the Holocaust and the mass imprisonment? What insights into the totalitarian system and mindset can be gained from psychology and psychoanalysis? Under what psychological/social conditions are individuals capable of offering opposition or resistance, as did the German resistance and the “rescuers” of Jews under Nazi domination or dissidents in the Soviet Union?

While the manifestations of totalitarianism may now appear to be bygone of merely historical interest, the social psychology of “totalitarian situations” remains acutely important, even in present-day democratic societies. The massacre at My Lai, the obedience experiments carried out by Stanley Milgram, similar events and similar studies, provide evidence of how easily average citizens – and by no means only the “authoritarian personalities” as described by Theodor W. Adorno and Erich Fromm – have the potential of behaving inhumanely in specific situations, when unthinking submission, even to the most questionable orders, seems to be the easiest way to deal with the stress and insecurity of the moment.

What follows are the class schedule and the reading assignments for the eleven class sessions. Please be sure to have worked through the readings carefully prior to each session. All the texts identified below are included on our digital learning platform Blackboard. In addition to these readings, there are two pocket books to be read and analysed in a research paper, namely Arthur Koestler’s, *Darkness at Noon*, London: Vintage 2005 (first published in 1940), and Aldous Huxley’s, *Brave New World*, New York: HarperCollins 1998 (first published in 1932).

Learning Objectives

- Introducing the history of National Socialism (including the Holocaust) and Stalinism (including the Great Purge) as well as other violent events in modern history
- Studying different approaches that try to explain the individual, collective, and societal premises of the Holocaust and other genocidal case studies
- Training to form and express arguments during (scholarly) debates in class, and to articulate complex thoughts during an in-class presentation
- Training how to read, capture, and employ theoretical approaches in the field of the humanities
- Improving essay-writing skills in the field of the humanities

Student Profile

Should be in their fourth semester of college/university education or beyond.

Assignments and Grading

Attendance and participation (includes Independent Project report and an in-class presentation): 200 Points

Weekly written summaries of readings: 200 Points

Midterm Exam: 250 Points

Term Paper: 350 Points

Completion of the Midterm Exam as well as the Term Paper is needed for a grade.

FUB Grade	Points of 1,000
1.0	980-1,000
1.3	950-979
1.7	900-949
2.0	850-899
2.3	800-849
2.7	750-799
3.0	700-749
3.3	650-699
3.7	600-649
4.0	500-599
5.0	< 500

Attendance

Attendance in class is mandatory. We also expect you to be punctual out of respect to both your instructor and your fellow students. If you cannot attend class because you are ill, please report sick to the FU-BEST office (info@fubest.fu-berlin.de) and to your instructor by e-mail before class.

Absences are **excused** in case of **illness**; however, for the fifth sick day and every other sick day after that (consecutive or cumulative, counted not per individual course but for the program overall), you will need to turn in a doctor's notice ("Attest" in German) to the FU-BEST office in order for them to count as excused, too.

If you miss an exam due to an excused absence, your instructor and the FU-BEST team will arrange a make-up exam for you; you may also be entitled to a term paper deadline extension. If you, however, do not fulfill all course requirements needed for a grade by the (later) date determined by the program, passing the course is no longer possible.

Please also note that if you miss more than half of a course's sessions (even if due to excused absence), passing the course is no longer possible.

Personal travel and visits by relatives or friends are **not** accepted as reasons for absence (i.e., absences for these reasons always count as unexcused).

Regarding **unexcused** absences, please note the following:

- Any unexcused absence has consequences for at least the participation portion of the grade.
- Two unexcused absences lead to a formal warning and a lowering of the course grade by a fraction.
- Three unexcused absences will result in an "F" (5.0) on the transcript.

An absence for more than half of a particular day's session will be considered an absence for that day.

Literature

Digitalized readings posted on FU platform Blackboard.

Arthur Koestler: Darkness at Noon

Aldous Huxley: Brave New World

Course Schedule

Calendar	Topics, Readings, etc.
Session 1	<p>Topic: Introduction to the course; overview of the concept of Totalitarianism.</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiro, Herbert, "Totalitarianism," in: International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, ed. David L. Sills, London 1968, vol. 16, pp. 106-113.
Session 2	<p>Topic: The concept of Totalitarianism and its limits of explanation</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geyer, Michael, Fitzpatrick, Sheila (Ed.): Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared, Introduction, Cambridge 2009, pp. 1-26. • Bauman, Zygmunt: Modernity and Ambivalence, Ithaca/NY 1991, pp. 1-52.
Session 3	<p>Topic: The Mind of Perpetrators and Popular Attitudes towards Atrocities in Totalitarian Society.</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
Session 4	<p>Topic: Individual Resistance to the Holocaust: The Rescuers.</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Berenbaum / Abraham J. Peck (ed.), 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, op. 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.
Session 5	<p>Topic: The Rescuers (continued).</p> <p><i>Independent Project report to be submitted</i></p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Inge Deutschkron, We survived. Berlin Jews Underground, German Resistance Memorial 2008. <p>Discussion: Huxley's "Brave New World"</p>
Session 6	MIDTERM EXAM

Session 7	<p>Topic: The Classical Concept of the “Authoritarian Personality”.</p> <p><i>(Tentative) literature list/bibliography for Term Paper to be submitted</i></p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baberowski, Joerg, Doering-Manteuffel, Anselm: The Quest for Order and the Pursuit of Terror: National Socialist Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union as Multiethnic Empires, in: Geyer/Fritzpatrick 2009, pp. 180-230. • 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. <p>Discussion: Koestler`s “Darkness at noon”</p>
Session 8/9	Excursion
Session 10	<p>Topic: Totalitarian Situations in Free Societies: The My Lai Experience.</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
Session 11	<p>Topic: Totalitarian Situations: The Milgram Experiment.</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stanley Milgram, Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View, New York 1974, pp. 1-31, 165-168, 179-189. • Goffman, Erving: Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity, London 1963, pp. 4-36. <p>Term Paper to be submitted!</p>
Session 12	<p>Topic: Psychoanalysis as an Antidote against Totalitarianism? Psychological Roots of Submission.</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bruno Bettelheim, The Informed Heart. Autonomy in a Mass Age, Glencoe 1963, pp. 3-41. • Detlef Oesterreich, “Flight into Security,” (paper) Berlin 1998.
Session 13	<p>Topic: Individual Freedom and the Longing for Submission. Enlightenment as an Antidote against Totalitarianism?</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 1071-76 (reproduced in: Peter Gay, ed., The Enlightenment: A Comprehensive Anthology, 1973, pp. 383-3900).