

Science and Fascism: State and Expertise in Interwar Europe and the Two World Wars (1914-1945)



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In 1942, the American sociologist Robert Merton described modern science as an intellectual enterprise that can produce truthful and factual knowledge only if inspired by democratic values. Yet such concept contrasted starkly with the reality of science in the interwar period and World War II, at the peak of the clash between liberal democracies and fascist dictatorships. What was the role of science in the global conflict between liberalism and the fascist ‘New Order’? What did science and technology look like under fascism?

This class examines the relationship between science and fascism in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Franco’s Spain, and Salazar’s Portugal. During the Great War (1914-1918), science and technology were enlisted as critical assets for the war effort and the international scientific community was shattered across national lines. The Great War proved the importance of the scientific organization of society and state-controlled scientific advancement. Fascism developed this lesson in the interwar period to pursue its nationalist and imperialist goal: the creation of a new world order.

Thus, the seminar explores the entanglement between science, technology and fascism by examining a wide range of disciplines, such as physics, medicine, eugenics, statistics, demography, agronomy, and engineering. Focusing in particular on fascism’s central themes of race and empire, the course examines the relationship between state power and scientific expertise, the persecution of Jewish scientists in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, and scientists’ critical competition in World War II ahead of the creation of the atomic bomb, which ushered in the new era of the Cold War.

Learning Objectives

- Students will gain a deep understanding of the history Fascism as a complex political, economic, cultural, social and scientific phenomenon in European history and political theory.

- Students will compare and explore different interpretations of the relationship between science and politics in a wide range of national and disciplinary contexts. Was science a victim of authoritarian regimes, as illustrated by the case of Jewish scientists? Who were the scientists that eagerly collaborated with the regimes of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany?
- Students will be able to analyze how scientific and historical arguments are constructed based on sources, historiography, and research questions.
- Students will gain a broad bibliographical preparation to conduct further research on a wide range of topics in European history (e.g. authoritarianism, Fascism, Nazism, anti-Semitism) and history of science (science and the state, the production of scientific evidence and objectivity, science and society). This is a reading intensive course designed to help you develop and define a research question in dialogue with existing historiography.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Class: Thursday, 10:10 AM – 12:00 pm EST online

Office hours: TBA or by appointment: acagliot@barnard.edu

1. **Week: Introduction**

Thursday September 10

2. **Week: The Origins of Fascism in the Great War**

Thursday September 17

- Jon Agar, “Science and the First World War”, from *Science in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, Polity, 2012, pp. 89-117.
- M. Mazower, "Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century", Chapter 1 (The Deserted Temple: Democracy's Rise and Fall), pp. 3-40;
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015045995258&view=2up&seq=8>
- Finchelstein, Federico. *From Fascism to Populism in History*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017, Prologue and Introduction, pp. ix-xx & 1-30.
(<https://california-degruyter-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/view/title/556269>).

3. **Week – Politics and Fascism**

Thursday September 24

- Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (Introduction, Chapter 2, 5)
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015058281414&view=2up&seq=8>
- Ruth Ben-Ghiat. *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, Introduction, pp. 1-15.
<https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/9614572>).
- Christian Goeschel, “*Italia Docet?* The Relationship between Italian Fascism and Nazism Revisited,” *European History Quarterly*, 42 (3), 480-492. <https://journals-sagepub->

com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/doi/full/10.1177/0265691412448167?utm_source=summon&utm_medium=discovery-provider

4. Week – Fascism and Race: Demography and Racial Hygiene

Thursday October 8

- Mark Mazower, “Empires, Nations, Minorities” from “Dark Continent”, Chapter 2, pp. 41-75 and chapter 3 "Healthy Bodies, Sick Bodies", pp. 76-103
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015045995258&view=2up&seq=8>
- Carl Ipsen, *Dictating Demography. The Problem of Population in Fascist Italy*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 1-32; 50-89; 195-252;
<https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/sq87bt72z>
- Burleigh, Michael. *The Racial State: Germany, 1933-1945*. Cambridge University Press, 1991, Introduction and Chapters 1 (“How Modern, German and Totalitarian was the Third Reich?”), pp.7-22 3 (“Barbarism institutionalized: racism as state policy”, 4 “The persecution of the Jews” & 6 “The Persecution of the ‘hereditary hill’, the ‘asocial’, and homosexuals”). Scanned copies will be made available by the instructor.
- Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene. Medicine under the Nazis*, Harvard University Press, 1988 (Introduction, Chapters. 1, 3).
<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000950577?urlappend=%3B>

5. Week – Nazi Life Sciences

Thursday, October 29

- Sheila Faith Weiss, *The Nazi Symbiosis: Human Genetics and Politics in the Third Reich*, University of Chicago Press, 2010, Introduction, Chapters 2, 3, 5 and conclusion.
<https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/10416554>

6. Week: German Eugenics in International Context

Thursday October 22

- Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene. Medicine under the Nazis*, Harvard University Press, 1988 (Chapts. 4, 6, 7). <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000950577?urlappend=%3B>
- Richard F. Wetzell, Chapter 5 - Eugenics, Racial Science, and Nazi Biopolitics, in *Beyond the Racial State: Germany, 1933-1945* <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/core/books/beyond-the-racial-state/39CE8643462B63036393F477FB4683D1>
- Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection. Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*, Oxford University Press, 1994, Chapters 3 (Skim), 4, 5 (Very descriptive, skim if necessary), 6 (important), 7 (optional), 9
<https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14134931>
- Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nations: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*, UC Press, 2005, Introduction and Chapters 3 and 4 (optional), titled (Instituting Eugenics in California and California’s Eugenic Landscapes), pp. 72-121
<https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14073476>

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7. **Week: Fascism and the Economy: Pick a Commodity!**
Thursday October 15

- M. Mazower, "Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century", Chapter 4 ("The Crisis of Capitalism"), pp. 104-137.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015045995258&view=2up&seq=8>
- Choose a commodity among fascist wheat, potatoes, pigs, coffee, rubber, cotton and sheep in T. Saraiva, "Fascist Pigs: Techno-scientific Organisms and the History of Fascism": (<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/48402/>).

Paper Prospectus Due

8. **Week: Environmental Health Policies**
Thursday November 5

- Robert S.C. Gordon, "Race", from "The Oxford Handbook of Fascism", pp. 296-316.
<https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/13081679>
- Frank Snowden, *The Conquest of Malaria. Italy 1900-1962*, Yale University Press, Chapter 6 ("Fascism, Racism, and Littoria"), pp. 142-180.
<https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/10699779>
- Robert Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer*, Princeton University Press, 1999, Chapters 3-5-6, pp. 58-73; 120-247 <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14812719>

9. **Week: Environment and Fascism**
Thursday November 12

- From "*How Green were the Nazis? Nature, Environment and the Nation in the Third Reich*" please read chapters 1-2-5 Scanned copies will be made available by the instructor. Chapter 5 should be easy to skim and read quickly if you read Saraiva.
- From *Modern Italy*, 19:3 (2014) please Marco Armiero, Introduction "Fascism and Nature" and "Making Italians out of Rocks: Mussolini's Shadows on Italian Mountains" <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/modern-italy/issue/fascism-and-nature/16C99A34184286534B6D2A10B68B1702>
- From Lino Campubri, *Engineers and the Making of Francoist Regime*, MIT Press, 2014, Introduction and Chapter 5 "The Total Systematization of a River and the Limitations of Totalitarianism" <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/11273003>

10. **Week: Wartime Atrocities and the Holocaust**
November 19

- Alberto Sbacchi, "Poison Gas and Atrocities in the Italo-Ethiopian War 1935-1936", in Mia Fuller (ed.), *Italian Colonialism*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, 47-56 Scanned copies will be made available by the instructor.

- Mazower, Mark. *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000, Chapter 5 “Hitler’s New Order”, pp. 138-181.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015045995258&view=2up&seq=8>
- Aly, Götz, and Susanne Heim. *Architects of Annihilation: Auschwitz and the Logic of Destruction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002, Chapters 2-3-4-7-8-11-12. Scanned copies will be made available by the instructor.

11. Week: Happy Thanksgiving!

12. Week: Physics and World War II

Thursday December 3

- Peter Bowler, Excerpt “World War II” from “Science and War” in “Making Modern Science” pp. 468-479. Scanned copies will be made available by the instructor.
- Alan Beyerchen, *Scientists under Hitler. Politics and the Physics Community in the Third Reich*, Yale University Press, 1977, Chapters 3, 7 & 9 (“The Toll of the Dismissal Policy” pp. 40-50 & “Aryan Physics” pp. 123-140; “The War Years”, pp. 168-198). Scanned copies will be made available by the instructor.
- Mark Walker, *German National Socialism and the Quest for Nuclear Power 1939-1949*, Cambridge, 1989, Chapter 3 (“The War Comes Home” pp. 88-128) & 7 (“The Myth of the German Atomic Bomb” pp. 222-228). <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/9451755>
- Neufeld, Michael J. “The Nazi Aerospace Exodus: Towards a Global, Transnational History.” *History & Technology* 28, no. 1 (March 2012): 49–67.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07341512.2012.662338>.

13. Week – Fascism and the University

Thursday December 10

John Connelly (ed.), “Universities under Dictatorships”, 2005, Chapters: “Italian Universities and Mussolini’s Dictatorship”, “German Universities under the Swastika”, and “Spanish Universities in the Francoist Dictatorship”, pp. 45-138
Scanned copies will be made available by the instructor.

14. Week: Conclusions

Thursday December 17

- Proctor, Robert. “Nazi Science and Nazi Medical Ethics: Some Myths and Misconceptions.” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 43, no. 3 (May 1, 2000): 335–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/pbm.2000.0024>.
- Jon Agar, “Nazi Science” from “Science in the Twentieth Century and Beyond”, pp. 211-228. Scanned copies will be made available by the instructor.

- Michael Burleigh, *The Racial State: Germany, 1933-1945*. Cambridge University Press, 1991, Chapter 1 (“How Modern, German and Totalitarian was the Third Reich?”), pp.7-22.

Final Paper Due on the last day of class

EVALUATION

Option 1:
Paper Prospectus: 30%
Weekly Response Papers: 15%
Participation: 15%
Final research paper: 40%

- Participation is a crucial component of this course. It consists of the quality of contributions to class discussions. Students will also be asked to lead the beginning of the discussion at least once during the semester.
- Weekly response papers consist of a response to the readings about one-page and a half or two pages maximum long. In the response, students should summarize the argument and evidence offered by the readings, compare the arguments presented by different authors, and suggest questions to be discussed in class.
- The paper prospectus (about 8 pages long) will require students to define a topic of their choice, their research questions, and offer a preliminary survey of the sources that they intend to use. Consultation in advance with the instructor is highly recommended ahead of the submission of the proposal. The instructor will also provide feedback to build on the paper prospectus for the structure and research of the final paper.
- The final research paper (about 10-12 pages long) will be an opportunity for students to develop their research skills on a topic of their choice related to the themes discussed in class (e.g.: science and politics, specific aspects of fascism, fascism and authoritarianism in a specific geographical and cultural context). While based on research on secondary sources, the use of primary sources is encouraged depending on students’ language skills.

POLICIES

- **Academic Integrity and Honor Code:**

Please make sure to familiarize yourself with Barnard’s Honor Code and respect it at all times. Approved by the student body in 1912 and updated in 2016, the Code states:

“We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by engaging with integrity in all of our academic pursuits. We affirm that academic integrity

is the honorable creation and presentation of our own work. We acknowledge that it is our responsibility to seek clarification of proper forms of collaboration and use of academic resources in all assignments or exams. We consider academic integrity to include the proper use and care for all print, electronic, or other academic resources. We will respect the rights of others to engage in pursuit of learning in order to uphold our commitment to honor. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.”

For more information, please visit: <https://barnard.edu/honor-code>

A crucial part of academic integrity consists of avoiding plagiarism. Plagiarism includes using other people’s work without acknowledgment, for example by copying or paraphrasing ideas, concepts and metaphors taken from others or the internet without appropriate reference. It is also forbidden to submit papers or assignments produced for other classes. Many of the themes discussed in class deal with sensitive issues of the politics of race, class, and gender. Please be always respectful of other participants to the seminar and their reactions to the readings.

- **Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services Statement:**

If you believe you may encounter barriers to the academic environment in an off campus course due to a documented disability or emerging health challenges, please feel free to contact me and/or the Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services (CARDS). Any student with approved academic accommodations for an off campus course is encouraged to contact me during office hours or via email. Please be advised that disability accommodations available for on campus courses may not be available for off campus courses in every instance, so please contact CARDS to discuss the particulars of the course location and how it may impact the availability of particular accommodations. If you have questions regarding registering a disability or receiving accommodations for the semester, please contact CARDS at (212) 854-4634, cards@barnard.edu, or learn more at barnard.edu/disabilityservices. CARDS is located in 101 Altschul Hall.

- **Wellness Statement:**

Your personal, emotional, physical, financial and mental well-being is of paramount importance for your academic success, especially during the current Covid-19 pandemic. The Barnard community urges you to make yourself - your own health, sanity, and wellness -your priority throughout this term and your career here. Sleep, exercise, and eating well can all be a part of a healthy regimen to cope with stress. Resources exist to support you in several sectors of your life, and we encourage you to make use of them. Should you have any questions about navigating these resources, please visit these sites:

- <https://barnard.edu/primarycare>
- <https://barnard.edu/about-counseling>
- <https://barnard.edu/wellwoman/about>

- <https://barnard.edu/events/Stressbuster>

As instructor, I am committed to support you in any way to achieve your best results and enhance your learning experience. Please feel free to communicate with me about any circumstances that may impact your wellness during the semester.

- **Affordable Access to Course Texts Statement**

All students deserve to be able to study and make use of course texts and materials regardless of cost. Barnard librarians have partnered with students, faculty, and staff to find ways to increase student access to textbooks. By the first day of advance registration for each term, faculty will have provided information about required texts for each course on CourseWorks (including ISBN or author, title, publisher, copyright date, and price), which can be viewed by students. A number of cost-free or low-cost methods for accessing some types of courses texts are detailed on the Barnard Library Textbook Affordability guide (library.barnard.edu/textbook-affordability). Undergraduate students who identify as first-generation and/or low-income students may check out items from the FLIP lending libraries in the Barnard Library (library.barnard.edu/flip) and in Butler Library for an entire semester. Students may also consult with their professors, the Dean of Studies, and the Financial Aid Office about additional affordable alternatives for having access to course texts. Visit the guide and talk to your professors and your librarian for more details.

- **Class Attendance Policy**

Be punctual: respect means also to be timely. I will tolerate up to 10 minutes of delay. If such delay becomes recurrent, it will affect your grade. Class discussion and participation are a fundamental component of this class. Do not miss class! If needed, please justify your absence in advance.

- **Late Assignments Policy**

Assignments that are overdue will not be accepted. Exceptions can be granted based on previous communication with the instructor. If you have any specific concern about meeting a deadline for an assignment, you should contact me at least three days in advance for an extension.

- **Email policy**

Please allow about 24 hours for email responses. Make sure to start early on your assignments. Emails with requests of extensions on deadlines and communication on short notice ahead of submission cannot be satisfied.

HAVE A GREAT SEMESTER!

Angelo Matteo Caglioti