

Professor Andrew Poe
Tuesdays 2-4:30 in Clark 100
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Political Science 401

Fanaticism

-Introduction-

Many perceive a dangerous rise in radically utopian politics, often described as ‘fanaticism.’ Against the backdrop of increased ethnic and nationalist violence, authoritarianism, and declining safeguards for human rights, fanaticism is considered a fundamental impediment to well-functioning democratic politics. Yet, if such a concept is to have the theoretical force policy makers and theorists would like, more clarity is needed regarding what ‘fanaticism’ is and how it operates.

This course examines the genealogy of fanaticism as a political concept. We will explore theoretical critiques of fanaticism, especially as the concept developed in relation to the history of liberal democracy. The first section of the course examines the emergence of fanaticism as a political – not merely as a religious – idea. Engaging Enlightenment debates on civil society, toleration, and public passions, this section of the course should highlight how fanaticism came to be reconceived in modern political thought. The second part of the course questions the conceptual costs of this redefinition. Here we will explore the traditionally perceived dangers of fanaticism to democratic politics. Who are political fanatics? What are the political (and psychological) consequences to ‘us’ in labeling others as ‘fanatics’? How might we distinguish between fundamentalism and fanaticism? Is fanaticism necessary to define the extant parameters of toleration or civil society? Is fanaticism always dangerous to democratic politics? We will conclude the course in the third section by engaging a variety of political texts aimed at motivating and legitimating actions that others have labeled as fanatical. Ultimately these inquiries are designed to test our assumptions about what fanaticism is as a political idea and how it operates in contemporary political thought.

-Course Requirements-

There are **two** requirements for this course:

1. 25-page seminar paper on the topic of political fanaticism; Topics to be proposed by students, pending professor's approval – 70%, as follows:
 - A. Précis (10%) – Students should offer a proposed topic and thesis statement on some aspect of political fanaticism requisite to the course (not to exceed 1000 words); due in class on February 14th
 - B. Draft (25%) – A 10-page draft version of a section of the paper, pending professor's approval, due by email (as word attachment) on March 16th
 - C. Final (35%) – The final 25-page paper, with amendments and additions post-draft, due by email on May 11th

2. Attendance and active participation in seminar - 30%

Late Assignments: Except in documented cases of serious emergency, late assignments will receive a 1/3 grade penalty for each calendar day the paper is late.

-Texts-

The following books are available for purchase at Amherst Books:

Hill- *The World Turned Upside Down* (Penguin)
Burke – *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Stanford)
Spinoza – *Theological-Political Treatise* (Cambridge)
Locke – *Political Writings* (Hackett)
Lenin – *Essential Works of Lenin* (Dover)
Asad – *On Suicide Bombing* (Columbia)

The remainder of the readings will be available on course e-reserve

-Schedule and Readings-

Introduction

January 24th – Recognizing Fanaticism

Part 1: The Modern Idea of the Fanatic

January 31st – Fanaticism and Utopia

Readings: Alberto Toscano, “Figures of Extremism” (from *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea*)

John Gray, “The Death of Utopia” (from *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*)

February 7th – Prophecy

Readings: *Cohn, “The Egalitarian Millennium,” (from *The Pursuit of the Millennium*)

Luther, “On Christian Freedom” / “Letter Against the Peasants”
Müntzer, *Revelation and Revolution* (selections)

Recommended Reading: Anthony La Vopa, “The Philosopher and the *Schwärmer*: On the Career of a German Epithet from Luther to Kant,” *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. ½ 1997

February 14th – Dissent

Readings: *Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (selections)
The English Levellers (selections)

February 21st – Martyrdom

Readings: Michael Biggs, “Dying without Killing”
Talal Asad, “On Suicide Bombing”

Part 2: Critiquing Fanaticism

February 28th – Political Passions

Reading: Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* (selections)

March 6th – Civil Society

Readings: *Colas, “Civil Society and Fanaticism: Conjoined Histories” (from *Civil Society and Fanaticism*)

Hegel, “On Civil Society” (selections from *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*)

March 13th – Toleration

Reading: Locke, *An Essay Concerning Toleration* (complete)

March 27th – Abstraction

Reading: Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (complete)

Recommended Reading: John Mee, “Enthusiasm, Liberty, and Benevolence,” in *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period*

Part 3: Whose Fantasy? Whose Rationality?

April 3rd – Terror

Readings: *Lenin, *What is to be Done?*

Slavoj Zizek, “Revolutionary Terror from Robespierre to Mao” (from *In Defense of Lost Causes*)

April 10th – Fundamentalism

Readings: *Qutb, *Milestones* (selections)

Roxanne Euben, “A View from the Other Side: The Political Theory of Sayyid Qutb” (from *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism*)

April 17th – Moral Cause

Readings: *Wendell Phillips, “Philosophy of the Abolitionist Movement”

Joel Olson, “Friends and Enemies, Slaves and Masters: Wendell Phillips, Fanaticism, and the Limits of Democratic Theory,” *Journal of Politics*

April 24th – Exclusion

Reading: *Anders Breivik, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence* (selections)

Rogers Brubaker, “Rethinking Nationhood: Nation as

Institutionalized Form, Practical Category, Contingent Event,”
(from *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National
Question in the New Europe*)

Conclusion

May 1st – Is there a Political Identity of the Fanatic?

Additional Readings on Fanaticism

Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: On The Uses of an Idea* (Verso)

Dominique Colas, *Civil Society and Fanaticism: Conjoined Histories* (Stanford)

Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Oxford)

John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (Doubleday)

Judith Shklar, *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith* (Princeton)