

Wednesday, 27 August 2025 // filmosofia 11 at Rozz-Tox // *V for Vendetta* (2005 McTeigue, dir.) & “The Problem of Political Authority” (Huemer 2013)¹

Agenda:

- pre-screening discussion (about 6:30pm, informal)
- film starts 7:00pm
- 10 minute break
- post-screening discussion of Huemer reading selection and film from 9:15pm to 10:15pm

Pre-screening discussion (6:30pm)

- general remarks about filmosofia series:
 - roughly every other month we screen a film and we pair it with a famous philosophical text that examines themes related to that film
 - the 2025 filmosofia schedule is up on instagram (@rozztox_qc & @casuallyinefficacious) and on the Rozz-Tox website; stay tuned for updates about the 2025 philosophy events
 - the next filmosofia 2025 screening will be the Cronenberg's (1986) *The Fly*, and the reading will be David Lewis's (1976) “Survival and Identity”:
 - Wednesday 29 October
 - free print articles for filmosofia are in the front of the café
- More details on the four main branches of philosophy:
 - metaphysics: the theory of reality
 - notable sub-fields: ontology (the study of what exists), philosophy of mind (theory of the nature of consciousness)
 - epistemology: the theory of knowledge
 - notable sub-fields: analysis of ‘knowledge’ (challenges to the “Justified True Belief” model), debates over the a priori vs. a posteriori justification (whether there is justification independent of experience)
 - axiology: the theory of value
 - notable sub-fields: normative ethics (theory of right/wrong), aesthetics (theory of good/bad art), social and political philosophy
 - logic: the theory of right reasoning
 - notable sub-fields: classical logic (modern formal theory of entailment), non-classical logics (formal theories that reject assumptions in classical logic, such as the principle of explosion (*ex falso quodlibet*) in paraconsistent logics)

¹ Huemer, Michael. “The Problem of Political Authority.” *The Problem of Political Authority: An Examination of the Right to Coerce and the Duty to Obey*. Palgrave MacMillan. 2013. p3-19.

- tonight's topic: political philosophy–fascism and anarchism (axiology)
 - fascism, anarchism, and the social contract
 - stay tuned for a related PHILOSOPHY PUB session led by our good friend Stephen Zbornik on philosophical anarchism–Wednesday 26 November 8:00pm - 9:30pm (“Remember, remember the 26th of November...”)

Post-Screening Discussion (9:15pm)

- tonight's topic: axiology (political philosophy)
 - three themes:
 - what is fascism?
 - how might a government be legitimate?
 - what is anarchism?
- the film: some general remarks
 - the Norsefire party (led by Sutler, Creedy, et al.) clearly represents a fascist government that has taken over Europe after some major disaster
 - it is worth noting that the Norsefire party's rise in the original graphic novel (Moore & Lloyd) was due to political failures following a nuclear war, not a pandemic and chemical war
 - the character V represents a just opposition to the Norsefire regime
 - more significant departure from the source material: V in the graphic novel is arguably more insane, and is not motivated by “revolution” but instead by an explicit desire to bring about anarchy
 - in the film, V is more heroic and sympathetic for a general audience
 - critics object that this depiction of V is too sanitized, and doesn't present the real challenge that Moore was aiming for in the graphic novel: the challenge to government in general
- What is fascism?
 - etymology: from the Latin “fasces” which refers to the imagery from the Ancient Roman empire of a bundle of sticks bound together with an axe through the center (sometimes with an eagle on top, the standard of Caesar)
 - the fasces represent “strength through unity” (sound familiar?!?)
 - the effort is often an explicit ploy to appeal to a glorious, mythic past, in which men ruled with strength, and as a way to criticize the present as having “lost its way” (Stanley)
 - Make Italy Great Again???



- recent account of fascism (Stanley 2018): a far-right, ultra-nationalist form of authoritarianism, in which all power is centralized around a strong-man leader
 - this typically involves an appeal to a patriarchal, mythic past (Stanley 2018, 2025)
 - there's a close relationship between these ideas and the concept of totalitarianism, which seeks to exploit fear and loneliness to maintain control (Arendt)
- an argument that democracies are particularly vulnerable to fascist propaganda (Plato, Rousseau):
 1. Liberal democracies prioritize freedom of thought.
 2. If liberal democracies prioritize freedom of thought, then they must require freedom of speech.
 3. Freedom of speech means that liberal democracies must permit speech that aims to erode liberal democracy.
 4. Speech that aims to erode liberal democracy is especially prone to fascist authoritarianism, given the human tendencies for manipulation in propaganda.
 5. Thus, liberal democracies are particularly prone to manipulation by means of fascist authoritarian propaganda. (Stanley 2015, p34)
- If fascism is illegitimate, how might a government be legitimate?
 - the social contract theory: government is an agreement between rational parties (Glaucon in Plato's *Republic*, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau)
 - classical conservative view of human nature (Hobbes, Pojman): government is necessary to save us from our natural tendencies toward violence
 - classical liberal view of human nature (Rousseau, Pojman): government creates greed by legitimizing property
 - question: do we really consent to this arrangement, or is it forced on us by circumstances outside of our control?
- What is anarchism?
 - straw man variation: violence is permitted and encouraged willy-nilly
 - a less ridiculous formulation: power is not centralized in a single individual or institution, but is decentralized; there is no entity called "The State", but individuals govern equally
 - emphasis on personal liberty and consensus approaches (Bakunin,
 - some maintain that while this is a valuable starting point, the emergence of states is practically unavoidable, so the aim is the "minimal state" (Nozick)
 - [connection to early Cynics and their "cosmopolitan" ways (Dobbin)]

- Why some anarchists maintain that the state is never legitimate: Huemer's analogy to a creepy neighbor who volunteers to round up all the bandits, and comes to your house demanding compensation for his "service".
 - Huemer's question: if this is obviously illegitimate, how is the activity of the state not just as illegitimate?
 - conditions for legitimate government: [generality, particularity, content independence, comprehensiveness, and supremacy (p12)]
- an argument for anarchism:
 1. If the government has political authority then (a) the government has political legitimacy (the right to rule) and (b) the citizens have a political obligation to obey the government.
 2. If the government has political legitimacy, then the government is a distinct kind of agent from an ordinary individual.
 3. The government is not a distinct kind of agent from an ordinary individual: it doesn't have any moral supremacy that makes it distinct in kind to enforce coercion (violence or threats of harm) over citizens.
 4. Therefore, the government does not have political authority.

Recommended Further Reading/References:

1. Arendt, Hannah. (1966) "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government." *The Origins of Totalitarianism, New Edition*. Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. p460-479.
2. Aristotle. (335BCE/2019) *Nicomachean Ethics, Third Edition*. Irwin, trans. Hackett Publishing.
3. Aristotle. (350BCE/2017) *Politics*. Reeve, trans. Hackett Publishing.
4. Bakunin, M. (1910/1970) *God and the State*. Dover.
5. [Dobbin, R. (2012) *The Cynic Philosophers from Diogenes to Julian*. Penguin.]
6. fasces image credit: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fasces>
7. Fiala, A. (2021). "Anarchism." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anarchism/>
8. Hobbes, Thomas. (1651/1997) *Leviathan: Revised Student Edition*. Tuck, ed. Cambridge University Press.
9. Huemer, Michael. (2013) "The Problem of Political Authority." *The Problem of Political Authority: An Examination of the Right to Coerce and the Duty to Obey*. Palgrave MacMillan. p3-19.
10. Locke, John. (1690/1980) *Second Treatise of Government*. Macpherson, ed. Hackett.
11. Moore & Lloyd. (1982-'89/1995) *V for Vendetta*. Vertigo.
12. Nozick, R. (1974) *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Basic Books.
13. Plato. (375BCE/1992) *Republic*. Grube & Reeve, trans.. Hackett Publishing.
14. Pojman. (2005) *Who Are We? Theories of Human Nature*. Oxford University Press.
15. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. (1762/1968) *The Social Contract*. Cranston, trans. Penguin.
16. Stanley, Jason. (2015) *How Propaganda Works*. Princeton University Press.
17. Stanley, Jason. (2018) *How Facism Works*. Random House.
18. Stanley, Jason. (2025) *Erasing History: How Fascists Rewrite the Past to Control the Future*. Footnote Press.