

What Ought We Do Under Dictatorship?

Philosophy Pub - January 28th, 2026

Presented by Morgan Haskill (Augustana '25)

Agenda:

- Introductions
- What this meeting *is* and *is not*
 - It is meant to stimulate ideas and invite people to be more conscious about their day to day activities. The main focus should be on ethical decision making, not political theory.
 - It is NOT the first meeting of a political action group.
 - See "Indivisible" if you are interested in such activities.
- Please speak up if you have questions, ideas, or challenges!

Definitions:

- Dictator
 - A person with power over the state with no checks or balances.
 - Benevolent dictator?
- Despotism
 - Dictator who oppresses people under their control.
- Nationalism
 - Extreme pride for a nation that inspires loyalty and devotion for the nation's culture, people, military, and laws.

➤ Fascism

- “Ultranationalism of some variety (ethnic, religious, cultural), with the nation represented in the person of an authoritarian leader who speaks on its behalf.” - Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works*
- i.e. Dictator + Despotism + Nationalism = Fascism

➤ Totalitarianism

- “Decisive in our context is that totalitarian government is different from dictatorships and tyrannies... for total domination is the only form of government with which coexistence is not possible. (Hence, we have every reason to use the word ‘totalitarian’ sparingly and prudently).” - Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

Q1: What is the most ethical course of action for citizens belonging to an unjust system?

- Escape: Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, Hannah Arendt, Bertolt Brecht, Sigmund Freud, among others...
- The White Rose
- Widerstand und Resistenz

Q2: Is it right not to act when under an immediate threat?

Q3: Is pacifism a viable ethical option for those under a dictatorship?

Recommendations:

- Historical “Fiction”
 - *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* (2005)
 - *The Zone of Interest* (2023)
 - *Maus* by Art Spiegelman
 - *Night* by Elie Wiesel
- History
 - *The Third Reich Trilogy* by Richard J. Evans
 - Note: There is a good audiobook for all three books. Read/listen to this instead of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William L. Shirer, it is much more accurate and has more breadth of information.
 - *Ordinary Men* by Christopher R. Browning
 - *The White Rose: Munich 1942-1943* by Igne Scholl
 - *They Thought They Were Free* by Milton Meyer
- Philosophy
 - ?

The White Rose Broadsheet



NSPM-7

