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FASCISM IN SCI-FI: “MOBILIZING PASSIONS” IN
ROBERT A. HEINLEIN’S *STARSHIP TROOPERS*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English
at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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Abstract

This thesis responds to criticism of Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959) as a "fascist" novel by further investigating the claim through a close reading of the novel that applies political theory scholarship on fascism. Chapters I and II introduce the novel along with its general reception and controversy. These chapters consider the accusations of "fascism" given to the novel while at the same time understanding that a clear, exact definition of "fascism" has long been grappled with by scholars since the rise of the regimes in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Chapters III and IV apply political theory to examine *Starship Troopers's* characters, language, and plot to find if the novel's narrative expresses the "mobilizing passions" of fascism identified by Robert Paxton in *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004). In addition to Paxton, the political theory analysis will also be aided by Roger Griffin's *The Nature of Fascism* (1991) and Umberto Eco's 1995 essay "Ur-Fascism." The focus will be on "checking off" each mobilizing passion listed by Paxton, but consideration will also be given to how *Starship Troopers* buys into the "national rebirth" myth in Griffin's definition of palingenetic populist ultranationalism as well as how it expresses certain fascist features observed by Eco. Chapters III and IV ultimately find that *Starship Troopers's* narrative expresses all of the mobilizing passions listed. Chapter VI concludes the analysis by denouncing fascism and *Starship Troopers's* vision of a false-utopia, pointing to the inherent ineffectuality and destructiveness of fascism. The concluding chapter closes with final remarks reflecting on applying current scholarship on fascism to the reading of a novel.

Chapter 1: History and Controversy of *Starship Troopers*

Robert A. Heinlein's 1959 sci-fi novel *Starship Troopers* sparked controversy as soon as it was published. The novel is set in a future where a military (veteran) dictatorship known as "The Terran Federation" has taken global power after the worldwide collapse of democratic government. The Federation uses the catastrophic failure of the "unlimited democracies" to justify its own authoritarian-like system. Readers see this fictional future society through the perspective of Juanito Rico, who chooses to join the Federation's mobile infantry (MI) fresh out of high school. Throughout Rico's military career, he comes to understand the two concepts of "duty" and "freedom" very differently from the way they were commonly understood in the failed democracies of the twentieth century, and his faith in the Federation's cause grows to be absolute. At the center of the novel's controversy is the heroic depiction of the Federation's militaristic and anti-democratic government. The Federation seemingly restricts franchise/citizenship to veterans who have completed military service, so that only military veterans have voting rights, and this anti-democratic policy is even passionately argued for by the heroes of the novel. In evaluating the anti-democratic society and extreme militarism portrayed in *Starship Troopers*, some critics have gone as far as to call the novel "fascist," with filmmaker Paul Verhoeven putting Federation characters in Nazi-esque uniforms in his 1998 film adaptation of the novel.¹

The goal of this thesis is to further affirm the accusations that *Starship Troopers* is a fascist novel by examining how *Starship Troopers* expresses the nine "mobilizing passions of

¹ Reviewer Ben Child overviews some of the fascist imagery used in Verhoeven's film, with its casting of attractive young actors as "a nod to Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda films and their depiction of flourishing square-jawed Aryan youth." Child also points out the similarity of Neil Patrick Harris's uniform to that of an SS officer (*The Guardian*).

fascism” described by Robert Paxton in *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004). The argument will be made through a close reading of the novel that applies the lens of current political theory on fascism. I will examine how the attitudes expressed in the novel (either through its characters or the narrative itself) can be matched with the nine “mobilizing passions” of fascism which Robert Paxton theorizes in trying to understand the underlying emotional drives behind fascist movements.² The work of two additional scholars, Roger Griffin and Umberto Eco, will be used to support and complement Paxton’s perspective on fascism. Thus, while going down the list of Paxton’s mobilizing passions and checking off each one expressed by *Starship Troopers*’s characters and narrative, this paper will also consider how *Starship Troopers* appeals to the “national rebirth” myth/fantasy described by Roger Griffin in *The Nature of Fascism* (1991), as well as how the novel shows certain features of “Ur-Fascism/Eternal Fascism” given by Umberto Eco in his 1995 “Ur-Fascism” essay. In arguing that the depicted regime in *Starship Troopers* is fascist, this thesis will also show how “fascist” can be a term ascribable to a novel as well as an actual regime.

Making the argument that the novel is fascist will be a challenge for several reasons. “Fascism” has avoided a concise definition, and everyone from political theorists to psychoanalysts has gone to a great deal of effort in trying to define what a fascist regime is and why a fascist regime arises—whether fascism can still be found today, or if it was exclusive to the Nazi and Italian Fascist regime. Now, thanks to the work of scholars like Robert Paxton, Roger Griffin, and Umberto Eco, a clear and authoritative “definition” of fascism has gradually been

² Robert Paxton argues “[f]ascism was an affair of the gut more than of the brain, and a study of the roots of fascism that treats only the thinkers and the writers misses the most powerful impulses of all” (42). Therefore, Paxton presents a list of nine “mobilizing passions” that are meant to outline the “subterranean passions and emotions” at fascism’s core (40-41).

drawn. Chapter Two will explore the contrasting arguments for what constitutes a fascist regime to explain why Griffin's definition of fascism as "palingenetic populist ultranationalism" and Paxton's list of "mobilizing passions" of fascism may provide the most accurate understanding of what fascism is.

Entire books are devoted to debating how fascism should be defined, but for the purpose of this thesis, I must provide a clear definition of fascism from the start. As one of the most evil, destructive movements of the modern era, any definition of fascism is inevitably destined to be a highly political one. A definition associating fascists with any other political group will surely result in that group making every effort to deflect the association onto someone else. As a result, the truth of what fascism is becomes intentionally distorted. Whatever it is fascism is for, and whoever its allies are, fascism is clearly against "the corrosive effects of liberal individualism, class conflict, and alien influences" (Paxton 219). Although the fascists hold hatred for the liberalism of the capitalist society they inhabit, they desire for their mass movement to only revise their society rather than do away with it, "build[ing] rhetorically on the cultural achievements attributed to the former," which is why Griffin's definition highlights the fascists' desire for "national rebirth" (47). In fact, the fascist holds a deep national pride and nostalgia for their nation before it became "contaminated and corrupted" by liberalism, and immigration. The racism of fascism and the inherent violence of its pursuit of a so-called "national rebirth" is clear. Griffin affirms that "fascism is essentially racist, just as all forms of chauvinism, imperialism and colonialism are" (48). Fascism takes imperialism to the furthest extreme, with the intent "to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law" (Paxton 220). Considering these aspects of fascism most of all, I draw on the work of Paxton, Griffin, and Eco to roughly define fascism as a racist, populist mass movement against both liberalism and

Marxism, whose ultimate goal is to rescue and reinspire capitalism, harnessing it for the purpose of total domination and oppression by the fascists over all other groups.

While the research of Paxton, Griffin, and Eco is largely focused on identifying fascism within a regime, the goal of this thesis is to identify fascist themes expressed within a novel. I will attempt to use the existing political theory definitions of fascism to identify fascism within the novel, but to do so, I must acknowledge that I am using political theory intended for identifying real fascist regimes (with all their dystopian aspects) to an “idealized” fictional portrayal. For my argument, therefore, I must create a “working definition” to explain what exactly I mean when I call a novel fascist. My definition of a fascist novel will be similar to my definition of fascism in general. Chapter Two will show how I arrive at my conclusion for developing both definitions, although its focus will be producing a definition of a fascist novel.

Even with a concise definition of a fascist novel, it will still be a challenge to argue that a novel like *Starship Troopers* is fascist. The authorial intent behind Heinlein’s classic has been disputed along with the textual interpretations, which is why this paper will utilize meticulous close reading in an attempt to accurately decipher the novel. The challenge of comprehending the complexity of both fascism and *Starship Troopers* may explain why the “controversial classic” has generally only been regarded as “controversial” rather than being compared to such reviled and suppressed works as *The Turner Diaries* (1978).

The Puzzle of Starship Troopers

The Federation’s anti-democratic policy could have been dismissible as yet another out-of-this-world premise for a reader to get past in order to enjoy a military sci-fi novel. However, the premise of the novel (i.e., *what if the entire human race was run by a military (veteran) dictatorship?*) is difficult to dismiss when a significant number of pages throughout the novel are

devoted to characters defending the Federation's ideology. The narrative itself even seems to favor and reaffirm the characters' beliefs with very little (if any) obvious critique of the authoritarian system. Each chapter of the novel is introduced with a quote, often from a US military hero or patriot, and the rhetorical appeal created by this feature makes it difficult to discern how serious the novel itself is about the future government it depicts. The novel's politics were easily noticed upon its first publication. The critic Anthony Boucher is said to have written for *The Herald Tribune* that *Starship Troopers* is "not a novel at all, but an irate sermon with a few fictional trappings" (qtd. in Panshin). Readers have to wonder if the novel idealizes the kind of military dictatorship it depicts.³ Heinlein himself may have even relished in the discord the novel created, sounding amused in a later interview that "[t]he 'Patrick Henry' ad shocked 'em; *Starship Troopers* outraged 'em; [...] It continues to get lots of nasty 'fan' mail," before bragging "but it sells and sells and sells and sells, in eleven languages. It doesn't slow down—four new contracts a year" (*Expanded Universe*, 482). While bragging over the success of *Starship Troopers* to his novel's critics, Heinlein could also be implying that "controversy sells." As much as *Starship Troopers* is criticized, its lasting popularity may suggest that the novel deals with sensitive yet relevant topics, raising uncomfortable questions that society still grapples with.

Despite accusations that the novel is "fascist," *Starship Troopers* has not received the same censure and suppression that other far-right novels have—even with *Starship Troopers* arguably glorifying the genocide of "other races" as well as possibly buying into the racist conspiracy theory currently known as the "Great Replacement Theory." As of 2023, The "controversial classic" can still be found in a local *Barnes & Noble*, while one may be lucky to

³ Heinlein's response to *Starship Troopers*'s criticism is provided in his *Expanded Universe* (1980): "[t]hat book glorifies the military! Now we are getting somewhere. It does indeed" (484).

find Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) or any other Heinlein novel alongside it. *Starship Troopers* seems to have found the perfect "sweet spot" for being controversial enough to remain a bestseller while avoiding any real publishing threat from critics or general public opinion. The following section theorizes how *Starship Troopers* has managed to evade being officially labeled as a "fascist novel," while also observing how it may be unable to evade the label for much longer.

Conflicting Interpretations of Starship Troopers

Perhaps the reason *Starship Troopers* was able to "get away with" its fascist themes and remain on the shelves was because at the time of the novel's first publication in 1959, "fascism" as a movement and political ideology had not been easily defined, and the relationship between fascist regimes and their political affiliates had not been entirely clear.⁴ Every so often, there can be seen a skepticism within public discourse regarding whether the "fascist" label can be ascribed to any other regime or movement outside of the Nazi and Italian Fascist ones. Meanwhile, *Starship Troopers* does not push the specific ideology of the Nazi or Italian Fascists, nor does the novel explicitly praise the Nazis or the Italian Fascists (at least not directly, though Dubois's letter to Rico is suspect).⁵ Meanwhile, the character Major Reid holds plenty of criticism toward the collapsed "North American Republic," but he still considers it to have been

⁴ Robert Paxton's *The Anatomy of Fascism* studies the uncomfortable allyship that the Nazis and Italian Fascists held with conservatives and liberals of the Weimar Republic and the Kingdom of Italy (22-23, 123-124).

⁵ Refer to p. 48 examining Dubois's statement that "The noblest fate that a man can endure is to place his own mortal body between his beloved home and the war's desolation [...] This is an immutable, true everywhere, throughout all time, for all men and all nations" (Heinlein 115). I consider whether Dubois's statement risks offering an intentional or unintentional alibi for Nazi and Italian Fascist soldiers—if indeed Dubois means "for all men and all nations."

“in many ways an admirable culture” (Heinlein 152). Although set in a future where the United States has fallen, the novel is clearly inspired by American patriotism and not Nazism or Italian Fascism.⁶ If *Starship Troopers* is fascist, then why do its characters look back rather nostalgically upon a nation of “freedom, liberty, and justice for all”?

Whether one is defending the novel or calling it “fascist,” there are also several conflicting interpretations of *Starship Troopers* that must be grappled with. Race is one of the novel’s controversies, as *Starship Troopers* does not appear to express Nazi-like antisemitism, and even imagines a world where there is racial equality among humans. At the same time, however, Rico makes a strange comment about “breeds being crowded out by other breeds” in debating the morality of planned parenthood (237). The most confounding contradiction of *Starship Troopers* is its definition of “veteran.” In Heinlein’s *Expanded Universe*, the author seems to argue that the Federation is not *as* bad as it sounds, saying “[t]he criticisms are usually based on a failure to understand simple indicative English sentences, couched in simple words—especially when the critics are professors of English, as they often are” (Heinlein 482). In defending the novel, the author seems to take a rather anti-intellectual stance to say that English professors are overthinking or over-interpreting the language of the novel in trying to connect evidence to make an evaluation of the work. Heinlein proceeds to explain the use of the term “veteran” in the novel: “[v]eteran’ does not mean in English dictionaries or in this novel solely a person who has served in military forces [...] In *Starship Troopers* it is stated flatly and more than once that nineteen out of twenty veterans are not military veterans” (Heinlein 483). Yet from analyzing the text, Heinlein’s statement would appear to be (at most) only half-true. In their

⁶ Several chapters of *Starship Troopers* are introduced with quotes by patriotic US historical figures such as Thomas Paine (98) and Thomas Jefferson (165). Meanwhile, the Federation’s spaceships are given names like *Valley Forge* and *Alamo* (330).

essay on “The Nature of Federal Service in Robert A. Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers*” (1996), the Heinlein scholar James Gifford acknowledges that “the words of the book itself—do indeed prove him [Heinlein] wrong [...] By the text of the novel, Federal Service is entirely military in nature” (10-11). Major Reid claims that the Federation “insure[s] that all who wield [sovereign franchise] accept the ultimate in social responsibility—we require each person who wishes to exert control over the state to wager his own life—and lose it, if need be—to save the life of the state” (235). How an individual could put their own life on the line “to save the life of the state” could perhaps be imagined in different ways, yet the default example given by the novel for such a sacrifice is military service. Major Reid further clarifies that “[u]nder our system every voter and officeholder is a man who *has* demonstrated through voluntary and difficult service that he places the welfare of the group ahead of personal advantage” (*my italics*, Heinlein 233). There are other (less popular) ways to obtain citizenship in the Federation, but these vague “dirty, nasty jobs” (Heinlein 37) do not sound anything like work as a firefighter. The alternative federal service jobs, likely far more degrading than combat, are considered an equal if not even more risky sacrifice—to the degree that franchise would be considered “a booby prize” (45). The claim Heinlein makes in his *Expanded Universe* that the term “veteran” in *Starship Troopers* carries a different meaning from what the novel itself explicitly portrays raises questions: why would Heinlein deny a fact about the Federation that is a fundamental expression of its ideology?—And did he make any unsuccessful effort to revise the work for future editions?⁷ The seeming

⁷ In examining the contradiction between novel and author regarding the nature of federal service in *Starship Troopers*, Gifford comes to “believe that Heinlein’s intention was for Federal Service to be only five percent military, and that in the haste and fury of writing it and due to the nature of the protagonist’s service, the supporting statements were left out or inadvertently edited out” (11). However, Gifford’s conclusion gives a significant degree of grace to a novel that (arguably) pushes a very bold political message.

contradiction between authorial intent and actual textual interpretation of *Starship Troopers* adds to the controversy of whether the novel can be labeled “fascist.”

Even if the Federation can be labeled fascist, it is hard to tell just how serious Heinlein feels about the Federation, and “satire” can get away with a lot more than “serious fiction.” It is unclear to what degree he sees the military dictatorship as an ideal system of government, yet *Starship Troopers* may have been the author’s means of attempting to “reach at” and explore certain ideas via the novel’s hyperbolic vision. Ideas introduced by Dubois and Reid are reflected and/or expanded upon by Rico as though the author himself could just as well be ruminating over the same concepts. Yet, at the same time, the Federation seems to discredit its own ideas from an intellectual standpoint. Major Reid rejects the idea that veterans are given franchise because they are “smarter,” believing such a notion to be “preposterous” and retorts that “[s]ervice men are not brighter than civilians. In many cases civilians are much more intelligent” (Heinlein 230).⁸ However, “being smarter” does not appear to be imperative to the Federation, and Major Reid claims “[t]he practical reason for continuing our system is the same as the practical reason for continuing anything: It works satisfactorily” (231). The Federation’s humility in being “satisfactory” is somewhat false, however, as it turns out that “satisfactory” by their standards means being a great deal better than any other governmental system to exist in the past. The Federation seems to perceive all previous systems as having worked “unsatisfactorily,” and seemingly under this assumption, Major Reid asks another officer-in-training “why our system works better than any used by our ancestors?” (232). Therefore, the Federation is

⁸ Dedman sees Major Reid’s input reflected in Philip Jose Farmer’s response to the novel, it is a “well-known and thoroughly authenticated tendency of the military system to be stupid... A world ruled by veterans would be mismanaged, graft-ridden, and insane as one ruled by men who had never gotten near the odor of blood and guts” (79).

depicted as both ridiculous/satirical while also “better” than any other government existing before it.

Starship Troopers features one or two other examples where the satire is unclear. I will later examine a second example that readers are given as to why the “North American Republic” is supposed to have collapsed: children in the United States were not spanked enough. The reason given for the societal collapse of the United States sounds ridiculous and unbelievable at first, but then the Federation’s critique of US child discipline is connected to US attitudes surrounding corporal punishment. We are told that US citizens held up their concept of individual rights so highly that they were not only “too soft” in disciplining their children but also in how they punished criminals, and the result was that both grew out of their nation’s control (143-152). Dubois theorizes that the softness on crime resulted in the overwhelming number of “juvenile delinquents” in the country: “[t]he junior hoodlums who roamed their streets were symptoms of a greater sickness; their citizens [...] glorified their mythology of ‘rights... and lost track of their duties. No nation, so constituted, can endure” (Heinlein 152). While the reason given for the collapse of the US initially seems ridiculous, it can raise very serious questions about personal responsibility vs. personal liberty: which should take priority over the other? *Starship Troopers* reads like satire at times, but it seems just a little too serious overall to be labeled as such.

Even if *Starship Troopers* is satire, how much would it matter in an age where satire is an effective medium for very serious ideas? In the 2015 German film *Er ist Wieder Da/Look Who’s Back*, which adopts a novel of the same title (2012), Adolph Hitler miraculously returns to life in the present day. The German people mistake him for a brilliant comedian impersonating Hitler, and they do not realize he is the real Nazi dictator responsible for the Holocaust. The Hitler of

the film uses his charisma and “humor”—the main joke being that he is Hitler—to become a superstar comedian. The film Hitler then uses his popularity to platform his ideology, an ideology to which the German people are still susceptible. David Wnendt’s film is aware of the role that dark/“edgy” humor has come to play in pushing malicious agendas; we are wrong to assume that, when Nazism revealed itself to be one giant, horrible joke, it could never be taken seriously again. Therefore, any media satirizing fascism or Nazism ought to deal with these subjects with greater sensitivity and awareness, especially with the reemergence of white supremacists in mainstream US politics.

Facing Fascism

Paul Verhoeven’s 1997 film adaptation of the novel is intent on portraying the Federation as “fascists,” and the uniforms of the Federation officials are obviously meant to look similar to those of the Nazis. Sometimes the adaptation receives criticism that it addresses the themes of Heinlein’s novel immaturely and merely dresses the Federation personnel in uniforms reminiscent of the twentieth-century fascists while lacking real depth—but then, how seriously should *Starship Troopers* be taken if it is hard to tell how seriously Heinlein *wanted* his novel to be taken? By dressing the Federation like Nazis, Verhoeven’s adaptation also seems to be assuming that the audience members are already “in on the joke,” the joke being that the Federation is fascist. I would argue that many viewers may not be aware that *Starship Troopers* is fascist, and the uniform similarity may not even be picked up on, because fascism has historically been poorly understood and its nature widely contested. Viewers of the film who are unfamiliar with political theory or history might *feel* that the Federation is fascist (they may at least be able to identify signs that the Federation is antidemocratic i.e., “service guarantees

citizenship”), but likely would not be able to explain *why* exactly the Federation is fascist aside from its obvious militarism.

Scholars have come a long way in trying to understand fascism’s nature. Fascism as a political ideology and movement has been difficult to define. Conflicting or vague twentieth-century definitions of fascism have been critiqued as more revised definitions have begun to reach a consensus. With these clearer revised parameters defining the somewhat elusive ideology of fascism, these new definitions can be used to investigate the genre of science fiction more accurately for the fascist attitudes (“mobilizing passions” as termed by Robert Paxton) that many may believe to have dissipated after 1945. Chapter II examines and evaluates definitions of fascism to craft a definition of a “fascist novel.” Since it is rather bold to call a novel “fascist,” it is necessary that I clearly define what a fascist novel is.

Chapter 2: Defining Fascism

Fascism’s Relation to Doctrine: Fascists cannot Define Fascism?

It is a challenge to define fascism as a political movement because each fascist movement possesses its own internally incoherent ideology. One fascist regime’s ideology never quite matches that of another,⁹ and each fascist regime’s beliefs were not always fully reflected in their actions. In *The Anatomy of Fascism* Paxton notes the “peculiar relationship” fascism has with its ideology, which is “simultaneously proclaimed as central, yet amended or violated as expedient” (Paxton 219). The attitude of doctrine not being crucial to the movement appears reflected in the

⁹ The ideology of each fascist group is usually not the same, but as Eco writes in his “Ur-Fascism” essay, “the fascist game can be played in many forms, and the name of the game does not change.” Scholars who view fascism as its own unique political movement consider both Italian Fascism and Nazism to be different permutations of the same type of political movement.

Jane Soames 1933 translation of *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*, whose author is claimed to be Mussolini. In the manifesto, it is declared that “[f]ascism was not the nursling of a doctrine worked out beforehand with detailed elaboration; it was born of the need for action and was from the beginning practical rather than theoretical” (236). The attitude that action somehow must supersede the very doctrine being acted upon is also the third key feature of Ur-Fascism identified by Umberto Eco: “Irrationalism also depends on the cult of *action for action’s sake*. Action being beautiful in itself, it must be taken before, or without, any previous reflection. Thinking is a form of emasculation.” Eco’s theory of the “action for action’s sake” attitude within fascist regimes further supports Paxton’s argument that fascists pursue “deliberate replacement of reasoned debate with immediate sensual experience” as they seek to maintain the exciting sensation of mass mobilization under a common cause (Paxton 17). The dependence Nazism held toward action is identified as early as Hannah Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), which describes this dependence as “perpetual-motion mania” (306). Seeing as how fascist movements were so strongly driven by “the need to act,” can we really rely solely on any of the fascists’ semi-expendable “philosophy,” doctrine, or manifestos to fully understand what drives a fascist movement? I will later discuss the approach Robert Paxton takes in order to fully understand the motives behind fascist regimes.

Early Definitions of Fascism

Attempts to define fascism *specifically* have perhaps been held back by the initial popularity and preference toward the broader definition used for both fascism and communism: “totalitarianism.” Because the fascists’ purported ideology is clearly not enough to fully understand the nature of fascism, scholars study the behavior of fascist movements as much as

the ideology they pushed. The concept of totalitarianism compares fascism and communism in the way they attack democracy and individual liberty to establish a new kind of total authority. The comparison has led scholars such as Hannah Arendt to consider fascist movements as sharing the same “practical goal” as communist movements, “to organize as many people as possible within its framework and to set and keep them in motion; a political goal that would constitute the end of the movement simply doesn’t exist” (326). Thus conceived, totalitarianism is not a tool to bring about a “fascist utopia” or “communist utopia” and then be done away with—contrary to Friedrich Engels's vision in *Anti-Dühring* (1877) that the proletarian dictatorship eventually “withers away” (355)—rather, totalitarianism is the end solution rather than just a means to an end.

The totalitarian model for understanding fascism is certain to remain popular, although it does face criticism. Perhaps the most obvious critique is that the fascists and communists were not happy bedfellows in their assault on democratic liberalism as can clearly be seen by the events of WWII—whatever attitudes Hitler and Stalin may have held toward each other prior.¹⁰ Within Nazi Germany, in addition to Jewish people and other minority groups, Marxists were also the target of Nazi violence (Paxton 135). The anti-Marxism of Nazi Germany should not be overlooked in trying to draw a concise definition.

Paxton additionally notes how, in contrast to the Bolsheviks, the Nazi government cooperated (to a degree) with German traditional elites who helped them in their rise to power: “[t]otalitarian theory is blind to this fundamental character of the Nazi governing system, and thus tends to fortify the elite’s postwar claim that Hitler tried to destroy them.” (212).

¹⁰ Arendt speculates the nature and implications of Hitler and Stalin’s attitudes toward each other prior to WWII (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 309-310).

Totalitarian theory paints a picture that communism and fascism were the same assault on liberal democracy, but the Nazis were lent their power by the existing elites of the liberal democracy of the Weimar Republic. Therefore, a further reason for a definition of fascism as its own distinct political movement is that totalitarian theory underplays the relation that fascist parties had with the existing state.

Fascism's Relation to Leftist Movements.

Because the Nazis pushed for what they termed “national socialism,” there is an immediate temptation to compare fascists to socialists and communists. However, it is important to remember that fascist movements seek sensational mass mobilization, and they have no doctrine set in stone. Although the Nazis called for what they termed “national socialism,” the fascists were not at all socialists. Paxton explains how “in practice that fascists’ anticapitalism was highly selective” (56), and although the fascists used anti-capitalist rhetoric, he finds that “[w]hat they criticized in capitalism was not its exploitation but its materialism, its indifference to the nation, its inability to stir souls” (10). Therefore, Fascists did not desire socialism, but rather a form of capitalism where the economic system’s service to “the nation” was clear. They thus saw capitalism as a target for their totalitarianism and a potential asset for strengthening mass mobilization. Paxton considers the fascist movements of both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany to have ultimately been right-wing movements “against liberal individualism and constitutionalism and against Leftist class struggle” (40). Similar to how fascist doctrine did not always reflect fascist action, the fascists’ adoption of radical-leftist-sounding “buzzwords” turned out to have only been superficial usage.

Recent Definitions of Fascism

In recent decades, some scholars have moved away from the totalitarian interpretation, instead aiming their research at understanding both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy as the same type of right-wing populist movement (although they both have their differences). To find a definition of fascism more precise than the totalitarian model, I rely on three authoritative scholars of fascism in particular: Umberto Eco, Roger Griffin, and Robert Paxton. Whereas Totalitarian theory compares and contrasts the features of Nazi Germany and Communist Russia, Umberto Eco's "Ur-Fascism" essay proposes that there can be found fourteen shared features within the Nazi and Italian Fascist movements. Meanwhile, Roger Griffin's *The Nature of Fascism* offers its own unique definition of fascism as "palingenetic populist ultranationalism" (26). Griffin argues that fascism seeks to inspire mass mobilization by appealing to a "palingenetic" myth of "national rebirth," and so the "mobilizing vision [of fascism] is that of the national community rising phoenix-like after a period of encroaching decadence which all but destroyed it" (38). The fascist believes that their "decadent" and "fallen" nation can only be "reborn" through a populist mass movement in the direction of what Griffin terms "ultranationalism" (37), a concept which may be comparable to the totalitarian model observed by Arendt. I will examine Griffin's definition more in-depth in the following chapter when I consider how *Starship Troopers* may appeal to the national palingenesis myth.

In *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Robert Paxton produces a definition of fascism that supports Griffin's analysis of fascist movements being obsessed with national decadence followed by national rebirth. Paxton defines fascism as follows:

Fascism may be defined as a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion. (Paxton 218).

Paxton's definition alludes to Griffin's palingenesis theory, but it also emphasizes the distinct relationship fascism holds with the "traditional elites" of the nation it infects—presumably of a liberal democracy since "democratic liberty" is done away with. The extreme caution Griffin and Paxton's final definitions take is noticeable. Both definitions come off as very politically neutral, seeming to avoid directly defining fascism's exact relation to capitalism.

The same neutrality of Paxton's definition may extend into his list of mobilizing passions. Before presenting his definition, Paxton adds a disclaimer that "[d]efinitions are inherently limiting. They frame a static picture of something that is better perceived in movement" (14), which is why, to produce his definition of fascism, Paxton examines the actions of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy through their rise and fall rather than merely focusing on their ideology. Paxton acknowledges the importance of creating a concise definition of fascism (15), but he holds equal importance to listing a set of "mobilizing passions" that he considers to be the driving force behind fascist movements (41). Analyzing the attitudes and actions of the Nazis and Italian Fascists, Paxton's work produces a list of nine "mobilizing passions" to be found expressed within both regimes (41, 219-220). Yet, using the nine mobilizing passions of fascism that Paxton lists to try to differentiate fascism from communism may not be entirely effective; it

could be argued that many if not all of Paxton's listed mobilizing passions of fascism can be found within the communist regimes as well, especially two, three, and seven: "the primacy of the group...", "the belief that one's group is a victim...", and "the beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when they are devoted to the group's success." Returning to Paxton and Griffin's definitions, could it be argued that many communists and socialists are also fixated on "community decline" and "decadence" under capitalism, pushing for "internal cleansing" with slogans such as "eat the rich" and external expansion with the establishment of universal communism? Although flaws have been identified within the definition of "totalitarianism," scholars are still faced with a level of difficulty in trying to break away from the concept of totalitarianism to yield a more exact definition of fascism fully distinct from communism.

In the case of my thesis, I am not faced with the great challenge of claiming that any real political movement or group is fascist. I am instead examining an idealized, "utopian" portrayal of fascism in Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. The anti-democratic nature of the Federation *combined* with its anti-Marxism cannot be ignored if we are to fully understand the novel's fascist themes. Examining what the Federation is *against* helps us to understand what the Federation is *for*. Since I am analyzing a novel portraying "idealized" fascism, I believe it is appropriate to define fascism in relation to "idealized" communist and liberal democratic states, rather than the dystopic forms these systems of government may have manifested in reality. I consider one of Paxton's main critiques of totalitarianism in crafting my definition: "Hitler and Stalinism also differed profoundly in their declared ultimate aims—for one, the supremacy of a master race; for the other, universal equality" (212). Therefore, in creating my definition of a fascist novel, I hold the assumption that the shared aim of both liberal democracy and communism is "universal equality" —in stark contrast to the fascist goal of global domination by

a “master race.” My definition also draws particularly on the second, seventh, and ninth mobilizing passions listed by Paxton (219). I additionally adopt Paxton and Griffin’s understanding of fascism’s obsession with national rejuvenation, but I specify the rejuvenation in its relation to capitalism.

Drawing on the research of Robert Paxton, Roger Griffin, and Umberto Eco, along with my understanding of fascism in *Starship Troopers*, I define a fascist novel as follows: A fascist novel idealizes totalitarian mass mobilization against the ideals of both liberalism and Marxism, seeking to revitalize and reinspire capitalism to the benefit of the fascist’s “race.” The fascist protagonist realizes their destiny neither through any kind of fulfillment as an individual nor through shared struggle among their fellow proletariat against an oppressive system, but rather their destiny is realized in fulfilling their “duty” to their race. The fascist protagonist is therefore compelled to advance their race in a fight for domination over all other races. Thus, my definition of a fascist novel is similar to my definition of fascism from Chapter 1, but my definition of a fascist novel goes into detail in describing the relation of the fascist protagonist to the fictional fascist group, and so alludes to the actual relation the real fascist citizen’s felt toward the fascist state. The definition I have produced aligns with the generic storyline of a protagonist who faces and overcomes both an internal and external conflict. It likely will not fit the narrative of every fascist novel that has been written. Nonetheless, I argue that my definition of a fascist novel wholly fits the narrative of Robert Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers*.

Applying Theory to Starship Troopers

Although the general intent of Paxton’s list of mobilizing passions is to identify fascist attitudes within a political regime, Chapter III of this thesis will use Paxton’s method to identify

fascist attitudes within the *Starship Troopers* novel. Before mobilizing passions can be identified fairly within *Starship Troopers*, I must examine what the Federation is *against* to understand what it is *for*. Therefore, Chapter III will first have to use the work of scholars to compare basic facts concerning both the Federation and the twentieth-century fascist regimes—particularly how both are strongly anti-democratic *while also* anti-Marxist. Eco’s “Ur-Fascism” essay and Griffin’s *The Nature of Fascism* will be used to support Paxton’s list of “mobilizing passions,” although the focus of Chapter III will remain on the mobilizing passions rather than Eco’s features of ur-fascism and Griffin’s “fascist minimum.” The analysis of the mobilizing passions within *Starship Troopers* will be done under the following assumption: a character in a novel can be a fascist without the novel itself being fascist, but if the very narrative of the novel expresses attitudes that can be considered “mobilizing passions” then a strong argument can be made that “the novel is fascist.”

Chapter 3: Fascists and “The Crisis of the Left”

Despite having a premise in a future society, it should not be contested that Robert A. Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers* is a novel concerned with the author’s own time (or as it is referred to in the novel, the “XX century”). Rico’s mentor characters, Mr. Dubois and Major Reid, have a great deal to say about twentieth-century society, mostly harsh criticism. Decades after the novel’s original release, the 2003 *Penguin Random House* edition of the novel offers an introductory quote from *SFcrownsnest*: “Troopers has to be seen partly a celebration of victory in World War II with its unsung citizen-heroes, partly a reflection of the Cold War and its attendant anxiety, and partly a reaction to growing popular discontent which originated with the inconclusive Korean War and culminated in the anti-war movement of the 1960s.” To put it more bluntly, *Starship Troopers* glorifies warfare and militarism, seems to use an alien species

threatening to kill the entire human race as a metaphor for communism, and essentially blames the fictional future collapse of the United States on “Americans going soft.”

Starship Troopers's “reflection and reaction” to twentieth-century conflicts express a radical idealizing of militarism and imperialist expansion, and this is clear regardless of the novel being labeled as “fascist.” The primary threat identified by the novel's narrative is both the radical Left and more traditional liberalism. Affirming Boucher's claim, Mr. Dubois and Major Reid, the two patriarchal figures of the novel and unofficial spokesmen for the Federation's ideology, are explicit in their anti-Marxist stance, intent on making the ideology appear ridiculous with no redeeming insights into governance or art.

For *Starship Troopers*, communism is both an ideological and physical threat. While Reid calls Karl Marx “a pompous fraud” (117), the Federation's greatest external threat is the Arachnids, an alien species who are compared to “the Chinese Hegemony,” a communist government that is supposed to have fought against the Ruso-Anglo-American alliance in the late twentieth century (194-195). To a degree, the Arachnids' nature remains somewhat of a mystery for the Federation, but from Rico's limited understanding of the Arachnids, “their organization, psychological and economic, is more like that of ants or termites; they [the Arachnids] are communal entities, the ultimate dictatorship of the hive” (Heinlein 171). The Arachnids appear to serve as a metaphor for communism.

The communist Arachnids are a formidable opponent, but the Federation is set on conquering the galaxy before they do, and “carrying the war to the Bugs” (Heinlein 169). Diplomacy or peaceful resolution does not seem to be an option: the Bugs will take over the galaxy if the humans do not first. Rico declares that it is “the Bugs or us. Fight or die” (226); he will later dial down his previous statement, pondering whether negotiating peace might be

possible as opposed to genocide: “[m]ust we wipe out every Bug in the Galaxy? Or was it possible to trounce them and impose a peace?” (283), but then he is uncertain “if they *can* surrender” (171). Whether “us/we” refers to the Federation itself or humanity as a whole (the Federation seems to govern all of Earth/“Terra” in addition to other planets), he poses the Bugs—and communism via metaphor—as a threat to human society and existence.

Starship Troopers gives the impression that its author may have believed communism to be an equal threat to humanity as the Bugs are in his novel. As war rages on with the Bugs, Rico observes that Federation forces “were learning, expensively, just how efficient a total communism can be when used by a people actually adapted to it by evolution” (194). Two fair assumptions can be made from the comment: Rico (and probably the rest of the Federation members) believes the human race is not biologically adapted to communism and that the Federation at least considers itself to NOT be communist, as humans would not be adapted to such a system.

The Federation expresses a strong anti-communist stance from early on in the novel. Communism and Karl Marx are targeted by Mr. Dubois in one of his classroom rants, he declares the Marxian theory of value to be “ridiculous,” and Dubois is aggressive in making his students see the Marxian theory of value the same way, calling communism a “magnificent fraud” and using “kitchen illustrations” to “demolish the Marxian theory of value” (116). Dubois is intent on denigrating both Marx’s theory and his character, Marx’s ideas apparently being in direct opposition to Dubois’s ideology and the ideology of the Federation.

Dubois’s final comments on Karl Marx are dismissive but also somewhat cryptic: “the disheveled old mystic of *Das Kapital*, turgid, tortured, confused, and neurotic, unscientific illogical, this pompous fraud Karl Marx nevertheless had a glimmering of a very important truth.

If he had possessed an analytical mind, he might have formulated the first adequate definition of value... and this planet might have been saved endless grief” (Heinlein 116-117).¹¹ Even if Dubois believes Marx “had a glimmering of a very important truth,” he clearly has a personal vendetta toward the thinker, seeing him not only as a “pompous fraud” but also someone who brought on “endless grief.”

Readers are not given many concrete historical details of what kind of endless grief Marx is supposed to have caused for the twentieth century. Outside the brief mentions of the Russo-Anglo-American war with the Chinese Hegemony and the Treaty of New Delhi, *Starship Troopers* only provides vague accounts of the societal disorder and collapse in the late twentieth century (117, 151, 229, 232). Rico does provide a comment on pre-Federation history when he reflects on the nature of the Bugs’ “communist-like” tactics: “Bug commissars didn’t care any more about expending soldiers than we cared about expending ammo. Perhaps we could have figured this out about Bugs by noting the grief the Chinese Hegemony gave the Russo-Anglo-American Alliance” (195)—note the same word “grief” is used by Rico and Dubois.

Despite the vagueness of the twentieth-century accounts in *Starship Troopers*, it can at least be proposed from the text examined so far, through Dubois’s specific targeting of Marxism and the presence of the “communist” Arachnid threat, that *Starship Troopers* is posing Marx and communism as a threat to human society. As much as Rico and Dubois oppose communism, it is not the only ideology from pre-Federation/twentieth-century history that they have qualms—yet their qualms with other movements interconnect and make for a great deal to unpack to fully

¹¹ Dubois’s belief is that “[n]othing of value is free” (118). The mention of Marx is brief, and we can get the sense from Dubois’s “mud pie” argument (116) that the reader is not invited to consider Marx’s theory in depth. Attempting a deeper analysis of how the Federation’s “theory of value” differs from Marx’s theory (or perhaps misinterprets Marx’s theory) seems unlikely to be altogether productive or fruitful for a thesis of this nature.

comprehend the Federation's ideology. Although Boucher called *Starship Troopers* "an irate sermon with a few fictional trappings" (qtd. in Panshin), the sermon is one that is broken up into pieces and scattered throughout the narrative of Rico's journey through the MI. The sermon is at the center of the novel, and the world of *Starship Troopers* is also dedicated to showing a society where the ideals of the sermon are actualized. It will take careful piecing together to understand the sermon, and caution must be taken since Heinlein already asked that English Professors look a little more closely at the details of his novel before drawing conclusions (Heinlein, *Expanded Universe* 482). The point to be understood for now is that the Federation is anti-communist.

The Federation's Understanding of Liberal Democracy and "Decadence"

Starship Troopers and the twentieth-century fascists at least identify a common enemy, not exactly alien insects but certainly communism, both seeming to identify communism as a high-level threat. Paxton explains it was fear of communist "terrorism" that would eventually compel the government of the Weimar Republic to allow Hitler and the Nazi party totalitarian-level power over the nation. Meanwhile, Mussolini was confident enough in public support of his fascist party (and the lack of popularity toward the Italian Left) to take full responsibility for the murder of the Italian Socialist Party member, Giacomo Matteotti (107-109). Of course, The Federation's anticommunist stance and the description of the Arachnids as a "communist" hivemind do not serve as an immediate indication of the novel's narrative and/or characters expressing fascist sentiments. However, the fact that *Starship Troopers* strongly opposes both socialist *and* democratic governments should begin to raise concerns.

According to Major Reid, the collapse at the end of the twentieth century was brought on not just by communism but also by the weakness of liberal democracies. Reid explains how the

“unlimited democracies” of the twentieth century were not only unstable but also ineffectual, saying “mankind has tried thousands of ways and many more have been proposed [but...] [a]ll these systems worked and none of them well. All were regarded as tyrannical by many, all eventually collapsed or were overthrown.” Major Reid makes a point to say that the “unlimited democracies still “excluded [some] from franchise” (232). In his criticism of liberal democracies, Reid does not seem concerned that these democracies “were regarded as tyrannical by many,” or that citizens could potentially exercise their freedoms in a way that could restrict others’ freedom. He seems to imply that the “tyrannical” unlimited democracies could merely set the bar lower for the Federation when it comes to granting freedom. Reid proclaims, “personal freedom for all is greatest in history” under the Federation, but Dedman (*May the Armed Forces Be with You* 2016) concludes that “we can only take his word for this, as nothing else in the novel supports this statement” (82). What is instead implied as paramount from Reid’s statement is that the Federation remains stable and is never overthrown like the governments before it.

Reid appears to express the attitude that the purpose of government should be to create a lasting order and to preserve the nation, and the novel shows that the Federation is actually very comfortable with being “regarded as tyrannical” by their civilian population to this end. Characters like Rico’s father and the doctor complain about the authoritarian power of the military under the Federation as well as the restriction of franchise to military veterans. Major Reid acknowledges that “complaints [toward the government] are loud and unceasing” (235). To dismiss the civilians’ discontent with the system, Reid claims that “[t]he practical reason for continuing our system is the same as the practical reason for continuing anything: It works satisfactorily” (231). Therefore, the restriction of franchise to military veterans is there to stay, so long as it keeps the Federation working “satisfactorily.”

Viewing “stability” as a government’s priority, the Federation does not see liberal democracies as an ideal system of government, as they lack the level of stability the Federation desires. Members like Reid theorize the instability of liberal democracies is largely due to how their citizens understood their relation to the state:

The unlimited democracies were unstable because their citizens were not responsible for the fashion in which they exerted their sovereign authority [...] No attempt was made to determine whether a voter was socially responsible to the extent of his literally unlimited authority. If he voted the impossible, the disastrous possible happened instead—and responsibility was then forced on him willy-nilly and destroyed both him and his foundationless temple. (Heinlein 234)

Reid does not provide an immediate answer to what kind of “impossible” or “disastrous possible” an irresponsible citizen in the liberal democracies might have voted for, and readers must examine the rest of his sermons thoroughly. However, it can be fairly assumed from what is been examined so far (specifically the anti-Leftist rants) that Reid believes liberal policies’ attempts to serve the interest of the individual rather than the group will ultimately fail to achieve their ideals and instead spell disaster. In Reid’s worldview, citizens should exercise their sovereign authority with the needs of the state/group in mind rather than their individual needs.

A “disastrous possible” for Dubois could mean not only the rise of communist regimes but also a general societal decay and disorder. When lecturing on “the disorders” that arose in the liberal democracies in the late twentieth century, Dubois focuses on the example of “the North American republic” describing to his students how “[m]urder, drug addiction, larceny, assault,

and vandalism were commonplace” (143). Dubois believes one of the two reasons for the high level of juvenile “delinquency” and crime in the North American Republic was the existing criminal justice system’s hesitation to provide “severe enough” corporal punishment to be effective in preventing future crimes. He points a finger at two factors that led the republic to withhold the degree of punishment toward the juvenile criminals he believes would have been necessary: one factor was the twentieth-century child psychologists who believed in better alternatives to physical discipline, and the other factor was the republic’s liberal ideals of human rights opposing the use of cruel and unusual punishment. Reid says he “do[es] not understand objections to ‘cruel and unusual’ punishment [...] punishment must be unusual or it serves no purpose,” as he believes punishment should be “so unusual as to be significant, to deter to instruct” (145-147).

Dubois deduces the other reason for the prevalence of juvenile criminals in the North American Republic connects to the lack of severe punishment. The juvenile criminals were unable to understand their duty to the state: “Nobody preached duty to these kids in a way they could understand—that is, with a spanking. But the society they were in told them endlessly about their ‘rights.’ [They] glorified their rights and lost track of their duties. No nation, so constituted, can endure” (151-152). Dubois argues that the way twentieth-century democracies granted citizens their rights without emphasizing their civic duties resulted in citizens taking such rights for granted. Many citizens, believing the rights they were granted by the state to have been natural ones, exercised their rights in their own self-interest and with a sense of entitlement. The entitled attitudes led many to even take advantage and bring harm to other citizens to fulfill their own desires, as seen in the example of the juvenile delinquents (described as “wolf packs of children”) said to have attacked whoever wanted to just take a walk in the park (143). Dubois

deduces that the unlimited democracies' "glorification" of citizen rights without regard to duty is what ultimately led to the fall of the twentieth century. He claims that "[n]othing of value is free" (118); if we are to follow his logic, then the rights freely granted by a state to its citizens are worthless—in Dubois's words:

This was the tragic fallacy which brought on the decadence and collapse of the democracies of the twentieth century; those noble experiments failed because the people had been led to believe that they could simply vote for whatever they wanted... and get it, without toil, without sweat, without tears. (Heinlein 117-118)

When critiquing the failures of past liberal democracies, Dubois's use of the term "decadence" should be noteworthy if *Starship Troopers* is to be investigated for fascist themes. The concept of "decadence," specifically as a term to describe cultural or societal decline, was a fixation of the twentieth-century fascists, to the point that "some authors have put ["brooding about cultural degeneracy"] at the center" of the fascists' primary frustration (Paxton 144). "Decadence" appears to be applied in the same way by Dubois: to describe cultural societal decline, such as in his example of the juvenile delinquents.

Beginning to Identify Mobilizing Passions to Starship Troopers

Anxiety about cultural decline is not always exclusive to fascists.¹² However, when Dubois and Reid spend so much time pointing fingers at the "decadence" of liberal democracies

¹² Griffin makes a point to note that authors such as Aldous Huxley, who "shared" "many of their [the fascists'] preoccupations with the crisis and decadence of modern culture, remained [...] within the fold of a relativist humanism" (200). A fixation on "cultural decadence" is not always (but often) a trait exclusive to fascists.

and communism while giving little to no mention to the atrocities of the Nazis and their ilk, then it is fair for *Starship Troopers* to be suspected of expressing one of the fascist moods listed by Paxton: “Dread of group decline under the corrosive effects of democratic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences” (219). Dubois believes the “unlimited democracies” fell with “group decline” because “[they] glorified their mythology of ‘rights’ ... and lost track of their duties” (152). Meanwhile he violently denigrates Karl Marx and *Das Kapital*. The novel’s narrative seems to work in dialogue with Dubois by setting up the “communist Bugs” as a threat to humanity (and these “alien influences” are literally aliens).

From the analysis of the novel so far, we can see that the Federation’s anti-democratic nature goes beyond just restricting franchise to military veterans; Dubois also seems to believe in the use of “cruel or unusual punishment.” It is also apparent that civilians are discontent (235), but Federation citizens like Reid view maintaining the current hierarchy as paramount because they do not believe in “unlimited democracy.” The Federation expresses the first mobilizing passion listed by Paxton: “a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions” (219).

Liberal Democracy and “Decadence” in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy

Liberal democracies held anxieties for both liberals and conservatives of the early twentieth century. The twentieth-century philosopher Hannah Arendt (who saw the rise and fall of the Axis powers) theorizes in “What is Authority?” (1959) that liberals’ desire to attain freedom for all and conservatives’ desire to reestablish authority could be a sign of “a simultaneous recession of both freedom and authority in the modern world” (Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt* 469). Paxton overviews how many intellectuals in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Europe grew concerned with the effects of Modernity on the masses of

their nations. These masses were perceived to have grown less inhibited by traditional sensibilities, increasingly pursuing their own personal interests with a declining obligation toward spiritual or governmental authority. Amidst such anxieties concerning the deteriorating authority or outright opposition toward traditional hierarchies, many Europeans dreaded a “collapse of community solidarity [...] under the impact of urban sprawl, industrial conflict, and immigration (Paxton 35), which in turn would even further threaten the power/authority held by the traditional ruling majorities of Europe.¹³ Liberal democracies can struggle to come to a democratic consensus on issues when the plurality of their societies leads to conflicting desired outcomes between newly empowered individuals and the traditionally empowered who fear disempowerment. While the Marxists identified the bourgeoisie as the enemy of the working class and human progress, the fascists would identify a different enemy within their societies: “decadence.”

But what exactly is “decadence” outside of the *fin de siècle* aesthetic sense, and why did the fascists fixate on “decadence?” Why did they spend as much time being reactionary (decrying whatever they identified as decadent) as they spent pushing their own agenda? Understanding fascists’ sense of “decadence” is important for understanding how fascists justify the atrocities they commit in their efforts to achieve their goals. Understanding the fascist obsession with decadence will also be important for understanding how the Federation of *Starship Troopers* justifies its own actions because both the Federation and the fascists of the twentieth century have a very similar understanding of what is “decadent.”

¹³ Arendt considers that “the famous ‘decline of the West’ consists primarily in the decline of the Roman trinity of religion, tradition, and authority” (*The Portable Hannah Arendt* 501).

As a general term, “Decadence” can be understood as “the process of falling away or declining (from a prior state of excellence, vitality, prosperity, etc)” (OED). It suggests “falling from a standard”/ “a decay” rather than an evolution or adaptation. In *The Nature of Fascism*, Roger Griffin argues that fascism inspires the masses by appealing to the myth of death/decay/decline leading to rebirth with “national decadence conceived in such a way that it could be reversed by a radical process of national regeneration” (201).

Griffin therefore describes fascism as “palingenetic ultranationalism,” the term “palingenesis” applied in a political sense meaning “a ‘new rebirth’ occurring after a period of perceived decadence.” The “rebirth” that fascists desired for their nation and the radical reaffirming of its citizens’ national identity would require a dramatic transformation after decades or centuries of liberal developments. Therefore, “*ultra-nationalism*” as applied by Griffin, “refer[s] to forms of nationalism which ‘go beyond,’ and hence reject, anything compatible with liberal institutions or with the tradition of Enlightenment humanism which underpins them” (Griffin 36-37). Paxton similarly agrees with Griffin’s definition of “populist ultranationalism,” believing that “[f]ascisms seek out in each national culture those themes that are best capable of mobilizing a mass movement of *regeneration*, unification, and purity, directed against liberal individualism and constitutionalism and against Leftist class struggle” (*my italics*, 40). Fascists sought to reestablish authority to “the state”/“the nation” after the effectiveness and respect for the nation’s traditional government had waned in the face of conflicting ideologies and individualism; hence their push for “ultranationalism.”

I argue that *Starship Troopers*’s narrative fulfills the “palingenetic” political myth in a way that promotes the “ultranationalism” described by Griffin. Although *Starship Troopers* depicts a futuristic society with advanced technology (“power armor” being the novel’s

statement piece), a technologically advanced society does not go against a fascist vision. Fascists desire to rescue their nation from any “decadence” introduced *with* industrialization and globalization (such as immigration and liberalism), and fascism is *not* anti-modern in the industrial sense. Eco’s *Ur-Fascism* confidently assesses in feature #2 that “[b]oth Fascists and Nazis worshiped technology,” and so fascists’ talk of “decadence” refers to the outcomes of the development and application of liberal ideals: “[t]he Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, is seen as the beginning of modern depravity.” Because fascists want to use industrialization and scientific innovation to the fullest advantage for their desired outcomes, Griffin distinguishes that fascism “represents an alternative modernism rather than a rejection of it [...] it is the decadent features of modernity that are being attacked in order to outline the prospect of a totally different type of society”; this is why Griffin describes fascist ultranationalism as “palingenetic.” It implies the nation being born anew and “greater” than before, and in the twentieth century, this meant fully taking advantage of modern advances in science and technology (Griffin 47).

Dubois and Reid’s criticisms of the twentieth century are directed towards its liberalism (concerning morality, human rights, nature of citizenship, value, etc.); Dubois describes the end of the century as “loaded with pre-scientific pseudo-psychological nonsense” (146). Meanwhile, they express little or no lamentation toward the development of increasingly advanced science and technology as the century progressed. Rico himself devotes several pages to describing the “beauty” of the power armor he wears in combat (127-131).

While Dubois and Reid describe the decadence and collapse of the liberal democracies of the twentieth century, the extraordinarily technologically advanced future society of the Federation is portrayed as a near-utopia (or truly a utopia by some characters’ standards). Although Reid initially says the reason for the Federation’s existing system to be kept in place is

that “it works satisfactorily,” he then asks one of his students the assumptive question “why our system works better than any used by our ancestors?” (231-232). Reid boasts that the Federation has achieved a great deal: “[m]any complain but none rebel; personal freedom for all is greatest in history, laws are few, taxes are low, living standards are as high as productivity permits, crime is at its lowest ebb” (232). When Rico visits a future Vancouver after finishing boot, he is in complete awe of the city (158). Further along in his career and travels, Rico decides that “the human race had reached its ultimate peak” (202). In *Starship Troopers*, humanity reaches its peak through their technology and strict “theory of morals,” and not by achieving some god-like form of enlightenment/thought as may be seen in other sci-fi.¹⁴

Though the Federation’s war with the Arachnids poses a threat to the entire human race, the Federation seems to have solved or nearly solved many of the issues that human governments have struggled with. The Federation achieves stability and order even with a high level of industrialization and urbanization, despite the complex issues/questions that have arisen with the two. If what Dubois and Reid say about the history of Terra/Earth is correct, then *Starship Troopers*’s narrative depicts a “palingenesis” actualized. The collapse of the “decadent” twentieth-century governments led to the rise of the Federation: “something had to fill the vacuum” (229). The Federation now has a system that “works better than any used by our ancestors,” and now humanity seems to have “reached its ultimate peak” according to Rico.

The question to return to: does the novel *Starship Troopers* fulfill the national palingenesis myth through ultranationalism? The Federation school textbooks say that a soldier (in contrast to a civilian) “accepts personal responsibility for the safety of the body politic of which he is a member, defending it, if need be, with his life,” but as Dubois asks Rico, “[B]ut do

¹⁴ One example being Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

you understand [the words of the textbook]? Do you *believe* it?” In other words, with what degree of seriousness or veneration do Federation soldiers give themselves to their nation? Is federal service merely a job or is it made to be something more? —What is the nature of citizenship under the Federation? Is it merely a veteran oligarchy or military dictatorship—or is it truly an ultranationalist regime? How did the Nazis and Italian Fascists conceive of and adopt ultranationalism?

Chapter 4: Mobilizing Passions of Ultranationalism

Fascism compels susceptible citizens of liberal democracies to exercise their individual rights in a way that, ironically, surrenders their individual rights and personhood to a homogenous conception of “the state” or “nation.” For the fascists, an ideal male citizen “is instinctively prepared to sacrifice himself to the higher needs of the nation” (Griffin 42). Anyone who does not possess such an intense sense of duty to their nation is seen as an outsider if not an enemy, as Eco understands it in his tenth fascist feature: “Every citizen belongs to the best people of the world, the members of the party are the best among the citizens, every citizen can (or ought to) become a member of the party.” Because the fascists see the loss of their nation’s traditional authority (often more gloriously imagined than it was in reality) as the cause of social decay and decadence, “any social energies unco-ordinated by the state are symptoms of decadence” (Griffin 45), and so the fascist call for “ultranationalism.” Paxton similarly agrees that “the first giant step” in “[t]he fascist mission of national aggrandizement and purification [...] was to subordinate the individual to the community,” to the degree that “individual rights had no autonomous existence” within fascist states (142).

From the fascists' perspective, their group (the group they perceive) has strayed far from the original sense of purpose and community that all their actions and way of being were once supposedly driven by. The fascists' solution is to reassert their citizens' sense of duty toward an authority that has dissipated or no longer exists (if it had existed). Because fascists desire (as Griffin words it) all "social energies" to be "coordinated by the state," the private sphere is targeted: "[f]or some observers, this effort to have the public sphere swallow up the private sphere entirely is indeed the very essence of fascism" (Paxton 144). The attack on the private sphere can give an idea of what makes "ultranationalism" distinct from general "nationalism," Griffin further clarifies the definition of ultranationalism: "forms of nationalism which 'go beyond', and hence reject, anything compatible with liberal institutions or with the tradition of Enlightenment humanism which underpins them" (37).

How would/could a novel express ultranationalist attitudes?

Ultranationalism requires that the national, homogeneously conceived group not only take primary importance over the individual within the group but also supersede it so that the individual cannot be conceived of outside the group: "individuals as individuals have no rights, and the People is conceived as a quality, a monolithic entity expressing the Common Will" (Eco). Eco's understanding of ultranationalism is reflected in the third listed mobilizing passion: "the primacy of the group [...] and the subordination of the individual to it" (Paxton 219). If a novel is to express "ultranationalism," its protagonist(s) would not only need to have a sense of duty toward their nation but would also reject or suppress all aspects of themselves that are not geared toward the advancement of the national group. The protagonist's character, morals, and actions would need to reflect and reinforce the conceived homogeneity and national identity so that the individual is merely a microcosm of the state without much of a unique self; this could

even extend to the character's sexuality so that their sexuality is experienced through their sense of duty and belonging to the group. Umberto Eco designates "sexual matters" as one of the primary targets of Ur-Fascism. He argues one of the primary examples of Ur-fascism targeting "sexual matters" is the restrictive expression of "*machismo*" desired by fascist regimes, which "implies both disdain for women and intolerance and condemnation of nonstandard sexual habits, from chastity to homosexuality." Returning to the idea of a fascist novel, expressions of generic misogyny and/or homophobia may not immediately indicate fascist attitudes. However, if femininity or homosexuality acts as a foil to "manliness"/"masculinity" or is positioned antagonistically against the protagonist, this may be a good indication of the novel having fascist sentiments.

If a novel with ultranationalist themes were to portray sex and sexuality, I theorize it would have distinct fixations regarding the subject. The novel would seek to portray a clear distinction between the sexes so that women are "X" and men are "Y" with little to no similarity between them so that both are contained to "his or her proper sphere" (Paxton 143). Although attention would be given to women, the novel would be primarily concerned with maintaining the "*machismo*" that Eco describes. The distinction between the sexes would likely be enforced through the objectification of female characters by male characters. Sex in the novel would be exciting but *not* experimental or liberating for the individual—but perhaps somehow liberating for the "master race." Reproduction and/or sexual conquest would need to be the ultimate outcome of all sexual energies. Fascist sex should reinforce the distinction between the sexes and/or reproduce more soldiers or breeders for the nation or "master race." Examining how gender and sexuality are portrayed in the novel will be important for identifying the next three mobilizing passions of fascism that follow "the primacy of the group": "the need for closer integration of a

“purer community”, “the need for authority by natural leaders (always male)”, and “the superiority of the leader’s instinct”; These three passions can offer important insight into fascist regime’s male hierarchy specifically.

Ultranationalism in Starship Troopers

Dubois and Reid decry the way in which twentieth-century citizens of the “unlimited” democracies “glorified their rights and lost track of their duties” (152), but they do not seem to believe in a compromise between both, instead, they believe a citizen should “place the welfare of the group ahead of personal advantage” to a degree that risks death (Heinlein 233). Therefore, Dubois and Reid, the unofficial spokesmen of the Federation, could already express the second mobilizing passion observed by Paxton: “The primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it” (219). In order to be given franchise, a citizen of the Federation must first “defend [“the body politic”] if need be, with his life” (33). Meanwhile, the Federation is also willing to restrict rights to the individual for maintaining order, even going as far as utilizing cruel and/or unusual punishment (146).

The next question to ask: to what extent the Federation believes it should take “primacy” over the individual? Does the Federation merely ask its citizens to risk their lives in “difficult service,” or does the Federation want not only the right to their bodies but also their souls? Does the Federation really seek to dissolve the private sphere like the fascists of the twentieth century?¹⁵ Although the restriction of franchise to veterans is the premise of *Starship Troopers*,

¹⁵ Refer to p. 37-38 drawing on Paxton’s research into how fascists target the private sphere (Paxton 144).

the fact alone does not necessarily say how the characters themselves feel about the policy; Dubois questions Rico on this in the second chapter:

“You [Rico]. What is the moral difference, if any, between a soldier and the civilian?”

“The difference,” I answered carefully, “lies in the field of civic virtue. A soldier accepts personal responsibility for the safety of the body politic of which he is a member, defending it, if need be with his life. The civilian does not.”

“The exact words of the book,” he [Dubois] said scornfully. “But do you understand it? Do you believe it?”

(Heinlein 32-33)

Dubois and Reid take up a great deal of the novel’s dialogue in expressing why they believe in the Federation’s restriction of franchise. The Federation’s franchise restriction does not seem to merely be a unique sci-fi premise; the novel’s narrative is also intent on defending the premise as though it were being contested as an actual system of government. Dubois and Reid serve as soap-box characters of the Federation and a seemingly singular ideology. While the Federation’s ideology is critiqued to some extent in the novel, the criticism is not frequent.

Civilian characters who criticize the Federation are made to appear ridiculous and naïve (by both the narrative and Dubois/Reid). The doctor character tells Rico that “military service is for ants” and that the citizenship granted with federal service is “[a] purely nominal political privilege [...] that most [citizens] aren’t competent to use wisely anyhow. Now if they would let medical men run things” (40). Meanwhile, Rico’s own father believes humanity has “outgrown wars.” Rico’s father goes as far as to describe “federal service” as “[p]arasitism, pure and simple.

A functionless organ utterly obsolete, living on the taxpayers” (30). While Major Reid’s retelling of the failure of the “so-called “Revolt of the Scientists” (230), seems to offer a kind of rebuttal to the doctor, the argument made by Rico’s father that the military is obsolete is made to look entirely disconnected from reality when the Bugs decimate Buenos Aires. The attack is the catalyst for Rico’s father to have an ideological conversion and join up himself. By the end of the novel, Rico also seems to adopt the same ideology as Dubois and Reid (though he still appears to have a few unanswered questions) with little to no deviation in worldview, fully believing in the Federation’s cause.

Masculinity and Heroic Citizenship in the Federation

While *Starship Troopers* is primarily concerned with the concept of one’s duty to the group, it is also a novel that is *very* concerned with masculinity and manhood—this does not mean that women are not given attention to in the novel: “everybody, male and female, shall have his born right to pay his service and assume full citizenship” (36), yet in the language itself, the masculine “his” is assumed as the default.¹⁶ The official-sounding language also translates into policy, and female members of the Federation are more segregated from the men and do not necessarily fight alongside the men as portrayed in the Verhoeven film.

There are no women in Rico’s boot camp. He and his fellow MI men suffer through boot for so long without seeing women that they eventually “became convinced that there were no such creatures, just mythology created by inflamed imaginations” (66). When women are

¹⁶ In *Foreign Security Policy, Gender, and US Military Identity* (2013) Elgin Brunner finds that the U.S. military has remained a “hegemonic masculinist institution” despite the changes it underwent after the Vietnam War (specifically allowing women into the military). Brunner’s examination of U.S. military internal documents shows the (masculine) gendered narrative still adopted by the US military (23-24).

portrayed (which is not often), Rico and his fellows will ogle over them to a somewhat comedic level (201). The women often serve as pilots for Federation dropships rather than infantry. Rico describes the *Tours* as a “mixed ship,” but the women live in separate quarters apart from the “rough characters who shave” and the women normally eat separately from the men (260). Male and Female officers dine together on the ship, but it is done in a ritualistic manner where customs like the greeting and the seating emphasize the distinction between them (261-262).

Speaking in the same language that assumes male as default, Dubois proclaims in one of his many lectures that “a juvenile becomes an adult when, and only when, he acquires a knowledge of duty and embraces it as dearer than the self-love he was born with” (152). As examined in the previous chapter, the Federation believes that the way to instill a juvenile with a sense of duty is “with a spanking” (151), tying into Reid’s belief that “political authority is *force*” (234).

Other members of the federation appear in dialogue with Dubois and his idea that a juvenile becomes a man through discipline (“a spanking”). Fresh recruits and drop-outs get called “overgrown babies” (44) or “babyish” (67) by the higher-ups. Captain Frankel even tells Sergeant Zim in private that “the most important and the most delicate work in the Army [is] turning unspanked young cubs into soldiers” (103), seeming to reference the specific punishment that Dubois said the juvenile delinquents of the twentieth century required.

Through the boot camp arc, the novel does seem to suggest that Rico undergoes a kind of growth from “a boy to a man,” and he seems to “mature into manhood” in both a spiritual and sexual sense. In the letter Dubois sends to Rico during boot, Dubois asserts himself as a fatherly figure (often seeming to replace Rico’s own father) to instruct Rico with fatherly advice about what it means to be a man. Dubois praises Rico for staying in boot, and he proclaims in the letter

that “[t]he noblest fate that a man can endure is to place his own mortal body between his loved home and the war’s desolation.” Because Rico has set himself on this noble path which may result in him suffering “the noblest fate,” Rico’s path is also spiritually fulfilling; as Dubois says, he has reached “that spiritual mountaintop” (114). Rico finds Dubois’s words affirming, but he seems already aware of how spiritually fulfilling joining up has been. Although boot camp is intense and difficult for Rico, devoting his energies to training with his fellows and learning to become a soldier gives him a sense of fulfillment and even inner peace. He confidently declares “[a]ll the wealthy, unhappy people you’ve ever met take sleeping pills; Mobile Infantryman don’t need them” (65). Rico’s statement echoes Dubois’s anti-materialism while also connecting to Paxton’s “primacy of the group” mood. Through Federal Service, Rico arrives at a “spiritual mountaintop” with no fears or worries to keep him up at night: “The fascist state embodied the national destiny, in service to which all the members of the national group found their highest fulfillment” (Paxton 142).

Rico undergoes not only a spiritual maturation through boot camp but also a kind of sexual awakening. Joining the service appears to heighten Rico’s sexual virility, whereas in high school he only appears casually interested in women (going on double dates). Contrary to the Verhoeven film, Carmen is not Rico’s girlfriend, rather she “wasn’t anybody’s girl” (33). However, Verhoeven still translates Rico’s sexual ineptitude from the novel to the screen, giving viewers the sense that Carmen on the big screen is not fully interested in Rico either. As Rico is sworn into service, he notes the “cute” female clerk who reviews his physical examination records and fingerprints. When Rico arrives in Vancouver after basic training, he “gawks” at the city environment, but “[e]specially at girls,” saying he “hadn’t realized just how wonderful they were.” The difference in gender is further emphasized by Rico continuing “I’ve approved of girls

from the time I first noticed that the difference was more than just that they dress differently” (158). At times, the sexualization of women by Rico and other male soldiers is somewhat over-the-top; Rico views guard duty as a “privilege [...] standing two hours out of each six with your spine against bulkhead thirty and your ears cocked for just the *sound* of a female voice” (Heinlein 201).

The sexualization of women by Rico and his MI fellows seems to have two functions: one is to portray that they have grown from boys to virile men through federal service/“duty,” and the other is to create a strong distinction between the sexes. Paxton writes that “[f]ascist regimes set out to make the new man and the new woman (each in his or her proper sphere)” (143), which would seem to align with Eco’s understanding of Ur-Fascism’s targeting of “sexual matters.” Although women may also be granted citizenship through federal service, they are restricted to roles like pilots and are not shown enduring the brutal MI boot camp. They are further segregated from male soldiers through the language employed (masculine pronouns as default), separate quarters, ritual, and sexualization.

Machismo and Matricide in the Federation

Eco understands Ur-Fascist machismo as featuring a “disdain for women,” and although *Starship Troopers* objectifies women, there is also a suggested “disdain” for femininity. When Rico arrives in MI boot camp, he and his fellow fresh recruits are greeted by Sergeant Zim, who calls them “a disgraceful huddle of momma’s spoiled little darlings” (55). The mention of their mothers holds stronger significance to the rest of the novel. While women are crucial to the Federation for birthing and raising new potential soldiers or underlings (as seen in Rico’s anti-abortion argument), they are also positioned as gentle antagonists who would deter boys from becoming men (“men” in the Federation’s sense).

When Rico at one point considers dropping out of the MI during boot, Rico's mother writes to him and momentarily convinces him to return home to her. His mother's letter to him is filled with overly-coddling, mushy language. She repeatedly calls Rico her "baby"/"baby boy"/"little boy," telling her son that he is "always my little boy who bangs his knees and comes running to my lap for comfort," and insists that "[l]ittle boys never get over needing their mother's laps" (111). Mothers are emasculating in *Starship Troopers*. As a concept, mothers do not seem to fit the vision of the novel outside of reproduction. They do not seem to have anything to offer a boy in his journey to becoming a "real man." Rico and the other new recruits are shocked by the hypermasculine and brutal Sergeant Zim while they suffer through boot camp. When Jenkins asks if Sergeant Zim "ever [had] a mother", an instructor corporal says that sergeants "don't have mothers [...] [t]hey reproduce by fission... like all bacteria" (63). A similar example of a "motherless" character is Captain Chandar in Rico's officer academy: "widely believed never to have smiled at his own mother" (233). Zim and Chandar appear as "real men" to the degree that their subordinates struggle to imagine them as ever having been helpless babies held in their mothers' arms.

The positioning of Rico's mother as an antagonist in the narrative becomes further apparent when Rico meets his father again. Overjoyed, Rico discovers that his father has also become a member of the MI following the death of Rico's mother. Rico's father seems to express that he felt held back by his wife from "joining up," telling Rico that "[y]our mother's death released me for what I had to do" (218). Rico's father also appeals to the idea of "boys to men through duty" by telling Rico "I had to prove to myself that I was a man. Not just a producing-consuming economic animal... but a *man*" (Heinlein 219). Because Rico is supposed to be on the Federation's path to manhood, and because his mother's love is so suffocating and

emasculating, it is not surprising that she is killed off in the bug attack. With his mother killed off, Rico can further develop into a “real man.” After her death, Rico and his father cannot wish to avenge her, as that would express a remaining attachment toward her. Rico coldly informs the reader of her death in passing. Meanwhile, Rico’s father will clarify to his son that he *did not* join up “to avenge her—even though I had that in mind, too” (217). For the plot of *Starship Troopers*, Rico’s mother was necessary for birthing him, perhaps serving as the devil character to test/tempt him, but nothing beyond that.

Discipline and Punishment in the Federation

Confusion opens up about how the Federation views discipline and punishment. Dubois believes the juvenile delinquents of the twentieth century needed punishment for their disobedience to become disciplined citizens. Meanwhile, Rico and his fellow recruits have not committed any crime to deserve punishment upon arriving in boot camp—yet they are called “unspanked young cubs” (103). Dubois expresses his own confusion, saying the term “juvenile delinquent” is a contradiction” because he believes “delinquent” means “failing in duty.” But *duty* is an *adult* virtue (144). Therefore, the Federation sees “juvenile” and “delinquency” as going hand in hand, which implies that those who do not acknowledge their duty are not only “boys” rather than “men,” but also “delinquents.” Dubois’s understanding of “juvenile delinquency” further affirms that the Federation views “any social energies unco-ordinated by the state [as] symptoms of decadence” (Griffin 45)—and not only decadence but also “delinquency.” A recruit can be flogged publicly (within the confines of the camp) if he commits a strong enough offense. After being flogged himself, Rico thinks that “[a] flogging isn’t as hard to take as it is to watch” (135). Witnessing disobedient soldiers be punished is what further

motivates the others to “fall in line” and not deviate. The Federation implements a similar strategy (public violence toward deviants to encourage group obedience) on its civilians, who may witness public floggings at the federal buildings (96).

It becomes apparent that Reid believes “political authority is *force*” (234) because the Federation has little other authority as powerful. Their only appeal to moral authority draws on “the instinct to survive”—perhaps *only* to “survive” with their system that just “works satisfactorily.” Preserving the human race and maintaining the established hierarchy within the human race are the central (if not the only two) concerns of the Federation. C. W. Sullivan III asserts that “Reid presents no philosophical or moral justification for his proposed system” (223). The following quote from Hanna Arendt’s essay *What is Authority?* Offers further insight into the weakness of the Federation’s authority over its civilians:

Since authority always demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power or violence. Yet authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed. (Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt* 463).

The Federation views authority *as* “power or violence” (force) demanding obedience, and they do not appeal to any faith or liberal principles in making a case for their authority. While praising the efficacy of spanking, Dubois decries the “pre-scientific pseudo class” of child psychologists” in their handling of juvenile delinquents: “the do-gooders attempted to “appeal to their [the juveniles] better natures,” to “reach them,” to “spark their moral sense.” Tosh! They had no ‘better natures’; experience taught them that what they were doing was the way to survive” (151). Dubois expresses a deep pessimism, suggesting that humans act on their most base desires

by default, and without discipline, they are mere animals—“animals” in the sense that they will only ever think and act in their own self-interest. This pessimistic worldview allows the Federation to justify their use of cruel and unusual punishment “to deter, to instruct,” as it is the Federation’s job to “cultivate” the individual’s survival instinct “into motivations more subtle and much more complex” (147-150). The Federation teaches obedience primarily through punishment. The comparison of instilling a sense of duty in a citizen to house-training a puppy is a crucial appeal for Dubois in his argument for spanking (147). Dubois’s comparison does not acknowledge the speech barrier between a dog and its owner. An owner cannot explain to a puppy *why* it should not urinate in the house, whereas a person can be convinced through language (without the use of force) why they should or should not do something.¹⁷

The past three sections have been dedicated to showing how the Federation expresses the fourth mobilizing passion that Paxton lists: “the need for closer integration of a purer community, by consent if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary” (219). The only way to become a citizen of the Federation is through federal service. It is through federal service/duty that citizens find “fulfillment,” which seems to be both spiritual and sexual. The Federation has several ways of enforcing distinct gender binaries, idealizing machismo while shunning femininity or “weakness.” The floggings, which are said to be “[not] as hard to take as it is to watch” (135), seem to work as the “exclusionary violence” that Paxton refers to.

¹⁷ Dubois mocks his students, “I doubt if any of you here would recognize ‘civic virtue’ if it came up and barked in [their] face!” (Heinlein 33). Perhaps the specific use of the word “barked” (relating to dog) makes Dubois comment about the incomprehensibility of “civic virtue” relate to his house-training analogy and the human-dog speech barrier.

Beginning to Unravel the Federation's Pessimism

The Federation's pessimistic worldview goes further. The Federation views civilians as "unspanked puppies" and believes that discipline, punishment, and intimidation are the most reliable ways to instill a sense of duty to the group ("political authority is force"). Rico and his fellows are not taught to develop a moral conscience based outside of the Federation's "scientifically verifiable theory." While they are still in uniform, they are not expected to be the ones making most of the ethical decisions in warfare: "It's never a soldier's business to decide when or where or how—or *why*—he fights; that belongs to the statesmen and the generals" (79). The Mobile Infantrymen are not diplomats, and Rico explains that the technologically advanced power armor the MI wears is designed to "leave you free to follow your trade, slaughter" (131).

The Federation may believe it turns boys into men, but by the end of his training, Rico concludes that man is just "a wild animal with the will to survive [...] not what do-gooders and well-meaning Aunt Nellies would like him to be" (238). Rico's statement seems to reflect the same pessimism as Dubois's (151). Further affirming, Reid notes that even veterans are not as distinguished from civilians as their underlings would like to think, and they will still commit crimes to fulfill their basic drives (231). It seems that those still in uniform are not much more morally superior to a civilian or a veteran. The Federation only trains "unspanked puppies" to be obedient dogs who will serve their master's bidding without question. At one point, soldiers of the Federation are even compared to "sheepdogs" by one of the officer's academy students, and Major Reid considers this to be a "[n]icely put" analogy (235).

Soldiers ("sheepdogs") are expected to do whatever the "statesmen and generals" order them to (79), but the Federation is only governed by veterans (soldiers), who may be neither "brighter than civilians" nor more "self-disciplined" (230-231). This factor, among others,

suggests that the Federation expresses the sixth mobilizing passion of fascism: “the superiority of the leader’s instincts over abstract and universal reason”, which connects closest to the fifth mobilizing passion “the need for authority by natural leaders (always male), culminating in a national chief who alone is capable of incarnating the group’s destiny” (219).

A Military Veteran Dictatorship with no Dictator?

The relationship between the fascist leader and his regime is complex and also crucial to its success. The last two mobilizing passions mentioned at the end of the previous section highlight how crucial a dictator is to “divine the will of the People” for a fascist regime; as Eco puts it, “[s]ince no large quantity of human beings can have common will, the Leader pretends to be their interpreter. Having lost their power of delegation, citizens do not act; they are only called to play the role of the People.” Hitler’s suicide signaled the end of the Nazi regime. Paxton observes that “fascist rule is more nakedly dependent on *charisma* than any other kind, which may help explain why no fascist regime has so far managed to pass power to a successor” (126). However, if the fascist leader is important to his regime’s success, and if *Starship Troopers* is fascist, then where is the fascist leader in *Starship Troopers*? No actual dictator figure is shown in the Federation’s government, but then, there is not much textual evidence for or against one existing, as very little is shown of the Federation’s bureaucracy in general. Rico mentions “the statesmen and generals” commanding those lower on the Federation hierarchy (79), but they are never otherwise depicted. Meanwhile, from a narrative perspective, the “Dubois/Reid” character seems to take the role of a fascist leader in the sense that they dominate the narrative and hold powerful influence over Rico’s perception of the world.

Polarization in the Federation and Twentieth-Century Democracy

There is no room for compromising between the Federation's ruling opinion and public opinion. There is no argument presented for both "medical men" and military veterans to have franchise, instead, it is argued whether scientists *or* military veterans should have franchise. Similarly, the Federation's military is either "utterly obsolete" as Rico's father first argues (30) or it must carry out an expansionist, genocidal warfare against the Arachnids, there is never a middle-ground argument made for ramping up military defenses without also conquering the whole galaxy. Meanwhile, the novel pushes the idea that military service is the *only* way to be a "real man." The polarization can be found at the core of the Federation's ideology with its belief that "glorifying" individual rights rather than instilling a sense of "duty" in their citizens toward the nation would lead to decadence and collapse; it does not attempt to balance the polarization.

Dubois and Reid claim it was the Federation that all too recently brought humanity out of the chaos and turmoil into a new age of order. The two veteran representatives of the Federation are the only ones who provide vague accounts of how the Federation came to be formed, Major Reid provides one such account:

nobody can describe accurately how the Federation came about; it just grew. With national governments in collapse at the end of the XX century, something had to fill the vacuum, and in many cases it was the veterans [...] The first known case, in Scotland, was typical. Some veterans got together as vigilantes to stop rioting and looting, hanged a few people (including two veterans) and decided not to let anyone but veterans on their committee. Just arbitrary at first—they trusted each other a bit, they didn't trust anyone

else. What started as an emergency measure became constitutional practice... in a generation or two. (Heinlein 229-230)

If certain political theorists were to hear “an emergency measure that became constitutional practice,” it becomes very tempting to play with the comparison of the Federation’s claim to power as an “emergency measure” to the Nazi’s seizure of emergency power, in which “Hitler was given the authority to set aside any existing law or right as needed to cope with a perceived national emergency of Marxist “terror” (Paxton 121). The comparison is even more tempting when already aware of the Federation’s strong anti-communist stance. Even more interesting is the description of “the veterans” who “got together as vigilantes,” as Paxton notes specifically that “[v]eterans were a key element in early fascist recruitment” (226). The *squadristi* and the SS come to mind when Reid says the “veterans got together as vigilantes.” For the veterans to be “vigilantes” implies an existing establishment that they are acting within. Rather than being described as total revolutionaries against whatever existing system remained, it could be suggested that the veterans merely took the law into their own hands “to stop rioting and looting, hang[ing] a few people.” Reid describes these vigilantes as being veterans exclusively, which could give the sense that these vigilantes bonded over a shared nationalism and experience in a strict hegemonic institution.

The entire governmental system of the Federation would seem to rest on the excuse of human society’s hopeless polarization and failure to find common ground for all. Meanwhile, I have observed that, throughout Dubois’s and Reid’s rants over the “unlimited democracies” of the twentieth century, there is an effort made by them to delegitimize the concept of democracy. These delegitimizing attacks range from statements like “[a]ll were regarded as tyrannical by

many” to extreme hypothetical questions like “[w]hat right to life has a man drowning in the Pacific” (151).

The polarization or “deadlock” portrayed in the novel (and the Federation’s dismissal of attempts at compromise to solve the polarization and to become more democratic) is significant when considering how a similar political environment worked for the Nazis and Italian Fascists in their rise to power. Before the Kingdom of Italy became unable to function, Italian Fascists seem to have already taken issue with the parliamentary government’s “mediocrity.” Fascists hold “contempt for the soft, complacent, compromising center” and “scorn for liberal parliamentarianism and for slack bourgeois individualism” with its “weakness and disunity” (Paxton 11-12). The fascist resentment toward “rotten” parliamentary governments” was detected by Umberto Eco, who witnessed both the fascist occupation of Italy and its liberation during his childhood in Milan. From his list of “features of Ur-fascism” in his 1995 essay “Ur-Fascism,” the 13th feature listed by Eco concerns the fascist resentment toward liberal governments always seeking compromise between groups. According to Eco, such a resentment derives from a kind of “selective populism” or “a qualitative populism” rather than quantitative, in which “individuals as individuals have no rights, and the People is conceived as a quality, a monolithic entity expressing the Common Will” (Eco). Because fascists wish to imagine “the People” (for the Nazis, “die Volk”) of their nation as a “monolithic entity,” there should not be need for any kind of compromise unless it is a compromise with those who are not a part of “the People.”

This is where the fascists’ necessity for a dictator comes in. Paxton explains a fascist leader’s charisma “rested on a claim to a unique and mystical status as the incarnation of the people’s will and bearer of the people’s destiny,” Thus, Hitler and Mussolini were viewed by

their followers as having such a connection to the *Volk* or *razza* (126). I argue that Dubois's character possesses a similar kind of charisma where he alone is capable of determining the Federation's destiny.

We are told that the *History & Moral Philosophy* high school class he teaches is one that "everybody had to take but nobody had to pass," which leads one to wonder what the actual purpose of the class is. Even Dubois himself "never seemed to care whether he got through to us or not" (31), and yet he speaks very passionately about a range of subjects (Marx being my previous example). What is more to consider is the power dynamic in the classroom; only veterans (those with franchise) are permitted to teach required *History & Moral Philosophy* (115), while the high school students taking the course are mere civilians without franchise. It seems as though *History & Moral Philosophy* may be primarily designed to impress upon young civilians the superiority that citizens have over them, both morally and politically. The class textbook says that "the moral difference" between a soldier and a civilian "lies in the field of civic virtue," and Dubois insists that none of his civilian students "would recognize 'civic virtue' if it came up and barked in [their] face!" (Heinlein 33). Dubois's implied moral superiority may extend not just over civilians but also many soldiers. While observing the shortcomings of soldiers, Reid confesses that a soldier "may [also] lapse in civic virtue" (233), and Rico himself has to admit that "Patriotism was a bit esoteric for me, too large-scale to see" (208), finding a sense of "esprit de corps" toward his fellows much more attainable (265). Dubois alone (and perhaps Reid) seems capable of understanding the "esotericism" of "civic virtue."

Starship Troopers expresses the fifth listed mobilizing passion of fascism: "the need for authority by natural leaders (always male), culminating in a national chief who alone is capable of incarnating group destiny" (Paxton 219). Federation soldiers are taught to answer to the

higher-ups without question. Rico says it is up to “the statesmen and generals,” who are supposedly “older and wiser heads,” to decide the reason for war, and “it’s never a soldier’s business” (79). Because Dubois so strongly asserts his moral superiority over civilians and soldiers, MI may follow their trade of “slaughter” without conscience of moral setback; they “are only following orders” from those who supposedly know better than them.

Syncretism in the Federation

Rico’s attitude is that a soldier need not worry about the ethics of the war he fights in, all responsibility for his actions goes to the people giving him orders. The mentality Rico holds, which would seem to allow him to evade responsibility for his own actions as a soldier, appears to have been influenced by Dubois’s letter to him (the one that convinced him to stay in MI):

The noblest fate that a man can endure is to place his own mortal body between his beloved home and the war’s desolation [...] basic truths cannot change and once a man of insight expresses one of them it is never necessary, no matter how much the world changes, to reformulate them. This is an immutable, true everywhere, throughout all time, for all men and all nations. (Heinlein 115)

By Dubois’s logic, fighting for one’s nation is the “noblest fate [to] endure”¹⁸ regardless of why and how that war is fought. He believes it is a “basic truth” that is “immutable [...] for all men and all nations.” If defending one’s nation is a noble act regardless of

¹⁸ In Heinlein’s *Expanded Universe*, the author responds to claims that the novel “glorifies the military”: “It does indeed. Specifically the P.B.I., the Poor Bloody Infantry, the mudfoot who places his frail body between his loved home and war’s desolation” (484). The quote from the author would appear to reflect the attitudes expressed by [Dubois](#).

what one's nation is fighting for, would Dubois's logic not then justify the actions of Nazi soldiers in their defending of Germany at the end of the second World War? Likewise, is Rico's statement that "it's never up to a soldier to decide why he fights" attempting to make an alibi for the people who were "only following orders" in past wars?

Dubois's letter arguing for "basic immutable truths" aligns with Eco's observation about the Ur-Fascist feature of "syncretism." Because fascists wish to reject ideals of liberal individualism and because they feel strong "contempt for the soft, complacent, compromising center" (Paxton 11), they are compelled to buy into an alternative reality where there is only one truth for all people. The "truth" is the same for everyone (anytime and anywhere) and reality has nothing left to be discovered that could challenge or complicate the truth, only further affirm it—as Eco puts it, "there can be no advancement of learning. Truth has already been spelled out once and for all, and we can only keep interpreting its obscure message." Paxton explains "[t]he truth [for the fascists] was whatever permitted the new fascist man (and woman) to dominate others, and whatever made the chosen people triumph" (16). For fascists, the only truth of the world is the one held by those who "come out on top." The truth allows them to set aside traditional ethics so they may cruelly oppress their enemies without moral hesitation. I will expand upon the function of "fascist truth" in the section on Griffin's concept of fascist "creative nihilism."

Dubois is not the only character who expresses this attitude of syncretism; each chapter of the novel will be introduced with a quote from the likes of Thomas Paine (98) or and Thomas Jefferson (165), quotes having to do with "being a soldier" or "fighting

for freedom”—but would Thomas Jefferson or Thomas Paine have been in support of a military veteran dictatorship? The use of the introductory quotes, which are removed from their original historical context to seemingly be related to the ideals of the Federation, further reminds us of Eco’s understanding of fascist syncretism: “Each of the original messages contains a silver of wisdom, and whenever they seem to say different or incompatible things it is only because they are alluding, allegorically, to the same primeval truth” (Eco). With a simplified, black and white view of the world, it is easier for fascists to name “right from wrong,” as well as to determine their destiny—which for them, coincides with the destiny of the “master race.” Paxton explains that the fascists’ pursuit of their destiny is “experienced sensually” as a group (race) that is “fully aware of its identity, historic destiny, and power.” Nothing more strongly offers fascists such a group sensual experience as intensely as war does (17).

For *Starship Troopers*, syncretism is used as a tactic to justify war for the sake of it. Whatever reasons or disputes past wars were fought over do not matter, glory is given to those who “plac[ed] his own mortal body between his beloved home and the war’s desolation” regardless of whether their “beloved home” was Nazi Germany or the United States. From this analysis, I argue that *Starship Troopers* expresses the seventh mobilizing passion: “the beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when they are devoted to the group’s success” (219).

War and Morality in the Federation

During Rico’s officer academy training, Reid gives Rico a written assignment asking him to “prove that war and moral perfection derive from the same genetic inheritance” (236). The concept of “moral perfection” has to do with the Federation’s

current “scientifically-verifiable theory of morals.” The Federation uses its theory of morals to justify warfare and to restrict individual rights.

The Federation seeks to prove the necessity of a “scientifically-verifiable theory of morals” through their vague yet biased account of the widespread collapse at the end of the twentieth century. They strongly enforce their singular worldview to the degree that they seem to despise subjectivity or variety of opinions. Dubois calls twentieth-century child psychologists and social workers a “pre-scientific pseudo-class” while saying that the twentieth century itself was “loaded with pre-scientific pseudo-psychological nonsense”. The Federation does not wish to take long debating the ethics of their actions, which is why they rely on a “scientifically-verifiable theory of morals” that allows them to “solve any moral problem, on any level” (146-150).

As I have hopefully demonstrated, the Federation views the needs of the group to be above the needs of the individual, seeing democratic liberalism and individualism as vulnerable to decadence and societal collapse. In order to address the flaw they see in democratic liberalism, the Federation repudiates the belief in natural rights. Dubois himself proclaims that “a human being has *no natural rights of any nature.*” A state may allow privileges to its citizens, which they may call rights, but Dubois believes those rights would not exist if not allowed to them by the state. To support his point, Dubois provides extreme hypotheticals not to be found in daily life: “[w]hat ‘right’ to life has a man who is drowning in the Pacific? [...] What ‘right’ to life has a man who must die if he is to save his children? [...] If two men are starving and cannibalism is the only alternative to death, which man’s right is ‘unalienable’?” (151).

As extreme and divorced from the everyday political and social realities as Dubois’s examples may seem, the narrative of *Starship Troopers* presents the Federation with the same

moral problem as the one of the two starving men where “cannibalism is the only alternative to death.” In *Starship Troopers*, The Federation is one “starving man” while the Arachnids are the other, and “cannibalism is the only alternative to death.” Rico says that war “results from population pressure,” and both the humans and the Arachnids are experiencing this, having colonized (or destroyed) the galaxy to the point that there is no room left to share: “[e]ither we spread and wipe out the Bugs, or they spread and wipe us out—because both races are tough and smart and want the same real estate” (237). Both humankind and the Arachnids have colonized and exploited the galaxy's resources to the point that there is little left to claim which does not already belong to either one of them.

To a degree, Rico begins to think for himself while in the officers’ academy. Rico cannot help but ponder: if the Federation believes morals should be “derived from the instinct to survive,” but the Federation does not believe in natural rights, then what right do humans have to survive? Rico asks, “[D]oes Man have any “right” to spread through the universe?” To answer the question, Rico appeals to the pessimistic worldview he has been taught:

Man is what he is, a wild animal with the will to survive, and (so far) the ability, against all competition. Unless one accepts that, anything one says about morals, war, politics—you name it—is nonsense. Correct morals arise from knowing what Man is—not what do-gooders and well-meaning Aunt Nellies would like him to be./ The Universe will let us know—later—whether Man has any “right” to expand through it. (Heinlein 238)

Rico views humans as “wild animals” first and foremost, and this fact would supersede any higher moral conscience. As wild animals, humans will just do what is in their

“nature,” which in this case is taking over the entire galaxy. Dedman also examines how Rico muses over the Federation’s “right to survive” paradox, and he determines that “[m]orality, in *Starship Troopers*, comes down to “might makes right” coupled with a Darwinian drive to defend yourself and your offspring, to go forth and multiply” (82). It is not surprising that Rico comes to this conclusion, because he lives in a world where everyone is trying to overpower someone else. In the world of *Starship Troopers*, fathers reject their sons for not growing up to become “businessmen” just like them, mothers threaten to suffocate and emasculate, and governments have little authority aside from force. It seems that in the end, the Federation is just another one of the “wolf packs of children” Dubois mentions attacking people in the park (143), only more sophisticated and functioning on a galactic scale.

The last two fascist mobilizing passions can now be identified in *Starship Troopers*. The eighth mobilizing passion is “the belief that one’s group is a victim, a sentiment that justifies any action, without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both internal and external” (Paxton 219). Paxton designates two national crises Germany experienced after WWI that would compel its citizens to give power to the Nazi regime, one was “national humiliation by the Treaty of Versailles” and the “catastrophic” economic collapse that followed it (67). It is vague how the Federation took power (“filled the vacuum” as Reid puts it) after the global collapse of the twentieth century, but there is still an interesting feeling of victimhood expressed in the Federation’s founding myth: “[the veterans] had lost a war, most of them had no jobs, many were sore as could be over the terms of the Treaty of New Delhi.” This “soreness” felt by the veterans supposedly compelled them to take up vigilantism, which I have compared to the actions

of the *SS* and *Squadristi*. The sense of group victimhood seems to have led the veterans to “not let anyone but veterans on their committee. Just arbitrary at first,” before taking full power and deciding franchise would not be granted to non-veterans (Heinlein 227). Even though the military veterans have established their dictatorship, their infantrymen still experience a level of persecution from civilians.¹⁹ For most of the novel, the hostility is depicted as tame, such as when Rico’s father calls military members “inferior people (30), yet the hostility manifests itself in outright violence in the scene where Rico and two of his fellows are attacked by civilians while the infantrymen are visiting Seattle (161). It is interesting to ponder why a novel intended to “glorify the military”²⁰ depicts the civilian hostility toward the military as much as it does, especially to the degree that the hostility is shown in the Seattle scene.

Although the official verdict from Reid that “[t]he practical reason for continuing our system is [...] [i]t works satisfactorily” (231), we get the sense that there is a lot of anger masked behind all their reasoning for restricting individual freedom and expansionist warfare. Rico claims the “Bug War” comes down to “population pressure” but there is a sense of vendetta against the Bugs after they decimate Buenos Aires.

The Federation’s mentality and treatment of its internal and external enemies match with the final mobilizing passion of fascism: “the right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group’s prowess within a Darwinian struggle” (Paxton

¹⁹ Heinlein directly points out the civilian hostility shown to the military in the novel, “the military tends to be despised by most civilians and this is made explicit” (Heinlein, *Expanded Universe* 484).

²⁰ Refer to p. 7 overviewing criticism of the novel along with Heinlein’s response assuring that the novel does indeed “glorif[y] the military” (Heinlein, *Expanded Universe* 484).

219); the fascist sense of “right” so defined matches up exactly with the sentiment expressed by Rico and seemingly the rest of the Federation (238). The Nazis sought to dominate Europe if not the world, meanwhile the Federation is intent on taking over the entire galaxy. To reach its expansionist goals, the fictional Federation seems willing to use just as much brutality and cruelty as the real Nazi regime did.

I agree with Dedman (82) that there is no evidence in the novel to support Reid’s statement that “personal freedom for all is greatest in history” in the traditional idea of personal freedom. However, I do propose that “freedom” for the Federation could mean the freedom to oppress or dominate others without moral restraint in a way that may be similar to the Nazis’ distorted Nietzschean ideals.

The Federation’s “Creative Nihilism”

I refer several times to what I have called the Federation’s “pessimism” for convenience, but scholars like Griffin argue that fascism is not *necessarily* pessimistic. Fascists’ particular pessimism and nihilism pave the way for what Griffin considers to be “a manic charge of cultural optimism” in which “fascists believe the destruction unleashed by their movements to be the essential precondition for reconstruction.” Thus, Griffin argues that fascists adopt “creative nihilism” in committing violence and atrocities (47). Relating to Griffin’s argument, Paxton observes how at the height of Nazi Germany’s radicalization, when the German army lost power to the Nazi Party, “[p]arty radicals felt free to express their hatreds and obsessions in ways that were foreign to the traditions of state service” on those in conquered territories (170). The Federation’s “creative nihilism” seems to manifest in their oppression of their own people, terrorizing the Skinnies, and attempting genocide on the Arachnids. In retrospect, the entire novel

seems to dedicate itself to justifying the attack on the non-hostile Skinnies in the prologue—the reason given seemingly being “for the survival of the human race” (and no other).

Chapter 5: Reflecting on the Fascism of *Starship Troopers*

Starship Troopers and Fascism's Lack of Vision

The Terran Federation in *Starship Troopers* is as close as it comes to the fascists' vision of a “utopia.” The regime still faces conflicts both external and internal, but conflict is crucial for the regime to maintain power: “[f]or Ur-Fascism there is no struggle for life but, rather, life is lived for struggle” (Eco). The Federation sees themselves as one of two starving men on a deserted island, and they must take the initiative to eat the other man first. *Starship Troopers* is a world where “everyone is out to get you,” they could be a mother, a father, or an alien race; Dubois tells his students that “[l]iberty is never unalienable; it must be redeemed regularly with the blood of patriots or it *always* vanishes” (Heinlein 151).

The Terran Federation has plenty of internal enemies; most civilians show discontent (sometimes hatred) toward the regime. However, internal conflict is not unideal for a fascist regime. If Major Reid declares “political authority is force” (234), then the Federation must constantly exercise its force to maintain authority. Eco likewise explains why the use of force is necessary: “the [fascist] Leader, knowing that his power was not delegated to him democratically but was conquered by force, also knows that his force is based upon the weakness of the masses; they are so weak as to need and deserve a ruler.” In the example of the Nazi regime, Paxton observes that once it reached “the outer limits of radicalization,” the regime would turn against its own nation, taking the “violent action” that had been focused toward external enemies and turning it toward conservative allies and German citizens. The redirection of Nazi violence

against internal enemies would eventually lead to the Holocaust: “fanatical fascists prefer to destroy everything in a final paroxysm, even their own country, rather than admit defeat” (Paxton 170-171).

Although the Terran Federation may face the threat of total annihilation by the Arachnids, it also depends on permanent warfare (against either the Arachnids or some other external enemy) for the survival and strength of the regime and the ideology it is built on. The Federation achieves a small victory against the Arachnids at the end of the novel, but the war is not over. Dedman notes the significance of *Starship Troopers* not ending with the Federation taking a final victory over the Arachnids and ending the war. Without war, the M.I.’s ideology would not hold up to reality, and the Federation would risk becoming even more unpopular. With the Federation’s need for war in mind, Dedman points to the final line of the novel, “[t]o the everlasting glory of the infantry,” and concludes that “for everlasting glory, you need a war that lasts forever” (82-83). Whether intentionally or unintentionally, *Starship Troopers’s* narrative adapts the fascist myth of eternal war. Within the ninth feature of fascism Eco observes is the idea that “life is permanent warfare.” As a fascist novel, it should be no surprise that the Federation should only achieve a small victory over the Arachnids rather than an end to the war, because a final victory over the enemy “implies a further era of peace, a Golden Age, which contradicts the principle of permanent war” (Eco). Paxton offers further insight into the necessity of war for the fascists: “war making proved essential to the cohesion, discipline, and explosive energy of fascist regimes” (155).

Both Paxton and Griffin discern the ineffectuality of fascism to establish a viable system of government. For Paxton, the regimes driven by mobilizing passions culminating in expansionist warfare, “seemed doomed to destroy themselves in their headlong, obsessive rush to

fulfill the ‘privileged relation with history’ they promised their people” (Paxton 171).

Meanwhile, Griffin argues that because palingenetic populist ultranationalism depends on an unachievable national rebirth, the constant maintenance of a sense of palingenesis along with the regime’s “charismatic appeal [...] utterly destroys fascism’s viability as the blueprint for a new type of society” (Griffin 43).

Reflection on Applying Robert Paxton’s “Mobilizing Passions of Fascism” to a Novel

This thesis set out to argue *Starship Troopers* is a fascist novel by examining how both its characters and narrative express Paxton’s mobilizing passions of fascism in tandem. Before beginning the analysis, I first overviewed how the novel has been strongly criticized while at the same time being very popular, managing to stay on the shelves and avoid being shunned like other far-right texts. To begin identifying *Starship Troopers* as a fascist text, I first considered how evasive fascism has been in avoiding concise definition in the past, but with the growing scholarship that has been done to understand fascism’s real nature, fascism is unlikely to continue evading definition. To examine *Starship Troopers* for expressions of the mobilizing passions of fascism listed out by Paxton, I used the scholarship of Griffin and Eco for additional aid. In using these additional scholars, I gave particular attention to Griffin’s understanding of palingenetic ultranationalism, identifying its myth in *Starship Troopers* in addition to the mobilizing passions.

Although the primary intention behind Paxton’s mobilizing passions is to identify fascism within ideological, political, or cultural movements, this thesis has shown Paxton’s work to be effective in identifying fascism in a novel as well. In attempting to reveal the fascist “subterranean passions and emotions” (Paxton 40) within *Starship Troopers*, the novel incidentally revealed fascism’s ability to appear “intellectually sophisticated,” while at the same

time maintaining its irrationality. Although Paxton claims that “fascism was an affair of the gut more than the brain” (42), there are still intellectuals existing within fascist movements. The vague defenses made that *Starship Troopers* “is too complex” for the immediate fascist label do not appear reasonable, as fascism can still present itself as ideologically complex. It is natural that fascism would borrow from more intellectually sophisticated and rationalized political ideologies to gain traction—after all, Paxton observes the only way it was able to take full force in Italy and Germany was through collusion with existing conservative political elites (98).

The ideas and attitudes behind “fascism” were never confined to the Nazi and Italian Fascist regimes, and both Paxton (201-202) and Griffin (165) have observed fascist-like movements in the US especially. Today, white supremacists have reemerged into mainstream U.S. politics, and right-wing politicians have shown some willingness to collude with them amidst the waning popularity of Christian fundamentalism and traditional neoconservatism.

In assuring that fascism can still be found lurking within the Western democracies of today, Paxton claims “[g]iving up free institutions,’ especially the freedoms of unpopular groups, is recurrently attractive to citizens of Western democracies, including some Americans” (220). As it so happens, restricting voting rights is an idea Heinlein plays with in the “afterword” provided in his *Expanded Universe* to his “Who are the Heirs of Patrick Henry” essay. I previously observed how Heinlein uses this “afterword” to criticize English professors for supposedly misunderstanding his use of the term “veteran” in the novel, claiming that the term “veteran” does not mean what critics believe the novel clearly indicates (483). Whether or not the author truly meant for the term “veteran” to extend beyond those who have fulfilled military service, Heinlein explains one of the main ideas his novel presents: “I think I know what offends most of my critics most about *Starship Troopers*: It is the dismaying idea that a voice in

governing the state should be earned instead of being handed to anyone who is 18 years old and has a body temperature near 37°C” (485). Heinlein then laments over the state of US democracy in his time for much the same reasons given by Dubois. He suggests that many citizens use their rights to serve their own interests with no sense of duty to the group, and without “proper consideration for the future of his children and grandchildren.” Heinlein then alludes to the fact that the right to vote was originally restricted to white landowning men and how “[t]he founding Fathers never intended to extend franchise to everyone” (485). From Heinlein’s response, we can see that *Starship Troopers* is “very complex” while at the same time having quite a simple motive and message. I speculate that some of the serious fans of *Starship Troopers*, who refute a fascist label for the novel using the argument that it is “too complex” to ascribe it to any one political ideology, are too afraid to directly support certain lost causes.

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