

AN ANALYSIS OF HEINLEIN'S *STARSHIP TROOPERS* AND THE DISCOURSE ON DEFINING FASCISM

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the requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

The thesis/project titled “An Analysis of Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers* and the Discourse on Defining Fascism” submitted by Mosabbir Alam Khan (23263010) of Summer 2025 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in English on October 14, 2025.

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Abstract

Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* is greatly influential in the military science fiction genre but faced controversy due to accusations of promoting fascism that still linger on in online debates even today. This is questionable as there is a lack of academic materials that carry out an in-depth analysis of the novel and its ideas while addressing the fascist question. This paper aims to address this gap by thorough analysis. For this, the paper defines fascism using a number of existing academic works and sources to compare to the ideas explored and promoted in the novel. The analysis reveals that core ideas promoted by the novel like individualism are at odds with fascist beliefs but it does not stop others from deriving their own meaning that often contradicts the novel's established elements. The findings indicate that the novel is not fascist as it is deliberately reinterpreted to align with Western political narratives.

Keywords: Starship Troopers; Fascism; Military science fiction; Culture wars; Korean War; Death of the author.

Dedication

Dedicated to all people across the globe who are fed up with political idiocy, word games, mental gymnastics and other treacherous means routinely employed by indifferent politicians and want a world of clarity where actions are transparent and consistent with claims and intent rather than one of deceit through ideology and false narratives meant to only protect the interests of the elite few.

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INTRODUCTION

Fascism has always been a fascinating topic of research for me. I first came to know about fascism as an ideology when going through the history of the Second World War. Any study of that particular point in human history, whether academic or purely out of personal interest, would be incomplete without touching on the subject of fascism. The meteoric rise of fascism in the wake of rising ultranationalist fervor in West European countries like Germany and Italy during the interwar period played a key part in sparking the global conflict that took away the lives of millions. Moreover, the fascist regime of Nazi Germany led by Adolf Hitler was responsible for the Holocaust, a state-sponsored organized genocidal campaign seemingly aimed to exterminate those deemed undesirable by the German state that was executed with brutal efficiency on a scale seen never before in human history till that point. Hence, it is understandable why fascism is considered an evil ideology by many all over the world owing to the bloody mark it has left upon human history with fascist symbols and groups being banned in a number of countries. For example, Mussolini's fascist party was banned by the constitution of postwar Italy alongside the Scelba Law being introduced in 1952 which prohibited anti-democratic groups along with those who glorified fascism or employed violence for it. German law on the other hand outlaws the fascist salute and one could face up to three years in prison as a punishment (Lowen). However, the fact that laws are required to keep fascism and related ideology outlawed even to this day is also an indicator of its lasting presence as its shadow still remains despite its seeming downfall by the end of the Second World War. It lives on both as ideology as well as in the form of various Neo-Nazi and other groups. For instance, supporters of Mussolini in Italy formed the Movimento Sociale Italiano, or MSI to revive fascism and oppose communism after the Second World War alongside other parties showing support for fascist ideology and symbols

like the Forza Nuova which draped a deceased party member's coffin with Swastikas and chanted Sieg Heil during their funeral (Lowen). In addition, Elon Musk displaying the Nazi Salute during a rally celebrating Donald Trump's second inauguration as president of the United States on January 20, 2025 had sparked a massive controversy that drew criticism from many, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Connolly). Such examples demonstrate how fascism still lingers on in the modern world. And a more academic analysis of fascism reveals how it is more than just an irrational and hateful ideology that most people see it as. Such notions underestimate the adaptability and deceptive qualities of fascism that allow it to manipulate, mobilize and mechanize the masses to fulfil the agendas of the fascist elites at top and has led to historically catastrophic results. As such, the belief that fascism has died following its military defeat during the Second World War and the idea that it cannot easily thrive in the world dominated by the so-called rules-based world order is a hollow notion.

This brings us to Robert A. Heinlein's military sci-fi novel *Starship Troopers* that is hailed as one of the most influential works of the genre. Set in a futuristic version of Earth that is governed by the Terran Federation, a military-led governing body where those who served their time in public service have voting rights, it is a coming of age story of the everyman protagonist Juan "Johnny Rico" who enlists in the Mobile Infantry of the federation's military and takes part in the war against the alien arachnids. The novel also serves as a work of philosophical fiction that explores ideas such as the value of human lives, violence from a perspective of political realism, the relation between science and morality alongside criticizing communism aspects of the 1950's United States such as the military being dependant on conscripts (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). However, the novel had sparked controversy upon its publication due to the anti-democratic society of the Federation and militarism that caused some critics to label it as fascist (Ayers 6). Yet, *Starship Troopers*

is not widely regarded as a fascist or far-right akin to texts like *Mein Kampf* with debates regarding its nature still raging on in the internet. Ayers acknowledges how the novel did not receive the same suppression and censure that other far-right novels and it has become what he calls a “controversial classic” due to finding a sweet spot where its controversy is enough to ensure it remains a bestseller while not experiencing any publishing threats from critics or general public opinion (Ayers 10-11). This unique state of reception and public opinion of the novel is something I find to be fascinating. In addition, the debates surrounding the novel’s nature among the adherents of Western Left and Right political ideology has made it a part of the ongoing “culture war” in the Western world and is how I came to learn about the novel and the controversy surrounding it.

However, I found a shortage of detailed academic research materials exploring this topic with proper attention to detail despite how the novel and its seeming relation to fascism is widely debated online. Many complexities and details are absent in such discussions and analysis. In addition, some of the claims made about the novel seem to be based on assumptions and reinterpretations that contradict or outright ignore the presence of many aspects of the text such as the discussion about the value of human lives that is nonexistent in both Left and Right-wing interpretations of the novel. Because of this lack of nuanced research materials that fully accounts for the complexities and details present in the novel, the aim of my paper is to address this gap by analyzing *Starship Troopers* and its themes as well as exploring its relation to fascism in light of those elements. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate, explore and analyze the claim of *Starship Troopers* being a fascist text by carrying out a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the novel that will focus on its various themes, characterization, explored ideas and philosophy alongside the historical context of the time it was conceived and published by Heinlein as well as his political views.

For the purpose of this analysis, the paper will also attempt to properly define fascism and identify its core concepts or ideas that can be present in any fascist system or ideology no matter how much they wildly vary from one another externally. It is imperative to identify this core in order to ascertain whether or not *Starship Troopers* is actually fascist due to the deceptive nature of fascism in how fascists present it to the masses in order to garner their support. This paper will employ a number of approaches for this goal. Firstly, the obvious option would be employing the vast library of existing works of scholars that define fascism by analyzing historical fascist entities. This includes works such as *The Nature of Fascism* by Roger Griffin, Umberto Eco's 1995 essay "Ur-Fascism" along with Robert Paxton's *The Anatomy of Fascism* to name a few. However, the reactionary nature of these texts may fail to fully explain the core of fascism despite how such an approach is widespread. As such, this paper will take a step further by also analyzing the works made by fascists themselves during the 1930's that aim to promote fascism. The most notable example would be *The Doctrine of Fascism* by Italian Fascist Benito Mussolini who has been hailed as one of the founders of fascism. The core of fascism can be better understood if such texts are analyzed given how they come from a time when fascism had mainstream acceptance as a school of thought and political ideology compared to the present where it is obviously reviled and censured due to the damage it has caused in the past. Hence, these texts can offer a glimpse into the blueprint of fascism and that can be helpful in understanding what lies at the core of fascism. We can also further supplement it by observing examples of fascism in practice, both historical as well as more contemporary ones like the Awami League regime led by Sheikh Hasina that ruled Bangladesh for 15 years or the state of Israel.

Understanding the core of fascism can then allow the paper to properly analyze *Starship Troopers* to evaluate the claim of the novel promoting fascism or fascist ideology. This will be achieved by carrying out a comparative analysis of core aspects of fascism with

various aspects of the novel such as themes, characters and ideas or philosophy that is promoted by the novel. Furthermore, the analysis will also be reinforced by exploring Heinlein's political views and history alongside the historical context of the novel given how it is a relic of the Cold War and its influence on the novel is quite obvious like many other works of American literature from this time period. In this way, the paper will provide a more nuanced elucidation of the novel and properly explore whether or not it truly promotes fascism through seemingly glorifying militarism and other means as many had claimed.

Lastly, I believe that analyzing the novel and addressing the fascist question in a more nuanced way can allow a better understanding of the true nature of fascism as well as the role of the culture war in Western politics that is also related to it. The influence of politics on the culture war cannot be denied despite how irrationally dogmatic and reactionary it can appear to be from the layman perspective that dominates it. After all, modern fascism must account for and make use of it if it were to thrive in the modern world due to newer spaces or battlegrounds that have opened up, most notably the online space in social media. This analysis can allow the paper to highlight how political narratives are capable of subtly taking control of interpretation of texts by addressing the fascist question of *Starship Troopers* through properly exploring the complexities in it and other details in a nuanced way, something said narratives appear to be unaware of or likely ignore deliberately. This can lead to texts becoming a tool for political agendas regardless of the intent of the author who created it. Thinkers such as Roland Barthes present the idea that meaning can often be forged by readers or interpreters themselves that can be independent of that of the author, leading to what can be claimed as the *Death of the Author*, which is the conveniently named title of the essay where he describes such (Barthes). With this in mind, the paper will then explore the implications of such political ownership of texts through culture war narratives in the West and its relation to fascism in the modern era with regards to how it obstructs the process of

properly identifying and properly defining modern methods of fascism. It is logical to assume that fascism no doubt evolved to a form more suited to thriving in the modern era compared to what it was during the 1930's and the Second World War which is the image that occupies the mind of most people when they think of fascism. After all, one must understand the enemy first in order to have a better chance of winning against it in a fight.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* initially appears to be a typical novel about military adventurism in a futuristic setting where mankind has expanded into space and finds itself in a war for its very survival against a race of alien bugs. Humanity is ruled by the Terran Federation, a seemingly authoritarian military regime formed by veterans where only those who have served in the military or public service are considered "citizens" and are entitled to a number of additional rights that civilians do not get, including the right to vote. Furthermore, the Federation also employs corporal punishment in the form of publicly flogging people for crimes, which according to the story is due to the failure of judicial systems in handling juvenile criminals. But further scrutiny reveals that the plot of this controversial novel is a coming-of-age story for the protagonist Juan "Johnny" Rico with the sci-fi setting also being used to explore a number of philosophical ideas such as the value of human lives and the conflict between morality and cold scientific logic of numbers alongside criticizing the Labour Theory of Value and the use of conscripts as soldiers. (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*).

While the novel employs a far-future science fiction setting, the real-world factors that influenced it are obvious. One can notice how the Cold War tensions during the time in which the novel was written is a clear influence with the US experience during the Korean War in particular being noteworthy. During a History and Moral Philosophy class, Heinlein uses the example of US prisoners of war being brainwashed and demoralized by their captors as an example of the ineffectiveness of conscript armies. According to a study headed by Dr. William E. Mayer, the American captives were not subjected to brutal and inhuman physical torture but rather a form of subtle mental indoctrination that subtly manipulating them into becoming distrustful towards their own fellow captives and collaborate with their captors

while destroying their loyalty, morale and motivation. According to Wubben in “American Prisoners of War in Korea: A Second Look at the ‘Something New in History’ Theme.”, the revelation of American soldiers mentally broken under captivity created an uproar in the United States with the now-common term brainwashing being coined to specifically describe the methods used on American POW’s. As Americans have long since held a notion of superiority due to considering themselves being immune to human frailties that others were not free of, it came as a shock that raised alarms about the degradation of what they perceived as their national character. And some critics blamed the advent of the New Deal and progressive education for such the perceived deterioration of the great American national character (Wubben 3-19). Hence, the extreme quality over quantity approach by the mobile infantry in *Starship Troopers* may be Heinlein’s way of providing an alternative approach to military recruitment to combat such a perceived deterioration of soldiers with the Terran Federation also being a new and better replacement of what the author believed was a society in decline.

The novel is hailed by many as one of Heinlein’s most notable works and has left a lasting impact as its influence can still be observed in the science fiction genre even to this day. Brown calls the novel a genre cornerstone or template for all military science fiction works that have followed it. That includes the works of authors who oppose the ideas promoted by Heinlein, as the works of said authors often are in dialogue with Heinlein’s works (Brown). It has a number of adaptations, notably a live-action film directed by Paul Verhoeven that satirizes the book alongside an anime OVA series from 1988. Not only that, it has become staple reading material among military personnel in the United States. Milzarski notes how the book has found itself on nearly every single required reading list for members of the US Military (Milzarski).

However, the novel has also faced accusations of promoting fascism, something that is still a hot topic in online debates even to this day and is what inspired me to create this paper. According to Ayers, the novel promotes fascist ideas of a false utopia by mobilizing passions, citing works such as Robert Paxton's *Anatomy of Fascism*, Roger Griffin's *The Nature of Fascism* and Umberto Eco's *Ur-Fascism* as references to reinforce his claim (Ayers). The novel is often associated with Western Right-wing politics. For example, veteran director Paul Verhoeven, who adapted the novel into a satirical live-action film in 1997, considers the source material to be right-wing. His adaptation ended up being quite misunderstood and ironically was accused of promoting the same ideas that the director wanted to criticize (Smith). *Starship Troopers* does seem to have garnered the fondness of the Western right-wing to a degree, which could also be a reason for the fascist accusations as it mostly comes from the Western left. For example, Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy claimed how voting rights should be earned by young people through service in the US military, something that is similar to the society depicted in the Terran Federation (Burgis). Another reason for such accusations appears to be the militaristic nature of the story, as militarism is often associated with the Western right-wing and fascism. The novel does seem to portray the military in an overall positive light despite acknowledging how it can lose men during training and due to drastic flaws in the strategies of the higher-ups. Still, this connection is questionable given how militarism and martial culture exist independently of fascism and have been existing centuries before the birth of fascism as an idea in Western Europe. Portraying the military in a positive light is something not exclusive to fascism and the seemingly utopian nature of the Federation could simply be due to Heinlein using the novel to explore ideas (Jones). Regardless, it is difficult to accurately ascertain whether or not the novel promotes fascism through glorifying the military alone. On the one hand, its depiction of warfare from a *realpolitik* perspective can be seen as a way to provide readers

with an honest and grounded understanding of the very nature of war itself rather than through a political lens that either irrationally glorifies war to gain disposable recruits for the state or portrays it as an abstract and alien form of evil detached from “humanity” while not being able to explain its prevalent existence throughout human history. As Clausewitz notes in *On War*, war is a continuation of politics through other means (Clausewitz). On the other hand, such honesty can also be a form of normalizing moral greyness that presents violent conflict as simply part of nature itself and an inevitable, unchanging reality that is to be accepted in order to subtly justify military expansionism of the US state regardless of actual motives of the state elites by downplaying it as simply a part of the natural world itself. One can observe such a sentiment in former Israeli Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan’s eulogy for slain security officer Ro’i Rothberg in 1956. In his eulogy, Dayan openly acknowledges how the Palestinians have a legitimate reason to hate Israelis due to the latter forcibly taking away their land and making it their own. In spite of such an admission that later faced censorship in Israeli radio, Dayan did not ask for pursuing a means of reconciliation with the Palestinians or making amends to solve the conflict. Instead, he strongly urges the Israelis to be armed and prepared for war, as if it is an inevitable reality from which there is no escape. He calls it the destiny of their generation where they must kill or be killed (Bartov). And as one observes the Israeli oppression of Palestinians that is still carried out with enthusiasm from the Israeli side despite having the power to pursue long-term peace that is rejected voluntarily, it makes it abundantly clear that promoting a form of Darwinist moral greyness is an effective means of dehumanizing and organizing people into amoral state bio-resources to carry out atrocities and justifying them by simply labeling it as nature running its course.

Further complicating matters is how difficult it is to accurately ascertain Heinlein’s political views and ideology. Hickman notes how Heinlein’s works contain racist stereotypes that pander to those possessing xenophobic attitudes towards East Asian (Hickman) For

instance, Heinlein had a pro-war view during the Cold War where he actively wanted the US to win and this is reflected in his novel *Glory Road* where it promotes the philosophy that heroes who can kill hordes like the Asians are a necessity (Franklin). This is in stark contrast to how the Terran Federation in *Starship Troopers* cares little about race with characters from numerous nations, ethnic groups and religious beliefs working together in the Federation alongside Rico himself being a Tagalog speaker from the Philippines. Moreover, Heinlein shows a more libertarian view with a great distrust towards the state in *Take Back Your Government!: A Practical Handbook for the Private Citizen Who Wants Democracy to Work*, where he encourages the idea of citizens being wary of the state and having the power to exert influence on it to make democracy work (Heinlein, *Take Back Your Government!: A Practical Handbook for the Private Citizen Who Wants Democracy to Work*). His most notable novel, *Stranger in a Strange Land* was beloved by the 60's counter-culture for its message of free love inspiring polygamous communes alongside the Church of All Worlds that as a New Age sect that based its name off the fictional religion in *Stranger in a Strange Land*. Meanwhile, libertarians like Milton Friedman praised the Moon is a Harsh Mistress and Heinlein for popularizing the slogan there ain't no such thing as a free lunch. The variable nature of Heinlein's political views and his complex, contradictory life that influenced his works makes it quite difficult to fully ascertain his political views. Aside from accusations of shifting to the Right, some like William Patterson argues that Heinlein was no Rightist but rather a radical liberal with a democratic soul (Heer). One can see Heinlein's libertarian views being reflected in the Terran Federation where the government does not advertise public service and does not interfere with civilian affairs that much given how many in the federation are able to express their criticism and grievances about it. This is in stark contrast to how fascism is heavily state-centric, as Benito Mussolini notes how nothing can exist outside the state in his essay, *The Doctrines of Fascism* (Mussolini). The difficulty of

defining fascism is something Robert Paxton shares in “The Five Stages of Fascism.” He expresses how major difficulties exist in defining fascism such as how fascist regimes greatly vary from one another in terms of cases, the ambiguous relationship between doctrine and action (Paxton, “The Five Stages of Fascism,” 1-5). And given the negative image of fascism due to the lasting image of Axis atrocities during the Second World War, it is unlikely that the modern fascist or those with similar goals would allow their beliefs to be associated with fascism in any way to avoid being rightfully delegitimized and vilified.

But perhaps a proper explanation behind the fascist controversy surrounding *Starship Troopers* can be found in the notion of readers forging the meaning themselves rather than the author. Foucault questions the role of the author in creating meaning when readers themselves are able to comprehend a text differently and outright forge the meaning themselves (Foucault). Barthes also shares a similar sentiment in *Death of the Author* (Barthes). Reader interpenetration and political discourse may be a reason why the narratives surrounding the novel often felt detached from what is said in the actual text itself. With Heinlein being dead and unable to provide answers about his novel, modern political discourse forges its own meaning of *Starship Troopers* based on their own ideological framework. This can also explain why Verhoeven’s satirical adaptation was misunderstood or deliberately reinterpreted in a way different from his vision.

DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ESSENCE OF FASCISM

It is important to define what fascism is as well as understand its true nature before any discussion about whether or not *Starship Troopers* intentionally promotes fascist views or ideology. However, merely coming up with a definition by looking at historical information and academic literature related to it is not enough for this analysis. Existing definitions and observations on fascism may not be adequate to analyze the case of *Starship Troopers* given how the novel was published years after the Second World War alongside the debate of it being fascist being more recent. Robert O. Paxton expresses that the greatest obstacle to the revival of what he calls classical fascism after 1945 is the disgust it has come to inspire (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* 172). This is hardly surprising given how fascism was responsible for sparking the Second World War that caused immense devastation all across Europe and beyond alongside leading to some of the most heinous atrocities ever recorded in human history. Moreover, Paxton notes how the revival of fascism in the post-1945 era faced other obstacles such as the rise of globalization, individualistic consumerism, increasing prosperity along with how the notion of war as an instrument of national policy was declining for larger nations in the nuclear age alongside a diminishing revolutionary threat (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* 173). This particular argument by Paxton regarding the obstacles to the revival of fascism does raise some questions due to factors like how the major powers such as the Soviet Union and the United States of America did engage in proxy warfare across across the globe alongside how the latter saw a sharp rise in anticommunist sentiment and policies. Nevertheless, it still highlights how the world has changed after the Second World War that would call for fascists to employ different tactics more suited for the post-1945 scenario. Paxton would also state how polemical name calling further made a fascist revival difficult during the postwar period with the far Right being accused of reviving fascism and with how certain parties have become adept at putting on a moderate face in front of the general public

while privately welcoming fascist sympathizers into their fold by enticing them with promises of accepting one's history, restoring national pride or honoring the bravery of soldiers in all sides of the war. In addition, Paxton also mentions that the fascism of the future does not need to perfectly resemble classical fascism in its symbols and signs. It will rise as an emergency measure against some unimagined crisis and will mobilize people around a new group and identity that would give up free institutions. It will also have a new enemy other than the Jews to rally against, with Paxton mentioning how an American fascism will have blacks or Muslims as the designated enemy. (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* 173-174). Based on this, it is clear that fascism can change forms to adapt to a new environment or time, which can make the task of defining it difficult. In addition, popular perception of fascism can also raise further complications.

As such, the optimal approach would be to identify and understand what lies at the core of fascism, one that is common among all manner of fascist regimes and entities no matter how different they appear or how much their circumstances vary compared to one another. This will also enable this paper to properly elucidate the fascist connection in *Starship Troopers* while avoiding the pitfalls of popular layman perspective of fascism that is often lacking in nuance and fixated on externally visible traits to identify fascism such as militarism despite how it has existed since ancient times and long before the inception of the nation states, let alone fascism itself.

Firstly, the obvious approach would be to use the existing academic works on fascism in order to define fascism and identify its core. Vast amounts of academic research materials on the topic of fascism exists given its impact upon world history as well as its infamy that made it acquire the interest of academics and ordinary people alike. American historian Robert Owen Paxton is notable for his works on fascism. In particular, *The Anatomy of*

Fascism explores the history of fascism in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, how it acquires power alongside attempting to provide a concise definition. In particular, the eighth chapter of the book, “What is Fascism,” is dedicated solely for the purpose of providing such a definition of fascism. There, Paxton explores the numerous theories, both ideology-oriented and empirical, that arose to define fascism, many of which are contradictory to one another and have its limitations. One such concept that Paxton tries to address is the idea that fascism was simply a tool of capitalism. Paxton disagrees due to how it ignores the genuine populist appeal of fascism and its autonomous roots alongside not accounting for the human factor by observing capitalism as the inevitable outcome of overproduction. Paxton adds how “real capitalists” preferred authoritarians over fascists when they picked democracy (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* 207). In addition, Paxton also explores the opposite interpretation of fascism victimizing business communities. He states how it takes middle level frictions in this relationship far too seriously alongside self-exculpation efforts of businessmen in the postwar era, given how capitalists simply adapted to fascist takeover to benefit like with the case of the German chemical combine I.G. Farben. Paxton affirms that both cases require a subtler model of explanation that can allow for interplays of accommodation and conflict (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* 207-208). He also mentions how another sociological approach claims that late nineteenth century urban and industrial leveling created an atomized society where simple hatreds could be exploited. However, Paxton also debunks it by citing how the best empirical work regarding how fascism rotted itself in society has little support for this theory with Weimer German society being richly structured and Nazis exploited it for recruitment by mobilizing entire organizations through targeted appeals to specific interests (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* 2009). Another theory regarding fascism was how it is a form of developmental dictatorship created to quicken industrial growth by regimentation of the workforce and forced savings. While proponents of this theory primarily look at the case

of Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany could also be an example where the already industrial giant needed to structure its society and people to rebuild after their defeat in the First World War in 1918. Paxton finds this theory problematic as he questions whether or not fascists even pursued any rational economic goal with Hitler using the economy to serve political objectives while Mussolini prioritizing prestige over economic rationality given how he overvalued lira in 1926 and engaged in risky expansionist warfare over sustained economic growth after 1935. Paxton calls the case of Fascist Italy a failure of developmental dictatorship and while the Italian economy did see growth under Mussolini in the 1920's, it pales in comparison to the growth before 1914 and 1945. He also adds how the developmental dictatorship theory enables all sorts of Third World autocracies lacking popular mobilization and lacking prior democratic foundations to be branded as fascist (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* 210). While it is understandable why Paxton questions the idea that the goal of fascism is the industrial growth of the nation, the idea of fascism having little to do with accelerating industrial growth does need some scrutiny. Firstly, Paxton highlighting how the fascists yielded less than stellar results while handling their respective economy appears to be based more on observing fascist regimes with historical hindsight. Mussolini and especially Hitler had no doubt overestimated the capabilities of their armed forces to wage war and likely expected quick and spectacular decisive victories rather than being bogged down in a prolonged war and being pushed back. Such victories would have brought more territory and resources for their industries to utilize. In addition, the idea of fascists pursuing industrial growth with the goal of benefiting the countrymen they rule over is unlikely due to how brutal and repressive such regimes can be on their own countrymen. A plausible explanation of the origins of the developmental dictatorship theory of fascism would be that of fascists advertising themselves as bringers of economic growth, progress and industrial development to the masses to gain their support and acquire power. This can

explain why fascists would find expansionist warfare as a viable option despite the loss of life it can cause to their own countrymen as the elites can simply reap whatever benefit that is brought by the blood spilled from relative safety. Moreover, capitalist elites can also profit from war. What is evident here is how fascists do not intend to prioritize the welfare of the common people regardless of what their rhetoric claims.

Other theories explored by Paxton also include the one about fascism being a subspecies of totalitarianism. The totalitarian theorists of the 1950s often drew parallels between Stalin and Hitler, based on common grounds such as a single party promoting an official ideology, brutal police control and monopoly over sectors such as armed forces, means of communication and economic organization. However, a new generation during the rebellious 60's accused the totalitarian theorists of transferring patriotic anti-Nazism of the Second World War to the communists to serve US Cold War agendas. Furthermore, this equating of Hitlerism and Stalinism is questionable in spite of some similarities due to how their claimed ultimate goals diverged greatly. Hitler boasted of the supremacy of the master race while Stalin promised universal equality under communism. It creates a dilemma where one has to decide which monster among the two were more monstrous. Paxton in his book shuns both regimes for their terror but condemns the Nazis more as their racist extermination deliberately targeted even women and children (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* 211-212). The comparison between Hitlerism and Stalinism highlights how overlapping of common attributes with other ideologies and schools of thought make it difficult to properly define fascism. Paxton states that properly understanding fascism can be difficult without drawing clear boundaries to separate it from other superficially similar forms (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* 215). For this purpose, Paxton explains how fascism differs from tyranny and military dictatorships that are frequently associated with fascism. Citing the exiled Socialist Gaetano Salvemini, Paxton mentions how the boundary separating fascism from classical

tyranny is simple. Fascism is a phenomenon of failed democracies where citizens voluntarily get rid of free state institutions. Unlike classical tyranny that clamps silence upon citizens since ancient times, fascism has a means of channeling their passions into creating an obligatory domestic unity focusing on internal cleansing and external expansion.

Predemocratic dictatorships, despite their cruelty, lack the demonic energy and manipulated mass enthusiasm of fascism alongside its quality of making citizens give up free institutions in the name of national unity, purity and force (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* 216). The key insight here is how fascism is ideologically driven with how citizens are manipulated into complying willingly rather than ensuring submission through force. Lastly, Paxton also mentions how fascism is frequently confused with military dictatorships given how fascists militarized society as well as their fetishization of guns and uniforms. However, most military dictatorships are not fascist but rather simple tyranny. They have existed ever since there were warriors and have no necessary connection to a failed democracy (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 216). This exploration of numerous theories regarding fascism demonstrates the difficulties in understanding and defining fascism.

Finally, Paxton provides a definition of fascism that contains what he believes are its key characteristics and traits. He defines fascism as a form of political behavior characterized by an obsession with community decline, victimhood or humiliation and compensatory cults of unity, purity and energy. One where a populist political party of nationalist militants cooperating with traditional elites discards democratic institutions and pursues goals of internal cleansing and external expansion with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* 218). Paxton further adds how the ideas underlying fascist actions are best understood from said actions since some of them are implicit and left unstated in fascist public language. Furthermore, most of them exist in the realm of visceral feelings rather than reasoned propositions. Hence, he has defined them as

mobilizing passions that includes a sense of crisis, primacy of the group and a sentiment of it being victimized alongside fears of its decline due to factors like liberalism, class conflict and external influence, faith and trust in a natural leader as a bringer of salvation for the group, the beauty of violence and the efficacy of the will when directed towards achieving fascist goals alongside belief in the supremacy of the group and its right to dominate others in a Darwinistic worldview. Paxton argues that this definition of fascism is still viable today with how one can spot such traits and emotions in modern times with all democratic countries existing at the first stage, including the United States (Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 219-220). Paxton's idea of fascism is thus characterized by voluntary rejection of democratic institutions or rights voluntarily by citizens whose sentiment is exploited by nationalists with elite collaborations who steer the masses.

Paxton is not the only scholar who defines fascism with a focus on the ideology and sentiment seen in those people who willingly support fascists and assist their takeover. Italian political commentator and cultural theorist Umberto Eco's essay *Ur-Fascism* outlines a list of fourteen features that can be found in fascism. This includes fascism being a cult of tradition, rejection of modernism that views the Enlightenment and later influences as depraved and pursues irrationalism, action for action's sake, equating disagreement with fascist narratives as treason, exploiting social frustrations of the middle class, providing identity through nationalism and being alarmed by a plot against the country, hatred for an enemy the fascists believe they can defeat, seeing life as permanent warfare, popular elitism where the masses consider themselves superior but seek a strong leader to be ruled by, desire to be a suicidal hero for the nation, machismo, selective populism that promotes fascist narratives as the common will that is superior to the individual and Orwellian Newspeak where vocabulary is regulated to limit critical thinking (Eco 5-9). We can see some similarities between Paxton and Umberto Eco's view of characteristics of fascism such as irrationality, collectivist or

group identity under the nation and believing in its supremacy, populism, sense of victimhood and fear of degradation at present.

While both of these theories mention an elite class driving fascism, that is not explored in detail as the focus seems to be more on the irrational masses who become the servants of the fascist regime. Israeli historian Zeev Sternhell's view of fascism follows a similar pattern. He claims that fascism was a cultural phenomenon before it became a political force and it would not have been possible without the revolt against the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (Sternhell 3). According to Sternhell, the fascist ideology that developed during the 1920's and 1930's was a synthesis of organic nationalism with the antimaterialist revision of Marxism. It expressed a revolutionary aspiration based on rejecting individualism, be it Marxist or liberal, and that gave birth to a new and original political culture. Furthermore, this political culture by nature was communal, antirationalistic and anti-individualistic while representing the rejection of the legacy of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Later on, it pursued the creation of a comprehensive alternative moral, intellectual and political framework that would ensure a human collectivity that perfectly integrated all strata and classes of society. Fascism seemingly wishes to correct the disastrous consequences of modernization in Europe along with providing a solution to issues like atomization of society, its fragmentation into hostile groups, and how the free market economy alienates an individual. While fascism does theoretically rebel against the dehumanization in human relations due to modernity, it was still willing to retain the benefits brought by progress and did not advocate for a complete return to a hypothetical golden age in the past. This is due to fascism opposing the ideas of modernity of the eighteenth century such as rationalism, optimism and humanism (Sternhell 6-7). This highlights recurring patterns we see in the theories of other scholars such as collectivism, nationalism and a perceived crisis and degradation that fascism promised to provide a solution to. Furthermore,

Sternhell emphasizes on how fascism is ideologically opposed to the values of the Enlightenment. The comprehensive rejection of the heritage of the enlightenment combined with a strong cultural pessimism made fascism inevitable as the situation could be exploited by a cult of elitism and violence. Sternhell also concludes that no better basis for human order exists other than the universalism and humanism of the Enlightenment (Sternhell 257-258). While Sternhell's views on fascism provide a glimpse on its ideological aspects, his advocacy of Enlightenment values and portraying fascism as its fundamental enemy raises some questions. The humanist values of the Enlightenment that Sternhell holds in such a high regard were not universal in practice if one looks at history. The humanist values of the Enlightenment were selectively humanist as the Europeans who embodied it carried out the subjugation, enslavement and genocide of non-Europeans through colonial expansionism alongside branding them as inferior and subhuman. Colonial atrocities like that carried out by the German Empire in Africa were quite similar to the methods employed by Nazi Germany for the Holocaust. Even today, the Zionist state of Israel presents itself as a champion of the so-called civilized world and Enlightenment values of the West while carrying out one of the most heinous atrocities in human history. Hence, Sternhell's view of fascism fundamentally opposed to European values of the Enlightenment, which he highly regards, is problematic owing to how it covers up a long history of atrocities carried out by European nations. If anything, fascism appears more as a natural evolution of the violent imperialistic mindset of the Western colonial powers and its utter disregard for human life. Given the case of Israeli atrocities, there is no doubt that said values of the Enlightenment can be used as an ideological basis and banner of identity to create an Eurocentric fascist ideology that designates the Orient as a fundamentally different inferior and subhuman alien or other compared to them to justify racism, xenophobia and subjugation through force.

Aside from Sternhell, British political theorist Rodger Griffin provides a notable theory regarding the nature of fascism. He considers fascism a political ideology that has a number of observable attributes. This includes, but is not limited to, having an utopian revolutionary aspect aimed at overthrowing the current establishment, advertising an utopia that will never be realized in practice due to fascists creating a travesty of it, power being rooted in irrational drives and mythical assumptions along with having a diverse and varied support base with differing motivations and interests that make them support fascists (Griffin 26-27). This is in line with what we have observed from the theories of other scholars who also mention fascists promising to create better conditions compared to the present that is considered degraded. Moreover, Griffin also believes that fascism has a core like any other political ideology that is a fundamental political myth that mobilizes its adherents and activists. According to Griffin, this core of fascist ideology or generic fascist minimum is a form of palingenetic ultranationalism. It employs a myth of palingenesis or revival that promotes the idea that the people are at a turning point in their history where they can support the fascists to be rid of their degraded and decadent state of the present. It is further combined with a form of populist nationalism that tries to acquire support by maximizing genuine popular consensus rather than employing terror and manipulation (Griffin 27-38). This theory of fascism having palingenetic nationalism at its core aligns with the narratives presented by a number of fascist regimes or those that are considered fascists. For instance, Adolf Hitler promised the revival of German glory from the ashes of Germany's humiliating defeat in the First World War. And in the modern era, US president Donald Trump promises to "Make America Great Again" while Indian Hindutva ideology that is rooted in 1930's European fascism promotes the idea of restoring an undivided Indian state or "Akhand Bharat" that spans the entire Indian subcontinent and vows to "return Hindu lands" that are present day independent nations like Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal, creating ideological justification

for future annexation of said countries and subjugation of its natives. Thus, the fascist appeal to the masses can be identified as a false promise of something better than their current state of affairs that is used to overthrow the current order to set fascists in power. Sometimes, it takes advantage of existing woes of society. If not, the fascists artificially manufacture issues to raise concerns and instill fear that would be exploited to acquire support.

Comparing and cross-referencing the works of existing academics reveal some of the common attributes of fascism. However, there are some limitations with using these theories to define the core of fascism. The problem lies in how they emphasize the irrational and ideological aspect over elucidating the rational parts of fascism. The brutality and xenophobia of fascist supporters appear irrational, fascist regimes as a whole are far from disorganized mobs. History has shown the scale of organization fascist entities are capable of through means such as control of the state and regimentation of society. The scale of atrocities and devastation fascists have often left in their wake would have been impossible without an organized driving force at its core. Hence, we must look for the rational core of fascism that is applicable for the elites who run it rather than the citizens who are compelled to support and serve. For this, the opinions of fascists themselves about fascism can be analyzed like Benito Mussolini, who is often credited as the inventor of fascism. Naturally, this approach can raise questions given fascists being deceptive about their ideology and intent. However, analyzing fascist text before the Second World War made the ideology infamous and universally loathed can yield some insight as fascist ideologues of that time did not have to worry about hiding their fascism as it was considered a legitimate political ideology and school of thought rather than something vile that was responsible for millions of deaths.

A notable fascist text to analyze would be *The Doctrine of Fascism* by Benito Mussolini. Published in 1932, the essay explains fascism as a political conception in detail.

Of note is how Mussolini details the relationship between fascism and the state. He sees the state as an organic and philosophical system rather than a mere institution. According to him, there can be no conception of the state that is not a conception of life itself. Therefore, such a conception is a spiritual one that rose in reactionary opposition against 19th Century materialistic positivism. The fascist idea of the state is totalitarian and all-embracing with no human or spiritual value existing outside of it. It is the fascist state that interprets, develops and potentates the entire lives of people. Mussolini also notes how the fascist idea of life is anti-individualistic. The state is of absolute importance and only accepts the individual if their interests coincide with that of the state. And in the fascist conception of history man is man due to his virtue of the spiritual process through which he contributes to the family, group, the nation and in function to history that is shaped by nations (Mussolini 1-7). Aside from aligning with what other scholars said about fascism like its collectivist nature and being against existing values of that time, Mussolini highlights the state as a key cornerstone of fascism. It is the physical framework, a system, upon which fascism is based on. From Mussolini's essay, state-centrism is the most notable trait of fascism, which also connects with how nationalism is a common trait in fascism in the observations of other academics discussed earlier.

The state-centric theory of fascism defines fascism through a rationalist and materialist angle while not being detached from its ideological aspects. This relationship and fascism itself can be better understood through Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore's views on nationalism. Tagore makes a clear distinction between patriotism and nationalism, two terms that are used interchangeably most of the time. To Tagore, patriotism or "deshoprem" is rooted in culture while nationalism or "Jatiyatabad" is an European implant produced by industrial capitalism that destroys basic human instincts. Tagore's views make him appear as a patriot rather than a nationalist as he advocated for true freedom of the people that

contained not only freedom from external control but also spiritual freedom (Chatterjee 72). Moreover, in his essay *Nationalism in India*, Tagore describes the nation as the aspect of a whole people being turned into organized power through strength and efficiency being emphasized by the organization called the nation. He expresses how this design of the nation diverts the energy of man from his higher nature that is moral, creative and self-sacrificing and instead is utilized for the maintenance of the nation that is a mechanical organization. What makes it dangerous to humanity is how man still acquires the satisfaction of moral exaltation while submitting to the mechanical nation (Tagore 28). Tagore's views highlight nationalism as a form of biomechanization of man that makes one become a resource of the state voluntarily while they falsely believe that they are serving a higher purpose. This further aligns with Mussolini's view of the fascist state being totalitarian where the individual's value only exists when their interest coincides with that of the state. Tagore's theory explains how the fascists make use of nationalism and irrational ideology to stir the emotions of people into making them mechanical resources to utilize for their agendas through the state. It is the missing link between the irrational and ideologically driven fascist supporters and the cold and rational mindset of the elites that exploit them through fascist nationalist ideology.

Hence, fascism can be defined as a form of collectivist mass control using the state as a system where the citizens within it are turned into mechanized bio-resources to serve the agendas of the elites voluntarily through the use of nationalist ideology and false promises where fascists often take advantage of current grievances to advertise themselves as bringers of salvation to acquire the support needed to overthrow the current order to acquire power. The fascist citizen is reduced to a mechanized resource who fulfills the interests of the elites voluntarily due to believing that he is performing the greater moral good by serving the state that is ideologically tied to his collective identity. Thus, the core of fascist ideology can be

identified as inducing voluntary biomechanization of the masses through nationalist ideology to ensure their support of elite agendas through the mechanical nation-state.

ANALYZING *STARSHIP TROOPERS*: WHAT IS IT REALLY ABOUT?

Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* appears quite simple at first glance when the plot is summarized on the surface level. It is a coming of age story of the protagonist Juan "Johnny" Rico who finds his calling as a soldier of the mobile infantry in the Terran Federation, a military-led world government of the futuristic sci-fi setting of the novel. Beyond the surface level, the novel is a philosophical fiction that explores a number of ideas related to the value of human life, science, violence and history through the lens of political realism by using its setting, plot and character. Heinlein makes it somewhat easy to track some of the key ideas as he as the history and moral philosophy classes act as scenes dedicated to explore them. To do a comprehensive exploration of the novel, this segment will explore *Starship Troopers* from two angles. Firstly, we will identify and explore the ideas and philosophical views expressed by the novel in detail. Afterwards, we will look at how said elements are implemented or highlighted in practice through the plot, setting and characters. This will allow the paper to evaluate the fascist accusations by analyzing both the core ideas and the means of their presentation while also comparing them to what this paper has discussed regarding fascism.

One such idea is the value of human life that serves as a central theme in the novel, being thoroughly discussed in a history and moral philosophy class alongside being tied to the story's climax during the second battle of Klendathu. During officer training, Rico has to attend a special history and moral philosophy class where passing was mandatory and it all depended on the opinion of the teacher, with his displeasure potentially resulting in an investigation and removal from public service entirely. Here, he has a debate with the instructor Major Reid who was a blind man. The Major presents a scenario of soldiers being taken as prisoners of war and asks Rico if it would be sufficient reason to resume or start a

war with the enemy to rescue a thousand prisoners, even if it means risking more lives. Rico answers that it is, even when the Major asks him if the same applied for a single prisoner. He sticks to his answer even when the Major debates him with logic about people dying all the time and asks Rico through analogy if the price of one potato was equal to a thousand. Rico answers by saying “Men are not potatoes,” which makes the instructor praise him while asking for written proof of his argument in symbolic logic for the next class (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). Here, Rico’s argument is based on the idea that the value of human lives are not akin to quantifiable resources like potatoes and is clearly against utilitarian logic that would justify abandoning the prisoners to save more lives. The argument Heinlein seems to be presenting here is that the value of an individual cannot be quantified like that of resources due to its dehumanizing nature. This is further reinforced by how the events of the Second Battle of Klendathu thematically play out in the climax of the novel. Due to Rico and a number of other mobile infantry soldiers refusing to abandon a single platoon sergeant trapped inside bug tunnels, the Federation manages to capture their first ever pseudo-arachnid brain bug, a major breakthrough in the war. In addition, the epigraph at the start of the final chapter of the novel contains two verses from the Bible and one from the Qur’an (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). The first Bible verse is Genesis IV: 9 where Cain answers “Am I my brother’s keeper?” When God asks him about Abel after Cain had murdered him. The second one is Matthew 18:12-14, also known as the parable of the lost sheep. Here, Jesus cites the example of a shepherd owning a hundred sheep where he would rejoice after finding a single sheep that was lost. The third one is Matthew 12:12 where Jesus uses the example of rescuing a sheep fallen in a pit to highlight the value of a human being. Jesus argues that if a sheep requires more effort to be rescued then a man should also be helped, asking how much value does a man have compared to a sheep. As for the verse from the Qur’an, it is a part of V:32 or the 32nd verse of Surah Al-Ma’idah. It strictly deals with the value of life where Allah asserts

that someone who wrongfully kills a single person will be a sinner equal to one who has killed the entirety of mankind. Inversely, one who saves a single person will be as if he had saved the life of all mankind. The latter part about saving a life is the one in the epigraph. This is further reinforced in a history and moral philosophy class Rico was in that was taken by Mr. Dubois, a former veteran. While discussing morality and value, he mentions how all moral problems can be best highlighted from the misquotation: 'Greater love hath no man than a mother cat dying to defend her kittens.' and asserts that one will be ready to examine themselves and climb higher up the moral ladder if they understand the problem facing the cat and how she solved it (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). Moreover, Rico at one point reflects on how human behavior is unique when it comes to assessing the value of human life while thinking about the prisoners taken by the bugs alongside their utilitarian nature that makes them abandon their own if they have no value. He states the example of typical incidents one can find in headlines like two people drowning to save a child or hundreds will search for one person lost in the mountains and often result in two or three of the searchers being killed. He expresses how this logic may be poor arithmetic and a weakness in the grim logic of the universe, it is something human that is rooted in all human folklore, religion and literature and a unique strength that can win them a galaxy (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). In another scene that involves a history and moral philosophy class, Mr. Dubois criticizes the Marxist or Labor Theory of Value and the notion of value being defined by the amount of labor put into something. He states how no amount of effort can turn a mud pie into an apple tart while unskillful work can subtract value, citing the example of an untalented cook failing in spite of having the best ingredients. Nevertheless, he does credit Marx for having the glimmering of a very important truth and claims that he would have devised the first adequate definition of value if he had a more analytical mind. Furthermore, Mr. Dubois seems to favor the Subjective Theory of Value due to how he claims that value is related to living beings. What

is noteworthy about this scene is not the debate about which theory of value is better, with it being obvious that Heinlein is supporting the Subjective Theory of Value through Mr. Dubois, but rather his view about what is the most valuable. To him, the greatest things in life are beyond money while the most valuable thing in life is life itself (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). This is a stark contrast to the fascist assessment of the value of a person's life where it is ascertained based on their worth to the state as nothing outside of it has any value (Mussolini 2). Thus, the novel considers human lives valuable, even if it is just a single one and is against the idea of treating them as resources through materialist logic of numbers.

Related to the novel's idea of how valuable human lives are is how it promotes individualism over collectivism. This leads to the novel's critique of some Marxist and Communist ideas. The most notable example is how the proto-arachnids or alien bugs the federation are fighting are described as a species that has evolved biologically to adopt total communism. The bugs have a hive mind linking them all to the upper caste and have no self-preservation instinct as they all act as mindless drones to enforce the will of the hive caste without any regard for their own lives and cannot do anything outside their designated roles. This also makes them formidable opponents as they are able to coordinate on a level far beyond the humans in battle. Their wave-based tactics paid off as Rico noted how the bugs were still winning the war of attrition even if it took a thousand bugs to kill a single mobile infantry trooper, with the bugs expending their lives akin to how the mobile infantry expended ammunition. In spite of the qualitative superiority of the power-armor equipped and well trained mobile infantry, they experienced a staggering eighty percent casualty rate on the ground and the federation was on the backfoot during the war for the most part as the bugs kept advancing. Yet, it was humanity's persistence as well as individuality that ultimately led to success during Operation Royalty in the climax where Rico's alertness and paranoia made him disobey orders to switch shifts to sleep and he alongside a number of

other mobile infantry soldiers acted on their own to save the trapped sergeant in the cave that led to the capture of the brain bug that carried our coordination (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). The novel uses this scene to highlight how human individuality and one's self-preservation instincts managed to triumph over the collectivist organization or "total communism" of the bugs in spite of the advantages they possessed and resulted in the Terrans achieving a rare victory that would not have been possible with strategy or technology alone. While the bugs being compared to communism does appear to be typical US anti-communism from that era, the novel's argument applies to the broader idea of collectivism that fascists also share where they turn people into resources at their disposal under the state system.

Another key example of the novel promoting the merits of individuality is the quality over quantity approach of the mobile infantry and how it recruits new soldiers. When Rico goes to enlist for public service alongside his friend Carl, the person managing the recruiting station was a fleet sergeant who seemingly had his right arm and both legs missing. He reveals that the government put him there to deter those who see federal service as stylish and a simple means to earn additional rights of citizenship. In addition, he reveals how most people think that all it takes to serve is having four limbs and a stupid mind. But unlike the era of Julius Caesar where that was viable, it does not apply to the Federation that needs specialists who could master any trade that was required. Later on, Rico meets the fleet sergeant and sees him in civilian clothing with all four limbs. He reveals that he had to put on an act of being crippled as a part of his job (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). This demonstrates the distinct approach the federation employs that is different from real-life recruitment where recruiters try to persuade others into serving the military through means such as propaganda or appealing to ideology, promoting machismo as well as incentives such as payment for college alongside the obvious forced conscription. The Terran Federation by contrast only wants capable and willing volunteers for soldiers with the Mobile Infantry being a small but

professional force that can be compared to modern-day special forces rather than regular military units. Rico at one point notes how the mobile infantry is the smallest army in history when compared to the population it defends. He also states how the ordinary soldiers of the mobile infantry are free men and that leads to having more morale or esprit de corps due to these soldiers being driven by their pride as well as self-respect and camaraderie rather than being forced to fight like galley slaves in the armies of old. Moreover, the mobile infantry is also stated to have the lowest percentage of officers in history due to a divisional wedge that requires the unit to be able to employ all soldiers for frontline combat if necessary (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). Rather than forcing people to serve as disposable pawns in war, the mobile infantry attempts to maintain a strong morale by looking for people who are mentally willing to do their part for the army voluntarily. This is a stark contrast to the US military policy of employing conscripts at the same time the novel was published and Heinlein himself is critical of it as he is against any form of conscription, both in fiction and in real life. He considers the draft as involuntary servitude that is immoral and unconstitutional regardless of what the supreme court says (Heinlein, *Expanded Universe* 397-398).

Heinlein's portrayal of the mobile infantry is not merely influenced by his personal views as there are some historical elements involved. For example, Major Reid once mentions the Mayer report from the 1950's as a historical example of conscript armies failing. The Mayer report covers the observations of Lt. Col. William E. Mayer regarding US troops during the Korean War who returned after being held as prisoners of war by the Chinese and North Koreans. What is notable about this event is how it affected the American view of themselves. The Americans perceived themselves as immune to human frailties that others lack and the accounts of the US prisoners of war in Korea sparked a controversy and panic regarding a perceived deterioration of the American national character. It was not simply the 38% death rate in captivity, the highest in history by that point, which raised concerns. There were also

accounts of low morale among US troops held captive who gave up, cooperated with their captors alongside defecting to the communist side as well as adopting a more liberal view due to brainwashing (Wubben 3-14). In addition, the mobile infantry having fewer officers is likely due to Heinlein seeing problems in the US military based on what happened during the Korean War. Heinlein foresaw a problem that would become more noticeable in the Vietnam war due to the multiplicity of officers in the US army who were concentrated in non-combat zones. This shift from traditional leadership model to one of management led to reduction in morale (Shippey 300). As such, the portrayal of the mobile infantry as a small but professional all-volunteer force was Heinlein's way of criticizing the conscript-driven nature of the US military in his time and pointing out issues he observed. He proposes a solution through the mobile infantry that is driven by individual will of its soldiers rather than coerced conscripts and ideology.

The novel also explores ideas related to power, political realism and violence by using the novel's plot and setting. One of the controversial elements of the novel that plays a major part in accusations of promoting fascism is how only those who have served in the federal service are called citizens and allowed to vote. This undemocratic structure naturally leads to the Terran Federation being considered fascist but I believe there is more to it than being a case of a tyrannical group of elites keeping all power to themselves. Firstly, any civilian can apply for federal service as a constitutional right and it is not merely limited to military service. Furthermore, the terms "citizen" and "civilian" in the federation do not seem to apply in the traditional sense like in our world. The civilian or non-citizen in the Terran Federation is far from being someone deprived of all rights that citizens of the real world are entitled to other than voting. In fact, the average civilian of the federation is shown to be able to lead prosperous and comfortable lives. Major Reid claims how personal freedom is the greatest in human history in the federation with laws being few, low taxes and living

standards being as high as productivity permits alongside crime rates being low. This is reinforced by how we see Rico's father wanting his son to be a businessman rather than join the federal service alongside many civilians seeing federal service as extra and unnecessary effort (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). The reluctance of citizens to serve seems to be based on not wanting extra work and responsibility that it entails when they are already living comfortable and prosperous lives, thus making it a practical choice rather than being politically excluded given how they still have the constitutional right to be able to apply for federal service.

Another reason for the Terran Federation's limited democracy seems to be Heinlein's own criticism of the shortcomings of democracy as we know it. Major Reid notes in one history and moral philosophy class how all systems attempt to create a stable and benevolent government by limiting franchise. Unlimited democracies are no exception as it excludes one quarter of the population from voting on the basis of age, birth, poll tax, criminal records or other factors. The voters are not selected based on their special wisdom, talent or training but rather are those who have proven through public service that they can place the welfare of the people above personal interest. Furthermore, Reid also adds how voting is wielding authority and all authority is derived from force. He also explains how the converse of authority is responsibility and a system needs to balance authority with it for both practical reasons and mathematically verifiable moral reasons. He also states how irresponsible use of authority is disastrous and unlimited democracies were unstable due to citizens not being responsible in how they exercised their voting authority (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). Such discussions in the novel appear to explore the concept of voting and its power alongside highlighting a flaw that can lead to disastrous consequences when voting power is not employed in a responsible way. Heinlein's own words also highlight how this was his intention with the Terran Federation's limited franchise in *Starship Troopers* as he states how democracies collapse

after a while when plebs discover they could vote in bread and circuses for themselves for a while. He also adds how a voter has to vote responsibly while considering the future of his children and grandchildren as well as that of others (Heinlein, *Expanded Universe* 399). And in *Take Back Your Government!: A Practical Handbook for the Private Citizen Who Wants Democracy to Work*, Heinlein notes how democracies is not an autonomous condition that comes from laws and the constitution but rather a living, dynamic process where one needs to be personally involved in or it will cease to be a democracy in spite of its shell and form remaining (Heinlein, *Take Back Your Government* 4). As such, the depiction of voting in *Starship Troopers* is aimed towards discussing the nature of voting as an authority and the importance of exercising it in a responsible manner rather than shunning it entirely as a rejection of liberal humanist ideas that fascism of old pursues.

Moreover, the novel also raises questions regarding the nature of rights. In a history and moral philosophy class, Mr. Dubois argues that human beings have no natural rights of any form. And as a student brings up life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, he debunks the idea of unalienable rights. He first questions the notion of right to life by bringing up the example of a man drowning in the pacific where the ocean will not hear his cries. Then he mentions the case of a man who is to die to save his children and questions if it is a matter of right if the man decides to save his own life instead. He also brings up the case of two starving men with cannibalism being the only alternative remaining. For liberty, Mr. Dubois claims that it is the least cheapest and never free of cost out of the so-called natural human rights as it must be redeemed regularly with the blood of patriots or it will vanish. As for the pursuit of happiness, Mr. Dubois claims that it is an universal condition that tyrants cannot take away nor be restored by patriots as one can theoretically pursue happiness as long as the brain lives but nothing can insure that they would catch it (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). This is arguably one of the most thought-provoking sections presented by the novel as it

deconstructs the idea of rights in society. From a perspective of political realism, Mr Dubois does make sense as there is no natural or divine guarantee in the living world that enforces rights automatically. Human rights are something constructed that needs to be enforced manually. The case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a practical example of the failure of the so-called Rules-Based World Order spearheaded by liberalism as Israel is able to carry out its atrocities upon the Palestinians with impunity and openly due to its economic and military superiority combined with diplomatic ties with the US and the Western World that ensures that the Zionist nation can violate international laws due to the West needing a regional proxy in a strategically important location alongside Israel being a key economic partner. Rights cannot exist on its own naturally without being enforced.

Not only that, the novel has a fascinating discourse in one History and Moral Philosophy class regarding why the Federation never experienced any revolutions in spite of frequent complaints that are loud and unceasing, a question asked by Major Reid. A young cadet answers how a successful revolution requires aggressiveness alongside dissatisfaction since a revolutionary needs to be willing to fight or die or they become a mere parlor pink. Thus, separating the aggressive ones and making them the sheep dogs will ensure that the sheep will never give any trouble. Major Reid praises his analogy and claims how it was close to facts (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). At face value, this line indicates that the Federation is stable and facing no internal threat of rebellion due to those with potential to be violent revolutionaries being recruited into the military to be the “sheep dogs” and thus leaving the population or “sheep” being unable to exert any force. This is interesting because how Heinlein openly acknowledges the Federation employs a strategy to ensure that it faces no revolutionary threat to the existing order rather than hide it. But more importantly, the discussion also serves as a reminder of the necessity and value of power and how those not

willing to employ it cannot exert any force regardless of how dissatisfied they are and are at the mercy of those powerful.

In addition, the origins of the Terran Federation are also worth discussing. According to the novel, the end of the 20th century saw a major conflict between the communist Chinese Hegemony and the Russo-Anglo-American alliance alongside criminal activity becoming rampant and uncontrollable, leading to collapse of national governments all over the world. While nobody could accurately describe the federation's origins, it is well known that it was the returning veterans from the war. They were disgruntled by losing the war alongside the terms of the Treaty of New Delhi that abandoned fellow soldiers while also being unemployed. But due to the power vacuum being created by the collapse of governments, they stepped in. One of the first known cases was that of a group of veterans in Aberdeen, Scotland who would form vigilante groups to maintain order and put a stop to rioting and looting, resulting in some people being hanged, including two veterans. They also only included veterans in their committee due to only trusting each other a bit and distrusting others. This emergency measure eventually became a constitutional measure after a generation or two, resulting in the birth of the Terran Federation (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). The Terran Federation was born as a practical solution that was needed in a time when governments collapsed and lawlessness was rampant. Its acceptance by the people was likely due to simply restoring order during tumultuous times. This is in contrast to the fascist revolution that overthrows the old order by exploiting people into supporting them through ideology and taking advantage of concerns that are artificially created.

Practicality is another belief that seems to be at the core of the federation given its lack of nationalist narratives and myth-making about collective identity. The federation discards ideology in favour of a more rational and practical approach to ensuring good

governance. One such area where this is noticeable is how the novel discusses the nature of violence and war from a perspective of political realism. In one history and moral philosophy class, Mr. Dubois says how violence or naked force has settled more issues in history than any other factor and contrary opinion to it is wishful thinking at its worst as breeds who forget this often pay for it with their lives and freedom. He said this in response to a girl claiming how her mother believed that violence does not solve anything and also cites historical examples of Carthage being destroyed (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). Naturally, one with an Western Leftist mindset could use this to present the argument that the novel promotes unrestricted and amoral use of violence but that is not the case due to how there is an emphasis on morality and practicality in the novel. Perhaps the best example of this is a discussion about the nature of war between the mobile infantry instructor sergeant Zim and the trainee Ted Hendrick. At one point, the latter asks Zim why they had to learn knife throwing when there exists so many advanced weapons like the H-bomb as well as questioning how it can be pointless if the enemy is equipped with more advanced weapons when one only has a knife. This leads to a debate where the sergeant explains how there are no such things as dangerous weapons but rather dangerous men alongside explaining how a knife can be more handy when trying to silently dispatch a single target quickly without raising an alarm. He also cites the example of cutting a baby's head off to teach it a lesson and compares it to Hendrick's argument involving the H-bomb to prove how its excessive and unneeded force. He then defines war as not merely violence and killing but rather controlled violence for a purpose where the goal is not to kill the enemy for the sake of killing but rather make him do what you want him to do (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). This definition of war brought by Sergeant Zim is a clear paraphrasing of how Prussian military theorist Claus Von Clausewitz defined war in his treatise *On War*. According to Clausewitz, war can be termed as the continuation of policy through other means and the use of force to

compel the enemy to do their will (Clausewitz 75-87). The knife-throwing scene and the debate about the H-bomb may have some inspiration from the American involvement in the Korean War given how the novel was published not long after. A famous but historically contentious debate regarding the conflict was the willingness of the US to use nuclear weapons against North Korea and possibly China. Despite the fear of nuclear escalation due to the Soviets also acquiring nuclear capabilities, President Truman and General Douglas MacArthur considered it a viable option. Some historians believe that General MacArthur was removed from service due to wanting further escalation with China. He did submit a list of targets for nuclear strike as well as express how he wanted to drop between 30 to 50 nuclear bombs on key targets on the neck of Manchuria later in 1954. Regardless, Truman's approval ratings hit record lows due to removing MacArthur as the decision was unpopular with the American public (Atomic Heritage Foundation). While it is unclear if Heinlein used this scene as subtle commentary on the Korean War debacle involving nuclear weapons, the possibility exists given how the brainwashed prisoners of war issue from the Korean war was directly mentioned in the novel. Heinlein himself did express how the novel pays tribute to the "Poor Bloody Infantry" or P. B. I. He expresses how the infantryman should be honored for his sacrifice given how the invention of the H-bomb did not abolish his role but rather made him essential (Heinlein, *Expanded Universe* 398).

The novel also shows the mobile infantry employing this philosophy of war being controlled violence strictly in practice. During the war against the bugs, Rico and his comrades are sent on a mission to force the skinnies, an alien race forced to ally with the bugs, to defect to the Terran Federation's side by destroying their properties. During the mission, the soldiers are given strict rules of engagement to not kill a single skinny and focus only on the objective (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). While one can argue that the novel encourages and glorifies militarism, it should be noted that from a realist perspective, violence or military

action becomes the only viable option in certain scenarios, such as self-defense against an invading force or revolting against a tyrannical regime. The federation's war against the bugs was a similar case. The federation was losing the war according to Rico alongside obvious proof such as losing territory to the advancing bugs alongside a scarcity of officers as the conflict progressed. It has become a scenario where the Terran Federation had no other option but to fight in order to survive as the bugs were not willing to communicate either (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). Some arguments that I have seen online present the Terran Federation as a colonial invader trying to forcibly colonize bug territory as something akin to an interstellar manifest destiny, causing a hostile response. This argument is problematic as the bugs are clearly on the offense rather than merely fighting to keep the humans out of their territory. American political scientist William Spaniel in *Game Theory 101: The Rationality of War* a side resorts to warfare when fighting is projected to yield a better outcome compared to peaceful options. Otherwise, countries would all pursue a bargained resolution (Spaniel 14). Using the logic of game theory that quantifies outcomes of actions based on gains and losses to deduce the logical decision, war becomes rational if the reward is much more than what is lost. The bugs going on the offense was a rational option from their side as their strategy of sending waves of bugs lacking individuality and obedience to the hive caste was paying off given how they were gaining ground alongside the hive caste having no issues using the lower caste workers and warriors as disposable resources. Hence, the bugs had no logical reasons to pursue negotiations. On the other hand, the humans were against an enemy unwilling to negotiate and had no other option but to fight for their survival as the bugs kept advancing. Thus, the federation's war on bugs was a war for survival rather than fascist imperialism. It was no different from that of France and Poland fighting Nazi invaders during the Second World War or Bangladeshi protesters responding violently against Awami League party brownshirts like the Chattra League and law enforcers given shoot on sight orders

during the July uprising in Bangladesh. The novel having a discussion on the role and nature of power from the perspective of political realism is likely one of the key reasons for Western Leftists accusing it of promoting fascism given their history of ideologically rejecting violence of all forms.

Lastly, another interesting detail is how history is taught in the History and Moral Philosophy classes. A glimpse of this can be seen when Rico was given a master's thesis assignment by Major Reid. Rico suggested that Crusades were different from other wars and his topic was rejected and he was required to find proof of how war and moral perfection comes from the same genetic inheritance. Rico then notes how all wars, including the Crusades, were influenced by population pressure that can be understood by analyzing things such as trade routes, birth rates and other factors. In addition, he ponders about how all correct moral rules derive from the instinct to survive alongside exploring the idea of man as a wild animal with the desire to live, which Rico connects to the ongoing bug war and expresses how it has become a kill or be killed situation between the two warring factions (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). This approach to history that sees conflict as something rooted in rational factors as well as competition between groups is a form of political realism, albeit a bit shallow in exploration due to not covering a number of factors such as conflict of interest, environmental influence, social and class structures and ideology to name a few. I found it quite ironic that Heinlein discarded narratives about the Crusades being special in favor of treating it like any other conflict since the Western Far Right and White Supremacists, who are considered the fascist sympathizers of today, promote specific narratives about the Crusades that are linked to Islamophobia like treating it as a defensive war against Islam alone, despite how many Crusades had infighting among Christians like the French and Venetians in the Fourth Crusades assaulting Greek Christians and devastating Constantinople alongside alliances with Muslim factions like the Turcoples mercenaries in

the Holy Land (Jones). The political realist approach can deconstruct narratives and allow one to understand history from a more nuanced perspective based on analyzing materialist factors. Using Heinlein's own arguments about moral virtue being derived from survival instincts, one can also claim how Muslims in the Holy Land were following a moral cause due to fighting to survive invaders or apply the same for anyone fighting against a fascist aggressor that is driven by an imperialist desire for excess accumulation through force in the upper echelon that serves as the brain of the fascist body politic.

In addition, *Starship Troopers* also explores the relationship between science and morality. While the Terran Federation is highly meritocratic due to how it carefully selects those based suited for various public service positions, it does not equate intellect and mechanical performative qualities with moral superiority. On numerous occasions in the novel, it is mentioned how the Federation is successful not due to assigning the most intellectual person to the top position but rather due to people being responsible. Rico notes how the civilians with high skills can be bought but the mobile infantryman cannot (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). While the novel does not seem to encourage anti-intellectualism and shun science as a whole given how the Federation still employs a strict meritocracy and places a huge emphasis on scientific developments given their R&D and technology employed. The argument the novel seems to be making is how the pursuit of cold scientific logic does not guarantee a moral solution. Major Reid in the novel explains that each officeholder is someone who has proven themselves through difficult voluntary service that they can put the welfare of the people ahead of personal agendas (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). The argument the novel appears to be making is how a moral driving force must be ensured in a practical way for all people to prosper rather than give authority to someone simply out of their scientific performative acumen which may lead them to abuse their authority. It is in line with the novel's theme of human lives having the most value rather than reducing it into statistical

factors based on cold mathematical logic. This is also another reason for why the federation only allows a limited number of people to vote to ensure only those who have proven themselves to be voluntarily willing to work for the people acquire the right to wield voting power rather than it being bought or given. Moreover, the history and moral philosophy classes that Heinlein uses as convenient dumping grounds for philosophical ideas and debates are also quite an interesting part of the federation's curriculum. In high school, it was said to be different from other courses where all students needed to take it but nobody had to pass it. But the same did not apply when the course was taught as a part of officer training where there were strict rules where one can only pass by proving themselves to the instructor or could potentially be kicked out of the mobile infantry if they disappoint (*Heinlein, Starship Troopers*). It is quite interesting for a futuristic society ruled by the military, especially one that is accused of being fascists, to place such an emphasis on a liberal arts course to the point of making it a vital part of society and the highly meritocratic military. History and moral philosophy classes in High Schools not needing any grades to pass while still being mandatory is a fascinating idea that may be worth exploring to properly preserve the essence of humanities instead of turning it into a means of merely acquiring marks. Moreover, the course also appears to be integrated into science given how the instructors there often ask the students to bring rational proof to reinforce moral and philosophical topics. It somewhat makes sense based on the novel's theme of human lives being something whose value cannot be derived by cold numerical logic.

Lastly, the novel also portrays the Terran Federation as diverse and multicultural with characters from numerous racial and religious backgrounds being present. Rico himself is of Filipino descent and is shown to know Tagalog language. Other characters of note include trainee Shujumi being Japanese and the son of an officer who mentored Sergeant Zim while Sergeant Jelal from the roughnecks was a Finno-Turk to name a few examples. There are also

mentions of chaplains for Christians, Muslims and Jews being present in the military. Aside from that, there are no restrictions based on race, religion or creed for those applying to be citizens. Although the novel does seem to have a strange portrayal of gender roles where pilots are excessively female due to being supposedly proven to be superior to males in that job while the mobile infantry is all male as expected of typical patriarchal views of that era (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*.). The federation being multicultural is quite a contrast from other works of Heinlein that contain more racist stereotypes that pander to racist xenophobic sentiments. This includes stereotypes such as coolie, pollutant, yellow peril, model minority and gook (Hickman 1-12). This makes *Starship Troopers* an outlier among Heinlein's works.

Lastly, the novel seems to leave a lot of things open to interpretation rather than always providing rigid conclusions. As the everyman narrator, Rico mostly ponders and presents information to the reader to think about. This is nothing unexpected from a work of philosophical fiction. That being said, I do feel like the novel is shallow in many cases in terms of exploring ideas. For example, the mobile infantry marauder suits are equipped with miniature nuclear bombs called peewee that are below two kilotons in yield (Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*). It becomes jarring when these are deployed in the mission against the skinnies as that mission had the soldiers strictly ordered to only damage key buildings and avoid killing skinnies. It appears that Heinlein has forgotten that nuclear weapons leave radiation. Moreover, the whole premise of the federation being successful heavily hinges on the idea of its collective leadership of citizens or service holders being proven to be moral and responsible. While it is certainly true that public service could deter opportunists by the weight of responsibilities turning away those who want privilege and power with low effort, its idea can collapse if individuals or a group wanting to infiltrate the government is determined and ready to go through public service while still holding onto their objective of taking over. Sure, one can argue that others in the federation could resist but that can lead to

an internal conflict that can be further exploited. Furthermore, while Heinlein makes a case for individuality through the climax of Operation Royalty and showing the demerit of the bugs being biologically evolved collectivists, the novel's idea of individualism can also be questioned. If the bugs are biologically evolved to adopt total communism or collectivism, one can also make the case that humans can adopt a more terrifying form of collectivism through social engineering. One where limited autonomy and individuality is retained to allow better performance in tasks the citizens are expected to do for the state while becoming loyal servants voluntarily out of ideology, social influence and indoctrination. *Starship Troopers* scratches the surface of a number of interesting ideas but does not go the extra mile to properly explore them in detail.

Starship Troopers is flawed but has some interesting aspects that should not be ignored. I would describe it the same way as Mr. Dubois in the novel describes Marx's theories of value: Heinlein had a glimmering of some valuable ideas. Had he possessed a more analytical mind and the willingness to explore ideas in much greater detail, he could have elevated *Starship Troopers* from a flawed military sci-fi novel with some philosophical within to a text that is noteworthy for using its story to explore a number of philosophical ideas. Nevertheless, to give credit where it is due, if Heinlein's goal with *Starship Troopers* was to provide something thought-provoking for readers who actually read and invite them to ponder about topics such as the nature of democracies, political realism and the relation between science and morality, then he has succeeded. Although, it is not guaranteed that the conclusions derived by readers would align with his views.

DISCUSSION: OF IMPLICATIONS, INTERPRETATIONS AND NARRATIVES

Based on the discussion so far, the core of the Terran Federation can be identified as being theoretically post-ideological with its primary goal being the pursuit of a moral path for mankind in a practical and pragmatic way with science being a means to an end for that purpose. This makes the claim of the novel directly promoting fascist ideas quite dubious given how fascism heavily relies on ideology to ensure obedience alongside the fascist view of human value being tied to the state contradicting that of *Starship Troopers* where human lives are said to have the ultimate value. While there is no shortage of online critics calling the novel fascist, it is difficult to find any academic analysis that takes a deep look at the novel. The closest I found was a paper by Alton C. Ayers titled *Fascism in Sci-Fi: "Mobilizing Passions" in Robert A. Heinlein's Starship Troopers*. Ayers takes a similar approach as this paper by using the theories of academics like Paxton, Umberto Eco and Roger Griffin to look for fascist traits in *Starship Troopers*. But Ayers reaches a different conclusion where the novel is deemed as fascist due to supposedly having the mobilizing passions of fascism that Paxton identified alongside the palingenetic myth of revival of Roger Griffin as well as some of the traits of fascism that Eco identified in *Ur-Fascism* (Ayers 5). However, I find his arguments about *Starship Troopers* being a fascist novel lacking due to his understanding of the novel being shallow and not properly exploring the ideas expressed in it alongside having questionable interpretations of various elements of the novels.

Firstly, the idea of the Terran Federation being formed on a palingenetic myth of rebirth is questionable. Unlike fascism that seizes power by overthrowing the current order through a misguided revolution, the Federation originated from veteran-led vigilante groups trying to restore order in society following the collapse of national governments. Moreover,

the federation was born from a practical contingency measure and lacked the ideological vision of reviving a perceived state of past glory that the fascists claim they want to revive to gain populist support. The Terran Federation lacks such a vision and instead moves forward with the goal of serving humanity's interest in a moral way with rational practicality and pragmatism rather than pursuing a supposed past glory. Furthermore, Ayers's statement regarding how the federation shows a number of fascist traits is also quite dubious due to how they are focused on surface-level elements and ignore many of the novel's themes and exploration of philosophical ideas. For example, Ayers ignores how human individualism is a core theme of the novel and asserts that the federation is against it alongside interpreting Mr. Dubois's statement about man having no natural rights as a fascist attack against what he calls democratic liberalism (Ayers 61). He ignores the statement that Mr. Dubois was exploring the concept of rights from a perspective of political realism alongside the instructor's further comments regarding liberty needing to be protected through sacrifice. It is baffling how Ayers is not acknowledging how Mr Dubois is stating liberty as something that needs to be defended while claiming how the novel is fascist for liberal ideas and human rights. Not to mention how he ignores the federation's lack of nationalist ideology, the strict and unusual recruitment process for federal service that is designed to deter opportunists rather than advertise benefits for mass recruitment alongside themes of individualism to claim that the federation promotes ultranationalism towards the state in a misleading way that makes use of a statement about the responsible pursuit of duty towards others over one's self-interest and paints it as collectivism or "primacy of the group" that Paxton identifies as a mobilizing passion for fascism (Ayers 42). By this logic, rebels or guerrilla fighters risking their lives fighting against a fascist entity can also be called fascist simply by branding them as deluded and self-sacrificial collectivists for not running away due to wanting to live, ignoring how such resistance fighters often have no choice but to fight or be systematically

killed by fascists or invaders who want to remove all potential sources of resistance that typically involves who they define as military age males. The sort of arguments made by Ayers is what I would call the quintessential Western Leftist views about *Starship Troopers* that is politically motivated, disingenuous and makes use of cherry-picking parts of the novel out of context and questionable reinterpretations to reinforce their views.

What I find to be highly problematic regarding not just the fiasco surrounding *Starship Troopers* but how fascism itself is defined is the way in which Western Leftist narratives present a dichotomy between fascism and liberalism or the humanism of the Enlightenment, as evident in the views of academics like Zeev Sternhell. To the unquestionably evil ideology that is fascism, the so-called liberal humanist ideas of the Enlightenment that the Western Leftists promote by contrast are deemed as morally righteous and universal. It sets a dangerous precedent as it creates a whitewashed Eurocentric narrative of the Enlightenment that promotes European ideas as universal for all mankind while ignoring how the torchbearers of said values dehumanized non-Europeans of the orient and carried out untold atrocities upon them through centuries of colonial expansion and conflict. As of working on this paper, the Zionist state of Israel is currently carrying out a genocide in the Gaza Strip while presenting itself as a champion of democracy and civilized Western values of the Enlightenment. Furthermore, the paper has also previously mentioned how fascism can take drastically different forms depending on the environment. In the modern Post-Second World War, Post-First Cold War and Post-9/11 era dominated by the so-called Rules-Based World Order whose ideology has its roots in the enlightenment values, it would not be impossible to create a new Eurocentric form of fascism or a its successor ideology made to sufficiently pursue the same goals of control and biomechanization of fascism by framing the rise of non-Western powers and cultures like China as degradation of so-called morally superior Enlightenment values of the West and prompt a fascist mobilization by

creating us vs them narratives where the Enlightenment values serves as an unifying banner of a new breed of Eurocentric Western fascism that can take a transnational form by appealing to a collective Western identity while shunning Orientals or other designated political targets of the elites as non-enlightened savages and justify their subjugation in the name of moral policing. This is why I believe that discourse about fascism and its nature should be expanded and explored further rather than have it rooted in traditional European academic views that typically see it exclusively as a Right-Wing openly militant ideology that is seemingly against the values of the enlightenment. The possibility of seeing the rise of a new breed of fascism more suited to the current global environment and having leftist roots in its ideology is something that should not be ignored. One of the inspirations for this topic in my paper was an article by British Journalist David Bergman published in the Bangladeshi news daily, *The Daily Star*. There he claimed how the ousted Awami League regime in Bangladesh was not fascist simply due to its atrocities not reaching the scale of Nazi Germany regardless of the nature of its gross human rights violations (Bergman). It highlights the problem of the European definition of fascism being deliberately limited to the European experience. As a Bangladeshi citizen who has lived through the entirety of Hasina's 15 year long rule alongside being able to witness many of her regimes moving parts as well as key events from relatively close up from the 2009 BDR mutiny to the Monsoon Uprising in 2024 that ousted Hasina, I found Bergman's argument to be quite misleading and of questionable motivation as the Awami League regime not only bears a number of key traits associated with fascism, with state-centrism being the most evident, but could also be categorized as an example of a modern fascist regime whose national ideology has leftist attributes rather than a militant right-wing ideology. But that is a topic for another paper.

Hence, I find the leftist arguments of *Starship Troopers* promoting fascism to be misleading and problematic. Lest we forget, both the most war hawk of right-wingers and the

most seemingly anti-war pacifist or leftists in the United States both ultimately end up funding Israeli weapons used to carry out a genocide in Gaza alongside other forms of US imperialism overseas through their tax dollars. That is the nature of the world we live in.

While this paper has argued so far about how the Western Leftist claim of *Starship Troopers* promoting fascism is misleading, it would still be wrong to claim that the novel has no relations to fascists or the Western Right Wing politics. The novel is on the reading list of all branches of the US military (Milzarsky) alongside being quite popular among the Western Right. The right wing fascination for *Starship Troopers* is not simply limited to online supporters as even politicians are involved. For instance, Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy once proposed that voting should be limited to those who are 25 or older alongside younger adults needing to participate in military service to have voting rights, a policy that drew comparison to *Starship Troopers*. Furthermore, an article about both the film and the novel in the far-right publishing site *Counter-Currents* calls the novel a Right-wing pop-cultural reference point for glorifying the far-right cause and promoting ethnocentric martial mindset that aligns with their racist theories alongside comparing leftists to bugs attempting to force all into the “Afro-Eurasian hive” while labeling them as “bugmen” who is considered the ultimate individualist or the total private individual (Dew). What I find the most intriguing about the whole debate surrounding *Starship Troopers* is the common ground in the arguments of both the Western Left and the Right. Like Ayers, the article from *Counter-Currents* also engages in cherry-picking and reinterpreting segments that align with their political ideology while ignoring aspects that go against fascists tenets like the novel’s promotion of responsible individuality over collectivism and the federations lack of nationalist ideology. While the article shuns the “bugmen” of the Left as the ultimate individualist, it’s in contrast to Heinlein’s own distrust for communism that is rooted in his advocacy for individualism, something that is clearly promoted in *Starship Troopers*.

Heinlein, while reflecting on his trip to the Soviet Union, mentions how communism has no concern for the individual and cites the atrocities committed by the Soviets upon their own citizens and figures like Trotsky as well as slaughtering millions like in Ukraine through the Holodomor (Heinlein, *Expanded Universe* 410). Both the Western Left and Western Right are wrong or ignorant about a number of ideas in the novel and fail to engage at a deeper level while having interpretations that seem to align with their political ideology.

But *Starship Troopers* is not the only work involving interstellar warfare that has such a lively debate about being fascist. A recent yet notable example would be the popular video game *Helldivers 2*. It is an online third-person shooter where the players take on the role of the titular Helldivers, stylishly caped yet disposable soldiers of the world government known as Super Earth to spread “Managed Democracy” across the galaxy. It incorporates satirical comedy elements that are heavily inspired by Verhoeven’s 1997 adaptation of *Starship Troopers* in its aesthetics, such as the style of propaganda videos that are highly reminiscent of the movie. Yet, the game has sparked online debates due to a number of people being seemingly ignorant of its satirical aspect (Rosenblatt). This debate has reached such a state that even the United Nations got themselves involved in it and reached out to Arrowhead, the studio responsible for the game, and requested them to talk about psychological defense against manipulation. Arrowhead CEO Johan Pilestedt noted how they asked themselves if it was possible to brainwash an entire community into fighting for a fascist state which turned out to be true while also adding how the tone and imagery of the game was to be used in an educational way to teach people to recognize elements of a totalitarian state (Wagner). My personal experience with the *Helldivers 2* gaming community showed me that most people do understand the satire and often like to roleplay as brainwashed disposable Helldivers of Super Earth in the game, complete with some funny dark humor. However, I did find some people who ignore the satire and take the game seriously and claim how Super Earth is justified in its

pursuits and have Right-wing views. It is also noted by gaming content creator Christian Divyne that some people tend to claim that they'd have no choice but fight for Super Earth in self-defense if they were in a Helldiver's position (Rosenblatt). I find this statement accurate based on my experience and have also observed a similar case in the *Warhammer 40k* community with the franchise also being a futuristic sci-fi fantasy that takes some inspiration from *Starship Troopers* and has also faced accusations of promoting and attracting fascists from the Western Left that naturally led to the Western Right coming to "defend" it in response.

Another similar case is the Japanese anime *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* that has also found itself in Western partisan political discourse online related to fascism. The fantasy anime is centered around the titular character and the emotional turmoil she has to deal with due to being an elf whose natural lifespan far exceeds that of other humans she grows close to, making her outlive them. The debate surrounding *Frieren* stems from its portrayal of demons as a race that is evil by nature and is fundamentally opposed to coexisting with humanity, being willing to employ any and all means necessary to kill them, including abusing human emotions. The Western Right quickly painted such depiction of demons as evil threats that need to be dealt with as validation of their xenophobic ideology and praised the main characters fighting demons for not being like the Western Left while the Left accused the anime of promoting fascist ideas. Both of these groups ignore the emotional core of the story that explores grief and memory as well as Frieren accepting his friend Himmel's beliefs of peace and love for humanity that inspires her actions rather than xenophobia and hate. Mehanna blames lack of media literacy and applying Western political concepts to non-Western storytelling for this issue that creates echo chambers that prevent nuanced discussion in favor of sensationalism (Mehanna). The case of *Frieren* is significant as unlike *Starship Troopers* or *Helldivers 2*, the story is furthest from militarism and nationalism as it is a

character-focused emotional drama. Yet, it did not stop Western audiences from crafting their own meaning and tie it to ideas like fascism and xenophobia.

This phenomenon of media like *Starship Troopers*, *Frieren* and *Helldivers 2* being reinterpreted can be explained by using the theory of readers deriving their own meaning. In *Death of the Author*, Roland Barthes notes how writing itself contains several voices that can't be discerned with literature itself being an invention of this voice. Furthermore, texts do not contain a single theological meaning but rather are a space of many dimensions. And once the voice loses its origin, the writer enters his own death as the writing begins. With the author gone, the attempt to decipher the text becomes useless. Barthes closes the essay by stating how the birth of the reader has to be ransomed by the death of the author (Barthes 1-6). Michel Foucault also shares a similar view where the author is no longer of utmost significance as it does not matter who is speaking anymore (Foucault 222). I believe this theory of the death of the author or readers creating their own meaning of the text separate from the author's vision can explain how the Western Leftist and Right-wing interpretation and views of *Starship Troopers* diverge so much from established elements of the text alongside some clear influence of political ideology being a driving force behind such interpretations. Leftist want the novel to be fascist in order to shun ideas they find deplorable like violence and political realism. Meanwhile the Western Right wing either accepts the fascist accusation of *Starship Troopers* due to being openly fascist themselves or attempts to deflect the fascist accusations due to its infamy in the post-Second World War era. What should not be ignored is how this culture war sets a dangerous precedent where the Leftists, instead of taking a nuanced approach to analyzing the text, end up rejecting it entirely including its political realism and legitimate questions about the nature of violence, war and rights. This can allow fascists to stay politically relevant by giving them an advertisement space where they can present themselves as champions of a practical realist approach and

offer what the Left does not or capitalize on the discontent towards them. Especially in times of crisis, it can be easy to portray the Left as weak, indecisive and lacking the strength to act accordingly in self-defense of the people as fascists present themselves as warriors who are in touch with reality over blind idealism. Furthermore, the Western Left's tendency to apply postmodern deconstruction in a way lacking nuance results in greying of narratives, which gives further space to fascist narratives to validate themselves by leveraging their Darwinistic tribalism as strength is supreme in an amoral world. What the Left should have done is properly understand *Starship Troopers* and instead turn its ideas against the fascists and far right, which is not a difficult feat given the novel's advocacy of individualism, the value of human lives as well as how it claims that the desire to live is the basis of all morality. Fascists can easily be compared to the hive mind bugs fought by the Terran Federation due to how ideology turns them all into mechanized resources of the state system who serve as tools to pursue the interests of the elites. A case could also be made of human fascists being even worse since bugs are biologically tied to the hive mind while humans submitted in spite of being born with free will.

As such, the accusations of Heinlein using the novel to promote fascism is not only incorrect, the discourse surrounding it itself is based on the political ideology of the Western Left and Right trying to wage a culture war against one another and interpreting texts in a way that aligns with their political ideology.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, *Starship Troopers* is a fascinating novel that is far from the one-dimensional promoter of fascist military expansionism that some claim it to be. Heinlein utilizes the military sci-fi setting of the novel as a vehicle to explore a number of philosophical and political ideas such as the value of human lives, the conflict between morality and scientific logic, collectivism and individualism as well as political realism and the role of force. It does manage to provoke thought related to topics that are relevant even to this day in spite of its age as well as issues with execution with regards to how the ideas are presented alongside shallowness due to lacking further exploration of said ideas. The novel overall feels less about the glorification of macho militarism and more akin to a philosophical text that intends to provoke thought among the readers and make them think about certain ideas.

Furthermore, the novel is also of historical significance as it bears the influence of certain events that transpired during the Korean War and the American experience during that time that Heinlein incorporates in the novel. One can observe the concern among Americans raised by the supposed “brainwashing” of US prisoners of war by their communist captors during the Korean war that Heinlein employs to reinforce his belief that armies should be made up of willing volunteers who have the mental capacity to do their jobs as individuals rather than being forced to serve through conscription, something that Heinlein despises. In addition, the Mobile Infantry’s strict qualitative approach and emphasis on on-field leadership is Heinlein’s way of highlighting problems he observed in the US military at that time that involved a more managerial approach where higher-ranked officers managed soldiers like disposable assets from relative safety far away from the front lines rather than leading through example. With hindsight, it is clear that Heinlein managed to predict issues in the US military that became more evident during the Vietnam War.

In addition, the idea that the novel promotes fascist beliefs is something that does not stand detailed scrutiny. This paper highlighted how core ideas promoted by the novel such as the value of human lives, the Federation's post-ideological approach and especially the emphasis on individualism are strongly at odds with beliefs that are commonly at the heart of fascism such as collectivism, ideology and human value being defined with regards to their utility to the state. Yet, we have seen how that does not stop fascists and the far right from using the novel to glorify and promote their political ideology in spite of how the ideas of the novel are at odds with their beliefs. It is a case of politically motivated selective reinterpretation where political groups create new meaning of an existing text to push their own political narratives, with the Western Left branding all forms of patriotism and notions of employing military force as fascism through surface-level comparison to 1930's classical fascism while the Western Right presents themselves as warrior paragons who are the only ones capable of defending against supposed grave threats by drawing false and artificially constructed narrative parallels between the Terran Federation's predicament and their narratives. *Starship Troopers* is not the only example of this as other media such as *Helldivers 2* or *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* also fall victim to the same sort of political culture war involving ideological narratives where the adherents of certain political ideas derive a new meaning of the text that aligns with their political ideology in order to promote it. This highlights how fascism is an ideological fraud that aims to acquire support and allegiance from others by pushing false narratives. It turns people into something far worse than the bugs of *Starship Troopers*. Unlike the bugs who can make the excuse of being biologically evolved to become subservient to their higher caste, the lowest common denominator of fascist adherents is a bio-drone who submits voluntarily to the state machinery in spite of being born free with the opportunity to make decisions on their own. That is what fascism does by employing ideology. What is equally concerning is how this

culture war of political ideology is providing fascists with more opportunities to make themselves more appealing and seemingly legitimizing their beliefs and narratives by leveraging Leftist dogmas while also moving attention away from newer forms of fascist ideology that are more suited to the modern world that is dominated by the Rules-Based World Order.

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