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PSC 395.01: Utopianism and It's Critics

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University of Montana
Department of Political Science

Utopianism & Its Critics

PLS 395
Fall 2000
MW 4-5:30 p.m.

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*My utopia is actual life pushed to the limits of its ideal possibilities.--
Lewis Mumford*

*A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even
glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always
landing. And when Humanity land there, it looks out, and seeing a better
country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias.---Oscar Wilde*

*The world is now too dangerous for anything less than Utopia.--
biophysicist John R. Platt*

Course Description: This seminar has a very timely quality, partly because we are starting a new millennium. Yet with the future looking increasingly uncertain and unpredictable, it seems that the Utopian tradition has entered a period of terminal crisis. This has happened, according to Judith Shklar, because nothing is as simple as it was once —there is so much we don't know— or what we do know, we know can hurt us. Either way, the future looms rather than beckons. There is even speculation that we have arrived at the "end of history;" that is, we have reached whatever goal we might realistically wish for, and so no further Utopias need or *can* be conceived.

But what would it mean for political theory if the search for Utopia was called off? Would there not be a loss, as well as a gain, if the habit of playing with ideal alternatives were to be thoroughly discredited? Perhaps it is time to take stock. This semester we will examine the classic utopias, from Plato's *Republic* to B.F. Skinner's *Walden II* as well as their critics, to determine what it might mean if we abandon utopianism.

Readings:

Plato, **The Republic*. **New Atlantis*
ed. Frederic White, *Famous Utopias*
William Morris, *New From Nowhere*
Lewis Mumford, *Story of Utopias*
B.F. Skinner, *Walden II*

•••Huxley, *Brave New World*••• (or Orwell, 1984, or Zamyatin, *We*)

++Gilman, *Herland* (or Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* in FAC PAC)

FAC PAC: Masc. Utopias

*selected readings on library reserve {Works Recommend: see attached list}

Course Objectives: upon successfully completing the course work, the student should be able to:

1. Identify and assess the major themes, works, and political thinkers associated with utopian literature.
2. Develop a coherent position with regards to ethical idealism, political realism, elitism, democratic doctrine, individualism and communitarianism.
3. Orally critique an essay in terms of its analytical clarity, accuracy in its interpretation of primary readings, and the logic of its conclusions.

To achieve the above objectives: course Grading: Each student will submit and orally defend in class four critical essays (48% of course grade), not to exceed 4 double-spaced, typed pages. Each essay (see schedule for topics) will be assigned weekly and is due *no later* than the class period before you are scheduled to orally present it. If your essay is turned in late or if you are absent the day we are scheduled to discuss your essay, you will not get credit for it. In addition, each student will complete on time a final (42% of course grade.) Final exam will be take-home. Grade points will be deducted for grammatical and spelling errors.

Extra-Credit Essay: If you receive a "C" grade or lower on an essay, then you may rewrite the essay and/or do the scheduled extra-credit essay.

Cautionary Note: Class participation and attendance will constitute 10% of your grade. This includes being prepared on a *daily* basis to discuss the readings and the essays. Each student will get three (3 only) free absences, and three points will be deducted for every absence thereafter. {The extra-credit essay may not be used to make-up absences or participation points.}

Course Schedule:

9/6 **Introduction to the Course**
Read: *Plato's *Atlantis* {400 B.C.}; *Iamboulos' *Island of the Sun* {300 B.C.} *on library reserve; Mumford, *Story of Utopias*, Chap. 1

Utopia or Eutopia?: How seriously are utopian proposals to be taken? Are they blueprints for realizable social and political arrangements?

9/11- **If Plato & Iamboulos are utopians, what makes them so?**
9/13 **Read:** *Plato's *Republic*, Books III & IV (*on library reserve); Mumford, *Story of Utopias*, Chap. 2

- 9/18 **Plato's *Republic & Utopian Justice***
Read: *Plato's *Republic*, Book I
Essays (due 9/13): How convincing is Plato's argument that the justice of the good man and the good state is the same justice?
- 9/20 **Plato's "*Philosopher Queens & Private Wives*"**
Read: White's "Introduction" *Famous Utopias*; More's *Utopia*, Book I
Essays (due 9/18): Examine the male-female roles in Plato's *Republic*. How "radical" is Plato's utopia with respect to women?
- 9/25* **Plato's *Republic & Its Critics***
Read: More's *Utopia*, Book II
Essays (due 9/20): What tastes/appetites are given free reign and what tastes/appetites are suppressed when we look around Plato's utopia?
- 9/27 ***Sir Thomas More's Utopia: Heaven on Earth?* {1516 A.D.}**
Read: More's *Utopia*, Book II; Mumford, Chap. 3
Essay (due 9/25): Like most utopians, More's ideal state sets up a government without politics. How?
- 10/2 ***More's Legal System: Justice on Earth***
Read: Mumford, chap. 4
Essay (due 9/27): More's utopia provides courts without lawyers? Possible? Desirable?
- 10/4 ***Plato & More: Eugenics***
Recommend: John M. Smith, "Eugenics & Utopia," *Utopias & Utopian Thought*, ed. by Frank Manuel
Essay (due 10/2): Compare Plato and More on the role of marriage & childrearing. Is one utopia superior to another? Why, why not?
- 10/9 ***Illness & Death in Utopia***
Read: Campanella's *City of the Sun*, 155-204
Essay (due 10/4): What type of treatment for illness, disease, accident, and death might we expect in More's utopia? What can we learn from this utopian about public health care?

* September 25th is the last day to add/drop by DIAL BEAR

- 10/11 **Relieving Man's Estate: Campanella's Heavenly City** {1623}
Read: Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 207-250; Mumford, Chap. 5
Essay (due 10/9): What is the role/purpose of art in *City of the Sun*? How much artistic freedom does Campanella allow?
- 10/16 **Bacon's New World** {1624}
Read: Morris, *News From Nowhere*, Intro., Chaps. 1-15; Mumford, Chaps. 6-7
Essays (due 10/11): How "scientific" is the management of public and private institutions (i.e. marriage &/or selection of government officials) in Bacon's Bensalem?
- 10/18 **Socialist Utopians: Cabet, Macnie, Fourier**
Read: •Cabet, *A Voyage to Icaria* {1845}; •Macnie, *The Diothas* {1883}--see FAC PAC; Mumford, Chap. 8; Morris, *News From Nowhere*, Chaps. 16-25;
Essay (due 10/16): How "radical" are the utopias of Cabet and Macnie in regards to equality of the sexes?
- 10/23 **Socialist Utopians: Morris** {1890}
Read: Morris, *News From Nowhere*, finish; Mumford, Chaps. 9-10
Essays (due 10/18): There are always certain occupations and professions missing in every utopia. Morris's is no exception. Discuss
- and/or
- How does Morris defend economic equality? How does his socialist utopia promote it? Critically evaluate it.
- 10/25 **Craftsmen & Artists**
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, "Walden II Revisited," Chaps. 1-5
Essays (due 10/23): How much of an improvement is Morris' utopia over other utopias we have read regarding the artist & art?
- 10/30 **Modernism & Utopia**
Read: H.G. Well, *A Modern Utopia* {1905}see FAC PAC; Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 6-14.
Essays (due 10/25): What appears to be "modern" about H.G. Well's utopia? How does it depart from Morris' ideal society?

- 11/1 ***Skinner's Utopia of Social Engineering***
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 15-20
Essay (due 10/30): Who or what determines "crimes & punishment" in *Walden II*? Do Skinner's penal system rely on negative or positive reinforcements? Consequences?
- 11/6 ***Science & Utopia: Bacon to Skinner***
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 21-29
Essays (due 11/1): "At least implicit in all elitist doctrines is the assumption that politics is a true science." Discuss with reference to Skinner's utopia.
- 11/8 ***Courtship & Childhood in Walden***
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 30-35
Essays (due 11/6): How innovative and desirable are Skinner's ideas regarding marriage and childrearing? Why the preference of "nurture" over "nature"?
- 11/13 ***Men, Women, and Gender-Bending Utopias***
Read: de Foigny, *Terra Australis Incognita* {1696}, in FAC PAC; Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* {1974} in FAC PAC or Gilman's *Herland* {1915}
Essay (due 11/8): Feminist authors (including utopians) have relied upon two divergent strategies for liberating women, either focusing on their unique character/perspective from men or eliminating all differences between genders. Discuss the advantages and/or disadvantages of either approach with reference to de Foigny and Gilman.
- 11/15 ***Feminism & Utopia:***
Read: Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* {1974} in FAC PAC or Gilman's *Herland* {1915}
Essay (due 11/13): What, if anything, do the male visitors reveal about Gilman's feminist position?
- Essay (due 11/13):** What are the "utopian" characteristics of Le Guin's *Anarres*? What are the "feminist" characteristics?

11/20

A School for Women

Read: Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* {1974} in FAC PAC or Gilman's *Herland* {1915}

Essay (due 11/15): How much do Gilman & Le Guin borrow from Plato in setting up the educational & work system in Herland? What, if anything, does they reject from Plato's ideal society?

Essay (due 11/15): How "radical" are the relationships between men and women in Le Guin's utopia?

**** 11/22-11/24 * * * * Thanksgiving Break * * Read: dystopian novel**

11/27

Gilman's Philosopher Queens & Le Guin's Anarchism

Read: Huxley, or Orwell, or Zamyatin

Essays (due 11/20): Who scores the most points for liberating women, (men, and children): Gilman or Le Guin? Why?

Essays (due 11/20): Le Guin's utopia appears to be more 'revolutionary' than any previous work, so much so it's almost *unutopian*. Discuss

11/29-
12/4

Utopia & Its Critics

Read: Mumford, Chaps. 11-12

Essays (due 11/29): In reading Mumford, consider his overall view of the utopian tradition. To what extent does he approve or criticize it?

12/6

Utopia as Nightmare: Huxley's Brave New World

Read: Huxley, or Orwell, or Zamyatin

Essay (due 12/4): What are the sources of Bernard's (or Winston's or D-503's) discontent? Spiritual, physical, intellectual? What is Huxley (or Orwell or Zamyatin) assuming here about human nature?

12/11

An Apology for Utopia

Read: Huxley- Finish

Essays (due 12/6): Given all of our reasons to despair of modern humanity, why does Mumford remain hopeful? Which is the *utopian* characteristic: the despair or the faith?

12/13

Utopia as Nightmare: the Perfect Hell?

Extra-Credit Essays Due 12/11

12/19

Utopia Final Due by 5 p.m..

Final Paper:

Each student will choose one topic to examine with regard to all the utopias read this semester, and write an analysis. Please sign up with me on the subject.

Final Essay Topics: *How will those decisions that we think important be made in utopia?* Specifically regarding:

- (1) choosing a mate; male-female relationships & roles, friendship & marriage
- (2) deciding how many children to have; parents & childrearing
- (3) choosing a school/university; purpose & content of education
- (4) a career/job; types & purpose of work: good or bad?
- (5) determining crimes & punishment; administration, purpose, and nature of law/justice
- (6) indulging one's tastes/appetites; houses, gold, and the money economy
- (7) health care treatment/policy; illness, disease, accidents, & death
- (8) joining a church/embracing a faith; spirituality & tolerance
- (9) freedom of artistic expression; the role/purpose of art
- (10) selecting a government/making policy; selection of rulers, citizen participation, and civic obligation

While it is not required, you may wish to read secondary literature to support your final paper, or –better still– just out of curiosity. The following is a good start:

- ** REF. Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Utopian Literature*
Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (1960s ed.)
Marie Berneri, *Journey Through Utopia*
Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia*
R. Dahrendorf, "Out of Utopia: Toward a Reorientation of Sociological Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* vol. 64, no. 2, 1958: 115-27
Jacques Ellul, *The Technology Society*
Barbara Goodwin, *Social Science & Utopia*
George Kateb, "Utopia & the Good Life," in *Utopias & Utopian Thought*, ed. by Frank Manuel ;
Utopia & Its Enemies
Leszek Kolakowski, *Toward a Marxist Humanism: Essays on the Left Today*
Melvin Lasky, *Utopia & Revolution*
Karl Mannheim, *Utopia & Ideology*
Thomas Molnar, *Utopia: The Perennial Heresy*
Lewis Mumford, *Utopia, The City & the Machine*, in *Utopias & Utopian Thought*, ed. by Frank Manuel
Popper, Karl, *The Open Society & Its Enemies*
Peyton Richter, *Utopias: Social Ideals and Communal Experiments*

- Judith Shklar, *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith*;
"The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia," in *Utopias & Utopian Thought*, ed. by Frank Manuel
- J.L. Talmon, *Utopianism and Politics*
- Paul Tillich, "Critique and Justification of Utopia," in *Utopias & Utopian Thought*, ed. by Frank Manuel
- Adam Ulam, "Socialism & Utopia," in *Utopias & Utopian Thought*, ed. by Frank Manuel
- Roland Young, *Approaches to the Study of Politics*, see Mumford Sibley's "The Place of Classical Political Theory in the Study of Politics: The Legitimate Spell of Plato"