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PSC 450.01: Utopianism and Its Critics

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University of Montana
Department of Political Science

PSC 450
Fall 2007
MWF 12:10-1

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Utopianism & Its Critics

*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*

Course Description: This seminar has a very timely quality, partly because we are in 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 utopia;" 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 classic and contemporary utopias, from Plato's *Republic* to Barbara Goodwin's *Justice by Lottery* as well as their critics, to determine what it might mean if we abandon utopianism.

Readings:

*Plato, *The Republic*, Chaps. III-V.
ed. Frederic White, *Famous Utopias*
William Morris, *New From Nowhere*
Lewis Mumford, *Story of Utopias*
B.F. Skinner, *Walden II*
Goodwin's *Justice by Lottery*
C.P. Gilman, *Herland*
FAC PAC: Masc. Utopias

*See library for copies

{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:

This course will be taught as a seminar. Each student will submit and orally defend in class **3** critical essays (**45%** of course grade or 20pts each), not to exceed three double-spaced pages. The essays (see note for those taking this course to fulfill writing requirement) will be assigned weekly and are due *no later* than the class period before you are scheduled to orally defend it. (For topics, see below.) 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 a **take-home final (30%** of course grade.) Each student will be graded on class **attendance (10%)** and **participation (15%** of course grade.) As Burke said, *it does not honor a writer ...to read him without seeking to challenge him . . . or her.*

Cautionary note: if you are absent more than 3xs, three attendance points will be deducted for every absence thereafter. Excused absences require a medical note for illness, injury, family emergency, or letter from instructor for field trips, ASUM service, music/drama performances, intercollegiate athletics, military service. Instructor will also excuse absences for reasons of mandatory public service.

Note: If taking this course to **fulfill writing requirement**, then student will be expected to revise and resubmit all three of their essays. Substantial revisions will be expected.

Graduate Students, in addition to completing the above assignments, will submit a 10-15 page research paper on one of the utopian thinkers or their critics which addresses a substantive theoretical topic in consultation with the professor. This paper will be of publishable quality, and will probe more deeply a theoretical issue related to modern thought than those of the undergraduate essays. The paper shall include an introduction that clearly identifies a question or issue and its significance in modern political theory,

and will draw upon appropriate primary & secondary literature to support the paper's thesis and analysis.

- Plus/Minus Grades will be used based on the following:
100-93 = A; 92-90 = A-; 89-87= B+; 86-83 = B; 82-80 = B-; 79-77= C+; 76-73= C; 72-70=C-; 69-67=D+; 66-63=D; 62-60=D-; 59< =F

Course Schedule:

- 8/27 *Introduction to the Course*
Read: *Plato's *Republic*, Chaps. III., *on library reserve;
Mumford, *Story of Utopias*, Chap. 1
- 8/29 *Outopia or Eutopia?*: How seriously are utopian proposals to be taken? Are they blueprints for realizable social and political arrangements?
Read: *Plato's *Republic*, Chaps. IV {see library editions.}
- 8/31 *Plato's Utopia*
Discuss: *If Plato is a utopian, what makes him so?*
Read: Mumford, *Story of Utopias*, Chap. 2

******* NO Class ***** Labor Day September 3rd *******

- 9/5 *Plato's Republic & Utopian Justice*
Read: *Plato's *Republic*, Book V (on library reserve)
Essays (due 8/31): How convincing is Plato's argument that the justice of the good man and the good state is the same justice?
- 9/7-
9/10 *Plato's "Philosopher Queens & Private Wives"*
Read: White's "Introduction" *Famous Utopias*; More's *Utopia*,
Book I
Essays (due 9/5): Examine the male-female roles in Plato's *Republic*. How "radical" is Plato's utopia with respect to women?
- 9/12-
9/14 *Law & Plato's Perfectly Just Society*
Read: More's *Utopia*, Book II
Essays (due 9/10): Plato's *Republic* presumes that monism (a uniform vision of the good life and morality) will lead to dispensing with formal laws. Is he correct? Discuss with reference to examples from his utopia.

- 9/17 *Plato's Republic & Its Critics*
Read: More's *Utopia*, Book II
Essays (due 9/14): What human desires are given free reign and what desires are suppressed when we look around Plato's utopia? How might this influence (positively or negatively) works of art?
- 9/19 *Sir Thomas More's Utopia: Heaven on Earth? {1516 A.D.}: Plato & More: Eugenics*
Read: More's *Utopia*, finish; Mumford, Chap. 3
Recommend: John M. Smith, "Eugenics & Utopia," *Utopias & Utopian Thought*, ed. by Frank Manuel
Essay (due 9/17): Compare Plato and More on the role of marriage & childrearing. Is one utopia superior to another? Why, why not?
- 9/21 *More & Utopian Authority*
Read: Mumford, chap. 4
Essay (due 9/17): Like most utopians, More's ideal state sets up a government without politics. How? Is this desirable? Why, why not?
- 9/24-
9/26 *More's Legal System: Justice on Earth*
Read: Campanella's *City of the Sun*, in Utopia reader, 155-204;
Essay (due 9/21): More's utopia provides courts without lawyers? Possible? Desirable?
- 9/28-
10/1 *Illness & Death in Utopia*
Read by 10/10 Bacon, *New Atlantis*, in Utopia reader, 207-250
Essay (due 9/26): 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 &/or its limits?
- 10/3 *Relieving Man's Estate: Campanella's Heavenly City {1623}*
Read:; Mumford, Chap. 5
Essay (due 10/1): What is the role/purpose of art in *City of the Sun*? Should art have a social purpose? If so, what? If not, why not?

- 10/5 *Ebenezer Howard & the Garden City Movement*
Read: Mumford, Chap. 6; look up references on Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement.
Essays (due 10/5): How does Ebenezer Howard's conception of the garden city expand upon Campanella's notion that human character and values is shaped by our surroundings? Discuss with reference to Missoula city planning today.
- 10/8-10/10 *Bacon's New World {1624}*
Read: Morris, *News From Nowhere*, Intro., Chaps. 1-15; Mumford, Chap. 7
Essays (due 10/5): How "scientific" is the management of public and private institutions (i.e. marriage &/or selection of government officials) in Bacon's Bensalem?
- 10/12 *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 10/10): How "radical" are the utopias of Cabet and Macnie in regards to equality? Consider the various forms of equality: social, economic, and/or political.
- 10/15-10/17 *Socialist Utopians: Morris {1890}*
Read: Morris, *News From Nowhere*, finish; Mumford, Chaps. 9-10
Essays (due 10/12): There are always certain occupations and professions missing in every utopia. Morris's is no exception. Discuss
or
Essays (due 10/15) How does Morris defend economic equality? How does his socialist utopia promote it? Critically evaluate it.
- 10/19 *Craftsmen & Artists*
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, "Walden II Revisited," Chaps. 1-5
Essays (due 10/17): How much of an improvement is Morris' utopia over other utopias we have read regarding the artist & art?

- 10/22 *Skinner's Utopia of Social Engineering*
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 15-20
Essay (due 10/19): Who or what determines "crimes & punishment" in *Walden II*? Do Skinner's penal system rely on negative or positive reinforcements? Consequences?
- 10/24 *Science & Utopia: Bacon to Skinner*
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 21-29
Essays (due 10/22): "At least implicit in all elitist doctrines is the assumption that politics is a true science." Discuss with reference to Skinner's utopia.
- 10/26-
 10/29 *Courtship & Childhood in Walden*
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. Chaps. 30-35
Essays (due 10/24): How innovative and desirable are Skinner's ideas regarding marriage and childrearing? Why the preference of "nurture" over "nature"?
- 10/31-
 11/2 *Men, Women, and Gender-Bending Utopias*
Read: de Foigny, *Terra Australis Incognita* {1696}, in FAC PAC; excerpts from Cavendish's "The Blazing World" (1666), Corbett's "New Amazonia (1889)," and Piercy's "Women on the Edge of Time" (1979) in library reserve; Gilman's *Herland* {1915}
Essay (due 10/29): 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 (or any of the above).
- 11/5-
 11/9 *Feminism & Utopia cont.:*
Read: Gilman's *Herland* {1915}; Goodwin, Chaps. 1 & 2.
Essay (due 11/2): What, if anything, do the male visitors reveal about the possibility of realizing Gilman's utopia?
- Or
- Essay (due 11/5):** How much does Gilman borrow from Plato's utopia in setting up the educational and work system in

Herland? What, if anything does Gilman reject from Plato's ideal society?

Or

Essays (due 11/7): 'In some respects, Gilman's utopia shows the same 19-early 20th century biases as her male counterparts. That is, she's not radical enough in her thinking.' Discuss

******* NO Class November 12th *****Veterans Day Holiday *******

11/14 *The Lottery Society*

Read: Goodwin, Chaps 3.

Essay (due 11/9): Goodwin's utopia appears to be more 'revolutionary' than any previous work, so much so it's almost *unutopian*. Discuss how she departs from previous utopias we have examined thus far.

11/16 *Lottery Liberation?*

Read: Goodwin, Chap.6.

Essay (due 11/12): Who's utopia would score more points for liberating women, (men, and children): Gilman or Goodwin? Why?

11/19 *Job Lotteries*

Read: Goodwin, Chap. 9.

Essay (due 11/16): Does Goodwin's "job" lotteries presuppose a high or low degree of human talent?

******* Thanksgiving Break ***** November 21st-25th *******

11/26 *Job Lotteries continued*

Essay (due 11/19): Would Goodwin's lottery system help (or hinder) the artist & enhance the arts? Why, why not?

11/28- *Lottery Politics & Consensus*

11/30 Read: finish Goodwin, Chap. 9.

Essay (due 11/26): What kind of social/political questions would be undesirable to submit to a lottery? Are there many or few issues that ought to be decided in this fashion? Discuss with examples.

Or

Essay (due 11/28): All things considered, is Goodwin's TLS equitable, fair, and moral?

12/3- *Utopia & Its Critics*

12/5 Read: Mumford, Chaps. 11-12

12/6 *Lewis Mumford & His Pilgrimage through Utopia*
Essays (due 12/7): Given all of our reasons to despair of modern humanity, why does Mumford remain hopeful? Which is the more *utopian* characteristic: the despair or the faith?

12/12 Wednesday Utopia Final Due by 12 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 (**8** double-spaced pages). 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*

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*

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

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