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PSC 395.01: Utopianism and Its Critics

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University of Montana
Department of Political Science

PSC 395
Fall 2003
MWF 2:10-3 p.m.

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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

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 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

*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 (60% of course grade), not to exceed 3 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 points (15) for it. In addition, each student will complete on time a final (30% of course grade.) Both exams will be take-home. Grade points will be deducted for grammatical and spelling errors. If you are using this course to fulfill the PSC 300 writing requirement, please see me.

Extra-Credit Essay: If you receive a "C" grade on any essay, you may do an extra credit essay on either a short "perfect hell" or "perfect heaven." This extra credit may not be used to make up a late paper, absences or participation points.

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.

- Students must have a doctor's note, funeral notice, or letter from a coach to be excused from class or to make-up an essay or final due to an emergency. Late final papers will receive a grade reduction for every day it's late.
- If a student elects to take the course as a Pass or No Pass, he or she should be aware that a total of 65 pts or lower will be a NP.
- Please see me and UM catalog p. 21 for criteria on Incomplete Grades.

Course Schedule:

- | | |
|------|---|
| 9/3 | <i>Introduction to the Course</i>
<u>Read:</u> *Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Chaps. III., *on library reserve; Mumford, <i>Story of Utopias</i> , Chap. 1 |
| 9/5 | <u><i>Outopia or Eutopia?</i></u> : How seriously are utopian proposals to be taken? Are they blueprints for realizable social and political arrangements?
<u>Read:</u> *Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Chaps. IV {on library reserve.} |
| 9/8 | <i>Plato's Utopia</i>
Discuss: <i>If Plato is a utopian, what makes him so?</i>
<u>Read:</u> Mumford, <i>Story of Utopias</i> , Chap. 2 |
| 9/10 | <i>Plato's Republic & Utopian Justice</i>
<u>Read:</u> *Plato's <i>Republic</i> , Book V (on library reserve)
Essays (due 9/8): How convincing is Plato's argument that the justice of the good man and the good state is the same justice? |

- 9/12-9/15 *Plato's "Philosopher Queens & Private Wives"*
Read: White's "Introduction" *Famous Utopias*; More's *Utopia*, Book I
 Essays (due 9/10): Examine the male-female roles in Plato's *Republic*. How "radical" is Plato's utopia with respect to women?
- 9/15-9/17 *Law & Plato's Perfectly Just Society*
Read: More's *Utopia*, Book II
 Essays (due 9/12): 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.
- 9/19 *Plato's Republic & Its Critics*
Read: More's *Utopia*, Book II
 Essays (due 9/17): 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?
- 9/22 *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 9/19): Compare Plato and More on the role of marriage & childrearing. Is one utopia superior to another? Why, why not?
- 9/24 *More & Utopian Authority*
Read: Mumford, chap. 4
 Essay (due 9/22): Like most utopians, More's ideal state sets up a government without politics. How? Is this desirable? Why, why not?
- 9/26-9/29 *More's Legal System: Justice on Earth*
Read: Campanella's *City of the Sun*, 155-204; Howard's Garden Cities (on library reserve).
 Essay (due 9/24): More's utopia provides courts without lawyers? Possible? Desirable?
- 10/1-10/3 *Illness & Death in Utopia*
Read: Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 207-250
 Essay (due 9/29): 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?

- 10/6 *Relieving Man's Estate: Campanella's Heavenly City {1623}*
Read: Mumford, Chap. 5
 Essay (due 10/2): 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?
- 10/8 *Ebenezer Howard & the Garden City Movement*
Read: Mumford, Chap. 6
 Essays (due 10/36): 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 city planning today.
- 10/10-
 10/13 *Bacon's New World {1624}*
Read: Morris, *News From Nowhere*, Intro., Chaps. 1-15; Mumford, Chap. 7
 Essays (due 10/8): How "scientific" is the management of public and private institutions (i.e. marriage &/or selection of government officials) in Bacon's Bensalem?
- 10/15 *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 10/13): How "radical" are the utopias of Cabet and Macnie in regards to equality? Consider the various forms of equality: social, economic, and/or political.
- 10/17-
 10/20 *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
 or
 How does Morris defend economic equality? How does his socialist utopia promote it? Critically evaluate it.
- 10/22 *Craftsmen & Artists*
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, "Walden II Revisited," Chaps. 1-5
 Essays (due 10/20): How much of an improvement is Morris' utopia over other utopias we have read regarding the artist & art?
- 10/24 *Skinner's Utopia of Social Engineering*
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 15-20
 Essay (due 10/22): Who or what determines "crimes & punishment" in Walden II? Do Skinner's penal system rely on negative or positive reinforcements? Consequences?

- 10/27 *Science & Utopia: Bacon to Skinner*
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 21-29
 Essays (due 10/24): "At least implicit in all elitist doctrines is the assumption that politics is a true science." Discuss with reference to Skinner's utopia.
- 10/29-
 10/31 *Courtship & Childhood in Walden*
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. Chaps. 30-35
 Essays (due 10/27): How innovative and desirable are Skinner's ideas regarding marriage and childrearing? Why the preference of "nurture" over "nature"?
- 11/3-
 11/5 *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 10/31): 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).
- 11/7-
 11/10 *Feminism & Utopia cont.:*
Read: Gilman's *Herland* {1915}; Babauf, "Equality" {on library reserve}; Goodwin, Chaps. 1 & 2.
 Essay (due 11/5): What, if anything, do the male visitors reveal about the possibility of realizing Gilman's utopia? How "radical are the relationships between men and women in her 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?
- 11/12 *The Lottery Society*
Read: Goodwin, Chaps 1 & 2.
 Essay (due 11/10): 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.
- 11/14 *Lottery Liberation?*
Read: Goodwin, Chap. 3, pp. 105-112, 117-122.
 Essay (due 11/12): Who's utopia would score more points for liberating women, (men, and children): Gilman or Goodwin? Why?

11/17-
11/19 *Job Lotteries*
Read: Goodwin, Chap. 6.
Essay (due 11/14): Does Goodwin's "job" lotteries presuppose a high or low degree of human talent?

Or
Essay (due 11/14): Would Goodwin's lottery system help (or hinder) the artist & enhance the arts? Why, why not?

11/21-
11/24 *Lottery Politics & Consensus*
Read: Goodwin, Chap. 9.
Essay (due 11/19): 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 11/19): All things considered, is Goodwin's TLS equitable, fair, and moral?

** 11/26-11/30 * * * * Thanksgiving Break * *

12/1-
12/3 *Utopia & Its Critics*
Read: Mumford, Chaps. 11-12

12/5 *Lewis Mumford & His Pilgrimage through Utopia*
Essays (due 12/3): In reading Mumford, consider his overall view of the utopian tradition. To what extent does he approve or criticize it?

12/8-
12/10 *An Apology for Utopia*
Essays (due 12/5): 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 *Utopia as Nightmare: the Perfect Hell?*
Extra-Credit Essays Due 12/8

12/15 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 (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:

