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PSC 395.03: Utopianism & Its Critics

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University of Montana
Department of Political Science

Utopianism & Its Critics

PLS 395 sec. 3
Fall 1997
MW 5:10-6:30 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 approaching 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*
ed. Frederic White, *Famous Utopias*
William Morris, *New From Nowhere*
B.F. Skinner, *Walden II*
C.P. Gilman, *Herland*
Huxley, *Brave New World*

Works Recommend: see attached list

Course Grading: Each student will submit and orally defend in class three critical essays (45% 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 (40% of course grade.) Both exams 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 or midterm, then you may wish to do the scheduled extra-credit essay.

Cautionary Note: Class participation and attendance will constitute 15% 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:

9/3 ***Introduction to the Course***

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

9/8- ***If Plato is a utopian, what makes him so?***
9/10 **Read:** Plato's *Republic*, Books II, III, & IV

9/15 ***Plato's Republic & Utopian Justice***
Read: Plato's *Republic*, Books V, VI & VII
Essays (due 9/10): How convincing is Plato's argument that the justice of the good man and the good state is the same justice?

9/17 ***Plato's "Philosopher Queens & Private Wives"***
Read: White's "Introduction" *Famous Utopias*; More's *Utopia*, Book I
Essays (due 9/15): Examine the male-female roles in Plato's *Republic*. How "radical" is Plato's utopia with respect to women?

- 9/22* **Plato's Republic cont.**
Read: More's Utopia, Book II
Essays (due 9/17): What tastes/appetites are given free reign and what tastes/appetites are suppressed when we look around Plato's utopia?
- 9/24 **Sir Thomas More's Utopia: Heaven on Earth?**
Read: More's Utopia, Book II
Essay (due 9/22): How utopian do you find More's system of government?
- 9/29 **More's Legal System: Justice on Earth**
Essay (due 9/24): More's utopia provides courts without lawyers? Possible? Desirable?
- 10/1 **Plato & More: Eugenics**
Recommend: John M. Smith, "Eugenics & Utopia," Utopias & Utopian Thought, ed. by Frank Manuel
Essay (due 9/29): Compare Plato and More on the role of marriage & childrearing. Is one utopia superior to another? Why, why not?
- 10/6 **Illness & Death in Utopia**
Read: Campanella's City of the Sun, 155-204
Essay (due 10/1): 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?
- 10/8 **Relieving Man's Estate: Christian Utopias**
Read: Bacon, New Atlantis, 207-250
- 10/13 **Campanella's Heavenly City**
Read: Morris, News From Nowhere, Intro., Chaps. 1-15
Essays (due 10/8): What is the role/purpose of art in *City of the Sun*? How much artistic freedom does Campanella allow?

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

- 10/15** ***Bacon's New World***
Read: Morris, *News From Nowhere*, Chaps.16-25
Essays (due 10/13): How "scientific" is the management of public and private institutions (i.e. marriage &/or selection of government officials) in Bacon's Bensalem?
- 10/20** ***Socialist Utopians: Fourier to Morris***
Read: Morris, *News From Nowhere*, finish.
- 10/22** ***Economics & Work in Utopia***
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, "Walden II Revisited," Chaps. 1-5
Essays (due 10/20): 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.
- 10/27** ***Craftsmen & Artists***
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 6-14.
Essays (due 10/22): How much of an improvement is Morris' utopia over other utopias we have read regarding the artist & art?
- ***10/29***** **Slack Day**
Read: Skinner, Chaps. 15-20
- 11/3** ***Skinner's Utopia of Social Engineering***
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 21-25.
Essay (due 10/29): Who or what determines "crimes & punishment" in Walden II? Do Skinner's penal system rely on negative or positive reinforcements? Consequences?
- 11/5** ***Science & Utopia: Bacon to Skinner***
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 26-29.
Essays (due 11/3): "At least implicit in all elitist doctrines is the assumption that politics is a true science." Discuss with reference to Skinner's utopia.

- 11/10 ***Courtship & Childhood in Walden***
Read: Skinner's *Walden II*, Chaps. 30-35
Essays (due 11/5): How innovative and desirable are Skinner's ideas regarding marriage and childrearing? Why the preference of "nurture" over "nature"?
- 11/12 ***Skinner's New Religion***
Read: Gilman's *Herland*, Chaps. 1-3
Essays (due 11/10): If (Skinner) was successful in demonstrating that science would give power to men over nature he assumed, rather than proved, that science, by satisfying man's needs (appetites?), would automatically increase his happiness."
 Discuss
- 11/17 ***Feminism & Utopia: C.P. Gilman***
Read: Gilman, Chaps. 4-8.
Essay (due 11/12): What is role/purpose of the male visitors to *Herland*? What, if anything, do they reveal about Gilman's feminist position?
- 11/19 ***A School for Women***
Read: Gilman's *Herland*, 7-9
Essays (due 11/17): How much does Gilman borrow from Plato in setting up the educational & work system in *Herland*? What, if anything, does she reject from Plato's ideal society?
- 11/24 ***Gilman's Philosopher Queens***
Read: Gilman-Finish; Huxley's *Brave New World*, "Foreword," Chaps. 1-3
Essays (due 11/19): "Whatever her politics may be, one thing is certain: Gilman is no feminist!"
- ** 11/26-11/30 * * * * Thanksgiving Break * * Read: Huxley's *Brave New World***
- 12/1 ***Utopia & Its Critics***
Read: Huxley, Chaps. 4-10
- 12/3 ***Utopia as Nightmare: Huxley's Brave New World***
Read: Huxley, Chaps. 11-14
Essay (due 12/1): What are the sources of Bernard's discontent? Spiritual, physical, intellectual? What is Huxley assuming here about human nature?

- 12/8 ***An Apology for Utopia***
 Read: Huxley- Finish
- 12/10 ***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. 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, *The Story of Utopias*;
"Utopia, The City & the Machine," in *Utopias & Utopian Thought*, ed. by Frank
Manuel
Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, And Utopia*
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