PAR 190-02: **Freedom, Culture, and Utopia** Fall 2005
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Utopias are generally understood as ideally perfect places, ones where the social and political conditions work to the advantage of most members of society. Thomas More invented the word, punning on the Greek words, **ou** [English: 'no' or 'not] and **topos** [English: 'place']. More also played on the Greek adjective **eu** [English: 'excellent' or 'good'] to speak of his **eutopia** as a good place. Since that time, many have taken More to be critiquing his own society, and thus providing us with a description of a **dystopia**, a bad place. So from this brief etymology, we should pay close attention to 3 things connected with utopian thought: a. utopias are ideal societies, i.e. they don't actually exist, though b. they are always combined with a **topos**, some location in time and space other than the present; so, c. utopian schemes are always visions that criticize current socio-political conditions. The earliest utopias are described for us in terms of religio-poetic myths – a Golden Age, an Arcadia, an Eden, or an Isle of the Blest; more recent ones envision constructive (or, destructive) changes brought about by current science and technology.

This course will examine, from a historical-philosophical perspective, several utopian visions in Western thought – one from the classical Greek, one medieval Christian, and one from the early modern Enlightenment periods, along with some more recent versions of the scientific utopian experiment. As we study each utopian scheme, we will also read a critique or satire of each of these visions. We will begin with Plato's philosophical vision in the *Republic*, then will examine Aristophanes' comic representations of Platonic ideas. Then, we will read the late Roman Stoic philosopher, Epictetus. Next, we will read St. Augustine's Christian utopian vision of a City of God, as presented in his *Of True Religion*, along with a contemporary critique of Augustinian thought. In our concluding utopian vision, we will read Rene Descartes' *Discourse on Method* as representative of a modern scientific utopian vision, along with some critics of Enlightenment thought. Finally, we will conclude with Aldous Huxley's well-known *Brave New World.*

Some of the questions that will arise as we read these sources are: How does human freedom get impacted by utopian idealism? What roles are permitted historically disadvantaged groups or minorities in such utopias? Are such idealistic schemes feasible? What sorts of restrictions must occur to some people in society so as to insure unity or community in such ideal societies?

List of Daily Reading Assignments

August 25 – Utopia: The Quest for Justice, Equality, Perfectionism a Jest?

I. The Ancient Greek Ideal Society: Plato's *Republic* as Well-Ordered *Kallipolis*

30 -- Solon, Lycurgus: Lawgivers [Claeys, Sargent 15-27]

September 1,6 -- Plato: *Republic* [CS 27-56]

8,13 -- Paul Cartledge: *The Spartans* [DVD in class, but read Ch. 5: "Women and Religion" on reserve in Hunter Library]

15 -- Aristophanes: *Lysistrata*

20,22 -- Aristophanes: *Ecclesiasuzae, Birds*; cumulative quiz

II. The Ancient Roman Stoic Ideal: Epictetus' *Discourses*

27 -- Epictetus: *Discourses,* Bk. 4, Ch. 1 "On Freedom" [find at **EpistemeLinks.com**]

III. The Medieval Christian Ideal: Augustinian City of God

29 -- Augustine: *Of True Religion* [e-reserve in Hunter Library]

October 4,6,11 -- Augustine: *Of True Religion*

18 -- **MIDTERM EXAM: Review Readings, Notes, Terms**

IV. Enlightenment Scientific Utopian Ideal: Descartes

20 -- Descartes: *Discourse on Method*, Parts One, Two
[**EpistemeLinks.com**, then click **E-texts**, then **Search Philosopher by Name (Descartes),** then select **Bartleby** website]
25 -- Descartes: *Discourse on Method,* Parts Three, Four
27 -- Descartes: *Discourse on Method,* Part Six

V. Contemporary Scientific Utopias: H. G. Wells, B. F. Skinner

November 1 -- H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* [CS 312-319]
3 -- B. F. Skinner: *Walden Two* [CS 372-390]
8 -- Skinner: "Walden Two Revisited" [CS 390-398]

VI. Dystopianism: Huxley, Orwell, LeGuin

10,15,17,22-- Huxley: *Brave New World*
29 -- Orwell: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* [cs 398-407]
December 1 -- LeGuin: "*The Day Before the Revolution"* [CS 408-420]
8 -- Review for Final Exam

Friday, December 16 -- **FINAL EXAM, 12:00-2:30** MK 201

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Texts

A. Rental: *The Utopia Reader,* edited by Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent (readings are signified by 'CS' followed by page numbers).

B. Supplemental: The 2 supplementary texts which you are required to buy are *Aristophanes: Four Plays* and Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World.*

1. Homework Assignments: I expect all members of the class to keep current on assigned class readings; accordingly, I will expect you to be prepared to discuss the daily reading, to raise some questions about how we are to interpret the text, the author's claims (thesis, argument), or the cultural context which produced this text & author. If you are having trouble with the reading, then your classmates' and my discussion should help to illuminate those dim spots in your understanding. As the semester proceeds, you will be writing outlines of textual arguments or critical analyses (1-2 pages each) of the texts we are reading; so, your attendance is imperative. You will write between 8 and 10 of these short papers. These assignments will count for 20% of your grade.

2 & 3. Midterm and Final Exams: there will be a midterm examination on October 18, so your attendance in class is necessary to ready yourself for that exam. In an historical and conceptual course (such as this one), everything builds on previous thinkers we have studied; so if you miss a class, it will hurt your comprehension of the overall trends of philosophical thought. Also there will be a final examination at the end of the semester. Both the midterm and the final, individually, will count for 20% of your grade; both together will comprise 2\5 of your grade.

4. Critical Analysis Paper: Each student will turn in a critical review of Huxley's *Brave New World.* In this review, I expect to see signs of critical engagement with the text, some awareness of other utopian visions that we have read throughout the semester, and your own alternative utopian vision that you offer. Do not merely download some cheesy Internet review of Huxley's work – plagiarism will earn you an F for the course, and will be reported to the Office of Judicial Affairs. To help you avoid plagiarism and cite sources correctly, I also have required a book, *Writing with Sources* by Gordon Harvey. This project is an opportunity for you to be creative in your thinking and writing about what we have read and to offer up your own reflections on what constitutes an ideal society.

5. Participation: The university allows us to keep these seminars small in size, with the goal of there being much discussion of academic topics. So, following the ancient Greek model of democracy, I will treat this class as a **polis** – a self-sufficient, self-governing community of citizens who directly participate in the affairs of state.

Thus, class attendance, quizzes on assigned readings, and written questions on daily readings demonstrate your active participation as a citizen – **politês**. Accordingly, anyone who misses class 4 times or more can expect their cumulative grade lowered one letter grade.

The following are some well-known works in the area of utopian/dystopian literature. Some of these works may be useful for contrasting/comparing with the works we will read in class.

1. George Orwell, *Animal Farm*
   Nineteen Eighty-Four
2. Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*
3. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*
4. Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Dispossessed*
5. John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*
6. Edward Rothstein, Herbert, Muschamp, Martin Marty, *Visions of Utopia*

I offer here some secondary sources that have been central to my pursuit of wisdom; they should enable you to understand more completely some of the pivotal philosophers, their concepts, theories, and terms:

A. Single-volume Works with concise explanations
   1. Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*
   2. Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*
   3. Edward Craig, *Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford U. Press)

B. English Dictionaries
   1. The Oxford English Dictionary (now available on-line or in CD-Rom; also, *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* is an invaluable, inexpensive 2-volume edition)

PLUS/MINUS GRADING SYSTEM

The plus/minus grading system is now in effect at Western Carolina University, and will be utilized in computing grades for this course. Your papers and exams will be returned with numerical grades on them, but the following scale will make it easy for you to determine your standing in the course by simple conversion from the numerical grade to the corresponding letter grade. The primary reasons for changing to a plus/minus grading system are that plus/minus grades are more precise in indicating a student's actual grade in a course, the "plus" grades recognize exceptional work of students, grade inflation is reduced, and final exams should be more prominent in motivating student course work.

Numerical Grades	=	Letter Grades	=	Quality Points
93 - 100		A		4.00
90 - 92		A-		3.67
87 - 89		B+		3.33
83 - 86		B		3.00
80 - 82		B-		2.67
77 - 79		C+		2.33
73 - 76		C		2.00
70 - 72		C-		1.67
67 - 69		D+		1.33
63 - 66		D		1.00
60 - 62		D-		0.67
0 - 59		F		0.00