

History 2700-301: Utopia
Spring 2023

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OH: W10.30-1, & by appointment

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| 18 Jan | Introduction |
| 25 Jan | Plato, <i>Republic</i> , pp. 56 (368a) through 132 (427c), and pp. 158 (449b) through 248 (521b -- that is, through the cave image and the philosopher ruler section). Read the rest if time permits. |
| 1 Feb | Thomas More, <i>Utopia</i> |
| 8 Feb | Francis Bacon, <i>New Atlantis</i> (Group A)
Tommaso Campanella, <i>City of the Sun</i> (Group B) |
| 15 Feb | Jean Jacques Rousseau, <i>Social Contract</i> (Group A)
Étienne Cabet, <i>Travels in Icaria</i> (Group B)
FIRST ESSAY DUE |
| 22 Feb | Marx and Engels, <i>Communist Manifesto</i>
Utopian Architecture I — Utopian public building, community planning, domestic architecture: Ledoux, Boulée, Owen; Howard, Garnier, Unwin & Parker; Letchworth Cooperative Houses |
| 1 Mar | Edward Bellamy, <i>Looking Backward</i> (Group A)
William Morris, <i>News from Nowhere</i> (Group B) |
| 8 Mar | Spring break |
| 15 Mar | Charlotte Perkins Gilman, <i>Herland</i> (Group A)
BF Skinner, <i>Walden Two</i> (Group B)
SECOND ESSAY DUE |
| 22 Mar | Ernst Callenbach, <i>Ecotopia</i> (Group A)
Ursula LeGuin, <i>The Dispossessed</i> (Group B) |
| 29 Mar | Aldous Huxley: Dystopia and Utopia
<i>Brave New World</i> (Group A)
<i>Island</i> (Group B) |
| 5 Apr | Marge Piercy, <i>Woman on the Edge of Time</i>
Margaret Atwood, <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> & selections from its 2019 sequel, <i>The Testaments</i> (Group B) |
| (Sat, 8 Apr) | FINAL ESSAY DUE (Group #1, by noon) |
| 12 Apr | Utopian Architecture II: Marinetti, Sant-Elia, Tatlin, Vesnin, Lissitsky, Taut, Wright, Corbusier, Soleri, Friedman, Fuller
Utopia in the Twenty-first Century (presentation and discussion of Group #1 utopias) |

(Sat, 15 Apr) FINAL ESSAY DUE (Groups #2 and #3, noon)

19 Apr Utopia in the Twenty-first Century (presentation/discussion of Group #2 utopias)

26 Apr Utopia in the Twenty-first Century (presentation/discussion of Group #3 utopias)

Readings

Books are at Penn Bookstore, except that Cabet, Campanella, Marx, and *Testaments* selections are on Canvas. If you buy online, please get the same edition (e.g., Penguin for Plato, Yale for More) that the rest of the seminar is reading. You needn't read the editors' introductions, and you should certainly not cite them in papers: these are secondary sources, and our focus will be on your own analysis of what the authors have to say. Complete both reading and journal entries before class each week. No readings will be assigned for the architecture sections.

Writing Assignments

There are four writing assignments for this course — two short topical essays, one longer opportunity for creative writing, and a reading journal.

(1) The **FIRST ESSAY**, due 2/15, should argue a thesis that you define on one or more of the utopias you have read by that point in the term (by Plato, More, Bacon, Campanella, Rousseau and/or Cabet). It should be short (*ca* 5 typed pages), concisely written, and carefully argued. You may set your own topic or opt for one set by the instructor, but the topic should be rather narrowly focused on a point that can be argued from the text itself. For example, since "utopia" means "no place" in Greek, you might argue that More was not serious about his proposals, but was as a good Catholic writing an elaborate critique of the sinful human nature that makes utopia impossible. Or perhaps he was writing a colossal joke. Another possible More topic is what some commentators identify as his feminism. Was he really a sexual egalitarian? A possible Plato topic: since his real subject is justice, why does he spend so much time talking about sexuality? Note that this is not a research paper; no reading is expected beyond the assigned texts. Parenthetical page references (or section numbers for Plato) will suffice in lieu of footnotes.

This paper assignment is intentionally open-ended. A variety of perspectives in the group will doubtless produce widely differing treatments of the texts. Feel free to share your paper, in early draft or final version, with others in the seminar; compare notes as you write and talk about possibilities for reading and analyzing the texts. Learn from each other.

(2) The **SECOND ESSAY**, again about 5pp. in length and due 3/15, should be comparative. You might choose an aspect of ideal society that is treated by two or more utopias and discuss similarities and differences in treatment of it. Then go beyond description to analysis. For example, all utopias address the issue of labor and production, but even in those written in industrialized nineteenth-century Europe and America, labor problems are resolved in very different ways. Why? What historical factor seems to be most important in determining a utopian writer's view of labor? Other examples abound: You might compare several writers' treatments of marriage, or the ownership of property, or the role of technology, or the relationship between nature and religion. Alternatively, you might decide to compare the literary style or formal structure of two or more utopias. How does the form of the text itself reflect the

concerns of the author or the reader's reception of the ideas in the text? Does the literary form of a utopia parallel the structure of the utopia itself? Remember: history is the interdisciplinary discipline.

(3) The **FINAL ESSAY** will be your own utopia, due 4/8 for those presenting 4/12 and 4/15 for those presenting 4/19 and 26 (NB: neither due date is a class meeting day). We will discuss this assignment later in the term, but essentially, it will be a two-part production: The first will be a BRIEF (one page) outline of your ideal society. The second and larger part will be a detailed description and discussion of the most fundamental aspect of your utopia. This could be economic, technological, ecological, political, or psychological. It could be destruction or re-ordering of the family, or of traditional views of sexuality, or of race (a topic not broached by most of our historical sources). It could be a new approach to education. It could consist of architectural drawings or even a musical composition. It could be fiction, or a discursive essay, or a manifesto. The possibilities are as limitless as the visions of utopia that western society has produced during the last half-millennium. You, like earlier utopia writers, will be setting your vision within your own historical context – one that's particularly fraught at the moment.

Final utopias should be posted to the whole class. The final three seminar meetings will be devoted to discussion of each utopia. A second reader will be assigned to each to guide the discussion, but everyone should have read all the utopias to be presented on that date and come prepared with comments, questions, protests, praise, or perhaps a sign-up sheet for those who wish to join proposed experiments!

(4) Your **READING JOURNAL** should be kept in electronic form and employ a "double entry" approach: on the first page, under the title of the utopia you have read for that week, descriptively outline the utopia. This can be most efficiently done with brief entries under categories like politics, social structure, family, education, sexuality, labor and production, religion, diplomacy, ecology, etc. You should be able to do this on one single-spaced page. Your entries don't have to be complete sentences. (Don't use bullet points: they take up too much of your space!) On a second page, write your own comments on the utopia, again single-spaced. These may include suggestions for analysis, questions, objections, personal responses, comparative notes — use your imagination!

Of course, you may take additional notes on your utopia elsewhere; I am interested only in your 2-page summary/response to each utopia. Bring a hard copy of the week's entry to the seminar meeting to aid your discussion participation. I'll periodically ask by email for your journal to date, generally on the evening before class (so include that week's assignment) and will send in return brief comments or questions about it. You should send the journal as soon as you see the email request: if it takes a couple of days, I'll assume you haven't been keeping it up to date. The journal is your best preparation for class, so it really is due before the class begins. Journals will not be graded, although your efforts there will play a part in the final assessment; I want to know how you think about these quite various visions of the ideal society, what kinds of questions you ask of the texts, and how you set them in historical context. I'm also curious to see how your thinking changes over the course of the semester.

Seminar Participation

Please don't bring food or drink to class: we're meeting in a library seminar room and will often have rare books on the table. Out of consideration for your colleagues, don't leave class until the break, and keep to the time limit of the break: this is not the time to buy coffee or a meal, which you can't bring to class anyway.

Your journal will be most helpful to you in planning your contributions to discussion, but some

additional preparation will be necessary when your group (A or B) takes charge of the discussion. We'll set up groups at the second class meeting. Get together with the other members of your group during the weekend before each class either electronically or (preferably) face-to-face, to discuss your take on the reading and how you will as a group summarize for the rest of the seminar the utopia you have read and organize discussion of it. Decide, for example, which questions are most important to ask of the text. Work on specific ways to get your fellow-students who haven't read the utopia engaged in setting it in the larger context of utopian writing and evaluating its possibilities. Collaboration is, after all, what makes a seminar seminal, so do it both with your writing and in preparing for discussion. You will learn from each other. Each group will have only about an hour and twenty minutes to discuss its utopia, so prepare your colleagues by emailing them your group's composite one-page summary (with the usual categories) at least 24 hours before class (designate a member to send this, & take turns). If your utopia is a novel, include a couple of sentences at the top summarizing the plot and main characters. During the seminar time, you can allow a few minutes for questions about the summary, but most of your time should be devoted not to description, but to discussion, by the whole group. This means that everybody is responsible for reading and considering the other group's summary before class.

Class participation and writing will be calculated at about 40% and 60%, respectively, of the final grade, although I would like to retain some flexibility (always in your favor), in this as in weighing the four writing assignments. If, for instance, your journal entries and papers steadily improve in insight, substance, imagination and clarity over the course of the semester, I certainly won't weigh the earlier work as heavily as the later, improved work. I don't want grades to get in the way of active learning and creative expression. Actually, I'd be happy to dispense with them altogether – but for the system in which we find ourselves. If you'd prefer just getting narrative comments on your work, as most utopia students do, I'm happy to oblige (though I'll let you know if for some reason you're in trouble). If you want a letter grade on each assignment, I'll do that; just indicate your preference in a note on your first essay. Everybody starts out with an A, and with any luck the semester will wind up that way. Regular attendance and careful preparation are, of course, presumed; falling down there would short-change your colleagues by depriving them of your insights. Failure to keep up your reading journal I take as a very bad sign. And due dates for papers are strict: please don't ask for an extension unless you're at death's door. This is a matter of equity; your colleagues deserve a level playing field. There will be no formal examinations in this course. Exams are another phenomenon that would be absent in my own utopia.