

UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE (JPB163)

COURSE SYLLABUS

Semester: Summer 2024
Time: Wednesdays 2.00–3.30PM
Classroom: B330
Instructor: Jakub Franěk (jakub.franek@fsv.cuni.cz)
Office hours: See: <https://konzultace.fsv.cuni.cz>.

Course description

Utopia, i.e. a description of a fictional ideal society and/or political regime, is a venerable genre. While the term *utopia* was coined by Sir Thomas More in his book *Utopia* (1516), the roots of the genre can be traced back to Plato's *Republic* (380 BC). From the very beginning, utopia has been accompanied by its twin-sister – *dystopia*, i.e. negative utopia. The first work of dystopian literature, Aristophanes' comedy *The Assembly of Women*, was actually written more than a decade before Plato's *Republic* – in 391 BC. Nonetheless, the heyday of dystopian literature arrives only in the twentieth century, when dystopia practically displaces utopia. The veritable boom of dystopian literature accompanied by the nearly complete disappearance of its utopian counterpart seems to signify that in a century that witnessed the rise of totalitarianism, as well as the unleashing of the Faustian powers of modern technology, our imagination came to be dominated by fears and nightmares rather than hopes and dreams.

The aim of this course is to introduce the students to the study of utopian and dystopian literature. We will explore the historical development and characteristic features of this literary genre, and more importantly, its role as a tool of social and political criticism. Throughout the semester, we will explore the way in which the examined books and films express the hopes and fears characteristic of their day and age. In other words, we will examine how the imagined worlds and societies depicted in utopian and dystopian works reflect upon the real world and society.

The course will be divided into three parts. The first part will examine classical political utopias from Plato's *Republic* to Bacon's *New Atlantis*. The second part will focus on 19th century utopian socialism. The third part will examine primarily the 20th century dystopian literature.

Aims and purpose

The primary aim of this course is to introduce the students to the study of the development of the specific genre of political utopias (as well as dystopias) both in political philosophy and in literature. Participation in the seminar should also improve students' analytical and argumentative skills.

Teaching methodology

This course uses a combination of lectures and seminars. The students will be expected to have read the assigned reading before the class so that they can participate in the discussion.

Assignments

Apart from participating in the seminar meetings, the students will be required to prepare and present in class a brief review paper and to write a term paper.

Relative weight of individual assignments

Review paper / in-class presentation: 35%

Term paper: 55%

Participation: 10%

Grading scale

The Faculty of Social Sciences uses the following A-F grading scale:

A (excellent) = 91-100%

B (very good) = 81-90%

C (good) = 71-80%

D (satisfactory) = 61-70%

E (sufficient) = 51-60%

F (fail) = 0-50%

Schedule of Classes

NB: "Main text" readings are required readings for all students. "Secondary texts" are required readings only for the students who write and present a paper on the given topic and strongly recommended to other students.

1. Introduction, course overview.

2. Plato's *Republic* as the first utopia.

Main text: Plato, *The Republic* (selections) – Secondary texts: H. Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics"; K. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (selections).

3. Virtuous Utopia versus Corrupt England? The irony of More's *Utopia*.

Main text: T. More, *Utopia* – Secondary text(s): TBA

4. The New Atlantis: Francis Bacon's vision of society governed by science and technology.

Main text: F. Bacon, *The New Atlantis* – Secondary texts: F. Bacon, *Essays* (selections); M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno, *The Dialectics of the Enlightenment* (selections).

5. Utopian socialism I (R. Owen).

Main text: R. Owen, *A New View of Society* – Secondary texts: TBA.

6. Utopian socialism II (C. Fourier).

Main text: C. Fourier, J. Beecher, R. Bienvenu, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier* – Secondary texts: TBA.

7. Big Brother is Watching you: Orwell's vision of dystopian future.

Main text: G. Orwell, 1984 – Secondary texts: H. Arendt, "Ideology and Terror".

8. A. Huxley: Orgy-Porgy – another kind of late modern social dystopia.

Main text: A. Huxley, *Brave New World* – Secondary text: N. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (selections).

9. Huxley's "hippie paradise"? Main text: A. Huxley, *Island* – Secondary text: A. Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*

10. In the Matrix of virtual reality. Main film: *The Matrix* – Secondary text: G. Debord, *Comments on The Society of the Spectacle*.

11. – 12. Meanwhile in Russia. Readings TBA.

Literature:

NB: All assigned readings will be available through Moodle e-learning system. Additional literature may be assigned during the semester.

Primary literature:

Aristophanes, *The Assembly of Women*.

F. Bacon, *New Atlantis*.

C. Fourier, J. Beecher, R. Bienvenu, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*.

A. Huxley, *Brave New World*.

A. Huxley, *Island*.

T. More, *Utopia*.

G. Orwell, *1984*.

R. Owen, *A New View of Society*.

Plato, *The Republic*.

Secondary literature:

H. Arendt, "Ideology and Terror"; "Philosophy and Politics".

F. Bacon: *Essays*.

G. Debord, *Comments on The Society of the Spectacle*.

M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno, *The Dialectics of the Enlightenment*.

A. Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*.

K. Popper: *The Open Society and its Enemies*.

N. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.