

Phil 197B—First Year Seminar:
Dialogues with Utopia
DePauw University
Fall 2008

CLASS MEETING: TR 12:40-2:10, East College 115
INSTRUCTOR: Richard A. Lynch
OFFICE: Asbury 213
OFFICE HOURS: TR 2:30-3:30 & by appointment
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Calendar

- R Aug 28 Welcome and introduction
- T Sep 2 More, Utopia, pp. 3-40
- R Sep 4 More, Utopia, pp. 41-107
- M Sep 8 Paper #1 due (by email) before 10:00 AM.**
- T Sep 9 Mead, Coming of age in Samoa, pp. 3-15, 42-76 (optional: pp. 16-41, 77-85)
- R Sep 11 Mead, Coming of age in Samoa, pp. 86-127, 135-170 (optional: pp. 128-134)
- T Sep 16 Freud, Civilization and its discontents, pp. 10-63
- R Sep 18 Freud, Civilization and its discontents, pp. 64-112
- F Sep 19 Paper #1-Rewrite (with marked-up original) due in my office before 12:00 noon.**
- T Sep 23 Huxley, Brave new world, pp. 3-139
- R Sep 25 Huxley, Brave new world, pp. 140-259
- T Sep 30 Marx & Engels, The Marx-Engels reader, pp. 579-585, 4-5 (the one long ¶), 149-163, 12-15 (optional: 469-500)
- R Oct 2 Goldman, Anarchism and other essays, pp. 47-67, 227-239, 177-194
- F Oct 3 Paper #2 due (by email) before 12:00 noon.**
- T Oct 7 Freire; Zeno [both in library reserves]; Le Guin, The dispossessed, pp. 1-25
- R Oct 9 Le Guin, The dispossessed, pp. 26-191 **Weather permitting, today's class will meet in the Nature Park (special class meeting time 12:15-1:45, so we can get out there and back in time for our 2:20 classes).**
- T Oct 14 Le Guin, The dispossessed, pp. 192-387
- R Oct 16 **Midterm exam**
- T 21-R 23 **FALL BREAK: Read The grapes of wrath over the break—it's long!**
- T Oct 28 Steinbeck, The grapes of wrath, pp. 1-230
- R Oct 30 Steinbeck, The grapes of wrath, pp. 231-445
- Sun Nov 2 3:00 PM, Watson Forum: film screening of parts 1-2 of "When the levees broke"**
- M Nov 3 7:00 PM, Watson Forum: film screening of parts 3-4 of "When the levees broke"**

- T Nov 4 Lee, When the levees broke; Douglass, Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, pp. 3-46
- R Nov 6 Douglass, Narrative..., pp. 46-86; Butler, Parable of the sower, pp. 1-6
- T Nov 11 Butler, Parable of the sower, pp. 7-149
- R Nov 13 Butler, Parable of the sower, pp. 151-329
- T Nov 18 **Paper #3 due at beginning of class—bring 4 copies. In-class editing workshop.**
- R Nov 20 Frankl, Man's search for meaning, pp. 3-93 (optional: pp. 97-154)
- M Nov 24 Paper #3 due (by email) before 12:00 noon.**
- T Nov 25 Golfing & Golfing, "An essay on utopian possibility"; Tillich, "Critique and justification of utopia" [both in library reserves]
- R Nov 27 **T'GIVING BREAK: Read Parable of the talents over the break!**
- T Dec 2 Butler, Parable of the talents, pp. 1-133
- R Dec 4 Butler, Parable of the talents, pp. 135-275
- T Dec 9 Butler, Parable of the talents, pp. 276-408
- R Dec 11 Lynch, "Reconciling utopia and dystopia in social critique" & "The functions of utopia: blueprint or critique?" [both are PDF files]
- W Dec 17 Paper #4 due (by email) before 4:00 PM. (This is the end of our scheduled final exam period.)**
- M 15-F 19 An oral final exam will be scheduled during finals week.**

DIALOGUES WITH UTOPIA

A utopia, it seems, is a perfect society, where everyone lives in harmony and happiness. But utopia, literally, is no place. So why is it that there have been so many different visions of utopia? How is it that the idea of utopia has continually inspired theoretical analyses of society, fictional imaginations of a better world, and even historical attempts to create such a perfect society? In this course, we'll draw on literature, history, and philosophy to try to grapple with the meaning and importance of utopias and utopian thinking. We'll engage in a series of "dialogues with utopia"—utopian visions in dialogue with the ideas and issues of their contemporaries, but also our own dialogue between ourselves and with these utopian visions—in order to ask what these utopias tell us about what we think is good, whether a utopian vision can offer an effective critique of actually existing social orders, and whether it can serve as a model for changing contemporary societies.

We'll be engaged in lots of discussion—this is, after all, a seminar. I hope that we will be able to use these texts and questions to reflect upon our experiences, and perhaps to challenge some of our presuppositions—please bring your own questions, concerns and agenda to the conversation! The most important thing you can do to succeed in this class is to come prepared every day, so that we can all learn from each other's questions and insights. The reading requirements for this class are high—the number of pages per session will occasionally be quite long (i.e., novels) or dense (philosophical prose). (I know that you'll have a *lot* of reading—but I promise that this is *fun* reading, and most of the novels are page-turners.) Be forewarned—welcome to college!

THE FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR AS PART OF A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

This course is intentionally designed to be one of the first courses you take at DePauw University—it's a chance for us to immerse ourselves in the ethos of a liberal arts education and to explore ideas that are interesting and important to us. Along the way, we'll also develop a number of academic skills that are constitutive of this liberal arts ethos. In this light, here are a few of the goals that I hope we can work toward (these goals also reflect my approach to learning and doing philosophy):

Our first goal will be to learn something, in this case, about various utopian visions—literary, historical, and philosophical—and how they reflect or challenge their and our values and beliefs. This means not only a familiarity with some of the thinkers, but also with the questions and problems that motivated them, and problems that we inherit from them. Along the way, we'll be able also to learn about our own values and motivations. This second task, self-reflection, discovery, and critique, is intimately connected with, and perhaps more important than, the more externally-oriented goal of learning about others' utopian visions. We will accomplish this double-goal, most immediately through our reading, reflection, and discussion.

But reading is *not* a passive activity. I don't want us to simply "absorb" what these thinkers are saying. Rather, we'll need to *challenge the texts, and engage in a dialogue with them*, in order to articulate our own intelligent responses to their ideas. So our second goal will be to learn how to read, and how to read difficult texts in particular. Now of course, we all learned how to read in elementary school, right? Well, we'll soon see that reading—especially, but not exclusively, when one is reading philosophical or argumentative texts—involves a lot more than understanding all of the words in a sentence. To read effectively, we have to be able to analyze the texts and their underlying questions and concerns. This involves *interpretation*, i.e., recognizing what the author is arguing, and *assessment*, responding to the argument (with questions such as: Is it logically sound?, Is it correct?, Do I agree?, Does it trouble me?, To what extent?, Why?).

Notice that reading philosophy and literature draws on a number of advanced cognitive skills—interpretation and evaluation, as well as understanding. For many of us, it will be a challenge to develop these reading-and-thinking skills. But we'll be able to help each other grasp and grapple with the texts through our discussion. So our third goal will be to improve our oral expression and discussion skills. If you're struggling to understand a text, or aren't sure if your criticism of an idea works, *ask questions*, both inside and outside of class, to me and to your classmates. If you think you've got it, don't be afraid to offer your own answers to these questions, and perspectives on and criticisms of the texts. Your classmates will be able to help you, in a low-stress, low-stakes way, to better understand the text and your own reaction to it. Our interactive dialogue in discussion can help all of us to understand the texts and each other better, and to be more articulate ourselves. As we become more articulate in classroom discussions, this will also help us to become better, clearer writers.

Our fourth goal is to develop our ability to write effectively and concisely. This course will feature two basic kinds of writing assignments: short pieces that aim to clarify what you've read as well as to improve your ability to interpret and evaluate those ideas, and longer essays in which you use what you've read to develop your own argument in your own voice. Careful critical thinking and effective, clear writing go hand in hand—each develops and improves the other.

This brings us to our fifth goal for the semester, which is to develop our own ability to think critically—not only about the ethical problems that we confront through our readings, but also those in our lives beyond the classroom, and ourselves. Our assessment of the readings will provide an initial occasion to develop this skill. Furthermore, though reading and writing are in large measure solitary activities, reflection and thinking are not. We will need to engage in dialogue and argument with each other, as well as with the texts, both in and out of class, in order to discover the strengths and weaknesses of these past writers' views, as well as our own. Our in-class discussions and frequent writing projects will also develop our critical skills, in group and alone.

As you can see, these five goals are interwoven and mutually supporting. But they do require some effort on your part. So, in order to help us meet these goals, I expect:

- (1) that you will have read the assigned texts before class, so we will be able to discuss them; and
- (2) that you will come prepared to discuss the ideas and arguments presented in the reading—this means that you will have questions, comments, quibbles, or other responses, which you will be ready to share and discuss with the group; and
- (3) that you will work to clearly and carefully articulate your own argumentative engagements with the ideas and readings in the various writing assignments throughout the semester.

Our time together in class represents a focused time when we can work toward these goals together, but much of this work will happen outside of our scheduled meetings—on your own, reading, writing, and thinking; with each other in small groups; and one-on-one with me in consultations. Take advantage of all of these opportunities—the more you put into it, the more you'll gain.

A few tips: You will find that the assigned readings can be rather difficult. Be sure to allow enough time to do the reading—don't start reading the day's assignment in the morning before class. A second reading before class (this you could do in the morning, or at lunch right before class) and another reread (or skim) after the discussion can prove to be very helpful. You will be prepared for discussion if you have questions about the texts (especially the more difficult ones), interpretations or assessments of the arguments presented, counterpoints, and/or criticisms. When responding to these texts, you may remember that there isn't necessarily any single "right answer" and you should develop your own views. As discussion and dialogue are so important for academic discourse (and philosophy in particular), the final exam will be an oral exam.

Finally, I am a resource for you. I want to help you understand the texts and ideas, master these skills, and develop your own values and voice. I'm available here in class and in my office, by phone and email. If you ever have questions, difficulties, or insights, please feel free to bring them up. Since I'll be your advisor, just about anything you want to talk about—including how things are going in other classes—is fair game.

My office hours are times that I've especially reserved for meeting with students—please come by during these times: I'm here for you. I will definitely be available during those times—if you can't see me during my office hours (because of work, other classes, or whatever), I'm happy to schedule appointments at other times. Furthermore, you're always welcome to drop by *anytime* to talk about class, life, the pennant races, or whatever. If I'm free, we'll talk. You can always talk to me immediately following class, or email or call to schedule an appointment.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

These graded assignments are intended to help you develop certain components of good reflective and critical thinking—the goals I've discussed above: careful reading, good writing, and articulate oral expression.

- (1) FOUR PAPERS (each paper is weighted differently; 55% of your course grade in total):

The first paper is what I'd describe as a "précis-plus" (500 words, about 1-2 pages): you'll need to succinctly summarize some important point or passages in More's Utopia, and then begin to critically assess or respond to that point or passage. You have a lot of freedom to define the scope of your paper—you can determine which point or passages you wish to speak about. (Despite its shortness, you may well find that short papers are harder to write well than longer papers.) The first complete ("final") version, due on Monday, Sep 8, is worth 5% of the course grade. A rewritten version, due Friday, Sep 19, will *also* count 5%, so in sum this paper is worth 10% of the course grade.

The second paper must address (articulate, assess, and critically respond to) a topic or theme arising from Mead, Freud, and/or Huxley. This paper should be 4-6 pages in length, and is worth 10% of the course grade.

The third paper will be similar in scope to the second, but should address Steinbeck, Douglass, Lee's film, and/or Butler's Parable of the sower (material from fall break to the first Butler

novel). This paper should be 4-6 pages in length, and is worth 15% of the course grade. We will spend one class period editing each other's papers before they are turned in for me to grade.

The fourth paper, due at the end of our scheduled final exam period, is an opportunity for you to develop a more extensive argument, considering all of the themes we've discussed in the semester (including the material since the last paper). In particular, this is your chance to respond to, or develop an argument like, *Golfing & Golfing*, *Tillich*, or *Lynch*. This paper should be 6-10 pages in length, and is worth 20% of the course grade.

Except for the day when we'll edit each others' papers, the papers are all due on non-meeting days. (That way you never have reading and writing due on the same day.) We can talk more about the requirements and expectations for all of these papers during the semester.

(2) ONE MIDTERM EXAM (15% of the final grade):

This is scheduled for our last class before fall break—don't leave early! We'll talk more about the format of the exam later in the semester.

(3) TWO ORAL PRESENTATIONS (1st is 7.5%, 2nd is 15% of the final grade; 22.5% total):

Once in each half of the semester, you and another student will give a joint oral presentation to the class, and then lead the discussion. Essentially, you and your partner will be responsible for teaching the day's material (with me as your safety net). You'll have two discrete tasks in these presentations: a clear summary or outline of the ideas in the day's reading; and facilitation of the group discussion. Your presentation should focus on the assigned material—I don't expect outside or additional research, though you're welcome to do so. You'll be required to meet with me in advance to discuss the presentation, as well as discussion-leading strategies. We'll talk more about this, as well as pick our presentation days, later in the semester.

(4) AN ORAL FINAL EXAM (7.5% of the final grade):

These will be scheduled during final exam week. I anticipate that this exam will be one-on-one, and will probably last about 15-20 minutes. Think of the exam as a conversation, reflecting the importance of discussion in philosophy. I will provide more information about, and we will discuss the nature of, an oral exam as the semester moves along.

(5) Active class participation:

Discussion is absolutely essential for any intellectual enterprise, especially in a course exploring ethical values and ideas. Class participation is not given a percentile weight for the purposes of determining your grade, but it will affect your final course grade— if your grade is on a borderline, I'll look to class participation to see which way the scales tip. If you miss too many classes, or are present but "deadweight," your final grade may be reduced; if you consistently *come prepared and participate* in class, this could improve your final grade (not to mention that you'll probably do better on the written and oral assessments as a result of your participation). If you skip a lot of classes, or disappear halfway through the semester, even if you do "A" quality work, you will fail or be dropped from the course. *We are all responsible adults, and I don't expect this to be a problem.* But I reserve the right to implement a more formal (and draconian) policy if necessary.

(6) Short homework assignments and unannounced in-class quizzes:

On unpredictable and irregular occasions, I will give you homework assignments or short little in-class "pop quizzes." Many of these will ask you to explain a "gobbet," a short chunk of text, from a phrase to several sentences long, which I will ask you to locate and explain. Usually I'll pick a pithy quote with a big idea or an important summary or transition. You should be able to explain what the sentence means, where it fits within an argument or idea, and what its significance is. *These assignments and quizzes will not count separately in your final grade (think of them as free feedback)*, but will give me a good indication of your participation and preparation—they thus will be considered as part of class participation (5). These quizzes will also give you practice for your papers and the "gobbet" portion of the exam.

(N.B.) You can think for yourself, and I expect you to exercise good common sense:

This means that mutual respect and cordiality should characterize our discussions, even if they sometimes get heated (passion in our convictions is a good thing and not to be discouraged, but it should not lead to disrespect of others). And we can and should learn from each other in our conversations. But we're all old enough to understand the difference between learning from someone and stealing their ideas or words. *This means that plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any sort will not be tolerated.* No excuses, no bullshit.

TEXTS

There are 12 required texts (available at Fine Print Bookstore and the bookstore in the UB):

More, Thomas, Utopia, revised edition, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002, ISBN# 0521525403
Mead, Margaret, Coming of age in Samoa, Harper Collins, 2001, ISBN# 0699050336
Freud, Sigmund, Civilization and its discontents, Norton, 1989, ISBN# 0393301583
Huxley, Aldous, Brave new world, Harper Perennial, 2006, ISBN# 9780060850524
Tucker, Robert C., ed., The Marx-Engels reader, 2nd edition, Norton, 1978, ISBN# 039309040X
Goldman, Emma, Anarchism and other essays, Dover, 1969, ISBN# 0486224848
Le Guin, Ursula K., The dispossessed, Harper Prism, 1994, ISBN# 0061054887
Steinbeck, John, The grapes of wrath, Penguin Classics, 2006, ISBN# 9780143039433
Douglass, Frederick, Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave, written by himself, Yale University Press, 2001, ISBN# 9780300087017
Butler, Octavia, Parable of the sower, Grand Central Publishing, 2000, ISBN# 9780446675505
Frankl, Victor, Man's search for meaning, Beacon Press, 2006, ISBN# 9780807014295
Butler, Octavia, Parable of the talents, Aspect, 2001, ISBN# 9780446675789

You're welcome to buy these texts wherever you'd like. (Some, but not all, of the texts can be purchased more cheaply at amazon.com.) But be sure to get the *exact* edition that I've ordered—different editions have different pages, and if your pages don't match the rest of us, you'll be screwed. The ISBN# (International Standard Book Number, either 10- or 13-digits) is unique to that edition, and you can search by that number in amazon, etc.

In addition to these texts, I will ask you to read several shorter articles. These texts are available at the ROW library reserves desk, and you can make your own photocopies. (Since there is only one copy of the book on reserve, you can't all get it the night before our class discussion. So plan ahead, and go make the photocopies early—you could do this in the 1st or 2nd week of classes—and then you won't be rushed later.) These readings are:

For Oct 7:

Zeno, "ii. Zeno," pp. 106-112 in Philip Wheelwright, ed., The presocratics (1966)
ROW Reserves: B 188.W54 1966

Freire, Paulo, "Chapter 2," pp. 52-67 in Pedagogy of the oppressed (1970/1993) ROW
Reserves: LB 880.F72 P4313 1993

For Nov 25:

Golffing, Francis and Barbara Golffing, "An essay on utopian possibility," pp. 29-39 in
George Kateb, ed., Utopia (1971) ROW Reserves: HX 806.K27 1971

Tillich, Paul, "Critique and justification of utopia," pp. 296-309 in Frank E. Manuel, ed.,
Utopias and utopian thought (1966) ROW Reserves: HX 806.M35

For Dec 11:

Lynch, Richard, "Reconciling utopia and dystopia in social critique: Tillich and Butler through each other's eyes" and "The functions of utopia: blueprint or critique?" Both of these papers will be emailed to you as PDF files.

Bonus, just for fun (read it if you'd like, when you have time):

Le Guin, Ursula K., "The day before the revolution," pp. 232-246 in Le Guin, The wind's twelve quarters (1975) ROW Reserves: PS 3562.E42 W56 1975 This is a short story about a day from Odo's life, with a few prefatory remarks about The dispossessed.