UTOPIA AND POLITICAL RHETORIC

ENGLISH 30 – Honors Freshman Rhetoric and Composition
Spring 2003

Instructor: Steven Thomas
office: 146 South Burrowes
office phone: 865 - 9005
e-mail: swt116@psu.edu
mail box: 116 South Burrowes

This class will focus on the concept of utopia as a tactic of political argument. We will begin with the history of both political argument (namely Aristotle) and the word utopia (first coined by Thomas More). We will then look at other uses of the utopian concept – its parodies, its anti-utopian (or distopian) forms, and its plural (or heterotopian) locations. We will examine the concept of utopia as both a problematic tool of political rhetoric and as an ambivalent element of modern culture.

At the same time, I want you to refine your talents at public discourse and academic writing. You will be expected to engage with the public sphere in both its overtly political and its subtly cultural dimensions. You will also be expected to learn the tools of college research and the protocols of college writing. My hope is that reflecting on the meaning of utopia will give you an interesting and fun perspective on the challenges of public discourse in general, but I also hope it will give you insight into one of public discourse’s specific forms – academic writing.

Required Texts:

Aristotle. The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle.
Thomas More. Utopia.
Jonathan Swift. Gulliver’s Travels and Other Writings
Henry Giroux. The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence.
Course Packet (at the Student Bookstore only):
 Plato. Critias
 selections from Plato’s Republic
 Francis Bacon. New Atlantis
 selections from John Locke’s Two Treatises on Government
 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Communist Manifesto
 Ursula K. Le Guin. “Schrodinger’s Cat” and “She Unnames Them”
 selection from Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man
 Alifa Rifaat. “My World of the Unknown”
 Lunsford and Connors. Easy Writer (recommended)
Assignments:

Public Discourse

- One Personal Reflection (2-3 pages double spaced)
- Two Editorials (300 words each)
- One Advertisement Analysis (2-3 pages double spaced)
- One Group Oral Presentation on a Utopian / Distopian Novel or Non-fiction Writing
  (3 people per group; 6-7 minutes per presentation)
- Participation in class and on-line in the message board within Angel
  (<www.angel.psu.edu>)

Academic Writing

- One Research Project (in 3 steps)
  - What are the Issues Research Paper (5-6 pages double spaced)
  - Rough Draft of Final Paper (7-8 pages double spaced)
  - Final Paper (8-10 pages double spaced)

Grading and Requirements:

I expect you to

1. attend all class meetings prepared
2. participate in class discussions
3. participate in on-line discussions
4. perform in-class writing exercises
5. participate in group work and draft workshops
6. complete all written and oral assignments on time, in the proper format, and according to the assignment’s guidelines

15% Participation (in class and on-line discussion, group work, preparedness for class)
5% Self Reflection
5% First Editorial
10% Advertisement Analysis
15% Second Editorial
10% Group Oral Presentation
15% What are the Issues Paper
5% Rough Draft of Final Paper
20% Final Paper

Format for Written Assignments:

Essays must be typed, printed in black ink, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. In the upper left hand corner, place your name, name of assignment, course number, my name, and the date. This should be single spaced. All pages subsequent to the first page must be numbered in the upper right hand corner with your last name and the page number. All of your papers must have an interesting, but not ridiculous, title that is centered. You do not need a separate title page. Fasten pages with a staple. You should not write more nor less than what is specified for each assignment.

Guidelines for Assignments:

Self Reflection Paper (2-3 pages double spaced): In this paper, I expect you to synthesize two tasks: (1) reflect on your own personal history as a writer; (2) think generally about what writing is and what it is for. Some questions to ask yourself are why do you write? In the past, why have you chosen certain topics rather than others? What is you relation to the topic and to the audience? Who are you when you write?
How do you go about putting a paper together? I expect you to illustrate your general thoughts with specific examples, and I expect you to consider the reading assigned and the ideas discussed in class.

**Editorial #1 (300 words):** You will write an editorial to the *Daily Collegian* about any issue. Your editorial may not be more than 300 words long. The goal is to be as persuasive as you can about your view on the issue. Thus, you need to have a clear point, a lively prose style, convincing reasons, and sufficient evidence (i.e. research). You need to relate to your readers, show how the issue matters to them, and establish yourself as a credible spokesperson about this issue. And you need to do all that in 300 words or less. If you use sources, please also include a bibliography whether you cite them or not. After the editorial, please also write a “Reflection” on this assignment, which need only be 4-6 sentences. In this “Reflection”, I’d like you to think about how you approached this assignment. I’d also like to you think about who your audience was and how you tried to appeal to them. In other words, what was your “rhetorical situation.”

**Editorial #2 (300 words):** This is the same assignment as the Editorial #1, except that you must choose a periodical other than the *Daily Collegian*. I suggest a magazine with a particular kind of audience, like *The Nation*, *Harper’s*, *The New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Vogue*, *Sports Illustrated*, etc., but you are allowed to choose. You will need to familiarize yourself with the periodical to make an educated guess about its audience, values, and expectations. Even if you think you know the periodical already, try to look at it again with fresh eyes. Then write an editorial that strongly asserts your view on an issue in a way that would appeal to the readership of that periodical. As with the first editorial, also write a “Reflection.”

**Advertisement Analysis (2-3 pages):** You will find an advertisement in a periodical and analyze its rhetorical situation. What is its purpose? Its message? Its values? Its social context? How does it appeal to the specific readership of the periodical in which you found it? Naturally, the creators of the advertisement spent a lot of time and money thinking about these things, so I expect you to consider these issues carefully by questioning your own assumptions about the readership and about how you respond to advertisements. Since this is a class on “utopia”, I’d also like you to pick an ad that seems in some way utopian. In other words, choose something that seems to exhibit (whether consciously or unconsciously) some of the ambivalent or contradictory values that More’s *Utopia* ironically reflects upon.

**Group Oral Presentation (6-7 minutes):** You will form a group of 3 people. Your group will choose one of the utopian books from the list of recommended texts. I suggest you not wait until the last minute, but visit the library early to look through several of the texts. Give yourself time to acquire the book, since you may want to order it from a bookstore or request copies from other libraries. Together, you will work on an oral presentation for the class that will explain and analyze the book. You are allowed to be creative with the form of your presentation, but it must not be more than 7 minutes, and all three members must speak a somewhat equal amount. I expect your presentation to consider that your audience is not familiar with the book. They will also be listening to 8 presentations, and may get a little bored. Therefore, your job is to be as clear as possible about the contents of the book, as interesting as possible about what’s worthwhile or worthless about the book, and as insightful as possible about how it relates to this course.

**Research Project:** The second half of this course will be devoted to a final research paper. The purpose of this assignment is two-fold: you will learn the proper protocols of academic writing, and you will consider the role academia plays in understanding issues that matter to the public outside of the academic sphere. You will choose a current issue that interests you. By current, I mean it is an issue that people are discussing within the past two months, in some medium (magazines, newspapers, books, TV). I have broken this assignment up into three steps, which are steps I recommend you take on all research papers
that you write during your career as a college student. You may find after step one that your issue is rather
broad, and you will need to focus on some specific aspect of your issue.

**Step One – What are the Issues? (5-6 pages):** The purpose of this paper is to get a sense of the
conversation about the issue. You should discover the various points of view and understand what their
arguments are. You should learn who is most invested in this issue, who is involved, and whom it affects.
Naturally, you must also explain the context for the issue (i.e. how it came to be an issue in the first
place), and its history. You should not venture your own opinion in this paper. However, you should
reflect on how your personal biases as well as the limitations of your access to knowledge influence your
perception of the conversation and how you portray it in the paper. Only at the conclusion of this paper
should you suggest possible theses that your final paper might attempt to prove; I'd like you to keep an
open mind and speculate on two or three possibilities. You will print out two copies of this paper, and one
of them, you will share with class-mates. Your class-mates will read the paper and suggest directions your
final paper might take.

**Step Two – Rough Draft? (7-8 pages):** Now you will begin formulating your thesis about this
issue. There are several approaches you could take. Perhaps you want to suggest a solution to the
problem. Or perhaps, you merely want to assess what is causing the problem or conflict in the first place.
Or perhaps you simply want to evaluate the situation – whether it is good, bad, or whatever. Or you may
wish to focus on defining a crucial concept whose meaning is unclear or contested. Or you may want to
discuss whose jurisdiction this issue falls under. The point of this paper is to formulate your thesis, build
your argument – reasons, evidence, and appeals. Your goal is to be clear and persuasive. You will print
out two copies of this paper, and one of them you will share with class-mates, who will evaluate your
work and offer constructive criticism.

**Step Three – Final Draft? (8-10 pages):** I expect you to continue researching even after you
write the rough draft. You will try to improve upon your rough draft. It's possible that you may want to
significantly revise the arrangement or even the thesis of the paper.

**Participation:**
I expect you to be an active participant in this class. This means coming to class prepared, volunteering to
raise and answer questions, and posting your thoughts on the Angel message board. This also means
respecting the questions and ideas of others. When I say “respect”, I do not mean “agree with.” You may
disagree with your classmates and engage them in furious debate (and I encourage you to do so), but it is
important to do so in a way that respects their position and their person. You will discover that your own
arguments are far more convincing when you respect others’ views. I will be grading you not only on the
frequency of your participation (both in class and in Angel), but also on the manner of your participation
and the thoughtfulness of your statements.

**On-line participation with Angel:** You can access this by going to <www.angel.psu.edu> and typing in
your student ID and password. This is a tool that we will use throughout the semester to facilitate our on­
going conversation about various issues, reading, and writing assignments. I expect everyone to
participate on the message board – which I've entitled “Commonplaces” – every week. Occasionally I
will post questions or small activities either on the message board or as a lesson, so be sure to check and
review Angel before each class. This space is primarily for discussing the reading and writing
assignments, but I encourage you to bring in examples (such as current events from the news or such as
cultural artifacts like movies, paintings, or music) to illustrate your ideas and stimulate conversation. In
addition, there is a chat-room called “Utopia” which anyone can access as desired.
**Attendance Policy:**
Regular attendance is required. Your grade may be lowered for poor attendance. This is University policy. Specifically, you are permitted two absences. Above that number, I reserve the right to reduce your grade as I consider appropriate.

If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the assignments, class notes, etc. from a classmate; it is also your responsibility to keep track of and complete the missing work. Whenever you are absent or expect to be absent, I suggest you contact me as soon as possible.

If you miss class on the day a written assignment is due, make arrangements to send it along with a classmate.

**Academic Integrity:**
I expect all work that you hand in to be your own; I expect you to cite all sources that you use, quote, paraphrase, and/or summarize. It is a crime to do otherwise. Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. This is University policy.

**Non-Discrimination Policy:** Please note that Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible. It should go without saying that the university respects students of all races, heritages, genders, sexual preferences, economic backgrounds, religions, ideologies, and national origins. And it should go without saying that the university encourages all kinds of students to pursue their education and will accommodate any special demand that such identity politics place on the student. Although I believe that this should all go without saying, I believe it is important to keep saying it lest we forget the importance of this policy in the tradition of this university.
English 30 Calendar  
Spring 2003 – Steven Thomas

Unit One -- Public Discourse

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
<th>Readings Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>hand out of Hughes and Tan</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>What’s Rhetoric?</td>
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<td>Aristotle: bk 1, ch.1-2</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Introduce Editorial</td>
<td>Rhetorical Situation/Reflection</td>
<td>Aristotle: intro, summary, ch.3</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>LIBRARY – class is in 315 W. Pattee</td>
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<td>Begin More’s Utopia</td>
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<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>the problem of rhetoric</td>
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<td>Utopia, finish bk 1</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>introduce ad analysis</td>
<td>Editorial #1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Feb.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>meanings of utopia</td>
<td>Find utopian magazine ad</td>
<td>Utopia, bk 2; letters, p. 108-33</td>
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<td>ethos, pathos, logos, value</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>lines of argument, logic and fallacies</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>consumer culture</td>
<td>Advertisement Analysis</td>
<td>Giroux, introduction</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>problem of knowledge</td>
<td>Choice for Group Project</td>
<td>begin Plato’s Republic</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>dialectic and topos</td>
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<td>finish Republic</td>
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Feb. 21st, 4:00 pm, Heritage Hall, HUB – Prof. Michael Hardt speaks about Democracy, War, and Revolution

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<td>25</td>
<td>style and arrangement</td>
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