This is a text-based course that addresses one or two books per week. Music and film will occupy a few of the sessions. The unifying theme is the ways in which writers and other artists over the past two millennia have imagined perfect or just societies and, more recently, how they imagined perfectly unjust and nightmarish societies. These works are pleasurable in and of themselves, and the names will be familiar to anyone; actually reading them and understanding them in their respective historical and cultural contexts is intrinsically useful. Writers from Plato to Milton to Orwell may be considered “great” to some, “white men” to others, and both need to be considered; they are undeniably part of the shared idiom of the modern world, and mastering them offers a shared language (think Paradise Lost, Utopia, Newspeak, Big Brother) and a set of motifs (The Man in the Cave, The Class Struggle). They have percolated into the popular culture, some of it in decidedly trashy or campy form but no less thoughtfully and influentially.

At the same time we aim to sharpen tools that will be useful in any academic or professional setting. Any text is a proposition: it contains an argument and is based on explicit or more often implicit assumptions about the ways of the world, nature, nurture, and the better society. As we delve into these intricacies in the lectures and recitations, we will be enhancing our capacity to engage our minds and each other, and we should produce better arguments, insights, and rhetoric. Any text also has its context: it is best understood as a response to its surroundings and we will aim to identify what is specific to a time and place and disentangle it from what is transferrable. And as we trace these texts over time, we will establish some basic markers of historical change: what was and was not imaginable in, say, 400 BCE, and what was imaginable and not imaginable in 1991? It is one way to look at and speculate about change over time in the broadest sense.

The recitations will deepen the discussion and work with each student in a more intimate setting. Our vastly qualified preceptors will be in a better position to gauge what is or is not being understood and tailor the discussion accordingly. For the same reasons the preceptors are primarily responsible for grading, based on the following breakdown:
30 percent: attendance and preparedness in lectures and recitations, and useful contributions to discussion;  
30 percent: midterm paper;  
40 percent: final paper.

Midterm paper:  
This should be 5-10 pages in length. It will choose a topic (e.g., the nature of man, the idea of time) and compare how it is used in at least four of the texts we have discussed. It should show an awareness of the historical and cultural context of each text by way of footnotes and bibliography, but it is fundamentally based on the texts which should be cited specifically and liberally to illustrate points.

Final Paper:  
This is due on the last day of class. It will be similar to the midterm paper but it should use one text from the first part of the semester and at least three from the second. It can be 10-15 pages in length.

All books are on order in the bookstore. Please feel free to order them online, too, but we must all work from the same edition.

Tuesday, 4 September: Introduction: Ideology, politics, and text

Thursday, 6 September, and Tuesday, 11 September  
The Republic of Plato, edited by Cornford (Oxford edition)

Thursday, 13 September, and Tuesday, 18 September:  
Xenophon, The Persian Expedition (Penguin Classics)

Thursday, 20 September and Tuesday, 25 September  
Thomas More, Utopia (Cambridge)

Thursday, 27 September and Tuesday, 2 October:  

Thursday, 4 October and Tuesday, 9 October:  
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto (Penguin Classics) (Mickisch and Yanni Kotsonis)

Thursday, 11 October:  
H.G. Wells, The Time Machine (Norton Critical) (Gombos)
Tuesday, 16 October.
Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (Bantam Classics) (Salvati)

**FIRST PAPER DUE: Recitation, 19 October**

Thursday, 18 October, and Tuesday, 23 October
Evgenii Zamiatin, *We* (Penguin Classics)

Thursday, 25 October and Tuesday, 30 October
Mikhail Bulgakov, *Master and Margarita* (Grove Press).
Optional: Bulgakov, *Heart of a Dog* (Grove Press)

Thursday, 1 November and Tuesday, 6 November
Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (Harper Perennial Modern Classics)

Thursday, 8 November and Tuesday, 13 November
George Orwell, *1984* (Signet Classics)

Thursday, 15 November and Tuesday, 20 November
Film: Starship Troopers and others

Tuesday, 27 November and Thursday, 29 November
Film: Robocop

Tuesday, 4 December and Thursday, 6 December
Film: Demolition Man and others

Tuesday, 11 December
Music:
Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” and its sources.
John Lennon’s “Imagine.”
The Kinks, “Twentieth Century Man.”
The Internationale

**SECOND PAPER DUE, December 14 recitation**