We all have difficulty living in the present. We find ourselves stretched between the past and the future, flung into a world we did not seem to create and yearning for something better. We have expectations of the world and even fantasies of other ones. Our thought often transcends this world, leaving reality behind, and the stories we tell of other, better worlds can often be critiques of our own. Sometimes inspired by these stories we develop and implement projects for the transformation of this world and even of ourselves.

A name invented by Thomas More (d. 1535) for his novel of the same name, “utopia” is a neologism based upon the Greek “ou” (not) and “topos” (place), meaning “no place.” However, it also plays on the similarity between “ou” and the Greek word and prefix, “eu,” which means “good” or “well,” thus making this “no place” a “good place.” More’s Utopia describes a virtuous society and thus implicitly engages in a political and social critique of his own. This book had precedents, classical texts, which More himself knew, such as Plato’s Republic, and its popularity led to the common use of the terms, “utopia,” “utopian,” and “utopianism.” “Utopian” is sometimes used in earnest, but it is also employed as a term of abuse for those we deem “unrealistic” or “starry-eyed.” By the mid-twentieth century concerns about capitalism, modernity, scientific development, totalitarianism, and even failed attempts at utopia were expressed in art by the inversion of utopia: dystopia, which by the end of the twentieth century was a major literary and cinematic genre.

The literature of utopia is massive and the number of social projects that can be labeled “utopian” is myriad. We will in this course only address a small selection of the sources. Our goal is to examine the ongoing conversation about utopia in Western (i.e, ancient Greek and Roman, Western Mediterranean Christian, modern European, and Euro-American) cultural history. In looking at some parts of this complex and at times contradictory tradition we will develop a set of questions, which can be asked of utopian literature. Furthermore, we will also examine our own relationship to this literary, ethical, and political tradition.

Some of the questions we will ask of different authors and imagined utopian communities are:
1. What are the primary conventions of utopia as a literary genre?
2. What is the human being according to a particular utopia? Is there a presupposed human nature?
3. What is justice and the just society?
4. How do we get to utopia?
5. What is the role of education in utopia?
6. How important is individual liberty in utopia? How important is the collective for the individual in utopia? Is a state necessary?
7. What is the role of technology in a given utopia?
8. What are the relations between the sexes like in utopia?
9. What is the function of utopia in the text? Is it earnest? Is it ironic or satirical?
10. Where does utopia take place? The future? The past? A distant land? What is the function of the spatiality and temporality in the text describing utopia?
11. How does utopia relate to the world? Does it? Is it a model for how the world should be?
12. How is utopia a critique of current society?
13. What is the relationship between utopia and the author who describes it?
14. What is the relationship of utopia to dystopia and vice versa?
15. What is the relationship between utopia and religion? In particular, how does it relate to Christianity in the West? Does it result from it or arise within it? If so, why does utopian thinking seem to increase with the apparent decline of religion in modernity?
16. What are the fundamental problems a given utopian text aims to solve? How do we know these are problems?

Classroom Etiquette
Please be on time to both lecture and recitation section: it is distracting to others, including the professor, when students arrive late. Students should bring the reading with them to each class. Unless you have an excellent memory it will be difficult for you to do well in this course if you do not take notes in lecture. I suggest you take notes by hand in a notebook. However, if you choose to use an electronic device please do not go online, answer email, etc. This will distract you as well as the people around you. I may ask you to leave the room if your computer usage is distracting. Please silence your phone and do not have it out during lecture. Computers/electronic readers should only be for taking notes and accessing the reading.

Recitation sections: Unless it is to look at the reading or you have received some waiver of exception you may not use a computer in the recitation. The purpose of the recitation is to participate in a conversation, not to accrue information that needs to be written down.

Course Requirements
*Attendance (20%): Students must attend lecture and participate in section: There will be a reduction of the final grade proportionate to the frequency of unexcused absences. Excessive tardiness will be reckoned as absence.
*Short Papers (15%): There will be several very short assignments on weekly readings. Students will receive a prompt for all written assignments. These short papers will be due by 8:00 pm on Wednesdays.
*Midterm Examination (15%): identification, short answer, and short essay.
*Personal Utopian Project (15%): In this assignment students are asked to describe their own notion of utopia, criticize that notion, and then compose a rebuttal of this criticism (6-8 pages).
*Thematic Essay (15%): The purpose of this assignment is to reflect upon one theme and how it is played out in several readings from the syllabus (6 pages).
*Final Examination (20%): identification, short answer, and short essay.

More formal descriptions of each assignment will be provided as they are assigned.

Students are responsible for any distributed additional readings.

There are no rewrites for papers. Unexcused late assignments are reduced a grade for each day late (e.g., an A becomes an A-). Do not plagiarize. Plagiarized assignments will receive a failing grade and the plagiarism will be reported to the relevant superior office.

# a required text available at the bookstore   *a text available online at NYU Classes
COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1
Sept. 8: There’s No Place like Utopia

Week 2
Sept. 13: Ancient Precedents; Plato’s Ideal City and Self

Sept. 15: Plato’s Ideal City and Self
#Plato, Republic, Bks II-V

Week 3
Sept. 20: Plato’s Ideal City and Self
#Plato, Republic, Bks VI-VII

Sept. 22: Plato’s Ideal City and Self
#Plato, Republic, VIII-X

Week 4
Sept. 27: Hebrew Bible: Eden, Torah (Law), and the Temple; Exile, Prophecy, and the End of History
*Genesis 1-3
*Deuteronomy 1, 4-18, 22-28, 34
*Isaiah 40-45, 49-55 (Second Isaiah)
(All Bible readings should be in the NRSV or RSV version)

Sept. 29: New Testament: The New Jerusalem and a New Community Not of this World
*Apocalypse of John 1-2, 4-9, 11:15-11:19, and 17-22 (Skim through whole).
*Matthew 5-7
*1 Peter

Week 5
Oct. 4: The Invisible City of God and the Earthly City of Man; The Christian Monastery and the Return to Eden
*St. Augustine, City of God, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 1984), I.preface, 35; XII.28; XIV.28; XV.1-2, 4-6; XVIII.1-2, 47, 49; XXII.23-24, 29-30 (pp. 5-6, 45-46; 508-9; 593-4; 595-8, 599-603; 761-5, 828-30, 831-2; 1069-76, 1081-91). Summary of whole pp. lxii-lxiii in the introduction to the translation.
(also see summary pp. xxxvii-xxxviii and at: http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/civ.html).

Oct. 6: The Expulsion of the Idols: The Reformation
*Martin Luther, “Friendly Admonition to Peace concerning the Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants (1525),” in Hillerbrand, The Protestant Reformation, 67-87.

**Week 6**
Oct. 12: Thomas More: The Naming of Utopia (NOTE: This is a Tuesday)


**Week 7**
Oct. 18: Midterm Examination

Oct. 20: Noble Savages and New World Utopias

**Week 8**
Oct. 25: Enlightenment Utopia


**Week 9**
Nov. 1: “Utopian Socialism” and the Communist Manifesto (1848)

Nov. 3: Karl Marx and Nineteenth-Century Anarchism
*Tucker, The Marx-Engels Reader, 53-54, 222-228, 236-246, 70-81, 143-145, 149-165, 172-175, 186-188.
Week 10
Nov. 8: Utopianism in the Nineteenth Century US: Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1887)

Nov. 10: More on Bellamy; Marx meets Ruskin: William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890);

*Personal Utopia Project due Friday, Nov. 12*

Week 11
Nov. 15: A World without Men: Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915)

Nov. 17: More on A World without Men: Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915)

Week 13
Nov. 22: The Emergence of Dystopia: Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932)

Nov. 24: More on The Emergence of Dystopia: Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932)

Week 14
Nov. 29, Dec. 1: Science Fiction: Utopia and Dystopia

In-class viewing of Star Trek, “The Apple” (1967)

*Thematic Essay due Friday, Dec. 3*

Week 15
Dec. 6, 8: Science Fiction: Utopia and Dystopia

Week 16
Dec. 13: Final Class
*short reading to be announced

Final Examination: To be announced