

**UTOPIA'S ECLIPSE? THE HORIZON OF POLITICAL HOPE IN THE WAKE OF EMPIRE AND
REVOLUTION**

PLSC 22205/LLSO 22205/CRES 23205

University of Chicago, Winter 2022

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 11am-2pm (by appointment)

Course description

The twentieth century was a time of extraordinary political hope associated with socialist and anti-colonial struggles that promised to usher in new forms of human freedom. However, by the 1980s, this hope had given way to catastrophe as the horizons of political possibility and revolutionary aspiration characterizing these struggles collapsed. How do we reckon with this collapse, and what does it mean to make a life for oneself in the wake of these failed emancipatory projects?

This course seeks to explore this question by examining the place of utopian thinking, broadly understood, in the projects of anticolonial and socialist struggle in the twentieth century and by reading this strain of thought in light of the doubts that certain thinkers have raised about the possibility of attaining utopia's promise. Taking as a starting point the idea that utopian thinking—at least in its modern, universalistic form—has always existed in a complex relationship to the figure of the “savage Other” and the project of Western imperialism, the first half of the course will invite students to test this claim against the aspirations advanced by certain anti-colonial and left revolutionaries. In the second half of the course, we will turn to contemporary debates about the possibilities of renewed utopian thinking in the present. In particular, we will examine some important recent reflections on the postcolonial predicament to consider what we might learn from the revolutionary failures of the twentieth century and what critical resources this history has yielded to us.

Course Requirements

Participation

This course will be run in seminar format, and students are expected to have completed the readings before class and to be prepared to engage actively in class discussions. The cultivation of an effective classroom discussion depends on each student being willing to play different roles. Rather than thinking about a discussion seminar as an environment for students to pose questions about the texts to the instructor, a more effective classroom discussion will result from students being willing to pose questions of interpretation or clarification not only to the instructor, but also to their peers. Students are encouraged to pose questions about the text, to volunteer to answer those questions, and to ask one another, as well as the instructor, to clarify key concepts or ideas that are being used in the discussion.

Reading Responses

With the exceptions of those completing the presentation for a given week are required to write a brief paragraph once a week (beginning in week 1) that develops a question about the week's reading assignment. This exercise will help you to prepare for class discussions. Your paragraph should be at least 150 words and the question should focus on a specific issue, argument, or concept that you find puzzling or especially thought-provoking, whether in the week's reading or in the pre-circulated presentation for that week. As you develop your questions, please feel free to draw productive connections between the texts that we are reading in this course and those that you have read (or are reading) for other courses. Whatever approach you take, be sure to include page numbers for reference. Questions should be submitted via the Assignments section of Canvas by 9am on the day of class.

You will receive credit for your weekly questions if you fulfill the stated requirements and submit your work on time. I will give you credit for one late submission if I receive it within a week of its due date; otherwise, late submissions will not be accepted.

Group Office Hours

Every student is required to attend weekly group office hours for one 30-minute session per week. Group office hours are an opportunity for up to six students to discuss a text, assignment, or some implication of the reading with me—and with one another. These meetings offer students an opportunity to extend our conversations beyond the classroom, but also to get to know one another a little better.

Final Project

For continuing students, the final project is due (by email) on the Wednesday of Week 9 at 6pm. For students intending to graduate this quarter, the final project is due (by email) on Wednesday of Exam Week at 6pm. The final project should be 9-12 pages long, double-spaced, 12-font, with 1-inch margins.

This project can take one of two forms.

- The first option, is for you to submit a paper that develops a line of argument that answers a question related to the broad themes of the course. This can be a critical engagement with one or more of the texts that we read for the class, or an essay based on preliminary primary research that aims to explore the themes of the class as they appear in some collection of primary source materials (based on empirical research conducted by you).
- The second option is for you to develop a research prospectus for a proposed thesis research project. This is an opportunity for you to develop a proposal that might form the basis for your future thesis research. This prospectus would need to include a focused discussion of the question you plan to investigate and the intellectual importance of doing so, a detailed literature review that situates this project in the wider academic field into which

it hopes to intervene, an account of the primary source materials on which this research would be based, and a careful discussion of the methodological approach that you plan to take, as well as of the possible challenges posed by your chosen method.

Irrespective of which choice of project you hope to undertake, you must receive my approval for your chosen topic. In identifying and crafting an appropriate final project topic, you will be required to fulfill two additional writing assignments.

- First, before **noon on Sunday of Week 4**, you will submit a 1-2 page memo identifying a focused topic for your final project. Within this focused topic, you will be required to identify three potential questions that might form the basis of your project, and the significance of each of these questions. You will meet with me in office hours the following week (**week 5: February 8-13**) to discuss your topic in light of this memo.
- Second, before **noon on the Thursday of Week 7**, you will submit a second 1-2 page memo that presents a single refined research question. The memo must connect this question to a conceptual puzzle or problem and must make clear the stakes of resolving this puzzle or problem. If the project is based on primary research, the memo must also address the feasibility of conducting primary research on this question in the remainder of the quarter.

When developing your final paper topics, you are welcome to suggest topics that were not directly covered by the readings but that are otherwise related to the themes of the class.

Note: I will not read drafts of the final papers, but students are welcome to meet with me in office hours to discuss their papers.

Accessibility

The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by [Student Disability Services \(SDS\)](#) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations.

Phone: (773) 702-6000

Email: disabilities@uchicago.edu

Late Essay Policy

Please let me know should you ever find yourself in the position of having to submit your papers late. I do not need to know why your work is late, but it is important to maintain communication when this happens. Late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day (e.g. an A- paper one day late becomes a B+).

Finally, all essays will be submitted by email. If there is a problem with your submission, I will contact you via email and you will be expected to send a new file to me the same day that you receive my message, otherwise the paper will be counted as late. You will not be granted a grace period simply because you didn't check your email account.

Absences

Participation in class discussions is the basis of learning in seminar courses, so absences of any kind are taken seriously and will impact your grade. After you have missed two classes, you will automatically lose a full letter from your participation grade for each subsequent absence. You will be ineligible for a letter grade for the course after your fifth absence and you must instead request a W from your advisor.

Per university policy, you will not be penalized for an absence due to a religious observance if you let me know about it at the beginning of the quarter.

Finally, coming late to class affects your own ability to participate and disrupts the learning of others. Tardiness will therefore negatively impact your participation grade.

Individual Office hours

I encourage everyone to come to my individual office hours at least once during the quarter, in addition to the required meetings in preparation for the final paper, though you are welcome to come to office hours as often as you wish. I am happy to discuss the reading and writing assignments with you, and it is especially important to see me if at any point you are struggling in the course. I set aside Thursdays for my office hours meetings, primarily between 11am and 2pm. If you wish to meet with me, please make an appointment via Canvas. If, for whatever reason, you cannot make an appointment between 11am and 2pm via Canvas, I will endeavor to find some other time for us to meet.

Group Office hours

You can sign up for group office hours through Canvas: go to our course's homepage and click on the link for "Utopia Class – Group Office Hours." Each 30-minute slot is limited to 6 students. You must sign up for one, and only one, slot per week, though it need not be the same slot every week. If you cannot meet at any of the available times, please contact me as soon as possible so that I might arrange an extra group office hour slot that you can make.

Policy on electronic devices

You should not be using any electronic device during class unless you have received an accommodation to do so.

Plagiarism

Proven plagiarism of any kind may result in automatic failure of the course. At minimum, you will receive an F for the assignment and the case will be referred to the University for further disciplinary action. There will be no exceptions to this rule. You should consult the course's writing guidelines or

contact me immediately if you are ever unsure about what constitutes plagiarism. I have also included a statement from the American Historical Association with this syllabus, which offers a detailed description of norms of academic honesty.

Grade Distribution

Participation	35%
Weekly reading response	10%
Group office hours	10%
Memo 1: Topic	5%
Memo 2: Refined question	5%
Final Paper	35%

Required texts

The following texts are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-Op Bookstore. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are available on Canvas (either via the Library Reserves or the Files link). Please use these editions of the texts to aid in the in-class discussion of specific passages.

1. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2004)
2. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (W.W. Norton, 2010)
3. Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019)
4. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002)
5. C. L. R. James, *World Revolution, 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (Duke University Press, 2017)
6. William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, ed. David Leopold (Oxford University Press, 2009)
7. David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Time, Tragedy, Memory, Justice* (Duke University Press, 2014)

Reading Schedule

Week 1

Introduction

*Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness," in *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (Palgrave, 2003), 7-28.

*Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "A Fragmented Globality," in *Global Transformations*, 47-78.

*Fredric Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia," *New Left Review* 25 (Jan/Feb 2004), 35-54.

Week 2

Socialism and Utopia

William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, ed. David Leopold (Oxford University Press, [1891] 2009), entire.

*Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge, September 1843, in Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Penguin, 1992), 206-09.

Week 3

Revolution!

C. L. R. James, *World Revolution, 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (Duke University Press, 2017), 63-191.

Week 4

Finding hope in the wake of betrayal

James, *World Revolution*, 192-400.

**** Memo 1 due**

Week 5

Probing Utopia's Limits in the Wake of Catastrophe I

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (W.W. Norton, 2010), entire.

Week 6

Probing Utopia's Limits in the Wake of Catastrophe II

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002), xi-xix, 1-34, 94-136.

*Theodor W. Adorno, "Resignation" (1969).

* [Excerpt] from "Marxism and the West" in Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (Columbia University Press, 2017), pp.164-77.

Week 7

Anti-colonial Futures: The Revolutionary Aspirations of the Third World

*Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2008), 198-206. [via library reserves]

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2004), 1-62, 97-180, 235-39.

**** Memo 2 due**

Week 8

The Promise of the Post-colony: Making the World Anew

Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019), entire.

Week 9

Envisaging a future from the ruins of the postcolonial present

*David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 190-224.

*David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Duke University Press, 2004), 1-9.

David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Time, Tragedy, Memory, Justice* (Duke University Press, 2014), entire.

**** Final Project due**