

# IHST-249-IH1: Ideas of Utopia and Apocalypse in History

## MICA - Spring 2009 - Course Syllabus

Th 1:00-3:45 PM  
Main Bldg. 222



4 Horsemen, detail from the *Apocalypse* - Albrecht Dürer, 1498

**Instructor: Michael Sizer**

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“Who could endure a world... without the divine folly of honor, without the senseless passion for knowledge outreaching the flaming bounds of the possible, without ideals the essence of which is that they can never be achieved?”

- Oliver Wendell Holmes, Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, 1895

### Course Description

For thousands of years, possessors of utopian and apocalyptic knowledge have had a tremendous influence on politics and society. Prophecy has always been connected with power; in the modern period this has moved from ecstatic religious beliefs to convictions in the perfect State. Although expressions of apocalyptic and utopian beliefs represent some of the most extremist ideas in Western history, in this course it will be argued that they also constitute a central aspect to Western political cosmology and culture, and in fact may represent its most fundamental and unique feature.

This course will survey the intellectual history of the connected idea of apocalypse and utopia from ancient civilizations to the present day. Most of the emphasis will be on Western civilizations where this idea has been particularly influential, but comparisons with other civilizations will show how apocalyptic ideas have a wide cultural currency and a variety of meanings and uses. We will read from a wide variety of source material as well as scholarly interpretations of the sources, and also be introduced in the class to the ways that expressions of apocalypse and utopia had an impact outside of the texts that describe them. These connections - between the endless possibilities of the textual world and the contingent realities of the social world - will be one of the recurring concerns of the course.

The course will be structured in 2 parts. The first part of the course will study the foundational texts of utopian and apocalyptic thought in the ancient, medieval and early modern periods. The second part of the course will provide an overview of some of the major examples of the flowering of apocalyptic and utopian thought in the modern period. Unlike most courses on

utopia, this course will place particular emphasis on the ancient and medieval foundations of the concept of apocalypse, arguing that ideas of apocalypse and utopia are intimately connected, particularly in Western intellectual history, and provide an excellent framework for understanding the connections between religion, politics, literature and aesthetics within the culture as a whole.

The course will serve as an introduction to a major theme of Western and World intellectual history, but will also explore how to use art and literature as historical sources, and how art and literature reflect the times in which they are produced. Students will actively engage in such analysis through hands-on projects and discussion. The course will also develop students' critical abilities and their abilities to read a wide variety of sources as historians.

### **Course Format, Grading and Assignments**

As a seminar, this course will emphasize class and small group discussion. **Class participation is crucial to this course, constituting 20% of your grade.**

One aspect of your class participation will be your creation of a **utopian chant, song, communal exercise, meditation, totem, symbol, collective reading or activity** to help our utopian classroom attain spiritual communion with one another so we can advance the cause of knowledge and righteousness more fully and beautifully. A different **group of 2-3 students**, determined in the 1<sup>st</sup> class session, **will devise one of the activities above as a team** and will lead us all through it to begin each class, thereby cleansing us of any wicked thoughts or demons that might impede our mission. The daily leaders **will have to create any necessary visuals, audio, and handouts**, etc. to assist us in our cause. This activity will represent **5% of your final grade.**

The **readings** are vital, as they will form the basis of our discussions and activities, as well as the mini-paper assignments (see below). There will be about 50-100 pages of reading per week. It is important not only that you do the readings thoroughly, but that you **bring them with you to class** to use as a basis for discussion. **Failure to do so will result in a grade of 'F' for your class participation for that day.**

There will be **5 short (1 page or so) mini-papers** due in class during the semester. You may choose to write in any 5 weeks of the semester (except for those days when another major assignment is due), **although at least one mini-paper is due on or before week 4 of the class.** These must be typed, but they are informal papers in which you respond to the source material. **You should spend no more than an hour on them.** They are meant to get your brain moving: to help you develop your analytical and writing skills, and for you to engage the material so that we can use them as a jumping-off point for class discussion. They will be graded according to effort and engagement, and less on your writing ability (although it helps to be able to express yourself well!), and the lowest graded paper will be dropped. **No make-up papers** will be allowed, and **only 1 paper may be submitted per week. These mini-papers constitute 20% of your grade.**

There will be a **short paper** (2-3 pages) due in Week 5 of the semester, in which you will be asked to formulate and defend a historical argument based on the readings from the first part of the course (this assignment will be explained in more detail before it is due). **This short paper represents 15% of your grade.**

You will be required to write a very **short** (1-2 pp.) **informal review** of *We* in week 11 of the course, in which you 1) assess the main themes of the book, 2) describe how it functions as a

critique of the concept of utopia, and 3) a short paragraph describing how you felt about the book. **This short review represents 10% of your grade.**

The **most important aspect of your involvement in the class** will be your **final research paper**, the particulars of which will be explained in a separate handout. This will be a formal research paper, with footnotes and bibliography, as well as original research (handouts directing you on proper procedures will be handed out during the semester). This paper will ask you **to describe and analyze historically a particular apocalyptic or utopian text, community, or movement - or a scholarly interpretation of these things** - tying it to the themes of the class. You must **submit a short, informal paper topic proposal to me by Week 7** at the latest. The paper will be graded according to originality and clarity of argument, use of evidence, quality of research, and writing (including footnote and bibliography format). The paper will be due in the last class, where you will be expected to provide a **brief (5 min.) informal presentation** of your paper to the rest of your classmates. **This final project represents 30% of your final grade.**

### **Late Assignment Policy**

As reaction papers are meant to be used in class discussion, they will not be accepted late. The first (short) paper will be marked down a grade for each day late (A to A-, B- to C+, etc.) The final paper and the presentations will not be accepted late - **NO EXCEPTIONS!**

### **Attendance Policy**

There are only 15 meetings in the semester and so we have to make the most of them. Any unexcused absence beyond 1 will result in a decrease of one full letter grade from class participation (A to B, B- to C-, etc.). 2 late arrivals (> 10 minutes) equals 1 absence.

### **Classroom Laptop/Cellphone Policy**

Because students in previous classes have abused the privilege of having laptops in class, I am going to set limits on their use in our class. **If there are no online or Blackboard readings, an open laptop is not permitted in class, unless you receive special permission from me to take notes on it or for some other purpose.** If there are online or Blackboard readings, you can have the computer open. However, if you are observed using the computer for anything not related to classroom activity, **you will get an F for the day and your laptop privileges will be revoked.** Cellphones must be stowed away and turned off for the duration of the class.

### **ADA Compliance Statement:**

*Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact [insert instructor's name/title] privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Learning Resource Center at 410-225-2416, in Bunting 458, to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://www.mica.edu/learningresourcecenter/>.*

### **Health and Safety Compliance:** *From the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)*

*The Office works to provide EHS support for all members of the MICA community. The primary goal of the Office is to be proactive in establishing a culture of safety in which each member of the community shares ownership responsibility that allows each person to be involved in maintaining a healthy work and studying environment. EHS uses several methods to achieve this objective.*

*First, the EHS office looks at the totality of the EHS requirements by combining campus needs with state and federal requirements and clearly communicating the shared policies and procedures. Second, EHS identifies training needs and develops guidelines for the use of equipment, material and procedures. Third, we ensure compliance with policies through evaluations, inspections, and committees.*

*It is the responsibility of faculty and students to understand health and safety policies relevant to their individual activities and to review MICA's Emergency Action Plan, as well as to participate in training, drills, etc. It is also each faculty member's responsibility to coordinate with the EHS Office to ensure that all risks associated with their class activities are identified and to assure that their respective classroom procedures mirror the EHS and Academic Department guidelines. Each of the Academic Department's also publish EHS procedures and policies such as a dress code, the use of personal protective equipment, fire safety, training, and how to properly dispose of chemical waste. Each of these policies and procedures must be followed by all students and faculty. Most importantly, it is the responsibility of the faculty to review, test, and assess each student's awareness of basic safety procedures, such as evacuation routes, use of chemicals, fire prevention, and all other guidelines posted by the Environmental Health and Safety Office, (e.g., smoking policy, independent studio policies, pet policy, disposing of hazardous and chemical waste, etc).*

*To become a member of the Faculty EHS Committee or for any questions relating to EHS, please contact Denelle Bowser, EHS Manager, at [dbowser@mica.edu](mailto:dbowser@mica.edu) or by calling 410.462.7593. You can also visit the department online at [www.mica.edu/ehs](http://www.mica.edu/ehs)*

### **H1N1 Pandemic Information:** *From the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)*

#### **What to do if I get sick?**

*If you are sick consider the following:*

- Limit contact with other people as much as possible. DO NOT GO TO CLASS! Seek medical attention at Mount Royal Medial Assoc. (410) 225-8855 but please call ahead*
- Students who are sick should self-isolate for at least 24 hours after any fever is gone.*
- Make sure to get plenty of rest and drink clear fluids to keep from being dehydrated*
- Avoid normal activities including work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings*

#### **Reporting Procedures:**

- Contact the Office of Student Affairs at 410-225-2422 who will assist with plans for self-isolation, arranging for meals, and any other necessary support*
- Contact any faculty whose class you anticipate missing and inform them of your illness. Work with them to make arrangements for catching up on any missed work. If you have difficulty reaching your faculty or if your illness lingers to the point where you will miss two or more of any one class contact the Office of Student Affairs.*

#### **Readings**

- The Utopia Reader, ed. Claeys & Sargent (NYU Press, 1999).*
- Yevgeny Zamyatin, We (Modern Library, 2006).*
- Supplementary texts on reserve, on Blackboard, or handed out in class.*

## **Course Schedule (Topics and Assignments) - Subject to change if necessary.**

Assignments are listed the day they are due, not the day they are assigned.

### **\*\* PART I: FOUNDATIONS OF APOCALYPTIC AND UTOPIAN THOUGHT \*\***

#### **Week 1 - 9/3: Introduction to course**

- Go over syllabus; the basics of the meaning of utopia, apocalypse, eschatology, prophecy and other related words.

#### **Week 2 - 9/10: The Golden Age**

- Discuss Classical traditions of the Golden Age, cycle and decay, Hesiod, Ovid, the Garden of Eden and Noah's Flood

##### Reading:

- *Utopia Reader*, pp. 1-9; 12-13 (Introduction, Hesiod's *Work and Days*, Vergil's 4<sup>th</sup> *Eclogue*, Pindar, Horace *Epode 16*). Ovid will be included in a fuller version below.
- Bible: Genesis: 1-3, 6-8. Use any Bible version you wish: on-line versions can be found at <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/KjvGene.html>
- Blackboard: Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, on Ages of Man (6 pp.)
- Blackboard: Plato on Atlantis (4 pp.)

Assignments: Reaction paper.

#### **Week 3 - 9/17: Prophets of the Axial Iron Age; the Book of Isaiah and Plato's *Republic***

- Theory of the Axial Iron Age; Old Testament prophetic tradition in Isaiah; Greek theorizing the political and Plato

##### Reading:

- Blackboard: Ch. 10 "The Axial Iron Age: the Triumph of the Sky Gods" from Bruce Lerro, *From Earth Spirits to Sky Gods: the Socioecological Origins of Monotheism, Individualism, and hyperabstract Reasoning from the Stone Age to the Axial Iron Age* (pp. 267-295).
- Selection from the Bible: Isaiah 24. Use any Bible version you wish: on-line versions can be found at <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/KjvIsai.html>
- *Utopia Reader*, pp. 27-55 (Plato's *Republic*).

Assignments: Reaction paper.

#### **Week 4 - 9/24: Christian Apocalypse**

- Eschatology in Jesus; the book of Revelation; Augustine's Christian worldview

##### Reading:

- Bible: the Book of Revelation. Use any version you wish: an on-line version can be found at <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/KjvReve.html>
- Augustine, *City of God* (short excerpt): <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/aug-city2.html>

- Blackboard: Peter Manchester, "Time in Christianity" from *Religion & Time*, pp. 109-137.

Assignment: Reaction paper.

**Week 5 - 9/31: Judgment and Apocalypse as Applied Theory: the Middle Ages; Ephemeral Utopia: Saturnalia and Cockaigne**

- Last Judgment tympana on medieval cathedrals; Joachim di Fiore; Flagellants; on reading scholarly articles; monasticism and the perfect life of God; Concept of the carnivalesque; peasant utopia; ecstatic celebrations.

Reading:

- *Utopia Reader*, pp. 64-66; 68-69; 71-76 (Lucian *Saturnalia*; Benedict's rule; Cockaigne legend).
- Blackboard: excerpts from Joachim di Fiore's *Letter to the Faithful* (3 pp.)
- Blackboard: materials relating to the Drummer of Niklashausen

Assignment: Reaction paper; FIRST SHORT PAPER (2-3 pp.) DUE.

**Week 6 - 10/8: Comparison - Apocalypse and Time in non-Western societies**

- Islamic millenarianism; theories of non-Western time, Ragnarok & Cargo Cults: syncretism or independent tradition?

Reading:

- Blackboard: Newell Booth, Jr., "Time and Change in African Traditional Thought"
- Blackboard: Robert Stitler, "2012 and the Maya World" and Arjuna Ardagh, "The Clock is Ticking" from *The Mystery of 2012: Predictions, Prophecies, & Possibilities*, pp. 89-107 & 213-227.
- Blackboard: Sioux Ghost Dance lyrics (2 pp.)
- Read short (2-3 pp.) background handout on Cargo Cults (Blackboard) and then read the *Smithsonian* article online, "In John They Trust,":  
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/people-places/john.html>

Assignment: Reaction Paper.

**Week 7 - 10/15: Thomas More and Early Modern Utopias**

- More: invention or adaptation?; why the explosion in early modern utopias?

Reading:

- *Utopia Reader*, pp. 77-93; 106-118; 128-140 (Thomas More, *Utopia*; Thomas Campanella *City of the Sun*; Margaret Cavendish, *Inventory of Judgements Commonwealth*; James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*).
- Blackboard: Christopher Columbus, "Sailing to Jerusalem" (4 pp.)

Assignment: Reaction paper; FINAL PAPER TOPIC DUE IN CLASS TODAY

**\*\* PART II: THE FLOWERING OF UTOPIAN AND APOCALYPTIC THOUGHT IN THE MODERN PERIOD \*\***

## **Week 8 - 10/22: Democracy: Utopian?**

- The connection between utopian/eschatological thought and democratic revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

### Reading:

- *Utopia Reader*, pp. 170-179 (William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*; Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*; Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*)
- Blackboard: François Furet, “Democracy and Utopia”
- Blackboard: Alphonse de Lamartine 1830 poem, ‘Les Révolutions.’
- Barack Obama’s Victory Speech (Nov. 2008): Read/listen at <http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/president/speeches/obama-victory-speech.html>

Assignment: Reaction paper.

## **Week 9 - 10/29: America as City on the Hill: Yankee Utopianism**

- Shakers, Oneida, Fourierism and Brook Farm

### Reading:

- Excerpt from Winthrop’s 1630 sermon “A Model of Christian Charity” (aka: the “City on the Hill” speech): <http://www.historytools.org/sources/winthrop-charity.pdf>
- *Utopia Reader*, pp. 182-202 (Shaker, Amana, Oneida texts; Charles Fourier, *Selections Describing the Phalanstery*; texts on American Fourierism).
- Blackboard: Brook Farm testimonials

Assignment: Reaction Paper.

## **Week 10 - 11/5: Socialism, Communism and the Technology Paradise**

- Communism, Technological Utopia, Futurism

### Reading:

- *Utopia Reader*, pp. 227-228; 240-273 (Marx & Engels, *Communist Manifesto*; Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*).
- Necheyev, *Revolutionary Catechism*: <http://www.spunk.org/texts/places/russia/sp000116.txt>
- Blackboard: Alexander Blok poem ‘The Twelve.’

Assignment: Reaction Paper.

## **Week 11 - 11/12: Dystopia**

### Readings:

- Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*
- *Utopia Reader*, pp. 398-407 (George Orwell, *1984* Appendix on Newspeak)

Assignment: Write short review of *We*.

## **Week 12 - 11/19: Black & Feminist Utopianism; Rastafarian Eschatology**

- Rastafarianism; Feminist Utopias

### Readings:

- *Utopia Reader*, pp. 319-328 (Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*)
- Blackboard: Ray Bradbury, "Way in the Middle of the Air" from the *Martian Chronicles*
- GG Maragh, *Promised Key*:  
<http://books.google.fr/books?id=tXwe18Ri6EC&printsec=frontcover#PPR5,M1>

\*\*Listen to: Jackie O Motherfucker, "Ol' Hannah"; Cornell Campbell, "The Judgment Come"; Max Romeo "Chase the Devil"

Assignment: Reaction paper.

**\*\*\* NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK \*\*\***

## **Week 13 - 12/3: 1960s and New Age; Cults & Communes; Walden 2**

- Better living through chemistry: psychedelic utopianism of the 1960's; Walden 2; Cults & Commune movement of 1960s and New Agers of 1970s

### Readings:

- *Utopia Reader*, pp. 372-398 (Skinner, *Walden 2 & Walden 2 Revisited*).
- Blackboard: readings from leaders of Heaven's Gate, Aum Shinri Kyo cults
- Blackboard: Richard Bauman & Neil McCabe, "Proverbs in an LSD Cult"
- Blackboard: "The End is Nearish" (3 pp.)
- Read and listen to the story on 1960s commune on NPR's website:  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89422387>

\*\*Listen to: Bob Dylan, "Gates of Eden"; the Byrds, "Mind Gardens"; Max Frost, "The Shape of Things to Come"

Assignment: Reaction paper.

## **Week 14 - 12/10: Millenarianism at the end of the Millennium**

- CLASS ACTIVITY: Film from 2000: "Left Behind: the Movie" starring Kirk Cameron  
- Nuclear apocalypticism; Christian fundamentalism.

### Readings:

- Blackboard: Daniel Wojcik, "Embracing Doomsday: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalyptic Beliefs in the Nuclear Age"
- Blackboard: William Laurence, "Nagasaki, 1945" from *NY Times* (Aug 1945); Hal Boyle, "Dead Cat on Our Rainbow" (9 pp.)
- Blackboard: Misc. charts, readings and poll data on Fundamentalist Beliefs (3 pp.)

Assignment: Reaction paper.

## **Week 15 - 12/17: Last Class: Environmentalism: our apocalypse?**

- Environmental apocalyptic beliefs; BRIEF INFORMAL PRESENTATION OF FINAL PAPERS

Reading:

- Blackboard: Union of Concerned Scientists 1992 “Warning to Humanity” on Environment
- Blackboard: Excerpt from Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (approx. 5 pp.)

Assignment: FINAL PAPER DUE IN CLASS TODAY.

- EACH STUDENT SHOULD BE PREPARED TO DELIVER A BRIEF (5 min.) INFORMAL PRESENTATION IN CLASS TODAY