

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

SOCIOLOGY 3362F-001 (Sociology of Utopia)

TERM:	Fall Term 2021
INSTRUCTOR:	Dr. Michael E. Gardiner
OFFICE:	SSC 5424 (661-2111, ex. 85139; megardin@uwo.ca)
CLASS TIME	Thurs. 9:30 am - 12:30 pm (online)
OFFICE HOURS:	By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will concentrate on the formation of the Western utopian tradition in sociology, including the ideas of the main theorists of utopia, the history of modern "intentional communities," and current debates within utopian social thought. We'll conclude with a consideration of the utopian/dystopian possibilities of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Prerequisite(s):

Third or fourth year standing in a module in Sociology or Criminology.

Antirequisite(s): N/A

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will:

- * Have a deep and broad understanding of contemporary social theory as it relates to utopianism
- * Understand how social theory informs other branches of sociology
- * Significantly develop their critical and creative thinking & writing skills
- * Develop presentation skills (clearly express ideas and arguments orally & lead discussions)

MAIN TEXTS

All readings are online via OWL/CT with one exception:

Peter Frase, *Four Futures: Visions of the World after Capitalism*, London and New York: Verso, 2016.

Physical copies can be ordered through the campus bookstore and sent directly to your place or residence; alternatively, electronic copies can be ordered via:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/246224/four-futures-by-peter-frase/9781781688151>

GRADE BREAKDOWN:

Synchronous Class participation	15%
Forum responses (asynchronous)	10%
Class presentation	20%
Term paper proposal	10%
Term paper	45%
Total:	100%

REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. Synchronous virtual meetings (15% participation)

These being Covid times, seminars will be synchronous sessions via Zoom scheduled during the allotted time above, between 10 am – 12:15 pm weekly (transitional break 11:00 am – 11:15 am). Half the class will participate in the first hour (10 am – 11 am), organized around one oral presentation (more on this below), and the other half in the second hour (11:15 am – 12:15 pm). The goal is to try to overcome the limitations of the technology as much as possible and emulate a face-to-face seminar by having multiple smaller groups. **Web cameras must be turned 'on' at all times.**

2. Asynchronous responses to readings (10%)

10% of the final grade will be allotted to written responses to *one* of the class discussion questions pertaining to the readings posted each week (2 marks each, five per term), 200-250 words each post. Such postings cannot involve questions or readings student base their oral presentation on (see below). Students can respond to such postings for discussion purposes, but only in a respectful and scholarly manner.

3. Class presentation (20%)

Each student will be required to present orally on one of the readings assigned in a given week. This will be a critical précis that raises questions for class discussion. Prepare for a 15 minute presentation. The use of (very) short video clips or other materials is acceptable, but has to be approved by the Professor in advance. A week after the presentation, the student will submit a written version of the talk for grading (20% of final grade).

4. Term paper proposal (10%)

Term paper proposals will be due 28th Oct. by 4:00 pm. Two pages point form, single-spaced, plus one page of references (minimum five). The Professor will comment on the proposal and provide feedback and additional references relevant for the writing of the final term paper.

5. Term paper (40%)

The final term paper (3000-3500 words, 12-15 pages, 12-scale font Times Roman), worth 45% of the final grade, will be due 9th Dec. by 4 pm. (Comments on major term papers will only be

provided if requested in advance of submission, and late assignments will receive no written feedback.)

READING AND SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Sept. 9) (Orientation)

Week 2 (Sept. 16) (Concepts and Definitions)

"Introduction" (Sargisson, 1-5)

"Definitions, Debates and Conflicts: Utopianism, Anti-utopianism and Anti-Anti-Utopianism" (Sargisson C1, 6-40)

Week 3 (Sept. 23) (Fundamentalisms)

John Gray, "Armed Missionaries," in *Black Mass: How Religion Led the World Into Crisis*, Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2007.

"Religious Fundamentalism" (Sargisson C2, 41-54)

Week 4 (Sept. 30) (Gender and Sexuality)

"Feminism and Gender" (Sargisson C3, 55-78)

"Sex and Sexual Identity" (Sargisson C4, 79-97)

Week 5 (Oct. 7) (Utopia and Nature)

"Climate Change and Catastrophe Fiction" (Sargisson C5, 98-115)

"Human Attitudes to Nature" (Sargisson C6, 116-128)

Week 6 (Oct. 14) (Intentional Communities)

"Green Intentional Communities" (Sargisson C7, 129-146)

Chris Land, "Flying the Black Flag: Revolt, Revolution and the Social Organization of Piracy in the 'Golden Age'," *Management & Organizational History*, 2(2), 2007: 169-192.

Week 7 (Oct. 21) (Cities and Architecture)

"Fantastic Architecture and the Case of Dubai" (Sargisson C8, 146-66)

"Domestic Architecture: New Urbanism and Cohousing" (Sargisson C9, 167-88)

Week 8 (Oct. 28) (Utopia and Mass Culture)

John O'Neill, "McTopia: Eating Time," in *Utopias and the Millennium*, Krishan Kumar and Stephen Bann (eds.), London: Reaktion Books, 1993, 129-37.

"Computer Gaming" (Sargisson C10, 189-207)

Richard Keller Simon, "Advertising and Utopia," in *Trash Culture: Popular Culture and the Great Tradition*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999, 77-90.

Week 9 (Nov. 4) Reading Break (no class)

Week 10 (Nov. 11) (Technology and Futurism)

"Introduction: Technology and Ecology as Apocalypse and Utopia" (Fraser, 1-34)

"Cloning, Cyborgs and Robots" (Sargisson C11, 208-38)

Week 11 (Nov. 18) (Possible Futures I)

"Communism: Equality and Abundance" (Fraser, C1, 35-68)

"Rentism: Hierarchy and Abundance" (Fraser, C2, 69-90)

Week 12 (Nov. 25) (Possible Futures II)

"Socialism: Equality and Scarcity" (Fraser, C3, 91-119)

"Exterminism: Hierarchy and Scarcity" (Fraser, C4, 120-143)

"Conclusion: Transitions and Prospects" (Fraser, 144-50)

Week 13 (Dec. 2) (Post-pandemic Utopias)

Franco Berardi (2020) "Beyond the Breakdown: Three Meditations on a Possible Aftermath." (<https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/beyond-the-breakdown-three-meditations-on-a-possible-aftermath-by-franco-bifo-berardi/9727>)

Benjamin Bratton (2021) "Conclusion: What is the Post-pandemic?," *The Revenge of the Real: Politics for a Post-Pandemic World* (London and New York: Verso), 153-66.

Fritjof Capra and Hazel Henderson, 'Pandemics — Lessons Looking Back From 2050', March 2020 (<https://www.fritjofcapra.net/pandemics-lessons-looking-back-from-2050/>)

Jean-Luc Nancy (2020) "Communovirus." (<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4626-communovirus>)

IMPORTANT POLICIES

A Note on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence (the Scholastic Offence Policy can be viewed in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (www.turnitin.com).

Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness

Western's policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness can be found at www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf. Students must see the Academic Counsellor and submit all required documentation in order to be approved for certain accommodation: https://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/academic_consideration.html

Accessibility Options:

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website:

www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site:

www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Mental Health

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html) for a complete list of options how to obtain help.