

Paper Assignment I
Hard Times
Charles Dickens
19th C. Europe
Dr. Melton

According to Dorothy van Ghent in her essay “On Great Expectations,” Charles Dickens writes about an England in which individualism is falling prey to urbanization, industrialization and popular theories such as Utilitarianism. She writes

Dickens's intuition alarmingly saw this process in motion, a process which abrogated the primary demands of human feeling and rationality, and he sought an extraordinary explanation for it. People were becoming things, and things (the things that money can buy or that are for making money or for exalting prestige in the abstract) were becoming more important than people. People were being de-animated, robbed of their souls, and things were usurping the prerogatives of animate creatures—governing the lives of their owners in the most literal sense.¹

Write 4-6 page essay on one of the following questions.

1. Discuss the merits of this view as pertains to *Hard Times*. How does Dickens portray the industrial society of the 1840's? What does he fear as the most dehumanizing element and why?
2. Discuss Dickens's attitude toward the Utilitarianism of his day. Does he agree or disagree with it? Why? What does he see as the logical consequences of such a philosophy?

¹ Dorothy van Ghent, “On Great Expectations,” in Robert Langbaum, ed., *The Victorian Age: Essays in History and Social and Literary Criticism* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1967), pp. 202-03.