

## Political Theory 4932\_001 / Women's Studies 4930\_003: Dystopian Politics

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Florida Atlantic University, Fall 2021

Course Credits: 3.000

Prerequisites/Corequisites: None

TR 2:00 – 3:20PM, Social Science Building Boca 207

**Professor:** Dr. Rebecca LeMoine

**Office Location:** SO 384C

**Contact:** rlemoine@fau.edu or (561) 287-3947

**Office Hours:** TR 12:45 – 1:45PM,  
or by appt.

**GTA:** Isabel Rolfes ([irolfes2021@fau.edu](mailto:irolfes2021@fau.edu))

**GTA Office hours:** R 12:45 – 1:45PM in AH 207,

or W 1:30 – 2:30PM via Zoom (see Canvas course homepage for link)

### Course Description

In the midst of a global pandemic, climate change, and increases in political extremism, it can feel as though the world is crumbling around us. It's at this moment that we need dystopian political fiction to remind us of one simple fact: it could be so much worse. Or could it? By stepping into the dystopian worlds of *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Brave New World*, *Anthem*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and other classic works of dystopian political fiction—as well as a few classic tales of “utopia”—we will gain some much-needed perspective on our own politics so that we can better assess it. What makes a political society “dystopian”? Why is the genre of dystopian political fiction often filled with tales of lost individuality, oppressive governments, environmental destruction, technological control, and the mis-treatment of women, gender, and sexuality? Does dystopian literature look different based on the writer's political ideology? Why does this genre of writing hold so much popular appeal? Is it merely a popular form of entertainment, or does it have a serious political message? Finally, what does it say about modern political life that we have shifted away from the preoccupation with “utopia” (from the ancient Greek οὐ [“not”] and τόπος [“place”]) found in ancient Greek philosopher Plato's *Republic* and Renaissance philosopher Thomas More's *Utopia*?

### Objectives

- 1) Develop an understanding of the distinction between “utopian” and “dystopian” political fiction, and the purposes of each kind of literature.
- 2) Identify and analyze major themes in dystopian political fiction and their application to contemporary political life.
- 3) Learn to read and interpret works of fiction from the lens of political theory.
- 4) Improve ability to construct persuasive arguments, both verbal and written.
- 5) Practice a more contemplative and self-aware form of citizenship, and consider its effects on political life and personal fulfillment.

### Classroom Expectations

This class brings to life the art of Socratic conversation. That means that our time together will consist of you all discussing the material with my guidance. You can expect me to ask a lot of questions, pose ideas for consideration, play songs and videos to help bring the material to life, work to bring the conversation back when it veers too far off-track, and otherwise intervene as necessary to promote a fruitful discussion. What I will not do is lecture for any extended period or

summarize the readings for you. It is therefore imperative that the vast majority, if not all, of the class shows up having carefully read the material assigned for that day. The purpose of this teaching style is to help you all uncover the meaning of the text for yourselves, an exercise that is far more beneficial to the development of your thinking and reasoning skills.

While I generally do not “call” on students, I expect (and make every effort to invite) broad participation. It should be evident from this description that if no one has done the readings, or only a few students have done the readings, then the class will not go very far. Such is the nature of Socratic inquiry: it depends heavily on student engagement. The purpose of this is to help you become a better reader and thinker. You and your classmates will get out of the class what you put in. Aim to be a good classroom citizen.

### **Tips for Success**

#### *Preparing for Class*

- Fiction works are generally easier to read than scholarly articles, which makes it tempting to wait until the last minute to complete the assigned reading for this course. I strongly urge you to resist that temptation, as I suspect that you will find the reading load equivalent to other upper-level courses despite the nature of the material. Moreover, you should plan to give yourself plenty of time to reflect on what you have read—as well as time to re-read.
- Skimming through, passively reading a text is a fun pastime that I fully support, but the purpose of this course is to give fiction works serious academic treatment. So, you will need to practice being an active reader. As you read, make note of recurring themes (e.g., write “I” in the margin next to passages related to the theme of individuality), underline/highlight any phrases or passages that stand out to you, look up the meanings of unfamiliar words or literary references, write down questions or reactions you have, etc. **If you do not like reading, you should reconsider taking this course. You cannot pass without doing the readings... and there is a lot of assigned reading!**

#### *Participating in Class*

- For a Socratic discussion to work, everyone must be present—not just physically, but psychologically. You cannot be present if you are checking email, chatting with friends online, watching ESPN, etc. Accordingly, use of electronic devices is strongly discouraged during class time. **If you choose to use an electronic device, be prepared for me to call on you.**
- Many find the texts assigned in this course controversial. Each class session, I will push you to think “sympathetically” about the text by taking on the voice of the author. This means at times I will appear to adopt some unsavory positions. If you are uncomfortable with teachers who play “devil’s advocate,” or don’t like it when teachers sometimes withhold their own opinions in an effort to get you to think for yourself, then you probably will not enjoy this class.
- I expect you to treat your peers and me with respect. We may disagree, but we will do so cordially. That means being an attentive listener, giving others a chance to speak, and critiquing the argument rather than the person who made it.

#### *After Class*

- With many students and limited class time, not every question will be satisfactorily addressed for every student. If you find yourself confused about anything, first try re-reading the text. If

you are still lost, please don't hesitate to visit me during office hours or send me an email. I enjoy chatting with students about the material, so your office hour visits are part of what makes this job so fulfilling to me.

### Required Texts

The following books are available for purchase at the FAU Bookstore. While electronic versions are allowed, **I highly recommend that you purchase hard copies of these exact editions.** Throughout each class session, you will be asked to turn to specific pages in the book. If you do not have the same edition or cannot easily turn to a given page, you will be lost and unable to contribute as effectively. Moreover, students often find it helpful to be able to write directly in the margins of the book. **If you decide to read texts from an electronic device, be prepared for me to call on you.**

Atwood, Margaret, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Doubleday, 1998. ISBN: 9780385490818

Bradbury, Ray, *Fahrenheit 451*, 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, Simon & Schuster, 2018.  
ISBN: 9781451673319

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, *Herland and Selected Stories Including "The Yellow Wallpaper,"* Penguin Group, 2014. ISBN: 9780451469878

Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited*, HarperCollins, 2005.  
ISBN: 9780060776091

More, Thomas, *Utopia*, trans. Clarence H. Miller, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Yale University Press, 2014.  
ISBN: 9780300186109

Rand, Ayn, *Anthem*, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, New American Library, 1995.  
ISBN: 9780451191137

In addition, you must log into Canvas with your FAU ID and Password to access the materials and assignments in this course. If you do not know your FAU ID or Password, [contact OIT for help](#).

### Instructor Availability

It is important to me to be accessible to students throughout the semester. Below are the ways you can contact me:

### FAQ Discussion Board

You should ask general, course-related questions in the FAQ discussion board on Canvas, which will be active throughout the semester. If you have questions of a personal nature, you should email me from your FAU email address or schedule an office hour appointment.

### Email

Except for weekends and holidays, I will typically respond to email within 48 hours. **Please use your FAU email address rather than the Canvas inbox system.** Follow basic norms of

professionalism (don't start an email with "hey"). If you have questions about what is appropriate, this is a helpful resource <http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor>

### Office Hours

On *Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:45-1:45PM*, I hold open office hours. No appointment is necessary; simply drop in during that time slot, keeping in mind that my hours end promptly at 1:45PM. My office is located in the Social Science building, third floor, room 384C. Given the circumstances of COVID-19, I am also happy to "meet" via a phone call, if you prefer, but please email me in advance to schedule a time for the phone call.

### Course Requirements

Participation:	20%
Quizzes:	20%
Presentation:	10%
Paper #1:	25%
Paper #2:	25%

### Participation (20%)

Your participation grade will be comprised of two, equally weighted components: attendance and participation in class discussions/activities.

- Attendance: I will take attendance each class discussion. Everyone is permitted *one "free" absence* and *two excused absences*. **Excused absences require make up work, which is due within a week of the absence.** For an absence to be excused, you must clear it with me in advance or, in cases of illness or emergency, as soon as possible. It is up to my discretion whether or not to grant an excused absence. The following generally count as *unexcused* absences: slept through alarm; need to study/work; need to finish an assignment; leaving early/arriving back late from vacation; bad hangover.

If you think you will miss more than two classes due to University-approved activities, please see me at the start of the semester. Please note I will abide by *FAU's official attendance policy*: "Students are expected to attend all of their scheduled University classes and to satisfy all academic objectives as outlined by the instructor. The effect of absences upon grades is determined by the instructor, and the University reserves the right to deal at any time with individual cases of non-attendance. Students are responsible for arranging to make up work missed because of legitimate class absence, such as illness, family emergencies, military obligation, court-imposed legal obligations or participation in University approved activities. Examples of University-approved reasons for absences include participating on an athletic or scholastic team, musical and theatrical performances and debate activities. It is the student's responsibility to give the instructor notice prior to any anticipated absences and within a reasonable amount of time after an unanticipated absence, ordinarily by the next scheduled class meeting. Instructors must allow each student who is absent for a University-approved reason the opportunity to make up work missed without any reduction in the student's final course grade as a direct result of such absence."

- Participation: Attendance makes up only half of your overall participation grade; the other half is based on your participation in class discussions/activities. This means **you cannot earn above a 50% for your participation grade if you never speak in class, even if you have perfect attendance.** Students who struggle with classroom participation should therefore schedule a meeting with me during the first week of class to discuss strategies for increasing classroom participation. It is also possible to *supplement* one's participation grade

with office hour visits, emails demonstrating engagement with the material, posts on the Canvas discussion board, etc. If, on the other hand, you do not struggle with public speaking, note that speaking frequently does not guarantee you a good participation grade. **I value quality of contributions over quantity.** You must reference details from the readings and point the class to specific passages to earn a good participation grade.

### **Quizzes (20%)**

A short quiz will be administered promptly at the beginning of each class. These quizzes will test how closely you read the text(s) assigned for that day. Please note: **if you do not do the reading, you will not pass the quiz.** As you will discover, the quizzes will ask about details not found on Sparknotes, Wikipedia, etc. It is therefore essential to do the readings in full. During the quiz, you may use notes you have handwritten on a separate sheet of paper or in a notebook created for this class. To ensure your grade is not adversely affected by a particularly difficult quiz, **I will drop your lowest three quiz scores.** There are **no make-up quizzes.** If you walk into class after the quiz has already been collected, you will not be able to take it.

### **Presentation (10%)**

Almost all of the works we will read in this class have been adapted into another form, whether film, television show, Broadway play, graphic novel, or song. After signing up in class for an assigned reading to present on, your mission is to find an adaptation of it and prepare a short (approx. 7-8 minute) presentation on how this adaptation compares to the original work. Your presentation will be delivered in class on your chosen presentation date. Further instructions will be posted on Canvas and discussed in class.

### **Paper #1 (25%)**

For this assignment, you have two options:

Option 1: Write a 6-8 page (double-spaced) persuasive argument paper on the visions of utopia offered in Plato's *Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia*.

Option 2: Write a 6-8 page (double-spaced) work of creative fiction describing your own original version of utopia.

Further instructions will be posted on Canvas and discussed in class.

### **Paper #2 (25%)**

For this assignment, you have three options:

Option 1: Write a 6-8 page (double-spaced) persuasive argument paper on the visions of dystopia offered in two of the following works: Rand's *Anthem*, Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, or Huxley's *Brave New World*.

Option 2: Write a 6-8 page (double-spaced) persuasive argument paper on Gilman's *Herland* and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Option 3: Write a 6-8 page (double-spaced) work of creative fiction describing your own original version of dystopia.

Further instructions will be posted on Canvas and discussed in class.

### Grading Policies

- *Presentation*: Late presentations will be accepted only for university-approved absences (see attendance policy above), and in all but the most extraordinary of circumstances must be delivered at the next course meeting.
- *Papers*: Late papers will be penalized 5% if less than an hour late. Beyond an hour late (even by a single minute), papers will be penalized 10% per every 24-hour period late. This means that your paper will not be accepted for any credit if it is 10 or more days late. **Since you have the deadlines well ahead of time, experiencing technological difficulties will not count as a valid excuse for submitting late work.** The best way to avoid a late penalty is to make sure to submit your work well ahead of the deadline. **Note that copy-editing and revision are integral parts of the writing process. Papers that show an unacceptably high level of error or carelessness (for instance, five or more errors in a paragraph) will be returned for you to proofread before resubmitting them. You will have five business days to edit the paper and to resubmit it with an automatic penalty of 10%. After five days, the grade on the paper will automatically drop to an F.**
- *Assignment Feedback Policy*: I will provide feedback on all submitted assignments within two weeks of the submission date. If an assignment requires a longer review period, I will communicate that to you. Participation will be assessed by the beginning of section II.
- *Graded Work*: I will not discuss grades on any assignments for 24 hours after they have been returned. If, after 24 hours reflection, you do not understand why you received a particular grade, send me a written memo via email and I will respond as soon as possible.
- *Extra Credit*: You can receive a 1% bump to your final course grade (which can mean the difference between an “A” and an “A-”) by scheduling an office hour visit to discuss the material with me. To receive the extra credit, you must: (1) prepare a few questions or passages you want to discuss and (2) complete the visit **before the final paper deadline (by 3:45PM on Tues., Dec. 14<sup>th</sup>)**. You can only receive the extra credit points once, though additional office hour visits can help to supplement your participation grade.

### Grading Scale

A = 94-100	A- = 91-93.99	B+ = 87-90.99	B = 83-86.99
B- = 80-82.99	C+ = 77-79.99	C = 73-76.99	C- = 70-72.99
D+ = 67-69.99	D = 63-66.99	D- = 60-62.99	F = below 60

**Please be aware that you can track grades for individual assignments on the Canvas ‘gradebook’ but do not rely on the Canvas reported grade. The percentages do not calculate correctly and many assignments cannot be inputted correctly into the interface. Throughout the semester if you have any concerns you can ask me for an update on your grade.**

### Honor Code Violations

Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the university mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the university community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal

integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see [http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg\\_4.001\\_5-26-10\\_FINAL.pdf](http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg_4.001_5-26-10_FINAL.pdf).

Please note that I take plagiarism very seriously. If I catch you plagiarizing on a paper, you will receive an automatic “F” in the course and will be reported to the university, which will likely result in a permanent honor violation notation on your transcript. So that we are all on the same page, here is the university’s definition of plagiarism (found in the document linked above):

- “1. The presentation of words from any other source or another person as one’s own without proper quotation and citation.*
- 2. Putting someone else’s ideas or facts into your own words (paraphrasing) without proper citation.*
- 3. Turning in someone else’s work as one’s own, including the buying and selling of term papers or assignments.” (FAU Code of Academic Integrity, 2.B)*

### **Disabilities**

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) and follow all SAS procedures. SAS has offices across three of FAU’s campuses – Boca Raton, Davie and Jupiter – however disability services are available for students on all campuses. For more information, please visit the SAS website at [www.fau.edu/sas/](http://www.fau.edu/sas/). If you require a special accommodation, please make an appointment at the beginning of the semester to discuss the accommodation with me.

### **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAP) Center**

Life as a university student can be challenging physically, mentally and emotionally. Students who find stress negatively affecting their ability to achieve academic or personal goals may wish to consider utilizing FAU’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Center. CAPS provides FAU students a range of services – individual counseling, support meetings, and psychiatric services, to name a few – offered to help improve and maintain emotional well-being. For more information, go to <http://www.fau.edu/counseling/>.

### **University COVID Policy**

Due to the surge in COVID-19 cases and the delta variant, all students regardless of vaccination status are expected to wear masks while indoors in any FAU facilities, including classrooms and laboratories. Students experiencing flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath), or students who have come in contact with confirmed positive cases of COVID-19, should immediately contact FAU Student Health Services (561-297-3512). Symptomatic students will be asked to leave the classroom to support the safety and protection of the university community. For additional information visit <https://www.fau.edu/coronavirus/>. In classes with face-to-face components, quarantined or isolated students should notify me immediately as you will not be able to attend class. I will not be able to offer an online version of the class but will make reasonable efforts to assist students in making up the work. Vaccinated students have much lower chances of needing to quarantine and a much lower chance of missing class time.

### Policy on the Recording of Lectures

Students enrolled in this course may record video or audio of class lectures for their own personal educational use. A class lecture is defined as a formal or methodical oral presentation as part of a university course intended to present information or teach students about a particular subject. Recording class activities other than class lectures, including but not limited to student presentations (whether individually or as part of a group), class discussion (except when incidental to and incorporated within a class lecture), labs, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving student participation, test or examination administrations, field trips, and private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the lecturer, is prohibited. Recordings may not be used as a substitute for class participation or class attendance and may not be published or shared without the written consent of the faculty member. Failure to adhere to these requirements may constitute a violation of the University's Student Code of Conduct and/or the Code of Academic Integrity.

It should also be noted that one of the objectives of this course is to facilitate critical thinking and debate around topics, theories, and concepts where disagreement is not only anticipated, but encouraged. The ability to think critically, express your ideas clearly, and respond to the professor and other students civilly is the keystone of the academic experience. In this course, the professor may articulate positions and make statements for the purpose of accomplishing this objective and enhancing the learning environment. As a result, students should keep in mind that, at times, the ideas conveyed during class may not necessarily reflect the professor's personal beliefs or opinions on the subject matter.

### Course Schedule

CV = Reading posted on Canvas

#### Section I: Utopian Classics

Date	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
24-Aug	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Course syllabus</li> </ul>	
26-Aug	The Ideal City (in Speech)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plato, <i>Republic</i> excerpt (CV)</li> </ul>	
31-Aug	A Strange Narration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More, <i>Utopia</i>, pp. 1-25 ("Thomas More to Peter Giles," start "Book I")</li> </ul>	
02-Sep	A Conversation with Plato	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More, <i>Utopia</i>, pp. 25-50 (finish "Book I")</li> </ul>	
07-Sep	Utopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More, <i>Utopia</i>, pp. 51-95 (start "Book II")</li> </ul>	
09-Sep	Utopia, cont'd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More, <i>Utopia</i>, pp. 95-140 (finish "Book II")</li> </ul>	

#### Section II: Dystopian Classics

Date	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
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14-Sep	Collectivism vs. Individualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rand, <i>Anthem</i>, pp. xiv-xvi (“Author’s Foreword”) and pp. 1-51 (ch. I-II)</li> </ul>	
16-Sep	Collectivism vs. Individualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rand, <i>Anthem</i>, pp. 52-105 (ch. III-XII)</li> </ul>	
21-Sep	The Hearth and the Salamander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bradbury, <i>Fahrenheit 451</i>, pp. 1-65 (ch. 1)</li> </ul>	
23-Sep	The Sieve and the Sand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bradbury, <i>Fahrenheit 451</i>, pp. 67-106 (ch. 2)</li> </ul>	
28-Sep	Burning Bright	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bradbury, <i>Fahrenheit 451</i>, pp. 107-158 (ch. 3)</li> </ul>	Paper #1
30-Sep	Mechanical Citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i>, pp. 1-36 (ch. 1-2)</li> </ul>	
05-Oct	Conformity and Rebellion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i>, pp. 37-86 (ch. 3-5)</li> </ul>	
07-Oct	The Other Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i>, pp. 87-135 (ch. 6-9)</li> </ul>	
12-Oct	The Savagery of Civilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i>, pp. 136-179 (ch. 10-13)</li> </ul>	
14-Oct	The Politics of Happiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i>, pp. 180-231 (ch. 14-18)</li> </ul>	

### Section III: Contemporary Issues in Utopian/Dystopian Political Fiction

Date	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
19-Oct	Feminist Utopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gilman, <i>Herland</i>, pp. 1-38 (ch. 1-3)</li> </ul>	
21-Oct	Herland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gilman, <i>Herland</i>, pp. 39-74 (ch. 4-6)</li> </ul>	
26-Oct	Femininity and Masculinity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gilman, <i>Herland</i>, pp. 75-111 (ch. 7-9)</li> </ul>	
28-Oct	Leaving Utopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gilman, <i>Herland</i>, pp. 112-149 (ch. 10-12)</li> </ul>	
02-Nov	Feminist Dystopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Atwood, <i>Handmaid’s Tale</i>, pp. 1-49 (ch. 1-8)</li> </ul>	
04-Nov	The Dystopian Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Atwood, <i>Handmaid’s Tale</i>, pp. 50-99 (ch. 9-17)</li> </ul>	
09-Nov	Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Atwood, <i>Handmaid’s Tale</i>, pp. 100-147 (ch. 18-24)</li> </ul>	
11-Nov	<i>No Class</i>	<i>Veteran’s Day</i>	
16-Nov	Knowledge as Temptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Atwood, <i>Handmaid’s Tale</i>, pp. 148-195 (ch. 25-30)</li> </ul>	
18-Nov	Walking into the Past	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Atwood, <i>Handmaid’s Tale</i>, pp. 196-250 (ch. 31-38)</li> </ul>	
23-Nov	Salvaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Atwood, <i>Handmaid’s Tale</i>, pp. 251-311 (ch. 39-46, “Historical Notes”)</li> </ul>	
25-Nov	<i>No Class</i>	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	

30-Nov	Sacrifice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Butler, "Bloodchild" (CV)</li> </ul>	
02-Dec	Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (CV)</li> <li>• Jemisin, "The Ones Who Stay and Fight" (CV)</li> </ul>	
<b>Tues., Dec. 14<sup>th</sup> 1:15 – 3:45PM</b>	Concluding Remarks	Paper #2 due	Paper #2