

REL4092/LIT3400/JST3930 Ethics, Utopias, Dystopias

I. General Information

Meeting days and times: T (5:10-7:05), R (5:10-6:00)

Class location: T (FLI 0105), R (AND 0134)

Instructor: Yaniv Feller

Office Building/Number: 122 Anderson

Phone:

Email: yfeller@ufl.edu

Office Hours: T 4-5pm or by appointment: <https://calendly.com/yfeller-1/30min>

Course Description

Examines the ways that utopian, dystopian, and anti-utopian ideas interact with ethics. We will focus in particular on the ways that dystopias and utopias – fictional and historical – serve as political and ethical critiques of present conditions and present positive visions of a good society.

Prerequisites: None.

General Education Designation: H, WR2

All General Education area objectives can be found [here](#).

Course Materials

- Tabor and Gallagher, *Why Waco?* (physical copy in course reserves)
- Philip Roth, *The Plot against America* (physical copy in course reserves)
- All other materials on Canvas

II. Student Learning Outcomes

A student who successfully completes this course will be able to:

- Identify utopian and dystopian modes of thought
- Analyze philosophical arguments and the way they shape ethical thinking
- Communicate orally and in writing about complex arguments
- Produce critical explorations of utopias in writing and art

III. Graded Work

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the [Catalog](#).

Graded Components (100%)

Active participation (10%): This is a discussion-based class. You are expected to come to class having read the text and ready to discuss it. See also grading rubric below.

Unit Responses (20%): You are required to submit **one** reflection per unit. Each should be about a page long, double-spaced. Units are marked in Roman numerals (I, V etc.). Deadline is BEFORE class that day at noon. For example: on More's *Utopia* you need to submit by Jan. 21 at noon. I read these before class and prepare based on your interests and what you got from the text. These very short papers are a chance for you to reflect on the readings. Each reflection paper should have the following components:

1. What you take to be the main argument of the text. If it is a literary work, what you take to be the main thrust of the section we read (how it propels the plot, what the author is trying to convey etc.).
2. A paragraph or two that offer an analysis of a key moment in the text. Depth over breadth here. Choose one thing but delve into its meaning for the broader topic.
3. One analytical question you have.

Counts toward WR requirement.

Short assignment: To Infinity, and Beyond! (15%): For this assignment, you are required to imagine how the actual settlement of space/Mars would look like based on a vision of your choice from *Astrotopias*. Deadline: Feb. 20, 4:55pm. Counts toward WR requirement.

Short Assignment: Alternative Histories (20%): Using AI LLM, you will develop an alternative history version of the United States of America, inspired by Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*. The task will be to identify a moment in the history of the country, imagine what would have happened if it had gone otherwise, and write a short script/book proposal based on it. Counts toward WR requirement.

Final Project Outline (5%): Prepare an idea for your final project, provide research question, thesis, and short annotated bibliography. Counts toward WR requirement.

Final Project Presentation (5%): Present, using images and sound, your final project to the class.

Final Project (25%): develop into a full-length paper the ideas you worked on in the outline and presentation. Counts toward WR requirement.

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade
A	100-93
A-	92-90
B+	89-87
	C- 72-70

Letter Grade	Number Grade	
B	86-83	D+ 69-67
B-	82-80	D 66-63
C+	79-77	D- 62-60
C	76-73	E 59-0

See the UF Catalog's "[Grades and Grading Policies](#)" for information on how UF assigns grade points.

Note: A minimum grade of C is required to earn General Education credit.

Grading Rubric(s)

Writing Assessment Rubric and Statements

	SATISFACTORY (Y)	UNSATISFACTORY (N)
CONTENT	Papers exhibit at least some evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing sources, and provide at least an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.	Papers either include a central idea(s) that is unclear or off-topic or provide only minimal or inadequate discussion of ideas. Papers may also lack sufficient or appropriate sources.
ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE	Documents and paragraphs exhibit at least some identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement but may require readers to work to follow progression of ideas.	Documents and paragraphs lack clearly identifiable organization, may lack any coherent sense of logic in associating and organizing ideas, and may also lack transitions and coherence to guide the reader.
ARGUMENT AND SUPPORT	Documents use persuasive and confident presentation of ideas, strongly supported with evidence. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, documents may provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.	Documents make only weak generalizations, providing little or no support, as in summaries or narratives that fail to provide critical analysis.
STYLE	Documents use a writing style with word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical sentence structure. At a minimum, documents will display a less precise use of vocabulary and an uneven use of sentence structure or a writing style that occasionally veers away from word choice or tone appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline.	Documents rely on word usage that is inappropriate for the context, genre, or discipline. Sentences may be overly long or short with awkward construction. Documents may also use words incorrectly.
MECHANICS	Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the Satisfactory range, papers may contain some spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive so they do not muddy the paper's argument or points.	Papers contain so many mechanical or grammatical errors that they impede the reader's understanding or severely undermine the writer's credibility.

- The Writing Requirement (WR) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning.
- The instructor will evaluate and provide feedback before the end of the course on all of the student's written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization.
- WR course grades have two components. To receive writing requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course.

Participation Rubric¹

	Excellent 9-10	Good 8	Average 7	Insufficient 6	Unsatisfactory 0-5
Knowledgeable: Shows evidence of having done the assigned work.	Consistently makes excellent contributions to the overwhelming majority of class discussions in a way that shows excellent preparation of the relevant class materials.	Contributes to most class discussions in a way that shows good preparation of the relevant class materials.	Regularly contributes to class discussions and is able to explain their position based on the reading.	Sometimes contributes to the discussion in ways that do not necessarily show good preparation of class materials.	Never or rarely contributes to class discussions, and the contribution do not prove evidence of reading.
Thoughtful: Evaluates carefully issues raised in assigned work.	Consistently makes excellent contributions to the overwhelming majority of class discussions by raising important questions, relating to other comments, or making connections across readings.	Contributes to most class discussions by raising important questions, relating to other comments, or making connections across readings	Regularly contributes to most class discussions by raising important questions, relating to other comments, or making connections across readings.	Sometimes contributes to the discussion in ways that show the ability to carefully evaluate issues raised.	Never or rarely contributes to class discussions, and the contributions do not amount to careful evaluation of the material.
Considerate: Takes the perspective of others into account and listens attentively. ²	Always respectful to others, and takes their	Respectful to others and attempts to	Respectful, and sometimes relates to	Rarely takes into account how others might perceive	Does not take into account other people's

¹ Coming to class, having done the readings and ready to discuss them, is essential for your success in this course, and for the enjoyment of all of us. If you cannot make it to class because of a valid reason (religious observance, illness etc.) please let me know as soon as possible. Other than that, see the "attendance policy" above.

² Religion is a sensitive topic for many people. You may come from a faith tradition, or you may not. We are here together to learn more, so any question that comes from an honest desire to learn is a good question. Our goal is to explore and learn, but not

	comments seriously.	engage their comments.	others' comments	one's comments.	feelings and perspectives.
--	---------------------	------------------------	------------------	-----------------	----------------------------

IV. Calendar

Definitions (no response)

Tue., Jan. 14: Syllabus; Ursula Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”

Thu., Jan. 16: Sargent, “Good Places and Bad Places: Utopias before *Utopia*”

Tue., Jan. 21: Thomas More, *Utopia*

Unit I: Beyond This World? The Religion of the Modern Space Race

Thu., Jan. 23: Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Astrotopia*, chapter 1

Tue., Jan. 28: Rubenstein, *Astrotopia*, chapter 2-3

Thu., Jan. 30: Rubenstein, *Astrotopia*, chapter 5

Tue., Feb. 4: Rubenstein, *Astrotopia*, chapter 7

Unit II: America: The Promised Land?

Thu., Feb. 6: John Winthrop, “[City on a Hill](#)” (1630)

Tue., Feb. 11: Roth, *The Plot against America*, chap. 1-2

Thu., Feb. 13: *The Plot against America*, chp 3

Tue., Feb. 18: Roth, *The Plot against America*, 4-5

Thu., Feb. 20: Roth, *The Plot against America*, 6 To Infinity Assignment Deadline

Tue., Feb. 25: Roth, *The Plot against America*, 7-8

Thu., Feb. 27: Roth, *The Plot against America*, 9 and “Note to Reader”

Unit III: The Original Promised Land? Utopian Visions in and out of Palestine

Tue., Mar. 4: Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (sections I. Intro, II. The Jewish Question, V. Society of the Jews & The Jewish State)

Thu., Mar. 6: Herzl, *Altneuland*, books 1-3

Tue., Mar. 11: Herzl, *Altneuland*, books 4-5

Thu., Mar. 13: Saleem Haddad, “Song of the Birds”

Tue., Mar. 18-20: SPRING BREAK!!!

Tue., Mar. 25: Screening in-class of Ran Tal, *Children of the Sun*

Thu., Mar. 27: No class

to judge either each other’s traditions, or ignorance about them. You do not ever need to volunteer anything about your own beliefs, traditions, practices or opinions (or lack thereof) but if you do, make sure that you speak in the first person, thereby making clear that you are representing yourself and not an entire tradition in the discussion.

Unit IV: Messianism or Apocalypticism?

Tue., Apr. 1: Discussion of *Children of the Sun*; The Book of Revelation

Thu., Apr. 3: Tabor and Gallagher, *Why Waco?* chapter 2

Tue., Apr. 8: Tabor and Gallagher, *Why Waco?* chapter 3, 7

Thu., Apr. 10: Talal Asad, "Thinking about Secularism"

Class Presentation

Tue., Apr. 15: class presentation

Thu., Apr. 17: class presentation

Tue., Apr. 22: Concluding discussion

V. University Policies and Resources

Attendance policy

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Students requiring accommodation

Students who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting

<https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

UF course evaluation process

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <http://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <http://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <http://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

University Honesty Policy

University of Florida students are bound by the Honor Pledge. On all work submitted for credit by a student, the following pledge is required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Student Honor Code and Conduct Code (Regulation 4.040) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code, as well as the process for reported allegations and sanctions that may be implemented. All potential violations of the code will be reported to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. If a student is found responsible for an Honor Code violation in this course, the instructor will enter a Grade Adjustment sanction which may be up to or including failure of the course. For additional information, see <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>.

In-class recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party-note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Procedure for conflict resolution

Any classroom issues, disagreements or grade disputes should be discussed first between the instructor and the student. If the problem cannot be resolved, please contact Mario Poceski (mpoceski@ufl.edu, 352-273-2937). Be prepared to provide documentation of the problem, as well as all graded materials for the semester. Issues that cannot be resolved departmentally will be referred to the University Ombuds Office (<http://www.ombuds.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1308) or the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1261).

Resources available to students

Health and Wellness

- U Matter, We Care: umatter@ufl.edu; 352-392-1575.
- Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1575.
- Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS): Student Health Care Center; [352-392-1161](http://www.shcc.ufl.edu).
- University Police Department: <http://www.police.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1111 (911 for emergencies).

Academic Resources

- E-learning technical support: learning-support@ufl.edu; <https://elearning.ufl.edu>; [352-392-4357](tel:352-392-4357).
- Career Connections Center: Reitz Union; <http://www.career.ufl.edu/>; [352-392-1601](tel:352-392-1601).
- Library Support: <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>.
- Academic Resources: 1317 Turlington Hall; [352-392-2010](tel:352-392-2010); <https://academicresources.clas.ufl.edu>.
- Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall; <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.