Dystopias exist to provide insight in the problems that society faces or that the author predicts society may face soon. These stories ask: What if? They give us insight into how a perceived technology or trend may cause humanities self-inflicted downfall. Others ask what we will do when an inescapable disaster occurs. Some ask what are we doing right now to stop our future from being a dystopia.

While no two dystopias are exactly the same (despite the efforts of YA fiction) many of them share similar traits. These traits may be the events necessary for a dystopia to occur or just a function of how the dystopia persists. The seven traits that I identified for this essay are Scarcity, Corruption, Authoritarianism, Environmental Catastrophe, Comfort, Classism and Racism, and a Hope through Resistance. These traits recur in large ways through most stories and in the rest, they play a small role still.

Supposedly scarcity is an important thing. That’s what economics says. Without scarcity there would be no capitalism and that’s bad they say. It comes off sometimes as if they call it important but mean ‘good’. Scarcity is what causes the extreme poverty seen throughout the world today and in all of our written history and likely unwritten history. Scarcity is about disparity and struggling to make ends meet. If someone must make sacrifices to feed their kids or even survive that’s how you know scarcity is in play. Scarcity can lead people to great violence as shown in Jose Saramago’s *Blindness* where only one group has a deadly weapon. This one advantage grows because by using that power they are able to collect all of the food. Inequality
builds up and in Dystopias the advantage builds fast and high. That one group forces the other groups to rape in order to feed themselves. Later in the book after everyone has gone blind everyone wanders through the town scrounging food and when the doctor’s wife finds food she hides it. She hides it to feed her group and feels guilty. These dystopias show friendships fall apart because betrayal lets someone eat. In Saunders’ *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* many of his characters are hard working members of society that despite their work have received almost nothing. More often than not they are belittled as well. In this society, people aren’t rewarded for their work either monetarily or spiritually and their attempts to care for their friends and family lead them to abandon morals. For my dystopia it would have people making the choice of which person in their group starves.

One of the causes of scarcity other than the limited resources is corruption. Whether it is a government that loves to take bribes or an upper class that plays a game with different rules, corruption is about a serious of laws and rules that puts the dishonest or immoral ahead. In Falter the company Exxon is revealed to have realized the truth about climate change in the 1980’s. Did they tell us and help delay or prevent it? No. They hid it and continued to drill oil. They even built their oil rigs higher because they trusted the information and were willing to watch the rest of the world burn for their money. In the movie, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Offred is brought to a massive party. A massive party that goes against every value instilled by the oppressive regime onto the poor or lower class. They use the rules to control others and that power allows them to act selfishly. In my dystopia, corruption would manifest as a hypocrisy of the upper class that demands from the poor and uses that to keep the poor as destitute as possible while claiming to help them.
Authoritarianism is connected to the corruption as many authoritarian governments tend to be corrupt as well. The rules are presented as unbreakable with severe demonstrations of what happens to those who break them. Or in some dystopias the rule breakers disappear mysteriously for people to gossip and spread rumors about. Orwell’s *1984* projects authoritarian and totalitarianism to the next level with literal thought crimes. Knowledge about history and the truth is wiped from the books and every action is watched. Similarly, in *The Handmaid’s Tale* the regime of Gonead uses the existence of infertility to force its citizens to its will. An authoritarian government will use any trick it can to appear as if it is helping its citizens as a whole while removing their rights one by one. My dystopia would have numerous rules and regulations that exist less to provide order and more to guarantee that the government always has an excuse to arrest and detain someone.

Many dystopias have environmental issues as either a direct cause of the current state of affairs or at least an important part of the puzzle. These range from a nuclear winter, extreme pollution, or the removal of nature itself. Powers’ *The Overstory* shows a society similar to our own but in a dystopic light as our capitalist love for cutting down trees rips away beauty. The environmental issues of dystopias are human caused most often through greedy industry that only knows growth. Ellis’ *Anthropocene* is similar as well although it uses nonfiction as a medium to show our society as dystopic. We are causing a new extinction event and have altered the earth so heavily the Anthropocene separates the Earth before and the current one. A dystopia of my creation would focus heavily on the human actions that break the earth’s ecosystems for resources that get used up not much later.
Comfort is a topic in dystopias that is very related to the American culture likely more than any other. Comfort is about distraction. It exists through gluttony or sloth most often and it is about decent people not being able to rise against evil. In Anderson’s *Feed* the cybernetic implant in everyone’s head offers them an instant and overwhelming source of information. It provides ads, entertainment, information, and more while also limiting the options people have invisibly. People are so caught up in the feed world that they struggle to see problems in the real world when looking at it face to face like the cysts. Similarly, in Margaret Atwood’s *The Heart Goes Last* the main female character, Charmaine, is willing to execute people as long as it allows her to live her peaceful life. She imagines their death is painless to avoid guilt and never questions them out loud. She does her job. Comfort is about people tuning out a horrible reality and filling it in with a world that is imaginary. In my dystopia comfort would be represented by apathy to destructive events elsewhere in the world because people can still live normally for a short time before it affects them.

Racism and Classism could easily be two separate categories on their own. America has struggle with both from its inception and it is hardly alone there. Dystopic interpretations of racism and classism are often based on historic attitudes. Some focus on the wave of aversive racism we face now. Many use metaphors (like Stan Lee’s The X-men) as a stand-in for race. In “Bounty” many people are deformed. It often is not a big deformation and might just make them look slightly weird or ugly but these people are treated as slaves that can be killed or treated in anyway. Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* has a society that takes advantage of classism to keep people in their desire place. A beta doesn’t do the work of a gamma but does not grow jealous of an alpha. My dystopia would have clearly defined classes with no mobility. One of
those classes would be treated like garbage and the other like gods. Finally, the classes would be physically distinct so one could never escape the brand society gives them.

The last aspect of dystopias is a positive one. Someone provides hope through active resistance or rebellion. This often starts from one hero but grows and inspires those around them to better themselves and the world they live in. The actions of one tiny robot in Disney Pixar’s Wall-E that lead an opulent society that never works ever to return to Earth in an effort to regrow a plant and fix the planet is one of my favorite examples. Overstory shows how a person can unite people to a common cause but also how easily it can fall apart. The death in the middle of The Overstory allows the characters to go their own way and many of them find their own personal way of bettering the world. My dystopia would have a group that is willing to make sacrifices in order to make a world for their children.

I would argue all seven exist in some form. Personally, I think a story can’t be a good dystopia if its content has no bearing on the real world. However, despite this list being six negatives and one positive I do have hope. Solar panels are getting cheaper to manufacture and people are aware of problems with social media provided a powerful if erratic tool for social change. Far less people are homophobic in the US than ever before. We have hope.

Essay 2

Utopias like dystopias focus on aspects of our society that the author views as important. They are what ifs but in the opposite direction of a dystopia. So, their values are often related to the sins in dystopias but provide a guide to what we should do instead. The five I identified are the Environment, Equality, Isolationism, Justice, and the Abandonment of Money
Ecotopia shows the environment in a different state than the dystopias. In this country people care for their trees and everyone is taught to coexist with them. The level of respect demonstrated is so above what we see today where clear cutting of the Amazon rainforest still happens that it makes me sad to not live there. Protecting the environment requires some sacrifices by the people but they find it worth it. This low waste lifestyle isn’t about economic growth like capitalism but about living happily.

More’s Utopia is the earliest of our utopias and I think it established well the equality that so many utopias uphold in some form. In this book, people do not compete with one another. Everyone is part of raising the crops at different point and the leaders are not a valued position. With equality comes little crime because people are satisfied. It often feels fake for this reason as the pre-requisite for this equality is for people to be similar and not have conflict.

Isolationism is a weird aspect and definitely the one I like the least but with how often it recurs I felt it needed to be mentioned and compared with isolationism as it appears in our society. The early utopias we read were all isolationist and Gilman’s Herland is as well. These societies require isolationism because in general the more factors of the outside world are in the play the harder it is for us to imagine a perfect society. Isolationism allows everyone to be the same just like the women in the country of Herland. Isolationism in real life often comes across as xenophobia and in my opinion seems to be a selfish line of thinking that puts one’s home or country above the rest of the world.

Justice is interesting because in real life our laws conflict people. Some laws like abortion are debated constantly while others like those upheld by the Supreme Court case Korematsu are
universally reviled. In a utopia like Ecotopia or Utopia or New Atlantis everyone agrees on their way of society. This is often democratic in some nature. New Atlantis was a religious variation where justice is accepted as god’s will instead. The best utopias feel like everyone receives justice.

The abandonment of money is another aspect of utopias that I like because it feels like a necessary step for people to focus on being happy. People can work at jobs for fulfillment like in Ecotopia instead of working their 9 to 5 in order to pay rent on time. Ecotopia isn’t a society that lives to make money but one that uses money as a tool only when necessary. Utopias often display money as something that gets in society’s way from being happy. I think that these utopias have the right idea and while abandoning money entirely seems impossible. However, I wonder if the advent of robots that can take over all jobs being a possibility might rearrange the meaning of money in our society.

Essay 3

If I were to take any three people to bring to a utopia for a week it would probably be my three brothers Nate, Nick and Gabe because I know them well and want them to experience it with me. Also, because I know them well I can get their opinion about the experience afterward and know for sure that I could reminisce with them after it was over. If I could not choose my brothers, I think I might choose Optimus Prime, Wall-E from Wall-E and blank. I chose Optimus because as a kid Optimus Prime was a hero. He did what was right and he was kind to everyone while still being a good leader. I remember his box quote being that he respects all life and I thought that powerful. I chose Wall-E because of all the characters we read or watch this year he
seemed the one to have the most personality. I liked him and respected just how far he went to bring back the plant. The third person would be AOC or Alexandria Ocasio Cortes (I don’t know if that is spelled right) mainly because I find her inspiring for her work on the Green New Deal and simply fighting for the little guys. Also, she worked her way up from a bartender which make me feel better about what I can do.

If I were going to an awful destination the three people in the train car with me would be Craig from my 8th grade science class, Hitler is an easy choice, and Jared. I feel it is unnecessary to explain why I think Hitler is so bad. When I think of evil it’s him. However, I want to limit powerful men that have inflicted harm on the world to just him so I can discuss people who have done terrible things in my life specifically. Jared was a bully who lived in my neighborhood when I was in elementary and sixth grade. He would make fun of me and I would leave but when I found out he would harass my brothers it made me truly mad. I will never forgive him for that. Craig was incapable of shutting up. He would talk super-fast, all the time and super loudly. I sat across from him and couldn’t even focus on the teacher sometimes. Craig would talk so much he got sent to the deans before class even started sometimes. Once before he even sat down. Craig gave me migraines and would talk about stupid things like a swastika drawn on the table. Craig might have been a torture robot invented by the CIA and my table were the guinea pigs it was that bad. He would appear in my dreams at times just talking and it frustrated me so much. Craig is the realest evil I have ever experienced.