Jake Christ

Professor Samuel Mayer

English 165

1 May 2020

The Ideal Dystopian Society

The concept of an ideal society does not exist in today's world nor does it exist in dystopian literature. First, what defines a dystopia? We know that it is not a utopia where everything is seemingly perfect and everything in life is handed down with no struggles. Dystopia can be defined as a society that, “...demands the personal diminishment of the individual. It thrives on the erasure of identity, on fear, forgetting, hopelessness, terror, and irrationality, on creating material scarcity, damaging civility, and eliminating empathy” (Fifer 43-44). The common core issues of “fear, hopelessness, terror” define a dystopian society in literature and throughout world history. The ideal or perfect world can only exist in theory and many countries like the United States are falling onto the path toward dystopia. As a result, the Nation will either have an imbalance of power among the people or the unequal distribution of wealth. Life is not perfect especially in the literature of a dystopian seen by many dystopian novels. The concept of an ideal society is often depicted by literature that illustrates the dramatic inequality between the rich and the poor, manipulation of media and government’s enforcement of political correctness.

The dramatic inequality between the rich and the poor is seen through countlessly dystopian novels such as the *Hunger Games Trilogy* by Suzanne Collins, and throughout American history. *The Hunger Games Trilogy* highlights the unfair distribution of the wealth among the citizens of Panem. The unequal distribution of money, food, and safe housing can be seen within the Districts themselves. Districts are divided unfairly in order to keep resources from some citizens in the poor Districts and promote a lavish lifestyle for the rich Capital citizens. The government promotes the ultimate financial, social and political control of Panem throughout the *Hunger Games Trilogy*. As seen in the *Hunger Games,* Katniss says: “And here in the Capitol they're vomiting for the pleasure of filling their bellies again and again. Not from some illness of body or mind, not from spoiled food” (Collins 75). Dystopian societies are filled with suffering. Meanwhile, in the Districts people are dying of starvation proving that the diffusion of wealth forces people to focus on survival and not equality. In history, one of the most notable times of inequality between the rich and the poor is when settlers fought the Revolutionary War with England over taxation without representation. As described, “War too plays its part in all of our examples of tax and rebellion. The brutal conflicts between various states and regimes in feudal and capitalist society appear a constant backdrop to rebellion and revolution. War seems an inevitable consequence of class society” (Passant 94). Thus making it a graphic way of living classifying it as a dystopia. “Tax is both a cause and consequence of revolution and in the case of income tax, a consequence of capitalist development and expansion and the wars that go hand in hand with that development and expansion” (Passant 95). The root cause of unequal and separation of wealth suppresses people so that the governing party can benefit. Time and time again revolts will occur in an unbalanced dystopian world. In a utopian society the distribution of wealth would be evenly distributed so everyone has equal access to housing, money, safety and food. The distribution of currency is not the only problem that is held within the dystopian world. The spread of new information by means of governmental propaganda also relates to the central theme of the definition of an ideal world.

The notion of fake news, or strikes against media, as they relate to a dystopian society can be seen throughout literature and life. More specifically, the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell, shows how the main political party or group of a society can control the way people think by constant interactions of the media. The way Orwell’s Big Brother government controls the media and this leads to the control of society’s minds. In Orwell’s novel, Big Brother manipulates people’s emotions and creates a false sense of reality for the masses by only sharing information that leads to the betterment of Big Brother. Orwell’s dystopian political system believes, “Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing”(Orwell 336). Big Brother’s control of the media shapes the reader’s idea of a perfect utopian society by showing the dramatic negative impact filtering media has on mankind. This can be seen in more recent years by looking at President Trump’s presidential campaign: “The similarities between the Trump campaign and the Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are further exemplified in how the two communicate with their supporters. Each of the controlling powers has benefited from technology to facilitate communication. Ned Resnikoff describes Trump’s significance in the public eye as a “constant media focus” that allowed him to “bombard the airwaves with an unending stream of surreal falsehoods” (McKay). Whether you agree with Trump or not, these tactics of media bombardment and control did win him a dramatic rise to power. What is seemingly overlooked is that many politicians like Trump use dystopian media tactics to gain power over the people. This is happening not only in the United States but in the world. Utopia would have the freedom of speech work to people’s benefit. Sharing of ideas, honest communication and the distribution of facts would be clear, concise, and honest so people could live informed. Dystopian governments not only monitor the way people think by the use of media, they also how the government is set up.

Conception of a hierarchical government that controls people based on fear or other unpleasant tactics can be seen through the lens of *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry. When one person does not comply with the rules in *The Giver* they either die through lethal injection or they get corrected by means of brutal punishment: “...for each lapse the discipline wand came again, escalating to a series of painful lashes that left marks on Asher's legs. Eventually, for a period of time, Asher stopped talking altogether, when he was three” (Lowry 55). Asher’s punishment for asking for a snack in an incorrect way is just one example of how if someone does not comply, even a child, they are subjected to punishment. In the United States people are sentenced to jail, silenced or publically bullied if their perspective is not ‘correct’ at the time. While not as drastically as the government’s control in The *Giver*, the United State is moving toward a dystopian world because our freedom of speech is being censored. In the article “The Dystopian Future of Leadership,” Barry Boyd states, “Jean Card (2016) asked if the United States is heading toward the dystopian future as described in popular dystopian fiction such as the *Hunger Games* and the *Divergent* series. She described how political correctness has expanded into a genuine threat to free speech, information sources are increasingly centralized and biased, and partisanship has paralyzed our government's branches” (Boyd 91). America’s real world utopia is turning into a real world example of how the United States could be seen as a dystopian world. Are we headed to a nation monitored based on what we say and how we act like in many dystopian novels? The world is forever changing the definition of “political correctness” where we all have to change the way we act based on what the government is doing at any given time. Utopia is defined by many as a place that encourages freedom of speech and expression of any ideas. Is this possible?

The unhealthy environment created by a dystopian society manifests itself in many ways, including financial, social, and physical, of controlling people. These principle characteristics lead to dystopian life and are critical to the concept of utopia versus dystopia. Can a utopian world also be seen as a dystopian one? A utopian society is defined as “ much better, even perfect, society”(Claeys 145). A world where everyone lives in a life of harmony and peace without consequences. Do oppressive governments try to make the dystopian world a utopian world for themselves? Within dystopian ideals and societies the governments directly try to benefit themselves by making a utopian lifestyle. Each dystopian novel teaches us how the world can not be a utopian one based off of one extramental factor that relates to power and control. Throughout history we see dystopian ideals, but without yin there is no yang. There has to be some type of consequences for every action, good or bad. Having an ideal society can not happen because there is always something that can go wrong or have an attended nor intended consequence.

Works Cited

Boyd, Barry. “The Dystopian Future of Leadership.” *Journal of Leadership Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2019, pp. 91., doi:10.1002/jls.21635.

Claeys, Gregory. “News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia.” *History*, vol. 98, no. 330, 2013, pp. 145., doi:10.1111/1468-229X.12005.

Collins, Suzanne. *Hunger Games Catching Fire*. Scholastic, 2009.

Fifer, Elizabeth. “Dead Reckoning. (Cover Story).” World Literature Today, vol. 91, no. 2, Mar. 2017, pp. 43–44. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hlh&AN=121529439&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Lowry, Lois. *The Giver.* Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993.

McKay, Ivy. “Donald Trump and Doublespeak: An Unsettling Precursor to the Dystopian Society of George Orwell's 1984.” *University of Central Florida Undergraduate Research Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2018.

Orwell, George. *Nineteen eighty four*. Secker & Warburg, 1949

Passant, John. “Historical Note: The History of Taxation Is Written in Letters of Blood and Fire.” *Australasian Accounting Business & Finance Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2, Apr. 2016, pp. 94-95. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.14453/aabfj.v10i2.6.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
|  |  |