The Utopian Dilemma in the Western Political Imagination

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In memory of Leo Farrell—“This is my utopia.”

There is an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry, of which there are many proofs.

Plato, *Republic*

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Imagining a World *Without* Heroes

> A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing …. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.
>
> —Oscar Wilde

> If we only wanted to be happy, that would be soon accomplished. But we want to be happier than other people, and that is almost always difficult because we believe other people to be happier than they are.
>
> —Montesquieu

The utopian observer, supposing that the means of happiness should belong to everyone, looks at the world and sees how many people have so much more than they need while others lack basic necessities. Sees the vanity, triviality, and luxury of the great, and that the value of what they strive for resides not in enjoying what they have but in having what others lack. Sees the absurdity of a social hierarchy based on family, wealth, or the arrangements of the feudal past. Sees the miseries of the poor and how money enters into every relationship, distorting the choices of love and profession without bringing happiness. Sees the unfair dominance of men over women, and the supreme value placed on the least reasonable human activities, war and destruction. Sees society being guided by heroic narratives of family, tribe, race, and nation instead of objective truth. Sees literature and art glorifying conflict and reveling in the chaos of an irrational existence. Sees the modern replacement of feudal-aristocratic culture with capitalist individualism as only a minor change in the score-keeping between the lowly and the great.

For utopians, hierarchical societies and the values that sustain them are brutal and mad, designed only for strife and misery and the abuse of human freedom. Added to this is the irony that aristocrats and captains of industry do not even benefit from most of their resources except as these resources set them above others in esteem. It is the hunger for status, the hunger to appear great in the eyes of others, not material self-interest, that drives the masters of society to accumulate so much more than they need. To make fame and grandeur in the eyes of others the principal objects of human aspiration is

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to worship at the altar of inequality. W. B. Yeats formulated the crucial objection to the heroic frame of mind which erects distinction as the central human value.

> A king is but a foolish labourer
> Who wastes his blood to be another's dream.[1]

The utopian concludes that the only solution for this aristocratic culture of folly must be an intentionally implemented scheme of rational, truth-centered happiness for all based on the absolute value of good things, not their relative value based upon who has what. The form this solution must take will be a city or state with laws and customs designed to short-circuit human frailty.[2] Only by such means will human beings escape their irrationality and enslavement to the past. The scheme will inevitably include a thorough remaking of citizens, through education or even breeding, and a reform of the incentives that shape everyone's behavior. It will rely upon the wisdom of the system, not the qualities of individuals. It will be a world without heroes or the need for them.

The utopian critique of heroic and competitive societies has great moral force. It builds on the painful but inescapable satiric insights developed by major authors ancient and modern. But taken as a practical program, it generates resistance from two sources. One is that designed societies, to keep them from disaster, need designers not only of superhuman intellect but also of superhuman virtue. The task is beyond the powers of any single legislator of the kind imagined in the ancient Greek city-states. What would be needed is a whole class of rulers lasting from generation to generation. Such superhuman lawgivers and administrators have not been forthcoming. Instead, reformers in power have too often set themselves up as new, exploitative elites. This is the political problem of utopia. It has bedeviled just about every utopian scheme that has been tried on a sizable scale, making political utopianism look like a recipe for its very opposite—dystopia.

The second source of resistance to the utopian vision is perplexing in a different way. It is the ethical problem of utopia, using "ethical" in the broad sense that includes not only morality but also wider questions, preeminently the question of how to live. The role of this problem in the history of utopian and dystopian writing is the subject of this book. To state it briefly, even if a rational social order could be achieved through political and administrative design, would it be a true answer to human desire? Can heroic psychology, which sets fame, respect, and social position above all other goods, and demands the freedom to pursue them, be successfully replaced by an order in which the good things of life are equally available to all? The heroic point of view says no—that without the struggle for competitive distinction, human existence would lack meaning and interest. That a life in which the ingredients of happiness are reliably administered to all would be beneath human dignity. King Lear, grieving at the removal of his cherished retinue

of knights, passionately states the case that such symbolic values cannot be dismissed merely because they serve no practical need. "O, reason not the need!" he says.

> Our basest beggars
> Are in the poorest things superfluous;
> Allow not nature more than nature needs,
> Man's life is cheap as beast's.[3]

There is a touch of paradox in Lear's attitude. He is being told that he has enough of everything he needs, but he replies that having enough is *never enough*, that even the poorest creatures require something which goes beyond necessity. That thing is distinction, dignity, respect—the marks of a king. Lear "wastes his blood to be another's dream" and does so willingly. The alternative would be a loss of humanity—a stripping down to "the thing itself," to "unaccommodated man," a "poor, bare, forked animal" (Act 3, scene 4, ll. 104–106). The need to have more, the need to *be* more, is fundamental.

Lear's heroic perspective mounts a powerful challenge to the view that happiness consists of having the good things of life, the things that utopians would distribute in fair proportion if they could. Indeed, the heroic view replaces this material type of happiness with something else, something fundamentally relative and social—the demand to be more which requires that others be less. In my epigraph, Charles Secondat, Baron Montesquieu, puts the matter in its acutest form. "If we only wanted to be happy, that could be easily done," he writes. "But we want to be happier than other people, and that is always difficult because we believe other people to be happier than they are."[4] He might have added that the belief that other people are happier than they are is stimulated in part by their tendency to show themselves as happier than they are, keeping up the appearance of happiness being the essence of status competition.

The dialectic between heroic and utopian positions has the form of a dilemma, a stand-off between two apparently valid but mutually incompatible views of happiness, each deeply grounded in human nature and experience. Essential values stand on both sides—fairness about the basic necessities of life on the one, dignity and the freedom to pursue it on the other. None of these is possible to sacrifice.[5] As an ethical position the heroic view, being grounded in the belief that human societies must be fundamentally unequal, is difficult to defend, but as a view of what is essential to human psychology it is difficult to dismiss. The evidence in its favor turns out to be the very same irrational pattern of social life targeted by the utopian critique, but it asks us to imagine a world in which this pattern does not hold while still being a recognizably *human* world. It would be a world without vanity, without dignity, without greatness, a world in which people are not motivated by the need to be respected and favorably

compared with others, either as individuals or in groups. From the utopian point of view the heroic world looks inhumane, while from the heroic point of view the utopian world looks inhuman. Both struggle to accept human beings' need for each other. The utopian tries to define the good in abstract material equality, denying the need for social dignity, while defenders of the heroic admit the need for social dignity but resist the implication that this implies dependency on others.

The argument of this book is that the utopian dilemma I have described, the conflict between heroic and utopian positions, is a crucial fault line in the political culture of the west, visible in a broad selection of major utopian and dystopian writings in literature and political theory. My account ends with two of the most determined defenders of each position—B. F. Skinner on the utopian side and Anthony Burgess on the heroic. But for the most part, the dilemma does not lead the authors I discuss to pitched battles. Rather, the dilemma itself is at the heart of the story. The majority of those who confront it, beginning with Thomas More, the inventor of utopia as a literary genre, feel the cutting power of both the dilemma's horns. The tension between utopian and heroic ideas, stances, and values is a powerfully generative stimulus for seminal figures as different as Jonathan Swift, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell. Their struggles with the dilemma form the backbone of the story I will tell.

This book is not a survey of utopias or utopianism.[6] It focuses on a sequence of major ancient and modern texts of a particular kind. They are *political utopias*—works that portray or reflect upon holistic, secular conceptions of ideal social design, what Lyman Tower Sargent calls "utopias of human contrivance,"[7] imagined either in the abstract or in fiction. Such texts have typically been considered by scholars to be primarily expressions of hope for a better world, one of the forms of "social dreaming."[8] Political utopias are often discussed in tandem with non-political ones—visions of tranquility and natural abundance set in the past like the Golden Age, in a millennial future, or in timeless realms like Arcadia, the Land of Cockaigne, or the Big Rock Candy Mountain.[9] Political utopias do retain a strong association with ideal satisfaction, even if that satisfaction is of something as abstract as the desire for things to be different. But what I hope to show in the following chapters is that our understanding of such utopias will be considerably sharpened by seeing them as responses to a specific, pre-existing cultural form—heroic-aristocratic society—along with the competitive psychology that fuels it and the literature that expresses its worldview. Even after the eighteenth century, when aristocratic culture had given way to capitalism and the middle class, major utopian works were still struggling with the need for fame and reputation, psychologically the core heroic imperatives.

Historically, then, utopias have a typical opponent, a formidable one with a classic philosophy of its own and ubiquitous literary and social expressions. This gives utopias a repressive as well as a liberating element.

They are always fighting with the slender resources of reason to reject the passionate, fame-centered ethos of heroic culture and the literary values it fosters, an ethos that was easily adapted to the bourgeois ambitions of capitalism. And because literature and art have so much importance in the modern world, the utopian ambition to rid the world of heroes and the struggles that create them has become a notable source of resistance to rational utopian planning. Scholars have long recognized the critical dimension of utopia and its connection with satire[10] as well as the resistance aroused by utopian visions, but utopia has been typically discussed as the primary term and anti-utopia as a reaction.[11] Here I experiment with inverting that explanatory relationship, setting the figure of utopia against the different, pre-existing, and ever-present ground of the heroic ethos.

Irony toward pride and the heroic concern with status rather than hopes for rational reform remained the dominant note of utopian thinking through the eighteenth century—as long, in other words, as aristocracy and monarchy remained in the ascendant. It was at this time, we will see, that the heroic emphasis upon social dignity received its most trenchant analyses in the works of Rousseau and Adam Smith. In the nineteenth century, however, when enlightenment egalitarianism, abetted by advances in technology and the modern sense of progress, made utopia look like a realistic goal, many utopians abandoned the satiric detachment and self-inclusive skepticism of their predecessors. Once utopian social thinkers began to aim at real-world implementation, they needed to recapture some heroic resources, including the resort to violence to which utopians had typically been averse. Utopian projects became prominent in a period of dynamic social change. Historicizing revolutionaries like Karl Marx could combine heroic and utopian moments in a single intellectual framework by locating them in separate phases of history; Marx saw his generation facing a dystopian present calling for heroic measures to produce a utopian future. Revolutionary heroism was by definition anti-aristocratic, but it produced new elites and new hierarchies of its own. In the twentieth century, utopian violence brought visions of an ever more dystopian future.

I have emphasized that the conflict between heroic and utopian forms and values which the dilemma produces is not an affair of opposing champions but rather of internal tension animating major works of the tradition. Still, marking out the typically contrasting features of heroic and utopian writing and thinking will be useful as a preface to the readings ahead. My first chapter begins with a discussion of Homer's *Iliad*, which gives a complete picture of the heroic-aristocratic culture to which utopia is the photographic negative. As it appears in Homer, the heroic mode is an integral functioning unit, with social, psychological, and literary elements naturally and inextricably fused. The utopian response to the heroic repertoire, beginning with Plato, does not always reverse every one of its features, but with these features in mind, we can inventory the anti-heroic features that utopian thinking and writing often share.

Most obviously, where the heroic ethos is conservative and past-oriented, utopias aim at the future and the possibility of change. War is the theater in which the heroic is at home, while utopias aim at peace, stability, and protection from war. Heroic culture also celebrates athletics and sports, especially hunting, whereas utopias often refuse competition and the shedding of blood. Violence and passion are congenial to the heroic sensibility, while utopias aim at control. Classic heroism has a decidedly masculine character, while utopias can be friendlier to women and sometimes have an explicitly feminist dimension. And where the family is the fundamental heroic social unit, utopia centers upon the city or the state, even tending to discourage personal attachment and the mourning that comes with it; utopias seek to forge emotional bonds between the individual and the state, an entity transcending death and personal sadness. The fundamental goal of the heroic spirit is glory, for the individual and for the family, while utopias aim at providing leisure and freedom from want. Heroic societies are hierarchical and competitive, whereas utopias aim to be at least relatively egalitarian and harmonious; indeed, the egalitarian element of modern culture gives it a strong utopian bent. Social worth in heroic society is hereditary, aristocracy being a justification in itself for power and respect; utopias, by contrast, aim to improve their citizens by education, by law, by eliminating monetary incentives, and often by eugenic control of reproduction. Heroic culture hews to the local soil, but utopian thinking can be cosmopolitan and even aim at a world state. Finally, heroic culture has a deep connection to the epic imagination and to literature in general; utopias, on the other hand, have at best an uneasy relation to the literary imagination, and the worlds without heroes they aspire to often lack literary interest. Rather than epic poetry, the most powerful utopian literary form is satire, though the reliance upon time travel and the discovery of new worlds in utopian narratives also permit rather weak versions of the romance. Since Plato, utopian and aesthetic values have been continually at odds, and modern authors like Friedrich Nietzsche who defend the heroic spirit often do so from an aestheticist point of view, putting intensity and grandeur over everyday happiness, taking the side of poetry in Plato's "ancient quarrel" between philosophy and poetry.[12]

Nietzsche sees the history of morals as a conflict of strong and weak biological types acting by the dictates of their natures, whereas the method of this study is literary and historical. It aims to show how major authors have struggled between the horns of the utopian dilemma and what they made from that struggle. Readers will decide for themselves if this tells us something about human nature, if it only is an accident of western history, or a distinctive element of the western tradition. For me, the fact that so many compelling writers and thinkers have struggled with the utopian dilemma is a strong indication that the phenomenon is a perennial one and that, however given to extremes, both sides of the argument have undeniable weight. Few of my readers will need persuading that the vision of stability and happiness

and the rational critique of heroic inequality offered by utopian thinkers have more than local, historical value, wary though they may be of utopian social controls. But it is important to recognize that the heroic side of the argument is not empirically frivolous. Indeed, the twenty-first century offers stronger evidence for the power and persistence of competitive psychology than was available to any of its predecessors. Despite the recent pandemic, people in the middle class of the developed world still enjoy physical security, longevity, quality of health care, ease and speed of travel, variety and safety of diet, and access to and quality of information and entertainment all at a level unimaginable even by the monarchs and captains of industry of the nineteenth century, and perhaps well into the twentieth. Even those members of the middle classes who are not as well off as their parents are still better off in material terms than Napoleon or Queen Victoria, for all of their lands, possessions, and servants.[13] From a material point of view, therefore, hundreds of millions of people have everything a utopia could offer, yet they are not necessarily satisfied. Modern advantages lack the gleam proportionate to their Napoleonic grandeur simply because so many other people have them. People of the present compare themselves not with Napoleon but with their peers, and they do so anxiously. An impressive body of research indicates that people's assessments of their own life satisfaction do not rise nearly in proportion to their material wealth. Rather, well-being is framed and experienced in local and comparative, not absolute terms; for many of the well-to-do, the wealth and prestige of those around them creates a need for more wealth and prestige no matter how much they have. Competition for the signs of happiness outweighs the happiness they bring. Social competition extends to the amassing of hundreds of billions of dollars, fortunes outshining all the treasures of past royalty. Yet with this vast surplus, beyond all powers of enjoyment, many continue to accumulate while others starve.[14]

While in traditional societies hierarchy, caste, and rank are sustained in their importance by official ideologies, often grounded in religious belief and celebrated in poetry and song, the partial, theoretical egalitarianism of modern, capitalist democracies makes assertions of merit more guarded and covert. But status signaling and status hierarchies remain pervasive. Ranks come into play more or less instantaneously in even the most casual and transient social interactions. Academic research in sociology and psychology supports the ancient belief that concern for status (respect, fame, admiration, attention) is a fundamental human motive. Psychologists disagree about whether status-seeking and hierarchy formation are autonomous, naturally evolved tendencies or whether they are a cultural creation like a language for which we have an evolutionary predisposition.[15] But there is general agreement that concern for status is not only important but ubiquitous in all societies and across differences of culture, age, and gender. Human beings are constantly monitoring how they are being evaluated by others and judging what role they can play in order to be favorably accepted by any group of which they are a part. They are equally energetic in judging

what roles they willingly accord to others. Remarkably, people are more accurate when assessing their standing relative to others than when assessing themselves in absolute terms, in which case they tend to exaggerate their own positive qualities.[16]

No student of the past will be surprised that "fame is the spur" ("That last infirmity of noble mind," as Milton called it) which leads human beings to "scorn delights and live laborious days,"[17] nor that respect and relative standing are central human concerns. It is evident on every page of the history and literature of the world.[18] Milton's Satan provided its ultimate motto—"Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven"[19]; for Satan, neither the ultimate comforts of heaven nor the ultimate torments of hell can outweigh the attractions of relative social superiority. For the defenders of heroic psychology, protesting against the dullness of utopia, the spoils of victory are not the key to happiness. They see the taste for the competition itself, and for the struggles it demands, as the bass notes of human sensibility, typically conceived, of course, in a distinctively masculine manner. The competition and the glory of it, not the prize, is the answer to human desire. True happiness requires struggle, just as true solidarity requires a common enemy. Worlds without struggle and without the heroes that emerge from struggle, worlds blessed with systemic happiness, look so tedious as to be unendurable. Wallace Stevens puts the heroic complaint with unforgettable vividness. Without the heroic imagination, he says, human beings would be "Castratos of moon-mash."[20]

The freedom from difficulty, therefore, which is the goal of utopia, is actually, from the heroic point of view, its greatest drawback. And it is a disquieting point against the utopian position that when human beings are free to amuse themselves—an activity that presumably tells us something about the kind of world they want to live in—they divide up into teams to imitate the dynamics of war. It is even more disquieting for the utopian that, when poets and writers come to tell the tale of life according to the dictates of their imagination, it is misery, strife, and struggle they use their powers to evoke. Storytelling, whether historical or fictive, dwells overwhelmingly upon violence, passion, and change. It dwells, in other words, upon just those costs of grandiosity and folly which utopias aim to eliminate. This is why utopian literature struggles to rise above the banality of goodness. By the very token of its validity as a rational vision of life, utopian happiness lacks everything that appeals to the storytelling imagination. As Mustafa Mond, Controller of the utopian World State in *Brave New World*, explains, "Happiness is never grand."

Insofar as imaginative power, then, is an indicator of what people desire from life, utopia is sadly lacking. Literary visions of the happiness of others can please in modest, lyric doses, or at the end of a comedy of errors, when the happy couples must be ushered off-stage as quickly as possible before their felicity begins to cloy. But the appetite for the spectacle of others' suffering seems to be insatiable, making it look as though human beings

are really dystopians at heart. If it is true that one person's paradise can be another's hell, the compensations of the dystopian imagination make it look like one person's hell can also be another's paradise.

From the utopian point of view, of course, the heroic protest against happiness looks like an insane combination of sadism and masochism. If you don't like peace and order, the utopian might ask, why settle for just a little struggle and adventure? Why not opt for total chaos? This looks like a devastating argument, but the true defender of the heroic has a reply: Let us have war and the poetry of war. Hasn't war always been the noblest field of heroic aspiration? Doesn't great art require spectacles of struggle and sacrifice? And isn't the utopian mission also a heroic one, requiring its own, overmastering elite? Doesn't the appeal of revolution depend just a little on unseating and doing violence to one's enemies? Isn't it, in fact, only in war and disaster that the collective unity longed for by utopians is ever realized? As committed a utopian as the Marxist Fredric Jameson seems to admit this when, with rueful irony, he refers to World War II as "the great American utopia."[21]

The utopian and heroic modes mark the extremes of the political scale—with communism and its dream of equality on the side of the utopian and fascism with its aesthetics of violence and its nostalgia for the past on the side of the heroic. But what makes the dilemma especially painful and exhausting is that, under conditions of polarization, it also operates in the middle zone of politics. The last few years in the United States have made this obvious. Progressive politicians who want to improve the material lives of ordinary people find themselves resisted not only by the wealthy defending their elite status but by the very people who stand to benefit from such improvements but whose dignity resists the condescension of charity, who identify in imagination with the privileges of the wealthy, and who resent the critical stance toward the heroic view of national greatness which socially remedial measures seem to imply. It was this aspect of human psychology, we will see, that led Dostoevsky to define the human being as "the ungrateful biped."

Mask resistance in the recent pandemic provides a graphic illustration of this dynamic. Wearing masks to prevent the spread of a virus seems like the most minimally utopian imaginable demand, but for many, dignity requires the freedom to say no. The rational planner says that the individuals who demand this choice are going against their own interests, but the heroic reply reminds us that human beings are not the rational utility-maximizers imagined by progressive politicians and economic theorists. Freedom and dignity easily prevail over material benefit. Adding to the effect of this dilemma is the fact that people on both sides of it feel a need to establish their identities in contrast with the other and the true difficulties of political compromise come into focus. Seemingly tiny matters can become signs of party affiliation, badges of ultimate loyalty. In politics, as Aristotle puts it, "Every difference is apt to create a division."[22]

It is infuriating that rational planning on the social level confronts so many obstacles from the human ego. My emphasis upon the explanatory power of the heroic imperative toward status should not be mistaken for an endorsement of its ethical outlook, even though I believe its demands for dignity and the challenge of life must be taken seriously. The social hope embodied in utopian dreaming is essential to any tolerable prospect for the future, as Oscar Wilde's famous words suggest. Such hopes must contend with the dilemma whose literary and historical expression is traced in these pages.

Let me end with a word about the limits of this study. As mentioned above, I have concentrated on political utopias, works which develop or reflect on the possibility of circumventing the foibles of human nature by a radical reform of social arrangements. This leaves out religious schemes of life such as those of medieval monasticism or the American Shakers which have undoubtedly contributed to utopian thinking. Many important utopian writers have had religious motivations, and many religions—Christianity and Buddhism most notably—share the utopian rejection of violence and aristocratic privilege. They do so, however, by offering other-worldly rather than secular alternatives. This opens up its own dilemmas, but they are different from the one I have treated here. In some cases, the tension between religious humility and the heroic spirit produces ambiguities and ambivalence not unlike what I describe in the chapters below. I am thinking especially of John Milton, whose portrait of Satan in *Paradise Lost* provides at once an evocation and a powerful critique of the heroic spirit. Milton's concern for the freedom in thought and action of the "warfaring Christian," for the need for truth to be tried "by what is contrary," and his belief in his own grand mission as an epic poet and defender of regicide, stands in awkward relation to his ultimate defense of hierarchy and Christian obedience.[23]

Restricting my topic to secular utopianism helped focus this study on western and modern examples in conformity with my personal expertise. I have mentioned that I see the utopian dilemma as a more or less perennial phenomenon, however strongly inflected by differences of time, place, culture, and literary tradition. My confidence in this regard depends not primarily on the psychological research on status cited in my notes but from the ubiquity in the history and literature of the world of status competition and the respect of others as motivations for human behavior along with a persistent irony about its costs and the difficulty of imagining its overthrow. Let me say to readers who cannot countenance any perennial explanation that the value of this study need not depend upon any one attitude toward the utopian dilemma. This study will have achieved its goal if it can show that awareness of the dilemma casts valuable light on a broad range of canonical works under the umbrella of utopia.

Notes

1 "Fergus and the Druid," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 37, ll. 27–28.
2 As J. C. Davis puts it, "In Utopia we see no invocation of a *deus ex machina*, nor any wishing away of the deficiencies of man or nature. Systems have to be devised whereby men will be able to offset their own continuing wickedness and cope with the deficiencies of nature. Such systems are inevitably bureaucratic, institutional, legal and educational, artificial and organizational." J. C. Davis, "The History of Utopia: The Chronology of Nowhere," in *Utopias*, eds. Peter Alexander and Roger Gill (London: Duckworth, 1984), 9.
3 William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series, 1997), Act 2, scene 2, ll. 453–56.
4 Charles-Louis Secondat, Baron of La Brède and Montesquieu, *My Thoughts*, trans. Henry C. Clark (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012), 274. Adapted.
5 For a thoughtful assessment of the utopian's potential replies to what I call the heroic critique, see George Kateb, *Utopia and Its Enemies* (New York: Shocken, 1972). It is evidence of the intractable character of the utopian dilemma that, writing not a decade after the original edition of his book (1963), Kateb had already changed sides. "The very wish to compose a utopia," he writes, "to set forth in detail a utopian way of life, may in fact be repressive." "Preface," vi.
6 For broad views of the subject see Frank E. Manuel and Fritzi P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys, and Lyman Tower Sargent, eds., *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstruction of Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Gregory Claeys, *Utopia: The History of an Idea* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020). An excellent place to start with utopia studies is Sargent's *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
7 Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopia Revisited," *Utopia Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994): 4.
8 Idealized religious and folk images of society are present in many cultures and periods, though secular schemes of utopian design are primarily the products of the West. For a survey of "Extra-European Visions of the Ideal Society," see Claeys, *Utopia*, chapter 3.
9 Krishnan Kumar, for example, regards utopianism as a composite of many forms—visions of Cockaigne contributing the "element of desire," Paradise and the Golden Age contributing the "element of harmony," the millennium contributing the "element of hope," and the ideal city contributing the "element of design." See Kumar, *Utopianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 18. But J. C. Davis persuasively separates utopia from other modes of social dreaming that focus on the millennium, arcadia, cockagne, and the perfect moral commonwealth and recognizes the utopian mode as a constant form. See *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 5–6.
10 Robert C. Elliott has traced the deep connection between utopia and satire. "Satire and utopia seem naturally compatible," he writes, satire having "two main elements: the predominating negative part, which attacks folly or vice, and the understated positive part, which establishes a norm, a standard of excellence, against which folly and vice are judged. The literary utopia, on the other hand, reverses these proportions of negative and positive, … presentation of the ideal overweighing the prescriptive attack on the bad old days which Utopia has happily ended." See *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 22.

11 See, for example, Krishnan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), another broad treatment which contains rich discussions of several texts discussed below. Kumar considers utopia a strictly modern phenomenon.

12 Nietzsche's Apollinian–Dionysian dichotomy is a way of formulating the utopian dilemma in psycho-mythologizing terms, and his "genealogy of morals" is a resource for defending the heroic imperative. Nietzsche sees what he calls the history of morals as a conflict between the two points of view I have been describing, the "knightly-aristocratic class" versus its egalitarian enemies. The knightly class, he argues, "noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded," creates its own values out of the "pathos of distance," which is to say "the protracted and domineering fundamental total feeling" of a higher over a lower type. Correspondingly, Nietzsche argues that religious and utopian critics of the heroic imperative are working from "below," putting forward a slave morality normalizing human frailty in opposition to the morality of strength of the masters. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989), 26. Translation slightly altered. Nietzsche paints a broad historical canvas based on the distinction between master and slave morality. Homeric greatness, he believes, was undermined by Socratic questioning, the grandeur of Rome was undone by the Hebraic spirit of Christianity, the resurgent heroism of the Renaissance and its renewed "classical ideal" were quashed by the Reformation, and, going in the other direction, the utopian leveling of the French Revolution evoked a heroic response in the rise of Napoleon—a "synthesis of the *inhuman* and *superhuman*" (52–54). In the final analysis, however, Nietzsche believes that the utopian morality of the slaves has won out over the heroic morality of the masters, resulting in a nightmare scenario—the "leveling of European man" (44), the "reduction of the beast of prey man to a tame and civilized animal" (42).

13 For a recent account, see Bradford DeLong, *Slouching Toward Utopia: An Economic History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2022).

14 Status as a factor in human behavior has not found its Marx, though Adam Smith made a seminal contribution in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as did Max Weber in *Economy and Society*. French authors like La Rochefoucauld, Laclos, Stendhal, and Proust anatomized the subtleties of social vanity, including its role in the experience of love, and as far back as the early eighteenth century, the Duc de Saint-Simon observed the flourishing in pre-civilized societies of caste hierarchies like his own. (See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie with the collaboration of Jean-François Fitou, *Saint-Simon and the Court of Louis XIV*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 64–65). Thorstein Veblen pioneered the economics of status as "conspicuous consumption" in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, a line of insight followed up over many years by the economist Robert Frank (especially in *Choosing the Right Pond*). The anthropologist Louis Dumont broke important ground studying the Indian caste system in *Homo hierarchicus*, and Marcel Mauss opened his field to the socially aggressive aspects of generosity and the "gift-attack" in *The Gift*. Pierre Bourdieu explored the implications of status for aesthetic judgment in *Distinction* and W. David Marx's recent book *Status and Culture* explores the subject in depth. The vast literature on happiness and its lack of correlation with material rewards beyond the basic necessities provides a parallel commentary to the study of status.

15 For the evolutionary account of status competition, see Joey T. Cheng and Jessica L. Tracy, "Toward a Unified Science of Hierarchy: Dominance and Prestige Are Two Fundamental Pathways to Human Social Rank," in *The Psychology of Social Status*, eds. Joey T. Cheng, Jessica L. Tracy, and Cameron Anderson (New York: Springer, 2014), chapter 1. One of the best places to begin on the subject of

status in general is Cecilia L. Ridgeway, *Status: Why Is It Everywhere? Why Does It Matter?* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2019), which provides a broad overview of the subject while defending the theory of status systems as cultural inventions.

16 The findings in this and the next paragraph are surveyed and assessed in Cameron Anderson, John A. Hildreth, and Laura Howland, "Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive? A Review of the Empirical Literature," *Psychological Bulletin* 141. no. 3 (2015): 574–601.

17 John Milton, "Lycidas," in *Milton's Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jason Rosenblatt (New York: Norton, 2011), ll. 70–72.

18 It is so ubiquitous in recorded history that David Graeber and David Wengrow have to exercise their extraordinary interpretive ingenuity upon the thin record of prehistoric humanity looking for hopeful signs of cultures consciously chosing nonhierarchical, noncompetitive forms of social organization. See *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2021).

19 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Second ed., ed. Alastair Fowler (New York: Longman, 1998), l. 263.

20 "Men Made Out of Words," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 355. The masculine slant of the heroic position hardly needs to be emphasized.

21 Fredric Jameson et al., *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army,* ed. Slavoj Zizek (New York: Verso, 2016), 21. Surprisingly, Jameson sees the U. S. Army as the most likely vehicle for the utopian transformation of the United States, a startling example of the utopian reclamation of heroic resources.

22 *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 211.

23 "Areopagitica," in Milton, *Milton's Selected Poetry and Prose*, 350.

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1 The Hero and the City
Homer to Diogenes

Homer and the Heroic Worldview

Utopian thinking, the search for the best form of socially organized life, emerged in the Greece of classical times, a culture whose worldview was firmly grounded in epic poetry and the heroic-aristocratic culture that produced it. Indeed, Utopia finds its anti-type and rival in the heroic worldview, a near-universal pre-modern phenomenon canonically embodied for western culture in epic poetry and particularly the works of Homer. Its core value has many aspects and goes by many names, honor, dignity, respect, glory, and fame being just a few of them. The family and the tribe are its bearers; glory passes down from father to son and works its way back upward from son to father and grandfather. War is its proving ground. The Trojan Hector expresses the essential dream of the hero in Book 6 of *The Iliad* when he holds up his baby boy, Astyanax, and prays that, "like me, he will be preeminent among the Trojans … and someday let them say of him, 'He is better by far than his father'," when he brings home the "bloody spoils."[1]

Money and property have their place in the life of the hero, but chiefly as a means of displaying power and exchanging the gifts that cement alliances among warriors. Both giving and taking are heroic, self-glorifying actions, and every valued action has a heroic character. In *The Iliad*, even the mosquito is admired because it never tires of questing for human blood (17:570–572). Women typically play the role of booty in this world, prizes for masculine conquest and exchange, or they offer a distraction from the path of the hero, though there are exceptions like Penelope in *The Odyssey*. Aristocratic women can share the proud standing of their families. The dynastic significance of marriage gives women status. Women's beauty can have disturbing, uncanny effects, and women can be bringers of conflict and violence, like the fatal sisters Helen and Clytemnestra.

Inequality is no by-product of the heroic-aristocratic mode but its raison d'être. Conflict distinguishes the victors from the vanquished, demonstrating that some people—and some families—are simply greater, nobler, and better than others. So arises a justified scale of worth that stretches from king to slave. But despite the glamor of social rank, the epic worldview is

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gravely pessimistic, even fatalistic. Mortality is the defining aspect of the human condition just as dealing out death on the battlefield is the surest sign of worth. For mortals, there is no true afterlife. Hades, the Homeric underworld, is a sink for shadows. "Like leaves," says the god Apollo, mortals "now flourish and grow warm/with life … but then again fade away" (21:464–466). Mortality sets human beings apart from the gods—the immortals. The one way to transcend mortal existence is by surviving through family and through fame in the minds of others.

Such an outlook can only be fundamentally conservative. Greatness resides in the past inherited from one's ancestors and, however grim the warrior's life, however meager the existence of mortals compared with that of the gods, an untarnishable glamor attaches to the human past and its memory. Everything older is better, grander, more glorious. Even the doings of the immortals, creatures of an ageless perfection, pale in interest beside the legends of mortal heroes. For immortal beings, no permanent change is possible, no pain or trouble can touch them vitally, unless it be through their attachment to mortal fates, and for this reason they exhibit a certain utopian dullness. The power of the gods compels deference, tribute, and even gratitude, but not praise. Human fragility, by contrast, imparts seriousness to human life and action, and while human greatness passes away, its memory endures in poetry. Poets, as the bearers of fame and memory, also claim their share of glory, engaging in their own heroic performances as they celebrate the heroes of the past. The link between poetry, memory, and the heroic past is necessary and essential.

The Homeric world has no politics, no interest groups, no principled conflicts of right. Monarchy in the form of tribal leadership is not subject to question. But in another sense, Homer's characters inhabit a thoroughly political cosmos, for the mortals' relations to every element of their surroundings must be negotiated on a personal basis with tribute-seeking deities, the natural world being populated by hungry tutelary presences. The sun, the wind, the sea, all of the elements insist on their just deserts, and mortals cannot thrive without their favor. Aristocratic relations of superiority and deference extend upward into the heavens, where another, grander monarchy holds sway. The gods, too, are relentless in their need for tribute, respect, and sacrifice. The rate of epic calamity shows how impossible it is to slake their hunger for regard.

The power of Homeric divinities, permeating all of nature, extends inward as well, to the human mind. Love, wisdom, courage, anger, and fear are divine; they come and go at the bidding of the gods. The modern sense of inner self and outer world is still a thing of the future. In Homer, the precarious nature of external fortune, the caprice of divine favor, and the uncontrollability of human motives interact in a peculiarly unstable and frightening way. Add to this that the gods, in their idleness and craving for tribute, show a fearful disregard for the value of human life, in a way that Homer often depicts as comic. In a spat with Zeus in Book Four of *The*

Iliad, Hera bids her husband to go ahead and destroy her favorite Greek cities—"Argos, Sparta, Mycenae of the wide ways"—so long as she can do the same to Troy (*Iliad*, 4:51–55). Later, armed with magical resources borrowed from other gods, she seduces the monarch of the cosmos in order to distract him from the conflict on earth. While Zeus and Hera make love in a cloud, dozens of Trojans die grisly deaths.

It is not easy for the mortal inhabitants of such a fraught and haunted world to coalesce into extra-familial units. Because reputation is a competitive commodity, even the bond of the fighting group has its limits, illustrated supremely by Achilles' withdrawal from the Trojan conflict. Fighters compete for the sake of personal glory and the spoils, with little sense that victory is a collective achievement. What the warriors have in common is the glamor of battle and its pain. *The Iliad* provides a complete catalogue of the insults that can be sustained by the human body. The interest of the final confrontation between Hector and Achilles depends not upon the drama of the struggle—Achilles inspects Hector with cool detachment and effortlessly slits his throat—but upon the utter humiliation and pain of Hector's death, a death made all the more vivid because Hector's own parents are watching, their pathetic pleas for his retreat having been ignored. Hecuba, with the most graphic possible gesture, bares her breasts to call her son back home, and Priam, grieving over the ugliness of his old man's carcass as it will appear when Troy is taken, pictures the dogs gnawing the genitals that bred his family.

No public spirit mitigates such private sufferings, for the loss of life is made only more bitter by the loss of glory. By the same token, there is no limit to Homeric expressions of grief. For Achilles, the pain of the hero at the loss of Patroclus is calamitous and the sheer scale and extravagance of his mourning mark his wealth, his power, and his greatness. The death of Hector is anticipated repeatedly and with terror by the members of his family. On both sides of the conflict, mourning is the climax of the narrative. It has often been noted that, even though *The Iliad* is a Greek poem, the difference between Greeks and Trojans is not one of good versus evil, both sides being great and noble. While this is true, it does not keep the hatred between the antagonists from becoming absolute. Achilles, left to his own devices, would outrage Hector's body forever; his fury leads him to sacrifice twelve Trojan boys. Hector's mother wishes she could devour Achilles raw.

It must be recognized that even the epic has its utopian note. The overwhelming force of violence and suffering in the poem does not prevent Homer from recognizing the value of domestic felicity and social unity. Indeed, that felicity is the measure of what is lost in battle and makes for the poignancy of its loss. Homer lingers fondly over the reliable architecture of reproduction in Troy, where Priam's fifty sons and twelve daughters sleep with their spouses in rows of stone chambers. As he shows Achilles chasing Hector around the walls of Troy, the poet nostalgically takes note of the "washing hollows … stone and magnificent" where the Trojan women in

peacetime would come out of the city to do their laundry (22:153–154). The stories of Achilles, Odysseus, and their literary descendant Aeneas are all designed to illustrate the sacrifice of everyday happiness demanded by the hero's fate, and the charms of home and peace have never been more achingly attractive than in the light of their ruin in the Trojan War. At one point, even Achilles questions the choice of fame over long life and happiness, and the shield made for him by the god Hephaistos provides an unrivaled image of all that is lost in war. It shows an ideally cooperative agricultural society and a city ruled by just legal customs. In the end, however, Achilles makes the heroic choice, and while, in the underworld of *The Odyssey*, he laments the emptiness and lowliness of the afterlife, he is still transported by the news of his living son's accomplishments. Fame and war, not peace and homecoming, remain the family's governing interest. The special luck of Odysseus is that his homecoming is also an occasion for heroic violence and an increase of his glory. At the end of *The Odyssey*, we see him fighting in tandem with his father and his son, the family intact as a heroic unit.

Athens

The works of Homer were preserved by the Greeks of the classical period as the bearers of all wisdom about men, women, and the gods, but Homer's anarchic vision could not be the basis for civilized life. Plato, imagining Kallipolis, the ideal city of *The Republic*, indicts the Homeric poems for destabilizing the citizen's psyche with a terrifying and scandalous image of the gods as well as for inviting violent passion and a fear of death that would undermine the courage of the city's defenders. These are only a few of the motives for philosophy's "ancient quarrel" with poetry. It is not simply poetry that Plato is complaining about; it is the entire heroic worldview which poetry exists to celebrate and which was a constant problem for the culture of the city. Plato's attack on heroic culture will be a model for the utopias of the future. His aim is to replace Achilles with Socrates, to put an intellectual hero in the place of a martial one as representing the highest type of human being. It is a late gesture because the Greek polis had been struggling for centuries to adapt the family-oriented warrior-ethos of Homer to its needs.

The appeal to classical Greeks of the heroic ethos would never be dampened, and all of Athens' famous leaders were men of noble family,[2] but Athenian politics, under tyrants and democratic governments, developed in a way that steadily marginalized aristocratic family interests in favor of the ordinary citizen. The political stability of the Athenian democracy depended on the pursuit of empire and grand public works like the Parthenon, both of which employed and empowered the less wealthy men of Athens. The government itself remunerated citizen participation in public decisions. The Eleusinian Mysteries, festivals like the Panathenaia, and especially the

City Dionysia, with its tragedies, comedies, and triumphant processions, all contributed to the popular dynamism of Athens, though they also gave scope to the self-display of wealthy citizens like the men who funded the choruses.

In the fifth and fourth centuries, it was taken for granted that Athenian citizens—Athenian males, that is, with enough property to qualify—had no private interests which could legitimately oppose the democracy. The self-regard of Achilles would have been hazardous in the world of the polis. There were limits on the opulence of private dwellings, and citizens whose wealth or behavior posed a threat to social harmony could be ostracized by a vote of the assembly for no other reason than their potential divisiveness. During the reforms of Cleisthenes in 508, the city had been reorganized into "demes," artificial districts carved out of non-contiguous urban, rural, and coastal areas in such a way as to undermine local and tribal affiliations. Athens solicited its citizens' allegiance with a full schedule of choruses and religious festivals, which were also celebrations of the city, including offerings to the gods for the benefit of all. Its funeral orations—a uniquely Athenian genre—marked the glory not of the individuals who had fallen in battle but of the city itself. Listings of the dead omitted their patronymics and deme-affiliations, converting the fallen into pure citizens of the democracy.[3]

In Pericles' funeral oration, as presented by Thucydides, fallen Athenian citizens, "in a small moment of time," are said to achieve "the climax of their lives, a culmination of glory" which "remains eternal in men's minds."[4] This is glory of the Homeric sort, but Pericles diverges from epic practice by failing to name a single hero. The sacrifice of the dead to the city was to be celebrated, not mourned, in prose rather than poetry.[5] Only the tears of the enemy were to be mentioned (85). The fact that private mourning was the special domain of women gives point to Pericles' famous comment that widows are best not heard from at all. The tears that belonged to Achilles and Priam in epic poetry now belong only to women and are kept firmly in the margins (79). Indeed, the democratic culture of the Athenian polis tended strongly to suppress the more prominent role of well-born women in aristocratic culture.[6]

Poetry, of course, did have its place among the Athenian festivals, especially the City Dionysia, held every spring, which included the tragic and comic contests along with parades featuring the spoils of war, tribute drawn from the empire, and state-supported orphans. Though the tragedies seem to revel in the pity and fear that Pericles avoids and that Plato would later denounce, it must be remembered that the calamitous events presented on the tragic stage were set in the distant past. For the most part, they occurred not in Athens but in other cities like Thebes, with which Athens had unfriendly relations. The tragedies dramatized explicit problems of the polis. In plays such as Sophocles' *Antigone*, the Athenians could see what happens when family and city interests collide. In Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and in Euripides' *Medea*, they could see what

happens when women bring the world into disorder by stepping outside their place. When Athens itself appears in the tragedies, it is often a scene of reconciliation, where the blood feud of Aeschylus's Orestes and the Furies can be settled by Athena and the city's judgment, converting the Furies into "kindly ones" and bringing a blessing to the polis. Athens is where Sophocles' Oedipus can reach his final, sacred resting place just outside the city at Colonus. It is to Athens and its ruler, Theseus, that Euripides' *Phoenician Women* find recourse after the Thebans' refusal to bury the Seven Against Thebes.

Tragedy, then, was a forum in which Athenians could explore the tensions between their still-active Homeric heritage and the demands of city life while maintaining a certain exemption from the darker implications of disaster. It celebrated the city as a principle of power, unity, and order, even as it dramatized the disastrous grandeur of individual fates. There was also a warning that the controlling power of the city should not go beyond its proper limits. Tragedy resided not under the auspices of a god of reason and civility like Apollo but under the auspices of Dionysius, an outsider god of revelry and natural force. Tragedy could thus offer warnings to city rulers like Sophocles' Creon, who goes too far in suppressing Antigone's imperative to bury her brother according to the rites of the family cult. And in Euripides' *The Bacchae*, it is Dionysius himself who shows what happens when the ruler's impulse toward control fails to respect the force of the divine. Two millennia later, Friedrich Nietzsche, that late defender of the warrior ethos, was to cast the psychic struggle between utopian and heroic imperatives precisely in terms of the conflict between the two Greek gods, Apollo and Dionysius.

Sparta

The Athenians, of course, were not alone in facing the challenge to adapt the heroic-aristocratic ethos to the needs of the city. By the time of Pericles, Greece was a fully developed polis-culture, occupying a broad geographical area unified by a common language, common gods and customs, and national institutions like the Delphic Oracle and the great athletic contests, though with each city enjoying its own political independence.[7] The ancient model of monarchy, based on the rule of a single natural unit, the family or household, had given way to more complex aristocratic and democratic regimes. Greeks thought of their cities not as products of nature but as human contrivances invented by great founders. From the mid-eighth to the mid-sixth centuries, cities on the mainland gave birth to hundreds of politically independent colonies around the Mediterranean, so the construction of new cities with the best possible laws was not an intellectual exercise but an ongoing practical project.[8] As late as the mid-fifth century, the Sophist Protagoras was appointed by Pericles to devise a constitution for the new colony at Thurii, with the utopian town planner Hippodamus as

the architect and Herodotus, that connoisseur of cultural invention, among its first citizens (23).

In Aristophanes' play *The Birds*, when a great new polis, Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, has been established in the sky, cutting off the Olympian gods from their supply of tribute and sacrifice, one of the urban hangers-on who show up to offer the new regime his services is a poet who promises to give the city a newly minted founding legend. It is, of course, a sally against the heroizing gift of poetry and the self-glorifying habits of the city, but it also shows how thoroughly the political realm had been established as a field of invention. Throughout his career, Aristophanes relentlessly mocked the ingenuity of Athenian democracy by devising absurd scenarios of social innovation. Some of them involve sympathetic portrayals of anarchic individuals like Dikaiopolis, the hero of *The Acharnians*, who virtually achieves a one-man secession from the city, making a private peace with the Spartans during the Peloponnesian War, setting up his own war-profiteering market, and conducting his own festival of Dionysius. It is a striking portrayal of the private resistance to a failing regime, but reform of the city is Aristophanes' primary theme. He repeatedly invents comically utopian solutions for the Athenian war-addiction, including Lysistrata's Panhellenic sex-strike to bring the soldiers home, and the gynarchic communist regime of *Women of the Assembly*. It is high-born women who carry out Aristophanes' utopian fantasies of peace,[9] rescuing the city in imagination, as Plato was to do, from the humiliations of the democracy. One of the strengths of the Athenian polis and its patriarchal order was that it could find amusement in imagining utopian alternatives to itself.

For the ancient Greeks, then, politics had become a utopian field of invention and, eventually, of scientific investigation, and by the middle of the fourth century, Aristotle and his students could compile accounts of hundreds of different polis-regimes. It would be naïve to think of the differences in regime among Greek cities only as experiments in living. They were the products of internal social conflict and provided ideological instruments of war against other cities. The aim of Greek politics was not utopia but victory. The non-utopian consequences of the heroic competition among political regimes were made fully evident in the Peloponnesian War, when Greeks stood against each other in grand alliances. The war destabilized the internal order of cities, with democratic factions scheming to call in the Athenians and oligarchic factions scheming to call in the Spartans, each craving a bloodbath for their opponents and fearing one for themselves. War, Thucydides observed, brought a "general deterioration of character throughout the Greek world" (244), and eagerness for revenge led men to begin "repealing those general laws of humanity which … give a hope of salvation to all who are in distress" (245).

With this spectacle of chaos, Greek political inventiveness could hardly be celebrated. But after twenty-seven years of bloodshed and chaos, the Peloponnesian War resulted in the victory of Sparta, the most elaborately

artificial, conservative, specialized, martial, and aristocratic Greek regime, over its more free-wheeling and impulsive democratic rival. Long after the Spartan defeat by Thebes at Leuctra in 371 BC, marking the beginning of the city's long decline, it was Sparta that offered the prestigious model of the polis, the one most resistant to faction, innovation, and internal violence.

The Spartan regime was memorialized at the time by Xenophon and centuries later by Plutarch as the creation of its legendary founder, Lycurgus. Its appeal for utopian thinking has been perennial.[10] The Spartan system featured two kings with limited, largely military roles; an elected council of elders, the *gerousia*; and important judicial officials called *ephors* chosen from among the entire body of the citizens. It was thus a mixed regime with a strongly aristocratic bent, though egalitarian within the ruling class and including a popular element. In its original, legendary design, land and wealth were distributed equally among the citizens, who could engage in no labor and handle no money except for local Spartan coinage. All the non-military work was relegated to slaves and resident aliens. Sparta provided a lifetime of education for its citizens. Male Spartan babies healthy enough to pass the state inspection for infanticide were educated primarily to be soldiers and left to forage in packs during early childhood. Later they would be provided with an older male lover as a military tutor.

Until the age of thirty, citizen-soldiers lived and dined in barracks and, when married, could only visit their wives under cover of darkness. The restrictions upon male activity provided opportunities for Spartan women, who were literate, could own property, took part in gymnastics, appeared in public, and had a strong role in managing the household. They were famous for enforcing high standards of masculine courage, and their sexual favors could be shared in order to produce the best offspring. Plutarch also mentions that the Spartans respected sexual relations between women.[11] Like other cities, Sparta discouraged individual self-display. Spartan graves were anonymous except for the special benefactors of the polis—men who died in battle and women who died in childbirth.[12]

The Spartan regime inaugurated many prominent utopian themes: the suppression of superior wealth and privilege; eugenic attitudes toward breeding, with a hint of sexual communism; strict physical and martial training along with control of diet; the prominence of women; and the subordination of the individual to the state. It is also notable for its singular focus on the duty of the citizens as soldiers to the exclusion of all other activities, including poetry, which did not exist in classical Sparta.[13] The grounding of political design in the necessities of war would also become a prominent utopian and dystopian theme. The key fact of the Spartan polis was its dependence upon the submission of a large class of ethnically homogeneous slaves, the Messenian helots (75). It was in response to a revolt of the helots that the Spartans abandoned their more cultivated way of life for the strict order which kept the helots in place. Spartan solidarity, discipline, and conservatism were inseparable from the fear of revolt. Other

Greek cities, including Athens, had large populations of slaves, but they were war-captives of diverse origins, not former possessors of their own land; while they could exploit the tumults of war to escape from their masters, they did not pose the same collective threat as the Messenians. The Spartans used notoriously cruel methods to humiliate their slaves and eliminate the most enterprising among them.[14]

The case of Sparta might seem to cut against the contrast I have been drawing between utopian and aristocratic forms of culture since they thought of themselves as an elite, aristocratic society, descended from the Dorian conquerors of centuries earlier. They allied with and supported aristocratic factions all over Greece, in opposition to the democratic interests favored by the Athenians. But the terms of Spartan excellence were not the traditional terms of heroic-aristocratic culture. It was the Spartans' elite training and character that distinguished them from the resident aliens and slaves, who did all of the non-military work. Differences of blood and wealth were less important than the excellence in battle that made for the pride and solidarity of the ruling class. In a sense, it was a return to the original source of distinction in war-making adapted to the needs of the city. Taking a very different path from the one taken by the Athenians, during their period of dominance the Spartans successfully marginalized aristocratic grandeur in favor of the collective heroism of the polis.

Plato

If Plato had completed his *Critias* showing the defeat of the mythical city of Atlantis by ancient Athens, he would have been the first purveyor of an ideal fictive city in action, what we now call a utopia. He was, nevertheless, the first to elevate the Greek concern with political design to a theoretical level, pursuing the question of how to avoid the disastrous factionalism described by Thucydides. His famous solution is to connect the proper order of the city with the proper order of the psyche and to insist that, in the polis, the one depends upon the other. The health of the polis, in other words, hinges upon its ability to educate its citizens in the proper way, which can only come about under the direction of a philosopher-king. Plato is thus proposing a new explanatory principle for political excellence. It resides not in hereditary worth but in the proper order of the soul, which coincides with the proper order of the city. In that city, wisdom, in the person of the philosopher, being guided by the soul's reasoning part, establishes its rule by recruiting the aid of the military guardian class, which expresses the soul's honor- and victory-loving part.[15] In combination, the two of them i control the common people, who are driven by the desiring part of the soul. Justice, in the city and in the soul, resides precisely in the dedication of each of the parts to its proper role, each "minding its own business," as Socrates puts it (112). Those individuals, then, who, for reasons of expediency, would substitute the false appearance of justice for actual justice, would be upsetting the

balance and harmony of their own souls, putting the beastly rather than the divine part of the human being in charge. Such a decision leads to tyranny in the city and, for the individual, in the final, mythic part of Plato's exposition, to rebirth as a lower form of being in the next life (297–303).

Kallipolis, then, the "Beautiful City" of Plato's design, does not depend upon achieving the universal perfection of the human being but upon achieving the perfection of relations among human beings, each taking their proper place in the order of the city. It is only the elite and highly educated guardians and philosophers for whom Plato has high personal expectations. About the common people, who perform all of the tasks that sustain the life of the city, he has little to say. They are governed by the lowest instincts of human nature, the violent and sensual wishes that appear nakedly in dreams (251–52). When the people rule, their appetites lead them to degradation, and eventually they surrender the control of the city to a tyrant who can pander to their appetites even better than they can.

It is with the education of the guardian class that Plato is most concerned, and it is presumably from among the best of them that the philosophers will be selected when they reach the age of fifty at which philosophical training can fruitfully begin. Educating the guardians, Plato adopts many of the structural features associated with the Spartan regime, though with philosophical enhancements. The warriors will dine together and live in equality, without personal property or the use of money, and be educated entirely for the service of the city. They will not be cast into the wild to fend for themselves like Spartan boys, but they will be conditioned by the right balance of music and gymnastics, avoiding the excessive softness that could come of the one or the excessive hardness that could come of the other (90). Plato takes the Spartan enabling of women to a new level. Socrates argues that, since men and women have the same range of capacities, with some women being better at all activities than many men, the women of Kallipolis can become guardians and philosophers too (133–34). They will even engage in the aristocratic, manly, and distinctively Greek activity of exercising naked (135). The excellent breeding of the guardian class will be sustained by a secret sorting system governed by "subtle lots" (139), a eugenic regime more carefully calculated and more centrally planned than Sparta's. Women and children, like everything else, will be held in common. The whole group will be united like a single family, their belief in a common brotherly origin sustained by a "noble lie" about their common generation beneath the earth (93–94). The ruling elements of the city will thus enjoy a union of friendship, a widely cherished Greek ideal. As Socrates says, "Friends have all things in common" (101).

The key virtue of Plato's regime is its stability. It fosters courage and fixity of conviction on the part of its rulers and protectors and the complete absence of friction among its elements. Such a city will always triumph in conflict with other cities, even when they are larger, because other cities are actually many cities disguised as one, whereas Kallipolis is truly a unit

(100). And because stability is the key virtue of the polis, we can understand the dangers offered by the poets, especially the tragic poets, among whom Homer is repeatedly said to be the master. They show the gods as changeful and violent and performing unjust actions. Even the spectacle of their laughter is objectionable, for laughter is a spasm of involuntary change in the soul, whereas perfect beings like the gods would never need to change. The poets also portray the afterlife as terrifying and grim, in such a way as to undermine the courage of soldiers. And rather than encouraging toughness in the face of adversity, the poets indulge in extravagant grief and mourning, which should be left to bad men and unserious women (65). Poetry even makes mourning a source of pleasure (288), while the calm and stable life of the good man holds no interest for the poets. Their art requires the irritable changefulness and violence of conflict which animates the characters in their works. And whereas Platonic education aims at a personality as fixed and immobile as an idea, Homer and his followers portray the human personality as temporary, fragile, riven by alien forces external and internal, subject to an incomprehensible fate and to the whims of irrational gods.

Poetry's greatest offense is that it makes a claim to truth which rivals that of philosophy. While the philosopher-king has made an arduous journey, starting from the kingdom of shadows in the cave of Plato's famous metaphor, struggling upward into the light of truth and the Good, and then, having achieved it, venturing back down among the shadows to govern the creatures of illusion, the poet simply surrenders to the shadows themselves, demonstrating his treacherous instability of soul by giving voice to one character after another rather than keeping to his own (74). The poet is on a par with those false teachers, the sophists, gratifying the prejudices of the multitude rather than leading them toward the Good. Poets make hymns to tyrants and flatter the democracy (247). In Socrates' regime, only those poets who imitate the true world in the proper way will be admitted.

Socrates claims that his Beautiful City can serve as a "pattern" in heaven "laid up for the man who wants to see and found a city within himself" (275), but he insists that it could be more than just a model for the individual, that the conditions of its realization in the polis are "hard but not impossible" (179). Plato's own repeated experiments with the regime in Syracuse suggest that for him the ideal city was more than a matter of theory. Indeed, if the Seventh Letter attributed to him is authentic, he would have been ashamed to think of himself "as a pure theorist, unwilling to touch any practical task."[16] At the same time, he makes it clear that, even if Kallipolis were to be achieved, it would require constant philosophical supervision, and even that would not prevent the inevitable decay to which temporal things are subject (223). Sooner or later the mathematical calculations which govern the breeding of the guardians, ensuring that the best mate only with the best, would be neglected, leading inevitably to faction and the beginning of decline (226). The first step of that decline would be toward the Spartan or Cretan

regime of aristocratic timocracy (223). Rather than having the balanced soul of the philosopher-guardian, the men of this regime would be honor- and victory-loving aristocrats of the usual heroic sort, excessively devoted to gymnastics and the hunt. Explaining the psychology of this regime, Plato has immediate recourse to the vicissitudes of the family. Corruption would begin with rivalry among women as to whose husband would be the ruler of the city (227). Whereas in Kallipolis properly established, the honor-loving part of the soul allies with reason in devotion to the Good, now it seeks glory for its own sake.

Clearly, the aristocratic and familial love of social distinction is the first and crucial obstacle to political order. When the love of honor cooperates with the love of learning and wisdom, the city thrives, but when honor becomes an end in itself, the city is on its way toward factional disintegration and mob rule. Once the city has yielded to that most multiple and mobile of regimes, the democracy, it is almost impossible to imagine the emergence of a philosopher worthy to govern the city. The crucial reason for this is that the philosopher must be a person who has learned not to care for anyone's opinion but his own (180), whereas the democracy allows the most promising young men to speak in the assembly and hear their own words echoed back to them by the great beast of vulgar desire (172). The natural product is not a philosopher but a political charlatan, not a Socrates but an Alcibiades. In such a city, the philosopher stays out of politics and looks to his own soul (176). A debased form of heroic culture has triumphed over reason.

Plato imagined the collectivist project of the Greek polis taken to its farthest extreme, engaging in a broad culture war against the false teachings of the poets who sustained the aristocratic ethos and against the sophists who courted the democracy.[17] In search of stability and harmonic balance, he inaugurated a new, philosophical form of agonistics, building on the method of Socrates. His recognition, however, that the political motives of status and wealth which fuel the aristocratic way of life are grounded in permanent parts of the psyche led inevitably to the conclusion that a permanent solution to the utopian dilemma—a definitive victory of reason over honor and the appetites—was not to be expected at the level of the polis. And Plato's reliance in his own writings upon so many of the poetic resources he condemned—passionate agonistic confrontations between complex, divided characters, polyvocal imitation, humorous irony, and even myth, not to mention the heroic stance of the philosopher himself—suggests that philosophy would have no easy victory in its quarrel with the Homeric spirit. Indeed, at the very moment that Plato recognizes the long background to philosophy's ancient quarrel with poetry and its resources, he admits that if there would appear "any argument" that they belong in "a city with good laws, we should be delighted to receive them back from exile, since we are aware that we ourselves are charmed by them" (291). Even for Plato, the charms of heroic poetry are not easy to sacrifice.

Aristotle

The difference in sensibility and method between Plato and Aristotle could not be more obvious. Plato is a revolutionary against the state of things where Aristotle is a confirmer of the natural order. This is not surprising when we consider that Plato was an aristocrat living under the democracy which put his teacher to death while Aristotle was the privileged tutor and client of Greece's ruler, Alexander the Great. Plato views common opinion as akin to illusion, but Aristotle assumes that it is typically on the right track, needing only philosophical clarification. Aristotle also assumes that just about all common practices would not exist if they did not serve some good. In politics, he believes it is best not to disturb the existing order, which depends upon habit for its preservation.[18] Whereas Plato seeks the ideal regime, Aristotle is more interested in studying the political dynamics in many types of regimes. It is with Aristotle's *Politics* that the empirical richness of the Greek political experience comes into view. "The attainment of the best constitution," he writes,

> is likely to be impossible for the general run of states; and the good lawgiver and the true statesman must therefore have their eyes open not only to what is the absolute best, but also to what is best in relation to actual conditions. (155)

These actual conditions include matters of climate and terrain, the population's means of achieving subsistence, and the class structure of society. "Every difference," Aristotle says, "is apt to create a division," posing a challenge for the lawgiver whose goal is social unity (211).

Each type of regime is suited to different conditions and has characteristic advantages and flaws, and it is no surprise that Aristotle inclines strongly toward a mixed and moderate regime, closest to the mean, having observed the harm done by the extreme Spartan and Athenian models (183). A polis centered upon the middle class, he believes, is most likely to behave according to reason, while giving enough scope to democratic and aristocratic elements to sustain their loyalties (180–81). Aristotle's famous objections to Plato's Kallipolis speak strongly in favor of conventional arrangements and attitudes. Plato, he argues, wants to impose a unity upon the polis which would go against its composite nature (40–42). By merging all of the guardian households into one, Plato would abolish a set of family relations that is natural to human beings, including the male's governing relation to the female. Confusion of family identities would also lead to the unholiness of incest (46), while the community of women and children would produce only a "watery sort of fraternity" (47). What belongs to everyone is least cared for, he says, while "to think of a thing as one's own makes an inexpressible difference" (50). And joint ownership does not necessarily

reduce the chances of conflict since the most frequent disagreements, he observes shrewdly, occur between partners (51). Depriving citizens of private property would also deprive them of the opportunity to be liberal. It would eliminate generosity, one of the defining attributes of the great. Though he is critical of those who would make wealth the highest good, Aristotle's protectiveness toward liberality is a sign of his continuing sympathy with aristocratic values. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he states that the finest person, the "great-souled man," is "concerned especially with honors," which he will accept only from "excellent people," while "if he is honored by just anyone, or for something small, he will altogether disdain it."[19]

The excellence of "excellent people" here is a social as well as a moral quality. The great-souled man should maintain his social standing. He is "the sort of person who does good but is ashamed when he receives it; for doing good is proper to a superior person, but receiving it is proper to an inferior person" (58). These views are also consistent with Aristotle's defense of natural slavery and his insistence that blood is the source of excellence. "The descendants of better men are likely to be intrinsically better," he writes. "Good birth means goodness of the whole stock."[20] Where for Plato the human need for honor and victory must be carefully managed to avoid harm, and breeding must be constantly supervised to prevent the decline of the stock, Aristotle broadly endorses the pride that belongs to social superiority and affirms the natural differences between classes of people.

The Politics does conclude, however, with a discussion of the absolutely best regime, and though it seems incomplete, it has a more revisionist, or even utopian character, than is typical of Aristotle's thinking. One of its most striking qualities is the demotion of war as the purpose of political life. The ideal polis would not be primarily devoted to war, as common opinion would hold, nor would its citizens engage in labor. Instead, the highest life—the most truly active life—would be spent in leisured reflection (289). War, when it occurs, is a necessity, not a good in itself, a distinctly non-aristocratic and non-heroic view.

By the time of Aristotle's writing, the prestige of the Spartan model had long been in decline, "refuted," as he puts it, "by the evidence of fact" (318); Sparta, he believes, was too narrow in its education, too indulgent to women (75), and too bent upon external goods, especially excellence in war (323). Greek cities in general were too centered upon war and conquest. A city without neighbors to fight against and conquer, Aristotle argues, would be perfectly capable of a good life (289)—a remarkable admission for the client of Alexander. "War," Aristotle concludes, "must therefore be regarded as only a means to peace; action as a means to leisure" (307). This is neither a Macedonian nor an aristocratic point of view, and it would also discourage the Athenian democracy's enthusiasm for spoils.

If Aristotle takes a less radical approach to the suppression of political upheaval than Plato, and sees political arrangements as less susceptible to disruption by intellectual and artistic influences, he does focus on the

same psychological quality as the key to political turmoil: the hunger for distinction. Aristotle divides this hunger in two: the passion for equality and the passion for inequality—in other words, the desire of the multitude to be level with the elite and the desire of the elite to remain above the multitude. Along with the general insatiability of human desire, these passions are the motors of social instability (67). Aristotle does not imagine that these passions can be suppressed but he does think they can be managed; it is a dynamic balance rather than an ideal stasis that is the key to the stability of the city. Aristotle's view of the best statesman is less like Plato's philosopher-king than Thucydides' image of Pericles, who "because of his position, his intelligence, and his known integrity, could respect the liberty of the people and at the same time hold them in check."[21]

Aristotle's generally accommodationist social and political attitude means that he was not the man to take up Plato's quarrel with poetry. He does not see epic or tragic poetry as enemies of truth or rivals to philosophy. As with every other subject of inquiry, he is simply interested in understanding how poetry works. Where Plato castigates the poets for offering a false view of the world, Aristotle evaluates the views expressed in tragedy only according to how well they suit the characters who put them forward in their dramatic contexts. And where Plato is disturbed by the violence of tragic plots, Aristotle simply notes that shocking plots make the best plays. "A plot ought to be so constructed," he says, "that he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt with pity at what takes place."[22] The best effect is achieved "when the tragic incident occurs between those who are near and dear to each other" (79). Aristotle is undoubtedly thinking of plays like Euripides' *The Bacchae*, in which a mother tears her son apart in a Dionysian frenzy. Plato's Kallipolis would have neither heroes nor tragedies nor violent myths about the gods. There would be no families to carry a tragic curse. But for Aristotle, tragedy, insofar as it causes a tumult in the psyche of the audience, is a prophylactic, leading to the catharsis of undesirable emotions such as pity and fear. From this entirely clinical perspective, tragic poetry exerts therapeutic effects.

When it comes to the soul as well as when it comes to the city, Aristotle is not looking for an ideal Platonic unity or stasis but a dynamic balance of disparate elements. The most utopian element of his thinking is his conclusion that the life of reflection is the best life, and that the ultimate purpose of the polis is to furnish the refined leisure of the citizen. It is easy to see how poetry could play a role in such a citizen's life. In general, however, Aristotle's rich description of the city's ethical life and character, his situation-oriented account of ethical decision-making, and his acute sense of the variety of political forms and their dynamics do not point toward the radical demotion of practical activities, complete suppression of the heroic element, or simplification of life toward a single utopian goal. He is generally lacking in the pessimism that makes utopians unhappy with the status quo.

Diogenes

Both Plato and Aristotle saw the intellectual life as the highest life, but they also believed the city to be the necessary and inescapable setting for that life. Plato's philosophers, having escaped from the cave of public opinion, must try to return and establish their regime in the real city, and Aristotle provides a broad account of civic virtue in action. His *Politics* became the model for the empirical investigation of political design in a wide range of actual conditions. Study, the contemplation of the truth, is, he believes, the highest of the human powers but not the only important one. After Aristotle's death, coinciding as it did with the loss of political independence in Greece, philosophy acquired a more valedictory and unworldly character. The primary goal of philosophy in the Stoic and Epicurean schools, and in Plato's Academy, where the questioning, potentially skeptical aspect of Socrates' method became dominant over metaphysics, was to find peace in psychological detachment from the world, rejecting heroic and martial values and the emphasis on wealth and creaturely passions. Each of the schools offered a fundamental critique of the happiness offered by worldly engagement and indulgence as well as a remedy for the terrors of death and superstitious belief in the Homeric gods.[23] These critiques found a practical counterpart in the centering of philosophical activity in schools, where each sect pursued its studies in separation from the others. The philosophical schools, with their common dining tables,[24] are an obvious echo of the Spartan barracks and comprise a little utopia in themselves.

This familiar story of the withdrawal of philosophy from the world, however, while largely true, tends to leave out the legacy of the Cynics, who in one sense took withdrawal to an extreme but in another sense made their refusal of common life into a lifestyle of its own, and one with a distinctly public character. The emblematic figure is Diogenes of Sinope, who imitated Socrates by inciting public philosophical debate and confronting the polis with an alternative way of living. That way of living was to abandon all of the common conventions of life, all of its grand aspirations and polite inhibitions, in order to exist with utter simplicity according to one's animal nature. To live, in other words, like a dog on the street—hence the name "cynic," from *kuna*, dog. Diogenes and his imitators had a familiar outfit—the beggar's bag, doubled cloak, and staff. They shared Socrates' indifference to physical discomfort and often professed an anti-aristocratic acceptance of physical labor. Indeed, their favorite hero was the long-laboring Heracles; they identified with Odysseus in his role as beggar, and they even recognized a kinship with Homer's ranting Thersites because of his obstreperous outspokenness.[25]

Far from endorsing normal standards of worldly honor, the Cynics took shamelessness to be a source of pride, and Diogenes made a point of demonstrating his freedom from ordinary conceptions of shame. Masturbating in public, he wished he could also satisfy his empty belly just

by rubbing it.[26] His "dog-married" followers, Crates and Hipparchia, had intercourse in public to demonstrate their freedom.[27] In another recounting of the masturbation story, Diogenes claims that, if all men could free themselves from sexual need in the same manner, "Troy would never have been taken nor Priam … slain at the altar of Zeus."[28] It would be hard to find a better example of the anti-heroic character of Diogenes' outlook.

Diogenes was even less interested in abstract intellectual issues than Socrates, and he made a point of mocking the pretensions of Plato's philosophy, plucking a live chicken to refute the Platonic definition of a human being as a "featherless biped" (43); Plato called Diogenes "a Socrates gone mad" (55). Diogenes was more directly moralistic than Socrates in public dispute. He mocked prostitution, the indulgences of the rich, and many other luxurious practices with great vituperative energy. Cynic "outspokenness" (*parrhesia*) became a watchword, and Diogenes' advocacy of free speech is a lasting contribution of the Athenian democracy.

Diogenes played the philosopher-king in a manner very different from the one envisioned by Plato, comically reveling in his kingly freedom from want. Yet despite his outlandishness and Plato's disapproval, Diogenes' contemporaries did not dismiss him as a crank. Diogenes even managed to provoke the admiration of Alexander the Great, leading to the famous episode in which he refused Alexander's offer of bounty by saying "Stand out of my light" (41). According to Plutarch, Alexander was impressed enough with the philosopher's contempt and "haughty detachment" to remark that if he had not been born Alexander, he would have liked to be Diogenes.[29] The popularity of this anecdote makes it clear that ancient readers saw the philosopher's power to keep face before Alexander, a king and the very epitome of martial excellence, as showing a distinctive power of his own.

The myriad anecdotes about Diogenes and other Cynics, with their provocative sallies and quips, retold and embellished over the centuries, became the essential form of Cynic wisdom. Near contemporary sources attribute to Diogenes a considerable list of philosophical titles, including a *Republic*, but even then there were doubts about his authorship.[30] His attitudes and manner of life suggest neither the motive nor the means for writing, though he left a name eminently worth borrowing. His method, which seems too basic for a formal defense, was simply to demonstrate in his own person that, without the common accoutrements and offices of life, one can be perfectly self-respecting and happy. One can live in rags, or naked, in a container variously described as a barrel or a tub, survive by begging, and achieve a kingly autonomy simply by wanting nothing more. The artificial constraints of custom and ritual can and should yield entirely to the promptings of nature, as witnessed among the animals and as rumored of the barbarians.

Whether or not Diogenes wrote his own *Republic*, his doctrines exercised a formative influence upon the Stoic tradition—especially upon its founder, Zeno of Citium, and on Chrysippus of Soli, both of whom wrote a *Republic*

which provided systematic expositions of Cynic/Stoic doctrines. None of the Cynic or Stoic versions of *The Republic* have survived, but they were notorious in their time. They apparently kept Plato's most radical innovations—sexual communism and the dissolution of the household, with its property and family ties—adding sexual freedom to these along with egalitarianism and citizenship of the world in place of alliance to the polis (111). They envisioned the abolishing of public institutions—temples, law courts, gymnasia, money[31]—and they even demystified the taboos on incest and cannibalism, no custom being so sacred that it could not be challenged by the force of nature. Later Stoics were to repudiate the anti-intellectualism of Diogenes and, especially among the Romans, they tended to avoid the disreputable Cynic origins of Stoicism, though for influential Stoic teachers like Epictetus, the original Cynics still represented a high ideal; Cynicism offered the shorter, if harder, way to perfection rather than the Stoic way, which did not require abandoning worldly offices and pursuits.[32] Diogenes' mocking stance was an inspiration to satiric writers like Lucian, who produced outrageous burlesques of the Greek gods and heroes; his favorite mouthpiece was the Cynic Menippus (38). The antics of later Cynics also provided targets for Menippean satire, most egregiously the Cynic Peregrinus Proteus who, in order to demonstrate the meaninglessness of death, announced at the Olympic Games of 161 A.D. that he would immolate himself publicly at the next Olympiad, which he proceeded to do four years later. Lucian's biting treatment of this charlatan's publicity stunt in *The Passing of Peregrinus* highlights the fact that Cynic anti-heroism had an undeniably self-glorifying and fame-seeking turn of its own. It was a return to heroic action even while rejecting heroic ethics.

The contents of the post-Platonic *Republics* make their titles sound distinctly ironic. Cynic satire, however, can also take on a utopian character of the popular, escapist sort even while it mocks epic grandeur and passion. Consider how Crates compares the wonders of the beggar's bag (*pera*) with the Eros-driven follies of the Trojan War.

> There is a city, Pera, in the middle of wine-dark smoke, beautiful and with rich soil, washed by dirt, possessing nothing. To it sail no fools or parasites or lechers drooling at some whore's behind. Instead it brings forth thyme and garlic and figs and loaves of bread. For such things nobody fights wars, and here they do not arm themselves to battle for coin or glory.[33]

This is a satiric note grounded in a genuine, if comically enhanced, alternative form of life, a utopian gesture which accents its charm by contrast with the insanity it mocks. The Cynics were not much concerned with art, either to foster or to censor it, but they invented a distinctive art of life with a style and a tone all its own, one that would feed into utopian satires of a later age.

The Greek polis achieved only a partial success adapting its epic and heroic inheritance to civic values. Plato contributed a philosophical and speculative interpretation of that task, one that stressed the need to eliminate the influence of epic and tragic modes of thought and feeling. Aristotle provided a broad assessment of the general problems raised by the distribution of power in the polis. Both philosophers gave a deeper intellectual, ethical, and psychological basis for, in one case, the complete and, in the other, the partial suppression, or balancing out of heroic-aristocratic values. The Cynics and their philosophical descendants offered a total critique of civilized life and a vision of natural happiness that does not need utopian public arrangements. They repudiated hierarchy and aristocratic distinction more decisively than any other ancient philosophy, looking forward toward modern anarchism more than utopian communism; indeed, the anarchist Peter Kropotkin, in his classic *Britannica* article on anarchism, cites the Cynics as precursors.[34] The Cynics even disparaged slavery, not as a matter of justice but because it enslaves the master,[35] an argument that looks forward to Rousseau and Hegel. By dramatizing the view that social existence depends upon irrational motives and destructive behavior, the critiques provided by the Cynics and their less humorous and confrontational philosophical successors would provide a long-lasting intellectual and literary legacy to utopian thinking. At the same time, the heroic aspects of Cynic and Socratic stances suggest that the charms of self-aggrandizement and self-display would not be easy to renounce.

Notes

1 Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), Book 6, ll. 477-81. Adapted.
2 M. T. W. Arnheim, *Aristocracy in Greek Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 132.
3 Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2006), 52.
4 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin, 1954), 149.
5 Loraux, *Invention*, 89.
6 Jeffrey Henderson, *Three Plays by Aristophanes: Staging Women* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 7.
7 Mogens H. Hansen, *The Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.
8 Doyne Dawson, *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopianism in Greek Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 22.
9 Henderson, *Three Plays*, 40.
10 See Elizabeth Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).
11 Plutarch, *Greek Lives*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 28.
12 On the history and culture of Sparta see especially Paul Cartledge, *The Spartans: The World of the Warrior-Heroes of Ancient Greece, from Utopia to Crisis and Collapse* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004).
13 Arnheim, *Aristocracy*, 73.

14 Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 313.
15 *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed., trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 120.
16 Plato, *Complete Works*, eds. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1649.
17 Plato's vision of Kallipolis does have one seemingly important aristocratic social element which is that of rank, but it is not rank in the traditional, heroic form, dependent on the patriarchal identity of the family; instead, it is a meritocracy implemented by the city. It would be strange to say of Plato, as Karl Popper does, that "Equalitarianism was his arch-enemy, and he was out to destroy it" since, in Plato's day, there was no "equalitarianism" to destroy. See Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies: A New, One-Volume Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 89.
18 *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 73.
19 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 57.
20 Aristotle, *Politics*, 132.
21 Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War,* 164.
22 Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher (New York: Hill & Wang, 1961), 78.
23 For a classic account, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995).
24 Dawson, *Cities of the Gods*, 161.
25 William Desmond, *Cynics* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 14.
26 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, rev. and rptd. 1931), vol. 2, 47.
27 "Outlines of Pyrrhonism," in *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), vol. 1, 89.
28 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, 261.
29 Plutarch, *Lives*, 323.
30 Dawson, *Cities of the Gods*, 147.
31 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, 145.
32 Desmond, *Cynics*, 59.
33 Quoted and translated in Desmond, *Cynics*, 26.
34 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 1910–11, s. v. "Anarchism."
35 Desmond, *Cynics*, 97.

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2 Thomas More's Imaginary Kingdom

Despite the fact that the heroic-aristocratic view of life, with its stress on the accumulation of honor and wealth in the family, was one of the principal targets of Christianity, the dominance of the Christian faith in the European Middle Ages, and even the flourishing of a Christian intellectual culture permeated with the outlook of Greek philosophy, did not undermine the literary and social primacy of the heroic ethos. Instead of converting aristocratic pride into Christian humility, the princes of the Church imitated the proud manners and modes of their secular counterparts. Religious and aristocratic values marched side by side in mutual tolerance. Scholastic philosophers defended the legitimacy of the "Just War" and the dominant role of the aristocracy in a mixed regime. Even monastic culture, with its vows of poverty, preserved the degrees of aristocratic distinction, while the literature of chivalry became as much a signature of medieval culture as the philosophy of the schoolmen. It was not until the eighteenth century that the position of Homer and Vergil as the princes of poetry came substantially into question or that anyone doubted that the aristocratic implications of epic and romance were valid for society. But the opening of the Old World to the New, which brought reports of unknown peoples living "according to nature," innocent of European luxury, did manage to set the philosophical imagination dreaming. In the record of Amerigo Vespucci's voyages, the peoples of the New World were described as Epicureans, engaging in no trade or barter, "content with what nature gave them," and holding European riches to be "of no value at all."[1] It was just the first of many utopian fantasies inspired by the crossing of the Atlantic, and it provided the stimulus for Thomas More's invention of an imaginary society free of inequality and systematically purged of its heroic elements.

As social theory, what sets *Utopia* apart from its ancient predecessors is the trenchancy and depth of its critique of contemporary social arrangements as articulated by More's imaginary mariner, Raphael Hythloday, a philosopher in Cynic garb[2] and emphatically unencumbered with family responsibilities. Hythloday goes beyond the familiar concern with the stability of the state and the avoidance of faction; he is actually interested in the well-being of the commoners and disgusted by the sheer

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irrationality and unfairness of the distribution of labor and goods. English society, in his view, is a "conspiracy" of the greedy and idle rich, who live only to waste and squander at the expense of the poor, which is to say those who do all the useful work. The English display a "proud newfangleness in their apparel" and "prodigal riot and sumptuous fare at their table."[3] The country is beset with idle nobility and their hordes of retainers, who frequently turn to thievery and dissipation. Soldiers back from the wars have no way to support themselves other than by praying upon the public, and people who resort to stealing out of poverty and desperation are victims of an excessive zeal for capital punishment. On top of this, Hythloday adds, the entire country and its inhabitants are being devoured by ravenous sheep, the labor-saving robots of the sixteenth century (22); he is referring to the enclosure of public lands aimed at producing wool for the European market. Such enclosures led to increased vagrancy and drove up the price of food and clothing, further exacerbating poverty and theft. Instead of executing their citizens, Hythloday believes the English crown should provide them with the conditions of a good life the way they do in Utopia.

The Utopians, we subsequently learn, have solved all of these problems by abolishing money and private property and making labor universal. Because everyone in Utopia works, no one has to work more than six hours a day (58). There is no need to say *even the nobility must work* because there are no nobility. With universal labor, Utopians enjoy a surplus of the necessities and even some opulence in public palaces and gardens. Their windows are fitted out with glass. The entire country is comfortably furnished with standard housing and other facilities, including public dining halls. Everyone dresses in the same modest fashion; there is no outlet for distinction or personal display. "Though no man have anything, yet every man is rich" (119). Utopia has the unity of a single, happy family. It permits no idleness, no brothels or places of dissipation (68). Instead of empty pleasures, the Utopians, after More's own heart, indulge their affinity for Greek literature, reading not Homer but humanist favorites like Plutarch, the recorder of ancient virtues, and Lucian, the puncturer of ancient vices (86–87). The goal of Utopian society is for everyone, men and women alike, to have the maximum opportunity for the study of letters. It is a humanist paradise.

No respect at all, then, is accorded by the Utopians to aristocratic family identity, and every measure is taken to dull the glamour of wealth and precious metals, which are accumulated by the commonwealth for foreign trade alone. In Utopia, gold and silver are put only to "vile uses" or trivial ones—to make children's toys, for example, and chamber pots (71). Criminals, to their embarrassment, are shackled in what other kingdoms consider precious metals, generating confusion and mirth when foreign ambassadors come decked out in silver and gold like a Utopian chain gang (72–73).

Utopian innovations can be whimsical—the imprinting of chicks, for instance, on their human owners (51). Most striking, though, is Utopia's

thoroughly anti-martial character. The Utopians have a rational horror of battle. They "count nothing so much against glory as glory gotten in war" (97). When obliged to fight, they use mercenaries rather than risk the lives of their citizens. Instead of open conflict, they prefer "craft and deceit" and other distinctly unheroic measures—bribery, for instance, and even assassination (79). With no interest in chivalry, the Utopians keep few horses (51–52), the ultimate symbol of aristocratic bearing; and hunting, the year-round pastime of European aristocrats, is considered by Utopians "a thing unworthy to be used by free men" (80–81). Even the slaughter of animals for food is forbidden to Utopian citizens, the job being relegated to slaves, since the killing of beasts, Utopians believe, makes men less sensitive to violence (64).

Utopia is, then, in every sense, a bloodless world. Still, when Utopians do fight, all means of avoiding conflict having failed, they are able to fight courageously, not having to worry about the future of their families and descendants; indeed, women and children accompany Utopian soldiers into battle (103). Being confident of the afterlife and being secure in this life under the trans-generational care of the state, Utopians show Socratic freedom from the fear of death, taking any display of it as an "evil token," while they celebrate the passing of those who approach death in a "merry" frame of mind (110–111). And for those who are ill, there is even the option of voluntary euthanasia. Tragic grief is utterly out of place in Utopia.

The success of the Utopian regime does not depend upon the noble lies or musical and gymnastic conditioning that Plato advocated, though Hythloday does strike the constant Platonic theme of setting the mind over the body; the Utopians even defend their coldly rational approach to war on the basis that it employs the power of wit, the intellectual rather than the beastly part of human nature (99). What makes Utopia work, however, is not the conditioning of the population or the division of the classes but the change in human incentives. There is simply no reason for Utopians to be greedy or self-seeking because, with the efficiency of the state and the universality of work, all have enough of everything they need, and their life-long education teaches them to value the pursuits of the intellect over irrationally based social superiority. "Is it not like madness to take a pride in vain and unprofitable honours?" Hythloday asks. "For what natural or true pleasure dost thou take of another man's bare head or bowed knees?" (79). No one who lives "according to nature" would desire such things.

Utopia is a world without heroes. Life is static, gentle, industrious, and contemplative, and to modern readers it may seem to depend upon the "cancellation" of individual identity as it does to Stephen Greenblatt, who points to the fact that, in Hythloday's account, no Utopian is given a name except for their Plutarchan lawgiver, King Utopus.[4] Some readers have taken the family's role to be enhanced in Utopia because all other institutions have been replaced by the state,[5] including the grand repertoire of medieval guilds and associations. Still, the Utopian family has been deprived of social

distinction and economic significance. It is an affective unit only. Though it has its patriarchal structure and rituals, it has no dominion of its own. Indeed, the realm of private life has been more or less evacuated. Utopians have no personal privacy. Public supervision is constant; their double-leaved doors have no locks and can be opened with the push of a finger (54). Even the ghosts of their departed ancestors linger to keep an eye on them (111).

With its panoply of departures from the conventional order of things—including elections for kings, divorce, and considerable freedom of religion—Utopia teases More's readers with two central questions. First, is the rational life of the Utopians truly meant to be desirable? Weighing on the positive side is the enormous power of Hythloday's account of the unfairness and insanity of the contemporary aristocratic world, presented with the authority of a man who knows its workings from the inside, as his creator surely did. Also in Utopia's favor is the prestige of the Platonic model, the resonance with Cynic and Stoic moralism, and the example of early Christian communism. More's friend Erasmus believed that communism was deeply compatible with Christian teaching and he highlights the Greek saying that "Friends hold all things in common" by making it the first among his *Adages*.[6] The opposition to war is also very much in line with Erasmian humanism; only a year after *Utopia* Erasmus was to publish his pacifist classic, *The Complaint of Peace*.

Utopian discipline might seem confining to modern readers, as it would have to aristocrats in More's day, but it is far less confining than the monastic practices More admired, and the six-hour workday would have struck the laborers of More's world as beyond their wildest dreams. These advantages do much to lighten the weight of the discipline which makes them possible. Similarly, the Utopians' willingness to enslave criminals rather than executing them will not appeal to modern sensibilities, but it is a moderation for the time. Doubts may be raised by the Utopians' willingness to use unchivalrous means of war, including assassination, which is contrary to the teaching of Cicero, an important humanist authority.[7] In making this point, however, Cicero assumes that the ultimate end of war is honor, and this is the very heroic assumption that Hythloday's account of Utopia seeks to undermine.

On the whole, then, there seems no strong reason to doubt that Hythloday's vision of Utopia is rational and desirable if only it could be achieved. It comes as a surprise, then, when Thomas Morus, More's fictive version of himself in the role of narrator, while discreetly avoiding a confrontation with Hythloday over the account of Utopia, lets the reader know that he regards the Utopians' regime as a system of absurdities—including their religion, their laws, and the "fashion of their chivalry" (123). The greatest sticking point for Morus is the "community of their life" with its abolition of money, which would lead, he complains, to the destruction of "all nobility, magnificence, splendor, and majesty, which are, in the estimation of the common people, the true glories and ornaments of the commonwealth"

("omnia nobilitas, magnificentia, splendor et maiestas, uera ut publica est opinion decora atque ornamenta Reipublicae").[8] Morus is right, of course, that Utopian communism eliminates all of these things, but he seems to be missing the mariner's very point, that a rational commonwealth would indeed require the complete overthrow not only of money but of "all nobility, magnificence, splendor and majesty" as well as "the estimation of the common people" (123). Morus seems to be behaving like the fool his Latin name would suggest. The reference to "the estimation of the common people" may seem to leave him a loophole, but he has already made it clear that he thinks Hythloday's account is completely unreasonable.

It is hard to imagine the Christian humanist More standing behind Morus's defense of money as not a necessary evil but an indispensable good. To do so would go against the Augustinian–Platonic and Cynic–Stoic traditions, while hewing closely to the Aristotelian–Scholastic vein which More and his fellow humanists so boldly and constantly opposed. It was even more flattering to the Utopians to show them uninterested in money than it was to show them incapable of the subtleties of scholastic logic. The seriousness of More's communism has produced so much dispute that it would be folly to show great confidence in affirming it, but the dubious aspect of Morus's focus on money as the root of all *good* has not been sufficiently stressed. More seems to be using his own persona as a foil, with the implication that to dismiss Utopian communism is to ignore the critique of aristocratic culture which animates both the Gospel and Cynic and Stoic moralism. When Erasmus, in the commentary to his edition of The New Testament, claims that "a great part of Christ's doctrine is to be found in the philosophers," he cites specifically Socrates, Diogenes, and Epictetus.[9] Morus, with his defense of magnificence, is certainly not a philosopher of this kind. The author of *Utopia* seems to be using his own fictive persona to tempt his readers into two mistakes—to take Utopia for a real place and to take it for a mad place, when the real mad place is the one his readers are living in.

If Utopia really is a worthy goal, then the second key question arises—can it be realized? Can the need for magnificence truly be set aside? Once again, however, More has made this question as tricky as possible. An important section of Book One (second in order of composition and a kind of commentary on the practical value of Book Two) is devoted to the question of whether it is possible to give counsel to princes. Morus and his friend Peter Gilles strongly urge Hythloday, with his vast knowledge and experience, to become an advisor at a European court, but Hythloday refuses. He does not believe that court policy can be swayed by rational advice (15–17). So the realizability issue for Utopia cedes to a broader question—whether there is any point at all in giving rational advice to the princes who would have to be the implementers not only of Utopia but of any reasonable reform. This raises the bar for Hythloday's argument because he has to show not only that kings can't become Utopians but that they aren't even reasonable enough to hear the truth about any of their policies. Against the urgings of

his newly acquired humanist friends, Hythloday insists that philosophy has "no place among kings," who are interested only in making war, enlarging their dominions, and exploiting their subjects (16). Erasmus's Folly would readily back him up:

> If anyone thinks it's a good life to be on intimate terms with princes and move in the gaudy, glittering circles of the court, nothing can be of less value to him than wisdom, because nothing is more offensive to the great.[10]

To show that counseling princes is a losing proposition, Hythloday first provides a telling snapshot of debate at the court of More's early patron, Cardinal Morton, suggesting by example that the discussion of serious issues with courtiers leads only to vain competition and frivolous quarreling. It is in this context that Hythloday presents his discussion of English justice and capital punishment. But though the courtiers' behavior justifies Hythloday's pessimism, Morton himself takes a reasonable view of Hythloday's suggestion that capital punishment is too harsh a penalty for theft and is willing to give mere enslavement for criminals a try (30–31). So Hythloday's own example of fruitless counsel seems to undermine his argument, his counsel having been at least a partial success.

The second part of Hythloday's attack upon counsel is to provide two brilliant hypothetical scenarios of policy debate before a prince, one about extending the prince's dominions and the other about extending his revenues. Hythloday points out how impossible it would be to intervene in the middle of such venal trains of thought, with their fantastic elaborations of manipulation and deception, in order to tell the prince that he should "amend his own life, renounce unhonest pleasures, and forsake pride" (40). Once again, however, Hythloday undermines his own point by giving examples of how other nations on his travels have found measures to restrict their princes' freedom, suggesting once again that his counsel could be valuable after all.

Morus does not quibble with Hythloday about whether or not one can make kings rational; instead, he recommends the use of "another philosophy more civil" (41). "You must," he tells Hythloday, "with a crafty wile and a subtle train study and endeavour yourself, as much as in you lieth, to handle the matter wittily and handsomely for the purpose; and that which you cannot turn to good, so to order it that it be not very bad" (42). Hythloday's reply about the hopelessness of this compromised position is brilliant and crushing. "To remedy the madness of others," he says, "I should have to be even as mad as they" (42). Only a systemic solution, the removal of money and private property, can bring true change, and that will not come about via counsel at court (44). Again, the debate is not fully resolved. In a superficial sense, Hythloday's examples of the failure of counsel do not work, but his deeper logic is hard to argue with, and More's

plea for "philosophy more civil" seems doomed to the result Hythloday imagines—that in the presence of the corrupt, the philosopher will find himself having either to agree with the venal consensus or be silent. The real Thomas More, of course, could not settle for either of those options and lost his life by giving rational counsel to the man whose name adorns the opening sentence of *Utopia*—"The most victorious and triumphant King of England, Henry the eighth of that name, in all royal virtues a prince most peerless" (10).

As Quentin Skinner has pointed out, humanist authors, confronting the old Aristotelian choice of the best life—between philosophy and politics—tend to begin with the philosophical position that it is always foolish to sacrifice tranquility for worldly involvement, but in the end they wind up endorsing the value of courtly advice and the Ciceronian obligation to give it.[11] Indeed, without this belief, it is unlikely that so many Platonic books of advice to princes could have written. While he was writing *Utopia*, More himself was contemplating the issue from a personal point of view regarding whether he should leave his situation as undersheriff of London and take up a position at the court of Henry the Eighth. The fact that he did take up this position suggests that Hythloday's arguments against counsel didn't finally win out with their author, even if Hythloday's vision of Utopia was meant to be convincing. When it comes to practical affairs, it seems, the philosopher must yield to the courtier who can play a different kind of role. The problem with this resolution is that the very diagnosis which explains the need for utopian reforms also suggests why they don't occur. Human pride is the key obstacle. Rational self-interest and the example of Christ would long ago have banished "Lady Money" and instituted Utopia's laws in Europe, Hythloday observes at the end of his discourse, "if it were not for one single monster, the prime plague and begetter of all others." Hythloday is talking about Pride, a monster who

> measureth not wealth and prosperity by her own commodities, but by the miseries and incommodities of others; she would not by her good will be made a goddess if there were no wretches left over whom she might like a scornful Lady rule and triumph … gorgeously setting forth her riches. (122)

The pride-driven hunger for inequality, the very basis of heroic-aristocratic culture, is "so deeply rooted in men's breasts, that she cannot be plucked out" (122).[12] It is a note on which More's Christian-Augustinian and Cynic predecessors agree. Indeed, it is struck resoundingly by Lucian, some of whose works were translated by Erasmus and More during their early collaboration. Lucian goes so far as to claim that, if the flatterers who surround the rich were to remove themselves, the rich would go begging to the poor to witness their luxuries in order to give them value. "A fine house

is useless to the owner," he says, "and so are gold and ivory, unless there's someone to admire them."[13]

Hythloday's emphasis upon pride as the governing principle of human motivation stands in strong tension with his utopian critique of English life as a remediable condition. Indeed, these are the two poles of More's great book, critique of existing conditions and Lucianic satire on the incorrigibility of humankind, the second giving a strongly pessimistic import to the first, reform of human nature being hard to imagine if Pride and Folly are at the root of it. Erasmus had already made this point in *The Praise of Folly*, that human beings cannot thrive without self-aggrandizing irrationality. It is the "foolish desire for praise," based upon pride, that "gave rise to cities, held together empires, built legal and religious systems, erected political and religious structures, in fact, human life as a whole is nothing but a kind of fool's game" (27). Human behavior is driven by emotions, not reason, and philosophers like the Stoics who want to suppress our emotional nature would find themselves removing our humanity along with it. The real-life Stoic, viewing human life as madness, would be repulsive to others, having no family, no friends, no needs to make him human (30). To the philosopher's complaint that to live according to Folly is to live in misery, Folly replies, "that's what it is to be a man" (32). Folly finds her ultimate defense in the fact that Christianity itself depends more upon emotion than rational detachment (83).

It is this fine balance of perspectives—between the repulsiveness of Pride and the indispensability of Folly—that gives *Utopia* its enigmatic charm and power. It is what allows More to put his work forward in an appropriately unheroic—indeed, mirthful—spirit, with its absurd comical names advertising that Utopia is a "No Place" and its advocate, Hythloday, a "peddler of nonsense." In subsequent editions, the author and his humanist friends carried the joke over the borders of More's original text, adding various accoutrements and correspondence in which they earnestly discuss the "No Place" as if it were a real place, again in a Lucianic vein. Part of the joke is the surprisingly adulatory treatment of the author Morus in the accompanying documents, culminating with Erasmus's claim that learned men unanimously recognize Morus's "transcendent genius" (144). It is almost as if we have before us another *Encomium Moriae*. And More, anticipating the arrival of the finished volume, himself indulged in the humorous fancy of his legislative elevation, writing to Erasmus with comic grandiosity that

> You have no idea how thrilled I am; I feel so expanded, and I hold my head high. For in my daydreams I have been marked out by my Utopians to be their king forever; I can see myself now marching along, crowned with a diadem of wheat, very striking in my Franciscan frock, carrying a handful of wheat as my sacred scepter, thronged by a distinguished retinue of Amaurotians, and, with this huge entourage,

> giving audience to foreign ambassadors and sovereigns; wretched creatures they are, in comparison with us, as they stupidly pride themselves on appearing in childish garb and feminine finery, laced with that despicable gold, and ludicrous in their purple and jewels and other baubles.[14]

David Wooten has suggested that the suppression of individual identity in Utopia is not an expansion of family solidarity of the Platonic sort but an expansion of friendship into a Christian or Pythagorean community. "If there were moments of authenticity in More's life they were in his relationships with his friends, and for him friendship involved a cancellation of identity, the recognition of another as one's true self." Following Stephen Greenblatt's notion that there is a self-canceling psychology behind More's vision of the impersonal character of Utopia, Wooten goes on to say that "It is because *Utopia* is about friendship that in it More dramatizes the merging of identities, the loss of self-consciousness, the abandonment of role-playing."[15] I find it unlikely that More imagined friendship as "the abandonment of role-playing," taking as my evidence the production of *Utopia* itself, which is an elaborate in-joke among friends that explores and dramatizes the tensions within the humanism which was their common property, all in a comic spirit. *Utopia* is nothing if not an exercise in self-conscious role-playing in which More could set himself and his friends apart from others by posing to the reading public a set of nearly insoluble riddles while laying a trap for any fools who might be tempted to set sail for his imaginary kingdom. In *Utopia,* More and his friends were building a private literary fantasy-world which they could mischievously share with privileged others without entirely tipping their hands. It is a manifestation of superiority and pride, indeed of the heroic spirit, but one that avoids the temptations of Cynic grandiosity by keeping to a self-knowing and self-mocking vein, providing yet another example of Folly's Lucianic wisdom.

What made the grand joke possible, of course, was access to print on the continent, a relative novelty, which allowed men like More and Erasmus the freedom to reach beyond the life of court to an international audience. That medium was about to lose its innocence with the Reformation beginning in the following year, but fragile as the moment may have been, it gave More the chance to propose a powerful critique both of his contemporary world and of human nature while including in the picture the limits and risks of critique. More was able to do this not in a spirit of bitterness but consoled by humor and warmth among friends engaged in a common endeavor. Such intellectual balance—insight into insanity: insight into the insanity of escaping from insanity—may only be sustainable as a literary stance, or as the basis of an ironic bond among friends, perhaps the most convincing realization of the utopian spirit.

Notes

1 Amerigo Vespucci, *Amerigo Vespucci Letter to Piero Soderini, Gonfaloniere. The Year 1504*, trans. George Tyler Northup, in *Vespucci Reprints, Texts and Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1916), vol. 4, 9.
2 See the introduction to Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Dominic Baker-Smith (New York: Penguin, 2020), xxvi.
3 Thomas More, *Utopia*, in *Three Early Modern Utopias*, ed. Susan Bruce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 24.
4 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 44.
5 J. H. Hexter, Introduction to *Utopia*, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, eds. Edward Surtz, S. J. and J. H. Hexter (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), vol. 4, xli.
6 On the significance of this idea see Kathy Eden, *Friends Hold All Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the Adages of Erasmus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).
7 Cicero, *On Duties*, trans. Benjamin Patrick Newton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 157.
8 *Utopia* in *Complete Works*, vol. 4, 244 and 245.
9 See the "Paraclesis, or An Exhortation" (1516), the introduction to Erasmus's Latin translation of the New Testament, in Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly and Other Writings*, ed. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1989), 124.
10 Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, 73–74.
11 Quentin Skinner, "Political Philosophy," in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, eds. Charles Schmidt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 449–50.
12 J. C. Davis has richly explored the implications of "emulative pride" and More's departure from aristocratic and martial values. See "Thomas More's *Utopia*: Sources, Legacy, and Interpretation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 41.
13 Lucian, "The Philosopher Nigrinus," in *Chattering Courtesans and Other Sardonic Sketches*, trans. Keith Sidwell (London: Penguin, 2004), 57.
14 Thomas More, *Selected Letters*, ed. Elizabeth Frances Rogers, in *The Yale Edition of the Works of St. Thomas More*, Modernized Series (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), vol. 1, 85.
15 David Wooten, "Friendship Portrayed: A New Account of *Utopia*," *History Workshop Journal* 45 (1998): 43.

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Wootton, David. "Friendship Portrayed: A New Account of *Utopia*." *History Workshop Journal* 45 (1998): 29–58.

3 Francis Bacon and the Heroism of the Age

In "Democritus Junior to the Reader," his whimsical introduction to *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton, observing the rash of imaginary republics since the time of More, ventures to take advantage of their legislative freedom.

> I will yet, to satisfy and please myself, make an Utopia of mine own, a new Atlantis, a poetical commonwealth of mine own, in which I will freely domineer, build cities, make laws, statutes, as I list myself. And why may I not?[1]

In the comic spirit of *Utopia*, Burton offers to reveal the latitude at which his imaginary kingdom can be located and welcomes candidates to fill its offices. The radical aspects of utopia, however, do not appeal to Burton, and he echoes the character Morus in saying that "Utopian parity is a kind of government, to be wished for, rather than effected" (101). He calls *Christianopolis* by Johann Valentin Andreae, *City of the Sun* by Tommaso Campanella, and *New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon "witty fictions, but mere chimeras." Burton considers Plato's *Republic* "in many things … impious, absurd and ridiculous," and he adds the complaint, again following Morus in *Utopia*, that "it takes away all splendour and magnificence." Burton's *Utopia* will be monarchical and admit no social leveling; he will have "several orders, degrees of nobility, and those hereditary," though worthy plebeians can be elevated. Burton's comic excursion into political fancy shows the attractions of utopian lawgiving, the charms of comic world-building, and the classic resistance to utopia—that it takes away the grandeur of life.

As Burton's remarks suggest, a hundred years after *Utopia* More's book had become the model for a genre, a ready vehicle for social and intellectual speculation, however idiosyncratic in the hands of writers like Campanella and Andreae. It could be reinvested with an explicitly Christian or monastic spirit and a regime of education with resources from the scholastic tradition that More shunned. But the decisive utopian project for the future of modernity was to take a very different, anti-philosophical turn in the writings of Francis Bacon.

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Bacon left his utopian fiction, *New Atlantis*, incomplete at his death, but it was just a small addendum to the revolutionary program he had been advocating for decades, a program based not upon political change but upon a thoroughgoing reform of intellectual activity. According to Bacon, the great obstacle to progress in the understanding of nature had long been the slavish worship of the ancients, especially Aristotle and his followers, the "schoolmen." Inquirers into nature have for centuries been mesmerized by these arrant thinkers of the past, armed with "the dazzle of an alien and intrusive beam."[2] It is time, Bacon argues, to "try the whole thing anew upon a better plan and to commence a total reconstruction of sciences, arts, and all human knowledge, raised upon the proper foundation."[3] Freed from the "vermiculate questions" of the schoolmen, the conquest of nature would only be "the work of a few years."[4] *New Atlantis* ends with a list of the accomplishments to be expected from this revolution realizing perennial dreams of humankind. Among them are

> The prolongation of life.
> The restitution of youth in some degree.
> The retardation of age.
> The curing of diseases counted incurable.
> The increasing and exalting of the intellectual parts.
> Making of new species.
> Transplanting of one species into another.[5]

Not all the items on Bacon's wish list can be considered universally beneficial. "Instruments of destruction, as of war and poison" also appear, though balanced by "The increasing of ability to suffer torture or pain" (186). But it is remarkable that Bacon considered all of these wonders to be so easily in reach.

The rejection of scholastic philosophy and the turn to the practical sphere of life are humanist attitudes that Bacon shares with More, but whereas More envisions a social solution to England's problems, the redistribution of labor and property, Bacon expects a revolution from the intellect alone. And while More's speculation has a secularizing aspect, Bacon relies upon the religious rhetoric of reform brilliantly adapted to the investigation of nature. Whereas the schoolmen inhabited the "mimic and fabulous worlds" of their own imaginations,[6] Bacon's scientists will submit to the world that God actually made. Instead of Catholic fantasy and presumption, Bacon calls for the "true and legitimate humiliation of the human spirit" (34), his fundamental maxim being "Nature to be commanded must be obeyed."[7] Bacon added to this key argument his brilliant account of the "Idols of the Mind," mapping out a new subject of investigation, the vast realm of human error. That realm, thanks to Bacon's insight, can now be consigned to the past, and here the rhetoric of humility toward God's creation cedes to a heroic note—the overthrow of all piety toward tradition in favor of a revolutionary

proclamation of the modern. "Not for nothing," Bacon writes, "have we opposed our modern 'There is more beyond' to the 'Thus far and no farther' of antiquity. The thunderbolt," he continues, "is inimitable, said the ancients. In defiance of them we have proclaimed it imitable, and that not wildly but like sober men, on the evidence of our new engines." Though submission to God has a bravery of its own, submission to tradition is cowardice. "It would disgrace us, now that the wide circle of the material globe, the lands and seas, have been broached and explored, if the limits of the intellectual globe should be set by the narrow discoveries of the ancients."[8]

Bacon does not scruple to claim that inquiry into nature will enable a more or less complete reversal of the Fall,[9] and in his most enthusiastic early account of his project, "The Masculine Birth of Time," he envisions "A blessed race of Heroes or Supermen" as the product of his reform.[10] The age itself is the hero of Bacon's romance, the revolutionary triumph of the modern. Its protagonists are not men like Copernicus, Kepler, or Galileo, whose discoveries he rejected as not only ill-founded but uselessly abstract. Rather, Bacon's pride is invested in printing, gunpowder, and the compass, the three inventions that have brought down the old world to usher in the new.

Bacon's rhetoric of heroic submission to the hard truths of the real world, adapted from Luther and other early Reformers, carried forward well into advanced modernity, all the way to Nietzsche and Freud. Bacon presents his opponents as being so deluded that he cannot even find grounds to argue with them. Instead of being refuted, they must be diagnosed.[11] This superior stance of suspicion and reduction is maintained in all of Bacon's philosophical expositions, which is why *New Atlantis* is such a valuable addition to his work, for here another voice emerges, the voice of an ordinary person being set in the proper relation to the leaders of Bacon's utopian world. The principal effect is to make it clear that the conduct of the age belongs entirely in the care of the state.

New Atlantis begins with sailors out of Peru giving themselves up for lost at sea. Their reception by the officials of Bensalem is so generous that they take it to be a "picture of our salvation in heaven" (152). It is as if they had "come into a land of angels" (159), a new creation of the world. The Biblical parallels multiply.

> We are men cast on land, as Jonas was out of the whale's belly, when we were as buried in the deep: and now we are on land, we are but between death and life, for we are beyond both the Old World and the New.

The sailors are struck by the fact that the priests and officials of Bensalem refuse to be compensated for the offices they perform as part of their duties. They refuse to be "twice paid" (155), a sign of angelic perfection among royal personnel.

The inhabitants of Bensalem are Christians, Christianity having been revealed to them directly in a miracle announced by a "great pillar of light" (159). Confronted with this sign, a wise man of the society of the House of Salomon, "which house or college is the very eye of the kingdom," makes a prayer which marks out the distinction of its ruling elite. The wise man thanks God for having "vouchsafed of thy grace to those of our order, to know thy works of creation, and the secrets of them" (160). Secrets is the key word here. Salomonic wisdom, as opposed to moral, Solomonic wisdom, is knowledge of God's secrets to which the strangers must submit in order to enjoy the state's benevolence. Bacon did not develop his scheme far enough to reveal how the ordinary citizens of Bensalem differ from strangers in relation to the elite order of Salomon's house, but it is impossible to imagine that a similar deference to official secrecy and rigor would not have been required of the common people.

The most striking aspect of the state of Bensalem is the elaborate formality and punctilious conduct of its representatives who, in the midst of their expositions of official procedure, are constantly being called away to attend to more urgent matters. It is as if the state and its administration manifest the exquisite complexity, rigor, and secrecy of nature itself, which royal officials must carefully manage behind the scenes. Control of nature and control of society are equal concerns. Bacon anticipated with remarkable prescience the power that could be achieved through collaborative scientific endeavor, but he was concerned that this power should be carefully managed to benefit the state alone. This is why poisons and engines of war are among the marvels to be aimed at.

The practical basis of More's *Utopia* depended in large part upon its egalitarian distribution of labor and its fruits. Bacon too offers abundance, not through leveling but through the enhancement of the crown. A clear sign of this is the luxurious and stately appointments of Bensalem's officials and their retinues. The Father of Salomon's House, for example, despite the secret nature of his mission, makes his entry "clothed in a robe of fine black cloth and wide sleeves, and a cape," with an undergarment of "excellent white linen down to the foot," gloves that are "curious, and set with stone; and shoes of peach-colored velvet." He is "carried in a rich chariot without wheels" by two horses in blue velvet. His chariot is "all of cedar, gilt, and adorned with crystal" and "panels of sapphires, set in borders of gold" (175). I have selected only a few of the exquisite details to which Bacon is exquisitely attentive. Nothing could be further from the modesty of More's Utopian officials. The aristocratic style of luxury is on full display, in service not to a great family but to the state. Atlantan officials are named only by their offices, the sole exception being the Jewish merchant Joabim, whom Bacon has chosen, quite mysteriously, to be one of the sailors' informants; the state's unfathomable imperatives override all common distinctions.

With Francis Bacon, utopian thinking puts aside the question of whether human beings are capable of rational behavior and whether rulers or ruling

groups can listen to rational advice. The bases of reform are intellectual and technical rather than moral. Transformation will result naturally with the leaving behind of a tradition grounded in collective delusion. True religion favors this transformation, but the key element is an elite administration belonging to the absolutist state. Rationality, science, and modernity all depend upon the practical success of the state. It is a heroic conception of the age, and its state representatives are clothed in all the trappings of aristocratic dignity. This is the first appearance of the heroic form of utopianism which would become dominant in modernity, going counter to its original nature. While Bacon never obtained the sponsorship of science he advocated at court, his utopian conception of science and modernity has had a long ascendancy. We will never know if Bacon's enthusiasm for scientific power and the modern age would have survived the emergence of free market capitalism, democracy, and individualism, when the controls he glorified would no longer be in force.[12]

Notes

1 Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Holbrooke Jackson (New York: Vintage, 1977), 97.
2 "The Refutation of Philosophies" ("Redargutio Philosophiarum," 1608), in Benjamin Farrington, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon: An Essay on Its Development from 1603 to 1609 with New Translations of Fundamental Texts* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), 107.
3 *The Great Instauration*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding (Boston: Taggard & Thompson, 1863), vol. 8, 18.
4 "Description of a Natural and Experimental History Such as May serve for the Foundation of a True Philosophy," in *Works*, ed. Spedding, vol. 8, 354–355.
5 Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis,* in *Three Modern Utopias*, ed. Susan Bruce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 185–86.
6 Bacon, *The Great Instauration*, 46.
7 *The New Organon*, in *Works*, ed. Spedding, vol. 8, 68.
8 "The Refutation of Philosophies," 131.
9 *The New Organon*, in *Works*, ed. Spedding, vol. 8, 350.
10 Farrington, *Philosophy of Francis Bacon*, 72.
11 John Farrell, *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 98–101.
12 J. C. Davis speculates that Bacon's failure to compete *New Atlantis* was due to his essential political conservatism and mistrust in idealism of any kind. I suspect that if the politics of a science-based regime gave Bacon pause, it was because he feared that the power to subdue nature might escape the control of the ruling class. Hence the extraordinary display of deference in *New Atlantis*. See Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chapter 5.

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4 Jonathan Swift and Utopian Madness

In Book Three of *Gulliver's Travels*, Sir Thomas More appears as the only modern figure in Swift's sextumvirate of anti-tyrannical worthies. In another place, Swift refers to him as "the only man of true Virtue that England ever produced."[1] Though it was More the rebel against false authority that earned this honor—just about the only honor given to a human being in the course of Gulliver's adventures—Swift's affinity with More goes beyond the English martyr's standing as an example of political courage. Swift shared More's humanist contempt for speculative philosophy, his Lucianic taste for prankish invention, and above all his understanding of human psychology as rooted in pride, Swift's appreciation of the latter being deepened and refined by his reading of La Rochefoucauld, where he "found [his] whole character."[2] Swift is not an enemy of aristocracy per se; there is a hierarchy of breeds even among his rational horses, the Houyhnhnms, with some only fit to be servants. Like Raphael Hythloday, however, Swift sees the aristocracy of his own day as utterly degenerate and corrupt. And as for the traditional grounding of aristocratic identity in the pursuit of arms, Swift is utterly contemptuous. His most brilliant and bitter critique of martial glory is given in *A Tale of a Tub*, where the war-making of kings is set precisely on a level with the breaking of whores' windows by bullies venting their sexual frustrations. Kings make war out of selfish passion, careless of their subjects' lives.

The critique of martial glory is only the beginning of Swift's attack on the rationality of human nature, which deepens book by book. Gulliver's stay among the Lilliputians in Book One provides a mocking account of English politics during Swift's heyday as a Tory propagandist, but its satiric reach is much broader. The Lilliputians form religious and political factions based on trivial and arbitrary distinctions, make government appointments according to absurd ritual tests, and parade themselves vaingloriously in miniature. The full repertoire of court pettiness and conspiracy is on display, as well as royal hypocrisy and brutality. In later books, the deficiencies of European civilization are developed in a lacerating manner during Gulliver's conversations with his two rational interlocutors, the Brobdingnagian king and the Houyhnhnm master. Swift's critique will be familiar to many readers, but as an articulation of the insight that motivates

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utopian criticism it has never been bettered. To the Brobdingnagian king, who has not become accustomed to the corruptions that Europeans take for granted, Gulliver's account of European affairs during the previous century amounts only to a "heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, banishments, the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice, and ambition, could produce," and he responds to Gulliver's "most admirable panegyric" upon English life by noting that Englishmen's virtues do them no good at all while their vices lead to every form of advancement.

The Houyhnhnm master, lacking the Brobdingnagian king's share of human nature, is even more mystified by the contortions of human irrationality. Going reasonably under the "Supposition that all Animals had a Title to their Share in the Productions of the Earth,"[3] he is at a loss to understand a system of trade that ransacks the world for luxuries while the common people starve. These and many other scarifying insights derived from Gulliver's account justify the Houyhnhnm master's judgment that the "small Pittance of *Reason*" which has somehow fallen to Gulliver's kind has been put to "no other Use, than by its Assistance, to aggravate our *natural* Corruptions, and to acquire new ones which Nature had not given us" (477). Human reason is a slave to human perversity and vice.

Swift's discussion of economic injustice and human pride is also in the Hythlodayan mode, with More's presentation of the problems of trade sharpened by intervening developments. Swift adds to the Utopian glance the spectacle of two hundred more years of modernity—centuries of warfare, fueled by such ferocious religious controversy and political factionalism as to make all sides of every dispute look equally venal and mad. Swift was not alone, of course, in this reaction. The fisticuffs of the Civil War period produced a vogue of irony that dominated English culture for a century and permanently altered its tone. But it was the modern remedies for human nature that earned Swift's most pointed contempt. Book Three of *Gulliver's Travels*, the last to be composed, is devoted to these remedies, providing a systematic demolition of all schemes of science and improvement. Mathematics and empirical investigation, political projections, and mechanical aids to thought are all equally annihilated as contemptible follies. In the rare cases when they work, as in the Floating Island, they provide the means of autocratic domination very much in the Baconian spirit. A considerable part of Swift's notorious anti-intellectualism is due to his fear of the use that modern states might make of further scientific and technological discoveries, especially military ones.

In contrast with the realms of folly, Swift presents Gulliver with two alternative rational worlds. The first is the land of Brobdingnag and its philosopher-king, who is able to see through Gulliver's clumsily dulcified accounts of life in England to recognize that the people Gulliver describes are "the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth" (397). Brobdingnag, however, is

no utopia but an ordinary kingdom populated by citizens with ordinary vices and virtues enjoying the peace furnished by a wise and unostentatious monarch. The ordinariness of the Brobdingnagians, however, is kept from any hint of idyllism—and from utopian dullness—by the challenge of their enormous size. In Brobdingnag, the romance association of beauty with aristocratic virtue is systematically undermined, and it is a permanent strike against courtly vanity to see the Brobdingnagian queen "craunch the Wing of a Lark, Bones and all, between her Teeth, although it were nine Times as large as that of a full-grown Turkey" (380). The queen's maids of honor, presumably the fairest of their sex, are also a disillusioning spectacle. "Their Skins appeared so coarse and uneven, so variously coloured, when I saw them near, with a Mole here and there as broad as a Trencher, and Hairs hanging from it thicker than Pack-threads" (388). It only completes the survey of human frailty when Gulliver inspects the bodies of the common people, including "a Woman with a Cancer in her Breast, swelled to a monstrous Size, full of Holes, in two or three of which I could have easily crept, and covered my whole Body" (384). Gulliver is seeing the Brobdingnagians as the Lilliputians saw him. Swift's capacity for disgust and apparent abhorrence of sex are peculiar to him, but he is effective in making the point that the allure of the human body depends upon a narrow and ultimately arbitrary perspective. To refuse that idealizing perspective is to sacrifice the benign ministrations of Folly. As the cracked narrator of *A Tale of a Tub* points out, the madness of delusion may be preferable to such clarity (74–75).

Gulliver's second rational alternative is the Houyhnhnms, the race of intelligent horses. "Their grand Maxim is, to cultivate *Reason*, and to be wholly governed by it" (483). It is a maxim they follow so easily and naturally that it is surprising they need maxims at all. The Houyhnhnms exhibit the characteristics envisioned in the classical utopia. They have no personal or family attachments, not even to their offspring. "They will have it that *Nature* teaches them to love the whole Species" (483). Their mating is by arrangement, for eugenic purposes rather than personal choice, and like Plutarch's Spartans, they are willing to share their wives for breeding purposes. The Houyhnhnms practice civility without ceremony. Males and females are equal and receive the same education. Because they make logical use of their resources and have no unnatural needs, property is barely an issue among them, nor do they have any use for abstract speculation; on this, Gulliver points out, they agree with Plato's Socrates (483). The Houyhnhnms are entirely superior to the considerations that lead Europeans to war and their rational nature makes them virtually incapable not only of faction but even of simple disagreement; the most they need to do is "exhort" one another. Famously, they have no word for lying, being unable to understand such a misuse of language. The worst they can imagine doing is to say *"the thing which was not"* (462).

The Houyhnhnms practice athletic games—naked, of course, like the Greeks; they cannot understand Gulliver's physical shame or need for clothing. And they do have a Platonic allowance for poetry that expresses "exalted Notions of Friendship and Benevolence" or gives praise to athletic victors (487), both common ancient topics. Houyhnhnm poets charm not by heroic grandeur but by "the Justness of their Similes, and the Minuteness as well as Exactness of their Descriptions"—in other words, purely intellectual virtues. Epic, of course, has no purchase among the Houyhnhnms and, in general, death offers no excitements, their lifestyle leaving them entirely free of disease and danger.

> If they can avoid Casualties, they die only of old Age, and are buried in the obscurest Places that can be found, their Friends and Relations expressing neither Joy nor Grief at their Departure; nor does the dying Person discover the least Regret that he is leaving the World, any more than if he were upon returning Home from a Visit to one of his Neighbours.

The Houyhnhnms have no concept of pride, and it is symptomatic of their perfect convergence with nature and with each other that they apparently have no need for personal names. Unlike Gulliver's earlier hosts, they do not give Gulliver a name, though the one touching episode of the story occurs when, at the moment of Gulliver's departure, just as he moves out of sight, he hears the sorrel nag, who "always loved" him, cry out "Take Care of thyself, gentle *Yahoo*" (493). Among the Houyhnhnms, this familiar and sentimental note could only have been produced by a member of an inferior breed.

Many readers have agreed with George Orwell that the Houyhnhnms are "dreary beasts,"[4] and it may well seem that, after their chilly rationality, a touch of Erasmian Folly would be more than welcome. But it is unlikely that Swift shared this sentiment, having declared that there are "two points of the greatest moment to the being and continuance of the world" upon which "God has intended our passions to prevail over reason. The first," he goes on to say,

> is the propagation of our species; since no wise man ever married from the dictates of reason. The other is, the love of life; which, from the dictates of reason, every man would despise, and wish it at an end, or that it never had a beginning.[5]

Swift gives no evidence of gratitude that either sex or life itself is immune to the veto of reason.

Still, however congenial the Houyhnhnms may be to Swift's peculiar temperament and tastes, Houyhnhnmland is no utopia. Its inhabitants

require no special arrangements which human beings could imitate to free themselves from collective misery. They are simply members of a species truly different from humankind, Swift's purpose being to show what a "rational animal" would actually be like and how little it would be possible for human beings to satisfy that definition. Indeed, from the rational point of view occupied by the Houyhnhnms, human beings are no different from the wretched Yahoos who occupy the subservient position of European horses among them except that, as we have seen, human beings are more dangerous than Yahoos on account of their "Pittance of *Reason*."

It is the inhumanity—or rather, nonhumanity—of Houyhnhnm virtues that keeps *Gulliver's Travels* from the insipidness of utopian fancy and Swift from the implausibly superior stance of the reformer. Genuine reason and virtue always come as a rebuke to Gulliver as a representative of human nature. Even in Lilliput, where he appears as an innocent victim of court intrigue, Gulliver cannot rise above the infelicities of physical human nature. The excremental extrusions of his giant body bring constant embarrassment, making for a striking contrast with Swift's Rabelaisian model.

Book Two is a further demonstration of the impotence of satire. Faced with the very ordinary vices of Brobdingnag and the quiet virtue of its monarch, the satiric gaze again turns back upon the observer. In comparison with its unpretentious inhabitants, Gulliver is shrunken to the size of a mite, reduced to impotent pride and vanity. He quickly becomes an enthusiastic court pet, showing off with Tom Thumb bravado his skill at killing Brobdingnagian rats and flies. His hair-raising adventures among his rival pets—the king's dwarf, cat, and monkey—take status competition to a frightening animal level. The childish character of heroic ambition receives its definitive presentation when Gulliver tries to impress his audience by leaping over a huge piece of Brobdingnagian cow dung and winds up falling squarely in the middle of it (391). Satiric violence compensates for the absence of drama in a world where valor has been reduced to childish exhibitionism.

It is in Book Four that the full hazards of the satiric-utopian perspective come into view. Gulliver finds himself confronted with two species of creature each of which lives according to its nature. Neither of them requires the disguise of clothing, whereas it is only his clothing that allows Gulliver to conceal his kinship with the disgusting Yahoos. Clothing here represents the full panoply of human attempts to rise above nature. Unable to defend himself from the purely rational and impersonal recognition by the Houyhnhnms that he is a Yahoo, Gulliver finally converts to their view of human nature, while attempting to avoid the implications for himself.

> When I thought of my Family, my Friends, my Countrymen, or the human Race in general, I considered them, as they really were, *Yahoos* in Shape and Disposition, perhaps a little more civilized, and qualified with the Gift of Speech; but making no other Use of Reason, than to

> improve and multiply those Vices whereof their Brethren in this Country had only the Share that Nature allotted them. When I happened to behold the Reflection of my own Form in a Lake or Fountain, I turned away my Face in Horror and Detestation of myself, and could better endure the Sight of a common *Yahoo* than of my own person. (490)

Unfortunately, it is not Houyhnhnm rationality that Gulliver manages to acquire, only their equine appearance and manners. Having learned to "imitate their gait and gesture," he now trots like a horse and even sounds like one.

At this point Gulliver is truly mad. He is unable to accept his own irrational nature, but his conversion to rationality involves nothing more than the expansion of his sphere of disgust. Even human beings of ordinary scale now revolt him. He can barely tolerate the "courteous and generous" Portuguese sea-captain, Pedro de Mendez, who brings him back to Europe (495), and his own wife and children fill him with "Hatred, Disgust, and Contempt" (497). Gulliver winds up being comfortable only in the stable with his horses, with whom he converses four hours every day (498).

Gulliver carries out the promise, made to his Houyhnhnm master, that he would attempt to convert his fellow Yahoos to the Houyhnhnm way of life. The book we have been reading, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*, is the result, and the "Letter from Capt. Gulliver" to his publisher, "Richard Sympson," added to the 1735 edition, completes the joke when the author proclaims his disappointment that, after "above six Months," "instead of seeing a full Stop put to all Abuses and Corruptions, at least in this little Island," none of the thousand "Reformations" his publisher led him to expect has taken place (316–17). In the terms of Plato's metaphor of the cave, Gulliver is a failed philosopher who, having managed only a partial glimpse of the light, returns to the cave of this world in a state of confusion, unable to distinguish substance from shadow. The notion of utopian reform, thus, is Swift's final and ultimate satiric target. Human beings cannot be reformed, but the intractability of their vices is almost a relief when such madness is the alternative. If humankind is capable of improvement, apparently it is only in the direction of the banality of Brobdingnag, a land governed by a reasonable monarch without ambitions toward perfection—a philosopher-king, in other words, who knows enough to accept his citizens as they are.

Gulliver's Travels is so deeply indebted to More's *Utopia* that it is remarkable how thoroughly Swift finally rejects the utopian perspective. If More does not explicitly endorse that perspective, he at least keeps it powerfully in play, while Swift is contemptuous of any arrangement that would alter the character of humankind. Such schemes touch the apogee of human and "modern" folly. To become rational animals, human beings would have to be a different kind of animal altogether; as Pascal put it,

"Men are so necessarily mad that not to be mad would only be a further turn of madness."[6] Neither satire nor rational persuasion can change that.

Swift, of course, had the opportunity to live out the satirist's career in a way that More did not. Swift too had his coterie of literary friends with access to the freedom, anonymity, and license of the press, but compared with More's hopeful band of humanist reformers, Swift's circle of cynical and detached wits—the Scriblerians Arbuthnot, Pope, and Gay—saw themselves as veteran sages in a hopeless rearguard action against insanity, the hopelessness of the attempt being a considerable part of the glory. Tellingly, though, where the frame of *Utopia* is a testament to friendship in a familiar classical spirit—"Friends have all things in common"—Swift's concept of friendship comes from that disillusioned modern aristocrat La Rochefoucauld, well-suited to Swiftian paraphrase.

> In all Distresses of our Friends,
> We first consult our private Ends;
> While Nature, kindly bent to ease us,
> Points out some Circumstance to please us.[7]

Or, even more painfully, "The strongest Friendship yields to Pride,/Unless the Odds be on our Side" (ll. 37–38). If the idea of utopia is an extension of friendship, Swiftian friendship does not offer much hope for utopia.

Gulliver's Travels shows how little is left when the critique of human nature has discredited both aristocratic glamor and the chances of rational reform. Swift shows the utopian critique of human nature as being entirely valid but also as near as possible to being useless. Still, before we take Gulliver's final madness, and *Gulliver's Travels* as a whole, as Swift's final word, and as evidence that he pursued the utopian dilemma to a purely ironic impasse, we must remember the many political battles that the Dean of St. Patrick's fought on behalf of the Irish, battles where he took real risks and went beyond the mere giving of counsel. While he considered human beings incapable of the rationality that would lead to utopia, or perhaps any broad, rational reform, he still believed in the power of reason to intervene in the daily struggles of the world and he used his reason to that end.

Notes

1 Marginal comment in Lord Herbert of Cherbury's *Life and Raine of Henry VIII,* in *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, eds. Herbert Davis, Irvin Ehrenpreis, and Louis A. Landa (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962–1968), vol. 5, 247.
2 Letter to Alexander Pope of November 26, 1725, in *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, eds. Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins (New York: Norton, 2010), 678.
3 Swift, *Essential Writings*, 472.
4 George Orwell, "Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of *Gulliver's Travels,*" in Swift, *Essential Writings*, 844

5 "Thoughts on Religion," in Swift, *Essential Writings*, 710–11.
6 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 412, *Oeuvres completes,* ed. Louis Lafuma (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963), 549.
7 "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," in Swift, *Essential Writings*, ll. 7–10.

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5 Voltaire's Garden Retreat

It may seem strange to involve Voltaire in the utopian dilemma given that *Candide* is nothing if not a survey of human misery, but Voltaire was writing in opposition to the most anti-utopian philosophy ever proposed, the philosophy of optimism developed by Leibniz and popularized by his disciple Christian Wolff. Its famous answer to the problem of God's justice—how could an all-powerful, perfectly good deity create a world full of evil?—is that even God could not optimize all the desirable qualities the world might have had at the same time. A world without evil, as conceived by human beings, would have to exclude qualities valuable to God; it could not have the maximum of harmony, order, beauty, variety, power, and economy of effects all at the same time.[1] Evil, therefore, is a necessary part of the creation; without it, the cosmos would not be a satisfactory spectacle for God's contemplation. The world God created, therefore, is the best of all possible worlds. It could not be any better for human beings without being worse from the point of view of its divine author. As Candide puts it, "Troubles are just the shadows of a beautiful picture" (56).[2]

It turns out, therefore, strangely enough, that the strike against a cosmic utopia is the same as one of the strikes against a social utopia. Just as, according to the common opinion expressed by the character Thomas Morus, Hythloday's Utopia would have lacked its "true ornaments and honours," so from God's point of view, without the shadows of evil, the cosmos would lack aesthetic interest. God could, of course, intervene if he wished to prevent particular ills like the Lisbon earthquake which so troubled Voltaire, but such local and contingent fixes would destroy the integrity and autonomy of the system. "Nothing would be less rational," Leibniz wrote, "than these perpetual miracles."[3]

Voltaire struggled with the problem of evil all his life, and in the years after *Candide* he gradually moved back to a more rationalist position.[4] In *Candide* he acknowledges the inevitability of evil but ridicules the impulse to call it good. The story begins with the hero being expelled from a comical Eden—a pathetic German castle with a thunderously funny name and an absurd philosopher, Pangloss, to sing its praises. Pangloss plays the Mentor to Candide's Télémaque. His endless train of specious arguments

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("metaphysico-theologico-cosmoloonigology") manages to flatter both the divinity and his aristocratic patrons in a single breath. "Observe: noses were made to hold spectacles," he famously proclaims, "and therefore we have spectacles … stones were made to be shaped and build castles with; thus my Lord has a fine castle, for the greatest Baron in the province should have the finest house" (4). Pangloss can find necessity and goodness anywhere. Even syphilis, which, he blithely explains, "attacks the source of generation and sometimes prevents generation entirely," is nevertheless a source of good, for if Columbus had not brought it back from the New World, "we should have neither chocolate nor cochineal" (10). When Jacques, the good Anabaptist, claims that human beings have corrupted their original nature with ingeniously destructive inventions, Pangloss, himself now one-eyed on account of syphilis, insists that "private misfortunes make for public welfare, and therefore, the more private misfortunes there are, the better" (10). When the Anabaptist drowns in the Bay of Lisbon, Pangloss argues that the Bay had been put there "precisely for that purpose" (12).

This is no philosophical refutation of Leibniz, since Pangloss trades in a mishmash of particular episodes, contingent contrivances, and general laws. Voltaire's aim is not philosophy but humor; his comic rhythm oscillates between brutal catastrophe and absurd rationalization. Pangloss's pretense to wisdom is constantly undermined by his own follies and the disasters they bring. His is only one of the ancillary narratives with which Candide's adventures are punctuated, each containing remarkable concatenations of misfortune. Tellingly, it is the great who suffer the most painful reverses, as emphasized by the episode where Candide finds himself buying dinner in Venice for six penniless deposed monarchs. Pangloss's optimism eventually finds its counterpoint in Martin's Manichaean pessimism with its own false teleology—the world was formed "to drive us mad" (50)—making the mechanical and pointless nature of the philosophical debate even more obvious. In the conduct of Candide's adventures, Pangloss's philosophical counsel is quickly replaced by the far more savvy advice of Candide's servants, Cacambo and the old woman with the missing buttock.

Pangloss's philosophical optimism is the compulsive flattery of a court hanger-on, a kind of metaphysical toadyism, and throughout the story, philosophical and aristocratic pretensions operate in tandem. Satire of aristocratic pride begins in the first paragraph with the revelation that Candide's mother would not marry his father because he could trace his family back only seventy-one generations while she could trace hers seventy-two. Such apparent inequalities of birth are staples of romance writing, and Voltaire is borrowing the popular form of early modern romance. Instead of depending upon martial heroics in the Arthurian manner, these stories show the beautiful and good aristocratic couples-to-be undergoing a series of unpredictable adventures—shipwrecks, confused identities, abductions by pirates—until fortune brings them together, their noble pedigrees having finally been confirmed by Providence. For English readers, Shakespeare's

romances are the most familiar examples. Voltaire borrows this form only to explode it. In the romances, Providence rescues characters given up for lost; as Candide puts it, "people often turn up whom one never expected to see again" (64). But in *Candide*, characters miraculously return from their miseries only to endure new ones. In the romances, heroines are treated royally even in misadventure; their aristocratic nature preserves them from rape and injury, and they frequently outwit their oppressors, keeping their jewels and beauty (206–07).[5] In Voltaire's hands, the natural sanction that protects aristocrats from harm is violated with grim regularity and abruptness. Hearing that Cunegonde has died, Candide asks if she died of grief at seeing him "kicked out of her noble father's elegant castle." "Not at all," says Pangloss matter-of-factly.

> She was disemboweled by the Bulgar soldiers, after having been raped to the absolute limit of human endurance; they smashed the Baron's head when he tried to defend her, cut the Baroness to bits, and treated my poor pupil exactly like his sister. (9–10)

The homosexual rape of the Baron's son, followed by the complete demolition of the best of all possible castles, both of them unthinkable in the world of romance, give the final proof that aristocratic privilege is nothing but a fantasy. The only consolation is that the Bulgars subsequently had the same thing done to them and, indeed, Cunegonde's own distress is humorously moderated in retrospect when she learns that everything that happened to her and her family in her father's castle was merely a matter of routine (17). The magical invulnerability of romance heroines is replaced with a buffering of cynicism.

The folly of love is the other idealizing phantom mocked by Voltaire, with Candide following Ariosto's Mad Orlando by pathetically carving his beloved's name on trees (42). Cunegonde's turn to ugliness is another generic anomaly, and Candide's persistence in spite of it is one more way in which his idealizing pretensions make his behavior absurd. In the final event, it is the impertinence of Cunegonde's brother, the Baron, who is still insisting, after all that has happened, that Candide is unworthy of Cunegonde's aristocratic pedigree, which motivates Candide to marry her (78). Romantic love, then, and aristocratic vanity are of a piece.

Disenchanted with Europe, Candide hopes the Americas might turn out to be the best of all possible worlds (21), but things in the New World are, if possible, even worse than things in the old one. Voltaire is particularly mordant on the subject of colonialism, showing the brutal slavery which is the price of European sugar (44). The utopian state of El Dorado can thrive only because it is beyond the reach of European adventurers. Transported there as if by magic, Candide finally realizes the true squalor of his Westphalian origins. El Dorado is magnificent and peaceful. There is

no need for law courts or prisons. Everyone believes in a single, beneficent God who is praised continually for all of His gifts. Trade and science are nurtured by the state in a manner reminiscent of the *New Atlantis*. And while there is no ceremony of court, the sayings of the king are witty even in translation! Asked how to approach him, Candide is told that one embraces the king and kisses him on both cheeks. Aristocratic grandeur is unknown and personal wealth irrelevant (37–44). As in More's Utopia, the children play with precious stones, not only because such things are contemptible but also because they are so bountiful as to be ordinary, making the European obsession with them look absurd. The very name of the place, El Dorado, reminds us that its glamor depends upon what the king of El Dorado calls the European passion for "our yellow mud" (43), a substance valuable elsewhere only because it is rare and a mark of distinction.

Candide and Cacambo could remain in this unpretentious paradise, which is far more glamorous to them than to its inhabitants, but they lack the wisdom of its modest king, who tells them that "my kingdom is nothing much; but when you are pretty comfortable somewhere you had better stay there" (42). Unfortunately, Candide is still in thrall to the quest for love, wealth, and distinction. "If we stay here," he tells Cacambo,

> we shall be just like everybody else, whereas if we go back to our own world, taking with us just a dozen sheep loaded with Eldorado pebbles, we shall be richer than all the kings put together, we shall have no more inquisitors to fear, and we shall easily be able to retake Miss Cunegonde. (42)

The illusion of romance and the lust for distinction outweigh the glamourless happiness of utopia.

Candide's adventures end with another, far less opulent garden retreat, where the characters learn how tedious it is to give up life's illusory goals. The old woman, reflecting on her own mishaps, wonders

> Which is worse, being raped a hundred times by negro pirates, having a buttock cut off, running the gauntlet in the Bulgar army, being flogged and hanged in an auto-da-fé, being dissected and rowing in the galleys—experiencing, in a word, all the miseries through which we have passed—or else just sitting here and doing nothing? (79)

Martin points the moral: "man is bound to live either in convulsions of misery or in the lethargy of boredom," while Pangloss goes on reciting his optimistic doctrines without believing them; boredom has deflated his philosophy in a way no misfortune could. The antidote comes from a wise old Turk who ignores the calamities of the great world to cultivate twenty acres with his sons. "The work keeps us," he says, "from three great evils: boredom, vice,

and poverty" (80). Candide meditates deeply upon these words and takes them to heart. There is a fourth great evil to be avoided as well—philosophy. "Let's work without speculating," Martin says, "It's the only way to make life bearable." So when Pangloss offers a last Providential gloss on their happy ending, Candide utters the famous words, "but we must cultivate our garden" (81). Scholars have found a resonance of the Garden of Epicurus here, and certainly, the search for repose and the deflation of theological issues is compatible with Epicurean wisdom.[6] The chastened note, however, seems more biblical than philosophical, and the emphasis upon work is a final renunciation both of aristocratic privilege and of philosophical leisure.

Like Swift, whom he admired and imitated, Voltaire has a firm belief in the ordinariness of human felicity. It is only by renouncing both the aristocratic romance of love and distinction and the flatteries of philosophy that one can arrive at a sane attitude toward human experience. Insofar as human beings are capable of happiness, it is by accepting the banal utopia of the ordinary, with all its tedium and trouble. The ending of *Candide* suggests that Voltaire had a little more hope than Swift that reason could moderate human folly. And Voltaire's wit has a finish to it, a satisfying completeness and detachment from its object which seem to exempt the author and his readers from the stupidity of the spectacle, while Swift's vision, by contrast, turns back upon itself with impotent fury. Like Swift, though, Voltaire indulged in the ironic grandeur of critique and political engagement, the mission of "écrasez l'infâme," rather than the quiet of the garden, suggesting yet again the irresistible charms of heroic distinction.

Notes

1 See Donald Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), especially part one.
2 Nicholas Kronk, ed., *Candide, or, Optimism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 2016), 56.
3 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, trans. Austin Farrar (LaSalle: Open Court, 1985), 193.
4 See Bronislaw Baczko, *Job, mon ami: Promesses du bonheur et fatalité du mal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), première partie.
5 James J. Lynch, "Romance Conventions in Voltaire's *Candide*," in *Candide*, ed. Kronk, 199–210.
6 Denis Fletcher, "*Candide* and the Philosophy of the Garden," in *Candide*, ed. Kronk, 130–143.

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6 Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Land of Chimeras

> I will be told that I too dream. I agree; but I give my dreams as dreams, which others are not careful to do, leaving it to the reader to find out if they contain something useful to people who are awake.
>
> —Rousseau

With his attack on aristocratic thinking and writing of every kind, it might seem as if Voltaire had taken the anti-heroic position as far as it could go. *Candide* even includes an attack upon the most sacred literary idols of the heroic—Homer (boringly repetitious) and Virgil (frigid). But it was left to Jean-Jacques Rousseau to dig up the psychological roots of heroic culture and expose them in a political and historical context. In his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, it is society itself that is responsible for all of human ills, and the governing impulse that brings society into existence is the desire of human beings to be admired and discussed by other human beings—to experience the feeling of their own existence through the minds of others. Rousseau's target, therefore, is the key heroic value of fame itself. He agrees with the ancient moralists that eagerness for fame is the source of human accomplishments, but he takes the majority of those accomplishments to be disguises for artificial self-aggrandizement. They are only apparent, not real goods, abuses rather than benefits. They are not the natural expressions of human nature but the products of "fatal chance" ("funeste hazard"), having been brought about by accidental, unconnected causes.[1] Once innocence is lost and people have begun to care about how they are regarded by others, they have no choice but to begin the game of deceptions and false appearances that fuels all social interaction, leading to the "national wars, battles, murders, and reprisals … and all those horrible prejudices that rank the honor of shedding human blood among the virtues" (70).

Rousseau's point of contrast is, of course, the state of nature, in which, he posits, human beings led an animal existence, without reason, society, or language. This state can still be glimpsed among the "savages" of the Americas, who live in a simple, day-to-day present, without need of reflection or comparison. The imagination of savage man

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> depicts nothing to him; his heart asks nothing of him. His modest needs are so easily found at hand, and he is so far from the degree of knowledge necessary to make him desire to acquire greater knowledge, that he can have neither foresight nor curiosity … . He does not have a mind for marveling at the greatest wonders … . His soul, agitated by nothing, is given over to the single feeling of his own present existence, without any idea of the future, however near it may be, and his projects, as limited as his views, hardly extend to the end of the day. (46)

It was by chance meetings in the forest that unself-conscious human animals became infected with the pride that made them sociable. Sight was the fatal medium.

> Each one began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem had a value. The one who sang or danced the best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most adroit or the most eloquent became the most highly regarded. This was the first step toward inequality and, at the same time, toward vice. From these first preferences were born vanity and contempt on the one hand, shame and envy on the other. (64)

The maxim which Rousseau never tires of repeating is that the masters who dominate society are actually its slaves because they depend upon the people they dominate for the value of their own lives. Thus, it is with a profound irony that Rousseau contemplates a society in which the sufferings of the poor are real and the privileges of their masters a façade. Rousseau claims that, if he could give a complete account of the origins of inequality, it would show

> how much that universal desire for reputation, honors, and preferences, which devours us all … excites and multiplies the passions … making all men competitors, rivals, or rather enemies … . I would show that it is to this ardor for making oneself the topic of conversation, to this furor to distinguish oneself which nearly always keeps us outside ourselves, that we owe what is best and worst among men, our virtues and vices, our sciences and our errors, our conquerors and our philosophers, that is to say, a multitude of bad things against a small number of good ones. Finally, I would prove that if one sees a handful of powerful and rich men at the height of greatness and fortune while the mob grovels in obscurity and misery, it is because the former prize the things they enjoy only to the extent that the others are deprived of them; and because, without changing their position, they would cease to be happy, if the people ceased to be miserable. (78)

What we have here, then, is another version of Hythloday's Lucianic complaint that Pride depends upon witnesses for its own pleasures, but Rousseau goes further to add that Pride is not merely the root of vice but of civilization itself. To escape from it would be to renounce all the benefits of civilization, an accomplishment Rousseau knows to be impossible. Even love of the romantic kind is due to inequality. It is "an artificial sentiment born of social custom," he writes. "Love means nothing to the savage, being founded on certain notions of merit or beauty that a savage is not in a position to have, and on comparisons he is incapable of making." For Rousseau's savage, "any woman suits his purpose" (56).

It has often been pointed out that Rousseau's account of the emergence of society from the state of nature is another version of the Fall of Man. As Ernst Cassirer put it, Rousseau had invented a new subject of "imputability"; in place of Adam and original sin, it was now society that had corrupted each individual.[2] As with the Fall of Man, the emergence of society from the state of nature did not have to happen but now it is irrevocable. It was only within decades of Rousseau's writing that the cultural force of the narrative of the Fall had begun to weaken; by the time the *Discourse on Inequality* was written, almost a century had passed in which nature and human nature were being rehabilitated from the Christian emphasis on their depravity. It had become an intellectual cliché that nature and reason are one and the same and that both are essentially good. This made for a rather bland, rationalistic moralism, with the stark opposition between good and evil being reduced to the tension between what is obviously reasonable and what is not. Rousseau's new version of the Fall provided nature with a much more robust, binary opposition that restored the drama to moral judgment.

Rousseau's naturalistic account of the irrationality of social inequality and of social life in general looks back to Cynic and Stoic moralism, and it inverts the valences of the high and the low in the way that Christianity sought to do. Its enormous contemporary impact, however, depended upon the way it was able to idealize for an expanded audience the lives of ordinary people and their simple feelings. It not only denigrated aristocracy; it also elevated the humble in an unprecedented way. Both Christian and Cynic moralism demanded a withdrawal from the ways of the world, and Stoic apathy depended upon achieving a degree of detachment that was hard to credit. But Rousseau and his romantic successors exalted the lives and feelings of ordinary folk in a way that provided a release from the perennial habits of deference to aristocratic worth. It is difficult for us, the inhabitants of advanced modernity, to imagine the charm which came from the relaxation of aristocratic privilege, the constant glamorizing of the doings of the great, and, for many, the noble insolence of their daily presence. If we no longer weep over the sentiments of the lovers in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, kept from marrying because of their social inequality but exquisitely virtuous in spite of their sexual indulgence, it is because the sense of moral democracy and the goodness of natural feelings which emerged in the eighteenth century

is for us no longer new. But although Rousseau and his generation created a utopian image of the ordinary and the bucolic—of life in contact with nature and its perennial rhythms—that life was also utopian in the negative sense, always elsewhere, unavailable to the sophisticates who were reading about it and who were in danger of being corrupted by the urban and the artificial. Rousseau, in his paradoxical manner, accentuated the ironies of his moral system. The more we talk about the state of nature, the farther away we get from it.

Rousseau fully recognized that the unthinking bliss of the natural condition had been lost forever. Only if some disaster should happen to reduce a society back toward its natural state could it be usefully reformed. The age of the lawgiver was over. Rousseau did, however, envision a kind of political solution to the problem of inequality, a solution embodied in the social contract that constitutes the state itself. Entering into Rousseau's ideal society, the citizen receives a new, artificial nature and acquires a new collective self, "le moi commune," integrating his own will with the general will. In doing so, each person, "while uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before" (148). Since each person gives himself to the general will "whole and entire … the condition is equal for everyone" (148), so inequality is overcome and liberty achieved, liberty being, in the terms of Rousseau's famous definition, "obedience to the law one has prescribed for oneself" (151). Thus, the very act of will which creates the sovereignty of the state overcomes the inequalities of social existence and brings into being a social entity that is by definition devoted to the good of the state rather than the pursuit of private interest. For a person to put private over general interests would be to surrender the liberty that derives from participating in the general will. Anyone who refused to yield to the general will would have to be forced to obey by the entire body of the citizenry. Thus, in Rousseau's famously chilling formula, such a person would be "forced to be free" (150).

Rousseau's conception of sovereignty, then, has a strangely therapeutic dimension. It solves the problems of conflict among unequal agents, who corrupt each other through their competitive instincts, by banishing otherness entirely. The innocent individual, no longer being degraded by society, now unites in singleness with the state so that the state is no longer anything but himself writ large. The single and the general will are one and the same. Utopians since Plato imagined the state as uniting the people into a single family, and Plato analyzed the city and the soul in analogy, but Rousseau merges the state and the individual will into a single unit.

It is uncanny how the philosopher of absolute social alienation became the philosopher of absolute social absorption. As a model of utopian thinking, however, Rousseau's scheme has two serious limitations. First, for citizens to enter into the spirit of the general welfare which animates the public good, it requires that they already be virtuous. Their laws, in other words, would have to be framed by a lawgiver who could make them good and do so according to their local conditions. But if men were capable of receiving such

laws from another person they would have no need of them, so the lawgiver would have to work upon them without their knowing it. He would have to operate secretly and use religion to conceal from the people the fact that it was not necessity but the will of another human being which was giving them the laws they freely "prescribed for themselves." Such a lawgiver could only be the owner of almost supernatural powers, and Rousseau's description of the qualities the lawgiver would need seems calculated to suggest how unlikely it would be for any human being to have them.

> Discovering the rules of society best suited to nations would require a superior intelligence that beheld all the passions of men without feeling any of them; who had no affinity with our nature, yet knew it through and through; whose happiness was independent of us, yet who nevertheless was willing to concern itself with ours; finally, who, in the passage of time, procures for himself a distant glory, being able to labor in one age and find enjoyment in another. Gods would be needed to give men laws. (162–63)

Just as the tutor in *Émile*, Rousseau's treatise on education, must secretly arrange all of his student's experience so that the boy can be educated without knowing that another human being is working his will upon him, so the lawgiver is a hidden god whose operations, being invisible or sanctioned by divine inspiration, do not hinder the citizen's sense of liberty by confronting him with the will of another. As I have argued elsewhere, this is a scheme for paranoia rather than utopia.[3] Perhaps that is why political philosophers have tended to ignore the dependence of Rousseau's social contract upon the chimerical figure of the lawgiver who makes it work.

It is harder to miss the second element of *The Social Contract* that narrows its appeal as a prescription for utopia, and that is Rousseau's belief that the general will can only operate on a scale small enough to permit each citizen's direct participation in the act of legislation. For Rousseau, representative government is a fruitless modern innovation. "Any law that the populace has not ratified in person is null; it is not a law at all" (198). The liberty of the individual decreases with the size of the state (174) and "the more the social bond extends the looser it becomes" (167), meaning that larger states are not only less free but also less durable. Uncosseted Spartan simplicity is Rousseau's ideal, a small economically independent political culture unpolluted by luxury or trade. "The word finance," he says, "is a slave's word" (198).

Rousseau's insistence upon the intimacy of the state makes him a utopian of the anarchist sort, though a utopian who barely believes human beings to be capable of reform. Such improvements as can be made must occur on the local level, as exemplified at Clarens, the estate portrayed in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, where the de Wolmars keep their strange menage. Clarens is

autonomous and self-supporting, its inhabitants living in tasteful simplicity. The servants go about their work with a love that responds to the love bestowed upon them by their mistress, Julie, and according to the model of virtue that is provided to them by the entire de Wolmar family. Such servants cannot be found but must be created, schooled in austere devotions and simple pleasures by their masters. Everything at Clarens is natural, beautiful, orderly, and good like the souls of those who created it. There is, however, a fatal limitation to this idyll, though one that is essential to its narrative interest. Clarens is built upon communal love, but it is also devoted to the taming of romantic love between individuals—in other words, to the taming of the sweetest of the passions created by inequality. The estate is the site of an experiment in sublimation undertaken by Julie's husband, who has invited her former lover, Saint-Preux, to join the household as tutor to his children in order to cure him of his passion for Julie, an accomplishment which de Wolmar believes is essential to the happiness of everyone involved.[4] It is a project that requires enormous insight and detachment but, of all men, de Wolmar is the most capable of these things for, as he admits, he has a "naturally tranquil mind and a cold heart … . Little susceptible of pleasure and of grief"; he even confesses experiencing "only very faintly that sentiment of self-interest and of humanitarianism which makes the affections of others our own." De Wolmar's "only active principle is a natural love of order" (317). According to Julie, he "does not laugh," though "he is serious without disposing others to be so." He exhibits no emotion, loving "only as much as he wishes" and wishing "only as much as reason permits" (260). If he admits to "any ruling passion, it is that of observation. I like to read the hearts of men," he says. "Since my own gives me few illusions, since I observe coolly and without self-interest, and since long experience has given me some insight, I hardly ever am mistaken in my judgments." Society is "agreeable" to de Wolmar only "for the sake of contemplation, not as a member of it. If I could alter the nature of my being," he says, "and become a living eye, I willingly would make this exchange" (317). Here we have a Plutarchan lawgiver very much as Rousseau imagined him in *The Social Contract*, "a superior intelligence" who observes "all the passions of men without feeling any of them"; who has no affinity with our nature, yet knows it "through and through."[5] It is these gifts that allow de Wolmar to impose a new social contract upon his household and provide the laws and education to go with it.

De Wolmar's project, however, has two essential drawbacks. The first is that Julie's happiness is marred by a "single secret sorrow" which "poisons it"—de Wolmar's atheism (331). Unlike his Plutarchan model, de Wolmar cannot provide a religion to support his regime. It is painful to Julie that the animated beauties of nature are "dead in the eyes of the unfortunate Wolmar" and that where "everything speaks of God with such a sweet voice, he perceives only an eternal silence" (350). The second drawback is that de Wolmar's "living eye" cannot penetrate his wife's

heart. (This may be a symptom of one of Rousseau's most anti-utopian principles, expressed by Julie herself—that male and female natures are utterly different—108). As a result, Julie is not cured; she loves Saint-Preux to the end of her life. She concludes her deathbed letter to him by stating her belief that the virtue which separated the lovers in this life will unite them in the next. "I am dying in this sweet hope," she writes, "only too happy to purchase at the price of my life the right of loving you forever without crime and of telling you so one more time" (407). The utopian retreat at Clarens, it turns out, was based upon an enormous sacrifice. After the reign of complete virtue it made possible, Julie is happy to lose her life in order to escape from it. Suppressing love, that last expression of inequality, was her undoing.

Rousseau's elevation of nature and the simple life over the spurious values of aristocratic distinction gave impetus to the egalitarian aspirations of modern culture, and the importance of his emphasis on the experience of nature and the "sentiment of existence" as a literary and cultural resource can scarcely be overstated. His opposition to the heroic-aristocratic spirit makes him a key figure in the story of modernity and a major source of its penchant for utopian hopes. But his paradoxical theory that, to be free, individual social identity must merge completely with a "general will," that social difference must cede to union in a single identity, produced a conception of utopia that could only thrive among citizens shaped in delusion by a latter-day Lycurgus or enervated by the guidance of beings as purely rational and lifeless as M. de Wolmar.

It is no consolation to the utopian spirit that, by keeping them from satisfying their love, de Wolmar may have been kinder to Julie and her lover than they realize since, in Rousseau's philosophy, expressed by de Wolmar himself, the achievement of our desires in life necessarily deprives them of the charm that imagination gave them in prospect. "Woe to he who no longer has anything to desire! he loses, so to speak, all that he possesses!" He loses, in other words, that hope which is more valuable than its object.

> In this world, the land of chimeras is the only one worthy to be inhabited, and such is the nothingness of human things, that except for that Being who exists by himself, there is nothing beautiful but that which is not.[6]

Notes

1 *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 59.
2 Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. Peter Gay (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 75.
3 John Farrell, *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), chapters 13 and 14.
4 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Héloïse. Julie, or the New Eloise. Letters of Two Lovers, Inhabitants of a Small Town at the Foot of the Alps*, trans. and

abridged by Judith H. McDowell (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1968), 284.

5 Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings*, 162.

6 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *La Nouvelle* Héloïse, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959–95), tome 2, 693. Rousseau utters the same maxim to his pupil in *Èmile, ou, De l'èducation*, tome 4, 861.

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7 Adam Smith and the Utopia of Commercial Society

If to be a utopian thinker is to imagine the best possible order for society, then Adam Smith is unquestionably a utopian thinker. What makes him different from classic utopians like More or Rousseau is his belief that the best order of society is a spontaneous development of human nature. No legislator or philosopher-king is required; indeed, such characters are the obstacles to social welfare. In spite of them, natural human activity has gradually elevated the human species from its original state of barbarism to the "opulence" of "commercial society"—an achievement driven by the human penchant to "truck, barter and exchange" and the division of labor it permits.

> The natural effort of every individual to better his own condition, when suffered to exert itself with freedom and security, is so powerful a principle that it is alone, and without any assistance, not only capable of carrying on the society to wealth and prosperity, but of surmounting a hundred impertinent obstructions with which the folly of human laws too often incumbers its operations.[1]

It is to the understanding and removal of these "impertinent obstructions" that Smith's work is devoted. Where the great focus of previous reformers had been the restriction of the aristocratic class, Smith shifts the focus to the rising mercantile class and its material pursuit of self-interest. In doing so, he shows, we shall see, that the mercantile class does not escape from the irrational aspects of heroic psychology.

The efficiencies created by the division of labor are so powerful, Smith explains, that the "industrious and frugal peasant" of his day in Europe is richer by far than an African king (1:16). It is not by moral reformation but merely by allowing human self-interest to take its natural course that this result is achieved. "All systems either of preference or of restraint," Smith writes, "being thus completely taken away, the obvious and simple system of natural liberty establishes itself of its own accord." Once this system has been established,

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> every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way, and to bring both his industry and capital into competition with those of any other man, or order of men. (2:208)

No franker rejection of privilege, either aristocratic or mercantile, has ever been made.

Smith's endorsement of the "obvious and simple system of natural liberty" and the freedom to pursue self-interest should not be taken as a statement of skepticism about the existence of higher human motives such as benevolence. Smith is not a cynic like Bernard Mandeville, who sees the very notion of the virtues as a plot in restraint of trade. What Smith does famously emphasize is that "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest" (1:18). He does not say that these tradesmen lack benevolence. His point is that "in civilised society," the individual "stands at all times in need of the co-operation and assistance of great multitudes, while his whole life is scarce sufficient to gain the friendship of a few persons." Benevolence is too dependent upon local connections and personal choices to motivate the entire system of the economy, with its vastness, diversity, and impersonality. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how such a system of "great multitudes" could function without the spur of basic human needs. As Fonna Forman-Barzilai points out, Smith's sense that sympathy works outward spatially to various distances, that "human affection and care are ordered spatially around the self in a concentric pattern," is one of the many echoes of ancient Stoic ethics in Smith's work.[2]

Smith's understanding of the power of the division of labor, and of the expansion of markets it makes possible, gives him a radically new perspective on the differences among both individuals and groups. He sees the same economic forces that spur or obstruct trade in Europe operating at all times in all parts of the world. Just as in Europe, it is narrow thinking, not racial characteristics, which has limited the world's economic growth. Even the wealthiest countries can be deterred from trade by irrational factors like the ancient Egyptians' "superstitious aversion to the sea" (2:203). "The same capital," Smith writes,

> will in any country put into motion a greater or smaller quantity of productive labour, and add a greater or smaller value to the annual produce of its land and labour, according to the different proportions in which it is employed in agriculture, manufactures, and wholesale trade. (1:389)

It is not differences of ability but differences of economic system that determine wealth.

The egalitarian character of Smith's attitude toward personal abilities is even more striking. What appear to be natural differences in talent among individuals are actually due to trade and the division of labor. Such differences, Smith claims, are

> in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions, when grown up to maturity, is not upon many occasions so much the cause as the effect of the division of labour. (1:19)

It is "habit, custom, and education" that create the separation between "the most dissimilar characters, between a philosopher and a common street porter" (1:19-20). Identical in the eyes of parents and playfellows till the ages of six or eight, the distinction in their talents emerges only as they follow different occupations, widening "by degrees, till at last the vanity of the philosopher is willing to acknowledge scarce any resemblance." Without the division of labor and the "disposition to truck, barter, and exchange" upon which it depends, none of them would have developed these distinct capacities (32). This is not a view friendly to aristocratic distinction.

Individual initiative may be the main driver of Smith's system, but not all of the means to facilitate trade emerge naturally from the self-sustaining actions of individuals. The government must also contribute to sustain the means of trade. "Good roads, canals, and navigable rivers" are especially important and constitute "the greatest of all improvements. They encourage the cultivation of the remote," thus expanding the circle of the market and bringing more diverse resources into contact with each other (1:165). The public sphere also has an obligation to mitigate the harmful side-effects of specialization, especially the narrowing of the intellect that derives from compartmentalized, repetitive labor. Smith did not foresee the effects of industrialization and the assembly line, but he was quite concerned about the limiting effect of specialized labor on the human character and the political hazards which could arise from a citizenry whose means of earning a living required an increasingly narrow focus. The effects of repetitive labor upon the worker are both intellectual and moral.

> The torpor of his mind renders him not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life.

Under this dreadful regime, the citizen becomes "altogether incapable of judging" such matters as "the great and extensive interests of his country" (2:303). It is a situation in which, as with many utopian schemes, the public interest must intervene for the intellectual benefit of its citizens.

Smith, then, sees the major European nations as already having been transformed in a utopian direction by the development of trade, which alters human life and consciousness far beyond what any individual could plan or foresee. It changes the conditions under which people live and it changes the people themselves. On a collective scale, the pursuit of self-interest leads to good for all. But that does not mean, of course, that all self-interested activity leads to beneficial effects; that is the opposite of Smith's belief. Indeed, he characterized his own work as a "very violent attack … upon the whole commercial system of Great Britain,"[3] and the focus of that attack is not only the system itself but the self-interested mercantile economic theory behind it. The essential problem is a problem of class. Smith divides the economy into three classes—those who live by rents, those who live by labor, and those who live by profits. It is the latter, merchant class which plays the greatest role in directing the economy. It "puts into motion the greater part of the useful labour of every society," directs "all the most important operations of labour," and does so with a view toward maximizing its profits (1:277). Profit is the crux because "the rate of profit does not, like rent and wages, rise with the prosperity and fall with the declension of the society" (1:277-278). High profits depend upon monopolies and other restrictions. Profit "is naturally low in rich and high in poor countries, and it is always highest in the countries which are going fastest to ruin." So the interest of the merchant class "has not the same connection with the general interest of the society as that of the other two" (347–348). Yet merchants have the greatest control of capital, the widest contacts, and the greatest knowledge of the economy. They "draw to themselves the greatest share of the public consideration" (348). They have a more acute understanding of their own interests than the country gentleman and they have "frequently imposed upon his generosity, and persuaded him to give up both his own interest and that of the public, from a very simple but honest conviction that their interest, and not his, was the interest of the public." Merchants always want to narrow the market and restrict competition, thus "raising their profits above what they naturally would be, to levy, for their own benefit, an absurd tax upon the rest of their fellow-citizens" (348). The danger of this tax upon the public leads Smith to utter a stern warning:

> The proposal of any new law or regulation of commerce which comes from this order [that is, the merchant class] ought always to be listened to with great precaution, and ought never to be adopted till after having been long and carefully examined, not only with the most scrupulous, but with the most suspicious attention.

The need for this precaution lies precisely in the fact that such proposals for laws and regulations come from

> an order of men whose interest is never exactly the same with that of the public, who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the

> public, and who accordingly have, upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed it. (1:278)

The great problem which Smith's work is designed to address, therefore, is the power of wealthy and powerful merchants to influence the government in their own favor, by deception, by corruption, and by means of the mercantilist theory which supports their interests. It is not government per se that is the problem, but the tendency of government to indulge the profit-seeking schemes of entrepreneurs, who are always looking for privileges and monopolies to enhance their profits at public expense. "All for ourselves," Smith writes, "and nothing for other people, seems, in every age of the world, to have been the vile maxim of the masters of mankind" (1:437).

The greater part of *The Wealth of Nations* is taken up with Smith's account of mercantile conspiracies and delusions and their immense public costs. All restrictions upon labor are detrimental to the prosperity of the public, including residency restrictions and vagrancy laws, apprenticeships, guilds, slavery with all its horrors, and the abusive bargaining power of employers over their workers, always supported by the state. Smith's withering attack embraces tariffs, subsidies, joint-stock companies, entails and primogeniture, monopolies and other restrictions on trade, the fetishizing of precious metals and the currency, which to Smith are commodities like any other, and all the commercial enterprises in which the government plays a part. Trade wars are public amusements, colonialism is a mere expression of the delusive "sacred thirst of gold" (2:73), and the great British Empire itself is finally nothing other than a means of flattering the vanity of the British public with a "golden dream," an endeavor that thrives "in imagination only" (2:486). Imperialism is a long-lingering reflex of the heroic imperative.

Given the power of such reflexes, Smith understands that his vision of free and competitive markets is just as unlikely to arrive as any other utopia. "To expect, indeed," he writes, "that the freedom of trade should ever be entirely restored in Great Britain is as absurd as to expect that an Oceana or Utopia should ever be established in it." Public prejudice is one of the obstacles to free trade, an obstacle that Smith with his own work could hope to remove. "But what is much more unconquerable," he admits, is that "the private interests of many individuals irresistibly oppose freedom of trade" (1:493).

One of the perennial subjects of discussion among scholars of Adam Smith has been the so-called "Adam Smith Problem,"[4] sparked by the apparent contradiction between the explanatory power of self-interest as it appears in *The Wealth of Nations* and the account of moral motivation given by Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, where he stresses the strong disposition for human beings to seek approval and attention from others and to judge themselves from outside, as an "impartial spectator" would do. The contradiction is only an apparent one. As I have pointed out, Smith does not deny the power of moral considerations but he does

not think they can operate on the scale at which trade, mobilizing its "great multitudes," takes place. The chief motivation for economic activity must be people's basic need to sustain themselves. This is what Smith means by "self-interest." This emphasis should not lead us to overlook the powerful strain of moral indignation that runs through *The Wealth of Nations*. It is not with moral neutrality Smith observes that "Avarice and injustice are always short-sighted" (1:416), or that "Wherever there is great property there is great inequality. For one very rich man there must be at least five hundred poor, and the affluence of the few supposes the indigence of the many" (2:232). Still, Smith's target is not individuals and their behavior but the mercantilist system of government.

If the traditional Adam Smith Problem is a false one, reading *The Wealth of Nations* in the light of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* does generate another problem—or irony, at least—for throughout the more famous book it is taken for granted that wealth, or "opulence," as Smith calls it, is an obvious good and that the "absurd tax" imposed on the public by profit-seeking mercantile interests is a source of genuine harm. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* however, we learn that it is honor, not wealth, which provides the true motivation and reward for human activity. Honor as a motivating force, and as form of compensation which can substitute for wealth, does appear frequently in *The Wealth of Nations*, but in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* it becomes clear that it is "chiefly" to be admired by others that "we pursue riches and avoid poverty. For to what purpose," Smith asks, "is all the toil and bustle of this world? what is the end of avarice and ambition, of the pursuit of wealth, of power, and preheminence?" It is not for the necessities of life. Even the poor can afford "superfluities" and, "upon extraordinary occasions," indulge in "vanity and distinction."

Why then, Smith wonders, should the rich fear to sink to the condition of the poor?

> Do they imagine that their stomach is better, or their sleep sounder in a palace than in a cottage? The contrary has been so often observed, and, indeed, is so very obvious, though it had never been observed, that there is nobody ignorant of it.

It is not the material benefits but the "emulation" of others that motivates the pursuit of wealth in every rank.

> To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation, are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it. It is the vanity, not the ease, or the pleasure, which interests us.

The rich man's "heart seems to swell" with the thought of how others view him, while the poor man shrinks with shame at his poverty and neglect.

He can expect the contempt of the wealthy. "The fortunate and the proud wonder at the insolence of human wretchedness, that it should dare to present itself before them, and with the loathsome aspect of its misery presume to disturb the serenity of their happiness."[5]

While Smith emphasizes the motivating power of honor and rank as sources of human motivation, he is also struck by the "peculiar sympathy" that people of lower status feel with the condition of the great. "We favour all their inclinations and forward all their wishes. What pity, we think, that any thing should spoil and corrupt so agreeable a situation!" Both their happiness and their pains are grander than those of other men. "It is the misfortunes of Kings only which afford the proper subjects for tragedy," Smith observes, adding a concrete example—"All the innocent blood that was shed in the civil wars provoked less indignation than the death of Charles I" (63).

Clearly, in Smith's view, the possessors of rank provide for everyone, in "delusive colours," an image that can only be described as utopian, "the abstract idea of a perfect and happy state," "the very state which, in all our waking dreams and idle reveries, we had sketched out to ourselves as the final object of all our desires" (63). The rich possess the admiration that motivates human effort, the lack of which lowers the spirit. But the "delusive colours" in which the imagination paints the condition of the great warn us that, even though the great do possess the sympathy and admiration they strive for, it does not actually bring them the advantages they seek. The motivations and the rewards of effort turn out to be only distantly related. Here Smith adds another layer of irony to his account of human motivation. The utopian image of the great does not depend only upon the fact that they possess more of the necessities of life than others, or even that their position entitles them to more respect than others. It is also that, in the eyes of those who do not possess their advantages, their life seems embedded in a grand system of convenience embracing things large and small, the appeal of which is "often the secret motive of the most serious and important pursuits of both private and public life." To illustrate his point, Smith provides a kind of Horatio Alger story involving a "poor man's son, whom heaven in its anger has visited with ambition" (211). From his youth he admires the ease and grandeur of the rich, their "machines," and their retinue. "Feeling himself naturally indolent," he begins to imagine that "if he had attained all these, he would sit still contentedly, and be quiet, enjoying himself in the thought of the happiness and tranquillity of his situation." This sets his effort in motion and, "to obtain the conveniencies" of the rich, "he submits in the first year, nay in the first month of his application, to more fatigue of body and more uneasiness of mind than he could have suffered through the whole of his life from the want of them." He expends a lifetime of laborious effort, and "makes his court to all mankind; he serves those whom he hates, and is obsequious to those whom he despises." Pursuing the idea of a certain artificial and elegant repose which he may never achieve,

"he sacrifices a real tranquility that is at all times in his power" till, in the bitterness of his old age, he finds

> that wealth and greatness are mere trinkets of frivolous utility, no more adapted for procuring ease of body or tranquillity of mind than the tweezer-cases of the lover of toys; and like them too, more troublesome to the person who carries them about with him than all the advantages they can afford him are commodious. (212)

The only difference between "the palaces, the gardens, the equipage, the retinue of the great" and the "trinkets of frivolous utility"—"the curiosity of a tooth-pick, of an ear-picker, of a machine for cutting the nails"—is that great works are more observable to others and so they "more effectually gratify that love of distinction so natural to man." Smith can wonder whether, to a man alone on a desolate island, a palace or a tweezer-box full of trinkets would "contribute more to his happiness and enjoyment." But when we ask why the spectator enters into the feelings of the great, "we shall find that it is not so much upon account of the superior ease or pleasure which they are supposed to enjoy, as of the numberless artificial and elegant contrivances for promoting this ease or pleasure" (213). The spectator "does not even imagine that" the rich

> are really happier than other people: but he imagines that they possess more means of happiness. And it is the ingenious and artful adjustment of those means to the end for which they were intended, that is the principal source of his admiration.

But this admiration does not last. Smith's ironic peroration deserves to be quoted in full.

> Power and riches appear then to be, what they are, enormous and operose machines contrived to produce a few trifling conveniencies to the body, consisting of springs the most nice and delicate, which must be kept in order with the most anxious attention, and which in spite of all our care are ready every moment to burst into pieces, and to crush in their ruins their unfortunate possessor. They are immense fabrics, which it requires the labour of a life to raise, which threaten every moment to overwhelm the person that dwells in them, and which while they stand, though they may save him from some smaller inconveniencies, can protect him from none of the severer inclemencies of the season. They keep off the summer shower, not the winter storm, but leave him always as much, and sometimes more exposed than before, to anxiety, to fear, and to sorrow; to diseases, to danger, and to death. (213–14)

This view is utterly discouraging to the glamor of fortune and the human effort it inspires. It puts one much less in mind of the "spirit of capitalism" than of the Cynic and Stoic moralism we have so often seen in connection with the utopian critique of society, and it is interesting to see Smith in his literary essays sending his readers to the writings of Swift and Lucian for moral instruction. "Both together form a System of morality from whence more sound and just rules of life for all the various characters of men may be drawn than from most set systems of Morality."[6]

Smith does not draw a Cynic's conclusion from his observation about the emptiness of wealth. Rather, like his friend Hume, he is grateful that the psychological impact of philosophical reflection is meager and temporary. Even though in point of real satisfaction the mode of living of the great is actually "contemptible and trifling," nevertheless "we rarely view it in this abstract and philosophical light."[7] Instead,

> We naturally confound it in our imagination with the order, the regular and harmonious movement of the system, the machine or oeconomy by means of which it is produced … so that it strikes the imagination as something grand and beautiful and noble, of which the attainment is well worth all the toil and anxiety which we are so apt to bestow upon it.

This being the case, "it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner. It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind," producing all the sciences, arts, and embellishments of life that have "entirely changed the whole face of the globe" (215).

It is credulity about the happiness derived from riches, then, which drives human beings to produce the necessities of life. Though the rich would keep all for themselves, they actually consume no more than the "meanest peasant." The rest they are obliged, ironically, to distribute among their servants, "who provide and keep in order all the different baubles and trinkets, which are employed in the oeconomy of greatness." This leads Smith to the famous metaphor of the "invisible hand" which has mesmerized so many of his readers.

> The produce of the soil maintains at all times nearly that number of inhabitants which it is capable of maintaining. The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth

> been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. When Providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it neither forgot nor abandoned those who seemed to have been left out in the partition. These last too enjoy their share of all that it produces. In what constitutes the real happiness of human life, they are in no respect inferior to those who would seem so much above them. In ease of body and peace of mind, all the different ranks of life are nearly upon a level, and the beggar, who suns himself by the side of the highway, possesses that security which kings are fighting for. (215–16)

The "invisible hand" metaphor also occurs once in *The Wealth of Nations*, where Smith makes the point that merchants do not intend the good to the public that derives from their efforts (1:477). That is one providential benefit. Here Smith emphasizes the other side of it, which is that the merchants in their greatness do not actually enjoy the benefits they bring to themselves, though their efforts do support the population. The great earn the respect of others by accumulating the supposed means of happiness rather than achieving happiness itself. Smith's skepticism about the strength of the connection between wealth and happiness has been richly borne out by contemporary research.[8]

Few of Smith's readers have chosen to dwell upon his ironic attitude toward wealth above subsistence and its irrelevance to happiness. Regarding the passage I have quoted above, a distinguished editor of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* asks "Can Smith have really believed that?" before going on to acknowledge that

> The passage was written for the first edition of 1759, when the young professor in his thirties may well have entertained some romantic notions and thought them suitable for students mostly destined for the ministry. Yet he left it unaltered when he revised the book in 1789, long after he had written *The Wealth of Nations*.[9]

It is only in our world that professors are young in their mid-thirties, and it is hard find "romantic notions" in a conception of life closer to Pope's ironic theodicy than to any romantic.

Smith's conclusion is not ad hoc. It derives very closely from the central claim of his moral psychology, which is that the admiration and approval of others is more important to us than anything else, so that we are more powerfully motivated to acquire the things other people admire and envy than the things we really need. Commercial society brings to many the utopia people wish for, but even though the glamor of that utopia is false, it also brings the necessities of life to many more people than the globe would otherwise support. So the utopian dilemma takes an unusual turn in Smith's

thinking. Though the heroic imperative may be delusory, it brings society as close to real equality as it is likely to get.

Smith's distributive view of wealth might seem like a justification for the inequality of commercial society, though a main thrust of *The Wealth of Nations* is that society is far more unequal than it should be. Apologists for capitalism have taken up the utopian aspect of Smith's "invisible hand" while ignoring his irony toward the actual value of wealth. At heart, Smith is a Cynic who believes that the necessities of life are enough for everyone but that the spur of honor is so irrepressible that the best way to provide the necessities for everyone is to let the great waste their lives in their delusions of felicity while society reaps the unintended benefits. Add to this his opposition to heroic enterprises like imperialism and colonialism, his warnings about the mercantile manipulation of markets, and his support for the education of the public, and Smith becomes one of the most interesting and sophisticated utopians.

Notes

1 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* 2 vols., ed. Edwin Cannan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), vol. 2, 49-50.
2 *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8.
3 Letter from Smith to Andreas Holt, October 26, 1780, in Adam Smith, *Correspondence*, in *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, eds. E. C. Mossner and I. S. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), vol. 6, 251.
4 See, for example, Doğan Göçmen, *The Adam Smith Problem: Human Nature and Society in* The Theory of Moral Sentiments *and* The Wealth of Nations (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007).
5 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 61–62.
6 J. C. Bryce, ed., *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, vol. 4 of *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. A. S. Skinner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 125.
7 Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 214.
8 See, for example, Robert Frank, *Choosing the Right Pond: Human Behavior and the Quest for Status* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) and *Luxury Fever: Why Money Fails to Satisfy In An Era of Excess* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001); Daniel Nettle, *Happiness: The Science Behind Your Smile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons From A New Science* (New York: Penguin, 2005).
9 D. D. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator: Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 90.

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The Utopian Dilemma in the Western Political Imagination

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Chapter 8

Karl Marx and the Heroic Revolution

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8 Karl Marx and the Heroic Revolution

We have been following the development of opposing attitudes toward life and society, one for which the essence of happiness consists in achieving admiration and respect by means of a superior social position and another for which the competitive drive for status represents a fundamental irrationality at the heart of human nature, an irrationality to be overcome, if possible, only through radical social and philosophical reform. From the ancient world to the time of Rousseau and Smith, the struggle between these opposing attitudes, the heroic and the utopian, was confined to elite philosophical and literary writing; the only attempts to establish communistic lifestyles or instigate egalitarian reforms were made under the auspices of religion. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, the American and French Revolutions, each in their own way, opened new possibilities for the utopian impulse. The French Revolution in particular was an explosion that threw off particles of political and social energy in every direction. In the nineteenth century, we arrive at the age of practical, secular utopianism—dreams hatched in the Old World to be fostered largely in the New, in the "republic of North America," the fancied realm of freedom, democracy, loose social control, and unsecured real estate. Wider cultural and economic trends played their part. The Romantic rejection of the civilized in favor of the simple, the natural, and the rural was an important contributing element, along with an ever-mounting cry denouncing the immiseration of industrial workers. Utopian Socialists like Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Étienne Cabet each sought to develop scale models of an equitable and peaceful society that would allow individuals the fullest self-development. Many Utopian Socialists saw themselves as implementing a new Christianity in accord with the spirit of the Gospels. In America, the remarkable practical success of the Shakers made the utopian mode of life seem easily within reach, though the Shaker formula, based as it was upon pious self-discipline, proved hard to reproduce.[1]

Karl Marx is universally considered a utopian thinker—indeed, among the greatest of utopian thinkers—and there can be no doubt that he is a genuine heir of the utopian tradition. He opposes the feudal-aristocratic class and envisions the solution of all social problems through the abolition of private

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property, the quintessential utopian reform. His historical account of why this reform was bound to happen draws on the idealist philosophical tradition and it became among the most practically influential of all philosophical schemes. Yet Marx disclaimed both utopia and philosophy; throughout his writings, *utopian* is a term of contempt. He derided all forms of Utopian Socialism even while finding value in the critique of capitalism provided by Owen, Proudhon, Saint-Simon, and Fourier. Indeed, the label "Utopian" was one that he pasted on them permanently despite their own claims to be "scientific."[2] Marx refused the utopian label because, unlike many of his interpreters, he recognized that his entire outlook was deeply incompatible with those essential elements of the utopian tradition which his socialist rivals shared with the Hellenistic philosophers and Thomas More. Unlike the socialist reformers of his day, Marx did not believe his ideal society could be realized with a change in thinking about social organization or by what he condemned as the personal, egoistic heroism of philosophers who considered themselves "superior to all class antagonisms."[3] Instead, Marx believed that a better world could emerge only at the end of a destructive process of violent struggle. The arrival of communism does not depend upon leveling class differences or withdrawing from the conflicts that undermine social harmony. It requires the intensification of conflict.

With his belief that struggle is the only vehicle of historical progress, Marx is following the lead of his master, Hegel, who wrote that "The History of the World is not the theater of happiness. Periods of happiness are blank pages in it, for they are periods of harmony—periods when the antithesis is in abeyance."[4] Only suffering and struggle are truly productive. This is a formidably anti-utopian form of idealism. As Leszek Kolakowski puts it, for Hegel,

> Reason justifies history and condemns to vanity and ineffectiveness all arbitrary models of a perfect society. Even if these are in accordance with the just demands and rights of the individual, "the claim of the world-spirit rises above all particular claims."[5]

History is equally careless of the miseries of its "Heroes," those "World Historical Individuals" whose pursuit of their private interests and aims leads them unconsciously to advance the progress of "Spirit" (30–31). It is wrong, Hegel says, to take a psychological or satirical view of their turbulent passions and sufferings—to see Alexander, for instance, as guided by a "morbid craving" for fame and conquest (31). Such men are unconscious servants of the idea and in tune with the deepest needs of their time. Where Voltaire says that "No man is a hero to his valet," Hegel repeats Goethe's reply—"not because the former is not a hero but because the latter is a valet" (32). Critics of World-Historical Individuals are like Homer's Thersites carping against Achilles in Book Two of *The Iliad*. Of their animus against great men, Hegel is willing to provide a psychological explanation—there

is an "underlying worm that gnaws" them with the knowledge that their "vituperations remain absolutely without result in the world."

Informed by this view of history, Marx then, like any hero of romance, sees himself and his followers as servants of the age, newly conscious of their mission, engaged on a grand quest, a violent adventure on a world-historical scale, working alongside the proletarian class which represents universal humanity. The goal is a distant but heroic one—the overcoming of all obstacles to human freedom and the disappearance of the distinction between the individual and society. This is Marx's seminal and fateful imaginative contribution to modern culture, the philosophical crystallization of a *utopian but heroic* political stance—a phrase that would be an oxymoron in the terms of this study were it not that the utopian element of Marx's scheme is postponed to an indefinite future while the heroic adventure is for today. It is the sense of rupture between the present order of division and the ultimate goal in which all divisions are overcome that keeps Marx from feeling the tension of the utopian dilemma and the paradox of heroic egalitarianism.

All of Marx's complaints about the varieties of Utopian Socialism come from the heroic direction. In his contempt, he sounds like the feudal aristocrats he admired the bourgeoisie for having buried. Utopian schemes are rooted in vulgar "avarice" and "envy" and the "urge to reduce to a common level." They would abolish private property but not property itself. "In negating the personality of man in every sphere, this type of communism is really nothing but the logical expression of private property" (82).[6] Instead of abolishing capitalism, what the socialist—or "crude communist," to use Marx's term—really wants is capitalism for everyone. "In crude communism," Marx writes, "the community becomes the universal capitalist." The fact that this "annulment of private property" is not really an "appropriation" in the true sense is proved for Marx by the fact that it negates "the entire world of culture and civilization." This negation of culture is a "regression" the pettiness of which reflects its source in the "unnatural simplicity of the poor and undemanding man who has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not yet even attained to it" (83). The "crude communist," the "poor and undemanding man," is historically retrograde, having not even reached the level of capitalist appropriation. He is a failed bourgeois and Marx's patrician disdain for this creature is obvious. Further, the imagined sharing of women in "crude communism" is only another form of crass acquisitiveness extended to the public; it is intended to make women "the spoil and handmaid of communal lust" (83). All in all, Marx believes that communism of the "crude" utopian sort is just another expression of the "vileness of private property" (84).

As one would expect, Marx is also suspicious of the Christian affiliations of earlier socialists. Christian Socialism is but the "holywater with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat."[7] Indeed, the rejection of asceticism in any form is one of Marx's most passionate and

enduring attitudes. Asceticism is a vice that Utopian Socialism shares not only with Christianity but with capitalism itself. "Self-denial, the denial of life and of all human needs," is the "cardinal doctrine" of the "science of industry." Such self-denial moves Marx to bitter mockery. "The less you eat, drink and read books … the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you save."[8] Both capitalists and utopians, therefore, are pitiful connivers at their own repression.

But the greatest drawback of all utopian social schemes is not their pseudo-Christian asceticism but their petty, non-heroic, non-world-historical scale. Just as Bacon had greeted the modern age as the true agent of transformation, Marx sees history, with its chosen protagonist, the universal proletarian class, as the only true agent of transformation. Small-scale experiments lack the exhilaration and irreversibility of historical momentum. Marx has no patience for the founding of "isolated 'phalansteries,'" "duodecimo editions of the New Jerusalem," all these "castles in the air" (499), because it is only the true Communists who "take care of the future" (500). The momentum of the future will not be advanced, only impeded, by "economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind." Marx is no more friendly to such *hoi polloi* than he is to the *Lumpenproletariat*; there is only harm in those "complete systems" like Proudhon's which have been worked out on a puny, humanitarian basis (496). The proletariat can only exist world-historically. Its emergence is an irreversible, global event. "Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples 'all at once.'"[9] To ameliorate the effects of this global dynamic would be to betray it. Outlawing child labor, for example, would be "reactionary," an "empty, pious wish" and "incompatible with the existence of large-scale industry."[10] Even abolishing slavery would be nothing better than a damaging retardation of capital. "Without slavery no cotton; without cotton, no modern industry," Marx writes, with truly Panglossian logic.[11] The point of communism is not to improve the capitalist system but to push it to its destined end. This is why, for Marx, the last word of social science will always be [quoting George Sand] "Combat or death: bloody struggle or extinction."[12] The advocacy of violence is the most explicitly heroic and anti-utopian aspect of Marx's thought.

It is to the proletariat that Marx looks forward as the great hero of his world-historical epic. Ironically, however, it is his own class, the bourgeoisie, which displays the true dynamism of emergent social and economic forces. Marx's enthusiasm for the productive energy of the bourgeoisie is nearly boundless as it transforms nature and human relations in its own image. "It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades."[13] It goes about its world-historical mission with demonic force, putting an end to "all

feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations," stripping the "halo" from "every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe," tearing away from the family its "sentimental veil" and drowning "the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation" (475–76). With its need for a "constantly expanding market," it must "nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere" (496). With its "constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation," it destroys all the relations that sustained the old personal, social, religious, and national boundaries, leading Marx to a famous sentence: "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind" (496). No one understood better than Marx and Engels what these accomplishments had cost the members of the industrial working class, but they still give the impression that the benefits of capitalism had already outweighed its costs, even before the proletariat could come into its own.

The heroic and self-consciously anti-utopian character of Marx's program is clear. Instead of advocating a peaceful, philosophically motivated reorganization of society that will reduce inequality, poverty, oppressive labor conditions, and social tension, Marx aims to accelerate these tendencies toward their inevitable, violent resolution. Marx's readers will also recognize the epic character of his rhetoric, which deals constantly with the clashes of eras and worlds, irresistible forces, and collective delusions. There is even a Gothic tinge, when Marx speaks of the "were-wolf's hunger for surplus labor" or, even better, when he writes that "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks."[14] Nothing could be farther from utopia than the Gothic sense of the way the past haunts and dominates the present. "The tradition of all the dead generations," Marx writes, "weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."[15] Only a violent solution could lift such a nightmare.

The great bulk of Marx's work is directed at understanding the nature and dynamics of the heroic struggle between classes, while his portrayal of the utopian end-state of communism is abstract and vague. Communism will arrive gradually, after a period of the "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."[16] Its essence will be the end of class struggle in the victory of the universal proletarian class, a class which, being universal, does not generate an antithesis and so has no opponent to struggle with. The end-state of humanity, therefore, will be perfect social unity—a world without heroes. What is the basis of this unity? It cannot be some universal truth; that would be a bourgeois illusion. Rather, the basis is simply the absence of any further term of the dialectic. Practice itself will produce no further need for difference. Politics and the state will wither away. Markets will be abolished. The proletarian victory will be final.

Unless human beings are suddenly to acquire a Houyhnhnm's rationality, this state of perfect agreement—presumably on a democratic basis—is hard to imagine, and the replacement of dialogue with simple unity has doubtful antecedents. The appeal of Hobbes's Leviathan is that the reigning power, being single and indivisible, will put an end to all arguments simply by having its own way, the right of individuals to defend their own interests being more trouble to the commonwealth than it is worth. Rousseau's general will operates by a similar collective individualism, freedom consisting in obedience to a law one has given (collectively) to oneself. To remember Rousseau's chilling statement, those who disagree with the *general will* would have to be "forced to be free." And Hegel's dialectic also ends with the annihilation of difference. The subject of Absolute Spirit progresses by constantly recognizing, whenever it faces what seems like an object external to itself, that it is facing only its own creation. In the final state, every seemingly objective limit has been transcended and Absolute Spirit recognizes nature and the history of the world as nothing but the expressions of its own development. Consequently, the opposition of freedom and necessity dissolves. And for Marx, too, the arrival of the end-state, communism, depends upon the abolition of social otherness and indeed of all otherness and division. Communism is "the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (ie., human) being." Communism is humanism and naturalism at once. Communism

> is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.[17]

As a description of communism, these words of the young Marx, not published during his lifetime, have never been superseded. They envision the total overcoming of human limits by the collapse of all ontological and social distinctions. Marx's correspondence shows how little interest he had in speculating further about the nature of the coming transformation.[18]

The specific form of otherness that distinguishes capitalism is the alienation brought about by the division of labor and the creation of value through exchange, referred to by the early Marx as "alienation" and by the later Marx as "commodity fetishism." In communism, the opaque, thing-like objectivity of the economic system and its operations will cede to the perfect transparency of the universal class. The human personality will become fully itself in relations that are unalienated and social, being entirely dependent upon people and not at all upon things. The contrast with Rousseau is striking. Where Rousseau, despairing of rational discussion, hopes to escape the battle of wills among human beings by an entire dependence

upon things, Marx, trapped in a world of hostile social relations disguised as things, hopes to escape the hidden battle between classes by an entire dependence upon other people—people whose difference, whose otherness from each other, has completely been overcome. In either case, the social other has disappeared, dialectic is over, and freedom and necessity are one.[19]

When Marx thinks about what communism, based upon the fully rational control of the means of production, would actually be like, it is not the increase in productivity that engages him, nor the overcoming of poverty, but this reunification of the alienated human being. In a communist society, the division of labor will not be necessary. "Nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes." This is possible because "society regulates the general production." Marx believes that rational planning will obviate the specialization which Adam Smith saw as the key to modern productivity. Communism will make available to everyone the choice and variety of occupations that in Marx's day belonged only to the aristocratic man of leisure. And Marx carries his vision of liberation even further, to the point where "Man appropriates his total essence in a total manner, that is to say, as a whole man" (87).

Marx's vision of communism, then, is utopian but in a grander and more heroic key than offered by classical utopias. It is not so much a solution to the social problem as an abolition of the entire dimension of the social as a sphere that contains human beings with interests different from one's own.[20] At the same time, the social ills it seeks to overcome are not true ills but necessary evils, stages of the struggle toward the final realization of humanity. That being the case, Marx has none of the reservations about art and its disturbing power that trouble other utopians. He looks with rueful irony on the fact that capitalism has destroyed the conditions under which epic literature could thrive. "What chance," he asks, "has Vulcan against Roberts & Co., Jupiter against the lightning-rod and Hermes against the Credit Mobilier?"[21] Marx can never be convicted of nostalgia, of preferring imaginary to real mastery. He cannot regret that capitalism has undermined the mythological foundations of Greek art just as it has undermined other idols of the past—the family, the nation, and eternal ideals.[22] But Marx is sensitive, nevertheless, to the weakening of art as a baleful effect of modern technology. "Is Achilles possible," he asks,

> with powder and lead? Or the *Iliad* with the printing press, not to mention the printing machine? Do not the song and the saga and the muse necessarily come to an end with the printer's bar, hence do not the necessary conditions of epic poetry vanish?[23]

Though the social conditions under which Greek art and epic poetry arose have vanished, "they still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and as an unattainable model" (246). Communism will never surpass them. But the ascetic spirit that would reject

the "unattainable model" of heroic art because it does not accord with the modern spirit of progress is entirely alien to Marx's thinking. The historical consciousness that comes at the end of the dialectic has already assimilated all of its former stages, and nothing is now foreign to it. "Why should not the historic childhood of humanity, its most beautiful unfolding, as a stage never to return, exercise an eternal charm?" This is the Promethean grandeur of Marx's imagined end-state, the aesthetically and sensuously responsive assimilation of the entire history of humankind. It will never repudiate the heroic imagination. The early Marx glimpsed the logic by which philosophy is transformed into action when he wrote that "as the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes worldly," that "its realisation is also its loss," and that "in its very struggle it falls precisely into those defects which it fights."[24]

Marx was not the first, of course, to combine utopian hope and revolutionary violence. But it is with him that we see the full and decisive reclamation of heroic violence in a utopian context, even though the postponement of the utopian dimension to an indefinite future beyond the reach of idealizing philosophy protected Marx from feeling the tension between his utopian dream, with its collapse of social difference, and his heroic mission. It was an ironic return to feudal weapons turned against the capitalists so admired by Marx for demolishing the feudal mode of production. Anarchism was to take a similar stance, often adopting violence even more directly, without the concern to follow the developmental path of history. Heroic rhetoric and heroic thinking became so much a possession of the Left that it could fall prey to Nietzschean anxiety about the softening effects on the human character fostered by modern utopians. The French Marxist Georges Sorel, in his *Reflections on Violence*, provides a striking example. He calls for utopian intellectuals, who would steer the working-class movement in a conventional political direction, to get out of the way so that the working class can discover its own path. The essential instrument of the working class is the violence of the general strike, a catastrophic expression of myth with the potential to effect a total transformation of society. For Sorel it is revolutionary violence that sharpens the distinction between classes and stokes the engine of history; without it, the future looks vague and indeterminate. "Proletarian violence," he writes,

> exercised as a pure and simple manifestation of the feeling of class struggle, thus appears as a beautiful and very heroic thing; it is at the service of the primordial interests of civilization; it is not, perhaps, the most appropriate method for obtaining immediate material advantages, but it can save the world from barbarism.[25]

Sorel's rejection of intellectualist utopianism and his return to ancient notions of heroism is unequivocal. "Let us salute the revolutionaries," he urges, "as the Greeks saluted the Spartan heroes who defended Thermopylae

and helped maintain the light of the ancient world" (57). The idealistic and sublime spirit of war, not resentful envy toward the rich, must animate the working class as it performs deeds which are "purely and simply acts of war" (80). It is to this martial spirit of violence that "socialism owes the high moral values by which it brings health to the modern world" (253).

Sorel shows no philosopher's embarrassment in seeking the renewal of an "entirely epic spirit" (252). Philosophers should seek to learn from art rather than trying to control it. The "catastrophic notion" of the general strike has the character not of idea but of myth, "the myth in which socialism is entirely enclosed" (95). Myth, according to Sorel, is "an arrangement of images capable of instinctively evoking all the feelings that correspond with the diverse manifestations of war engaged by socialism against modern society" (95). Instead of trying to tame this myth, modern socialists must stand aside to let the proletariat develop its own new ways of organizing society in the spirit of war inculcated by the general strike. "The strikes have engendered in the proletariat the most noble, most profound, and most energizing feelings that it possesses" (96).

Sorel did not believe that a bloodbath would be necessary to overturn capitalism. The moral force of the strike would achieve that transformation through exemplary acts of sublimity like the deeds of the Christian martyrs. Sorel must be one of the few socialists to have seen the same predatory spirit in Nietzsche, Andrew Carnegie, and Theodore Roosevelt—and he approved of it. He is an eccentric in the socialist tradition and has often been ranked among the fascists, though, in spite of his enthusiasm for ancient heroism and myth, he does not read like a fanatic. His intuitive and mythic conception of the strike owes as much to Bergson as to Nietzsche. Nevertheless, Sorel highlights the heroic, anti-utopian character of the resources needed to bring about the social revolution he saw prophesied in Marx.

It is not surprising that modern scholars have found little attraction in Sorel's Nietzsche-inflected concept of the path to utopia. Their thinking about utopia has been influenced by later Marxists such as Ernst Bloch and Fredric Jameson who, in contrast to Sorel's heroic vision, advocate conceptions of utopia with a deep connection to everyday life.[26] They are able to discern, embedded in art and in all sorts of everyday phenomena, glimpses and glimmers of an ideal future which is unthinkable under present conditions and which can only be made concrete by historically efficacious praxis. From this perspective, the obstacles to utopia are not widely observed traits of human behavior but constraints of thought and language generated by the totality of the capitalist order, constraints which make the potential utopia only fleetingly detectable. The ability to detect such fragile harbingers of the future depends upon the providential scheme which makes them intelligible as utopian. The result is a fertile but very abstract hermeneutic. It is interesting that Bloch recognized heroic narratives as the antithesis of what he considered the more utopian and future-oriented genres like the fairy tale. He understood that the epic connection to the past

and its sense of destiny run counter to utopian aspirations.[27] Bloch saw the concreteness of epic, and even the level of detail found in utopian fiction, as incompatible with utopia, reducing its open-ended, multivalent, and hopeful character.[28] This strain of Marxism makes the future attractive, but the fact that utopia is best imagined in brief, fleeting glimpses is evidence of its highly ambiguous appeal and its tenuous connection to life, while heroic culture makes an unabashed appeal to the imagination.

Notes

1 Chris Jennings, *Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism* (New York: Random House, 2017), 52.
2 Darren Webb, *Marx, Marxism and Utopia* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 13–15.
3 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 498.
4 Hegel, Introduction to *The Philosophy of History,* trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 26–27.
5 Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), vol. 1, 73.
6 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 83.
7 *Manifesto*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 492.
8 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 95.
9 *The German Ideology*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 162.
10 *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 541.
11 Letter from Marx to P. V. Annenkov, December 28, 1846, quoted in Andrzej Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 16–17, from Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1969), vol. 1, 523–24.
12 *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 219.
13 *Manifesto*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 476.
14 *Capital*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 367 and 362–63.
15 *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 959.
16 *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 538.
17 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 84.
18 Webb, *Marx, Marxism and Utopia*, 66.
19 As I have argued elsewhere, Hobbes's Leviathan and Rousseau's Social Contract similarly depend upon establishing a unity which abolishes otherness and difference. See John Farrell, *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 270.
20 As Steven Lukes has pointed out, the "anti-utopian utopianism" of Marx and Engels is less akin to the classic utopia based on legal and institutional reform than to millennial thinking, visions of the Land of Cockaigne, or aristocratic moral reforms leading to an ideal commonwealth, types delineated by J. C. Davis. See "Marxism and Utopianism," in *Utopias*, eds. Peter Alexander and Roger Gill (London: Duckworth, 1984), 155.
21 *Grundrisse*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 245–46.
22 *Manifesto*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 487–88.
23 *Grundrisse*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 245–46.
24 "The Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophies of Nature," *Marx-Engels Reader*, 10.

25 Georges Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence* (Paris: Librairie de "Pages libres," 1908), 57. My own translation.
26 See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), and Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005). Jameson interprets utopian texts with a typological scheme modeled on St. Augustine's. See chapter one.
27 See Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 130. For a critical assessment of Bloch, see Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 3, chapter 12.
28 Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 145–46.

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The Utopian Dilemma in the Western Political Imagination

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Chapter 9

Fyodor Dostoevsky and the Ungrateful Biped

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9 Fyodor Dostoevsky and the Ungrateful Biped

Throughout his career, Fyodor Dostoevsky was intensely concerned with the idea of utopia as a response to the ills of the world. He grieved deeply over the injustices of Russian society, and his decision to join the radical movement in the 1840s was particularly motivated by his hatred for the institution of serfdom. The account of his subsequent imprisonment in *Notes from the House of the Dead* shows Dostoevsky discovering a new, non-utopian source of hope, based not upon Western social ideals but upon the moral and spiritual strength of Russian folk on Russian soil. Despite this conversion away from radical politics, Dostoevsky recognized that the secular utopian impulse to remedy the inequities of society was much in accord with the message of the Gospel and that his own social attitudes had been permanently shaped by French Utopian Socialists who advertised their debts to Christianity. Still more important to Dostoevsky as social critics were novelists like Balzac, Hugo, Dickens, and George Sand. Though recognizing, for example, that Sand was a deist, Dostoevsky, marking her death near the end of his own career, still expressed reverence for this "woman of almost unprecedented intelligence and talent," calling her "one of the most thoroughgoing confessors of Christ even while unaware of being so."[1] He went on to say that "She based her socialism, her convictions, her hopes, and her ideals on the human moral sense, on humanity's spiritual thirst, on its striving toward perfection and purity, and not on the 'necessity' of the ant heap" (513). It was the "'necessity' of the ant heap," the anti-Christian philosophy of later generations, not their social ideals, that disturbed Dostoevsky. The atheism and materialism of the West were the "demons" that corrupted the characters explored in his major novels—Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov, Stavrogin. *Notes from Underground,* Dostoevsky's brilliant inner dialogue, was a prologue to those intensely disturbing moral and psychological investigations.

Notes from Underground is in part a response to Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?*, one of the most influential books of nineteenth-century Russia and an inspiration to the makers of the Russian Revolution. That book was in turn a reaction to Ivan Turgenev's portrait of the new generation of radicals in the person of Bazarov, the

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self-proclaimed "nihilist" hero of the novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862). A "nihilist," in Turgenev's coinage, accepts nothing upon authority but discovers everything for himself, on a firm, empirical basis. Bazarov, a medical doctor and a scientist, is a harsh debunker of ideals, abstractions, "romanticisms," and social pretensions. He has little interest in manners or feelings and considers art and music a waste of time. This is not a charming portrait of nihilism, but despite his brusque manner and grudging outlook, Bazarov has the common touch, and his brutal honesty is truly without pretense. He suffers from the bleakness of his own philosophy, and his negligence toward his own emotional needs leaves him vulnerable to amorous disappointment. After a painfully abortive encounter with a woman aristocrat of high intelligence who rejects his declaration of love, Bazarov dies of an infection incurred, tellingly, while performing an autopsy.

Turgenev was shocked by the angry response to his portrayal of Bazarov, which was widely taken to be a hostile or satiric portrait of the younger generation, whereas Turgenev believed he was trying to "make a tragic figure" out of Bazarov.[2] (He was grateful to Dostoevsky for being one of the few to recognize his admiration for Bazarov's character.[3]) In *What Is to Be Done?* Chernyshevsky seeks to rectify Turgenev's dour image of enlightened youth and the radical movement they represent. His novel contains three utopian elements. The first is a detailed account of how the heroine, Vera Pavlova, sets up a democratically run women's cooperative for seamstresses, offering a blueprint for a future socialist society. The second is Vera's sequence of prophetic dreams, especially the fourth of them, a pastoral vision of the future in which a feminine goddess, a late version of Lady Philosophy, instructs Vera on the gradual humanization of the species which has been brought about by ideal figures of feminine beauty and power like Astarte, Aphrodite, and Aspasia.[4] Vera's vision also dwells upon the futuristic image of the glass and cast-iron Crystal Palace in London, originally built for the Great Exhibition of 1851, which has been provided, in Vera's imagination, with furnishings made of the splendid new material aluminum (370). It is the symbol of a new world built of new materials, both physical and human.

The third utopian element of *What Is to Be Done?*, and by far the most important, is the revolutionary and heroic nature of its young, radical characters. They are free of Bazarov's melancholy but also of his sober, practical skepticism toward grand ideals. In addition to Vera Pavlova, the chief protagonists are two high-minded young men, like Bazarov both doctors and aspiring scientists; one of them is even named Kirsanov after Bazarov's friend in *Fathers and Sons*. Both are men of the highest social ideals but they differ from Bazarov in being possessed of exquisite moral sensitivity and self-understanding. They are examples of a new type—energetic helpers of women in adverse circumstances, eager rescuers of girls from prostitution and daughters from forced marriages. They employ

astonishing psychological clairvoyance and elaborate subterfuge in plotting their noble deeds, very much in the manner of Rousseau's M. de Wolmar.

What is most remarkable about these reformers, eager as they are to reeducate society for the good of all, is that they consider themselves motivated entirely by self-interest. Indeed, this is necessarily so, they believe, because "man is governed exclusively by the calculation of his own advantage" (115). Because human beings are utterly predictable, these young people possess "an infallible means for analyzing the movements of the human heart" (251). The wisdom they provide is simple. "Be honorable, that is, calculate carefully," as Kirsanov puts it. That is "the whole code of laws needed for a happy life" (246). Such advice is barely necessary, though, because "People are powerless against their own natures" (315). And since the happiness of others is what their natures most desire, it is inevitable that, guided by rational egoism, there soon will come "a time when all the needs of every man's nature will be entirely satisfied" (256). The completion of feminism and the abolition of conventional sexual morality will be the first steps. Here we see Marx's heroism of revolt and the utopian overcoming of the division between individual and society being melded together and dramatized in fiction. And Chernyshevsky gives the heroism of revolution a further turn. Alongside the story of Vera and her clairvoyant friends, he also adds the biography of the superman Rakhmetov, a nobleman whose devotion to the "common cause" (code for the revolution) has become the governing necessity of his life. The converted aristocrat sleeps on a bed of nails; he travels the world investigating the condition of all classes in anticipation of the coming change (271–93). Rakhmetov represents in individualized form the utopian heroism of the modern age already envisioned by Marx.

The narrator of Chernyshevsky's novel provides a running metacommentary mocking the bourgeois expectations about plot and character which the novel neglects at every turn. But despite these willful disappointments, and the unmistakable tumidity of the work, its influence was prodigious. As the memoirist and critic Alexander Skabichevsky remembered, people at the time read the novel "practically on bended knee, with the kind of piety that does not permit the slightest smile on the lips, the kind with which sacred books are read."[5] The banning of the book led to a holy vocation of scribal copying. As Irene Paperno relates, all of its features became objects of imitation.

> Producers' and consumers' associations, sewing, shoemaking and bookbinding workshops, laundries, residential communes, and family apartments with neutral rooms [for celibate married couples] began to be founded everywhere. Fictitious marriages in order to liberate the daughters of generals and merchants from familial despotism in imitation of Lopukhov and Vera Pavlova became normal phenomena. It was, in addition, quite rare if a woman liberated in this way did not

> open a sewing workshop and did not relate vatic dreams in order to resemble the novel's heroine exactly. (29)

What Is to Be Done? inspired several generations and launched a political revolution. Its most famous acolyte was Lenin, who said that his life was "ploughed over" by it (30), and who borrowed the work's title for a revolutionary book of his own.

In *Notes from Underground*, Dostoevsky's primary line of response was not to the politics of *What Is to Be Done?* but to Chernyshevsky's belief that egoism, even of the most rational sort, could produce the subtle, sublime, and generous behavior displayed by its characters and, further, that the denial of human freedom could be the basis of social hope. *Notes from Underground*, however, is not a mere satire nor is its approach entirely negative. What Dostoevsky offers, as he says in a separately signed introductory note, is the depiction of a social type which "must exist in our society, taking into consideration the circumstances under which our society has generally been formed." He goes on to say that "In this fragment [Part One], entitled 'Underground', this person introduces himself, his outlook, and seeks, as it were, to elucidate the reasons why he appeared and had to appear among us."[6] In describing the work as a social introduction, Dostoevsky emphasizes one of its key features. It is a dialogue between a character and an imaginary audience whose existence and relevance the speaker constantly denies yet whose influence he cannot escape. This speaker has gone "underground," where revolutions are hatched, but his underground turns out to be not the launching place for a change of life but a perennial retreat into an interminable philosophical entanglement with the utopian dilemma. At the end of the story, when the speaker declares that he will write no more, Dostoevsky completes his framing of the speaker's address with another note saying that his character in fact "could not help himself and went on" (130).

"Underground," then, as it is framed here, is a place where thought goes on in retreat from all social engagement or conversation, sustained only by raw human need, but unable to escape from the presence of internal interlocutors. As Mikhail Bakhtin pointed out, every word in the story is part of a dialogue, which goes on like an "inescapable *perpetuum mobile*."[7] In contrast to Chernyshevsky's characters, who act in perfect conformity with their rational schemes and offer themselves as models of the age, the Underground Man is internally riven by his own process of rationality and cannot escape from it even in isolation from human contact. Instead of offering a model for the future, the Underground Man is another example of the Russian type of the "superfluous man," separated from the currents of Russian life by western influence. Dostoevsky's character, however, is unlike his predecessors (in Pushkin, Gogol, Goncharov, and Turgenev) in that he has decisively embraced his irrelevance with an act of withdrawal,

even though, in the space of this withdrawal, he cannot actually cease the conversation he has fled. That conversation goes unstoppably on inside his head in a manner looking forward to Beckett's paralytic monologues.

Having been framed by the author as a social type and the symptom of a decadent era, the Underground Man portrays himself as a recluse, a misanthrope, a "sick" and "wicked" man who, when he was part of society, behaved like an utter scoundrel. Dostoevsky himself, in his concluding note, calls his character a "paradoxalist." This would make him a strange spokesperson for any author, yet the arguments he poses against the modern utopian point of view are Dostoevsky's own.[8] The original title of the work was *Confession* and, in the planning, Dostoevsky told his brother that all his "heart and soul" would go into it. "I conceived it in prison," he writes, "lying on my plank bed, at a moment of sorrow and demoralization."[9] Writing *Notes*, Dostoevsky was thinking back to a period of his life when he was closer to the utopian point of view he perennially wrestled with, and the work is a product of that wrestling. His starting point is that Chernyshevsky does not understand the implications of his own rational egoism. He does not understand that if rational egoism could truly be occupied as an intellectual and psychological position, it would lead not to utopia but to the kind of intellectual suicide or self-immolation which has buried the Underground Man. Furthermore, if rational egoism could actually be implemented as a practical system, it would turn human beings into mere insects swarming on an anthill.

No summary can convey the power of the Underground Man's tormented and endlessly self-disclaiming confession, in which so many later nihilists have recognized themselves. The essential dilemma, developed in the first six sections of Part One, is one of ontology and belief. In the grip of total skepticism, the Underground Man is incapable of believing or *being* anything. It is not only that he is incapable of becoming the kind of person people generally aspire to be or to which Enlightenment ideals would lead—an "*homme de la virtue et la vérité*," as he puts it. Rather, he is not even capable of ordinary nastiness. As debased and humiliated as he often feels, he cannot even become an insect. "Only fools become something," he says, whereas "an intelligent man of the nineteenth century must be and is morally obliged to be primarily a characterless being" (6). He is what Robert Musil would later call a "man without qualities." Capable of being "neither a hero nor an insect," his need for dignity strives at a level far beneath heroic standards. Yet it plagues him nonetheless. "I'll tell you solemnly," he says, "that I wanted many times to become an insect. But I was not deemed worthy even of that. I swear to you, gentlemen, that to be overly conscious is a sickness, a real, thorough sickness" (6).

The intelligence and "heightened consciousness" which make the Underground Mann incapable of rising to the level of an insect still fuel his vanity. He claims to envy the stupid people who understand their lives in conventional terms and, when offended, can take their revenge and believe

in it (13). But with his "heightened consciousness," he has no object to blame but the laws of nature. "Where are the primary causes on which I can rest, where are my bases?" he asks. "For me every primary cause immediately drags with it yet another, still more primary one, and so on ad infinitum. Such is precisely the essence of all consciousness and thought" (17). In the infinite regress of causes, there are simply no moral agents either to commit an action or to be the object of blame. The Underground Man's only respite is in the perverse joy that comes from playacting at feelings he doesn't believe in. He comes to "a voluptuous standstill in inertia" (14). His final pleasure is in merely fancied humiliations which are his only relief from boredom.

The first six sections of *Notes from Underground* deal with this problem of the speaker's alienation from his own heightened consciousness, which leaves him without adequate objects for his feelings. The succeeding sections turn to the question of whether the utopian world of the Crystal Palace can solve the problems of the hyper-self-conscious man. Is the utopia envisioned by radicals of the Chernyshevsky type truly the object of human desire, as they believe? The Underground Man admits that it seems like madness to reject the good things utopia offers—"prosperity, wealth, freedom, peace"—but there is one form of "profit" the advocates of utopia leave out, "a profit to go against all laws, that is, against reason, honor, peace, prosperity" (21). That profit is freedom, a form of profit which is inherently destructive of order. Freedom is "remarkable precisely because it destroys all our classifications and constantly shatters all the systems elaborated by lovers of mankind for the happiness of mankind" (22). Even if "all human actions will be calculated mathematically, like a table of logarithms" (24), so that the coming of the Crystal Palace is inevitable, human beings will reject such necessary happiness just to prove their freedom—just to go on "living once more according to our own stupid will!" (23). Human beings prefer a chaos of their own making to a happiness dictated by reason and the laws of nature, a conclusion the Underground Man supports by noting the continuing violence of civilized countries, where "blood is flowing in rivers, and in such a jolly way, like champagne" (23). About world history "only one thing cannot be said," he observes, "that it is sensible" (29–30). The fantastical and perverse preference for stupid but independent living over rationally planned happiness leads the Underground Man to a striking definition of the human species: "a being that goes on two legs and is ungrateful" (29). Ingratitude is precisely the human inability to accept the conventional ingredients of happiness when they are not a testimony to one's own freedom and will. In such a situation, the most pampered man, "out of sheer ingratitude, out of sheer lampoonery, will do something nasty." He has to his mix in "his own pernicious, fantastical element" (30).

The definition of the ungrateful biped is formulated from the point of view of human beings as recipients of happiness. But from the point of view of human beings as agents, as creators, the love of disruption has

another source, which is that nothing is more instinctively repugnant than the completion of a task, even the task of achieving human fulfillment. "Can it be that [man] has such a love of destruction and chaos … because he is instinctively afraid of achieving the goal and completing the edifice he is creating?" the Underground Man asks. "Maybe he likes the edifice only from far off, and by no means up close; maybe he only likes creating it, and not living in it, leaving it afterwards *aux animaux domestiques*, such as ants, sheep, and so on" (33). Again the Underground Man has a Frenchified contempt for servile happiness. He is striking Pascal's note that the achievement of goals can bring only melancholy—that for our fallen nature, distraction is the only means of avoiding the recognition of our emptiness, so that "we prefer the hunt to the capture."[10] For Pascal, as for Dostoevsky, Christ was the only remedy, but the Underground Man finds in this flaw of our nature only a "terribly funny" joke (30).

Dostoevsky, however, did intend to offer his character, after forty years in the desert of the underground, an alternative to the indestructible Crystal Palace and to any other edifice that would bring the human process of creation and destruction to an end, thus taking away the freedom to stick out one's tongue "on the sly." "Seduce me with something else," the Underground Man urges his imagined audience, "give me a different ideal" (35–36). But here, perhaps prophetically, the Russian censors seem to have intervened, and the note of Christian hopefulness Dostoevsky intended does not appear. "The swinish censors," he complained to his brother Mikhail, "where I mocked everything and sometimes blasphemed *for the sake of effect*—it was permitted, and where I deduced from all of that the need for faith and Christ—it was prohibited.[11]

It is striking that Dostoevsky attributes this deduction of the "necessity" of a Christian alternative not to his fictional character but to himself, using the first-person pronoun, so it is natural to speculate about the missing passage with the help of his other writings. Just a couple of years earlier, in *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, an account of his travels in Western Europe, Dostoevsky recorded in bolder, more explicit terms his fearful reaction to the utopian vision of the Crystal Palace. Standing before it, he cannot keep himself from feeling that "something has been achieved here, that here is victory and triumph." And yet his reaction is fear. "Can this," he asks, "in fact be the final accomplishment of an ideal state of things: Is this the end, by any chance? Perhaps we shall really have to accept this as the whole truth and cease from all movement thereafter?"[12] Seeing the millions of tourists from all over the world, "people who have come with only one thought, quietly, stubbornly and silently milling round in this colossal palace," Dostoevsky experiences a revelation. "It is a biblical sight," he says, "something to do with Babylon, some prophecy out of the Apocalypse being fulfilled before your very eyes." To resist such a sight would require extraordinary resources. "A rich and ancient tradition of denial and protest" would be needed "in order not to yield, not to succumb

to impression, not to bow down in worship of fact, and not to idolize Baal, that is, not to take the actual fact for the ideal" (50-51).

Dostoevsky's antidote to this terrifying vision of Baal is a brotherhood of human beings, not based upon the rational egoism and natural love of humanity described by Chernyshevsky, but rather a brotherhood that requires a total sacrifice of everyone for everyone. "What a Utopia this is, really! It is all based upon sentiment and upon nature, and not on reason. Surely this is humiliating for reason. What do you think? Is this Utopia or not?" (70). Yes is surely the answer, and Dostoevsky comes strangely close to Chernyshevsky's view that such a spontaneous fusion with the interests of the collective is a human possibility. At the same time, and paradoxically, Dostoevsky's conception of utopia is based on sacrifice—and not through a spontaneous impulse but "a voluntary, absolutely conscious, completely unforced sacrifice of oneself for the sake of all." Such a sacrifice is not a denial of the "individual personality" but its "highest development …, its highest power, highest self-possession and highest freedom of individual will." Clearly, Christ is the model for this form of individual development. "Voluntarily to lay down one's life for all, be crucified or burnt at the stake for all, is possible only at the point of the highest development of individual personality" (68). But the regeneration of society on this basis will not be easy; it will take thousands of years (67).

Thanks to the censor, this hopeful note does not sound in *Notes from Underground*, and given the daunting nature of the task of human regeneration as Dostoevsky conceives it, there is no reason to fear that the uncensored version of the story would have been weakened by too sunny a prospect of redemption. Reading *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* in the context of later writings, one is reminded how habitually Dostoevsky's process of thought takes the form of paradox, inner drama, and dialectic. It is inconceivable that, in a work as contorted as *Notes from Underground*, he would have provided the Underground Man with anything more than a glimpse of that thousand-year-distant salvation mentioned in *Winter Notes*. Dostoevsky's aversion to closure, to final answers and completed schemes, is a key principle not only of his psychology but also of his art. This is the author whose most Christlike character, Prince Myshkin, is his most tragically ineffectual, and whose most sympathetic hero, Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*, was destined in the unwritten sequel to kill the czar.

It is not surprising, then, that the censor did not recognize Dostoevsky's note of Christian redemption for what it was. But even after the censor's intervention, and despite the Underground Man's morbid state of mind and voluptuous inertia, there are hints that the suffering speaker's illness is partially rooted in the repression of a goodness which is still part of his nature. Even in his attempts at wickedness, he tells us, he was

> conscious every moment of so very many elements in myself most opposite to that … I knew they had been swarming in me all my life,

> asking to be let go out of me, but I would not let them … They tormented me to the point of shame; they drove me to convulsions. (5)

And the Underground Man's reason for resisting a utopian frame of mind, a state of mind sustained only by reason, is hard to discount. "I, for example, quite naturally want to live so as to satisfy my whole capacity for living, and not so as to satisfy just my reasoning capacity alone, which is some twentieth part of my whole capacity for living" (28).

Despite this valuable reservation, at the end of the preamble which constitutes Part One the Underground Man is precisely where he began, in a "soap bubble and inertia" (18), envying and despising the ordinary, stupid people who take their own lives and feelings as given. In Part Two, he undertakes a confessional narrative of his life as a test, to find out if it is "possible to be perfectly candid with oneself" about one's past actions and "not be afraid of the whole truth" (39). Even though he is writing only for himself, with no audience, he believes that putting the shameful memories of past behavior that still haunt him onto paper may allow him to get free of them. Though this confession remains a private ritual, it does purport to deal with genuine events, so finally, we depart from the bracketed world of the Underground Man's interior conversation to the ethical realm of action.

Joseph Frank has identified the subject of Part Two of *Notes from Underground* as the "dialectic of vanity."[13] Indeed, that could be a fitting label for the entire work. Part One deals with the ontological affront to the dignity of the human personality posed by the radical utopian point of view. Part Two deals with the pathological condition of personal humiliation that led Dostoevsky's character to withdraw completely from social life into the underground, where his struggle for dignity continues inside his head. The Underground Man begins his second, social confession by going back to the time when he was twenty-four years old and living a "gloomy, disorderly" life, "solitary to the point of savagery." He narrates three episodes to illustrate the "boundless vanity" and the absurd "exactingness" toward himself which led to his eventual withdrawal. At the office, "afraid to the point of illness of being ridiculous," the Underground Man loved "falling into the common rut" (44), avoiding any eccentricity that would make him stand out while still being tormented by feelings of unacknowledged superiority. In the first episode, he agonizes over how to avenge himself for an accidental insult given to him by a six-foot-tall lieutenant. He fantasizes about challenging the lieutenant to a duel, which he imagines will eventually lead to a mutually elevating friendship, and he even writes out a challenge which he does not send. Eventually, he works up the nerve to bump into the lieutenant on the Nevsky Prospect. This doesn't even get the man's attention, yet the Underground Man feels he has "preserved [his] dignity, yielded not a step, and placed [him]self publicly on an equal social footing with" the lieutenant. He returns home

"perfectly avenged for everything. I was in ecstasy. I exulted and sang Italian arias" (55).

In the second, even more pitiful episode, the Underground Man horns in on a dinner party honoring an odious former schoolmate named Zverkov where he is obviously not wanted and is treated accordingly. Offended, he makes a scene and winds up challenging Zverkov to a duel. When that does not even lead to fisticuffs, he exacerbates his self-abasement by borrowing money from one of the group so he can follow them to a brothel. Again he has humiliated himself in front of people for whom he feels absolute contempt. His heroic fantasy life makes it impossible for him to be on a level with any other person. If he cannot rise to the level of absolute superiority, he falls into shame. "Either hero or mud," he says, "there was no in between." Yet even in the mud, his vanity survives. "In the mud I comforted myself with being a hero at other times, and the hero covered up the mud: for an ordinary man, say, it's shameful to be muddied, but a hero is too lofty to be completely muddied" (57).

The Underground Man's "boundless vanity" makes ordinary human relations impossible. In the one case where he had a friend, he behaved like "despot" toward him, demanding "unlimited power over his soul; I wanted to instill in him," he says, "a contempt for his surrounding milieu; I demanded of him a haughty and final break with that milieu." Once the project succeeded, and the friend, "a naive, self-giving soul," was driven to tears and convulsions by this "passionate friendship," the Underground Man immediately discarded him—"as if I had needed him only to gain a victory over him, only to bring him into subjection" (68). For the Underground Man, interpersonal relations are solely relations of vanity and power.

This same "dialectic of vanity" plays out, most painfully, in the final episode with the young prostitute, Liza. Having taken his pleasure with her, the Underground Man begins to amuse himself by depicting for her benefit, and with graphic vividness, the life she has ahead of her, enslaved to the brothel-keeper until physical decay makes her worthless to customers and she winds up in a shallow, watery grave, all this instead of the beautiful family life she could have led, which the Underground Man also describes in fulsome detail. But the seemingly defenseless young woman, before succumbing to this theatrical routine, makes a halting remark that takes the Underground Man by surprise and leaves him "twinged": "It's as if you … as if it's from a book" (98). This bookishness is something the Underground Man has been intensely aware of but he is embarrassed to have it pointed out—that the heroic fantasy life which has been fueling his degradations is something entirely borrowed from books. His private literary reveries have even inspired him with unironic moments of "positive ecstasy," full of "faith, hope, and love," in which he

> blindly believed then that through some miracle … a horizon of appropriate activity would present itself, beneficent, beautiful, and,

> above all, quite ready-made (precisely what, I never knew, but above all *quite ready-made*), and thus I would suddenly step forth under God's heaven all but on a white horse and wreathed in laurels. (56–57)

The "ready-made" character of these heroic fantasies betrays their bookish and, indeed, properly quixotic nature. The Underground Man's "beautiful forms of being, quite ready-made," have been "stolen from poets and novelists, and adapted to every possible service or demand" (58).

The character of Underground Man's quixotism is not special to him. It is, for Dostoevsky, the signature of an era. At the end of Part One, the Underground Man introduces his confession with reference to the image of the "wet snow" falling outside—the reader's only glimpse of the world above ground. As if marking the transition to a dream, this image provides the title of Part Two, "Apropos of the Wet Snow," which takes the scene back to the 1840s when the action occurs and when the wet snow of St. Petersburg provided the atmosphere for the sentimental writings of that period when Dostoevsky made his own dramatic arrival as a young writer. It was a time when Dostoevsky experienced his own "dialectic of vanity," his self-esteem having been so dramatically elevated by the enthusiastic reception given to *Poor Folk* by the circle surrounding the critic Vissarion Belinsky that he became unbearably proud and comically grandiose in his behavior toward his fellow writers. Two of his talented contemporaries, Turgenev and the poet Nikolay Nekrasov, wrote a mocking poem about him called "The Knight of the Rueful Countenance," and Dostoevsky had to confront Nekrasov to stop him from reciting the poem everywhere he went.[14]

Part Two of *Notes from Underground* begins with a thirteen-line epigraph from a well-known, sentimental poem by this same Nekrasov narrating the charitable rescue of a prostitute. So when Liza tells the Underground Man that he sounds bookish, her remark is sharper than she knows. The Underground Man is playing out with her a sentimental fantasy of saving the lost woman, a fantasy that belonged to an entire generation and a version of which appears in *What Is to Be Done?* Dostoevsky is not merely parodying Chernyshevsky or Nekrasov with the story of Liza and the Underground Man. He is showing the true psychology of egoism and the falsely sentimental and literary heroism that motivated the radical culture of the time. This rescue fantasy is as feigning and trumped up as the aristocratic fantasies of dueling that animated the first two episodes of Part Two. Imagining his amorous reconciliation with Liza according to the script, the Underground Man fancies he would "let his tongue run away with [him] in some such European, George-Sandian, ineffably noble refinement" (111). As the Underground Man concludes this fatuous reverie, Dostoevsky interpolates the final two lines of Nekrasov's sentimental poem begun in the epigraph, driving in the point that the Underground Man's self-indulgent sentiments belonged to

a whole literary era. As we have seen, later in his life Dostoevsky took a more generous view at least toward George Sand and French Utopian Socialism than he does here, where he sees the "ineffably noble" stance of moral superiority it offered as an invitation to self-intoxicated cruelty. The more elaborate and ineffable the kindness, the more secret and insidious the cruelty.

It is with overt cruelty that the Underground Man reacts to Liza's recognition that he sounds bookish. He exerts himself to break her spirit and succeeds, then reverts to the script of his rescue fantasy and tells her that she should visit him at home. Another humiliating form of determinism is gnawing at his ego here, a literary and cultural determinism that will prove as insidious as the physical determinism of Part One. Having put on the mantle of heroic rescuer, the Underground Man suffers several days of tortured inadequacy, knowing that, if Liza comes to him, she will see the pitiful conditions in which he lives. Worst of all, the entire spectacle will take place in the presence of his servant, Apollon, an old man of indestructible self-esteem whom the Underground Man is shamefully unable to cow. When Liza does come, wanting, of course, his help in escaping from prostitution, the Underground Man's dignity breaks down into a complete and pitiful confession. "Power, power, that's what I wanted then," he tells her about his rescuer's routine. "The game was what I wanted, I wanted to achieve your tears, your humiliation, your hysterics—that's what I wanted!" He even admits the weakness behind his desire for power and the mechanical character of his behavior. "I couldn't stand it myself, because I'm trash, I got all scared and, like a fool, gave you my address, devil knows why" (121). The Underground Man winds up in hysterics of his own.

After she comforts the Underground Man by making love with him, Liza can already tell he is too weak to accept her generosity. He is ashamed to look her in the eyes, feeling that "the roles were now finally reversed, that she was now the heroine, and I was the same crushed and humiliated creature as she had been before me that night" (124). For him, "to love meant to tyrannize and to preponderize morally" (125), and he has lost the power to do that. He responds by trying to put her back into her place with another supremely bookish gesture, giving her a five-ruble note in return for their love-making, which she tosses to the floor on her way out. He ends up with the absurd rationalization that perhaps he has done her a favor by insulting her because "the insult will elevate and purify her." "Which is better," he asks himself, "cheap happiness, or lofty suffering?" (128). This is the utopian dilemma in a nutshell, but the ungrateful biped is unable to admit that the happiness Liza offered him was not cheap at all.

As an expression of Dostoevsky's response to the conflict between utopian aspirations and heroic human dignity, *Notes from Underground* is extremely complex. Behind the sentimental social idealism of the 1840s, of western and literary provenance, Dostoevsky sees hidden and quixotic vanity, a desire to help others that is itself a vain affront to their dignity, even while he

also recognizes that it can be sincerely meant and in accord with Christian charity. Social egotism does not lead to universal love, as Chernyshevsky assumed. Egotism can be overcome, but only by the spontaneous generosity of a soul like Liza's, which can never become the norm, at least not until the arrival of a distant Christian future. Dostoevsky's consciousness of the importance of social vanity is as intense as More's or Rousseau's and far more pessimistic than Smith's.

Further, in the utopian rationalism of the 1860s, Dostoevsky sees a grave affront to human dignity which he himself genuinely resents even while recognizing that his own resentment is deeply connected with the "stupidest," most irrational, "ungrateful," and destructive elements of human nature. Dostoevsky's major novels of the 1860s and 1870s would explore the dialectics of vanity and the hidden vainglory of materialism and social idealism taken to every extreme. But he never let go of his belief that the condition of the world required an enormous change. Though he can by no means embrace Ivan Karamazov's utopian vision, Dostoevsky is not willing to denounce as "cheap happiness" the bread and security offered by the Grand Inquisitor, for it is impossible to forget Ivan's complaint that, in the current order of things, even blameless little children have to suffer, and such a world can never be accepted.

It should not be forgotten, of course, that Dostoevsky also harbored political hopes of a different utopian sort. He dreamed of a Russian empire, centered in Constantinople, in which the universal character of Russian spirituality could lead the way to a better world. But his creative imagination did not lend itself to such futuristic visions. In one of his last and finest treatments of the utopian theme, "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," the title character, another superfluous man and antihero, is rescued from suicide by a vision of a better world full of love and generosity, but the dream ends with him mysteriously corrupting that world merely by his own unconscious human influence. The Ridiculous Man returns to the world to do good, but the sober ending of his glimpse of the ideal suggests how fragile were Dostoevsky's hopes that the world could be saved from suffering at any rate above one person at a time. The contagion of vanity in a single man has poisoned the utopian character of an entire planet, leaving the suspicion that utopia must always be elsewhere, beyond the touch of proud and weak human beings.

Notes

1 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, vol. 1 (1873–76), trans. Kenneth Lantz with an introduction by Gary Saul Morson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 511.
2 Letter to K. K. Sluchevsky, April 14 (26), 1862. In Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*, trans. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: Norton, 1966), 185.
3 Letter to Dostoevsky of March 18 (30), 1862, in *Fathers and Sons*, 182–83.
4 Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, trans. Michael R. Katz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 365.

5 Quoted in Irene Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 27.
6 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1993), 3.
7 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 230.
8 James P. Scanlan is persuasive on this point in *Dostoevsky the Thinker* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), chapter two.
9 Letter to Mikhail Dostoevsky of October 9, 1859, in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Complete Letters*, trans. David Lowe and Ronald Meyer, 5 vols. (Ardis: Ann Arbor, 1999), vol. 1, 393.
10 Blaise Pascal, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Louis Lafuma (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963), 517.
11 Letter to Mikhail Dostoevsky of March 26, 1864, in Dostoevsky, *Complete Letters*, vol. 2, 100.
12 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, trans. Kyril FitzLyon (Richmond: Alma Classics, 2008), 50.
13 Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 334.
14 Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 168.

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10 Edward Bellamy's Invisible Army

With Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, we reach the era when the utopian imagination focuses not upon the founding of model communities but upon world states and systems—when utopian fiction, in other words, begins thinking on the same global, world-historical, and heroic scale as Karl Marx. In the Postscript to *Looking Backward*, Bellamy claimed that, in spite of the "fanciful romance" form of his story, it was "intended, in all seriousness, as a forecast, in accordance with the principles of evolution, of the next stage in the industrial and social development of humanity."[1] Like Marx, Bellamy believed that the economic forces driving the capitalist economy would inevitably lead to the creation of a socialist state that would put an end to economic competition and distribute both labor and resources with equity. Though Marx expected this to happen through the growth of class struggle, he did entertain the possibility that, in highly developed economies like those of the United States, Britain, or Holland, the workers could achieve their goals by peaceful means.[2] For Bellamy, it was neither class conflict nor worker initiative but the consolidation of capital which would overcome the wastefulness, squalor, and cruelty of the modern world. The giant trusts that were plundering the world in the nineteenth century were about to merge into a single "Great Trust" which would direct a truly rational, centrally planned economy designed to unify the interests of all, make politics obsolete, and improve the human race by removing the wealth-based distortions to sexual selection. While the great monopolistic giants would eliminate all small and local interests and the "great city bazar" would crush its country rivals, it would ultimately be the people who would take the reins just as they did in 1776, "organizing now for industrial purposes on precisely the same grounds that they had then organized for political purposes" (32). Remarkably, Bellamy expected this democratizing of the economy to make political democracy more or less obsolete except for the choice of top leadership, which would be made by those who have retired from service. In Bellamy's America of the future, even jury trials would no longer be necessary, expert judges having no private interests to corrupt them and crime having become a rare atavism, to be treated like a disease, its rational motives having been removed (121).

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Monopoly-making captains of industry play the chief role in Bellamy's forecast, but they are absent from *Looking Backward* itself. Bellamy's slumbering time-traveler, Julian West, had not been a businessman in his nineteenth-century existence but rather a rentier drone living off his inheritance, a decent, liberal spirit and a sympathetic reader of Dickens but impatient with the strikes and labor disputes that were delaying construction of the dream-house he was building for his fiancée. All his life he had been a complicit bystander in the irrational injustices of his century. Translated to the year 2000, finds himself introduced to a new and improved world by Dr. Leete and his daughter, Edith, a Boston version of Prospero and Miranda, and is given an education in the fraternal, collectivist order that governs the new century. The dialogue between Julian and Leete allows Bellamy to develop a powerful critique of capitalism, explore the mechanics of his utopia, and confront a wide range of objections. It is the depth and seriousness of this discussion, carried on while Julian is struggling to reorient himself in a new world, that accounts for the power of the book, its tremendous international popularity, and the astonishing vogue of utopias it set in motion.[3] During the economic and social upheavals of the 1890s, "looking backward" on a peaceful transition to a more rational economic system proved to be a far more tolerable way of contemplating reform for middle-class readers than looking forward, through an apocalyptic transition, to a dictatorship of the proletariat.[4]

The proletariat, in fact, has simply disappeared from Bellamy's eugenically purified world, where everyone has full access to education, refined leisure, and congenial employment until their secure retirement at forty-five. Bellamy was uncomfortable with working-class activism and he shared the doubts about democracy and universal suffrage that were common among intellectuals and writers of the time, including figures like Mark Twain, Francis Parkman, and Henry Adams.[5] Bellamy's vision of socialism has a certain affinity with ancient Sparta. Money has been eliminated and everyone works for the state in analogy with universal military service (36). Everyone gets the same pay—even those who cannot work—simply by virtue of being a citizen, and labor is compulsory for all who can work. Not to work would be a kind of social death, and the system is so rewarding that all citizens willingly contribute as much as they can. Remarkably, Dr Leete explains, "In their lucid intervals, even our insane are eager to do what they can"! (77). Though labor is compulsory, and all citizens begin with a three-year period devoted to basic jobs requiring no expertise, everything is done to match task or profession to individual inclination. Work is doled out by a system of credits, and those who take on the more unpleasant tasks are compensated with shorter hours, so that everyone's contribution is equal. And since labor is service to the state for the collective good rather than for the good of individuals, all the indignities of labor have been removed (119).

Julian has to struggle to accept the idea that, in spite of differences of talent and energy, it is reasonable for everyone to be compensated at the same rate,

even the members of the "invalid corps" who cannot work at all (77–78). In spite of the general prosperity of the new order, to the nineteenth-century mind, tormented by the "Sphinx's riddle" of the "labor question," as Julian calls it (28), such a practice seems not only unfair but impractical as a driving motive for personal industry. But here is the key element of Bellamy's system. Since everyone now depends upon the state for the necessities and benefits of life, there is no private accumulation of wealth and no dependence upon family or spouse for economic support, all financial dealings between citizens having been eliminated. As a result, honor—the heroic motive—has been purged of its conservative and self-interested character. Honor's only source, now, is the quality of one's service to the state, and the competitiveness that created such wastefulness and injustice in the capitalist system now provides the motive for energy and initiative devoted to the common good. Thus, while the state provides the same financial reward to all laborers, it recognizes the quality of individual accomplishment by distributing prizes, ranks, and badges of iron, silver, and gold, a system that takes us back to Plato's *Republic*. When Julian protests that human motivation requires economic incentives, Dr Leete points out that even Julian's benighted nineteenth-century contemporaries knew better when making their arrangements for the most important task of all, that of national defense.

> When it was a question of the grandest class of efforts, the most absolute self-devotion, they depended on quite other incentives. Not higher wages, but honor and the hope of men's gratitude, patriotism and the inspiration of duty, were the motives which they set before their soldiers when it was a question of dying for the nation, and never was there an age of the world when those motives did not call out what is best and noblest in men. (56)

Leete goes on to make an even more important point, that even with regard to the ordinary accumulation of wealth in the nineteenth-century economy, the need for honor was again a driving psychological force.

> When you come to analyze the love of money which was the general impulse to effort in your day, you find that the dread of want and desire of luxury was but one of several motives which the pursuit of money represented; the others, and with many the more influential, being desire of power, of social position, and reputation for ability and success. So you see that though we have abolished poverty and the fear of it, and inordinate luxury with the hope of it, we have not touched the greater part of the motives which underlay the love of money in former times, or any of those which prompted the supremer sorts of effort. The coarser motives, which no longer move us, have been replaced by higher motives wholly unknown to the mere wage earners of your age. Now

> that industry of whatever sort is no longer self-service, but service of the nation, patriotism, passion for humanity, impel the worker as in your day they did the soldier. The army of industry is an army, not alone by virtue of its perfect organization, but by reason also of the ardor of self-devotion which animates its members.[6]

As a man who had been rejected in his application to West Point, Bellamy idealized the military life,[7] and in the course of *Looking Backward* it is often mentioned that Julian's last day in the nineteenth century was "Decoration Day," the day of remembrance for the nation's fallen heroes, later to be called Memorial Day. Dr Leete's appeal to the masculine idealism of the soldier resonated deeply with Bellamy's post-Civil War generation, which was focusing on the martial heroism of the 1860s as a way of forgetting the nation's racial and sectional divisions and reunifying the country on the basis of shared masculine sacrifice.[8] It is notable in this context that, as with many late nineteenth-century utopias, issues of race are not addressed by Bellamy's scheme for an "army of industry."[9]

The conversion of military discipline to peaceful uses looks a couple of decades forward to the famous argument, made by the pacifist William James, that the martial virtues are "absolute and permanent human goods" and that, for war to be truly eliminated, it would be necessary to make public service the "moral equivalent of war" as a partial replacement for army discipline. Only in this way would it be possible to keep a "peace-economy" from becoming a "simple pleasure-economy."

> In the more or less socialistic future toward which mankind seems drifting we must still subject ourselves collectively to those severities which answer to our real position upon this only partly hospitable globe. We must make new energies and hardihoods continue the manliness to which the military mind so faithfully clings. Martial virtues must be the enduring cement; intrepidity, contempt of softness, surrender of private interest, obedience to command, must still remain the rock upon which states are built.[10]

The hope that animated utopian thinkers like Bellamy and James was that the emulative and competitive urges, the concern with status and reputation which animated heroic culture, could, with the elimination of economic competition and family interests, be redirected to fuel the labors of a peaceful society. Where Marx resorted to heroic violence as a means to arrive at a utopian end-state, these thinkers sought to integrate heroic psychology into the end-state itself, and to do so on a grand scale. In this way no loss of energy or industriousness would detract from the proposed cost-saving advantages of a planned economy—its simplification and absence of duplication, advertisement, credit, financial cycles, and inequality. There is a qualification, however, to Bellamy's endorsement of competition, or

"emulation." For the noblest natures, to be motivated by the opinions of others, Dr Leete tells Julian, is "philosophically absurd," but even in twenty-first-century Boston, such absurd motivations are necessary because the system is designed to include both the weak and the strong (74). In the final instance, Bellamy has a higher regard for the philosopher than for the honor-directed hero.

In "How I Came to Write *Looking Backward*," an article in his magazine *The Nationalist* written only a year after the publication of the novel, Bellamy recalled that the idea of the industrial army was the generating core of the work, which started as a "literary fantasy, … a cloud-palace for an ideal humanity," until the true value of the military "object lesson" of mass conscription fully dawned upon him—the possibility that "a plan which was found to work so well for purposes of destruction" might be "profitably applied to the business of production now in such shocking confusion." Bellamy originally envisioned the opening scene as evoking the "solemn pageantry" of the annual "muster day," when new recruits would be sworn in and veterans discharged with the thanks of the nation, but this scene and other novelistic trappings were omitted so that Bellamy could develop the details of his social scheme. As a result, despite Bellamy's endorsement of the "industrial army" and its idealistic spirit, the sense of men in action is almost entirely missing from *Looking Backward*. In fact, as many readers have noticed, human beings in general are even more scarce in Boston than on Prospero's island. Except for a silent waiter serving the Leete family and their guest (without embarrassment because he is serving the nation), the industrial army simply does not appear. Twenty-first-century Boston is gleaming and magnificent but its streets seem to be empty. Life centers upon domestic privacy, and even the public dining facilities are equipped with private dining rooms. Superb classical music and Sunday sermons are piped telephonically into the home. The epic grandeur of the great Muster Day parade Bellamy originally imagined as setting the tone for the novel could hardly be more absent. The emptiness of twentieth-century Boston is highlighted by contrast toward the end of the novel when Julian dreams of returning to the nineteenth century and is horrified by the crowds of suffering poor.

Though nothing could be further from the epic spirit than Julian's cozy domestic invalidism, Bellamy has fallen back for narrative interest upon a frailer aristocratic vehicle, the romance, in that late form mocked by Voltaire in *Candide*. Dr Leete's daughter turns out to be the descendent and virtual duplicate of Julian's nineteenth-century fiancée, also named Edith, and their meeting is the equivalent of those magical Shakespearean reunions which bring the predestined couples back together in joy. Edith is a kind of therapist who helps Julian patch up his time-splintered psyche and deal with the psychological hazards of arriving in utopia from a morally tainted world. In Bellamy's utopia, women have their own army and receive the same financial benefits and independence as men; indeed, feminist readers of the nineteenth century found the life of women in Bellamy's future world

attractive, one notable reformer, Frances Willard, even speculating that the author of *Looking Backward* might be a woman.[11] Bellamy's women have been freed from their "unnatural rivalry with men" and, no longer stunted and confined in marriage, find happiness in "a world of their own, with its emulations, ambitions, and careers." They are delivered from "an existence that would have softened men's brains or driven them mad" (152).

In *Looking Backward*, women's liberation is also sexually stimulating. It allows for the "full play of differences of sex" so that men and women can experience each other with mutual "piquancy." All other social and economic factors having been removed from the equation, "The sexes now meet with the ease of perfect equals, suitors to each other for nothing but love" (155). That being the case, "There can be no marriages now except those of inclination" (156). Women are freed from the absurd requirement that courtship be left to men (155–156). No longer distracted from choosing the best mates on the basis of false criteria such as wealth or family, women are naturally drawn to those men with individual personal excellence, especially those who distinguish themselves in the only honorable competition left—professional excellence in service to the state. "Our women," Dr Leete explains, "sit aloft as judges of the race and reserve themselves to reward the winners." As a result, "The gifts of person, mind, and disposition; beauty, wit, eloquence, kindness, generosity, geniality, courage, are sure of transmission to posterity" (157). Once again Bellamy has found a way of adapting the heroic, competitive elements of human nature to utopian goals. His women are more feminine, more powerful, and more devoted to the good of the state than the women of the nineteenth century. Like Spartan wives, trained from childhood as "wardens of the world to come," their "feeling of duty" in selecting a proper mate "amounts to a sense of religious consecration" (158).

With a population delivered from the inefficiencies and burdens of capitalism, sexually enhanced and eugenically improved by the liberation of women and by their freedom to select the best partners, Bellamy's utopian future is an "era of unexampled intellectual splendor," including brilliance in the arts. Introduced to twentieth-century literature, Julian is astonished to discover that great fiction can be written about people living in a more or less perfect world. "The story writers of my day," he says,

> would have deemed the making of bricks without straw a light task compared with the construction of a romance from which should be excluded all effects drawn from the contrasts of wealth and poverty, education and ignorance, coarseness and refinement, high and low, all motives drawn from social pride and ambition, the desire of being richer or the fear of being poorer, together with sordid anxieties of any sort for one's self or others; a romance in which there should, indeed, be love galore, but love unfretted by artificial barriers created by differences of station or possessions, owning no other law but that of the heart. (100)

Julian has been reading a romance called "Penthesilia," presumably devoted to the Amazon queen of that name—a figure of martial heroism apparently freed from the rigors of war. Julian does not tell us how the interest of the story is achieved; we are left with the assurance that storytelling can survive the removal of all its familiar ingredients. But in a later chapter, we are told of another romance by the same imaginary author which dwells on the evils that can come about when women, overcome by pity, decide to marry one of those "unfortunates" whose genes should not be transmitted to the future (158). Edith Leete's attachment to Julian himself might well fit into this category. She does pity him, and he feels unworthy of her, though he fails to make the connection to the eugenic theme when he observes that "this radiant daughter of a golden age had bestowed upon me not alone her pity, but her love" (175). In utopia, it seems, the only source of narrative interest will be the residue of atavistic virtues like pity for the weak. Edith does have a generally retrograde mode of existence, besides being a reincarnation of her nineteenth-century namesake. She does not seem to be included in the women's industrial army. She is really a post-Victorian Angel in the House whose only contribution to the economy is attending to her time-traveling admirer. Even her distinction as an "indefatigable shopper" (58) seems like a holdover from the capitalist past, the complexities of consumer choice in Boston having been entirely removed.

A good part of the charm of *Looking Backward* for Bellamy's contemporaries lay in his ability to imagine a peaceful but radical change and to imagine it in detail, whereas the violence of Marxist revolution pointed toward an unspecified future.[12] The psychology of Bellamy's collectivist vision relied upon heroic resources normally foreign to utopian thinking, preserving individual competition, military-style discipline, and the spirit of sacrifice, while the Bostonian scene presented in the book is uncannily private and domestic. And while the individualistic point of view is associated in the book with capitalist waste and Julian's corrupt century, a good deal of the value of Bellamy's regime comes from the way it frees individual relationships, especially sexual relationships, from the distortions of social mediation. The telephonic Sunday sermon preached by Mr Barton emphasizes this element. "For the first time since the creation," he says, "every man stood up straight before God" (168). Bellamy's collectivism leads to a true and heroic Protestant individualism. The heroic and the utopian impulses seem to be coming together in a way that looks forward to later, dystopian developments, while the martial motivation that animates Bellamy's Boston, and the armies of labor that sustain it, have been kept puzzlingly invisible. Among utopians, Bellamy is one of the least subject to the tensions of the utopian dilemma; but the cost seems to be the complete lack of connection between the heroic psychology which animates his economic system and the domestic sphere which supplies the characters in the novel's sparsely populated world.

In the twenty-first century, Bellamy's ghostly "industrial army" may seem like a quaint conception, but it does offer an alternative to revolution as a way of recruiting the dystopian idealism of war for the cause of social harmony and the defeat of capitalism. Still, it is surprising to see Bellamy's army recently returning to its utopian role in the thinking of the Marxist critic Fredric Jameson. Where Bellamy imagined that the industrial army would emerge through the unification of capital into a single firm, the Great Trust, which would eliminate all smaller entities and the political and social conflicts that go with them, Jameson, writing in 2016, sees the U.S. Army as the candidate for this unifying role in his "American Utopia" because it is the one truly national entity that could override the many state and local barriers created by the federalism of the U.S. Constitution.[13] As a "dual power," a structure parallel to the entire nation, the U.S. Army would be in a position to offer benefits like universal healthcare which the American political system, with its anti-utopian checks and balances, cannot do.

The "universal army," as Jameson calls it, would have to be shorn of its heroic character, though the removal of its martial mission would allow it to include everyone regardless of capacity, giving it a democratic aspect (63). It would nevertheless have that "unquestioning subordination of the part to the whole which is a characteristic of every army."[14] But though it would be compulsory, service would be light—three or four hours a day—and work would be assigned by a Psychoanalytic Placement Bureau using an "unimaginably complex computer system" to assign both the tasks suitable to each worker and the therapies needed to keep them happy (81–82). Jameson's universal army would provide the economic base that supports the superstructure of private life, though he does not explain how it preserves its martial esprit de corps without an enemy to fight. Indeed, it is not clear what makes it any longer an army in the proper sense.[15] The universality of the universal army eliminates conflict of all kinds, both military and political. "We must cure ourselves," Jameson argues, "of the habit of thinking politically, for politics is the art of power and the state" (22).

With regard to the utopian dilemma, the interesting thing about Jameson's scheme is that, while the universal army, by abolishing political difference, removes the possibility of conflict with anything outside itself, it does not eliminate the psychology of conflict nor does it seek to repress aggressive impulses in the classic utopian manner. Indeed, Jameson believes that "the elimination of collective antagonism" will bring "inevitably the heightening of individual ones" (63). But these antagonisms, and every other form of neurosis, waywardness, or resistance to the system, will be confined to the domain of the superstructure, which is to say the secular realm of harmonized neuroses curated by the psychoanalytic supercomputer. These will include even "our instinctual fear that utopia (in whatever form) will be a place

without conflict or contradiction" (65). Jameson's future Americans would thus inhabit "a utopia of the double life," contributing their daily labor to the economic base, the industrial army in the Kingdom of Necessity, while the rest of the time indulging in unrepressed eccentricity and *ressentiment* in the phantasmatic Kingdom of Freedom, culture, and the superstructure. "Having secured the reproduction of the species" by means of the universal army, Jameson explains, the individual organism

> has to find something to do with itself, and human history has developed a whole shopping mall full of solutions, beginning with religion and art and running the gamut, not excluding asceticism, renunciation, self-mutilation, and the whole array of other pleasures and non- or anti-pleasures which it is the duty of every self-respecting utopia to take into account and provide for. (312)

Jameson mentions that generational conflict would be preserved but he does not mention that these pleasures or "anti-pleasures" would also have to include racism, sexism, and every other kind of group antagonism except for class conflict. There is a silver lining here, however, which is that art would no longer have to fear being deprived of its subject matter. Utopia would be just as ugly and crazy as ordinary life even though relieved of its inequalities and objective dangers, which would be replaced by the discomforts of equality itself. Hostility and pain would flourish along with love and pleasure, but strictly confined to the superstructure.

Jameson is canny in his recognition that utopianism has to deal with anti-utopian anxieties, though his recourse to psychotherapy is itself an invitation to anti-utopian fearfulness; it is not comforting to the heroic spirit to hear that the state will be "entirely withering away into some enormous group therapy" (82). But Jameson's "thought experiment" (43) differs from Bellamy's in that it shows a clear understanding of the utopian dilemma and the resistance to utopia, including its implications for art. His practical solution, though—and he insists on its practical intent—is no different in principle from Bellamy's. Both would outsource the dilemma to the non-political realm of the merely technical, eliminating politics and political conflict altogether. If these things can be removed from the economic base, they will be harmless in the causally nugatory superstructure. Jameson winds up, then, like Bellamy, with a rigid separation of public and private life, his public sphere featuring a universal, nonviolent, non-hierarchical but compulsory army and the private sphere a conflict-ridden society of mutually envious individuals and groups whose animosities have been neutralized in practical terms by computer calculation.

The self-consciously comic freedom of Jameson's speculative vision is underwritten by his Pascalian wager that, though the lives of individuals

have no inherent goal except perhaps the avoidance of repression, history must have one, which is to move toward utopia (311–312). Given the indispensability of that assumption, it is easier for him to imagine that utopia will arrive through the expansion and transformation of the U.S. Army than through the existing American political process or, indeed, through any political process at all. The effect is only to highlight the stubbornness of the utopian dilemma.

Notes

1 Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (New York: Oxford, 2007), 195.
2 Address to the International Working Men's Association, September 8, 1872, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 523.
3 On the popularity and influence of *Looking Backward* see Kenneth M. Roemer, *The Obsolete Necessity: America in Utopian Writings, 1888–1900* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1976), 2–3.
4 As Matthew Beaumont puts it, "Socialism appealed to intellectuals of the middle class to the extent that it opened up the possibility of ameliorating the capitalist system; but it tended to appall them to the extent that it threatened to overthrow it altogether." See *Utopia Ltd.: Ideologies of Social Dreaming in England 1870–1900* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 3.
5 Arthur Lipow, *Authoritarian Socialism in America: Edward Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 20.
6 Bellamy, *Looking Backward,* 56-57. Bellamy's argument that it is competition for respect and "rivalry of ostentation" (143) which animates economic competition, not mere "dread of want and desire of luxury," would inspire Thorstein Veblen's theory of "conspicuous consumption." The connection between Bellamy and Veblen is broad and significant. See Rick Tillman, "The Utopian Vision of Edward Bellamy and Thorstein Veblen," *Journal of Economic Issues* XIX, no. 4 (December 1985): especially 888–890.
7 Michael Robertson, *The Last Utopians: Four Late Nineteenth-Century Visionaries and Their Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 40–41.
8 T. J. Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), chapter 1.
9 Roemer, *The Obsolete Necessity*, 90.
10 William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," Association for International Conciliation, Leaflet No. 27 (February 1910), rptd. in *Writings 1902–1910* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1289–1290.
11 Robertson, *The Last Utopians*, 60.
12 For a sharp comparison of the appeal of Bellamy and Marx, see Merrit Abrash, "*Looking Backward:* Marxism Americanized," *Utopian Studies* no. 4 (1991): 6–9.
13 Fredric Jameson et al., *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 2016), 27.
14 Jameson quotes these words of Leon Trotsky, 33.
15 Jodi Dean makes this point in "Dual Power Redux," her reply to Jameson in *An American Utopia*, 108.

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11 William Morris and the Taming of Art

In his vision of utopia, Edward Bellamy hoped to find a replacement for the runaway energy of capitalist greed and selfishness by redirecting the human need to be recognized and admired into competition for public service—to preserve the force of heroic emulation, in other words, while depriving it of its individualistic cast in a society where all work to serve the nation. William Morris found the popularity of this vision of "Nationalism," or "State Socialism" as he called it, disturbing. As a way of tempering his review of a writer he recognized as a fellow socialist, Morris advised readers of Bellamy that "The only safe way of reading a Utopia is to consider it as the expression of the temperament of its author."[1] No Utopia bears so clearly the temperament of its author as *News from Nowhere*.[2] And yet it is surprising to find the author of medievalesque romances like *Sigurd the Volsung* eager to dampen the heroic note of emulation from his ideal culture. Morris idealizes the art and the culture of the Middle Ages, while depriving it of the epic character toward which his own poetry was inclined. It was remarkable how much of his own temperament Morris was willing to suppress.

Morris and Bellamy have a great deal in common. Both are bitter opponents of capitalism, and both see a revolutionary event in the offing which, by removing money and the profit motive from human commerce, will change the basic terms of social existence, uprooting the conditions that fuel greed, inequality, crime, and waste, and, by doing so, eliminating the necessity for politics and most functions of government. They both anticipate a great enhancement of the relations between the sexes under socialism, and with it the potential improvement of the human stock. But Bellamy sees the movement toward this change as emerging gradually on the corporate level and by necessity, while Morris rejects this "economic semi-fatalism" as "deadening and discouraging" (356). He believes that reform will require a conscious effort on the part of the working class, a takeover that will inspire a violent reaction and a two-year period of "eager, restless heroism" before a new order can be set in motion.[3]

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It is in imagining the form of this new order that Morris differs most essentially from Bellamy. Bellamy envisions a grand and gleaming modern metropolis where life goes on coordinated by mechanical arrangements from behind the scenes. Morris is right to say that socialists of Bellamy's type are "perfectly satisfied with modern civilization, if only the injustice, misery, and waste of class society could be got rid of" (354), but this "half-change" is not enough for Morris, who is an opponent of everything modern and urban and everything that smells of the machine. The "aggregations of population" that make up the modern city," Morris observes, "afford the worst possible form of dwelling place" (357). The London of *News from Nowhere* has devolved more or less back to the scale of village life, and Morris's protagonist, William Guest, arriving in this transformed England, feels as if he were back in the fourteenth century (61). The Thames has been liberated from its cheapened, "cockneyfied" urban setting. Its banks no longer cluttered with the houses of the rich, it flows with all of its original freedom and beauty. And instead of the harried companies of men that inhabited the city in Morris's time, Guest encounters only relaxed and open-hearted young people who have plenty of time to help a stranger find his way around while a couple of historically minded centenarians are eager to fill him in on how the current order came about.

All of Morris's objections to *Looking Backward* are typically romantic and validate his admission of his own, self-confessed "leading passion—hatred of modern civilization."[4] The key motif, though, which derives from his experience as a master printer, weaver, decorator, architect, and craftsman in many materials, is Morris's belief that the utopian condition cannot consist, as Bellamy imagined, of youth being dragooned into armies to do minimally uncomfortable work followed by retirement in the prime of life. Bellamy's society, Morris says, in spite of the disclaimers about each person's free choice of profession, gives the impression of "a huge standing army, tightly drilled, compelled by some mysterious fate to unceasing anxiety for the production of wares to satisfy every caprice, however wasteful and absurd" (356). Morris might have added that these soldiers of labor remain invisible in Bellamy's world, suggesting that the human reality of their labor is hard for the author to acknowledge. Bellamy is better at evoking the victims of capitalism than the masses who have been delivered from it.

For Morris, in great contrast, the key ingredient of utopian life is the happiness that derives from work itself. "Happiness without happy daily work," he insists, "is impossible" (123). Work is so necessary in Morris's utopia that the only thing its inhabitants have to fear is running out of it (122). There is honor and (surprisingly) even wealth in reward for work, but the greatest reward is the "conscious sensuous pleasure in the work itself" (123). Such unalienated labor is really indistinguishable from art, and the pleasure of art, along with the instinctive craving for beauty, is the animating force of Morris's imaginary world (160). The art that people create there does not cater to artificial needs invented for the world market

but has real value. "Nothing *can* be made now without genuine use," one of Morris's utopians explains; "we have found out what we want" (127). What is wanted is not cheap and mass-produced items made by machines for philistines; instead, everything produced in Morris's utopia is hallowed by the personal touch of the artist. "Art," Morris writes in another place, "is the expression of man's pleasure in labor," and he sees "the hallowing of labor" as one of the aims of art in his time.[5] The goods people make are as much for the good of the making as for the pleasure of their use. "We have time and resources enough to consider our pleasure in making them" (127), one of Morris's utopians explains, a conception of wealth and the value of resources very different from the late nineteenth century's. Guest's elderly informant Hammond sounds a little like Pericles defending Athens against the asceticism of the Spartan ideal when he argues "That we live amidst beauty without any fear of becoming effeminate; that we have plenty to do, and on the whole enjoy doing it. What more can we ask of life?" (105). The element of competition stressed by Bellamy as the motive for work is simply unnecessary in Morris's *Nowhere*.

Morris's utopians are much more brightly and colorfully dressed than the English of his day, less conventional in their housing arrangements, and freer in their marital couplings, which also makes them better-looking. "Pleasure begets pleasure" is one of their sayings, and among them even transient relationships make better children than the "respectable commercial marriage bed" of Morris's day (96). The people live long past their biblical three score and ten (84). There is no forced book learning among them and little specialization. Like Morris himself, they turn their hands to whatever occupations happen to please them; the weaver who is one of Guest's first acquaintances also does a little printing and has acquired a taste for mathematics and antiquarian history (58). For the inhabitants of Morris's vision, the hand of necessity seems almost entirely to have lost its grip. The "reasonable strife with nature" which occupies them does not keep them from "exercising … all sides" of their natures or from "taking the keenest pleasure in all the life of the world" (92). The only source of trouble left in Nowhere is the unruly passion of love, another autobiographical touch that makes the expression of Morris's utopian temperament seem complete. The battles that animate medieval sagas are entirely absent from the world of his fancy; Guest's journey on the Thames is entirely lacking the rigors that made Morris's Icelandic treks so inspiring; but the erotic upsets that fueled poems like "The Defense of Guinevere" and "The Haystack in the Floods" are still in play.[6]

It is to Morris's credit that he recognizes the limits of his new order from the point of view of literature, a concern he places in the mouth of an "old grumbler" (77) who has "read not a few books of the past days" and feels that the bygone era of "good sound unlimited competition" produced works that are "much more alive than those which are written now." They possess, he claims, "a spirit of adventure" and "signs of a capacity

to extract good out of evil which our literature quite lacks now." The grumbler "cannot help thinking that our moralists and historians exaggerate hugely the unhappiness of the past days, in which such splendid works of imagination and intellect were produced" (174). Putting the question directly, he asks the visitor if the people in Guest's competitive world were not "on the whole much freer, more energetic—in a word, healthier and happier—for it?" (176). Guest soberly denies the charge, but the more vivid reply has already been given by the old man's granddaughter, Clara, in a tirade against "Books, books! always books" when it is "the world we live in which interests us … which we can never love too much" (175). Her outburst is a thorough indictment of the privileges of imagination. Books were

> well enough for times when intelligent people had but little else in which they could take pleasure, and when they must needs supplement the sordid miseries of their own lives with imaginations of the lives of other people. But I say flatly that in spite of all their cleverness and vigour, and capacity for story-telling, there is something loathsome about them. Some of them, indeed, do here and there show some feeling for those whom the history-books call "poor", and of the misery of whose lives we have some inkling; but presently they give it up, and towards the end of the story we must be contented to see the hero and heroine living happily in an island of bliss on other people's troubles; and that after a long series of sham troubles (or mostly sham) of their own making, illustrated by dreary introspective nonsense about their feelings and aspirations, and all the rest of it; while the world must even then have gone on its way, and dug and sewed and baked and built and carpentered round about these useless—animals.

The comic figure of the grumbler cannot match Clara's unlettered eloquence as she annihilates the moral and literary value of aristocratic romance. The example of the liveliness he prefers is nothing more ennobling than Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (186)—scarcely a pleasure to weigh against the miseries it describes. But Morris had doubts about the value even of the greatest art. In modern times, as "the thought of man became more intricate, more difficult to express," art "grew a heavier thing to deal with," a spiritual trial leading to a division between greater and lesser men.[7] Morris opposed the distinction that set fine art above the crafts which give beauty to objects of everyday life. In his defense of the "secondary arts" of decoration, in which he was so deeply involved, he admits that there is a better, indeed, a "best art" which provides "the pictured representation of men's imagining," an art that is "always beautiful indeed, but oftenest stirring to men's passions and aspirations, and not seldom sorrowful or even terrible." With its depth and clarity, it can raise the viewers' life "above the daily tangle of small things that wearies him, to the level of heroism

which they represent." But "the very greatness" of this art "makes it a thing to be handled carefully" for, "like other animals," we must have rest and may become callous defending ourselves from "tragic emotions."[8] Morris concludes that

> Such callousness is bad, both for the arts and our own selves, and therefore it is not so good to have the best art for ever under our eyes, though it is abundantly good that we should be able to get at it from time to time. (258–59)

It is better that we should surround ourselves on a daily basis with "ornament that reminds us of the outward face of the earth, of the innocent love of animals, or of man passing his days between work and rest as he does." Such art does not "destroy our rest for us," a phrase which looks forward to the alternative title of *News from Nowhere—An Epoch of Rest*. Morris's utopia is a place from which the tragic realities of great art have been marginalized in favor of tranquil decoration. Even the "tumble-down picturesque" of nineteenth-century fancy is too suggestive of poverty to please the village dwellers of Nowhere. "Like the medievals," they like everything to be "trim and clean, and orderly and bright" (106).

Morris has answered Bellamy with a small-world utopia that goes beyond mere equality, leisure, and convenience, creating a busy sense of involvement in everyday happiness. It is romantic and spiritual to the core, grounded in a new "religion of humanity"—a new, much improved humanity—"free, happy, energetic … most commonly beautiful of body … and surrounded by beautiful things of their own making" (160). These are not prerequisites for revolution but its results. The great difficulty in the imagined post-revolutionary period of Morris's future England had been to raise the culture of the people to its current artistic level, since "the once-poor had such a feeble conception of the real pleasures of life." In their ignorance, "they did not ask enough from the new state of things" (157). There was a "period of disappointment" with a "dull level of utilitarian comfort," the old competition having been done away with, until quickly the instinct of truly artistic "work-pleasure" and the "craving for beauty seemed to awaken in men's minds" (160). Morris's own craftsmanship, in spite of its patrician and antiquarian character, was meant to be a prophetic instrument of this change, and though it may be as artificial as Yeats's Byzantium, his Nowhere offers an image of art still lending itself to competition but no longer grounded in social misery and no longer in conflict with the good of society. Morris finesses the utopian dilemma by evoking a return to the beauty of the medieval world but without its inequality and violence, a world purged of its heroic aspect and tempered to the scale of the everyday. It is a world in which the joys of artistic creation and intellectual effort have been made free to everyone, but at the price of a notable reduction in intensity. Science

no longer seeks to transform the world, and the temperature of art has been lowered to avoid the dangers and distractions of greatness that animate Morris's own heroic poetry. In *News from Nowhere*, heroic greatness is a small price to pay for the cleaner, brighter, gentler world of work.

Notes

1 Review of *Looking Backward*, *Commonweal*, June 22, 1889, in William Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings,* ed. Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin, 1993), 354.
2 For an excellent evaluation see Michael Robertson, *The Last Utopians: Four Late Nineteenth-Century Visionaries and Their Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), chapter 3.
3 Morris, *News from Nowhere*, 155.
4 Morris, "How I Became a Socialist," in *News from Nowhere*, 381.
5 "Preface to 'The Nature of Gothic', a chapter from *The Stones of Venice* by John Ruskin," in Morris, *News from Nowhere*, 367.
6 For a superb account of the place of travel and adventure in Morris's experience and thinking, see Rosalind Williams, *The Triumph of Human Empire: Verne, Morris, and Stevenson at the End of the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), Part Two.
7 Morris, "The Lesser Arts," in *News from Nowhere*, 238.
8 Morris, "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing," in *News from Nowhere*, 258.

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12 H. G. Wells and the Samurai

H. G. Wells began his career as one of the first great dystopian writers. Having pioneered a new and flexible form of experiment with science, fiction, and social fantasy, he acquired a remarkable hold upon British culture's image of the future by imagining what could happen if human societies did not take more effective control of themselves and their environment. In Wells's fantasies of the 1890s, leaving nature and human nature to take their course might lead to nightmare worlds like the one envisioned in *The Time Machine*, where the upper classes have devolved into tiny, charmingly effete Eloi while the working classes have become the frightening, subterranean Morlocks who feed on them. Wells displayed a ghoulish genius for imagining science gone mad in *The Island of Dr. Moreau,* showed science's egomaniacal destructiveness in *The Invisible Man,* and the potential dangers of the universe that science explores in *The War of the Worlds*. When Wells takes up Edward Bellamy's line of fancy in *When the Sleeper Awakes*, his version of Julian West emerges from his time-traveling slumbers into a world gone entirely wrong, divided between an oppressive plutocracy and a phony revolution. When the early Wells envisions a society of beings perfectly adapted to their social roles, the result is not utopia but the discomfortingly strange insect world of *The First Men in the Moon*.[1]

Wells's dystopian side has retained its hold upon the popular imagination, but as he progressed into the new century, he also became a superb satiric portraitist of the rising middle classes, whose empty and trivial mode of existence seemed to him no replacement for the imaginative conception of English life created by the gentry of centuries past.[2] He was still more influential in turning to the question of what human life could become if human beings did finally take effective control of nature, including human nature—if science, in other words, could be put to proper use and human societies develop under its direction, leading, in one of his myriad formulations, to a "world-wide synthesis of all cultures and polities into one World State as the desired end upon which all civilizing efforts converge."[3] Having invented dystopia for the modern world, Wells went on to reinvent utopia using the same science fiction instrument, all the while propagandizing endlessly in extra-literary venues for his rational utopian dream.

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The Wellsian vision was not the eccentric expression of a dissident temperament like *News from Nowhere*. It was a worked-out, Darwinian version of the dominant Baconian, progressive scientific image of the future, made vivid and persuasive by Wells's powerful rhetoric and imagination. It was the hoped-for continuation of the ever-forward Enlightened development of mankind described by Wells with massive detail in *The Outline of History*, a book that made him a fortune and demonstrated the continuing popular appeal of his futuristic hopes even after World War I. *The Outline* presents just one of many versions of Wells's utopian vision, discovering behind the contingencies of historical change "a sane order in a progressive intention steadily achieving itself" (88–89). Wells makes this growing order visible in the slow but consistent trend of human civilization away from local affiliations—of nation, class, race, religion, and language—toward a rational synthesis in a worldwide political union under the direction of a wise elite. In his fiction, Wells made this ideal future concrete and real enough to be feared, thus becoming a key trigger of reaction for the authors of seminal dystopian works—Evgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell. The Wellsian dream of a World State was augmented in its power and its fearfulness by the rise of Soviet communism. In this chapter I have recruited his tirelessly explaining voice in order to represent the progressive utopian sensibility as it entered the twentieth century.

Unlike Marx and his nineteenth-century opponents, Wells is quite forthcoming in acknowledging that his vision is "utopian." He does not use that word as a term of abuse, to be opposed to scientific history or historical materialism. Rather, it is a badge of intellectual modesty. For all of his faith in science, Wells recognizes that speculative schemes about the future have no claim to certainty, and he derides Marx for his scientism and reductionism,[4] joining William Morris in acknowledging that utopian visions are a form of self-expression. "One's political proceedings, one's moral acts are," he acknowledges, "just as much self-expression as one's poetry or painting or music."[5] But that recognition does not prevent Wells from energetically legislating in favor of his own self-expressive values. Wells's intellectual modesty, then, has a strange twist to it. His embrace of utopianism depends at least in part upon his belief that the personal, subjective aspect of his vision should not override the sense of superiority which makes his "imperatives" of "assimilation and aggression" more likely to be valuable than those of "unthinking men."

Wells also recognizes that the speculative character of utopia is an imaginative liability for the writer of fiction. "There must always be a certain effect of hardness and thinness about Utopian speculations," he admits. "Their common fault is to be comprehensively jejune."[6] But the Modern Utopia, as he calls it in the work of that name, has an advantage over the traditional one because of its Darwinian basis. "The Utopia of a modern dreamer," he writes,

> must needs differ in one fundamental aspect from the Nowheres and Utopias men planned before Darwin quickened the thought of the world. Those were all perfect and static States, a balance of happiness won for ever against the forces of unrest and disorder that inhere in things. One beheld a healthy and simple generation enjoying the fruits of the earth in an atmosphere of virtue and happiness, to be followed by other virtuous, happy, and entirely similar generations, until the Gods grew weary. Change and development were dammed back by invincible dams for ever. But the Modern Utopia must be not static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages. (11)

The Modern Utopia, in other words, has the form of an adventure, an eternal struggle for existence, through unpredictable changes and adaptations. This "kinetic" and unpredictable quality allowed Wells, over a period of fifty tumultuous and catastrophic decades, to issue a steady stream of new drafts for the emergence of a unified world and to do so in a key both heroic and popular. Indeed, even more than Marx, Wells rejoined the utopian vein of thought with its original heroic opposite, making struggle and death not merely the means for bringing about a final, communistic end-state but a signature aspect of the utopian condition itself. Darwinism was the key scientific ingredient. Life without the Darwinian "struggle for existence" would lead to the decadence of the human race already so vividly envisioned by Wells in *The Time Machine*. Thus in the twentieth century Wells sees utopian felicity and dystopian struggle moving gradually together.

The embrace of life as change gives Wells the glimpse of a utopian aesthetic oddly akin to the most apolitical, Paterian sort. "There is, indeed," he says, "no beauty whatever save that transitory thing that comes and comes again; all beauty is really the beauty of expression, is really kinetic and momentary" (158). This vision of the momentary and the transient rises to the level of Being itself. "Nothing endures, nothing is precise and certain," he says, "perfection is the mere repudiation of that ineluctable marginal inexactitude which is the mysterious inmost quality of Being" (20–21). And that Being itself is only graspable as flux.

> Being, indeed!—there is no being, but a universal becoming of individualities, and Plato turned his back on truth when he turned towards his museum of specific ideals. Heraclitus, that lost and misinterpreted giant, may perhaps be coming to his own. (21)

The alternative to this kinetic, Heraclitean vision would be "a Utopia of dolls in the likeness of angels—imaginary laws to fit incredible people, an unattractive undertaking" (23). Wells's desire to "modernise Heraclitus

and Empedocles" by emptying all general categories, leaving only "the world of individuality," leads him to recognize that "there are no absolute rights and wrongs, there are no qualitative questions at all, but only quantitative adjustments" (31–32). In such a world, utopia is not a sudden or revolutionary achievement but a long process. "There will be many Utopias," he predicts.

> Each generation will have its new version of Utopia, a little more certain and complete and real, with its problems lying closer and closer to the problems of the Thing in Being. Until at last from dreams Utopias will have come to be working drawings, and the whole world will be shaping the final World State, the fair and great and fruitful World State, that will only not be a Utopia because it will be this world. (245–46)

It was this hopeful scheme of endless revision and flux that allowed Wells to spin out version after version of utopia, a new future to go with each change in the state of the world. One of his most "fundamental beliefs" was that "the world is for experiment, experience, and change" (66).

Technology, of course, holds the key to the happiness of the future in the Wellsian vision; classic utopias thrive by toil, but in a modern utopia, work devolves to the machine. "There appears no limit to the invasion of life by the machine" (71); Samuel Butler's Darwinian doubts about technology made no impression upon Wells. Much of his appeal as a social prophet depended upon his ability to imagine the machines of future. Pinning his hopes on technology, Wells is the true disciple of Bacon working on an expanded scale, and in his Utopia the "worldwide House of Salomen" supports the research of a million men (186). Only such a commitment to science could make society an "organisation for the conversion of all the available energy in nature to the material ends of mankind" (62).

Despite the importance of technology, however, it is when we come to the politics of Wells's utopia that we reach the core of his thinking. Wellsian society is governed not by the whims of the democratic masses and their professional flatterers but by the guidance of a class of experts, the "samurai" as they are called in A *Modern Utopia*, an elite corps of "voluntary noblemen who have taken the world in hand" (86). The order of the samurai, Wells's Utopian narrator reports, "is open to every physically and mentally healthy adult in the Utopian State who will observe its prescribed austere rule of living" (174). The samurai "look like Knights Templars" (186), but it is to Plato's Guardians that they are most often compared.

> Practically the whole of the responsible rule of the world is in their hands; all our head teachers and disciplinary heads of colleges, our judges, barristers, employers of labour beyond a certain limit, practising medical men, legislators, must be samurai, and all the executive

> committees, and so forth, that play so large a part in our affairs are drawn by lot exclusively from them. (187)

They are also the only voters (207). The samurai are the products of meritocracy, not aristocracy, but Wells does his best to blur the distinction. The samurai, though "open to the whole world" and to both men and women, are yet a "noble and privileged order" (187). Their austerities are almost monastic and certainly Spartan; they take only cold baths, sleep alone four out of five nights (198–99), make pilgrimages and solitary retreats (202–3). Their dignity forbids them many of the common amusements, including acting, singing, and reciting; any form of mimicry is "not only held to be undignified in a man or woman, but to weaken and corrupt the soul," a strangely Platonic reservation. "Nor may the samurai do personal services, except in the matter of medicine or surgery; they may not be barbers, for example, nor inn waiters, nor boot cleaners." Competitive and team sports are also beneath samurai dignity, the "gentlemen of honour" of previous generations having made spectacles of themselves before howling mobs and "degenerated fast enough into a sort of athletic prostitute, with all the defects, all the vanity, trickery, and self-assertion of the common actor, and with even less intelligence." The samurai must have those "unconquerable souls" exalted by the Utopian double of Wells's friend W. E. Henley, reviser of the "Book of the Samurai" which includes his Stoic anthem "Invictus" (190).

The intellectual qualifications of the samurai might have placed them among Plato's philosopher-kings, but it is the role of the elite military guardians that attracts Wells since, in his Darwinian notion of history, struggle must continue; a final utopian solution to the problems of the world would lead to racial decadence. Thus his preference for the kinetic over the static is not only aesthetic and metaphysical but biological and ethical as well. Although the order of the samurai might have begun with intellectual collaboration and research, eventually it had to acquire the "militancy" which allows it to conquer political forces that would resist its dictates. "Traces of that militancy would, therefore, pervade it still, and a campaigning quality—no longer against specific disorders, but against universal human weaknesses, and the inanimate forces that trouble man" (236).

Given the need for this "campaigning quality," the samurai, of course, must be elite breeders; only samurai can marry samurai (196–97), and female samurai are required to bear children (199). Wells is careful to leave space for his own libertine sexual freedoms, but the state's interference in child-bearing will be formidable because the future of Utopia depends upon the quality of its citizens. In order to reproduce, citizens of Utopia must demonstrate "a certain minimum of personal efficiency" (169). The invalid, the madman, the unreclaimed criminal or failure, the "low-grade

man" must be eliminated (95–96). In *Anticipations,* his first book-length attempt at social projection, Wells labeled such inferior specimens the "People of the Abyss,"[7] and although, chided by friends like Joseph Conrad, he attempted a more charitable tone in later works,[8] he did not flinch from the Darwinian basis of his ethics. In *A Modern Utopia* Wells no longer sees a need for eugenic killing, except for some infanticide,[9] but "there must be a competition in life of some sort to determine who are to be pushed to the edge, and who are to prevail and multiply" (131).

With uninhibited consistency, Wells applies the same logic to the struggles of races and peoples. While accepting that not even the most superior human beings could be capable of deciding who is worthy to survive and who is not, and while rejecting the various cruel methods by which British colonial administrations have destroyed native populations, including the method of "honest simple murder" (224–25), Wells still considers that, if "there is an all-round inferior race, a Modern Utopia is under the hard logic of life, and it would have to exterminate such a race as quickly as it could." It is impossible not to count him, then, among the many for whom a hierarchy of race was replacing the older hierarchy of classes and who were taking the enforcement of such a hierarchy to an extreme. Wells is sensitive to the charge and makes the point that the extinction of inferior races would only be an extension of Utopia's policy toward all of its citizens. Utopia would eliminate the unworthy "without any clumsiness of race distinction, in exactly the same manner, and by the same machinery, as it exterminates all its own defective and inferior strains; that is to say, by its marriage laws." Such an extinction would occur without special state intervention, so it

> would need never be discriminatory. If any of the [inferior] race did, after all, prove to be fit to survive, they would survive—they would be picked out with a sure and automatic justice from the over-ready condemnation of all their kind. (299)

Since in Utopia everyone has had "a fair education and fair treatment, justice, and opportunity," those who cannot reproduce deserve a natural form of "extermination." So from the standpoint of the rational utopian, the goals of British colonialism could have been accomplished, without atrocities, through the natural workings of "the hard logic of life" unimpeded by the overly charitable scruples of civilization. The relaxed equanimity and open-mindedness with which Wells treats this subject reflect his moral neutrality and lack of distance from his racist audience. "Is there, however," he asks,

> an all-round inferior race in the world? Even the Australian black-fellow is, perhaps, not quite so entirely eligible for extinction as a good, wholesome, horse-racing, sheep-farming Australian white may think. These queer little races, the black-fellows, the Pigmies, the Bushmen,

> may have their little gifts, a greater keenness, a greater fineness of this sense or that, a quaintness of the imagination or what not, that may serve as their little unique addition to the totality of our Utopian civilisation…. Utopia has sound sanitary laws, sound social laws, sound economic laws; what harm are these people going to do?[10]

Overall, then, the Wellsian utopia has a strange, paradoxical quality. Its machines have freed human beings from the tedium of labor, and its laws have provided it with a population of beautiful, healthy, rational people, but the "hard logic of life" must remain in force to prevent the devolution of the species. "No Utopia," Wells insists, will ever be able to remove all of "the emotional drama of struggle" (96).

Almost two decades later, Wells was still defending utopia's need for the vitality of struggle. In *Men Like Gods*, his discouraged liberal protagonist, Mr. Barnstaple, finds himself happily transported to a parallel utopian universe only to find he has been accompanied by two carloads of foolish and destructive upper-class English people, people so absurdly attached to their irrational world that they are unable to accept the beauties of utopia and quickly begin plotting to destroy its rational, peaceful order, an order which has taken three thousand years to establish and for whom a million martyrs have died.[11] Wells stages this as a full-blown adventure tale, with narrow escapes and pitched battles, but for our purposes the interest of the story lies in the motives that bring Barnstaple's fellow travelers to resist utopia. The simplest of the dissenters is the chauffeur, a working-class barbarian who is disgusted by the unashamed nudity of the beautiful Utopians (96). Then there is Father Atherton, a priest whose "unclean mind" cannot accept the Utopian disregard of the marriage bond (85). Another anti-Utopian protest comes from the romantic nature-worshipper Freddy Mush, who cannot accept a Utopia where there is no "Balance of Nature" and no swallows, where ten thousand species have been literally put on trial and all of the "tiresome or mischievous" ones subjected to a "systematic extermination," leading to a much healthier and safer world (92). At the beginning of the civilizing process, as a Utopian informant tells Mr. Barnstaple,

> Half and more than half of all the things alive, were ugly or obnoxious, inane, miserable, wretched, with elaborate diseases, helplessly ill-adjusted to Nature's continually fluctuating conditions, when first we took this old Hag, our Mother, in hand. We have, after centuries of struggle, suppressed her nastier fancies, and washed her and combed her and taught her to respect and heed the last child of her wantonings—Man. With Man came Logos, the World and the Will into our universe, to watch it and fear it, to learn it and cease to fear it, to know it and comprehend it and master it. So that we of Utopia are no longer the beaten and starved children of Nature, but her free and adolescent sons. We have taken over the Old Lady's Estate. Every day we learn a little

> better how to master this little planet. Every day our thoughts go out the more surely to our inheritance, the stars. And the deeps beyond and beneath the stars. (107)

I imagine most readers will find this passage painful, as I do, both for its masculine hubris and for the distance between this relationship of science to nature and what we have witnessed in our own world, where the taming of nature has been carried out with reckless abandon.

All of these resisters to the ideal world are irrational fools, but the last among them, Mr. Rupert Catskill, has a "reasoned and intelligible view of Utopia"; Mr. Barnstaple "disagreed with it violently, but he had to recognize that it expressed an understandable attitude of mind" (98). Catskill is transparently a portrait of Winston Churchill, already famous in 1923 as a globe-trotting correspondent, historian, hero of the Boer War, party-switching cabinet minister, and architect of the disastrous Gallipoli campaign during World War I. "He has lived most romantically," Barnstaple explains to a young Utopian who is tempted to admire him. "He has fought bravely in wars. He has been a prisoner and escaped wonderfully from prison. His violent imaginations have caused the deaths of thousands of people" (125).

Wells allows Catskill the full flight of Churchillian eloquence for his heroic protest against the beautiful and tranquil world before him. Looking at the splendors of Utopia, Catskill "assumed losses with every gain."

> Life on earth was, he admitted, insecure, full of pains and anxieties, full indeed of miseries and distresses and anguish, but also, and indeed by reason of these very things, it had moments of intensity, hopes, joyful surprises, escapes, attainments, such as the ordered life of Utopia could not possibly afford. "You have been getting away from conflicts and distresses. Have you not also been getting away from the living and quivering realities of life?" (99)

As he launches upon his "eulogy of earthly life," Catskill/Churchill concedes all of its imperfections, all of its famines and pestilence and disease.

> The rats gnaw and the summer flies persecute and madden. At times life reeks and stinks. I admit it, Sir, I admit it. We go down far below your extremest experiences into discomforts and miseries, anxieties and anguish of soul and body, into bitterness, terror and despair. Yea. But do we not also go higher? I challenge you with that. What can you know in this immense safety of the intensity, the frantic, terror-driven intensity, of many of our efforts. What can you know of reprieves, interludes and escapes…. Because our life is dreadfuller, Sir, it has and it

> must have, moments that are infinitely brighter than yours. It is titanic, Sir, where this is merely tidy. And we are inured to it and hardened by it. We are tempered to a finer edge. (100–01)

The grand peroration ends with a ringing "No!" to the temptations of Utopia on behalf of humankind and its perennial travails because the people created by those travails are superior.

> For I take it, Sir, that it is now a proven thing that life and all the energy and beauty of life are begotten by struggle and competition and conflict; we were moulded and wrought in hardship and so, Sir, were you. (102)

Catskill adds that the most harmful of Utopian comforts is the elimination of the ultimate heroic testing ground, war, "the bracing and ennobling threat and the purging and terrifying experience of war." The final result of Utopian leisure is bound to be racial degeneration and an end to the meaningfulness of life's struggles. "What penalties," he asks, "are there any longer for indolence? What rewards for exceptional energy and effort? What is there to keep men industrious, what watchful, when there is no personal danger or injury to the community?" How will such a degenerate species, he finally wonders, protect itself from foreign threats from non-utopian parallel universes (104)? "How safe is your sweetness, your light and your leisure?" (103).

Mr. Barnstaple considers Catskill's mentality to be that of a "be-Kiplinged" boy scout (219), but Urthred, the Utopian informant, does not reject Catskill's demand for struggle and strife. Instead, he insists that Utopia can satisfy it.

> Everyone here works to his or her utmost—for service and distinction. None may cheat himself out of toil or duty as men did in the age of confusion, when the mean and acquisitive lived and bred in luxury upon the heedlessness of more generous types…. The indolent and inferior do not procreate here. (105)

From the Utopian perspective, the Earthlings of Barnstaple's world are not yet ready to face the thought of controlling the universe by giving up "their own violent little individual motives." They would rather leave matters to "God, or Evolution, or what you will" (106). Nature is another power Earthlings would rather cede to than take responsibility for themselves.

> This last man [Catskill] who spoke so impressively, thinks that this old Beldame Nature is a limitless source of will and energy if only we submit to her freaks and cruelties and imitate her most savage moods,

> if only we sufficiently thrust and kill and rob and ravish one another…. He too preaches the old fatalism and believes it is the teaching of science. (106)

Urthred believes that the energy of heroic competition can be preserved without the baleful consequences which fueled the "old fatalism." He finds Catskill's speeches valuable for the light they shed on Utopia's own past. "There are thoughts and ideas like yours in our ancient literature of two or three thousand years ago, the same preaching of selfish violence as though it was a virtue. Even then intelligent men knew better" (108), he says, recognizing as well the class motives behind the Churchillian stance.

> You take the best of everything without scruple and you adventure with life, chiefly at the expense of other people, with a mind trained by all its circumstances to resist the idea that there is any possible way of human living that can be steadfast and disciplined and at the same time vigorous and happy. You have argued against that persuasion all your life as though it were your own personal enemy. It is your personal enemy; it condemns your way of life altogether, it damns you utterly for your adventures. (109)

Wells's final view is that the heroic Churchillian stance and its epic literary expressions are archaic, barbaric remnants of aristocratic society, to be replaced by the new heroism of science. Mr. Barnstaple will feel no nostalgia for the reeking life of the Earth he has left behind. In Utopia,

> that common life of mankind—its ancient traditions, its hoary jests and tales repeated generation after generation, its seasonal festivals, its pious fears and spasmodic indulgences, its limited yet incessant and pitifully childish hoping, and its abounding misery and tragic futility, had come to an end. (169)

When Barnstaple imagines daily life in Utopia, he concludes that "The lives of the people must be like the lives of very successful artists or scientific workers in this world, a continual refreshing discovery of new things, a constant adventure into the unknown and untried" (171). Art, science, and adventure all coalesce, while the romantic spirit that regrets nature and the human species in their unimproved state now troubles only "adolescent imaginations" (173).

In the debate between Catskill and Urthred, *Men Like Gods* provides one of the most pointed explorations of the utopian dilemma, but it turns out that, for Wells, the debate is between an archaic version of the heroic imperative and his modern one, with its Heraclitean and evolutionary

elements. The Darwinian need to continue the struggle for existence in order to sustain the vitality of the human race turns out to be a happy necessity, ensuring that however fully the World State manages to tailor nature and society to human convenience, utopia will never lapse into tedium. We see in Wells, far more than in Bellamy, the notion of society as a Darwinian struggle which dominated the age. Even the most ambitious Utopian could depend upon the "hard logic of life" to save the mastered world from inertia.

Wells is, nevertheless, an ambitious utopian, advocating a true and complete rupture in the historical continuity of human experience. The charm of life in utopia will consist entirely of novelty and heroic investigation—an artist's pleasure in the reinvention of the human species. Wells dreamed throughout his life of a peaceful, unified world, and even his eugenic obsession with the degeneration of the species did not lead him, in his maturity, to advocate violence. The dynamics of population described by his heroes Darwin and Thomas Malthus made such measures unnecessary.[12] But the discipline and struggle that make both life and literature interesting were not going away; humankind was not going to solve its problems that easily. The World State would need to retain its "campaigning" spirit. In the early 1930s Wells could glimpse qualities of the samurai in the discipline espoused by Mussolini, and while he opposed leader-worship, he nevertheless wondered if a "Liberal Fascism" might not contain some of the ingredients of the coming World State.[13] It has struck many viewers that the heroic "Airmen," the samurai figures in Wells's film *Things to Come* (1936), look like fascists in their dark uniforms (541), and the film ends on the typical note of Wellsian heroism, the choice between heroic exploration and cowardly clinging to the past, with the young men and women of the new generation stepping out beyond the faded wisdom of their fathers. Both the actual behavior of the Bolsheviks and the future so potently and persistently evoked by Wells gave the early twentieth-century image of the modern utopia a strong and disturbing resemblance to its classical, heroic anti-type, preparing for dystopia as a newly persuasive genre.

Notes

1 For a fine recent assessment of Wells see Adam Roberts, *H. G. Wells: A Literary Life* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). For an account of Wells's influence as anti-utopian, see Mark R. Hillegas, *The Future as Nightmare: H. G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).
2 As Krishnan Kumar points out, this theme is taken up especially in *Tono-Bungay* (1909). See *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 212–13.
3 H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, ed. Gregory Claeys and Patrick Parrinder (New York: Penguin, 2005), 228.
4 H. G. Wells, *Men Like Gods* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 314.
5 "Scepticism of the Instrument," Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, 263.
6 Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, 13-14.

7 H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2008). The phrase is taken from Jack London's book of that title.
8 See the excellent account in John S. Partington, *Building Cosmopolis: The Political Thought of H. G. Wells* ([eBook] Routledge, 2016), chapter 3.
9 Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, 100.
10 In *Anticipations* Wells had been more decisive about the fates of non-white races. "And for the rest, those swarms of black, and brown, and dirty-white, and yellow people, who do not come into the new needs of efficiency? Well, the world is a world, not a charitable institution, and I take it they will have to go. The whole tenor and meaning of the world, as I see it, is that they have to go." See *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought*, 308.
11 Wells, *Men Like Gods*, 78.
12 Malthus's *Essay on Population*, Wells believed, had been enough to "wither the Rationalistic Utopias of the time and by anticipation, all the Communisms, Socialisms, and Earthly Paradise movements that have since been so abundantly audible in the world." *Anticipations*, 280.
13 See Philip Coupland, "H. G. Wells's 'Liberal Fascism'," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 4 (October 2000): 541–58.

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13 Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Mothers' Utopia

With its attack on the heroic-aristocratic and masculine-competitive roots of existing societies, utopian thinking has a natural sympathy with the interests of women. The feminist implications of the critique of Homeric culture were already evident in Plato. Later utopians have not always developed those implications as clearly, but the mere willingness to question the value of the patriarchal family is an invitation to rethink the position of women. Charlotte Perkins Gilman began her long career of political engagement by joining Edward Bellamy's "Nationalist" movement, and she eventually recast the utopian vision in feminist form. For Gilman, the distinction between utopian and heroic social arrangements, and between state- and family-oriented government, could be simply and dramatically restated in terms of gender. Utopian culture is the culture that women would naturally set up to replace the unjust, irrational, and destructive culture of men celebrated in epic poetry and still at the center of the decidedly martial and male-dominated early twentieth-century world. Utopia is female, dystopia male.

In *Moving the Mountain*, the first of three utopian works written and published in her journal the *Forerunner* between 1911 and 1917, Gilman borrows Bellamy's sleeper formula to tell the story of a man named John who returns from three decades marooned in Tibet to find what I will call Women's America, a socialist world of "higher, happier life" (52) from which war, crime, waste, and graft have been so thoroughly eliminated and science so far advanced that no one has to work more than two hours a day.[1] In Women's America, people live to be a hundred (43), and all social problems have been solved (54). It is a world in which, as John's sister Nellie tells him, "Women always will have the last word" (19). She puts the difference between the current world and the one he left "in a nutshell" for him. "We have changed our mind" (53). Gripped by an intellectual realization of a radical and total sort, women have redesigned the world and shaped men to suit themselves just as men had shaped women in the past (93), the result being better for everyone.

Gilman had argued for some time that this transformation was an inevitable evolutionary development and that it was going on in her own

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time "even without our knowledge and against our violent opposition."[2] According to the optimistic version of Darwinism propounded at the time by Lester Ward, the evolved intellect of human beings was allowing them to rise above mere evolutionary determinism, and with women recovering the dominant position they once occupied in the past, they would naturally shape the species in a positive direction.[3] As Gilman puts it, "The female is the race type; the male is her assistant" (vii). In *Moving the Mountain*, John's informant Owen, a male inhabitant of Women's America, declares Ward's theory "established beyond a peradventure" (74), and he attributes the progress of the world in the thirty years of John's absence to the "wholesale acceptance and application of the idea of evolution" (100). Gilman's relationship with Ward and his theory was complex,[4] but her confidence in the future rested both on what she saw as the progressive direction of evolution and the power of women's insight to change the world given their "measureless racial importance as makers of men."[5]

The key female attribute which enables women to reform the world and its inhabitants is their gift, indeed their consuming passion, for motherhood, which allows them to define utopia as the ideal place for children to develop. According to the "new science of Humaniculture" (76), women see none of the evil in human nature found by past generations (135). They treat children as people and give them genuine respect (95). Girls and boys are raised just alike, giving them a "strange air of being Persons" (115). Education has become a dynamic process, not the dull cramming it used to be (114). All of this is taken even further in the all-female world of *Herland*, Gilman's second utopia, where education proceeds, Montessori-style, through an ever-more-challenging sequence of games (237–38). The Herland child grows up in a "wide, friendly world," a world with "no shady places" and no contest of good and evil, only life as a principle of growth (233). From their first memories, all that these children will know is "Peace, Beauty, Order, Safety, Love, Wisdom, Justice, Patience, and Plenty" (232). It is the world just as mothers would have it. In classic utopian fashion, even the fear of death has been banished; children are taught to think of themselves as silkworms contributing their small personal lives to the greater fabric of society (134). In Herland, a concern for personal immortality would be an atavistic remnant of false individualism. Motherhood and the quality of the human race, not eternal life, have become the ends of religion and the "Great Mother Spirit" only a magnification of the passion for motherhood "beyond human limits" (241).

True to its Darwinian basis, the motherly gentleness of Gilman's vision does not keep it from being a philosophy of strength. "Ethics is social hygiene," Owen tells John; "it teaches how humanity must live in order to be well and strong" (113). With hygiene as the main ethical imperative, there is not much need for ethical or political reasoning. Gilman is responding to public health concerns of the time and particularly those concerning women. In the Women's America of *Moving the Mountain*, men are no longer allowed to

marry without proving their freedom from venereal disease (77); inflicting a woman with syphilis has become a criminal act (79). A "New Food system" provides a remedy for the old capitalist market in which no one was ever "sure of getting *anything* pure" (67). Women have made health, "physical purity," into "a practical ideal" (46). Even crime has come under the regime of feminine medicine, to be treated in "moral sanatoriums—healthful and beautiful; richly endowed with the world's best methods of improvement and managed by the world's best people" (141)—an Erewhonian reversal of attitudes that dizzies the revenant from Tibet.

Gilman is in step with her era in seeing the regime of health as applying not just to the improvement but to the production of the basic human materials. While education could do wonders and "Compulsory Socialization" could make immigrant "Humanity" adaptable to America (56), and while feminine sexual selection is the primary guarantor of the future, not all of the present human materials could be salvaged. For the benefit of society, many "hopeless degenerates" had to be killed (136), while the "helpless residue" of "blind and crippled" people are kept in pleasant asylums. "We don't make that kind of people any more" (98). Through careful population control, the human race is becoming more beautiful, and with the best judges of beauty elected to control the standard qualities of the environment—removing "disagreeable noises" and "ugly forms and colors"—a "general sense of beauty" has developed pervading all aspects of life. In Herland, though all women are apparently capable of parthenogenesis, there is a one-child policy to keep the population from Malthusian hazards, the only exceptions being made for the worthiest women, the Over-Mothers (206), a rare hint of Nietzsche in Gilman's scheme.

In *With Her in Ourland*, the sequel to *Herland,* Ellador, the visitor from Herland, submitting Gilman's current world to Tocquevillian review like William Dean Howells's *Traveler from Altruria*, finds the population of present-day America too diverse and divided to function in a democracy. Ellador tells her narrator-husband that "You have stuffed yourself with the most ill-assorted and unassimilable mass of human material that was ever held together by artificial means" (320–21). Gilman brings this Wellsian spirit to the discipline of the natural world as well. Her utopian environment has been beautifully shaped and ordered, especially in Herland, where cats have been bred for muteness and no longer kill birds (189), while dogs, as child-biting animals, have been eradicated altogether (191). Feminine kindness does extend to animals, though. In Women's America, there are no more menageries for "watching animals in pain" (92), and hunting, "the manly sport of killing things for fun" (93), has naturally been eliminated very much in the spirit of More's *Utopia*.

The elimination of war and violence leads naturally to the utopian turn away from the epic aspects of art, especially art for children. "Why on earth," Nellie remarks, "should we have fed our children on silly savagery a thousand years old, just because they liked it, is more than I can see" (64).

In Women's America, half of the artists are now mothers (88), and the greatest artists work for children (89). In this world of "universal beauty," art has "joined hands with life again." It has become

> common, familiar, used in all things. There were pictures, many and beautiful, but the great word Art was no longer so closely confined to its pictorial form. It was not narrow, expensive, requiring a special education, but part of the atmosphere in which all children grew, all people lived. (123)

As Nellie explains, art in Women's America is no longer heroic but a matter of "beautiful commonness." "Instead of those perpendicular peaks of isolated genius we used to have, surrounded by the ignorantly indifferent many, and the excessively admiring few, those geniuses now sloped gently down to the average on long graduated lines of decreasing ability" (99–100).

The theme of the democratizing and taming of art continues in *Herland*, where the male visitors find the drama of the country "rather flat" (231). There is "no interplay of warring nations; no aristocracy and its ambitions," no conflicts of rich and poor, only "a most impressive array of pageantry, of processions, a sort of grand ritual, with their arts and their religion broadly blended" (231), a Rousseauvian festival of the people.

Feminist utopias can be expected to arouse male resistance, and in her first two volumes, Gilman uses the resistance of her male characters to explore and defend her gynocentric vision. John's primary response to Women's America is wounded pride that men are no longer in charge, but Owen assures him that the improvement of women in the new regime has been worth the loss of "sex supremacy" (80). It is not only violent masculinity that has been reformed out of existence; along with it has gone the weak and passive femininity inculcated by the male regime. Such "pretty unsatisfactory" women, the men agree, offered "very little real companionship" (81), whereas now, Owen claims, men love the new, improved women, with their wide experience and expertise (81). Despite his resistance, John is welcomed into this new world; like Bellamy's Julian West, he is regarded as a valuable source of historical knowledge. Still, it is simply not his world. The "beauty and peace and order of the whole thing" leave him longing for trouble and disorder (142). Only a return visit to one of the unimproved, indeed horrific, Appalachian settings of his past life can finally make him into a convert to Women's America.

The plot of *Herland*, which introduces three adventurous males to the land of women, is calculated to develop the male–female conflict more pointedly. The most resistant is Terry—a "man's man," presented by the narrator in positive terms ("generous and clever and brave") but with a reservation about his penchant for taking male sexual aggression to "the limit" (157). Terry embodies all that is wrong with male-dominated culture. Predictably,

he finds the peace and order of Herland frustrating. There are no other men to compete with, and it takes him a long time to be convinced that a society of women could be organized enough to exist on its own (197). To Terry, Herland is "like a perpetual Sunday-school" (231). There is "nowhere to cut loose." There are no "wild beasts" and nothing to fight. Herland's "ultra-women" lack all the old vices that men expect in women—"feminine vanity … dull submissive monotony … pettiness … jealousy … hysteria," but for Terry, this makes them "deuced unnatural" (215–16). Women in Herland do not even understand the point of sexual pleasure. Intercourse for them is just a means of procreation. Not sex but childbearing is their "most intense and exquisite love and longing," the "Supreme Desire" and "overmastering demand" that compels them (264).

Women who define themselves in such exclusively motherly terms naturally define men only as fathers (251), and this is another source of Terry's annoyance. In spite of their superior beauty, health, and intellect, to Terry the women of Herland are "morbid, one-sided cripples" (266). This does not keep him from falling in love with one of them and, once they are married, from attempting to rape her, which leads to his humiliation when she so easily defends herself. So the masculine hero is exiled from Herland.

The narrator, Vandyck, by contrast, establishes a satisfactory relationship with the heroic Ellador, but he too finds Herland's women a challenge, especially because they have no sense of privacy or family, indeed "no exact analogue for our word 'home'" (227). There are no family names (211), housework and child-rearing are done by professionals (70), and marriage does not prevent the adventurers' wives from pursuing their own careers (251). Couples do not live together, and Ellador does not even understand Vandyck's claim that a man wants to be with his wife in a home of his own. In *With Her in Ourland*, Ellador, carrying out her critique of Gilman's contemporary world, continues her objections to the family, with its misguided reverence for dead fathers ("the Pilgrim fathers, the Church fathers, the Revolutionary fathers") and the egotism that glorifies "My name … my house—my line—my family" (333–34). She indicts the interests of the family as counter to democracy and therefore to her democratic women's utopia. The kind of attachment that Vandyck is missing, therefore, is not only emotionally but politically dangerous.

One of the key features of intellectual life in Herland is that Herlanders "put psychology with history" because psychology "changes with the succeeding and improving generations" (237). This is a progressive, feminine point of view which will not bend to the argument that war and male violence are irremediable parts of human nature. If anything, these evils should be ascribed to man's fighting nature (279). Vandyck restates Ellador's trenchant view of male sophistry regarding the nature of the human race. "Wherever men had been superior to women we had proudly claimed it as a sex-distinction. Wherever men had shown evil traits, not common to women, we had serenely treated them as race-characteristics"

(294); in other words, in assessing human nature, men take sole credit for the good while asking women to share the burden of the bad. Gilman is thus offering a correction to the historical record in favor of women and their enormous constructive contribution to human flourishing as well as a counter to male pessimism and to that masculine resistance to happiness which keeps men from recognizing the true direction of the future. Gilman is eager to remind men of their crimes—their treatment of the Indians (303), for example, and the natives of Hawaii (307)—but she is also keen to insist that the direction of society under the growing influence of women will be upward. Her third volume closes on the birth of a boy who signifies the ultimate reunion of the sexes in Herland.

Reading Bellamy, Gilman, and Wells reminds us that the progressive spirit of her era was working in an intellectual and social context very different from our own. Gilman's classically utopian hostility to the family seems incompatible with her stress on motherhood, and her conception of female activism as a form of motherhood is now unpalatable, though maternalist thinking was a significant part of the nineteenth-century women's movement; feminist scholars are still debating its value.[6] Gilman's ethics of social hygiene, her reduction of ethics and politics to matters of health and strength, resonates with the most troubling Social-Darwinian aspects of American and European culture at the turn of the century. Still, the women of Herland are generally humane while being intellectually powerful, and their physical strength and vitality do not lend themselves to masculine bravado. The virtues of war so important to Gilman's friend and mentor Bellamy as a model of human idealism and self-sacrifice play no role in Herland. Gilman's outlook is more democratic than that of Wells, and her writings have more of an atmosphere of active discussion than most utopias. Gilman's conception of female nature now seems so excessively rational and rigid as to appear punitive, and her hostility to sexual pleasure looks like a sign of victimization rather than a way of resisting it. Gilman's stress, however, on the economics of the sexual bond, and on women as creatures sold in the marketplace to be confined in the home, together with her historical critique of male heroics, is impressive for its subtlety and range.

Gilman is entirely negative toward the heroic attitude, which she sees as a masculine expression of capitalist individualism and contrary to women's nature. This is not, of course, the only direction that feminist imagination can take. Feminism does not have to be anti-heroic; instead of making the world more motherly and feminine in the traditional sense, it can seek to reduce the difference between men and women by giving women the opportunities for action that have been reserved for men. That is, in fact, part of what happens in *Herland*, where women must do everything for themselves, and it was happening during America's twentieth-century wars, which brought women into the workforce in a wider variety of roles than before. In Gilman's time, the suffrage movement produced real-life heroines like Alice Paul and the Pankhursts who pursued their goals with enormous

physical and moral courage, displaying heroic behavior that goes well beyond Gilman's conception of the motherly.

In the realm of the imagination, women were emerging in heroic roles previously reserved for men. Lady detectives were an established presence in fiction going back to the 1860s.[7] In the century since *Herland*, women have taken on an increasingly heroic cast in popular fantasy. With the emergence of superhero comics in the late 1930s, the ancient figure of the Amazon reappeared in the form of Wonder Woman, a creature, Jill Lepore has shown, generated from an eccentric combination of utopian, feminist, and male fantasy.[8] Wonder Woman has now been succeeded by female action-heroines brought to life by performers like Jennifer Lawrence and Brie Larson. It is difficult to say how this trend influences the actual situation of women, but it is another case in which the utopian point of view gives way, at least in imagination, to its heroic opposite.

Things are perhaps more complicated in literary fiction, and even science fiction. The novelist Joanna Russ in her essay "What's a Heroine to Do?" provides an early, wide-ranging discussion of the obstacles facing women writers when a culture's familiar, well-adapted and polished myths cast only men in the starring roles. Except as the protagonist of a love story, she observes, "Women in twentieth century literature seem pretty much limited to Devourer/Bitches or Maiden Victims."[9] Stories with female protagonists, she notes, are often criticized for being formally awkward and unshapely; their authors often resort to lyricism at the expense of plot, a strategy which takes the talents of a Virginia Woolf to pull off (13). Russ's approach is to co-opt the masculine action-hero's repertoire wholesale. At the beginning of Russ's novel *The Female Man*, the title character, Janet Evason, introduces herself as a wolf-killer, adventurer, farmworker, librarian, lover of wife and children, and victor in four duels.[10] This is woman-as-male protagonist in a utopian but heroic fantasyworld. Genetic men are absent, either because of a plague or because women have killed them off. In the course of the story, Evason interacts with and forms bonds with women from other worlds who have varying gender roles and internal states of gender conflict. She ultimately refuses an attempt by another female character, an assassin named Jael, to recruit her for a cross-world war against men. Russ's book has all of the ungainliness that she complains about in women's fiction, but it also differs from most utopian fiction in being written with literary power and imaginative freedom. The crossing of worlds allows Russ to keep heroic-dystopian and utopian-critical elements of the story simultaneously in play.

While the utopian-heroic tension continues within the realm of gender, in the long term the most prevalent utopian strategy has not been either Gilman's resort to feminine motherhood or Russ's playful coopting of masculine myths but the attempt at a more thorough undermining of the gender system, as we see in science fiction of the seventies like Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Samuel L. Delaney's *Trouble on Triton*, and Marge Piercy's

Woman on the Edge of Time. All of them have the benefits of the mixed utopian/dystopian strategy employed in *The Female Man*.[11]

Notes

1 *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Utopian Novels,* ed. Minna Doskow (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 26. All quotations from *Moving the Mountain*, *Herland*, and *With Her in Ourland* will be from this edition.
2 Introduction to Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*. With a New Introduction by Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), lxxv.
3 Gary Scharnhorst, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), 46–47.
4 Judith A. Allen, "'The Overthrow' of Gynaecocentric Culture: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Lester Frank Ward," in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Her Contemporaries: Literary and Intellectual Contexts*, eds. Cynthia J. Davis and Denise D. Knight (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2004), 61.
5 Introduction to Gilman, *Women and Economics*, lxxv.
6 Recent scholarship no longer tends to see "maternal" or "social" feminism and "liberal" or "equal-rights" feminism as completely divergent strains. See, for example, Marlene LeGates, *In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 244–56.
7 See Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1981).
8 Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (New York: Knopf, 2014).
9 The full title is "What's a Heroine to Do? or, Why Women Can't Write." Susan Koppelman Cornillon, ed., *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, revised ed. (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973), 8.
10 Joanna Russ, *The Female Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 1.
11 See the discussion of these works as examples of the "critical utopia" in Tom Moylan's *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014).

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14 Yevgeny Zamyatin and the Scythian Horde

Thanks in part to George Orwell, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, written in 1920–1921 and first published in an English translation in 1924, is often considered the first classic anti-utopian or dystopian novel. Orwell preferred it to *Brave New World* for its "intuitive grasp of the irrational side of totalitarianism—human sacrifice, cruelty as an end in itself, the worship of a Leader who is credited with divine attributes." In *Brave New World*, by contrast, Orwell found "no power-hunger, no sadism, no hardness of any kind."[1] Zamyatin was an engineer and former Bolshevik who spent time in England during World War I and was a great admirer of H. G. Wells for his ability to create myths, "fairy tales" that are also "logical equations" and symbols of contemporary life.[2] Zamyatin did not see Wells as a utopian writer in the line of More because, in his view, Wells did not present ideal societies and because he is essentially a storyteller. "A utopia," he writes, "is always static … and has no, or almost no, plot dynamics." Zamyatin does not seem to be aware of the Wellsian distinction between "static" and "kinetic" utopias; in his wide-ranging essay on Wells, he sees only *Men Like Gods* as utopian, making no mention of *A Modern Utopia* (286). For Zamyatin, it is Wells's myth-making grasp of the central trends of modern life—especially "the present-day city, with its uncrowned king, the machine"—(259) that accounts for Wells's power. "To me, the word *airplane*," Zamyatin writes, "contains all of our time. It also contains all of Wells, the most contemporary of contemporary writers" (284). *We* is clearly an attempt at mythic encapsulation and social diagnosis of the Wellsian sort. As we shall see, the novel is a protest against the power of the state. That protest is based on humanistic grounds, and Zamyatin also valued Wells for his humanism; but Zamyatin's protest is also based on modernist literary values and on a heroic, dynamic conception of revolution with utopian elements of its own. And he is no friend of the machine.

The Wellsian scenario of *We* features a regimented world in which "the Benefactor," a high-tech version of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, has provided happiness for all by relieving them of their freedom, undoing the error of the Garden of Eden, when human "idiots" chose freedom over happiness.[3] In OneState, a vast city with glass walls where everyone is under

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surveillance, citizens are numbers rather than people, and the activities of the population are coordinated to the maximum possible degree. All of life and happiness itself have been "Taylorized" (34). There is a great deal of parading and marching, and it is hoped that even the currently unregimented "Personal Hours" will eventually be synchronized. Sex is one of the few domains of personal choice, though no one can withhold it from anyone else; as in *Brave New World*, anybody can sleep with anybody (using a ration book of pink tickets); or, to express it in the mathematical language of *We*'s narrator, "Any Number has the right of access to any other Number as sexual product" (22). The timing of these encounters is set by the State; only at the Sex Hour is it permitted to close the blinds, when, all in sync, the Numbers enjoy themselves in "cages of rhythmic, Taylorized happiness" (44). No dissent of any kind is tolerated. The Benefactor is reelected unanimously every year, with no room for "randomness" or "surprises" (132). Disobedient numbers are executed by the Benefactor at a public ritual celebrated with poetry.

Zamyatin's humanistic condemnation and satiric treatment of the machine-state are relentless and unsparing. He considered *We* both "the most jocular and the most serious thing" he had written,[4] and OneState, in spite of its grim tenor and conclusion, has many comic features, especially regarding the arts. There are mathematical sonnets, and music is generated at the rate of three sonatas an hour by a machine called a "musicometer" (17). The most inspiring subject of OneState art is punctuality, celebrated in the "greatest of all monuments of ancient literature," the *Railroad Timetable*; tardiness is moralized over in the "immortal tragedy *Late for Work*" (67). As if these sallies were not enough, near the end of the story the hero's resistance to utopia is remedied with a newly developed operation by which the state surgically removes the imagination from the brains of OneState's numbers. Of course it has long been clear that only a dissident few of them have an imagination to be removed.

The story begins at the moment when Zamyatin's version of the Wellsian World State is about to launch a rocket called the INTEGRAL, the beginning of its program to colonize and, in the official words of the *State Gazette*, "place the beneficial yoke of reason round the necks of the unknown beings who inhabit other planets—still living, it may be, in the primitive state known as freedom" (3). The operation will not be a peaceful one. "If they will not understand that we are bringing them a mathematically infallible happiness, we shall be obliged to force them to be happy," a variant of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, where dissenters must be "forced to be free."

The INTEGRAL is a key symbol in Zamyatin's Wellsian myth, and his narrator and main character, D-503, is the "Builder" who designed it and is supervising its construction. He is thus a person whose outlook perfectly reflects what he calls the "mathematically perfect life of OneState" (4). For the Builder, love of mathematical necessity is not just a political or moral attitude; it is a powerful aesthetic imperative. Admiring the "grandiose

mechanical ballet" performed by the moving parts of the INTEGRAL, he explains that the dance is beautiful "because it is nonfree, because all the fundamental significance of the dance lies precisely in its aesthetic subjection, its ideal nonfreedom" (6). It is simply incomprehensible to the Builder that governments of the past could have allowed people to do things of their own free will and to do them on their own schedules; such an existence would be a "disorganized wilderness" (13). "Living like that was just murder" (14), he says, and such people are no different from beasts (15). The Builder has risen entirely above the bestial existence except for his shamefully hairy monkey's hands, which he considers "some kind of stupid throwback" (9). In OneState, the natural, animal condition of things has nearly been erased; even the food is synthetic, made of petroleum (158). All that is left of the natural condition is outside the Green Wall which separates the great city from its natural surroundings. For the Builder, "walls are the basis of everything human" (40). It is due to them that we keep the human animal from interfering with the machine.[5]

Unfortunately for the Builder, even mathematics seems to resist his attempt to live entirely according to necessity. Like the hero of Robert Musil's *Young Törless*, he is deeply disturbed by the validity of irrational numbers like the square root of negative one (38), the thought of which he does his best to avoid until he has the misfortune to meet a living irrational Number in the form of the woman I-330, who fascinates and disturbs him with her laughter, her "white sharp teeth," and "some kind of odd irritating X" that he can't "get at" or "express in numbers" (8). I-330 is part of a revolutionary movement, MEPHI, which opposes OneState and eventually breaks down the Green Wall that separates it from the natural world. In an attempt to recruit the Builder, she takes him to the "Ancient House," a kind of museum preserving the OneState past, the only remaining building in the city without transparent walls. I-330 wears antique clothing, smokes cigarettes, plays dissonant, Scriabin-like music, uses the familiar form of address, and drinks alcohol—all signs of rebellion. Her physical presence, combined with alcohol, quickly brings the Builder's hairy second self out of its shell, producing a drastic split in his personality; his rational mind watches helplessly as his animal alter-ego, entranced by I-330, "grabbed her with his hairy paws, tore the thin silk from her, sank his teeth..." (57).[6] In spite of his complete loss of control, however, the Builder never allows the beast within him to undermine his mathematical understanding of the world; "I AM NOT HIM," he says of his animal self (59). But he has succumbed completely to the joy of a new necessity, a new "*has to be*" (70). Zamyatin uses experimental techniques to render his character's schizoid experiences in a way that is quite unusual in a didactic genre. I-330's beautiful face, for example, frequently appears to him full of disturbing Xs, and her smile is a "bite" (18). The de-centering of the Builder's personality under the influence of I-330 is radical indeed. In one scene he reports that

> The two of us walked along as one. Somewhere a long ways off through the fog you could hear the sun singing, everything was supple, pearly, golden, pink, red. The whole world was one immense woman and we were in her very womb, we hadn't yet been born, we were joyously ripening. And it was clear, unshakably clear, that all of this was for me: the sun, the fog, the pink, the gold—for me…. Everything used to revolve around the sun; now I knew it all revolved around me—slowly, blissfully, squinting its eyes. (71–72)

At the moment of their coupling, the Builder feels himself

> Helplessly, like iron and magnet, sweetly yielding to the immutable precise law. I emptied myself into her. There was no pink ticket, no accounting, no OneState, there was no me. There were only the dear, sharp, clenched teeth, there were the golden eyes opened wide on me, and through them I slowly penetrated inside, deeper and deeper. And there was silence. Only in the corner, thousands of miles away, drops were dropping into the basin and I was the universe, and between one drop and another were eras, epochs….[7] (73)

I-330 treats this moment as a watershed in the Builder's conversion. "Well, fallen angel," she tells him, "Now you're ruined" (73). She even believes he is developing a soul (87).

But the Builder's soul, if he has one, remains in a rudimentary condition. There is no mental connection, no possibility of synthesis, between the ecstatic experience of love-making with I-330, to which he surrenders completely, and his rational, mathematical adherence to the OneState. Late in the novel the Builder is still attempting to stabilize himself with maxims like "*Homo sapiens* is not really man until his grammar is absolutely rid of question marks" (114). Taken outside the Green Wall by the "enemies of happiness" (143), he feels his consciousness not changing but simply exploding. "It's as if they set off a bomb in my head and all around, piled in a heap, are open mouths, wings, screams, leaves, words, stones…" (148).[8] For once the Builder sees throngs of people rather than Numbers, naked rather than in uniform, some, unbelievably, with hair on their faces. Told of the plan to seize the INTEGRAL with his help, for the first time he "stopped being one of many … and became just one" (151). Transported with enthusiasm, he begins to shout "Everybody has to go mad!" (152). But when a woman gives him a piece of fruit, "the legendary food of the ancients," he does not know if he can eat it (153). He is still not ready to fall from the OneState's paradise.

The oscillations in the Builder's identity end with his return to the fold of OneState. Confronted with his treachery by the Benefactor, his loyalty to the conspiracy is undermined by the suggestion that he has been recruited

only because he is the Builder of the INTEGRAL (207). Having undergone the newly invented operation for the removal of his imagination, he betrays his fellow MEPHI conspirators and watches without emotion as I-330 is tortured. Zamyatin leaves it unclear whether the rebellion against OneState will succeed or fail, though at the moment of crisis the Green Wall has been broken through, and the Builder is announcing Doomsday. He sees "male and female Numbers copulating without the least shame" (212).

Zamyatin's mocking condemnation of the OneState utopia and its static, Platonic character is complete, yet the ethical force of that condemnation never does penetrate to his protagonist's heart. The Builder is entirely the toy of outside influences as he veers between the necessitarian aesthetic of the Benefactor, which has completely imprisoned his sensibility, and the repressed animal power of I-330's terrifying sexuality. All value in opposition to OneState lies in the natural world outside the Green Wall, a world that, from the mathematical, OneState point of view, looks unbearably chaotic and unpredictable. One might conclude that Zamyatin's protest against the heroic oppressiveness of OneState is Rousseauvian in character—anarchistic and anti-heroic except insofar as it requires heroically opposing the regime. This would not be wrong; Zamyatin's point of view is indeed strongly Romantic as well as anti-Bolshevik. But the heart of his protest lies elsewhere, in a heroic impulse that seeks not violence but a perennial revolt against the status quo, a spirit of resistance that is the basis both of art and of revolution. I-330 puts the matter triumphantly in reply to the Builder's statement that there is no point to revolution because the Benefactor's revolution is already final and everyone is happy. "Tell me the final number," she demands, "the top, the absolute biggest" (168), and when he admits there is none, she draws the conclusion that what is true of numbers is true of revolutions too. "The number of revolutions is infinite." So the mathematician is finally trapped in his own system of metaphors, which does not contain the finality and completeness he has always loved and relied on.

Zamyatin's feminine rebel has her own philosophy, one that, instead of order, embraces conflict and revolution. There are "two forces in the world, entropy and energy," she explains. "One of them leads to blissful tranquility, to happy equilibrium. The other leads to the disruption of equilibrium, to the torment of perpetual movement" (159). But happiness and tranquility bring a loss of energy. "Only contrast in degree of heat makes for life—fire, explosion, inferno" (169), while the happiness offered by the Benefactor is the ultimate heat-death of the universe, minus 273 degrees Fahrenheit (177).

The glorification of revolutionary energy over entropy, the preference for Mephistophelian revolt over heavenly order which recalls both Goethe and Blake, is not just a social or political principle for Zamyatin. Rather, he shares his heroine's metaphysics. In an essay written shortly after *We*, he declares that

> Revolution is everywhere, in everything. It is infinite. There is no final revolution, no final number. The social revolution is only one of an infinite number of numbers: the law of revolution is not a social law, but an immeasurably greater one. It is a cosmic, universal law—like the law of the conservation of energy and of the dissipation of energy.[9]

It was not only the cruelty of the Bolshevik revolution, then, that disgusted Zamyatin. It was the fact that its original spirit of adventure had ossified into orthodoxy. It had turned "philistine,"[10] its art in danger of becoming no more exciting than the *Railroad Timetable*. Zamyatin sees an "ironic law" working in the "eternal movement forward" of history. "The realization, materialization, victory of an idea," he says, "immediately gives it a philistine hue" (22). Only change and revolution can keep the world from entropic decline. This belief in constant change is, of course, perfectly suited to the modernist literary sensibility of a man who had been exhilarated by the initial surge of the revolution but was finding it uncongenial to the freedom of the artist. "What we need in literature today," he writes, "are vast philosophic horizons—horizons seen from mastheads, from airplanes. We need the most ultimate, the most fearsome, the most fearless 'Why?' and 'What next?'" (109–110). The "old, slow, creaking descriptions" of the nineteenth century must be left behind: "today the rule is brevity, but every word must be supercharged, high-voltage. We must compress into a single second what was held before in a sixty-second minute. And hence, syntax becomes elliptic, volatile" (111).[11] Such literature, of course, is harmful to any existing political order. "But harmful literature," Zamyatin insists, embracing the paradox, "is more useful than useful literature, for it is anti-entropic, it is a means of combating calcification, sclerosis, crust, moss, quiescence. It is utopian, absurd" (109). We have here a reversal of so many of the usual equations. It is unhappiness, now, and heroic rebellion, that carries the hopeful note. Christ crucified is the victor, while "Christ victorious in practical terms is the Grand Inquisitor."[12]

Such an attitude is naturally congenial to the literary artist, who depends upon unpredictability and heroic conflict. If the importance given to literature in Zamyatin's way of thinking seems surprising, it is important to see that his extreme anti-Platonic attitude leaves little reason to distinguish between literature and more straightforwardly truth-bearing discourse. Nietzsche, with his protest against truth, is the ultimate sponsor of Zamyatin's "dialectical" hopes. "If there were anything fixed in nature," he writes, "if there were truths, all of this would, of course, be wrong. But fortunately, *all truths are erroneous*. This is the very essence of the dialectical process: today's truths become errors tomorrow; there is no final number" (111). And the difference between those who can accept this hard logic is the same for Zamyatin as it is for Nietzsche: "This truth (the only one) is for the

strong alone. Weak-nerved minds insist on a finite universe, a final number. They need, in Nietzsche's words, 'the crutches of certainty'" (111).

In Zamyatin's protest against utopia, then, we can see the full resurgence of the heroic and literary perspective, with figures like Galileo, Dostoevsky, Darwin, and Nietzsche serving as models of revolt. Its bent is entirely toward prophetic greatness and heretical protest against existing reality. It glories in superiority to the weak and the philistine. The ability to espouse it is a sign of greatness in itself even if it can also be a sign of madness, for the power to create belongs only to "madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels, and skeptics, not to executive functionaries."[13]

Zamyatin's essentially negative yet still progressive conception of literature is clearly linked to that of Goethe's Mephistopheles, the "spirit who always says no," and it is not an accident that the anti-OneState movement in *We* goes by the name of MEPHI. "Real literature," Zamyatin insists, "says 'no' to that to which everyone says 'yea'," and it especially says no to the present in favor of the future. "Real literature must speak of tomorrow's unattainable tasks in the realm of the beauty of form, in the realm of the beauty of life, in the social realm."[14] It is this Faustian/Mephistophelian negation that makes even paradisal happiness an ironically insufficient goal for the artist.

> Paradise for me is not at all a utopia; it shall be, it is almost here today, but that is precisely why it already does not exist for me. I want to think, speak, and write about what will be *tomorrow*, after this paradise, because in this corporeal, physical, Euclidean paradise, with its excellent electrification, canalization, and assonantization, man will not stop: a real man is always Faust, and real literature is without doubt Mephistopheles. (53)

The placing of "assonantization"—the smoothing out of sounds—alongside "electrification" and "canalization" shows how deliberately and consistently Zamyatin holds up the experience of life to the standards of art.

Zamyatin's Faustian position sheds a distinct light upon *We*'s portrayal of the Builder's distorted consciousness. While for Zamyatin's protagonist the constant explosions and schizoid displacements of his experience reflect his pitiful inability to assimilate what is happening to him into the dogmatic structure of his mathematically rigid and radically bifurcated mind, for Zamyatin the writer they open a pathway to new experience and literary creation, a license to distort and twist ordinary patterns of association, giving access to new, destructive energies.[15] The destruction of one utopia leads to the fiery creation of a different future.

Zamyatin did not see himself as being alone in this imaginative endeavor. He connected his search for anti-entropic creativity with the dynamic experimental poetry of the early Revolutionary period, by figures like

Alexander Blok and Andrei Bely who sometimes wrote under the banner of "Scythians," the title of an important Blok poem (1918).[16] For Blok, the Scythians are a heroic symbol of the Revolution itself, but while Zamyatin endorsed Scythian artistic revolt, he objected to the idea that there could be "hordes" of Scythians, as Blok imagined.[17] Zamyatin's image of the Scythian is a lone rider.

> A solitary, savage horseman—a Scythian—gallops across the green steppe, hair streaming in the wind. Where is he going? Nowhere. What for? For no reason. He gallops simply because he is a Scythian, because he has become one with his horse, because he is a centaur, and the dearest things to him are freedom, solitude, his horse, and the wide expanse of the steppe.[18]

In *We*, the utopian dilemma operates in a strange fashion. As a humanist, Zamyatin was deeply opposed to the terror and violence of the civil war of 1918–1921, to its "canonization of Bolshevik Communism as the sole truth,"[19] and to its restraint upon and trivialization of art. But alongside these responses to real-life events there is another, more philosophical impulse of rebellion, a Faustian and Scythian rejection of any limits upon human existence itself. It is a rejection that would apply to anything which might be claimed for a regime's success and, indeed, to the very notion of success—or even to happiness itself. The victorious revolution, by being victorious, had "turned philistine."[20] Zamyatin, having been drawn into the revolution by its heroic aspect, was deflated by its success. For him, only defeat and suffering are truly honorable, while the conditions of happiness present an unbearable affront to human dignity and the heroic imperative.

Notes

1 "Freedom and Happiness" [Review of Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*]. *Smothered Under Journalism, 1946*, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), vol. 18, 14.
2 Yevgeny Zamyatin, *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, ed. Mirra Ginsburg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 259.
3 Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, trans. Clarence Brown (New York: Penguin, 1993), 61.
4 Quoted in Mark R. Hillegas, *The Future as Nightmare: H. G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 139.
5 As E. J. Brown notes, the central theme of Zamyatin's work in general is the negation of the city "in favor of the precivilized and the primitive." See Brave New World, 1984, *and* We: *An Essay on Anti-Utopia* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976), 20.
6 Ellipses in original.
7 Ellipsis in original.
8 Ellipsis in original.
9 "On Literature, Revolution, Entropy and Other Matters" (1923), in Zamyatin, *Soviet Heretic*, 107.
10 "Autobiography," in Zamyatin, *Essays*, 23.

11 On Zamyatin as modernist see Patrick Parrinder, "Imagining the Future: Zamyatin and Wells," *Science Fiction Studies* 1, pt. 1 (Spring, 1973): 17–26.
12 "Scythians?" in Zamyatin, *Essays*, 23.
13 "Ja bojus'," *Lica*. N'ju-Jork; Izdatel'stvo imeni Čexova, 1955, 189, quoted in Alex Shane, *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamjatin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 52.
14 "Po povodu stat'I Fedina," in the Zamyatin Collection of Columbia University (1923–1936), vol. 4, 184–85, translated and quoted in Shane, *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamjatin*, 52–53.
15 Parrinder describes Zamyatin's method as "literary Cubism." Parrinder, "Imagining the Future," 23.
16 Neorealism and synthetism were other labels in currency. See Parrinder, "Imagining the Future," 19.
17 Shane, *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamjatin*, 18.
18 "Scythians?" in Zamyatin, *Essays*, 21. On the Scythians see Stefani Hoffman, "Scythian Theory and Literature, 1917-1924," in *Art, Society, Revolution. Russia 1917-1921*, ed. Nils Åke Nilsson (Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1979), 138–64.
19 Shane, *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamjatin*, 22.
20 "Scythians?" Zamyatin, *Essays*, 23.

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Chapter 15

Aldous Huxley and the Rebels against Happiness

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15 Aldous Huxley and the Rebels against Happiness

Aldous Huxley denied having read *We*,[1] though some details of *Brave New World* are eerily close to those imagined by Zamyatin, especially the compulsory exchange of sex. Much of what is shared by the two books derives from Wells. Zamyatin was responding to his own direct experience of revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, which had not come up to his expectations, whereas Huxley, as a Wellsian projector, was responding to a broader, less definite set of economic, social, and political trends. Both Wells and Huxley believed in the power of science to transform human life and experience, but Wells's response to that power was irrepressible hope, whereas Huxley's predominant response was fear. For decades it was possible to read Huxley's novel as showing the utter barbarity of science employed in human engineering. More recent scholarship has done the work of connecting *Brave New World* with the very different opinions found in popular essays like "Science and Civilization" which Huxley was turning out prolifically during the same period.[2]

Huxley's understanding of the crisis confronting the developed world at the beginning of the 1930s was crucially shaped by his belief that the massive increases in population, especially among the lower classes, made possible by runaway science and technology, were leading to the degradation of the human species, so that eugenic constraints would be necessary simply to preserve the quality of the human race. It was, as we have seen, a common attitude among progressive intellectuals at the time. With the expansion of the franchise after World War I, democracy was looking a lot more dangerous in the eyes of intellectual elites, particularly owing to the fear that the masses could be manipulated by dictators and demagogues. "Half-wits fairly ask for dictators,"[3] as Huxley put it. The Bolshevik revolution and the rise of fascism in Italy were already suggesting the results of this trend. At the same time, Huxley believed, the discoveries of modern psychologists—especially Pavlov and Freud—had made the manipulation of the masses easier and potentially more effective than ever before, especially with the help of the newly emergent mass media. The stupidity of mass culture and entertainment seemed a threat to civilization itself. Fear of the rising masses and the population explosion would haunt Huxley throughout his life.

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Given all these threats to rationality—the presumptive possession of the educated classes—there was no doubt in Huxley's mind that civilization would have to take control of its swelling populations in order to survive. Going back to nature, of course, was not an option for modern societies; that would require a catastrophic reduction of scale.[4] Control was the only answer. The real question, then, was who was going to take control of the civilization of the future and whose interests would it be designed to serve. Would it be the humanist, whose "ideal society is one whose constituent members are all physically, intellectually, and morally of the best quality"? In that case, the result could be beneficial,

> a society so organized that no individual shall be unjustly treated or compelled to waste or bury his talents; a society which gives its members the greatest possible amount of individual liberty, but at the same time provides them with the most satisfying incentives to altruistic effort; a society not static but deliberately progressive, consciously tending towards the realization of the highest human aspirations. Science might be made a means for the creation of such a society, but only on certain conditions: that the powers which science confers must be used by rulers who are fundamentally humanist. (150)

This is, of course, a grandly utopian prospect. However, in order to implement it, Huxley warns that the humanist-ruler might have to go a considerable way toward sacrificing the essential human value of liberty in order to provide a stable and predictable social order. Given that "any form of order is better than chaos" when civilization is in danger of collapsing," it may be that "dictatorship and scientific propaganda" will provide "the only means for saving humanity from the miseries of anarchy" (153).

The alternative is the one pictured in *Brave New World*, in which the future direction of society will be controlled not by the humanist but by the "economist-ruler" serving the needs of industrialists and financiers, represented in the novel by Henry Ford. From the economists' point of view, the most desirable qualities for the population will not be intelligence or quality of life but stability and sameness. "The mass producer's first need is a wide market, which means, in other words, the greatest possible number of people with the fewest possible number of tastes and needs" (150). Liberty and the eugenic quality of the citizens will be irrelevant to rulers preoccupied with guaranteeing that regular, predictable pattern of production and consumption which capitalist markets now fail to provide. For such an economic order, even future scientific discoveries will be undesirable, their ultimate consequences being impossible to predict. Thus the rule of the economists, with their need for stability before all else, was threatening to usher in "the kingdom of industry and the machine" (152).

In the World State of *Brave New World,* Fordism has become a religion and people are mass-produced like cars, swearing not by "Our Lord" but by

"Our Ford." Grown in test tubes, "decanted" rather than born, citizens of the World State are designed for the level of intelligence, or stupidity, that makes their work enjoyable (23).[5] With Freud being established as another god of the World State, the family, whose vicissitudes he theorized, has been eliminated, and along with it all deep emotions. No more family romances or Oedipal conflicts (44). Instead of sexual repression there is compulsory promiscuity—"everyone belongs to everyone else" (46). The remaining psychological wrinkles are smoothed out with Neo-Pavlovian conditioning, therapy, and a steady diet of the wonder-drug *soma*. Ordinary citizens have no access to science or history or great literature, or to the solitude that could produce these things, any of which might disturb their tranquility and undermine the stability of the state. Instead, the population is kept occupied with saccharine entertainments like the "feelies"—a sensually enhanced version of the "movies"—and games like "Electromagnetic Golf" and "Centrifugal Bumble-Puppy." This relentless regime of vapid pleasure makes Homer's gods look industrious by comparison. In one scene, we witness a chorus of dancers beating loudly on each other's buttocks:

> *Orgy-porgy Ford and fun,*
> *Kiss the girls and make them One,*
> *Boys at one with girls at peace,*
> *Orgy-porgy gives release.* (85)

In such rituals, the individual is made to merge completely with the group in meaningless pleasure. The overall impression is one of relentless, overwhelming triviality, stupidity, and, above all, vulgarity.

Huxley later described his book as having begun as a parody of *Men Like Gods* that had gotten out of hand and as an attack "on the horror of the Wellsian Utopia and a revolt against it"[6]; he even derided Wells himself as a "rather horrid, vulgar little man" (281). But although the "World State" is Wells's proprietary invention, and he resented Huxley's "bitter satire on progressive ideas,"[7] the regime mocked in *Brave New World* is not precisely Wellsian, for Wells, of course, was also eager to improve the human species and free it from servile labor and from subservience to industrial and business interests. Far from behaving like Huxley's economist-ruler, the Wellsian *samurai* would work apart from narrow class interests to pursue the good of the whole, a notion that Huxley himself frequently endorsed.[8] The World State in *Brave New World* is at least as Huxleyan as it is Wellsian. Setting aside the machine-driven elements, all of its central features were ones that that Huxley himself believed would be necessary to prevent the collapse of civilization—eugenics, elite centralized control, and propaganda. Hence his opposition to utopian planning was decidedly equivocal. Eugenics he welcomed so long as it aimed to improve the species; the system of political control he accepted as a necessary evil

in spite of its danger in the wrong hands; only the pandering to the masses involved in propaganda did Huxley regard with alarm and contempt, indeed with an almost Swiftian revulsion. Huxley could be compassionate toward the working classes, but he made no secret of his distaste for democracy. "The democratic hypothesis," he wrote, "that all men are equal … is so manifestly untrue that a most elaborate system of humbug has had to be invented to render it credible to any sane human being."[9] American self-promoters were the advance guard of this humbug system—undertakers, for example, escaping the "base association" of the term by turning themselves into "morticians," styling themselves as "artists and members of an almost learned profession" who render vital "services" to humanity. Such boosters

> overlook the significant historical fact that all the valuable things in life, all the things that make for civilization and progress, are precisely the unnecessary ones. All art, all science, all religion (by comparison with making coffins or breakfast foods) are unnecessary. But if we had stuck to the merely necessary, we should be apes. (558)

This is an elite humanist-ruler speaking loud and clear, in a voice that could be mistaken for Huxley's friend and correspondent H. L. Mencken.[10] Huxley goes on to insist that

> In every part of the world and at all times the vast majority of human beings has consisted of Babbits and peasants. They are indispensable; the necessary work must be done. But never, except at the present time, and nowhere except in America, have the necessary millions believed themselves the equals of the unnecessary few. (559)

Clearly, then, Huxley's attitude toward democratic mass culture is one of patrician resentment made all the more bilious by the political imperative to cater to the masses who were overpopulating the world and threatening its stability. As a member of the "unnecessary few," Huxley was at pains to explain that its members were also destined to be the "happy few," the nature of happiness being based upon limitation and the Law of Diminishing Returns. In "The Boundaries of Utopia," an essay nearly contemporary with *Brave New World*, Huxley argues that every right enjoyed by human beings depends upon someone else's loss and that the expansion of prosperity is only the expansion of mediocrity. "When everybody has three hundred a year," he argues, "nobody will be less, but also nobody presumably will be more free than the contemporary confidential clerk" (125). Freedom, rights, democracy, education, leisure, all are either zero-sum quantities or subject to the Law of Diminishing Returns. Travel, a Wellsian idol, undermines the differences of culture it seeks to experience, leading to the "standardization

of the world." The love of nature, too widely disseminated, destroys the unspoiled beauty which makes nature lovable (128). Every right we enjoy is "something which we have at other people's expense" and "beyond a certain point the return in happiness of increased prosperity steadily diminishes" (127).

"This is an ancient commonplace," Huxley adds, and he is right that he is articulating a familiar Cynic attitude, but he does not take up the Cynic remedy—to retrench one's desires and find security in freedom from need. Rather, he argues that "deliberate breeding and selection" offer the only concrete hope for an increased human capacity for happiness without diminishing returns (129). Even then, Huxley goes on to suggest, eugenically improved human beings would still be incapable of happiness in the mass. "Experiences which, enjoyed by a few, were precious," he says, "cease automatically to be precious when enjoyed by many." Even if the problems of scale could be addressed, there would be a final, insuperable obstacle—those cases in which "the preciousness of the experience is found to consist precisely in the fact that it can only be enjoyed by a minority." Once again we find the anti-utopian note that happiness itself is a competitive interest, dependent upon comparative advantage. The only solution Huxley can imagine is a Quixotic one based upon the proliferation of self-promoting delusions of just the sort he is normally eager to debunk. To provide experiences of value, he says, "it will be necessary in any future egalitarian state to create a number of mutually exclusive clubs or, better, secret societies, religious sects, even witches' covens." Only by such means can the members of an egalitarian society be granted "the infinitely precious experience of being in a superior minority."

Huxley, then, it seems, was truly an enemy of the utopian and democratic conception of happiness, and since he believed that "the future of America is the future of the world,"[11] the American festival of vapid and exhausting popular entertainments was particularly alarming to him, especially as seen in Los Angeles—"the City of Dreadful Joy"—where he took up more or less permanent residence after the 1920s.[12] In private correspondence, Huxley observed that California is "pure Rabelais," and "the nearest approach to Utopia yet seen on the planet," but "after twenty-four hours of it, you begin to pine for the slums of Dostoievsky's Saint Petersburg."[13] Facing a temple of Baal even more imposing than the Crystal Palace, Huxley finds himself in the same dialectical situation as the Underground Man. So what, then, in *Brave New World*, are his resources for counterpoint to the World State's utopia given the regime of conditioning which has vanquished all the vicissitudes of life and made people almost universally content with their lot? The characters Lenina Crowne, Bernard Marx, Helmholtz Watson, and John Savage each represent a potential candidate for the revolt against the World State, but all of them will prove disappointing.

Lenina Crowne, despite being an outstandingly "pneumatic" young woman, dissents in a minor way from "the strictest conventionality" (47)

of the World State because she likes to date the same men over and over again. Promiscuity does not appeal to her and is perhaps not as congenial to the World State's women as to the men, though "one's got to play the game," as Lenina's friend Fanny tells her (48). This potential for attachment is Lenina's only dissident trait, however. Bernard complains that "she thinks of herself as meat" (59), a creature of purely sexual value. Lenina constantly spouts the hypnopedic slogans of the World State's propaganda apparatus, and the steady consumption of *soma* insulates her from disturbances of the spirit. Lenina, of course, is only a Beta Plus, and there do not seem to be any Alpha females, so her potential to cause trouble is limited. Huxley's version of utopia lacks the feminist element.

Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson are the only two products of the World State's genetic machinery who "knew they were individuals" and who feel "different" from others (71). Bernard's sense of difference derives from the fact that he is eight centimeters shorter than the standard Alpha Plus model, while Helmholtz's derives from a slight "excess" of mental powers (73). Bernard wonders "what would it be like … if I were free—not enslaved by my conditioning," "free to be happy in some other way" than the one provided by the World State (90). He would like to experiment with self-control, "to try the effect of arresting [his] impulses" rather than dissipating his feelings with constant satisfaction. Bernard craves intimacy with Lenina and hopes by taking her out alone under the night sky to be "more *together*" with her, though she is mystified by the idea and recommends *soma* (90). It is natural, then, for readers at this point to think that Bernard, given that he openly questions the values of the regime, will head a revolt against the World State, and it is likely that Huxley originally conceived of him as doing so, but the manuscript revisions show that, in the process of composition, Bernard's character was revised in a negative direction.[14] The problem with Bernard is that his rebelliousness is rooted entirely in a sense of caste inferiority. "A chronic fear of being slighted made him avoid his equals, made him stand, where his inferiors were concerned, self-consciously on his dignity" (69). Coming into conflict with his boss gives Bernard an "intoxicating consciousness of his own significance" (96), allowing him to give Helmholtz a "heroic" account of it. But Helmholtz hates Bernard's boasting and self-pity (97), while Bernard is humiliated by Helmholtz's magnanimity toward him (164) and jealous of the friendship between Helmholtz and the Savage (166). When those two allies finally start a riot in the Park Lane Hospital, Bernard fails to help his friends, stalling in an "agony of humiliated indecision" (193) and in the subsequent confrontation with the World Controller Mustafa Mond, Bernard has to be carried from the room in "a paroxysm of abjection" (203).

Bernard exemplifies the negative character of the system of distinction when it is grounded in nothing but the need for distinction itself. Helmholtz Watson, by contrast, exemplifies how the person of true distinction can be conditioned and deprived of valuable experience so completely that his

own gifts become incomprehensible to him. Helmholtz is a "propaganda technician" who spends his time writing the jingles and slogans that keep the inhabitants of the World State happy in their imbecile condition. Yet he is haunted by "a queer feeling" that he has "something important to say," though he doesn't know what it is—"something much more important. Yes, and more intense, more violent. But What?" Helmholtz wants to "write piercingly," but the regimen of the World State offers no proper subject for such writing. "What on earth's the good of being pierced by an article about a Community Sing, or the latest improvement in sense organs.... Can you say something about nothing?" (73). When the Savage, whose experience of civilization consists only of the works of Shakespeare, reads Helmholtz some lines from *Romeo and Juliet* "with an intense and quivering passion" (167–68), Helmholtz exclaims "What a superb piece of emotional engineering!" (168). Romeo's situation seems ridiculous—"Getting into such a state about having a girl"—but its verbal expression is brilliant. Shakespeare "makes our best propaganda technicians look absolutely silly." Helmholtz recognizes the secret of Shakespeare's success—that he had "so many insane excruciating things to get excited about. You've got to be hurt and upset, otherwise you can't think of the really good, penetrating, X-rayish phrases." But Shakespeare's subject matter—about "fathers and mothers!"—brings Helmholtz only "uncontrollable guffawing" (168); in the World State, live birth and parental relations are matters comically smutty. "We need some other kind of madness and violence. But what? What? Where?" (169).

Helmholtz's hunger for madness and violence represents the claims of art and high culture against the World State utopia. Whereas Bernard represents the frustration of the heroic need for distinction, Helmholtz represents the epic imagination deprived of its heroic subject. Neither can manage a genuine challenge to the regime, though Helmholtz does join the Savage in a gesture of revolt. Neither Bernard nor Helmholtz is destroyed by his resistance to the World State. In their confrontation with the Controller, Mustafa Mond treats them leniently. Instead of freeing them from island captivity like Prospero, he sends them off to captive islands inhabited by people like themselves, "too self-consciously individual to fit in." Mustafa observes that, instead of being hysterical, Bernard should "understand that his punishment is really a reward. He's being sent to a place where he'll meet the most interesting set of men and women to be found anywhere in the world" (204). Helmholtz even finds an additional charm in his exile, opting for a bad climate, with lots of wind and storms (206). Mark Twain's minister advised "heaven for climate, and hell for society."[15] Helmholtz goes him one better in his taste for dystopia—hell for society *and* climate.

In terms of literary form, the Bernard/Helmholtz plot is resolved as a darkly ironic comedy. Helmholtz is the only one of the three protagonists whose character was not debased in revision, and for him the ending is perhaps a minor triumph, though his role in the story is the smallest of the three. At the end of the comedy, Huxley even permits his three dissidents a

moment of sentimental leave-taking; as they depart for their separate fates, "There was a moment of silence. In spite of their sadness—because of it, even; for their sadness was a symptom of their love for one another—the three young men were happy" (217). By enduring frustration and struggle, the young men have learned something of value and importance, and actually experienced an emotion, but they have done nothing to disturb the World State. But John the Savage's story is not over. Mustafa demands that his experiment must continue. His revolt will have a tragic form, but a tragedy even more darkly undermined by irony.

John the Savage has had the most exclusively literary and heroic education possible, raised on an Indian reservation with only the works of Shakespeare to instruct him. Though the Indians do not accept him as one of their own, he has fully internalized their religion and their warrior ethos, performing their painful and demanding rituals in private. He explains to Lenina that he wanted to be whipped "to show that I am a man" (111). Isolating himself in the desert in imitation of the natives' rite of initiation to manhood, he discovers "Time and Death and God" (127). And the words of Shakespeare give him an invaluable means to articulate his grand and heroic feelings. This resource, however, also has its drawbacks, because Huxley's Shakespeare is also Freud's, reminding us that *Hamlet* played an essential role in Freud's invention of the Oedipus complex. The Savage, having been brought into the world by a human mother, is subject to all the ills that Freudian flesh is heir to, all those "insane, obscene relationships" (43) in the family romance that Mustafa's utopia has eliminated along with live birth. John's mother's native lover, Popé, thus tortures the boy with all the pains of Hamlet contemplating his own mother's "enseamed bed." "Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain," repeats the Savage.

> What did the words exactly mean? He only half knew. But their magic was strong and went on rumbling in his head, and somehow it was as though he had never really hated Popé before because he had never been able to say how much he hated him. But now he had these words, these words like drums and singing and magic. (123)

The words are as powerful as a ritual, and it is hard to tell whether they simply express what is already in the Savage's psyche or whether they are conditioning him to share the feelings they evoke. Unlike Hamlet, though, the Savage makes an immediate attempt to stab his Claudius, and Popé responds with laughing appreciation of the boy's heroic gesture (124). Popé's uncivilized psyche doesn't obey Oedipal dynamics.

Once he has been introduced to the dehumanized conditions of the World State, the Savage's education enables him to articulate the heroic critique of utopia and even to act on it, but Huxley's psychoanalytic treatment of his character makes him ultimately a satiric figure. Like Bernard, the Savage

begins as the novel's apparent hero, but Huxley made him more neurotic in the process of composition.[16] He is erotically fascinated by Lenina and replays Romeo's ecstasy over Juliet's "pure and vestal modesty" in the presence of her clothing (134), but when it comes to actual love-making, Lenina's unchaste behavior, her immediate willingness to sleep with him, revolts the Savage. He needs to see her as a being superior to himself and to his own desires. "He was obscurely terrified lest she would cease to be something he could feel himself unworthy of" (155). For the Savage, the culture of the World State is "base" and "ignoble" (156). He wants to do something grand to show Lenina his worthiness, to "undergo something nobly," like bringing her a mountain lion as the Indians would do (173). But she is merely baffled. When she finally strips to seduce him, he retreats in terror and resorts to Othello's imprecations: "Whore! Impudent strumpet!" He even threatens to kill her. A moment later he is Lear raging against lechery (177–78).

From this point on, the Savage's Oedipal vulnerabilities become the main driver of the narrative, further exacerbated by the death of his mother in her final state of *soma*-induced "imbecile happiness" (181) among a horde of gawking children who are being conditioned to the benign vacuity of death (187). The Savage's irrational guilt over his mother's demise brings on the crisis in which he tries to start a freedom riot with a Shakespearean oration against *soma*. By the end of the novel, the Savage is clearly insane. His attempt at Thoreauvian retreat, with monkish bouts of self-flagellation, turns him into a media spectacle—an anomaly in the tranquilized, stability-driven World State. The novel's ending is slightly obscure, but it seems that the Savage's self-flagellating fury and the conditioned "habit of cooperation" of the spectators bring them all together in an orgy, a "long-drawn frenzy of sensuality" after which the Savage hangs himself. Huxley mocks his character by describing how his dangling feet point toward every direction of the compass except Hamlet's "mad north-by-northwest" (230–31). He was not Hamlet nor was meant to be.

Just as the Bernard/Helmholtz plot ends as an ironized comedy, the story of John the Savage ends as a parody of Shakespearean tragedy, or as a psychoanalytic interpretation of tragedy itself, a form of interpretation which has an inherently ironizing and satiric effect.[17] Huxley often sniffed at psychoanalysis,[18] but he seems to have been captivated by it nonetheless. The Savage has often been associated with Huxley's close friend D. H. Lawrence, who died the year before *Brave New World* was written and whose letters Huxley edited. Huxley admired Lawrence's genius, and they shared a common disgust with the machine-driven way the world was going. Mark Rampion, the Lawrence character in Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, gives a diagnosis of the current world situation that could well serve as a précis for *Brave New World*.[19] But John Savage is not D. H. Lawrence; he is neither a genius nor an artist nor even an intellectual in the proper sense, though he does espouse the possibility of escape from the aridity of machine

culture back toward something more primitive, a notion, we have seen, that Huxley thought impractical. As Philip Quarles, the Huxley surrogate in *Point Counter Point*, tells Rampion, "You can't go back, you can't scrap the machine, unless you're prepared to kill off about half the human race" (416).

In *Brave New World*, the Savage's downfall makes a grim commentary upon life in the World State, and with all of the rebels either dead or vanished, we are left with Mustafa Mond as the ruling force in Huxley's vision. The confrontation and judgment scene between him and the rebels is the highlight of the novel, and it sharpens the dialectic between utopian and heroic values to a fine point. Faced with the three trouble-makers, Mustafa's response is not hostile but rather one of "good-humoured intelligence" (197). He understands their point of view perfectly, having sacrificed his own love of science to take up the demanding task of assuring everyone else's happiness. In response to the Savage's complaint that, compared with Shakespeare, the culture of the World State looks "horrible," Mond can only agree. "Of course it does," he says.

> Actual happiness always looks pretty squalid in comparison with the overcompensations for misery. And, of course, stability isn't nearly so spectacular as instability. And being contented has none of the glamour of a good fight against misfortune, none of the picturesqueness of a struggle with temptation, or a fatal overthrow by passion or doubt. Happiness is never grand. (199)

As for the reduction in quality of the human materials that constitute the World State, Mond describes the regime's earlier efforts to avoid it. In the "Cypress experiment," "an experiment in rebottling," the island of Cypress was repopulated entirely with Alphas who were given all the equipment they needed to make a good life. "Within six years they were having a first-class civil war" (201). The natural state of fully developed humanity appears to be war. As for making life less dull for the lower-caste workers, giving them more leisure turned out to be a form of cruelty; they were soon looking for a holiday from free time (202). The World State has apparently been experimentally designed to preserve as much of the quality of humanity as possible without destroying human happiness, but that is not very much. "The optimum population … is modelled on the iceberg—eight-ninths below the water line, one-ninth above" (201). And they are happier below the water line.

For the Savage, the worst of defect of Mond's utopia is the absence of God, "the reason for everything fine and noble and heroic." Mustafa actually presumes that God exists, but civilization has "absolutely no need" for the virtues fostered by such a being, things like nobility and heroism being mere "symptoms of political inefficiency" (213). And as for the divine principle

of cosmic justice that punishes Edmund's "pleasant vices" in *King Lear*, when the Savage wonders if the "pleasant vices" of the World State aren't just as degrading, Mond declares such religious sentiments "superfluous" in a world where youth and prosperity are guaranteed till death (211–12).

In the Underground Man's choice between "cheap happiness and lofty suffering," Mustafa is determined to make happiness as cheap as possible for individuals, whatever the cost to the species, while for the Savage, "Nothing costs enough here," all the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" having been abolished (214). His Shakespearean eloquence makes no impression on a ruler whose chief concern is to preserve the peace by doing everything "comfortably." The Savage's protest is painful.

> "But I don't want comfort. I want God. I want poetry. I want real danger. I want freedom. I want goodness. I want sin."
> "In fact," said Mustapha Mond, "you're claiming the right to be unhappy."
> All right then," said the Savage defiantly. "I'm claiming the right to be unhappy."
> "Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind." There was a long silence.
> "I claim them all," said the Savage at last.
> Mustafa Mond shrugged his shoulders. "You're welcome," he said. (215)

Mustafa Mond is correct when he argues that the disagreement between himself and the Savage depends upon the choice of fundamentally different values, or "postulates," as he calls them. "You can't play Electro-magnetic Golf according to the rules of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy," he says (212), a formulation whose comically undignified language underlines the very point of the dispute. In the life of the World State, no distinction will be any more important than the distinction between trivial pastimes. The disagreement between Mustafa and the Savage is not one of understanding; the two sides are completely transparent to one another. It is a matter of fundamental commitment. Mustafa makes the Savage look like nothing but a masochist for disclaiming the wish for happiness, but the Savage's complaint is hard to ignore when the happiness of human life has been reduced to the smooth functioning of a machine, with the State as the engineer of souls.

Brave New World expresses both Huxley's genuine hope that science can be harnessed to make human beings happier and his fear that happiness might be purchased at the cost of humanity itself. And while he is naturally drawn to the elite concern for dignity that motivates the heroic perspective,

he is unable to imagine, at least in *Brave New World*, a character who is capable of living up to the heroic argument. This shows something about Huxley himself. In spite of his patrician sense of his own superiority, Huxley was contemptuous of the social pretensions of aristocracy. He recognized the fatuous aspects of social vanity and the irony of wishing for an unhappy and difficult world just because it provides the pleasures of high art. In his view, even the glory of science, for which Huxley had a deep admiration, poses a threat to human flourishing because of its unpredictable consequences and its devotion to the machine, while Freud's version of science makes all human motives beyond sexual satisfaction look bogus. In the years to come Huxley would take a religious and mystical turn that gave new access to human dignity, but at this point the heroic aspects of the humanist's critique of utopia were difficult for him to stand behind. The fragments of the heroic protest in *Brave New World* are portioned out among Bernard, Helmholtz, and the Savage so that their confrontation with Mustafa Mond is ultimately a standoff—a standoff, however, which puts the dilemma with unrivaled clarity and force.

In his Preface to the 1946 edition of *Brave New World*, Huxley identified the fault in the novel as his failure to give the Savage another choice between the "insanity" of the World State and the "lunacy" of personal neurosis. Huxley claimed that the impasse between insanity and lunacy had appealed to his younger self, the "amused, Pyrrhonic aesthete who was the author of the fable" (6). But the impasse that ends *Brave New World* does justice to the issues it raises better than any practical solution Huxley could have offered, including the decentralized "Henry Georgian" economics and the "Kropotkinesque co-operative" politics he later imagined as a third option (7). No more than D. H. Lawrence was Huxley amused by the situation that faced the world of the early 1930s. The problem was that he was caught between the horns of the utopian dilemma—the choice between administered happiness and human dignity.

Notes

1 Alex Shane, *The Life and Works of Evgenij Zamjatin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 140.
2 See especially the introductory essays by David Bradshaw in *The Hidden Huxley: Contempt and Compassion for the Masses* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994) and "Huxley's Slump: Planning, Eugenics, and the 'Ultimate Need' of Stability," in *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. John Batchelor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 151–71. For a recent synthesis see Joanne Woiak, "Designing a Brave New World: Eugenics, Politics, and Fiction," *The Public Historian* 29, no. 3 (2007): 105–29.
3 Huxley, "What Is Happening to Our Population?" in Aldous Huxley, *Complete Essays*, eds. Robert S. Baker and James Sexton (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), vol. 3, 1930–1935, 405.
4 "Science and Civilization," in Huxley, *Complete Essays*, vol. 3, 149.

5 Aldous Huxley, Brave New World *and* Brave New World Revisited (New York: Harper, 2004), 23.
6 *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, ed. Grover Smith (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 348.
7 Letter to W. W. Pickard, October 1, 1935. In *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells*, 4 vols. Ed. David C. Smith (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), vol. 4, 35.
8 See Bradshaw, *Hidden Huxley*, 31–41. Huxley even wished for another caste above the *samurai*. See Gregory Claeys, *Dystopia: A Natural History: A Study of Modern Despotism, Its Antecedents, and Its Literary Diffractions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 378.
9 "America," in Huxley, *Complete Essays,* vol. 2, 557.
10 On Huxley and Mencken see Bradshaw, *Hidden Huxley*, 1–25.
11 "The Outlook for American Culture: Some Reflections in a Machine Age" (1927), in Huxley, *Complete Essays*, vol 3, 187.
12 "America," in Huxley, *Complete Essays*, vol. 2, 553.
13 Aldous Huxley, *Selected Letters*, ed. James Sexton (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), 189, quoted in Claeys, *Dystopia*, 377. As Claeys goes on to point out, Huxley spent the rest of his life in this overly opulent utopia, promoting his own brand of counter-cultural hedonism. See *Dystopia*, 377–78.
14 See Donald Watt, "The Manuscript Revisions of *Brave New World*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 77 (July 1971): 376.
15 Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Speeches* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1910), 117.
16 Watt, "Manuscript Revisions," 377.
17 On "Freudian Satire" see John Farrell, *Freud's Paranoid Quest: Psychoanalysis and Modern Suspicion* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), chapter 5.
18 See Peter Edgerly Firchow, *The End of Utopia: A Study of Aldous Huxley's* Brave New World (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1984), 50–51, and Brad Buchanan, "Oedipus in Dystopia: Freud and Lawrence in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,*" *Journal of Modern Literature* 25, no. 3–4 (2002): 75–89.
19 See Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928), 415.

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The Utopian Dilemma in the Western Political Imagination

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Chapter 16

George Orwell's Dystopian Socialism

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16 George Orwell's Dystopian Socialism

George Orwell opposed every manifestation of the heroic spirit: aristocracy, caste and class privilege, economic inequality, nationalism, militarism, and fascism. England, to his mind, was "a land of snobbery and privilege, ruled largely by the old and silly."[1] Identification with the oppressed and contempt for privilege were fundamental to his outlook and motivation beginning with his school days and his youthful experience of colonialism in Burma. His commitment to democratic principles of equality deepened through his years of tramping and studying the poor, and in his own lifestyle he conscientiously refused the comforts of his middle-class childhood, spent, as he put it, among those "few million favoured human beings who live ultimately on the degradation of the rest."[2] He was renouncing something he possessed only painfully, being aware that the gentility of his own class position was "almost purely theoretical," that he inhabited the ranks of the "shabby-genteel," the "lower upper-middle class," people whose entire income goes into "keeping up appearances."[3] The egalitarian spirit Orwell found among his anti-Fascist comrades in Spain sparked his belief in the possibilities of brotherhood across class barriers. He had none of Huxley's Malthusian anxieties about the rampant breeding of the lower orders; instead, he worried about the declining British birthrate and the imbalance of generations it might produce.[4] His key insight into communism was that, no less than capitalism, it could become the way for an exploitative elite to establish its rule under the guise of the people's benefit. There was a utopian fervor in Orwell's commitment to socialism and democracy which no amount of disappointment with his fellow Left intellectuals could dampen.

But Orwell found many of his fellow socialists "unsatisfactory or inhuman types," unpalatable "cranks" whose fads and eccentricities were hurting the movement by making socialism "inherently distasteful" to the ordinary folk he had striven to know.[5] He believed that working-class people were baffled by the eccentric mindset of Left intellectuals and that the propaganda disadvantages of the socialist image were truly damaging. *The Road to Wigan Pier* is dotted with salvos against the association of the words "Socialism" and "Communism" with "every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England"

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(174). Orwell also regretted that socialism, even more than capitalism, was associated with the dominance of the machine and that socialism seemed to promise "a foolproof world" (195), "a world in which *nothing goes wrong*" (193), a world requiring so little expense of energy that it would "frustrate the human need for effort and creation" (200), leading to "some frightful subhuman depth of softness and helplessness" (201). In *Brave New World*, Orwell says, Huxley had seen through the "swindle of progress" (203) which was already making "a fully human life impossible" (191) by removing the occasion for meaningful work and effort. Orwell worried that the prospect of disgusting softness might lead to a "spiritual recoil from Socialism" (187). He could even detect "a huge contradiction" in the idea of progress itself; utopians, he feared, would wind up creating "artificial dangers in order to exercise their courage" (194). And while the need to escape the "repulsive softness" of the machine world seemed to push all of life toward the work-for-work's sake realm of art, the socialism of the present also condemned the respect for tradition as conservative and real art as bourgeois.

Orwell, then, felt compelled to confront head-on a fact he believed Wells would not confront—that "the machine itself may be the enemy" (203)—while at the same time believing the machine to be indispensable because there is no going back to the simpler world of the past. Socialists must play the role of a "permanent opposition" to the "machine-world" (219) but without giving it up. Instead, to avoid the "spiritual recoil from Socialism" (187) on the part of people who are not already committed to the Left, Orwell urges that socialist propaganda should stress not the "materialistic Utopia" of the machine but the simple moral basis of the revolution—"justice, liberty, and the plight of the unemployed" (230). It is not the absolute state of bliss that socialism should offer but a relative state of equality with the governing class.

The onset of World War II increased Orwell's concern that the hedonistic outlook of the Left, inadequate in its understanding of the human need for work and struggle, was even more inadequate in response to the demands of politics and war. "The energy," he wrote,

> that actually shapes the world springs from emotions—racial pride, leader-worship, religious belief, love of war—which liberal intellectuals mechanically write off as anachronisms, and which they have usually destroyed so completely in themselves as to have lost all power of action.[6]

Faced with the threat of Nazism, Orwell believed, it was dangerous to abandon these heroic resources. H. G. Wells again emerges as a salient example of the problem, representing those who simply could not understand the threat posed by Hitler and Stalin because they had intellectually distanced themselves from heroic struggle. Orwell locates Wells as belonging to the "non-military middle class" who are left cold by all the inspiring spectacles

of war—"the thunder of guns, the jingle of spurs, the catch in the throat when the old flag goes by" (151). Wells's work is built on the contrast between the man of science and the man of war.

Orwell overlooks the elitist side of Wells and the fact that, by the mid-thirties, his enthusiasm for samurai airmen had acquired a fascistic tinge. But Orwell's oft-repeated complaint fits the pacifist Left as a whole. It was disturbing to him that a lunatic like Hitler could touch the strings which motivate human beings more skillfully than the people who shared Orwell's own democratic ideals. Hitler, he says, reviewing a new edition of *Mein Kampf*, has understood the weakness of utopian hedonism.[7] "In his own joyless mind," Hitler

> knows that human beings *don't* only want comfort, safety, short working-hours, hygiene, birth-control and, in general, common sense; they also, at least intermittently, want struggle and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags and loyalty-parades. However they may be as economic theories, Fascism and Nazism are psychologically far sounder than any hedonistic conception of life. The same is probably true of Stalin's militarised version of Socialism.

Orwell finds the proof of this psychological insight in the practical success Hitler had enjoyed in marshaling the economic resources of the German nation to the service of war, while the wasteful capitalists of his own country are still being served by their butlers.

> All three of the great dictators [Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini] have enhanced their power by imposing intolerable burdens on their peoples. Whereas Socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people 'I offer you a good time,' Hitler has said to them 'I offer you struggle, danger and death,' and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet. (251)

This recognition of the charm of "lofty suffering" over "cheap happiness," to recall once again the words of Dostoevsky's Underground Man, and the threat it poses for a rational attitude toward the world, brings Orwell to confront the imaginative poverty of utopia as it is envisioned by Wells and other socialists. Utopia is a merely negative condition, a freedom from all evils. "We all want to abolish the things Wells wants to abolish," Orwell concedes[8]; the trouble, however, is that when this dream is realized in concrete form, it loses all of its vitality. "Is there anyone who actually wants to live in a Wellsian Utopia?" In fact, the prospect of winding up in such a place, of waking up in a "hygienic garden suburb infested by naked schoolmarms" (Orwell's description of the world of *Men Like Gods*), is not only uninspiring but frightful enough to generate resistance. "The desire to avoid a too-rational and too-comfortable world" actually furnishes one of the driving motives for fascism (204). When Orwell wants to identify a

source of relief from the heroic side of life that animates both fascism and those who fight against it, it is not to utopian horizons that he looks but to simple pleasures like the humor of the smutty postcards by popular artists like Donald McGill, vulgar outlets for the "worm's-eye view of life" which in real life "never gets a fair hearing." "Like the music halls, they are a sort of saturnalia, a harmless rebellion against virtue." Playing Sancho Panza to the high-minded quixotism of the middle class, they offer a mockery of bourgeois respectability and the heroic spirit of military culture without pretending to abolish them.[9]

In his contempt for the stereotyped conveniences of the modern world, Orwell can sound like Huxley or even Mencken. In an essay called "Pleasure Spots," for example, he contrasts the sublimities of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" with the air-conditioned "return to the womb" provided by a contemporary vacation pleasure dome (985). It is important to recognize, however, that Orwell's reservations about utopia are not limited to bourgeois fantasies or liberal daydreams. Human life in general was to him "not thinkable without a considerable intermixture of evil." "It is obvious," he says, "that humour and the sense of fun, ultimately dependent on the existence of evil, have no place in any Utopia."[10] And in his great essay "Can Socialists be Happy?" Orwell surveys the most traditional images of happiness—the various heavens and paradises and interminable Rabelaisian feasts—and finds that all of those, too, would quickly cloy. Even the powerful imagination of Swift, Orwell's literary idol and model, when he tries to portray the image of perfection, comes up with nothing better than those "remarkably dreary creatures" the Houyhnhnms.[11] The spectacle of the Cratchit family eating their Christmas goose brings more joy than any utopia because, for the Cratchits, a good meal is a rarity. "Their happiness is convincing just because it is incomplete" (203). Orwell comes to the sad conclusion that "human beings are not able to describe, nor perhaps to imagine, happiness except in terms of contrast" (207). Utopia is not a positive condition but a mere relief from suffering. The lesson is a stern one—"Whoever tries to imagine perfection simply reveals his own emptiness" (209). (It is perhaps to spare himself from the indignity of this error that old Major, the prophetic pig of *Animal Farm*, pronounces himself unable to describe to his fellow animals his utopian "dream of the earth as it will be when Man has vanished"; he replaces it with an ancient visionary song.)[12] Given the false glamour of perfect happiness, it was necessary for socialists, Orwell writes in a column published in the same issue of *Tribune* as "Can Socialists be Happy?", to "dissociate Socialism from Utopianism" because "Socialists don't claim to be able to make the world perfect"; rather, he insists, "they claim to be able to make it better."[13]

Orwell's turn against happiness implies a very radical shift away from the common view of human action and from the view of most philosophers. It suggests that, in a deep and very general way, the pursuit of happiness is

a false lead, and we take up this false lead because we do not really know what we want. Orwell puts pain rather than pleasure at the center of human motivation—the removal of our own pain and the imposing of pain upon others by having more than they have; indeed, going back to the classic insight expressed by Montesquieu, Orwell lends credence to the idea that being happy is less important than being happier than other people—or, as Adam Smith would put it, than having more of the purported means of happiness than other people even if those means do not bring the promised happiness. Orwell himself put the paradox of opulence in a maximally ironic form: "The rich lose almost as much by their wealth as the poor by their poverty."[14] Generally speaking, Orwell does not pursue the dystopian implications of his anti-hedonistic attitude for individual psychology, preferring to keep the discussion on the level of the social imagination. Faced with the dreadful situation facing the world at Christmas 1943, it was easy for him to say what the world would be better off without, but as always, the positive replacement remained elusive. "The world wants something which it is dimly aware could exist, but cannot accurately define."[15]

Orwell, however, does have a suggestion. While the world's unconscious desire is not for "some painless, effortless Utopia," happiness being nothing more, perhaps, than a "by-product" of human efforts, he ventures that "the real objective of Socialism is human brotherhood." The following sentences epitomize Orwell's point of view.

> Men use up their lives in heart-breaking political struggles, or get themselves killed in civil wars, or tortured in the secret prisons of the Gestapo, not in order to establish some central-heated, air-conditioned, strip-lighted Paradise, but because they want a world in which human beings love one another instead of swindling and murdering one another. And they want that world as a first step. Where they go from there is not so certain, and the attempt to foresee it in detail merely confuses the issue.

It is striking that Orwell goes so far as to appeal to love as the alternative to swindling and murder when he might have aimed at a more reachable target—at the fairness, for example, and the respect for human dignity which support individual freedom and democracy. He did not speak of love very often, yet he confessed that the bleakness of the world since 1930 and the impossibility of accepting that bleakness as final had left him only "the quasi-mystical belief that … somewhere in space and time human life will cease to be the miserable brutish thing it now is."[16]

Orwell combined the belief that his brand of socialism was a kind of mysticism with the belief that, deprived of religion, the human spirit is sadly maimed—that without belief in God, the soulless human being is, in his striking metaphor, like a wasp that does not notice it has been cut in two until it tries to fly.[17] Orwell wishes, then, for something between faith and soullessness. "The real problem," he says, "is how to restore the religious

attitude while accepting death as final." The thought leads him to one of his most quoted sentences. "Men can only be happy when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness."[18] But if the quest for happiness is not the answer, if the religious attitude is necessary not only for private motivation but for resistance to fascism, how is it to be preserved in secular terms? Orwell's last resort will be the hope of brotherly love buttressed by the love of nature and a belief in basic human decency. Put in the wartime context that was the crucible of so much of his thinking, this meant patriotism in defense of England, a sentiment to which Left intellectuals were reflexively allergic and which he had himself had labeled as an "atavistic emotion."[19]

The problem for Orwell, though, was how to distinguish patriotism of the positive sort from nationalism and its familiar horrors. In one of his most ambitious and penetrating essays, "Notes on Nationalism," he takes up this task, though the term "nationalism" was much too narrow for what he had in mind. The essay's subject is group-based judgments, positive or negative—those strokes of false wit by which "whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled 'good' or 'bad'."[20] The same irrationality, Orwell argues, is the governing element in group feeling of all kinds. The neo-Orwellian term "groupthink" would apply neatly to this tendency, though sociologists have used it for a narrower purpose.[21] The key trait is the "habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognizing no other duty than that of advancing its interests."[22] Or, in the vocabulary of *Animal Farm*, "Four legs good. Two legs bad."

Nationalism is "power hunger tempered by self-deception" (43). Among the general English population, the dominant form is "old-fashioned British jingoism" (45). Among the intelligentsia it is communism. Other current examples are "political Catholicism," Scottish nationalism, Zionism, antisemitism, and Trotskyism (46–48). People of these mindsets are obsessed and unstable in their allegiances and biased even in their aesthetic judgments, but Orwell's most impressive observation is how insensitive their commitment to a cause makes people to the reality around them. On account of the "loyalty or hatred" attaching to groups, "certain facts, although in a sense known to be true, are inadmissible" (64). It was simply inadmissible, for instance, for British Tories, that Britain was not coming out of World War II without loss of power and prestige; it was equally inadmissible for British communists that Russia could not have defeated Germany without British and American help. The power of group attachment and pride would not allow these facts to be faced. Even more disturbing, group loyalty suspends ordinary moral sentiments.

> There is no crime, absolutely none, that cannot be condoned when "our" side commits it. Even if one does not deny that the crime has happened, even if one knows that it is exactly the same crime as one has condemned in some other case, even if one admits in an intellectual

> sense that it is unjustified—still one cannot *feel* that it is wrong. Loyalty is involved, and so pity ceases to function. (66)

With this grim and all-too-persuasive account, Orwell has not made it easy for himself to distinguish "nationalism" in his special sense from the "patriotism" he is counting on to save England from capitalist greed and Left-wing fecklessness. He defines "patriotism" as

> devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, *not* for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality. (42)

From his earliest writings Orwell was intensely aware of the importance of social status as a human imperative. In *Down and Out in Paris and London* he observes the elaborate caste system even among the workers at the Paris hotel and the order of prestige among the various modes of begging on the London streets. The need to be socially superior to subject peoples and the fear of being laughed at by them are shown to be the motivating forces of colonialism in "Shooting an Elephant." And Flory, the protagonist of *Burmese Days*, is so painfully confined by the status hierarchy of the colonial setting that he commits suicide after a traumatic social shaming. What Orwell is looking for in patriotism is a form of attachment which can motivate loyalty and sacrifice without status competition or the need to dominate. Such a patriotism, a kind of "honourable bigotry," to recall Wordsworth's phrase, would not undermine that individuality which makes generosity, decency, and creativity possible.[23] The social image fostered by this vision would be an England without the empire and, above all, without the tyranny and waste of the upper classes whose position depends upon it. In another essay, "My Country Right or Left," Orwell acknowledges the unlikeliness of the amalgam he has set his heart on, "the possibility of building a Socialist on the bones of a [Colonel] Blimp," a socialism that does not neglect "the spiritual need for patriotism and the military virtues."[24]

As a personal defense against the blinders of groupthink, Orwell does go on to offer a superb description of the specifically moral effort needed to acknowledge one's own feelings and to identify the facts they compel us to ignore.[25] As his essay on Dickens makes clear, however, while he recognized the power of moral criticism, Orwell was not counting on a moral change of heart to make fundamental political alterations, and certainly not to overcome the three-fold threat of Leftist alienation, capitalist selfishness, and

Fascist violence. In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, his veritably Churchillian call to the defense of England in early 1941, it is to patriotism and the already established distinctness of national character and culture that he appeals—which is to say, to the peculiar characteristics of the English people. He plainly acknowledges that one has to go beyond rational thinking to find unity in a historical entity like a nation that is "always changing and yet is felt to be mystically the same" (342). Yet, while admitting the foibles of the English—their insularity, their anti-intellectualism and parochialism, their lack of care for beauty and nature—he cannot imagine them committing Nazi crimes. There is a distinctive moral quality in English life that is visible to Orwell in a thousand artifacts and customs, down to the "comic coloured postcards that you see in the windows of cheap stationers' shops." (In *1984*, Winston is constantly trying to make contact with this older England effaced by the regime, seeking it in antique artifacts and snatches of old rhymes.) Here one can find the "old-fashioned outlook of the English, their graded snobberies, their mixture of bawdiness and hypocrisy, their extreme gentleness, their deeply moral attitude to life" (295). "You notice it at the instant you set foot on English soil." What Orwell calls "the gentleness of English civilization," though "mixed up with barbarities and anachronisms," can also be seen in the fact that off-duty British Army officers do not wear uniforms and that the goose-step—"simply an affirmation of naked power"—has never been adopted by the English military. It is not that English officers would not enjoy goose-stepping but that, if they did, the common people of England would have the freedom to laugh them out of it (297). Elsewhere Orwell concedes that English gentleness is due not to some natural goodness but to the relative security and wealth of England compared with other countries, but that makes it no less real.[26] He was encouraged that, during World War II, the British press had not demonized the Germans to the same extent as in the First, nor had it returned to the term *Hun*. Such names, he believed, do more harm than dropping bombs on people because, though we are all individually going to die, hateful terms damage "the fabric of civilization" and undermine the basis of peace for future generations.[27]

In the menace of the early Forties, then, Orwell came to pin his hopes for the future on two resources he labeled "mystical"—a socialist dream of love that could not and *should* not be fully articulated or made concrete and a national sense of unity based on the pre-rational or unconscious but nonetheless deeply binding fabric of social life. At the moment, the heroic note of patriotic resistance to evil was more urgently needed than the note of class solidarity and brotherhood, and it is not hard to see why. Fascism, abetted by Left pacifism, posed a far stronger threat than capitalism, and there was also the hope that the collective effort to defeat Hitler would require the nationalizing of industry and the demolition of the wasteful class system, bringing about the socialist revolution Orwell longed for. After all, hadn't Hitler's victories in France already served as a "debunking" of capitalism?[28] If Orwell's critique of a too-passive socialist hedonism in this

period makes him sound like a dystopian socialist, that is partly because the unhappiness of war concealed the promise of a revolutionary silver lining—that England, under the pressure of Nazi aggression, might assume, through "equality of sacrifice," what Orwell calls its "true shape," which is to say its socialist character (324). Years later Cyril Connolly remembered how congenial Orwell found the wartime atmosphere. "He felt enormously at home in the Blitz, among the bombs, the bravery, the rubble, the shortages, the homeless, the signs of rising revolutionary temper."[29] Orwell saw even the wartime shortages and the shift toward cheaper, less passive entertainments like games, local sports, and literature as already improving the tone and character of English culture.[30] He would have liked the government's clothes-rationing policy—which was making snobbish class symbols like dinner jackets and top hats hard to find—made permanent after the war.[31]

It was during this same period that Orwell was also beginning to take up the political problem of utopia—not that socialism would be too weak and flabby-minded to face fascism but that it would itself become heroic and conservative enough to threaten democracy. The shift of emphasis corresponds with a change of focus from Hitler and Nazism to Stalin and communism as the primary threat. *Animal Farm* treats this theme with reference to the Soviet Union, showing with biting humor how the Bolsheviks coopted the revolution merely in order to replace the oppressive capitalist elite with a new and equally exploitative ruling class, thus fulfilling Bakunin's famous prediction. The fact that this witty beast-fable could have such an impact lends credence to Orwell's observation that people are aware of more than they admit to themselves; the mere clarity of the picture was politically significant and the fact that it was written at a time when England was still allied with the Russians made its message all the more salient, and indeed more controversial. England's most prestigious editors, including T. S. Eliot, refused to publish *Animal Farm*.[32] Orwell was determined to highlight facts which groupthink made it almost impossible to admit.

1984 goes beyond *Animal Farm*'s rueful and witty demonstration of how easily heroic psychology can exploit dreams of utopia and turn them into nightmares. The playing out of the totalitarian scenario on English soil and under the garbled name of English Socialism ("Ingsoc") made it easy for early readers to take the novel as an attack on the British Labour Party, but its subject is far more general (565–70). As Orwell and his publisher emphasized, the book is not a prediction but a warning. It is also a satirically hyperbolic compendium of things that had already happened.[33] The story is set in the grubby, shortage-ridden atmosphere of post-war London, whose hardships, rather than producing cross-class solidarity, are being used to whip up nationalist hatred. The novel's protagonist, Winston Smith, with his plebeian surname, also bears the name of Britain's wartime leader, which makes him a distinctly British everyman and a figure of its national destiny, reminding the reader of England's survival of the Nazi onslaught while suggesting that even the most resilient elements in the

English character could be destroyed by a sufficiently powerful enemy. Big Brother is clearly Comrade Stalin, an icon of leader-worship magnified in his ever-vigilant image. Soviet propaganda and torture were the models for "doublethink," the "Thought Police," and the "Ministry of Truth." The Spanish war had taught Orwell all about them, particularly in the way the events on the peninsula had been distorted by participants on every side. Orwell returned to this theme in an unpublished essay on Spain, written at an undetermined later date, where he notes that as recently as 1925 it hadn't seemed possible to imagine the "shifting phantasmagoric world in which black may be white tomorrow and yesterday's weather can be changed by decree."[34] The distortions of "nationalist" thinking and "all-prevailing schizophrenia" were in some ways an even more irresistible form of doublethinking humbug in democratic societies than in communist ones.[35] The disappearance of the past, the erasure of its human reality, as practiced by the Soviets and many others, was one of the things that Orwell found most disturbing about history in general. It frightened him to think of the hundreds of millions of slaves whose names and labors had been erased from ancient history.[36] In *1984*, O'Brien, interrogating Winston Smith in the Ministry of Love, tells him "You will never have existed."[37]

The truth-suppressing abuse of language satirized in *1984* was another trend that Orwell famously observed in the political writing of his own time, one that the regime of Oceania would only take to an extreme. And *1984*'s division of the world into rival superstates run by a managerial elite who keep their citizens under control with unwinnable but never-ending wars was a projection of current trends that Orwell found very plausible as an account of what had been happening over the last fifty years. Clearly, the mad logic exposed in *1984* was only a Swiftian exaggeration and intensification of what Orwell saw already happening across the globe.

The novel's account of superstates is presented in a document called "The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism" (184) given to Winston as a means of entrapment by his torturer, O'Brien, under the pretense that it was written by Emmanuel Goldstein, the novel's version of Leon Trotsky (originally Lev Bronstein). "Goldstein" is nothing but a propaganda vehicle for the regime, the bogeyman face of the subversive opposition just like Snowball in *Animal Farm*. Later in the story, O'Brien reveals that he himself is one of the document's authors, telling Winston that it is accurate as a description of the current world, though the program of resistance it proposes is absurd (261). The coming of superstates frozen in static opposition to each other was actually predicted in a widely discussed book called *The Managerial Revolution* by the American political theorist James Burnham, whose thinking Orwell followed closely through the mid-1940s. In Orwell's account, Burnham highlights the increasing dominance of technocratic managers across the globe, the "business executives, technicians, bureaucrats and soldiers" who constitute a new elite class

shaping the masses to their own ends.[38] "As an interpretation of what is happening," Orwell considered Burnham's theory "extremely plausible, to put it at the lowest," but he was harshly critical of Burnham's general attitude toward politics and entirely skeptical about his predictions. Since Oceania and its mirror-image rivals are a Burnhamite fantasy, Orwell's critique of Burnham is of the greatest interest in understanding *1984*.

Orwell recognizes that Burnham's dystopian vision of the future was by no means novel. He lists Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton, Jack London, Wells, Zamyatin, Huxley, Peter Drucker, and F. A. Voigt as precursors (1054–1055). (He could have added that Burnham's managerial class is the dark and perverted version of Wells's heroically progressive *samurai*.) For Orwell, what sets Burnham apart from these precursors is his attempt to diagnose the "managerial revolution" as an inevitable development on a world scale (1055). Burnham's key error is taking it for granted that the future must be like the past, that fundamental change is not possible, historical revolutions bringing only more of the same. Burnham sees history as nothing but a merry-go-round of regimes replacing one another, aided by empty political slogans like liberty or democracy or even utopia—all "humbug … covering the ambitions of some new class which is elbowing its way into power" (1053).

This is, of course, the very process that Orwell had depicted in *Animal Farm*. But he insists that the fact that things have happened this way does not mean they must keep happening this way in the future. Burnham goes wrong in believing that power is the only driver of history, whereas, as Orwell tells Jonathan Swift in an imaginary interview, human beings are not condemned to repeat the past; "human society, and therefore human nature, is capable of change."[39] Orwell sees Burnham's kind of historical determinism as a tendency to worship the current victors. Burnham is "fascinated with the spectacle of power."[40]

Burnham's Machiavellianism and submission to the power of the victors make him no different from the Left intellectuals Orwell was always mocking except that Burnham is clearer in his view of the present and more serious in following out the implications of his vision. He has "intellectual courage" (1223). But Orwell takes an unmistakable delight in showing how far from the mark were Burnham's predictions of the future, especially regarding Hitler's inevitable victory. Orwell is also astonished that a person of Burnham's gifts can take a morally neutral view of the Nazis. Amoral observers like Burnham do not understand that evil has a self-limiting character, that "the crimes and follies of the Nazi régime" had to lead "by one route or other to disaster" (1072). This makes it impossible to believe that Orwell's ultimate attitude was one of despair.

Along with his ringing refutation of Burnham's historical determinism, Orwell offers an explanation of why Burnham is clinging to an out-of-date conception of society from the early sixteenth century. It can "only be because his own power instinct leads him to brush aside any suggestion that

the Machiavellian world of force, fraud, and tyranny may somehow come to an end" (1070). This makes Burnham's theory an important symptom of the age. It is a variant, "an American variant," of the "power-worship" so pervasive among intellectuals, including the Soviet rulers and the British communists. They themselves all belong to Burnham's "managerial class," the class of intellectuals, scientists, technocrats, and politicians, "middling people who feel themselves cramped by a system that is still partly aristocratic, and are hungry for more power and more prestige" (1071). Such "middling people" are driven to look favorably on the Soviet Union as a place where intellectuals like them are in charge. Thus, Burnham's theory, rather than being a key to the future, is merely a symptom of the ambitions of the intellectual class (1071).

There is a real danger in Orwell's diagnosis, for while it reduces Burnham's theory to a mere rationalization driven by lust for power, the currency of thinkers like Burnham and that of the Machiavellians Orwell sees on the Left, provides evidentce for Burnham's "realist" thesis. Everywhere intellectual elites are taking over and supporting a power philosophy which puts people like them in charge. Given that *1984* not only furnishes a broad exposition of Burnham's theory but a supremely vivid portrayal of the theory in action, Orwell was posing a difficult task for the reader who wants to distinguish Burnham/Goldstein's view from Orwell's own. Shortly after the publication of *1984*, Orwell felt it necessary to issue a statement through his publisher denying that the book was a prediction of the inevitable, though he repeats Burnham's superstate theory while doing so. "Allowing for the book being after all a parody," he writes, "something like NINETEEN-EIGHTY FOUR *could* happen." The statement goes on to specify that the envisioned danger lies in "the acceptance of a totalitarian outlook by intellectuals of all colours" and that this danger is present not among the members of the present Labour government, "nurtured in a Liberal tradition," but in the younger generation among whom "the seeds of totalitarian thought are probably widespread." The key point is "*Don't let it happen. It depends on you.*"[41]

The notion of parody is difficult to apply here. Burnham's thesis itself is not being parodied in *1984*; it is borne out by the state of things as presented in the novel and, though its implementation is carried to absurd extremes, they are the very extremes that Orwell has been witnessing in the politics of his own era. What Orwell seems to be saying with his portray of Oceania is that the power philosophy of totalitarianism, with its erasure of history and truth, and its need for contradictory logic—"schizophrenia" or "doublethink"—may be absurd and akin to madness but, if enough people give in to it, civilization could be destroyed, either forever or for a very long time. The prospect was so frightening to Orwell that he could prefer a future dominated by nuclear war instead of the three-way standoff between superstates pictured in his novel.[42]

It is interesting that, in "The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism," the fictional author does make up for one weakness that Orwell found in its Burnhamite model—the assumption that class division always serves the same purpose.[43] Orwell believes this is obviously not the case. In Machiavelli's day there were only the means to support a small privileged intellectual class without which no progress could be made, but now, with the advent of the machine age, the need for inequality has been removed. In another essay, Orwell explores the paradox further. At the very moment, he observes, when abundance could be available to everyone, without seizing territories or materials or markets, when rationality and freedom could be attainable for all, that is when the worst violence has been unleashed. "The fact is," he says, "that human beings only started fighting one another in earnest when there was no longer anything to fight about.'"[44]

Pure lust for power was Burnham's answer, but that answer leads to a question the American should have asked: why is *this* the moment when the lust for power is becoming absolute.[45] The answer given in Goldstein's imaginary treatise is that the dissemination of prosperity was threatening to destroy "hierarchical society." In a world where the good things of life were widely distributed, "wealth would confer no distinction."[46] The continuous war policy of the regime of Oceania, therefore, is aimed not at victory but at destroying enough resources to justify the chronic poverty and shortages which keep social distinction in play. It does so all the more effectively because "scarcity increases the importance of small privileges and thus magnifies the distinction between one group and another" (191). Oceania, then, is an "anti-utopia" in the strongest sense, a regime designed to keep the utopian goals of equality and general happiness from being achieved.

Based on Goldstein's treatise, it appears that Orwell sees totalitarianism as a reflex of the heroic need for distinction in the face of capitalist-democratic leveling, a development akin to fascism, but curiously enough, that does not turn out to be the final answer to Burnham's neglected question about why the power crisis has emerged at this particular time. Just as Winston gets to the part of Goldstein's treatise containing the "central secret" about the "original motive, the never-questioned instinct that led to the seizure of power and brought *doublethink*, the Thought Police, continuous warfare, and all the other necessary paraphernalia into existence," he quits reading in mid-sentence, distracted by Julia's silence, and never has a chance to resume (217). Later, it will be his torturer, O'Brien, who answers the question for him. Winston thinks he knows what O'Brien will say—"that the Party did not seek power for its own ends, but only for the good of the people." Winston is expecting O'Brien to play the role of the Grand Inquisitor, making the argument that "the choice for mankind lay between freedom and happiness, and that, for the great bulk of mankind, happiness was better" (262). But O'Brien treats that idea with contempt. "The Party," he tells Winston,

> seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness; only power, pure power. What pure power means you will understand presently. (263)

In the end, the essence of Big Brother is neither the need for heroic distinction cited in the Goldstein treatise nor the misguided utopianism of a Grand Inquisitor but this more absolute will to power.

O'Brien insists that this honesty about the desire for power sets the regime of Oceania apart from previous oligarchies, all of which made use of some ideology to justify their position, an ideology in which they themselves at least in part believed. Such "cowards and hypocrites," he says, "never had the courage to recognize their own motives" (263). They pretended their regimes were a way station on the road to utopia. For the Big Brother state, O'Brien explains, there is nothing but power and no further aim than maintaining power. "Power is not a means; it is an end.... The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power" (263). Means and ends have collapsed into identity.

The simplicity of this logic is absolute. O'Brien is at pains to insist that the world he is creating is "the exact opposite of the stupid hedonistic Utopias that the old reformers imagined" (267). It will be "a world of fear and treachery and torment" in which the liberal idol of progress becomes "progress toward more pain." Family will be demolished and sexual love channeled into hate. Even the orgasm will eventually be abolished. O'Brien ends his account with a famous, typically concrete Orwellian metaphor—"If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—forever."[47]

Orwell's vision of totalitarianism is of a pure anti-utopia, its vision of brotherhood as intentionally cruel and hateful as utopia is kind and happy. It is also just as perfectionistic, but in a way that cannot be rational in secular terms. It is driven by something more absolute than status hunger. Not even the most "abject submission" will satisfy it (255). Winston must surrender of his own free will, just as the Christian God would demand. "I shall save you. I shall make you perfect," O'Brien tells him (244). O'Brien "had the air of a doctor, a teacher, even a priest" (245). A heretical Winston is cosmically unacceptable, "a flaw in the pattern" (255). It is "intolerable to us," O'Brien tells him, "that an erroneous thought should exist anywhere in the world, however secret and powerless it may be." Winston can recognize that O'Brien's is mad, that he is speaking with "a lunatic intensity," yet O'Brien's mind "*contained* Winston's mind" with godlike comprehension. It is not, of course, really intellectual power that Winston is responding to but the magnitude of O'Brien's power itself. "We are the priests of power. God is power" (264).

It is something of a puzzle that, among the literary dystopias, Orwell's is perhaps the most religious in form and motivation and also perhaps the

most purely sadistic, even though Orwell himself rejected the lapsarian religious view of human nature and made a creed of human decency. Oceania has, of course, all of the practical, secular aspects of totalitarianism that Orwell obsessively warned about—its destruction of truth and logic to the point of "collective solipsism" (266), its spasmodic alterations of the past, its distortions of language, and so on. But its ultimate model is the Catholic Inquisition. It wants to dominate not just Winston's body but his entire mind and soul. Orwell always considered the Catholic Church to be a major obstacle to a socialist future,[48] and Oceania possesses one of the Church's most frightening qualities—its meritocratic rather than hereditary form, which gives it special longevity.[49] Still more important, though, for explaining Orwell's vision of totalitarian evil, was his view that modern people, who largely believe that human life is finite, lack the motivation for the sacrifices needed to change the world, while it is the religious belief in immortality that offers that motivation. Orwell's fear is that totalitarianism can tap into that trans-individual motivation, leading to a brotherhood not of love but of hate.

It is easy to see Orwell's hostility to Catholicism as a residue of his Protestant and English upbringing, though strengthened, no doubt, by his experience in Spain. Orwell is in so many ways a moralizing Protestant individualist *après la lettre*. On the other hand, the fact that Catholicism provides the ultimate paradigm of totalitarian behavior was troubling to Orwell because he knew that his socialist desire for universal human brotherhood demanded a submerging of the self in something higher that was directly akin to what he saw in Catholicism. Orwell believed he could see the possibility for such merging of the self in the willingness of men to die in battle. "They are aware of some organism greater than themselves, stretching into the future and the past, within which they feel themselves to be immortal."[50] Heroic struggle involves a learning process, a dialectical, almost Platonic ascent in which people gradually rise to the true object of their love. They sacrifice, "facing bullets" for local loyalties, only gradually transferring their loyalty to the human race itself. This is precisely the religion of humanity that Winston pins his last hopes on, and it is described in the very terms used by O'Brien—an overcoming of mortality by the merging of the human cell into the great common organism, only for Orwell that common organism is not the Kingdom of God but "humanity," the Brotherhood of Man, a brotherhood demonstrated most clearly in heroic martial behavior. Orwell sees socialist humanity and totalitarianism as competing for the role of superorganism once occupied by the Catholic Church. In 1940, wartime solidarity was priming his optimism for social progress. In 1945 he was still capable of believing that human brotherhood could be achieved based on an argument he often mocked when applied to communism—that true socialism had never really been tried and that "no serious effort has been made to eliminate the power instinct."[51] It is hard to imagine what form the "elimination" of such an instinct could possibly take; the process has

an "Orwellian" sound which does not suit the author who inspired that adjective. The great organism of humanity would have to be the socialist alternative to Big Brother, and Orwell still hoped for such a brotherhood, though he also saw how easily the collectivist instinct could be perverted into its totalitarian opposite. It is interesting to reflect that Dostoevsky, who though of the Catholic Church as the Antichrist, could find a sympathetic note in the misguided utopianism of the Grand Inquisitor, while Orwell's inquisitor is a figure of pure evil with no pretense to utopian idealism.

Orwell's entire career was an intense struggle with the utopian dilemma. For the most part he recoiled from the religious character of utopian perfection, hoping to moderate socialist goals—from happiness to brotherhood, from perfection to making things better. He sought a place for patriotism that was not based on "nationalism" and "competitive prestige," yet he struggled to imagine a world from which the "power instinct" could be eliminated. His final vision of that instinct was not of mere status competition but of a merging of the individual in a larger, social organism, but he knew that such an organism could be devoted as easily to hatred as to love. He was subject to an irony we have seen before—the irony of viewing the human capacity for sacrifice for the public good as being supremely illustrated not in the brotherly sharing of life's necessities but in the heroic violence of war.

The enduring power of *1984* depends partly on the perennial character of the issues it addresses—the politics of truth and loyalty, the conflict between individual freedom and state control, and the relation of the present to the past. Orwell devised a brilliant satiric vocabulary to illuminate the treachery of modern politics. But the intensity and extremity with which he presents key issues, his vision of insane, absolute evil opposed only by ordinary human frailty, derives in large part from his vision of political motivations as having an ultimately religious character and so playing out on the widest horizon and with the starkest moral contrasts. Orwell aspired to a Religion of Man but feared that utopian perfectionism could lead to religious absolutism and sadism. This was why, it will be remembered, he preferred Zamyatin's *We* to *Brave New World,*for its "intuitive grasp of the irrational side of totalitarianism—human sacrifice, cruelty as an end in itself, the worship of a leader who is credited with divine attributes"; in *Brave New World*, by contrast, Orwell found

> no power-hunger, no sadism, no hardness of any kind. Those at the top have no strong motive for staying at the top, and though everyone is happy in a vacuous way, life has become so pointless that it is difficult to believe that such a society could endure.[52]

What Orwell said of Jack London might be true of him—that while he was devoted to social justice, he had enough in him of the fascist's "delight in struggle" and even "fascination with cruelty" to understand the forces of oppression.[53]

In his review of *Mein Kampf*, Orwell made a point of putting it "on record" that, though he would have killed Hitler if he had the chance, he was unable to hate the evil creature he saw in the newsreels because there was "something deeply appealing" about his mad but heroic persona. Intuitively, Orwell could understand the fascination Hitler exercised upon his people. "He is the martyr, the victim, Prometheus chained to the rock, the self-sacrificing hero who fights single-handed against impossible odds."[54] By contrast, Orwell confessed to an "aesthetic distaste"[55] for Gandhi, even though Orwell had long favored Gandhi's goal of Indian independence, admired his political achievements, and, when reviewing the man's life, could find nothing in it but fearless honesty, physical courage, and freedom from prejudice. Orwell concedes that no one can fail to admire Gandhi; he "enriched the world simply by being alive" (355). Nevertheless, whether or not he was a "lovable man" remained for Orwell an open question, and it was Gandhi's saintly and unwavering perfectionism which struck Orwell as uncongenial. He begins his "Reflections on Gandhi" with the principle that "Saints should always be judged guilty until they are proved innocent" (352), and even though Gandhi largely survives this strict scrutiny, it is that unshakable innocence which, in a sense, makes him hard for Orwell to love. Gandhi's conviction that to break a dietary rule would be worse than death was "perhaps a noble one," Orwell says, but it is also "inhuman" (357). More often than not, utopian perfection has for Orwell this quality of inhumanity, while he inclines toward tragic heroism and imperfect love. "The essence of being human," he continues, still with Gandhi in mind,

> is that one does not seek perfection, that one *is* sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one's love upon other human individuals.

I am not, of course, in any way implying that Orwell preferred Hitler to Gandhi. Indeed, I believe that Orwell was the kind of person who *would* have killed Hitler if he had the chance; he certainly made every attempt to get personally involved in World War II.[56] What I am saying is that Orwell could not hate Hitler as viscerally as he thought he *should*, while he had to overcome his visceral inclinations to do justice to Gandhi's virtues. Clearly the reason for this is that Hitler has the persona of the embattled hero, however mad, and Gandhi the persona of the saint, and Orwell has an affinity for the persona of the hero, no matter how much he opposes the irrational and inhumane demands of the heroic imperative, while the perfectionism of the saint strikes him as an alien breach of human solidarity.

Orwell's longtime willingness to expose the hypocrisies and inconsistencies of the Left, his attempt to play the role of the Left's "loyal opposition," as one critic puts it,[57] did not endear him to Marxist intellectuals, and *1984* was the last straw. Trotsky's biographer Isaac Deutscher complained that it was a book of "fear-ridden and restricted imagination," largely borrowed from Zamyatin's *We*, and that it was serving as an "ideological superweapon in the cold war."[58] Its "mysticism of cruelty" was a symptom of Orwell's defeatism, probably due to the spectacle of the Moscow show trials of the late 1930s. *1984*, Deutscher asserts, "is a document of dark disillusionment not only with Stalinism but with every form and shade of socialism. It is a cry from the abyss of despair" (126–27). Critics as generous in spirit as Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and E. P. Thompson took a similarly grudging and diagnostic approach,[59] instigating a major trend in the writing about Orwell[60] and overlooking the fact that Orwell's perennial faith in ordinary people remains present in *1984*, particularly in the humanity of the "proles" who, unlike their counterparts in the Soviet Union, have not been targeted for discipline by the regime. As Gregory Claeys points out, if we read the novel in the wide context of Orwell's writings, his choice to locate *1984* in Britain seems a deliberate attempt to leave room for the hope that Orwell found in ordinary English decency.[61] There is also a hint of optimism in the fact that both O'Brien and the order he represents are clearly mad and ultimately detached from reality. Instead of despair, it was embattlement and the heroic spirit of opposition that animated Orwell's entire career. If he feared hopeful delusions more than the animosity of his socialist allies, it was because he came to the need for revolution from the other side of the utopian dilemma.

Notes

1 "The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius," in George Orwell, *Essays*, ed. John Carey (New York: Everyman Library, 2002), 303. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Orwell's essays, reviews, introductions, and "As I Please" columns are from this selection from *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998).
2 "No, Not One," in Orwell, *Essays*, 386.
3 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (New York: Harcourt, 1958), 121–24.
4 Review of *Britain and Her Birthrate* by Mass Observation (September 6, 1945), in *I Belong to the Left,* 1945, vol. 17 of *Complete Works*, 280–82.
5 Orwell, *Road to Wigan Pier*, 182.
6 "Wells, Hitler, and the World State," in *All Art Is Propaganda*, compiled by George Packer (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2008), 150.
7 Review of *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler, in Orwell, *Essays,* 251.
8 "Can Socialists be Happy?" in *All Art Is Propaganda,* 203.
9 "The Art of Donald McGill," in Orwell, *Essays*, 383.
10 Review of *An Unknown Land* by Viscount Samuel, in *Complete Works*, vol. 14, *Keeping Our Little Corner Clean 1942-1943*, 254.
11 George Orwell, "Can Socialists be Happy?" in *All Art Is Propaganda*, 204. For reasons that remain unexplained, perhaps having to do with the journal's

accounting practices, this essay was published in *Tribune* under a different Orwell pseudonym, John Freeman. See *Complete Works*, vol. 16, "*I have tried to tell the truth*," *1943-1944*, 37–38.

12 George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (New York: Signet Classics, 1946), 22.
13 "As I Please" no. 4, in Orwell, *Essays,* 501.
14 "As I Please" no. 12, in Orwell, *Essays,* 546.
15 "Can Socialists be Happy?", in *All Art is Propaganda*, 209.
16 "What Is Socialism?", in Orwell, *Essays*, 1005.
17 "Notes on the Way," in Orwell, *Essays*, 256.
18 "Arthur Koestler," in Orwell, *Essays*, 748.
19 "Wells, Hitler, and the World State," in *All Art Is Propaganda*, 150.
20 George Orwell, *England Your England and Other Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1953), 41.
21 The term was popularized in 1972 by the sociologist Irving Janis as applied to distortions in group decision-making. See *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1972).
22 "Notes on Nationalism," in Orwell, *England Your England*, 41–42.
23 William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, third ed. (New York: Norton, 2018), 583.
24 Orwell, *Essays*, 287.
25 "Notes on Nationalism," in Orwell, *England Your England*, 67.
26 "No, Not One," in Orwell, *Essays*, 387.
27 "As I Please," no. 36, in Orwell, *Essays*, 702.
28 "The Lion and the Unicorn," in Orwell, *Essays*, 316.
29 Cyril Connolly, *The Evening Colonnade* (London: David Bruce & Watson, 1973), 383, quoted in Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life,* revised ed. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1981), 393.
30 "Money and Guns," in Orwell, *Essays*, 395–96.
31 "As I Please," no. 10, in Orwell, *Essays*, 535–36.
32 Crick, *George Orwell*, 552–59.
33 William R. Steinhoff, *The Road to 1984* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), chapters 10–13.
34 "Looking Back on the Spanish War," in Orwell, *Essays*, 442.
35 "In Front of Your Nose," in Orwell, *Essays*, 1043.
36 "Looking Back on the Spanish War," in Orwell, *Essays*, 443.
37 George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Signet Classics, 1950), 254.
38 "James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution," in Orwell, *Essays*, 1052.
39 "Imaginary Interview: Jonathan Swift and George Orwell," in Orwell, *Essays*, 458.
40 "James Burnham," in Orwell, *Essays*, 1054.
41 *Complete Works,* vol. 20, *Our Job Is to Make Life Worth Living*, 1949–1950, 134–35.
42 "Toward European Unity," in Orwell, *Essays*, 1246.
43 "James Burnham," in Orwell, *Essays*, 1070.
44 "As I Please," no. 63, in Orwell, *Essays*, 1137.
45 "Burnham," in Orwell, *Essays*, 1070.
46 Orwell, *1984*, 189–90.
47 Orwell's picture of power for its own sake as the motive of totalitarian government has been a point of controversy. In the 1950s most critics found the idea of a ruling class without belief in a justificatory ideology improbable. Irving Howe, for example, writing in the late 1950s, shared the common view, but by 1977 he could find the notion of ideology as pure fiction more plausible given that the Marxist basis of Soviet power now seemed moribund, with its gerontocratic elite

merely hanging on. It became evident, though, with the emergence of Gorbachev, that enough of the Soviet ruling class believed in communism's original ideals to try to implement them. See Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1957), 248, and Irving Howe, ed., *1984 Revisited: Totalitarianism in Our Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 13.

48 "Toward European Unity," in Orwell, *Essays*, 1246.
49 Review of *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* by T. S. Eliot, in Orwell, *Essays*, 1344.
50 "Notes on the Way," in Orwell, *Essays*, 258.
51 "Catastrophic Gradualism," in Orwell, *Essays*, 926.
52 Orwell, "Freedom and Happiness," Review of Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We,* in *Smothered Under Journalism, 1946*, vol. 18 of *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), 13–17.
53 Introduction to *Love of Life and Other Stories* by Jack London, in Orwell, *Essays*, 916.
54 Review of *Mein Kampf*, by Adolf Hitler, in Orwell, *Essays*, 250–51.
55 "Reflections on Gandhi," in *All Art Is Propaganda*, 361.
56 Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*, 381–83.
57 Alex Zwerdling, *Orwell and the Left* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 5.
58 Isaac Deutscher, "*1984*—The Mysticism of Cruelty," in *George Orwell: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Raymond Williams (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 119.
59 Their remarks are gathered in the collection by Williams cited above.
60 Claeys surveys the reception history in *Dystopia: A Natural History: A Study of Modern Despotism, Its Antecedents, and Its Literary Diffractions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 431–36.
61 Claeys, *Dystopia*, 436. Chapter 7 of *Dystopia* is an excellent point of entry to the literature on Orwell.

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17 B. F. Skinner's World Without Heroes

While George Orwell was looking toward a nightmare future in *1984*, the American psychologist B. F. Skinner was writing *Walden Two*, a late expression of American optimism and faith in progress.[1] *Walden Two* is less a throwback to Thoreau's solitary retreat than to the Utopian Socialist schemes of the mid-nineteenth century. Its story begins when a college professor named Burris, specializing in an unnamed subject, is visited by a former student just returned from the war and looking for a new, experimental kind of life. Burris undertakes to join him in visiting Walden Two, a thousand-member utopian community designed along behaviorist lines by T. E. Frazier, a "queer duck" Burris had known in graduate school. The chief tension of the story arises from the probing of the utopian dilemma itself in extended dialogues between Frazier, as designer-genius of the Walden Two community, and Burris's friend Professor Augustine Castle, an archetypal figure of "the Philosopher," possibly a Thomist (9). These are the good and bad angels of Skinner's morality play. As Frazier provides detailed explanations of how the Walden Two community's total environment has been designed to control the behavior of its inhabitants using positive reinforcement from cradle to grave, he makes the case that the happiness of his utopia is well worth the sacrifice of such besetting human illusions as freedom, autonomy, heroism, dignity, and democracy, while Castle fends off the tempter by defending all of these values. Burris is torn by the struggle. In the middle of his conversion he wants "desperately" to find "something wrong" with Walden Two (203). By the end of the novel, though, he has decided that Castle is not only close-minded and doctrinaire but a "tortured soul" caught in self-deception to a degree that "would not have been out of place in the clinical picture of a psychotic" (268). Frazier, on the other hand, in spite of his messianic tendencies, has found the key to happiness. Burris resigns his professorship and joins Walden Two.

It would be hard to imagine a thinker farther from Plato than B. F. Skinner given that Plato aims throughout his work to gain access to the full powers of the mind by making contact with ultimate reality in the realm of ideas, while Skinner aims throughout his work to eliminate the mind and its ideas from science in order to make contact with ultimate

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reality in the realm of human behavior. Such entities as "self," what Plato would call "soul" or "psyche," are for Skinner merely "a repertoire of behavior appropriate to a given set of contingencies," the contingencies being reinforcements provided by the environment.[2] The interior self—for Plato and most previous philosophers the subject of consciousness—is for Skinner a mere homunculus, a false center of agency. When science unmasks this puppet, it "does not dehumanize man, it dehomunculizes him" (200). It unmasks a fiction. We should expect, then, that Skinner's ideal social order would be radically different from Plato's, but in fact, in important respects, it is a fair copy of Plato's original. Both regimes apply conditioning to their citizens, Kallipolis using music and gymnastics to mold the temperaments of citizens, Walden Two using "operant conditioning." Both regimes have a eugenic scheme and a legislator—a philosopher-king or operant scientist working behind the scenes to coordinate the goals of individual and group psychology. Most significantly, in both cases the legislator's primary aim is to remove the family and the heroic individual from existence so that all human action can be dictated by the good of the social whole. The likeness between these two unlike thinkers is due to the fact that they face common obstacles—the human penchants for admiration and family attachment, what Plato attributes to the spirited and desiring parts of the soul.

What we see in *Walden Two*, then, is Frazier's imaginary attempt to model Skinner's anti-Platonic Kallipolis on a miniature scale. A key strategy in his fight against the vanities of the homunculus is to start education—which is to say "behavioral engineering"—early. In this respect Frazier is imitating society's traditional plan in its "pitched battle" with the individual. "Society attacks early," he observes, "while the individual is helpless. It enslaves him almost before he has tasted freedom."[3] In Walden Two, a child's ethical training is already complete by the age of six! Infants are raised together in a comfortable, carefully controlled environment (91). They have no reason for "the petty emotions" like jealousy and anger, and they are taught to control themselves in the presence of such temptations (102). They are given a "technique" accidentally discovered by Jesus—"Love your enemies"—in other words, "practice the opposite emotion" (96). Responding with love frees one from the pain of anger, frustration, and resentment, leading to the "heaven *on earth*" Jesus promised, "better known," Frazier says, "as peace of mind" (97).[4] Punishment is unknown in Walden Two, but artificial situations are arranged to "build in a tolerance for painful or distasteful stimuli, or frustration, or to situations which arouse fear, anger or rage" (97). In one scenario, hungry children must endure a five-minute delay before eating their soup; to help them master envy, some are chosen by lot to eat before others (100). Reinforcement schedules have been worked out experimentally to create a "system of gradually increasing annoyances and frustrations against a background of complete serenity" (101), allowing each child to "develop the greatest possible self-control" (105).

Taking charge of the raising of children, the community largely replaces the family (128). Parent–child bonding is weakened, and, in classic utopian fashion, the community itself becomes a revised version of the family (137), with community love replacing mother love (90). Problems of the Freudian family romance are thus avoided in Huxleyan fashion (134); in addition, parents are taught that it is in "bad taste" to provide special favors for their own children or to encourage them in invidious comparisons with those of inferior talent (132). Feelings of superiority and contempt are carefully suppressed; at Walden Two, one triumphs only over oneself (103). Added benefits are that people feel no stigma for being childless and all of them have an outlet for their parental emotions (132), while women are freed from the "slavery" of their traditional roles (135). The unfit are discouraged from breeding, and Frazier looks forward to the day when artificial insemination will allow the whole idea of hereditary relations between people to be forgotten, making experimental breeding possible (126). The details of the eugenic scheme remain unspecified but, according to Frazier, "Our people will marry as they wish, but have children according to a genetic plan" (133). Finally, as in *Looking Backward*, the removal of economic and family motives from sexual relations in Walden Two purifies those relations, so "you get to keep the affections you deserve" (137).

Many of Walden Two's features do not depend on its behaviorist principles. Some are based on simple efficiency of design and the coordination made possible by the relatively modest scale of the community. Some Walden policies are standards of Utopian Socialism like the universality of work and the elimination of unnecessary institutions and practices such as banks, insurance companies, and advertising. Walden's residents have no need for drugs or "cocktails to counter the fatigue and boredom of a mismanaged society" (55). Labor is distributed using Bellamy's system of credits, with the onerousness of the tasks offset by the shortening of the hours (45–46). The key to the community's happiness is the avoidance of "uncreative and uninteresting work." A good life requires minimum unpleasant labor without imposing on others, and since there is no compulsion involved in labor at Walden, it claims success in the achievement of one of William Morris's dreams; as in *News from Nowhere,* Walden Two's residents actually "*want* to work" (147). But they do not want to work very much, only four hours a day (52). The "Good Life" means "rest and relaxation" as well as "sports, hobbies, arts and crafts, and most important of all, the expression of that interest in the world which is *science* in the deepest sense" (148). The "Social Manager" uses "many ingenious devices" to help people find "congenial spirits" so that they can mix together, without "attitudes of domination and criticism," in a spirit of "general tolerance and affection."

Given this vision of things, it almost goes without saying that Walden Two is a "world without heroes," those creatures of the chaos generated by inadequate systems of government (220–21). The strength that belongs to heroes has been transferred to society itself. "A society without heroes,"

which is to say, without distinction, "has an almost fabulous strength" (222). Even people who have earned minor titles like "doctor" in the external world cannot use them in Walden Two (49). There is no leisure class; all share equally even in the menial tasks (50). With no differences in wealth, motives like fame and fortune disappear; there is no spirit of competition or even special approbation (156). Competitive sports and team games are forbidden. Personal credit and recognition are frowned upon, even gratitude between residents being discouraged, and the "personal contributions" of individuals are concealed; there is only a "generalized gratitude" toward the community (157). The Walden Code goes so far as to forbid expressions of thanks (158). "Here," Frazier explains,

> there's no reason to feel that anyone is necessary to anyone else. Each of us is necessary in the same amount, which is very little. The community would go on just as smoothly tomorrow if any one of us died tonight. We cannot get much satisfaction out of feeling important. (136)

This being the case, condolences, even from doctor to patient, are considered inappropriate, illness being treated simply as an "objective fact" (160). The tragic mortality of the hero is no more at home in Walden Two than among the Houyhnhnms or their Stoic models. But if there is no praise or sympathy in Walden Two, and no thanks to be earned, neither, by a logical correlate, is there blame or punishment to be feared. This world is not only without heroes but also without villains. People who turn out to be bad at their jobs are simply moved along to another one (159).

The key principle of Walden Two is that people feel happy and free because they have been raised in an environment designed to shape their behavior entirely through positive reinforcement, whereas the governments and religions of the world have all relied upon negative reinforcement. That, according to Frazier, produces only pain and a sense of injustice. The discovery of positive-only reinforcement constitutes a "critical stage in the evolution of society" (244). Once you have grasped this principle, "you can enjoy a sense of unlimited power," Frazier says. "It's enough to satisfy the thirstiest tyrant" (248). When Castle responds to this note of despotism by calling for the restraints provided by democracy, Frazier denounces democracy as a "pious fraud." Ordinary people have no expertise for governing; they can only exercise the tyranny of the majority, whereas Walden Two's Planners know the will of the people by scientific means. For these reasons, Walden Two's people want nothing to do with government (253).

While members of the community can discuss the Walden Code with the Planners if they wish, they are forbidden to discuss it among themselves (150). To prevent any sense of personal responsibility from developing, members are kept ignorant of the "managerial machinery" of the community (220) and

are discouraged from learning the history of how it began. "The founding of Walden Two is never recalled publicly by anyone who took part in it. No distinction of seniority is recognized" and "all personal contributions are either suppressed altogether or made anonymous" (221). The study of history in general is discouraged, being a mere pastime (106), and Frazier, though he pronounces about historical events all the time, regards them as "too complex to be adequately *known* by anyone" (224). History teaches only lessons to be unlearned. Conventional history is written about heroes by heroes and so is full of bad ideas. "Race, family, ancestor worship—these are the handmaidens of history." What the young people of Walden Two need is not an understanding of the past but "a grasp of the current forces which a culture must deal with. None of your myths, none of your heroes—no history, no destiny—simply the *Now*! … It's the only thing we can deal with, anyway, in a scientific way" (225). Skinner is immune to Orwellian fears about the erasure of the past.

Frazier's, and Skinner's, contempt for history is obviously a parallel to Plato's complaints against epic poetry, with its dependence upon heroic psychology and myth. But Frazier is not hostile to poetry or imaginative literature per se. Indeed, Walden Two provides patronage and culture and all the "right conditions" for art—"Leisure. Opportunity. Appreciation" (84). The very limitations of its regime (which are not specified) will prevent it from making life so peaceful and routine that there will be nothing to write about. "'We shall never produce so satisfying a world', he says, 'that there will be no place for art'" (116). Indeed, the prospects both for art and for science in a civilization modeled on Walden Two bring Frazier to perhaps his loftiest flight of utopian enthusiasm.

> What we ask is that a man's work shall not tax his strength or threaten his happiness. Our energies can then be turned toward art, science, play, the exercise of skills, the satisfaction of curiosities, the conquest of nature…, the conquest of man himself, but never of other men. We have created leisure without slavery, a society which neither sponges nor makes war. But we can't stop there. We must live up to our responsibility. Can we build another Golden Age? (69)

At this point Burris notes that "Frazier shook himself, as if the subject were physically painful." The pain is undoubtedly connected with the "we" responsible for the Golden Age, for that "we" is Frazier himself. The collective project he has set in motion—a kinetic utopia of the Wellsian sort, endlessly in the process of experimental reinvention—is his personal creation. This is precisely the point at which Castle's attacks find him most vulnerable. Castle is undoubtedly extreme in labeling Walden Two a "sadistic tyranny" (99) and Frazier an advocate of the "Führer principle" (172), but it is certainly true that the founder of Walden Two violates its anti-heroic rule whenever

he opens his mouth. When Castle complains about the entire experiment of Walden Two lacking an experimental control (163), Frazier relies upon his own personal, unscientific intuition to declare that the happiness and equanimity of the people in his community are "*obviously* related" to the self-control he has inculcated in them with his methods, a statement which Burris considers an "emotional rejection of academic rigor" (164). Frazier makes no effort to conceal either his hubris or his enthusiasm in anticipating future developments like "the design of personalities" and "the control of temperaments. Give me the specifications," he declares, "and I'll give you the man!" (274). Though he denies being a genius (270), Frazier considers Walden Two to be "the crowning achievement in the history of the human intellect to date.... The splitting of the atom pales into insignificance beside it" (271). Most disturbing to Burris—and to many of Skinner's readers—is Frazier's admission that he likes to "play God" (281); his "God complex," as Burris calls it, even leads him to pose, at one point, as Christ crucified (278). "I look upon my work," he declares, "and, behold, it is good." Getting ever further carried away at the end of the same conversation, Frazier makes a "sweeping gesture that embraced all of Walden Two." "These are my children, Burris," he says "almost in a whisper. 'I love them'." But then, "embarrassed and rather confused" by this display of megalomaniac sentimentality, he returns to the behaviorist frame of mind to ask "What is love ... except another name for positive reinforcement?" Frazier veers between heroic grandiosity and the utopian-scientific deflation of the ego.

Burris would seem to be in a difficult position, choosing between Castle, a rigid traditionalist with what Burris considers to be a psychotic level of self-deception, and Frazier, an engineer of souls with a self-confessed God complex, but at the end of the novel he casts in his lot with Frazier, experiencing a surge of joy and relief, and sending a kiss-off telegraph to the president of the university where he has spent his career. He portrays his decision as a kind of conversion and his trip back to the community as a "pilgrimage," confirming Castle's view that the spirit of Walden Two is rather like a religion. Burris also sees his choice as a declaration of independence. "This was what I had really wanted. I was on my own at last, and ahead of me lay a future of my own making." It is a strange note from a man who will be putting his future making solely in the hands of others.

Three considerations lead Burris to side with Frazier rather than Castle. The first is that the people of Walden Two do seem to be genuinely happy, while the rest of the world is heading toward disaster. The experiment is a success, and Frazier presents it as a blueprint for a new and entirely peaceful scientific world, a world without selfishness or strife or tedium, without war or politics or force of any kind. For the reader, of course, this is entirely imaginary evidence, but it goes along with Frazier's and Skinner's insistence that the science exists. All we have to do is use it.

A second consideration for Burris is Frazier's argument against the alternative to Walden Two. If environment determines behavior, then the key question is who controls the environment. Refusing to control other people's behavior, Frazier tells Castle, would only mean leaving things in the hands of the petty despots who control it now—"The charlatan, the demagogue, the salesman, the ward heeler, the bully, the cheat, the educator, the priest—all who are now in possession of the techniques of behavioral engineering" (240). This makes taking control look not only desirable but necessary. Frazier admits that this argument depends upon the truth of his main philosophical premise, that human beings are not free and are completely molded by their environment; without the denial of freedom, his program would be "absurd" (242). But he is willing to stand by that premise. In fact, the whole issue of freedom is ultimately meaningless for him. "Dictatorship and freedom—predestination and free will," he asks, "what are these but pseudo-questions of linguistic origin?" (279). With behavior dictated by positive reinforcement, people are doing what they want to do, so the question of freedom does not even arise (246), making Walden Two "the freest place on earth" (247). Redefining despotism rhetorically in a way that recalls communist reframings of freedom as freedom *from* rather than freedom *to*, Frazier rejects the forces now ruling the world of the present, the "despotisms" of ignorance, neglect, irresponsibility, accident, and democracy (252).[5]

It is disconcerting that the charlatans and demagogues of the world have the very understanding of behavioral engineering which the educators of the world lack, but it seems that behaviorism is not only the newest and rarest but also the oldest and most common instrument of control. Propaganda, on the other hand, seems to play no role in Frazier's thinking, probably because it involves an appeal to reason, whereas Walden Two, he says, must be "naturally satisfying" (195). While Walden Two is devoted to the experimental search for truth, it depends for its happiness on subrational controls. The fact that its designer is also clearly driven by subrational motives, then, is particularly troubling and constitutes Burris's third matter of concern as he investigates Walden Two. Frazier handles it in two ways. First, he surprises Burris with a display of self-awareness. He acknowledges appearing "conceited, aggressive, tactless, selfish," insensitive to the way he effects other people, lacking personal warmth and strength, driven by "warped" emotions and "ulterior and devious" motives. "In a word," Frazier sums up, "of all the people you've seen in the past four days, you're sure that I'm *one*, at least, who couldn't possibly be a genuine member of any community" (233). Frazier also admits that he began his researches with a "frenzied, selfish desire to dominate" until science taught him to submit to the evidence (271), an echo of Bacon's maxim that "Nature to be commanded must be obeyed."[6] But the key point of Frazier's self-defense is that, though he may be the first cause or "*primum mobile*," as he says, of Walden Two, he is not one of its creatures. *"I'm—not—a—product—of—Walden—Two!"* (233).

Indeed, the entire aim of Walden Two is to prevent the development of genius-heroes like Frazier and to eliminate the need for them. The fact that Frazier is not like the people whose temperaments he has molded is only to be expected. "Must the doctor share the health of his patients?," he asks. "Must the ichthyologist swim like a fish?" (234). Further, Frazier finds it unthinkable that a "dominant figure" like himself could emerge inside his creation since "no one in Walden Two ever acts for the benefit of anyone else except as the agent of the community. Personal favoritism, like personal gratitude, has been destroyed by our cultural engineers" (220). Being part of a non-competitive culture, the Planners have no reason to amass power, which would only weaken the community (255). And since control in Walden Two depends upon making people happy, a despot's power-grabbing strategy could only be to provide even more satisfaction, "a curious sort of despotism" (256). The suppression of heroism and despotism at Walden Two, therefore, depends upon Frazier's basic assumption that human beings are utterly malleable and that individual self-seeking can be conditioned out of them, making them too rationally concerned with the survival of the community to endanger the common good. One is left wondering, however, with all sense of responsibility removed and even personal attachment and gratitude out of bounds, what rewards will be left in *Walden Two*'s environment.

Skinner produced *Walden Two* in a "white heat," he reported, banging it out on a typewriter in a manner completely contrary to his usual practice of handwritten drafts with multiple revisions.[7] Creating the egotist Frazier was a form of self-examination. "I suppose that both Burris and Frazier are parts of me," he later acknowledged. "Writing *Walden Two* was a sort of self-therapy in which the Burris side struggled to accept the Frazier side" (152). In other words, *Walden Two* was Skinner's attempt to come to terms with the heroic dimensions of his own project and the problem of how to square them with its anti-heroic and anti-humanistic implications. The book had little impact when it first appeared at the beginning of the Cold War, but by the 1960s it was beginning to attract attention, and by the early seventies it was selling a hundred thousand copies a year (162). Three dozen Walden Two communities sprung up based on Skinner's ideas.[8] Skinner actually considered setting up a utopian community of his own and began reading about monastic regimes, but finally decided against the idea in favor of other projects.[9] When his behaviorist polemic *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* appeared in 1971, Skinner became a media celebrity, appearing on the cover of *Time* magazine, and his utopian scheme got renewed attention, though none of the Skinner utopias panned out for long. They tended to find the descriptions of scientific management and conditioning in Skinner's novel woefully inadequate to solve the problems of communal life.[10]

Beyond Freedom and Dignity, coming twenty-three years after *Walden Two*, doubles down on Skinner's project to shift responsibility and achievement to the environment and to abolish "autonomous man," the

homunculus created by liberal individualism (25). In it, Skinner surveys the "literature of freedom," with its attempts to avoid "aversive stimuli," and while he finds some value in its opposition to tyrants and priests, he indicts it for failing to recognize that all it is doing is replacing the tyrants of the world with an alternative source of control (181). Freedom remains an illusion.

As for the "literature of dignity," there Skinner finds no redeeming element. It inspires resentment toward explanations based on positive reinforcement because such explanations deprive the agent of credit. We admire people's behavior less, Skinner explains, as we understand it more, so the causal explanations offered by behaviorism are a direct threat to human dignity and the sense of worth (53). It is not just heroic dignity that is under attack but any dignity attaching to human action. The longing for such dignity, the belief in freedom that underlies it, and the resentment of external control, all these manifestations of resistance to science are symptoms not of such mythic inner states as "wounded vanity and nostalgia" but of the loss of accustomed reinforcements (212).

Beyond Freedom and Dignity brought Skinner fame but the reaction of intellectuals was very much the one he tried to forestall by putting it in the mouth of the philosopher Castle in *Walden Two*. A galaxy of distinguished critics—Noam Chomsky, Karl Popper, Carl Rogers, Joseph Wood Krutch, Arthur Koestler—denounced Skinner as an enemy of freedom whose pretenses to behavioral engineering, applied to human beings, were scientifically vacuous and viciously reductive. Chomsky ranks Skinner among the "behavioral scientists who can't tell a pigeon from a poet."[11] Skinner's reputation among academics in general has not recovered from this barrage, yet there is one respect in which it does him credit. Skinner did not flinch from the implications of his ideas, however troubling they might be. He made it clear that to follow them out consistently would require the abandonment of cherished notions like freedom, dignity, responsibility, and gratitude. Only thus would he be able to achieve "a special behavioral science which can take the place of wisdom and common sense."[12] Skinner's heroic identity as a utopian revolutionary demanded that he insist on such a complete reversal of common thinking. He presents, therefore, as bold and complete a rejection of the heroic spirit as any utopian thinker. Yet this leaves him struggling to account for his own heroically determining place within the future social order as he imagines it. "A utopia is a total social environment" (154), he states, a description that would fit any society as he conceives it. But who has designed that environment and whence comes that person's freedom? Whence comes that person's privilege to control? In Walden Two, Frazier is the exception to every rule, and his place as prime mover remains hidden. He does not resort to Plato's "noble lie" regarding the origins of his community, but he does aspire to the covert agency of Rousseau's lawgiver. He is thus at once the hidden solution to all of society's problems and the most obvious and

flagrant example of those very problems, making him the very epitome of the utopian dilemma.

Notes

1 It is telling that no dystopian novel of the first rank has been written by an American, though *The Iron Heel* by Jack London is a memorable attempt, *Brave New World* was inspired in good part by Huxley's experience of California, and *The Handmaid's Tale*, by the Canadian Margaret Atwood, is set in the United States.
2 B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: Knopf, 1971), 199.
3 B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two* (Indianapolis: New York: Hackett, 1976), 95.
4 This principle, focusing on the emotion instead of the behavior, seems heterodox for a behaviorist.
5 As Krishnan Kumar points out, Skinner considers liberal individualism and its conception of personal responsibility as "giving philosophic underpinning and respectability to the otherwise barbarous idea of punishment." *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 358.
6 *The New Organon*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding (Boston: Taggard & Thompson, 1863), vol. 8, 68.
7 Daniel W. Bjork, *B. F. Skinner: A Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 147.
8 Hilke Kuhlmann, *Living* Walden Two*: B. F. Skinner's Behaviorist Utopia and Experimental Communities* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), x.
9 B. F. Skinner, *A Matter of Consequences: Part Three of an Autobiography* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 252–55.
10 The story is told in Kuhlmann's *Living* Walden Two cited above.
11 Noam Chomsky, "Psychology and Ideology." *Cognition* 1, no. 1 (1972): 42.
12 "Walden Two Revisited," in Skinner, *Walden Two*, viii.

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18 Anthony Burgess and the Revenge of the Dandy

B. F. Skinner's commitment to the utopian position is heroically decisive. He will exact the full costs of his scientific regime, even if those costs include cherished illusions like freedom and dignity. Anthony Burgess recognized *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, when it appeared in 1971, as epitomizing everything he opposed. "Skinner's title appalls in itself," he wrote. "Beyond truth, beyond beauty, beyond goodness, beyond God, beyond life."[1] Burgess finds himself identifying with John the Savage in *Brave New World* when he protests to Mustafa Mond that "I don't want comfort. I want God. I want poetry. I want real danger. I want freedom. I want goodness. I want sin."[2] Like the Savage, Burgess accepts the fact that he is claiming the right to be unhappy, and in making this protest against Skinner, Burgess matches his opponent in the extremity of his commitment. While defending the value of the freedom and dignity which Skinner would sacrifice, Burgess concedes the extent of the cost—there will be no possibility of excluding human evil by any other than traditional means like charity and reason, means which, he knows, have given poor results. In *A Clockwork Orange,* Burgess drives home his message that the best parts of human nature—even the capacities for art and creativity—are inextricable from the worst—vanity, cruelty, sensuality, and violence. With the creation of Alex, his boy-monster hero, Burgess provides a striking example of the evil that comes with human freedom and the need for dignity. Skinner and Burgess each sharpen one horn of the utopian dilemma. Neither of them shows the ambivalence of Huxley or Orwell. But it is also notable that, in taking these decisive positions, both Skinner and Burgess feel a need for self-reflection sufficient to make them include a version of themselves in the story.

Even more than his literary hero James Joyce, Burgess was a lapsed Catholic for whom the childhood experience of religion provided a lifelong structure for seeing the world even in the absence of belief. Describing himself as a "Hebreo-Helleno-Christian-humanist" (97), Burgess believes that "the ethics of the Gospels can be given a secular application" (98). His views of politics and human nature very much depend upon a pessimistic Augustinian psychology which, repeatedly in his novels, he opposes to the Pelagian heresy, the belief that human beings are perfectible and that evil is

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something external rather than intrinsic to human nature. Burgess sees the history of political speculation as a conflict between the Pelagian desire to take control of people from outside and make them perfect, which he takes to be the essence of liberalism and its socialist and communist offshoots, and the conservative, Augustinian view, which sees the freedom to choose between good and evil as essential to human nature. From the Augustinian perspective, which is Burgess's own, what the Pelagian reformer advocates is the destruction of our humanity.[3] It is a little disorienting to see Augustine being set up as a stronger defender of free will than Pelagius when the main thrust of Augustine's complaint against Pelagius was that the heretic monk was making the scope of human freedom too wide and independent of God's grace. Burgess's concern, however, is that Pelagius, by presenting human nature as more malleable than it really is, has opened the opportunity for a more radical, denaturing reform on the part of the state—always for Burgess an object of mistrust and, indeed, even hatred. *A Clockwork Orange* can well be described the way Burgess describes *1984*, as "an allegory of the eternal conflict between any individual and any collective" (83).[4]

Burgess, then, is a defender of the individual's freedom and dignity even while fully admitting the charge that unhappiness is brought about by their abuse. That charge comes in the form of Alex, the fifteen-year-old gang leader of *A Clockwork Orange*, a representative of the younger generation whose violence had become an intense media preoccupation in the late 1950s and early '60s. Alex epitomizes everything that the utopian critique would censure in the heroic character. He is murderous, sensual, selfish, and cruel, and he revels in these qualities with youthful abandon. He is a Teddy-boy version of the dandy, aping, like all dandies, the privileges and manners of decadent aristocracy. He is also witty, creative, and joyous in his love of art and beauty. Against the background of a hypocritical, corrupt, and decaying world, he is a principle of creativity and vitality, an example of unvarnished and unconstrained humanity.

"Alex is a rich and noble name," Burgess asserts in the Preface to his book, "and I intended its possessor to be sympathetic, pitiable, and insidiously identifiable with us, as opposed to them" (95). "Them" here is the state, for whom Alex is a specimen of "Modern Youth," a principle of anarchy in a world where, even though the state has sent men to the moon, it cannot control the violent gangs of teenaged hoodlums. These hoodlums dominate the night while the people of the "old bourgeois type" (5) huddle at home in front of the television watching satellite "worldcasts," emerging to their government-mandated labors only in the daytime.[5] In writing about *1984*, Burgess stresses how much Orwell's portrait of Oceania depends on the pinched and decrepit day-to-day life of post-war England,[6] and *A Clockwork Orange*, despite its futuristic element, has a similar atmosphere of decrepitude and constraint. There is, though, an obvious difference. The violence—graffiti, vandalism, drugs, gang wars—now emerges from below as well as from above. The electoral struggle between Left and Right still goes

on but in a degraded form, with the liberals acting from dubious motives and the government looking for insidious ways to reduce crime, partly to make room for more "political offenders" (92). That is the background for "Ludovico's Technique," the brutal conditioning routine which is applied to Alex in the attempt to cure him of his vicious tendencies.

It is partly by setting Alex off against a corrupt political order—an order that seems to represent not so much the excesses of Left or Right as the corruption of politics itself—that Burgess succeeds in making his hero "insidiously identifiable with us." That is an achievement because Alex's adventures in mayhem are hardly glorious. He rapes ten-year-old girls, and he beats and tortures innocent, helpless victims, often elderly, chosen at random, just for the fun of it. Burgess makes the spectacle of Alex's reign of terror and its aftermath bearable and even amusing by presenting it from Alex's first-person point of view and in his special verbal register which is not merely adolescent but infantile. At the same time, the infantile character of Alex's perspective does not deprive it of a certain validity when applied to the corrupt world around him.

Commenting in retrospect, Burgess emphasized that he, like all of us, shares Alex's penchant for evil, but Alex actually shares a great many of Burgess's qualities and attitudes—humorous detachment, a very broad irony toward life in general, an intense dislike of authority, contempt for bourgeois respectability, and an amoral delight in the sensual and emotional pleasures of art. Music, of course, is Alex's greatest pleasure, and he has a sophisticated appreciation for it, though that appreciation centers not on any culturally elevating aspect but on its intensity and power. It is the heroic aspect of music that excites Alex, especially the music of that most heroic and rebellious figure, Ludwig van Beethoven, composer of the *Eroica Symphony*. In *A Clockwork Orange*, art is a supremely anti-utopian principle of freedom, anarchy, and violence.

The most important medium of art, of course, and the one that links Alex and his creator most nearly, is language. The world of *A Clockwork Orange* is linguistically polyglot, with different generations of teenagers speaking different dialects, and criminals having their own jargon, making the standard speech of the educated—the "gentleman's goloss" that Alex is always putting on—into just one more "dialect of the tribe" (114). Burgess originally planned to use current British teen slang for his character, but he recognized how quickly that would date.[7] On a trip to Russia he learned that the Russians, too, had teenage gang violence, which struck him, he remembers, with the idea that "if I could combine east and west in a single persona, a teenage persona, it would be appropriate to use a composite dialect that is Russian and English."[8] The result was "Nadsat" [teen-speak], Alex's Russian-based argot, which in addition to Russian has various regional and archaic elements of English, from Shakespearean eloquence to Cockney rhyming slang. Burgess apparently intended Nadsat to "buffer" the violence of the story, but it does much more than that. It is a creative medium which perfectly expresses

the childish character of Alex's perceptions without depriving them of an undeniable appeal. Alex speaks a dialect shared by others, but he employs it distinctively and ingeniously, so that it seems to be his own creation. One of the characters describes it as "subliminal penetration" (114), and indeed it does involve the reader in a foreign and dissident way of thinking and feeling. Nadsat's coinages have a Joycean character, of course, but the whimsical childishness of Alex's language is more reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's mock-heroic "Jabberwocky." Words like *eggiweg*, *purplewurple*, and *droog* have a disarming way of transforming Alex's murderous attitudes and behavior into something both less serious and more complicated. And although Alex is genuinely childish, he also has a compellingly sardonic way of mimicking the attitudes of the people he abuses. He takes pleasure hearing what the worn-out old people ("starry decreps"—13) have to say before he assaults them. "It would interest me greatly, brother," he tells an old man carrying an earnest volume on *The Mystery of the Snowflake*, "if you would kindly allow me to see what books those are that you have under your arm. I like nothing better in this world than a good clean book, brother" (5). Finding the book difficult to rip apart, he observes with mock nostalgia that it was from "the days when things were made to last like" (6).

To express and enforce his domination, Alex modulates athletically between low, comical elements and higher notes like the archaic but presumptuous "thou." He rebukes Dim, the lowest of his "droogs" [friends] for his bad manners, using words from Middle English (29). As George Orwell famously emphasized, for the English upper classes, the sense of smell is a powerful marker of distinction, and Alex's disdain toward others is often expressed with the use of what he calls his "sensitive sniffer" (96). After being apprehended for his crimes, he objects vociferously to being described as "unsavoury" and a "common criminal" (92). Taste in clothing is another form of distinction that is important to Alex. Like a self-conscious social climber, he notices what everyone is wearing, including the Minister of the Interior's beautiful suit (91). In the early pages of the novel, Alex is at pains to establish his own identity as a dandy, describing the extravagant costumes ("the heighth of fashion"—one of his favorite phrases) worn by him and his friends—tights and codpieces with comic designs (spider, hand, flower, clown), "waisty jackets without lapels," "built-up shoulders," "off-white cravats," and "flip horrorshow boots for kicking" (3). (The conversion of the Russian *khorosho* [good] into "horrorshow" serves throughout the story as a perfect stylistic expression of Alex's morally inverted point of view.)

Taken all in all, then, Alex combines all the inhumane elements of the heroic mode—violence (especially violence toward women), group identity, social superiority, aristocratic manners, self-exalting egotism, the glorification of art, and the rejection of all constraint, expressed in intensified, poetically charged if comically childish language. Just as he does with his "britva," or knife, so with his words can Alex "flash and shine

artistic" (16). His artistic temperament is never more vividly on display than when he describes his ecstatic experience of music, as when listening to the concerto by "the American Geoffrey Plautus."

> Then, brothers, it came. Oh, bliss, bliss and heaven. I lay all nagoy [naked] to the ceiling, my gulliver [head] on my rookers [hands] on the pillow, glazzies [eyes] closed, rot [mouth] open in bliss, slooshying [listening to] the sluice of lovely sounds. Oh, it was gorgeousness and gorgeosity made flesh. The trombones crunched redgold under my bed, and behind my gulliver the trumpets three-wise silverflamed, and there by the door the timps [drums] rolling through my guts and out again crunched like candy thunder. Oh, it was wonder of wonders. And then, a bird of like rarest spun heavenmetal, or like silvery wine flowing in a spaceship, gravity all nonsense now, came the violin solo above all the other strings, and those strings were like a cage of silk around my bed. Then flute and oboe bored, like worms of like platinum, into the thick thick toffee gold and silver. I was in such bliss, my brothers. (32–33)

The verbal ingenuity of this word-painting is suddenly liberated from its childish quality, enabling it to do justice to the value of a beautiful and what would commonly be thought of as an intensely elevating experience. But belief in the elevating effect of art is precisely the error that Burgess is concerned to repudiate. For Alex, art is not an alternative to violence but an enhancement of it. Laughing over an editorial in the morning newspaper which argues that "Great Music … and Great Poetry would like quieten Modern Youth down and make Modern Youth more Civilized," his response is

> Civilized my syphilised yarbles [bollocks]. Music always sort of sharpened me up, O my brothers, and made me feel like old Bog himself, ready to make with the old donner and blitzen and have vecks [men] and ptitsas [girls] creeching [screaming] away in my ha ha power. (42)

Throughout the story, music has precisely this violence-triggering effect, and the elevated state of bliss that Alex has been describing is the afterglow of his evening's rape and murder. The beautiful music of Geoffrey Plautus allows Alex to relive his doings, the musical climax coinciding with an orgasm.

> As I slooshied [listened], my glazzies [eyes] tight shut to shut in the bliss that was better than any synthemesc [drug-conjured] Bog or God, I knew such lovely pictures. There were vecks and ptitsas, both young and starry [old], lying on the ground screaming for mercy, and I was smecking [laughing] all over my rot [mouth] and grinding my boot in their litsos

> [faces]. And there were devotchkas [girls] ripped and creeching against walls and I plunging like a shlaga [club] into them, and indeed when the music, which was one movement only, rose to the top of its big highest tower, then, lying there on my bed with glazzies tight shut and rookers behind my gulliver, I broke and spattered and cried aaaaaaah with the bliss of it. And so the lovely music glided to its glowing close. (33)

For Alex, the joys of music, words, sex, violence, and images of violence are ecstatically joined. Burgess has produced a convincing depiction of the state of absolutely unified, unalienated consciousness, experiencing unmitigated freedom and joy, a state which depends upon actions that deprive others of those things just as absolutely.

In music lies Alex's ultimate freedom, and so perhaps it was for Burgess, a prolific but largely unrecognized composer of classical music whose novels are full of musical references and structures.[9] Music, however, while it gives freedom, also demands order and form, and *A Clockwork Orange* has an extremely formal three-part structure—Part One: Crime; Part Two: Removal from Society and Treatment/Punishment; Part Three: Return. In the British version there is also a Coda: Alex's Transformation from Teen to Adult. The primary theme of the composition is the problem of choice, expressed in a leitmotif announced with the opening words, "What's it going to be then, eh?" These words are repeated multiple times, being developed and recapitulated as in a sonata (88). In Part One Alex enjoys his freedom but loses it in tragic style not only by committing horrible crimes toward strangers but by treating his followers with overweening hubris. Imprisoned for murder, he develops the epic hero's sense that his destiny has been fixed and that he is the victim, and his dreams alternate between orgiastic fantasies and fated visions of betrayal. Religion consoles him, ironically, to some degree, but only because the wars in the Old Testament and the story of the Crucifixion gratify his taste for violence. Isolated and betrayed, full of self-pity and socially degraded among criminals, with their "greasy, dusty, hopeless" kind of smell or "von" (77), Alex finally makes the choice to regain his freedom by surrendering his power of choice.

The treatment that Alex undergoes—being subjected to films of sex and horrific violence while under the effect of sick-making drugs—is not Skinnerian but Pavlovian, a distinction Burgess took to be irrelevant because both types of conditioning treat human beings like machines. "It is the training itself that disturbs us."[10] "Ludovico's Technique" is modeled on the aversive conditioning that was tried in the fifties as a method of converting homosexuals (94). The most remarkable effect of the treatment is what it does to Alex's response to music. Instead of triggering joy and violence, music now triggers an aversive response and punishment. The effect is unintentional, but the reference to "Ludovico," an Italianizing of Beethoven's first name, suggests a hidden logic. With Beethoven's music turned to torture, Alex's joy is now

his sorrow, and the association with conversion therapy—not mentioned in the book—sharpens the doctor's quotation of the "poet prisoner" Oscar Wilde in response to Alex's outrage that his love of music has been turned to pain: "Each man kills the thing he loves." Burgess sometimes describes "Ludovico's Technique" as "brainwashing,"[11] a popular meme of the Cold War, but it is not Alex's mind that is affected by the treatment; as he is told, it is his body which is learning that "Violence is a very horrible thing" (108). The effectiveness of Alex's conversion is demonstrated before a crowd of witnesses. Presented with an old man who rebukes him for his smell, tweaks his nose, and stamps on his feet, Alex's angry response instantly triggers a sickness welling up inside him, and the only relief he can find is by going down to lick his tormentor's boots. The doctor explains that Alex is "impelled towards the good by, paradoxically, being impelled towards evil" (126). Physical distress forces Alex to "switch to a diametrically opposed attitude," just the technique that Frazier attributed to Jesus ("Love your enemies") in *Walden Two*. When Alex is presented with a beautiful, naked woman whom his first impulse is to rape, the sickness wells up in him again and he finds himself falling before her in courtly supplication. "Let me be like your true knight," he says, "and down I went again on the old knees, bowing and like scraping," demonstrating, as the doctor promised, "a manner of Love that was thought to be dead with the Middle Ages" (128). Even the thought of harming a fly makes Alex feel "just that tiny bit sick" (129). His heroic cast of mind has been converted to its opposite, falling naturally into cultural forms that express submission and obedience. His once unified consciousness is now perfectly alienated and paradoxical.

The third movement of Burgess's sonata plays out the consequences of Alex's conversion. Each of the three episodes of violence dramatized in Part One is replayed in Part Three, with Alex now the victim, until the torment of music finally drives him to an attempt at suicide, the perfect completion of the musical form now underlining the perfect justice of his fate. It is a structure of crime and punishment, in which Alex gets back almost all the evil he has given. But in a delayed reflex of the utopian dilemma, Burgess had trouble deciding how to complete his narrative, leading to two different endings.

In the American edition, published by W. W. Norton and followed in Stanley Kubrick's film, Alex winds up being delivered from the liberal politicians who were using him as a pawn to discredit the government (153). Now a pet political tool of the state which had conditioned him to goodness, he is released to take up his former life of crime. The story ends with the hero in a new, violent reverie, stating, with a last irony, "I was cured all right" (179). In this ending, Alex is simply vindicated against those who would deprive him of his freedom, and the novel is finally a comic vision of a violent, grim, and hypocritical social order pitted against anarchic individuals roaming in gangs. Glory is triumphant and so is the vitality of art and music. In this ending, Burgess takes the heroic side of the utopian dilemma as enthusiastically as Skinner had taken the utopian side.

In the ending published by Heinemann in Britain, on the other hand, there is a final chapter in which Alex returns to his old ways and recruits a new gang among whom he is now the eldest rather than the youngest. But reaching the age of eighteen, he finds there is "something soft" getting into him, "something happening inside," something like a disease (186). He is losing his taste for violence and rape and is thinking of settling down with a woman and having a baby. He feels himself becoming like a very old man—a "very starry chellovek." Where in his younger days he never cared about the money he took from his victims, his interest in crime being purely aesthetic—"as they say, money isn't everything" (2)—now he finds himself caring about money in a conventional fashion, and his taste in music has tempered from symphony to the gentler form of "what they call *Lieder*" (186). Alex meets his old gang-mate Pete, who invites him to play "wine-cup and word games. Harmless, if you know what I mean" (189)—pale substitutes for Nadsat, drugs, and the mayhem of the past. The sum of all this is that, by growing up, Alex is turning bourgeois. In doing so, he arrives at a new interpretation of his past life of crime, which is that teenagers do what they do because at that age they are like animals, or even more, like little machines, "these malenky [little] toys" being sold on the streets (190). The implication is that teens have no power of choice and are not responsible for their actions. Alex foresees that his son inevitably will become another one of these teen machines, each generation repeating the abuses of youth, "And so it would itty on like till the end of the world" (191).

It is this ending, the less satisfactory of the two, that Burgess chose to defend in later years, claiming that his editor at Norton cut the final chapter against his wishes, thus removing the musical coda and spoiling the symmetry of the three-part, seven-chapter structure completed by Chapter Twenty-One, a number representing Alex's arrival at maturity. In fact Burgess appears to have wavered about the need for the last chapter during the process of composition. The typescript he gave to Norton had a notation before the last chapter "Should we end here?"[12] suggesting that his Norton editor's denial that the chapter was cut against Burgess's wishes is highly plausible. In later years Burgess gave differing accounts of the whole affair. It is particularly interesting that, in preparing a screenplay version of *A Clockwork Orange* in 1969, Burgess himself left off the action of the final chapter, anticipating or perhaps even influencing Kubrick's approach.[13]

Chapter Twenty-One is problematic in more ways than one. Blaming the rise of juvenile delinquency on the perpetual errancy of youth seems a weak diagnosis of what looked at the time like a relatively new social problem, and Burgess's complaint that to condition away freedom is to remove humanity seems rather blunted if the victims are only machine-like animals in the first place. Further, Alex's sudden mildness seems rather premature. He is eighteen, not even having reached the age of maturity marked by the number twenty-one. Twenty-five or thirty would have been more plausible for a softening of Alex's temperament given that males up

to twenty-five are responsible for most of the violence in the world. Perhaps Burgess thought that to follow Alex the "Humble Narrator" too far into the future would have conflicted with the futuristic leap the story had already made and taken Alex the narrator too far from the Nadsat frame of mind.

Another ending would have been far more natural for Burgess's fable and made Alex's turn away from crime more convincing. Alex could have been more deeply affected by the torments inflicted upon him in Part Three, understood how they were a consequence of his actions in Part One, and repented of his Nadsat career. This is something that could plausibly happen at the age of eighteen. It is far more plausible than Alex's sudden outgrowing of his taste for violence. Such a resolution would have accorded with and been confirmed by the crime-and-punishment sonata structure of the work and its extreme, musically based formalism; like Euripides in *The Bacchae*, Burgess has embedded his tale of disturbing violence in a highly controlled formal structure which is a key element of its effectiveness. In the British last chapter, however—the coda of his sonata—this musical structure fails to strike a convincing final note.

Burgess's avoidance of the obvious and logical resolution of his story is all the more surprising given that freedom of choice and responsibility are his fully explicit themes, stated and restated both in the novel and in thirty years of subsequent discussion. What Burgess's two endings have in common is that Alex finally bears no responsibility for the use of his freedom. In the American version, the heroic, anarchic individual is left opposing the corrupt, hypocritical state and comes out bloody but unbowed, while in the British version his reign of terror, though inevitable and merely mechanical in its character, subsides into respectable dullness.[14] In either case, Burgess's thesis about the centrality of choice and the evil that comes of trying to separate the good from the bad in human nature is undermined. Such failures of consistency are hard to explain, but it seems to me that it was his partisanship in the utopian dilemma that made Burgess unable to accept the repentance of his hero. As an opponent of the state and its utopian ambitions, Alex cannot finally be humiliated even though, from the heroic point of view, his turning bourgeois in the end seems like a discouraging lapse into conformity. In later years Burgess revised his personal notion of Alex's life trajectory in an upward direction. He told Isaac Bashevis Singer that the British version permitted Alex an unexpectedly promising future. "In my version," he says, Alex "grows up. He understands that violence is an aspect of youth. He has energy. He'll be able to use it to create. He'll become a great musician."[15]

In retrospect Burgess resented the elevation of *A Clockwork Orange* over the rest of his large body of work, discounting it as "too didactic to be artistic."[16] It does contain perhaps too many explicit statements of Burgess's position on liberty and freedom of choice, while leaving this position unconfirmed by either ending. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, given the uneasy relationship between his philosophy and his story, that

in the course of the novel Burgess put his views into the mouths of comic characters, thus diffusing their effect with irony. The novel contains two main Burgess spokesmen. The first is the prison chaplain (the "charlie" or "charles," as in Charlie Chaplin), who gives Alex music privileges in return for mostly false information about other prisoners, information which the chaplain then uses to curry favor with the prison Governor. The chaplain's Christian services include egregiously bad hymns and sermons about hell. He explains the meaning of "Ludovico's Technique" to Alex in accurate but fulsome terms, but when Alex tries to con him by saying "Oh, it will be nice to be good, sir," the chaplain replies, "It may not be nice to be good, little 6655321. It may be horrible to be good." This paradox is enough, he claims, to cause him "many sleepless nights" of consternation. "What does God want?" he wonders, "Does God want goodness or the choice of goodness? Is a man who chooses the bad perhaps in some ways better than a man who has the good imposed upon him? Deep and hard questions, little 6655321" (95). These questions are indeed too deep and hard coming from a man who has already admitted that making a strong protest on the matter would not be "expedient" for his personal ambitions (94–95). Later the chaplain finds his nerve and winds up leaving the prison system to preach its abuses, but he remains not only a flawed but a largely comic character.

The other Burgess spokesman is F. Alexander, the author of the book *A Clockwork Orange*, whose "loving and faithful wife" (22), as Alex puts it, has committed suicide after being raped and beaten by him and his gang. When much later, in Part Three, Alex inadvertently returns to the "HOME" which was the scene of the earlier crime, having been beaten by his former friends, F. Alexander, recognizing Alex from newspaper accounts of his cure, takes him in sympathetically as a "victim of the modern age" (153). The minute he recognizes the boy as his wife's tormentor, though—identifying him, significantly, by his Nadsat speech—Alexander hatches the plot to combine his revenge against Alex with political gain; he uses the now aversive power of music to drive Alex into an attempt at suicide in order to leverage the episode against the party in power. When Alex survives, the government puts Alexander away to protect Alex's safety.

Despite his role as Burgess's spokesman, Alexander is, like the chaplain, a comic figure, pronouncing himself vaingloriously to be a defender of the "great traditions of liberty." "I am no partisan man," he says. "Where I see the infamy I seek to erase it. Party names mean nothing. The tradition of liberty means all." But that does not mean that things can be left to the judgment of the common people. "They will sell liberty for a quieter life. That is why they must be prodded, prodded" (161). In Burgess's view, the defenders of liberty are just as dangerous as their opponents. At the end of the story, it is not Alex but the hypocritical crusader for liberty who winds up in prison.

It is from F. Alexander's book that Alex learns the meaning of the title *A Clockwork Orange*. "The attempt to impose upon man," Alex reads in a

passage chosen at random, "a creature of growth and capable of sweetness, to ooze juicily at the last round the bearded lips of God, to impose, I say, laws and conditions appropriate to a mechanical creation, against that I raise my swordpen" (21–22). Again Burgess's own stance is presented as comically vainglorious and, in fact, loony, in spite of the fact that, as Burgess himself has pointed out, Alexander, being the author of a book called *A Clockwork Orange*, is a figure for the author himself. And the background for this choice is a serious one. Burgess's first wife, Lynne, was "robbed and beaten by three GI deserters" during World War II[17] leading to a miscarriage, sterility, alcoholism, a number of suicide attempts, and many years of tumultuous misery for her and her husband.[18] So in identifying himself with Alexander, Burgess was putting himself in the place of the victim of Alex's violence. Burgess describes the depiction of violence in *A Clockwork Orange* as having been for him "an act of catharsis and an act of charity," the charity presumably being forgiveness toward the perpetrators. A further implication, though, is that Burgess knows something about what it means to be victimized by violence but that this knowledge does not keep him from insisting that freedom and the joy of art are still more important than keeping people under control. And there is one turn more. Alex, picking up Alexander's book, notices that the author is "another Alex" (158), and this is a way for Burgess to acknowledge that he, too, like F. Alexander, shares as much with Alex as with his victims—or even more.

The comic distance with which Burgess treats not only the violence in his story but also the characters who see the issues it raises the same way he does is a clear feature of his literary sensibility. He was aware of being a "natural clown" for whom, despite serious intentions, "comedy breaks in."[19] In his autobiography, *Little Wilson and Big God*, Burgess treats his own life, including his difficult first marriage, with a similar, largely comical detachment. This detachment fits in quite naturally with the Joycean religion of art that is Burgess's true faith. His moral concerns and religious schemes must all submit to his ironic muse. Among all the anti-utopians treated in this book, only Zamyatin is equally motivated by the fear that art will be constrained, but whereas Zamyatin insists on artistic freedom itself as the test of freedom, and the perpetual revolution it requires, Burgess takes the test further. Not even heroic violence and utmost evil are worth suppressing at the cost of the freedom of art that Alex stands for. Art is "morally neutral, like the taste of an apple,"[20] Burgess insists, an interesting figure given the role played by such a fruit in the Christian myth. At the same time, for Burgess it is art that gets human beings as close as we can come to the ethical aspect of God's being. "God's goodness" is best conceived, he says, "as somehow analogous to the goodness of a grilled steak or of a Mozart symphony.... The goodness of art, not of holy men, is the better figure of divine goodness" (55). All that remains to be added is that, if we take Burgess at his word, he does not believe that the God whose goodness he is describing actually exists. What we are left with, then, in the place of

divine goodness, is art itself, and woe to the Pelagians and narrow moralists who would take that away from us just because it can be used for evil. Dr. Brodsky, the practitioner of "Ludovico's Technique" and yet another one of Burgess's ironized spokesmen, explains to Alex in the midst of the conditioning process why his conversion to goodness requires sacrifice. "Delimitation is always difficult," he says. "The world is one, life is one. The sweetest and most heavenly of activities partake in some measure of violence—the act of love, for instance; music, for instance. You must take your chance, boy. The choice has been all yours" (115). For Burgess, art is too great a sacrifice to make in exchange for moral goodness, especially the goodness promised by utopia.

Notes

1 Anthony Burgess, *1985* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1978), 92.
2 Aldous Huxley, Brave New World *and* Brave New World Revisited (New York: Harper, 2004), 85.
3 Burgess, *1985,* 53–54.
4 According to one of his biographers, Burgess acquired his Pelagian-Augustinian dichotomy from a Spanish-American soldier in a bar in Gibraltar, fictionalized as "Captain Mendoza" in Burgess's first published novel, *A Vision of Battlements*. Andrew Biswell, *The Real Life of Anthony Burgess* (London: Picador, 2005), 104.
5 Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (New York: Norton, 1986), 42.
6 Burgess, *1985*, 33.
7 How right he was can be gleaned with the quickest glance into books like Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* which gather once-current slang that is now unreadable.
8 Thomas Churchill, "An Interview with Anthony Burgess," *The Malahat Review* XVII (1971): 109.
9 See Paul Phillips, *A Clockwork Counterpoint: The Music and Literature of Anthony Burgess* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2010).
10 Burgess, *1985*, 91.
11 Anthony Burgess, "Clockwork Marmalade," in *Violence in Anthony Burgess's* A Clockwork Orange, ed. Dedria Bryfonski (New York: Greenhaven Press, 2015), 44. Rptd from *The Listener* 87, no. 2238 (February 14, 1972).
12 Biswell, *Real Life*, 203.
13 Andrew Biswell, "The Clockwork Collection: Burgess's Screenplay for *A Clockwork Orange*." *The International Anthony Burgess Foundation*. https://www.anthonyburgess.org/blog-posts/the-clockwork-collection-burgesss-screenplay-for-a-clockwork-orange/#. August 6, 2021.
14 Paul Phillips points out that the function of a coda in the sonata form is to resolve the tensions built up in development and bring the composition to an end. He speculates plausibly that the change of tone in Chapter 21 may have been due to Burgess's commitment to the musical structure of the work. Phillips, *Clockwork Counterpoint*, 90.
15 Anthony Burgess and Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Rencontre au Summet* (Paris: Arte/Mille et Une Nuits, 1998), 52, quoted in Biswell, *Real Life*, 262.
16 A Clockwork Orange Resucked," introduction to *A Clockwork Orange*, x.
17 Burgess, "Clockwork Marmalade," 48.
18 See the account in Biswell, *Real Life*, 109 and *passim*.

19 Churchill, "Interview," 107.
20 Burgess, *1985*, 55.

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Conclusion

I have offered an account of writers grappling with an ancient dilemma that persisted long after the cultural dominance of the aristocratic ethos which originally provoked it. The leaders of the ancient Greek polis faced the dilemma in its purest form as they strove to adapt the culture of the Homeric gods and heroes to their civic needs. Plato imagined a city with laws and a psychology to replace the heroic ethos, and later Greek authors developed a satiric critique of the heroic character which fed modern literature from More to Voltaire and beyond. The classic utopian satires, however, offered little hope that the heroic imperatives of human nature could be laughed out of existence. Their irony applied to utopian ambitions too, leaving a perennial puzzle about the seriousness of utopian hopes. The full flowering of modernity in the revolutions of the late eighteenth century brought with it a truly utopian ambition, the dream of an actual world without heroes, but in doing so it also demanded the recruitment of heroic resources to implement its leveling vision. The dystopias, real and imagined, of the twentieth century showed how utopia, having summoned the heroes it once banished, could become a fatal instrument in their hands.

While I have chronicled the discomforts of the utopian dilemma, I have not, of course, solved it. I doubt it is capable of being solved, for as I wrote at the outset, there are essential values on each side, rival visions of the human good neither of which can be persuasively dismissed. It may be that the utopian dilemma is just another name for politics itself, a perpetual negotiation between the rational interests of the participants and their need for dignity. Readers who have followed my story this far will be in as good a position as I am to draw the moral. Nevertheless, I will take this occasion to sketch a few conclusions of my own.

If, as these pages have shown, a world without heroes—a world of perfect equality—is almost as difficult to imagine as it is to achieve, that is not because the total system of capital makes it unthinkable but because the notion itself is an affront to human dignity and to the imagination which serves it. It is so much of an affront that reforms far less intrusive than the holistic, qualitative change envisioned by utopian theorists evoke stubborn resistance. The problem is not that of grasping the collective of society

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as a whole; the problem is that of grasping the collective in other than oppositional terms. Nor should we think that the pessimism fostered by the capitalist theory of selfish individualism is the great obstacle to utopian hopes. It is a mistake, in fact, to believe that the neoclassical economists' conception of individuals as rational utility maximizers leads to radical pessimism regarding social equality. Rational utility maximizers, if they existed, would quit when they had enough, whereas actual human beings keep stockpiling their resources as long as there is someone to outdo. The persistence of the heroic imperative suggests that human beings are indeed fundamentally social creatures but that their social nature is competitive. Perhaps it is incurably so.

The utopian dilemma is also not a problem of desire and repression but a problem of the failure of repression. The heroic impulse will not be denied. Its goal is not pleasure or happiness but superiority on the levels of the individual and the group. Social identity and bonding against the enemy are more important to it even than truth, as current politics in the United States massively confirms; the motto of the day could well be the saying of the seventeenth-century Jesuit Baltasar Gracián—"Better mad with the crowd than sane by yourself."[1] Progressives in this situation might consider lowering the scale of utopian ambition to moderate the backlash, but it is discouraging that even incremental changes in the direction of policies which are already in effect elsewhere can be resisted as utopian. Perhaps there is hope in the increasing participation of women in public life, but that hope rests on the uncertain notion that women are less heroic and competitive than men.

The utopian dilemma cannot be solved by superficial strategies like deconstructing or exposing the constructedness of social distinctions. The distinctions do not need rational bases to keep them in force, and suspicion of this sort tends to undermine the bases of political action itself. In earlier work I have tried to show how difficult it has been for modern intellectuals to develop a coherent sense of agency, and how even the intentions of literary authors have been subject to exclusion.[2] The utopian wish to escape from politics is another element of this modern problem of agency.

What does this story say to those who come to the utopian dilemma from the conservative side—for those, in other words, who resent the utopians' wish to sever culture from its heroic past and the art which served it and who fear the leveling and homogenizing character of utopianism even of the more mobile, "kinetic" sort envisioned by H. G. Wells? The clearest lesson is that the utopian critique of heroic irrationality will not go away. We are too rational to ignore it even if we are not rational enough to abide by it. And perhaps it is the defenders of freedom and dignity who should best appreciate the costs of hierarchy for the people whose freedom and dignity are not served.

The apparently irrepressible character of competitive psychology for many of the writers discussed in these pages may be discouraging, but the

moral force of the utopian critique is just as resilient. It may be sobering to consider how serious are the rivals to collective happiness as the aim of social existence; it may be even more sobering to consider how firmly the imagination takes sides against it. But it cannot be said that modernity's utopian goals have led only to dystopia. Perhaps Orwell struck the right balance. His belief that making the world perfect is a dangerous and ultimately unappealing goal did not discourage him from hoping to make the world fairer and better than it is.

Notes

1 Baltasar Gracián y Morales, *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia, ed.* Miguel Romera-Navarro (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1954), 261. As Romera-Navarro notes, the saying is repeated by La Rochefoucauld as number 231 of the *Maximes*. My own translation.
2 In *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), and in *The Varieties of Authorial Intention: Literary Theory Beyond the Intentional Fallacy* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

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