

UTOPIA. The term *utopia* (from the Greek *ou-topos*, “no place,” or *eutopos*, “good place,” and evidently coined as a pun by Thomas More for the title of his book published in 1516) has very diverse, often confusing connotations. Sometimes it is used to mean any idealization of the distant or primordial past, when humans lived closer to the gods (or God), as found in Sumero-Akkadian cuneiform accounts of Dilmun; in the Hebrew story of Eden of *Genesis*; in portrayals of the Golden Age by Hesiod, Vergil, Symmachus, and other Greek and Roman writers; in myths of the “perfect great period” (*kitayuga*, *susamā*, etc.) in later Vedic, earlier Jain, and Buddhist traditions; or in accounts of the early age of the four (mythic) emperors of popular Chinese thought. In some ancient cultures, the original inhabitants of certain foreign regions were imagined to live in an innocent, trouble-free state (the Greeks, for instance, wrote of the Ethiopians, Scythians, and others in this fashion), while not a few students of prehistory in modern times have visualized the earliest humans as herbivores, free from war (as held by Richard Leakey), or as without the sexual constraints and inequalities of later ages (as held by Friedrich Engels).

In contrast, the term *utopia* at other times refers to the future realization of some perfect place and time. It can take on futurist instead of primitivist associations, thus becoming a lost paradise regained, the projection of the hopes and dreams of a millenarianism (the kingdom of God or its equivalent on earth), or the establishment of an ideal society divinely or otherwise sanctioned to replace the glaring ills of the day. Occasionally notions of heavenly worlds—such as the mythic Isles of the Blessed in Greco-Roman belief, the Chinese Māhāyana Buddhist Pure Land of the West, or the Qur’anic vision of heaven as fertile gardens with maidservants—have been described as utopian, as also have visions of an eternal city set above the known order, such as Augustine’s City of God, which nevertheless partakes of earthly affairs.

A more traditional understanding of utopia (as in More) is that of a distant, wondrous land allegedly discovered and described by a traveler returning home. Hints of this are found in Homer’s *Odyssey* (the account of the Phaeacians), and the earliest extant written description of utopia is that of Euhemerus, who not only argued that the gods were originally deified mortals but also described an idyllic social order outside the bounds and difficulties of ordinary human life. Interestingly, priests are the effective rulers of the Sacred Isle, although they have no official political status.

Pertinent comparisons here include the Greek romancer (and perhaps Cynic) Iambulus writing on the island City of the Sun (early first century BCE), the church historian Socrates on the location of Eden (440 century CE), More’s *Utopia* (1516), the Spanish explorer Garcilaso de la Vega’s impressions of the Inca empire (1617), the Rosicrucian Johann Valentinus Andreae’s *Christianopolis* (1619), the Dominican Tommaso Campanella’s *City of the Sun* (1623), empiricist Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627), and *philosophe* Denis Diderot’s *Tahiti* (1772), all Western in origin. More’s crescent-shaped, two-hundred-mile-long, substantially urbanized island utopia is the most famous, remarkable for its religious tolerance and its endearing priests, who do not persecute but instead constrain those few who happen to hold to the three destructive, forbidden views: that the soul is mortal, that the world is the outcome of mere chance, and that there is no reward or punishment after death.

Possible Eastern analogues to these strangely removed lands are found in Chinese and particularly Daoist beliefs from the fourth century CE onward. Accordingly, select individuals could secure, by some potion or other means, virtual immortality, and “not somewhere else out of this world,” as Joseph Needham puts it, “nor in the underworld of the Yellow Springs, but among the mountains and forests here and forever.” Looking further afield, from the pre-Christian Americans one learns of South American Indian migrations (the Guarini, in particular) in quest of the “land without evil” to the east. In transitional Melanesia, individuals who have managed to journey well beyond their own cultural bounds during colonial times (such as police, recruited laborers, and others) have often spun together novel mythic histories about where the whites came from—Britain, Germany, Jerusalem, Sydney, and so on—and how they acquired “cargo” (European goods). From such far-off utopias, where God, the ancestors, and culture heroes are present, cargo came as transformation and blessing to the islanders.

In the present day, the idea of utopia has become inseparable from utopianism, the systematic attempt to engineer a preferable, even perfect society. The origins of utopia in this sense might be said to go back to the construction of the first cities (according to Lewis Mumford) or at least to the schemes of Plato (and the lesser-known Greek thinkers Hippodamus and Phaleas). But many scholars do not consider this exercise in model building for revolutionary social transformation much older than the eighteenth century (the mod-

erately aristocratic *Oceana* scheme by the Englishman James Harrington in 1656 being only faintly precursory), and they have pointed out the central role of the Western ideal of universal progression toward utopianism's realization. They also recognize the secondary importance of practical experimentation in the Americas, where, especially in North America, European colonists attempted to establish new kinds of community or sought a new paradise in the wilderness away from the evils of the Old World.

Utopianist designs for social reconstruction have not always been distinctly religious, except insofar as their ethical stances reflect spiritual values. As the chief protagonist in Plato's *Republic*, Socrates was an atheist when it came to the old gods, yet the guardians of his new polity were to be fully enlightened by the supreme idea of the good (the equivalent of God). In modern times, utopianists have voiced radically anticlerical, if not anti-Christian sentiments, yet they have been dominated by a vision of what is ethically right regarding human relationships. The first utopia as a projected, future program rather than a millennial fiat was that of the French progressivist Sebastian Mercier. In his tract on the year 2440 (written in 1770) he expressed his wish that the church as he knew it would not survive, but nonetheless he imagined an initiation ceremony using telescopes and microscopes, in which young people would discover God, the author of nature (which, in turn, would serve as the basis of justice). Disillusioned with ecclesiastical orthodoxy, in 1825, one of his successors, Saint-Simon, wrote *New Christianity*, and the renowned Charles Fourier described a New Earth in the dawning of the Third Age, like Joachim di Fiore's *Age of the Spirit* (1847). If François-Noël Babeuf and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, two other French utopianists, were secular communists in their approach, each nevertheless preached with a religious intensity against injustice. There were other European utopian thinkers in the nineteenth century, both English and continental, from Scottish industrial reformer Robert Owen, a man touched by Christian millennial hopes in his *New Vision of Society* (1813), to vehemently antireligious anarchists, including Petr Kropotkin, a Russian litterateur active at the end of the century.

Marxism has been characterized as a species of secular utopianism, even millenarianism, for presaging a future, supranational society free of classes following a series of proletarian revolutions. Both Karl Marx himself and his collaborator Engels, however, detached themselves from the utopians (especially Proudhon) by arguing that the historical process rather than artificial reorganization would produce a radically better order. However, the fact that the programs of Lenin and Stalin in Russia, Mao Zedong in China, Kim Il Sung in North Korea, and others reveal massive political manipulation and forced mobilizations to support communist state policies suggests that where Marxism has been dominant in certain societies, politics have typically drifted toward the utopian, social-engineering model that Marx himself disdained. The end product of these maneuvers was meant to be a society free not only from classes but from religion.

Communism and socialism take a number of forms, although many less obviously political expressions are often referred to as communalisms, communitarianisms, or communes. Many and varied small-scale utopian communities have been established in the modern-day West, with the greatest number in North America. One discovers parallel and prototypic communities in earlier religious history: the Chinese Daoist and Neo-Confucian retreats of sagehood (Zhang Daoling at Dragon Tiger Mountain, Kiangsi, during the first century CE, or Zhou Dunyi at Lu Shan, c. 1050); in the early monasticisms (both the Jain and Buddhist traditions in India, the Jewish Qumranites and Therapeutae, the Christian Pachomians, Benedictines and their medieval successors, etc.); in the elitist, and for all appearances sectarian, spiritual fraternities (Indian *āśramas*, the ancient gnostic and hermetic schools of Egypt, the medieval Brethren of the Free Spirit in Germany and the Low Countries, the Rosicrucian Order, and other esoteric groups in seventeenth-century England and Germany); and in the communities of the radical Reformation (Anabaptists, Hutterites, etc.) with this tradition generating Mennonite, Amish, and other experiments in North America, including the Quaker City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia.

By the nineteenth century the United States was sprinkled with many religious communities, at that time often dubbed "socialisms" (John Humphrey Noyes documented at least forty-eight in his *History of American Socialisms*, 1870) but today more likely called utopias or (somewhat pejoratively) "cults." The most famous, distinctly religious examples were Amana in Iowa, New Harmony in Indiana (inspired by Owen), the Shaker and Oneida communities (in New York and elsewhere), as well as the Mormon settlements in Utah. During the first half of this century such communities were spawned in the northwestern states, and since World War II the popularity of life in communes or special retreats has grown, especially in California because of the impact of Eastern meditative traditions and the rejection of highly mechanized and plutocratic North American society (in favor of, for example, a drug culture, anarchy, or a more highly disciplined, ascetic way of life). Some have been inspired by Thoreau's *Walden* and other American celebrations of seclusion in the wild, others by ravaged Amerindian traditions. Comparable postwar communes were established in northern Europe and Australia.

In view of these developments and the growth of state communism, Christian theologians have debated whether Christianity is a utopian faith. Reinhold Niebuhr characterized the Christian position as anti-utopian because evil can never be eradicated from society, while Paul Tillich argued that utopian dreaming has positive value in setting ideal goals but must be transcended when only enslavement or force can secure its long-lasting actualization. Modern Eastern philosophers, particularly Indian gurus who have encouraged or founded new communes, characteristically teach that such communities are but transitory supports before liberation from the realm of physical contingency and karmic law.

Utopia is a subject for both the sociology and psychology of religion. When attempts are made to realize a utopian scheme, it is important to ask questions about social dynamics, the role of a charismatic leader or elders, its degree of durability, and the rate of attrition. A stringently prestructured scheme usually results in a more legalistic orientation and a greater resort to authoritarianism, while in looser efforts at cooperation unity is maintained more by common hope of labors rewarded or a coming transformation. A shared sense of purpose, however, especially by the genuinely faithful, is crucial for the survival of either kind of movement. Apropos to religious categorization, utopianism tends to characterize sectarian, spiritualistic, and mystical persuasions, just as most utopists in the political arena tend to reject the current order of realpolitik, feeling it reflects the morally bankrupt established system.

Utopianism in practice is as attractive psychologically as millenarianism is for idealists, or for those in quest of some certainty and an anxiety-free existence in a sea of cultural, religious, and ethical pluralism. Utopia can also provide, as can the millennial transformation to come, satisfaction for feelings of resentment toward the world's ills or the society from which utopists secede. A need for the certainty a utopia can provide often coincides with extensive rule making and authoritarianism, while recriminatory tendencies can lead to isolationism and relative xenophobia.

Utopianism, when viewed as an oneiric tendency to project a vision of a better life or as exercises of the imagination that lead to social questioning, is more a product of the mind and religious intellectual activity than social organization. The contemplation of happiness and what it entails is a perennial feature of philosophical reflection in religious or quasi-religious traditions, and utopianism is one of its clearer manifestations. Students of the unconscious will note that the displacement of reality for imagined visualization can compel archetypally vivid dreams and rich symbols. Psychoanalytically interesting, moreover, is the aspect of utopias that touches on sexual mores. Thomas More imagined an ideal marriage state, with children being brought up by the community as a whole. An actual attempt at reconstructing Eden-like conditions of the male-female union came with the Adamites, one pre-Reformation group of which was isolated on an island in the river Elbe in Germany from the fifteenth century onward. Members went naked (a reminder that nudist colonies are essentially utopian), and the "naturalness" in the sexual relations of later groups are portrayed in the indelible symbols of Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Worldly Delights* (1506?). A modern utopia of particular interest regarding the relationship of religion and sexuality is the Oneida community which was governed by Noyes's complex books of instruction.

Whether as a product of thought or action, or analyzed in a sociological or psychological sense, utopianism characteristically betrays assumptions about the limited relevance of historical change. Utopias are often conceived, sometimes

unwillingly, "as good patterns of life in an ahistorical cosmos" (Olson, 1982). Little thought is given to what may lie beyond or develop out of these Utopias in the future, since, like the millennium, they constitute an end or proper fulfillment of the known order. Unlike the millennium, however, utopia can be discovered, and although it may also be the product of dreaming and imagination, it can be devised rationally and is not constructed only from the elusiveness and ambiguities of apocalyptic literary authorities. Admittedly some forms of millennialism, particularly those of American theologians who preached that the kingdom of God had to be worked for on earth (as documented best by Ernest Lee Tuveson), compare better with utopian visions. On the other hand, such visions are not intrinsically incompatible with noneschatological or more decidedly secular approaches to social reform. Marx, Freud, and other atheist commentators, however, suggest that all religion is inherently utopian in reflecting the presumptions or hypothesizing about a given realm—especially the afterlife—that escapes the ordinary contingencies of material existence and selfhood. And if this is at least arguable, so too it can be proposed that utopia is fundamentally a given of religious consciousness.

SEE ALSO Cargo Cults; Community; Golden Age; Millenarianism; Noyes, John Humphrey.

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