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PART I

Towards a Theory of Utopian Sociability

Community is the only heaven we can reasonably look forward to,—the only real and substantial salvation.

—HARRY HOWELLS HORTON, 1838[1]

Human nature is the true community of men.

—KARL MARX, 1844[2]

The love of possessions is a disease with them.

—SITTING BULL, 1877[3]

Forsooth, brothers, fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell: fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death: and the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowship's sake that ye do them, and the life that is in it, that shall live on and on for ever, and each one of you part of it, while many a man's life upon the earth from the earth shall wane.

—WILLIAM MORRIS, 1888[4]

The real objective of Socialism is human brotherhood.

—GEORGE ORWELL, 1943[5]

1. Harry Howells Horton, *Community the Only Salvation for Man: A Lecture* (A. Heywood, 1838), 14.

2. "Critical Marginal Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform': By a Prussian", in *Collected Works*, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 50 vols (Lawrence and Wishart, 1975–2005), 3: 204–5.

3. Quoted in John de Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor, *Affluenza: How Overconsumption is Killing Us—and How to Fight Back*, 3rd ed. (BK Currents Books, 2014), 115.

4. William Morris, *A Dream of John Ball; and, A King's Lesson* (Longmans, Green, 1912), 33.

5. George Orwell, *I Have Tried to Tell the Truth: 1943–1944* (Secker and Warburg, 1998), 42.

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Utopianism is dead, and without it no radical philosophy can exist.

—JUDITH SHKLAR, 1957[6]

When all truth is found to be lies / And all the joy within you dies / Don't you want somebody to love . . . ?

—JEFFERSON AIRPLANE, 1966[7]

If Ecotopia is merely Utopia in the sense of a cheap castle in the air, then we have no future at all.

—RUDOLF BAHRO 1986[8]

6. Judith Shklar, *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith* (Princeton University Press, 1957), 208.

7. Jefferson Airplane, "Somebody to Love", recorded 1966 by RCA Victor; copyright Darby Slick.

8. Rudolf Bahro, *Building the Green Movement* (Heretic Books, 1986), 174.

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1

Redefining Utopianism for a Post-consumer society

A SPECTRE IS haunting humanity—the ghastly dystopian image of its own extinction. Our world is burning up, and dying, nearly everywhere, from Indonesia and Australia to Brazil, the Arctic, Siberia, Greece, and California. We have at most a few short years to prevent its destruction, and our own extermination. To do so we need to rethink the very principles of our existence as a species from the ground up. This book proposes one way of doing this, derived from the tradition known as utopianism.

The despair sometimes called "doomerism" is one response to the environmental apocalypse. It often breeds depression, a sense of hopelessness, and a paralysing inactivity. Utopianism offers us a very different response.[1] The concept of utopia demands that we rise above the limits imposed by everyday reality and instead envision long-term futures in which humanity not only survives but flourishes. It can be used today both to help explain the history of humanity's aspirations to date and to project viable alternatives to the grim fate facing us. Every age has bred utopias in response its own specific crises. The foundational text of the literary tradition, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), was written in part to address the brutal displacement by greedy landowners of hundreds of thousands of agricultural labourers for sheep farming. Later phases of utopian thought reacted to the industrial revolution (the early socialists and Marx), then to the onset of monopoly capitalism (Edward Bellamy

1. The two main introductions to the wider concept are Krishan Kumar's *Utopianism* (Open University Press, 1991) and Lyman Tower Sargent's *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

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and the later socialists), and more recently to late capitalism's evident failure to provide a satisfactory human life for the majority (the counterculture and political rebellions of the 1960s). At these points utopia served as what E. M. Cioran calls "a principle of renewal in both institutions and peoples", lamenting and sometimes satirising decay while mapping a way forward.[2] Our own unique crisis must in turn have its unique utopia, indebted to its predecessors but like no other. One such possible ideal society is sketched out here. But such visions cannot be a mere phantasm, a wish or dream; they must be historically and empirically grounded, and demonstrably practicable. What Immanuel Wallerstein calls "utopistics" involves "the serious assessment of historical alternatives, the exercise of our judgment as to the substantive rationality of alternative possible historical systems."[3] We need to know where we are going, not only that we do not want to be where we are.

Our own crisis is easily summarised. In the last decade we entered a period technically termed the *sixth mass extinction*. For the first time such destruction results from the actions of only one species, *homo sapiens*. The last was sixty-six million years ago, when 76 per cent of all species died. Now some 70 per cent of species have gone in the last half century, and insect loss is at 2.5 per cent per annum (p.a.). The world is hotter than at any point in the last twenty thousand years.[4] As early as 1912 assessments indicated that coal consumption was warming the earth. In 1953 the capacity of carbon emissions to raise temperatures by as much as 1°C were discussed in prominent publications like *Time* and the *New York Times*.[5] By the 1970s the implications were clear to those who sought to know; indeed, "Nearly everything we understand about global warming was understood in 1979".[6] By 2000 it was being asserted that "Many climate researchers believe we would need to cut greenhouse gas emissions immediately by 60 or 70 per cent, which would mean a complete halt in the use of petrol- and diesel-engined cars."[7]

2. E. M. Cioran, *History and Utopia* (1960; Quartet Books, 1996), 10. Cioran himself foresaw a new barbarism emerging from the 1930s.

3. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Utopistics; or, Historical Choices of the Twenty-First Century* (New Press, 1998), 1.

4. See Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (Bloomsbury, 2014).

5. Nathaniel Rich, *Losing Earth: The Decade We Could Have Stopped Climate Change* (Picador, 2017), 189.

6. Rich, 3.

7. Jonathan Margolis, *A Brief History of Tomorrow* (Bloomsbury, 2000), 80.

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A vast conspiracy of silence and denial, abetted by a flood of mis- and disinformation, and a natural inclination to hope for the best, to cling to "normality", and to fear bad news, has led us to ignore these warning signs and downplay their implications. Instead, we have cloaked reality in comforting euphemisms like "climate change", and the anodyne phrase "global warming", coined around 1975.[8] The more technical term "greenhouse effect" describes the trapping of emissions of water vapour, carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane, ozone, and nitrous oxide. It was identified by the 1930s and acknowledged secretly by fossil-fuel companies by the 1970s. With remarkable accuracy, Exxon scientists in 1982 estimated 1°C warming by 2019 and a CO_2 concentration of 415 parts per million (ppm), against a safe level of 350 ppm. In 2022 it reached 420 ppm. It could reach 427 by 2025, 450 by 2035, and 550 by 2050 or soon after. Around 1990, a rise in temperature of 1.5–4.5°C above a baseline some 250 years ago was predicted.[9] In 2021 the actual rise averaged about 1.25°C, but was 4°C in the Arctic, where unprecedented heatwaves are now common. It could be 1.5°C by 2024, and 2°C as early as 2035: the surge in emissions predicted for 2021 will be the highest in a decade. But warming will be uneven, with the United States and Russia, amongst others, likely to be hit worse than many countries.[10] And even at the current warming level, well below the limit we are supposedly aiming to achieve, tipping points are becoming imminent—in forest and ice loss, and other areas—which will increase the rate of degradation elsewhere and push temperatures higher more rapidly. Beyond any of these—and each may exacerbate others—there may be no return.

Most frighteningly, the worst-case scenarios suggested over the past thirty years or so have turned out both to have been the most accurate, and to be occurring much faster than anticipated. Prediction after prediction has been fulfilled decades before the dates estimated only a few years ago. Carbon emissions have grown steadily since the first major international discussions aimed at limiting them: they were 61 per cent higher in 2013 than in 1990.[11] Fifty per

8. For an introduction, see Emily Boyd and Emma L. Tompkins's *Climate Change* (Oneworld, 2009). CO_2 emissions are measured from a baseline early in the Industrial Revolution.

9. Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (Viking, 1990), ix, 18.

10. The more pessimistic view is offered in David Wallace-Wells's *The Uninhabitable Earth: A Story of the Future* (Allen Lane, 2019). A more optimistic estimate and critique of Wallace-Wells's "doomist" narrative is given in Michael Mann's *The New Climate War: The Fight to Take Back Our Planet* (Scribe, 2021, 211–17). Mann, however, says little about climate tipping points, and rather more about "tipping points" in public attitudes towards the problem. A good review of the movement is provided in Dale Jamieson's *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle against Climate Change Failed—and What It Means for Our Future* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

11. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Allen Lane, 2014), 11.

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cent of all CO_2 emissions in history have been since 2000. Some 51 billion tons of greenhouse gases are now released annually, and the amount is rising by as much as 4 per cent p.a. It needs to fall by 7–15 per cent p.a. if we are to survive. But widely accepted projections indicate a 120 per cent increase in fossil-fuel consumption by 2030. For many years, at the climate-change summits from Kyoto (1997) to Paris (2015), 1.5–2°C of global warming was spoken of as "sustainable" and "liveable".[12] The most recent meeting, COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, continued to subscribe to this principle, while doing little to ensure that even 1.5°C would not be breached (1.8–2.8°C is estimated in the unlikely event that all pledges are met). But if the world is being destroyed at the current rate of 1.25°C, which is likely to bring us to 3–4°C or more, our problems are clearly worse than we think, and the enormity of what we face is simply not being recognised. Why should we settle on a ceiling higher than what is already destroying the planet? Can we really "compromise" with extinction, in order to retain "business as usual" for as long as possible? And the rate of degeneration will accelerate, since as the world gets warmer it will get hotter still if emissions are not drastically reduced. Nor are our distant "targets" viable. A notional zero-carbon goal by 2050 is now commonly touted—even in the proposed EU "Green New Deal", as of 2020. This is so improbably remote as to be meaningless. And the goals proposed for 2030 (as of 2021) would reduce emissions by only 0.5–1 per cent, when a 45 per cent reduction is necessary.[13] This is folly.

Such proposals still define our climate comfort zone. But they are seriously flawed. The non-threatening discourse which for the first decade of this century focused on a 1.5–2°C ceiling has now been replaced by forecasts of 4–5° or even more, and as early as 2060.[14] At 4°C, it is generally conceded, what we call civilisation will collapse, and most people will die. Even at the current rate of warming, the polar icecaps are melting in the Arctic (up to 20 metres thick, shrunken by 40 per cent since 1980, and melting at six times the rate of the 1990s). Some 40 per cent or more of the Siberian permafrost may vanish by 2100. Here and elsewhere, the permafrost could unleash as

12. But a recent account notes that "there is no specific scientific reason for picking these particular numbers": Eelco J. Rohling, *The Climate Question: Natural Cycles, Human Impact, Future Outlook* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 2. A 2°C ceiling is widely held to have originated with the economist William Nordhaus, who proposed it as early as the 1970s, but later described 4°C as "optimal", meaning that the costs and benefits of mitigating change balanced out. See Nobel Prize Organisation, "William D. Nordhaus: Facts", NobelPrize.org, Nobel Prize Outreach AB 2021, 8 November 2021, www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/2018/nordhaus/facts/.

13. *Guardian*, 7 May 2021, Journal, 1.

14. An early acute analysis of the problem assumed 2°C warming by 2030 as the "critical threshold": George Monbiot, *Heat: How to Stop the Planet Burning* (Allen Lane, 2006), 15.

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much as a thousand million tons (a gigaton) of methane and 37 thousand million tons (37 gigatons) of organic carbon, more than has been released since the Industrial Revolution. In the Antarctic (up to 5 kilometres deep), which holds 90 per cent of the world's ice, 2.7 trillion tons have been lost, currently at the rate of 1.2 trillion a year, and this tipping point will likely be reached with only 2–3°C of warming, which the targets now agreed on will likely produce. The world's glaciers are disappearing—in Greenland, at nine times the rate of the 1990s, which will alone produce a 7-metre sea-level rise. These changes are pretty much irreversible. The last time CO_2 levels were near today's was the Pliocene period, some three million years ago, when sea levels were 12–32 metres above ours.[15] We can expect much worse.

As temperatures rise, deforestation, with increasingly devastating forest fires (now up to 25 per cent of carbon emissions), the degradation of agricultural land, desertification, and water shortages proceed apace. By 2030 demand for water may outstrip supply by 40 per cent. Vast areas will soon be too arid to cultivate or live in. Coastal regions will be inundated, and some islands are already endangered. Huge movements of population will occur, and war over habitable land, including the use of nuclear weapons, will become inevitable. Sea temperatures are rising and threaten dramatic alterations in currents. The oceans, which absorb most of the heat, are becoming more acidic, spelling the end of coral reefs (99 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef is already doomed) and much marine life. As the poles and glaciers melt they reflect less sunlight and thus assist greater warming. In total, oceans could rise 80 metres above today's levels—and 40 per cent of the world's population lives within 100 kilometres (60 miles) of the coast. To pessimists like David Wallace-Wells, there is "almost no chance" that we can avoid many of these scenarios.[16] Agreements come and go, and "greenwashing" with fine words and exuberant but often insincere promises becomes increasingly plentiful. Meanwhile, emissions just keep rising. For, despite rising anxieties, many of us are wedded to the opulent lifestyle the wealthy nations enjoy. We are living the good life, and are loath to give it up. Or we claim the right to "development" in order to get there. So we race towards the cliff edge at high speed in our flashy red sports car, music blaring, not even wearing our seat belts.

It is time to slam the brakes on. Not only would 2°C be catastrophic, even 1°C spells disaster. Following the 2016 Paris Agreement guidelines, the consensus at the United Nations Climate Change conference, COP25, in Madrid (2019) and then at COP26 (2021) in Glasgow still presumed that 1.5° was

15. Rohling, *Climate Question*, 127.

16. Wallace-Wells, *Uninhabitable Earth*, 9.

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acceptable. It clearly is not: the Paris Agreement is far from adequate. It does not even dictate the need to cease fossil fuel use, and must be superseded by much more immediate and dramatic reductions in emissions. Even if existing goals were reached, warming of perhaps 3–4°C would still occur.[17] To Naomi Klein, 2°C of warming now "looks like a utopian dream."[18] A likely global temperature rise of 4–5°C by the mid-twenty-first century, rising to as high as 6°C by 2100, would mean summer temperatures in Europe and the Americas soon reaching 50–60°C.[19] At 3°C warming, trees will start to die, and few crops can be cultivated. Physical infrastructure (roads, electric wiring, window frames, etc.) then disintegrates rapidly. Rising sea levels would displace hundreds of millions of people, and the heat, billions more. By this point the process would be well-nigh unstoppable. Social and economic collapse would inevitably follow. A dramatic scramble for rapidly diminishing resources would result. Climate chaos breeds climate conflict. A "world where people shoot each other in the streets over a loaf of bread", in Bill McKibben's warning, may be just over the horizon.[20] A planet 4°C warmer could sustain only between 500 million and a billion people, out of a current population of some 7.8 billion, but as many as 10 billion in 2050. What will happen to the rest? And to the animals and natural world? No amount of posturing, virtue signalling, dithering, and delaying, or the announcing of distant goals, forever kicking the can further down the road, will save them. Action of an entirely different magnitude is required. This problem is greater than every other difficulty we face put together. It deserves our immediate, urgent, and undivided attention.

Here utopia enters into the equation. Defined as "no place", with "utopian" meaning "unrealistic" or "impossible", its relevance to the present is dubious. But it is much more. Utopianism allows us to project ideal societies or groups by imagining what might be but does not yet exist. Such maps of possibility take us beyond the thousand bubbles of everyday consciousness which envelop us, limiting our horizons to what our self-interest and desire for

17. Rohling, *Climate Question*, 95. Rohling regards 1.5°C as "too generous" (99). Wallace-Wells estimates 3.2°C of warming, provided all agreements are met (*Uninhabitable Earth*, 11), but also cites a UN report predicting 4.5°C by 2100 and an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report suggesting over 4°C of warming is likely (p. 41).

18. Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 13. Such tipping points could also occur through nuclear war or volcanic eruption.

19. Mark Lynas, *Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet* (Harper Perennial, 2008).

20. McKibben, *End of Nature*, 135.

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happiness demand, and making vastly superior social arrangements and great future changes appear nearly inconceivable. Utopia is part of a family of concepts of imaginary spaces, including heaven and paradise, which have historically used images of ideal communities to offer a moral compass or rudder to steer us through the storms of life and restrain the excessive greed and selfishness which forever threaten to destroy us, or to lament the folly of failing to do so.[21] Now too it can function to warn of the extreme dangers of our present course. Without it, indeed, no real advancement can occur. It is, thus, far more than a merely interesting and provocative concept: it is vital to our progress. No plea to return to "normality" or the "everyday" is now worthwhile. Only the extraordinary can save us.

Utopian*ism* also involves putting utopian ideas into practice. Distinguishing the realistic and attainable aspects of utopia from those which are purely imaginary (which some necessarily are) is attempted in part I here. Utopianism is examined in terms of form, content, and function. Its forms, we will see, are three: utopian ideas, literary utopias and dystopias, and communitarianism. Its functions are two. One is to permit visionary social theory by hinting at possible futures on the basis of lost or imaginary pasts, or extrapolating present trends to their logical conclusions or outcomes. We can call this the *futurological function*. It allows us to reach beyond the horizons of everyday life and push back the boundaries of the possible. It may offer a blueprint or programme which can actually be reached—who would construct a building, much less a new society, without one? Utopia's second function is essentially psychological. Here a "desire" or "principle" is often viewed as the core or essence of utopian thinking. This may produce an image which serves as a critical standpoint on the present but necessarily recedes like a mirage as we approach it. So while we may realise past utopias we also constantly move the conceptual goalposts forward, somewhat on the "grass-is-always-greener" principle. We can term this the *alterity function*. Utopia's content is usually defined by equality and sociability, or "community", which is here narrowed and refined into a need for belonging. So the concept cannot be reduced to meaning nowhere, impossible, impractical, or perfect, or even merely better. Nor should we treat it as a substitute for or variant on religion. It does not seek a final, total, or permanent state of earthly perfection, bliss, holiness, blessedness, the complete abolition of alienation, or any other variation on salvation (which is what these are), though we need to consider claims that it does. It can succeed only where it has more modest and secular aims.

21. In the sense that they are spaces we imagine, which might of course be real, lack of evidence notwithstanding; the point is how we use what we imagine.

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In a twenty-first-century utopia, it will be argued, these aims must include three key qualities: equality, sociability, and sustainability. Delving into earlier traditions reveals how they may be combined. Thomas More's humanist paradigm, here termed *utopian republicanism*, is defined by common property, relative social equality, and greater sociability, or a closer sense of community. More describes a form of polity or commonwealth, a mode of social organisation, and a sketch of the customs and manners appropriate to them. Suitably updated, and bolstered with suggestions drawn from later utopian thinkers, this tradition suggests clearer solutions for our unique problems than any other school of thought can offer. The examples drawn on here derive from all the emanations of utopianism; namely, literature, intentional communities, and utopian theory, which are introduced in a broadly chronological manner. They illustrate a rich and complex response to the central issues treated here, particularly that of needs, and of the desire for luxury goods and to emulate the wealthy, and suggest ways of releasing ourselves from the self-destructive mentality of consumerism and promoting what is now, and must remain, our own central principle: sustainability.

Equality and sociability are traditional utopian virtues, and indicate that the core of the ideal society is social relationships, not material plenty. This grates against many common images of utopia as universal abundance based on satisfying unlimited needs. For most of the last 150 years the "technological Utopia in which our descendants will live", as it was described in 1957, has evoked visions of gleaming skyscrapers and fantastic technologies which make everyone opulent and render onerous labour obsolete.[22] Yet in preceding centuries, both in fiction and in practice, utopia often stood for the image of a society defined much more by human interaction than by technology, physical infrastructure, or widespread luxury. Material needs have been satisfied in images of the ideal society, but they are not regarded as incessant or unrestricted. Utopia's key goal has been greater unity, camaraderie, and friendship, by contrast to dystopias, where fear and hatred of others predominate, and individual isolation and loneliness are deliberately promoted by rulers.[23] This gives us a spectrum of group types, with fear and alienation at the dystopian extreme, and friendship and belonging at the utopian end. People are nicer to each other in utopia, and less afraid. They have stronger feelings of what is here termed *belongingness*, or the need to feel accepted and to have a sense of home and place. This concept is at the heart of the aspiration for and experience of utopia, and is central to this

22. Harrison Brown, James Bonner, and John Weir, *The Next Hundred Years* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1957), 160.

23. See my *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford University Press, 2016), for this typology.

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book. But it can flourish only where luxury, great social inequality, and an obsessive desire to possess and consume things and display our wealth are curtailed.

The need for sustainability requires re-examining utopian approaches to needs, consumption, luxury, simplicity, and nature, and tracing how the idea of unlimited consumption emerged from the eighteenth century onwards, and how utopians responded to it. This mentality has become universal, and, forgive the pun, all-consuming. We embrace it passionately like our one true love. Few utopians, we will see, have accepted it, however, and most have foreseen its dangers and limits.[24] But even here, as in the wider society, a tension developed between the growing appeal of luxury for all and the desirability on moral, then increasingly on ecological, grounds of a regime of greater simplicity and restraint which sustainably preserves the best that science and technology offer us, in the interests of the survival of all. The manifold forms this tension has exhibited are explored throughout part II of this book.

These three ideas—equality, sociability, and sustainability—are treated here as part of a single relationship. A central argument of this book is that the quid pro quo for exiting consumerism is greatly expanding opportunities for sociability to help compensate for diminished material consumption. People are unlikely to relinquish a consumer-oriented lifestyle unless they see their lives improved in other ways. The appeal of consumerism is otherwise simply overpowering. The chief problem here is the richest 15 per cent of humanity, who have decent housing, transportation, food, and clothing. If, and it is a very big *if*, we can wean these from their greedy obsession with luxury goods and conspicuous consumption, and dissuade the rest from emulating them, we stand some chance of preserving our planet. But if all we have to offer is gloom and hopeless pessimism, constant demands for self-sacrifice and austerity, the authoritarian prohibition of pleasurable activities, or a blind optimism based on ostrich-like denial and love of luxury, which in turn feeds the climate-change deniers, we will lose the battle and thence the war, and our planet. So the task before us involves not merely moving towards renewable fuels, drastically reducing carbon emissions, and the like. It involves fundamentally rethinking the society we live in, and altering our habits and behaviour as consumers, indeed our very identity as human beings, in the direction of a sustainable lifestyle. Science and technology alone simply cannot do the job. Our social relations must be rethought and restructured.

Utopia can help us meet humanity's greatest challenge, then, by illustrating how sustainability has been imagined in the past. Renouncing consumerism

24. For an exploration of these trends, see Rudolf Moos and Robert Brownstein's *Environment and Utopia: A Synthesis* (Plenum Press, 1977).

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means acknowledging earth's incapacity to meet unlimited wants, and stressing conservation, repair, renewal, and autarky. It means ceasing to acquire products because we associate them with youth, sex appeal, beauty, or immortality, and prioritising instead their use value over their symbolic value. Following the sceptical tradition of Veblen, Packard, Galbraith, Potter, Riesman, and others, who throughout the twentieth century warned of the dangers of affluence, we must thus decouple our psychological wants from our physical needs.[25] This involves reversing a process developed over some three hundred years, which is here described as commodifying the self, "thinging ourselves", or identifying our personalities with objects. Decommodifying our lives allows us to view human progress in qualitative rather than quantitative terms, and to see this largely in terms of richer relationships with other people, or what is here called *enhanced sociability*, whose aim is belongingness, and whose antithesis is that type of alienation defined by a sense of lacking place. This compensatory sociability involves exchanging an unnecessarily wide range of consumer choices for a more nurturing, healthy, stimulating human environment. It implies constructing a set of institutions for promoting sociability, as well as nurturing attitudes towards other people which promote mutual assistance and conviviality. We must learn to interact more in order to shop less. And all this must be done within about a decade, or it will be too late.

This book thus rests on three premises:

1. That we value social relations more than anything else, which is easily illustrated, as we will see,
2. That the utopian tradition acknowledges this principle, and offers us a theory of the relationship between consumption and sociability, which is not too difficult to prove; and,
3. That a viable future is possible only if we relinquish a consumerist mentality in exchange for greater engagement with others. This is highly contentious, and not easily demonstrated.

This book, then, has three main aims: to defend a theory of "realistic" or realisable utopianism in order to describe the ideal we must aim for; to focus further on two main aspects of this theory—namely, sociability and restraining consumption, especially private luxury—by examining how the utopian tradition has treated these issues; and to make sense of what these imply for environmental degradation now. Some utopians have proposed ways of avoiding excessive private consumption by shifting our focus towards sustainable

25. On this tradition, see Daniel Horowitz's *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939–1979* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

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luxuries in the public sphere. With appropriate modifications these proposals can be applied today, particularly by offering compensatory and often public sociability in exchange for the diminished private consumption of unsustainable goods. The process will not be painless, but at least we might survive.

We begin first by laying out the ground of the general argument and defining our key concept here, commencing with a brief overview of the tradition and some influential approaches to its analysis.

The History of Utopianism

It is sometimes claimed that utopianism has no history, but expresses a timeless desire for human improvement. This is only partially true at best, and is more misleading than not. From its invention in 1516, utopia has proven to be an organic concept which evolves to meet successive challenges. It has come to represent a constant, ongoing conversation about humanity's potential, and especially its capacity for moral amelioration. Every age projects idealised responses appropriate to its own problems and aspires to build on the past and, increasingly, to surpass the ambitions of its predecessors. Earlier ideals invariably disappoint later readers, because our expectations advance. Many older literary utopias fall far short of modern aspirations in being repressive, authoritarian, patriarchal, and undemocratic. Their austerity, harshness, and coercion jar against our sensibilities. Then there is the outlook of Europeans on the rest of the world. The utopian idea commenced from a less-than-universalist, usually Eurocentric if not downright imperialist perspective, with numerous nations putting themselves forward as the "elect". Slavery and war are sometimes retained. Until fairly recently utopia remained an imperial concept, denoting a "commonwealth of increase", in the seventeenth-century republican James Harrington's phrase, and a fantasy of conquest which implied dystopia for indigenous and non-European peoples. Decolonising utopia is a task only just begun, for the arrogance which empire breeds is very slowly dissipated.

Only in the late nineteenth century did a universalist utopia become possible—at the height of imperial expansion. And even then, notes Norbert Elias, the tendency remained that "almost all these political utopias express a wish for hegemony", or rule over others, "a wish for the preponderance of one's own class or one's own state over all other people," a prospect which could end only when "Present-day utopias . . . become utopias of humanity and not merely state utopias", through a world state and united international order.[26]

26. Norbert Elias, *Essays I: On the Sociology of Knowledge and the Sciences* (University College Dublin Press, 2009), 265, 287.

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This trend began in the twentieth century, especially in the writings of H. G. Wells, when utopia evolved into an increasingly cosmopolitan, humanist idea centred on promoting world organisation for justice, peace, and plenty for all. Since then it has been marked by ever-greater aspirations to inclusivity, which demands recognising hitherto marginalised groups as entitled to equal respect.

Though it often harkened back to earlier, better times, from the eighteenth century onwards utopia can thus be understood as a subset of linear theories of indefinite progress, and the expectation that each generation would be better off than its parents, which became the most important modern social idea. Like rights theories, which it parallels in various ways but exceeds in ambition, utopian progress is, however, measured less by material than by moral improvement, defined by two key, related qualities, sociability and equality. Neither of these figures much in orthodox histories of ideas of progress, where, like some wayward relative arriving at the Christmas feast, introducing utopia often provokes an awkward silence in a celebration of humanity's glorious achievements, and a plea to have this somewhat unhinged guest ejected or sent to some distant table to avoid annoying the rest.[27] "Progress" has an orderly, bourgeois connotation. It results, we usually suppose, from gradual scientific and technological innovation combined with human ingenuity, efficiency, and ambition. It may emerge sedately out of an idea of Providence, or God's benign intention for the world, and plods relentlessly towards the future without spectacular frenzies of expectation, while always delivering something novel and delightful. By contrast, utopia often appears insistently disruptive and alarming. Utopians who embrace "an apocalyptic philosophy of history", in particular, are not seen as advocating "true progressivism" at all.[28] They, and especially Karl Marx, are instead derided as embodying what Robert Nisbet calls "a long and powerful tradition of Christian millennialist utopianism which could be, in some degree, secularized, with its apocalyptic intensity left undiminished."[29] Utopians are colourful cranks with bizarre and sometimes embarrassing or dangerous ideas. Some appear intoxicated by wild ideas, or to be downright mad. Utopia is the skeleton in the closet of progress.

But utopia's contribution to progress can indeed be measured by its aspiration for higher ethical ideals. It represents a process of continuous enlightenment, and a growth in maturity from humanity's childhood onwards, many

27. Robert Nisbet's *History of the Idea of Progress* (Heinemann, 1980) describes *Utopia* as "as far from the idea of progress as was More's beloved friend Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly*" (112).

28. John Baillie, *The Belief in Progress* (Oxford University Press, 1950), 91.

29. Nisbet, *Idea of Progress*, 67.

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lapses notwithstanding. To Elias, "More's *Utopia* represents a specific stage in the development of social conscience".[30] In portraying communities where oppression and exploitation have been eliminated or greatly reduced, utopians demand more of us than mainstream proponents of progress do. They dare to imagine that we can ask more of ourselves. They insist that our moral capabilities have not yet met their limits and represent moral intelligence, not just instrumental reason or material gain. We have a better self, they say, if we would only aspire to realise it. From the Enlightenment onwards, most notably, their humanitarian agenda has constantly urged the limitation of cruelty, violence, pain, punishment, and coercion, and the exploitation of people, animals, and nature. This clearly implies a defence of the principle that no one's life should depend on another's suffering. Utopias have increasingly advanced an ideal of consent and condemned rule through tyranny and fear. Now that the blithely and blindly optimistic ideal of progress-as-material-advancement is dead, utopia can stand in its stead as an organising principle for our aspirations.

Despite some of the more extreme claims associated with cultural relativism and postmodernism, this moral philosophy implies a grand narrative of progress which makes the quest to minimise coercion, harm, and suffering the chief theme in our moral history and places utopia at the centre of the narrative.[31] It demands not just that we progress towards these goals but that all enjoy the results thereof. It insists not only that we formally end relationships of extreme domination, like slavery, but that we also attack their causes and justifications, like racism. It routinely asks a basic but radical question usually missing from popular discourse: how far has the progress of science and technology benefited the average person and made them happier and more at ease? So utopians have been found at the forefront of nearly every progressive movement for five hundred years, including sexual liberation, animal rights, vegetarianism, and many other practices. This alternative world view aims distinctly at our improvement as a species. So, far from being a marginal or eccentric idea, utopia is important to everyone. It sums up humanity's highest aspirations and defines our best selves.

After a phase which constitutes its prehistory, four major stages in the development of this agenda are evident, each defined, for our purposes here,

30. Elias, *Essays I*, 227.

31. The centrality of some variant on John Stuart Mill's famous harm principle is thus assumed here.

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by a varying emphasis on three key qualities: equality, sociability, and sustainability.

The first stage is the concept's establishment in More's radical humanist text of 1516, against a background of profound social crisis, as the modern class war of the rich against the poor and the modern racial war of Europeans against the rest of humanity commenced. *Utopia*'s restatement of European conscience overlapped with the conquest of the "New World", to Europeans equally a destination ripe for plunder and embodying the lost virtues of the Garden of Eden or the Golden Age.[32] From the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries, the Americas in particular inherited aspirations drawn from ideas of the millennium, paradise, the chosen race and people, and the general salvation of humanity.[33] In a fundamental sense they became the chief modern spatial utopia, and the place to flee in order to escape the greater difficulty of promoting utopia at home, in old and corrupt nations.[34] To a lesser degree, Australia and the southern Pacific also came to embody ideals of primitive virtue and natural liberty, and the possibility of European conquest. And so to regain its own paradise, the west set out to conquer everyone else's.

The second phase occurred with the late eighteenth century's turn towards more forward-looking visions. The other place became the future time, replacing nostalgia for a lost Golden Age and the trope of discovering utopian places in distant lands with an imagined superior future. An air of profound expectation of imminent and dramatic improvement began to pervade the intellectual atmosphere. The wedding of *eutopia*, the imaginary good space, to *euchronia*, the future good time coming, sometimes implied the promise of being guaranteed by history, either rapidly, as in Marx, or more slowly, as in liberal theories of progress. As the west's main utopian project, Christianity, waned, a more secular utopia filled the void created by the loss of faith. Expectations of a millennium induced by God were now supplanted by visions of futures forged by human agency. A "religion of progress" saw faith in a future life replaced by "belief in human perfectibility and infinite progress".[35] In this phase utopia also represents a response to emerging crises, first of commercial

32. See Charles L. Sanford, *The Quest for Paradise: Europe and the American Moral Imagination* (University of Illinois Press, 1961).

33. Some of the spatialising process is traced in Jason H. Pearl's *Utopian Geographies and the Early English Novel* (University of Virginia Press, 2014).

34. See Ernest Lee Tuveson's *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (University of Chicago Press, 1968) and Frank Graziano's *The Millennial New World* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

35. E.g., Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry* (Sheed and Ward, 1929), xv, and generally 177–201.

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society, then of urbanisation and industrialisation. As a form of satire it often lambasted the growing luxury, vanity, and egoism which commerce fuelled, and sometimes directly counselled a return to greater simplicity. The American and French revolutions revealed a powerful desire for greater social equality, soon defined as socialism. As the chief form of modern utopianism, it was quickly recognised as the progeny of Thomas More. This trend demonstrates a growing realism and universalism within the utopian tradition. It also coincided with the consumer revolution, which drove both to a greater extent than is usually appreciated.

The third major historical stage in utopianism occurred in the late nineteenth century, with the advent and dissemination of large-scale collectivist solutions driven by science, technology, and industry. This induced the first great explosion of utopian literature, sparked by the statist socialist proposals of the American Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (1888). Then came the epoch of Karl Marx, the most influential non-religious utopian of all.[36] After 1917, spatially, anti-capitalist utopian hope was invested primarily in Russia's Bolshevik Revolution and, until the late twentieth century, in other societies inspired by or incorporated into the Soviet experiment. The idea of revolution inherited many assumptions formerly embedded in millenarian thinking, implying a moment of profound moral and psychological as well as social and political transformation, which overlapped with the language of conversion and redemption. Central to this expectation was the assumption that once private property was abolished, human behaviour would improve dramatically. If capitalism had betrayed the promise of universal happiness, this utopia seemingly offered a viable alternative, until, subverted by internal despotism and external pressures, the system finally collapsed in 1989–91. Meanwhile, capitalism also bred its own utopian alternatives, notably during the 1960s, in the form of a counterculture which often rejected consumerism.

The fourth historical turning took place in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This initially appeared as a claim of the ultimate victory of capitalism and liberal democracy over communism, and of the "end of history" and "end of utopia"—proposals which now look downright ridiculous. But now, as environmental catastrophe loomed, progress as such began to retreat rapidly. Dystopia came to overshadow utopia, whose prospects for revival now looked increasingly slender indeed.

36. In terms of readership as well as practical influence on ideas of a vastly improved future. Marx has easily outsold all the other practical utopists as well as the literary utopian and dystopian writers put together. He has thus a good claim to be the starting point for any history of the subject as a whole.

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The Historiography of Utopianism

To comprehend these developments we need to clarify the meaning of our central concept. But what is the history of utopianism a history of? The answer depends greatly on our starting point. Yet there are many of these, and which if any is best is much disputed. In academia, petty jealousies often trump real issues of principle. Disciplinary rivalry is particularly disruptive in promoting claims for a monopoly on interpretation. For who would not aspire to own utopia? "Every discipline which concerns itself with this area would like to keep it to itself", writes Norbert Elias: "Literary scholars would like to define utopia as an exclusively literary genre, historians might perhaps wish it to be understood as a unique historical formation, philosophers as an eternal philosophical question and sociologists as a fact of society."[37] Amongst other things, literary scholars probe authorial intention, narrative strategies, the nature of the "canon", intertextuality, the formal variations of the utopian genre, and the shifting nature of its norms, and how these relate to their dystopian counterparts, and to science fiction and other genres.[38] Historians of communal societies detail individual experiments, map out long-term trends in communitarianism, and explain their relative success or failure, the dynamics of various groups, and their relations to the societies from which they emerge. Political theorists and intellectual historians trace the evolution of utopian ideas within broader trends in thought, and analyse and categorise their various causes, emanations, and interrelations. Then there are sociologists; architects and town planners; and students of religion, psychology, philosophy, science, and technology, of popular protest and revolutionary movements, and of imagined futures both positive and negative.[39] The utopian and dystopian dimensions of art, music, film, architecture, travel and exploration, empire, gender, nostalgia, and a hundred other themes also lend meanings to the subject. A dozen or more definitions of utopia, more or less plausible, meaningful, or helpful, emerge from these concerns. And the subject does not stand still but is ever in flux, making Mosaic efforts to set any one typology in stone difficult.[40] To muddy the waters still further, the most influential strand of the tradition by

37. Elias, *Essays I*, 212. More historians would in fact likely treat it as organic than "unique".

38. For reasons explained in my *Dystopia* (284–90), science fiction is separated from utopia/dystopia, and is also generally excluded from my account here, though a few such texts are mentioned. In practice, a strict separation of subgenres is sometimes extremely difficult.

39. A recent general inquiry of this type is Mark Featherstone's *Tocqueville's Virus: Utopia and Dystopia in Western Social and Political Thought* (Routledge, 2008).

40. For an extensive range of these, see Fred. L. Polak's *The Image of the Future* (2 vols (Oceana, 1961), 1: 379–438.

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far, utopian theory, sometimes denies any affiliation with utopia. The most famous utopian of all, Karl Marx, is the key example here. But liberals too are often embarrassed by the label, which they associate with psychological weakness and political or religious extremism.

Many tensions exist between these approaches, and a lack of common ground causes persistent confusion in the field. Like the fabled elephant described by blind people, who touch its many parts and reason from the specific to the general without seeing the whole, utopia appears different to many who approach it. Much ink has been spilt over issues like whether or when texts should be privileged above context and history, or vice versa, and about what it is, ultimately, that we are trying to explain, or promote, in using the concept of utopia, or in subsuming it under or juxtaposing it to utopianism. Disciplinary jargon designed to exclude and intimidate sometimes functions as a substitute for thought. Some deploy the magical shield of various "isms", and invoke invisible armies of fellow "ists" who sprout like dragon's teeth every time the magic spell is uttered. (Shout "Marx" and imaginary millions, or at least real dozens, suddenly rally behind your banner.) At the opposite end of the spectrum, the mere word "utopia" may operate at the emotional level as a magical rescue concept, releasing us from our burdens, guilt, and feelings of inadequacy. Like back-page ads from 1950s comics for a Mr Atlas weightlifter's body so the bullies won't kick sand in your face on the beach, utopia can serve as a get-rich/strong-quick feel-good mantra, a wormhole whose fantasy releases us from oppressive reality, or a lifejacket which rescues us from drowning. (Say "utopia" and fly up into the sky away from it all.) Between these extremes lie a multiplicity of approaches and conflicting or overlapping meanings. This pluralism reminds us that utopia is too grand, brazen, complex, and epistemologically incisive a concept to be held captive for long by disciplinary imperialism. It cannot be owned: it is the common patrimony of humanity.

A loose agreement nonetheless exists that utopia consists in any ideal or imaginary society portrayed in any manner. This minimalist definition satisfies many and still portrays a discreet category. It overlaps with common-language conceptions of the term, where "fantastic" and "impossible" dominate. To Elias, utopia is a "fantasy image of a society which contains proposed solutions to specific unsolved problems of its society of origin".[41] Utopia thus sometimes posits an ideal which by definition is unattainable. Forever nowhere, like a mirage, it necessarily recedes as we approach it, because it is an aspiration based on something much better than the present. So as we reach that present, the ideal necessarily moves ahead of us and remains eternally in the future.

41. Elias, *Essays I*, 214. This would cover dystopia as well.

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This process is nonetheless exceedingly useful. It allows us to pierce the bubbles of everyday life, the veils of ignorance which obscure the causes of exploitation and extreme inequality and allow them to be portrayed as "normal". Yet this conception must also be reconciled with the fact that utopia also envisions long-term futures for humanity by offering projections, both literary and historical, of where we are going, to give us alternative visions of much better places where we might go, and to suggest how we might get there, while sometimes also caustically mocking our hubris and our failure to reach the destination. This ability to rise above our chronic and debilitating tendency to short-termism and to challenge "normality" is crucial not just for visionary thinking but also for the anticipation and avoidance of disaster.

Some utopias, too, are realisable, and here utopianism must be deemed realistic: today's present, somewhere, was someone's ideal future in the past. This raises the issue of practical utopian experiments in living in a morally superior way. While fantasy and the imaginative projection of unrealisable ideals are part of the utopian narrative, so too are actual communities, and more collaborative and collectivist ways of life. Here utopia might in principle exist outside the imaginary no place and have actually been realised or still lie within reach. But how should we describe the common core shared by these dimensions of utopianism? What relationship exists between fantastic projections and utopian practice? While the heuristic utility of emphasising fantasy is crucial to understanding the psychology of utopianism, this book pushes at the purely imaginary sense of utopia and contends that it can also be understood as an achievable, if invariably imperfect, set of human relationships. The realist argument presented here thus bridges existing disciplinary and epistemological divisions, the gap between imagination and reality, the practical and theoretical aspects of the subject, and between *utopia* as "nowhere" and *eutopia* as the "good place".[42] It also permits a symmetry with the study of dystopia, where real societies are often, indeed increasingly, described as dystopian, meaning not that they have necessarily reached dystopia but that they lean alarmingly in that direction. Utopian*ism* then becomes the quest for the good place, (e)utopia, where these solutions are seemingly realised, if only temporarily and imperfectly, guided by the image of utopia, the no place which might be. Utopia and eutopia are easily confused, especially because they are pronounced the same way, so that "utopia" is often used interchangeably to mean both "no place" and "good place". Here, except where specified,

42. A useful discussion here, which moves in a similar direction, is provided by Wayne Hudson in *The Reform of Utopia* (Ashgate, 2003), which argues for a "non-totalising" account of utopia (p. 2).

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"utopian" means "eutopian": the *e* is silently reinserted into *utopia*, without altering the spelling. But this too can be both real and imaginary.

The history of utopian*ism*, then, is the history both of its separate components and of what they share in common. The first use of the "ism" has been dated to 1649, though reflections on the meaning of utopia can certainly be traced back to the early reception of Thomas More's great work, which appeared in English in 1551.[43] On its broadest definition, the modern field of utopian studies commences with the revival of interest in More in the early nineteenth century. From the outset, this attention was not confined to literature, and the interdisciplinary nature of utopianism was recognised. In Britain, links between literary and communitarian utopias and trends in thought were already evident in the Pantisocracy proposals of the 1790s, and Plato, More, Robert Wallace, and others were connected by William Godwin as critics of private property.[44] A one-time disciple of Godwin, Robert Southey prominently associated the Welsh socialist Robert Owen with More in *Sir Thomas More; or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* (1829). To take only a few later examples, these links were also indicated in a series of studies of Owen, Charles Fourier, and Etienne Cabet; then in Marx's writings, which insisted on the now-indefensible distinction between "utopian socialism" and "scientific socialism",[45] and those of Louis Reybaud, who saw the "utopian movement" commencing with Plato and arriving at the "social utopias" of the period,[46] and others through the 1840s; through studies like William Lucas Sargant's *Social Innovators and Their Schemes* (1858), which associated socialism with More, Bacon, and Harrington.[47]

43. For the early period, see Robert Appelbaum's "Utopia and Utopianism", in *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose, 1500–1640*, edited by Andrew Hadfield (Oxford University Press, 2013, 253–66). For France, see Hans-Günter Funke's "Utopie, Utopiste", in *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich, 1680–1820*, edited by Rolf Reichardt and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink (R. Oldebourg Verlag, 1991, 11: 5–104). A good account of the etymology of the various related terms is Lucien Hölscher's "Utopie", translated in *Utopian Studies* 7 (1996): 1–65.

44. William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 2 vols (G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1793), 2: 805. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent citations refer to this edition.

45. Marx only very rarely used the "ism". See Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 28: 71, 180; 17: 90.

46. Louis Reybaud, *Études sur les réformateurs ou socialistes modernes*, 2nd ed., 2 vols (Société belge de librairie, 1844), 1: 37.

47. William Lucas Sargant, *Social Innovators and Their Schemes* (Smith, Elder, 1858), 18. See Peter Fitting, "A Short History of Utopian Studies", *Science Fiction Studies* 36 (2009): 121–31.

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Renewed stimulation of interest in the subject occurred during the second wave of European socialism, from the 1870s onwards, with works like Moritz Kaufmann's *Utopias; or, Schemes of Social Improvement* (1879), the best early study of this type, which uses "utopianism" once, and Karl Kautsky's *Thomas More and His Utopia* (1888) (also once).[48] In 1898 Vida Scudder used the term "social idealism" to describe More's inheritance amongst the "dreamers" of Victorian Britain.[49] In later studies, "utopianism" is introduced in Lewis Mumford's *The Story of Utopias* (1922), where thought and method are given pride of place.[50] Anticipating the psychological outlook now usually associated with Ernst Bloch, Joyce Oramel Hertzler's *The History of Utopian Thought* (1923) explicitly defines the "ism" as the "spirit of hope expressing itself in definite proposals and stimulating action, . . . meaning thereby the role of the conscious human will in suggesting a trend of development for society, or the unconscious alignment of society in conformity with some definite ideal."[51] Max Beer's *Social Struggles and Socialist Forerunners* (1924) adopts much of Marx and Engels's typology and does not discuss the "ism" as such, though Beer discusses More at length in his *History of British Socialism* (1929).[52] Much of the literature of this period and indeed subsequently relies on Marxist categories, and accepts, with Werner Sombart, the description that "All the older Socialists were Utopists because they mistook the real motive force in the life of society."[53] This insistence on proletarian class struggle as the dividing line between the utopians and more practical reformers, notably Marx, remained common through the 1980s.

Utopian*ism* as such became a serious object of study with the sociologist Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (1929), building partly on Bloch's early work, which did not use the "ism". Mannheim was chiefly concerned with the thought processes which motivate and structure knowledge, and with both wilful and unconscious desires for change, which in his interpretation ideology resists and utopia promotes. Of the utopians, he asserted, "Their thought is never a diagnosis of the situation; it can be used only as a direction for

48. For this period, see the incisive study by Toby Widdicombe "Early Histories of Utopian Thought (to 1950)" (*Utopian Studies* 3 (1992): 1–38). This terms Kaufmann's study "the first true history of utopianism" (6), while acknowledging that it does little to disentangle utopianism from socialism.

49. Vida D. Scudder, *Social Ideals in English Letters* (Houghton, Mifflin, 1898), 291.

50. Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias* (1922; Viking, 1962), 9.

51. Joyce Oramel Hertzler, *The History of Utopian Thought* (George Allen and Unwin, 1923), 268. This implies that planning is, however, every bit as important as hope in defining utopianism.

52. Max Beer, *History of British Socialism*, 2 vols, (G. Bell and Sons, 1929), 1: 34–43.

53. Werner Sombart, *Socialism and the Social Movement* (J. M. Dent, 1909), 38–39.

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action."[54] The "ism" is here thus more a habit of mind or sentiment than a catch-all description of the forms of thought and action which result. But the term did not catch on for many years, and, "scientific" Marxism having exempted itself from the label, was still often identified chiefly with literature. Paul Bloomfield's *Imaginary Worlds; or, The Evolution of Utopia* (1932), for example, associates utopianism with imaginative projection but conspicuously omits practical reformers like Owen, Fourier, and Marx. Frances Theresa Russell's *Touring Utopia* (1932) also links the "ism" to literature and decries the "erroneous identification" of socialism with utopianism.[55] Harry Ross's *Utopias Old and New* (1938) touches on socialism as having provided "pictures of a more pleasant future state", while again giving precedence to literary form, now often called the "utopian romance".[56] Marie Louise Berneri's *Journey through Utopia* (1950) abjures the "ism" but discusses socialist communitarianism and tries to rescue the utopians from some of Marxism's declamations.[57] The socialist movement continued to be the particular focus of most writers until after World War Two, when a shift towards literature is discernible, with dystopia looming centrally from the 1950s onwards.

Some early histories of communitarianism, like Charles Nordhoff's *The Communistic Societies of the United States* (1875), describe such experiments as "utopian", without delving further into definitions.[58] "Utopianist" and "utopianism" are used by George Jacob Holyoake in 1875 in relation to Owenism and the co-operative movement.[59] Morris Hillquit applied the label of "utopian socialist" to practical reformers in the "limited sphere" and at the national level.[60] Intellectual history did not arise as a separate discipline until the twentieth century, and treatments of utopian theory within mainstream ideas outside of Plato, Marx, anarchism, and socialism remain rare even today, especially with

54. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1936), 36. For a reconsideration of the main concepts here, see Lyman Tower Sargent's "Ideology and Utopia", in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, edited by Michael Freeden, Sargent, and Marc Stears (Oxford University Press, 2013), 439–51.

55. Frances Theresa Russell, *Touring Utopia* (Dial, 1932), 70.

56. Harry Ross, *Utopias Old and New* (Nicholson and Watson, 1938), 122.

57. Marie Louise Berneri, *Journey through Utopia* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950), 207–9.

58. John Humphrey Noyes curiously uses the term "utopian" only once in his classic study, originally entitled *History of American Socialisms* (1870), in reference to Adin Ballou (*Strange Cults and Utopias of 19th-Century America* (Dover Publications, 1966, 131).

59. George Jacob Holyoake, *The History of Co-operation in England*, 2 vols (Trubner, 1875), 1: 22–51, 155.

60. Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, 5th ed. (1903; Dover, 1971), 18–19.

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respect to liberalism. The exception is where, as a "model of an ideal society" or "concept of a good life", as Barbara Goodwin insists, it is distinctively radical and totalistic but nonetheless seen as integral to virtually every world view.[61]

Modern utopian studies dates from the 1960s, and the revival of interest in the subject which the idealistic counterculture, politics, and communalism of that decade provoked. More recent scholarship has encouraged a tighter typology which acknowledges the different components of the tradition while avoiding reducing them to any one part. The quest for utopia is seen as a common endeavour which is expressed in various complementary ways, though the trend towards treating utopia as primarily a literary concept persists.[62]

In recent years two authors have most prominently addressed the problem of utopianism. Both adopt definitions which mix form and function, but hint only more obliquely at content.[63] To Lyman Tower Sargent the three "faces" or forms of utopianism are utopian social theory, literary utopias and dystopias, and utopian practice. The "ism" as a whole is best captured in the phrase "social dreaming", a functional description. Attempts to transform everyday life in utopian directions are seen as "essential for the improvement of the human condition", though what this advance consists in, the content of utopia, is implied rather than explicit.[64] Krishan Kumar adopts a similar typology in distinguishing among utopian social theory, including Marx; utopian fiction; and utopian communal experiments. The last represent "the practice of utopia", which is in tension with the idea of utopia as "nowhere", though it is aligned with Sargent's description of communities as "attempting to create a better society". Kumar pleads for "a direct connection between the expressions of the social or literary imagination and the practical life of society", to clarify relations between theory

61. Barbara Goodwin, *Social Science and Utopia: Nineteenth Century Models of Social Harmony* (Harvester, 1978), 4.

62. Some recent trends in literature are examined by David M. Bell in *Rethinking Utopia: Power, Place, Affect* (Routledge, 2017).

63. Another major contribution to this debate, Ruth Levitas's *The Concept of Utopia* (Syracuse University Press, 1990), offers the best survey of definitions based on form, content, and function, though its conclusions vary considerably from those defended here.

64. Sargent, *Utopianism*, 3, 5, 8–9. Sargent's "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" (*Utopian Studies* 5 (1994): 1–37), first presented in 1975, is the most comprehensive attempt to clarify the definitional problem and provide a taxonomy of the various types of each "face". On current definitional disputes, see further Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent's *The Utopia Reader* (2nd ed., New York University Press, 2016, 1–15).

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and practice. He concludes in a Marxian vein that "All thought is shot through with practical elements; there is, likewise, no practice that is theory free, not governed by some sort of understanding that is essentially theoretical". So it may "be better to think of 'thought' and 'practice' not as in any way opposed to each other but as abstractions from a unified human activity." Practice produces thought, which induces further practice.[65]

The broadly accepted threefold typology of utopian forms does not indicate a specific *content* shared by them, only a definitive relationship among them. Clearly, ideal societies in literature and theory have much in common. Both are imaginary and textual, and they are separated only by the sometimes-thin veneer of fiction. The chief definitional problem arises here from including the third, practical component. How should we categorise the content of utopian practice? That is, how do we describe what happens when people think their way of life actually approximates to utopia, rather than merely aspiring to it or dreaming of the benefits thereof?[66] And how does this relate to the fictional and theoretical forms of utopianism? We cannot include communities in any typology simply because they *aim at* or *dream about* utopia and thus mirror a key utopian function. Like a mirage, this implies that they are condemned never to reach their goal, and by definition must fail or fall short, because their aspirations are unattainable in principle. In the meantime they must endure the Sisyphean frustration of seeing their goal inevitably receding as they approach it, remaining forever nowhere, at best a noble myth intended to guide aspiration. And they must swallow the mockery of those who condemn their claims of glimpsing utopia as deluded. But intentional communities and some similar spaces, discussed below, are clearly real, and are often called

65. Kumar, *Utopianism*, 64, 70; Lyman Tower Sargent, "Utopianism", in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online) (1998), https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/utopianism/v-1. Another useful account is Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor's *The Politics of Utopia* (Hutchinson, 1982), which argues that "utopianism as a tendency is a key ingredient of the whole process of modern politics" (9) and that "Utopianism depicts an ideal form of social life which, by definition, does not currently exist" (17). The authors also contend that "the Utopian enterprise is an attempt to depict the complete and concrete instantiation of these ideals in their society and the social consequences which this entails: this differs significantly from the approach which uses ideals as the light at the end of the tunnel, incapable of realization but useful to guide us in our choice of political means" (70). This incapacity is further modified later by the assertion that "Utopias are not realizable as totalities" (221) and the concession that many aspects of various aims and programmes both can and have been realised.

66. A few communes have also been called Utopia, like that founded by a group of Fourierists in Ohio in 1844.

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"utopian societies".[67] When they work well, their inhabitants do usually regard them as "good places", or eutopias. Can we really deny them the right to make this claim, on the grounds of the superiority of theory to practice? We cannot. This sentiment needs to be fitted into any definition of utopianism.

Defining Utopianism: Some Components

Clarifying the approach to the forms, functions, and content of utopianism proposed here requires briefly introducing some common conceptualisations of the subject. Utopia is often identified with five things, to which it should not, however, be exclusively reduced.[68] When proposed as definitions, none of these aspects are "wrong". To identify any of them *exclusively* as "utopia" tends to ignore too many phenomena which arise in other parts of the field, making it impossible to define the "ism". What we need is a composite definition which brings every relevant aspect under its rubric while not suppressing the legitimate claim of any component to be included.

Utopia as Literary Text

Firstly, despite its close association with More's *Utopia* and the thousands of books it has inspired, utopia is not solely a literary tradition.[69] Most utopian texts describe ideal societies, and can be classed as "political novels" or "novels of ideas", where the message is more important than the means used to deliver it. Such works of fantasy, now including dystopias, might indeed be termed the fictional subset of social and political thought and are sometimes as rich in historical analysis and suggestive blueprints. But utopian literature is more than this, and cannot be reduced to its programmatic aspects or content. It is often the public face of the idea of utopia, as well as a leading focus of scholarship. Compared to academic studies or political tracts, novels possess a power and capacity for penetration other writing usually lacks. They generally

67. See Lucy Sargisson and Lyman Tower Sargent, *Living in Utopia: New Zealand's Intentional Communities* (Ashgate, 2004), 1–3.

68. Earlier and cruder versions of this argument are outlined in my "The Five Languages of Utopia", in *Spectres of Utopia*, edited by Artur Blaim and Ludmilla Gruszewska-Blaim (Peter Lang, 2012, 26–31), and in "News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia" (*History* 98 (2013): 145–73).

69. The literature here is enormous. A good guide is John C. Olin's *Interpreting Thomas More's "Utopia"* (Fordham University Press, 1989). Recent trends are summarised in George M. Logan's *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). At last count, about 10,000 English-language utopian literary texts had appeared.

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succeed better at portraying the richness and complexity of life, capturing the imagination, personalising experience, reaching our emotions, and conveying the force and majesty of utopian ideas. They make utopia human. To Sargent, utopian literature may have as many as seven purposes: it may "be simply a fantasy, it can be a description of a desirable or an undesirable society, an extrapolation, a warning, an alternative to the present, or a model to be achieved", or present an image of an attainable intentional community.[70]

As even a cursory glance at the genre reveals, the production of utopian and dystopian literary texts is a cumulative and self-reflexive process from the outset. Most such works have a self-consciously critical engagement with the tradition as a whole, from Thomas More (Plato, Sparta, Christianity) through Bellamy (Carlyle, Comte, socialism, Christianity), Wells (Plato, Bellamy), Huxley (Bolshevism, eugenics), and Orwell (socialism, Wells).[71] Depending on definition, utopian and dystopian elements are also often found interwoven, with some utopias being dystopias or containing dystopian elements, on some definitions, and vice versa, or both at the same time. No specific "critical" subgenre of utopia or dystopia thus emerges at any one point. Despite the definitive status of works like Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626) or H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905), moreover, the literary genre is not a subset of that related and immensely more popular genre science fiction, or of speculative fiction.[72] Some utopian novels are centred on science and technology, but many others are not. Utopian fiction is a form of fantasy literature but is closer to the "realistic" or realisable end of the spectrum, compared with the more extreme fantasy of science fiction. The latter indeed sometimes has anti-utopian implications insofar as it posits that technological solutions, like escaping to space, rather than moral and political responses can save earth or underpin the ideal society. Space invites greater displacement, not more intense engagement with terrestrial problems. Attaining utopia requires human effort in real life.

Utopia as Religion

Secondly, neither the study nor the content of utopia is a branch of theology. Utopia, if sometimes murky, generally relies on empirical premises about the possibilities of human happiness. Theology rests on unproven and unproveable

70. Sargent, *Utopianism*, 8.

71. These writers of course confronted other utopian traditions as well.

72. This is the substance of the argument in Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (Verso, 2005). For elaboration, see my *Dystopia*, 284–90.

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hypotheses which are accepted on "faith", without passing minimal standards of scientific evidence. Utopia and religion intermingle at many levels, however, and their relationship is sufficiently important and complex to require disentangling here. Both have idealised groups of believers, with group membership, and the desire to belong, often being much more important than dogma. In the western tradition, Christianity is one of utopia's parents, and its effort to diffuse an ethos of universal love is itself a utopian enterprise and a prototype for many which followed. Many lapsed Christians have found the concept of utopia appealing. There are many Christian literary utopias. The longest-lived forms of western communitarianism have also been religious: the Amish, Shakers, Moravians, Hutterites, and other groups. So have some of the more spectacularly unsuccessful, such as Thomas Müntzer's millenarians.

But in seeking the ideal society utopians have mostly been more concerned with promoting citizenship than sainthood, and order rather than salvation. Their aim is more often civic virtue than an inner "politics of the spirit", in J.G.A. Pocock's phrase, and their virtues do not rest on the piety of an ersatz holiness.[73] This makes utopia a moral and political, not a religious, category. Utopia is not reducible to Christ's reign on earth, or to the search for paradise or heaven in this life, or to secular versions of millenarianism. To Krishan Kumar, it is not a state of grace or the antechamber to salvation, because most utopians have been Pelagians who deny original sin and want to change people's behaviour, not human nature.[74] By contrast, the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr writes, Christian reformers reject the fundamental utopian precept that "human ills are due to bad institutions, that a fresh start with good institutions will result in a perfect commonwealth".[75]

But this too is a misconception. Utopia does not generically portray the "perfect" society, except in the very limited sense of "best possible".[76] Lewis Mumford reminds us that "The student of utopias knows the weakness that lies in perfectionism".[77] Utopia is often about *perfectibility*, in the sense of

73. *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72. The classic analysis here is Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Secker and Warburg, 1947), after Mannheim the starting point in modern utopian studies.

74. Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia in Modern Times* (Basil Blackwell, 1987), 100.

75. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Harper and Bros, 1937), 49.

76. Thus Condorcet, for instance, was working within a utopian tradition in insisting that human progress aims at "the true perfection of mankind" in his 1794 *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (Greenwood, 1979, 173). This is closely linked here with the growth of inequality within and between nations.

77. Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (Secker and Warburg, 1940), 485.

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searching for indefinite improvement. But this is a process, not an end: we never reach "perfection", which is essentially a theological category inapplicable to the "crooked wood" of humanity, from which, in Kant's famous formulation, "nothing perfectly straight can be built".[78] In More's *Utopia*, crime, imperialism, and many other evils persist. Most intentional communities, too, acknowledge that behavioural improprieties will exist and seek to regulate them, rather than assuming they can be eradicated. Disorder disturbs more utopias than is usually presumed. It is just better managed than elsewhere. Attempts to remove it completely thus result from confusing utopia and religion. Identifying the two invites making perfection, often described in terms of some form of salvation, the aim of utopia. Once we sever utopia from "perfection", however, its attainability, as "the good" place, eutopia, also becomes plausible. And so by aiming for less we gain more.

Disentangling utopia from religion, and especially millenarianism, given their long and intimate historical relationship from at least the fourteenth century, is a daunting if crucial task, which is attempted in greater detail below.[79] Here we can briefly unpack the definitional implications of its affinity to utopia. Millenarianism is a concept rich in meaning but subject to much confusion. In early modern Europe, utopia and the millennium are often found closely linked. To John Passmore, instancing the Ranters in the English Revolution, "Utopian communism and the doctrine of sinless perfection were . . . conjoined in a single stream".[80] But we must be wary of bald generalisations such as that, by the nineteenth century, "'Utopias and dystopias' are, in modern times, secularized heavens and hells, metaphors of eternity rather than mortality", and that "The ideas of 'progress' and 'utopia' had emerged to supplant the sacred myths of heaven and the millennium".[81] Other writers allege that "millenarians are generally thought of as utopian thinkers or political radicals."[82] The hypothesis, as J.F.C. Harrison presented it, "that Utopia may be a secular equivalent of the millennium or, alternatively, that the millennium may be a religious form of Utopia", turns out to be a minefield of

78. Immanuel Kant, *On History* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 17–18.

79. A good account of these languages in relation to utopia is Alfred Braunthal's *Salvation and the Perfect Society: The Eternal Quest* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1979).

80. John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (Duckworth, 1970), 143.

81. W. Warren Wagar, *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (Indiana University Press, 1982), 6, 61.

82. Jean-Robert Armogathe, "*Per Annos Mille*: Cornelius a Lapide and the Interpretation of Revelation 20:2–8", in *Catholic Millenarianism: From Savonarola to the Abbé Gregoire*, ed. Karl A. Kottman (Kluwer, 2001), 53.

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definitional and philosophical issues.[83] Kumar writes that "the millennium is not Utopia. Its ideal order is predetermined. It is brought in by divine intervention. Human agency remains questionably relevant. The millennium is not, as is Utopia, a scheme of perfection to be realized—if at all—by conscious rational human action."[84] To Miriam Eliav-Feldon, "Genuine utopists do not indulge in fantasies about unattainable Gardens of Eden, but propose practical, though sometimes very drastic remedies for the defects of their societies." Thus, Renaissance utopians were "'Realistic' because they were not dependent on any supernatural conditions or on any divine intervention which would change the cosmos, human nature, or the course of history."[85] To Chloe Houston, by the 1640s, "*Utopia* was read by some not as an ironic jest but as a realistic model for the ideal society, albeit one that needed improvement, and utopian plans seemed timely and appropriate."[86] J. C. Davis's influential fivefold typology of early modern utopianism, which includes the "modes" of arcadia and cockaygne, sharply distinguishes among utopia, which "accepts deficiencies in men and nature and strives to contain and condition them through organisational controls and sanctions"; the millennium, which "assumes a coming state of redeemed and perfected men, restored to their prelapsarian command over nature, but such things cannot come from fallen man himself, only from a *deus ex machina*"; and the perfect moral commonwealth, where people are idealised.[87]

83. J.F.C. Harrison, "Millennium and Utopia", in *Utopias*, eds Peter Alexander and Roger Gill (Duckworth, 1984), 61. Harrison argues that in the eighteenth century "The millennium was secularised into a Utopia or perfect state of society, to be attained through a gradual and steady march of improvement" (65).

84. Kumar, *Utopianism*, 36.

85. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, *Realistic Utopias: The Ideal Imaginary Societies of the Renaissance, 1516–1630* (Clarendon, 1982), 129: "In this study 'utopia' will be used in a rather narrow sense to mean only *a literary work describing an ideal society created by conscious human effort on this earth*. This definition excludes any vision of an ideal existence that is other-worldly, unattainable, or dependent either on wonders of nature or on divine intervention. It also excludes states of bliss of one individual or other forms of personal salvation, as well as recommendations for piecemeal reforms and schemes for the amelioration of the human condition in any one particular field" (2).

86. Chloë Houston, *The Renaissance Utopia: Dialogue, Travel and the Ideal Society* (Ashgate, 2014), 163.

87. J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing 1516–1700* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 370. The other forms explored by Davis are arcadia, "a world of natural beneficence and human benevolence, where the deficiencies of both man and nature are made good in an atmosphere of calm and gentle fulfilment", and cockaygne, which

(continued...)

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