HUMAN NATURE

Human Nature and Politics in Utopian and Anti-Utopian Fiction

Nivedita Bagchi

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To my parents, without whose love, support, and sacrifice I would not have been able to study what I love, acquire my degree, and spend my life doing what I love. Bapi, I wish you could have read this.

To my husband, without whose constant encouragement, support, and help, this would never have been written. Thank you for being there for this project since its inception, reading drafts, listening to rants, talking through ideas, and watching kids, to enable this to get done.

Thank you all for your belief in me when my belief in myself failed.

Contents

Introduction

Anti-utopian fiction has recently captured the American imagination. Books such as *The Hunger Games* (Suzanne Collins) and the *Divergent* series (Veronica Roth) have sold millions of copies, and the movies based on these books have also been extremely popular. In January and February of 2017, Amazon briefly ran out of copies of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (George Orwell). The sales of *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Margaret Atwood), and *It Can't Happen Here* (Sinclair Lewis) have skyrocketed. This is amazing for a country founded on the utopian ideal of the "City on a Hill." The reason may be that both utopian and anti-utopian fiction can be extremely helpful at explaining the political and emotional environment of a time. Such literature has, historically, been extremely successful at capturing the political hopes, dreams, and fears of people, countries, and eras.

Utopias "manifest a very human desire to establish the right and perfect system and then let it work and have individuals operate within it, with the confidence that it will produce harmony, correct behavior, and the right goals."[1] This creates a debate about the extent to which human beings can be controlled and human nature modified through institutional arrangement. The political formulations of utopian and anti-utopian[2] writers are, thus, often based upon their assumptions about human nature. Such assumptions can hardly be avoided when the writer is building his or her ideal society. In providing critiques of the present societal (and political) structures and portraying the way society should be, utopias draw upon the author's conception of what is quintessentially human. In other words, the writer asks: What are the most important traits of human beings? Why are they important? What ramifications do these traits have on the political system? To what extent should the political system take account of these traits—through either constraining or developing them? To what extent and in what ways does the current political system take these traits into account?

Yet, these assumptions are rarely made explicit in utopian and anti-utopian works. In this book, I examine the relationship between different conceptions of what it means to be human and the concomitant politics, thereby placing these ontological assumptions at the center of the political debate between utopias and anti-utopias.

SCOPE AND AIM OF THE BOOK

My work in this book is to tease out the assumptions utopian and anti-utopian writers make on human nature. This book does not lay out a grand theory of human nature of its own. Rather, it unearths assumptions about human nature present in the texts it examines, even if these assumptions are implicit, unacknowledged, or unintentional. This book makes the claim that it is important to lay bare these assumptions as they help us to understand and critique these works and to show how assumptions about human nature undergird political beliefs and prescriptions.

Common to both ancient and the modern utopian writers is the claim to know, understand, and manipulate human nature. It is this knowledge that helps them to build a good society. Some utopians, like Thomas More, maintain that human beings have some intrinsic characteristics, which are politically relevant but cannot be uprooted. However, More argues that these characteristics can be molded through education. In other words, he believed that the intrinsic qualities that pose a threat to the political system have to be countered by the inculcation (through political and social education) of a separate set of human traits. On the other hand, intrinsic human traits that promote the ideal political system have to be developed and brought out by the political system. What should be stressed about this theory is that while More assumed some traits to be constant in human beings over time, he also accepted that human nature can be manipulated. He understood that human nature is a product of environment and education while believing that human beings may have certain politically key characteristics that remain unchanged through time.

Therefore, More's assumption of certain fixed elements that make up human nature does not preclude his belief in utopia because he still believed that human beings could be molded to fit the utopian framework. Human beings'

> "causal powers and capacities are not fixed by our genetic constitutions. We are able to adapt to new circumstances, learn new ways of behaving, and so on. But our causal powers are not only variable, they are deliberately modifiable. That is, we can deliberately take steps to increase our causal powers in some respects, change our attitudes, revise our priorities, and so on."[3]

If human beings do possess a certain nature as More suggests, it is also true that they can be incentivized to act contrary to this nature. This is not only acknowledged by ancient utopians but by most political thinkers. In other words, human behavior may or may not reflect human nature (making it doubly difficult to determine what human nature is). In its strongest form, the view that institutions can impact human behavior and nature assumes that there is no human essence that needs to be overridden or developed. B. F. Skinner, for example, posits no historical evolution or institutional incentives, but psychological conditioning, as the vehicle of human transformation. For him, human beings can be completely conditioned shortly after birth (man is "infinitely educable or conditionable"),[4] and there is no human essence that has to be overridden.

Thomas More's *Utopia* and B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* represent two extremes on the continuum between a fixed human nature and human nature being completely malleable. More's *Utopia* has provisions for education, but believing that people are vulnerable to evil, More (a devout Catholic) ensures the maintenance of his utopia through strict sociopolitical arrangements rather than simply through education. He did not think it possible to radically transform human beings—but transforming politics perforce leads to changes in human behavior. More held a negative view of human nature but believed that human beings can be made good through governance. As More pointed out, the goal of punishment is "the destruction of vices and saving of men, with so using and ordering them that they cannot choose but be good."[5] Thus, limiting choices of human beings is part of good governance. Skinner, on the other hand, aimed at transforming human beings. Frazier, his mouthpiece in *Walden Two*, arrogantly asserts: "Give me the specifications, and I'll give you the man!"[6] Thus, for Skinner, political arrangements take second place to the educational system and it is the latter which ensures that the utopia is maintained. It is important to stress that both positions agree that human beings are adaptable. This adaptability is important because human beings have to be adaptable to the proposed ideal state—if they were not, why write a utopia in the first place?

The dystopian view of human nature responds to two aspects of the utopians' conceptions of human nature: (1) that human nature is knowable and (2) that human nature can be manipulated to a certain extent. To understand dystopias, we need to start with the fact that they all seem to have been written in the early 1900s or later. The first of the quintessential dystopias, *We* (Yevgeny Zamyatin), was written in 1921, followed by *Brave New World* in 1932 and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949. The primary desire of dystopian writers is to promote individual liberty and negative freedom (in Isaiah Berlin's terms). Thus, given the time period in which they are written and their political priorities, it could be said that the dystopians provide the literature of liberalism. It is their push for individual liberty which provides dystopians

with their view of human nature. Dystopians criticize the utopian idea that human nature is knowable. Knowledge yields control and this is what the dystopians fear. The dystopian view of human nature is that human beings are almost unknowable and that human nature has a recalcitrant streak that makes people unpredictable and, therefore, difficult to control. The only predictable element about human beings is their desire for freedom. The importance of this desire is not that it cannot be suppressed—it can—but that it cannot be eliminated. Thus, people are willing to do things that are not in their self-interest, or that go against reason, when acting on this desire for freedom. In other words, this recalcitrant streak may be seen as human will-fulness. Human beings do not wish to live in a supposed utopia because they are all different and all see their self-interests differently. Human beings are willful and unpredictable. Thus, dystopians have a weaker view of human nature in the sense that they emphasize human desire for freedom but not much else that is predictable about human nature.

To the question, "can we understand human essence?" they respond that we cannot. To the question, "Need we understand human essence?" they respond that we should at least try. We need to attempt to know human essence to prevent false claims about human beings. Authoritarian political systems, according to the dystopians, may be based on false theories of human essence. Utopians "set out to find the path to happiness equipped with contour maps of human desire."[7] Dystopian writers protest two aspects of the utopian picture of human beings. First, they argue that depicting human nature as knowable is antithetical to human freedom. For the dystopians, the belief that human nature is knowable leaves people open to manipulation. Knowledge gives a great degree of power to the people in power.

Second, dystopians show that human beings are not only adaptable but also recalcitrant. Though adaptability is one of man's primary characteristics, it resides side-by-side with a contrary characteristic: recalcitrance. In empha-sizing that human beings can be both adaptable and recalcitrant, dystopians show that there is a limit to political innovation. Not learning this lesson is problematic because human recalcitrance inevitably bumps up against state power with potentially tragic consequences. Since human beings cannot adapt to all political systems (whether these systems are good or bad), it means that the more restrictive the political system, the more the individual and the state come into conflict. For dystopian writers, a conflict between a state and an individual always results in the defeat of the individual, and, therefore, the recalcitrance of the individual leads ineluctably to tragedy wherever there are restrictive political systems.

It is because of the recalcitrance of human beings that dystopians protest the idea of an ideal political system. In rejecting political idealism, they emphasize the fact that human dignity requires that people choose their own ends. Moreover, human beings are more likely to accede to ends they have

chosen for themselves rather than ends prescribed for them by the political system. So, it is not only that the ideal political system is impossible but that it is undesirable. Dystopians value the capacity to choose. Exercising this capacity is what confers human dignity, and, therefore, people should be given the freedom to make these choices.

This book lays out the dystopian political goals based on their understanding of human nature. The dystopians rely on a "thinner" conception of human nature arguing that since recalcitrance and adaptability are both characteristics of the human being, an ideal state is by definition repressive. The book draws out the dystopian claim that an attenuated, watered-down view of human nature is best able to ground a politics of freedom. In place of the "assertive, disengaged self who generates distance from its background (tradition, embodiment) and foreground (external nature, other subjects) in the name of accelerating mastery of them,"[8] dystopians posit a human being ruled by will, not reason.[9] For dystopians, reason does not provide universal answers and, therefore, it is an unreliable guide to human behavior. The only predictable human characteristic that dystopians acknowledge is the human desire for freedom. Dystopians argue that "we do have a natural value of freedom of choice, which is intrinsic to our natures, and cannot be permanently suppressed. The history of liberation struggles is powerful evidence for this proposition."[10]

There are a few key characteristics of the dystopian view of human nature. First, dystopians do not deny that the common human instincts can be combated through social conditioning. In fact, the state can inflict real damage on human beings precisely because they can mold them. However, dystopians also contend that these instincts cannot be completely suppressed and they break out in spite of all attempts to the contrary. Second, instincts may manifest themselves in a variety of ways but they are incalculable. In other words, this view of human nature does not see humans as completely knowable and controllable. The human behavior that devolves from this version of human nature is erratic in that it is expected to vary from one person to another. Third, dystopians try to present human beings as unpredictable and incalculable in order to prevent political systems from making claims about how human beings should/will act and force them to act accordingly. Human beings are defined by their particular circumstances, interests, passions, and eccentricities and, therefore, open to definition and redefinition. Thus, one cannot understand man fully and make him predictable. They reject the idea that human nature is to be perfected or to be returned to some original state. Knowledge of human nature is fatuous since the meaning of the concept itself remains open to question. Human nature and behavior is the sum of self-conceptions shaped by language, the sense of mortality, the process of socialization, and so forth. In this sense, dystopias aim to show that human instincts may exist but they are not the only wellsprings of human behavior. Human behavior is also shaped by the sociopolitical system and the individual

circumstances of a person's life. Thus, the dystopian view of human nature is not an entirely knowable concept and, therefore, is open to re-figuration. In this sense, dystopians accept the idea that "all fundamental conceptualizations of self, other, and the world are contestable" but "nevertheless necessary."[11]

This dystopian view of human nature is also linked to their use of tragedy in their works. Dystopians seem to have two uses for tragedy. First, they use tragedy as an educational tool to propagate their message of freedom. Second, they have an inherently tragic view of life. Tragedy is a peculiarly effective vehicle for dystopians given the sympathy which readers have toward protagonists caught in acts against an oppressive state. However, more importantly, the dystopians see the universe as limiting human achievement. Unlike the utopians, they do not think that all human desires, goals, and values can be harmonized. Rather, human life is about choice, which also means that we have to give up some of what we want to achieve. Not only does human life therefore require sacrifice, but it also means that in a repressive state, such choice—especially between the individual and the state—would result in the destruction of the individual. Thus, tragedy is inherent in life—defeating utopian aspirations.

I want to emphasize that this argument is not about causality. I am not arguing that certain views of human nature lead to or cause certain theories of politics. My strongest claim is that certain views on human nature—whether human nature as it exists today or the potential of human nature—logically impacts the writer's political views including their views on freedom. In other words, any given view of human nature limits political choices and carries with it a set of political imperatives.

CONCEPTIONS OF HUMAN
NATURE WITHIN POLITICAL THEORY

The goal of this book, therefore, is a dialectical engagement among different conceptions of human nature in utopian and anti-utopian works. But what does the term "human nature" mean? Is there any characteristic that all human beings have in common, which defines us as being human? How can we ever know what "human nature" is? There are some obvious problems in dealing with the term. "Some use it in a descriptive sense to refer to what all human beings can be shown to share in common. For others it refers to what human beings are ideally capable of becoming . . . For some what is natural must be unchanging; others think that it can be modified within certain limits."[12] For some, human nature is determinative, for others, it merely inclines people in a general direction. On the contrary, the critique of the term is that it generalizes human diversity and is an oversimplification of human behavior and experiences.

These questions lead to another host of questions regarding the term human nature:

> "Does human nature guarantee that certain social networks or institutions will be successful and others failures? Are certain behaviors (war, adultery, bribery) inevitable consequences of human nature? (2) To what degree is human nature modifiable or changeable? Is man the blank slate that Locke, Condillac and Helvetius described? Is he as pliable as Plato or Hume would have him? Is he as fixed as Augustine or Hobbes believe?"[13]

In this book, human nature refers to a set of characteristics that are common to all human beings. What the term "human nature" refers to changes with each author. The extent to which "human nature" can be changed by institutional incentives and disincentives also differs from one writer to another. However, it is important to note here that human nature differs from human behavior. Human behavior can be said to be outcomes at the intersection between human nature and sociopolitical strictures.

Conceptions of human nature have changed over time and few surveys have been done of this change.[14] The majority of books that exist on this subject focus on the postmodern age. A well-done survey of this sort by Peter Langford states that the goal of his work is to show how "philosophical opinions of human nature underwent a transformation from the God-centered views of Augustine and the scholastics to the human-centered views of Nietzsche, Freud and Sartre."[15] Though an excellent discussion of the views of the thinkers, this book focuses to a much greater extent on disproving the methodology that the thinker claims to use to arrive at his conclusion. As the author very candidly states, his "polemical" purpose is to "oppose the notion that the modernism of more recent writers was produced by methodological innovations" and to show that "there is always a jump in the line of argument, departing from the strict use of methodology in order to adopt unproven assumptions."[16] As such, this survey discusses less of the political theory and more of the thinkers' philosophical assumptions.

Another example of a book that deals with conceptions of human nature is *From Cells to Souls* (Malcolm Jeeves), which is an edited volume that examines different conceptions of human nature and how these conceptions speak to scientific developments such as cloning. The book starts with Kenan Malik's statement in *Man, Beast and Zombie* that "two mutually hostile camps are created, 'one viewing Man from a purely naturalistic viewpoint, the other seeing him as an entirely cultural being.'"[17] The book is an attempt to analyze this statement and show that both camps are "equally one-sided and equally flawed in its attempt to understand what makes us human."[18] Both utopians and dystopians avoid this overly simplistic dichotomy between nature and nurture. Utopians fall along a spectrum between acknowledging

nature and nurture while dystopians water down the concept of human nature without losing the concept entirely.

An attempt to decipher human nature and to formulate theories of human nature has flourished in other disciplines than political theory. For instance, psychologist Abraham Maslow stated that "if we improve human nature we improve all, for we remove the principal causes of world disorder. But human improvement depends upon an understanding of human nature."[19] Thus, Maslow accepts both the premises of utopian writers—that improving human nature improves the world and that human nature can be known and understood. Yet, ultimately, Maslow acknowledges that "man has one general nature when he is deprived of basic needs and another general nature when his needs are well taken care of, but that these natures certainly are not the same. Therefore, human nature is not constant, nor is it impervious to changes external to the person; rather, it is susceptible to change and alternation by numerous environmental conditions."[20] Man, according to Maslow, "has an essential, inner nature which is instinctoid, intrinsic, given, 'natural,' i.e., with an appreciable hereditary determinant, and which tends strongly to persist."[21] This is a person's "inner core," according to Maslow, which persists through time, sometimes unconsciously. Like the utopians, Maslow acknowledges both the existence of human nature and its mutability.

Paul Goodman summarizes the more recent theory of human nature: "you can teach people anything; you can adapt them to anything if you use the right techniques of 'socializing' or 'communicating.' The essence of 'human nature' is to be pretty indefinitely malleable. 'Man,' as C. Wright Mills suggests, is what suits a particular type of society in a particular historical sense."[22] The more nuanced version of this position is taken by John Mitchell. Mitchell states that "man (as well as his culture) is malleable there can be no doubt. Whether he is malleable because he has no human nature is one question. Whether he is malleable because part of his nature is to adapt to the requirements of his environment (within limits) is another question."[23] Knud Haakonssen says that "traditional philosophy is supposed to have operated with the idea of a universal human nature, and especially of universal cognitive powers. Yet it is evident that every aspect of human nature, qua human, is malleable by time and circumstance. Consequently there is nothing to be said in universal terms about human nature."[24]

Gardner Murphy and Bikhu Parekh have tried to reconcile the distinctions between conceptions of human nature that emphasize fixed traits and malleability. According to Murphy, there are three levels of human nature. According to Murphy, "The life of today has developed through the processes of evolution, through processes which produced a 'first human nature.'"[25] Bikhu Parekh develops Murphy's position. Parekh asserts that "our nature is articulated on (at least) three different though interrelated levels: first, the nature that we share as members of a common species; second, the nature we

derive from and share as members of a specific cultural community; and third, the nature we succeed in giving ourselves as reflective individuals."[26] Just as human beings are not prisoners of their nature, neither are they prisoners of their cultures. Therefore, nature, culture, and self-reflection all make up human nature. To this position, Ray Hart adds that it is human will, not merely self-reflection, that creates human nature. "Every exercise of will in the actualization of possibility, for which the human subject is responsible, restricts her range of possibilities for subsequent actualization."[27] Thus, there is a wide variety of literature on the issue of whether or not there is such a constant as human nature and what defines it.

It is only for utopians after the eighteenth century that "human nature does not represent the absolute imperative that it was for earlier utopians."[28] Barbara Goodwin points out that "The static, mechanical quality of pre-eighteenth-century utopias must be understood in the light of the absence of concepts of progress, the ideal then being the refinement and perfection of a human life whose elements were already known."[29] While Thomas More takes the essence of human nature into account in constructing his good society, Bellamy is much less concerned with it. As Frank Manuel points out in his analysis, More's utopians, while not being wholly natural in that they are shaped by the institutions of their state, are not unnatural either since these institutions aimed at utilizing benign instincts and suppressing harmful ones. More starts by determining what is virtuous and what is not and which human essences contribute to or detract from these virtues. Bellamy changes institutions and claims that this changes human nature.

UTOPIAS AND HUMAN NATURE

Some people make the argument that one person's utopia is another's dystopia and, therefore, these genres cannot be separated. This book posits an alternative thesis: that conceptions of human nature differ dramatically between utopias and dystopias and so does their outlook on the possibilities of politics. Dystopias are characterized by recalcitrance—in these works human beings break out of the mold and challenge the political system. Utopias, on the other hand, show human beings who are reconciled to, and even happy with, their political system. Thus, knowledge of a writer's view on human nature helps us distinguish utopias from dystopias.

Not only are there different definitions of human nature but there have been many definitions of what constitutes utopianism. For the purposes of this book, utopians are those thinkers who balance all values and achieve perfect harmony within their sociopolitical system. In other words, utopians claim to balance those values that are in conflict in existing societies without creating new tensions. The resolution of values and harmony is, in some

sense, final, making the resultant society vastly superior to any in existence today. Thus, as George Kateb points out, utopianism is

> that system of values that places harmony at the center: harmony within the soul of each man, harmony of each man with all others, harmony of each man with society at large, as that system of values which would hold social life to be perfect if between appetite and satisfaction, between precept and inclination, between requirement and performance, there fell no shadow.[30]

Lyman Sargent agrees with this definition of utopias as "projections of the desire for unity and simplicity. But this is not a complete picture."[31] Utopias also attempt to show how one dominant value or a set of dominant values could lead to a better society. The attraction of utopias is their holistic nature, their integration of their leading values into a concrete stable system.

There is a vast amount of literature on utopianism as a genre of political thought.[32] The extent of this literature is too broad to cover adequately but they can be divided into two broad categories or broad themes.

In the first group are writers who see political utopians as laying out a blueprint of a political system and contend that their attempts to achieve this system would lead to a totalitarian regime. Therefore, according to this view, all political utopias are potentially tyrannical. The most notable work in this school of thought is Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. These critics contend that utopians ignore the natural diversity of human desires and behaviors and, therefore, their tyrannical tendencies emerge out of their unnatural constricted systems. For these writers, utopias may be crackpot schemes, unattainable at best and tyrannical at worst. T. E. Utley warns that the utopian state of mind "starts with day-dreams and ends with tyranny. He reminds us again that those who ignore the frailties and complexities of human nature in making their political calculations end by trying to force the human soul into a shape conformable to their own predilections."[33] Those who fear utopias generally see them as blueprints contending that there is no such thing as a perfect society and even if there were, it would be impossible to achieve with imperfect people. Thus, force will be necessary to achieve and enforce utopia. This is one of the criticisms levied against utopias by anti-utopian writers.

> Politics is concerned with very intractable material—and by that I mean men. And it is not only men who have to be administered. It is also men who are engaged in permanent debate as to how and by whom the task should be carried out. In this sense, politics is of course a struggle for power . . . Utopianism, on the other hand, signifies that one assumes as possible (and perhaps even inevitable) an ultimate condition of absolute harmony in which individual self-expression and self-cohesion, though seemingly incompatible, will be combined.[34]

The second group of writers responds to the above criticisms. They are as explicitly supportive of utopias as the first group is critical of them. They examine different utopias to define "utopianism" and show how utopianism is a part of the political theory corpus. One such work is by Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor called *The Politics of Utopia*. This school of thought defends utopias in an attempt to define and reinvigorate utopian thought. According to this group of thinkers, utopianism is what provides us with a view of a better life. It is a philosophy of hope and effort. They refute the claim that utopianism will always result in tyranny, stating that these are not blueprints but visions of hope which can be changed to suit political goals and realities. Utopias provide a standard by which to judge existing practices. "Even when a utopia is designed as a realistic alternative, it is not intended to be achieved in all its detail. It is a vehicle for presenting an alternative to the present."[35] In this view, utopias offer choices and people have the freedom to accept or reject the choices presented to them. They are an expression of the human ability to dream of a better life.

Just as the definition of utopia remains in dispute, so do the works that comprise it. This book uses literary utopias. Krishan Kumar distinguishes between utopian social theory and formal literary utopias. For instance, Rousseau's *Social Contract*, for him, is the product "of the utopian temperament or the utopian propensity" rather than a true literary utopia.[36] Thus, Kumar distinguishes between literary utopias, which are explicitly utopian in form, from political and social theories (a.k.a. Rousseau's social contract), which are results of the "utopian temperament." Though he is sympathetic to the fact that both types of utopianism perform similar functions, he stresses the difference in the form of the two types of works that, he argues, leads to different effects on its readers. "In the abstract schemes of conventional social and political theory, we are told that the good society will follow from the application of the relevant general principles; in utopia, we are shown the good society in organization."[37] Kumar concludes that he will "classify our material in different ways according to particular purposes."[38]

The use of only utopian and dystopian works of fiction provides many advantages in this particular project. First, utopian and dystopian works make their ontological commitments and their political commitments clear within the same text. Thus, the conceptual connection between conceptions of human nature and political commitments is easier to draw out through these works. This differs from the work of some political philosophers who either leave their ontological commitments unclear or draw them out in separate and sometimes conflicting texts. Second, these writers directly converse with and respond to each other. For example, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written as a response to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. This makes it easier to examine the debate about the possible political implications behind any given ontological position. Similarly, Aldous Huxley's

Brave New World is a response to Plato's *Republic* as well as to H. G. Wells's utopian works. Therefore, the political implications of the ontological positions of political theorists can also be drawn out through the use of these works.

Since there are a vast number of utopian and dystopian works, picking the ones to work with was difficult. There were two primary considerations in choosing the dystopian works. For the dystopian works, I chose primarily those works that are emblematic of the dystopian corpus.[39] These are works that are agreed on by writers as being dystopic. In the case of the utopian works, I chose works that exemplified the ancient-modern divide in utopian writings. Since Thomas More's *Utopia* is recognized as the beginning of the utopian genre, I chose it to exemplify the ancient utopia, which takes human nature as somewhat more of a constraint than Edward Bellamy. Choosing among the modern utopian works was more of a challenge. I chose to concentrate on Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* for a few reasons. It is true that it exemplifies the modern utopia but so do many others like B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two*. *Looking Backward* is an iconic book exemplifying an era in American history. Furthermore, given that Thomas More has been said to have been influenced by Plato's communistic republic, both utopias examined here have a common theme in terms of property rights.

CONCLUSION

While the question of "what is human nature" remains politically relevant, it also remains unsolvable. How can we know what is natural? Moreover, this concept is usually used in an ahistorical manner. It is used to denote an unchanging sameness, a set of characteristics that remain unchanged throughout time. But Parekh points out that there are some advantages to using this concept. First, "it highlights certain basic properties that all human beings come to share in common after reaching a particular stage in their evolutionary development." Second, "it stresses the fact that despite all our diversities and differences we belong to a common species." Finally, it shows that "none of us is so different as to be wholly unintelligible or so superior as to belong to and to feel entitled to claim the rights and privileges of an entirely different and superior species."[40] This concept, as long as we acknowledge the impact of culture and socialization, enables us to "approach others on the assumption that they share with us the universal constants of human existence which they articulate and respond to differently, and that therefore they are unlikely to be wholly unlike us or totally different."[41]

This book does not seek to answer these questions nor does it seek to make a value judgment on whether humankind is more or less free with the conception of a human nature. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate how two

groups of writers—utopians and dystopians—have positioned themselves in this debate, thereby hoping to introduce one more possible answer to the question of grounding individual freedom.

NOTES

1. Warren Samuels, "A Centenary Reconsideration of Bellamy's *Looking Backward*," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 43, no. 2: 132.

2. I use the terms anti-utopian and dystopian synonymously through the entire book.

3. Brian Ellis, *The Philosophy of Nature: A Guide to the New Essentialism* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 31.

4. Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practice* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 104.

5. Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: Everyman, 1994), 34.

6. B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two* (New York: The McMillan Company, 1948), 243.

7. Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 68.

8. Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmations: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

9. Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* is the most explicit delineation of the dystopian emphasis on will.

10. Ellis, *The Philosophy of Nature*, 147.

11. White, *Sustaining Affirmations*, 8.

12. Leroy S. Rouner, *Is There a Human Nature?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 15.

13. John J. Mitchell, *Human Nature: Theories, Conjectures, and Descriptions* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1972), 69.

14. Some books in this vein include *Philosophy and Human Nature* by Kathleen Nott (1971, New York University Press) and Louis P. Pojman, *Who Are We: Theories of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). These works develop the ideas of human nature in a number of philosophers picked because they exemplify their era.

15. Peter Langford, *Modern Philosophies of Human Nature: Their Emergence from Christian Thought* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 3.

16. Langford, *Modern Philosophies of Human Nature*, 3.

17. Malcolm Jeeves, *From Cells to Souls—And Beyond: Changing Portraits of Human Nature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), xii.

18. Jeeves, *From Cells to Souls—And Beyond*, xii.

19. Abraham Maslow, "A Philosophy of Psychology: The Need for a Mature Science of Human Nature," in Mitchell, *Human Nature*, 3.

20. Mitchell, *Human Nature*, 67.

21. Maslow, "A Philosophy of Psychology," Mitchell, *Human Nature*, 303.

22. Paul Goodman, "Growing Up Absurd," in Mitchell, *Human Nature*, 17.

23. Mitchell, *Human Nature*, 73.

24. Rouner, *Is There a Human Nature?* 70.

25. Gardner Murphy, "Three Kinds of Human Nature from Human Potentialities," in Mitchell, *Human Nature*, 79.

26. Rouner, *Is There a Human Nature?* 21.

27. Rouner, *Is There a Human Nature?* 141.

28. Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 55.

29. Goodwin and Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, 69.

30. George Kateb, *Utopia and Its Enemies* (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 9.

31. Lyman Tower Sargent, "Authority and Utopia: Utopianism in Political Thought," *Polity* 14, no. 4 (1982), 572.

32. In this literature review, I will limit my comments to the secondary literature on utopianism rather than touching on the vast array of utopias written throughout the years.

33. Jacob Leib Talmon, *Utopianism and Politics* (London: Conservative Political Center, 1957), 6.

34. Talmon, *Utopianism and Politics*, 8.

35. Sargent, *Authority and Utopia*, 575.

36. Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 31.

37. Kumar, *Utopianism*, 31.

38. Kumar, *Utopianism*, 31.

39. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *1984* and Yvegny Zamyatin's *We* define the dystopian genre.

40. Rouner, *Is There a Human Nature?* 24.

41. Rouner, *Is There a Human Nature?* 26.

Chapter One

The Imperfection of Utopia

*The Combination of Reason
and Religion in Thomas More*

No discussion of utopianism is complete without a discussion of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*. It is this book that lends its name to the entire genre since *Utopia* is said to be the first book in this genre. Written around 1516, this complex work depicts a place with communal property, no love for gold or other ostentatious things, no poverty, little crime, and ample religious tolerance. The education system is such that this utopia needs very few laws (and has no lawyers) and what they have is made so clear so that all may understand them. This extremely complex and complicated society combines religion and reason and advocates virtue and human happiness. Utopia is a democracy with a prince elected for life but subject to recall for various reasons. Yet, this utopia has been highly debated over the years—not just for its provisions but also its intentions. Did More intend this as a serious work of political theory and was this is truly More's ideal state?

More's *Utopia* starts with the character of Thomas More conversing with his friend, Peter Giles, who introduces him to Raphael Hythloday. The characters of More and Giles try to convince Hythloday to be an advisor to a king but the latter refuses to consider this possibility. During this conversation, Hythloday describes Utopia, giving examples of how it is superior to the society they live in. Yet, while Hythloday clearly sees Utopia as far superior to present society, this is not true of the character More. Thomas More, the character, acknowledges that some practices of Utopia are superior but he rejects most of their practices as ridiculous. Therefore, *Utopia* is written as a dialogue which does not make clear the views of its writer, Sir Thomas More.

Some contend that Utopia is truly a good society; others that it is a satire; still others that it is an "open-ended dialogue."[1] Some emphasize its modern mindset; others, its medieval character. In this chapter, I will contend that Utopia is both modern and medieval; both religious and secular. It combines what seem to be contradictory principles but this is done in order to demonstrate the importance of each for a good society. Ultimately, Sir Thomas More shows us a society that, through education, religion, and institutional change, overcomes the weaknesses of human nature to create a good society but maybe not a perfect one.

Thomas More maintained that human beings have some intrinsic characteristics that are politically relevant and which cannot be uprooted. However, these characteristics can be countered through various means—education, socialization, punishment, and so forth. In other words, he argued that the intrinsic qualities that pose a threat to the ideal political system have to be countered by the inculcation, through political and social education, of a separate set of traits more conducive to the preferred political system. Traits that promote the ideal political system have to be developed. What should be stressed about this theory is that, while More assumed some traits to be constant in human beings over time, he also accepted that human nature can be known and therefore manipulated. Human nature is both intrinsic and a product of environment and education.

For More, human beings are capable of virtue, but virtue is difficult and human beings need external aids to keep them on the straight and narrow. To be truly virtuous, at all times, is difficult and only achieved through a combination of education, religion, and institutional support and arrangement, that is, penalties and rewards. The society he depicts in *Utopia* is a virtuous utopia based on reason. But reason has to be bolstered by religion. However, since human beings are not perfectly rational or obedient, even a combination of reason and religion cannot make them behave according to the dictates of this utopia. Ultimately, therefore, More's *Utopia* shows that even the combination of reason and religion is inadequate to build a true utopia since human beings remain flawed. Thus, to create utopia, a political system with rigid codes of conduct is necessary. Though this seems to make *Utopia* less appealing to present day readers, even this inadequate utopia is better than the societies that existed during More's lifetime. Thus, utopia can only be established through radical institutional and educational change.

It is my purpose in this chapter to show how More incorporates seemingly antithetical principles (reason vs. revelation, justice vs. utilitarianism, virtue vs. selfishness) in this work and how he proposes to harmonize these principles. More shows that all these principles are necessary for a good society and that they can be harmonized through the proper religious, educational, and institutional backing. The state has to educate its people in the practice of these principles and curb any behavior that might threaten the state. Thus, the

strict ethical and institutional arrangements of More's *Utopia*. However, what Utopia makes clear is that the resilience of this society lies in its inventiveness and capacity for change and evolution. Human beings may be flawed but they are also capable of great inventiveness and actions.

> *Utopia* as a whole figures forth More's belief, which he was later to expound fully in the Tower works, that the tribulatory imperfection of human nature itself similarly induces—or should induce—creative effort, social as well as individual, to mitigate its effects. Utopian history, particularly, shows what might be achieved, in the context of what cannot.[2]

INTERPRETATIONS OF *UTOPIA*

One is struck by the varied interpretations of *Utopia* that have been presented through the years. Most importantly, it is strange to find that scholars disagree among themselves on whether or not *Utopia* is actually meant to be a utopia as we understand the word today. While some contend that it is a picture of an ideal society and meant to be such, others contend that it is merely satire. The former group argues that this utopia perfectly embodies the Christian values upheld by More while the latter points to the repressive nature of this society and More's use of unserious names such as Raphael Hythloday ("purveyor of nonsense") as evidence for their position. At issue here is what More himself thought of this world that he created. Did Sir Thomas More reveal this utopia to us to be taken seriously? Or did he see it, and hope that his readers would too, as a satire of the world that he lived in? Did he intend this as a satire of utopia itself? Is it based on reason or on Christianity? Is it a modern vision or a return to medieval principles? Truth is, "More covered his tracks so cleverly that we shall never know for certain."[3]

These disagreements revolve around More's choice of the word "Utopia" for the title of the book. Meaning both "no place" and "good place," it feeds into this debate perfectly. For those who see it as a true utopia, the use of this term signifies that More saw it the same way but acknowledged that it did not exist at the time. For those who see it as satire, the use of this term is an acknowledgment that utopia is unattainable—a castigation of philosophy's search of this ideal. The title of the book is ambiguous—even beyond the ambivalence of the word "Utopia." The book, as translated, is entitled "On the Best State of a Commonwealth and on the New Island of Utopia." R. S. Sylvester has pointed out the ambiguity in this title. Is or is not Utopia the best state of the commonwealth? Why not make it clear that Utopia and the best commonwealth are one and the same?

The question of interpreting *Utopia* is complicated by the fact that it is not, as later utopias tend to be, a second-hand picture of an ideal society. Utopias usually start with travelers who mistakenly happen upon this hidden

ideal state. Initially they are skeptical but after spending some time in utopia, they accept it as perfect. They are the ones usually writing about utopia. Unlike this prototype (which is developed later), More's utopia is shown to us not second-hand, but third-hand. The narrator who has been to Utopia narrates his experiences to the characters Peter Giles and Thomas More and it is the latter who narrates the narration to the readers. Thus, the writer himself has not experienced this utopia—in fact, as we shall see, the character of More is not even convinced by Utopia. The character More encounters this utopia the same way the readers do—as a verbal picture rather than a sensory experience. All of this makes it difficult to understand who is speaking for the writer Thomas More. Does the character Thomas More represent the writer Thomas More? Does Raphael Hythloday, the traveler who claims to have seen Utopia, represent the writer? This inability to locate the author in the work leads to a true dialogue—a writing style preferred by More due to his education in rhetoric and law, which taught him to argue for and against any case.

Another issue in interpreting *Utopia* is its variance with More's later writings. It is almost universally accepted now that More changed his views—especially regarding the status of reforms within the Church—throughout his life. This has led to questions regarding which views are the real or true views of Thomas More. Do the earlier writings such as *Utopia* represent his real views or are these to be found in his later writings such as the ones written in the Tower of London? Hexter points out that this question should not be pertinent to an interpretation of *Utopia* because "in the year 1516 there could have been nothing further from Thomas More's mind than any intimation that the unity of the Church was about to be irreparably rent by a conflict over the fundamentals of Christian theology."[4] Hexter argues that More's religious priorities changed after the Protestant Revolution started and, therefore, interpreting *Utopia* should not take into account his later views.

Probably the most radical interpretation of the book sees *Utopia* as a dystopian work. This view is best summarized by Nendza, who says that the "purpose of More, as, I believe, of Plato, is not to present a proposal for actual political reform, but rather to show the limits of reasonable change and especially the dangers attached to the desire for radical change—the danger of what might be called political idealism."[5] In this line of argument, Utopia is Raphael's (the character who actually saw Utopia) ideal state, not More's. To prove this line of argument, Nendza points out that, as conceived, "Utopia neither provides all the natural pleasures nor are the pleasures it does provide sufficient for human happiness."[6] Their institutions suppress the human spirit and this lack is what leads to their cruel practices in war. The demands of politics and those of nature obviously cannot be reconciled. Utopia is drab and lacks beauty. The extreme measures they take "to counteract the admittedly universal tendency to delight in

gold reveals the attraction to be overcome. While gold may be useless, its beauty is no less natural an attraction to man."[7] Nendza contends that human beings have a number of "irrational but natural passions" and Utopia, while claiming that happiness lies in the fulfillment of man's true nature, restricts these passions. In doing so, it fails by its own standards.[8] The writer, Thomas More, moderates the dangerous philosopher Raphael by showing that the complexity of human nature cannot be fulfilled within the confines of one political system.[9] The problem with this interpretation is that Nendza sees Utopia as drab and unfree by his own standards. Nendza assumes that individual freedom was as important to More as it is to him—and that individual freedom and social justice had equal amounts of importance for More. But is this true? What was More's idea of freedom?

C. S. Lewis, unlike Nendza, does not see this as a work of serious political philosophy. Instead, he sees this work as an entirely literary enterprise, one not meant to be taken seriously. "It all sounds as if we had to do with a book whose real place is not in the history of political thought so much as in that of fiction and satire."[10] Lewis opines that its "place on our shelves is closer to Gulliver and Erewhon, within reasonable distance of Rabelais, a long way from the *Republic* or *New Worlds for Old*. The invention (the 'poetry' of which More was accused) is quite as important as the merits of the polity described, and different parts of that polity are on very different levels of seriousness."[11]

However, Alistair Fox opines that this argument is generally made by interpreters who want to refute the idea that More was a hypocrite or that he was inconsistent about Catholicism. Wanting to emphasize More the orthodox Catholic, they moved away from *Utopia*—a story about a society that advocates divorce, where women are priests, and euthanasia is permitted. Other writers point out that the idea that *Utopia* "was written as a jest may be dismissed. It was taken very seriously by More's contemporaries."[12]

The second approach used to show that More was not inconsistent about his Catholicism is to argue that More is serious about Utopia but it is not his perfect state because it is a perfect state attained through reason alone. Utopia is clearly not a Christian state and lacks the truths that come through revelation. The Utopians emphasize what R. W. Chambers sees as the pagan virtues and not the Christian ones of poverty, chastity, obedience, and faith. This view was first put forward by Chambers who thus saw Utopia as being far from More's ideal state. However, Chambers analyzed that *Utopia* serves as a serious work of political philosophy meant to show the European nations of the time that their actions were worse than those of the pagan Utopians.

Chambers's view was elaborated on by Father Edward Surtz who opines that

Utopia is a pagan state, newly discovered, but it need be changes very little to become a Christian state. For Thomas More as a Christian humanist, grace

builds upon nature, revelation complements reason, Christianity fulfills preex-
isting religions. R. W. Chambers declares: "The underlying thought of Utopia
always is, With nothing save Reason to guide them, the Utopians do this; and
yet we Christian Englishmen, we Christian Europeans . . . !" This interpreta-
tion is perhaps too narrow and too moralistic: too narrow because God and
religion, Christ and revelation, play a clear part in the *Utopia*, especially at
critical junctures, and too moralistic because the primary purpose of the *Uto-
pia* is not the exhortation of sinning Christians but the delineation of the ideal
commonwealth.[13]

However, it is not to be denied that "More lets the pagan Utopians quietly
show Christians where they must reform."[14]

Thus, in this view, Utopia is neither completely Christian nor completely
pagan; it is neither as bad as Christian Europe nor completely perfect. But, it
is a serious program of political reform. However, Surtz rejects the idea that
More meant communism to be the solution to European problems because
More has "the uncompromising Hythlodaeus overstate his case" and the
thinking audience knows that the choice is not between absolute communism
and the rampant selfishness as manifested in private property.[15] Ultimately,
More's Utopia "impose[s] superhuman demands upon man's nature" where
"the liberty of democracy becomes the tyranny of the many."[16] Thus, Surtz,
like Chambers, asserts that More did not approve of Utopia—it is not More's
perfect state.

The next group of interpreters sees Utopia as almost wholly secular. Unlike
Chambers and Surtz, this group of writers sees Utopia as More's ideal state.
Though they acknowledge that More tries to fuse Christianity and classicism in
this work, they argue that in his Utopia it is his "humanism which is clearly
uppermost. Over and above the specifically Christian influences, such as monas-
ticism, it is More's veneration for Plato and his delight in the Roman satirists
that most strongly shine through."[17] This was the age in which books were
written to give advice to rulers (*Utopia* was written around the same time as
Machiavelli's *Prince*) and there seems little reason to believe that More meant
his book to be anything else.[18] This is validated by the fact that the Christian
humanists of his time, of whom More considered himself a member, published
letters along with his *Utopia* showing their admiration for his project of reform.
His very good friend Erasmus, a prominent Christian humanist of this time,
wrote of More's intentions: "He published his *Utopia* for the purpose of show-
ing, what are the things that occasion mischief in commonwealths; having the
English Constitution especially in view."[19]

This view is best expressed by J. H. Hexter who shows that the years
"1515–16 marks the point of maximum convergence of the trajectories of
More and Erasmus."[20] In this interpretation, *Utopia* is itself a dialogue as
mentioned above. The "Dialogue of Counsel" (Book I) shows More's own
ambivalence on whether or not to enter the service of his king and country.

Thus, the views of Hythloday and the character of Thomas More both reflect the views of More the author. For Hexter, *Utopia* is not a work based on medieval Christianity. Hexter lists all the characteristics that distinguish *Utopia* from other medieval works to prove More's modern outlook. He points out that Utopia lacks all corporate life above the family and that Utopia castigates the noble class—which is not true of medieval social structures. Instead of accepting the Christian view of Utopia, Hexter contends that More accepted the Erasmian position that to "be a Christian was not first and foremost to assent to a creed, or to participate in a particular routine of pious observances; it was to do as a Christian; to be a Christian was a way of life."[21] Thus, Hexter, unlike Chambers, sees no distinction between

> pagan virtues and Christian. All virtues that men must practice in order to live righteously are Christian virtues. The distinction that concerns More is not one between types of virtue but between kinds of men—the men who live the rigorous disciplined life commanded and exemplifies by Christ and the men who—whatever their assiduity in lip service to orthodoxy—live like pigs and hyenas.[22]

The Utopians may not have the knowledge of Christian theology but they are good Christians nonetheless.

The problem with this interpretation is that Hexter too easily dismisses the contradiction between the good Christian life of the Utopians and their Stoic-Epicurean philosophy. He dismisses the philosophy of the Utopians stating that this philosophy "is not particularly persuasive; it did not capture the imagination of More's contemporaries or of subsequent generations."[23] The argument is that this is why More did not expand on these portions of the text once he returned from the Netherlands. The portions penned after his return to England concern the most important aspect of *Utopia*—communism. The modernity of Utopia lies in the institution of communism but most importantly in the mindset that a radical transformation of human life is possible through the radical change of human institutions. More was modern in his belief that "human happiness can be increased in a very large way by rules and teaching that repress men's evil impulses and foster their good ones, that do not subject them to temptations which are beyond the capacity of ordinary mortals to resist."[24] But "the route from corruption to decency in Utopia runs by the way of common action through the agency of public law, not merely by the way of the enlightenment of individual conscience through spoken or printed exhortation."[25] This, ultimately, is Hexter's point: that *Utopia* is a rebuke to not only the nominally Christian states of Europe but also to the project of Christian humanism itself. The humanists believed that a just society is simply possible by educating and exhorting people to virtue. What they failed to realize is that an entire sociopolitical system will have to be changed and re-created in order to achieve the just society.

As stated above, however, writers object to Hexter's identification of Utopia with the perfect commonwealth due to some of its features—euthanasia, divorce, their ruthlessness in war, and so forth. "The care with which More has built these ambiguities into the smallest units of his text suggests a conscious effort to utilize his mastery of the arts of rhetoric to make it difficult for the reader to accept his description at face value."[26] Ultimately, it is argued that "More began to devise an ideal society which eliminated many of the evils of Europe. By including many features objectionable to a Catholic humanist, he made it difficult to accept his creation as a pattern recommended for adoption; it was, rather, intended as a stimulus to thought."[27] This brings us back to the idea of Utopia as open-ended and actually, not More's ideal state.

The third view is somewhere between the first two. Expertly articulated by Fox, it states that *Utopia* is a product of More's contradictory impulses of optimism and pessimism. "On the one hand, he shared the excitement of other humanists at the prospect of political reform and wanted to contribute to it by offering the fruits of his wisdom and experience; on the other, he had a deeply ingrained pessimism about the extent to which the human condition could be ameliorated."[28] Fox contends that *Utopia* contains both utopian and dystopian elements. As the work was written, More progressively gained or lost faith in the possibility of radical reform and this reservation is the cause for the essential ambiguity of the work—the work was meant to be ambiguous. This work sees *Utopia* as "an ironic representation rather than a straightforward narrative."[29]

None of these works resolve the ambiguities in *Utopia* and all acknowledge the other strains that remain unresolved. Even Hexter acknowledges that More "was not exclusively one or the other but all three at once—medieval, Renaissance, and modern."[30]

While resolving all these debates to everyone's satisfaction is not feasible, the position of this chapter is that these debates are not all mutually exclusive and almost all the positions taken above apply to Utopia. This is a society where reason is tempered through religion. Though this society claims to be entirely based on natural principles, More understood that nature had to be bolstered by education, by laws, and by religion. More believed that human behavior could be changed and education and religion can be used to propel people toward virtue. On the other hand, More doubted that human beings could ever be trusted to be virtuous, and, therefore, his utopia has a system that strictly watches all activities. In doing so, More guides the attentive reader to the flaws in this utopian society thus highlighting his own fears that a perfect society cannot be created. This is why More writes it as a dialogue—his way of showing both the strength and weakness of this society that, without being perfect, far surpassed the states of his time.

The point to make here is that the views of those who see Utopia as a rational but pagan state and those who see it as essentially religious, those who see it as utopian and those who see it as dystopian are not mutually exclusive. To say that More wanted to convert his utopia to a complete dystopia may be a little extreme. Rather, More, in the midst of constructing a rational utopia, realized that, without the aid of religion, which helps to transform the human soul, human beings are incapable of sustaining utopia. But even with the addition of religion, More's "attempt to imagine an actual society founded on these very principles had led him to conclude that human nature would always render the complete reform of society impossible."[31] He worked to counteract the inherent evils of human nature within Utopia.

MORE'S THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE STATE

More starts *Utopia* with an acknowledgment of the diversity of human beings but also with an extremely negative view of human nature. He is contemplating whether to publish the book at all. Writing for the character, Thomas More, he says, "For men's tastes are so various, the tempers of some are so severe, their minds so ungrateful, their judgments so foolish, that there seems no point in publishing a book that others will receive only with contempt and ingratitude."[32] This could lead to the conclusion that with people like these, a perfect state is impossible. Imperfect people cannot make a perfect state. Then, why write *Utopia*? I will argue here that *Utopia* is organized in such a way that men cannot choose but to be good. If their propensity for evil remains, they will be deprived of the instruments with which to commit crime. Raphael Hythloday, the traveler, recounting what he saw in the land of the Polylerites (not Utopia) says of the goal of good laws and punishments: "the aim of the punishment is to destroy vices and save men. The men are treated so they necessarily become good, and they have the rest of their lives to make up for the damage they have done . . . Nowhere do the slaves have any chance of committing robbery."[33]

This passage seems to imply that people are and can be forced to be good through institutional arrangements. This is not to say that Utopia does not provide opportunities and means for human beings to be educated and socialized to act virtuously. However, one thing remains clear: More does not want to test the goodness of human nature. He does not leave opportunity for criminal activity. He does not think he can destroy human vices—he leans toward reforming human behavior in his Utopia rather than reforming human nature. Hythloday says that Utopia provides almost no room for corruption because the Utopians always live in public view and, therefore, have to live up to the expectations of the public.

The very existence of politics in *Utopia* shows that human nature has not been fundamentally transformed. Reforming human behavior requires politics. In other words, human beings need supervision, which is the task of politics. Unlike later utopians, Thomas More did not eliminate politics from utopia but rather utopia is formed through a reformation of politics. In this sense, More takes after the tradition of ancient political writers like Plato and Aristotle who saw politics as essential to the good life. Later utopians like William Morris's *News from Nowhere* would eliminate politics from their utopias because the need for supervision is eliminated when human nature is perfected. In Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, politics is reduced to mere administration. In Utopia, politics is supposed to do both—transform people into law-abiding citizens and then punish those who fail to achieve such transformations.

This is not to say, however, that Utopians' behavior cannot be changed at all.

> What links More's *Utopia* to, say, Robert Owen's *A New View of Society* (1813), and separates both from say Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Locke's *Two Treatises*, is the conviction that humanity is perfectible. This may be qualified—but not too much—by something like the belief in original sin; and the notion of perfectability will of course be interpreted in different ways by different people at different times. But what unites utopians, and gives to utopian theory its distinctive emphasis, is the assumption that there is nothing in man, nature or society that cannot be so ordered as to bring about a more or less permanent state of material plenty, social harmony and individual fulfillment. [34]

This line of argument emphasizes the moldable aspect of human nature. However, More believed both in this perfectibility and in the fact that a perfect society needs harsh laws to control imperfect people. Hythloday says of the role of the good king (and presumably of any political state), "Let him curb crime, and by training his subjects wisely keep him from misbehavior, instead of letting trouble breed and then punishing it."[35] In Book I, for instance, Hythloday sees the origin of crime in social institutions and not necessarily in the character of the individual. Thus, Hythloday sees the transformative power of institutions. Utopians are good people but it is not necessarily their nature that makes them so. It is because their laws, families, societies, mores, customs, and traditions hone their capacity for goodness and suppress the negative parts of their nature. However, "even in Utopia, with its splendid education, More thinks it necessary to provide a system of criminal justice: human nature is such that, no matter what nurture it receives, some fraction of individuals will always be criminals. And even those who are not criminals require an elaborate system of laws and moral suasion to ensure their good behavior."[36]

The first step toward creating utopia, for More, required the elimination of one of man's most destructive vices—pride. Utopia cannot be instituted

without the elimination of pride. Pride is the principal sin; it is one which is a huge block to any virtue. Without the barrier of pride, the laws of Utopia would have been adopted by other nations long ago. Utopia tackles pride through its institutions as well as through both religious and secular education. It is a vice that delights in comparison and in making sure that one person has more than another. The problem is that pride is not easy to erase out of the human heart. More does not clarify whether the Utopians have erased pride from human hearts or simply removed the conditions for its growth and exercise (though the possibilities are not mutually exclusive). More simply states that, under the circumstances, he thinks that it is lucky that the Utopians have achieved the republic that they have. This has been made possible through the three means: education, religion, and most importantly, the abolition of private property. Through these means, the Utopians claim to have erased ambition and division within the lands.

The Utopians, perversely it seems, combine the elimination of pride with what, at first glance, looks like a very selfish philosophy that allows individuals to pursue whatever they find pleasurable, provided it does not harm anyone else. At the same time, the Utopians distinguish several classes of pleasures, some of which they attribute to the mind and others to the body. Those of the mind are knowledge and the delight that arises from contemplating the truth while those of the body are ones dealing with health and, of course, sensory pleasure. The most highly prized pleasure is mental pleasure, which, for More, is a result of a virtuous and good life. This is an extremely moral concept in that a pleasure that is not considered honorable is seen as leading to pain. Thus, More combines selfishness with virtue and practicality with morality in Utopia.

This philosophy, therefore, turns out to be a combination of self-interest with morality. The utopians take it for granted that self-interest is a basic fact of human nature. Pleasure is the goal for individuals and the most pleasurable life is the life of virtue.

Though the Utopians define virtue as living according to nature, nature also inclines human beings toward a life of joy, free of anxiety. Virtue is made as pleasurable as possible. It also makes us compassionate toward others. "Nature bids mortals to make one another's lives cheerful, as far as they can" and "repeatedly warns you not to seek your own advantage in ways that cause misfortune to others."[37] Selflessness and selfishness is thus combined in the Utopian philosophy.

This combination of disparate qualities is what gives Utopia its ambiguity. For instance, though Utopians are unselfish in their internal affairs, they are extremely selfish and harsh when engaged in war. The self-interest that is suppressed within the state finds vent outside it. The Utopians combine this practicality with morality by arguing that they go into war for moral reasons only. This combination of practicality with morality is seen as early as Book

I where Hythloday objects to the killing of thieves because it is neither just nor useful. It is unjust because it is the structure of the political system that has driven most of these men to crime and it is not useful because execution is not a good deterrent to crime. The political arrangements of Utopia are thus presumably either useful/necessary or just or both.

WHAT MAKES UTOPIA POSSIBLE?

One of the ways in which to combine all these qualities (practicality, morality, selfishness, virtue, and lack of pride) is a sound education. More forestalled the objection that his character puts forward in the book—that for utopia to come true, men will have to be saints. "Utopians are not saints: all need to be educated carefully, and some do become criminals."[38] For More and for other Christian humanists, "the aim of educational reform was not merely an improved curriculum, or improved speakers and writers, but improved men."[39] Utopia educates in many ways. First, it educates through formal education. Second, it educates through social pressure including the use of the family. The entire family is shamed for the bad behavior of one of its own. The young are under the constant supervision of the older members of the family. Third, secular education is supplemented by religious education because "religion in Utopia is a principal means for reconciling the individual's pursuit of pleasure with the necessary political concern for the common good."[40] Priests educate students in manners, virtue, and opinions, which are useful to the republic. This sort of education is needed to put restraints on the utopian principle of pleasure. The priests in Utopia educate the people through social pressure as well. They are not above educating people by shaming them. Public approval is what makes people in Utopia what they are. Knowing that they provide a better life than other political systems, Utopians judge their own people harsher than others. Their reasoning is that people with good education and training need to behave better than those that lack these advantages.

The education of the Utopians is the key not only to inculcating the correct understanding of pleasure and virtue but also to the value of work. This is important in a society where everything is owned in common. Everyone is trained in farming from childhood and has to farm at some point in their lives. Each person is also taught a trade. Each family makes its own clothes, which are the same throughout the island, again, to eliminate a reason for pride. Sons follow the trades of their fathers but are allowed to follow their own desires into another trade. Thus, usefulness to the country, attachment to its principle of common ownership, and natural talents are all combined within this instructional system.

In Utopia free time is not to be spent in sloth. It is usually spent in intellectual activity. Utopians can attend daily public lectures if they are so inclined. Those that have devoted their lives to learning are required to attend these lectures. If you prefer to devote your free time to your trade, that is allowed too. Thus, those who want intellectual development are free to seek it while those who want to develop their trades are left to take that path. Natural desires rule one's choice—the only restriction is that free time should not be spent in sloth. The leaning toward intellectualism is seen in the fact that the citizens can take as much time as they want to develop their minds. That, according to the Utopians, is the source of greater happiness than anything else.

Religious education is key to harmonizing the contradictory principles that sustain Utopia. As stated earlier, it is now accepted that More's religious views changed over his lifetime. More, horrified by the doctrines of Martin Luther, clung more and more tenaciously to the tenets of Catholicism as his life went on. He considered institutions to be vital for the purpose of leading a virtuous life—and Luther posed a threat to one of those institutions. Human beings, according to More, are capable of virtue but exercise of virtue is difficult and requires external aid. This aid has to come from the state. Harsh laws are needed because fear of punishment is the best motivator. Human nature cannot achieve virtue without some aid. As R. W. Chambers points out, "An inhabitant of Utopia has little liberty, as little as a warrior in the Spartan State, or an inmate of a monastery, although the Utopian has an easier life than either. Utopia is indeed modeled on the Spartan and the monastic disciplines, with the austerities of both alleviated."[41]

Utopia is based on Christian morality. It is a Christian state without Christian dogma. But the Christian virtues upheld in Utopia are virtues based on reason rather than Christian theology.

"This fusion of Christian faith with the pagan belief in reason and virtue was the essence of the Christian humanism of the time. It formed a basis for the religion that More gave to the Utopians, a kind of humanitarianism deism which abhorred religious intolerance."[42] King Utopus, who settled the land of Utopia, had been able to conquer it because of the disputes among the people over religion. As a result, he had instituted religious tolerance. Religion in Utopia means holding two essential tenets. First, no Utopians believe that souls perish with the body and secondly, no Utopian believes that the earth is born by chance. In other words, Utopians believe in divine providence and in an afterlife. This is important because "from these two doctrines is derived the conclusion that punishments are decreed for vices, rewards for virtue."[43] Religion supplements the fear of the law as a means of bolstering correct behavior in all Utopians. Apart from this, each person is allowed to conceive of God as they wish.

Living according to nature is considered virtuous in Utopia. But nature is informed by both religion and reason. The Utopians claim that their religious principles are practical. They believe that the soul is immortal and born for happiness. For the Utopians, these principles can be accepted by reason. Acceptance of these principles leads to virtue and, therefore, to happiness. But happiness is not found in every kind of pleasure but "only in good and honest pleasure."

However, though the Utopians see their religion based on reason, it is also true that this religion can sometimes be carried to excess. There are some groups within Utopia who voluntarily lead a much more ascetic and spartan life than the rest of the population. Some of them remain celibate while others agree to get married but focus on serving others and on living lives of poverty. These groups are considered irrational by the majority of the population but since they serve society selflessly, they are tolerated.

In some of the ancillary materials published along with the original, the French humanist, Guillaume Bude, highlights the view that Utopia contains essentially Christian customs and principles. These customs include: "equality of all good and evil things among the citizens," "a fixed and unwavering dedication to peace and tranquility" and "utter contempt for gold and silver."[44] The image of Utopia as emphasizing More's devout Christianity is also seen in the biography of More written by his son-in-law, William Roper. Roper depicts More in almost saintly terms but most important for our purposes, he shows in More a combination of piousness and practicality characterizing Christian humanism. Some writers add a psychological dimension to this interpretation, arguing that "having decided to pursue the vocation of layman rather than priest, he was concerned to explore the possibilities of secular life for all men as well as himself. To this end he envisioned a polity embodying the virtues of the cloister at the same time as it acknowledged the social and political hopes of contemporary humanists."[45]

This is the rational religiosity of a pagan people.[46] Since these people have not received divine revelation, they hold views that resemble Christianity but include views that are clearly not Christian. While More creates a utopia that lacks Christianity, he also imbues this utopia with a philosophical basis for Christianity. The vast majority of Utopians believe in a single God who is beyond human understanding. This explains why Hythloday speaks of the eager acceptance of Christianity by the Utopians. They already have a basis for it in their own society. As Hythloday points out, they eagerly accepted Christianity because it resembled their own predilections, particularly the focus on community. The defense of communism is deftly combined with the Christian faith.

The position of this chapter is that this set of opinions shows More's tendency to combine supposedly disparate principles such as his combination of reason and religion. He provides the basis for religion as well as for a life

of pleasure and virtue through reason. In doing so, it ties together the concepts of pleasure and virtue and provides the basis for each. Yet, as we have seen, neither reason based on nature nor the principles of religion espoused in Utopia are enough to produce a truly self-governing society. Utopia has few laws but a number of harsh rules and customs. This is because all men are not able to internalize the attitudes that make Utopia possible. Thus,

> beneath the seductive appearance of the Utopians' simplified, rationalized laws and mores is the human perversity that makes their existence necessary: the lust that wrecks their ideal of the inviolability and permanence of marriage and leads them to permit an extremely liberal policy of divorce, the recalcitrance of hardened criminals . . . the anger which, in their warfare, induces them to duplicate some of the most fiendish practices devised by human nature.[47]

Utopia, therefore, requires some illiberality in order to make it possible due to the complications and inherent problems in human nature.

The second means to harmonize these principles is through the means of communism. Everything is owned in common by everyone. This is necessary because when there is inequality, "the proud do not remain satisfied with the original inequality that is responsible for their feelings of superiority. Instead, they use their superior wealth and power to get even more, thereby creating an even greater inequality between themselves and others."[48] Therefore, pride is not only a sin but a potential social evil. This is why communism of property is absolutely essential for Utopia—it prevents the comparative and competitive nature of pride from being indulged in. Especially to eliminate the problems that come with pride, More institutes a system of sameness and monotony. People wear the same clothes, live in the same houses, and cannot campaign for public office. Houses are never locked—there is no need to do so when everything is owned in common—and every ten years, they change houses. Maybe this rule prevents attachment to the same house. The only thing in which Utopians can take pride is their gardens. This is the one feature of their lives where they are allowed to indulge what More sees as their natural competitiveness. Cultivating the land is, therefore, something to be proud of but nothing else.

While Hythloday views communism as an implementation of Christ's teachings (though the Utopians did not know Christ before Hythloday's visit), it is done by the Utopians for both practical and moral purposes. It prevents attachment to particulars and makes each part of Utopia dependent on the others. The people in the countryside can request what they cannot get from the towns. The labor needs of the country are supplemented by people from the city. In Utopia all citizens are dedicated to labor and to their families. The whole society is invested both in their homes as well as in work that is meant for the community as a whole. All citizens in Utopia—men and women—perform physical labor. Work is not restricted to a class of citi-

zens—it is something that is expected from all citizens. There is only one class in society that is freed from the requirement to labor—the upper crust called syphogrants. However, More makes it clear that though priests can recommend that some of the brightest syphogrants be freed from physical labor, yet, they work nonetheless. The Utopians stress the dignity of all labor, regardless of the task at hand.

The distribution of food and goods in Utopia underscores how communism changes human behavior. Each household gets what it needs from the state's warehouses. There is no need to fear that people will exploit the system. As is pointed out, people only behave in that way in fear that they will have to hoard against future loss. When there is no fear of want, there is no need to behave in this greedy, unscrupulous manner. In other words, absent that fear and human beings no longer have to be selfish and demanding. More does not specify how deep-seated the change is—do people actually lose their selfish instincts or are they simply unnecessary in this situation? Maybe there is no way to know. However, he seems to be saying that people do change their behavior with this institutional change. It is the uncertainty about how deep-seated this change is that mandates that Utopia have institutions that keep an eye on the people to ensure that they behave in the anticipated ways.

This, in turn, complicates the question of utopia itself. If utopia requires vigilance to maintain itself because of human nature, then why make the radical change? Hythloday and the character of More both have extreme responses to this question. "Hythlodaeus' attitude towards reform is flawed because he believes in the necessity for absolute, radical change; he cannot comprehend the possibility of allowing to remain in existence a state that contains good and bad together."[49] He is unable to see the flaws in Utopia that the character of More points out to him. However, the character of More goes to the other extreme and focuses on the problems with utopia almost to the exception of everything else. The character More opines that, "If you cannot pluck up bad ideas by the root, or cure long-standing evils to your heart's content, you must not therefore abandon the commonwealth."[50] Thus, "by an direct approach, you must strive and struggle as best as you can to handle everything tactfully—and thus what you cannot turn to good, you may at least make as little bad as possible. For it is impossible to make everything good unless all men are good."[51] The character More seems to be of the belief that utopia is not possible because of the fact that people are inherently flawed. Thus, the only solution to our problems is tinkering with them; not radically changing the system. Raphael responds that dismissing innovation and difference would be foolish because "if we dismiss as outlandish and absurd everything that the perverse customs of men have made to seem alien to us, we shall have to set aside, even in a community of Christians, most of the teachings of Christ."[52]

The question remains: What does More himself think of his own utopia? Is utopia possible? Is it even wise to try and implement utopia? Which of these two, the character More or Hytholday, speaks for the writer remains unclear. Some writers point out that

> More created the Utopians in his own image. They share his contempt for material ostentation, as attested by their simple monastic garb and their debasing use of gold . . . They, too, believe that the secret of a happy life consists in the cultivation of the mind and achieve the same kind of communal domestic order for which More strove in his own household. [53]

He projected his own fondness for gardens, his liking for music and his delight in fools. Even if we accept this statement as fact (it is too controversial to accept lightly), we still cannot see Utopia as More's perfect society. The truth seems to be that neither More, the character, nor Hythloday seem to speak unilaterally for More.

Utopia is More's attempt to combine many different ideas and concepts. It is his attempt to show that a Christian nation should be ashamed if it is at least not as good as Utopia. It is his attempt to show that religion is not merely dogma but can be based on reason itself—and that reason in turn is based on nature. Therefore, it is an attempt to show that a certain type of religious virtuous life is both natural and rational. Finally, it is an attempt to show that politics will always be necessary because no matter how well educated people are in this philosophy, human nature is always such as to be unable to live up to the dictates of this morality. Therefore, a utopia has to be political and both better than current political systems and less than perfect at the same time. Utopia cannot be perfect because politics cannot transform the hearts of human beings. More is telling us that Christian virtues alone—without Christian theology—is incapable of producing utopia.

NOTES

1. John C. Olin, *Interpreting Thomas More's Utopia* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), xi.
2. Alistair Fox, *Thomas More: History and Providence* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 71.
3. Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia in Modern Times* (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc, 1987), 2.
4. Edward Surtz, and J. H. Hexter, *Utopia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), xxiv.
5. James Nendza, "Political Idealism in More's 'Utopia,'" *The Review of Politics* 46, no. 3 (1984): 429.
6. Nendza, "Political Idealism," 442.
7. Nendza, "Political Idealism," 444.
8. Nendza, "Political Idealism," 445–446.
9. Throughout this chapter, I will specify when I am talking about the character Thomas More in *Utopia*. If this is not specified, it should be assumed that I am speaking about the author.
10. G. P. Marc'hadour and R. S. Sylvester, ed., *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1977), 390.

11. R. S. Sylvester, *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, 391

12. William Nelson, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Utopia* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1968), 14.

13. Edward Surtz, SJ, *St. Thomas More's Utopia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), xxvii.

14. Edward Surtz, SJ and J. H. Hexter, *Utopia*, cxxxii.

15. Edward Surtz, *St. Thomas More's Utopia*, cxli.

16. Edward Surtz, *St. Thomas More's Utopia*, clx.

17. Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia in Modern Times*, 22. For a succinct example of this view, see Brendan Bradshaw's "More on Utopia" in *The Historical Journal* (Mar., 1981).

18. Of course, unlike Machiavelli, More was not trying to subvert the entire genre of books which gave advice to princes on how to be moral and virtuous rulers.

19. Nelson, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Utopia*, 14.

20. Edward Surtz, *St. Thomas More's Utopia*, xxvi.

21. Edward Surtz, SJ and J. H. Hexter, *Utopia*, lxx.

22. Edward Surtz, SJ and J. H. Hexter, *Utopia*, lxxiv.

23. Edward Surtz, SJ and J. H. Hexter, *Utopia*, cvii.

24. Edward Surtz, SJ and J. H. Hexter, *Utopia*, cxx.

25. J. H. Hexter, "Thomas More: On the Margins of Modernity," *The Journal of British Studies* 1, no. 1 (1961): 35.

26. Brian O'Brien, "J. H. Hexter and the Text of Utopia: A Reappraisal," *Moreana* XXXIX, no. 110 (1992): 23.

27. O'Brien, "J. H. Hexter and the Text of Utopia," 28.

28. Alistair Fox, *Utopia: An Elusive Vision* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 7.

29. Fox, *Utopia: An Elusive Vision*, 21.

30. Hexter, "Thomas More," 23.

31. Fox, *Utopia: An Elusive Vision*, 33.

32. Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 6.

33. More, *Utopia*, 24.

34. Kumar, *Utopianism*, 29.

35. More, *Utopia*, 33.

36. Olin, *Interpreting Thomas More's Utopia*, 29.

37. More, *Utopia*, 68.

38. Edward Surtz, *St. Thomas More's Utopia*, xxviii.

39. Edward Surtz, SJ and J. H. Hexter, *Utopia*, lxi.

40. James Nendza, "Religion and Republicanism in More's Utopia," *The Western Political Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1984), 197.

41. R. S. Sylvester, *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, 495.

42. Erasmus and William Roper, *Letter of Erasmus to Ulrich von Hutten and Roper's Life of More* (Princeton: Walter J. Black Inc, 1947) xviii–xix.

43. Nendza, "Religion and Republicanism," 198.

44. More, *Utopia*, 114–15.

45. Fox, *Thomas More*, 51.

46. For details on this view, see R. W. Chambers and Edward Surtz.

47. Fox, *Thomas More*, 58.

48. Olin, *Interpreting Thomas More's Utopia*, 48.

49. Fox, *Thomas More*, 60.

50. More, *Utopia*, 35.

51. More, *Utopia*, 35.

52. More, *Utopia*, 36.

53. Fox, *Thomas More*, 53.

Chapter Two

The Mutability of Human Nature in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*

One of the most successful novels of its time, *Looking Backward* sold thousands of copies, becoming one of the most successful novels ever. It was translated into many languages including German, French, and Italian. It led to the creation of Nationalist clubs around the country, which aspired to implement Bellamy's vision. However, even before the publication of this book, Bellamy was well known as a literary figure, earning praise from the likes of William Dean Howells and Mark Twain. This book changed the trajectory of Bellamy's career, and after its publication, he spent his energies on the Nationalist Party, which sprung up after the publication of *Looking Backward*. The Nationalist Party, and Bellamy with it, focused on the goal of nationalizing all industries under government control.

Looking Backward is a story about Julian West, a member of the rich upper crust of Boston society, who falls asleep in 1887 and wakes up in the year 2000. When Julian goes to sleep in the year 1887, the capitalist society he is a part of is in turmoil. Labor unrest, class divisions, and strikes have led to chaos and economic havoc. It also threatens to delay Julian West's marriage by delaying the construction of his new home. Thus, Bellamy starts the book by showing the personal and economic repercussions of competitive capitalism—through the eyes of an upper class capitalist. Julian West is part of the upper class, alarmed at the growing power of labor. This portion of the book sets the stage for a strong, repetitive critique of the late 1800s, which occurs throughout the book. West is also an insomniac who sleeps in a fireproof basement chamber and has to be hypnotized to sleep. The time travel that enables West to land in utopia is precipitated by a house fire. When his house burns down, he survives the fire and continues his hypnotic sleep till he wakes up in the year 2000 in the house of Dr. Leete, his wife, and

his daughter Edith. The socialistic society into which Julian awakes is one of equality and abundance. Everyone earns an equal income and there is a nationalized system of production and distribution. Every individual is a part of an industrial army and membership in this army is mandatory in this utopia. As Julian is shown around this utopia and its workings are described to him, his membership in the upper class does not deter him from admiring the new world that he sees. The old competitive society has been trounced in favor of an entirely new world. This new world is predicated on economic equality, as opposed to the class divisions of the old world. It is characterized by solidarity as opposed to the divisiveness of the old. It is a world where the state is entirely benign and bureaucratic in nature—and where every citizen supposedly feels a oneness with the state and finds one's purpose within its bureaucratic setup.

Indeed, though there is very little continuity between the past that Julian West has left behind and the future that he enters, he does not need much time to adjust to the new world. He thinks of the Leete family as similar to himself in the old world. While the present may look very different from the past in terms of the economic and political structures, the past and present remain connected. This will be further demonstrated by Bellamy's later revelation that Edith Leete, the daughter of Dr. Leete, is actually related to Julian West's fiancé in the world of 1887. This revelation is made just in time to make Julian feel his new love was connected to his old, to connect the present to the past, not simply through the character of Julian West but through the family of the Leetes. This continuity represents Bellamy's belief that human beings can change and evolve but often, this evolution is toward a higher, universal end.

BELLAMY'S VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

Fundamentally, this portrayal of utopia and the progress toward it is predicated on Bellamy's view of human nature. Bellamy's beliefs on human beings are intertwined with his view of religion. The son of a Baptist minister, Bellamy had a love-hate relationship with religion. Though Bellamy denies any religious affiliation, his writings show the impact of his early religious education on his thoughts and beliefs. Perhaps the most explicit piece by Bellamy on his ontological beliefs is *The Religion of Solidarity*. To summarize: Bellamy believed that human nature evolves over time, partly shaped by one's environment. "In an age that conceived of man as static, Bellamy insisted on the environment as a shaper of man."[1] For Bellamy, Darwinism is one of the most original ideas of his century and the evolution of human nature makes utopia possible.

Bellamy asserts, "Like his present endowment of mental faculties which man has slowly and painfully evolved since the savage state, so the full consciousness and active enjoyment of the universal soul will be slow and difficult in being realized."[2] Bellamy is specific about the goal of human evolution: it is the spiritual integration of an individual with, what he conceives to be, the universal spirit of all mankind. It is important to note here that Bellamy combines a developmental theory of human beings with a fixed standard. "On one hand is the personal life, an atom and on the other, is a certain other life, as it were a spark of the universal life, insatiable in aspiration, greedy of infinity, asserting solidarity with all things and all existence."[3] Bellamy asserts that this "dual life of man, personal and impersonal, as an individual and as a universal, goes far to explain the riddle of human nature and human destiny."[4] This "universal soul" of humankind grows and develops within individuals slowly and through eons of time. Thus, Bellamy explicitly espouses the standard of the universal soul, which is the point toward which humankind has been evolving.

However, Bellamy did not elevate one of these two aspects of human nature above the other. There is no condemnation of individuality vis-à-vis the universal soul. In fact, Bellamy posits that individuality preserves "that variety in unity which seems the destined condition of being."[5] However, it is undeniable that, for Bellamy, as human beings evolve, the impersonal would play a greater and greater role in the human psyche. Most importantly, he saw this impersonal universal soul as an unstoppable force that would develop within human beings. The call of the generous social impulses of the universal soul were as forceful as the selfish needs of an individual. Thus, this universal force will develop inevitably or naturally. This development was necessary for utopia. "Man's individuality—his selfishness, irritability, and suspicion—prevented his better self from managing his common intercourse in a manner which would contribute to 'the common happiness and rights.'"[6] In other words, while individuality provides variety, it is also the basis of some of the perceived problems impeding human improvement and sociability. Bellamy used the phrase "too much human nature" to demonstrate his belief that what is considered human nature today is based on purely circumstantial assumptions. The human nature of today is not the nature of the universal soul, because individuality is not the same as the universal soul. From his early writings, therefore, Bellamy believed that humankind is constantly evolving. The fact "of individuality with its tendency to particularizations is the centrifugal force which hinders the universal fusion" and therefore creates human tensions.[7] These tensions can be avoided through the fusion of individuality into universality. This fusion is not supposed to take place in some distant future or in the after-life. "We are now living our immortal lives. This present life is its own perfect consummation, its own reason and excuse."[8] Thus, while Bellamy seems to have some

standard toward which his developmental/evolutionary vision of human nature moves, it is clear that he is not an economic materialist like Marx. Examining the political utopia which he envisions and the means of achieving it should give us a better idea of what human nature should achieve for Bellamy.

Bellamy made it clear in *Looking Backward* that the problem in 1887 was that the capitalist economic system was set up on the false premise that selfishness and self-interest were the only components of human nature. To believe that the dominant and continuous elements in human nature are all negative was, for Bellamy, the short-sightedness of human beings. By changing the institutional structures and incentives, the same self-interest would be put to the service of the entire community and nation. The industrial army found in the year 2000, for instance, which mimics a military army, puts the selfishness of individuals to the service of the universal whole, the "second soul." The goal of Bellamy's utopia is to draw cooperation and solidarity out of isolation and individualism.

So what is the catalyst for human development for Bellamy? "Some have said that Nationalism requires a change in human nature; but men on turning soldiers do not become better men, do not experience a change of heart. They are merely placed under the influence of different incentives."[9] Bellamy asserted in *The Religion of Solidarity*, "It remains for us, by culture of our spiritual cognitions, by education, drawing forth of our partially latent universal instincts, to develop into a consciousness as coherent, definite, and indefeasible, as that of our individual life, the all-identical life of the universe within us."[10] Note the vehicles of achieving human transformation. We have to cultivate our "spiritual cognitions" at least partially through education. Bellamy also makes it clear that the universal soul lies latent within human beings and can be developed through these means. When speaking of culture Bellamy gives the word two meanings: first, culture means the environment within which an individual is raised, and, second, it means cultivation of certain faculties. This is the means through which human nature is transformed according to Bellamy.

Education or cultivation of human faculties is an important means of human transformation. "The process that would dissolve the 'twin tyrannies of ignorance and political oppression' was to be peaceful and would be the result of the education of the people, not that of the demagogues."[11] This is why Bellamy's utopia is achieved through an evolutionary process rather than through revolution. Bellamy believed that

> the success or failure of the state depended upon whether or not the people had the ability to form intelligent decisions and the morality to prevent their being corrupted. Individually, the happiness of man, his dignity, his ability, his de-

sire to perfect the social order, and his lack of religious superstition and preju-
dice depended upon his being educated.[12]

Before the ideal state can be brought to fruition, humankind "had to be
educated away from the idea that man is innately depraved and that his
wickedness would make the new order an impossible goal. . . . The reformer
had to teach people to regard the human race as innately good and as capable
of developing the social, generous instincts it possessed when given a more
healthful environment."[13]

Bellamy believed in human perfectability and argued that a change in
human conditions would lead to a new type of human being. Changing the
motivations of man by changing structures, would lead to better human be-
ings. However, people must start by believing in the good of human nature.

HUMAN NATURE IN *LOOKING BACKWARD*

The key features of Bellamy's utopian state in *Looking Backward* are equal-
ity, abundance, and a national hierarchic labor organization. Every person is
paid the same amount, no matter what work they do. This payment is not in
the form of money but an amount that is credited to their account out of
which they pay for the goods and services they receive from the state. Eco-
nomic equality is seen as the solution to all problems. "No passions or com-
plications arising out of human nature are recognized. Ambition; pride; love;
hatred; injustice; hypocrisy; differences of nationalism, language, culture,
race, and philosophy are all set at naught" and the entire country seems to be
run smoothly by a faceless and benign bureaucracy.[14] Perhaps the most im-
portant aspect of this work is Bellamy's idea of the "industrial army." Se-
verely criticized by other socialists of the time, this concept asserts that all
those who are of a certain age have to work and they are organized into a
hierarchical organization or the industrial army. The political being depen-
dent on the economic in Bellamy's utopia, the president of this utopia, is the
head of the industrial army. People are assigned jobs through a complicated
system which measures capability while taking their job preferences into
account.

Looking Backward is also characterized by a gendered division of labor.
Women form their own labor force, independent of men, and are supervised
by other women. Bellamy makes it clear that hard labor is not performed by
women, that women have shorter hours of work, and more frequent vaca-
tions. It is also evident that the most important roles performed by women in
this utopia is that of wife and mother. When women have children, they are
exempt from service in the industrial army since they become the primary
caretakers of their children. Therefore, the traditional gendered division of

labor was not challenged by Bellamy's utopia, providing space for this challenge by writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

The state distributes jobs according to the desires of the citizens. All jobs are made equally desirable, according to Bellamy by adjusting the hours of certain jobs. Those which are more desired would have longer hours than those which are desired less. But where do children get their desires for certain occupations? Bellamy attributes this to nature, natural aptitude to be exact. But natural aptitude needs to be administered by the state for the purposes of fulfilling the needs of the state. Bellamy gives a huge task to his educational system, which needs to create the culture that makes this utopia successful. Yet, he fails to describe this system in any great detail. The extent to which these inclinations are natural or are cultivated by the educational system or the hours of work remains unclear. Bellamy simply makes clear that the structure of government and society along with the incentives they provide, impact and influence human nature and behavior.

Julian West is introduced into this society, which claims to be "the logical outcome of the operation of human nature under rational operations."[15] This explanation gives us the first clue to the conception of human nature, which underlies this work. For Bellamy, human nature operates differently under different circumstances. As mentioned above, the people of Boston in the year 2000 emphasize that human nature has not changed but that the change in conditions have precipitated a change in human actions. In fact, Dr. Leete strenuously denies that human nature has changed at all. He insists that "the conditions of human life have changed, and with them the motives of human action."[16] Does this mean that people want exactly what they wanted before and yet, have changed their behavior because they cannot get it? Clearly, this is not the case. Real changes have taken place in human motives and desires. For instance, Julian is amazed at the desire to work manifested by the people of Boston in the year 2000. He observes that this is a real change from his time when neither the rich nor the poor desired to work. Dr. Leete responds that work "is regarded as so absolutely natural and reasonable that the idea of its being compulsory has ceased to be thought of. He would be thought to be an incredibly contemptible person who should need compulsion in such a case."[17] Work has been made more attractive, not through remunerations but through custom. Customs have changed human desires and now people want to work—both because it is pleasurable and because it will be considered dishonorable to shirk that responsibility. In this sense, Bellamy points out that the change is real and deep-rooted but it is institutional change that precipitates changes in human nature.

However, Bellamy is aware that exceptions may still exist. A man who can work but refuses to do so is sentenced to solitary imprisonment on bread and water. Thus, even if men and women do not want to work under this system, they are forced to do so and it is in their best interest to do well at

their work. Yet, in general, Dr. Leete claims that the "coarser motives, which no longer move us, have been replaced by higher motives wholly unknown to the mere wage earners of your age. Now that industry, of whatever sort, is no longer self-service, but service of the nation, patriotism, passion for humanity, impel the worker as in your day, they did the soldier."[18] The coarser motives, it is assumed, are eliminated through institutional organization, which does not allow such motives to pay off.

Yet, institutional changes are not the only means through which an improvement in human nature is affected. The second method is that of natural selection. This is not a state-imposed principle as in Plato's *Republic*. Rather, women are raised to see themselves as the means for the betterment of the state. Dr. Leete asserts that natural selection is the inevitable outcome of the idea that marriages are a result of love. Women pick men based on their desirability. Desirability is no longer based on income, which is equal for all, but on one's place in the industrial army, which is an outcome of work. Women refuse to marry men who do not accept this institutional system. Thus, sexual selection becomes the means for bettering the race with women rejecting men who are seen as inferior within this system. Institutional change can trigger natural selection without making it mandatory, and, therefore, the claim made by this system is that its people are better than those of the old system. People are better physically, intellectually, and morally. This selection of good men is a duty imposed upon women. Women feel that bettering the race is their duty and they are taught this lesson from childhood. Therefore, love, marriage, and the advancement of the human race go together.

For Bellamy, the nature of the people in this utopia is what "unperverted human nature looks like."[19] In fact, for Bellamy, the purpose of utopia is to take changes of human nature in hand and direct it toward the universal soul. In *Looking Backward*, Bellamy asserts that there are two elements of human nature—the antisocial part and the social cooperative part. The institutions of Boston 2000 are designed to appeal to, and develop, the social cooperative tendencies in humankind.

> It is not necessary to suppose a new moral birth of humanity, or a wholesale destruction of the wicked and survival of the good, to account for the fact before us. It finds its simple and obvious explanation in the reaction of a changed environment upon human nature. It means merely that a form of society which was founded on the pseudo-self-interest of selfishness, and appealed solely to the antisocial and brutal side of human nature, has been replaced by institutions based on the true self-interest of a rational unselfishness, and appealing to the social and generous instincts of men.[20]

Bellamy believed that at this stage, "humanity has entered on a new phase of spiritual development, an evolution of higher faculties, the very existence of which in human nature our ancestors scarcely suspected."[21] Believing in the

"unbounded possibilities of human nature,"[22] it becomes necessary to construct the system that will develop these possibilities.

Bellamy's belief in the evolutionary character of human nature is underscored by his views on human punishment. For Bellamy, moral defects are similar to physical defects and should therefore be treated with compassion rather than punishment. There are two reasons for this. First, for Bellamy, sin is not black and white. What a person considers an action sinful is, for Bellamy, a result of education and the circumstances of nurture. It depends on principles taught to the individual. These circumstances are beyond an individual's control. Second, Bellamy believed that, at each of many stages of one's life, one becomes a different person and punishing one person for another's mistakes is unjust. Bellamy believed that people develop souls as they pass through different experiences in life. In his story, *Miss Ludington's Sister*, Bellamy says that most people "in their fear of dying . . . quite forget that they have died already many times. It is the most foolish of all things to imagine that by prolonging the career of the individual, death is kept at bay. The present self must die in any case by the inevitable process of time, whether the body be kept in repair for later selves or not."[23]

Emphasizing the importance of evolution in his thought, Bellamy wrote: "The being of today has no identity with the being of yesterday (except that of the soul solidarity through which he is one with past, future, and all things) . . . Time daily recreates our individuality."[24] Consequently, if a person commits a crime and regrets it, Bellamy sees the result as an entirely new person who has been created anew.

Bellamy carries this idea of development into his utopia. With the free time left to them, the Utopians foster the "science of the soul."[25] They seek to know and manipulate human nature. In Bellamy's utopia, people are not even accidentally impolite or dishonest or negative in any way. In this world "the accidents and vicissitudes of the personality are reduced to relative triviality."[26] Thus, not only is human nature evolutionary but also manipulable under the right conditions. Indeed, the criticism of utopias stems from the fact that utopias like Bellamy's assume that human nature is knowable and can also be manipulated.

Bellamy believed that it was the institution of private property that developed the worst aspects of human nature. Bellamy feared that if each trade's members controlled the conditions of that trade, they may be tempted to be selfish and put their interests above those of the community. This is why, under capitalism, if laborers became capitalists, they would be as harsh as the existing capitalists. Thus, the principal transformative feature of Bellamy's utopia was its abolition of private property. Changing the institutions means changes in education. In the Boston of 2000, virtues are not the same ones as in 1887. Children are taught about the virtues of 2000 Boston early in life. Parsimony, for instance, is not a virtue. Thus, changing the economic system

and then tailoring the education system to match the economic system is an essential step toward changing human nature.

In *Equality*, Bellamy continues the description of the utopia that he started in *Looking Backward*. Though not as popular as the latter, *Equality* develops discussions that he leaves incomplete in the first book. This is equally true of his discussion of the impact of institutions on human nature. Perhaps the greatest means of showing this transformative character of political structures is through a literary device—showing the transformation of his protagonist, Julian West. West, while admiring the system laid before him, is still a product of 1887 Boston. Yet, by the end of *Equality*, he wants to be productive, to be part of the industrial army: he wants to work. This is a change, even from *Looking Backward*, where he is a convert to the system but is not necessarily a participant in it. It is important to note that he does not have to work. He is to be given a share of the country's income without having to work for it. Yet, he wants to earn his share. This detail is important because it shows that West's nature has changed. He is not changed due to incentive. In fact, he is given no incentive to work and he can refrain from working if he wants to. Yet, the fact that he still wants to earn his living— something he did not want to do in 1887 Boston—shows that his nature has fundamentally changed. Furthermore, "though impervious to the sufferings of others while living in the nineteenth century, Julian has now developed a new sense of human values—he has become an altruistic man."[27] In other words, he is now in favor of working for the good of the whole, something which would have shocked the Julian West of 1887.

Believing in the progressive capacity of human beings, Bellamy also believed that linear progress is possible. He derides the idea of cyclical history arguing that societies can break cycles to emerge into a process of long unbroken lines of progress. Thus, for Bellamy, "history repeats itself in an ever-ascending spiral."[28] History evolves and so does human nature—one inextricably intertwined with the other. For Bellamy, the utopia in *Looking Backward*, as well as the people, is a definite improvement on the diseases of the world he saw around him and which Julian West leaves for utopia. In summary, Bellamy's view of human nature in *Looking Backward* coheres with his view of human nature in his essays. In spite of all Dr. Leete's assertions that human nature has not fundamentally changed, one finds that Bellamy sees human nature as evolutionary. Humankind has the potential for cooperation and individualism. Bellamy sees the two characteristics as being opposed to each other and emphasizes the effect of the political and social environment in producing the cooperative or individualistic human being. Most importantly, Bellamy has a standard to judge human beings and this standard is his conception of "unperverted human nature." For Bellamy, human nature in its "essential qualities is good, not bad" provided it is developed in the correct environment.[29] Humans, for Bellamy, have become "altruistic, malleable being(s)."[30] Bellamy clearly believes in the

impact of the economic and sociopolitical system on human behavior. The cooperation which he portrays out of individualism is also a reflection of his belief that individual meaning in life would emerge out of an individualistic collectivism.

CRITIQUES OF BELLAMY'S
LOOKING BACKWARD

While Bellamy was extremely vague on the way in which his utopia will come about, he opined, after the publication of *Looking Backward*, that the extremely positive reception to the book showed that people were willing to try radical solutions to problems that plagued the present. In the same article, he pushed back against the criticisms against *Looking Backward*, some of which are listed below.

William Morris, among others, was concerned by the popularity of *Looking Backward*. He feared that Bellamy's vision would be confused with socialism and socialism as an ideology would be either accepted or rejected on this basis. As such, he wrote *News from Nowhere* as a response to Bellamy's vision. He levied two main criticisms leveled against Bellamy's utopia. First, he criticized the hierarchical nature of the industrial army. This criticism is part of a larger critique that claims that Bellamy, unlike Marx, defines work in opposition to leisure. Though Bellamy's utopians choose their profession, it is also assigned to them on the basis of their ability. For the most part, Bellamy assumes that people love the work that they can do well. Yet, it is undeniable that Bellamy makes much of the fact that people in this utopia work short hours, have plenty of vacations, and retire early. It is after they retire that they can start the process of self-development. Bellamy, therefore, is seen to present a separation between work as labor and work as pleasure. This is the main criticism that William Morris issues against this utopia. Morris opines that Bellamy's problem is that he is "seeking (with obvious failure) some incentive to labor to replace the fear of starvation . . . whereas it cannot be too often repeated that the true incentive to useful and happy labor is and must be pleasure in the work itself."[31]

The literary criticism related to this philosophical objection is that the workers "in *Looking Backward* are faceless, having the depersonalized and automatic qualities of soldiers on duty and, whether waiter or clerk, not interacting with those they serve."[32] Indeed, it is true that Bellamy shows very little of individual persons in his utopia, other than the Leete family. While the private and the public life are supposedly kept separate in this utopia, one gets the impression that the Leete family is isolated—as are probably the rest of the utopians. Bellamy fails to develop a social picture of utopia. Morris, on the other hand, believed that the ideal life needs to detach

the professional middle class people from the capitalist class. This is the defect that Morris sets out to remedy in *News from Nowhere*.

Bellamy pointed out that the spur to work in the late 1800s was the fear of poverty. In his utopia, he created a society where that fear is absent. Want "is the motive of only the worst work, while good work is done in proportion in which fear of want is absent, and the instinct of self-development, of ambition and honor, reputation and power, takes its place."[33] Therefore, for Bellamy, the idea that work should be leisure is too simplistic. Work is done for a living and it is done well when one's living is not in constant jeopardy. Human beings perceive the necessity to work through the lens of fear of want and human development is only possible after eliminating this fear.

The second criticism of Bellamy's utopia is about the evolutionary nature of his society. This utopia is not the result of class struggle but of the growing realization that centralization and abolition of private property is the means of transforming the lives and natures of the people. In this sense, Bellamy adopts a different form of socialism than Marx and Engels. Unlike in the case of Marx where the transition from capitalism to socialism marks the maturity of the proletariat, in Bellamy, the transition marks the maturing of all classes of society. For Morris, this means that Bellamy has changed very little of capitalist society. Bellamy's vision is still dominated by bureaucracy, industrialism, and machinery. Merely reducing hours and equalizing pay is not enough. This difference in the form of socialism, which Bellamy adopts, is squarely a result of Bellamy's views on human nature and its evolutionary capacity.

It is also important to note that Bellamy's utopia is the sort of state that dystopian writers like Huxley and Orwell respond to. It is forward-looking, centralized, administrative, and uniform in nature. Bellamy saw progress as a straight line from the workings of the state in 1887 to the year 2000. But critics of utopias saw this as a state-managed, mass society where initiative, individuality, and freedom are stifled on the altar of economic equality. It was attacked by socialists as much as by those worried about socialism. William Morris opined that for "the unit of administration to be small enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details, and be interested in them; that individual men cannot shuffle off the business of life on to the shoulders of an abstraction called the State, but must deal with it in conscious association with each other."[34] Here again, we see the idea that true socialism is predicated on a community life that is absent from Bellamy's utopia. Finally, dystopian writers attack the view of human nature as knowable, predictable, and hence, capable of being manipulated.

Bellamy's vision, however, is often seen as an argument for the welfare state and had a profound influence on several notable writers such as Thorstein Veblen. *Looking Backward* and *Equality* combine to critique the status quo and offer a new outlook on social values to be adopted. They are strong

responses to the writer's own time period's value system. While Bellamy's utopia is critiqued as losing individuality within a bureaucratic machine, Bellamy himself saw this as freedom and individuality for all, rather than only for those at the top of the economic ladder.

Thus, Bellamy asserts that spiritual growth is a result of the change in human society. Unlike his critics, Bellamy saw nationalism as harnessing all the positive characteristics of human beings, the benefits of capitalism, and the benefits of industrialism to create a new, cooperative, plentiful society that acts as one unit and yet allows all possible creative output that is necessary for a healthy socialism. "Nationalism contemplates society, both economically and morally, not as an accidental conglomeration of mutually independent and unconnected molecules, but as an organism, not complete in its molecules, but in its totality only. It refuses to recognize the individual as standing alone, but insists upon regarding him as an inseparable member of humanity, with an allegiance and a duty to his fellows which he could not, if he would, cast off, and with claims upon his fellows which are equally obligatory upon them."[35]

NOTES

1. Joseph Schiffman, "Edward Bellamy's Altruistic Man," *American Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1954), 205.

2. Edward Bellamy, *Selected Writings on Religion and Society*, ed. Oskar Piest (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1955), 11.

3. Bellamy, *Selected Writings*, 6–7.

4. Bellamy, *Selected Writings*, 7.

5. Sylvia Bowman, *The Year 2000: A Critical Biography of Edward Bellamy* (New York: Octagon Books, 1979), 32.

6. Bowman, *The Year 2000*, 102–3.

7. Bellamy, *Selected Writings*, 13.

8. Bellamy, *Selected Writings*, 55.

9. Edward Bellamy, "'Looking Backward' Again," *The North American Review*, 150, no. 400 (1890): 357.

10. Bellamy, *Selected Writings*, 11.

11. Sylvia E. Bowman, *Edward Bellamy*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 8.

12. Bowman, *The Year 2000*, 242.

13. Bowman, 46.

14. Berkove, Lawrence. "Edward Bellamy's 'Looking Backward': The Contemporary Context." *CEA Critic* 52 no. 1/2 (1990): 81.

15. Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (New York: Penguin Books, 1960), 89.

16. Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, 56.

17. Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, 57.

18. Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, 77.

19. Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, 191.

20. Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, 184.

21. Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, 194.

22. Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, 194.

23. Bowman, *Edward Bellamy*, 23.

24. Bowman, *Edward Bellamy*, 54.

25. Edward Bellamy, *Equality* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 266.

26. Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, 266.

27. Schiffman, "Edward Bellamy's Altruistic Man," 202.

28. Bellamy, 53.

29. Bellamy, 191.

30. Schiffman, "Edward Bellamy's Altruistic Man," 196.

31. A. L. Morton, *Political Writings of William Morris* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), 252.

32. In the Milton Cantor essay in Daphne Patai, *Looking Backward, 1988–1888: Essays on Edward Bellamy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 25.

33. Bellamy, "'Looking Backward' Again," 357.

34. William Morris, "Review of Looking Backward by Edward Bellamy," *Science Fiction Studies* 3, no. 3 (1976): 289.

35. Bellamy, "'Looking Backward' Again," 360.

Chapter Three

Technology and Human Nature in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*

Brave New World is set six hundred years in the future in London and depicts a world that has been entirely industrialized and standardized. Babies are bred in hatcheries. Both genetically and through nurturing, babies grow into members of one of five specific hierarchical classes fulfilling clear class roles. All castes are created to serve the state and society in some way and each caste seems to be aware of its own importance and the importance of the other castes. This world is controlled by a bureaucratic, scientific elite exemplified by the character of Mustafa Mond. The goal of the elite is to promote continuous consumption and ensure total stability. The former necessitates the latter. As a result, the Controllers exert complete control over the society, using drugs and distractions of all types to eliminate history, control nature, and satisfy every desire of every person within the state, in an effort to maintain complete control over the state.

Brave New World is often seen as the last of Aldous Huxley's satiric writings. The book was not received with universal praise. Some critics saw the work as superficial or fantastic, while others saw it as embodying a progressive attitude toward technology.[1] The scientist, Joseph Needham, praised the work saying he felt that it would only gain the appreciation of scientists and philosophers. H. G. Wells, on the other hand, excoriated it as "treason to science and defeatist pessimism." Others dismissed it as a joke rather than a serious warning.[2] Some people read it as a dystopia to come while others point to its supposed lack of hope in the present. Still others point out that Huxley himself believed many aspects of this dystopic vision as being necessary,[3] therefore, leaving it an open question as to whether or not it is a dystopia at all. This debate over the work continued for years. For example, political philosopher Judith Shklar dismissed it as a serious picture

33

of a totalitarian state while literary scholar Peter Firchow accepted its status as a serious work of satire.

Huxley, himself, saw the purpose of literature as a way to demonstrate all aspects of life, in all its bewildering totality. As a result, while not always concentrating on character development, human beings form the focus of his work. In fact, his most important essay collection is titled *Proper Studies*, after Pope's statement that "The proper study of Mankind is Man." The study of man is inextricably linked to the study of an ideal state. "Many definitions of the ideal human society have been attempted. That which, I suppose, the majority of modern men and women would find most acceptable is what, for want of a better name, I will call the 'humanistic' definition. The humanist is one who believes that our human nature can, and should be, developed harmoniously as a whole."[4] In other words, for Huxley, harmonious state arrangements go hand-in-hand with harmonious human nature. The problem, as we shall see, is that human beings may not develop "harmoniously" in the same way or even be able to define "harmoniously" in the same way. Therefore, expecting an ideal state requires complete control over the population of that state.

Meant as a critique of the world he saw in 1932, Huxley was widely seen as responding to H. G. Wells's *Men Like Gods* in this book. In fact, Huxley wrote in 1931 that this was a novel "on the horror of the Wellsian Utopia and a revolt against it."[5] In his seminal utopia, Wells conceives of an ideal world based on scientific and technological progress. In 1929, Huxley details one reason why he is opposed, not just to Wells's utopia, but to utopias in general. "I am all for man living scientifically, creating his own destiny and so forth. But in practice I doubt whether he can. I doubt whether any great scheme of human regeneration, of large-scale social Salvationism can be carried through."[6] Part of the reason for this is that "the complexity of society and of human nature is such that it is often very difficult to foresee all the results of a given social change. Reformers frequently discover that, along with much good, they have unintentionally done harm."[7] Huxley gave other reasons why he opposed large-scale attempts at creating utopias. The first is the extent to which utopias depersonalize people. "Politics can become moral only on one condition: that its problems shall be spoken of and thought about exclusively in terms of concrete reality; that is to say, of persons. To depersonify human beings and to personify abstractions are complementary errors which lead, by an inexorable logic, to war between nations and to idolatrous worship of the State, with consequent governmental oppression."[8] During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Huxley criticized the beliefs of his contemporaries as ideological. Both his criticisms can be connected to utopias. First, he derided the fact that people assumed that their beliefs/philosophies were comprehensive and necessary. In other words, utopias attempt to be comprehensive and the only path to making the world better. Second, people as-

sumed that their beliefs were natural in that they were rooted in nature.[9] Huxley's critique is that people usually write their theories and philosophies in an attempt to uphold a particular class, country, or belief. In other words, arguments about "nature" may have a hidden agenda, masquerading as "nature." Therefore, *Brave New World* can be seen as a book about technology's impact on human beings, their nature, and their behavior, and the possible resulting totalitarian state.

Brave New World is a book rife with the juxtaposition between nature and technology. The book opens with the Hatchery where children are made with the help of technology, instead of natural childbirth. The book juxtaposes the World State which is materialistic, heavily technological, and suppresses nature in every possible way, with the so-called Savage Reservation which is supposedly natural but, as we will see, has its own society and its own problems. Unlike Orwell, who, as we shall see, uses technology and state power to repress the individual, Huxley uses technology to create a dystopia of plenty, with complete uniformity, conformity in human desires and behavior in accordance with class, and finally to transform human nature itself. He created *Brave New World*, which creates, according to Hermann Hesse, "a standardized superficial world with its cheap department-store happiness."[10] Modern technology can be used to master, not just nature itself, but human nature.

Huxley, therefore, aims to do a few things simultaneously. First, he shows that totalitarianism comes in many guises and that the totalitarian state will try to mold human nature into whatever shape maintains the power of the state. We see this through the socialization techniques in *Brave New World*: through the process of decanting; through the elimination of love, family, and personal relationships; and through the elimination of history and nature. Second, he shows that, in spite of these efforts, feelings, individualism, and the desire for freedom can never to entirely eliminated in every single person. The recalcitrance of human nature and the lack of perfect control of the state (and a failure in its technology) can lead to differences among people and defy the standardization of man. Huxley clearly favored a definition of freedom based on the human capacity to choose. The conditioning by the state is not absolute, and, therefore, the desire for true freedom, the spark that differentiates one human being from another, is found even in this dystopia. The means of expressing this true form of freedom is found in the power to choose. Finally, he uses the book to draw a vivid, and repellent, picture, which leads the reader to rethink the world around them.

Some writers have traced Huxley's vision in *Brave New World* to his observations of the United States. In "The Outlook for American Culture: Some Reflections in a Machine Age" Huxley equates his observations in the United States to the future of civilized man. He worried that Americans were more interested in food, drink, and entertainment than in any "higher life."

There is greater and greater standardization of everything and this is not resisted because being average is better than being different. "All this mechanical and intellectual standardization, however, leads to the exaltation of the standardized man."[11] The standardization of man is paramount to the political system in *Brave New World*.

"DILUTING" HUMAN NATURE

Huxley shows how human beings can be standardized by suppressing and manipulating human nature. However, there is no simplistic bifurcation between the natural and the unnatural. In other words, Huxley shows how the state can manipulate and even form human nature but he does not assume that this is in opposition to "natural" people. Dystopian writers start with the proposition that naturalness is only a matter of degree. People are always products of socialization to a certain extent. Huxley starts by depicting a world where everyone has been "decanted." Therefore, there is really no natural being in this world. Eliminating natural birth is the only way of gaining complete control of a person's genetic structure. This control is necessary because "the most elemental process of human birth and human heredity contains the seeds of heresy."[12] Huxley sets this state against the Savage Reservations—so-called because they are outside the purview of civilization and, therefore, presumably natural. This is not to say that Huxley attempts to make the Savage Reservation into Rousseau's savage's paradise. The Reservations are not full of isolated robust individuals, acting free of all constraints. Rather, the Reservation consists of a number of tribes, each of which performs the socializing function that is performed by the State in the civilized world. The character of John, who has been raised on the Savage Reservations, is socialized by his tribe and by his mother who was raised in the World State—he upholds the values of the Reservation and those that he has internalized through Shakespeare. "John has been just as brainwashed by Shakespeare as Lenina has been by her popular culture."[13] Therefore, the behavior of John, the Savage, is not that of a "natural" individual. Thus, for Huxley, there is no absolute definition of naturalness; naturalness is only a matter of degree. One person may act more on his instincts than another but some of the instincts themselves may be the result of social conditioning. However, Huxley comes to the conclusion that while it may be difficult, maybe even impossible, to identify the natural, it is necessary to give people freedom in order to establish the possible existence of common human characteristics which may constitute human nature.

This lesson is solidified by the fact that John's education and life experiences have been muddled, leading to confused ideas on his part. John was born in the Savage Reservations, but was socialized by two different cul-

tures—that of the civilized world and that of the "savages." His mother was from the civilized world, and though he is brought up in the Savage Reservations, he has learned of the World State from his mother. At the same time, he longs to become a full member of the tribal society in which he is raised. This tension in his upbringing is epitomized by his love for Shakespeare and his rejection of the sexual freedom taught by the World State and seen in his mother's behavior. He is cast out of the society of the Savage Reservation due to her behavior. Like Bernard Marx, a character decanted in the World State, he wants to belong but is an outsider. Ironically, the book ends with his rejection by the social body.

The problematization of the natural is not only presented through the character of John but also through that of Helmholtz Watson and Bernard Marx. Both have been decanted by the World State and yet, they differ from the other Alphas within their social circles. While Marx is physically inferior to the other Alphas, Watson is mentally and physically superior to them. While Bernard Marx's inferiority is explained away as a technological aberration, there is no corresponding explanation given for the superiority of Watson. In fact, as we find at the end of the work, this is not the first time that Alphas "have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life."[14] Therefore, even in a world where babies are made and then heavily conditioned to fit into community life, one finds aberrations of behavior and budding individuality. Thus, while problematizing the natural, Huxley simultaneously strives to demonstrate that individuality can develop in all political conditions and, therefore, that it is natural. A weaker interpretation is that one can say that Huxley is skeptical of the conditioning power of even the most technologically advanced political system. The natural may not be absolute but it develops in the spaces left untouched by social and technological conditioning. Thus while John is proof positive that every person is socialized to some extent, Watson is proof that people cannot be socialized to be utterly congruent with social expectations all the time.

Difference from others, however, is difficult to accept, especially in the World State where social conformity is not only expected but seen as a virtue. However, as Huxley shows, this belief that social conformity is a public good is seen not only in the World State but also in the Savage Reservation. Bernard Marx becomes aware of his difference from others as a result of excessive alcohol added to his blood surrogate before he was decanted. Marx is also aware that the worst thing in this society is to behave in a manner incongruent with their class. Similarly, John has adopted the view of his tribe that his mother's promiscuous behavior is immoral. The acceptance of this view makes his assimilation to the World State much more difficult, and makes him ultimately reject the woman that he wanted to love—Lenina. Unorthodoxy is a problem that undermines the stability of the societal system.

As we shall see, states can use the desire to belong to a group as one of the ways to force conformity with their demands. They are strengthened in this enforcement of conformity by the fact that community beliefs often become the beliefs of members of that community. Thus, complete and utter freedom is never possible (in the sense that human beings cannot test out all their ideas and be completely free of the socioeconomic and political world that they are a part of). The community's very acceptance of certain tenets as truths qualifies them as such. "Their reality depends entirely upon human plurality, upon the constant presence of others who can see and hear and therefore testify to their existence."[15] Huxley shows that, whether or not the community's judgment on an issue is true or useful, these judgments appear to be absolute truths due to the human desire for validation and acceptance.

TOTALITARIANISM, TECHNOLOGY, AND HUMAN NATURE

Huxley takes on the conception of human beings as knowable, which is forwarded by most utopias. Huxley asserts that such a view assumes a false simplicity in human motives and desires that utopias claim are wholly compatible. This is not to say that utopian writers fail to acknowledge tensions among different values. What is unique, however, is that they see the correct structural arrangements as harmonizing these tensions. In Huxley's words, these theories are a product of the "Will to Order." Indeed, Huxley specifically attacks the position taken by B. F. Skinner. Mentioning Skinner by name, Huxley says that if the individual differences among people

> were trifling and could be completely ironed out by appropriate conditioning, then, obviously, there would be no need for liberty and the State would be justified in persecuting the heretics who demanded it. For the individual termite, service to the termitary is perfect freedom. But human beings are not completely social; they are only moderately gregarious. [16]

Huxley attacks the idea that human beings are born tabula rasa and can be completely conditioned to harmonize with the needs of the state. For Huxley, freedom implies a certain degree of unpredictability and human beings will always desire things antithetical to the common good or the dictates of the state.

Human beings combine contradictory characteristics—savage instincts as well as feelings of pity, love, goodness, and so forth. Society shows its dual character in, on one hand, "building nuclear bombs for the destruction of its fellow beings, while on the other, dedicated to charity and helping the poor."[17] Huxley expounds on both facets of human nature. On one hand, he believed that the very existence of society shows that cooperation is a part of

human nature. By demonstrating a similarity in the desires of characters that have been socialized by the political system and the characters that have not, he attempts to show a convergence of human desires over time. This similarity proves the potential existence of a common human nature. One example of this is the affinity that grows between John, the Savage, and Helmholtz Watson. In spite of the different backgrounds of these two men, they form a very close bond. This closeness is a result of shared instincts and desires though they cannot appreciate all things to the same extent due to their different backgrounds (for instance, Watson cannot understand John's reaction to Romeo and Juliet). Huxley takes pains to point out that the two men experience similar emotions while listening to the same poetry in spite of their very different upbringing. In this sense, though he still feels the social pressures, Watson disregards rules and as a result, demonstrates his true nature and desires. Thus, freedom or the abnegation of rules provides greater choices in terms of possible actions and, therefore, leads to the belief that any given desire, instinct, or behavior may be natural. Convergence of these desires over time shows the potentiality of a common human nature.[18]

The problem, according to Huxley, is the ability of technology to subdue and subvert certain human inclinations and characteristics. He envisions a scenario where the body can be used to condition the mind. "Huxley is critical of the mass society that suffocates human nature, and of any form of totalitarianism that, thanks to scientific and technological development, endeavors to modify it in order to impose upon it a happiness that does not belong to it."[19] Huxley was horrified by the ability of applied science (applied psychology) to determine individual thought and behavior. Thus, "Huxley identifies totalitarianism with the conditioning of human nature through applied psychology."[20] Therefore, Huxley, in attacking the idea of human conditioning, which some thinkers believe could create utopia, is aware that the possibility exists that such conditioning would create dystopia. Technology can do both good and evil. It pervades every aspect of our lives—even our leisure. Our problems are not caused by nature. Nature has been conquered by technology. Now technology creates our problems.

Totalitarianism, as Huxley conceived of it, is not necessarily implemented through violence but through persuasion. It can look benevolent while being restrictive. This form of tyranny looks less brutal than that envisioned in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for instance, and maybe even feels less brutal and coercive, but it is coercive nonetheless. This form of tyranny, by working through human nature, can be effective regardless of the type of political and economic system that it permeates. Huxley expanded on the themes of *Brave New World* in a BBC broadcast in January 1932. Published as *Science and Civilization*, this piece discusses how totalitarianism can take a new form by taking babies, conditioning their reflexes, teaching them in state schools, and eliminating all forms of free thought and reason. At this point, dictatorship,

in its traditional form, can be eliminated. "The rulers will re-establish democratic forms, quite confident that the sovereign people will always vote as they themselves intend it to vote. And the sovereign people will go to the polling booths firmly believing itself to be exercising a free and rational choice, but in fact absolutely predestined by a lifelong course of scientifically designed propaganda."[21] Nonetheless, the means used to acclimate human beings to conditions that they should not be acclimated to are reprehensive and the result is a clear restriction of human freedom.

Therefore, Huxley provides a warning about seeing technology as an unequivocally positive force. Science and technology are amoral and a means to an end. The crucial question is who determines that end. If scientific intervention on human feelings and desires can transform human behavior, totalitarianism, benevolent or malevolent, follows. The men of power and the men of science can come together to produce a world of their making. Bureaucracy and technology could be combined to create a class of specialist bureaucrats who would value order and stability at the price of freedom. For Huxley, "totalitarianism means, above all, action on the instincts—hatred, ambition, vanity—and on feelings—the need for transcendence, belonging, worship—that are part of human nature, in order to take them, manipulate them, direct them, and satisfy them to comply with the needs of the ruling class through scientific propaganda."[22] Huxley is concerned that "it is possible to modify men's behavior and thinking, without their being aware of it, and deal the final blow to individual freedom."[23]

In *Brave New World*, technical experts do create a hierarchical bureaucracy, which is used to enforce social conformity and a social and intellectual hierarchy on the population. Human beings are reduced to machine-like states. They are conceived through science and their entire life is based on science and its products. The mastery of nature which is shown in their birth and in the way their embryos are manipulated to divide people into classes is also shown in the way they are trained and conditioned to conform to the demands of the state. Nature in its unregulated state is cast out of the state. Nature is neither economically profitable, nor stable, nor uniform.

The cure for science is more science, applied by experts. The society Huxley describes in *Brave New World* is an economist's ideal society which emphasizes stability and uniformity. "The aim of the economist will be to make the world safe for political economy—to train up a race, not of perfect human beings, but of perfect mass-producers and mass-consumers . . . Once stability has been attained, further scientific research could not be allowed. For nothing is more subversive than knowledge."[24] Huxley makes it clear that an economist as a ruler will not want to improve the human race but actually to deteriorate it. The more intelligent the population, the harder it is to maintain stability. But a dumbed down population needs to be governed by a group of intelligent experts. This is why "Ideally, science should be applied

by humanists. In this case it would be good. In actual fact, it is more likely to be applied by economists, and so to turn out, if not wholly bad, at any rate a very mixed blessing."[25] It would be an oligarchy sustained by propaganda, which provides peace and stability at the cost of individual freedom.

Famously, the World State eschews the teaching of humanism and history. One sees why in Huxley's contention that "History as something experienced can never be fully recorded. For, obviously, there are as many such histories as there have been experiencing human beings."[26] Thus, he eschews the idea of an objective history in favor, not of history as experienced, but of history as historians think of it. In *Brave New World*, Mustafa Mond rejects literature, music, art, and philosophy. He sees history as a record of crimes and lawfulness and nothing more. Thus, history is not rewritten (as we will see in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) but actively removed from human consciousness. The future has to be tightly controlled. People in this world live in the present. There is no past and no future. Perpetual consumption is the key to living in the present. Human life no longer has meaning. Death is ignored, birth is not celebrated, and life lacks meaning. The people born in the World State lack history since they lack family ties, while the history of John the Savage is a troubled one. Thus, there is no example of a person whose history is both known and healthy enough to tie him or her to the past and the present.

CONTROLLING FEELINGS

In the 1930s, Huxley wrote that history "makes it fairly clear that most people will accept reason only in small doses and (except in matters which do not touch them very closely) only on irrational grounds, generally of a religious nature."[27] Huxley reiterated again and again that if fascism does win, it would win by emotional appeal. Thus, resisting fascism would need to be based on emotion as well. In *Brave New World*, we see how the state attempts to control all feelings and even eliminate them. We also see how feelings can resist the state's attempts at control.

Everything in the World State is focused on fulfilling desires and downplaying emotions. The stimulants, sedatives, and so forth, described in *Brave New World* are enough to show the problems with the system. As Huxley points out in his writings, the desire to escape from reality diminishes when one is in tune with the world around him or her. If life is seen as worth living, one does not attempt to escape from it. Huxley identifies two things that make people eschew this form of opiate. One is knowing that one's life is worthwhile and has a point. The second is doing one's job well. This Fordian world has no opportunity for individual personal growth or even for real feelings and emotions. Reality is viewed through the lens of the state's teach-

ing and conditioning. Everything in this world is mass produced and standardized—even thoughts and feelings. Anything unusual has to be immediately banished through sedatives, diversions, and so forth.

The ability to completely isolate an individual while weaving that individual into the political fabric is the chief characteristic of all these dystopian regimes. The goal of isolating people is the same, though the different works use different methods to that end. The unifying trend is the elimination of the family. Family can be a foundation of love and attachment and, therefore, needs to be eliminated. In *Brave New World*, the family becomes an outmoded institution and the very words "mother" and "father" invoke revulsion instead of love. Monogamy is seen as unnatural and is actively frowned upon. We see this in the opening chapters where Mond rails against the irrationality of a mother's bond. Such irrationality is eschewed because it generates instability in the social group.

Not only is the family threatened as an institution but, specifically, love as the emotional glue that ties the family together is also under attack. In fact, it may be argued that it is primarily the emotion of love that is under attack since the survival of the family unit is permitted in some cases but no dystopian regime endorses love. Constant change in partners (*Brave New World*), undermining the sexual instinct (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*), and the use of women for procreation or household functions only (*The Handmaid's Tale*) are only a few of the methods used to make love an outmoded emotion. Undermining emotional attachments is the primary goal; the mode of achieving this is secondary. Genuine friendship is similarly undermined. "Friendship also seems to be the bond that holds communities together, and lawgivers seem to attach more importance to it than to justice."[28] Certainly this is true of dystopian regimes to the extent that they eliminate friendship as far as possible. It is easier to withhold justice from an isolated individual than from a person with family and friends who are willing to stand up for them.

Another aspect of human life that the World State controls is reaction to death. Death is one of the biggest emotional triggers of human life (since it is usually tied to love) and it is necessary to prevent death from destabilizing the stability of the state. Children are brought to hospitals to desensitize them to death, even to the deaths of people they know. In this world, death does not look very different from life—death is not tragic.

However, while Huxley shows that the World State is largely successful in eliminating or suppressing emotions, he also shows that such control is not absolute. One example of this lack of control is shown through the character of Lenina. Brought up in the promiscuous culture of the World State and being extremely uncritical of it, it is shocking to see Lenina's desire for a monogamous relationship. This is evidence that the World State's control of its people is not absolute. Similarly, we see that Marx and Helmholtz Watson are drawn together more out of a common feeling of dissatisfaction with the

system than out of a genuine liking for each other. They have what Aristotle would consider a friendship based on utility. We see their friendship break apart when John is introduced to Watson. This is the first true friendship, a common understanding of each other that is seen in the book. Watson's friendship with John destroys the utilitarian friendship that he had with Bernard Marx. The point to emphasize here is the fact that while friendship may be destroyed by the state, the desire for it remains constant.

FREEDOM AND CHOICE

Huxley simultaneously demonstrates the power and necessity for choice and the ability of the state to eliminate it. Freedom has traditionally been associated with the capacity to choose. "The dictatorships of tomorrow will deprive men of their freedom, but will give them in exchange a happiness none the less real, as a subjective experience, for being chemically induced . . . the achievement of happiness may turn out to be incompatible with another of man's rights—namely, liberty."[29] A free person is allowed to make his or her decisions and then carry out those decisions. Isaiah Berlin defines freedom in his essay, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, as "the absence of obstacles to the fulfillment of a man's desires."[30] The problem with this definition is that it would assume that most of the citizens of Huxley's World State are free. Mustafa Mond is opposed to unfulfilled desire. Raw emotion is a destabilizing force and needs to be eliminated. Desire must be immediately fulfilled through drugs, entertainment, and so forth. Self-denial is discouraged. Their desires are conditioned by the system and they can have whatever they desire. The relationship between desire and its fulfillment in this system is, however, tautological. People are taught what to desire by the World Controllers, and, therefore, most of them never desire what they cannot have. Aware of this problem, Berlin developed the definition of freedom to "the absence of obstacles to possible choices and activities—absence of obstructions on roads along which a man can decide to walk."[31] Therefore, Berlin increases the scope of his definition from desires fulfilled to choice—choosing one's ends among possible courses of action. This change in the definition of freedom is useful to the extent that it emphasizes the human capacity to choose ends rather than fulfilling ends chosen for them. This thesis that human beings may choose good or bad actions through freedom but that freedom is a valuable principle regardless of what other principle it conflicts with, is similarly echoed in *Brave New World* by John the Savage. "I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin . . . I'm claiming the right to be unhappy."[32] But with unhappiness comes isolation in a society where immediate wish fulfilment and social conformity are the norms. Neither the Reservation nor the civilized world in

this book are completely free. Individuality is rejected in both. Integration into either society is done at the cost of individuality. To be integrated into society may make you happy but it erodes the individual. On the other hand, John claims that to be an individual is to accept unhappiness.

The most obvious way in which Huxley takes away choice in *Brave New World* is through the system of eugenics, which creates the classes within the state. The classes, which devote their lives to physical labor but are mentally free, are not likely to revolt against the conditions of their lives since they have not been taught otherwise. Thus, their mental freedom is not useful to their freedom to make choices.

The freedom to choose is also diluted in the World State through hypnopaedia or the method of teaching lessons during sleep. The World State starts this for all its citizens when they are babies. This method teaches all lessons which are necessary to uphold the economic, social, and political structures and traditions of the state. Huxley suggests that this method actually creates the person and conditions their choices for the rest of their lives. This process is repeated "till at last the child's mind is these suggestions, and the sum of the suggestions is the child's mind. And not the child's mind only. The adult's mind too—all his life long."[33] The state also institutes the "conditioned reflex," which provides electric shocks to children when they see books and flowers. The love of books and nature would be detrimental to the state's mission to maximize consumption of material goods, and, therefore, people have to be conditioned to hate these things. Happiness is now tied to consumption.

TRAGEDY IN *BRAVE NEW WORLD*

As Bertrand Russell notes in his review of *Brave New World*, Huxley "has undertaken to make us sad by the contemplation of a world without sadness."[34] Huxley juxtaposes tragedy against what he terms the "whole truth" in *Music At Night*. That is because creating tragedy requires isolating "a single element out of the totality of human experience," which is then separated from the whole truth.[35] It is this feature of tragedy that Huxley credits with its capacity for catharsis—the emotional response is elicited in response to the purity of tragedy. The response to what Huxley calls "Wholly-Truthful literature" is not as intense as the response to tragedy. But Huxley believed that our response to this form of literature is more long-lasting. Huxley saw the need for both tragedy and the literature of the "Whole Truth" in human life.

In banishing tragedy, utopians minimize not only the role of tragedy in individual lives but also the importance of tragedy as a teaching tool. Huxley demonstrates the utopian view of tragedy through the views of the World

State. In this work, John's high hopes are dashed when he realizes that this is a soulless world where babies are "decanted," not born, there is no such thing as family and individuals are "predestined" by science to possess certain natural characteristics, belong to a certain class, and have certain occupations. In an emotional scene with the Controller of this "Brave New World," he is given the philosophy behind this utopia. The portion that is relevant for our purposes is their discussion on tragedy. John, who has read Shakespeare his whole life, asks why the people are not given something like *Othello* to watch rather than the sensuous senseless "feelies." The Controller responds that "you can't make tragedies without social instability. The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get."[36] This argument summarizes very succinctly the position that utopias take on tragedy. Tragedy is nonexistent in utopia, which is also why it is impossible to appreciate tragedies in utopia.

But the incompatibility between utopias and tragedies comes from an additional reason. In *Brave New World*, the Controller claims that you have to make a conscious choice "between happiness and what people used to call high art."[37] This is because "actual happiness always looks pretty squalid in comparison with the overcompensations for misery. And, of course, stability isn't nearly so spectacular as instability. And being contented has none of the glamour of a good fight against misfortune . . . Happiness is never grand."[38] Thus, not only does tragedy have nothing to teach but it is also quelled—it is no longer an inevitable part of the human experience. It is no longer inevitable and, therefore, has nothing to teach. John, however, rejects the possibility of being happy while abandoning freedom and humanity, which is what he sees in this new world. But he also finds that his mother and Lenina cannot live up to his purified ideal of how women should behave. The women he wants to love are rejected because their behavior patterns are compatible with the sexual freedom of the World State. Thus, he wants to be happy and wants to be in love but cannot do either. John's life is, therefore, an illustration of the fact that all desires cannot be fulfilled—a rejection of the principle on which utopias are based.

Yet, *Brave New World* ends with what is clearly tragic—the suicide of John, the Savage. The suicide of John can have two, though not mutually exclusive, interpretations. The suicide can be seen as John's ultimate assertion of individuality against a society he despised, presaged in his words: "I'm damned if I'll go on being experimented with."[39] This interpretation sees suicide as a positive individualistic act in the sense that while this society can control peoples' lives, it cannot control their death. Thus, this is a world which tries to deny and minimize the reality of death at every turn because of its lack of control over it. This is the mentality that John flouts. His death, the death of a visible individual, is public and self-inflicted. It is something done with deliberation, not a denial of death. "it is in acting out

his own personality, in realizing his selfhood even unto death, that he finds redemption and deliverance."[40] Man has met death on his own terms. Man "is heroic in his capacity for committing himself to a tragic choice, and then accepting its full consequences. His pitiable or awful fate is less significant than the mere fact of his existence."[41] Seen in this way, tragedy serves to undermine the system.

The second interpretation would see his suicide as atonement, as John's acknowledgement that he could not live the pure life that he wanted in a corrupt world. This acknowledgment, both of his own corruption and inadequacy, and that of the world, is assumed to lead to a sense of hopelessness and pessimism. But even suicide due to pessimism, a lack of belief in the ability to change a regime has the effect of transforming readers and engendering a positive desire for change. The above two options can be summarized as follows:

> Strength, on the other hand, nature's gift to the individual which cannot be shared with others, can cope with violence more successfully than with power—either heroically, by consenting to fight and die, or stoically, by accepting suffering and challenging all affliction through self-sufficiency and withdrawal from the world; in either case, the integrity of the individual and his strength remain intact.[42]

In *Brave New World*, the possibility of tragedy is seen through character development in Lenina, a stunning development in a woman who is thoroughly brainwashed by the political system. She internalizes the mechanical nature of happiness that is a part of her world. Yet, even her character develops over time showing that "devotion to the end of pleasure and happiness has a dialectic that cannot necessarily be anticipated or controlled by either the society or the individual."[43] Therefore, "the very suggestion of a development in Lenina, following the impulse to pursue her happiness, is an indication that the stuff of a very different sort of happiness—and the possibility of tragedy—is a potentiality of even so debased a culture as *Brave New World*."[44] By the end of the book, Huxley has discredited both the World State and the Savage Reservation. For Huxley, there is no easy dichotomy between technology and nature. Leaving the overly technological restrictive World State for the primitive and "natural" Savage Reservation is not an option—and certainly not an easy one.

CONCLUSION

Huxley's statement that "Art is not the discovery of Reality—whatever Reality may be, and no human being can possibly know. It is the organization of chaotic appearance into an orderly and human universe" describes his central

preoccupation in this book.[45] Different authors are aware of their ontology to greater or lesser extents. Huxley sets out to demonstrate the power of the state in using various methods—consumerism, psychological condition, technology—to manipulate human beings, their nature, and their behavior. History, love, poetry, Shakespeare, even God and religion, are destabilizing agents and are incompatible with a materialistic outlook and stability. Therefore, there is an attempt to eliminate them entirely in the World State. In doing so, he also demonstrates that such control cannot be total, especially in suppressing feelings, wants, and desires. Marx is the character in the book who proves to be uneducable in that he actually regresses in character development by the end of the book. He cannot overcome his conditioning by the state. Thus, Marx shows the power of the state. But Watson and Lenina show that, even human beings who have been decanted and conditioned from birth, can show glimpses of individuality and independence. Huxley elaborates his view of human nature in his collection of essays, *Brave New World Revisited*. "Human beings act in a variety of irrational ways, but all of them seem to be capable, if given a fair chance, of making a reasonable choice in the light of available evidence."[46]

NOTES

1. John Wain calls Huxley a "pseudo-novelist" who uses novels for the purposes of writing tracts against materialism in Robert E. Kuehn, ed., *Aldous Huxley: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc, 1974), 26. In Peter Firchow's introduction to his book, *Aldous Huxley: Satirist and Novelist*, he covers the similar critique of Huxley—that he cannot create real characters. This is because of Huxley's unwillingness to focus on the novelistic techniques and his desire to focus on larger ideas instead.

2. For more on the reception of the book, see Robert Baker, *Brave New World: History, Science, and Dystopia* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), Chapter 3.

3. Prior to the events that enshrined Hitler and precipitated the Second World War, Huxley endorsed intellectualism, elitism, and even eugenics. He also wrote in favor of national planning and Five Year Plans. After the events that led to the Second World War, he seems to have come to see the potentially dangerous consequences of these views.

4. David Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley: Contempt and Compassion for the Masses* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 107.

5. Peter Firchow, *Aldous Huxley: Satirist and Novelist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 120.

6. Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, 31.

7. Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, 147–48.

8. Aldous Huxley, *Collected Essays* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1959), 255.

9. For more on this, see Baker, *Brave New World*, Chapter 7.

10. Donald Watt, ed., *Aldous Huxley: The Critical Heritage* (Boston: Routledge and Kagan Paul, 1975), 221.

11. Firchow, *Aldous Huxley*,128.

12. Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia*, 256.

13. Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*, 61.

14. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1969), 204.

15. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), 82.

16. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1958), 326.

17. Alessandro Maurini, *Aldous Huxley: The Political Thought of a Man of Letters* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 136.

18. *Brave New World*, of course, shows the futility of John's attempted assimilation into the technological, controlled dystopia that is the World State. While John's bonding with Watson helps the latter to reach beyond the superficial feelings that he is conditioned to, the former is unable to adapt to a state where individuality is buried, where stability is valued over freedom, where freedom is dangerous, and where feelings are buried under the drug soma and sex. He, ultimately, commits suicide, his final assertion of individuality and freedom in a state that is opposed to both.

19. Maurini, *Aldous Huxley*, ix.

20. Maurini, *Aldous Huxley*, xii.

21. Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, 110.

22. Maurini, *Aldous Huxley*, 59–60.

23. Maurini, *Aldous Huxley*, 102.

24. Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, 108.

25. Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, 114.

26. Huxley, *Collected Essays*, 222–23.

27. Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley*, 40.

28. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1953), 201.

29. Huxley, *Collected Essays*, 342.

30. Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), xxxviii.

31. Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, xxxix.

32. Huxley, *Brave New World*, 215.

33. Maurini, *Aldous Huxley*, 94.

34. Watt ed., *Aldous Huxley*, 210.

35. Huxley, *Collected Essays*, 100.

36. Huxley, *Brave New World*, 198.

37. Huxley, *Brave New World*, 199.

38. Huxley, *Brave New World*, 199.

39. Huxley, *Brave New World*, 217.

40. Laurence Michel and Richard B. Sewall, ed., *Tragedy: Modern Essays in Criticism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), 15.

41. Herbert J. Muller, *The Spirit of Tragedy* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1968), 22.

42. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 182.

43. Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia*, 286.

44. Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia*, 287.

45. Watt, ed., *Aldous Huxley*, 236.

46. Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*, 285.

Chapter Four

The Totalitarian State and Human Nature in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a remarkable work, not just due to its own content, but also due to the reception it received. Though written by a liberal and a self-avowed socialist, it was rejected by socialists and Marxists while being praised by conservatives. In 1947, before he wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell wrote that "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it."[1] This comment explains the reception of the book by liberals and conservatives alike. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* gained far better reviews in the United States than it did in England. The reviews of the book were also varied. Some interpreters saw the dystopic aspect of the book as one engendered by the illness that Orwell was battling as he wrote the work. The pain of such a prolonged illness, some argued, produced a book equally dark and hopeless. On the other hand, many saw this as a culmination of Orwell's views on freedom and the bureaucratic state. Many pointed out the mediocrity of the work, arguing that it lacked character development and the scenes of torture in it were substandard and unconvincing. Others pointed out that such a critique misunderstands the foundation of the book, which is meant to show what life looks like when individuality and freedom are completely eroded. Ultimately, Orwell has been claimed as a champion of both right and the left wing groups and thinkers. The reason is that his socialist leftist leanings have endeared him to the left while his dogged desire to tell the truth about Russia and the type of totalitarianism it embodied has been applauded by the right.

Orwell believed that politics (defined in the broadest possible sense) is a part of every book. For him, "no book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude."[2] Yet, he felt that his motivation for writing came from a mixture of egoism, a desire to find the truth and report on it, and aesthetic enthusiasm. Of course, the times could not be ignored. "In a peaceful age I might have written ornate or merely descriptive books, and might have remained almost unaware of my political loyalties. As it is I have been forced into becoming a sort of pamphleteer."[3] Ironically, Orwell makes it clear that it is political purpose that makes him write meaningful books rather than what he termed "purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug generally."[4]

It is notable that Orwell had read both Zamyatin's *We* and Huxley's *Brave New World* before writing this book. He clearly preferred the former to the latter. Orwell opined that Huxley's focus on modern psychological and biological theories made his work less political than Zamyatin's. George Steiner points out that "Orwell's review, moreover, picks up a decisive clue: 'What Zamyatin seems to be aiming at is not any particular country but the implied aims of industrial civilization.' Both the strength and the ambiguity of Orwell's fantasia stem from a latent identification between Stalinist terror and the inhumanity of a supertechnology."[5] In other words, for the first time, the possibilities provided by technology harmonize perfectly with the power of the state to produce this horrific state. Since *We* is about a state which runs as a machine and treats all its citizens as parts of that machine, it bears a far greater resemblance to the bureaucratic state that Orwell feared. This fear of the repressive capacity of technology that would facilitate the creation of a bureaucratic state is evident throughout *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell foresees this combination as being devastating to human beings through its manipulation of human nature and behavior.

It is important to note here that Orwell was not convinced by Huxley's picture of a world where people are kept in check by pills and genetic engineering. Orwell disagreed with Huxley's premise that a state that facilitated materialism could be as tightly controlled as a state that kept its people in poverty. In other words, Orwell believed that technology would be used for overt repression rather than the permissive materialism portrayed by Huxley. Orwell posited that in "Huxley's book the problem of 'human nature' is in a sense solved, because it assumes that by pre-natal treatment, drugs and hypnotic suggestion the human organism can be specialized in any way that is desired."[6] He saw this as an impossibility, at least in 1946, prior to writing his last book. Human beings will not be dehumanized through a life of plenty and sensory overload where material needs are met and surpassed and people are dulled into oblivion of the world around them. Orwell believed that it would take economic deprivation and fear to dehumanize a human being.

Secondly, for Orwell, Huxley fails to provide a rationale for the ruling elite and Orwell found it inconceivable that anyone would want power without any stated motivation. It is ironic that this criticism is also leveled against Orwell himself. Critics have pointed out that most ruling elites have a reason for their claims to power and that power itself and alone is not a justification for claims to that power. In the end, however, the Orwell of 1940 did not see Huxley's work as predictive but as descriptive. "But though *Brave New World* was a brilliant caricature of the present . . . it probably casts no light on the future."[7] Huxley, on the other hand, believed that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* would eventually transform into "the nightmare of a world having more resemblance to that which I imagined in *Brave New World*. The change will be brought about as a result of a felt need for increased efficiency."[8] The methods he described would be both more sure and more effective in controlling the population, according to Huxley.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is set in the year 1984 in the state of Oceania. The protagonist, Winston Smith, lives in London and his job is to rewrite history for the state. Even at the start of the book, we see a protagonist who has not bought into the idea that this is the best state that can exist. Seeing the lies that the regime is feeding its people, he starts down a path to regain his sense of history, the truth, and an identity separate from the state from two rebellious actions—starting a diary and his relationship with Julia. He reaches out to O'Brien who, Winston thinks, is a fellow rebel but O'Brien turns out to be a member of the Thought Police who arrests and tortures both Winston and Julia. In the course of this torture, the reader learns about the principles of this repressive regime and its claim that it can make human beings into whatever they want. This is certainly what they do to Winston Smith by the end of the torture session.

ORWELL'S VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

In his afterword to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Erich Fromm makes the point that the central question of this book is "can human nature be changed in such a way that man will forget his longing for freedom, for dignity, for integrity, for love—that is to say, can man forget that he is human? Or does human nature have a dynamism which will react to the violation of these basic human needs by attempting to change an inhuman society into a human one?"[9] This is a tricky question to answer, partly because, as is true of all fiction, one has to distinguish between the views of the author, Orwell, from that of the clues that one might find from the book. First, this book definitely shows that, while reason can be twisted to fit the purposes of the state, feelings that value individualism and freedom can never be completely suppressed. Throughout the book, Winston Smith cannot shake the feeling that

things are not better for people under the current government and that things could be better. In multiple ways, feelings speak against the dictates of reason. Most importantly, these feelings make it clear that it is impossible to completely suppress the desire for freedom. Yet, and secondly, this book demonstrates the role of language and other institutions in shaping human behavior. Newspeak, the language being developed by the state, is more an erosion of language than developing a new one. It eliminates some words entirely, narrows the scope of others, and develops acronyms to refer to most phenomenon. This is meant to make it difficult for people to articulate what they feel. The state also plays a role in brainwashing the children of Party members to put Party over family. They make sure that instincts like sex and love are driven out of people (particularly women), so that familial attachment or love are completely eroded. Therefore, Orwell simultaneously demonstrates the invincibility of emotions and desires like freedom, and the extent to which the state can manipulate human character, choices, and behavior. Finally, Orwell deftly uses the conclusion to the book to engender a feeling of urgency and push people to action.

Orwell portrays a world where the desire for liberty can be suppressed but not eliminated. In other words, Orwell seems to conceive of an indestructible core of human nature which can be suppressed at any moment and through any regime, but cannot be completely eliminated. He indicates that there may be an inherent desire for freedom that induces human beings to act against a totalitarian state regardless of the cost to one's own life. Other than this unquenachable desire, what constitutes human nature remains contested and often cannot be determined without individual freedom. Speaking against those who conceive of utopia, Orwell also reconfigures the place of reason in human life. Reason may not be the best guide to behavior and understanding, especially in a totalitarian state that attempts to manipulate history and storytelling. Instead, feelings and instinct are just as important, if not more so, than reason, in such an environment. Feelings may make human behavior unpredictable but it remains an important touchpoint for individual experiences. While reason is important, it can be converted into dogma, while emotion is a more individualistic touchpoint for human beings.

Orwell's own analysis of his work is instructive in this matter. "I am not pleased with the book but I am not absolutely dissatisfied. I first thought of it in 1943. I think it is a good idea but the execution would have been better if I had not written it under the influence of T.B. I haven't definitely fixed on the title but I am hesitating between 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' and 'The Last Man in Europe.'"[10] Orwell clearly characterizes Winston Smith as the "last man in Europe." The feelings, thoughts, desires, and views that make a person human has its last vestiges in Winston Smith. Thus, human nature finds its last refuge in Winston Smith. In fact, as Irving Howe points out, the characters of

Smith and Julia are not well developed because "they are slowly learning, and at great peril to themselves, what it means to be human."[11]

REASON VS. FEELINGS

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell certainly emphasizes feelings and instincts. Throughout the book, Winston Smith feels as if his life in Oceania is not better than the one he led in the past. This is not something he can corroborate, due to the Party's erasure of history. But Winston Smith is aware of the primacy of inarticulate feelings over the conscious reasons that the Party elite have been brainwashed into believing. As he points out, the "terrible thing that the Party had done was to persuade you that mere impulses, mere feelings were of no account."[12]

Indeed, the primacy of suppressed instincts over internalized rationality is evident in the behavior of Parsons. Parsons is one of the few characters in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* who is a genuine and enthusiastic supporter of the Party. His support is not an act enacted out of self-interest. In fact, at the beginning of the book, Winston is convinced that while his colleague Symes, Mrs. Parsons, and Winston himself will all be vaporized by the Party, Parsons will be the only one to survive such a fate. That he is wrong about this demonstrates the extent to which even Winston underestimates the desire for freedom. It is true that Parsons is genuinely in favor of the Party's policies. Yet, at the end of the book, he is arrested and thrown into the same cell as Winston Smith for thoughtcrime. In fact, he is arrested for his dreams, not for thoughts that he has entertained during his waking hours. As he says, he was not consciously aware of having any dissident thoughts but he was saying these things in his sleep. He protests that he "can't help" his thoughts. Yet, he is punished for his dreams. This validates Winston's thesis that the Party hands out punishments for what they consider to be useless—"primitive emotions"—because they know the power of feelings. The Party kills, not physically, but psychically and emotionally. Thus, not only reason but feelings have to be eliminated for a complete victory of the Party over the individual. As Winston tells Julia, "If they could make me stop loving you— that would be the real betrayal."[13] It is not merely a question of confessing to not loving Julia, it is destroying the feeling of love which would constitute a Party victory. Changing how people feel is the most complete victory possible over a person.

The other example of the primacy of feelings over reason is, of course, seen in Winston Smith himself. O'Brien makes it clear that the Party's goal is to convert him, "we capture his inner mind, we reshape him; we bring him over to our side, not in appearance, but genuinely, heart and soul. We make him one of ourselves before we kill him."[14] This is precisely why the ending

words of the book are so chilling. That Winston Smith now loved Big Brother showed the complete transformation in his feelings. The Party had achieved exactly what it wanted.

It is also important to note that achieving this complete control over a human being is not easy. O'Brien tortures Winston in the final parts of the book, all the while explaining the philosophy behind Oceania to him, and aiming to transform his feelings toward Julia. While O'Brien is successful at the end, Orwell shows that this transformation takes place in stages. After the initial torture sessions with O'Brien, Winston thinks that he has won, in spite of the complete physical decimation of his body. This supposed victory is because Winston no longer lets "heretical" thoughts enter his consciousness. Now "in the mind he had surrendered, but he had hoped to keep the inner heart inviolate."[15] He had changed his definition of freedom to simply continuing to hate the Party without any overt act or even thought of aggression against it. Winston also believed that it was important to keep on loving Julia, but knowing the power of the Party, he tried to dismiss all thoughts of Julia from his mind. However, he finds this impossible to achieve. What ultimately catapults him into the dreaded Room 101, the room where the ultimate torture takes place, is a dream of Julia that he is unable to suppress. In this sense, he is similar to Parsons who is also unable to control his dreams.

The Party not only emphasizes the importance of the right feelings when it comes to dissidents and rebels, but also when it pertains to Party members. Emphasizing the right instincts is especially important because Oceania lacks all laws. Therefore, a Party member is expected to have the right instincts and attitudes. "Even the humblest Party member is expected to be competent, industrious, and even intelligent within narrow limits, but it is also necessary that he should be a credulous and ignorant fanatic whose prevailing moods are fear, hatred, adulation, and orgiastic triumph."[16] In other words, the Party expects the people to eschew reason in favor of an irrational cleaving to Party dogma. This expectation is made plain in the book that O'Brien gave Winston Smith. Nowhere else are the expectations of a Party member ever made plain—either in Oceania or in the book—because doing so would expose the contradiction of the principles that the Party wants its members to live by. Crimestop refers to stopping short of thinking any thought contrary to the dictates of the Party. Doublethink refers to the ability to hold two contradictory thoughts in one's mind and yet, know that they are both true. Newspeak even has a word "duckspeak" which refers to saying things that contradict each other without being aware of that contradiction. These terms, all part of the Newspeak, which is developed by the Party, show that the Party's goal is to make sure that its members internalize dogma rather than embody reason. Ultimately, therefore, the Party demands a prioritization of instincts over reason, and emphasizes the right instincts, which require an enormous amount of mental gymnastics.

Orwell has been much criticized for his depiction of the proles. The proles or the proletariat live relatively free lives in Oceania. They are not under constant observation, they do not play roles in the Party or the administration, and seem to lead poverty-stricken but free lives. Presumably they are allowed this freedom because they are not viewed as a threat. But this freedom was criticized because it seems so out of keeping with the role of a totalitarian state. But, even here, Winston's faith in the proles (which may or may not be Orwell's views) seems to revolve around their feelings. Humanity in the proles is defined by the fact that they "had held onto the primitive emotions which he himself had to relearn by conscious effort."[17] An example of this feeling is given early in the book when Winston tells a story about a movie which depicts the death of a mother and child of the enemy in front of a large group, which included children and women. A prole woman got upset saying that the movie shouldn't have been shown in front of the kids. This connection to one's emotion is what gives Winston hope in the proles.

Another way in which the Party tries to suppress instincts is, of course, seen in their manipulation of children and their love for their parents. The Party takes pain to break the bond between parent and child and substitute in its place, a bond between Party and child. In essence, they eliminate the family without actually doing so. The children are made into an extension of the Thought Police—and the effectiveness of this maneuver is seen in the arrest of Parsons who was turned in to the Thought Police by his daughter.

The Party also attempts to eliminate the sex instinct. Both love (which isolates people against the state) and eroticism are the enemy of the Party. First, the natural desire for sex was eliminated—most specifically in women. The result is evident in the relationship that Winston has with his wife, Katherine, who he was sanctioned to marry precisely due to the lack of attraction between them. The Party does not allow relationships that are based on true attraction or love. Winston describes how his wife put up with sex simply because she wished to reproduce for the Party. When this did not happen, the two went their separate ways. This background shows why the relationship between Julia and Winston would not be sanctioned by the state and why it is referred to as a political act. In fact, Julia had grasped the reasoning behind the Party's control of peoples' sexual lives. "It was not merely that the sex instinct created a world of its own which was outside the Party's control . . . What was more important was that sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into war fever and leader worship."[18] This is precisely why Winston and Julia's relationship is a blow against the Party.

Thus, for Orwell, instincts can both preserve freedom and erode it. Assuming that Party members are able to hone the right instincts, they would be loyal members by eschewing reason. However, the suppression of instincts is intimately linked with the suppression of freedom. Freedom allows people to

exercise their capacity to choose their own ends. Only suppressing the instinctual desire for freedom will allow a political system to choose the goals for its people and allow it to dictate the feelings that people should have.

It is important to note that critics like Irving Howe are skeptical that any party or government would be able to suppress basic primal urges. This would be especially problematic given that there is a whole class of people (and presumably the majority of the population) who are left essentially free to live their lives as they choose.

FREEDOM AND CHOICE

Writers of dystopias prioritize freedom over most other values and their defining quality for a human being is the power to choose. In other words, the human capacity to choose is the ontological grounding for the political principle of freedom. While the desire for freedom is seen as instinctual and impossible to suppress, the means of expressing true freedom lies in being able to make one's own choices. Of course, the power of choice does not exist in Oceania. The members of the Middle Party have everything chosen for them. But far more crucial is the fact that they are deprived of the information that would make choosing possible. The Party creates the reality within which people live. People do not have any recollection of the past and all evidence of the past is constantly changed and manipulated by the Party. Winston's job is to change the historical record every time a change is needed. One of the most pivotal moments of the book is the portion where Winston tries to speak to an elderly gentleman in a bar, in order to corroborate what he thinks he remembers of the past. Unfortunately, while the man remembers some insignificant details, he is unable to answer Winston's central question: was life better and more free in the past than the present? Only once did Winston have tangible proof that the Party was changing history and, therefore, reality, but that proof, too, had been destroyed. This lack of a historical record of any kind rendered memories uncertain and made Winston doubt his own recollection of history—except in the very short term. As O'Brien tells Winston during one of the torture sessions, "reality is not external. Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else."[19] Since the Party controls the present, it is able to control the past, and since it controls the past, it will be able to control the future.

The second method by which the Party takes away the power of choice from the people, is through the manipulation of public opinion. Technology, of course, makes this totalitarian state possible. It not only enables constant observation of everyone within the state, but it also makes sure that all people have exposure to the same exact information—usually manufactured by the state. The telescreens watch every movement of every member of the Middle

Party and the microphones in the ground also transmit their voices from remote corners of Oceania. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, everyone is constantly under watch. This constant vigilance transforms habit into instinct. This happens even before there is any attempt by the Party to torture people and transform them. More frightening than the constant vigilance, however, is the "possibility of . . . uniformity of opinion on all subjects, now existed for the first time."[20]

Perhaps the most important method of limiting choice is the development of Newspeak in Oceania. Orwell associated precision in language with precision in thought and precision in thought with political awareness and political well-being. Words determine thoughts and thoughts determine deeds. While Orwell was not clear on the causal direction between imprecise language and unclear thoughts, he thought that the world had entered a cycle of impreciseness, vagueness, and deliberate obfuscation in both ways. In other words, "the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts."[21] While Orwell acknowledged that thought could start by corrupting language, the greater problem is that this corruption of language would spread through imitation and tradition until people did not understand that their language had been corrupted.

So what, exactly, did Orwell object to? In *Politics and the English Language*, written in 1946, Orwell objected to a few ways in which people use the English language. First, he insisted that embellishments of language is a problem. Embellishment is often used to make biased statements sound impartial. Orwell thought that words such as historic, unforgettable, inevitable, and so forth, are embellishments and are therefore imprecise. These words, he claimed, give a historical perspective to ahistorical and ideological judgments. Second, Orwell believed that, by not defining words, we have given multiple meanings to the same words, and thus, the meaning of such words become subjective—and meaningless. "By using stale metaphors, similes, and idioms, you save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your meaning vague, not only for your reader but for yourself. This is the significance of mixed metaphors."[22] Leaving meaning vague can be used to great political purpose to control the people. As Orwell saw it, to subscribe to a thoughtless political orthodoxy, one has to have a thoughtless style of speaking and writing. "If the speech he is making is one that he is accustomed to make over and over again, he may be almost unconscious of what he is saying, as one is when one utters the responses in church. And this reduced state of consciousness, if not indispensable, is at any rate favorable to political conformity."[23]

The importance that Orwell placed on language, and using language with precision and care, is seen in the fact that he wrote about the development of Newspeak at the end of the book. It is the only issue discussed after the book ended. "Orwell came to believe that the health of language and of society are connected by strong strands. To abuse, inflate, or falsify the meaning of

words is to devalue the political process. Political sanity, the ability of a community to view and communicate issues clearly, are closely dependent on the integrity of syntax."[24] As Orwell makes clear, Newspeak is less a development of language than a diminution of it. Some words would be eliminated entirely—honor, justice, democracy, science, and religion are just some of the eliminated words, according to Orwell. This meant that people may be able to feel something or instinctively want something, but will not have the language to express that feeling, instinct, or desire. This would not only diminish the possibility of individual expressions of dissatisfaction but also diminish the possibility of collective action against the Party. Orwell gives the example of the word "freedom" to demonstrate how the meaning of words have been narrowed. There would no longer be any way to use freedom to mean politically or intellectually free. Instead, freedom as a concept would disappear. The word "free" would merely describe things—like something being free of chemicals. In other words, the concept of freedom would vanish and the word "free" would have a very restricted meaning. Narrowing the number of words and the range of their meanings leads to a narrowing of conscious thought.

The last technique used by Newspeak is, of course, to invent words. The biggest challenge here, according to Orwell, is not only to invent words but to show which words they replace and to determine the range of meaning of these new words. Some of these words, duckspeak, thoughtcrime, bellyfeel, sexcrime, and so forth, are meant to demonstrate what Orwell calls a "mental attitude," which the Party wants from its members. In other words, opinions against the Party could not be expressed or backed up through reasoned argument. Ultimately, the goal is to make feelings inarticulate and reduce the ability of people to act on those feelings.

Another means of diminishing choice is by destroying the material resources of society. Orwell, unlike Huxley, believed that a hierarchical society could only maintain itself when it ensured that its people were poverty-stricken and ignorant. Thus, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depicts a system that produces goods through industrialism but then destroys them, keeping people in perpetual shortage of basic necessities. Hence, we are told of the shortage of razors, chocolate, cigarettes, even the foul-tasting Victory Gin. In addition, this has the further advantage of granting favored status to some groups versus others. As Orwell says explicitly, when there is a general scarcity of all things, big and small, allowing one group slightly more access to certain products makes that group feel special and favored. Hardships, therefore, allow the state to divide classes against each other as well as keep them ignorant of the choices that are available in states that are not totalitarian like Oceania is.

This way of diminishing material possessions and intellectual knowledge is seen in every aspect of Oceania. For instance, citizens of Oceania are not al-

lowed to meet or talk to foreigners. Their only interaction with foreigners is to witness them being put to death for alleged crimes against the state. The reason behind this is that talking to foreigners may show citizens of Oceania how similar these people are to the citizens of Oceania and that everything said against these foreigners are lies told by the state. Citizens of Oceania are not allowed to speak to strangers in case they discover standards of comparison that heighten their awareness of the oppressed and deprived state of their lives.

The most notable feature of Orwell's views on human nature is that he shows how difficult it is to define the term. O'Brien tells Winston what the Party line is on the question of human nature: "You are imagining that there is something called human nature which will be outraged by what we do and will turn against us. But we create human nature. Men are infinitely malleable."[25] The beliefs of the Party are clearly not the beliefs of the author. Indeed, the position of dystopian authors on the question of human nature can be summarized by Erich Fromm in his afterword to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: these authors

> do not start out with the assumption that there is no such thing as human nature; that there is no such thing as qualities essential to man . . . None of the three authors can be accused of the thought that the destruction of the humanity within man is easy. Yet all three arrive at the same conclusion: that it is possible, with means and techniques which are common knowledge today.[26]

TRAGEDY AND *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR*

The question whether the conclusion of the book is one of hopelessness is a question that has obsessed critics. In other words, critics have asked whether Orwell felt the hopelessness that seems to be embodied in the book. However, the more important question would be the effect of the conclusion on the readers. Does it engender hopelessness or action against totalitarianism?

The feeling of hopelessness is certainly dominant in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Winston Smith has no friends or family. He feels isolated from the world. There seems to be no memory of a better time. The bleakness and drabness of London, the stench, the inefficiency, the tasteless cigarettes and alcohol, all exacerbate this feeling of hopelessness. In fact, Winston seems to long for understanding and a conversation about his thoughts. It is this desire that draws him toward O'Brien. Even when Winston and Julia meet with O'Brien because they think he is a revolutionary, he makes it clear that it is possible that they will die and will not achieve their desired goals. Thus, even in a fake conversation about a fake resistance, O'Brien enforces the invincibility of the Party. "There is no possibility that any perceptible change will happen within our own lifetime. We are the dead."[27] Julia concurs with this assessment since she believed that "the Party was invincible. It would always exist, and it would always be the same."[28] Thus,

the feeling of hopelessness follows the reader throughout the book. The arrest and torture of Winston and Julia seem inevitable. Perhaps the only thing that seems to be a shock is the change in Winton and Julia's feelings toward each other. Thus, it is the transformation of feelings that forms the lynchpin of the shock value of the book.

Indeed, it is important to remember that this conclusion—that the state can render human beings completely malleable—is what horrifies readers and incites a determined reaction against such a state. "Once the secret of pure power is learned, Orwell suggests, the human being becomes completely malleable. And in that submission, the small flickering flame of self-consciousness, the ability of detachment which distinguishes men from other animals becomes extinguished."[29] The capacity of the state to detach human beings from all individuality and feeling as demonstrated by the fact that Winston and Julia do not love each other by the end of the book is truly a tragedy.

Winston believed that tragedy was not possible in the totalitarian state. Tragedy comes from two sources. First, it requires private ties that are obliterated by the authoritarian state. "Tragedy, he perceived, belonged to the ancient time, to a time when there were still privacy, love, and friendship, and when the members of a family stood by one another without needing to know the reason."[30] Personal relationships, love, and family were the foundations of tragedy and they were all eliminated in Oceania.

Second, tragedy requires feelings that are directed toward these private aspects of life, rather than solely toward the public sphere. Winston remembered this in his mother who "had possessed a nobility, a kind of purity, simply because that the standards that she obeyed were private ones. Her feelings were her own, and could not be altered from outside."[31]

Yet, one is sure that Orwell's purpose in writing this book is to ensure that people do not make the mistake of accepting the status quo as inevitable or not subject to change. In fact, Orwell himself did not suggest that the story was either predictive or hopeless. "I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily will arrive, but I believe (allowing of course for the fact that the book is a satire) that something resembling it could arrive."[32] Thus, Orwell did not see this society as inevitable but he certainly saw it as possible. The point of writing the book is to prevent a possibility becoming an inevitability. "The scene of the book is laid in Britain in order to emphasize that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, if not fought against, could triumph anywhere."[33] Therefore, Orwell himself suggests that no one group, country, or society is immune to the dangers of totalitarianism but that pointing out the dangers of this possibility and how it manifests itself is the key to stopping the spread of this phenomena. Instead of feeling resigned to a totalitarian state, Orwell wanted people to feel that "there is still time, and by responding with greater clarity and greater courage."[34] Orwell made it clear that his intention was to

show the danger of totalitarianism in every kind of state. By making London the center of the book, he problematized the familiar for his readers. While there are many theories on whether Orwell's setting for the book indicated his disillusionment with socialism in England under the Labor Party, the undeniable truth is that he feared that this form of state can evolve even out of a democratic framework. This is a warning "against Russia but also so that we will understand the ultimate dangers involved wherever power moves under the guise of order and rationality."[35]

This last point is perhaps the most important point to make. Philip Rahv disagrees with the view that Orwell intended this book as a fatalistic vision of the future. As Rahv points out in "The Unfuture of Utopia," in spite of the book's setting, Orwell does not make any attempt to convince readers about the inevitability of England becoming Oceania. Rather Rahv sees this as Orwell's warning against totalitarianism, which often exhibits itself in the form of a bureaucratic state.

In fact, Orwell himself makes it clear that some of the tendencies that alarmed him about modernity are, indeed, reversible. One of the lynchpins of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is, of course, Newspeak, which is meant to tighten control over the people and make them incapable of even conceiving of rebellion against an oppressive state. However, the degradation of language is reversible. "Silly words and expressions have often disappeared, not through any evolutionary process but owing to the conscious action of a minority."[36] In other words, people have to be conscious about the words they use and that consciousness will eventually be able to reverse the creep of corrupt language. But even the invention of Newspeak is not enough to doom Orwell's depiction of Oceania to tragedy. Booker explains how this dialogic tension is maintained in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

> At the level of the fictional universe of *1984* Newspeak is designed to prevent its users from challenging the principles of the Party; but at the level of the encounter between the reader and Orwell's text, Newspeak serves precisely the opposite function, demonstrating not only the lengths to which the Party is forced to go to quell opposition, but also that such links are necessary because the ideology of the Party is so seriously flawed.[37]

The book also begs the question: Where does the spirit of rebellion come from? In spite of the title that Orwell toyed with using, it is clear that Winston Smith is not the last person to feel the rebellious stirrings. We see it in Julia and also in Parsons (though in a less obvious and thoughtful way). This suggests that even people who are an integral part of the system and believe in it are able to see the inadequacies of it and viscerally respond to its repressive nature. Thus, the book suggests the possibility that the desire for freedom cannot be completely suppressed in human beings for all time. But Orwell is also adept in describing the means used by totalitarian regimes to

suppress human nature. His warning is crucial because people often fall into the mentality that such things could not happen where they live. By highlighting the feel of totalitarianism and its methods, Orwell allows a rebellion against it. Thus, it is "in part because of his capacity to be brutally candid about the worst possibilities in his own dream that his nightmare has not come true. It is still a possibility; but it can still be prevented."[38]

NOTES

1. Irving Howe, ed., *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Texts, Sources, Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 247.

2. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 245.

3. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 245–46.

4. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 248.

5. Jeffrey Meyers, ed., *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 372.

6. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 260.

7. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 277.

8. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 374.

9. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (New York: New American Library, 1961), 260.

10. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 284.

11. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 322.

12. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 136.

13. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 136.

14. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 210.

15. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 231.

16. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 158.

17. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 136.

18. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 110.

19. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 205.

20. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 170.

21. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 249.

22. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 254.

23. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 256.

24. Meyers, *George Orwell*, 369.

25. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 222.

26. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 261.

27. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 145.

28. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 127.

29. Meyers, *George Orwell*, 265.

30. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 28–29.

31. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 136.

32. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 287.

33. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 287.

34. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 266.

35. Meyers, *George Orwell*, 261.

36. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 257.

37. M. Keith Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 86.

38. Howe, *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four, 439.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Having seen the debate between utopians and dystopians on the questions of political goals, human nature, and even the attitude that one should take toward human betterment, one wonders if one view is superior to or truer than the other? The truth is that we need both utopias and dystopias to complement, supplement, and interrogate each other. Human beings cannot live without hope but no person has exactly the same hopes as another. In that sense, utopias and dystopias speak to us, and the continued dialogue between these two genres is what we need to press forward toward a better world, all the while tempering our belief in the moral superiority of our political and personal beliefs and works.

It is fitting to finish this book with an analysis of another work of fiction that highlights this point. *The Dispossessed* by Ursula LeGuin is a story of two worlds, Urras and Anarres. Urras represents the present, the un-utopian world–a world of capitalism, war, power struggles, and economic and gender inequality. Anarres is supposed to be the equivalent to utopia. It was founded by people who revolted against the Urrasti government. It calls itself an anarchic state with no government, a communal lifestyle, and no private property. The guiding principle of this society is mutual aid. Shevek, a theoretical physicist from Anarres, visits Urras and the story is a story of his life on both worlds.

What makes *The Dispossessed* different from other stories of utopia is that Le Guin tempers the utopia of Anarres. In fact, we see Anarres through the years as Shevek grows up there—it is shown through a long period of time. This, in itself, is unusual for utopias, which are usually shown as a snapshot of a brief period when the unknowing traveler visits it. The second difference with other utopias is that Anarres is not shown through the eyes of a stranger; it is shown through the eyes of a person born and brought up

63

there. As a result, this depiction of utopia is developmental. It shows how the people within the political system and the political system itself changes over time. Its political ideals are espoused by Shevek—he believes in them completely. However, with the passage of time, we see Shevek (and others) become increasingly disenchanted with the political regime. They become aware that the ideals do not live up to practice. This is what leads him to leave Anarres and go to Urras—the land the Anarrestis left because they were so disillusioned with its political system. Thus, the major contribution to utopianism made by this book is that it shows that utopianism is an imperfect ideology due to the fact that political systems change over time. Utopia cannot remain utopia forever. In this sense, Le Guin seems to bear out the philosophy of the dystopians.

There are a few ways in which Le Guin makes Anarres less than utopian. The revolutionaries of Urras had been given the Moon as a place to settle—thus, preventing any transformation on Urras itself. The settlers on the Moon called it Anarres. This place is one of scarcity. Extremely dry and dusty, it can only grow one kind of tree and that has to be carefully planted and nurtured to make sure it does not die. There are no animals on Anarres. During the course of the story, there is a two-year drought on Anarres that leads to rationing of food and water and separation of families to work at high demand jobs. Even during a normal year, there is no excess, no luxury. It is to the forbidding nature of this world that Shevek attributes its capacity to adapt and its principle of mutual aid. After all, "what is idealistic about social cooperation, mutual aid, when it is the only means of staying alive?"[1] Thus, for Shevek, the Anarrestis are not idealistic. They are practical. Their very collective existence depends on social cohesion.

Ostensibly, there is no government in Anarres. Anarres lacks laws and, therefore, prisons. The power inheres in the community. Those who violate its communal code end up isolated—sometimes even killed by others in their community. It has an administration that administers production. This is based in Abbenay, where decisions are made regarding work assignments by their Division of Labor. But no one has to accept an assignment. If they choose not to work, they can simply live where they want and eat and sleep in the common mess halls and dormitories. However, it is the social conscience that prevents people from taking from the community without contributing to it in return. But even before Shevek gets to Abbenay, he is warned that "power inheres in a center" and that the idea that Anarres has no government is untrue. As we find out in the course of the story, Abbenay is indeed a center of power and people are not as free as they like to think they are. Power is incrementally increased over time. The bureaucracy grows every time there is an emergency and the rigidity of the system is such that the power remains with the bureaucracy. The aforementioned drought had

rigidified this bureaucracy. Thus, even without an established government, Anarres has developed governmental machinery.

Le Guin complicates the problems of a society based entirely on social approval and public opinion but without government. Shevek encounters his society's disapproval when he wants to go to Urras and conduct research there. Public opinion is, it turns out, power. Thus, even in a society that claims that each individual is free from any exercise of power, it turns out that such power does exist. This problem is further exacerbated by the Anarresti idea that only cooperation leads to progress. Unfortunately, this often leads to the problem of government by the majority, imposed on the minority. The book depicts a complete disregard within Anarresti society for new ideas and anyone who speaks against the ideas of the collective is seen as uncooperative. Any invention or initiative that is not understood by the public/collective is discouraged. The effect of this on people is seen in a relatively minor character in the book called Tirin, a friend of Shevek's. Tirin ends up in a mental health facility due to the strong opposition to his work by members of the community. On the other hand, Shevek ends up leaving Anarres altogether in order to be able to pursue his interests and publish his research.

Work is usually chosen on Anarres based on interest and talent—with the caveat that everyone must do those tasks occasionally that need laborers (dirty or boring jobs). The more dangerous jobs are taken by people to show off to others. Thus, human ego becomes the conduit for doing everything that the state needs done. Work is defined as doing what one wants to do. In their language, work and play have the same word.[2] Shevek sees this as the outcome of the principle that people do what they are good at and choose to do. Yet, we see how the principles of Anarres, while theoretically beautiful, remain difficult to put into practice. There are some inherent tensions between these principles. What a person likes to do may not be what society needs from him. Thus, Shevek is put into the situation of either pursuing his interests at the expense of societal disapproval or doing the work demanded by his society while forgoing his interests. The problem is that, in Anarres, "the social conscience completely dominates the individual conscience, instead of striking a balance with it."[3]

Shevek takes the dystopian perspective in spite of coming from a land based on utopian sounding principles. For Shevek, absolute societal transformation is impossible. Removing suffering is impossible. "We can't prevent suffering. This pain and that pain, yes, but not Pain. A society can only relieve social suffering, unnecessary suffering. The rest remains."[4] It is this pain, this shared experience of pain, which, for Shevek, is the basis for uniting humankind. It is the basis for brotherhood.

His visit to Urras teaches Shevek the danger of the state and governmental machinery—not simply of public disapproval, as we see in Anarres, but of

a legal and political structure. He realizes that an "individual cannot bargain with the State. The State recognizes no coinage but power: and it issues the coins itself."[5] Like the dystopians, Shevek realizes that in a confrontation with the state, the individual is lost. Yet, the alternative posited is not perfect either as we see in Anarres. Public/societal opinion can be as oppressive as the state.

Therefore, this book neither discards utopianism nor adopts it. As the above quote shows, utopian hope must live with dystopic conditions of existence. If anything, Le Guin seems to say that utopianism as an experiment is necessary for a better world. No matter what the outcome, the very possibility of a radical transformation is what people need to hear when they are in an oppressive situation. This point is driven home when Shevek goes to Urras. The Urrasti government organizes his visit. He is shown all the achievements of this world—its advanced technology, its universities, its political openness as evidenced by debates in its senate. He is never shown the poorer sections of the towns. He is never given a chance to interact with those who are on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. As he realizes, this is because his very existence is a threat to the government of Urras. He is the representation of a different world, a better world. As he is told by one of the revolutionaries in Urras: "Do you know that when people here want to wish each other luck they say, 'May you get reborn on Anarres!' To know that it exists, to know that there is a society without government, without police, without economic exploitation. . . ."[6] Thus, utopias seem to provide something to look up to and something to aspire for.

Utopias, for Le Guin, do not differ from other societies that are works in progress. Anarres is settled on principles that seem utopian but have adapted to their specific conditions over time. Among the principles that settled Anarres is the belief that people are all different. Yet, the society expects sociability from the people—isolation is equated with disgrace. Shevek realizes that he prefers isolation—that it is precisely this isolation that makes it easier for him to pursue his work, work which will develop the technology of Anarres. Thus, Le Guin shows that, no matter how positive, beautiful, or utopian the principles of a society are, going against them may yet be in the society's greater interest. Most importantly, human beings cannot help but flout the principles or laws of a society. Absolute obedience from everyone remains an impossible dream/nightmare.

Tirin encapsulates Le Guin's understanding of the relationship between utopias and dystopias. Tirin states: "'Our earth is their Moon; our Moon is their earth.' 'Where, then, is Truth?' declaimed Bedap . . . 'In the hill one happens to be sitting on.' said Tirin."[7] This is crucial for understanding the relationship between utopias and dystopias. One utopia is not more absolutely beautiful than another. Nor can all utopias be unilaterally denounced as authoritarian or repressive. Rather, our views of utopia and dystopia depend

on our perspective. When we read the story of a future society, our perspective dictates whether we see it as utopia or dystopia. As technology developed and utopian dreams became more capable of realization, dystopias warned against the fulfillment of utopian dreams. Utopias seem beautiful or scary depending on perspective. In fact, to a certain extent, utopia itself is perspective. Defining utopia is difficult because while some people may see an idea as capable of realization, others may see it as an unattainable dream, while still others may see it as an achievable nightmare.

Le Guin shows all stages of societies in all stages of progress in this book. Some, like Anarres, start out as utopian but questions soon arise about whether they are true utopias. Others, like Urras, are dystopic, or at least, far from utopian. Then there is Terra which is on another planet. Terra's ambassador describes this world as devastated, a ruin. He blames human beings for the destruction of his world—human beings that were greedy and fought each other. Greed and violence are recipes for destruction of one's own world.

Terra is now clearly a dystopia. In order to survive, they have instituted total centralization. They ration everything and have instituted birth control and euthanasia to maintain control over the population. In addition, everyone is forced to join the labor force. All this is essential for the purpose of mere survival. It is no wonder that the Terrans see Urras as utopia—the land of plenty and ease. This contradicts the views of those poor and social and economically disadvantaged Urrasti who see Anarres as utopia. Terra's world was introduced to the readers as one supported by the Urrasti government. One wonders what would happen to Urras without the principles shown to it by Anarres. Thus, the need for a vision of utopia is shown as imminent even as utopia appears to be based on perspective.

So, what then, is the point of utopia? Shevek sees ideas as being grounds for debate and discussion. "It is of the nature of idea to be communicated: written, spoken, done. The idea is like grass. It craves light, likes crowds, thrives on crossbreeding, grows better for being stepped on."[8] Ideas change and grow as they are floated around. People change and grow over time too as do political systems. Denying this possibility is a mistake. Shevek emphasizes the importance of both being and becoming. Becoming is necessary for being. But simply being, without change, is boring, and probably not possible.

Ultimately, then, Shevek does not reject utopianism but he, like the dystopians, upholds choice as the most important characteristic for humans. "Though only the society could give security and stability, only the individual, the person, had the power of moral choice—the power of change, the essential function of life."[9] Thus, a person brought up to believe in communal aid and in societal approval ends with an idea of radical individuality. Shevek posits that "If we must all agree, all work together, we're no better than a machine. If an individual can't work in solidarity with his fellows, it's

his duty to work alone."[10] Utopias have to be created and recreated as the old principles die out, change, or prove unworkable. Shevek accepts the solution that "we'll get out, we'll go make an Anarres beyond Anarres, a new beginning."[11] The truth is that perfect is not forever and freedom is not free or eternal.

We should learn the same lessons Shevek learns—that no writer should think of his or her idea as purely theoretical. They should think through the implications of their ideas. Shevek believed that his ideas were only a theory—his life's work and an important theory but only a theory nonetheless. Yet, he sees that he is being manipulated by the Urrasti for this theory. What is only theoretical physics to him is the means of power and colonization to the Urrasti. Utopian and dystopian writers will do well to remember this lesson. Theories can be dangerous when put into practice. Yet, the hope that comes with these theories cannot be discounted.

Thus, we need both utopia and dystopia. The combination of the two represents our lives—filled with both hope and fear. We need the hope to offset the fear. Yet, working on an unbounded, unfounded optimism may be dangerous. As human beings, we are all widely different from each other. While this means that we cannot all appreciate and fit into the same political systems, this does not mean that we cannot have our hopes and dreams, ideas about what and how to fit our principles into a political framework. Utopias provide hope; dystopias provide realism. Ultimately, they form the two sides of the human experience. As the Terran ambassador says about Urras, about our world: "I know it's full of evils, full of human injustice, greed, folly, waste. But it is also full of good, of beauty, vitality, achievement. It is what a world should be! It is alive, tremendously alive—alive, despite all its evils, with hope."[12]

NOTES

1. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974), 119.
2. Can this be a means of brainwashing people? Orwell points out that manipulating language is a means of manipulating thought. So, do all people in this society simply do what they love or is this what they believe because they cannot express it differently?
3. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 287.
4. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 53.
5. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 237.
6. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 257.
7. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 36.
8. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 64.
9. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 290.
10. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 313.
11. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 331.
12. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 303.

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Index

71

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Nivedita Bagchi received her PhD in political theory from the University of Virginia. Since her dissertation, she has worked on, and remains fascinated by, the intersection of literature and politics. She has written, presented, and taught classes on *Casablanca*, the writings of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Lord of the Rings*, as well as utopias and anti-utopias. She currently teaches at Millersville University of Pennsylvania. When not working, she can be found herding her three children, reading more fiction, and cooking.