

Utopia versus Dystopia – a perfect Environment for a Perfect Existence

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Abstract. The present paper highlights a few aspects of a utopian society and the manner in which new forms of knowledge can contribute to reaching the ideal of a perfect community. Ever since the beginnings of humanity man has endeavored to inhabit a perfect world, where everyone can abide in peace. Many researchers have concurred with the idea that the best solutions for this are the latest technological developments, considering the fact that knowledge means power. The concept of utopia has been tossed around along the years because it means something different for each and every individual. From the first forms of utopia up to the modern day, writers and movies have come up with different visions and opinions on what the perfect world is. Therefore, what might represent utopia for one human being may be a dystopia for another, due to the reason that the several forms of knowledge related to laws, policies, religions are differently perceived.

Key words: utopia; utopia; dystopia; society; dream; ideal; perfection; freedom

1. An introduction to utopia

Utopian philosophy represents a guiding principle for humanity, a global element trying to achieve the best life possible in a complex and yet fragmented world. Even though we all belong to the human race, no two persons can be exactly the same. Therefore, everyone has thought, or at least wished for a better world without crimes, diseases or poverty – that is, the best life attainable. This is the common dream of humanity, but the way in which it is interpreted, or what utopia means for each single individual varies and depends on one’s personal vision of life.

First of all I should begin by giving a definition of utopia. Some say it is an ideal while others associate it with the Garden of Eden. Some could also identify it with trivial things of existence such as golden roads, chocolate rivers or diamond flowers. However, the most precious two things such a society would have are humanity and ethics or morality. After deciding that it can be an imaginary or remote place, a whole series of questions pops up into the reader’s mind: Where is this place? Can people become immortal? Will they ever grow old? Will they have the same ideas for perfection? According to Anatole France, utopia has existed ever since the era of cavemen. As utopia is the principle of progress, our forefathers traced the lines of the first city and turned into reality dreams which back then seemed rather futile. Many utopian ideas have emerged from literature as many writers proved a great interest in this matter. The path towards a better living has been and will be paved with dreams and desires which will ultimately materialize into technological developments.

Utopia might represent a new form of knowledge as human beings consist of both a physical and a mental state and therefore, the latest technologies and ideas should be employed to satisfy both states. A good knowledge of things opens many doors and provides infinite means of solving problems and achieving utopia. [1] The latest scientific research has proved that the intelligence of mice or monkeys can be genetically improved while the cloning possibilities are increasing. Computer knowledge and artificial intelligence have shown unlimited resources, and therefore, new forms of knowledge accelerate the rhythm of reaching a better if not perfect or utopian world. Research and development represent the best tools to

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support the cause, while humanity has discovered some ways of interacting with knowledge. [8] First of all, there is dissemination – which is a way of communication, of broadcasting a message to the public, and secondly, we are talking about acquiring information and knowledge through direct experience.

Humanity's dream of a better life, leads individuals towards a common destination – utopia, or “heaven” on earth, as religion calls it. People must strive and make all the necessary efforts to achieve it. In such a complex process, people should be clearly aware of what utopia is and what it involves. In its broadest meaning, utopia refers to people's trials and struggle of creating a perfect society by coming up with ideas that could radically change our world. Metaphorically speaking, this perfect society may be associated with a house. Once the person knows the architectural plan of the construction, the next step would be to decide what materials he needs as well as the working principles necessary to build it. First of all, people must communicate and cooperate, must interact with each other in order to carry out such a demanding task.

On one hand, humans have both positive and negative thoughts and that is why societies can be evil to different extents. But on the other hand, utopian communities formulate the idea that people should live in a positive way – and the struggle to achieve this goal would represent the first step, or the foundation of a utopian society. In the process of creating such a society many negative aspects of human life will have to be overcome. People will eliminate wrongful acts from their lives: malice, envy, hatred, infliction of physical harm, theft, destruction of property, lies, crimes. Individuals' main purpose should be to focus on virtues and values such as generosity and love. However, there are persons totally committed to evil, whose behaviour cannot be reformed. Some scientists believe that the only solution possible in this case is to remove them or to take them out of society for good. Such people represent the weeds of society which prevent beautiful flowers from growing healthily and brightly.

But these “rebels” or “weeds” so to say, represent the protagonists of dystopian societies. An anarchic and undesirable society, referring to a bleak future in which things take a turn for the worse and which displays images of worlds more unpleasant than our own may be called a dystopian society. The inhabitants of such a society lead a dehumanized and fearful life; they struggle for survival. The border between friendship and hatred is so thin and blurred, that anyone or anything might represent a threat. It is a breakdown from social order and it is closely-related to our present-day society. Religion is usually absent in such societies. People tend to replace God with the government which controls every movement of the citizens. [2,3] In what concerns the economy of such a society, they do not have too much freedom of choice and are not given any career options. The main character in dystopian fiction will eventually realize that something is wrong with the society he lives in and will break the law or the rules. Human beings have been created free, spontaneous and unpredictable, fact which endows them with endless capabilities. Unlike machines, people must have freedom to move, to speak and to express ideas and feelings. Any trial of mechanizing individuals leads to the emergence of a dehumanized world, eliminating thus, all the above-mentioned human traits.

The social and political scene of the 20th century determined some writers like George Orwell or Anthony Burgess to express their fears about the dark future of humanity. The latter one depicted such a society on the edge of destruction, with a demoralized protagonist under the mercy of the authorities' control. Being deprived of free will and choice the individual has to obey and to live in this devastating environment. Dystopian literature refers mostly to the decadence of people reflected in acts of violence, sexual immorality and use of drugs. The protagonists indulge themselves in sin living only in the present. This system destroys human individualism, controls the information that people receive, claiming that slavery means, in fact, freedom. When humans begin to be treated like machines which only process information in order to obtain or to anticipate a certain result, the so-called “end product” will be more often than not, a dystopian society. Even if one might think that psychological control establishes the order in a society, major drawbacks and repercussions occur. Anthony Burgess' book entitled *A Clockwork Orange* represents an attempt to improve a decaying world, or better said, a dystopian society. The book does not reflect a true story, but a possible one. He takes an extreme example of violence to emphasize his strong belief. It deals with alternative realism because it is a reflection of a future society. Even if it was written in 1962, it renders the society of the years 1995-2000. Personal freedom means to be able to act according to your own will, and not to be restricted by the social paradigm in which you live. Burgess wrote about a future dystopia. If a utopia is an ideal place or a

perfect society, where people experience no pain, in a dystopic future there is no goodness or peace. It is a society where juvenile delinquents rob, rape and terrorize innocent people in order to satisfy their own desires. They represent a menace to the society.

Free will is the highest gift men have been endowed with, as it is the only thing that separates human beings and animals from machines. Dystopian characters make use of human weaknesses in order to set forth and to prove the destructive power of authoritarian rule. Dystopian societies demoralize people, deprive them of the ability of taking decisions while their personal desires, either good or evil, are taken over by the state. They control the citizens of society, restrict independent thought, put them under permanent surveillance. People fear the outside world, they live in a dehumanized state where dissent is forbidden. The whole society is in fact an “illusion” of a perfect world, illusion which is maintained through corporate or mass-media control, red tape or incompetent government representatives, new technologies like robots or scientific methods and religious ideology. [4,5] The dystopian “inhabitant” constantly tries to escape this world in which he feels trapped, he does not trust the social and political system, which, in his opinion, promote wrong values and ideas. Through his own deeds and words, thoughts and feelings, this “inhabitant” helps the reader recognize dystopian societies.

Therefore, the two types of societies above-mentioned - utopian and dystopian – support different points of view. If the first one claims that the evil individual should be eliminated because his behaviour cannot be improved, the second one believes that he should be and can be reformed one way or another. Utopia represents one person’s paradise while dystopia is exactly the opposite – therefore it is very difficult to draw a line between the state of perfection and chaos. Each individual needs utopia to remove unhappiness, pessimism and deception. Dystopia can either describe hell on earth or too much perfection that eventually will lead to chaos. The two factors mentioned in both types of societies are religion and government. They both have a major contribution in the process of achieving a utopian world.

Churches should stop wasting their energies on disputes about religious beliefs, focusing more on providing food, clothes, shelter and medical care for the needy ones and taking thus a step forward and moving towards utopia. However, this does not mean that people should give up their religious ideas, because utopia in itself means freedom for the persons to believe whatever they want to. The second factor mentioned above is the government. It represents the only regulating body that can solve disputes and establish a certain order avoiding the chaos. Any fundamental freedoms are allowed to citizens as long as these do not affect others in a negative way. As society has changed with the times, the new forms of knowledge enable and encourage the nations to cooperate. Therefore, governments enact laws that encourage good and enlarge the horizons towards utopia. [7] They can promote and support the advancement of knowledge, because, according to some scientists and researchers, the basic element which represents the foundation of any ideal and perfect world is technological development. Even if nowadays, it is said that people are given unlimited freedom it is conditioned by the desires and decisions of others. Some individuals have to work for employers, others are enslaved by their own business. The solution envisaged to such a problem are the computers and machines which will eventually perform humans’ work giving them the opportunity of pursuing true freedom and happiness. Therefore, the utopian society is closely related to money, production and state-of-the-art technologies, providing thus a personal heaven for every single individual.

Knowledge can do lots of things in supporting the ideal of obtaining the perfect society. It can stop evil and pollution, cure diseases, supply food and provide unlimited production capabilities while at a mental level it offers an emotionally safe and fulfilling existence. This is why the barriers of ignorance should be destroyed and governmental, business and educational institutions should cooperate in an effort to increase knowledge and to inculcate the same ideas to future generations. Some people regard utopia as an impossible dream. But as it is a human invention and not a fundamental parameter of the universe, it can be accomplished.

Utopia may be regarded as a goal for humanity and therefore, we should try to achieve it together and not leave everything up to fate. The first condition would be for the people to agree upon the same idea of achieving a better world and upon the resources and efforts necessary to carry it out. As knowledge is the key to utopia, one can obtain anything through it. People could reach a better world, faster and more

efficiently if they focused more on dissemination and use of new forms of knowledge. This can be done with the help of computers and Internet access which offer the possibility of accumulating knowledge in any field. However, dissemination of information goes much beyond this, as it also involves education. In order to create a utopian society, scientists support more and more the idea of using robots and machines as much as possible. Therefore they consider that online universities represent the best choice for the utopian individual who needs quality education with a minimum expense of time and money. Reduction of economic costs for both schools and students eliminates barriers to education allowing each person complete freedom and opportunity of choosing a personal rhythm of learning. In this context one might think that teachers have been completely eliminated, but it is not the case. They should use their expertise in the research field committing to new discoveries and seeking new forms of knowledge.

2. New Forms of Knowledge

Humanity should investigate more in its future in order to have a utopian world. Subsequently, people must be aware of the fact that information is the key to their problem. And therefore, they should concentrate their efforts on research and development which can facilitate the access to human knowledge. Universities, industries and other organizations may have a huge contribution in this respect. They can allocate more resources to research and development departments in the purpose of finding beneficial knowledge such as medical cures or can help individuals become experts in one field or another, enabling them, thus, to provide the best solutions for the use of funds and to avoid wasteful governmental expenses. But in order to achieve this, it is absolutely necessary to make a global effort and people should act as a whole in the process of finding methods to increase knowledge.

In the process of creating a utopian society, besides governmental, technological and mental or philosophical issues, people should take into consideration the environmental issues as well. We are part of this ecological system and rely on it for survival, but unfortunately we are not aware of the damage we are causing to it, or even worse, we do not care about it. Nature's systems should be helped by human actions such as recycling, reducing the growth in population, energy conservation, planting trees, preventing and removing pollution. As mentioned above, in a utopian world, people must improve their knowledge and find the ability and the strength to live as a single entity, to live as one with the world. Individuals can influence the whole world through their actions because all systems have been created by humans capable of making decisions and establishing the course of action. The best way to involve in obtaining a utopian society is by acting as a productive citizen, by being positive, by spending time and money in this purpose and last but not least, by communicating. Therefore, the basic idea is that each individual should put oneself at the disposal of others and should act according to personal decisions that will be beneficial for one's peers. And it is not necessary to resort to negative actions in order to achieve something positive as long as utopian principles are totally against such practices.

As utopia is perceived differently from person to person, all views of it involve change. [6] Every social system, be it justice, business or other institutions must be reassessed and focused on serving humans. Human intelligence also differs from individual to individual so they filter knowledge according to the limits of their brain's ability of perception. The way thought processes work is still a mystery for humans as it is a complex mechanism influenced by lots of factors. Unfortunately it is mandatory for human beings to reach such an understanding because otherwise, utopia becomes impossible. Even if people create a perfect environment, negative feelings and emotions triggered by the complexity of the human brain will still emerge.

It is said that people possess the necessary resources to obtain a utopian environment. The only thing they have to do is to identify the problems and to use what they have with the purpose of eliminating such major issues like starvation diseases, animal extinction, deforestation or crimes. Some may say that this could be done at the level of communities. [8] Each community may have personal rules and principles and as a consequence, each individual can choose the community that best fits his necessities for living in a perfect world. As utopia is perceived differently by each person it is highly plausible that one can find absolute happiness and perfection in such an environment. However, utopia is not really a place; it is more of a state or feeling which should reach perfection.

On a psychological level, utopian “inhabitants” will be free from depression, from mental illness; they will be able to control any emotions and will be able to use their brains at full capacity. This will lead to a euphoric state of happiness while anger and other negative emotions will be completely eliminated. Scholars and utopian researchers support the idea of a virtual existence where, people can experience things in a virtual dimension rather than read a novel or watch a movie - providing them with unlimited amusement and interaction. They can also hunt or perform any other activity without harming anyone or anything. Utopian societies require individuals who have complete control over things and the ability of free will. By reaching such a high level of mental development, people will no longer need drugs and nor will they engage in crimes or other such activities; consequently, by being mentally satisfied, there will be no need for social rules. But unfortunately, the human mind has not reached such a level of knowledge yet, and it is by far, a dream or a difficult objective to accomplish. And this is why scientists believe that every human being can create one’s own picture of utopia by manifesting one’s personal ability to live in one’s own way. Freedom means to be given the possibility of choice in any area of life without offending others. One is perfectly free in his home and in order to maintain this state of mind, one should also act and manifest oneself in an adequate environment, which to correspond to one’s own wishes and lifestyle. By understanding the above-mentioned ideas, people might have a chance at getting to such a high level of existence, where there are no boundaries or restrictions. In the attempt to bridge the gap between past, present and future, or between reality and utopia, people might discover or reach an unknown state or method that will pave the way towards absolute freedom of choice and mental fulfillment.

To sum up I would add the fact that as long as it is up to humanity to select a path in life, as long as it has the freedom of choice, everyone may dream and wish for a better life – and what better solution for this than slightly walking towards utopia? Some people think it is possible while others don’t. In my opinion everyone should give it a try and a chance. If one truly believes in something, one’s dreams might come true. Humanity deserves a better existence. One might say that the constant search for a perfect vision, for utopia, keeps humans alive. By having a sense of purpose, a meaning, a hope or a dream, they could, one day, produce a perfectly fulfilled civilization. Utopian visions of all kinds have been present on earth. Some of them have triggered hostile changes while others have vanished into the mist of centuries, leaving no trace behind. But despite the multitude of visions mankind had to cope with, it still has a knack for repeating the same two mistakes: people either think that one particular vision will solve all human problems or that it represents the true vision all utopians have to follow. Therefore, the utopian society is not a new concept, but it represents an old hope for living a more pleasant and meaningful life. It stands as a symbol for heaven on earth, for turning into reality dreams and ideals of a perfect existence.

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