

UTOPIA: LAND OF COCAIGNE
AND GOLDEN AGE

Up to a point, but only up to a point, Utopia is the product of ancient nostalgia mixed with some examples drawn from the past. By "nostalgia" we mean the cast of mind which finds its way by mental channels to feelings and states of mind which are already familiar. The nostalgic aspect of Utopia which consists in the exorcism of reality by the evocation of a perfectly happy society, is only a repetition, rendered conscious and methodical, of the same range of insoluble questions and imaginary solutions which led to the creation of the myth of the Golden Age or of the Land of Cocaigne.

The first of these myths, which assumes an initial phase in the history of humanity which was infinitely happier than the present, depends in its turn upon the natural tendency to project backwards, and find the best part of our life in the sphere of memories. On a personal scale, each of us is in some way a *laudator*

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temporis acti; and a person for whom memories of childhood are not swathed in the attractive colours of the unredeemable past, is a very rare exception.

By a simple extrapolation, which applies the frame of reference of individual experience to all levels of history and the macrocosm, and which seems to have been a fact of all mythologies, the past and the "ages" of Man as a whole, were perceived in the same way, as was that of a nation, or even of a city. To Dante, the period of real Florentine glory was that of his ancestor, Cacciaguida; but it is transparently clear even to one who knows nothing of the town's history that this choice is subjective and lacks real foundation. Anyway it is known that when one cares, one comes closest to deception. The lost paradise is seated in the deepest, and therefore the most confused layers of the memory: it is confused because it is lost, and it is perhaps a paradise because it is confused. In any case, the Golden Age is the very first phase of a long evolution which strongly resembles a fall.

At that time, society enjoyed all the privileges a primitive society could dream of; for it must be taken into account that horizons and desires are of necessity very narrowly limited. According to Hesiod, "men lived like gods, their hearts free of worries, far from work and pain." They did not grow old. It is true, they did not enjoy the immortality which the gods had reserved for themselves, but at least they died "as one falls asleep, overcome by slumber." They knew nothing of economic problems. They shared the ample resources which an excessively benign nature placed at their disposal spontaneously and without work. Ovid improves upon this tale. As society had no problems, it had no need to impose laws upon itself: no military, commercial, or fiscal organisation, whose use had not yet been realised. But it is not hard to understand that if the soil's fertility, left to itself, is enough to provide men's needs, this is mainly because those needs are reduced to their lowest denominator. The poet himself acknowledges that men who are satisfied with wild fruit and the easy acquisitions of hunting are responding very frugally to nature's gifts.

This picture suggests the idea of a very primitive society. It is doubtless interpreted in the idyllic style, and idylls do not usually make a close study of necessity; but it is certain that that world was characterised by a very modest development, by

a strict limitation to the necessary. The Golden Age guaranteed its citizens subsistence, rest, and, in fact, happiness, but it was with the same harsh conditions of the earthly paradise. One must not eat of the forbidden fruit, nor create new needs or experience new desires, if one wishes happiness to continue: for happiness has always been the art of being satisfied with what one has. We have since realised that the conditions are unacceptable: and not just for Adam, since he acted for us all, and on all our behalfs, for we are incapable of being satisfied with what satisfies us. Thus it is not surprising to discover that the picture of the childhood of humanity was deeply modified by the Renaissance writers.

On one hand, they would not have been able to stick to such severe limitations even if they had not become totally inconceivable; at any rate, they were no longer compatible with the idea of happiness. Then geographical discoveries had just shown that primitive societies, which, so to speak, were swimming in the Golden Age, were still in existence. Most Indians from the Antilles, for example, did not sow seed, or work; they harvested communally; they found enough to satisfy all their needs close at hand; and this did not prevent war, or hatred, or anything which so unhappily characterises our iron century. As for the happiness which this relative abundance might bring them, there is no doubt that no European would have wanted anything to do with it. The idea of a pure and frugal Golden Age, both primitive and modest, had been hard hit, and its structure did not stand up to analysis.

And even if it had stood up, the idea of such a return was inconceivable to the Christian mind. It would have presumed the abolition—as desirable as it was illegitimate, and as sweet as it was vicious—of the first duty of all mankind, the obligation to earn one's bread by the sweat of one's brow. This need was not only an economic imperative: to the Christian thinker it was also an ineluctable religious law pertaining to the nature of Man, which was a part of the destiny allotted to him by God for eternity, in the person of the first man.

All these reasons together mean that the Golden Age, as imagined by, for example, Antonio de Guevara, is no longer based on the sharing of the earth's spontaneous bounty. An intervening individual effort makes a sense of original sin a

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necessity. And yet this effort is still minimal, and perfectly bearable, nor does it lead to the abuses ascribed to it now: "Each man cultivated his land, planted his olive-trees, picked his fruits, gathered his grapes, harvested his corn, and brought up his children. Finally, as he was fed by his own toil, he lived without harming others."

Happiness was now singularly reduced, since it is clear that it is artificially maintained, by virtue of the division of society into compartments. Guevara is not a Utopian, but if he were, he, in his turn, would have to prohibit exchanges and currency: to say nothing of the problem which he leaves unsolved, that of private property. It certainly appears that it was he who first introduced it into the image of the Golden Age; but it is unclear whether it was through simple thoughtless conformity, or because he believed that one could be a man of property and high principled at the same time; or else because under any circumstances he considered it preferable to take this last resource, which favours inequality, and creates, if not justice, right.

At any rate, the system is no longer the same. The Golden Age may still ensure happiness, but one must cooperate, and already one feels that effort will be necessary. He does not rule out work, and by the simple fact of having invented limits he has already introduced into the building the termite which will ruin it from top to bottom. As fatefully as the hand of the angel which consigned the houses of the Egyptians to the divine wrath, that of the proprietor who stores *his* corn marks the end of all illusions. If the author of the Bible had been a Utopian, he could just as easily have hung a key or some other personalised object in the forbidden tree. Cervantes knew this well. It is his famous remark which attributes all the virtues of the Golden Age to the fact that "Those who lived then did not know the words mine and yours."¹

The myth of the first happy period of history must have retained a certain theoretical interest during pagan antiquity in

¹ Antonio De Guevara, *Reloj De Principes*, 1, 31; Cervantes, *Don Quixote*. It is for the same reason that, according to Erasmus, *In Praise of Folly*, XXXII, there was no literature, science, or law then. On the Golden Age, see Hans Joachim Mahl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters im Werk des Novalis*, Heidelberg, 1965; Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*, Bloomington, Indiana Univ. 1969.

the sense that one could think in terms of its possible return. The circular and cyclic conception of the passage of time made it possible to foresee a repetition of the same historic phases and of the four ages of Man, at the end of periods whose total duration was very differently estimated by different authors: to the Pythagoreans, 40,000 years, to Plato 36,000, from Eratosthenes' point of view, 28,000, for Cicero 12,954. It would be hard to say if it ever managed to represent hope, for all hope in the Ancients is doubtful, and attaches itself to the present with a sort of childish rage, which can only see the brief splendour of a bright morning in life. Even if all had been different, such a hope would have been inconceivable, and would have denied its own essence, if it were to lie in such unattainable objects. It is true that the dogma of the last judgment and the Christian millenium are at least as far-sighted; but they are concerned with eschatology, that is to say, with the destiny of us all. In any case, from the Renaissance onwards, the classical tradition became reduced to a simple literary motif, which survived artificially, like Ronsard's nymphs, and like all borrowings from mythology. It was not related to any present reality, nor to any foreseeable future, because the circular vision of historic time has itself become a simple, shallow image; perhaps also because from the moment it ceased to safeguard against the hard need for work, the myth did nothing but pose problems, without suggesting their solutions.

But the simple fact of asking those questions is not without interest. Myth has all the nostalgic qualities of the landscapes of childhood. Like Utopia, it is a literary solution. It does not encourage hope, but regret and a dim melancholy; it does not construct, rather it recreates; it does not promise, but transport. And yet the outlines of the dream are the same, whether it is based on projects or memories. What remains is the shadowy image of an ideal world where Man is free to be his own master without being subject to other people. His happiness, if it exists, is composed of liberty and of what we would nowadays call non-involvement. He is alone in the world but with his nearest and dearest; he is free, but does not know what for. Having assured the background for his material existence, with the help of nature's maternal conniving, he is responsible to himself alone. If the myth is not anti-social, it is anyway completely asocial.

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The individual's victory, always supposing that it is a victory, is so fragile that one does not notice it at first. What springs to one's notice is the even and mediocre level of happiness as a whole: after all it is from there that the golden mean got its name. All this seems to be a challenge to intelligence: is this mediocrity and complete freedom, this circumscribed happiness in fact desirable? Does this possibility of happiness, for what it is worth, carry as much or less weight than our organised society, with its wheels of fortune, its congenital vices and temptations, from the basest to the most beautiful? Nostalgia feeds itself on absence, we already know that the Golden Age is not a present problem. But it is in the nature of nostalgia to suggest presences which must be denied, and to suggest options which remain potential: and if the Golden Age were to come tomorrow, would I find what I needed for my happiness?

Whatever he may say or think about it, the Utopian accepts the challenge, by the simple fact of having chosen Elsewhere. Instead of the natural and hasardous course of history, he prefers his nostalgia. It is not that he prefers the Golden Age as it is presented by classical tradition; he has remoulded and modified the myth to be able to speculate on it after having transformed it into a hope. His choice reveals a two-way pull. The Utopian believes that the future may be the product of a myth projected onto the future, just as the Golden Age is a myth projected onto the past; he believes that the destiny of Man should depend on mental syntheses and realised myths rather than upon elusive transcendances which may not exist. And on the other hand, he speculates upon these mental syntheses having happy and beneficial outcomes, because he builds with the material furnished by his nostalgia, deducing the hypothesis of a chance of happiness from the image of a happy childhood.

However, even if there is a certain likeness between the instruments employed by the imagination, there is no common standard of solutions. The Golden Age makes men happy, whereas Utopia is only concerned with the state's wellbeing, that of individuals being considered as a sub-product: and it only accepts the fact that a collective society is composed of individuals at the last stand, and even then it does not admit that those individuals sometimes feel the need to be free. The myth counts on Nature's total and devoted co-operation, which is seen as prov-

idence, while Utopia relies only on human labour. The myth makes a point of forestalling nothing, as it puts faith in Nature, while one act of forgetfulness, one single liberty taken could mean the ruin of the Utopian construct. It is clear that the two dreams do not grow in the same universe.

Thus the coincidences are fortuitous; or else, if it is true in spite of everything that a Utopian saw fit to take his cue from these mythical precedents, one must conclude from this that he did not realise the incongruity of the parallel. It is true, for example, that both attitudes assume a levelling of the human masses and that, in practice if not in intention, this levelling is found in mediocrity. But the myth discovers in mediocrity a logical consequence of like needs and total absence of other interests or passions; while Utopia acts under the pressure of distributive justice, which has to confront the need with supervised and codified resources, since Nature no longer so generously puts them at the state's disposal.

It is also true that the myth seems to state the problem of the suppression of property, which also is an almost constant preoccupation of Utopians in general. However, the situation is not the same. The primitive society of the Golden Age knew nothing of the proprietorial instinct, for the simple reason that social life had not yet drawn attention to its advantages. As long as men were content to gather the spontaneous products of the soil, the idea of property had no meaning, as the economics of picking implied constant change of the zones of exploitation. This had not yet made the use of work or production implements general, and personal harvests were not yet at the diversified stage. This is how, for example, the primitive inhabitants of the Antilles and of all regions of abundant vegetation used to live.

It was work which first introduced a personal coefficient into social relationships, with all its ever-deepening and subtle connotations: efficiency, value, merit, price, beauty, wealth, and so forth. It is impossible to underestimate its importance for it is work which makes most generalisations empty or tenuous. It is from this primary reality, which makes the individual's securest property, and whose exact quantitative and qualitative value is the bane of all modern societies, that all other problems of human groups derive.

Primitive communism, such, for example, as Hesiod describes,

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appears thus as the spontaneous expression, where economic relations are concerned, of a level characterised by undifferentiated labour. In return, communist nostalgia, as in More's vision, and in all Utopias in general, is certainly just that, a backward step, and a solution *a posteriori*; like all nostalgia, it is also the incorrect application of a demoded solution. In fact, the Utopian universe, like Guevara's Golden Age, is already a differentiated society, subject to work, with its own levels of production, its vineyards beside fields of corn: soon there will be surveyors and architects, mathematicians and poets. All this poses problems of the price of labour, and of distributive justice, of the limitation or suppression of rights, of equality, or at least of harmony in diversity. These problems are the daily bread of all Utopians, and they have not yet been given a solution better than the squaring of the circle. But this is not a sufficient reason for confusing the terms, since the problems are never the same. The Golden Age ignores them, but this does not mean that it has solved them. Thomas More knows them, and considers that the collectivist solution is compatible with a primitive economy, but for him this is already a backward look and a past ideal. As for modern Utopians, they read the future in a mirror, and find a back-to-front projection into the future, of the effects of the lost Golden Age, which from this new point of view, becomes the cause of the Golden Age which is to come.

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And yet as radical as possible a solution to the problem of labour had already been found in the legend of the Land of Plenty, and perhaps the Utopians were mistaken not to hold by that. But although the connection between that legend and Utopia figures in many modern critical texts, it really seems that the analogies invoked are more glaring than profound.

The Land of Cocaigne is a completely Utopian country. Its two most outstanding features, which coincide in part with those of the Golden Age, are the total satisfaction of individual needs, and the freedom of that satisfaction, or, in other words, the law based on permanent rest. As in all Utopias, it is not the country which has produced the law, as Montesquieu might have supposed, but the law which has given rise to the country.

Throughout his history, Man has had to confront the problem of survival, in much more painful and precarious situations than we generally imagine. The Land of Cocaigne provides an escape from the anxieties and material hardship of existence, by the creation of a parallel consoling world. In this dreamed-up world, which, in reality, is a compensation, whatever is established as most difficult in everyday situations, becomes instantly available and taken for granted. Just as the poor country girls consoled themselves in their isolation with the impossible image of Prince Charming, who could only reach them in a dream-world; just as the prisoner in his sleep sees roads and tempests, and the poet sees crowns and love; in the same way the tired, hungry worker was wise in his ravings when he was travelling towards the Land of Cocaigne: at least there he found some rest, and his joy was the sweeter for being dreamed. He gave himself thus what he most cruelly lacked.²

The conception of a parallel world which is governed by unprecedented laws whose solutions are derived from a strange but nevertheless effective form of logic, is already a Utopia in itself. And the Land of Cocaigne is a scheme which provides solutions applicable to any men; it goes further than what is offered us by our law and customs, but its direction is still Utopian: it aims to give us a better life. Finally, it should be taken into account that Utopia is only concerned with Man's fate on Earth, and his material well-being, without considering his salvation, or offering him the hope or the illusion of metaphysical transcendence: and this is also what happens in the land of Cocaigne. The extravagant opulence of material life is the exclusive preoccupation there; and, in fact, one can hardly, if at all, speak of preoccupation as such, in an organisation where the satisfaction of needs is excessive, as the demand is plainly less than the aggression of the supply. It has been said, with reason, that this legend is the cavalier or libertine response to Christian asceticism. There, indeed, one may find not merely the only possible way

² On the myth of the Land of Plenty, see V. Rossi, *Il paese di Cuccagna nella letteratura italiana*, in the *Lettere di messer Andrea Calmo*, Turin 1888; Arturo Graf, *Il paese di Cuccagna e i Paradisi artificiali*, in *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del Medio Evo*, Turin 1892; Giuseppe Cocchiara, *Il paese di Cuccagna*, Turin 1956; F. and C. Sluys, *Le pays de Cocagne*, in "Problèmes," no. 77 (1961).

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of gorging oneself painlessly and for free, but also the only chance to commit the sin of greed without having to reproach oneself and do penance, since the whole thing happens in the imagination.

The parallel fiction, the preoccupation with Man's destiny, and the strictly materialistic solution are the three fundamental features shared by Utopia and the Land of Cocaigne. This has already been pointed out by many researchers; and yet the matter is not as simple as it appears at first sight. If one examines the parallel with more careful attention, one soon realises that the coincidences are quite superficial.

The parallelism exists, but it is related to facts which, as far as their credibility is concerned, are very different. Utopia is presented as a possibility which is parallel to historical realities; as an alternative which has not occurred, but which could quite easily have done so. The land of Cocaigne is only Utopian in appearance, for it presents the picture of an impossible country. Utopia is to a legend what a novel is to an epic poem. In order to remain what it is, Utopia has to imitate reality, and make use only of the virtuality contained by the circumstances: since it develops on the material level of our existence and does not await or hear any messages from above, it is committed to some degree of respect for matter, and cannot allow itself to go against physical laws without contradicting itself. This, on the contrary is precisely what characterises the Land of Cocaigne.

The latter's untrustworthiness does not spring from the fact that it places an excessive quantity of consumer goods at the individual's disposal, which far outweigh his needs and even his possibilities: this would not be a theoretical impossibility. But one should not forget that those goods respond spontaneously to needs without waiting for those needs to be expressed, and that they have also been produced by spontaneous generation, without any effort being required. There is aggression in the production and aggression in the offer against the consumer, and that is what is the real meaning of the tale. This contradicts the physical laws which we think we know; and by contradicting them, the author of the Land of Cocaigne renounced credibility and the claim to being interested in the future and well-being of men. The country is not an image of the future, it is contemplated without being expected, and its time is the time of illusion. This is a rule shared by all literary games; it does not nullify the

work's symbolic value, but, on the contrary, transforms it into a valid and real response in defiance to reality. Here the response is offered by the image of saturation and excess, with all their charms, but also with all their faults and inconveniences. The doctor of the Land of Cocaigne cures hunger by indigestion and nausea.

On the other hand, the crass enjoyment of materialism in the Land of Cocaigne must not be confused with that which reigns in Utopia. In the story, what first strikes one is the alimentary debauchery: the abbey with columns and cloisters made of candy; the streams of milk and honey; the roast geese which fly into the eater's mouth; the larks cooked with cloves and cinnamon, which were the *non plus ultra* of mediaeval greed, and according to Dante, the first fermentation of corruption; the suckling-pigs which ran in the streets with the knife already sticking in their backs (this shows lamentable negligence on the author's part, since this last image demands of the consumer that he cut a slice of ham for himself). This endless feasting, these orgies of the imagination, are a far cry from the monastic sobriety, which is both controlled and accepted, found in all Utopian countries. The image of two different countries can be distinguished there: one individual and debauched, the other collective and ascetic. On one hand the worker-bees, which harvest but do not profit by it, on the other, the bumble-bees which enjoy but never harvest.

This draws attention to another difference. Although superabundance is the most striking feature of the Land of Cocaigne its fundamental law is not the one which orders that the belly be filled, but the one which commands that this should be done without work. To fill one's belly is not an idle, impossible wish, it is an ideal which may be accessible to even the most poor. Roasted larks may surmount the barrier of dreams and become realities with the aid of a simple combination of circumstances; but there is no known system which lets us imagine a world where larks roast themselves of their own accord and convey themselves to the mouth.

In the whole story, this fantasy probably constitutes the most clearly anti-Christian material element. Religion and Christian morality allow enjoyment, but only as the reward for work. Since the day when our common ancestor was condemned to earn his

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bread by the sweat of his brow, and in spite of the redemption of lost humanity which has since happened through Christ's sacrifice, the consciousness of this necessary relationship has never abated. In the Land of Cocaigne, wantonness and abuse are the rule. The individual is there only to enjoy: everything is due to him, and he owes nothing to anyone. Moral responsibility, a sense of balance between what one gives and what one claims, are as non-existent there as the law of supply and demand, and the laws of production and distribution.

This interpretation of materialism knows no mental restrictions and transcends matter, transforming it into providence and tutelary divinity. This attitude does not coincide with Utopian morality. Certainly Utopia relies on the cooperation of a benevolent Nature too; but that benevolence is a sort of neutrality which facilitates and simplifies the Utopian project by eliminating surprises, but without resolving any of the problems. And Utopia is not a paradise for layabouts, but a hive. To elevate laziness swollen with greed, parasitism and uselessness to a social norm is an attitude totally opposed to the Utopian outlook, which claims to make use of all its citizens' energy at any price and in all circumstances.

The distance between the two countries is very wide, and the similarities should not deceive. The Land of Plenty is only Utopia in some of its coordinates; however, rather than a country without a place, it is Unomia, or the country without law. We cannot tell if education and culture, justice or industry may be found there; but these terms lose their significance in a land where the only problem is consumption. There can be no government either; and it is to be supposed that the uninterrupted carousal leaves neither time nor inclination for the fomenting of conflict, war, or love. The Land of Plenty is the world where law is useless, as is government and religion. The solution it offers the spirit is anarchic and destructive. This again places it as the antithesis of the Utopian workshop which is founded on the cohesion of parties and the logic of obligation.

All these discrepancies appear to be explained by the difference in cultural level. The myth of the Land of Cocaigne relies mostly upon Nature's magic powers, making all our hopes of happiness dependent upon it. Without the aid of Nature, which is identified with God, we can do nothing: therefore it would be useless to

undertake anything, since, if that is God's will, everything will come to us without effort. The country is one of Nature's gifts; and since, in the hypothesis of its possible realisation, we could not behave in any way except as consumers, that is to say, as passive subjects, we cannot find the means within ourselves of making it shift from the category of dreams to that of reality. It deprives the individual of all responsibility and initiative and deems the solution of his problems to be in the hands of the gods. Taken to the limit, and in spite of his materialistic veneer which hides the mythical structure, the citizen of the Land of Cocaigne is a quietist.

Utopia, in opposition to this attitude, transfers the need and responsibility for changing his world onto Man. The goodwill of the gods does not count. Man has to do everything, provide for everything, organise himself so that he cannot be surprised, nor the community to which he belongs. One might say that the gods are dead, for Man has only his own resources, and never appeals to them. Every Utopian legislator is a Crusoe, who has to create everything out of nothing and discover everything by himself. His only asset is that he can and should rely on collectivity more than on isolated individuals: as the problem is the same for all, the multiple effort of the group seems more likely to succeed.

From this arises the illusion that Utopia is more likely to be realised than any myth. It must be possible, as it depends on us alone: naturally Utopia seems more plausible than the wonderful tale of the Land of Cocaigne. The reverse side of the coin is that according to the Utopian formula, one must deal with men: and as it is not possible to deal with them by half-measures, they must be possessed entirely. An old and unfortunate tradition which has been disguised under different names at different times, has always led us to believe that it is possible to use men like numbers, and employ them as units in all calculations.

In fact, Utopia, no less than the Land of Cocaigne, is subject to ideas of magic, merely directing them differently. The belief is, indeed, a myth or an act of faith, which seems never to have been abandoned, that humanity is a cohesive whole, which is identical to itself in all its parts, and inclined to bend to forms, distributions, orientations, and the moulds which one is kind enough to suggest to it. This is what separates the two myths.

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Utopia becomes basically organising, since its function consists in achieving its own finality by its own methods. The myth of the Land of Cocaigne becomes dissolatory because it subjects everything to superior powers before which the individual finds himself alone, overpowered and defenceless.

This difference in level partly corresponds to two stages of thought and two different chronological periods. Despite its coarse materialism, the Land of Cocaigne represents an act of faith which replaces one god by another: it is not chance that this legend has its sources in the Middle Ages. On the other hand, Utopia is a desacralisation, an awakening of the realisation that Man must and can be self-sufficient, and that the gods have deserted him: so it is not simple coincidence that no literary Utopia before the Renaissance can be referred-to. Here one may see two successive phases of mythical thought. In the first, faith has become knowingly unfixed, and knows that the solution is no more than an evasion; but even in unfixing, it is only seeking God's most friendly face, the one which will allow of the most possible adaptations of his law. In the second, the Utopian keeps the rights of God in reserve, either because he no longer believes in them, or because he has decided that in his own house he ought to start by making order himself; but even in this attempt to protect human society from the influence of the gods, he does not manage to shake off the metaphysical ghosts and the cult of transcendental values. Logically, going from there, the Land of Cocaigne chooses the individualist solution, since Man is anyway not alone where God is present and society does not strengthen him. In an equally logical way, Utopia confines itself to collectivist solutions, since, from the moment when we do without God, we cannot do without our fellows on pain of being confronted with ourselves, with that horror of the *tête-à-tête* which Pascal has described so well.

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To the idea of a world without worry because without needs, and the nostalgia for the sweetness of living without opposition, the Middle Ages had added the dream of the happy island, which it had, in fact, inherited from antiquity. The Elysian Fields, the earthly paradise isolated in the middle of the

occidental ocean, existed in the ancient imagination like a geographical remnant of the Golden Age; it offered the same lures as the latter, although it was far distant and protected differently. It was the abode of the just, and as such, it was not easily accessible to mortals; but it was not a forbidden territory. It did exist somewhere on the map, which included more unknowns than frequented ports; and one might have the good fortune to find it, even though it had not yet revealed how it might be found. This was just what was needed to feed the dream.

The interior organisation of this island, the abode of souls in bliss, recalls the life of the primitive society of the Golden Age, placed in a frame which is vaguely similar to the Land of Cocaigne. Homer, and later, Horace, sing the praises of its agreeable climate, its abundant spontaneous harvests, the exquisite peace of its problem-free universe. Lucian exaggerates most; but he was already known to lack seriousness on occasion. His island enjoys scented air, meadows and groves full of singing birds. Old age is unknown there, everyone keeping the same age at which they arrived. The fruit of the vine ripens twelve times a year, and the orchards yield thirteen times, these latter making an extra effort for the month devoted to Minos, the great patron. The ears of corn do not bear grains, but baked loaves: and around the capital city run seven rivers of milk and eight of wine; if one adds to these the twelve yearly harvests, one will perceive that wine is a greater favourite. And it is strange that the writer put no houri in this paradise; but it should be remembered that this natural human need is not afforded as much consideration as hunger and thirst, and is much neglected by most Utopians.

Geographically, the Elysian Fields are confused with the Fortunate Isles, which are situated in the Occidental ocean beyond the coast of Spain. They have been identified with the Canary Islands, on which the ancients held a few rather imprecise notions. However, it is possible that they are part of a purely fantastic geography, with no more basis in reality than the terrifying presence of the sea of Darkness, the impenetrable ocean which gave rise to so many legends and was the lair of so many ghosts.

In fact, the Fortunate Isles have left a sort of spectral image

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in the collective imagination of the western world, which can be found in a host of traditions which are equally hard to place. It is a happy island which haunts the sailor's imagination. Apropos, the Inaccessible, that no ship can approach; or the Island of Avalon, of the Celtic legends, where it never snows or rains, and from which King Arthur came to England; or the Undiscovered Island which the Portuguese sailors sought in vain, and which was extolled and beloved of the melancholy Guido Gozzano; or Saint-Brendan's, that kind of fatamorgana which dazzled the gaze and the imagination of the Canary navigators so often; or the island of Brazil and of Antilles; or, further north, the Penguin Island, which arose from Anatole France's fantasy based on Saint Brendan. It is probably to the same nostalgic source that one may attribute Fenelon's image of Baetica which "seems to have preserved the delights of the Golden Age;" as with the seven islands of the Sun of which Diodorus of Sicily speaks, which are characterised by their sweet idyllic life, perfect peace, and by their sea of fresh water and their hot water springs.³

It is not only nowadays that there is talk of the nostalgia for islands: by definition, there is nothing more nostalgic. The very name evokes the idea of isolation, and hence the idea of escaping other people and discovering oneself. In the imagination the island takes the form of a point, and a point is easily conceived of as an aim; in the memory, it creates the illusion of being encompassable all at once, which creates a sort of image of fidelity. The life led there is thought to be more complete because the sea hides nothing and leads everywhere: Crusoe's exploits are not geographical, but a testing of the individual.

From this point of view, the idea of insularity is quite unsuitable for Utopia. But this has not prevented it from using islands regularly as the setting for the ideal republic, which would seem to assume a contradiction. The explanation is that the

³ Cf. Paul Gaffarel, *Les îles de l'Atlantide au moyen-âge*, in the *Bulletin de la Société géographique de Lyon*, IV (1833), p. 431-433; W. H. Babcock, *Legendary Islands of the Atlantic. A Study in Medieval Geography*, New York, 1922. For the relation of these myths to Utopia, see S. B. Liljegren, *Studies on the Origin and Early Tradition of English Utopian Fiction*, Uppsala 1961, p. 15-27; Mircea Eliade, *Paradis et utopie: géographie mythique et eschatologie*, in *Eranos Jahrbuch*, XXXII (1963), p. 211-34.

nostalgia for paradisiac islands does not draw upon the same values as those which recommend the Utopian island. We have already seen that the latter requires isolation and insulation, in order to be able to conduct experiments with all the sterilisation of a laboratory, shielded from the danger of contamination.

To Utopia, the island also represents another sort of temptation, in the extent to which it is a repetition of the literary theme of the Golden Age and of an eternally happy world. Finally, the island evokes the idea of travel, in a form which should strongly attract the Utopian's attention. He is bound by the nature of his work to describe a state of affairs in a static and horizontal way, which suppresses transition and depth. All descriptions of journeys are horizontal; but they include intermediary phases: an introductory phase, a successive setting of the scene and to a certain extent, a slow conditioning; while the sea voyage instantly places the Utopian in the presence of his object, which he seems to discover suddenly in all its dimensions, as if the latter had just risen from the waves. All islands give the impression of being there by chance; and on landing, one does not have the impression of discovering them, but of embracing and knowing them.

Finally, there is another reason which must have strongly interested Utopians in happy islands and the advantages they may offer their projects. At the time of the first Utopias the Utopian island was already more than a legend: it had become a geographical reality. By a unique quirk of history, what had previously existed entirely on the level of pure nostalgia became an object and example. There is no doubt that the geographical discoveries of the Renaissance had a determining influence on the formation of the Utopian literary genre; but it must be added that this influence has often been exaggerated or misinterpreted.

The idea of the New World supposes and implies that of the parallel world. Without mention of Christopher Columbus' successful Utopia, the reality of his discovery imposed upon minds a revision and a comparison of some principles after the event, which now relied upon evidence, and which had previously only been justified by the abstract entertainment of ideas about the Utopian method. Better still, the temptation to consider and

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compare was not practically presented, as the idea of relativism had not yet broken free from the idea of a hierarchy of values. An example will clarify this fundamental change in criteria and perspectives, introduced by the widening of geographical horizons. A thinker of the Middle Age had very clear and systematic ideas about such notions as nature or reason. But, setting apart the brave, muddled effort of an isolated precursor like Dante, a thinker of the period would not have been able to entertain the idea of the constitution of a state founded on reason alone, free of scruples of religious dogma and Christian morality, if not unsolicited and using deductive reasoning. There was no advantage in using it, for it would have led to results which were inconceivable for a Christian. There were no visible examples to excite his curiosity: the Moslem states were not based on reason, but on error and on religious principles which were reputed to be false, and what savages had been seen, rarely and in unusual cases, were not witnesses of a political standpoint.

The discovery of the American continent changed an idle, abstract and dangerous point of view in mediaeval thought, into a tangible reality which it was impossible to underestimate or disregard. And yet it was this last attitude that the first conquistadors had chosen for preference; for obvious reasons, they contrived to show that the Indians were sub-human creatures or beasts. This interpretation, which was not upheld by the evidence, and which attempted to make a covert justification of a series of economic and political interests which it was difficult to uphold openly, had aroused the indignation of several religious and political thinkers, almost unintentionally. These contemporaries of the first Utopians, of whom Bartolomeo de las Casas was the most distinguished, reestablished, by their stubbornness, at the end of a long battle, that the American savages should have their full human rights.

These savages were not rebels against God, like the Muslims; they merely were ignorant of God, and yet their society was a real one. The Indians from the Antilles, and those from Mexico and Peru, also provided thinkers with this possible parallel and the reference that no one had yet hoped for and which surreptitiously introduced doubts and the suspicion of relativity into reasoning. These savages represented Utopia in operation, since by their presence they invited the exploitation of possible laterals,

and they offered the results to immediate analysis, even before deductive reasoning could enter into play.⁴

As a result, in its beginnings, Utopian thought had an inverse procedure from its normal habits, and organised itself according to reality. Imagination, in its turn, needed this shock before it could begin to work: Utopia starts from a hypothesis, but it cannot start without a confrontation with the facts. Faced for the first time with a parallel situation, Renaissance Man submits it to the Utopian examination, and deduces the final results: there exists in the newly discovered Indies a society based on the only natural religion, which has remained at the primitive stage: let us imagine a society governed on the same principles, but having attained our stage of civilisation. As Diderot would have said, Is it good? Is it bad? It is the play of comparison which makes the workings of the first Utopians' thought. Far from claiming to give a new form to society, they first applied themselves to moulding their thought according to the new forms which had just been revealed to them.

This is so true, that this very evidence has led to the strangest exaggerations. For example, it has been claimed that the whole of More's Utopia was inspired by the socialist organisation of the Inca state. It cannot be denied that there are surprising analogies between this theory and practice; but the mere chronology of the discoveries is enough to destroy all presumptions to direct or indirect influence. As the same causes produce more or less the same effects, the results obtained by the Incas partly coincide with More's deductions about as much as a knight-errant resembles a samurai.

Nevertheless, America is the land-elect for Utopias, and its principal touchstone. The newness of its parallel world imposed

⁴ There is abundant historical and critical literature; here, as with all the points which follow, one must restrict oneself to the essential. On the role played by the discovery of America in the revision of values, and in the formation of Utopian thought in particular, cf. J. O. Hertzler, *The History of Utopian Thought*, London 1923; Edmundo O'Gorman, *Sobre la naturaleza bestial del indio americano*, in *Revista de la Facultad de filosofía y letras* (Mexico), 1941 p. 141-58 and 305-15; Lewis Hanke, *La lucha por la justicia en la conquista de América*, Buenos Aires 1949; Venancio Carro, *La teología y los teólogos-juristas españoles ante la conquista de América*, Salamanca 1951. On the myth of the noble savage, which derives from the same connections cf. R. Gonnard, *La légende du bon sauvage*, Paris 1948; Giuseppe Cocchiara, *Il mito del buon selvaggio*, Messina 1948.

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a severe review of generally accepted values. It not only led to the discovery of Utopia and the application of the Utopian method to social problems, but also to the practical application of that same Utopia, and its transformation into a plan of action.

In fact, Utopia suggests new structures to the imagination, which assume a radical change in our customs and institutions. When one considers it, as has been done often, from the point of view of its practical chances of being realised, one comes up against great difficulties if one tries to apply it to groups of a traditional kind, as so much has to be destroyed before one can start to rebuild. From the conquering Europeans' point of view, helped by their cultural impermeability, the Indies offered themselves as lands without a past, and, better still, as a world to be created, and a future society. Just as a Utopian thought discovered America, it was America which discovered Utopia, and it was also America which most often placed it in the testing-ground.

Las Casas' collaborationist experiment, which started from the hypothesis that good intentions and evangelical preaching were enough to assure the conquistadors of a welcome from the natives, was already a kind of Utopia, which led to its well-known failure. Vasco de Quiroga, the bishop of Michoacan in Mexico, and his purely Utopian foundation, in 1535, of hostels organised according to a programme directly inspired by Thomas More, was the first to apply literary Utopia to reality, and this continued for two centuries. The Jesuit missions in Paraguay, which are the first attempt on a large scale at a collectivised and planned, both paternalist and communal society, yielded lasting results, so that the regions which were under Jesuit rule are today the only American zone where the indigenous population still makes a national majority. And it is also significant to note that most Utopias transported to the testing-ground, and of which Cabet's Icaria is the best known, chose American soil as the place for their experiments out of preference.⁵

⁵ On Las Casa's attempt, cf. M. Gimenez Fernandez, *Bartolomé de las Casas*, vol. 11, Seville 1960, p. 1137-73, and M. Bataillon, *Études sur Bartholomé de las Casas*, Paris 1965, p. 51-84, and 115-36. On Vasco de Quiroga, cf. Silvio A Zavala, *La "Utopia" de Tomas More in La Nueva España y otros estudios*, Mexico 1937 and A. Reyes, *Utopias americanas*, in *Obras*, vol. XI, Mexico 1960, p. 95-102. On Cabet, cf. below, ch. VI. On the Utopian colonies and establishments in North America, Vernon L. Perrington, *American Dreams, a study on*

Thanks to these repeated experiments, of which some have lasted centuries, the Utopian workshop in America has served more than any other to determine the vitality and profitableness of Utopia. The Mexican experiment may be considered as a success; but the limits of this success are also evident. It is a matter of a benevolent institution where subsistence is ensured by the foundation, and where Utopia is, more than anything else, a way of life.

The example of the Jesuit conquest of Paraguay is much more suspect. It fired progressive opinion in the XVIIIth century, which was not exactly friendly towards the Jesuits; and it is still often considered as a successful and durable communist experiment. The experiment certainly succeeded. Under the Jesuit administration, the Guarani survived, and this is already a considerable achievement, but their material and social living conditions always remained very low. A complete and carefully supervised plan provided for all their material needs; but at the beginning of the XIXth century, fifty years after the expulsion of the Jesuits, there was almost no Guarani who knew how to read or write, and they were also ignorant of Spanish. As for their communism, it has been proved that any analogy with our modern ideas must be excluded, as the Guarani traditionally attach no importance to ownership of land, and avoid working it as much as possible: the Jesuits' chief, and rather useless, concern was precisely to inculcate them with a notion of property, in order to establish them, and induce them to work.⁶ Thus, Utopia proved, at the

American Utopias, Brown University (Providence) 1947; Mark Holloway, *Heavens on Earth, Utopian Communities, 1680-1880*, New York 1951; D. D. Egbert and Stow Persons, *Socialism and American Life*, Princeton, 1952; Robert W. Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies*, San Marino (Cal.) 1953. Similar experiments have been made in England, cf. W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below. Utopian Experiments in England, 1560-1960*, London 1961.

⁶ This is the thesis which Alberto Armani develops in *Sull'origine e sviluppo dell'ordine politico e sociale nelle riduzioni del Paraguay*, from *Archivum historicum Societatis Jesu*, (XXIV) 1955, p. 379-401, and generally recognised by the Jesuits themselves. It has been claimed (Eberhard Gothein, *Lo Stato cristiano-sociale dei gesuiti nel Paraguay*, Venice 1928, p. 217), that the Jesuits aimed to found a Christian and communist republic like Campanella's: but it has not been established that Campanella had that intention, and anyway, the *City of the Sun* was published in 1623, and the first copy is dated 1609. Cf. also Pablo Hernandez, *Organización social de las doctrinas guaraníes*, Barcelona 1913, 2 vol. L. Baudin, *Une théocratie socialiste. L'état Jésuite de Paraguay*, Paris 1962; Robert Lacombe, *Statut politique et droit de propriété dans les réductions de Paraguay*, in *Revue d'Histoire économique*, XL (1962) p. 289-97;

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most, that it could be realised and maintained in a phase of subsistence economy. This proof was probably not necessary: on one hand, many primitive societies maintained themselves in this way, and on the other hand, we know only too well that any regime can keep itself going.

As for the Utopias realised in the XIXth century, they all failed rather disastrously, at the end of an existence of varied length. And yet the style of life which they proposed was probably capable of assuring everyone of his work and his bread. Everything would perhaps have gone well, if it could have ended there. But the other deep aspirations of the individual, his personal affirmation, his definition by otherness and negation, his liberty, his communication, the desire to know, to love, follow fatally after the satisfaction of basic needs, and act as dissolvers of Utopia and maybe also of any society. This is not a recent discovery: Plato already knew it 2400 years ago. This being known, the American Utopians made a grave mistake in not making sure, as all goods Utopians do, that their establishment was watertight. As osmosis and the temptations of the outside world have free play, one may understand that societies devoted to fixity, and monotonous happiness, would welcome the arrival of any contamination.

* * *

As for Plato, he saw rather than predicted. From the Utopian point of view, he is definitely an ancestor and precursor. It is agreed that all Utopians owe more to him than to any other thinker who came before them, and he has even been honoured by the distinction of being considered the first Utopian. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that all political thought followed the lines he had suggested after Socrates, and that his influence on the Utopian idea is only one aspect of his political thought.

In fact, it is easy to confuse matters by talking of Plato. Utopians refer to his work in two very different ways, which

Maxime Haubert, *La vie quotidienne au Paraguay sous les jésuites*, Paris 1967
On the Guaranis' illiteracy, see Marcos Morinigo, *Para la historia del español en la Argentina*, in *Actas de la Quinta Asamblea interuniversitaria de Filología y Literatura hispánicas*, Buenos Aires 1968, p. 197-204.

need to be analysed separately. There are Utopian traits, or traits which are considered as such, in the myth of Atlantis which he very probably created, and there are also traits in his abstract and ideal Republic. The two images are not identical.

Atlantis and its lost continent, according to the picture painted by Plato, present Utopian aspects and appearances which might be described as surprising. To Plato, whatever the partisans of a submerged continent may think, it seems likely that he saw only a literary creation in it. The first proof may be found in the fact that he made no effort to give the legend an air of authenticity. He supposes that Atlantis was at war with Athens, nine thousand years before his own time: and it is doubtful, considering the cycle of legends about the foundation of Athens, with which he must have been acquainted, that the philosopher could have attributed such a great age to his own city. Be this as it may, the description of Atlantis, sketched in *Timaeus* and completed in detail in *Critias*, is not introduced by chance, but because it is part of a whole system by which Plato explains his ideas on the State. The image of Athens and Atlantis makes a pair of examples which act as illustrations of abstract speculations on the nature and origin of the ideal state as they are set down in the *Republic* and the *Laws*.

This continent's topography is purely Utopian, in the sense that it is roughly what is found in everything that follows. Symmetry, distance and isolation characterise it. It is a big island surrounded by five circular enclosures, with hot and cold water springs, big cities, enormous temples, and palaces of orichalque. Ten kings assured good government, guided by just laws that Poseidon himself had ordained and laid down. It was the most populous, rich, and powerful society in the whole world, and all its inhabitants were happy. But the kings ended by becoming unjust, and the gods decreed that they should be punished, so the entire continent was engulfed in the ocean.

This is the myth, reduced to its essentials. A more detailed analysis could show many aspects which seem to derive from specifically Utopian ideas. But it would perhaps be worthless to carry the research any further, since the fundamental traits are enough to create the image of this imaginary state. It cannot be confused with Utopia, as defined by us, even if it was through it that almost all histories of Utopia began.

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For Atlantis was created by the gods, not by men; the justice which holds sway there, and about which Plato gives only inadequate information, is the work of a divine being. This is a clear indication that it is not given to mankind to find the fairest laws by their own means, and that the republic needed a revelation from on high. It is true that the organisation of Atlantis did ensure its citizens' prosperity and happiness; but when it is left in men's hands, it is subjected to the fatal corruption to which Plato condemned all republics, and disappears through its own fault;⁷ this would be inconceivable in a Utopia. By the fact of its divine origins, Atlantis leaves no room for hope; because of its fall, it does not present the image of an ideal city; it does not imply a criticism of an existing order; so that it contradicts the definition of Utopia.

In fact, it is yet another Fortunate Isle. What features it has in common with Utopia cannot be explained by similar intentions, but by common nostalgias. Nevertheless, Plato created a myth in Atlantis which has long haunted and disturbed our minds and, indeed, continues to haunt them. It offered the setting and, as it were, the body of Utopia in its description of the imaginary island. But the spirit of Utopia is not to be found there. It is not because Plato did not know it, for it is the same spirit to which we owe the *Republic*.

This dialogue is in contrast to the description of Atlantis in that it seems to have nothing to do with Utopia. It is a Socratic conversation; in conversation with his surrounding friends, Socrates develops his ideas about society according to his flexible

⁷ Perhaps that is where one must seek the explanation of the 9000 years which Plato puts between his own time and the disappearance of Atlantis. According to his account, Athens, at that distant time, was at the height of its prosperity and good fortune. Since, according to Plato's own calculations (in the *Republic*) the Great Year lasts 36000 years in succession, and at the end of that cycle everything starts anew, this means that a quarter of the cycle had passed since the catastrophe of Atlantis. Anyway we know that the Platonic doctrine foresees a fatal predestined outcome to all republics, according to a cycle which passes through the four possible political regimes and slowly makes its way towards final decomposition. Combining the donnes of this double argument, one thus finds that Athens was at its apogee 9000 years before Plato. So the Athenian republic found itself in mid-course. The second period had just ended, and the third, which was to take 9000 years, must have ended in Plato's time. This is a way of saying that the city of Athens had already begun its fourth and last historic phase, which is the declining phase.

and dialectic method. To get a good grasp of these political ideas as a whole, which we will never be able to attribute accurately to Plato or to Socrates, a study of the dialogue needs to be completed by a study of the *Laws*: although the former is sufficient from the particular point of view which concerns us, and which allows us to make a very quick examination of its doctrine.

As in all Plato's other dialogues, it must be taken into account that what is said is filled out and varied by the general assumptions of the author's philosophy, such as it appears in other works. In the terms of literary comparison, the Athenian philosopher's work as a whole is an epic novel: one can read one book and be satisfied, but the outcome of everything which goes on and its implications cannot be understood without taking the other parts of the whole into consideration. Starting with this point of view, one may say that Plato's dialogues are integrated in a system which postulates the unity and harmony of a pyramidal universe as an axiom. At the summit of the pyramid, is the idea of Good. If it is at the very top, this is not only because the elevated position is its due, but it is also in particular because Good is not a static concept, but an active and dynamic idea whose action engenders and projects all the rest of the pyramid. The supreme idea is reflected in the world of general ideas, like the virtues; they are realised in the world of groups, such as society or the city, and this last world is reflected in its turn in individuals. Symmetrical projection and harmony is all; and this musical overlapping of parts, which may be inspired by Pythagoras, means that in studying any level of the pyramid, one is at the same time recognising and analysing all the other levels. These subtle connections and the constant interpenetration of levels must be taken into account in order to follow the rather oblique course of the dialogue.

The group of friends begin their conversation by defining justice. One speaker quotes Simonides' definition: "To attribute what one owes to each man;" and Socrates sets himself to show how empty this formula is, not without a little rather comical bad temper. When provoked to offer his own opinion in turn, he suggests that the conversation should be taken a stage higher, to the analysis of justice, not as it ought to be understood between individuals, but in society, since larger groups facilitate detailed examination. Thus Socrates developed a whole logical

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system on the lines which a republic follows after its first beginnings. This analysis does not start from concrete examples taken from historic reality: it uses only syllogisms or deductions. It goes from the first organisations of primitive society, made up of four or five people united by the same interests, to arrive gradually at the establishment of a genuine republic, through the birth of new needs and new diversifications. This follows the universal law of decadence and goes inevitably through four phases which complete the cycle: timocracy, or government founded on honour, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny. These phases are reflected on the individual level by the development of four different characters in the subjects of the republic, and by the play of relations which make it all hold together.

Thus the ideal republic or pure state, is placed right at the beginning of the cycle, before timocracy, which is already a primary stage of decadence. This republic *ought* to be: but Plato sees it not as a phase, equivalent to the four already mentioned, but as a quintessence of principles governing the world, which however one does not hope to see integrally realised.

This republic counts on a reduced and severely limited population: in the *Laws* it is laid down that there should be no more than 5,040 citizens. It is composed of three social classes: the magistrates, the soldiers and the artisans, as well as a priestly caste which enjoys a different regime. The two first classes live under a system of commonwealth, which ought to obviate the temptations of private interest; while the artisans' life is organised by an authoritarian system. Common life presumes fairly ascetic conditions, as is the rule in Utopias in general. A great importance is given to education; justice is strong and stern, religion is obligatory. Wealth and poverty are equally banned, as is the taste for novelty.

Communism applies to women too: they are part of the community; the author's own explanation of this is the necessity of transforming social solidarity into family feeling, and the brotherhood of citizens into a biological probability. Women are equal to men. This tends to make one think that their opinion was solicited, and that they agreed to conditions made for them. On the other hand, as the republic cannot allow itself the luxury of supporting useless elements, ill people and children who are born deformed must be exterminated. The other children are

taken away from their mothers and brought up at the community's expense. And eugenics must co-operate with the aims of the state: despite the existing liberty in sexual relations, the magistrates would take care to encourage the pairing off of the youngest and most vital elements, as is done with dogs or horses, by means of pious lies.

It is pointless to discuss all these instructions in real terms, as they are only what we would call working hypotheses. To understand Plato's intentions properly, one must remember the layout of his dialogue, and go over the ground again backwards. He is looking for the definition of virtue; to be surer of finding it, he looks not in the individual but in the state; and to be sure of finding it pure, he needs an ideal state; for the state to be ideal, he does not need to take into account what actually happens, but rather to purify himself to the utmost, without reference to contingencies. This state is not a model, but a spiritual survey.

And the fact is that if those results are achieved even once the republic is completely and irreproachably organised according to logic, then the philosopher finally discovers justice: It is the power thanks to which one preserves one's own limits, or, in other words, a synthesis of the three cardinal virtues, prudence, courage, and temperance. In the republic, it is justice which makes the summit of the pyramid, as had been foreseen from the beginning; but the definition of that summit was made possible by defining the base, justice being the cement or the sum of the cements which preserve the republic's unity and cohesion. As the whole thing was deduced from parts, and these from the syllogism, it is easy to see that the justice itself is also nothing but a spiritual survey. The republic was set up according to the Utopian method, and the rules of deduction lead the thinker to a definition which lays itself open to several criticisms if one considers the norms of behaviour which this conception of justice engenders in an objective way. It may also be observed that this same justice results from a series of deductions where sophistry plays an important part, since for example, the starting-point is the ill-established idea that justice's aim is to ensure the unity and harmony of the whole.

In all this, the individual only exists because there is such need of him. One of Socrates' interlocutors certainly poses him

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the problems of individual happiness: how can the soldiers be happy if they have nothing? The philosopher pondered on this and the result of his thought, once again, bore a strange resemblance to the abstract and general conclusions of Utopia. It would be a surprise to think that the warriors of such a republic could be happy; but anyway, why should they be. In creating a state, Socrates replies, we did not aim at creating the happiness of a certain class of citizens, but of the whole state: to think of such a solution as the first, would be to set up the reign of injustice. What obliges him to make this choice is not a concern for distributive justice, but for the efficacy of the republic as perfect institution. A happy warrior would be a warrior no longer. Since everything happens in the mind, and imagination can allow itself all luxuries, "we would be able to dress our labourers in long robes, encrust their clothes with gold, and make them work the earth for the fun of it," but they would no longer be labourers.

It seems that individual happiness is not sympathetic to the republic. It certainly is not in reality. If Socrates does not think of it, it is because one does not encumber oneself with particular considerations when one is concentrating on the perfection of the whole. However, there still remains the system of correspondences and projections which can, in fact, still save everyone's happiness. If justice becomes real, this is because virtue reigns in the republic; and the virtue of the whole being the virtue of each of its parts the citizen will be virtuous, hence, happy.

Be this as it may, and whatever one may think of the fairness of these ideas, this demonstration is striking in its harmonious development, and by the force of its deductions. The philosopher constructs a theoretical society from top to bottom, though he evidently does not believe in it as a formula which is practical in reality. Anyway, the question is not put like that: the city is only presented to the senses in one of its four corrupt forms which we have already mentioned. In the ideal city, everything is conceived so that justice may reign, and so that no opening be left for injustice. But this last is at least as active a ferment as virtue, and the philosopher is well aware of this. So he is not recommending, for example, that malformed or unsound children be exterminated: what he is doing is to draw attention to the fact that the conservation of malformed children is the seed of

inequality, and therefore, of future injustice. There are complaints of the lack of liberty in the ideal republic: one may yet find it in a democracy, but in an impure form, since liberty (just) is confused with licence (unjust). One might say as much for all the other details of organisation which attract attention because of their harshness or their anti-individual character.

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Nevertheless, this construction in the air lays itself open to discussion. In the long run, it comes back to saying that the ideal is not ideal, and that we can but congratulate ourselves every time the practice does not tally with the theory. To be more precise, the terms of the discussion would have to be modified. In reality, Plato has not described the absolute city, which applies the principles of justice in a total or irreproachably logical way. And we know, at least since Cicero, that total justice is total injustice. Plato himself probably felt it, since one of the speakers, Glaucon, reproaches Socrates with having conceived of a republic which is good enough for pigs. Antiquity certainly amused itself at the philosopher's expense: Aristophanes made fun of his sharing of women and Lucian was amused by the idea that Plato was luckily the only inhabitant of his republic. Aristotle, who also wrote a *Politics*, makes more than one criticism of his master's system.⁸

These criticisms are a great embarrassment to the upholders of Platonism, who end by saying that the Stagyrans philosopher had not fully understood his master's doctrine: as if we were in a better position than he for judging Plato's intentions. In fact we start from a different position, which must lead to different conclusions. Plato creates a Utopian state, based exclusively on

⁸ Aristophanes, *Ecclesiasousai*; Lucian, *True History*, 115. Aristotle's critique in the *Politics*, concerns the kinds of government which Plato had predicted (1,2); the criticism of the commonwealth of goods is not explicit, but is found implied in the eulogy on property (1, 11, 4); A criticism of female communities (1,1,3 and 11,1,15); on the absence of love and concern (1,1,17); the consignment of children to different classes according to their individual capacities (1,11,18); the constitution of a social magistrates class (11,11,15). For his own definition of justice, see Aristotle, *Politics*, 111, VII, 1. The Platonic thesis on female communities seems to have been refuted since antiquity by Epiphane and Carpocrates, in two lost works.

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the idea of justice, and does nothing but examine this basic idea and all its results and implications; while Aristotle suggests a eudaemonic explanation of the state according to its historic constitution, and therefore sees material and affective values, which are without interest from Plato's purely logical point of view, with greater clarity. It is true that Aristotle also thought of justice as being the prime mover of a republic; but he defines this justice in a very different way, as "general utility." This is enough to show the distance which must naturally separate the two thinkers.

The moderns have not always spared Plato. Erasmus seems to congratulate himself, like Lucian, whom he knew so well, that no republic has ever been tempted by the Platonic system; and in our time Bertrand Russell was very hard with him.⁹ Most often, these criticisms do not take into account that Plato's intentions were not so much to create a plan of government as to make a *reductio ad absurdum*. The perspective from which one views it is the only thing which allows one to judge if it is a matter of the will to change history, by virtue of ideas, or a logical attempt to interpret reality in the light of a scale of transcendental values, or a brilliant firework display of deductive logic; but to see only monstrosities in it is to take Plato for a Marquis de Sade before the fact, and assume that he intended to make us disgusted with virtue.

⁹ Erasmus, *In Praise of Folly*, XXVII; B. Russell, *Philosophy and Politics*: That Plato's Republic has been admired as a political work by honest folk, is perhaps the most surprising example of snobbery which history can offer us. Let us examine a few of the features of this totalitarian essay. The principal object of education, to which everything is subordinate, is courage in battle. To achieve this, a rigid censorship of stories told to children by their mothers and nurses must be set up; Homer must not be read to them, as this degenerate rhymers makes heroes weep and gods laugh; the theatre is forbidden because villains and women appear in it; music should be of a certain type which corresponds to what would now be *Rule Britannia* or *The British Grenadiers*. Government is in the hand of a little oligarchy which employs lying and subterfuge: subterfuge to manipulate the drawing of lots according to a eugenic plan; and lying to convince the population that class-differences correspond to biological differences. Finally, infanticide should be practised on a large scale for those children who are not the product of government manoeuvres. Whether the people in this community are happy or not is of no importance, according to what we are told, since excellence is to be sought in the whole and not in the parts." I have reproduced this long passage, not only for its criticism, but also because it completes the list of reproaches usually levelled at Plato's ideal state.

And it is also easy and common to berate Plato by putting his doctrinaire attitude, which is applied to everything and which claims to account for the smallest details, in relation to his resounding double failure in Sicily. In that case, all Utopias should be rejected, for Thomas More was chancellor of Engrand and had his head cut off, Tommaso Campanella passed half his life in prison, afflicted with an itch to reform which went almost as far as madness, and Bacon, chancellor like More, failed gravely and in the most lamentable conditions. At the most, this proves that Plato's principle, according to which the ideal republic should be governed by philosopher-leaders, has no chance of being correctly applied directly. Erasmus had already seen what a mere glance at history will confirm, that the worst rulers are those who have a philosophic bent.¹⁰

And yet Plato's influence was not lessened by this. His idealism recommended him to Christian thinkers: already Clement of Alexandria contrived to interpret his republic with a rather suspicious goodwill.¹¹ Saint Augustine is really a sort of Christian heir to Plato, as, like him, he sees above the real republic a city of souls and of God which creates an ideal state, of which the other is nothing but a corrupt expression. Anyway, so as to avoid going over the entire history of western Platonism, it is enough to say that among the modern specialists on Plato, Koyre admires the "extraordinary modernness" of his political thought: this is a compliment to the Athenian philosopher, but could also be interpreted as a witticism at the expense of modern thinking, which has made so little progress in the field of politics. Cassirer, for his part, points out with equal surprise that Plato, with his eminently mythic spirit, expresses himself "in a very different way when he is developing political theories:" this is not quite certain, as there are few myths with consequences as grave as

¹⁰ Erasmus, *In Praise of Folly*, XXIV. Diderot was perhaps recalling Erasmus' comment when he wrote on Grimm's *Correspondance*: "Are these philosophers politicians? It is sometimes said that a Christian people, as they should be according to the spirit of the Gospels, could not survive. This would be much truer of a philosophic people, if it were possible to create one."

¹¹ Clement of Alexandria thinks that Plato and Saint Augustine are not incompatible; that the former was inspired by Moses; that the idea of a philosopher-king coincides with Christian attitudes, since the politician and the Christian live in contemplation (*Stromata*, 1,25); and that female community should only be entertained for young women as a possible pre-nuptial experiment. (*Stromata*, 111,2).

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that of the just state, or of the world made of harmony and unity. And this without counting that everything is myth in Plato's political thought: that at the founding of Athens, just as at that of Atlantis, it was the gods who presided and laid down the laws; and that the division of the earth among the protective gods was supervised by Dike, the goddess of justice; and that in general Plato's thought could not do without its mythic and metaphysical sources.¹²

It is not a matter of reproaching him, but of clarifying the grounds on which his political system is developed, before examining the advantages of the system from the Utopian point of view and the kind of temptation which Platonism may have represented to the latter. This temptation is relevant on two counts: on one hand the strictly Utopian, on the other, the generally political.

Considered from the Utopian angle, *The Republic* is a particularly brilliant example of dialectic application of the Utopian method. The scheme of thought which gives the state its form, and the procedure which consists in making institutions and laws, derive necessarily from coherent principles; all this has schooled Utopian writers well, and has taught them the formulae for republic and government which are considered good. And even though there are researchers who continue to think of Plato's dialogue as one of the literary Utopias, it is not possible to apply our terms of definition to it.

The Republic is a Utopian work, but it is not a Utopia: we have already insisted on the difference between these two ideas. In relation to literary Utopias, it is in the same position as the works of Hobbes, Fourier or Marx. And Plato's dialogue is not a description but a theoretical and deductive exposé. His republic is not an individualised example, but an abstract paradigm; it may be a model, but it is an inaccessible one. And anyway it belongs to a universe of concepts which is different from that of Utopia: it is subject to cyclic laws which ordain that everything, first of all perfection, should run inevitably towards ruin and decomposition. So it is appropriate to consider Plato not as a representative of Utopia, or as its precursor, but as the author

¹² A. Koyré, *Discovering Plato*, New York 1945; E. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven 1946.

who taught all Utopians the art, or if you will, the method of political thought. Plato is a master of thought rather than a model builder.

And he is also this from the point of view of the principles which are the basis of his political system. Rightly or wrongly, Utopians have thought to find a particularly substantial food there. A simple exposé of the fundamental traits of the Platonic republic is enough to show that it presents a large number of similarities with the constitution of most Utopian states. A list of all the common characteristics would be too long to set up, and anyway their meaning is not always clear. It is often difficult to take direct influence into account, and to separate it from independent syllogistic deduction which is parallel, and coincides more or less spontaneously because it starts from the same hypotheses. Thus, for example, we have seen that Plato claims to inculcate his citizens with the idea that differences in social class are justified by biological difference, practically by more or less precious metals which go to the making of their bodies. This idea resembles the one developed ingeniously by Huxley in *Brave New World*. It would however be difficult to claim that Huxley took his idea from Plato, as that peculiarity of his Utopian country can be adequately explained as being a logical result of the possibility of intervention in the biological development of the race.

Thus coincidental details are not always significant; but the total conception of the state always is. In all Utopias, the pattern of the republic follows a Platonic model quite transparently. The great principles which inspire them may all be referred back to this single source. They are principally: the idea that politics is a branch of morals and philosophy; the function assigned to the state, to watch over the administration and security of justice; the delegation of this responsibility to a philosopher-king, supported by a superior and ascetic caste of guardians of the law; and, as all this implies the idea of a new man, the importance given to eugenics, and the education in selection and formation of future citizens.

This sketch may not include all Plato's political thought; but it is about all the Utopians saw in it, from the point of view of great principles. One finds the same basic ideas in almost all literary Utopias, variously altered, corrected, or amplified. In fact,

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they are also to be found in the political life of almost all the nations of the modern period, even in cases where the actual politics are not brave enough to affirm them so clearly.

In politics, we are still living the great principles first affirmed by Plato. As Cassirer says, "Plato was the first to introduce a theory of the state, not as an understanding of multiple and different facts, but as a coherent system of thought;" and according to the same author, "The Platonic theory of the legal state is part of humanity's indestructible heritage," there is no clearer way of saying that our political life is as it was more than two thousand years ago: if not in the same form, at least with the same justifications.

More precisely, we continue to live now, as far as political ideas are concerned, as poetry existed in the XVIIth century, at the time when they still believed in the value and existence of rules of poetry. By integrating politics with philosophy and morals, Plato gives it a transcendence, and imposes duties and justifications on it which we no longer dispute. So politics could not be what it is if we cut off half of it. We always agree that justice is the aim of the state, but we no longer believe in the immanence of justice, nor in all its different harmonious levels. We have preserved the aims of the republic, but we have denied its teleology and transcendence. We do our best to maintain an old metaphysical edifice which is in danger of ruin by applying new coats of ideological plaster, and at the same time by doing away with all irrational residues, turning politics into a Penelope's tapestry and decking ourselves in it like the emperor in Andersen's story with his nonexistent coat. It is not even a matter of proving Plato right or wrong, since anyway we only maintain him by demolishing him, and we only suppress his legacy by reinforcing it. This heritage is weighty and all reproaches which can be made to it can at the same time be levelled at Utopia in exactly the same terms, as it is superfluous in exactly the same way.

Plato founds his republic on justice, and the Utopians repeat this postulate, as do all contemporary politics. It would have been very well if Plato had known how to define justice: for if one places a stone at the base of an edifice, one assumes that it is a stone. But one has only to read *Menon* and *Protagoras* to realise that Socrates does not know what justice is, nor virtue

in general. It is true that he gives a definition of it in the *Republic*; but it is a mainly sophistic definition, since it is not a foundation-stone, but a keystone, a final deduction after several hundreds of successive deductions. Thus Socrates does exactly what he accuses Menon of doing: he puts the cart before the oxen and studies the properties of something of whose nature he is ignorant.

Even if we do wish to admit that this twisted reasoning leads him to the discovery of truth and that justice is what he makes of it, the conclusion must still be that justice and virtue are not of this world, since they only work fully in the absolute republic, and only under those conditions, whether superhuman or subhuman, that Plato's scheme proposes. This makes justice into a relative function, which opens the door to all interpretations and to all abuses. Justice was a thing which was definite to Plato; but already Aristotle, who was his disciple, sees it as something appreciably different: it is not surprising that more or less philosophic kings who followed his advice should each have interpreted him in their own way, and have made justice the measure of their needs and interests. Thanks to this relativity introduced into immanence, politics has become a sort of casuistry which justifies everything according to a general policy. The justice which engendered the republic ends by being engendered by it. On the arrival of the first tyrant, the first person in power is authorised, tacitly and implicitly, under the pretext of the public weal, to create new truths which will necessitate new justices.

Again, Plato's system justifies and legalises class differences, which is inevitable, considering his chronological and cultural level, so that it would be unfair to reproach him with it. However, he instituted among the classes that one should be a caste of guardians of the law. This, in fact, existed in many countries, but he was the first to justify it. The existence of this superior and as it were specialised class indicates that political activity does not befit all citizens, but is a privilege reserved for elites. And this is certainly what Plato thinks, since, to him, democracy is the penultimate phase of decay. This view finally sets up the politician as a hero of the republic. Politics may not be a class privilege, but political activity continues to confer class-superiority upon whoever exercises it, and also mythical

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powers or, as we say, with eloquent symbolism, "power." It is true that Plato made the exercise of power exclusive to ascetics and saints; but it was he who set them up as a class, and isolated them from other citizens, and entrusted the care of the Republic exclusively to them, as one entrusts a nurse with the care of a child. He had not foreseen that, with the help of decay, the philosopher-king would become a nurse, that the republic would in truth be treated like a child, and that, etymologically, an infant is one who does not speak.

Besides, the Platonic conception reviews the social whole, without consideration for the individual. We now know that his thought includes an ideological hinterland, thanks to which the individual is not quite absent from his calculations; but finally it is he who associates the idea of individual happiness with that of corruption and injustice. The citizen is not an individual: he is part of the homogeneous mass which the state may and should manipulate to make it correspond to its needs. It is not the republic which bends to the needs of people, it is the individual who bends beneath the republic. This is a particularly unfortunate idea which, more unfortunately still, has flourished. Utopias and Utopian thought in general have probably helped a lot; but it is Plato who remains the first culprit. At least he acted in the name of a transcendent idea, which saves his thinking if not the human subject of which he speaks. This has given rise to the habit of thinking of men as numbers and functions, on one hand, and on the other, the hatred of transcendent ideas which authorise this abuse with such ease.

Finally, Plato's thought underlines the fact that politics is something impure which aims hopelessly towards purity: this is enough to authorise the frustration of the pure and to confer a certain standing to the impure. Evil means and evil results no longer go with an evil conscience, because of the fatality which is betrayed by the acceptance of a halting and imperfect state of law. As, on the other hand, politics remains impure, people have had no qualms about incorporating impure alloys, and gathering inspiration from sources which in general have nothing to do with politics, nor justice, nor the fate of humanity. Even in Plato himself one can tell how much his Republic is an aesthete's dream, a sort of symphony which has been orchestrated according to such aesthetic scruples that their realisation

causes him a shiver of artistic delight. Other thinkers had recourse to astrology, music, mathematics and particularly geometry.

It may be that we owe the fate of Utopia in politics to the vocation of impurity. As Utopia has been reduced to finding its welfare where it can, it has not cavilled at looking to literature for inspiration, as it had previously looked to religion, philosophy and morals. From this point of view, it was another step along the road to secularisation: but only one step. Politics has probably passed the religious phase now, but it is not yet out of the literary rut. We may congratulate ourselves on this as lovers of belles-lettres, if not as citizens.