

# The Mundialization of Home: Towards an Ethics of the Great Society

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As the title of this paper might suggest, I am going to argue that utopic projects are endemic to the essence of humanity. I will first delineate the ways in which human beings collectively and individually are directed toward utopia through their constant interaction with their own changing lifeworlds and the lifeworlds of others. I will be most particularly concerned with the way in which ideas from alien or strange communities become transformed as they intertwine with the schemata of a 'home' community or, to state this another way, I will examine a process I have come to call mundialization, by which ideas, customs and even attitudes are transformed as they make connections with other cultures. In this light, I will examine Paul Ricœur's insightful hermeneutical exploration of ideology and utopia and their changing phenomenological landscapes. Lastly, I will identify certain concepts which, though only sporadically developed through the ages, are now, in this age of accelerated globalization and mundialization, making their way into a transformative, utopic realm.

## Utopia as endemic to humanity

'We are such stuff as dreams are made on', said the Great Bard, Shakespeare. By 'we' he meant humanity. Not only are we the very foundation of our dreams, we are also the architects and the builders of those dreams. When Prospero, the protagonist of Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*, utters the words above, he is also preparing to give up his magic utopia-building powers and we, the audience, are forced to assume what we already surely know: that if we, as human beings, by our very nature are the foundation and architects of our dreams, we individually and/or collectively are also their destroyers. And, while Prospero does not specify whether or not the dreams he alludes to are horrific or idealistic, in the play they are both; and alas, to modern readers, even the most noble of the play's dreams are tainted with ignobility. This too, of course, is as it should be, if dreams are built upon and fashioned by the

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conflicted 'stuff' of humanity, such as greed and generosity, revenge and forgiveness. Yet despite being tainted by their inherent opposites at their very emergence into agency, in the play the loftier dreams prevail and they clearly contain what Shakespeare viewed as the human capacities to forgive, to change, to reform oneself and, at least for some, to be able to imagine that such can be achieved.

### The 'stuff' of humanity

Any universal characteristic of humanity might be construed as part of the 'stuff' of human kind. But rather than attempt to note all such characteristics, I propose that a model from one of my earliest mentors, Eugene Fink, offers a good springboard to an understanding of the 'stuff'. Fink maintained that we are born into a world already full of innumerable ways to coexist through love, hate, death, work and play. Indeed, he maintained that all societies and civilizations develop out of the learning and practice of coexisting through these forms in all their oppositional manifestations. We learn love in the bosom of our families where we might, as we compete for parental love with our siblings, learn hate. From the death of loved ones, we learn to revere life and fear its end for ourselves and those we hold dear. But we also learn that death dispenses with enemies and gratifies the rage of revenge. As humans coexist in work and play, they build and create together the structures for their societies. From Fink's broad brush-strokes, we can discern a picture of the beginnings of human society and its progression to more complex structures and manifestations of the forms by which we coexist.

Here, let me turn to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* once again to reveal the complexities of Fink's model of coexistence in a simulated lived experience. Prospero came to an island wherein he fashioned a utopia with his magic. However, he did not come to the island by choice; rather he found himself there because his ambitious brother, Antonio, usurped his dukedom and attempted to murder him. Loyal friends, however, saw to it that he was set upon the open sea with his daughter and his books of magic so that he might drift to an island. With his magic, Prospero lures his brother's ship to wreck itself upon the island and plans to revenge the evil his brother did to him, but his plan is tempered by seeing the genuine love of his daughter for his enemy's son, and he forgives instead. His forgiveness is also tempered, one might even say tainted, by the fact that he, as a man of magic, plans both the revenge *and* the love match between his daughter and his enemy's son at the same time, knowing full well that this marriage will restore both his own and his daughter's wealth and position in the world he left behind. I need say no more of Prospero's conflicted intentions for us to see that the way in which human beings coexist is extraordinarily complex. Since we are the 'stuff' dreams are made on, it is no accident at all that Shakespeare has Prospero say directly to us, the audience, at the play's end when he returns to the world and forsakes his magic, that we are more powerful than he with his magic, and it is we who determine what happens next. Without magic, we are the ones who fashion dreams into reality. If we are born into a world of innumerable ways to conduct our lives, we still manage to invent new ways and graft them onto the old, dreaming and enacting new realities all the while.

We are not taught explicitly how to do this. We are not taught the rules of our cultures; rather, we constantly intuit and learn those rules through interaction with others and with the pervasive nuanced ideologies layered with history and with changed and constantly changing traditions. In this interaction, we are agents and interpreters so that our interactions in our lifeworld, as Husserl called it, are mediated by our human capacity to reason, imagine, empathize, communicate and act in and upon our ever-changing lifeworld. A lifeworld is both uniquely individual and collective, all at the same time, for the lifeworld is what each individual self experiences and what makes sense to that individual self, but it is also a world of shared experiences and meanings.

Husserl conceived the lifeworld as pristine, existing outside of science or technology. That conception no longer holds, of course, for not only are science and technology continually changing because of our lifeworlds, our lifeworlds are continually and forever changed by science and technology. The world of nature Husserl knew no longer exists, had not, of course, been 'natural' even in his day. Science and technology are constantly redefining the natural world. Such changes, wrought as much by science and technology themselves as by their interactions with lifeworlds, are part of the utopic essence of humanity. The intentions behind the changes are no less conflicted than those of Prospero, nor, alas, are the results.

### **Mundialization and the 'stuff' of humanity**

How do ideas change? How do the ideas and viewpoints of one culture become those of another? Or do they do these things at all? We have only to look at the world about us to know that ideas travel, though there is always something different about them after the trip. They travel, of course, through modes of globalization. Merchants, travelers, wars, colonizers and colonization are some of the ways in which ideas, customs and attitudes are globalized. The way in which globalization occurs plays an important role in the transculturation of an idea from one person or culture to another. By transculturation I mean the mediation of elements in one culture's (or person's) conceptual schema that are compatible with elements in the conceptual schema of another culture. With transculturation, the schemata in question are entirely transformed. The alien has become familiar but it is no longer quite what it was. It has transformed to fit into a new structure, and that structure has had to change to accommodate it.

Students often tell me of their first encounter with individualism as it is conceived in the West. They are at first alarmed at what they see as disrespect for elders and lack of concern for family and the good of society. Gradually, they come to see respect and concern practiced in ways other than those of their own society. Once they observe these common mediating elements, they are able to accommodate the western notion of individuality, recognizing how it is manifested in different ways in their societies. Some meld aspects of western individuality into their own styles; others might simply accord western individuality more acceptance than previously because they recognize its mediating elements. In any event, the students have encountered an alien notion and taken it into their perspective. I call this phenome-

non mundialization, the taking in of the world. Through mundialization, a strange idea is mediated into our own schema and becomes objectified in our lifeworld. We can interpret with the concept, restructuring other schemata as we do so, and certainly, as with the students, reconstructing the new concept in the process. Thus the 'stuff' of humanity-individuals, their lifeworlds and the lifeworlds they share, is in a constant state of mundialization, indeed, the process of mundialization might even be said to belong to 'the stuff' of humanity upon which dreams are made.

### Ideology as catalyst for utopia: the insights of Ricœur

Our humanity may indeed be the foundation of utopia, but it is the foundation for other projects as well and mundialization is also a conduit for these schemes. To understand how and why utopian impulses are so pervasive in human history, and why they will continue to be so, we need to examine them in terms of their relationship to what has been characterized as their antithesis: ideology. For this, I can think of no insights more compelling than those found in Paul Ricœur's *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986). Both the terms ideology and utopia have been in existence for some time and the meanings assigned to them have been many. While utopia is always recognizable as 'a better place' at the least, and 'perfection' at the most, ideology has undergone several changes in meanings since it was first coined in the French Post-revolution period and many of them coexist today, muddying the philosophical waters, so to speak. In this paper, I will be faithful to Ricœur's hermeneutical discussion of the term though I hope to add dimensions to it through my own arguments.

Like Karl Mannheim before him, Ricœur does not see ideology as always being inherently false or deliberately misleading as Marx did, belonging only to some nefarious other and never to the 'good guys'. Rather Ricœur sees ideology as a set of political ideas, agreeing in this respect with Daniel Bell that ideology is 'an action oriented system of beliefs'. Ricœur assigns ideology three stages. In the first stage, ideology distorts social life. In its second stage, it serves to legitimize the status quo and bridge the claims for legitimacy of the system of power with a belief in that legitimacy. In the third stage, ideology is seen as positive and necessary, integrating individuals within varied subcultural and cultural groupings. In this third, positive stage, particularly as concerns the integration of groupings, ideology is involved with social and cultural imagination.

Ricœur assigns utopia three stages as well. In the first, it is seen as escapist, an inability to deal with real social life. In the second, it acts as a challenge to authority and power, attempting to unmask the claims of ideology. In the third, however, utopia is seen as social imagination itself, critiquing ideology. Thus, Ricœur says, utopia becomes 'intellectual midwife' and 'political educator' in motivating social change. He also argues that when ideology and utopia are conjoined, both are infused with social imagination and integrity. Both then contain reform, imagined betterment and revitalization of tradition to meet challenges.

In his discussion of the third stage of ideology, Ricœur gives as examples one's culture or one's religion, as either one is a giver of meaning to our lives. The sym-

bolic structures of culture and religion are always open to distortion, to a freezing of integration, to a prevalence of rationalization.<sup>1</sup> It is when this happens that utopian impulses come to the fore, reanimating tradition via social imagination so that tradition can evolve to new and pertinent levels of meaning.

For Ricœur, utopia's relationship with ideology changes at each stage. In the third stage, utopia represents reform; in the second, it is a kind of muckraker, revealing the falseness of unfounded claims for power. In the first, it seeks only to escape an ideology's distortions of real life without, perhaps, offering any sort of connection to real life itself. In all three stages, however, utopia breathes imagination and posits what could be, what might be and, morally, what should be.

If culture and religion are designated as ideologies, it is clear that in our lifeworlds there are many ideologies, some or all of them competing as spurs or guides to action. We can also see that as part of our lifeworlds, human beings are born into ideologies and they interact with their meanings, constructing new meanings as they do so. We can also surmise that individual and collective mundialization affects ideologies of every stripe. Indeed, ideologies as described by Ricœur are structures of significance constructed by human beings. They are the products of human interaction, globalization and mundialization mediated by reason and social imagination.

I am intrigued with the idea that social imagination and moral imagination can activate and propel utopic impulses. But why has our social, moral imagination failed so in the past? Why, for example, have the great experiments in communism shattered? Why do their lofty ideals of equity in the distribution of wealth lie in tatters about them now? Is it really a matter of power being corruptive? One is tempted to say that, especially since the ideas which inspired communism – concern for equity and a distribution of wealth that does not allow for people to be starving – are alive and well articulated in socialistic circles throughout the world. My own theory on the matter, however, is that the utopias of governance which were founded on concern for the rights of the poor and to achieve equity in wealth distribution took too much of the cultural ideology, which they then sought to remedy or abandon, into their foundation, specifically, the authoritarianism and patriarchy which so pervaded every form of government in the early 20th century and beyond. Reform towards any kind of equity cannot exist under authoritarianism. Benign authoritarianism is a dangerous oxymoron. It may well be that utopic reforms can really only succeed as alternatives to a third-stage ideology, that is, when ideology has attained a synthesis and is capable of integrating disparate groups. When this happens, ideology contains, according to Ricœur, its own model of what should be, and therefore has, at least, a conservative pseudo-utopian critique built into its structures. At that point, social imagination, reinterpreting and revitalizing tradition to meet the demands of the critique may open to true utopic social imagination, calling for the enlargement of such ever-present but muffled societal dreams as equity, justice, peace.

### **Hope for utopia: the mundialization of transformative concepts**

Do those dreams exist in the competing, often conflicting ideologies of our lifeworlds? Is there a Great Society in the wings of our destiny? There are certainly

trends to indicate that certain dreams have been in the making for some time now. The first of these is human rights. In modern history, we have seen the notion articulated as universal by a world body, the United Nations, as short a time ago as 1948. And since then, we have seen social imagination propel the notion of the inclusivity of human rights at rates unheard of in earlier times. Not only does the notion of human rights now refer to the right to food, clothing and shelter, it embraces the right to freedom, justice, education. Moreover, ownership of human rights includes all humanity. I am not speaking of an actuality; I am speaking of a dream that literally millions of people actively support and work to make a reality. I am speaking here of the ever-growing global civil society dedicated to securing human rights for all.

Other notions inherent in the concept of freedom have also seen an acceleration of mundialization due to the advances of communicative technology and the diminishment of the oppressive governments that flourished in colonial times and their aftermath. Justice is one of these. Freud once wrote that the impulse to be free was ubiquitous to the human spirit, but civilization must, by necessity, impose restrictions. His theory was that as civilizations evolved, justice would demand that the same restrictions on freedom would apply to all. Unfortunately, though human beings have discussed the nature of justice for many, many centuries, the crudest forms still prevail. The 'eye for an eye' theme, which Gandhi rightly noted begets a world of the blind, has been protested for many centuries, to little avail. Even Christianity, founded on the teachings of Jesus who preached forgiveness and the turning of the other cheek, has a history long steeped in vengeance.

Any reform of justice is utopic in the purest sense, it seems to me. All our ideologies seem to promote integrating the early forms of justice without a hint of forgiveness. But when social imagination can, in order to bring disparate groups together, revitalize those strands of what might be that have been muffled in the traditions that once nurtured them, utopia's social and moral imagination can 'imagine something else, the elsewhere', 'the glance' which Ricœur says is not from ideology's conservative, preservative imagination, but is, rather, a 'glance from nowhere'.<sup>2</sup> Thus we see, 'as glances from nowhere', the movements led by Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr and, more recently, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The leaders of these movements claim that they arose from long-held traditions regarding the dignity of all human beings, freedom for all, and the necessity for forgiveness. From long-held traditions that did indeed have buried in them the notion of forgiveness and of freedom for all, all three of the leaders involved invoked the transforming rationalization and moral imagination radiating from the very title of Tutu's book about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *No Future Without Forgiveness*.

### **The Great Society revisited**

Surely we are witnessing greater mundialization of utopic themes than ever before. And surely, because they rub against the grain of modern warfare, justice as it is established in most of the world and the growing mundialization of exclusivity

themes, these utopic themes should be nurtured and given a place in our societies wherever possible. I propose a revitalization of an idea of John Dewey's: the making of a Great Society. In Dewey's Great Society the goal was a true democracy. For him that meant a democracy in which all members of a society understand democracy's principles and, especially, the responsibilities of majority rule. This could be achieved, he felt, if at all levels of society people, even schoolchildren, engaged in participatory democracy. Debate, discussion, a scrutiny of issues, these were to be everyday fare in the Great Society.

Other philosophers have added to that everyday fare, particularly with regard to education. Martha Nussbaum, for example, proposes the cultivation of moral empathetic imagination through a study of other cultures. She is not advocating comparative studies so much as studying the literature and lives of other cultures – and she includes minority groups in one's own culture in this – from the perspective of those people. When we are able to understand the decisions they make from their perspectives, not our own, we can come close to empathy.<sup>3</sup> Empathy is surely a prerequisite for peace.

In the failed utopian endeavors of the last century, I do not recall that peace was ever a serious consideration. Peace, human rights, freedom and justice are, however, the goals of UNESCO, and in its preamble it notes the source of that peace: 'that peace' it reads, must 'be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind'. The utopic trends I have noted in this paper stem from that civic, intellectual and moral solidarity. And perhaps, in the end, we may say with confidence that utopias cannot be legislated, mandated or forced upon anyone. War does not create peace. Coercion does not create freedom. Exclusivity does not create justice. The Great Global Society we long for must be founded upon the 'stuff' of our humanity, our 'intellectual and moral solidarity'. As Shakespeare's Prospero says when he gives up his magic, what will happen next is up to us.

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## Notes

1. Ricœur (1986: 266).
2. Ricœur (1986: 265–6).
3. Nussbaum (1997).

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