

Utopia

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It has been suggested that *utopianism* be merged into this article or section.
(Discuss)

Utopia, in its most common and general positive meaning, refers to the human efforts to create a better, or perhaps perfect society. Ideas which could be/are considered able to radically change our world are often called utopian ideas.

"Utopian" in a negative meaning is used to discredit ideas as too advanced, too optimistic or unrealistic, impossible to realize. Hence, for example, the use by Marxists, of such expressions as "utopian socialism".

It has also been used to describe actual communities founded in attempts to create such a society. Although some authors have described their utopias in detail, and with an effort to show a level of practicality, the term "utopia" has come to be applied to notions that are (supposedly) too optimistic and idealistic for practical application.

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Basics of Utopia

Dictionary definition

Adjective - utopian:

According to Oxford dictionary, it is usually used negatively to criticise proposals or ideas having or aiming for a level of perfection of utopia which is impossible or very difficult to achieve.



Look up ***Utopia*** in Wiktionary, the free dictionary.

Noun - utopian:

The word **utopian** can be used as a noun to mean someone who imagines, proposes, or supports a utopia.

Derivation of utopia

The term **utopia** was coined by Thomas More as the title of his Latin book *De Optimo Reipublicae Statu deque Nova Insula Utopia* (circa 1516), known more commonly as Utopia. You can read the original text here (<http://la.wikisource.org/wiki/Utopia>) , in the wikisource. Also a place

Etymology

The term "utopia" is combined from two Greek words - "no" (ou) and "place / land" (topos), thus meaning "nowhere" or more literally, "no-place / no-land". The word "utopia" was created to suggest two Greek neologisms simultaneously: *outopia* (no place) and *eutopia* (good place). In this original context, the word carried none of the modern connotations associated with it.

Related terms

- **Anti-utopia** questions the moral or practical validity of *utopias*
- **Dystopia** is a *negative* utopia.
- **Eutopia** is a *positive* utopia, roughly equivalent to the regular use of the word "utopia".
- **Heterotopia**, the "other place", with its real and imagined possibilities (a mix of "utopian" escapism and turning virtual possibilities into reality) - example: cyberspace. Samuel R. Delany's novel *Trouble on Triton* is subtitled *An Ambiguous Heterotopia* to highlight that it is not strictly utopian (though certainly not dystopian). The novel offers several conflicting perspectives on the concept of utopia.
- **Ourtopia** combines the English 'our' with the Greek 'topos' to give 'our place' - the nearest thing to a utopian planet actually attainable,

Other subcategories include Arcadias and Cockayngnes. Ruth Levitas is one who has developed such a categorization.

More's Utopia

Main article: Utopia (book)

Thomas More depicts a rationally organised society, through the narration of an explorer who discovers it - Raphael Hythlodæus.

Utopia is based on Plato's *Republic*, although More extended the communism of property to all citizens. Furthermore it is a perfect version of The Republic where the beauties of society, eg. equalism and a general pacifist attitude, although its citizens were all ready to fight if need be. The evils of society, eg. poverty and misery, are all removed. It has few laws, no lawyers and rarely sends its citizens to war, but hires mercenaries from among its war-prone neighbours (these mercenaries were deliberately sent into dangerous situations in the hope that they would be killed, thus ridding the world of a parasite).

It is likely that Thomas More, a religious layman who once considered joining the Church as a priest, was inspired by monastical life when he described the workings of his society. Thomas More lived during the age when the Renaissance was beginning to assert itself in England, and the old medieval ideals – including the monastic ideal – were declining. Some of Thomas More's ideas reflect a nostalgia for that medieval past. It was an inspiration for the *Reducciones* established by the Jesuits to Christianize and "civilize" the Guaraní.

His book reached high popularity so the term **utopia** became a byword for ideal concepts, proposals, societies etc. Like later utopian works, More's book contains explicit and implicit criticisms of perceived faults in existing societies. Utopian authors speculate that such faults could be eliminated in societies designed around their favored principles. The innovations portrayed in utopian visions are usually radical, revolutionary, inspirational, or speculative.

Throughout the years, many interpretations of Thomas More's work, **Utopia**, have arisen. Although countless individuals

have chosen to accept this imaginary society as the realistic blueprint for a working nation, others have postulated More intended nothing of the like. Some maintain the position that More's **Utopia** functions only on the level of a satire, a work intended to reveal more about England than about an idealistic society.

Types of utopia

Economic utopia

These utopias are based on economics. Most of them formed in response to the harsh economic conditions of the 19th century. Particularly in the early nineteenth century, several utopian ideas arose, often in response to the social disruption created by the development of commercialism and capitalism. These are often grouped in a greater "utopian socialist" movement, due to their shared characteristics: an egalitarian distribution of goods, frequently with the total abolition of money, and citizens only doing work which they enjoy and which is for the common good, leaving them with ample time for the cultivation of the arts and sciences. One classic example of such a utopia was Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. Another socialist utopia is William Morris' *News from Nowhere*, written partially in response to the top-down (bureaucratic) nature of Bellamy's utopia, which Morris criticized. However, as the socialist movement developed it moved away from utopianism; Marx in particular became a harsh critic of earlier socialisms he described as utopian. (for more information see the History of Socialism article)

Utopias have also been imagined by the opposite side of the political spectrum. For example, Robert A. Heinlein's *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* portrays an individualistic and libertarian utopia. Capitalist utopias of this sort are generally based on perfect market economies, in which there is no market failure—or the issue of market failure is never addressed. Also consider Eric Frank Russell's book 'The Great Explosion'(1963) which last section details an economic and social utopia. This forms the first mention of the idea of 'LETS'.

Political and historical utopia

Political utopias are ones in which the government establishes a society that is striving toward perfection. With that said, many such governments tend to be harsh in its execution of laws and allow little individualism if it conflicts with its primary goals. Many strive for a controlled society where the state or government replaces religious and family values (and loyalties for that matter).

A global utopia of world peace is often seen as one of the possible inevitable endings of history.

Sparta was a militaristic utopia founded by Lycurgus (though some, especially Athenians, may have thought it was rather a dystopia). It was a Greek power until its defeat by the Thebans at the battle of Leuctra.

Religious utopia

These types of society are based on religious ideals. This makes its members required to follow and believe in the particular religion that established it. These tend to be the most common in history so far. The Christian and Islamic ideas of the Garden of Eden and Heaven tend to be a form of utopianism, especially in their folk-religious forms: inviting speculation about existence free of sin and poverty or any sorrow, beyond the power of death (although "heaven" in Christian eschatology at least, is more nearly equivalent to life within God Himself, visualized as an earth-like paradise in the sky). In a similar sense, the Buddhist concept of Nirvana may be thought of as a kind of utopia. Religious utopias, perhaps expansively described as a garden of delights, existence free of worry amid streets paved with gold, in a bliss of enlightenment enjoying nearly godlike powers, are often a reason for perceiving benefit in remaining faithful to a religion, and an incentive for converting new members.

In the United States during the Second Great Awakening of the nineteenth century, many radical religious groups formed utopian societies. They sought to form communities where all aspects of people's lives could be governed by their faith. Among the best-known of these utopian societies was the Shaker movement.

See also: End of the world, Eschatology, Millennialism, Utopianism

Scientific and technological utopia

These are set in the future, when it is believed that advanced science and technology will allow utopian living standards; for example, the absence of death and suffering; changes in human nature and the human condition. These utopian societies tend to change what "human" is all about. Technology has affected the way humans have lived to such an extent that normal functions, like sleep, eating or even reproduction, has been replaced by an artificial means. Other kinds of this utopia envisioned, include a society where human has struck a balance with technology and it is merely used to enhance the human living condition (e.g. Star Trek). In place of the static perfection of a utopia, libertarian transhumanists envision an "extropia", an open, evolving society allowing individuals and voluntary groupings to form the institutions and social forms they prefer.

Garrett Jones published "Ourtopia" in 2004, arguing that, instead of a 'no place' we need to use all the resources at our command to make 'our place' proof against climate change and obsolete tribalisms. Buckminster Fuller presented a theoretical basis for technological utopianism and set out to develop a variety of technologies ranging from maps to designs for cars and houses which might lead to the development of such a utopia.

One notable example of a technological and libertarian socialist utopia is Scottish author Iain M. Bank's Culture.

See also: hedonistic imperative, transhumanism, technological singularity, abolitionist society, techno-utopia, technocratic movement

Opposing this optimism is the prediction that advanced science and technology will, through deliberate misuse or accident, cause environmental damage or even humanity's extinction. These pessimists advocate precautions against the premature embrace of new technologies.

Characteristics of Fictional Utopia

Many works of utopian fiction depict an outsider, a time-traveler or a foreigner, who can be shown the features of the society so that they can be shown to the reader.

Virginia Woolf was deeply critical of the level of characterization shown in many utopias, flatly asserting in her essay, "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown," "There are no Mrs. Browns in Utopia."

Examples of utopia

- *Plato's Republic* (400 BC) was, at least on one level, a description of a political utopia ruled by an elite of philosopher kings, conceived by Plato. (Compare to his Laws, discussing laws for a real city.) a Gutenberg text of the book (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/150>)
- *The City of God* (written 413–426) by Augustine of Hippo, describes an ideal city, the "eternal" Jerusalem, the archetype of all "Christian" utopias.
- *Utopia* (1516) by Thomas More a Gutenberg text of the book (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2130>)
- *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) by Robert Burton, a utopian society is described in the preface.
- *The City of the Sun* (1623) by Tommaso Campanella depicts a theocratic and communist society.
- *The New Atlantis* (1627) by Francis Bacon
- *Oceana* (1656) by James Harrington
- The section in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift depicting the calm, rational society of the Houyhnhnms, is certainly utopian, but it is meant to contrast with that of the yahoos, who represent the worst that the human race can do.
- *L'An 2440* ("The Year 2440") by Louis-Sébastien Mercier.
- *Year 4338* (1837) by Prince Vladimir Odoevsky
- *Voyage en Icarie* (1840) by Etienne Cabet
- Cypress Creek in You Only Move Twice, a season eight episode in The Simpsons
- *Erewhon* (1872) by Samuel Butler
- *Looking Backward* (1888), by Edward Bellamy

- *Freiland* (1890) by Theodor Hertzka
- *News from Nowhere* (1891), by William Morris; see also the Arts and Crafts Movement founded to put his ideas into practice a Gutenberg text of the book (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3261>)
- *Utopia, Limited* (1893) is a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta in which a small island nation reforms itself along British lines, with amusingly utter success.
- *Intermere* (1901) by Wiliam Alexander Taylor.
- A large number of books by H.G. Wells, including *A Modern Utopia* (1905)
- *Herland* (1915), by Charlotte Perkins Gilman; an exclusively female utopia and its journey towards "bi-sexuality" as presented by one of three male explorers who "discover" the country.
- Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) can be considered an example of pseudo-utopian satire (see also dystopia). One of his other books, *Island* (1962), demonstrates a positive utopia.
- *Shangri-La* described in the novel *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton (1933)
- *Islandia* (1942), by Austin Tappan Wright, an imaginary island in the Southern Hemisphere, a utopian containing many Arcadian elements, including a rejection of technology.
- B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948)
- *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell. A novel set in a futuristic, almost dystopian society where privacy is non-existent and an all-seeing entity known as Big Brother controls the populace.
- *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), by Ray Bradbury. A novel set in a different futuristic society where the general populace is controlled by the television and only do fun things. They are, however, not permitted to read or be educated. "Firemen" actually set fires to libraries and the houses of anyone who possesses written materials.
- *The Cloud of Magellan* (1955) by Stanisław Lem
- *Andromeda Nebula* (1957) is a classic communist utopia by Ivan Efremov
- The Great Explosion, Eric Frank Russell 1963 In the last section setting out a workable utopian economic system leading to a different social and political reality.
- *The Corridors of Time* by Poul Anderson (1965) features a protagonist recruited by a woman from a future society to go back in time to help her fight her dystopian, time-traveling foes, who dominate half the world in her time. The utopian claims of her society are undermined, especially by time-travelers from a more distant, utopian future who plunge him into aspects of it hidden from him, and hint that their future must be brought about by his actions.
- *Star Trek* (1966) science fiction television series by Gene Roddenberry
- *Imagine (song)* (1971) by John Lennon, prays for brotherhood of man which would exist in a utopia without hell or heaven.
- *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas* (1969), by Ursula K. Le Guin, describes what some would call a very close to perfect society but only by rationalizing one moral dilemma of a price.
- *The Dispossessed* (1974), a science fiction novel by Ursula K. Le Guin, is sometimes said to represent one of the few modern revivals of the utopian genre, though it is notable that one of the major themes of the work is the ambiguity of different notions of utopia. Le Guin presents a utopian world in which ditches do need digging, and sewers need unblocking — this drudgery is divided among all adults, and is contrasted, in the language of the utopia, with their everyday, more satisfying work.
- *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) by Marge Piercy is a feminist science fiction novel in which the protagonist must act to win the utopian future over an alternative, dystopian, one.
- *Ecotopia (novel)* (1975) by Ernest Callenbach blends elements of science fiction and utopian fiction in a future North America where the west coast states of Oregon, Washington and northern California have seceded from the U.S. to form an environmentally self-sustainable utopia. (See ecotopian fiction).
- *Dinotopia*, (1992) originally an illustrated book and now expanded into other media, is about an island where humans and dinosaurs coexist peacefully. Most are vegetarian, trade has replaced currency, and nature is carefully protected. However, it's inescapable, and some are displeased by this lifestyle, so one character points out that the word "Dinotopia" doesn't mean "a utopia of dinosaurs," it means "a terrible place."
- The *Three Californias Trilogy* (especially *The Pacific Edge* (1990)) and the *Mars trilogy* by Kim Stanley Robinson
- *La Québécoise* (1990) by Francine Lachance
- *The Giver* (1993), a novel by Lois Lowry, depicts a "perfect" society of the far future whose elimination of war, disease, fear, &c. comes at the inherent price of the repression of human emotions, individuality and free will.
- most of the stories in *Future Primitive: The New Ecotopias* (1994), edited by Kim Stanley Robinson
- *The Hedonistic Imperative* (1996), an online manifesto by David Pearce, outlines how genetic engineering and nanotechnology will abolish suffering in all sentient life.

- *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You* (1997) by Dorothy Bryant
- *The Matrix* (1999), a film by the Wachowski brothers, describes a virtual reality controlled by artificial intelligence such as Agent Smith. Smith says that the first Matrix was a utopia, but humans disbelieved and rejected it because they "define their reality through misery and suffering." Therefore, the Matrix was redesigned to simulate human civilization with all its suffering.
- *Equilibrium* (2002), is a film and describes a future in which feelings are forbidden. The movie is strongly influenced by *Brave New World* (above), the dystopian 1984 by George Orwell and the dystopian *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury.
- *Xen: Ancient English Edition*, (2004) is a novel about a true Utopia, with a bias toward Matriarchy, in the distant future of Earth, "translated" by D.J. Solomon
- *Ourtopia*,(2004) is not escapist, but Garrett Jones's practical projection of the ideal planet we should be working towards (paperback or etext available from author's website).
- *Ensaio sobre a Lucidez* ("Treatise on Lucidity") by José Saramago (2004), describes a city where there is 83% of blank votes at an election.
- *Globus Cassus*, (2004), is a project for the transformation of the Earth into a large, hollow structure inhabited on the inside, which would be organised by new types of societies and political systems.
- *Phaeacia* is an utopian island in Greek mythology.
- Gottfried Leibniz's assertion of the best of all possible worlds

Related terms and concepts

- Abolitionism
- Atopia
- Aztlán
- Brutopia
- Cacotopia
- Christian anarchism
- Dystopia
- Ecotopia
- El Dorado
- Eutopia
- Garden of Eden
- Heaven
- Heterotopia - physical locale set apart from traditional public life where rules and expectations are suspended, often to address moments of crisis or deviance, developed by Michel Foucault
- Intentional Community
- Kibbutz
- K-PAXian
- Omnitopia - a structural and perceptual enclave whose apparently distinct locales convey inhabitants to a singular place. Etymologically, the term reflects a neologism of the Latin omni (all; 'in all ways or places' or 'of all things') and the Greek topos (place).
- Outopia
- Regional planning
- Simple living
- Urban planning
- Utopia Planitia
- Utopian and dystopian fiction
- Utopian socialism
- Utopianism

Links on utopia

- Utopia and Utopianism (<http://www.utopiaandutopianism.com>) is an academic journal specialising in the subjects of utopia and utopianism.

- Full text of Thomas More's Utopia (<http://www.gutenberg.net/etext/2130>) from Project Gutenberg
- Utopia - The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition, 2001 (<http://www.bartleby.com/65/ut/Utopia.html>)
- Utopia - Definition and History of the Term - The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (http://www.uni-potsdam.de/u/anglistik/stud_pro/utopieseite/genre/utopia.html)
- Society for Utopian Studies (<http://www.utoronto.ca/utopia/>) is the Main Page for the Society for Utopian Studies, an international, interdisciplinary association devoted to the study of utopianism in all its forms, with a particular emphasis on literary and experimental utopias.
- The Abolitionist Society (<http://www.abolitionist-society.com/>) is dedicated to the elimination of suffering through science
- Utopia Creative Community (<http://utopiagraphics.com/>) is a growing Utopian community for artists and designers.
- Utopia Fan Site (<http://cd.bromley.ac.uk/olegs>) is a growing Utopia Fan community site.
- Utopia by Swirve Games (<http://games.swirve.com/utopia>) is an interactive online game run in real time.

Further reading

- *Thinking Utopia: Steps Into Other Worlds*, Berghahn Books, 2004, ISBN 157181440X, Google Print (<http://books.google.com/books?ie=UTF-8&vid=ISBN157181440X&id=3ye0vWc85eYC&dq>)

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Categories: Articles to be merged | Ethics | Fictional countries | Utopias | Communalism | Social philosophy

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