

Quotes from Secondary Literature

The English Utopias I. seminar

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A. L. Morton

“I have not felt myself too strictly bound by my definition of Utopia as an imaginary country described in a work of fiction with the object of criticising existing society. Some such definition was necessary to keep my book within reasonable bounds, and it excludes from consideration both attempts to found Utopian communities and works in which the element of fiction is absent.”

A. L. Morton, *The English Utopia* (Berlin: Seven Seas Books, 1968 [1952]), p. 12.

Manuel and Manuel

“Utopia thus became laden with meanings as it moved through time: a literary genre, a constitution for a perfectly restructured polity, a state of mind, the religious or scientific foundations of a universal republic.”

“Utopia could always be used either positively or pejoratively. (...) In English a utopian became a person who inhabits a utopia or one who would like to be in a utopia or has a utopian cast of temperament. Some men were utopographers, a seventeenth-century word for the writers or inventors of utopias. The researcher into the utopian propensity of mankind, though he is one of a long line going back to Aristotle, has no particular name, and must rest content with the plain appellation historian, though his subject has been dubbed utopology by a recent innovator.”

“The origin of the utopian propensity is, in an absolute sense, not knowable; its application and incorporation in given utopian configurations or constellations are. These become the main subject of our inquiry.”

Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap), 1997 [1979], p. 2; p. 13.

J. C. Davis

“The initial premise of this book is that a serious study of the political thought of early modern utopias is warranted and in some respects overdue.”

“But utopian thought itself is not a tradition in the sense outlined above. (...) Its practitioners are not always aware of those utopian writers who have preceded them. In fact such awareness is very rare indeed. In that respect a greater number of utopian writers have been unselfconscious.”

“Utopian writing is *not* a tradition of thought (...) Rather it is a mode or type of ideal society, and what utopian writers have in common is not common membership of a tradition but their subjection to a common mode.”

“Is utopia a paradigm? No. For a paradigm is partly defined by its capacity for structural flexibility and transformation, its capacity to sustain, direct and finally succumb to evolving tradition. But utopia as a structure of thought is relatively unchanging. It is its sameness, its constancy which must be emphasised. The bold claim might be made that utopia as outlined here has barely changed in the last four and a half centuries.”

J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the ideal society: a study of English utopian writing 1516-1700*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), from *Introduction*.

Krishan Kumar

“As so often with concepts in the human sciences, it seems best not to insist on some ‘essentialist’ definition of utopia but to let a definition emerge: by use and context shall we know our utopias.”

“A strict definition of utopia would serve no useful purpose; as Nietzsche says, ‘only that which has no history can be defined.’”

Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and anti-utopia in modern times*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 26; p. 32.

Gregory Claeys – Lyman Tower Sargent

“As a literary genre, utopia refers to works that describe an imaginary society in some detail. Utopian thought construed more widely, however, is not restricted to fiction and includes visionary, millenarian, and apocalyptic as well as constitutional writings united by their willingness to envision a dramatically different form of society as either a social ideal-type or its negative inversion. Not all forms of imaginative literature and social and political thought, however, should be called utopian.”

Utopianism - social dreaming

Utopia - a nonexistent society described in detail and normally located in time and space

Eutopia or positive utopia - a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which the reader lived

Dystopia or negative utopia - a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived

Utopian satire - a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of the existing society

Anti-utopia - a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia

Critical utopia - a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve, and which takes a critical view of the utopian genre

Gregory Claeys – Lyman Tower Sargent eds., *The Utopia Reader* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 1-2.

Morris-Kross

“Given the vagueness of the concept of utopianism—currently being applied to everything from a world without war and poverty to an educational system where *every* student will be trained to be a knowledgeable and productive citizen (education being the key to success in all utopian societies) and to the short-lived communes of the 1960s and 1970s dedicated to finding Nirvana in sex and drugs—a definition is in order in preparing this historical dictionary. Accordingly, we have adopted the following guidelines in selecting entries for this dictionary:

1. The subject or entry included, whether a philosophical, instructional, or implementational idea or a person involved with utopianism, must refer to, describe, or outline a perfect or near perfect group-based human condition that is without basic conflict and is attainable by a nation, a society, a subgroup of that society, or the world. This group-based proposed state must be in time and be of this world, as opposed to otherworldly, thus eliminating religious communities or orders of professed members who seek perfection primarily in the afterlife; or,
2. The idealized subject must in the mind of its author be an improved state that not only could be but also should be implemented, by definition excluding pipe dreams or idle musings of solitary and dysfunctional thinkers; or,
3. The subject must include the assumption of malleability of persons because inherent within utopianism is the idea that by means of rational and/or moral education, a fundamental and total change in a society’s laws, customs, and mores, an improved state, society, or societal subgrouping can and should be brought into being, whether through gradual or dramatic change or by fixed and inherent stages of development; or,
4. The subject, presented as a concrete plan, a new model (whether based on religion, reason, or science) to be followed in time (whether in the form of a work of literature or of credible philosophical, political, or economic reflection), must represent a superior alternative to the present to those who would give credence to it. Thus politically, whether ruled by an oligarchy made up of a natural aristocracy, a theocracy, a republic, or a democracy, it must

promise total peace and fundamental justice for all persons within it. Socially it must promise a perfected family structure based on kinship and brotherhood or sisterhood with class and sexual distinctions usually eliminated to assure a community of equals in all respects. Economically it must promise equality, cooperative effort toward a common and understood goal, and at least equity (if not equality) in income or reward; or,

5. The subject must be dystopian in nature, that is, a criticism of utopian ideas and schemes as unworkable in practice and contributing to, if not guaranteeing, the lessening or destruction of the humanity of its practitioners despite the loftiness of the goal or goals to be attained; or,

6. The subject must not represent mere escapism or the desire of a group with like interests (such as artists or voyeurs) to associate only with those of the same interests for their own enjoyment or edification. Nor must it represent mere reformism, that is, improving one or another factor in a nation's, a society's, or a societal subgrouping's existence; it must include both totality and perfectionism as basic components of its vision."

James M. Morris – Andrea L. Kross, *The A to Z of Utopianism*, (Lanham-Toronto-Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2009), pp. xxiii-xxiv. (The A to Z Guide Series, No. 36.)