Beyond dominant tendencies to contrast utopia and ideology, the book reconceptualizes utopia and approaches it along with the notion of dystopia. The interplay of utopia and dystopia is examined, some major anti-utopian arguments are refuted and a new utopianism emerges, one that radicalizes critique and makes engagement with present global realities more pressing.

Educated fear, i.e., a critical awareness of dystopian realities, and educated hope, i.e., a critical awareness of the possibility of human perfectibility cohabit a theoretical space that breaks with utopianist modern theoretical underpinnings and becomes historically and spatially more inclusive, while retaining the motivational and justificatory force of ethical imagery. If education is not just an institution of unreflective socialization, if it is about futurity, it has to renegotiate utopian thought. As the interest in utopia is being renewed both in general philosophy and philosophy of education and as dystopia is still neglected, a book that re-defines utopianism and explores for the first time the role of dystopia in radicalizing educational demands for systemic change is indispensable for Utopian Studies, Philosophy and Philosophy of Education academics and students alike.

The title of the book is first transliterated into Utopia, a typeface in which Brazilian artists Angela Detanico and Rafael Lain replace capital letters with the iconic buildings of Brazil’s foremost modernist architect, Oscar Niemeyer, whilst lower-case letters are equated with urban interferences such as fences, skateboarders, CCTV cameras, electricity cables, in short, all those elements that escaped the utopian dream of the architect. To me, it bears associations of the philosophical notion of counterfactuality and of Adorno’s notion of mimesis. The title is then transliterated into Helvetica Concentrated (a digital typeface that concentrates the surface of Helvetica characters in dots which has been created by Detanico and Lain in collaboration with Jiri Skala). The term Helvetica bears the associations of a modernist utopia of success, performativity, prosperity, predictability, rational planning and uniformity.
Educated Fear and Educated Hope
EDUCATIONAL FUTURES
RETHINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE
Volume 40

Series Editors
Michael A. Peters
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

Editorial Board
Michael Apple, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA
Miriam David, Institute of Education, London University, UK
Cushla Kapitzke, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
Simon Marginson, University of Melbourne, Australia
Mark Olssen, University of Surrey, UK
Fazal Rizvi, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
Linda Tuahwai Smith, University of Waikato, New Zealand
Susan Robertson, University of Bristol, UK

Scope
This series maps the emergent field of educational futures. It will commission books on the futures of education in relation to the question of globalisation and knowledge economy. It seeks authors who can demonstrate their understanding of discourses of the knowledge and learning economies. It aspires to build a consistent approach to educational futures in terms of traditional methods, including scenario planning and foresight, as well as imaginative narratives, and it will examine examples of futures research in education, pedagogical experiments, new utopian thinking, and educational policy futures with a strong accent on actual policies and examples.
Educated Fear and Educated Hope

*Dystopia, Utopia and the Plasticity of Humanity*

Marianna Papastephanou

*University of Cyprus*
For my family and for Yannis and Constandinos, my little nephews
CONTENTS

Acknowledgements............................................................................................................vii

Introduction.........................................................................................................................ix

1. Anti-utopianism as a Current Theoretical Challenge....................................................1

2. The Course of Utopian Thought .................................................................................23

3. Utopia and Dystopia: Conceptual Clarifications .........................................................43

4. Education and Dystopia: Mamet’s Oleanna ..............................................................63

5. Educational Theory and Practice: The 2000 Curriculum ...........................................81

6. Utopia, Representation and Image ............................................................................103

7. Utopia and Reality ...................................................................................................121

8. The Foul Stain of Our Species: Anti-utopianism and Anthropology.............................147

Conclusion.........................................................................................................................177

Notes ................................................................................................................................177

Bibliography .....................................................................................................................193

Index .................................................................................................................................199
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our debts, intellectual or other, surely extend far beyond the restricted space of an acknowledgement note. Still I would like to express my gratitude to the following persons and institutions.

Sincere thanks are due to the University of Cyprus, to the Head of the Department (Prof Constandinos Christou) and all my colleagues in the Department of Education, especially those who struggle to maintain it such a civilized, easy-going and congenial workplace. Thanks also to my colleagues and friends Charoula Angeli, Mary Koutselini and Nicos Valanides for our friendly collaboration on many academic endeavours. Another large debt is to my students who provided and sustained the stimulating context within which some of the arguments and ideas in this book were first tried out.

Regarding the materialization of the book, I am grateful to the publishing house, the anonymous reviewers whose constructive reports helped me with the final revisions and Peter de Liefde in particular for his advice at various stages of the publication process. I owe specific debts of gratitude to Michael Peters whose help and faith in this project made it possible in the first place. He should therefore take a part of the credit (though none of the blame) for the way the book has turned out.

I am also indebted to Terry McLaughlin who invited me to give a lecture at the INPE conference in 2006 (Malta). Terry’s memory brings to my mind Victor Hugo’s dictum, “les morts sont les invisibles mais ils ne sont pas les absents”. Terry’s invitation got me more seriously involved in what had been, until then, a vaguely formulated research project. I am especially grateful to the organizers of that conference and to the audience whose questions and comments clarified my thinking on several points. The invited paper that I delivered there was on the topic of utopia, dystopia and education and appeared in the Studies of Philosophy and Education. Parts of it have been included in this book – I am grateful to the journal for this. Likewise, thanks to Ethics and Education for the kind permission to employ some of the ideas of my article ‘Hesiod the Cosmopolitan’ that was published in the journal last year. And I am grateful to the Brazilian artists Angela Detanico and Rafael Lain for kindly agreeing to adapt an idea of mine to their splendid work, their powerful visual poetics, and thus to design the jacket illustration for me.

More broadly, I owe special thanks to Prof Christopher Norris for his exemplary guidance and support over the years of my PhD research as well as for the many hours of fruitful conversation and for his invaluable friendship, then as now. I am also much in debt to Prof Karl-Otto Apel for supporting me as a supervisor would do during my studies in Berlin and for continuing to encourage me ever since. After my employment at the University of Cyprus, I have been lucky to have met Professors Richard Smith, Paul Standish, Marius Felderhof, Barath Sriraman, who I thank for their friendship, for their sharing their views and experience with me on various occasions throughout the years and for easing my transition from philosophy into philosophy of education. Their encouragement, along with that of Chris Norris and Karl-Otto Apel, has constantly been a source of restored motivation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

and fresh inspiration. I would like also to acknowledge that I have derived much benefit from discussing some of the ideas of the book with James Mensch, Padraig Hogan, Denise Egéa-Kuehne, David Bridges and Jim Conroy.

Finally, let me thank: my friends outside the academic world for the mind-broadening conversations and the memorable moments that we have had as this work went along; and my family for their inexhaustible patience over the last years, for their warmth and goodwill that relieved the solitude of authorship as well as for other reasons that are too many to account.
INTRODUCTION

Dystopian is a world and a life which one might have plausible and strong reasons to revoke; in so doing, one may invoke the image of a desirable reality, the utopia of how the world and life should be. The meeting point of thought and reality, of utopia and dystopia, is the yearning for change: perhaps not just any change, but the kind of change that involves hope and imagination of a truly good life and a just world.

From antiquity, even before Socrates asked his friends to imagine the ideal city (Plato, Politics, 272 a),\(^1\) philosophy had invited humanity to hope for the unexpected, for if ‘you do not expect it, it will never come’ (Heraclitus, frag. 18). However, for many decades now, (post)modern philosophy has renounced its own transformative relation to the existing reality and condemned theories of dystopia and utopia to obsolescence.

Much criticism of utopianism has been apposite and useful, but, in displaying a sweeping anti-utopianism, i.e., a general hostility to dark depictions of the here and now (as supposedly exaggerating) and to powerful portrayals of perfectibility (as supposedly unrealistic and dangerous), philosophy has turned against itself. For philosophy is expected to pit ‘thought against injustice, against the defective state of the world and of life’, and there is no philosophy ‘without the discontent of thinking in its confrontation with the world as it is’ (Badiou, 2005a, p. 29). An unmitigated anti-utopianism is an anti-philosophical stance to life and the world.

When education endorses the general late modern philosophical tendency to dismiss all talk about radical critique and desire for change it becomes anti-philosophical too. This is all the more worrying if we consider that education is precisely about the moulding of human desire and the shaping of the citizen. Education and futurity are inextricably connected because education acts upon the current state of affairs for the sake of the world that is to come, of the society and its citizens in roughly twenty or in thirty years time. Hence, if the desire of philosophy implies a dimension of revolt (Badiou, 2005a, p. 29), the desire of education implies a dimension of preparation. An ecological ideal for environmental protection, for instance, that would challenge those dominant human priorities that destroy nature has to be theorized (philosophically, scientifically, politically and educationally negotiated) and cultivated/debated in classrooms if it is to be activated in order to play a significant role in the life of future generations. Contrary to some anti-utopian assertions, education involves, by definition, issues of utopia and of what counts as a good life – issues that education cannot sidestep without losing its critical and preparatory character. Or, in other words, instead of being pleased with life as it is and reproducing it uncritically, education must retain and defend its proximity to the philosophical desire for perfectibility in a world where systemic demands and procedural standardization make this task increasingly difficult.

Then again, it is true that educational practice has improved: it is more progressive than authoritarian and elitist, more democratic and open to the masses.
INTRODUCTION

and surely more multivocal and sensitive to the historical context than ever. Yet, it seems that precisely its de-distantiation (Mannheim, 1960), its proximity to the needs of everyday life and its sensitivity to context have brought educational practice closer to purposes set by the market (Young, 2003) that are extrinsic to the educational ideal of human perfectibility. Against such tendencies of marketization, for example, of ‘increasing corporatization of the university and the advance of global capitalism’, it is no wonder that many educational theorists emphasize the need ‘to resurrect a language of resistance and possibility’. Such a language is expected to embrace ‘a militant utopianism while constantly being attentive to those forces that seek to turn such hope into a new slogan or punish and dismiss those who dare look beyond the horizon of the given’ (Giroux, 2003, p. 477).

The neglect of utopian thought and of utopian literature

But even the cornerstones of such a language of resistance, i.e. some of the most cherished educational ideas and aims that enjoy the approval of all fields of educational sciences suffer the consequences of anti-utopian hegemony and become impoverished. Critical thinking, for instance, is often subordinated to an ideal of performativity that affirms and reinforces the existing conditions of life and the current state of the world. It is thought that criticality must steer clear of conceptions of the good life and avoid any prioritization of one ethical ideal over others. However, critical thought requires ideas of the good life and critical approaches to value systems if it is to be something more than just effective accomplishment of pre-set and heteronomously authorized tasks. Anti-utopian critical thought tends to always be immanent, i.e. to avoid going beyond thin, minimal and safe value paths. By contrast, Ernst Bloch, a leading utopian figure of the 20th century, saw critical thinking as a ‘venturing beyond’. Such a formulation captures the complex relation of new contents of thought with the existing reality from which they emanate but which they transcend by the force of an extreme effort of will (Bloch, 1986, p. 4). In fact, even now that most liberal philosophers converge on the priority of the right over the good, utopian thinkers emphasize the significance of futurity and of conceptions of the good for a truly critical thinking. ‘Without some, more or less determinate, guiding idea of the good society, critical social thinking would be inconceivable: it would lack an ethical basis for its critical diagnoses and its endeavor to stimulate social and cognitive transformation would have no ethical point’ (Cooke, 2006, p. 3).

Even within the framework of anti-utopian immanence, it is true that critique continues to be an enshrined ideal of education. Yet the very moment it takes the shape of a standardized critical thinking, in its dominant, anti-utopian conception, critique loses its internal connection to theoretical endeavour and becomes a means for developing skills and performing specific tasks. While critique was associated in modernity either with the coming of age of humanity (Kant) or the radical change of the world (Marx) and it was accompanied with revolutionary enthusiasm regarding those two possibilities, nowadays it is often attached to a mere refinement of established orders. This effects not just the domestication of critique
that is now being widely discussed, but also its subjugation to technicist and performative purposes. It further has negative implications for education’s relation to vision, humanities, and the experience of time – time understood both as an always specific era determined by certain characteristics as well as a lived condition of human action that is spent and managed according to given sets of priorities.

Lacking critical self-distance and often theorized through the disillusioned perspective of a post-metaphysical era, educational practice sometimes appears insouciant. It indulges in the thought that it does its best, that, ultimately, our world is the best possible and that any utopian attempt to change it for the better will end in disaster. In so doing, it ignores and simultaneously fuels the dystopian elements of the present. Thus, ‘with the end of realistic socialism in Europe, any vision featuring a perspective that might transcend the status quo seems doomed’ and ‘the political project of humanising society’ (Wimmer, 2003, p. 167) is in crisis. Not that vision as such is given up; vision is still a guiding thread of human and educational action but now vision is channelled in individualist and materialist outlets. As futuristic visions ‘are increasingly linked to technological progress’, they acquire the status of psychic discharge operating around a singularly ‘practical realisation of perfection’ (ibid).

Evidently, human sciences (humanities) and cultural or educational experiences related to critique and vision or presupposed by them suffer the consequences of the change that critique and vision have undergone. The time that is given to them, e.g. curricular and classroom time or leisure time spent on them, is gradually contested, as it bears more and more the condescension of conceded time or the discontent of wasted time. Michael Wimmer formulates the paradoxes of the contemporary world in a way that is particularly helpful here as it brings all these notions together: ‘reflexive modernisation produces a devaluation of reflection; acceleration of all processes to save time produces lack of time; and society’s high estimation of science makes it into an enemy of theoretical thought’ (Wimmer, 2003, p. 171).

In this context, as I understand it, utopianism is neglected not only in its political or project-like sense of change and vision of perfectibility but also in its literary version. More generally, in fact, literature is emphatically understood as fiction, in the sense of the unreal that is counterposed to real life facts and data. The latter is now the myth-averse slogan of the realities of ‘contemporary society’ which has, in being itself a cliché, turned into a myth. Literature as fiction is then connected to leisure, a leisure that is more and more rare and unavailable, opposed to the urgency of results, standards and pressures for increased productivity and trapped in the ‘time – lack of time’ paradox. The fastfoodization of knowledge that is connected with deadlines, performance and achievement devalues whatever can be postponed to be carried out at a more convenient time. The increasingly frequent response that students give to the question about the extramural books they read is their ‘lacking time for such things’, rendering a further question about the way literature influences their life and thought pointless. Worse, ‘I don’t read fiction’ no longer comes apologetically or accompanied with any discomfort and any sense
INTRODUCTION

of missing something valuable. It now comes naturally and even with an air of self-importance: the more you disqualify things that do not fit in your timetable the more organized, dedicated and hard-working you appear to be. Now, if we realize that ‘with the development of computer technology, text has expanded into the digital realm and new options such as literary hypertext or e-literature are gaining a presence’ (Sumara, Luce-Kapler and Iftody, 2008, p. 229), the paradoxical nature of our era, its capacity to disable the enabling new opportunities and to block the possibilities for a harmonious interplay between science and humanities, becomes evident.

Even when literature is accommodated in schooling, the employment of it is often narrow, flat, uncritical and uninspiring. Hence the plea of many theorists coming not only from purely literary contexts but also from the social sciences context to reconsider the educational handling of reading comes as no surprise. ‘Teachers need to interrupt the superficial reading practices of students that are now supported by school curricula and mandatory high-stakes testing regimes. Many students use the text to confirm rather than to question their own beliefs’ (Sumara, Luce-Kapler and Iftody, 2008, p. 238). What we described briefly above as a toning down of critique and vision regarding practice more generally reappears here as a fact concerning reading more specifically.

Anti-utopianist thought fits in well with a reality in which being ‘down to earth’ means asking too few questions about the world as it is, as it might or as it should be. From this perspective, Fredric Jameson’s explanation of the decline of utopian literature in late capitalism makes good sense. To him, readers of that kind of literature ‘become extinct because the level of tolerance for fantasy is suddenly modified by a change in social relations’. Predictably, then, ‘in the windless closure of late capitalism it had come to seem increasingly futile and childish for people with a strong and particularly repressive reality-and-performance principle to imagine tinkering with what exists, let alone its thoroughgoing restructuration’ (Jameson, 1989, p. 75).

RESPONDING TO THE NEGLECT OF UTOPIANISM. POLITICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL UTOPIANISM AND LITERARY UTOPIANISM

Without underestimating the qualities of our world and its educational achievements, this book will respond to the challenge utopianism presents by defending the claim that the dystopian element in educational life must be acknowledged not so as to promote cynicism and resignation but so as to motivate desire for more radical reorientation. However, this claim presupposes a philosophical reworking of the notions of utopian thought, dystopian reality and anti-utopian hegemony. Thus, the book begins with the main anti-utopian arguments that have reduced the importance of utopia and dystopia as theoretical tools (chapter one). Then it is shown that much anti-utopian critique misses its target because utopianism is not homogeneous enough to be susceptible as a whole to the standard charges directed at it. To this purpose, gleanings from the historical course of utopian thought are recruited proving the diversity and richness of utopianism and the possibility to have futurist ideas that do not suffer from the
INTRODUCTION

standard problems that anti-utopianism justifiably chastises (chapter two). This takes us to a brief study of the way in which the notions of utopia and dystopia are now being evoked in most philosophical and educational trends and to a reworking of the conceptions of utopia and dystopia and of their interrelation. The reworking of utopianism and the exploration of the relation of utopia and dystopia attempted in this book is then conveyed through the last pages of Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* (chapter three). To illustrate the diagnostic force and usefulness of dystopia, I read David Mamet’s play *Oleanna* as an educational dystopia (chapter four). To uncover the spectral presence of dystopia and utopia as well as the repressive nature of some liberal anti-utopianism through a more concrete educational example, I explore an exemplary text of educational promise, a specific national curriculum (chapter five). Then the aim of the book turns to a more positive task, i.e. the deployment of (the proposed) utopianism through discussions of some of its basic theoretical underpinnings in relation to other theoretical approaches. Indicatively, the issue of utopian representation will be canvassed with reference to Louis Marin, that of utopia and ideology through criticisms of Karl Mannheim and Paul Ricoeur and that of utopian determinacy vs formalism by discussing Fredric Jameson (chapter six). Via Maeve Cooke’s view of utopia as an ethical picture, I move to an exploration of the ethical element of utopianism and I explain my preference to ethico-political utopianism. To depict the specific relation of dystopian reality and utopian imagination that I propose and to couple it with ethics and politics, I refer to Hermann Hesse’s short story ‘Strange News from Another Star’ (chapter seven). The book ends with a confrontation with the strongest anti-utopian argument, the culturally deep-seated anthropological objection that all this might be useless if humanity’s longing for perfectibility is doomed to always lead to failure due to what Isaiah Berlin (1991) called ‘humanity’s crooked timber’ (chapter eight).

It is already clear that I shall be using texts that do not only belong to philosophy and to political, planned utopianism but also to the utopian literary genre itself. Thus, although my approach does not focus on the literary genre but on utopian thought in general, on its significance for education and, more, on utopia and education being inextricably linked, I consider literary utopia as a cultural force that is complementary with the force of the better utopian argument (i.e., with political philosophical utopianism). As the relation of the utopian genre with politics and education is not the main focal point of the book, to justify this employment of examples of what this genre has to offer, I would like to register now some arguments that support the turn to political utopianism from the prism of the relation of education and literature.

Literature is significant for a more reflective and transformative education. This is most strikingly evident in one of the most politically involved genres, namely utopian and dystopian fiction. Many utopias and dystopias have, in their dimension that is critical of existing reality, warned us against social phenomena that affect education dramatically, such as the now dominant combination of sexual puritanism and reactionary hedonism that join forces in consolidating commodification of sexual, pharmacological and media hedonism. They have also warned us against
INTRODUCTION

epistemological tenets that enforce scientific positivism (e.g. the dehumanization typical of a world ruled by mathematics and science). And many utopias and dystopias have articulated a powerful critique of mechanical progress for its own sake or production for production’s sake (Milner, 2005). Through works that pertain to this genre such as Owen’s New Lanark, Zamyatin’s We, Čapek’s Rossum’s Universal Robots, literature can be valuable to combating scientism and positivism in education and questioning objectivist convention in schools. For example, Lilian Hellman’s 1934 play, The Children’s Hour, can be read as a drama of a dystopian world set in a school context. While blurring the line that separates school and home, the play examines in a provocative and path-breaking manner how objectivism in societies reflected in schools creates the dystopian effect of persecution, self-reproach and cynical exploitation in various aspects of the established order.

The list of examples and of their varying contributions could be endless, and it would be a needless intricacy to enter into the maze of utopian literary constructions here. What is more important is that, regrettably, the constellation ‘utopia/dystopia, political consciousness and education’ has not adequately been mined in philosophy of education (and education in general) yet.

Given the cultural and educational context that I have already briefly sketched, the challenge for education is today, amongst other things, to escape its entrapment in what Sartre (2004) called in his later works the realm of the ‘practico-inert’, a realm that reduces education to a conservative and social-reproductive institution. In a world that gives priority to scientistic and technicist ideals and effects a ‘truncating’ (Adorno’s term) of thought, literature should not only become educationally rehabilitated but it must also become an actively intervening force of educational redirection. If literature can teach how to live better, as many philosophers of education argue, then the genre that concerns images of a better life or a life as it should be seems the most appropriate to critical educational aims. The genre in question is the utopian. Apart from offering images of a better life, that is, apart from giving a possible content to teaching about a worthwhile life, literary utopias have another connection to education: both assume the pliability of humanity and operate in virtue of the feasibility of change for the better. Many utopian/dystopian works see the child as the source of new hope [e.g. Andrei Platonov’s The Foundation Pit (see, Osborne, 2003)] and reassert in this way that the plasticity of humanity is education’s primary concern, while revealing the dangers lurking in accounts of education that eliminate imagination.

Within the utopian genre itself, there have been variations of themes that tackle in different and rich ways what ‘better’ might be. Now, since the socio-historical and, consequently, the educational context favour practical-technological, instead of ethico-political, aspirations to perfection (Wimmer, 2003, p. 167), those kinds of utopia that revolve primarily around scientism and technicism would arguably be part of the above mentioned problems rather than their solution. The most popular, and, therefore, culturally and educationally less neglected literary works are usually cybertopias and sci-fi; the opposite seems to hold for literature that involves some form of collective ideal of perfection or an explicit political utopianism. Whilst much futurism revolves around an unhindered flow of communication and a
pharmacological, surgical or genetic (in fact, eugenic) ‘enhancement’ of humanity and prolongation of vitality and youth, ironically, society recoils in the idea of political vision. Hence, although I am aware of the fact that some sci-fi works are commendably political even up to the concrete aspect of movementist ecotopia [e.g. Ursula LeGuin’s books (see, Kumar, 1991, p. 105)], here, in this book I am more interested in, and shall draw from, those utopias that have an ethico-political direction and not a communicative, scientific, technological and medical direction.

Literature in educational settings has usually been seen as a means for cultivating narrative imagination and identification with various ‘existing’ others within a community and outside of it thus promoting cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism (Nussbaum, 1997). The starting point is, often unconsciously, the self, the self-consciousness and the perception of the other in consciousness. In a way, this is an individualist frame of thinking about the ethico-political relevance of literature which is important but inadequate in itself to cover the whole ground of what literature might offer to readers. In fact, it cannot accommodate utopian literature, for, as Martin Buber explains, utopia is as such tied with the yearning (Sehnsucht) for the just (Recht) as an idea which can by nature be realized not in/for the individual but in/for the human community (Buber, 1985, p. 30). What the individualist narrative imagination leaves out is, amongst other things, the literary portrayal of alternative and possible worlds, of collectivities of the future and fresh ways of handling world politics beyond – though not against – the issues of individual rights and respect for pluralism.

My rehabilitation of the educational significance of political utopian literary works presupposes that literature is valuable not just for identification with the right models or empathetic understanding of otherness, as it is widely assumed, but also for enlarged thought and an active life (vita activa) [to use Hannah Arendt’s (1989) terms]. Nothing compels us to view the educational significance of literature exclusively through the lens of empathy, but, on the contrary, we have reasons to question the absolute paradigmatic reliance on it. The focus on empathy has been rightly criticized for its facile assumptions (Scarry, 1996) and it can also be criticized as didactic, instrumental and committed in a rather costly way. The major difference I see in the empathetic and the utopian perspective is that the former revolves around an axis of actuality and subjectivity, whereas the latter is oriented toward possibility and collective universality. My claim is that enlarged thought is assisted by utopian literature because of the latter’s relation to vision. Narrative imagination in utopias is extended beyond the actual and the individual. The self constructs images of alternative realities that heighten awareness of present societal flaws, instead of just being identified with various others and their consciousness. Then, the self might be drawn into something better by the force of the evocative and seductive literary portrayal of a yet unexplored ethical possibility. By contrast, the empathetic focus on literature associates it solely with individualist ideals of a more sensitive self that is valuable to society and the world only by implication.

Further, the preoccupation with literary utopianism can be more directly encompassing of cosmopolitan themes and of educational priorities than the
INTRODUCTION

preoccupation with individualist narrative imagination might be, that is, it may score better even where narrative imagination is usually taken to be at its best. This is due to reasons that can be associated with the following multiple dimensions of utopianism. First, the utopian perspective makes world literature rather than restrictively Western(ized) literature important for education (spatial dimension); second, much utopian literature of the past has been and it can still be path-breaking for education (diachronic dimension); and third, contemporary utopianist literary works reveal social pathologies that educationists must bear in mind and aim to avoid while providing ethico-political images of the collective Good (synchronic dimension). An abundance of Golden Age narratives throughout history and around the globe (narratives that do not largely offer main characters for individual, empathetic identification) testifies to the fact that literature has often mapped the human desire for a better world and/or the political effort to realize it. But, also, from western and non-western antiquity to the present, literature in the form of novel provides us with a very rich material of literary portrayals of a better life of all kinds and for various social groups. As an example, consider, for instance the feminist utopia we encounter in China. In the 18th century we find the first feminist Chinese utopian novel authored by Li-Ju-chen (c. 1763–1830) and entitled The Mirror of the Flowers. It is a novel that is set in the 7th century and ‘describes the adventures of a hundred talented women in imaginary kingdoms; the description gives rise to an acid criticism of China under the Manchu dynasty. In these kingdoms women have the right to sit for public examinations, they study, they marry freely [and] they do not have to bind their feet or serve as concubines’ (Chesneaux, 1968, p. 84). Again, the list of examples could be endless here regarding various aspects of non-Western or ancient Western utopian constructions of worlds in which the ‘no-count’, i.e. Jacques Ranciere’s (1999) politically marginalized societal groups gain voice and intervening force in a universalizable manner. The upshot is that political utopianism in its spatial and temporal dimensions is not just an ideal that draws mainly from western, modern literary sources; in being more encompassing, political utopianism in its literary form can serve cosmopolitanism in ways that have not, despite intentions, been utilized by standard, empathetic approaches to education and literature.

Diachronically and synchronically, literary utopias have offered education valuable insights, or, as Jameson (2005) might put it (and much earlier than him Walter Benjamin), glimpses from the future. For instance, Owen’s New Lanark concerns the creation of a small society where there is no place for poverty, neglect of health and crime and where education is put centre stage materialized by a school that employs methods that can be characterized progressive even by contemporary standards, e.g. the use of play for learning purposes in the early years (Halpin, 2001b, p. 306). In New Lanark, Owen ‘pinpointed with astonishing prescience the disastrous flaws in the “created opposition of interests” on which the early capitalist systems of production, exchange and consumption were based, finding “true civilization” impossible under such disabling conditions’. Unlike much established educational practice, ‘the children at New Lanark were taught to compete in “friendly emulation” but also to value “going forward with their companions” over “leaving them behind”’ (Davis, 2003, p. 577).
INTRODUCTION

Owen’s views are a telling example of the fact that the educational element in utopias was not serving purely rhetorical or literary purposes but it was, rather, a significant source of inspiration and intervention in actual educational discourses. His emphasis on the cultivation of imagination, on the significance of cooperation and his employment of other, related terms, such as energy, emulation, activity, liveliness, play, curiosity etc often nourished what came to be seen as an educationally ‘libertarian lexicon’ against the then commonly held oppressive educational tenets (Davis, 2003, p. 577). Unlike some literary works of a more individualist character, utopia critiqued the modernist instrumentalist and performative priorities of education (Davis, 2003, p. 580) and the concomitant goal-setting and deserves some wider educational attention than it has so far enjoyed.

Another useful example here could be Fourier’s utopian work, for it outlined ‘a projected future where passions, the basic unit of humanity, rather than Marx’s labor, would be liberated, allowing for free associations through sex, love and artistic appreciation’ (Leonardo, 2003, p. 513). These forms of passion are retarded by a commercialism which, along with other operations of capitalism, it effects also a transformation of the self and the other into abstract entities. In the embodied and sensual dimensions of humanity that have to be redeemed, Fourier sees, as Zeus Leonardo explains, the possibility of a complete, other-oriented and harmonious humanity (ibid). This ideal of the homo harmonicus is accompanied by an ideal of harmonious education emphasizing human attraction. Despite the asphyxiating organization of daily life and the overdeterminacy of the utopian planning as well as other problems of the modernist, canonical conception of utopia from which neither Fourier nor Owen escaped, what remains important is that such works connect education with radical societal redirection for collective happiness and perfectibility and are in some respect really advanced efforts to invigorate education even by contemporary standards.

The emphasis on literary utopianism by no means entails that other literary genres are of secondary importance for education. It rather entails that, as a subset of literature, the utopian genre must be rehabilitated and its educational significance acknowledged in ways that the individualist, often didactic, focus on the character(s) of a novel and the individual psychology (or their social positioning) has not yet allowed.


As we have already seen, utopia relates to education by definition as both assume (and are preconditioned on) the plasticity and perfectibility of humanity. However, the connection has not been established adequately, despite the abundance of ancient Polieías (Republics) or ethnographic utopias that reserved a crucial role for education and of modern utopias that almost always put education centre stage. Significantly, some of the earliest non-Western cases of Golden Age utopianism connect egalitarianism and education. For instance, in a very ancient text in the Chinese Book of Rites (Li Chi), the Golden Age period of Great Unity (ta-t’ ung) is characterized, amongst other things, by education for all the young (Chesneaux,
INTRODUCTION

1968, p. 79). Education is available to all in More’s utopia (written at a time when
the democratization of education was inconceivable in England) (Halpin, 2001b, p.
304) and this is very telling about the extent to which education is valued in
utopias. Already in More, utopia is more of a thought experiment about how
humanity might be moulded rather than a detailed directive of the appropriate
course of change: it communicates ‘what is possible if you dare to deliberate,
daydream even, outside the strict confines of ways of thinking that currently have
the greatest salience and influence’ (Halpin, 2001b, p. 309). In some cases, the
pedagogic element of reshaping humanity would find in modern utopias a narrower
specification which is no less interesting in its connection of education with
concrete themes that aim to untangle theoretical knots. As an example of this one
might consider the effort to find a pedagogic mediation between religion and
science which ‘would flourish in an educative utopia’ and was the sole concern that
united utopian authors/thinkers as diverse as Bacon, Andreae and Comenius

Yet, the opposite, that is, educational theory accommodating utopia or explicitly
discussing it has not been the case. The exception here is John Dewey’s article for
the New York Times in 1933 with the title ‘Dewey Outlines Utopian Schools’
where he assumed the role of a visitor to a Utopia in which children and adults
interact to gain and develop skills and an inquisitive stance to life (Dewey, 1986)
as well as a willingness to tackle problems. Exceptions have also been some books
of the ’70s such as George Leonard’s Education and Ecstasy and John Mann’s
Learning to Be. Finally, the earliest exploration of the relation of utopia and
education that I know of is Howard Ozmon’s 1969 book Utopias and Education.6
True, despite such exceptions, the dominant trend in education has been anti-
utopianism, but recent educational theory has so far gradually retrieved utopian
thought in various ways. Anti-utopianism is still very influential, however, especially
in the liberal persuasion and in fields other than philosophy of education. Hence, as
late as 2001, David Halpin points out how neglected the concepts of utopia and
hope have been in ‘educational management studies and in the study of education
generally’ (2001a, p. 105). Dystopia is even more neglected, almost unspoken in
educational contexts.

However, the interest in utopia is now being renewed in general philosophy, in
cultural studies (Passerini, 2002, p. 17) and in philosophy of education (Halpin,
2001b, p. 300; Lewis, 2007, p. 1) through a series of books, special issues and
conferences on utopian imagination and through a proliferation of ‘sites,
organizations and communities that sustain themselves by reference to the utopian
tradition’ (Peters and Humes, 2003, p. 429). I believe that the educational
comeback of utopia can now largely be found in four trends: (a) the rehabilitation
of anarchist thought, of its utopian impetus and of its faith in education as
developed by Judith Suissa’s work; (b) the rich educational critical response to
Futures Studies (Peters and Humes, 2003); (c) the radical transformation approach
to education (which preserved the utopian element all along from Freire down to
Giroux and McLaren) and which defends the need to develop pedagogies of hope
(Stewart-Harawira, 2003); and (d) the reformist approach to educational practice
from Dewey down to recent thinkers (Halpin, 2001a & b; Demetrion, 2001)
INTRODUCTION

favouring piecemeal pragmatist utopian change. Overall, a number of educational pathologies are expected to be treated by means of utopian thinking, pathologies such as teacher apathy, student resignation and the oppressive reproduction of social inequalities through schooling practices (Lewis, 2007, p. 1).

Despite their being valuable and very welcome in their capacity to invigorate philosophical dialogue and reorient education to more critical and utopia-inspired aims, educational approaches to futurity are often attacked by many of the above mentioned utopianist educational philosophers for succumbing to systemic imperatives. As Peter and Humes remark, the utopias of contemporary educational futures suffer from the narrowness and limits that follow their subjection to methodology and disciplinary formation and their elevation to the status of official policy narratives. A critical educational approach to Futures Studies questions the predictive and planning emphasis that accompanies the viewing of education through the lens of technical-managerial priorities (2003, p. 432). Further in Peters and Humes’ words, ‘now that the question of futures is subjected to its own disciplinary formation and methodologies, educational futures tend to be more mundane and technical, or both, especially when they are harnessed as official policy narratives’ (Peter and Humes, 2003, p. 431).

One may also notice and add that most of the attempts to retrieve utopia, even those which go beyond Futures Studies, lack the comprehensiveness (often requiring book length exposition or defence of utopia) that is necessary if the old, faulty lines that were justifiably targeted by anti-utopianism are to be avoided. For instance, in much of the relevant material, utopia is more historically mapped rather than revisited through the prism of contemporary philosophy. Or, when it is reformulated, its renegotiation occurs within the confines of a particular tradition, e.g. pragmatism, liberal realism, and Marxist or Lacanian and Althusserian reconsiderations of utopia and it is almost always negligent of, or dissociated from, the kindred notion of dystopia. The latter is often presented as the polemical other of utopia, that is, the inexorable and hard reality of failed dreamworld or it is confused with anti-utopia. The importance of dystopia for education as a diagnostic but also critical tool of pathologies is, to my knowledge, totally absent. This neglect, within the received view, of the possible complementary relation of utopia and dystopia is accompanied by a failure to provide or imply a different anthropology or, in other words, a different descriptive frame of what is to be human and what counts as humanly (im)possible that would justify utopian normativity. As a result, the normative force of utopia is attenuated through limitations imposed along pragmatist and realist lines. The idea is that when utopian efforts aspire to something beyond the axes set by neo-pragmatism and some version of realism, dystopia will, by some kind of anthropological necessity, be the inescapable conclusion. The term ‘realistic utopia’ encountered in John Rawls, Alasdair Mcintyre and others and the term ‘pragmatist utopia’ in Richard Rorty’s work exemplify the presence of utopian energies in political philosophy and their simultaneous attenuation through a less imaginative invocation of the potential for changing historical reality. These approaches seem to have determined the course of the revival of utopian thought in general philosophy and philosophy of education, and
INTRODUCTION

the treatment of the anthropological grounds of utopia that I propose further aims to contribute to an enrichment and redirection of this course. For the attenuation of utopian energies through a specific description of human potentiality and its limits, i.e., through a particular philosophical anthropology, is usually accompanied by a restriction of the symbolic association of utopian thought to ideology alone, which is either contrasted or connected with it, to the total neglect of the corrective and directive functions of dystopia and with a domestication of critique as a further consequence.

In what follows, in order to make things clearer about the aims of this book, I sketch some general ideas for a rehabilitated utopia coupled with, rather than in opposition to, the notion of dystopia.

The conceptualisation of dystopia, utopia and relevant terms characterized by futurity (such as hope, counterfactuality, regulative idea, thought experiment etc) and the theoretical discussion of utopia as a political project and as a literary genre require a distinction between the descriptive and the normative plane. Those correspond to accounts of reality, cosmos and humanity on the one hand and the image-creating [Buber’s (1985, p. 29) Bildschaffende] human desire for an ethical life on the other. The descriptive and the normative side of the issue of utopia relate thus: reformulations of what we should hope for presuppose what we regard ourselves capable of and how we detect and describe our supposedly inherent limits. Observing reality we can know how people have been and to some relatively safe extent how they will be in the very near future. But this tells us very little, perhaps nothing, about how people could and should be. Hence, the descriptive frame does not comprise only observations of actuality but also conjectures of possibility. The latter are crucial for judging the imaginative reach of normativity, while normativity is crucial for inspiring a reconsideration of those conjectures. This distinction between the descriptive and the normative justifies the emphasis that the book gives (in the last chapters) to issues that go beyond a mere, posited and often axiomatic shift toward, and renewal of, the interest in utopia.

More concisely, this is how the argument of the book goes:

The significance of utopian thought for education can be made evident through reconceptualizing utopia and approaching it alongside with the notion of dystopia. Awareness of dystopian elements of reality radicalizes the kind of critique that assists utopian thought and makes engagement with it more pressing. Awareness of the lurking danger of future dystopia goes hand in hand with a utopia that is cautious and vigilant of its own possible turn into catastrophe. If education is not just an institution of the unreflective socialization and social integration of the young immersed in technicist and prudentialist goals, if it is about futurity and vision of a better world, it has to rely on, and renegotiate, utopian thought. Yet, all this presupposes a new descriptive account of the self and the world that breaks with the kind of anthropology and ethics that generated a particular conception of utopia as impossible and purely dreamlike.7
Anti-utopianism as a Current Theoretical Challenge

Anti-utopian is largely the kind of political discourse that treats utopias as pernicious visions, condemns ideas of radical change, avoids experiments with collective life and defends the reproduction (material, symbolic) of society or, at most, the modest, minimal betterment of conditions of political life. Before coupling utopianism and education, it is important to explore the counterarguments to utopianism, that is, to consider the possible anti-utopian objections to the whole venture. If they are decisively on the right track, the whole project of reviving utopia – within, for and as education – that many philosophical educational works have recently undertaken or favoured (this book not withstanding) is pointless.

Of course, counterarguments to utopia have taken the length of numerous books and they cannot be done justice, much less be refuted, in a book or, worse, in a book chapter. Nevertheless, utopianism and education as I intend to discuss them presuppose that the equation of utopia with inescapable prospective and dramatic failure is wrong. And this presupposition has to be explained programmatically and convincingly enough to justify the worthiness of the suggested turn to utopian discourse. The relevant steps cannot follow a linear logic because the main aim of the book is not to target anti-utopianism exclusively and thoroughly but rather to confront it only in a way that will enable the move to a more positive task: namely, educationally to placing utopia alongside with dystopia and to highlighting their corrective and directive interplay. Hence, to use a metaphor that illustrates the non-linearity of the expositional strategy that I explain below, the intersection and recurrence of the moves that are required for the deployment of the main argument brings to mind images of waves, or, better, of ripples on water surface.

Anti-utopianism kept at bay: A more Detailed Commentary on the Structure of the Book

The main part of the book begins with this chapter (chapter 1) which contains indications of the chief directions of anti-utopianism and sorts or orders the most outstanding anti-utopian arguments. This move will justify two other chapters of the book, one (chapter 2) which follows right after the exposition of anti-utopianism, responds to some weaker anti-utopian arguments and facilitates the reconceptualization of the utopianist terms that is necessary for the positive task as stated above. The twin chapter (chapter 8) concentrates on the anti-utopian argument that is most difficult to tackle, i.e. the anthropological argument, and appears last in the book. For, the chapter-length response to the anthropological argument presupposes, in its turn, the ground that will be covered by the more
 CHAPTER I

substantive discussion of utopianism and education (chapters 4 and 5) and the recurrent, additive defence of utopianism from multiple angles that comes about through the deployment of the basic argument of the book (chapters 3, 6 and 7).

The deeper, internal logic of this articulation of the material of the book that is relevant to anti-utopianism is the following: by focusing on particular conceptions of utopia its detractors render the concept of utopia as such philosophically suspect. Partly, the mistrust of utopian thought rests on a faulty and partial understanding of what utopianism might be about (chapter 2). Some assumptions involved in the rejection of utopian possibilities can be shown to be apposite only to specific, bad and obsolete kinds of utopianism. Usually, defenders of utopianism confine their response to anti-utopianism to such a demonstration of the opponents’ faulty generalizations. They argue that the idea that any imaginable utopia would be a static, totalitarian, over-determined, finalist and detailed blueprint of the good society is a wrong way of conceptualizing utopianism. Chapter 2 aims to show that the richness of the historical course of utopian thought approached from an enlarged, universal perspective precludes the reductive understanding of utopia strictly as a vision of a rationalist, motionless and utterly regulated society. In showing this, one may go even further than the usual defence of utopia along lines of conceptual richness. One may open the way to a conceptual renewal of utopianism and to a possibility of reshuffling its components, i.e. utopia and dystopia so as to rearrange them in their position within utopianism and in their relation to one another (chapter 3).

Yet, we should not make things too easy for ourselves. We must not ignore that the strongest challenge to utopianism, the deepest-seated in the Western thought, does not just affect the various conceptions of utopianism but it affects the concept of utopianism itself, that is, the very faith in human perfectibility, the discomfort with the existent, the act of imagining a radically different future and the remoulding of the gloomily depicted present along the vision of such futurism. The strongest argument against utopia deals with the shortcomings of humanity (human frailty), not just with the shortcomings of specific models of the good (chapter 8). Therefore, it does not concern only old, rationalist, end-state utopias. The anti-utopian equation of all utopias with dangerous efforts for social change rests on the idea that human nature is prohibitive of radical change.

Hence, to formulate a new account of utopianism that is not teleological or too determinate is one thing; to show that this formulation is not unrealistic qua at odds with human potentialities is quite another. The challenge now is different, mainly, either:

(1) to prove that the reformulated utopianism is quite mild in its political demands on humanity and compatible with the dominant account of human nature’s narrowly defined potentialities;
or:
(2a) to stick to a bold utopianism oscillating, however, between acknowledging its necessity for the regulation of human action yet acknowledging also its supposedly simultaneous impossibility due to human nature;
or:
ANTI-UTOPIANISM AS A CURRENT THEORETICAL CHALLENGE

(2b) to stick to a bold utopianism and justify this commitment by rejecting the standard view of human nature that precludes bold utopianism and displaying why that view involves an unsubstantiated elevation of Western self-conceptions to anthropological constants.

Option 1 allows for the so-called pragmatist or realist utopia (e.g. Rawls, McIntyre) which is modest enough to promote only the moderate change a (post)modern citizen as a rational egoist would wish (whatever else s/he might wish) but unable philosophically to sustain radical redirection. Option 2a revisits and revives the Marxist tradition via deconstructive, poststructuralist or continental post-metaphysical insights and it preserves the vision of radical change but in a way that I regard as politically inoperative, deep down conventionalist and at times contradictory. The final main option (2b) can accommodate radical change and the aspirations of utopianism proper but requires an additional and more risky theoretical endeavour: to show why its twin option (2a) is inadequate, while also showing why the realist depiction of human nature as rationally egoistic is problematic, that is, why the bulwark of anti-utopianism must be attacked. As I go for this 2b option, the book will not finish with the exposition of the connection of utopia, dystopia and education, as it might do (up to chapter 5), but it will go on with a deeper justification of this connection (chapters 6, 7 and 8). Thus the rest of the book chapters (after ch 5) will deal with a critique of the utopian thought that I would place in 2a (Paul Ricoeur, Fredric Jameson, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek and Maeve Cooke) and of the received view on humanity, its relation to reality and its supposedly ‘natural’ limits.

ANTI-UTOPIAN ARGUMENTS AND POLITICAL UTOPIANISM

Whereas in early modernity the notion of utopia was embraced and projected on a temporal dimension of fulfilment that radicalized its initial spatial and novelist character (Habermas, 1994), later it fell upon hard times. The attitude to actual political utopian projects changed too. Even during more politically unsettled periods with more revolutionary confidence, e.g. May 1968, there had been an ambivalent stance to utopia. As Luisa Passerini (2002) explains, ‘the protagonists of 1968 did not like to use “utopia”, because the negative sense of the word had prevailed, indicating something impossible to reach, a sentiment against the spirit of 1968’. However, the very moment when utopia appears tarnished, ‘slogans such as “Being a realist means demanding the impossible” testify to the utopian strength of 1968’ (Passerini, 2002, p. 17). The reasons for the ambivalence regarding utopia or even for its downright rejection have been productive of very strong anti-utopian theoretical positions (Sargent, 2006, pp. 13–4). In their simpler version, those positions are by now well known as they have been popularized and widely disseminated: for most lay people, the utopian is equated with the unrealizable, the impossible in principle, or the impossible for most human beings over which one should not waste time or energy. Apart from being presented as futile, the utopian has been accused of having pernicious political implications. In philosophy and in education as much as in the general, perhaps global, social imaginary ‘an anti-utopianism of both the right and left can be found in those views that reduce
utopian thinking to state terrorism and progressive visionaries to unrealistic, if not dangerous, ideologues’ (Giroux, 2003, p. 475). From the anti-utopian perspective, dabbling in arbitrary, wishful thinking may bring along risky social and political experiments, even totalitarian new collective formations. Such formations may see themselves as perfect and in need of no further change ending up in static and illiberal models of society and life. Utopia appears, then, as inescapably totalizing. Finality as an attribute of utopian thought derives from the taken-for-granted assumption that ‘the long series of improvements on social reality was bound to reach at some point its natural conclusion: not just a better society, but the best society conceivable, the perfect society, society in which any further change could be only a change to the worse’ (Bauman, 2003, p. 15).

The disparagement of utopia or, at best, the oscillation between positive and negative treatments of utopia marked the modernist conception of education as a project for future betterment of humanity – with the negative stance toward utopia increasingly gaining a sweeping force. The anti-utopian loss of faith in human malleability has pervaded education to such an extent that it has made schooling complicit in the political and cultural failure to meet the task of imagining and forging a better humanity. Adorno’s remark in a radio interview is very telling.

Not only does society, as it is presently structured, keep people immature but every serious attempt to shift it – I’m avoiding the word “educate” deliberately – to shift it towards maturity is immediately met with indescribable resistances, and all the evil in the world at once finds its most eloquent advocates, who will prove to you that the very thing you are attempting to achieve has either long been overtaken or is utopian or is no longer relevant (Adorno & Becker, 1999, p. 32).

Given that education has played an important role in many utopian projects or novels (Peters & Humes, 2003, p. 429), it is ironic that utopia has fallen into educational disrepute (Wimmer, 2003, p. 167). What is alarming, though, is the political quietism that results from the fact that philosophy of education loses much critical force when it gives in so light-heartedly to anti-utopian trends. For Ernst Bloch, as Vincent Geoghegan puts it, ‘the real enemy of humanity is not illusory dreaming but nihilism, the loss of the capacity to dream at all’ (Geoghegan, 2004, p. 130). Karl Mannheim (1960) sees as a de-distantiation a cultural democratization where aristocratic cultural ideals give way to more mundane concerns. The aspect of the Mannheimian de-distantiation that is relevant to education is the one that contrasts the quasi-aristocratic, humanistic ideal of the all-round person with the democratic ideal of vocational specialization. The shortcomings that Mannheim detects in educational humanism comprise ‘the mistaking of one’s own limits for those of the world; lack of contact with the realities of life; a purely aesthetic relation to things; a lack of awareness of new potentialities and situations’ (Turner, 2003, p. 40). The democratic ideal is praised, on the other hand, for its focus on the existing, limited situation. However, the danger of such de-distanciation lies in its exaggeration that threatens humanity as such. For Mannheim, achieving some distance from the contingencies of one’s existence is a fundamental trait of the human being. Those for whom nothing is of value beyond their immediate situation are not fully human. The ideal of going beyond the situational perspective is termed ‘ecstasy’. In Mannheim’s approach, ‘rather than suppressing the possibility
of ecstatic experience in favour of a culture saturated by vocational specialization, democracy has the potential to become the basis, and the sole basis, for ecstasy as a “universally shared form of experience” (Turner, 2003, p. 41). Whether democracy on its own suffices to maintain the ecstatic is a debatable issue which will be encountered elsewhere in the book. The point here is that when ecstasy is missing from the pedagogical enterprise, education becomes a modest operation of socialization, an adaptive and conservative institution that aims to reproduce or, at most, to modify and readjust the world to new developments rather than to raise more radical demands on humanity.

True, the anti-utopian tendencies in modernity did not gain absolute control of philosophical or educational thought. The most famous exceptions to the anti-utopian theoretical concordance in the 20th century have been the works of Ernst Bloch (1986) and Karl Mannheim (1960) but, despite their influence, those works never turned into a dominant current of thought. In late modernity, conservative and Cold War liberal attacks on the dangerous ambitions of utopianism assisted by the downfall of revolutionary confidence led to ‘a full-scale retreat from visions of perfection’ (Geoghegan, 2003, p. 156). And neo-liberalism now exploits the collapse of alternative socio-politico-economical systems such as that of the Eastern bloc. It lives off or it becomes constantly reinforced by ‘the increasingly dominant view that society cannot be fundamentally improved outside of market forces’. By means of such re-invigoration of its energies ‘neo-liberalism strips utopianism of its possibilities for social critique and democratic engagement’ (Giroux, 2003, p. 475). By means of neo-liberal self-recuperative strategies that guarantee the survival of the system, despite crises and democratic deficits, the need to reclaim ‘utopian thinking as both a discourse of human rights and a moral referent for dismantling and transforming dominant structures of wealth and power’ (Giroux, 2003, p. 475) becomes undermined. But the sharpest anti-utopian argument against radical human redirection is not the spectre of totalitarianism that several liberal positions at times recruit. The sharpest anti-utopian argument is the ultimate one, the point where a conversation between a utopian and an anti-utopian theorist ends, that is, the anthropological argument about human nature being prohibitive of perfectibility. From Adorno, as we saw above, down to Giroux, utopian theorists confront ‘what Russell Jacoby called a “convenient cynicism”, a belief that human suffering, hardship, and massive inequalities in all areas of life are simply inherent in human nature and an irreversible part of the social condition’ (Giroux, 2003, p. 475).

In what follows, let us order and codify the main anti-utopian arguments encountered in public debates, media culture and the social imaginary and let us associate them with some emblematic figures and philosophical trends that have at times initiated or promoted them.

THE MAIN ARGUMENTS AGAINST UTOPIA

(1) There have been severe criticisms of utopia for its prioritizing the role of faith and not of reason in politics leading immediately to fundamentalism and/or expansionism. This set of criticisms is usually put forward by much secular liberal
philosophical discourse. (2) Unlike those who accuse utopia for too much reliance on faith, there are those who accuse it of too much faith in reason and too much reliance on the rationalist organization of life. Against the rationalism of a perfectly regulated society and the dream of the radical change that would erase all blemishes of an existing society, anti-utopians such as Karl Popper (1957) draw a distinction between utopian holistie engineering and piecemeal engineering. (3) There are anti-utopian arguments against visions of collective happiness as supposedly suffocating for the individual. Here the issue is freedom and the balance between subjectivity and society. Friedrich von Hayek (1944) attacks utopian central planning for its inherent inefficiency as well as for its blockage of individual freedom. From another perspective, Isaiah Berlin (1991) criticizes the utopian emphasis on collective ideals as consolidating a split within the self and as ultimately harming human freedom. (4) Marx and Marxist philosophers argued against what they saw as utopian socialism charging it with unrealizability, inoperativeness and escapism. (5) Much like the Marxist criticisms of utopian thought, left-leaning deconstructive arguments are put forward against utopian unrealizability, inoperativeness and escapism (e.g. Derrida). However, in my view, they constitute a separate category because they do not share the positivist Marxist distinction between ideology and science within which the Marxist critique of utopian unrealizability is couched. Without assuming an eventual and scientifically predicted realization of ideals, the deconstructive arguments contrast the inoperativeness of the chimeric with the urgency of the here and now. (6) There have also been some post-metaphysical, continental- and liberal- philosophical arguments against the Marxian, Marxist and Mannheimian ideas of utopian realizability and blueprint quality. Many continental and Anglo-American liberal philosophers converge on the idea of utopia as, at best, a possibility while denouncing utopia’s reconstructive aspirations and the metaphysical, philosophical-historical framework that underpinned those aspirations. (7) Some anti-utopian liberals are more dismissive of utopia as such because they see in utopian thought a desire for stability and consensus. Their arguments focus on the significance of conflict and dissent in societies. Ralph Dahrendorf’s (1967) anti-utopianism is a case in point. (8) We notice a similar emphasis on conflict against consensus-theory utopianism within some philosophies that are usually placed in the category of postmodernism. Michel Foucault’s arguments come to mind here. (9) Neo-pragmatist arguments are also put forward against utopian metaphysics but they are accompanied with a mild appropriation of some utopianism as creative impetus (Rorty, 1995) or as part of the democratic process (from Dewey down to contemporary educational pragmatism). (10) Finally, there have been arguments in favour of political formalism and against the political utopianism of a specific conception of the good alongside an appropriation of utopian consensual themes (communicative utopias of a Habermasian style).

Surely, some of the above anti-utopian arguments have a methodological rather than an absolute, all encompassing character. They are sometimes employed by thinkers who wish to refute some kinds of utopianism while retaining, often tacitly, milder forms of utopian-like visions of collective life and society. Thus, many theorists employ ‘utopianism’ in a mitigated and strategic fashion, as a charge only
to attack what they consider as bad utopianism, not to attack any utopianism or to condemn the attempt to construct a utopian vision wholesale. For instance, Herbert Marcuse (see, Cooke, 2004, p. 414) rejected utopias as obsolete and impossible, distant from actual human potential and effort. This critique of utopian thought holds that the utopian distance from the actual historical process obscures the redemptive possibilities within everydayness. But this did not stop Marcuse from having a very strong image of the good life based on the Great Refusal, i.e. the protest against, and overcoming of, surplus repression (Cho, 2006, p. 23) and from being one of the most distinctively utopian authors of the Frankfurt School. But, despite the few exceptions such as Marcuse’s methodological anti-utopianism for the sake of a different utopianism, beneath the surface of most of the above counter-arguments or condemnations of utopia, even of mitigated and strategic anti-utopianism, one finds a common grounding of the anti-utopian sentiment. Anti-utopian variations share an implicit over-view of humanity that goes against the utopian anthropological assumptions regarding the malleability of the human self, the relativized, depoliticized and historicized character of human frailty and the questioning of the supposed inherence or directive priority of egoism over altruism.

THINKING OVER THE ANTI-UTOPIAN CHARGES

When looking at these charges as a whole, we realize that they are not always compatible with one another and they do not address a single or uniform conception of what utopia is about. Evidently, the charge of escapism cannot be plausibly directed at utopia as rationalist or central planning and the charge of chimeric unrealizability cannot be considered as justifiable regarding piecemeal, democratic change. Those Golden Age narratives that had a distinct political element and orientation cannot be charged with escapism nor can they be condemned for supposedly offering a detailed and static model of society (Papastephanou, 2008a). Hence, we need first to recall that utopia has taken a wide number of meanings along its historical course and its often conflicting manifestations and that not all versions of it are susceptible to the above criticisms. A fuller deployment of this argument, however, will be carried out in the next chapter which concerns the appropriate redefinition of the terms. What is important here is that, if taken as a whole, the above criticisms of utopia are either incoherent/inconsistent or they can be played off against one another.

Simultaneously, one might show that the charges misfire one by one if directed at a conception of utopia that is neither escapist nor too determinate, neither illiberal nor hostile to controversy and, more generally, at a conception of utopia that suffers from none of the above defects. This determines the task of contemporary utopian thinking as one of showing that utopia can be conceived in fresh terms. The book as a whole aims to contribute to this task. Conversely, this entails that the opponents of utopia could be shown to fall into the trap of a genetic fallacy [i.e., the failure to suspect that the fault might lie in the various conceptions (the thematization), not the concept f utopia as such] and that it rests with them to prove that their criticisms of utopia do not concern specific, mostly modern conceptions
CHAPTER 1

of utopia but the concept of utopia itself. Genetic fallacy is the mistaken assumption that the problematic origin or specific location of an idea must render the idea itself problematic (Price, 1999, p. 77). In the case of utopia it might mean that the fact that utopia had been thematized in times when regularity, stability, duration and utter determinacy were in theoretical fashion sealed its fate and reception in later times when that fashion was rendered obsolete. Again, the next chapter with its gleanings from the history of utopian thought displaying the richness of utopia beyond its modernist thematization and with its redefinitions aims to expose this specific problem of anti-utopianism.

Nevertheless, in this chapter we should better present some general objections to anti-utopianism and then move to a brief, one by one discussion of the above summarized main anti-utopian arguments. It has to be noted, however, that the critical discussion of anti-utopianism that will follow and the examination of anti-utopianism’s own complicities do not undermine its undiminished usefulness as a valuable tool against bad utopianism. Some anti-utopian arguments are still the most effective and appropriate answer to facile and pernicious futurism. The problem is that often anti-utopianism presupposes, or it slides in, such bad futurism and becomes itself a crypto-utopianism. Often, anti-utopianism creates the conditions for the twist of the utopian impulse into naïve and undesirable, even totalitarian or fundamentalist vision. It does so by favouring a wrongheaded assumption that lofty ideals are no longer needed thus opening space for all sorts of public exploitations of people’s desire for, and thoughtless replacement of, the lost transcendence.

Interestingly, to my knowledge, the earliest refutation of anti-utopian liberal arguments can be found in the earliest liberal use of utopia alongside with dystopia. We may stretch that refutation to turn it against current liberalism. To explain: John Stuart Mill used the term dystopian in a public speech in the House of Commons along with the term ‘cacotopian’ [coming from or favouring a bad place, ‘cacos’ in Greek means ‘bad’]. He accuses his opponents of being cacotopians and says ‘what is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable, but what they appear to favour is too bad to be practicable’ (cf. Sargent, 2006, p. 15). However, I believe, to prove that this is not just a rhetorical flourish, one has to stretch the argument and analyze what the anti-utopians actually defend showing that it is indeed a bad place. In other words, we need a critical dystopian description of the here and now that would expose the anti-utopians who rationalize the here and now as cacotopians. This will be taken up in the chapters on Oleanna and on the 2000 curriculum (chs 4 and 5 respectively).

Another objection related to the one above about favouring a bad place concerns the fact that liberalism, which chastises utopia as promoting a specific vision while pretending that liberalism itself does not promote any such vision, appears indeed to also presuppose a concrete vision of the good. David Blacker makes clear that, despite pretences, liberalism does operate with vision. Especially liberal contextualism becomes associated in Blacker’s explanation with a world that is dreamed of and is wider than any single philosophy (2007, p. 184). Liberal contextualism appears in favour of ‘a certain picture of society’ (p. 193) as much as other, less liberal views do. From another perspective, Slavoj Žižek also highlights the ideological character
ANTI-UTOPIANISM AS A CURRENT THEORETICAL CHALLENGE

of anti-utopianism, despite the latter’s claims to being simply realistic. ‘Ideology is not only a utopian project of social transformation with no realistic chance of actualization; no less ideological is the anti-utopian stance of those who “realistically” devalue every global project of social transformation as “utopian”, that is, as unrealistic dreaming and/or harbouring “totalitarian” potential’. From there on, Žižek’s criticisms of such devaluation become sharper. ‘Today’s predominant form of ideological “closure” takes the precise form of mental block which prevents us from imagining fundamental social change, in the interests of an allegedly “realistic” and “mature” attitude’ (cf Brockelman, 2003, p. 196).

Finally, another important variation of criticisms against anti-utopianism on grounds of the latter’s own ideological character concerns the inability of anti-utopians to avoid the unitarism and holism they detect in their ideological opponents. For Mark Olssen, not only ‘much anti-utopian thought from liberal quarters is incoherent’ (Olssen, 2003, p. 527) but, more than that, it suffers precisely from the weaknesses it chastises. ‘The way Popper, Hayek […] and Dahrendorf reject all philosophical alternatives to classical liberalism, as leading to totalitarianism, reveals its own peculiar unitarist mantle’ (Olssen, 2003, p. 538). It also reveals a kind of stasis and perennialism, since liberalism becomes the last word in politics, a word that has only to be perpetuated. It thus becomes the unsurpassable philosophical theory beyond which lies the chaos and abyss of disaster.

Then again, such a general questioning of anti-utopianism might not do justice to the specificity of the arguments we summarized above. Those deserve a separate and more detailed discussion.

(1) It is thought that when faith escapes from the private to infuse the public sphere it will inescapably revert to bad utopianism and fundamentalism. Conversely, when phenomena of bad utopianism and fundamentalism (utopias turned into dystopias) crop up in world politics religions must be hidden somewhere around. There is some truth in this in some cases, but the sweeping assertion that ‘the dystopias that are bedevilling us in the 21st century are based on faith and tradition not reason’ (Sargent, 2006, p. 13) is wrong if by ‘faith’ and ‘tradition’ it refers to religions or convictions rather than to the time honoured Western values of profit and success. It might be true to some extent that ‘George W. Bush is as much a utopian as the Taliban and other Islamic extremists, and they are both certain that they are doing their god’s work’ (Sargent, 2006, p. 12); but it is rather naïve to believe that, let us say, the Iraq war broke out because of faith, irrespective of geopolitical and economic Western interests or that the American cold war ‘intervention’ in Guatemala in 1954 overthrowing Arbenz was justified and planned on the basis of the supposed will of god. It might also be true that bad utopianism today revolves around faith rather than reason, and this is a good counterargument to the Popperian charge of utopia as such with rationalism (Popper, 1957). But we must not lose sight of the fact that when colonies produced ‘utopias for the colonists and dystopias for the colonized’ (Sargent, 2006, p. 11), expansion was fuelled by prospects and profit, the enshrined secular priority of the Western self. The role of faith then was at most simply ancillary providing or supporting rationalizations or disseminating throughout the world by religion’s ‘missionary
CHAPTER 1

position’ the puritan lifestyle and mindset that desires possession and self-preservation accomplished through conquest. The tendency to produce exclusivist and expansionist utopias can be found not only in faith or in reason but also in other justifications of specific conceptions of the good.

We may turn this objection to anti-utopian secularism into a more general argument that counterfeits the naïve assumption that the disconnection of faith, utopia and politics guarantees a better, safer albeit less ambitious future. Hannah Arendt had already warned us on this faulty assumption and provided the ground for such a general argument. She had explained that ‘it seems rather obvious that men who have lost their faith in Paradise will not be able to establish it on earth; but it is not so certain that those who have lost their belief in Hell as a place of the hereafter may not be willing and able to establish on earth exact imitations of what people used to believe about Hell’ (Arendt, 1994, p. 404). The spectres of oppression, injustice and terror do not always appear in cassock or cloaks. Sometimes they appear as power-dressed, ordinary profit-seeking achievers.

(2) Karl Popper argued against calculated and radical, holistic utopian change unravelled through a large-scale project of realization of an ultimate goal. He thus renounced comprehensive ideals of the good. He emphasized, instead, the kind of piecemeal engineering that combats the most urgent pathologies of society. Popper held an account of society as nothing more than the sum total of its members. Thus, any other account of society, one that sees in it more than just a multiplied individualism, appeared to him as inviting totalitarian oppression of the self and its rights in the name of a dangerous abstraction, i.e. the ultimate collective good. Olssen provides a very apposite critique of the distinction between utopian and piecemeal change and shows how liberalism itself relies on a programmatic ideal that it fails to acknowledge (2003, p. 532). What becomes ultimately apparent is that Popper’s grounds for attacking utopia wholesale are more ideological rather than epistemological (p. 533). Piecemeal engineering searches and combats the greatest and most urgent evils of society; it does not go after the ultimate good. I have argued elsewhere why this establishes an ethics of control undermining an educationally more worthwhile ethics of risk (Papastephanou, 2006), so, there is no need to cover the same ground here. What has to be added, however, is that, as we shall see in a later chapter, without referring to Popper, Alain Badiou (2001) provides a strong criticism of ‘the stodgy conservatism’ informing piecemeal change and the idea of searching for the evil to eradicate it instead of searching for the good to make it endure.

If the ethical “consensus” is founded on the recognition of Evil, it follows that every effort to unite people around a positive idea of the Good, let alone to identify Man [sic] with projects of this kind, becomes in fact the real source of evil itself. Such is the accusation so often repeated over the last fifteen years: every revolutionary project stigmatized as “utopian” turns, we are told, into totalitarian nightmare. Every will to inscribe an idea of justice or equality turns bad. Every collective will to Good creates Evil (Badiou, 2001, p. 13).

I bring up Badiou’s work here as an example because it is now being treated by many commentators as a fresh defence of comprehensive conceptions of the good against the liberal priority of the right over the good and the concomitant favouring
of piecemeal change. Badiou’s work is seen as ‘a robust critique of the various value systems and schools of thought which over the past quarter century in particular have sought to minimise the potential for large-scale change in favour of, at best, limited and partial progress’ (Hewlett, 2004, p. 338).

(3) Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) comprises arguments against utopia and its treatment of individual freedom. In the effort to oppose post-war statism and defend individualism coupled with economic growth, Hayek directs his criticisms, amongst other things, against utopian planning and utopia more generally. Utopian central planning is, according to Hayek, inefficient and illiberal qua anti-individualist. This is because public intervention in processes that resemble a Darwinian natural selection in their independent self-regulation is doomed to fail and to cause disaster. As Olssen puts it, for Hayek, ‘there is a natural selection of competitive traditions whereby rules and practices that confer success come to replace those unsuited to the human environment’ (Olssen, 2003, p. 529). More deeply, Hayek sets out to develop his attack on utopia from a springboard of absolutized individual and marketplace negative liberty. It is negative liberty in the sense of one being free from coercion by governments and communities and of being in the position of a non-intervening spectator regarding the unintended effects of the market on the whole of society. Hayek stresses the freedom not to be coerced by governments and other people. Yet, there are unintended effects of markets on people which Hayek celebrates instead of condemning them, as he naturalizes them via a Darwinian biologism. A simple and direct way of criticizing Hayek would be to show the proximity of the ‘survival of the fittest’ rationale to Nazism and to charge his views with a naturalistic fallacy, the well-rehearsed argument, since David Hume, about the mistaken conflation of the Is and the Ought. In less polemical terms, even if one grants Hayek an accurate depiction of biological large-scale operations (which is debatable as such), this in no way justifies the transference of biologism in political life and in society.

Isaiah Berlin is also a vehement critic of utopia along similar individualist lines but for somewhat different reasons. In his work, the emphasis is put on the negative, undesirable side of the positive freedom that grounds utopianism. Berlin sees utopia as presupposing a subjective split between the regulating and the regulated self. The regulating self identifies with supra-individual oppressive mechanisms, e.g. the state or a collectivity; the regulated self is tailored to the ostensibly rational expectations of the regulating self. Predictably, for Berlin, a society that presupposes no specific and privileged conception of the good loosens the tension within the subject, encourages freedom and diversity and is thus preferable to a more active and intervening society or state. As liberalism is taken to advocate no substantive conception of the good, it becomes the locus of freedom *par excellence*. Within liberalism the space for diversity seems to be freed and to be threatened only by statist, national, or other such collectivist interventions to pluralism and individual freedom (Olssen, 2003, p. 536). Most of those arguments are refuted very pertinently by Olssen and we might simply refer to his text. But an additional comment would be helpful here: an important question is whether there can be a society that does not presuppose a privileged conception of the good. Even if that is a possibility, the liberal society is not its materialization. Perhaps in a
CHAPTER 1

liberal society one may be a believer or non-believer without serious cost, although
now even this is debatable given the fear of terrorism and its association with some
religious doctrines. But can one be a non-achiever, a so-called ‘looser’ in the eyes
of others, without paying too high a price, not only existentially but also socially
and politically? Is the self that is profit-seeking and success-oriented not a
regulated and coerced self? What would lie underneath a positive, possibly
Berlinean response to the last question would be the assumption that in seeking
profit and promoting self-interest, the human self is free because it is at its most
natural and authentic condition. In that case, the further confrontation with this
claim would take us directly to chapter eight where human nature is discussed.

(4) Marxism has had an apparently ambivalent position on utopia. Obviously,
unlike liberalism, it is appreciative of the social ideal inspiring many utopias. It has
attacked utopia nevertheless for reasons that the relevant literature has already
registered abundantly revolving around issues of proximity and distance to science
and ideology on the one hand and issues of realizability and escapism on the other.
Within the Marxist framework, scientific socialism was opposed to ideological,
utopianist socialism and anarchism, where the former referred to realizable and
sound political aspirations while the latter referred to chimeric and escapist, vain
hope. Marxism used the term ‘utopia’ to disparage particular versions of socialism
and anarchism (Buber, 1985) but it shared much with utopian constructions, and
the Marxist classless society fits in well with the end-state version of utopia. Many
left-wing thinkers have also maintained a negative or an ambivalent stance toward
utopia, often echoing Marx’s unease or downright rejection of the idea. After all,
Marx famously asserted: ‘I don’t write recipes for the cookshops of the future’
(Kumar, 2003, p. 68).

Marx’s objections to utopia are usually taken to have been directed against the
spatial utopian socialism but, as Ruth Levitas following David Harvey reminds us,
Marx also opposed Adam Smith’s utopianism of process (Levitas, 2003b, p. 141),
i.e., he opposed the utopianism of politico-economic liberalism. However, as
Michael Gardiner explains, ‘in repudiating abstract or idealist utopias, Marx did
not seek to embrace a kind of naïve empiricism and dispense with utopianism
tout court’. It can be shown, following Gardiner, that ‘what is under attack in Marx is
not anticipation or utopian expressions as such, but “rather the failure to root this
anticipation in a theoretical framework cognizant of the essential dynamics of
capitalism”’ (Gardiner, 2006, p. 9). Be that as it may, the ambivalence within
Marxism regarding utopia has not been without cost for Marxism itself, for ‘the
traditional Marxist antipathy to utopianism has been repaid by a bourgeois antipathy
to Marxism as utopia’ (Kumar, 1991, p. 94). As Jameson puts it, ‘“utopian” has
come to be a code word on the left for socialism or communism; while on the right
it has become synonymous with “totalitarianism” or, in effect, with Stalinism’
(Jameson, 2004, p. 35).

Marxism rejected utopia for the sake of a rational and scientific organization of
life on the basis of a specific vision of the good which was considered imminent in
a historical materialist sense echoing the positivism and eschatology of the times.
In fact, a regulated, detailed end-state [both spatial (utopian socialism) and
temporal (capitalist progress)] was rejected for another regulated, detailed end-state
ANTI-UTOPIANISM AS A CURRENT THEORETICAL CHALLENGE

[spatial (Britain as it would evolve from the industrial revolution era to the proletarian revolutionary era) and temporal (the time of the ripe conditions for a classless society)]. Marxist anti-utopianism did not escape from the traps in which its opponents had fallen. Thus, justifiably, some theorists have accused Marxism of an arresting of time that ultimately undermines utopian impetus as such. The ‘unutopian ideal that guides Marx’s theories’ is, according to Arendt, the idea of a ‘completely “socialized mankind”, whose sole purpose would be the entertaining of the life process’ (Arendt, 1989, p. 89). Rather than freeing political thought from bad utopianism, Marxist methodological anti-utopianism has not avoided the dangers of bad utopianism. For the problem with both Marxism and utopianist socialism/anarchism has been their modernist tenets directing them to exclusivist and static visions (the utopia of a soteriological exclusive group, e.g. the proletariat, and the utopia of a specific space of suffocating regulation of life correspondingly), and not their supposed proximity or distance from science and ideology or realizability and escapism.

(5) Yet it is not only Marxism that has charged utopia with unrealizability and escapism. The incredulity toward utopia and the attack on utopia’s supposed relation to the chimeric that has been brewing for some time now in postmodern thought is evident in Derrida’s following assertion.

Although there is a critical potential in utopia which one should no doubt never completely renounce, above all when one can turn it into a motif of resistance against all alibis and all ‘realist’ and ‘pragmatist’ resignations, I still mistrust the word. In certain contexts, utopia, the word in any case, is all too easily associated with the dream, with demobilisation, with an impossibility that urges renunciation instead of action (Derrida, 2000, p. 8).

This ambivalence regarding utopia is echoed in various instances and in the work of many proponents of Derrida’s deconstruction. For instance, Sean Kelly (2004) employs the term ‘non-utopian utopia’ to describe Derrida’s idea of cities of refuge, where even the unforgivable is forgiven and where free movement and settlement is predicated on an unconditional hospitality. Elsewhere (Papastephanou, 2006), I explain why I do not consider the cities of refuge as dramatically challenging of the existent as its proponents imagine, and why I do not consider them exhaustive of the ethical content of utopia proper. Thus, here I give only a skeletal exposition of that argument. A utopian ethic of risk and a genuine cosmopolitanism begins with hospitality, it does not end there. When it does end in invitations and visitations, ethics loses its critical edge and leaves the Western subject in the privileged position of the benefactor without for a minute forcing it to confront the psycho-political denials from which its global position maintains its privileges and its very capacity to benefit others (2006, pp. 53–4). In other words, the politically inoperative pacification that Derrida associates with utopia may as well apply to the non-utopian utopia of his politicization of hospitality.

Beyond this criticism, education as theory and practice could very well answer Derrida’s concerns about utopian quietism. Theory aspires to formulate an appropriate regulative ideal; practice aspires to approximate it, but, more than that, practice raises a demand for ‘here and now’ that prevents the degeneration of the ideal into an ever receding futurism. It also provides means for critiquing and
modifying the ideal through the scrutiny that actuality invigorates and recharges. Besides, utopia and education (as both theory and practice) have a common denominator: the former presupposes the plasticity of humanity; the latter constantly moulds and remoulds humanity. Education then fulfils its purposes better when it exercises its utopian right, so to speak, most consistently, that is, when, against any stagnation and against any relegation to a distant future, it raises the demands of action and mobilization and shapes the subjects that are suitable to the vision of reflective, sensitive and active citizens.

(6) It is said by many postmodern thinkers that utopia suffers from a tyrannical blueprint quality and that it disqualifies whatever futurism appears as a mere possibility. True, much utopianist discourse has been influenced by versions of Marxism or by an adherence to Karl Mannheim’s conditioning of utopia on realizability and confines utopia to project-like, reconstructive vision. However, the anti-utopian postmodern argument that utopia should be rejected as inherently premised on realizability and blueprint planning concedes too much, and in an arbitrary fashion, to that particular utopianist trend. But nothing compels us to accept realizability as a criterion (even if a retrospective one) for distinguishing between utopia as a project and utopia as futile daydreaming. Various points of later chapters will deal with the why of this questioning of realizability and blueprint quality more effectively. Suffice it here to say that the anti-utopian postmodern charge of utopia as inherently predictable, too concrete and regulated is easy to refute because its target is principally a set of various versions of an eschatological Marxism up to Mannheim’s utopianism. All we need to show is that the teleological and determinist account of utopia is not binding and that a reconstructive utopia need not be favoured against less detailed or non-project-like utopian thinking.

Moreover, against the argument that utopia as a political vision is always too determinate, teleological and finalist, there have historically been very many cases that disprove this hasty identification; perhaps it is pertinent to turn to a case where even the same thinker has an early position on utopia that contradicts his later one. As Zachary Price explains, the substantive body of the early Georg Lukács’ work, while indisputably utopian, is not readily subject to the criticisms that have been directed at Marxist utopianism. Lukács does not offer a systematic account of society or a description of the course of social action leading to the realization of utopia (Price, 1999, p. 80). Unlike his later writings, which are characterized by the determinacy with which they predict utopia as a future possibility, his earlier ones do not claim that utopia should be theorized as the outcome of an identifiable process of social change.8 ‘Utopia is instead used only as a hermeneutic device, a ground upon which to criticize the dystopian present and a means by which to stretch the critical imagination’ (Price, 1999, p. 68).

Like the early Lukács, many Frankfurt School thinkers, especially Adorno, treated utopia as a mere possibility. I maintain that we should deliberately avoid any systematic theory of society and the temptation to elaborate a course of social action that is likely to realize utopia. Like those, we too might simply allow ‘utopia to appear as a possibility – albeit one among many – in spite of the alienated, dystopian quality of life in the present-day world’ (Price, 1999, 80). We have no
reason and no ground whatever to assume that utopia is predictable or imminent. Being *anthropologically* optimist, that is, believing in the human potential for perfectibility and believing that there is nothing *inherent* in humanity that blocks it, does not amount to a *naive* *political* optimism that assumes that history or social practice delivers perfection to humanity without the latter’s conscious effort. The realization of utopia is not guaranteed. On the contrary, as things stand in global politics, it seems quite distant, perhaps far more distant and unreachable than mediocrity or even disaster. Nor does precision remain an absolute requirement of utopia today. Badiou’s utopianism, for instance, escapes the charges that are usually directed at blueprint utopia because, as Hewlett stresses, Badiou ‘has no clear vision of an alternative future’ (Hewlett, 2004, p. 338), without ceasing to defend a bold utopianism of radical socio-political transformation.

Already in Walter Benjamin’s time and, especially, in his own thought utopia can be imagined in terms that escape such charges. This is how Gardiner puts it regarding Benjamin’s understanding of utopian wish-images. ‘Such wish-images are best understood as sparks or flashes of insight and awakening that are spurs to practice, not “blueprints” of some sort of fully imagined, perfect society of the future. As such, Benjamin’s position here escapes the charge of “social engineering” that is often levelled at utopianism’ (Gardiner, 2006, p. 20). Maeve Cooke helps us unpack ideas of this kind by elaborating on the complex nature of the formalism on which it rests. Formalism is not a *necessary* component of utopian thinking that seeks to avoid ‘bad utopianism’, ‘finalism’ and ‘totalitarianism’. Rather, ‘formality is a pragmatic requirement of such thinking. A projected utopian image must be indeterminate enough to appeal to a wide range of social agents with varying evaluative commitments and convictions, yet determinate enough to motivate them to engage in transformative social action’. Yet, all this can be promoted in awareness that ‘the line dividing formal and substantive accounts of the “good society” is always inexact and provisional’ (Cooke, 2004, p. 427, fn 16).

(7) Dahrendorf is against utopia because it renders conflict superfluous. ‘One of the basic assumptions of all utopian constructions is that conditions may be created under which conflicts become superfluous’ (Dahrendorf, 1967, p. 139). Exclusively associated with eschatological narratives of a supposedly prospective undifferentiated unity, utopianism is then rejected as a violent revocation of singularity and heterogeneity for the sake of totality and homogeneity. Apart from tailoring utopianism to specific meta-narratives, criticisms such as those by Dahrendorf as well as similar ones by many postmodern thinkers do not perceive the significance a distinction between conflict and controversy might have for utopian thought (Papastephanou, 2005a, p. 14). Interestingly, the earliest political and educational utopian Western text, Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, utilizes the distinction between bad and good strife for utopian purposes in a unique way. As I have discussed this elsewhere (Papastephanou, 2008a), I shall concentrate here on a summary (more will follow in chapter 8) of how I connect conflict, controversy and utopianism against Dahrendorf’s (or postmodernist) charges. The exaggeration of the significance that conflict may have for justice and societal wellbeing has led to extreme positions that revert to a covert bad utopianism, i.e. to a utopianism that Jacques Lacan would see as a hysterical attachment to a master signifier from which all
goods are expected with no effort on the part of the subject. In this specific case, conflict has started to operate theoretically as a Promised Land, since the mere existence or perpetuation of disagreement and tension appears to be the ultimate fulfilment of politics. Conflict is considered the force that unsettles hierarchies and undoes stabilized significations. It is then expected to generate fresh and surprising events that unleash the flow of becoming against any sedimentation of being (Papastephanou, 2005a, p. 15). Within those extreme positions, even the mention of consensus suffices to trigger liberal-Dahrendorfian, postmodern or post-structuralist attacks. Attacks of that sort are justified only to a very limited extent as reactions to an old but still growing tendency in applied politics to consider agreement the ultimate answer to world problems, thus hypocritically glossing over issues of power and uneven positioning of the parties expected to agree. But such attacks are unsubstantiated and even dangerous especially when they quickly and reductively dismiss agreement or consensus as ostensibly conservative features of universalist and foundationalist utopias. Dissent and conflict may generate fresh outlooks and just stances to unassimilated alterity. But in their inflated and non-nuanced form dissent and conflict may work against the longing (especially of those who have suffered the effects of violent conflict or perennial unresolved disagreement) for peaceful coexistence of peoples. When dissent and conflict signify a commitment to critique and wield new, as yet unknown and challenging ideas, they may take the form of controversy and be very welcome in any worthwhile utopia. But in their exaggerated emphasis they may lead to a sterile, perpetual or even violent negativity. Too many expectations from the inflated tropes of dissent and conflict reify them and blunt their critique of stasis because, in the end, they attribute to them a static, invariable social role.

The shortcomings of the celebration of dissent, the exaggerated political expectations from conflict and the reluctance to utilize its difference form controversy for utopian purposes are present not only in Dahrendorf’s position but also in that of Laclau and Mouffe (Cooke, 2004) and Žižek, despite the fact that their anti-utopianism is fundamentally different from the one that recruits the threat of totalitarianism (Brockelman, 2003, p. 198). Typically, Laclau takes politics to be the incompleteness of the hegemonic game (based on an unevenness of power) and fulfilment to be the negation of politics: whenever the undecidability in the relation between the universal and the particular was missing, ‘all conceptions of a utopian society in which human essence would have found its ultimate reconciliation with itself have invariably been accompanied by one or another version of the end of politics’ (Laclau, 2001, p. 10). What is common between Laclau and Mouffe, on the one hand, and Žižek (Žižek, 1998, p. 992) (especially and more explicitly after the Ticklish Subject), on the other, is that they have used a dose of anti-utopianism in order to make room for radical transformation as each of them understands it. Thus, as Brockelman rightly remarks, Žižek’s anti-utopianism is fundamentally different from the liberal anti-utopianism that was constructed as a backlash response to a supposedly ever threatening totalitarianism which animates the condemnation of all radical political thought (Brockelman, 2003, p. 198). However, as both these kinds of anti-utopianism criticise rationalist utopia from the perspective of its discomfort with antagonism and as this blanket criticism derives from
an anthropological rather than a political pessimism, I take it up again and confront it through the anthropological analysis of the last chapter.

(8) Not only the post-Marxist deconstructive Lacanian-influenced trend but also the Foucauldian postmodern trend has developed a reticent stance to utopia for reasons of consensus and comes extremely close to Dahrendorf’s liberalism. In a striking resemblance to liberalism, the bogie of dystopia is recruited by Foucault to combat the claims or aspirations to escape from the system. Foucault couples utopia and dystopia in just such a manner: ‘we know from experience that the claims to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions’ (Foucault, 1984, p. 46; also cf. Olssen, 2003, p. 541).

Furthermore, the criticisms of rationalist utopias are usually expanded to communicative utopias too. In his critique of Habermas, Michel Foucault makes clear his misgivings about what he sees as the utopian element in Habermas’ communicative action theory. ‘The thought that there could be a state of communication which would be such that the games of truth could circulate freely, without obstacles, without constraint, and without coercive effects, seems to me to be Utopia. It is being blind to the fact that relations of power are not something bad in themselves, from which one must free oneself’ (cf Olssen, 2003, p. 540). This critique, which reflects, in my view, the anti-utopian argument (already familiar from Dahrendorf’s anti-utopianism) that utopia promotes unrealistic stagnation and tension-free homogeneity, stems from the fact that Foucault does not take here into account an adequately theorized distinction between power and domination. Had he done so, Foucault would have viewed Habermas’s ideas not as a plea to overcome all subtle and complex forms of power that operate in life and in mutual understanding but as a plea to render dialogue more inclusive, enlarged and frequently used in ethical and political matters. If we realize that the issue for Habermas is coercion-free or undistorted communication rather than a perfectly transparent communication and notice the difference between the two, we see why Foucault’s worry that Habermas aspires to a utopia of a society without relations of power is off the point. Once again, the challenge is to see what might be accepted as controversy and what is undesirable as conflict. Along with many liberals such as Dahrendorf, Foucault seems to believe that a reality of diversity and a reality of conflict are one and the same thing that has to be preserved at all costs. Hence whatever tries to minimize conflict is regarded as tyrannical rationalist utopianism. What is forgotten here is, amongst other things, that, if Habermas were against diversity, his whole emphasis on dialogue as will-and opinion-formative process would be pointless. Consensus occurs precisely when people who differ and come from diverse backgrounds and persuasions converge or agree on something they find convincing. Identical people, if they could ever be so, would not begin a dialogue because they would not have a point of contention from where to start. They would object to nothing, they would ask too few questions [as Harold Pinter (1999, p. 1) put it when commenting on the fact that the British and the Americans accepted their countries’ wars so easily] and debate too little in the public sphere, even if they were ready to fight to the death for their economic interests in the
private and social sphere. Ironically, in most non-utopian, real societies the very moment controversy is absent, conflict is very much present.

Besides, to be politically meaningful, diversity must correspond to something more than folklore and inoperative identities. It must entail active and interventionist identities that question reality and cause controversy, identities that enrich debates by introducing new sensibilities to them. All that is said by the theory of communicative action is that such debates must be settled by the force of the better argument and must presuppose that the partners in dialogue must be treated as equal and co-responsible agents. True, there are problems with Habermas’s (1994) or Apel’s (2001) communicative ‘utopias’ but, I believe, they are other than those detected by Foucault.

Be that as it may, the difference between Foucault and Habermas lies in the fact that, for the former, political consensus ‘is not rational but functionally expedient and provisional, and continuing conflict is not a failure of communicative rationality but an indication of diversity’ (Olssen, 2003, p. 540). That is, the Habermasian force of the better argument is treated with suspicion as a sign of rationalist utopianism and the emphasis on consensual solutions is met with the anti-utopian argument about ongoing conflict as a sign of a free and open society. One often wonders how all this would look if made relevant to unresolved conflicts and problems of international legality and what the alternative to dialogue and consensus (rational rather than merely expedient and provisional) might be. Now, as Olssen pertinent shows, when interviewed and pushed in the direction of accepting utopia as unrealizable and unattainable yet a worthy critical ideal, Foucault did leave space for utopia as a critical idea to maintain ‘at all times’. In Foucault’s own words, the thrust of this idea is ‘to ask oneself what proportion of nonconsensuality is implied in such a power relation, and whether that degree of nonconsensuality is necessary or not [on grounds of which criteria? The force of the better argument, perhaps? - M. P.], and then one may question every power relation to that extent’ (cf Olssen, 2003, p. 542). However, this version of utopia (reminiscent of the Derridean one which we saw above) that Foucault is led to endorse is an enervated one. For, what is the point of a ‘critical’ utopia regarding which no attainability or approximation of any sort is granted, other than perhaps its function as a psychic discharge or, at best, as a springboard for minor modification of the actual society? Is a critical outlook that does not believe in the possibility of its declarations not a domestication of critique and an indirect, liberal anti-utopian affirmation of the existent?

(9) Richard Rorty employs anti-utopian ideas and argues against grand political theory (just as the liberal critics of utopia do) but tries nevertheless to rescue the utopian element in some adulterated form in the idea of trial and error, of experiment and piecemeal engineering. He does so from a neo-pragmatist perspective. The latter is sometimes scornfully and undialectically rejected by defenders of more radical projects of change, but my own mistrust should not be confused with such sweeping and wholesale attacks. Many anti-utopian arguments that Rorty and other pragmatist thinkers employ are apposite especially when they target end-state types of utopia. And the positive task they assign to a pragmatist utopia, namely, to open paths for improvement and betterment of societies, reflects the fact that utopia
might consist of incongruous moments and glimpses of light here and there rather than of absolute, timeless happiness. Although modest in scope, the ‘space for limited reform within capitalism, that at least has the capacity to profoundly matter to those potentially affected, should not be lightly ignored’ (Demetrion, 2001, p. 59).

However, the kind of utopia that is promoted by Rorty over-relies, in my opinion, on the reformist potentials of creativity and democracy at the expense of the acknowledgement of the significance of ethics and epistemology. This argument will be unravelled in chapter seven but some indication of its direction is necessary here. Despite his anti-utopianism on other occasions, Rorty (1995) characterizes pragmatist feminists as utopians approvingly. He sees them as critical thinkers in practice who use the springboard of real or imagined alternative linguistic communities in order to introduce new and improved language games and modalities of being and of socializing. Rorty’s own springboard that facilitates this accommodation of utopia in his discourse is, according to Maeve Cooke, the idea of a creativity that flourishes in a democracy. It is a ‘poetic discourse that aims to create new descriptions and self-descriptions’ and that, by having ‘a place in the domain of justice’ (Cooke, 2006, p. 33), it undoes the usual rigidity of Rorty’s distinction between the private realm of creative imagination and the public realm of democratic politics. ‘In other words, the utopian vision motivating democratic politics is not just one of increased solidarity but one of unfettered creativity’ (Cooke, 2006, p. 33). For educational thinkers who follow some form of pragmatism, usually the Deweyan variety, especially for those who compare the implicit or explicit utopias of Giroux’s transformative pedagogy and Dewey’s democratic change, Dewey’s concept of democracy ‘represents a nearer term utopian project that could push trajectories toward Giroux’s ideal, however piecemeal and episodic’ (Demetrion, 2001, p. 58). Or, some combine Dewey with Hardt and Negri’s notion of the multitude as a new form of collective agency, one that is not mediated through a national identity but rather through the unity effected by the desire for democracy (Lewis, 2007, p. 8). This desire for democracy is taken to mean a desire for cosmopolitan freedom, where the latter seems to be equated to the ability to move across all borders without impediments (Lewis, 2007, p. 9). Yet, such a connection of democracy and multiculturalism has been shown, by Ernesto Laclau amongst others, to quickly confront the limits of democracy itself (Laclau, 2001, p. 4).

Despite its importance, the coupling of democracy, utopia and creativity does not suffice on its own to stave off a naively optimist, bad utopianism. Cosmopolitanism is more than just free circulation; it is not just about the encounter or agreement with the other, it is about the treatment of the other. Not all poetic discourse is ethically desirable or politically pertinent and no democracy may guarantee a reflective handling of political matters. True, reflection is assisted by, and presupposes, full and unhindered participation as well as the kind of maturity that only democratic conditions of life can allow. But reflection signifies something more than participation. Beyond politics, reflection is the dynamism of thought that points to the realm of the ethical, the emotive and the epistemological. Without a clearer vision of what is to count as democracy, the good life and the well-being of cosmos, without an emphasis on reflection for good measure, all absolutizations of
global mobility or creativity are doomed to misfire or, worse, to revert to yet another bad utopianism. To avoid this, the strong pragmatist anti-utopian argument against rational utopia must be revisited and limited to a more modest role.

(10) Adhering to the priority of the right over the good, Habermas (1994, p. 69) rejects specific conceptions of the good that substantive utopias prioritize. He promotes a formalist, communicative utopia. Anti-utopianism is then expressed regarding the old utopian tendency to offer a more or less determined and detailed picture of what counts as a good life. To some extent, this variation of liberal anti-utopianism is justified and valuable. Yet it fails to see (and, consequently, to accommodate) the points where material, substantive utopias score better than the formalist, communicative ones. By avoiding specific pictures of the good and by letting the task of specifying the vision to the participants in communication alone, communicative utopias operate at a psychological and moral, intersubjective level. They concretize the dream of a subject who feels at ease to take part in dialogue and assumes argumentative responsibility for it while acknowledging the equal rights of the interlocutor. But the dreams of the starved, of those who lose their loved ones in war, or of lack of water supplies, or of diseases that are curable in the West might be different. On those, communicative utopia is silent. The material and political gains envisioned by, let us say, a substantive utopia of global redistribution of wealth are secondary and derivative in a communicative utopia. They might get decided in dialogue at some point by all those affected when and if such a topic becomes ever thematized.

Furthermore, the price communicative utopias have to pay for their concessions to anti-utopian formalism is none other than their own consistency and coherence. To illustrate this, let us consider whether communicative utopias are indeed as formalist and indifferent to specific conceptions of the good as they purport to be by contrasting two communicative utopias, the one of Axel Honneth and that of Habermas. Honneth sees Habermas’s theory as one that projects ‘a vision of the good society in which human beings would have achieved a state of perfect communication’. To this, Honneth counterposes the vision of ‘a social condition in which human beings would have achieved a state of perfect mutual recognition of each individual’s needs, rights, and distinctive contributions to society’ (Cooke, 2006, p. 46). As Cooke rightly observes, these different normative conceptions of the good, detect a different social obstacle to human flourishing.

Habermas is concerned with social impediments to the development of communicative relations based on practices of reason giving; he argues that, currently, the functionalist rationality of the economic and administrative systems pose the greatest threat to such communicative relations. Honneth, by contrast, is concerned with social impediments to the development of an ethical personality […]; these impediments take the form of institutional arrangements that deny the individual human being full social recognition of her needs, rights, and distinctive contributions to society (Cooke, 2006, p. 46). As Cooke rightly observes, these different normative conceptions of the good, detect a different social obstacle to human flourishing.

Evidently, here we have two communicative utopias that differ not only in form but also in content. They rely on two distinct conceptions of the good and on two specifications of what hinders it. Formalism in utopia is not consistent and the content of the vision is of decisive importance even within communicative utopias,
ANTI-UTOPIANISM AS A CURRENT THEORETICAL CHALLENGE

i.e., utopias that share the formalist framework of intersubjectivity. In stressing their argumentative character so as to avoid charges of bad utopianism, both neglect the material dimension of human collective desire and the critical-ideological significance of the discussion of what counts as need and determines political outlooks and justifications.

DEFECTS VERSUS AMBITIONS. THE RICHNESS OF UTOPIANISM

We have already confronted anti-utopianism with some head-on attack on its assumptions and a ‘one by one’ refutation of its arguments, and we have done so only indicatively; many critics of anti-utopianism (Levitas, Kumar, Geoghegan, Cooke and in educational discourse Olssen, Halpin, Suissa) have so far provided much more detailed and thorough developments of some of those points. But what has been gained by this exposition and is useful for the next steps is an overview of the stakes of utopianism, of the tensions, divergences and dilemmas within anti-utopianism, of the complexity of the whole issue against dismissive and simplistic stances as well as a set of admissions that prepare the ground and the limits within which the book will move. Utopian constructions of the past had very many shortcomings that anti-utopian discourse rightly chastises. Curiously, though, they stood accused in postmodernity not for those shortcomings but rather for their ambitions. Those ambitions do not always appear to anti-utopians as unrealistic. On the contrary, the nightmare of anti-utopians is usually not the unattainability of utopias but precisely their realizability. ‘The burden of the anti-utopian critique was not that utopia was impossible, the irresponsible fantasy of shallow optimists: quite the contrary [although I believe that this is often the case too - M. P.]. What appalled them was that the modern utopia was only too possible’ (Kumar, 1991, p. 93).

Even if those ambitions were irretrievably tarnished by the limitations, or even if ambitions can often themselves be a defect, as one might object, they had a unique ethical significance: they loaded political action with a responsibility for, and accountability to, hopeful and anticipating publics. They promoted an ethic of responsibility¹⁰ that took into account the consequences of political actions and condemned the loss of control (now found most exhilarating by much postmodern vogue or liberal political globalism) whenever such loss appeared in contexts where it was most needed and judged desirable (Crowley, 2000, p. 151). Anti-utopian argumentation misses both, the variety, richness and diversity as well as the ethico-political significance of utopian ambition.

The next chapter turns to some other indications, the indications of the richness of the concept of utopia and the variety of its conceptions throughout its historical course. The aim is to show that many charges against specific conceptions of utopia misfire when directed at other, alternative conceptions. This paves the way for a reconceptualization of the notions of utopianism (utopia, dystopia, counter-utopia etc) and for a different connection of them against some received views which truncate utopianism in order to render it amenable to the justified anti-utopian attacks. What follows the suggested reconceptualization is a whole set of clarifications of the significance of utopia and dystopia, hence utopianism as a total. In this way, my defence of utopia will once again be indirect: rather than
further combating anti-utopianism with direct counterarguments I shall show the lasting significance of utopianism and its relation to education. As I consider the anthropological argument the most worthy of attention and in need of deconstruction, I shall take up again a more direct defence of utopia in the final chapter, the one on anthropology.
CHAPTER 2

THE COURSE OF UTOPIAN THOUGHT

Some anti-utopian thinkers attack particular conceptions of utopia. Having first equated those conceptions with the concept of utopia as such, then they move to a wholesale rejection of all bold visions about humanity’s potentials. Therefore, an immediate response to some anti-utopian criticisms would be to show that the various conceptions of utopia that are susceptible to those criticisms are only some of the possible contents that the concept of utopia may take. It can be demonstrated that the plausibility of anti-utopianism depends on the scope and calibre of its charges. More deeply, a confused position on conceptual matters about utopia leads to a wrongheaded treatment of its beginnings, its course, its ‘form versus content’ quandaries and its particularist or universalist character. Further, it may have undesirable theoretical consequences for opponents and proponents of utopia alike.

In turn, this has implications for educational theory because the latter largely derives its position on utopia from the philosophical and/or cultural debate on what counts as utopia and on what might justify anti-utopianism. Thus, the educational-theoretical benefits of conceptually revisiting utopia can be summed up as follows. A large part of a rich but neglected utopian cultural and theoretical material might be recuperated through questioning the received view on utopia which limits it to the modern conception. Apart from affecting the misinformed way in which we might select and utilize utopian taught material, a new approach to definitional and conceptual standards of utopian thought might change our outlook on the relation of education and utopianism. The need for such a change is further established by the fact that various and often contradictory definitions of utopia (Lewis, 2007, p. 1) are asserted within educational philosophy.

Then again, an attention to redefinitions and reconceptualizations does not amount to a plea for a rigid and non-elastic definition of utopianism that would occlude any reformulation and ossify the term. The acknowledgement of the openness and inconclusiveness of a defining effort is a necessary filler of the crack separating the essentialist element within the notion of a ‘concept’ and the fluid pluralism inherent in the notion of a ‘conception’. Even when our ultimate aspiration might be to approach something like the concept of a term, we are usually aware that we may speak only about formulating new conceptions. We do not delude ourselves that our reformulations will constitute ‘the last word’ on the subject. Such reformulations will be revisable reflections of how the terms of a subject could be more comprehensively and plausibly grasped so as to clarify many issues at stake and, more than that, to overcome previous consolidations and sedimentations of meaning that block our vision. However, the admission of the inconclusive character of reconceptualizations must not discourage us from taking up the challenge to re-approach the semantic content of an idea. For, the exaggerated efforts to stress the
indefinitiveness and openness of conceptualizations are, in the end, those which consolidate conceptual essentialism by letting existing and widely-held conceptions be elevated to the onto-epistemological level of the concept and by regarding contingent tensions within the established discourse and the consolidated terms of the surrounding debates as onto-logical constants. In simpler words, when reconsiderations are feared, dominant conceptions remain unshaken and misguided, thus re-establishing what is most feared, i.e., conceptual closure.

In what follows, I first glean from the richness of the utopian history those elements that expose the exclusions effected by standard conceptions of utopia. It will become clear that the established conceptions elevate modern utopia to the status of the concept of utopia, lead to conceptual confusions and oust certain important varieties from the utopian conceptual province. Then, I give an outline of the reformulations and prepare the ground for the next chapter and its discussion of utopia alongside with dystopia.

FANTASY, POLITICAL PROJECT AND IDEAL ETHICAL LIFE

To begin with, some anti-utopian sentiment might be due to conceptual confusions that arise when dialogue turns to the notion of utopia without a prior questioning of the ‘commonest popular meaning of the word’. The popular meaning of utopia has negative and derisive connotations, since it implies the fanciful, useless, and wildly impractical (Dawson, 1992, p. 5). All utopian discourse is thus equated with an overt or covert chimeric daydreaming or even pursuit of what is humanly impossible. To provide some working categories so as to add some order to an otherwise unmanageable material, let us name this loosely understood utopia ‘daydreaming utopianism’. Opponents and proponents of escapist fantasylands rely implicitly on this category. Against it, there have been conceptions of utopia as a more or less realistic account of the ideal society. Those conceptions that stress the more realistic possibility of thinking about the common good take utopia to mean an ideal society as a program for political action. Let us place these conceptions within a broad category of ‘programmatic utopianism’. Opponents and proponents of concrete projects of radical, reformist or piecemeal change usually debate utopianism within the confines of the programmatic conception (from socialism and evolutionist liberalism down to Rawls’s or MacIntyre’s realistic utopias). Conceptions of utopia that emphasize the less realistic account of the good life employ utopia as a regulative ideal that sets a theoretical standard to be approximated even if never attained. Let us call this ‘regulative utopianism’ and associate it with classical constructions of the ideal city (e.g. ancient Republics), formalist communicative utopias (Habermas, Apel), deconstructive impossible yet necessary futurism (Derridean cosmopolitanism) and vaguely determinate ethical pictures of collective life (Cooke). A crucial point of difference of the regulative utopianism from the programmatic is that the latter usually has a more historicist conception of time and thus a stronger predictive dimension or a more progressivist perception of the course of utopia.
Depending on their implicit attachment to either of such categories, i.e. between fantasy, political project and ideal ethical life, many theorists set the historical origins of utopianism in different temporalities and spatialities or they often employ anti-utopian arguments against one another. For adherents to daydreaming utopianism, all western and non-western ancient yearning for a better life and its projection to a fantastic time and place constitutes the beginning of utopia corresponding to the earliest historical times. For proponents of programmatic utopianism, the ‘revolutionary tradition that began in early-modern Western Europe and climaxed in the socialist movement’ (Dawson, 1992, p. 5) restricts political utopianism to North-western modernity. Adherents to regulative utopianism set the beginning of utopia in classical ancient Greece. Both programmatic and regulative utopianism can inspire a dismissive stance to daydreaming utopianism since they seem to share the view that the oneiric pictures of a better life elsewhere or in another time, pictures encountered in Western antiquity prior to Plato and in most non-Western ancient cultures, had only a comforting purpose and reflected an individualist and particularist ethics. Such pictures are invariably dismissed as escapist and are excluded from utopia proper. What is usually missed is the political element which appears in stronger or weaker forms in various Golden Age narratives of most cultures and thus the universalism of utopia as a human longing for a better ethico-political condition. Proponents of programmatic utopianism are more adamant on dismissing (political or less political) fantasy, since they understand utopia as collective ideality about the ethical and political life aspiring to a collective finalistic (short- or large-scale) reform of society. Obviously, they do not find project-like, modernist elements in non-Western or ancient Western utopias and they see no purpose in fantasylands, other than offering solace to individuals. This argument is further extended to cover, and ultimately exclude, even the softer political regulative utopianism, to the point that the cases in the fringes are automatically relegated to daydreaming utopianism. Thus, the Stoic and Cynic utopias, being in the same category with Plato’s (i.e. regulative utopianism) but even less preoccupied with guidelines about how the citizen body can set up the right mechanism of rule, are usually placed in the ‘utopia’ of the pure imaginary and remain under-theorized. The escapist prejudice further grounded many unsubstantiated restrictions of ancient utopia to Plato’s Republic, to the exclusion of the utopian writings of the Stoics, the Cynics and others, and perpetuated the false common perception that ‘ancient utopian thought has nothing to teach us’ (Dawson, 1992, p. 4). Lewis Mumford’s work on utopia comprised a distinction between utopias of reconstruction and utopias of escape in virtue of the fact that the former’s ideal society is detailed and plausible (Mumford, 1922). It was a distinction that was destined to influence decisively the formation of a Western canon of utopianism proper and to enforce a rigid demarcation between serious utopias which are peculiarly western (Dawson, 1992, p. 3) and folk utopias to which myth, fantasy, messianic expectation along with non-modern, non-Western ideality are usually relegated.

Furthermore, many proponents of programmatic and regulative utopianism attack daydreaming utopianism wholesale because they have too narrow a conception
Doyne Dawson makes an explanation that is useful to keep in mind before examining the possibility that some Golden Age narratives may rightfully belong to a political utopianism as we might wish it to be in times after postmodernism. Dawson distinguishes between the political in the fullest Greek sense and the political in one common modern sense. The political in the Greek sense proposes that one dealt with the affairs of the polis, which did not necessarily include programs for immediate action, that is, with the politika in the sense of reforms of a public and social nature. The political in the modern sense recommends that one be engaged in or taking sides in the struggle for governmental power (1992, p. 6). Some versions of Golden Age utopianism (Greek and non-Greek) are political in the fullest Greek sense rather than in the common modern sense. Besides, we must not forget that 'politics, the activity aimed at designing, guarding, correcting and repairing the conditions under which people pursue their life-purposes, derived its name from the Greek term meaning the “city” — and whatever else the city might have been, it was always a place’ (Bauman, 2003, p. 21). Politics is not only associated explicitly with land, space, but also with fantasy, imagination: perhaps this is nowhere more clearly manifested than in Plato’s Politics (272 a) where Socrates challenges his friends to invent a State ‘with our imagination’. Fantasy, land and politics are inextricably connected not only in ancient Greek thought but in non-Western accounts of the ethical life that we shall indicatively approach later on. Here, a first approximation of what might count as utopia begins to emerge in a negative way. Utopia is not an individualist ideal of personal flourishing but a vision of a collective harmonization/regulation of action that allows worldly happiness. Utopianism includes the political variety; that is, the ideal city is a subset of the set ‘utopia’. If we identified utopianism with the ideal city, this would mean that only political utopianism deserves the name and that all other utopianisms are not about life as it might be. The ideal city cannot exhaust the content of utopianism because we may have medical, technological, scientific and other varieties of utopianism (where, again, the utopian element in such visions lies in the fact that they do not concern just a personal dream of gratification but rather a collective ideal of happiness).

UTOPIANISM AND EUROCENTRIC CATEGORIZATIONS

It might be true that many ‘utopias’, old or contemporary, do not deserve the name because they are limited to individualist complaint about the hardships of quotidian life and lack all connection to totality or, in the case of political utopianism, to politics, either in the Greek or in the modern sense. But not all folk, non-western or pre-Platonic dreamworlds are of this kind. Each version must be dealt with in its specificity. Regrettably, this has not been the case, and the relevant scholarship has operated within rigid demarcations and Eurocentric sweeping categorizations. For, apart from essentializing programmatic and regulative utopianism and apart from being entrapped into those faults of modern utopia that have justifiably been condemned by anti-utopians, this restriction of utopia to its modern shape denies other cultures their voicing of the human desire for
perfectibility and of their hope for collective happiness. In this way, north-Western early modernity becomes the starting point and preserves for itself the status of utopian history proper, setting the standard of a linear, North-Western European time against which other ‘utopian’ histories could be defined retrospectively and negatively, i.e. in their difference from it. What is relatively other to modern utopia and its specific operations and modalities is set in what I would describe, adapting Anne McClintock’s insights (expounded for a different purpose), as a relation of propositional time, pre- or meta- and is given at most only the status of progenitor, precursor and ultimately, prehistory (McClintock, 1994, p. 255).

The following are some examples of programmatic or regulative utopianist temporalization. For Judith Shklar, ‘the real history of utopia does not begin in ancient Israel or Greece but in Tudor England, specifically in the infinitely complex mind of Sir Thomas More’ (Shklar, 1981, p. 280). For David Halpin, whose work on utopia is pioneering in current educational philosophy, just as for other thinkers in general philosophy, the long history of utopia stretches ‘from the third century BC (Plato’s Republic and Iambulus’ Heliopolis)’ (Halpin, 2001b, p. 301). Frederic Jameson sees More’s Utopia as ‘a convenient and indispensable starting point’ of the utopian genre (2005, p. 1) but he does not complement this clarification with any specification or mention of the beginnings of political utopianist thought.13 More explicitly, Krishan Kumar believes that myths of the Golden Age (‘a time of beginnings in which humanity lived in a state of perfect happiness and fulfillment’, 1991, pp. 3–4) are a variety of thinking about the good that is distinctive from utopia. He writes,

> the “original” time or condition was one of simplicity and sufficiency. There was an instinctive harmony between man and nature. Men’s [sic] needs were few and their desires limited. Both were easily satisfied by the abundance of nature. Hence there were no motives for war or oppression. Nor, for the same reason, was there any need to toil painfully for long hours. In the Golden Age men and women lived in a state of ease, plenty, and freedom. Simple and pious, they were and felt themselves close to the gods. For the West, the myth of the Golden Age was definitively expounded by Hesiod, Plato, Virgil and Ovid (Kumar, 1991, p. 4).

Apart from omitting Homer here, whose Odyssey includes islands on each of which there is a distinct order, at times paradisiacal, at times infernal (Ainsa, 1986, p. 37) as well as islands of the Blessed (Bichler, 1995, p. 49), Kumar overlooks the fact that, at least in Hesiod, Cronus time does not fulfill the same purposes that other Golden Age accounts do (Papastefanou, 2008a), and it should not be placed in the same category, say, with the Golden Age myths of the Latin poets.
CHAPTER 2

THE ‘JUSTIFICATIONS’ OF THE EUROCENTRIC CATEGORIZATIONS:

*The Golden Age and Escapism*

More about why this lack of nuance should be reconsidered will follow soon, but here it is important to see how this flat treatment of ancient narratives is usually justified. Established authorities on utopianism have played a crucial role on this. For instance, Mumford’s (1922) work on utopia has been monumental in its influence. Thus, when Mumford distinguished between utopias of escape and utopias of reconstruction (Dawson, 1992, p. 3), he initiated the kind of utopian discourse that was to seal the fate of all imaginary worlds, the Golden Age being one of them, that failed the test of offering blueprints and ‘directions of use’. Escapist utopias include ‘all the worldwide myths, legends, and folklore about gardens of Eden, golden ages, Elysian fields, lands of Cocaygne, and other more-or-less primitivistic paradises set in remote times and places; and all the sophisticated literary adaptations of this theme, from the Old Comedy of Athens to contemporary science fiction’ (Dawson, 1992, p. 3). Mumford’s ‘utopia of reconstruction’, on the other hand, ‘is a serious political theory and peculiarly Western’ (ibid). Against this position, I claim that we must relativize or, at least, render this demarcation of escapist and reconstructive utopia less rigid, less exclusivist and less Eurocentric.

Nuance must first be acknowledged regarding the modern utopia itself. Dawson, following Miriam Eliav-Feldon, gives several types of 16th century, modern, ideal society. There had been (1) models of good government based on moral rather than institutional reform; (2) idealizations of existing societies (e.g. Venice); (3) architectural designs for model cities; (4) descriptions of primitive Golden Age; (5) programs for secret societies, real or imaginary; (6) plans for world empires; and (7) prophecies for theocratic millenial kingdoms (Dawson, 1992, p. 11, fn 12). Such nuance is encountered in utopias of premodern and non-Western times and spaces. Of all those Renaissance types, only the last two were unknown to the Greeks, as Dawson shows. It should be noted here that, if we take into account that those two extra kinds of utopia (empire utopianism and millennium utopianism) emerged in Renaissance times, then we realize that it is simply false to charge indiscriminately all utopia with teleology, messianism, stability and expansionism. Regarding the rest of the types, programs for alternative ideal communities (number 5 above) can be associated with the Pythagorean *koinos vinos* in ancient Greece (Dawson, 1992, p. 16) and, outside of Greek antiquity, with secret societies of egalitarian or millenarian aspirations in the China of the Mongol and Manchu dynasties (Chesneaux, 1968, p. 85). Already in western and non-western antiquity the complexity of utopianism is such that reductive accounts of it, be they anti-utopian or pro-utopian, face difficulties.

Of course, the question whether various utopian constructions deserve the name of political utopianism can not be answered by recourse to nuance itself. To this end, more substantive discussion is needed. In contrast to the committed modernism of many contemporary utopianist thinkers, Walter Benjamin’s position,
THE COURSE OF UTOPIAN THOUGHT

if thought to its ultimate conclusions, helps us see the possibility that some Golden Age narratives might be politically utopian. For Benjamin, ‘there has existed in the collective consciousness of humanity since time immemorial countless dreams and “wish-images” of a free human society founded on equality and universal material abundance’ (Gardiner, 2006, p. 19). But, as Gardiner explains, although rooted in a timeless past, what is important to Benjamin about such wish-images is that ‘they are anticipations (pace Ernst Bloch) of a transformed future society, and hence a kind of “dreaming forward”, or “future nostalgia”’ (Gardiner, 2006, p. 20). However, more often than not, even when the universalism of utopia is, theoretically and historically, acknowledged as a desire for a better life common to all humans [by Ernst Bloch (1986) approvingly, by the Manuels (1979) less appreciatively], it acquires only an impulsive psychological character, lacking direct political pertinence. The universality of utopics is better defended and non-Western utopian concerns better accommodated by undoing first the Eurocentric prejudice that a politically relevant utopia begins either by Plato or by Thomas More and that whatever is of a Golden Age character is necessarily apolitical or not serious. Such accounts overlook the rich history of imaginary states in ancient texts that is manifested in many ways: as part of the history of literature, as a chapter of the history of political thought, as a model for the early Enlightenment reception of antiquity and much more. As Bichler remarks, Plato’s work occupies the middle of this history and marks at the same time the decisive turning point (Bichler, 1995, p. 4).

To undo the Eurocentric prejudice, then, we need to indicate why the charge of escapism cannot be levelled invariably at all Golden Age narratives. In Roman times, the Golden Age is given a naturalist and nostalgic, rather escapist twist (e.g. in Ovid’s Metamorphosis or in Tibullus’s Elegy) and an inherent ambivalence. On the one hand, it becomes an era of absolute bliss, sufficiency and reconciliation of humanity and nature (Ryberg, 1958). But these elements are either unavailable in the Hesiodic original narrative or extracted from its context and inflated by the Roman poets. On the other hand, and this is a Roman addition to the narrative, the golden era is not perfect for people because, as long as it lasts, they experience utter boredom. For many Roman poets who praise nostalgically the Golden Age, self-sufficiency and freedom from care is an aura mediocratis (Ainsa, 1986, p. 28), a golden mediocrity that haunts the contented of the earth, and, to overcome it, people begin to travel, to cross borders and create their own world. For some Romans this is celebrated as the dawn of human inventiveness and rationality. For others, it is the break with an initial state of happiness and the beginning of an eventually harmful enlargement of the world, where greed and desire for gold is introduced and along with it self-interest, strife and war. In an interesting reversal, the gold of the Golden Age, i.e., gold as marvel is lost when people start searching for gold as booty. The myth of the Argonauts and the Golden Fleece is the archetypal story suitable to Seneca’s intentions to weave his account of the lost happiness with his interpretation of mobility and discovery of lands in his Medea. There Seneca predicts that ‘the time will come as the years go by in which the ocean will unfasten the barriers of the world, and the world will be opened to its
CHAPTER 2

full extent’. However, for Seneca, when people abandon their homelands in pursuit of new boundaries, it is because they have lost their happiness in their native land. Thus, the prophecy that the ocean will unfasten the barriers of the world allowing the unveiling of ‘the secrets hidden beyond the limits of the known’ is ‘a malediction cast at the future rather than a joyful announcement of a discovery’ (Ainsa, 1986, p. 23).

The Hesiodic Golden Age refers to issues of justice and politics far more explicitly and directly than the Latin counterparts and reflects political utopianism for reasons that I have explained elsewhere (Papastephanou, 2008a). The Golden Age of the Latin literature is at first glance more individualist and idyllic, without lacking entirely, however, the political element, as the ‘gold as booty and marvel’ dichotomy shows. And even when a Golden Age utopia of abundance and leisure is described without any overt political allusions, it can have a direct political significance on grounds of its theoretical employment. Such is the case of Fourier’s materialist utopia in which no one went hungry. There, through the use of the graphic imagery of a Land of Cockaygne kind of utopia, Fourier ‘was seeking to mobilise among his readers a commitment to a conception of social life in which being properly fed was regarded as a basic human right’ (Halpin, 2001b, p. 302).

Egalitarianism

Then again, pre-modern utopianism is often discarded, especially, by programmatic-socialist utopianism, not because of its relation to Golden Age narrativity but because of its supposed irrelevance to specific ideals which are crucial for modern political utopianism, e.g. the egalitarian ideal. Thus, Bruce Mazlish maintains, for instance, that ‘More’s utopian communism was different from the earlier Christian version and was an idea that had never existed before in the history of the Western World’ (Mazlish, 2003, p. 46). Likewise, egalitarianism ‘is commonly assumed to be a Judeo-Christian ideal, and Thomas More is commonly given credit for introducing it into utopia’ (Dawson, 1992, p. 4). Yet this is not so accurate, not only regarding ancient and non-Western utopia but also regarding More’s Utopia and its sources. Dawson questions the above common assumption about egalitarianism throughout his book which aims precisely to retrieve the egalitarian, even communist element in ancient political ideality. And it can be argued that More’s influences regarding egalitarianism had not been entirely Judeo-Christian but also Greek. For instance, More’s Utopian citizens mock the foreign ambassadors who display proudly their golden ornaments and, as Moses Hadas showed, this was taken from Herodotus’s narrative of how the ambassadors of Cambyses were ridiculed for their golden chains and then shown that, among the Ethiopians, prisoners’ fetters were made of gold (Hadas, 1935, p. 113). There had been striking anticipations of utopian egalitarianism in Herodotus again (that More had in mind) with Ethiopia being the place where the community leaders deposit food during the night that can be freely taken by the people during the day (Hadas, 1935, p. 114).

More generally, as explained above, Dawson has established that some classical Greek texts as well as attempted utopias dealt with egalitarianism and utopian
communism. But the egalitarianism that Hesiodic Golden Age (the time of the reign of Cronus) inspired is only almost inadvertently acknowledged by Dawson; it is not fully utilized. That ‘at the harvest time festival of the Cronia in Attica, masters and slaves exchanged places, apparently to recall the primitive equality of Cronus’ time’ (Dawson, 1992, p. 14), and the same idea was pervading the Roman Saturnalia (Ainsa, 1986, p. 33), is very telling as to the political significance of the Golden Age, even if such significance had remained under-theorized or subconscious. This is also shown by the fact that Plato, whose utopia is otherwise so different from the Golden Age and people tend to contrast it to Hesiodic escapism, urges his compatriots to ‘imitate with all possible means the legendary life of the age of Cronus and obey all there is in us of immortal principles’ (Plato, Laws IV, 713e). Instances of egalitarianism in thought and in political proposals abound in antiquity, with Phaleas of Chalcedon being the first to suggest redistribution of property (Aristotle, Politics, 66 a 39) and with various law-givers such as the Spartan Lycourgos or architects such as Hippodamus promoting a utopianism of a kind of central planning aiming to control inequality (Aristotle, Politics, 67, b 22).

For Hannah Arendt, ancient politics and the ideal city are exemplary cases of the aneconomy that should be constitutive of an active life (1989, p. 29). Economy as oikos and nomos, and, consequently, the household as family and property are left aside or even transcended in ancient politics. As the boldest experimentation with politics, ancient utopia had been radically aneconomic, that is, beyond individual property and beyond the family, and that makes it easier to understand that in most ideal cities, egalitarianism took the form of sharing everything in common with others on grounds of philia, as the famous phrase koina ta ton philon = ‘friends share everything in common’ has it (Dawson, 1992).

Egalitarianism is very much present or alluded to in various utopian pre-modern non-Western narratives. In accordance with other, Western Golden Age descriptions, there is in the Chinese equivalent respect for and protection of all members of society, especially the old and the sick, and there is commitment to work (contrary to Western misreadings of the Golden Age as a time of effortless plenty). Yet, very much like the Hesiodic common sharing of the fruits of human effort, that commitment to work was not for private gain. A similar ideal is encountered in the 6th century Chinese thinker, Mencius. Thus intellectuals too, borrowed constantly from the Golden Age heritage either to express in words their criticisms of the established reality and their visions of a more just society or to put their social reform projects into practice (Chesneaux, 1968, p. 82). And ancient Chinese ideas such as tai-ping (great harmony) and p’ ing-chung (equalization) that derived directly from Golden Age narratives of the Taoist kind had been sources from which ‘peasant revolts and Utopian reformers’ borrowed ‘heavily throughout the history of China’ (p. 81).

A possible objection here would be that in both ancient Greek and non-Western utopian narratives egalitarianism was not strong enough to keep away forms of aristocracy that reintroduced hierarchies by the back door. For example, Plato’s Republic promoted an intellectualist aristocracy and a division between the mental and the manual that consolidated inequalities other than the economic. But such an
objection is misled by a uniform and misinformed image of ancient utopia, one that focuses exclusively on Plato, and bypasses the fact that the utopias of the Cynics and the Stoics did not hold those hierarchical commitments or distinctions. Cynic and Stoic Politeiai differ from Plato’s Kallipolis in egalitarianism, universalism and sexual freedom. The Cynics first highlighted the oppositional character of a utopia regarding the established city, its being anti-thetical to the existing order. According to Diogenes or Bion, love of money is the metropolis of all evil. Their ideal city was an antipolis and was worldwide, that is a cosmopolis (Dawson, 1992, p. 149). The Diogenic Republic proposed the raising of children in common, the use of dice for currency, and the abolition of war. Likewise, Crates gave all his property to the Thebans and, outside the narrow circle of Cynic thought, Onesicritus talked about the Indians as an ideal society with no war, crime or slaves. Instead of having slaves, the Heliopolitan citizens of Iambulus’s utopian imaginary society performed themselves chores for each other in rotation (Dawson, 1992).

The Cynics used to satirize the intellectualism and the narrowness of Plato’s Kallipolis (Dawson, 1992, pp. 139ff). In another suggestive resemblance, the ancient Chinese agrarian utopians ‘attacked the views of Confucius on the necessity of having wise men, exempt from manual labour, to direct the State. In the ideal country they describe, the leaders cultivate the land with the simple folk, and prepare their morning and evening meals themselves, and at the same time carry out their official duties’ (Chesneaux, 1968, p. 82). Many other analogies between what J. Chesneaux following sinologists describes as ancient Chinese utopia (p. 82) and various Greek utopias can be found but they are beyond the scope of this chapter. What is important so far is that not only a vague utopian impulse is available in Western and non-Western antiquity (as many theorists might concede) but also utopian egalitarianism is manifest in it thus revealing the temporal and spatial richness of political utopian thought.

As for the modern version of political utopian thought, it does begin in the Renaissance but it is influenced, amongst other sources, by an ancient egalitarian utopianism that is wider than the Platonic. To deploy this argument, we may borrow some distinctions from Dawson’s (1992) account. According to Dawson, there is in antiquity what he calls a ‘low utopia’ as a comprehensive program for an ideal city meant to be put into action while providing a critique of the existent and a model for limited reform. It is utopian because it envisions reforms belonging to a total, radical long-range plan. It is termed ‘low’ because the program is real and practical. It includes the predecessors of Plato, Aristotle’s utopia and a number of little known works by later Aristotelians, as well as Cicero’s On the Republic and On the Laws. ‘High utopianism’, on the other hand, is a plan for the ideal city that is not to be literally enacted, that is, it is a model for reform but in a more oblique way. Such are Plato’s Politeia and the Cynic and Stoic utopias (3rd century BC). Low utopia is of the 5th BC whereas high utopia (invented by Plato) is of ca 375 BC.

The Platonic Politeia inspired Renaissance thought and art (and even more recent modern utopias such as those by H. G. Wells) (Kumar, 2003, p. 66). Plato’s Atlantis and Old Athens (in Timaeus) inspired the utopian element in Renaissance
architecture, e.g. Antonio Filarete’s *Trattato dell’ Architettura* of 1460/64. But, contrary to widely-held assumptions, the latter was also influenced by another ancient Greek text that was translated in Latin in 1449, namely, Diodorus’ *Universal History* (Bichler, 1995, p. 3) and which had many ethnographic utopian elements. Other architectural works of the early renaissance had rediscovered Hippodamus from Miletus (Bichler, 1995, p. 178, fn. 13). For Dawson, Hippodamus of Miletus resembles modern utopians in planning a total and radical reconstruction of society. He was according to Dawson the inventor of political utopianism (1992, p. 21). As an architect, designer of imaginary cities with imaginary laws and a lawgiver (like the figure of the lawgiver we encounter in Rousseau’s social contract) Hippodamus gave an abstraction to planning that proved to be a crucial influence in later times. Regarding utopian literature, Campanella’s *City of the Sun* as well as a long series of early and later renaissance utopian texts (ibid) had been influenced either by regulative ancient utopianism or by accounts of lost, novelist ancient egalitarian utopias or travel narratives.

**Secularization**

Often, the exclusion of ancient or non-Western utopianism from the domain of utopia proper is effected on grounds of secularization. Thus, for Krishan Kumar,

> one reason why it is difficult to find utopia in non-Western societies is that they have mostly been dominated by religious systems of thought. It is this that also makes problematic the idea of a Christian utopia. Utopia is a secular variety of social thought. It is a creation of Renaissance humanism (Kumar, 1991, p. 35).

Roland Fischer breaks with this account only to the extent that the classical ideal city and even the Golden Age are rehabilitated as utopias. But he joins Kumar in placing the Christian heritage alongside the classical one and in denying the universality of utopias. He claims that utopias ‘appear only in societies with the classical and Christian heritage, that is, only in the West’ (Fischer, 1993, p. 14).

Such Eurocentrism overlooks the fact that the egalitarianism of the Golden Age and the religiousness of archaic societies made common cause in some historical instances rather than being adversaries. Before expanding on this, let us first differentiate millenarianism from religious utopianism. Millenarianism is a non-utopian vision of an ideal situation, because, as Kumar rightly remarks (1991, p. 36), this situation of perfection is not realized by conscious rational human action but by divine intervention or providence. The fact that the ideal state is disclosed or reached by faith and not by reason and the fact that such faith presupposes a linear and eschatological sense of time explains why the millenarian kind of ideality we encounter in the Renaissance is not available in Greek antiquity.18 Judaeo-Christianity added to the vision of a good society in the Western world the idea of the deliverance through a messiah and the culmination of history in the millennium (Kumar, 2003, p. 63; Racine, 1983, p. 127). It added, that is, a dynamic element that provided the terminology of the end of days and the
end of history (Kumar, 2003, p. 67). The worldly element and the belief in utopia as a mere human possibility being missing in millenarianism suffice to place it in a position of ideality that is distinct from the utopian.

However, that the political optimism of the time to come combined expectation with preparation entailed some political action that was not of the kind we encountered in the Medieval contemptus mundi relegation of perfection to the celestial kingdom. After all, ‘the Christian millennium was to be a terrestrial order. The second coming of Christ would usher in Christ’s thousand-year reign on earth’ (Kumar, 2003, p. 67). That millenarianism was pronounced a heresy in 431 AD (Kumar, 1991, p. 9) does not mean that the idea of earthly bliss was also erased. Interestingly, the millenarian Joachim of Fiore is echoed in Hegel, Saint-Simon and Marx (Kumar, 1991, p. 11); modern millenarianism had religious origins that seem to be forgotten due to its laicization (Racine, 1983, p. 128 and 133). Despite its overall significance, and contribution to the rise of utopianism, as Kumar argues (p. 36), or to modern utopianism as I would specify, millenarianism has, arguably more often than not, contributed to a bad utopianism that was to tarnish utopian thought and offer ample space for anti-utopian critique.

Millenarianism aside, images of original earthly perfection expressed in religious parlance worldwide the human dissatisfaction with the present. During the Krita Yuga, the first and perfect age described in the Mahabharata, the Hindu epic, there were no poor and no rich and there was no hatred and cruelty suffered by anyone (Kumar, 1991, p. 4). Just like in Greek and Roman antiquity, where perfection (the Golden Age) is contrasted to existing imperfection (the Iron Age), for the Hindus, Krita Yuga is set against the Kali Yuga, the gloomy description of the present (Racine, 1983, p. 125). In the sacred book of Dilmun of the Sumerian civilization, centuries before all other Golden Age narratives, an idyllic and peaceful condition is described in which (wo)man has no rival (Ainsa, 1986, p. 25) and lives in harmony with nature. The Golden Age is also involved in the Dreamtime of the Australian Aborigines (Kumar, 1991, p. 4), in the Egyptian Kingdom of the Dead and in Celtic traditions of a Paradise (Ainsa, 1986, p. 23), the Celtic Atlantic in the Western Ocean (Kumar, 1991, p. 5), the Nahuatl songs about the ancient Toltec where no one among them went hungry (Ainsa, 1986, p. 42) and even in forms of millenarianism encountered in religious views without the Christian influence, e.g. among the Guarani Indians of Brazil and the Indians of the Pacific North-West (Kumar, 1991, p. 11). But, even beyond the Golden Age, there had been sporadic instances of utopianism in the ancient expressions of religiousness. In Homer, when the Gods wish to avert their eyes from the cities in war, they turn them to the ideal extremes and edges of the world: the Ethiopians in the far south and the Hyperboreans in the far north (Hadas, 1935, p. 116). What is utopian about Zeus’s averting his eyes from the scenery of the Trojan War and turning to the Ethiopians? By imagining a disapproving and dismissive withdrawal of divine attention, human beings express discomfort, guilt about the wars they unleash and a deep knowledge of the fact that it is possible to act better, to form a better society. Finally, egalitarian traditions and narratives used to hold an
important place in Buddhist countries of South-East Asia and in the Moslem
countries (Chesneaux, 1968, p. 79).

As for the idea that early Christianity ‘produced no utopia’ (Kumar, 1991,
p. 35), it is arguably true if by ‘utopia’ we mean the novel. But this idea loses its
validity and becomes just another sweeping and forced statement if by ‘utopia’,
here, we do not understand strictly the literary genre. For if we take it to mean
utopian thought with a political, egalitarian touch, an antipolis, we see that the
early Christian agapai and the emphasis on the sharing of the clothes with those
who do not have (symbolically a redistribution of wealth) are, at least before
Clement of Alexandria, of a utopian nature. Not accidentally, the ancient author
Lucian associated renunciation of property equally with the philosophical trend of
Cynicism and with Christianity (Dawson, 1992, p. 273). Against the dissociation of
religiousness from egalitarian political utopianism that prevents us from perceiving
other choices and possibilities, we may draw attention to the reception of Luke’s
phrase panta koina (all in common) (p. 278), and to the influence of the
‘communistic rhetoric of pagan philosophy’ (in interpreting the Apostolic practice
of no property) on early Christianity in general (p. 277). It is mainly by Clement of
Alexandria that the call to sell all is stripped of subversive tendencies and takes the
allegorical meaning of generous almsgiving and ‘selling everything you have’ in
the soul (p. 278) and, further, simply entailing detachment from worldly goods.
Indicative, then, is the way in which Origen rejects Clement’s allegorical exegesis
of the call to sell all ‘on the grounds that historical examples prove that it is
possible to take it literally: complete renunciation of property was practiced by
pagan philosophers like Crates, and also by the first Christians described in the
Acts’ (p. 280). In an interesting parallel, the Islamic idea of riba, i.e. the increase of
wealth, excessive gain and illegitimate pecuniary advantage without providing
services in exchange was being condemned as a grave sin (Chesneaux, 1968, p. 98)
and an ethic of sharing was religiously being promoted in the Muslim world.

From another perspective, rather than being a dividing line between ancient and
modern utopianism, the Christian element is so strong in some early modern
utopias that their ideal world can be aptly described as a Christian commonwealth.
Andreae’s Christianopolis, for instance, is such a Christian utopia, and the
pansophic utopias of Bacon, Comenius and Leibniz, as Fischer argues, were
conceived within the framework of Christian philosophy and submitted science to
its purposes. In the early modern Christian world, the effort to find a pedagogic
mediation between religion and science which ‘would flourish in an educative
utopia’ was the sole concern that united utopian authors/thinkers such as Bacon,

When Kumar argues that utopia is a renaissance creation, he admits nevertheless
that ‘its practitioners have often been devout Christians – Francis Bacon no less
than Thomas More – but what their utopias principally declared was a faith in
human reason’. To harmonise the claim that utopia must be non-religious to
deserve the name with the claim that such Christian thinkers had been no less
utopian pioneers, Kumar argues that ‘in their utopias, whatever the case in their
other speculations, they were more concerned with the City of Man than the City of
God’ (Kumar, 1991, p. 35). Now religiousness as the dividing line seems to be blurred and the contrast appears to be between utopian reflective, rational vision and non-utopian hope for divine intervention. But if that is what differentiates utopianism from non-utopianism, then, on what grounds is all western and non-western antiquity seen as utopia’s prehistory? For one thing, many ancient utopias that are excluded from accounts of utopia proper share with modern utopias a strong faith in reason. In a striking similarity with the meritocracy of an intellectual Platonic aristocracy, in the ancient Chinese narrative of Great Unity (ta-t’ ung) the leaders were chosen on grounds of talent, they exercised harmony and their voice was sincere. Rather than being unreflective, the unity of both the Greek Golden Age (as expressed by Hesiod) (Papastephanou, 2008a) and the Chinese ching-t’ ien (a myth of primitive agrarian communism, as expressed by Mencius) is based on critical thinking and describes a society were people ‘live intelligently together’ (Chesneaux, 1968, p. 80).

Thought through, the idea that ancient societies have been dominated by religious systems of thought with the immediate consequence that their utopian cultural material, unlike Renaissance, is not capable of declaring faith in reason is too sweeping and unsubstantiated. It is precisely for doing all this, i.e., for defending worldly happiness through human sensible or even wise conduct that the ancient utopias belong to political utopianism as much as their Renaissance counterparts. True, More is the initiator of modern utopianism,20 of the coining of the term and he is, indeed, the exemplary reference point of the corresponding literary genre. But utopia in precisely those terms of reason coupled with a vision for a perfect society and the good life on earth is prior to Renaissance and its exclusion from contemporary accounts is contradictory.

Traits, Specific Contents, Quantities, Concepts and Traditions

If utopias declare a faith in human reason, on what grounds are they said to be a renaissance creation and not, say, of classical antiquity? Kumar is apparently aware of that and discusses it a few pages later, yet in a way that is so forced that it confirms rather than dissolves the suspicion that More’s utopia is not argued as the beginning of the history of utopia, it is simply asserted. He writes, ‘utopia is not just the conception of the good or perfect society. It is a particular and distinctive way of discussing the good society’. This way of approaching ethical life has specific traits and ‘its own form. Moreover it arose at a time when the very idea of what constituted the good society was being transformed. This gave it too a distinctive content. In both these ways the utopia of More’s invention distanced itself from the ideal city of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds’ (Kumar, 1991, pp. 37–8). As said above, no one doubts the originality of More’s venture and the special position of his Utopia especially for the literary genre. But is this a criterion for placing it in a rigid demarcation from the past and excluding from the province of utopia whatever was or is not like it? After all, before More, many other utopians had broken with Plato’s Kallipolis, i.e. with the specific content of Plato’s utopia in significant ways. For example, prior to influencing Thomas More, Plato’s
Republic had been a point of critical departure for Al-Farabi (also known as Avennason), an important representative of medieval Moslem thought (c. 950 A.D.). In his On the Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Perfect State, he criticizes various political systems in a Platonic manner and contrasts degenerate cities (I would say ‘dystopias’) with the perfect city. He departs from Plato in extending the vision of the localized city to a limitless human community (Chesneaux, 1968, p. 96). Surely, Avennason’s text is not a utopian novel but it is clearly an essay of political utopianism that precedes modern western utopianism and cosmopolitanism by roughly five centuries. Why should its differences from More’s utopia play such a decisive role regarding the beginnings or the evolvement of political utopian thought as to constitute reasons for denying it the status of a political utopianist text?

Beyond form, a further argument for excluding the versions of ancient ideal cities from utopia proper is that the ‘classical texts that have any claim to be considered as utopias’ are very few (Kumar, 1991, p. 38). A first objection here: why should sample quantity be an argument for conceptualizations? A second objection: it is possible that the texts that have such a claim appear to be so few because those discussing them have already committed themselves to exclusivist and too narrow conceptions of utopia. If by ‘utopianism’ one has already decided to mean novels of ideal islands or socialist projects for centrally planned and sustained radical change, understandably the starting point is either the Renaissance or the Enlightenment. In fact, if utopian thought is understood as thought (at times expressed through literature, at other times through political planning or action) about the possibilities for a collective life as it might or should be on grounds of human action that can change the unsatisfactory world and as a commentary (prosaic, satirical or not) on them, the eligible texts are very many and the sporadic utopian ideas in other texts rich enough to need book length exposition. I believe that the problem arises not only because Kumar and other utopian thinkers have a narrow conception of utopia but also because they have a very narrow approach to the idea of a concept. Rather than being an unchanging entity, a concept can be broad enough to accommodate a great number of conceptions, of textual forms and various contents and elastic enough to accommodate peripheral change of its attributes. If Kumar is comfortable with the fact that the concept of the ideal state of affairs in his work is broad enough to incorporate the primitivist account, the ancient Greek city, the Chinese rural social ideal, the millenarian constructions etc, why should the notion of utopia be narrower and not have its own distinctive scope of those ideal societies that, despite their variations and differences, unite in challenging the collective existent by providing images of an alternative life through human agency?

Kumar goes as far as to write that there is no tradition of utopia and utopian thought outside the Western world and he seems to maintain this position even in his later writings (2003, p. 64). Other varieties of the ideal society or the perfect condition of humanity are to be found in abundance in non-Western societies, ‘usually embedded in religious cosmologies. But nowhere in these societies do we find the practice of writing utopias, of criticizing them, of developing and
transforming their themes and exploring new possibilities within them’ (Kumar, 1991, p. 33). An obvious objection to the claim that there were no written utopias comes from Chesneaux’s essay where there is mention of *The Mirror of the Flowers*, a Chinese text that could easily pass, in my view, for a feminist utopia, one that antedates any Western equivalent - apart from Aristophanes’s *Ecclesiazoo- usae [Assemblywomen] - and to which we have already referred in the introduction. And there are very many other examples again from Chesneaux’s pioneering work on the topic that are left aside here for reasons of space. Yet, Kumar’s response would be, as he makes clear in another passage, that even if some individual works correspond to a Western utopia, ‘there is no utopian tradition of thought’ (ibid). Kumar is well aware that Chesneaux and several sinologists present the Chinese thought on utopia as a tradition in its own right, but he objects to this by reducing Chinese utopias to primitivist conceptions whose central feature is a lost Golden Age (ibid). Thus, in an endnote (en 27, p. 112) of his 1991 book and in his 2003 article (en 20, p. 75), he quickly dismisses Chesneaux’s claim that not only in China but also in South-East Asian places like Burma there had been a utopian tradition by writing that ‘it is clear that [Chesneaux] uses the term “utopian” very loosely’. However, rather than Chesneaux using utopia very loosely, it is Kumar who, in his earlier work, following a long Western canon, uses utopia too strictly and Eurocentrically. The Western discourse on utopia has established criteria that tailor utopia only to the conceptions of a very specific Western era, the modernist. A careful reading of Chesneaux proves that he cautiously included in his research material only that kind of utopian thought that had visible (and I mean this literally, implying concrete images) egalitarian significance and other political implications. That material is then woven with its intellectual remoulding and with its historical role in political upheavals and risings avoiding most of the themes that remained within the frame of an escapist individualism or individual religious soteriology (redemptivism). The political element, the relation to practice and the relevance to real life, the clear sense of a tradition and the nuanced reshaping of the Golden Age myth are very well presented there, aptly enough to establish the difference between primitivist narrative and utopian thought and to corroborate the existence of the latter. On the contrary, one may argue today, in the hindsight of the years that have passed since the publication of Chesneaux’s essay that, writing in 1968, Chesneaux himself appeared overanxious to establish a direct relevance of his material with some sense of communism and too diffident in his conclusions. And he did so precisely because he, like those who preceded and followed him, was deeply suspicious of any Golden Age talk and familiar with the tendency to classify it in apolitical escapism, knowing that only concretized socialism could easily pass for utopianism. Instead of Chesneaux using utopia loosely, it is Kumar and others sharing his view, who fail to distinguish between utopian thought and its thematization, that is, utopian discourse. Had they assumed such a distinction, they would have noticed that lacking an academic discourse (i.e., systematically theorizing and criticizing utopias, debating its various contents etc) is not quite the same as lacking a thought.
By leaving a more nuanced approach to non-Western and ancient material aside, Kumar and many other proponents of utopianism axiomatically set More’s utopia in a privileged position as a yardstick for whatever is assessed as deserving the title of utopia. Implicitly, the renaissance conception of utopia is elevated to the status of a concept, the exhaustive and absolute demarcation of what can count as utopia. In this way, they make things easier for opponents of utopianism to generalize their anti-utopian criticisms that are justifiably directed at modern utopia and to thus reject utopia wholesale. We realize here that, by implication, a rehabilitation of some ancient and non-Western utopianism is not just a matter of preference or an arbitrary shift of the boundaries that Western utopian discourse has set in more inclusive directions. To see why there are other, equally substantial reasons, let us consider where utopianism stands now regarding its political reconstructive element that has been so glorified.

In the many years hindsight of concrete political efforts for radical social redirection and of their failures and produced terrors, and under the pressure of those anti-utopian arguments that are sound, utopian theory has become suspect of end-state models of the good life (McKenna, 2001, p. 6). As Kumar himself admits, a detailed reconstructive utopianism is no longer tenable. ‘Utopian conceptions are indispensable to politics, and to progress; without them politics is a soulless void, a mere instrumentality without purpose or vision. But this is quite different from treating utopias as blueprints for action’. He astutely perceives that ‘it is precisely in taking them as such that the anti-utopians are able to score their points’. However, he curiously associates this fact solely with the socialist utopia. ‘It is the concept of utopia as blueprint that has discredited the socialist utopia and made the apparent bankruptcy of socialist experiments tantamount to the bankruptcy of utopia itself’ (Kumar, 1991, p. 96). What remains unacknowledged in this passage is that the detailed and over-regulated renaissance utopia has also discredited utopia as such. It is not only the temporal, teleological blueprint kind of utopia that has given a bad name to the term. It is the renaissance type of utopia that emphasized stability and holism and not necessarily all versions of utopia. As Olssen rightly remarks, the ‘renaissance characterization of utopia, with its emphasis upon stability, consensus, and holistic construction’ also accounts for the bad image of utopian thinking in Western political culture (Olssen, 2003, p. 527).

As things stand now, the most convincing utopian approaches to politics revisit the older demand for detailed representations of perfection, for signposts and cartographic guidance to a desirable future. They speak against the authoritarianism of the determinacy and finalism of past project-like utopias and portray the reconstruction of political vision in more suggestive terms (Cooke, 2006). The desirable destination looks hazy in the distance, and it is recognizable as utopian by its evocative ethico-political impression. The overcoming of modern metaphysics of eschatology and teleology has also put an end to predictions of the human arrival to the unknown land and to the naive optimism of a linear, proceduralist and eventual human anchoring in the ports of the good life.
 CHAPTER 2

Now we can see Mumford’s distinction between reconstructive and escapist utopias and the segregation of ‘serious’ utopias from folk utopias in virtue of the fact that the former’s ideal society is detailed and plausible (Dawson, 1992, p. 4) in a different light. Regrettably, although the teleology and linear eschatology underlying the detailed reformist program have been questioned, or even rejected and overcome within current utopianism, Mumford’s categorization of utopias on such grounds and Mannheim’s distinctions of utopianism retrospectively along the axis of their realisability and eventual materialization have not yet attracted a concomitant critical attention. Those (mostly proponents of programmatic utopianism and to a lesser extent regulative utopianism) who do not use the term utopia loosely enough to contain any form of escapism and millenarianism tend also to banish all Golden Age narratives (along with many other texts that diverge from the socialist model) from serious utopian thinking. And those who adopt a concept of utopia that is too elastic leave the assumption that any employment of a Golden Age myth (e.g. Hesiod’s poetry, ancient Taoist ideal-society visions) is escapist and apolitical untouched. What is thus missed is: the interplay of utopian and dystopian images in the earliest utopian narratives; the abstraction of those narratives that allows them to avoid the conservatism we encounter in many modern utopias that detail a moralistic and socially approved or an idealized lifestyle and concerns of the times; the positive implications of the fact that the embarrassing detailed and finalistic element of temporal modern utopias and the equally embarrassing rigid architecture of spatial utopias are absent in most ancient and non-Western narratives; and, overall, the fact that in some non-modern narratives there is no strict utopian prediction and the message for change is articulated for the whole of humanity rather than for a specific carrier of revolutionary potentials.24

Does this mean that everything is utopia? No. Utopias and dystopias concern societies and are structured systemically (by this term here I do not denote necessarily detailed and rigid systemic organization) exploring the position of the individual within simple or complex (depending on the era and culture of the utopian construction) institutional and societal processes. There is a collective dimension in the notion of utopia in the sense that utopia is ultimately about the relation and harmonization of the private and the public, the individual and society.25 An individualist dream of eternal youth, for instance, is not utopian, strictly speaking, although, say, a research project of gerontology might very well be utopian if there is in it a vision that concerns collectivity.

The collective element is there in political utopianism, namely, in the category of utopianism that concerns this book, and it is there in all versions of political utopianism, all along from ancient times. All utopias that preceded Plato and More can be examined as to political utopianism to the extent that they were ideals of action coordination within the community or state life and not just ideals of personhood. Let us rephrase the initial question then: is any collective ideal depiction of the world (past, actual or possible) a utopian one? Again, the answer is no. A primitivist ideal society [as much as the contemporary, cultural qua collective yet deep-down individualist discharges of the urge for a new beginning
THE COURSE OF UTOPIAN THOUGHT

(e.g. shopping therapy, pharmacological or surgical ‘utopias’ of ‘eternal youth’)] is not utopian when its construction functions purely in escapist, nostalgic, regressive, crypto-utopian and even anti-utopian ways (e.g. when it is deployed in order to relegate perfection to an unreachable, forever lost, idyllic world, thereby channelling the desire for change to privatist paths). Evidently, to be in a position to classify ideals into utopias or not, one has to examine their semantics, their energetics [their proposals about human action (Papastephanou, 2006)], their descriptive frame and their normative imaginative reach.