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Preface

When Thomas More published his famous work *De optimo Reipublicae Statu deque Nova Insula Utopia*, he could not foresee that its title would give rise to a new literary genre. Other authors very soon developed similar or different utopias, or elaborated dystopias, and since then, this combination of creative philosophical thinking and inventive imagination has never ceased. Although More thus inaugurated a new and very rich literary tradition, he did not produce his new genre from nothing. As a matter of fact, he was in more than one respect indebted to an age-old ancient tradition of ‘utopian thinking’.

Plato, of course, comes to mind as the principal source for such utopian thinking, but in fact, the tradition itself is considerably older. It can ultimately be traced back to the earliest phase of Greek literature. In the *Odyssey*, Homer described Scheria, the island of the Phaeacians, as a place where nature provided everything in abundance (7,112–132). This motif of the *bios automatos* also occurs in several of Theocritus’ *Idylls*, in Latin poetry of the Augustan period, and especially in ancient comedy (see Telecleides, *Amphityones* fr. 1; PCG VII, p. 668 for a particularly salient example). It is sometimes connected with that of the ‘Golden Age’, the earliest version of which can be found in Hesiod’s *Works and days* (109–126). Famous adaptations of the ‘Golden Age’ theme can be found in Aratus (*Phaen.* 100–114) and Vergil’s fourth *Eclogue*. Both of these motifs were a constant source of inspiration for later utopian literature. As a rule, utopian societies indeed benefit from abundant natural blessings, which make hard work unnecessary, and show all the high moral qualities associated with primitive generations.

In Aristotelian terms, one might perhaps characterize this motif as the material cause, as it were, of a Utopia. But what function does it perform? In many cases, a Utopia may have a positive role, that of presenting an ideal city, or state, which allows us human beings the best possible life. As we will see, Magnesia in Plato’s *Laws* clearly seems to have such a role. But there is another, perhaps even more important, if negative, role that is very well exemplified in Thomas More’s own Utopia: through presenting an ideal case, to help us readers of such a fiction look at our own real city, or state, with a critical eye. Contrary to Magnesia, this may very well be the primary function of Kallipolis. This notwithstanding, as many scholars have suggested, Kallipolis may well have a hidden, direct ancestor: Aristophanes’ utopian cities of which Nephelokokkugia (‘Cloud-cuckooland’) is arguably the most famous.

As Giulia Sissa argues in ‘The quest for the best. Praise, blame, utopia’, comedy should be best considered as the actual birthplace of full-fledged Utopia. Contrary to what one might think, this should come as no surprise. In More’s Utopia, praise is what best characterizes the passionate presentation that Raphaël Hythlodæus makes of the utopian society. In classical Athens, praise and eulogy of the Athenian people and power was a crucial feature. When locating a new, fictional city in the sky, Aristophanes also uses the language of praise, or actually self-praise, in order to make his audience laugh, and thus, make them rethink their own city and their democracy.

There is another sense in which one should not confuse the Golden Age and Utopia. Thomas More makes it clear that there will be no playing dice in *Utopia*: the inhabitants of Utopia do not so much as know “dice or other such foolish and ruinous games”. And this is the case in ancient texts as well: while dicing is absent from ancient utopian landscapes (notably in Aristophanes’ *Ecclesiazusae*) it is present in the landscapes of paradise (both in Teleclides, and Cratinus). As Stephen Kidd shows (‘What will we do when we get there?: Utopia and Dicing in Greek Comedy’), in utopia one finds goals like self-improvement and goods like efficiency, while in paradise, efficiency, self-improvement, even the very concept of goals simply make no sense.

Thus, a utopia, contrary to what paradise would consist in, supposes self-improvement, and more generally, something ideal that is to be pursued. In this respect, the question of the ideal constitution is central to the topic of utopia. This, of course, became one of the main issues in ancient Greek political philosophy from Plato onwards, but again, the tradition is older than Plato.

In Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Raphael Hythlodæus bestows upon the islanders of Utopia a library of Greek authors, which includes Herodotus (alongside more traditional political thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Thucydides). Herodotus’ inclusion on the Utopian reading list invites the question of whether his *History* is in any sense a work in utopian political theory. As Thornton Lockwood argues (‘What Thomas More learned from Herodotus about Utopia’), Herodotus focuses primarily on political and social customs: similar to More, Herodotus uses the otherness of distant political and social customs as an opportunity to theorize and evaluate political institutions.

Different ‘utopian’ motifs, then, were in the air long before Plato undertook to conceive his ideal state in a more systematic and philosophically stringent way. Moreover, Plato also had other thinkers as more direct predecessors, although our information about them is quite meagre. In the second book of his *Politics*, Aristotle mentions the political views of Phaleas of Chalcedon and Hipodamus of Miletus. The former especially focused on equality of possessions and education, developing a new system of dowries (1266a37–1267b21). The lat-

ter devised a constitution for 10,000 citizens that was largely based on a tripartite structure (1267b22–1268b25). Although the political ideals of both thinkers were impracticable and even somewhat naive, their views illustrate a growing interest in the improvement of existing constitutions and even in the development of blueprints of ideal constitutions. Thus, they paved the way for Plato.

Plato has imagined no less than three ‘utopian’ cities: Kallipolis in the *Republic*, Atlantis in the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*, and Magnesia in the *Laws*. In her ‘Plato’s ideal society and Utopia’, Julia Annas reconsiders their respective status. In the same way More’s Utopia will do, Kallipolis must be seen, Annas claims, as a ‘philosophical Utopia’, that is not as an ideal city that should be implemented as it is described but rather as an imaginatively presented society whose odd and idiosyncratic features are meant to help us readers reflect on the society in which we live in. And this is also the case with Atlantis. It actually may explain why Plato apparently decided to leave it unfinished once he realized how appealing the dystopia of Atlantis (which is supposed to represent Athens itself and its imperialism) has become to his readers, and therefore not only unhelpful but even damaging to them. But if Kallipolis is primarily meant as philosophical, Plato was certainly also keen of the idea of trying to produce the best possible society in the real world. The problem, though, is how to start. There is no starting point in the *Republic*: in order to have a perfect society, you must have citizens educated in the perfect way, which supposes a perfect society. Hence, Plato’s project of Magnesia, where laws are the central feature: once people agree to live under certain perfect laws, and thus are supposed to become more and more perfect themselves, a perfect city could develop.

The problem of practicability of a Utopia is also dealt by Dimitri El Murr (‘Philosophy, Power, and Practicability in Plato’s *Republic*’) and Anthony Hatzistavrou (‘Plato and the utopia within us’). El Murr claims that this problem is intimately connected to Socrates’ defence of philosophy in the central books of the *Republic*. For the transformation of the image most people have of the philosopher is a key element of Plato’s argument in favour of the practicability of the ideal city. Hatzistavrou focuses on Plato’s account of the rule of reason as the ‘utopia within us’. Plato, he claims, may have realized how unrealisable such model of human agency would be at least if one takes it in a purely epistemic way. Hence his defence of the importance of the laws: the members of the Nocturnal Council in the *Laws* and possibly the philosopher-rulers in the *Republic* continue to control their desires by subordinating themselves to the institution of law. While Plato is ambivalent about the possibility of autonomous rule of reason, he believes that institutionally controlled rule of reason is viable.

Like Plato, Isocrates and Xenophon were deeply impressed by the challenging and stimulating conversations with Socrates, yet their interests and focus sig-

nificantly differed from Plato's. This is especially true in their own versions of utopias. In 'Temporality and utopia in Xenophon and Isocrates', Carol Atack interprets Xenophon's and Isocrates' use of past and imagined political arrangements, such as the *patrios politeia* (ancestral constitution), as the basis for their re-imagined ideal versions of Sparta, Persia and Egypt. For them, the mythical past functions as a location for setting political ideals in play in a similar way to the spatially distinct utopias of later writers, whether Hellenistic ideal cities or Renaissance literary utopias. Unlike Plato, with his gestures towards the realisation of plans for Kallipolis and Magnesia, neither has any programme for restoring the past that they praise. Instead, Xenophon's and Isocrates' nostalgia for an imagined political past expresses a conservative hostility to political change, and a longing for personal virtue.

Like Isocrates and Xenophon, Aristotle was far less inclined to elaborate speculative, political ideals than Plato. It is probably no coincidence that he inserted in the second book of his *Politics* a lengthy attack on Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*. For his thorough familiarity with the various existing constitutions in the different cities of the Greek world no doubt helped him to see the weak points and the infeasibility of Plato's theoretical ideals. Yet in the later books of his *Politics*, Aristotle tries to find out the model of the ideal polis himself.

In 'Aristotle's 'City of our Prayers' within the History of Political Utopianism', Christoph Horn defends the thesis that Aristotle, like Plato, develops a full-fledged utopia based on his own type of normativity: the *aretaic* and *eudaimonic* criterion as formulated at the beginning of *Pol.* VII. The best constitution is the one that leaves enough room for those who can develop their virtues – and thereby arrive at happiness – and that gives political power to these individuals. Aristotle's utopia is that of his city of prayer (*kat' euchên*); the other normatively attractive models, i.e. kingdom, aristocracy, polity (mixed constitution), and deliberative democracy are measured according to a single scale based on the question to what extent it leaves room for virtue and happiness.

In Hellenistic philosophy, we again find several traces of 'utopian' thinking, especially in early Cynic and Stoic philosophy. In his own 'Republic', Diogenes of Sinope mainly advocated an ideal of self-sufficiency and personal freedom, against unreflecting conformism and broadly accepted customs. As Susanne Husson shows ('Utopia and the quest for *autarkeia*'), the cynic claim to be self-sufficient is not, by itself, contradictory to utopian designing of a perfect community of sages: indeed other Greek philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle, faced the same problem and came to distinguish different meanings and levels of self-sufficiency, in order to solve it. So while cynics similarly claimed to be self-sufficient, particularly on an economic level, that does not logically imply a solitary life.

The Stoic Zeno of Citium also wrote a ‘Republic’; several fragments suggest that in a somewhat similar cynic vein, he also severely criticised the existing customs (including the pedagogical system and the use of money). As Gretchen Reydam-Schils argues (‘Were the later Stoics anti-utopians?’), the political community outlined by Zeno has a function that is analogous to that of the Stoic sage, who is either non-existent or very rare: just as the sage is meant to guide ordinary human beings in their striving towards the goal of life as stipulated by the Stoics, an ideal political construct can still affect existing socio-political conditions if it is interpreted as a critique of prevailing practices. It is usually assumed though that later stoics did not follow that radical, transformative view of politics; focusing on the question of participation in public life and politics, Reydam-Schils argues that this is not the case.

Unlike the Stoics, Epicurus was not interested at all in utopian constructions or theoretical drafts of ideal constitutions. He was a sober-minded thinker who turned to the demands of real life and recommended a careful and rational calculus of pleasure and pain in order to maximise our own pleasure and happiness. Yet there is one interesting Epicurean text that is usually ignored in discussions of ancient utopias, viz. a fascinating fragment from Diogenes of Oenoanda (56.I.1–12 Smith), in which he evokes a future ‘Golden Age’, when the life of the gods will arrive, when everybody will be wise and when there will be no need of laws or walls, since everything will be full of justice and mutual friendship. This, for Diogenes, is just a hypothesis (whether or not influenced by the contemporary ideology of the Roman Empire), and nothing suggests that he has in mind a full-fledged utopian theory, yet he probably found a universal breakthrough of Epicurean philosophy an attractive and pleasant idea that was at least worth mentioning.

Just like the Epicureans, the Academic sceptics showed little enthusiasm for utopian constructions, although in this tradition as well, the motif of the ‘Golden Age’ occasionally occurs. In ‘Cicero and the Golden Age tradition’, Sean McConnell makes the case that in *De re publica* and later philosophical works such as the *Tusculan Disputations* Cicero draws on philosophical accounts of the golden age in his analysis of the Roman *res publica* and the nature of Roman political virtue. By emphasising the intrinsic virtues of the Roman people, and the need to ensure the conditions that allow them to find proper expression in political life, he offers an achievable means for the Roman *res publica* to attain its best state, exemplified by its glorious past: rather than advocate an unworkable and problematic top-down imposition of a utopian model of an ideal state, Cicero is confident that the best state will come to be from the bottom-up, if the superior nature of the Roman people is simply allowed its full natural expression.

Ancient philosophical tradition thus contains many ideas and motifs that have a 'utopian' flavour. Yet the ancient works that come closest to our modern concept of utopian literature are perhaps not to be found in philosophical literature but rather in historiography. That may seem surprising at first sight, but we may recall that even Plato's myth of Atlantis is presented as a true discourse about the past, based on respectable sources.

Theopompus, for his part, relates Silenus' account of the world. Whereas Europe, Asia and Libya are only islands, so Silenus argues, there is a big continent that surrounds the outside of this world, with two big cities on it, called 'Warlike' and 'Pious'. He also mentions the Meropes, in whose country can be found two rivers, 'Pleasure' and 'Pain'. Whoever eats from the fruits of the trees that grow on the banks of the river 'Pain' never stops lamenting for the rest of his life. But the person who tastes from the trees alongside the other river, loses all his desires and is gradually rejuvenated until he dies as a baby. Aelian, who is our source here, concludes by characterizing Theopompus as a clever inventor of stories, a μυθόλογος (Aelian, *Var. hist.* 3,18). As a matter of fact, Theopompus combined several 'utopian' motifs, including elements from the 'Golden Age' and the *bios automatos*. Nothing is told, however, about the political constitution of the Meropes, and it would probably be wrong to regard Theopompus' account as an elaborate and carefully considered utopian draft.

Euhemerus introduced his well-known theory about the origin of the gods in the context of a 'utopian' story about the island Panchaea (see Diodorus of Sicily, 5,41–46). Next to the typical motifs of the abundant life, socio-economic issues also receive attention, although Euhemerus' overall discussion of the constitution of Panchaea was probably rather superficial and his first interest was presumably with his controversial theory about the gods. Euhemerus' utopian work is often compared to that of Iambulus. The latter described his journey to the Islands of the Sun. There, he entered a fantastic world, inhabited by strange animals and beautiful people with remarkable customs.

In 'All Over the World: The Utopian Idea in Diodorus Siculus', Iris Sulimani inspects Diodorus' descriptions of idyllic islands, comparing them with accounts of utopian and dystopian places found in other authors, and examines Diodorus' depictions of real lands, contrasting them with those of other writers. Her study demonstrates that Diodorus, inspired by the events and the politics of his day, locates the utopian islands on the edges of the *oikoumenē*, yet on the actual map of the world. Simultaneously, known lands and islands that bear resemblance to these utopian islands may be found either in the remote parts of the universe or nearby. The impact of Alexander's campaign and its subsequent developments, as well as Caesar's deeds, may explain the prevalence of the utopian idea in Diodorus' work.

Authors such as Euhemerus and Iambulus were a welcome source of inspiration for Lucian. His *True stories* is a particularly clever and humorous variation on the theme of utopian constructions. Lucian tells the story of a lengthy journey to several islands (including the moon, the Isle of the Blest, the Isle of Dreams, and many more; even Aristophanes' Cloudcuckooland is mentioned), during which he learned to know their inhabitants and their customs. Especially interesting is the programmatic introduction to the work, in which Lucian bluntly states that nothing of what he will tell is true, thus straightforwardly opposing the truth claims of authors such as Iambulus, Ctesias and Homer.

In 'Laughter in Lucian's Utopias of the Dead', Inger Kuin deals with Lucian's world of the dead, which could be imagined in many different ways in antiquity, as a canvas for utopian scenarios. From his writings two different versions of the underworld emerge: one is the paradisiacal Island of the Blessed in *True Stories*, the other the Cynics' egalitarian dream world of *The Dialogues of the Dead*, *Charon*, *Menippus*, and *Kataplus*. Humour plays a central role in each scenario: it qualifies or even undermines these underworlds as utopian visions, but at the same time creates opportunities for coping with death through laughter.

As we have seen, the theme of Golden age plays an important role in the utopian descriptions we find through Greek and Roman antiquity. And this is also a theme that is prominent in the Classical Chinese literature, in authors such as Laotse, Confucius, Han Fei and Tao Yuanming. But if some analogies are remarkable, the place of the State and of religion in a utopian society are rather dissimilar in both contexts. In 'Tao Yuanming's 'Peach Blossom Source' and the Ideal of the 'Golden Age' in Classical Antiquity: Utopias in Ancient China and Classical Antiquity', David Engels shows that while in the Greek world, intimate links to the gods or a proper government are important (with the notable exceptions of the anarchism of the Cynic school and the rationalist approach of Euhemerism), Chinese philosophers of the pre-Buddhist era were generally adverse to depict their utopias as set up and guaranteed by the gods, as well as relied on the power of institutions.

We may conclude this outline with a brief survey of several ancient attempts to realize utopian projects. Porphyry relates how his master Plotinus tried to re-found a city in Campania and give it the name of Platonopolis. There, a group of philosophers would live under Plato's laws. But the project was never achieved, due to the opposition of unnamed opponents from the entourage of the emperor (Porphyry, *Vita Plot.* 12). In addition to philosophers, politicians also pursued the actualisation of their utopian ideals. Agis IV of Sparta, for instance, tried to return to the Lycurgan constitution and to that purpose proposed a cancellation of debts and a redistribution of properties. But his noble aspirations were crushed by the rich and the naive young king paid for his lofty ideals with his life (see

esp. Plutarch's *Life of Agis*). More bizarre is the story of Alexarchus, the son of Antipater and brother of Cassander. Alexarchus founded Uranopolis, a new city on Mount Athos, and even developed a completely new language for it (Athenaeus, *Deipnosoph.* 3, 98df; cf. also Strabo, 7 fr. 35). Aristonicus, finally, tried to become the new king of Pergamon and therefore started a revolution. After he suffered defeat in a naval battle, he withdrew to the inland and assembled a group of poor men and slaves, calling them citizens of the town of the Sun. After a few initial successes, he was defeated and brought to Rome, where he was executed. A poor end of his utopian dream...

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