The Utopian Dilemma in the Western Political Imagination

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Introduction

Imagining a World *Without* Heroes

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Introduction
Imagining a World *Without* Heroes

> A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing .... Progress is the realisation of Utopias.
>
> —Oscar Wilde

> If we only wanted to be happy, that would be soon accomplished. But we want to be happier than other people, and that is almost always difficult because we believe other people to be happier than they are.
>
> —Montesquieu

The utopian observer, supposing that the means of happiness should belong to everyone, looks at the world and sees how many people have so much more than they need while others lack basic necessities. Sees the vanity, triviality, and luxury of the great, and that the value of what they strive for resides not in enjoying what they have but in having what others lack. Sees the absurdity of a social hierarchy based on family, wealth, or the arrangements of the feudal past. Sees the miseries of the poor and how money enters into every relationship, distorting the choices of love and profession without bringing happiness. Sees the unfair dominance of men over women, and the supreme value placed on the least reasonable human activities, war and destruction. Sees society being guided by heroic narratives of family, tribe, race, and nation instead of objective truth. Sees literature and art glorifying conflict and reveling in the chaos of an irrational existence. Sees the modern replacement of feudal-aristocratic culture with capitalist individualism as only a minor change in the score-keeping between the lowly and the great.

For utopians, hierarchical societies and the values that sustain them are brutal and mad, designed only for strife and misery and the abuse of human freedom. Added to this is the irony that aristocrats and captains of industry do not even benefit from most of their resources except as these resources set them above others in esteem. It is the hunger for status, the hunger to appear great in the eyes of others, not material self-interest, that drives the masters of society to accumulate so much more than they need. To make fame and grandeur in the eyes of others the principal objects of human aspiration is

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to worship at the altar of inequality. W. B. Yeats formulated the crucial objection to the heroic frame of mind which erects distinction as the central human value.

> A king is but a foolish labourer
> Who wastes his blood to be another's dream.[1]

The utopian concludes that the only solution for this aristocratic culture of folly must be an intentionally implemented scheme of rational, truth-centered happiness for all based on the absolute value of good things, not their relative value based upon who has what. The form this solution must take will be a city or state with laws and customs designed to short-circuit human frailty.[2] Only by such means will human beings escape their irrationality and enslavement to the past. The scheme will inevitably include a thorough remaking of citizens, through education or even breeding, and a reform of the incentives that shape everyone's behavior. It will rely upon the wisdom of the system, not the qualities of individuals. It will be a world without heroes or the need for them.

The utopian critique of heroic and competitive societies has great moral force. It builds on the painful but inescapable satiric insights developed by major authors ancient and modern. But taken as a practical program, it generates resistance from two sources. One is that designed societies, to keep them from disaster, need designers not only of superhuman intellect but also of superhuman virtue. The task is beyond the powers of any single legislator of the kind imagined in the ancient Greek city-states. What would be needed is a whole class of rulers lasting from generation to generation. Such superhuman lawgivers and administrators have not been forthcoming. Instead, reformers in power have too often set themselves up as new, exploitative elites. This is the political problem of utopia. It has bedeviled just about every utopian scheme that has been tried on a sizable scale, making political utopianism look like a recipe for its very opposite—dystopia.

The second source of resistance to the utopian vision is perplexing in a different way. It is the ethical problem of utopia, using "ethical" in the broad sense that includes not only morality but also wider questions, preeminently the question of how to live. The role of this problem in the history of utopian and dystopian writing is the subject of this book. To state it briefly, even if a rational social order could be achieved through political and administrative design, would it be a true answer to human desire? Can heroic psychology, which sets fame, respect, and social position above all other goods, and demands the freedom to pursue them, be successfully replaced by an order in which the good things of life are equally available to all? The heroic point of view says no—that without the struggle for competitive distinction, human existence would lack meaning and interest. That a life in which the ingredients of happiness are reliably administered to all would be beneath human dignity. King Lear, grieving at the removal of his cherished retinue

of knights, passionately states the case that such symbolic values cannot be dismissed merely because they serve no practical need. “O, reason not the need!” he says.

> Our basest beggars
> Are in the poorest things superfluous;
> Allow not nature more than nature needs,
> Man’s life is cheap as beast’s.[3]

There is a touch of paradox in Lear’s attitude. He is being told that he has enough of everything he needs, but he replies that having enough is *never enough*, that even the poorest creatures require something which goes beyond necessity. That thing is distinction, dignity, respect—the marks of a king. Lear “wastes his blood to be another’s dream” and does so willingly. The alternative would be a loss of humanity—a stripping down to “the thing itself,” to “unaccommodated man,” a “poor, bare, forked animal” (Act 3, scene 4, ll. 104–106). The need to have more, the need to *be* more, is fundamental.

Lear’s heroic perspective mounts a powerful challenge to the view that happiness consists of having the good things of life, the things that utopians would distribute in fair proportion if they could. Indeed, the heroic view replaces this material type of happiness with something else, something fundamentally relative and social—the demand to be more which requires that others be less. In my epigraph, Charles Secondat, Baron Montesquieu, puts the matter in its acutest form. “If we only wanted to be happy, that could be easily done,” he writes. “But we want to be happier than other people, and that is always difficult because we believe other people to be happier than they are.”[4] He might have added that the belief that other people are happier than they are is stimulated in part by their tendency to show themselves as happier than they are, keeping up the appearance of happiness being the essence of status competition.

The dialectic between heroic and utopian positions has the form of a dilemma, a stand-off between two apparently valid but mutually incompatible views of happiness, each deeply grounded in human nature and experience. Essential values stand on both sides—fairness about the basic necessities of life on the one, dignity and the freedom to pursue it on the other. None of these is possible to sacrifice.[5] As an ethical position the heroic view, being grounded in the belief that human societies must be fundamentally unequal, is difficult to defend, but as a view of what is essential to human psychology it is difficult to dismiss. The evidence in its favor turns out to be the very same irrational pattern of social life targeted by the utopian critique, but it asks us to imagine a world in which this pattern does not hold while still being a recognizably *human* world. It would be a world without vanity, without dignity, without greatness, a world in which people are not motivated by the need to be respected and favorably

compared with others, either as individuals or in groups. From the utopian point of view the heroic world looks inhumane, while from the heroic point of view the utopian world looks inhuman. Both struggle to accept human beings' need for each other. The utopian tries to define the good in abstract material equality, denying the need for social dignity, while defenders of the heroic admit the need for social dignity but resist the implication that this implies dependency on others.

The argument of this book is that the utopian dilemma I have described, the conflict between heroic and utopian positions, is a crucial fault line in the political culture of the west, visible in a broad selection of major utopian and dystopian writings in literature and political theory. My account ends with two of the most determined defenders of each position—B. F. Skinner on the utopian side and Anthony Burgess on the heroic. But for the most part, the dilemma does not lead the authors I discuss to pitched battles. Rather, the dilemma itself is at the heart of the story. The majority of those who confront it, beginning with Thomas More, the inventor of utopia as a literary genre, feel the cutting power of both the dilemma's horns. The tension between utopian and heroic ideas, stances, and values is a powerfully generative stimulus for seminal figures as different as Jonathan Swift, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell. Their struggles with the dilemma form the backbone of the story I will tell.

This book is not a survey of utopias or utopianism.[6] It focuses on a sequence of major ancient and modern texts of a particular kind. They are *political utopias*—works that portray or reflect upon holistic, secular conceptions of ideal social design, what Lyman Tower Sargent calls "utopias of human contrivance,"[7] imagined either in the abstract or in fiction. Such texts have typically been considered by scholars to be primarily expressions of hope for a better world, one of the forms of "social dreaming."[8] Political utopias are often discussed in tandem with non-political ones—visions of tranquility and natural abundance set in the past like the Golden Age, in a millennial future, or in timeless realms like Arcadia, the Land of Cockaigne, or the Big Rock Candy Mountain.[9] Political utopias do retain a strong association with ideal satisfaction, even if that satisfaction is of something as abstract as the desire for things to be different. But what I hope to show in the following chapters is that our understanding of such utopias will be considerably sharpened by seeing them as responses to a specific, pre-existing cultural form—heroic-aristocratic society—along with the competitive psychology that fuels it and the literature that expresses its worldview. Even after the eighteenth century, when aristocratic culture had given way to capitalism and the middle class, major utopian works were still struggling with the need for fame and reputation, psychologically the core heroic imperatives.

Historically, then, utopias have a typical opponent, a formidable one with a classic philosophy of its own and ubiquitous literary and social expressions. This gives utopias a repressive as well as a liberating element.

They are always fighting with the slender resources of reason to reject the passionate, fame-centered ethos of heroic culture and the literary values it fosters, an ethos that was easily adapted to the bourgeois ambitions of capitalism. And because literature and art have so much importance in the modern world, the utopian ambition to rid the world of heroes and the struggles that create them has become a notable source of resistance to rational utopian planning. Scholars have long recognized the critical dimension of utopia and its connection with satire[10] as well as the resistance aroused by utopian visions, but utopia has been typically discussed as the primary term and anti-utopia as a reaction.[11] Here I experiment with inverting that explanatory relationship, setting the figure of utopia against the different, pre-existing, and ever-present ground of the heroic ethos.

Irony toward pride and the heroic concern with status rather than hopes for rational reform remained the dominant note of utopian thinking through the eighteenth century—as long, in other words, as aristocracy and monarchy remained in the ascendant. It was at this time, we will see, that the heroic emphasis upon social dignity received its most trenchant analyses in the works of Rousseau and Adam Smith. In the nineteenth century, however, when enlightenment egalitarianism, abetted by advances in technology and the modern sense of progress, made utopia look like a realistic goal, many utopians abandoned the satiric detachment and self-inclusive skepticism of their predecessors. Once utopian social thinkers began to aim at real-world implementation, they needed to recapture some heroic resources, including the resort to violence to which utopians had typically been averse. Utopian projects became prominent in a period of dynamic social change. Historicizing revolutionaries like Karl Marx could combine heroic and utopian moments in a single intellectual framework by locating them in separate phases of history; Marx saw his generation facing a dystopian present calling for heroic measures to produce a utopian future. Revolutionary heroism was by definition anti-aristocratic, but it produced new elites and new hierarchies of its own. In the twentieth century, utopian violence brought visions of an ever more dystopian future.

I have emphasized that the conflict between heroic and utopian forms and values which the dilemma produces is not an affair of opposing champions but rather of internal tension animating major works of the tradition. Still, marking out the typically contrasting features of heroic and utopian writing and thinking will be useful as a preface to the readings ahead. My first chapter begins with a discussion of Homer's *Iliad*, which gives a complete picture of the heroic-aristocratic culture to which utopia is the photographic negative. As it appears in Homer, the heroic mode is an integral functioning unit, with social, psychological, and literary elements naturally and inextricably fused. The utopian response to the heroic repertoire, beginning with Plato, does not always reverse every one of its features, but with these features in mind, we can inventory the anti-heroic features that utopian thinking and writing often share.

Most obviously, where the heroic ethos is conservative and past-oriented, utopias aim at the future and the possibility of change. War is the theater in which the heroic is at home, while utopias aim at peace, stability, and protection from war. Heroic culture also celebrates athletics and sports, especially hunting, whereas utopias often refuse competition and the shedding of blood. Violence and passion are congenial to the heroic sensibility, while utopias aim at control. Classic heroism has a decidedly masculine character, while utopias can be friendlier to women and sometimes have an explicitly feminist dimension. And where the family is the fundamental heroic social unit, utopia centers upon the city or the state, even tending to discourage personal attachment and the mourning that comes with it; utopias seek to forge emotional bonds between the individual and the state, an entity transcending death and personal sadness. The fundamental goal of the heroic spirit is glory, for the individual and for the family, while utopias aim at providing leisure and freedom from want. Heroic societies are hierarchical and competitive, whereas utopias aim to be at least relatively egalitarian and harmonious; indeed, the egalitarian element of modern culture gives it a strong utopian bent. Social worth in heroic society is hereditary, aristocracy being a justification in itself for power and respect; utopias, by contrast, aim to improve their citizens by education, by law, by eliminating monetary incentives, and often by eugenic control of reproduction. Heroic culture hews to the local soil, but utopian thinking can be cosmopolitan and even aim at a world state. Finally, heroic culture has a deep connection to the epic imagination and to literature in general; utopias, on the other hand, have at best an uneasy relation to the literary imagination, and the worlds without heroes they aspire to often lack literary interest. Rather than epic poetry, the most powerful utopian literary form is satire, though the reliance upon time travel and the discovery of new worlds in utopian narratives also permit rather weak versions of the romance. Since Plato, utopian and aesthetic values have been continually at odds, and modern authors like Friedrich Nietzsche who defend the heroic spirit often do so from an aestheticist point of view, putting intensity and grandeur over everyday happiness, taking the side of poetry in Plato's "ancient quarrel" between philosophy and poetry.[12]

Nietzsche sees the history of morals as a conflict of strong and weak biological types acting by the dictates of their natures, whereas the method of this study is literary and historical. It aims to show how major authors have struggled between the horns of the utopian dilemma and what they made from that struggle. Readers will decide for themselves if this tells us something about human nature, if it only is an accident of western history, or a distinctive element of the western tradition. For me, the fact that so many compelling writers and thinkers have struggled with the utopian dilemma is a strong indication that the phenomenon is a perennial one and that, however given to extremes, both sides of the argument have undeniable weight. Few of my readers will need persuading that the vision of stability and happiness

and the rational critique of heroic inequality offered by utopian thinkers have more than local, historical value, wary though they may be of utopian social controls. But it is important to recognize that the heroic side of the argument is not empirically frivolous. Indeed, the twenty-first century offers stronger evidence for the power and persistence of competitive psychology than was available to any of its predecessors. Despite the recent pandemic, people in the middle class of the developed world still enjoy physical security, longevity, quality of health care, ease and speed of travel, variety and safety of diet, and access to and quality of information and entertainment all at a level unimaginable even by the monarchs and captains of industry of the nineteenth century, and perhaps well into the twentieth. Even those members of the middle classes who are not as well off as their parents are still better off in material terms than Napoleon or Queen Victoria, for all of their lands, possessions, and servants.[13] From a material point of view, therefore, hundreds of millions of people have everything a utopia could offer, yet they are not necessarily satisfied. Modern advantages lack the gleam proportionate to their Napoleonic grandeur simply because so many other people have them. People of the present compare themselves not with Napoleon but with their peers, and they do so anxiously. An impressive body of research indicates that people's assessments of their own life satisfaction do not rise nearly in proportion to their material wealth. Rather, well-being is framed and experienced in local and comparative, not absolute terms; for many of the well-to-do, the wealth and prestige of those around them creates a need for more wealth and prestige no matter how much they have. Competition for the signs of happiness outweighs the happiness they bring. Social competition extends to the amassing of hundreds of billions of dollars, fortunes outshining all the treasures of past royalty. Yet with this vast surplus, beyond all powers of enjoyment, many continue to accumulate while others starve.[14]

While in traditional societies hierarchy, caste, and rank are sustained in their importance by official ideologies, often grounded in religious belief and celebrated in poetry and song, the partial, theoretical egalitarianism of modern, capitalist democracies makes assertions of merit more guarded and covert. But status signaling and status hierarchies remain pervasive. Ranks come into play more or less instantaneously in even the most casual and transient social interactions. Academic research in sociology and psychology supports the ancient belief that concern for status (respect, fame, admiration, attention) is a fundamental human motive. Psychologists disagree about whether status-seeking and hierarchy formation are autonomous, naturally evolved tendencies or whether they are a cultural creation like a language for which we have an evolutionary predisposition.[15] But there is general agreement that concern for status is not only important but ubiquitous in all societies and across differences of culture, age, and gender. Human beings are constantly monitoring how they are being evaluated by others and judging what role they can play in order to be favorably accepted by any group of which they are a part. They are equally energetic in judging

what roles they willingly accord to others. Remarkably, people are more accurate when assessing their standing relative to others than when assessing themselves in absolute terms, in which case they tend to exaggerate their own positive qualities.[16]

No student of the past will be surprised that "fame is the spur" ("That last infirmity of noble mind," as Milton called it) which leads human beings to "scorn delights and live laborious days,"[17] nor that respect and relative standing are central human concerns. It is evident on every page of the history and literature of the world.[18] Milton's Satan provided its ultimate motto—"Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven"[19]; for Satan, neither the ultimate comforts of heaven nor the ultimate torments of hell can outweigh the attractions of relative social superiority. For the defenders of heroic psychology, protesting against the dullness of utopia, the spoils of victory are not the key to happiness. They see the taste for the competition itself, and for the struggles it demands, as the bass notes of human sensibility, typically conceived, of course, in a distinctively masculine manner. The competition and the glory of it, not the prize, is the answer to human desire. True happiness requires struggle, just as true solidarity requires a common enemy. Worlds without struggle and without the heroes that emerge from struggle, worlds blessed with systemic happiness, look so tedious as to be unendurable. Wallace Stevens puts the heroic complaint with unforgettable vividness. Without the heroic imagination, he says, human beings would be "Castratos of moon-mash."[20]

The freedom from difficulty, therefore, which is the goal of utopia, is actually, from the heroic point of view, its greatest drawback. And it is a disquieting point against the utopian position that when human beings are free to amuse themselves—an activity that presumably tells us something about the kind of world they want to live in—they divide up into teams to imitate the dynamics of war. It is even more disquieting for the utopian that, when poets and writers come to tell the tale of life according to the dictates of their imagination, it is misery, strife, and struggle they use their powers to evoke. Storytelling, whether historical or fictive, dwells overwhelmingly upon violence, passion, and change. It dwells, in other words, upon just those costs of grandiosity and folly which utopias aim to eliminate. This is why utopian literature struggles to rise above the banality of goodness. By the very token of its validity as a rational vision of life, utopian happiness lacks everything that appeals to the storytelling imagination. As Mustafa Mond, Controller of the utopian World State in *Brave New World*, explains, "Happiness is never grand."

Insofar as imaginative power, then, is an indicator of what people desire from life, utopia is sadly lacking. Literary visions of the happiness of others can please in modest, lyric doses, or at the end of a comedy of errors, when the happy couples must be ushered off-stage as quickly as possible before their felicity begins to cloy. But the appetite for the spectacle of others' suffering seems to be insatiable, making it look as though human beings

are really dystopians at heart. If it is true that one person's paradise can be another's hell, the compensations of the dystopian imagination make it look like one person's hell can also be another's paradise.

From the utopian point of view, of course, the heroic protest against happiness looks like an insane combination of sadism and masochism. If you don't like peace and order, the utopian might ask, why settle for just a little struggle and adventure? Why not opt for total chaos? This looks like a devastating argument, but the true defender of the heroic has a reply: Let us have war and the poetry of war. Hasn't war always been the noblest field of heroic aspiration? Doesn't great art require spectacles of struggle and sacrifice? And isn't the utopian mission also a heroic one, requiring its own, overmastering elite? Doesn't the appeal of revolution depend just a little on unseating and doing violence to one's enemies? Isn't it, in fact, only in war and disaster that the collective unity longed for by utopians is ever realized? As committed a utopian as the Marxist Fredric Jameson seems to admit this when, with rueful irony, he refers to World War II as "the great American utopia."[21]

The utopian and heroic modes mark the extremes of the political scale—with communism and its dream of equality on the side of the utopian and fascism with its aesthetics of violence and its nostalgia for the past on the side of the heroic. But what makes the dilemma especially painful and exhausting is that, under conditions of polarization, it also operates in the middle zone of politics. The last few years in the United States have made this obvious. Progressive politicians who want to improve the material lives of ordinary people find themselves resisted not only by the wealthy defending their elite status but by the very people who stand to benefit from such improvements but whose dignity resists the condescension of charity, who identify in imagination with the privileges of the wealthy, and who resent the critical stance toward the heroic view of national greatness which socially remedial measures seem to imply. It was this aspect of human psychology, we will see, that led Dostoevsky to define the human being as "the ungrateful biped."

Mask resistance in the recent pandemic provides a graphic illustration of this dynamic. Wearing masks to prevent the spread of a virus seems like the most minimally utopian imaginable demand, but for many, dignity requires the freedom to say no. The rational planner says that the individuals who demand this choice are going against their own interests, but the heroic reply reminds us that human beings are not the rational utility-maximizers imagined by progressive politicians and economic theorists. Freedom and dignity easily prevail over material benefit. Adding to the effect of this dilemma is the fact that people on both sides of it feel a need to establish their identities in contrast with the other and the true difficulties of political compromise come into focus. Seemingly tiny matters can become signs of party affiliation, badges of ultimate loyalty. In politics, as Aristotle puts it, "Every difference is apt to create a division."[22]

It is infuriating that rational planning on the social level confronts so many obstacles from the human ego. My emphasis upon the explanatory power of the heroic imperative toward status should not be mistaken for an endorsement of its ethical outlook, even though I believe its demands for dignity and the challenge of life must be taken seriously. The social hope embodied in utopian dreaming is essential to any tolerable prospect for the future, as Oscar Wilde's famous words suggest. Such hopes must contend with the dilemma whose literary and historical expression is traced in these pages.

Let me end with a word about the limits of this study. As mentioned above, I have concentrated on political utopias, works which develop or reflect on the possibility of circumventing the foibles of human nature by a radical reform of social arrangements. This leaves out religious schemes of life such as those of medieval monasticism or the American Shakers which have undoubtedly contributed to utopian thinking. Many important utopian writers have had religious motivations, and many religions—Christianity and Buddhism most notably—share the utopian rejection of violence and aristocratic privilege. They do so, however, by offering other-worldly rather than secular alternatives. This opens up its own dilemmas, but they are different from the one I have treated here. In some cases, the tension between religious humility and the heroic spirit produces ambiguities and ambivalence not unlike what I describe in the chapters below. I am thinking especially of John Milton, whose portrait of Satan in *Paradise Lost* provides at once an evocation and a powerful critique of the heroic spirit. Milton's concern for the freedom in thought and action of the "warfaring Christian," for the need for truth to be tried "by what is contrary," and his belief in his own grand mission as an epic poet and defender of regicide, stands in awkward relation to his ultimate defense of hierarchy and Christian obedience.[23]

Restricting my topic to secular utopianism helped focus this study on western and modern examples in conformity with my personal expertise. I have mentioned that I see the utopian dilemma as a more or less perennial phenomenon, however strongly inflected by differences of time, place, culture, and literary tradition. My confidence in this regard depends not primarily on the psychological research on status cited in my notes but from the ubiquity in the history and literature of the world of status competition and the respect of others as motivations for human behavior along with a persistent irony about its costs and the difficulty of imagining its overthrow. Let me say to readers who cannot countenance any perennial explanation that the value of this study need not depend upon any one attitude toward the utopian dilemma. This study will have achieved its goal if it can show that awareness of the dilemma casts valuable light on a broad range of canonical works under the umbrella of utopia.

Notes

1 "Fergus and the Druid," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 37, ll. 27–28.
2 As J. C. Davis puts it, "In Utopia we see no invocation of a *deus ex machina*, nor any wishing away of the deficiencies of man or nature. Systems have to be devised whereby men will be able to offset their own continuing wickedness and cope with the deficiencies of nature. Such systems are inevitably bureaucratic, institutional, legal and educational, artificial and organizational." J. C. Davis, "The History of Utopia: The Chronology of Nowhere," in *Utopias*, eds. Peter Alexander and Roger Gill (London: Duckworth, 1984), 9.
3 William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series, 1997), Act 2, scene 2, ll. 453–56.
4 Charles-Louis Secondat, Baron of La Brède and Montesquieu, *My Thoughts*, trans. Henry C. Clark (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012), 274. Adapted.
5 For a thoughtful assessment of the utopian's potential replies to what I call the heroic critique, see George Kateb, *Utopia and Its Enemies* (New York: Shocken, 1972). It is evidence of the intractable character of the utopian dilemma that, writing not a decade after the original edition of his book (1963), Kateb had already changed sides. "The very wish to compose a utopia," he writes, "to set forth in detail a utopian way of life, may in fact be repressive." "Preface," vi.
6 For broad views of the subject see Frank E. Manuel and Fritzi P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys, and Lyman Tower Sargent, eds., *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstruction of Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Gregory Claeys, *Utopia: The History of an Idea* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020). An excellent place to start with utopia studies is Sargent's *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
7 Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopia Revisited," *Utopia Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994): 4.
8 Idealized religious and folk images of society are present in many cultures and periods, though secular schemes of utopian design are primarily the products of the West. For a survey of "Extra-European Visions of the Ideal Society," see Claeys, *Utopia*, chapter 3.
9 Krishnan Kumar, for example, regards utopianism as a composite of many forms—visions of Cockaigne contributing the "element of desire," Paradise and the Golden Age contributing the "element of harmony," the millennium contributing the "element of hope," and the ideal city contributing the "element of design." See Kumar, *Utopianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 18. But J. C. Davis persuasively separates utopia from other modes of social dreaming that focus on the millennium, arcadia, cockagne, and the perfect moral commonwealth and recognizes the utopian mode as a constant form. See *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 5–6.
10 Robert C. Elliott has traced the deep connection between utopia and satire. "Satire and utopia seem naturally compatible," he writes, satire having "two main elements: the predominating negative part, which attacks folly or vice, and the understated positive part, which establishes a norm, a standard of excellence, against which folly and vice are judged. The literary utopia, on the other hand, reverses these proportions of negative and positive, … presentation of the ideal overweighing the prescriptive attack on the bad old days which Utopia has happily ended." See *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 22.

11 See, for example, Krishnan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), another broad treatment which contains rich discussions of several texts discussed below. Kumar considers utopia a strictly modern phenomenon.

12 Nietzsche's Apollinian–Dionysian dichotomy is a way of formulating the utopian dilemma in psycho-mythologizing terms, and his "genealogy of morals" is a resource for defending the heroic imperative. Nietzsche sees what he calls the history of morals as a conflict between the two points of view I have been describing, the "knightly-aristocratic class" versus its egalitarian enemies. The knightly class, he argues, "noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded," creates its own values out of the "pathos of distance," which is to say "the protracted and domineering fundamental total feeling" of a higher over a lower type. Correspondingly, Nietzsche argues that religious and utopian critics of the heroic imperative are working from "below," putting forward a slave morality normalizing human frailty in opposition to the morality of strength of the masters. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989), 26. Translation slightly altered. Nietzsche paints a broad historical canvas based on the distinction between master and slave morality. Homeric greatness, he believes, was undermined by Socratic questioning, the grandeur of Rome was undone by the Hebraic spirit of Christianity, the resurgent heroism of the Renaissance and its renewed "classical ideal" were quashed by the Reformation, and, going in the other direction, the utopian leveling of the French Revolution evoked a heroic response in the rise of Napoleon—a "synthesis of the *inhuman* and *superhuman*" (52–54). In the final analysis, however, Nietzsche believes that the utopian morality of the slaves has won out over the heroic morality of the masters, resulting in a nightmare scenario—the "leveling of European man" (44), the "reduction of the beast of prey man to a tame and civilized animal" (42).

13 For a recent account, see Bradford DeLong, *Slouching Toward Utopia: An Economic History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2022).

14 Status as a factor in human behavior has not found its Marx, though Adam Smith made a seminal contribution in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as did Max Weber in *Economy and Society*. French authors like La Rochefoucauld, Laclos, Stendhal, and Proust anatomized the subtleties of social vanity, including its role in the experience of love, and as far back as the early eighteenth century, the Duc de Saint-Simon observed the flourishing in pre-civilized societies of caste hierarchies like his own. (See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie with the collaboration of Jean-François Fitou, *Saint-Simon and the Court of Louis XIV*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 64–65). Thorstein Veblen pioneered the economics of status as "conspicuous consumption" in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, a line of insight followed up over many years by the economist Robert Frank (especially in *Choosing the Right Pond*). The anthropologist Louis Dumont broke important ground studying the Indian caste system in *Homo hierarchicus*, and Marcel Mauss opened his field to the socially aggressive aspects of generosity and the "gift-attack" in *The Gift*. Pierre Bourdieu explored the implications of status for aesthetic judgment in *Distinction* and W. David Marx's recent book *Status and Culture* explores the subject in depth. The vast literature on happiness and its lack of correlation with material rewards beyond the basic necessities provides a parallel commentary to the study of status.

15 For the evolutionary account of status competition, see Joey T. Cheng and Jessica L. Tracy, "Toward a Unified Science of Hierarchy: Dominance and Prestige Are Two Fundamental Pathways to Human Social Rank," in *The Psychology of Social Status*, eds. Joey T. Cheng, Jessica L. Tracy, and Cameron Anderson (New York: Springer, 2014), chapter 1. One of the best places to begin on the subject of

status in general is Cecilia L. Ridgeway, *Status: Why Is It Everywhere? Why Does It Matter?* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2019), which provides a broad overview of the subject while defending the theory of status systems as cultural inventions.

16 The findings in this and the next paragraph are surveyed and assessed in Cameron Anderson, John A. Hildreth, and Laura Howland, "Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive? A Review of the Empirical Literature," *Psychological Bulletin* 141. no. 3 (2015): 574–601.

17 John Milton, "Lycidas," in *Milton's Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jason Rosenblatt (New York: Norton, 2011), ll. 70–72.

18 It is so ubiquitous in recorded history that David Graeber and David Wengrow have to exercise their extraordinary interpretive ingenuity upon the thin record of prehistoric humanity looking for hopeful signs of cultures consciously chosing nonhierarchical, noncompetitive forms of social organization. See *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2021).

19 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Second ed., ed. Alastair Fowler (New York: Longman, 1998), l. 263.

20 "Men Made Out of Words," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 355. The masculine slant of the heroic position hardly needs to be emphasized.

21 Fredric Jameson et al., *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army,* ed. Slavoj Zizek (New York: Verso, 2016), 21. Surprisingly, Jameson sees the U. S. Army as the most likely vehicle for the utopian transformation of the United States, a startling example of the utopian reclamation of heroic resources.

22 *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 211.

23 "Areopagitica," in Milton, *Milton's Selected Poetry and Prose*, 350.

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