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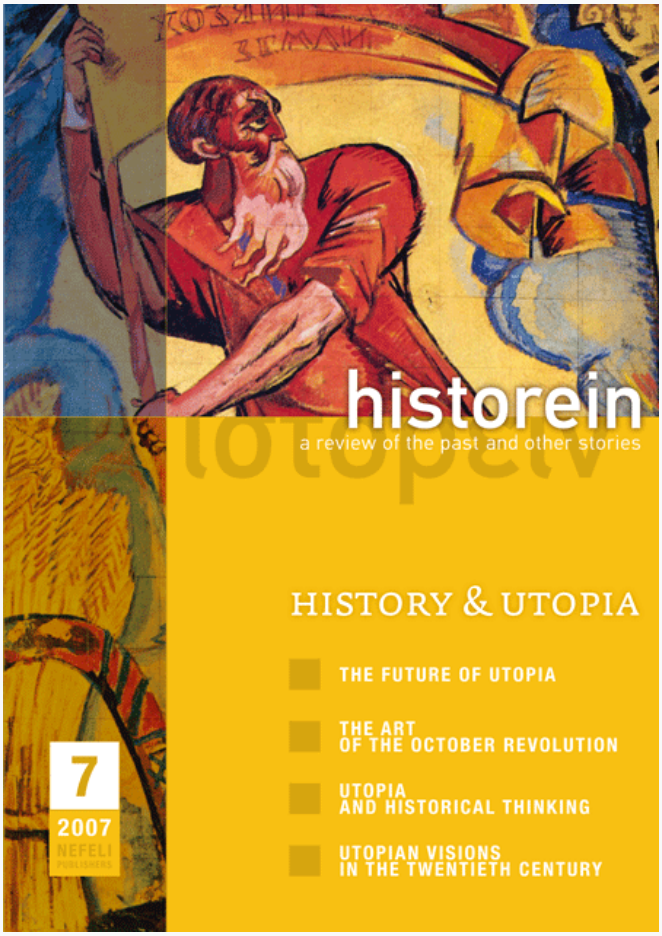

Utopian and Historical Thinking: Interplays and Transferences

Antonis Liakos

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Utopian and Historical Thinking: Interplays and Transferences

Antonis Liakos

University of Athens

The terms *utopia* as a form of writing about future expectations for ideal societies and *history* as a way of thinking and writing about the past have been considered as opposite concepts, devoid of any contact. Presupposing that there is a common denominator to historical ways of thinking and also to the utopian imagination, and assuming the existence of a recognisable demarcation between them, do they also share any middle ground? Is utopian material discernible in the background of historical thinking? Did the ways in they changed over time share a common tempo? Did both respond in the same way to the same questions in different eras? My starting point is not to investigate history as a background for imagining utopias, nor utopias as participating in the prefiguration and realisation of historical change; rather, I am concerned with the role of history within imagined utopian societies, and the place of utopia in the background of historical thinking. According to utopian writers, what do the ideal societies they have created have to do with history? What do they advise utopian citizens to do in regard to their past? What is the place of history as a cognitive method? Where is memory in utopian societies? Would they require historical thinking? Would they have an historical culture of the past as historical societies do? The central idea here is that despite their multifarious appearance and categorisation as different genres in each historical period, the terms history and utopia were subjected to transformation in their attitudes towards the past and the future. Both experienced the same changes. As a consequence, it is worth exploring the relationship between imagining the future in utopian language and thinking and writing history.[1] The dimension

of future time and of the social expectations and anxieties in writing and thinking history is often undervalued in the history and theory of historiography.[2] This paper argues that the exploration of the link between utopian and historical thinking is necessary for understanding the horizon of long-term social expectations in writing history. From this point of view, ideas about the future are part of the deep structure which forms our understanding of what is historical thinking.

1. The Controversy over the Book of Daniel

Eschatology and utopia

Before moving to the relationship between utopia and history, we should look at the relationship between utopia and Christian eschatology. It has been argued that utopia differs fundamentally from the Christian imagination because the former envisages an ideal society on Earth, while the latter expects one in Heaven. According to the same argument utopias began to be imagined when Christianity ceased to satisfy the needs of educated society in the sixteenth century.[3] The other position is that in the pre-modern Mediterranean world and Europe, Christian eschatology and millennialism, which provided a vision beyond real time and reality, could be considered as a form of social imagination to which millennialism and utopia belonged, despite their differences. There was no clear moment of rigid separation between millennialism and utopianism, but rather a continuum, although non-linear, and fusion.[4] During the seventeenth-century Puritan revolution in England an eschatological predicament coexisted with republican utopias.[5] Writers of utopias built upon previous traditions, and as Ernst Bloch has written: "Utopian unconditionality comes from the Bible and the idea of the kingdom, and the latter remained the apse of every New Moral World."[6] Indeed, as in utopian novels, the Book of Revelation includes a clear statement on the future of society:

> *[T]he holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband ... And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:1–4).*[7]

This relationship between eschatology and utopia has been demonstrated by a parallel reading of Augustine's *The City of God* and Thomas More's *Utopia*. Despite their difference in perspective, there is a dialogue between the two books and, metaphorically speaking, between the heavenly and the insular city.[8] Utopian writers have employed the concept and the image of the millennium as a new era in the existence of humankind. The nineteenth-century Welsh utopian reformer Robert Owen announced the imminent dawn of the new order in the first issue of the *New Moral World* (1834) in millennial terms:

> *This ... is the Advent of the World, the second coming of Christ, for Truth and Christ are one and the same. The first coming of Christ was a partial development of Truth to the few ... The second coming of Christ will make Truth known to the many ... The time is therefore arrived when the foretold millennium is about to commence.*[9]

The imagined Bostonians of the year 2000 in Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Back: 2000–1888* considered their era as the "Post-Millennium": "Such is, in fact, the belief of some per-

sons nowadays," a doctor commented, that they "hold that we have entered upon the millennium, and the theory from their point of view does not lack plausibility."[10] Apocalypse was also the model of a strand of nineteenth-century American utopian novels. Despite being a religious metaphor, in these novels the apocalypse served as a political paradigm. The image of the future was imagined as presupposing the destruction of the old and sinful order. This ideal future was not conceived as an individual vision in juxtaposition with the present but as the climax of an historical process. The concepts of "redeemed nation" and "manifest destiny", which came to form the hardcore of American national ideology, were derived from these approaches to the future. Nationalism in the USA was anchored to the future; not to the past as it mostly was in Europe.[11] In both approaches, which separate or link millennialism and utopia, the common question is how people imagine the future. In other words, what do people expect change will bring in the future?

The next question is how history is related to eschatology? The English poet William Blake (1757–1827) in his work "A Vision of the Last Judgment" argued that the Last Judgment was a "vision" of history, graspable only through mystical revelation rather than empirical and critical observation. His attitude was that this would be the way of mastering major historical events: as myths that require spiritual veneration and interpretation rather than factual explanation.[12] In the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin wrote that in the history of historical thinking, the texts that lay behind the concept of Messianism presented for the first time a solid vision of world history in the form of a narrative with a plot, which contained the Fall and Salvation, desperation and hope. This structure was used extensively as a narrative trope to narrate and give meaning to history and histories.[13] What is argued in the following section is that there is a transportation and even a transformation of material between history and eschatology related to reality and the ways of perceiving it.

History transformed into prophecy

Leopold von Ranke, in the preface of his *Weltgeschichte* (1883), wrote that:

> *The historians of bygone days were satisfied with the conception of the four great empires of the world, drawn from the prophetic books of the Bible. As late as the seventeenth century this conception prevailed, but in the eighteenth it was upset by the general progress of civilisation.*[14]

This conception of the "Four Empires" comes from the *Book of Daniel.* This book, part of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, provided the central story for millennialist Christian conceptions of history. The images contained in chapters two (the Idol of Colossus) and seven (the Four Beasts) of the book were employed in Saint John's *Apocalypse* and continued to be used in the construction of the Christian vision of history until the seventeenth century.[15] The centuries-long debate about the meaning of the *Book of Daniel* is employed here as a method to explore the close interrelationship between historical and utopian thinking.

The story starts with a displacement of meaning. The history of imperial domination in the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean has been viewed as a "succession of the four empires". This image emerged from scattered references by Herodotus to oriental empires. These references were already transformed into a teleology of the succession (and transfiguration) of worldly

power before being transferred to the biblical text. Greco-Roman historians (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Appian, and Marcus Velleius Paterculus) adopted this scheme and transformed it into a narrative to promote the idea of the inevitability and greatness of the Roman Empire.[16] Through imperceptible shifts in meaning, this narrative also came to be used to express anti-Roman feelings in the obscure literature of the Sibylline Oracles produced by dissident groups (Pompeius Trogus).[17] Continuing down the slippery slope, this narrative was then transformed into the genre of Jewish prophecy and was included in the *Book of Daniel* (Daniel was the name attributed to its unknown writer(s)). An ending was added to the story in which God intervenes and destroys all the empires. In the *Book of Daniel* the same story was presented in two versions, both in the form of visions. The first, inspired by Hellenistic iconography, describes an image of a colossus representing the succession of four empires. A stone, representing God, pulverises the colossus, replacing the empires with his rule (Chapter 2). The second version narrates a vision, containing essentially the same story as the first, but presented in the mythological language of the Near East.[18] It describes four beasts emerging from the sea and devouring the populations of the Earth. In the end, the "son of man", God with a human face, comes and defeats them to establish the rule of his saints (Chapter 7).[19] Both versions were used by Jewish writers to express feelings of bitterness and revenge; against whom precisely being the subject of a long debate and controversy ever since the book was written.

What I would like to point out is the transference of this story between historiography and prophecy. The apocalyptic scheme of the succession of the four empires shares a common origin with historiography. The question is what other links exist and how historiography and apocalyptic discourse have interplayed.

The *Book of Daniel* served to structure Christian imaginary throughout the course of late antiquity, the medieval and early modern periods. It is central to Saint John's *Apocalypse* and the apocalyptic tradition.[20] In medieval Western Europe this scheme of the four empires was conceptualised as the "Translatio imperii", a term referring to the imagined transfer of imperial power from one nation to another, particularly from the Romans to the Germans.[21] History and eschatology have used the same historical material, adapting not only different symbolic languages but also different political eventualities as well. In the long tradition of interpretation, the scheme of the four empires was used either as a metaphor for the divine provenance of power and legitimisation of temporal authority[22] or as a promise for the destruction of profane power and the restoration of God's rule. The *Book of Daniel* offered both a comprehensive vision of history and, at the same time, an interpretation of history. The deep structure of the story concerns the challenge to God by evil powers, the need for his direct intervention, and the subsequent rule by the righteous, who will rule society forever. Rebellion against God and divine punishment, promise and fulfilment, the expectation of better times as a response to growing evil, and interaction by human and divine agencies are the structural elements shaping a vision of human history, giving meaning to each period of historical time over the centuries until the mid-seventeenth century.

The story narrated in the *Book of Daniel* was not a unique case of transformation of history into prophecy. Constantinople, as the capital and the personification of the Christian Roman Empire, was connected with this eschatological tradition. The capture of the city by the Ottomans

in 1453 was transformed to a prophetic myth of retreat and promise of future restoration.[23] The prophecy of return was quite common to the stories involving defeat by enemies of vastly greater power. During the nineteenth-century colonial wars, this uneasy relationship between Europeans and vanquished peoples made the writing of history relentlessly frustrating and disappointing. The transformation of history to prophecy made the appeal to prophecy an act of escaping the present and hoping for revenge in the future.[24] History as prophecy meant that the impulsion to write history was intended to 'correct' the past and to demonstrate the fragile nature of 'reality'. The meaning was that the undesirable and the unsupportable reality could be changed in the future, that the Messiah was coming not only to redeem suffering peoples but also to exact revenge.[25]

Does history explain prophecy or prophecy interpret history?

There were two basic interpretations of the *Book of Daniel*. The first was historical. Porphyry, a fourth-century philosopher and Christian adversary, wrote that the story told by Daniel referred to the Jewish opposition to the Hellenistic king Antiochus Epiphanes. It had not been written earlier, as was alleged, but during the second century BC to express the outrage felt by Jewish writers and their fellow believers about their enforced Hellenisation and cultural assimilation. In consequence, the *Book of Daniel* was not a prophecy about what would happen but a *post eventum* story. The last empire, then, which the prophecy foresaw would be destroyed was the Greek Empire. Since the Hellenistic kingdoms were absorbed into the Roman Empire by conquest, this was not any vision of the future; it was just history, written allegorically.[26] According to the second interpretation, the story of the colossus and the beasts was an authentic prophecy. The last of the four empires cited by Daniel was not Greek but Roman. The Roman empire was a fluid term, taken to refer equally to any of several imperial states that drew their symbolic heritage from Rome. In this interpretation, then, the *Book of Daniel* was a prophecy of the near future, not the past: one of the imminent and the unfulfilled. It belonged to the realm of promise and not to the realm of fulfilment. This second interpretation, however, existed in two variations: the first was literal, the second metaphorical.

Both of these basic interpretations raised the question whether history should be used to explain prophecy or prophecy to explain history? Leaving aside for the moment the two meanings implicit in the term history (*res gesta* and *de rerum gestarum*), the first approach legitimised established power. Prophecy was considered to having been fulfilled, so there was no threat to established power. The second undermined the legitimacy of established power. Prophecy was considered an open historical possibility, an announcement of an imminent rupture in history. The consequences of this dilemma were remarkable: the use of history as an explanation of prophecy encouraged the undertaking of historical research as a rational recognition of the past. This interpretation powerfully influenced the revival of ancient languages and the tradition of scholarship in sixteenth-century Europe.[27] The contrasting interpretation, that prophecy explained history, encouraged utopian speculation about history.

Beneath this dilemma was the question of meaning; how should the text be understood? Are words to be used in a literal or in a metaphorical and allegorical sense? The literal reading encour-

aged political activism. The debate had begun in the fourth century with the merging of Ecclesia and Empire, and continued during the Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the Reformation the *Book of Daniel* was taken to be critical of secular and ecclesiastical power, which was represented by the imagery of the beasts. Martin Luther, although rejecting radical millennialism, affirmed the relationship between prophecy and the events of his time, particularly the corruption of the Church and the Ottoman conquest of South-Eastern Europe. The German humanist and reformer Melanchthon (Philipp Schwarzerd, 1497–1560), who saw Ottoman power and the Pope as the double incarnation of the Antichrist, considered the image of the colossus in Chapter 2 of the *Book of Daniel* as a comprehensive image of world history.[28] Two centuries after Melanchthon's death this cognitive aspect of the image as a compendium of world history was still extant. In 1774 the Augsburg engraver and cartographer Tobias Conrad Lotter (1717–1777), produced an image of the "colossus", embellished with historical details from the reign of the biblical Nimrod, descendant of Noah and first Babylonian king, for the Habsburg Joseph II (1741–1790).

The connotations of subversion in the story of the four empires were stronger than those of knowledge during the Reformation and the seventeenth-century English Civil War. For the radical reformer and leader of the Peasants' War in Germany, Thomas Münzter (1490–1525), "the fifth (monarchy) is the one before us ... the stone dislodged from the mountain by no human hand is a large one now, the poor laity and the peasants". He referred to divine rule as the fifth monarchy that was to replace all previous corrupt hegemonies. During the English Civil War, members of a radical armed sect called themselves the "Fifth Monarchists". For Gerrard Winstanley, leader of another dissident sect, the "Diggers", the first beast was described as representing the king, the second unjust laws, the third the enclosure of the land, and the forth the clergy. He wrote that "the Creation will never be in peace, till these four beasts, with all their heads and horns ... do run into the sea again". The *Book of Daniel* was both a catalyst for and a discourse on rebellion. Reality was perceived as the final battle of good against evil: "Jerusalem and Babylon, Eschaton and the Apocalypse converge here and now." This kind of discourse laid the foundation of the agency of rebellion.[29]

Contrary to this interpretation, the allegorical reading emphasised spirituality and contemplation. For the fourth-century Christian Fathers, who were interested in associating the Roman Empire with the Church and legitimising both, the last empire of the prophecy was of course the Roman, but they offered a new interpretation for the image of the stone smashing the statue. They replaced the violence and the destruction of the empire with the coming of Jesus and his spiritual power. Thus, the prophecy was considered as having been fulfilled and not as imminent. Some Church fathers tried to trivialise the prophecy's imminence, considering it as the daily battle between good and evil in personal and internal life.[30] During the renewed debate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, allegorical or historical readings were adopted by non-Germans and non-millennialist reformers such as John Calvin, Hugo Grotius, Henry More and other theologians. Isaac Newton (1642–1727) wrote a book entitled *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel* (published posthumously in 1773) in which he argued, "we can only content ourselves with interpreting what hath already been fulfilled". For Newton, who wrote another book on history entitled *The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms amended, to which is prefixed a Short Chronicle from the First Memory of Things in Europe, to the Conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great* (published in 1728), the language of prophecy was a form of algebra for understanding history: "[F]or understanding the Prophecies,

we are, in the first place, to acquaint ourselves with the figurative language of the Prophets. This language is taken from the analogy between the world natural, and an empire or kingdom considered as a world politic."[31] The literature of commentary on the *Book of Daniel* by historians, philosophers, and theologians has since become immense.[32]

The question whether history should be understood through prophecy or prophecy through history was reactivated again and again as a quarrel between theology and history, or revolution and history.

(Re)Structuring historical time

As a framework of world history, the *Book of Daniel* remained powerful until the seventeenth century. In his *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (1566) the French statesman and historian Jean Bodin included a chapter, entitled "Refutation of Those who Postulate Four Monarchies and the Golden Age", in which he recognised that these were the prevailing ideas of his time: "A long established, but mistaken, idea about four empires made famous by the prestige of great men, has sent its roots down so far that it seems difficult to eradicate."[33] This interpretative framework was gradually abandoned not only as consequence of the political and religious crisis of the seventeenth century; the geographical knowledge derived from European expansion and the discovery of new lands and old cultures was another intellectual crisis. The 'discovery' of America had an immediate impact on the utopian novels of Thomas More, Francis Bacon and Tommaso Campanella. The first paid attribute to Amerigo Vespucci, the second to Columbus and the third alluded to the Amerindian civilisations[34]. The European realisation that a civilisation existed in China that was older than the world described in the Old Testament was ironically called the "death of Adam".[35] The Christian paradise was challenged by the image of the newly discovered lands. The Americas became such a land of lost or recovered paradise; it was not only a territory where many utopian experiments took place, but it also inspired the utopian novels of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[36]

Until this time, the eve of modernity, the *Book of Daniel* had provided one of the more durable structures of periodisation in world history. Through this narrative, history was placed in the shell of eschatological thinking. It was impossible to think about the past without a framework comprising the future. It had to be abandoned in order for a restructuring of historical time. The modern structure of three time periods (ancient, medieval and modern) was introduced at the end of the seventeenth century.[37] The transition from the old to the new periodisation is a reflection of the intellectual border between eschatology and history.

Millennial, as well as utopian, time was qualified by promise and fulfilment. It led to and concluded in *kairos,* a concept belonging to time but signifying its end. For prophecy, *kairos* was the time of divine intervention in history. As a consequence, the past–present–future order was restructured with this imminent time at its centre. Past and present became less important than the time of fulfilment. In terms of the rhetorical turn, the concept of *kairos* imposed an "emplotment" upon history-writing (and history-thinking) which emphasised the changes, long time-periods, causal

interdependence, and moral quality of each epoch, as well as the intentionality of the historical process. In millennialism the past was to be judged and retribution would come in the future. It was not a definitely closed past, but a still open, 'imminent' one. As a consequence of this arrangement of time, the task attributed to history was to foresee both the past and the future. Millennial thinkers judged the past according to their expectations of the future. At the same time future expectation depended on the moral choices of the past. Future catastrophe and salvation were the keys for interpreting past history. Seventeenth-century utopian novels entered a similar structure of time in that they depicted an end to time. At last, utopian novels were narratives on the end of history.[38]

In historical thinking, in contrast to eschatology, historical time was quantified and measured. For this reason, in early modern European society the estrangement of historical thinking from eschatology resulted in an obsession with time and chronology.[39] Thinking historically meant that the past should be considered as a 'closed' case, as something complete which would not threaten established order. Since the establishment of modern states, history, not eschatology, was the safer way of taming the consciousness of time and future expectations of society. For the European monarchies of the seventeenth century, the "*eschaton*" had already been realised or belonged to a purely spiritual order at the very least. There was no paradise, no millennium, no golden age and no utopia to await on Earth. It was the task of historiography to explain how and when the prophecies had been fulfilled and point out the events to which they corresponded; it was not the task of history to guess the future.

The other way of avoiding the threat of divine interference in human history was theology, the purpose of which was to explain the relevance of prophecy not to historical events, but to personal, 'inner' life.[40] This transition marked a shift in historical perspective. Historical thinking 'resigned' from its role as a compass for the entirety of time from Genesis to the Second Coming, and confined itself to focusing on the past, which it used in moral teaching, in doing so re-enacting the Hellenistic and Roman topos of "*historia magistra vitae*".[41] Although it retained a wish to influence the future, it did not deny that the past was mastered, completely closed, and without promises yet to be fulfilled. The concept of the past was transformed into things already done, beyond the reach of promise and fulfilment. In his *L'idee de l'histoire accomplice* (1559), the French Renaissance historian La Popelinière wrote that the ultimate goal of the historian was to tell what actually happened in the past ("*réciter le chose comme elle est advenue*").[42] His realm was the past, not the future. This orientation has been embodied in the understanding of the purpose, meaning and task of history ever since. According to R. G. Collingwood:

> *[T]he historian's business is to know the past, not to know the future; and whenever historians claim to be able to determine the future in advance of its happening, we may know with certainty that something has gone wrong with their fundamental conceptions of history.*[43]

This has been the first article of faith for professional historians since nineteenth-century historicism. Donald Kelley has given an epigraphic description of the core doctrine of historicism:

> *Not universal and unchanging law but particular and changing custom was the concern of the historical school; not abstract and classifying reason but concrete and localised memory; not mechanical or mathematical models but human language and culture; not the imperialism of liberal of liberal economics but the realities of national development* – not, in short, the way

> the world should be *(according to revolutionary, Bonapartist, Liberal, or Hegelian prescription) but the way it really was*.[44]

History was established as a disciplined way of thinking through this clear and unambiguous orientation to an irreversible past.

2. Eutopia or Euchronia?

The divorce of utopia and history

Was there any place for history in the new utopian landscape after the publication of More's *Utopia* in 1516? There is no unique answer because this is not a unique question. If the question is how utopias have been related to their historical context, then the answer should be affirmative. For Marina Leslie, *Utopia* very explicitly and persistently engages the problem of history because it poses the problem of what has to be done with the lessons drawn from history to reform reality.[45] But in this case, the presence of history in utopian novels was not explicit, but implicit through the experience of the author. Indeed in the utopian novels of this period there was no place for history. Utopias resisted, escaped from, and introduced a suspension of history. History in utopia was absent and considered an obsolete adviser. Although the formation of utopian expectations, values and norms was historically embedded in the background of utopian thinking, history as a concern for the past was totally out. Utopia may be considered by recent scholarship "as a critical practice investigating the historical subject in the interrogative mode";[46] nevertheless, utopian authors did not enumerate history as an agency shaping new societies or, more than that, forming utopian subjectivity.

Utopian thought rejected history because the new ideal world had to emanate from reason, nature or morality. Those were the signifiers of modernity. History was bound to tradition, not to the self-shaping human. History could not add or subtract anything from these utopian amalgams of the ideal and the material world. The utopian writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century were highly learned people. Had they followed the millennialist tradition, they would have searched for ideal society within, not outside, the divine prospect. Having abandoned this tradition, they adopted a conception of history in which there was no place for substantial social change. With the imitation of ancient models of historiography, the Renaissance world adopted arguments claiming that "no change was better than change, in as much as change brought troubles".[47]

If history was conceived as an arrow of time proceeding from the past to the present without undergoing substantial change, then it could be conceived also as a homogenous plane. This immobile vision allowed an imagining not only of the rotation of individual fortunes in Herodotian terms, but also of a structure of several superimposed levels, from pure ideas and abstractions at the top, to the concrete material *cosmos* at the bottom in Platonic terms. Utopia for the Greeks, as well as for the philosophers of the sixteenth century, was suspended in the middle of this non-temporal structure. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the European image of the "new world" was that of a landscape untouched by history, that is a place free from and unspoiled by

the evils of European societies.[48] The use of history as the opposite of happiness is fundamental in this approach of excluding history from the shaping of ideal societies.

Moreover, utopian writers considered history as the useless burden of the past. Utopian time is frozen time. Utopias were outside of history and acquired significance exactly because they were not part of history, and because they occurred in a remote place, free from the pains and sufferings generated by the responsibility of history. Although in the works of Francis Bacon and Tommaso Campanella, the utopian writers of the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, history occupied a place in their depiction of the "House of Knowledge", its meaning was reduced, or loosened, placing it on a par with observation and description. For Campanella, "history is narrative discourse, variously formed, truthful, honest, clear, sufficient for the basis of science". Both Bacon and Campanella followed Bodin's division of history in three *genres*: *historia divina, historia naturalis* and *historia umana*. The purpose of the first was to narrate the appearances of God, the second the things of nature and the third civil history and the deeds of men. For Bacon the most useful kind of history was a fourth *genre*: the history of learning, which was not to be confused with the history of science because even it comprised the history of "prophecy and accomplishment". To understand Bacon's inclusion of prophecy in the history of learning, we should consider that one of his most frequently cited quotations was from the *Book of Daniel*: "Many shall pass to and from, and science shall be increased."[49] Bacon and More, besides writing utopias, wrote history books. Were their utopian novels, written during breaks from their historical work, an alternative to the reality they were describing? Bacon insisted that "all past knowledge, Greek and medieval, had to be jettisoned".[50] Why?

Historical and utopian thinking were diverging on the eve of modernity, not because the first was oriented towards the past and the latter towards the future. Both were interested in the future, but in different ways. For Niccolò Machiavelli, "whoever wishes to foresee the future must consult the past; for human events ever resemble those of preceding times".[51] His fellow citizen and historian Francesco Guicciardini argued that past events shed light on the future because "the world has always been the same, and everything that is and will be, once was; and the same things recur, but with different names and colours".[52] History could undertake an educational role because of the similarities of past, present, and future times. In his historical method, Bodin insisted that "nothing is more important or more essential than history, because episodes in human life sometimes recur as in a circle".[53] Reinhart Koselleck has explained the mental background of this pre-Enlightenment mentality, arguing that "the present and the past were endorsed within a common historical plane" in which there was no room for change.[54] In short, in historical thinking from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century the future was not essentially different from the past despite a certain unpredictability. This idea of the non-structural changeability of the world was part of a conception of the universe, prevalent in Western European learned society, known as the 'Great Chain of Being'. The world was a continuum, containing plenty of creatures and plants, running from the simpler to the more perfect, which were subtly differentiated in a linear and hierarchical way. This chain was the imprint of the divine rationality, ruling out evolution, extinction and new species. In this universe, "[t]here not only is not, but there never will be, anything new under the sun. The process of time brings no enrichment of the world's diversity; in a world which is the manifestation of eternal rationality, it could not conceivably do so."[55]

In contrast, in utopian thinking the conception of historical time was differentiated. The future was of a different quality than the present, either as a parallel time (in More's *Utopia*, Bacon's *Atlantis*, Johann Valentin Andreae's *Christianopolis*, Gabriel Plattes's *Macaria* or Campanella's *Città del Sole*), or as a remote time (in futurist novels written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). Without this differentiation, utopia could not be different from the existing order. Utopian thinking emerged out of an intellectual rivalry with the prevailing conception of reality. The rejection of history in *Utopia* was the result of a re-elaboration of the relationship between history and reality. Early Modern European utopian authors took on an intellectual challenge with ontological and cognitive dimensions. They suggested to see in reality not only what has been done, but also what could have happened but did not, what should not have happened but did, and what could not and did not happen.

This attitude was in contrast to the affirmative predisposition towards reality performed by historical thinking. History's identity in this period was undergoing transformation and "art historica" was called into question. History was moving from the status of a literary art to that of a cognitive science. Even more, it became not only a mode of understanding but also a way of organising the other arts and sciences.[56] The task of the historian was not to deny human deeds but to describe and compare them, to chart what Machiavelli called the "new route" which would lead to the art of dominating reality. This reality could not be perfect and historians had to be educated to defend imperfect traditions without rejecting them.[57] History was more a way of avoiding the path towards hell than of opening the way to paradise. Karl Mannheim's description of the conservative mentality is very close to this mentality, common to historians, which "lacks all those reflections and illuminations of the historical process which come from a progressive impulse".[58] The utopia, on the other hand, could "provide the standards to measure such a facticity", according Ernst Bloch, because, although it had never come to be, functioned normatively towards the "realisation of reality".[59] The case was not the departure of utopia from reality, but the inadequate conception of reality by history. What was the subject matter of history: the 'fait accompli' or the 'unfinished reality'? Was it a reality open or closed to contingencies and possibilities?

Despite these differences between utopian and historical thinking in this period, however, both had something in common. In the *Book of Daniel*, the source of temporal and divine power was outside human history; it was given by or belonged to God. During the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the hierarchy of the *Res Publica Christiana* vanished into the air, utopian writers and historians had to deal with the question of who should provide the body politic with order. Their different answers reflected aspects of a secular problem caused by the institutional crisis. Historians responded by writing the genealogy of institutions, though utopians imagined societies creating their own institutions and the rules of their self-regulation.

A new encounter in transition

When did utopia and history meet again? Utopia became available for a new encounter with history when it was transformed into "*euchronia*" in the eighteenth century.[60] Reinhart Koselleck describes it as the "temporalisation of utopia".[61] Since the sixteenth century, imagined ideal soci-

eties has been described in another space (in Greek: *topos*) but in a parallel time. The awareness of the scientific, cultural, and material achievements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries made it obvious that neither the sharp, apocalyptic discontinuity of time nor the frozen time of utopia as the realisation of eternal ideas could describe the wishes and hopes for a better society. The concept of improvement and the implied sense of gradualism embodied in the notion of progress placed the realisation of the ideal society within a time-span between the immediate and the remote future. In future time, society would be competent, mature and willing, as a result of progress, to realise the sublime. As a consequence, the ideal society was presented as the remote destiny of existing society, as the forthcoming and heralded 'good time' (*eu chronos*).

This transformation required the prerequisite of conceiving *society* as an ontological concept, detached from the presence of God, autonomous, and grounded in human needs. This concept emerged in the seventeenth century in the middle ground between the religious and the sceptical. The question, or rather the aporia, which led to the concept was "what will happen to a *cosmos* deprived of Grace?".[62] The invention of society had long-term consequences in the shaping of the intellectual tools of studying, ruling, and imagining the social, at least until Foucault's criticism of the totalising concepts of society in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

> *I believe, Foucault said to an interview, that this particular idea of the 'whole' society derives from a utopian context. This idea arose in the western world within this highly individualised historical development that culminates in capitalism. To speak of the 'whole society' apart from the only form it has even taken is to transform our past into a dream.*[63]

New tools were forged for the new concept of society, as was the case with the study of the natural world. "Euchronia" could not be conceived without a concept of society. At the same time society could not be conceived without futurity, or in simple words, without a better future. The concept of "society" ran parallel to and, to a certain degree, was a prerequisite for the semantic transformation of history, from unconnected histories to new universal histories, or to histories of society. As was the case with society, *history* too acquired an ontological status, independent of its representational role and literary form. As we will see later, history was conceived as a *real* force leading to the future through this conceptual transformation.[64]

Utopias acquired a hidden dimension of transformation between the present and the future, in which the fusion between millennialism and utopianism was reproduced as two dispositions, one historical and dynamic and the other rationalist and ahistorical. Would the new world be achieved through the will of society, or would it come as a necessary result of the evolution of society?[65]

In utopian thought where the *will* prevailed and the image of future society was projected onto present society, history was still considered useless and even harmful. In his utopian novel *L'An 2440* (written in 1768), Louis-Sébastien Mercier dismissed historians and eliminated history books: "[Future generations] will push us so far back ... that there will remain of us neither trace, nor vestige, nor memory ... We teach them little history, because history is the disgrace of humanity, every page being crowded with crimes and follies."[66] The literary records of the past, considered useless and pernicious, would have been almost deliberately destroyed by fire. From the viewpoint of the eighteenth century, if human nature were to be reshaped, then the past would be irrelevant.

In contrast, where *necessity* prevailed and when it was considered that "the present is pregnant with its future" (Leibniz), then history was indispensable for exploring the necessary conditions and the time of the transition from the old to the new society. For Friedrich Engels, in order for the proletariat to "accomplish this act of universal emancipation [it should] thoroughly *comprehend the historical conditions* and [have] a full knowledge of the conditions and of the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish".[67] As a consequence of this need to comprehend history as a prerequisite for transforming society, social utopia encountered what was going to develop into the *social sciences* (including history and anthropology as ways to investigate the origins, laws and destination of human society).

Indeed, the term "social science" appeared for the first time in a utopian context: in the writings of Charles Fourier (1808) and the Saint-Simonians, after being elaborated as "social art" or "moral sciences" during the late Enlightenment. Why this connection between social sciences and utopia? If utopia was considered as the necessary future stage of society, then society was worthy of scientific study, just as nature was. The concept of natural laws was extended to "social laws" and, as a consequence, the "social sciences" were built on the intellectual pattern of the natural sciences.[68]

Salvation or progress?

The transformation of utopia into euchronia was not the only way leading to the new encounter between the imagining of the future and history. A parallel way was via the secularisation of millennialism, and its transformation into gradualism, evolution and progress. The mental leap which permitted such a transformation was the abandonment of the idea that Salvation would terminate history after the culmination of the struggle against evil. On the contrary, the idea that Salvation would be the consequence of the gradual triumph of good was adopted. History was no longer conceived as drama involving discontinuity and radical change, but rather as a shift towards the notion of improvement in history and the gradual transformation of society. This change of view had to overcome a 'degenerationist' way of thinking which believed the natural and human world was in the process of getting older and becoming degenerate and decadent.

In early modernity, people were familiar with social change from the bad times of war, plague and famine, or from benevolence during good times and prosperity. All these changes were imagined as the result of the rotation of fortune. The transformation which they were now called to understand was different, deeper and durable. What was the consequence of the betterment not only of material life, but also of intellectual and moral life? They had to understand what structural transformation meant for individuals and society alike. In fact this improvement was obvious to the theologians and thinkers of Western Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most of them living in flourishing capitals, like Amsterdam and Paris, or in university communities, like Oxford and Cambridge, where the rivers of new knowledge resulting from the discoveries of new worlds, the decipherment of ancient manuscripts and experimental inventions converged. According to Henry More (1614–1687), a Cambridge scholar, this improvement was a manifestation of God's will to change human nature in order to accept Salvation. But Salvation was not something as external to history as the stone smashing the last Empire.

It was not the consequence of the Fall and no disasters and catastrophes had to announce its coming. It was part of history, and progress was the royal way leading to it through the study of the natural world and the enlightenment of intellects.

The next step was to consider progress not as the immediate work of Providence. If God was a lawgiver, working through secondary causes, then Providence manifested itself through natural law. There was a *God–Providence–Nature* conceptual shift in the high culture of the eighteenth century. If God became Providence, then he was visible in the regularities and symmetries of nature. He did not interfere arbitrarily in the affairs of rational creatures; the more remote his place was considered, the more necessary it was to speak of a benevolent intention in nature itself.[69] Two consequences resulted from this *God–Providence–Nature* shift. First, progress was not a matter of choice but the necessary condition of life and history. Second, progress was equated with evolution because, as Leibniz argued, "nature never makes leaps". What was the final stage of this progress? Leibniz described this progressive utopia in Augustinian terms:

> *[A]ll spirits must compose the City of God, that is to say, the most perfect state that is possible, under the most perfect monarchs.*
>
> *The City of God, this truly universal monarchy, is a moral world, and is the most exalted and more divine among the works of God; and it is in it that the glory of God really consists, for he would have no glory were not his greatness and his goodness known and admired by spirits. It is also in relation to this divine city that God specially has goodness, while his wisdom and his power are manifested everywhere.*

And what was the royal road to the divine royal city? "[T]hings lead to grace by the very ways of nature."[70]

If the concept of evolution was immanent in nature and history, then history was not dependent on fortune and contingency but on universal laws. Progress was such a law. Natural history and gradualism began to determine the view of human history. History was structured in stages leading to perfection. The concept of *stages* or *epochs* gave a mental structure of seeing the past as *succession of stages,* and the present as a hierarchy of peoples living in different stages. The Marquis de Condorcet canonised world history in such a table, consisting of ten stages: the formation of peoples; the invention of agriculture; scripture and the alphabet; the Greek sciences during Alexander's era; the subsequent decline of science; late medieval scholasticism; the invention and diffusion of printing; eighteenth-century philosophical criticism; the French Revolution; and the future.[71] As humanity was not moving forward as a whole but with unequal paces, he argued that prehistory could be studied by observing modern 'savages'. As a consequence, the hierarchy of saints of previous centuries became a hierarchy of the civilised. A canon of world history pointing out this hierarchy of civilisations began to emerge; but this canon was like a chrysalis; as soon as it was created, it was transformed into the canon of Western History. The construction of macro-narratives depicting "*les progrès de l'esprit humain*" through the systemic changes of historical stages was the task of Enlightenment philosophers and historians like Voltaire, Pietro Giannone, David Hume, Adam Smith, Edward Gibbon, Adam Ferguson and William Robertson.[72] History and progress were fused into a conception of a human development leading to a condition of society in which humanity would enjoy perfect happiness. Enlightenment historiography was bound to the future as much as it was talking about the past and, according to Donald Kelley, "it reflected not only the past and the potential of

human reason but also its future promise for social perfection. The sequence of historical epochs would culminate in a transcendent age of moral, social and political perfection."[73] History could not be conceived as something regarding the past without the futurity of the past.

Kant: a link connecting three strands

The most clear and well-structured expression of this change of attitude towards history, from the apocalyptic to the progressive perspective, was given by Immanuel Kant in his text "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" (1784). For the citizen of Königsberg history was a narration of human actions which, observed from a broad perspective and over time, were regulated by universal laws. This regularity was meant neither as a sequence of moments nor the unfolding of a plot. It had a transformative character and orientation as "all the capacities implanted in a creature by nature, are destined to unfold themselves, completely and conformity to their end, in the course of time". This capacity of transformation belonged not to individuals but to society as a whole.

> *The history of the human race, viewed as a whole, may be regarded as the realisation of a hidden plan of nature to bring about a political constitution, internally, and, for this purpose, also externally perfect, as the only state in which all the capacities implanted by her in mankind can be fully developed.*[74]

The idea of history as the *realisation of a hidden plan* sounds very similar to the millennialist view, but there is a fundamental difference: the substitution of nature for God as the embodiment of universal law. From this point of view, the utopian perspective of *a perfect civil union* was part of a project concerning reality and not imagination."A philosophical attempt to work out the universal history of the world according to the plan of nature in its aiming at a perfect civil union, must be regarded as possible, and as even capable of helping forward the purpose of nature."[75]

History seen by Kant as the *plan of nature* was a link connecting three strands: a) millennialism transformed into teleology, b) utopianism, and c) modern historiographical perspectives. In the modern perception of history, this view acquired a constitutive value with long-term consequences. Until then, historiography was split between descriptions of long processes without causal explanation, and causal explanations of particular aspects or of short term events. J. B. Bury, a historian of the Roman past and also a theorist of the historical discipline who advocated the scientific turn of historiography, described this new perspective as follows: "[History is] a causal process which contains within itself the explanation of the development of man from his primitive state to the point which he has reached."[76] This impact of seeing *history as the realisation of interconnectedness* with a purpose was strong not only in historiography; a culture of history was created, which in a stronger version created a faith in history. Since Giambattista Vico, the *hand of God* ceased to play any role in the evolution of society. In its place came *the hidden plan* (Kant), *the invisible hand* (Adam Smith), and *the cunning of Reason* (Hegel). As a consequence, history was given substance, existence, and agency. History was conceived in a quasi-metaphysical way, as something that defined right or wrong, judged the present, saved the best and condemned the worst of human actions. History was represented as the "demonic nature of social process" which emerged with the French Revolution and found its highest expression in historicism.[77] After the

rejection of the Christian view of history based on sin and the impotence of man, modern culture embraced a conception of omnipotent history, and gave it the status of *redemptive history*. Comparing the distance between the Christian and the modern view of history, Reinhold Niebuhr wrote that the dominant note in modern culture is not so much confidence in reason as faith in history.[78] This view of a world in the process of movement, growth, and development, was a promise of emancipation from every evil. In Kant's text this attitude activates the link in the third direction: history leading to utopia, with utopia not external but integral to history. Utopia was not waiting at the end of history nor did it exist alongside history in an imaginary space. Rather, utopia existed within history and was built into it.

Creative evolutionism

The Imperial Britain of the following century demonstrates the depth of this conviction that the utopian future was embedded in history.

> *Utopia, which we have long looked upon as synonymous with an evident impossibility, which we have ungratefully regarded as "too good to be true", turns out on the contrary to be the* necessary consequence of natural law*, and once more we find that the simple truth exceeds the most brilliant flights of the imagination.*[79]

It was Sir John Lubbock's conviction, expressed in the conclusive part of his mega-history of the human species, that natural laws led to utopia. The shift of history from the kingdom of Providence to the realm of natural law implied that society was thought of as the prolongation and the development of nature itself. What could be retained in the passage from a paradigm with a plot to another without plot? A sense of purposeful development was identified in the concept of "progress". This idea gave meaning to a thinking of the past where history was considered as the monitor of progress. But directionism did not exclude cyclical views of history, derived from a degenerate and unprogressive view of history. In the previous century, Giambattista Vico conciliated the two visions, representing history as a perpetual process in which cultures, like humans, were born, grew, decayed and died.[80] In the nineteenth century, both views were absorbed into the concept of "evolution", which covered nature and society. Originating in embryology, the concept of evolution spread to the natural and then to the social sciences and the development of the embryo became a metaphor which gave a structure of stages and purpose to the life of society and civilisation. Civilisations went through cycles of birth, growth, decline and death, contributing to the general direction of humanity. The question why all species did not evolve towards more complex forms of life and all societies towards higher degrees of civilisation laid the path for conceiving non-developed societies as immature versions of highly developed ones. Under the paradigmatic title *Pre-historic Times, as illustrated by ancient remains, and the manners and customs of modern savages,* Lubbock declared that the Stone Age ancestors of Victorians could be studied through the "primitive" tribes of his time. He was not the first who saw prehistorical ancestors in modern savages. The myth of the noble savage was coupled with the myth of an original society free from the deviation and the vices of civilisation.[81] This utopia of alluding to a golden past and a remote present as a way of criticising modern European civilisation was no longer held in the nineteenth century. Under the auspices of biology, an intellectual model was

constructed which considered the survival of lower orders of plants and animals as the survival of previous forms of life. Modern and past savages were no longer idealised; rather they were considered previous and foregoing, or stagnated forms of society. Through this model of linear evolution, life sciences, archaeology, paleontology and anthropology were joined to history. This theory of evolution and its use in historical disciplines was a selective reading of Darwin's theory of natural selection. It was selective because Darwin emphasised the adaptation of species to environmental change, not the lower/higher taxonomy of societies that prevailed during his time as an involuntary consequence of his influence. According to his theory each culture could be considered as a form of adaptation to the environment. But what European elites learned from Darwin was the "survival of the fittest". Social Darwinism was used in Britain and the USA mainly to support free enterprise competition and to justify class difference, but in continental Europe it was used for nationalist purposes. In both parts of the West, Social Darwinism was used to justify the superiority of the white man, the politics of imperialism and the politics of extermination of 'inferior' races.[82]

"What can be learned from the principles of Darwinism for the application to the inner political development and the laws of the state?" This question was posed as the theme of a prize competition in Germany, sponsored in 1900 by the big arms industrialist Friedrich Alfred Krupp, demonstrating the influence of this free interpretation of Darwinism on the political projects and ideologies of the early twentieth century.[83] Even utopian thinking could not escape the impact of evolutionism and Social Darwinism. H. G. Wells, successful author of a world history, two books on utopia and several essays on social reform, declared that after Darwin, "static" utopias were no longer possible. He introduced the term "kinetic" utopia, sustaining that the ideal society should be conceived not as static but in a state of movement, transformation, and evolution. But evolution could not be left to itself; T. H. Huxley demonstrated in his famous lecture "Evolution and Ethics" (1893) that natural evolution was not progressive. Cosmic entropia could interrupt progress and civilisation and lead to human degeneration. Evolution ought to be planned. In his *Outline of History* (1920), Wells used the theory of evolutionism not only to depict humanity's past but also its future as a desired control of its destiny.[84]

Darwinism, interpreted as "creative evolution", influenced utopian thinking and resulted in the foundation of the eugenics movement.[85] The father of the movement, which linked science and utopia, practice and vision, was Francis Galton (1822–1911), a cousin of Darwin and committed Social Darwinist. Eugenics would encourage the reproduction of the fit and discourage, and even prevent, the reproduction of the unfit and defective. Eugenics acquired widespread acknowledgement from all over the Western world, from right- to left-wing circles, before collapsing after being discredited by the Nazi experience. Galton's vision was to regulate society through evolutionist biology. According to this applied utopia, with its scientific pedigree, future society should be ruled by an eugenic elite which would impose restrictive reproductive rights, according to certain criteria, on all those considered unfit social, human elements.[86] From euchronia to eugenics? If evolution led to better times, why abandon the future to chance and contingency? Why not intervene, why not attempt to control it? Eugenics could engineer humans for a society without disease, pathology and deviance. But the path from the healthy society to the handsome nation and from there to the health and purity of the race was not an unbridgeable chasm.

The preoccupation with civilisation and subsequently with the nation and its racial origins was already a well-established tradition (mainly in Germany and France, from Herder to Gobineau),[87] before the spectre of evolutionism cast its shadow on historiography, archaeology, anthropology and social theory. In 1899 Houston Stewart Chamberlain, one of the champions of eugenics, published the *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, an enormous popular and influential world history which emphasised the mission of "awakening peoples to the consciousness of their all-important vocation as the founders of a completely new civilisation and culture". Later, the work provided the Nazis with arguments to claim the "truth" of their racist theories.[88] Theories of race were projected onto the world's past and history was seen through the lens of the "struggle for existence", the "survival of the fittest", the submission of the "degenerated", and national superiority.[89] Karl Pearson (1857–1936) wrote that: "The path of human progress is strewn with the decaying bones of old nations, everywhere we can see the traces left behind by inferior races, the victims of those who have not found the narrow path to perfection."[90] Pearson was the first chair of Eugenics at University College London, a biographer of Galton, author of the influential *The Grammar of Science* (London 1900 and still in use as textbook) and a utopian novel. He was a socialist supporter of the Empire and a sympathiser of the feminism of his time. His activity from science to utopia and socialism to eugenics was not considered contradictory by himself or his contemporaries. It was part of the Western canon of history which was reassured and re-established through the linear evolutionary perspective in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Euro-American nations were themselves regarded as obvious proof of a historically higher degree of cultural complexity and consequently occupied the leading position among the people of the world. They experienced their history with a particular dynamism and were moving forward. They came to believe that progress and evolution were specifically European and American properties, which obliged them to civilise the 'rest of the world'. Eugenics, as an applied utopia, evolutionist theories, biologism, natural anthropology and pre-historic archaeology created a state of mind which gave an impetus to the writing of world histories, all of which had to respond to the need of thinking about humanity and its destiny. Most of them were written to provide a sense of where humankind stood and what its future would be in an age of rapid change and apocalyptic potential.[91]

History as a holy hieroglyph

Nevertheless not all historians were willing to play host to utopia. For Ranke, history writing, as a reaction to philosophy, needed to become a distinct discipline. That meant that history should not encompass the whole time-span of human evolution from the primitive age to the perfect society. He excluded the "deep history", "geological time" and the debates on the "arrow of time" from the preoccupations of historians. He insisted that "history cannot discuss the origin of society, for the art of writing, which is the basis of historical knowledge, is a comparatively late invention ... The province of history is limited by the means of her command."[92] Historians' subject matter should be limited to a segment of historical time, to the epochs of written sources, periods which were relatively short considering the long perspective of anthropology and archaeology of his time. He considered that societies (except those of non-European, backward peoples, whom he believed still lived in the realm of nature) should be studied by the discipline of history and not the natural sciences. Ranke's intention to define what history could or could not do should be understood in

the context of his conception of the scientificity of history. In narrowing the historical space, he was sharpening the critical awareness of historians.

Ranke was also a deeply religious man and his religiosity penetrated his epistemology: "There is nothing without God, and nothing lives except through God."[93] He mistrusted the principle of progress. He saw perfection not in any anticipated form of history but in the already existing institutions or "spiritual forces", such as the state. He always stressed the limited character of progress. Not all nations had advanced to civilisation; some of them had fallen back to primitivism. Not all the human faculties had been developed; the future was unexplorable. Inner moral progress could perhaps embrace mankind but there was no proof of it. The historian's task would be "merely to keep to the facts", because "history teaches us that many peoples are not capable of culture and that earlier epochs were more moral than later ones".[94] In contrast to seeing history as progressing in stages, as steps from the unfulfilled to the fulfilled, he restored the autonomy of each individual era: "Every epoch is immediate to God, and its worth is not at all based on what derives from it, but rests in its own self." The past acquired value as a past not related to any future.[95] This immediate relationship of the individual to God was not deprived of eschatological connotations, originating from a Lutheran reading of Paul's teaching on Salvation and Judgment. Each historical act was liable before God. But where was God in Ranke's historical thinking?

> *In all history God dwells, lives, is to be found. Every deed testifies to Him; every instant preaches His name, but above all, I think, the great interactions of history. He stands there like a* holy hieroglyph*, perceiving only in its outline and preserved lest it be lost from the sight of future centuries. Boldly then!* Let's things happen as they may*; only, for our part, let us try to unveil this holy hieroglyph. And so shall we serve God; so are we also priests, also teachers.*[96]

Was God an all-encompassing signifier of history? The phrase "let things happen as they may" constitutes the political as well as the epistemological basis of conservatism, and the disciples of history were prepared by Ranke to serve it. This attitude was heavy criticised in Germany after the Second World War, even by conservative historians, because it created a historical tradition which was passive towards the German political system and failed to judge it in terms of human values.[97] Historical passivity was the consequence of conceiving the world *as it really was*, avoiding a perspective on what it *ought to be*.

Reading history backwards

Writing about utopias published at the end of the nineteenth century, Lewis Mumford, author of a history of utopias, said that their common elements were "steel and planning".[98] Indeed, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (Boston 1888) was much more than a utopian novel. It was a well-elaborated essay on the potentials of the industrial economy. It was published in one of the most intense periods of economic growth, social turmoil and expectations the USA had ever experienced. Between 1880 and 1890, there was an incredible wave of strikes, which culminated in 1886 May Day demonstrations, involving 340,000 workers all over the country, demanding the eight-hour workday. The day was marked by the Haymarket Riots, the anniversary of which became the first worldwide celebration of a non-religious event, and, in addition, a

day of hope for a better world. In the same decade, an amazing number of one hundred utopian works of fiction appeared in the United States. This was the historical context of Bellamy's novel. The book became one of the most diffused, studied and copied books of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and is considered as one of the most influential books in the formation of the social consciousness of the English-speaking world. *Looking Backward* had an enormous effect on the American labour movement and progressive political leaders. Roosevelt's New Deal cannot be understood outside the orbit of its travelled ideas.[99]

What had Bellamy's novel and the writing of history in common from the end of the nineteenth century up to the outbreak of the First World War? Despite Ranke's reservations, the gazes of both the historian and the utopian crossed in the projection of the past onto the future and of the future onto the past.

History writing in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, mainly in the expanding British Empire and US, was projected onto this idea of progress and of evolution leading to utopia. Gradualism became the exemplary element of the ideal type of history, represented by British history, where each step was considered the natural consequence of an earlier one.[100] History was marching, or rather working, underneath society, bettering learning, improving morality, and expanding freedom from the past into the future, excluding any contingency, reversal, or discontinuity. This idea was highlighted by Lord Acton, the undisputed advocator of liberal history, in a methodological premise on studying history and judging historical facts: "But we have no thread through the enormous intricacy and complexity of modern politics except the idea of progress towards more perfect and assured freedom, and the divine right of free men."[101] Progress not only gave meaning to history, but history itself was subjected to progress: "We are still at the beginning of the documentary age, which will tend to make history independent of historians, to develop learning at the expense of writing, and to accomplish a revolution in other sciences as well."[102]

This idea of an objectified history, progressing closer to the truth, was at the threshold of a perception which disconnected historians from their histories. A good historian was the invisible historian: "Do not imagine you are listening to me; it is history itself that speaks."[103] Through progress and the projection of the past onto the future, history acquired the status of an agency in transforming society. History was speaking through historians, and the greater focus on history meant greater advance in progress. While this idea of progress was criticised by Nietzsche at the time,[104] his criticism was not echoed in mainstream historical studies. A counter-discourse to this idea of progress and historical continuity emerged in the interwar years and after the experience of the Second World War.

In his *Whig Interpretation of History*, Butterfield criticised the prevailing ideas of his time, namely that progress decided what was worthy of historical attention or not, and that human deeds were evaluated through the perspective of the present: "The Whig historian stands on the summit of the twentieth century, and organising his scheme of history from the point of view of his own day."[105] The image is reminiscent of Bellamy's hero, the university history professor who lectured on the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries looking backwards from his vantage point in the year 2000. This observatory, watching the past from the present, was conceived

in utopian terms, as the conclusion of evolution towards certain values and an idea of society derived from a liberal Protestant progressive outlook.[106]

> *The Whig interpretation of history is not merely the property of Whigs and it is much more subtle than mental bias; it lies in a trick of organisation, an unexamined habit of mind that any historian may fall into. It might be called the historians "pathetic fallacy". It is the result of the practice of abstracting things from their historical context and judging them apart from their context – estimating them and organising the historical story by a system of direct reference to the present.*[107]

History thinking in Lord Acton's era was quite far from a conception of the past as the repository of values and examples for the present. History was imbued with the spirit of progress which was invented as a thread leading from prehistoric times to the present and as an ever-present idea described in the intellectual tradition of the West from antiquity to the present.[108] What Butterfield was criticising was this looking backwards for steps to the future. He pointed out that a utopian vision was immanent in this looking retrospectively of historical thinking. Reading backwards and marching forwards is the phrase that best describes historical studies and thinking history during most of the nineteenth and a great part of the twentieth centuries. Through progress and the nation, and through their projections onto the future, history acquired the status of a dynamic *totality in movement*, which transcended the immovable concept of *cosmos.* A certain inevitability and direction was attributed to history, which contained a plot and laws waiting to be discovered. The meaning could be uncovered by unveiling and looking behind individual historical facts. Conservative historicism was transformed into a radical historicism and history became History.[109] What lay on the dark side of the history of progress did not belong to history: "The positive content of history consisted not in the meaningless fermentation of passive or barbarous societies but in the movement of society, the process, conscious or unconscious, by which certain societies, at certain times, had risen out of the barbarism." This was the most detested passage of Hugh Trevor-Roper, declaring that Africa had no history before white colonialism.[110]

The transformative sciences

During the second half of the nineteenth century society began to be described in biological terms, as an organism growing through successive "stages", corresponding to blocks of time. At the end of the century, with the state increasingly involved in the economy and penetrating into society, with growing popular demand for social reforms, two new powerful ideas emerged: social engineering and planning. These ideas were served by the new language of social sciences and were supported by a new, and expanding, intellectual elite. Of course, ideas that progress and freedom were improving society were scarcely new; they were part of the horizon of expectations outlined in the later Enlightenment. But in the second half of the nineteenth century, technoscience provided an immense impetus to the utopian vision of the future. The advancement of technology was equated with utopia itself.[111]

The new idea at the end of the nineteenth century was that the economy, society, education, culture, family, health, aging – all the dimensions of *bios* – were subjected to planning, engineering and management. Taylorism, based on an extended network of technicians, specialists and

bureaucracy, emerged as a universal method of applying science to the workplace. Under each plan was an inspiring utopia. Aims and means were identified and the fulfilment of these utopian promises was not placed in the remote but in the near imminent future. The twentieth century was envisioned and identified as the triumph of technoscience.

History, while in a privileged position during the process of nation-building in the nineteenth century, could not remain apart and unaffected by these changes. In the new intellectual environment, a new history emerged from the crisis of historicism. Historical scholarship had to replace the descriptive with the genetic method, and make the explanation of change its central concern. Social history, as part of the social sciences, acquired a new role in tracing the long-term transformation of society. The concept of social transformation was the epistemological background for the disciplines of social history and the social sciences, which consisted of a broad spectrum of schools, trends, and personalities. Sewell explains how social transformation became the central concern of the social and historical sciences. He also uncovers the corollaries of the teleology which was immanent in this concept of transformation. Past events were actually explained through events in the future, by being categorised according to backward- or forward-looking historical trends. Society and history were divided between the modern and the traditional; the term modern acquired an anticipatory meaning, as the seeds of the future in the present.[112]

It may be argued that, from a broad perspective, most of the intellectual production from Marx, Toqueville, Durkheim, Weber and Tönnis to 1960s and 1970s social theory, social history and historical sociology, belongs to a theory of transformation. This theory of transformation was imbued with the logic and the practice of social engineering.[113] Social sciences at the end of the nineteenth and during most of the twentieth century were constructed under the influence of transformative utopias and were conceptualised within an anticipatory and teleological view of reality. This was the forum for the new encounter between utopian and historical thinking. This forum constituted a socio-cognitive framework which played a major role in the conception and construction of social reality in modernity. Social reality was constructed with material from the *already done*, but according to the designs of the imagining of what *should be done*. The imagining of alternatives in society was the impulsion and the driving force behind the claim of social science to transform reality. Central to this mentality was the belief in the self-transformative capacity of modern societies, i.e. in the capacity to shape themselves according to the projection of their aspirations to an imaginary future. The history of utopian thinking since the sixteenth century contributed greatly to this conception of modernity. Before it had even materialised, the modern world had been imagined in minor and marginal philosophical discourses.[114] This inner capacity of society to permanently change its conditions of existence is at the core of the idea of modernity and the raison d'être of social theory and social science.[115] Cornelius Castoriadis has pointed out this role of autonomous imaginary practice in institutionalising society:

> *History is impossible and inconceivable outside the productive or creative imagination, outside of what we have called the radical imaginary as this is manifest indissolubly in both historical doing and in the constitution, before any explicit rationality, of a universe of signification.*[116]

But how free and autonomous is social imaginary? The very concept of transformation implies moving in a given direction. This direction imposed norms and values on considerations of the

past. Concepts such as modernisation, rationalisation, development, differentiation, accountability and others derived from a social-liberal utopia, imposed a normative framework on writing the past. As the criticism of modernisation theories has pointed out, their values and norms were derived from a utopian vision of Western societies and in particular from post-Second World War American society. This vision was contrasted with the backward world, as its unavoidable future, in the manner of nineteenth-century social evolutionism.[117] These visions provided the standards with which to measure historical realities as achievements of a motion towards a direction and an orientation. As a consequence, reality was conceived as an unfinished reality. The history of the world was measured against the history of the West. Modernisation theories imposed a break between the present of modernity and its past. The present was the realm of the abstract and the universal; the past of the particular and the local. The trajectories of those who succeeded in modernising themselves were different from the stagnant history of backwardness. The reasons for success were the usual topics of historical research for the first, the causes of failure for the later. Historians, despite their affection for particularities, became the main advocators of measuring the history of their own countries using the modernity vision as a yardstick. From this point of view, the historical fact represented something that had been accomplished as well as something that was lacking.[118]

The "not yet"

Ernst Bloch analysed this missing dimension in the relationship between utopia and reality.[119] He emphasised the productivity of utopia, pointing out its cognitive, educative, anticipatory and causal function. Utopia was a form of research into the *not yet* realised possibilities of reality.[120] This unconscious "not yet" became the location where historians and social scientists measured reality, even before Bloch's use of this term. The value system by which past and present was described, interpreted and explained was derived from this "not yet" vision. The case is that this "not yet" location did not refer simply to a temporal dimension concerning "tradition" and "modernity" or "backwardness" and "progression"; it assumed a spatial order also. For those outside the Western world, as well as for post-colonial societies, these visions enabled them to measure their success or failure. The "not yet" dimension of utopia was transformed from an anticipatory consciousness into a consciousness of inadequacy. Post-colonial and peripheral societies were conceived as *not yet* achieving the norms of being modern/Western societies.[121] The spatialisation (as opposed to the temporalisation) of the dimension of the "not yet" reveals the intellectual connections between the established canon of world history, which envisaged Europe as the climax of human evolution, and social scientific theories of social transformation, which conceived history as an evolutionary, linear transformation progressing to its fulfilment. Although unintentional on his part, Bloch's "not yet" was used to serve and sanction this canonical thinking. As modernity – in its global dimension – was transformed from *telos* into *status*, the time-scale of evolution was depicted as a rigid hierarchy, and the "not yet" became equivalent to outside modernity and to subalternity. It entered into a spatial framework where temporal backwardness was transformed into outside-ness and exclusion. The advance from backwardness no longer required temporal movement; escape was transformed into a spatial transference, represented by the exasperated exodus of migrants.[122] Turning our gaze from the

above to the below, from the universal to the local, the "not yet" acquires simultaneously the quality of anticipation and normativity, and, jointly, the temporal and the spatial dimension. As capitalism, technology and information assumed worldwide dimensions, people entered into a continuous comparative activity between the local and the foreign, between the present and the expected, where the *not yet* utopia was represented by "the idea of Europe as the *telos* of all comparative activities".[123]

3. Searching a Place for Hope

No hope, no history

Throughout the twentieth century, the idea of progress has been treated with mistrust, if not totally abandoned by intellectual elites, and the expectation of better times exploded in various directions, between hope and anxiety, between furious optimism and exasperated pessimism. Twentieth-century utopian narratives became a place where the crisis of the concept of modernity was manifested and challenged.[124]

In the second half of the twentieth century, the landscape between utopia and history was dominated by three discourses. Karl Mannheim's book *Ideology and Utopia* was central to the first discourse. For Mannheim, as utopia (meaning socialist utopia) acquires broad support and draws closer to social and political reality, it loses its utopian, imaginative and radical character, which normally transcends existing society. This process transforms utopias into ideologies. With this transformation, utopia disappears and history ceases to be conceived as a process leading towards an ultimate end. Historical time becomes more and more an undifferentiated space. Past utopias and great ideals are viewed from a sceptical relativist point of view. The future, too, loses its teleological aspect and it is perceived as being open to probability. Mannheim believed that "with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it", because "no interpretation of history can exist except in so far as it is guided by interest and purposeful striving". Without utopias, there can be no understanding of history.[125] Or, to reverse the phrase, to understand history, some form of utopian thinking is needed. If utopia establishes the distance (and the difference) between what is and what ought to be, this space is needed by historians in order not to succumb totally to the principle of the discipline of "what really happened" and to claim the right of creativity of interpretation. Interpretation needs eventuality and the possibility to imagine alternatives as part of the reality, because interpretation is not something which comes after exploring the past, but is the means of travelling into the past. Historical phenomena are constituted and acquire meaning through interpretation. Historical thinking exists between the dogmatism of reality, which imposes on us the authority of "what really happened", and the hopes of what ought to be. Without this intervening space there is no need and no possibility for historical thinking. If there is no interpretation, there is no history; and without hope there can be no interpretation.[126] Consistent with this connectedness of hope and history is the attitude of Fredric Jameson, who argues that political art needs to "convey the sense of a hermeneutic relationship to the past which is able to grasp its own present as history only on condition it manages to keep the idea of the future, and of radical and utopian transformation, alive".[127]

In conclusion, this discourse on hope and history connects the role of history to the social expectations and the cultural values implied in it. The question is how to think historically without a plausible image of the futurity? Commenting the ideology of the *End of History*,[128] Joan Scott considers it as an abandonment of the idea that there will be a better future, as an affirmation of the present as the desired and the only realisable reality, and as a "loss of futurity". To this "loss of futurity" she renders the obsession with identity, which bounds history more to the past than to the idea of transformation.[129] Indeed, in the last quarter of the twentieth century there was a shift from anticipation to remembrance and a return of history, mainly in art and literature, which had been strongholds of avant-garde. This turn was tinted by nostalgia; yet, nostalgia means the "no longer" and is quite the opposite of the "not yet" of utopia. Between the no longer and not yet, between affection for the past and aspirations for the future, where could a place for hope be found?

As globalism entails a break between the present and the past, between the unifying forces of the world (capitalism, science, technology) and the diversity of the local, then historicism and empiricism construct a world in which nostalgia entails an agenda of resistance towards the modernising world. In this way the hope articulated at the grassroots and the local seeks refuge in the past, rather than in the future.[130] Nostalgia, the defence against the attack of the present on the rest of time, seeks "the exploration of the no-places, the exclusions, the blind spots on the maps of the past, often invested with utopian energies very much oriented toward the future".[131]

Saving history from dystopia

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and the manipulation of memory were central to the second discourse. For Orwell, as well as for Aldous Huxley and Yevgeny Zamyatin, the problem was not that utopia was unattainable, but quite the opposite: namely, that utopia might become reality. In Orwell's novel, utopia is transformed into dystopia,[132] a nightmare in which memory is erased, and the past recreated. Twentieth-century utopian novels upgraded memory and history and turned them into issues of preoccupation.

Shortly before the appearance of Orwell's novel, the leading behaviourist B. F. Skinner published *Walden Two* (1948).[133] In the 1960s and 1970s, Skinner's novel was the most influential and hotly debated utopia in the United States and has inspired more than three dozen intentional communities.[134] Skinner was the most outstanding exponent of behaviourism, creating an immense impact on the foundation of school psychology, social reforms and the treatment of deviance in the USA and other Western countries in the post-Second World War period.[135] In *Walden Two* he transformed his experiments, to which concepts of controlled behaviour and social engineering were central, into societal rules, arguing that "we not only can control human behaviour, we *must*".[136] From this perspective, utopia becomes an indispensable framework and is an inspiring end:

> *What was needed was a new conception of man, compatible with our scientific knowledge, which would lead to a philosophy of education bearing some relation to educational practices. But to achieve this, education would have to ... step forth into a broader sphere of human engineering.*[137]

There is no place for history in this society, people read almost no history and refuse to accept any guidance from it. "History is honoured in *Walden Two* only as entertainment. It isn't taken seriously as food of thought."[138] The "planners" (the governing elite in Skinner's utopia) consider previous human history as largely irrelevant, because as history never sets up the experiments the right way, it consequently never leads to valid conclusions. Thus, history and things past were a useless waste of time.

> *Nothing confuses our evaluation of the present more than a sense of history ... Race, family, ancestor worship – these are the handmaidens of history, and we should have learned to beware of them by now. What we give our young people in Walden Two is a grasp of the* current *forces which a culture must deal with. None of your myths, none of your heroes – no history, no destiny – simply the Now! The present is the thing. It's the only thing we can deal with, anyway, in a scientific way.*[139]

Though inspired by mid-twentieth century American liberal values, Skinner was an advocate of human engineering, which was a nightmare for Orwell. His book *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was a warning against these scientific-totalitarian dreams. His famous phrase "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" became one of the inspiring quotes about the difficult coexistence of history with totalitarianism in the twentieth century. What is remarkable here is the change of attitude. When from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries utopian thinkers eliminated history from their ideal societies, considering it an obsolete reminder of the past, this was not seen as detrimental. Angela Carter, in her feminist dystopian satire *The Passion of the New Eve* (1982), criticises the elimination of history, even as a dimension of social life. She describes ironically the city of reason, clean from pastness and historicity, alluding to New York:

> *[T]he streets had been given numbers and not names out of a respect for pure function, had been designed in clean, abstract lines, discrete blocks, geometric intersections, to avoid just those vile repositories of the past, sewers of history, that poison the lives of European cities. A city of pure reason – that had been the intention.*[140]

What must be underlined here is the radical change in attitudes towards history from Mercier's *2040* (1768) to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In the eighteenth century, detachment from history was associated with the hope of transforming society. Happiness was thought as ahistorical, and for this reason was considered by Hegel to be incompatible with history, something like blank pages in the book of world history.[141] History was associated with disgrace, sin, guilt: an attitude reflected in popular culture.[142] In contrast to this inculpation of history, in the twentieth century it was sanctified and associated with the anxiety about real or menacing transformations of society and the frightening mechanisms capable of controlling human actions and personalities. As a result, the concept of *saving history* acquired a new meaning which gave history and, in particular, memory a new role, creating a vast and polymorphous landscape of historical culture. For people who experienced mass deportation and migration, dictatorship, fascism and the Holocaust, Stalinism and its Great Purge, history was not the "tradition of all dead generations [which] weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living" (Marx),[143] but something precious and worth salvaging. It was in this context that Walter Benjamin wrote his well-known phrase "that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins",[144] which should be read as testimony to the deep and extensive moral-cultural reversal of attitudes towards the value of history.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the concept of *trauma* was used extensively in place of the warning that dystopia would erase memory. The literature on the Holocaust, feminism and deconstruction was devoted particularly to showing that this erasing of history and memory was not imminent but already done. It was not a future possibility but part of the political and mental order of the earthly world. From this perspective, the case with memory was something much more than its recovery. It was connected with the impossibility of being recalled and represented. History was understood as performing rescue work, in a way similar to psychoanalysis.[145]

The past as utopia

"Why should men care to preserve the record of history at all?" asked E. P. Thompson in his book on the nineteenth-century English utopian William Morris.[146] Thompson's attitudes were influential in the third discourse, which included the English social history tradition and continued up to the intellectual utopianism of the 1968 generation. His answer is quite far from a conception of history as a moral teaching or as a discipline of social engineering. For Thompson, the past should be rescued in order to provide alternative ways of seeing things, as well as possible new values for the future. For him, the problem of utopia was neither that it was unattainable nor the danger of its realisation. Utopia was an education of desire:

> *And we enter Utopia's proper and new-found space: the education of desire. This is not the same as "a moral education" towards a given end: it is rather to open a way to aspiration,* to teach desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way.[147]

This educative aspect of utopia was stressed at the same time by Bloch in *The Principle of Hope* (1959). For him, the education of desire was necessary for the broadening, deepening and rising of aspirations in terms quite different from those of everyday life. It was an education similar to that offered through artistic works, which contained the utopian element:

> *Vulgar Marxism is already haunting the world in a kind of petit-bourgeois communism ... It is exactly against such red philistinism that the new surplus, free of ideology, establishes and launches its utopian essence, its moral central concern.*[148]

The reintroduction of utopia to Marxism was the result of a Marxist opposition to Soviet Communism and the Western European Social Democracy of the post-World War era. In theoretical terms this criticism was unfolded by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and English Marxism. Despite the differences, the reconciliation between romanticism and Marxism were central to both. This was manifest in Benjamin, Bloch and Marcuse, as well as in E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams[149] and the *History Workshop* journal.

This idea of desire as central to the utopian project was echoed by Fredric Jameson:

> *[W]e might think of the new onset of the Utopian process as a kind of desiring to desire, a learning to desire, the invention of the desire called Utopia in the first place, along with the new rules for the fantasising or daydreaming of such a thing – a set of narrative protocols with no precedent to previous literary institutions.*[150]

The phrase "learning to desire" belongs to the same context of rehabilitating utopia from capitalist alienation, Herbert Marcuse's theory on true and false needs, and the liberation and transformation of desire.[151] For Thompson, Bloch, Marcuse and Jameson, the rehabilitation of utopia was necessary for the education of desire, which consequently was necessary for the development of an alternative common sense, which in turn was necessary for social transformation. The concept of desire was central to '1968' utopianism. In the mentality of the slogan "Being a realist means demanding the impossible", neither the object of desire nor satisfying desire was important; what mattered was the state of desiring. There were, however, two components of utopia: utopia as desire, and utopia as nostalgia.[152]

Barbara Taylor, a historian formed in the intellectual environment of English social history, explains this nostalgia component. Her *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (1983) deals with the efforts of Robert Owen's followers to create a "New Moral World", built on class and gender equality.

> *This book ... is an examination of how vision – the vision of women's emancipation – arose, became part of the ideological armoury of a popular social movement, and inspired attempts to construct a new sexual culture in a society driven with sex- and class-based conflicts. It is also an exploration of the failure of that vision, and the significance of that failure for feminist socialist politics today.*[153]

The history of the paths not taken or "failures" was not something secondary to the conception of history of her generation. It was evidence that history as an agent of transformation has given way to a history of discontinuities, broken threads, fragmentation, and contingency. Taylor referred to these connections between history writing and political aspirations: "[F]orgotten connections may be recalled and restored; visions revitalised ... We, and those who ally themselves with us, are the Utopians of today."[154] For her, writing the history of utopia meant desiring a future painted with past nostalgia, the nostalgia of imagining the future in a different way from what has been realised, and re-enacting the possibilities of the past in juxtaposition to the present.

How can the three concepts, utopia, desire, and nostalgia be connected? Underlying this attitude was the conviction of the historicity of the past not as a linear and progressive procedure in stages, nor as progress, but representing otherness and discontinuity between the present and the past. Since the 1970s, historical studies thematised discontinuity in various ways. But it did not lead, necessarily, to a history-thinking deprived of political dynamism. Joan Scott, commenting on the Foucauldian concept of discontinuity in history, writes that:

> *The difference of the past challenges the certainty of the present (its understanding of itself as the culmination of evolution, for example) and so introduces the possibility of change ... The result does not guarantee progress; but it does support the belief in futurity ... Certeau ties such a belief to history's ethical project, a project in which time establishes the difference not only between past and present, present and future, but also between "what is and what ought to be". In this way, the past was open to be used for undermining certainties of the present. Nostalgia was not a neutralising concept of history, but under certain conditions, would have a subvertial dynamics.*[155]

The meaning of this search for an alternative past is the possibility to perceive each past as a present, open to more than one possibility, which has as a consequence the problematisation of the relationship between the present and the past, the observer and the observed. Historical time ceases to be conceived as continuous and homogeneous, the present is no more the linear result of the past, testimonies are pregnant with expectations, and memory is the refuge for those longing for another life.[156]

Conclusion: A dance with changing roles

Viewed from a distance, the literature on utopia has to do with the dimension of the future and the variety of patterns to deal with it. Even the fervent historical discussion on utopia at the beginning of this new century has to do with the treatment of the future in the past. The past cannot be seen without its hopes and anxieties or without the past projections onto the future. Historical thinking cannot be conceived independently of collective hopes and fears and their cultural construction in utopian terms. Despite their different orientations, history and utopia may not be seen as antithetical and clearly defined categories, where one is turned towards the past and genuine facts and the other towards the future and fantasy. Both were involved in a debate that might be considered a dance that transcended its role. In the first role, where the search for an ideal society took the form of a belief in the future coming of the "son of man" (in our terminology a society "with a human face", in contrast to the devouring beasts of empire), interest in history was seen as exploring the three dimensions of time (past, present, future). A second role was performed when utopia took the form of an ideal society in a remote space beyond time, where history was confined to the past. History writing was to provide instructions for governing, and the nation-state was legitimised by what it considered had definitely happened in the past. When utopia returned as the desired or necessary ideal future, history was called upon to play a third role, namely to trace the transformation of society. As a consequence, the writing of history assumed norms derived from an imaginary future. Finally, the realisation that progress could be made without a utopian goal or, even worse, the recognition that the past was in danger of being manipulated by the twentieth-century utopias which had come into being, created a fourth role: history and historians (or at least some of them) endorsed the role of saving the past as a utopian background for the still unfulfilled. In the twentieth century, the utopian landscape has exploded, producing sites of utopia, anti-utopia, dystopia, ecotopia, feminist utopia, and phantascience. At the same time, history has exploded too, producing several sites of interest for the past, as well as fragmented worlds where future, anxiety, hope and expectations are compounded. The central idea of this article was to explore the interconnections between these two ways of thinking, to re-elaborate the relationship between looking at past experiences and future expectations and, in addition, to trace the multidimensionality of time in historical thinking.

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FOOTNOTES

1 For a detailed discussion on what encompasses Utopian thinking, see Lyman Tower Sargent, "Three faces of utopianism revisited", *Utopian Studies* 5:1 (1994), pp. 1–37. He argues that a map of utopianism should include: a) utopian traditions in literature, from peasant utopias (*The Land of Cocaygne*), the myths of the Golden Age, pastoral novels like *Arcadia*, and utopian novels and utopian science fiction; b) communitarianism and communities attempting social experiments; and c) utopian social theory. See also Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1990, where she emphasises desire as the distinguishing concept of utopianism.

2 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantic of Historical Time*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985, pp. 266–88.

3 E. M. Cioran, *History and Utopia,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 89; Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.

4 For the controversy on utopia and millennialism, see Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982; Krishnar Kumar and Stephen Bann (eds), *Utopias and the Millennium*, London: Reaction, 1993.

5 James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana and a System of Politics,* (ed. by L. G. A. Pocock), Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.

6 Cited in Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p. 98.

7 All Biblical verses are from the King James Version.

8 Gerard Wegemer, "The *City of God* in Thomas More's *Utopia*", *Renascence* 44:2 (1992), pp. 115–35.

9 Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought*, p. 587.

10 Chapter 19 of Edward Bellamy, *Looking Back: 2000–1888*, available on the Utopia Online Library, http://eserver.org/fiction/bellamy/contents.html (accessed 11 Dec. 2006). George Connor, "The Awakening of Edward Bellamy: Looking backward at Religious Influence", *Utopian Studies* 11:1 (2000), pp. 38–52.

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15 John Collins, *Daniel. A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.

16 Herodotus, *History*, I, pp. 95–130; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 1, II–III.

17 Joseph Ward Swain, "The Theory of the Four Monarchies. Opposition History under the Romans", *Classical Philology* 35 (1940), pp. 1–21; D. Mendels, "The Five Empires: A Note on a Propagandistic Topos" in *American Journal of Philology* 102 (1981), pp. 330–7; Arnaldo Momigliano, "Daniele e la teoria greca della successione degli imperi" in his *Pagine ebraiche*, Torino: Einaudi, 1987, pp. 33–9, and "From the Pagan to the Christian Sibyl: Prophecy as History of Religion" in A. C. Dionisotti et al. (eds), *The Uses of Greek and Latin Historical Essays*, London: Warburg Institute, 1988, pp. 3–17.

18 Jürg Eggler, *Influences and Traditions underlying the Vision of Daniel 7:2–14. The Research History from the End of the 19th Century to the Present*, Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Reprecht, 2000.

19 Maurice Casey, *"Son of Man". The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7*, London: SPCK, 1979.

20 Paul Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985.

21 The term refers to the crowning of Charlemagne (800) and Otto I the Great (962) as emperors by the Pope in Rome. The German emperors thus thought of themselves as being in direct succession of those of the Roman Empire. For this myth as an interpretation of history, see: Alexander von Roes, *Translatio Imperii*, (ca. 1281) and Otto von Freising (ca. 1158) in Donald Keely (ed.), *Versions of History from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1991**,** pp. 198–211.

22 Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957, pp. 292–4.

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