

UTOPIAN THOUGHT BETWEEN WORDS AND ACTION:
SEMINAR WITH RAYMOND GEUSS

UTOPIJSKA MISAO IZMEĐU REČI I AKCIJE:
SEMINAR SA REJMONDOM GOJSOM

UTOPIAN THOUGHT BETWEEN WORDS AND ACTION: Seminar with Raymond Geuss

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Raymond Geuss

Introduction

As should be clear, I'm trying to argue for the importance of utopian thinking in human life. And I specifically use the term utopian thinking, rather than simply utopia, because I take the term utopian thinking to cover a larger area than simply utopia. In fact, you might say that even the notion of utopian thinking is too narrow, you should think in terms of something like utopian activities. I spoke yesterday about the cooperatives in Limoges, a form of utopian organization. Europe has produced many utopias, that is many descriptions of ideal societies, and some of these are of an extremely high literary quality. But this has had the disadvantage of tending to cause us to focus our attention perhaps too exclusively on only one aspect of utopian thinking, namely utopia as a literary image of static perfection. And this, in turn, can lead to a certain stunting of our understanding of the possibilities of social thought and social action. If one looks at any of the traditional utopias, they seem to be descriptions of a perfect, and in particular, a perfectly stable and unchanging society, which is radically different from anything we know.

However, it seems also that utopias refer to an impossible world, so there might seem to be a quick and easy way to show the pointlessness of utopian thinking, simply by focusing on the impossibility of realization of any of these proposed topics. If the world of utopia is really impossible, then one might argue: what is the point of describing it, apart from simply satisfying some vain, unrealistic wish, such as the wish that we could live forever. Giving way to such wishes, however, is merely childish, and, as we mature, we should grow out of them. Actually, I think, there are three or perhaps four different kinds of impossibility, and it's important to think about the way in which the concept of the impossible is not just socially and contextually specified, but in which impossible refers to different dimensions. First of all, there is a utopian state that is, as it were, inherently or internally impossible, for something like causal reasons. That is, for example, the image of a society in which people live and consume, but engage in no productive activity at all. That's an impossible state. In the Western European peasant imagination, this is illustrated by

such fantasies as *The Land of Cockaigne*, which is depicted in this famous painting by Peter Bruegel the Elder, which is in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich.

Now, in this 16th century painting, you can see people lying around, feasting on food that they've not grown, and they're not engaged in preparing. If you look at the image, you can see this man is lying on his back, and the wine is dripping off the table into his mouth. Here we have an egg, that has legs of its own, is already broken open, and there's some kind of instrument inside the egg so that you can eat it. Up here you can see a pig, who's been roasted and is walking around with a knife ready for tranches to be cut off him. Actually, this is an image of a peasant idea of utopia, but of course if you look at the image you'll see that there's another aspect of utopianism in it. One aspect is that it's an image of consumption without production. The other aspect of utopia is that you will have noticed that, although this man seems to be a peasant, because he has a thrashing apparatus, that man is some kind of military figure, because he has a lance, and this man has a kind of ermine coat. So, as you know if you've read Dubois, the Middle Ages had this conception of the three orders of society, society was divided into three orders. Now, in general, that was thought to be the clergy, the people who prayed for us, the farmers, the people who worked for us, and the knights, the people who fought for us. And this I think is a slight variation on this, there's the military function, the peasant consumption function, and the administrative function, and they are all lying around companionably around the same table.

So there are two aspects of utopia here, one is consuming without producing, but the second is that the lamb has lain down with the lion, that is, the different social orders are in the same situation and are equal to each other, they are lying around in equal comfort. So it's a kind of visual static image of a society which instantiates utopianism in a certain way. But, in particular, one aspect of it might not be impossible, it might be possible for there to be social harmony, but another aspect of it definitely is impossible, with the technological means available, namely the idea that eggs could be grown that had legs, with which the eggs walked towards the mouths of those people who need them. When the peasants merely open their mouth, the fowl fly into them. Of course, one has to discuss this relative to the technological level of those involved, but certainly in the 16th century, it's not possible for a whole society to be organized around consumption without production. So that's a first kind of impossibility, some kind of internal impossibility. A slight variant of this, which I'd like to count as a second kind of impossibility, is one which is not strictly causal, but is based on a value incompatibility.

As Isaiah Berlin among others has argued, it's not at all obvious that all human goods are evaluatively compatible with each other. I gave that example yesterday of a blacksmith who wanted to be a miniature painter. A society which is maximally tolerant will not necessarily also be maximally efficient, or perhaps maximally well-ordered. Toleration of human deviance is a human good, but some minimal kind of social order and security are also human goods. This line of objection might be connected with a rejection of the utopian idea of harmony. It's not difficult to see that human societies will never exist without conflicts, and that this is partly a manner of the causal realities of our world, but also partly a question resulting from the fact that various human goods and virtues do not necessarily easily

coexist, so that struggle is endemic. So the very idea of a static human society might be incoherent. We've got verbal utopias, we've got visual utopias, and there can also perhaps be other forms of utopianism which are even less connected to writing or imagination. Both of these two senses of impossibility make no reference to the specifically historical or temporal dimension. They take the utopian society in question, as it were, in a single point in time. Now, in a third sense of impossibility, utopia might describe a situation that is impossible, not for causal reasons, and not because it describes a maximal instantiation of values that are incompatible, but rather it's impossible because it's internally unstable. The idea of a utopia is not that of a state of society at a single point of time that's maximally good, but of a continuing of society that's good. So the society might be maximally good at a point in time, but that might not be a form of society that is stable and could continue. That's a third sense of impossibility. We could have a feast and pull all our food together and consume without producing, that might be a state that is very nice, but it wouldn't be a stable state.

Robert Nozick, one of my *bête noire*, gives an example that's supposed to count against certain forms of utopian egalitarianism. He argues that you may well redistribute all the goods in a society at a certain time, and so you can have a society with complete equality at that time, but this state of affairs will never last, unless artificially and continually re-established. Left to their own devices – and this is an anthropological assumption he makes – people will exchange goods and they will use their resources in differential ways so that, in a short time, relations of inequality will re-emerge. The utopian ideal of equality, then, was not one of continually redistributing goods, or draconianly prohibiting any kind of voluntary exchange, but the idea of a good state of society that was stable.

A fourth sense of impossibility is the obvious one, namely the absence of access to the utopian state from where we are. Here it's not that the state is impossible, or that it's beyond us, but that it's actually so far beyond our reach as not to be a realistic option. Thus, to take the famous example – suppose a 19th century society has a choice between developing its systems of roads for transport, developing a system of canals, or developing a railroad network. So, starting from point zero, any of these three choices is possible, and most sensible societies will opt for some combination. But suppose this particular society decides to put all its resources into an extensive canal system. Then, if we live in the 20th century, we can imagine a world in which all long distance travel is by rail, that's possible, internally consistent, it might actually be stable. There's nothing inherently impossible about this, but at the same time it's effectively out of our reach. If we had invested our resources in the 19th century into building an appropriate infrastructure, some rail system, then we would have something to continue to build with now. But starting from where we are with canals but no railways, we can't, with the resources we have, simply throw away the whole canal system, and build a full rail system, *ex novo*. There's nothing inherently impossible about it, and it's not even unstable, it's just inaccessible.

So, I'll conclude then by reiterating my two basic points. First, impossible is itself a theoretical, not an observational or an empirical term. We should not assume that we antecedently know, in any situation, what is and what is not possible. Nor

should we assume that what is or what is not possible are fixed and invariant once and for all. Judgements about the possible and impossible are highly contextual and require careful scrutiny. This in itself is a justification of certain forms of utopian speculation and action as part of a larger process of evaluating how we want to live our lives. Second, I'd like to focus not on utopias as static pictures of perfection, or as full-fledged theories such as Newton's laws of motion, much less blueprints – rather, we should see utopia as a certain possible field of inquiry, or a domain of investigation, for utopia is a human task. As the early 20th century anarchist Gustav Landauer put it, this specific object domain is the realm of those vital human desires, the fulfilment of which is inherently impossible in our society, or purportedly impossible. In the 16th century this domain included the desire to have enough to eat without toil. Bruegel's picture was an exploration through art of this complex, and as such, it represents a kind of utopian thinking. It's a graphic rather than literary form of utopian thinking, but it's a kind of utopian thinking nonetheless.

This domain of investigation involves a number of things: bringing out clearly what the human desires in question are, for example. We are not always absolutely transparent to ourselves in our desires. So it's a tricky task to determine what we really want. It's not obvious, it has to be determined, that is part of the task of utopianism, to figure out what we want. You can't just read it out of revealed preferences, as economists think you can. We might not get a final or definitive answer to this, both because some desires might be too deeply embedded, outside the area to which we can get cognitive access, and because our desires sometimes change. Utopian thinking will have to extract and construct these desires, it won't in general be able to simply read them off from external behaviour. A further part of the investigation is trying to see whether the satisfaction of a given set of desires really is impossible, or it's merely assumed or asserted to be impossible, and if so, what. In addition we'll have to formulate some hypotheses about the conditions under which that, which was thought to be impossible, might after all prove to be attainable.

Utopian thinking refers to this whole process, not just to a particular isolated element in this process. It need not make any assumptions about the completeness, perfection or unchangeability of the picture it draws. This is an investigation of unsatisfied vital desires, without antecedent assumptions that these desires will necessarily have any rank ordering. We have a certain limited ability to become more fully aware of aspects of our situation of which we are unaware, and we also have the ability to call into question imaginatively investigated claims about what is possible and what is not. If we fail to cultivate either of these two faculties, we will have deprived ourselves of potentially important tools for discovering how to lead a better life.

Igor Cvejić

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I have a brief question from the perspective of the cognitive-conative divide, which is common in the contemporary Anglo-American theory of action. You sometimes use a similar terminology, but you clearly and explicitly have a different approach

to this question and you do not accept this strict divide. I'm also not a fan of this divide, but my goal is to try to provoke some problems and questions that could possibly lead us to some discussion. I have three questions. The first question is very general, it refers to the conative moments. If utopian thinking is a kind of motivational impulse, it is based on certain existing needs, as a formation of thinking about the realization of these needs, especially this moment when you refer to Gustav Landauer. If these needs are contextual, constructed within society, it would lead us to the conclusion that utopian thinking presupposes that my motivational impulse is not strictly utopian, a constructed social conative moment, and that I think about people with socially constructed motivations, needs and issues which are not utopian. Certainly, we are used to having some idea of utopia with utopian kinds of desires, needs, etc. So, either this utopian social structure is methodologically prior or even determines my utopian thinking, or we have to give some utopian meta-position about preferred motivations, which would lead us to some different concept of utopia. In a practical way you gave a solution yesterday, I'd call it a Marxist kind of solution, that our acting really changes our needs and desires in the future, but I don't think it could answer the question of thinking – is my current utopian thinking based on existing needs that are not utopian in themselves?

The second question is relatively connected, it is the question of the problem of the relation of the cognitive input to the conative states – of course, presupposing that we speak about some kind of reflexive utopian thinking, which could be, for example, changed in a deliberate way. If we presuppose that I could recognize better my needs and the needs that exist in society, the question is would it really change my motivation, would it be preferable, or I would simply prefer to watch TV shows, drink beer, get rich and screw all other people. That's the old question of rational motivation, I think it is radicalising your theory (when you criticize moralization) a little bit, the idea that good is in itself motivating.

The third question is explicitly about how utopian thinking leads us to action. The standard belief-desire model of action presupposes that X would do a thing only if X has a belief that F-ing would lead to the realization of the goal Y. If utopian thinking is not simply wishful thinking, then this is not the case, and, according to these theories, an agent would not act upon his utopian motivational impulse. So my question is based on the question what would trigger not just utopian thinking but action, that is, according to this thinking and in a specific situation. At some moment yesterday you made a comparison with pragmatism and religious persons. I think that this is not the case here because if fanatics have some beliefs that some F-ing would lead to the goal Y, we just find these beliefs unjustified. This is another problem because, with utopian thinking we don't really believe that F-ing would lead to Y, we try to problematize it. It looks as if utopian thinking must be in some way by itself practical, in a way that it could overlap counter-utopian cognition, that is, overlap mind-to-world direction of fit (the way they usually call it), even if it is just an internal practice of changing the way we construct our belief, that is how I see your position.

But the point of this comment is that, in order to act, we must have some cognitive input belief about F-ing. I really think that we must have it. Doing without it or, in other words, having some concrete case in this world where we could apply

our utopian thinking. That presupposes some knowledge and some beliefs about this world that allow us to apply our utopian thinking in a concrete case. My question is: do you think that you could explicitly give some model of action (because obviously this usual desire-belief model doesn't work) that could not just justify utopian thinking as a good idea, but justify the possibility of concrete acts motivated by utopian thinking. I have some ideas from some counter-perspectives from theories of emotion, which are against the cognitive-conative divide, but I'd just like to hear your answer.

Mark Losoncz

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As is well-known, there is a long history of the critique of utopia and utopian thinking, especially in conservative thought. However, I don't want to focus on the history of political ideas, but on an even more radical critique, on the philosophical critique of possibility as such. Philosophers who are often mentioned as representatives of *Lebensphilosophie* elaborated a devastating critique of possibility – I am referring to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Bergson. Just as they criticized the concept of nothing (*nihil*) they refused the modality of possibility as a pseudo-concept, as an illusion, as a false problem. They emphasized that the concept of possibility is merely negative, given the fact that it expresses a paradoxical existence that lacks effective existence. Within this framework, the realization of a possibility is nothing else than a neutral translation of something that is already given into the sphere of effective existence. Bergson claimed that the pseudo concept of possibility is the result of an illusory retrospective projection of an existing reality into the past. So, in his text entitled “The Possible and the Real”, he refused the concept of possibility and impossibility altogether. On the other hand, he evoked true creativity based on the heterogeneity and virtuality of duration. Schopenhauer refused possibility and impossibility as concepts of reflection. According to this, he introduced two concepts of reality – *Wirklichkeit*, on the one hand, which contains the modality of possibility and which is merely the result of abstraction, and *Realität* as a truly existing reality. Finally, and here I'm relying upon the interpretation of Arnaud François, Nietzsche refuses possibility as an expression of the false other-worldly hope. And finally, the theory of eternal return aims at the affirmation of an absolutely immanent life beyond possibility and impossibility.

To sum things up, one might reconstruct not only the history of utopias but also the history of anti-utopian thinking. What is more, the philosophical radicalization of the critique of utopian thinking shows that there could also be a deep desire which regards the liberation from the dangerous illusions of possibility which would have a certain therapeutic effect. It seems to me that every theory of utopia should be able to deal with these aspects of desire. Maybe there are also dreams of a world without possibilities. Now I would like to complete the first part of my intervention with a short reference to a contemporary philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, who also elaborated an alternative philosophy of possibility, but from an entirely different point of view. Namely, under the influence of certain scholastic philosophers, Agamben emphasizes that the Aristotelian concept of possibility,

dynamis, could also mean ‘to not do’ or ‘not be’. Thus, potentiality is not merely a privation of effective existence that precedes actuality, but it has a power of its own.

To put it differently, one could stop the transition from potentiality to action by making some potentialities inoperative, by suspending them. It is no coincidence that Agamben uses the terms ‘weak messianism’ and ‘the power of the weak’. As we know, he suggests that the political theory of liberation depends on whether we can have a new relation to the category of possibility. If so, one might ask whether utopian thinking necessarily has to focus on affirmation and creation, or we could experiment with a merely negative strategy that would make some power mechanisms inoperative. Would this strategy be utopian or not?

Finally, I would like to make a very short comment concerning the (allegedly) vain, unrealistic wishes, childish fantasies. What I found extremely exciting in the unorthodox Marxism of Ernst Bloch is that he elaborated an alternative theory of ideology that could appreciate such wishes and fantasies. Instead of refuting them as an expression of an irrational relation to the world, he claimed that we should perceive them as signs of unrealized expectations in bourgeois society, signs that point to alternative realities. In other words, he refused the *Aufklärer* position from which one could simply devalue these phenomena. He analysed fashion, orientalism, the books of Karl May, or even the story of Aladdin in this manner, as an expression of the desire for non-places, that tells us something about the dissatisfaction with the world. So one might ask whether a theory of utopian thinking must necessarily make a rigid distinction between realistic and unrealistic utopias or, instead, it should not underestimate even the most modest ways of alternative thinking.

Jelena Pešić

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I will be brief. My question would be to some extent similar to Igor’s. I’m a sociologist, so my question would be somehow determined by my background. If utopian thinking involves an extraction of basic human desires and fulfilment of basic human needs, the question which arises is whether we could ever agree on what these needs and desires are and, more importantly, what is the satisfactory level of their fulfilment. You have pointed out in one of your texts that these needs are historically changeable, but I would like to say that they are not only historically changeable, but they also vary within one society, across different social groups. In that respect, I’m wondering whether we could escape the claim that utopian thinking is always particularistic, and that it reflects the needs and desires of certain social groups. The question that arises from that is which groups or collective action utopian thinking is able to motivate, and under which conditions.

Raymond Geuss

Obviously I can’t respond to all of those points, I’m sorry about that. Let me start with the one where I think I have something relatively useful and helpful to say – let me start with Mark. The first point is that I assume that in any given society the distinction between necessary and possible may be flexible, that is, that in any given society certain things might in fact be possible that are considered to be

impossible. I still keep the concept of possibility as a central part of my thought. As we know, a lot of people have thought that's a big mistake. You mention Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and Bergson. Of course, one could also in a certain sense mention Spinoza. You all remember the famous example of Spinoza: if the arrow is shot from the bow, and if the arrow had been given consciousness, the arrow would be thinking not 'I've been shot from a bow', but 'I want to go'. So that the whole way of thinking about the human world as if there are possibilities is a mistake. It's an illusion.

That is a very, very powerful argument, for which I have a certain sympathy, but it seems to me that the point of view from which it's possible to see the world like that is, if you think in Nietzschean terms, not a human point of view. That is, that might actually be right, it might well be the case that there is no such thing as possibility but, for us as humans, we don't know what a human life would look like in which we really thought about ourselves in that way, except if we accepted certain extreme forms of Buddhism or religious thought perhaps. If you could accept certain extreme forms of religious thought, then perhaps you could become completely satisfied with seeing your life as one in which you had no possibilities. That's what Max Weber would have called one of the *Virtuosenleistungen* of religious belief. You can really not see yourself as having any choices at all. Now, that is not an argument because, as it were, metaphysically you might actually be right, and that might well be the case that there is no place for possibility in our world. But I'm not Superman. We are not Supermen, we're still human beings, and I'm trying to talk in the context of political human beings trying to live in the form of human life that we're accustomed to, and I think in that context, if this is an illusion, it's a very powerful illusion. I simply grant that, that you might well be right, but I'm making that assumption.

Your second point, something about the possibility of negative utopias, that is, utopias that didn't consist in acting, but consisted in failing to act. And, of course, that's a major topic in one of the philosophies I'm particularly interested in – Adorno's. Adorno is all about negative utopian thinking. When Adorno talks about Alban Berg's opera, *Wozzeck*, *Wozzeck* is a negative utopia. All works of art are supposed to be in some sense negative utopias. That's connected of course in Adorno with this thing he calls the *Bilderverbot*, the prohibition on graven images. So Adorno thinks all thought has to be utopian, but it must never be positively utopian, because if it's positively utopian it's going to be the golden calf, it's not going to be real utopia. I'm very happy to accept that, I don't know really what I can make of that, but that's my response to your two points.

The first set of comments, let me put some of what you said in my own terms. It's a question about the relation between people who are engaged in utopian thinking, between the producers and the consumers of utopia, that is, between the person who says I have a utopian project and the person who is supposed to be receiving the message of this utopian project. And you were asking: don't I essentially fail to look at an important factor here, namely that utopian thinking doesn't exist, as it were, in a vacuum? It doesn't occur in a vacuum, it occurs because of concrete people who are making concrete projects. And so, do I, as a utopian thinker, have to exempt myself in some sense from the ideological illusions that are around me? Don't I have to give some account of my own motivation for developing the utopian

project, or can I simply assume that my motivations need not be called into question? And am I trying to give a utopian project for others or for myself?

That's the first complex of things you were talking about. I completely agree, I'm trying to get away from the idea that the way to think about utopia is: Mr X sits down, he takes the ethnographer's view of society, he's like the administrator, he tells society what their needs are, and then people act on that. I'm trying to get away from that model, I'm trying to say that there are other ways of thinking about this, and part of what this will be of course is that the person who is painting a picture or writing a book or suggesting in the assembly that we have a cooperative, reflects on his own position and the nature of his own motivation in making this proposal. And, of course, my own motivation might be very different from the structure of the people I'm talking to, and that might be a very systematic problem that needs to be taken account of.

The second set was about the cognitive status of these utopias, you talked about the cognitive input. What I'm inclined to say is something which I think I can say – if I make a utopian proposal, that is some kind of suggestion that there are some vital needs that you have that I'm articulating. And if they really are vital needs, you won't necessarily immediately recognize them as such, because you might have various kinds of resistance to it. But if, in the long run, I've given this utopian project as good a run for its money as can be given, and you still refuse to accept it, then there's nothing I can do, I've shown myself to be wrong. Maybe it's not a cognitive failing, maybe it's more practical. The cognitive element is an important element in it, but the crucial element is an element of the ability on the part of the people to accept these suggestions, it's more like the purported effect of psychoanalysis, that you come to accept a certain interpretation of your behaviour. That's not detached from cognitive things, but it's not exactly the same thing. So that's the most I can say to the second point. The third point about utopian thinking and action – there I think you're right. I don't have much to say about that, I tried to gesture to Morus and the notion of *obliquus ductus*, indirect methods, but that's no more than a gesture, and I haven't really said much about that.

Your question then, Jelena – I don't know how much of this I should talk about. As you know, I think that it's really important to distinguish categorically between needs and desires. The normal way of presenting the concept of need is: I want, I desire, I desire very much, I need. And I need is an intensification of I desire. But I think that David Wiggins really saw the central point about this in an essay he wrote in the 60s, which is that I need is not an intensification of I want. They are two completely categorical kinds of claims. To say that I want or desire is to speak of an impulse that I have in a certain direction, it's to speak from the point of view of a subject who's moving out. To say that I need is to take an external point of view and talk about a structural relation that must exist. So when I say I want a pen, that's referring to my impulse to have a pen. When I say I need a pen, I need a pen doesn't mean I want it very much. It means, looking at my life from the outside, and seeing the projects that I have such as writing, you can see that this object plays an essential role in that project, whether I know about it and want it or not.

Now, in general I will know and therefore want what I need. But although that's in general the case, it's not the case in every particular respect. And what seems

to me to be very important in the Marxist tradition, a thing which has been completely lost sight of in economics, is that they represent two different categories. The economist wants to operate with a single category, the category of preference, in particular the category of revealed effective preference. What there is is what people want, that's all there is. And I'm keen to say that Marx was onto something, there are problems with it, but he was onto something in saying that it isn't just that I want and desire various things, it's also the case that I can say that I need certain things, and you can therefore investigate the relationship between my needs and my wants and desires. They are not the same thing, since they are approaching the same world from two different perspectives, and it's the ability to see that world from both of these perspectives at the same time, that gives social thinking its oomph. That is, what's really important to see is that there are three things you have to look at. First, there is what actually moves me to do things, there's what I think I'm doing, so there's desire in the sense of what actually moves me. There's recognized desire, there's what I know moves me. There are preferences, what I know moves me is what I can articulate. Then there are needs, and to have a social theory you have to be able to look at the human world through all three of those lenses at the same time. You have to look at it through the lens of how people are actually acting, what's actually moving them: through what they think they are doing, and through what they need seen through the context of some analysis of vital functions.

Now you will say – and it's absolutely right – doesn't this concept of need have authoritarian potentialities to it. Because someone has to say – the strength of liberalism is the strength of non-paternalism. Namely, you want to know what's good for me – what's good for me is what *I say*, and I'm the final goal for that. And that's the strength of liberalism. But that's also the weakness of liberalism, because it's not the case that I always know what's best for me. Much of my life has been recognizing why, in certain contexts, I didn't know what's best for me. So we have to accept that there's some way in which we give weight to the way people see the world, but we also have to accept that there are limits to that correctness with which they see the world, and it must be possible to look at that world from the outside, and look at them in terms of some analysis of their vital functions, and that analysis will of course then lead to an analysis of what they need. Now, you're absolutely right – two things: this distinction becomes much more difficult to maintain if you add to what I've said that human desires are changing historically and are changing sociologically, and human needs *are* changing. It's one thing abstractly to say we've got desires, we've got needs. It's a much more complicated thing to say there are desires and there are needs, when we admit that both of them are developing historically.

So I grant all of that, and I also grant that at this point it becomes important to see the political dimension of this, which is: who says which are the human needs. Agnes Heller of course wrote this famous book about the dictatorship over needs, and in a way what I'm saying is you can retain the focus on a distinction between desire and need, or focus on the distinctive impulse, without necessarily thinking that that means you can have an authoritarian dictatorship over what counts as needs. Now that means you're going to have complicated democratic politics in

which you have discussion of desires, needs, etc. That will be very complicated, and of course one will have to take into account all the things you've talked about, about the sociological differences of who's needs are being met and whose aren't and at what price, but that's the way I'd like to move with that.

Željko Radinković

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Ich möchte hiermit auf die für das utopische Denken konstitutive Ambivalenz zwischen dem vorgestellten, imaginierten Konstrukt und der Möglichkeit seiner Realisierung reagieren.

Mir scheint, dass in dieser Hinsicht ein Hinweis auf die produktive Kraft dieser Ambivalenz praktisch durchaus relevant sein kann, jedoch nicht genügt, solange der modallogische Charakter dieser "utopischer Differenz", dieses für das utopische Denken charakteristischen Modallgefälles Wirklichkeit-Möglichkeit nicht geklärt ist. Kurzum: Von welcher Möglichkeit sprechen wir, wenn wir vom Utopischen sprechen?

In diesem Zusammenhang würde ich die transzendentalphilosophische Fragestellung vorziehen, weil sie im Sinne der transzendentalen Dialektik eine Antwort auf dieses Problem zu bieten scheint. Demnach sei die Utopie bzw. die utopische Urteilskraft im Sinne vom regulativen Gebrauch der Ideen zu betrachten, insofern wir die antinomischen Struktur des utopischen Denkens richtig erfassen sollen. (Warum antinomisch? Es geht nämlich um den Status eines Transzendens, zu dem wir uns sowohl thetisch als auch antithetisch verhalten können. Die wahre Natur der oben erwähnten Ambivalenz ist diese antinomische Struktur.)

Die Utopie als regulative Idee hat auch Richard Saage im Sinne, wenn er sagt: "Die Gefahr utopischer Ideen besteht in ihrem Umschlag ins Autoritäre, wenn sie nicht als regulative Ideen verstanden werden, sondern als Rezepte, die Eins-zu-Eins umzusetzen sind. Realisierte Utopien müssen notwendig repressiv werden, weil sie dann gezwungen sind, andere utopische Alternativen zu unterdrücken." Die Realisierung nimmt der Utopie ihre normative Kraft, die nur zur Geltung gelangt, wenn die Differenz zwischen dem utopischen Konstrukt und der Wirklichkeit bestehen bleibt. (Es geht also nicht darum, diese antinomische Struktur des Utopischen aufzulösen, sondern sie angemessen zu erfassen, indem verstanden wird, dass es sich hier um den regulativen Gebrauch der Ideen handelt.)

Als regulative Idee hat die Utopie – frei nach Kant – keine Gegenstände bzw. keine neue Erkenntnis zu geben, sondern eine gewisse Ordnung in Erkenntnis- und Handlungsbegrifflichkeit zu bringen. Die Utopien können die Erkenntnisse und Handlungen orientieren und ordnen. Sie stellen gewissermaßen die höherstufigen Möglichkeiten dar, d. h. solche, die nicht zu realisieren sind, sondern die Möglichkeitsräume eröffnen und organisieren.

Beispiel: Francis Bacon (*Neu Atlantis*)

Das utopische wird nicht nach dem Grad des Realisierten bestimmt, sondern nach ihrem Potenzial der Eröffnung der Möglichkeitsräume.

Weshalb verliert eine Utopie, die zum Teil realisiert ist (wie Neu Atlantis), nicht an ihrem utopischen Charakter?

Predrag Krstić

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I would, first of all, like to thank Professor Geuss on this rare opportunity – as this year marks half of a millennium since the publication of More’s *Utopia* – to discuss with him precisely that which he seems to bear witness to better than anyone else: the possibility of non-doctrinary utopian thought in an age hostile to utopianism. My questions concern one doubt that is sparked by this commendable striving. In such an attempt to provide an apologia for utopia as Geuss’s, the focus is understandably on finding a justificatory function for utopian thought, that is on the process of ‘extricating’ from it the importance and the mission that it must still have for us today: Geuss thus wishes to ‘investigate the way in which wishing, hoping, and desiring interact with knowing; to throw light on connections that might otherwise escape notice; provide ideal types that can stimulate further thinking; serving as a source of useful hypotheses’; and, instead of offering ‘categories of immediate action’ and definite answers, he asks the reader to ‘reflect on such things as the socially recognised limits of that which is possible, the consequences and conditions of what we desire, the mutability of our needs’. One nevertheless gets the impression that the concept of utopian thought is so reductively and, to an extent, normatively reformulated that some of the classical, and perhaps equally valuable, elements of the complex of utopian thought are left out. To put it as a question – hasn’t the tradition of utopian thought been significantly impoverished precisely by the arguments which have undoubtedly managed to convince us that thought can be ‘cleansed’ of utopian elements only at its own peril, but arguments which have also reconfigured these elements into some kind of ‘realistic’ utopia or hypothetical utopian speculation, into a contextualized utopia, one that no longer needs to be closed, complete, stable and immutable, but that is rather linked with historical transformations and the development of human needs?

It seems to me that giving up a ‘picture of society in which everything is optimally arranged, in every aspect unsurpassably good’, giving up the idea of ‘unchanging perfection’ doesn’t necessarily mean that we can (or have to) do away with one common element that we find in every form of utopian thought – one that projects, after all, a certain kind of stasis, resistance to further dynamic, motion, complexity of the world, that projects an end to ‘bad kind of complications’ (that thereby also projects unsurpassability, because there is no further need for surpassing) – in other words, the common element which presumes that at least *some* aspect of society is thought of as optimally arranged once and for all. To put it more acutely, utopia doesn’t have to be total, it doesn’t have to project a society that has solved all its problems, but it can, or has to, think of at least one of them as *definitely* solved. It is my impression that the final argument of the paper “Some Varieties of Utopia” refers precisely to this kind of ‘non-comprehensive’ completeness, as well as the example of universal healthcare in “Realism and the Relativity of Judgment”. The question, however, remains whether, for example, a picture of a world without illness or disease would also count as one such desirable kind of utopia? Or that of a world without war, hunger or forced labor? Or whether, on the contrary, this would already constitute an unjustifiable step toward the pacification

of all tensions that resembles the unfounded ‘utopianism’, in the sense of ‘lack[ing] the specification of a mechanism for realising the utopian state’? As it seems to me that the latter is true, I would also like to ask: isn’t the contemporary ‘responsible’ kind of utopian thought, as one might call it, confined for this reason to the last defensive line, to offering merely the examples of minimal and totally ‘realistic’ visions? But, to what extent can we still call that ‘utopian’ in any sense of the word – and not simply a political program; how much of the ‘utopian’ is left when we do away completely with the element of the ‘definite solution’, and why wouldn’t we rather speak then, in terms of classical political philosophy, of a ‘political ideal’, or even a project of reform?

If this intuition is correct to any degree, wouldn’t we have to exclude from such a reduced tradition of ‘desirable’ utopian thought almost all (not incidentally) ‘islands’, except perhaps Bacon’s *New Atlantis*: the one from Plato’s *Critias* as well as More’s *Utopia* and even Huxley’s *Island*? All these visions include – the first one in the form of memory, the second as fantasy, the third in a resigned manner as a failed attempt – what You rightfully point out: the withdrawal from the world as it is, with a specifically utopian fundamental rejection of this world. They see this world, however, as shot through precisely with the kind of freedom-negating, unworthy social dynamic that the ‘island’ visions should prove to be unnecessary. In one inspired paragraph from *Minima Moralia*, Adorno contrasts the image of the linear expansion of productive forces, the increase of production, the never-ending creation and growth, the obese voracity, the image of the imperative of expansion, of *gleichmacherei*, the swollen collectivity as the blind frenzy of *making* – he contrasts this image with Maupassant’s vision of ‘lying on the water and watching the sky in peace’, of not doing anything, like an animal, of not being anything, ‘without any further designation or accomplishment’. Would such form of resistance to the ‘logic of capital’ today be unacceptable, left outside of the scope of justifiable visions due to its aspiration to a genuine state of peaceful completeness? Or would precisely such vision provide the kind of ‘fertility, suggestiveness and stimulation’ that You consider to be constitutive of the ‘right’ kind of utopian thought?

If one were to use strictly philosophical terminology, one could perhaps say that You point out carefully the problems of ‘absolutism’, but not of ‘contextualism’: it isn’t clear how the latter manages to avoid arbitrariness, ad hoc judgment and action and how it can accomplish more than simply demonstrating the irreducibility of every nominalized particular situation in its concrete complexity, and how it manages not to preclude any kind of ‘principled’ judgment. The attempt to connect ‘realism’ and the aspiration to the impossible is infinitely interesting, inspiring and instructive, nevertheless the fact remains (not only mental but historical as well) that realism which pays attention to the context, in its abandoning of troublesome universal standards, ends up in some form of conservatism, the standpoints of which one wouldn’t exactly call utopian to say the least – quite the contrary. Edmund Burke would already be a decent example. In the Preface to *Politics and Imagination*, You reject the idea that Conservative Realpolitik should be contrasted with utopian speculation, arguing that even the deepest kind of political conformism and any defense of the status quo require acts of imagining of some kind. However, as You lucidly note in the essay ‘Authority: Some Fables’ from *A World*

Without Why, drawing on Hegel, Marx and Freud, the role of the imagination in politics has more often been ‘to reinforce the hold of the past over the present’, than the ‘production of unrealistic fantasies about a utopian future’. The nostalgia for the golden age and its gorgeous landscapes, however, has politically always had the function of conserving an idealized origin and, at best, the function of a reasonable word of caution to the unbridled optimism of what we usually call the utopian projection of a bright future. Since it seems that you in large part accept this objection, how does your dichotomy of realism/moralism relate to the dichotomy of political empiricism/rationalism of Talmon and Oakeshott, for example, or even with the traditional division between utilitarian and deontological ethics?

Srdan Prodanović

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I wish to focus my comments or questions on three relatively interconnected problems. First, I agree with the idea that we should stop making relatively useless analogies between utopian thinking and any kind of finite projections or blueprints, as well as viewing this form of thinking as something that necessarily has no connection with concrete everyday experience. However, even if we accept Geuss’s position that utopian thinking is ultimately a form of posing questions, there still remains the issue whether this ‘method’ of questioning (of social practice) is primarily an individual /private or collective/public endeavour. I am not saying that we have here some sort of a binary opposition. My question mainly pertains to strategy. If we paraphrase the words from the second essay in Geuss’s *World without Why*: when we are using utopian thinking, do we first need to break down the familiar forms of everyday speech (and then perhaps in consequence certain routine patterns of action and interaction); or do we first need to create positive new meanings, ways of speaking and acting, and eventually modes of living?

2. In light of these issues, how do we envision social engagement that would be driven by utopias and the role of intellectuals?

3. When this type of non-dogmatic utopian thought eventually generates some sort of social action, does its inherent openness imply that utopian social movements cannot have rigid hierarchies or organizational structures? Was the Occupy movement in any sense utopian?

Raymond Geuss

May I start with Predrag’s question – you put your finger, of course, on what is the really central issue for me. Which is: I want, at the same time, to propound a certain kind of realism, which means, in some sense, I want to connect all forms of thinking with action, and that means I’m going to have to take some existing structures for granted, that’s what realism to some extent means. I can analyse them in various ways, but I have to start from them. And I want to combine that with utopianism, which, whatever it is, doesn’t have that form. And I fully admit that I have not gotten very far with that. I do want to make clear in response to something you said – I of course do not mean to deny that there can be definitive solutions to

some problems. I certainly do not mean that, when I say that utopian projects are not best understood as blueprints for perfection, therefore one cannot ever think one has found a definitive solution of a particular problem.

Let me give you an example that is close to me, because it is part of the tradition of utopianism that I grew up with. *News from Nowhere* by William Morris, they go out of their way to present a man who is one of the unhappy people in the future; he doesn't like the future, he pines for the old days of grandeur and tragedy and the existential, and this is an important part of Morris's project. Morris is not saying that there won't be people like that who will be unhappy. They are very unhappy, and he is not morally condemning their dissatisfaction, but what he is saying is, despite the fact that they are dissatisfied – and there is some reason for them to be dissatisfied – we have a definitively better society now.

So I wouldn't describe the world from *News from Nowhere* as having definitively solved a problem; I would say, though, it is definitively better. From the fact that it's definitively better, it doesn't follow that everyone in it is happy. There is this man who is justifiably unhappy, there is the married couple who have various problems. There are problems there, it's not a universal solution to all problems, it's not a panacea, but it can fail to be a panacea while still being an advance over the society in the past. My intention is to construe these things in such a way that you can recognize that there is no single solution to all these problems, and that there will be remaining things and *still* say: we have isolated some genuinely vital human needs and we've satisfied them. And that's all you need to say, but of course what a vital human need is is a question for interpretation, and there I think I probably am – just to refer to Željko's comments – I probably am further away from various Kantian ways of thinking than you would like, and I am closer to contextual and historical ways of thinking. And perhaps I'm wrong about that, but I believe that you've correctly diagnosed a number of problems with the contextualist view, I think those problems exist, but they are nevertheless less serious than the problems that would be associated with absolutism.

Another thing that I read out of your comments, which I think is also further criticism of my perspective, is that I think you saw quite rightly that, by virtue of trying to make the notion of utopian thinking more flexible, I am very much in danger of giving it no content. I'm very much in danger simply of identifying it with the imagination. Ideally, there is the imagination as a category, there is utopian thinking, then there is the kind of utopian thinking which is the blueprint for perfection. I'm trying to distinguish utopian thinking from these blueprints for perfection, but it isn't clear that, in doing that, I haven't simply moved it so far in the direction of simply identifying it with imagination. If even the conservatives who want to reproduce the status quo have to appeal to people's imagination, and if there is no distinction between appealing to people's imagination and utopianism, then you might say my whole project doesn't make any sense at all. So I do think they are all very fair criticisms, and I wish I could say something more about them, but thank you for that.

Željko, I'm going to try to rephrase some of the things you've said in a way that might not look natural and familiar to you, but tell me whether you can somehow see what you were trying to say in what I'm saying. Three different kinds of things:

there's the notion of a utopia that can be realized, or parts of which can be realized – *New Atlantis*, parts of that are realized. Second, there's the notion of utopia as a regulative thought, Kantian regulative thought. Now, of course, we know that a Kantian regulative thought, as you said in your presentation, has the property that it cannot be realized. If we have a regulative thought, this thought tells us which direction to go in, it says: every time you find a causal nexus, always look for a further cause. That's a rule which tells us how to proceed, but again Kant thinks, of course, that if I have the regulative principle which says: every time you see an event look for a cause, you follow the regulative principle, but it's a mistake to try to transform the regulative into a substantive or constitutive principle, that is to say that there is one cause which is the cause of every cause. So the regulative principle says: always look for causes, but the mistake is to think that always looking for causes means that there is a final cause that is the cause of everything. And you're appealing to that.

So you might think that, in Platonic terms, there is the ideal circle but no real circle can be like the ideal one, there's this utopian difference between the two of them. The first notion that you talk about is this notion of the thoughts that are impossible but in fact can be realized, you have the idea of a submarine and then it's realized. The second is a thought that inherently isn't the kind of thing that can be realized. Then you've got the third one, though, which is also extremely interesting, which is a sort of Heideggerian thought, which is that utopia shouldn't be understood, as it were, as if it's a project that might or might not be realized, and it also ought not to be understood as a perfect conception, which, however, you know can never be realized. But rather, utopian thought is like the Heideggerian opening of a domain for inquiry. You remember when Heidegger talks about Aristotle, and he says: the really important thing about Aristotle is that he for the first time opened up the field of there being such a thing as physics; by construing the world as bodies in motion, he made possible the development of physics. Now, that's a different sense of utopian thinking, that's not a sense of utopian thinking that can be realized or not, acting in such a way that produces the preconditions for other things is not something that can be realized and it's not a regulative principle. It's a different kind of thing, what Heidegger later calls *Stiftung*. So there's *Verwirklichung*, there's *Normativitaet*, *Regulativitaet* and *Stiftung*.

Three different ideas that you have in your discussion, and I think all of them are really important. I'm trying here to move utopianism both away from the idea that a utopian project is a total blueprint, and away from the Kantian idea that it's a regulative thing which can never be realized. So I was trying to move it away from both these things. Now, I understand that you resist that, and you have a good argument that you can use there. Namely (I'm putting words in your mouth), your suggestion is that there is some way in which precisely what you call the utopian difference can be a stimulation to further investigation. So that it isn't enough to do as I do, and to say you can't realize it fully, you have to realize that the fact that certain things can't be realized fully is itself a kind of *Ansporn*, it is itself a kind of motivation or stimulation, it can be a motivation for stimulating further utopian energies, and I agree with that. So I'm sorry, I don't know that I disagree with you sufficiently to respond. All I can say is I found that interesting and I think that I can do something with that.

Srdan, the first question was about individual meaning, public meaning, private meaning, everyday life and its role and the generation of new meanings. Obviously, it won't be news to you that I'm not in favour of the idea that meanings are private phenomena, or that we should think of this process of utopian thinking as a private phenomenon. That's why I kept saying: don't think about the picture or text, think about the whole process, which is a process of investigating and thinking about desires, and, I might say, the process of the reception of these. I haven't actually talked about these – partly because I haven't had time – but I'm thinking that, if you think about utopian thinking, the minimal unit should be the one that is expanded beyond the mere artefact, and it will include these things. Of course, it won't be private, and, as you know, one of the things I disapprove of most strongly in Rorty was this notion of individual, private vocabularies of giving meaning to things.

But you are also right that I tend to be on one side rather than the other of the great philosophical divide about everyday life and common language. Which is, there's, roughly speaking, the late Wittgenstein and there is, roughly speaking, Adorno. The late Wittgenstein says (it's a bit of exaggeration, but he says): philosophy changes nothing, it leaves everything as it was, everyday language is fine the way it is, it only becomes toxic when we begin to reflect and make these philosophical constructs; philosophy is just therapy, getting rid of these things, and then everything will be fine. My association with that is that Wittgenstein has this idea that there is this *Heile Welt*, the healthy world, 'zdravi svet', the romantic notion – the *Heile Welt* is everyday language. The other side is Adorno, which is that if societies really are totalities, and if there is something deeply wrong with our society – he thinks that what's deeply wrong is something about the dis-relation between the possibilities that we have and what we make of these possibilities.

For Adorno, the main instance of the evil of the world is the phenomenon of California. California shows why the world is evil, because it has wonderful possibilities and has been made into an inferno by human use of these possibilities. There is nothing wrong with starving in the Middle Ages, because, to some extent, you couldn't do anything about it. But there's a lot wrong with starving in the modern world, because we *could* do something about it and we don't. So it's that discrepancy between *wollen* and *können*. And if you think that societies are totalities, then that evil permeates the whole of the world, there is no innocent thing. Even everyday interactions are the reverse of innocent. And I must say that you can't hold those two views at the same time, they are just not compatible. I just think Adorno is more likely to be right about that, and that we must be scrupulously careful and reflective even about things that look to be most innocent things in the world. That means that I have a kind of scepticism about appeals to the health-inducing properties of participation in everyday life; that's not an argument, just an explanation.

Second, utopian thinking and social critique. That's a complicated issue, of course I tried to say a little bit about this as I said it seems to me that the two things go together, and it's not an accident that the Frankfurt School talks about ideologies very often as if they were poisoned utopias. Ideologies and utopia are the flip sides of the same coin, you want to analyse ideologies to set free the utopian kernel. And the last one was about hierarchy. Of course, there is a really important, although tremendously complicated discussion in Benjamin about the rebellion

of Korah in the *Book of Exodus* and the role of hierarchy in that, which is a monumentally interesting discussion but terribly difficult. I'm trying to get away from a focus on these traditional issues like hierarchy, and I don't want to be put in a position in which I must say every hierarchy is bad, because of course it depends what you mean by hierarchy. The term comes from *hieros arche*, sacred rule, and of course everybody is against hierarchy because we are against sacred forms of rule, but we use the term hierarchy today to refer not just to sacralized forms of rule but also to functionally necessary forms of rule. There are also hierarchical relations in this room, you can all speak in Serbian in this room, and I can't keep up with that, that's a hierarchical relation. I think it's a mistake to be hyper-leftist about the notion of hierarchy just as it's a mistake to be hyper-leftist about the notion of egalitarianism. I think what's important is to get some notion of the positive, decent life that one can live and to get rid of those hierarchical structures and those forms of inequality which are incompatible with that, but that's different from focusing specifically on hierarchies.

Marjan Ivković

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My question concerns one uncertainty regarding your concept of realism in relation to the task of the engaged theorist to open up space, through non-doctrinary utopian thought, for reflection and the envisaging of alternatives, including radical utopian alternative to the existing social order in the public debate. So, in light of your Hegelian orientation, you have frequently argued in favour of historicizing or, more precisely, genealogical in Nietzschean and Foucauldian terms, account of societal phenomena. An account of how things have come to look this way, how they have come to be assembled this way from various sorts of bits and fragments, how they have come to assume this particular shape or meaning over the course of history, as I understand the basic explanatory mode of genealogy. So, how all kinds of symbolic phenomena, including our sense of self, and therefore also sense of what our interests are, have come to be. And it even seems to me that you prefer this genealogical, which I would call non-normativist form of social critique, but still a form of critique, to any normativist type, including the standard version of critical theory, and Adorno, who does have a normativist standpoint.

As I understand you, the genealogical operation is essential for the breaking of the grip of the dominant ideology, above all liberalism, on our thought. The dominant ideology which portrays itself, or which even has succeeded in becoming, to a greater or lesser degree, the common sense. For example, the notion that freedom can only be thought as the property of an atomistically conceived self, as absence of coercion, this has, more or less, entered the realm of everyday speech, although it's a crucial part of the dominant ideology. Now, genealogy is therefore also an essential first step toward the creation of space for non-doctrinary utopian thought, or rather the creation of favourable conditions under which it might be to any degree endorsed by actors as an invitation for further reflection, for posing questions. On the other hand, it seems to me, a realist explanation of phenomena the way you conceive of it, is premised upon a rather non-historicizing, classical

Marxist understanding of certain phenomena in terms of objectivity, like the actors' objective interest. So, this concept of objective interest, as I see it, has also permeated everyday speech and become part of common sense, from an opposite direction than the liberal conception of negative freedom. But it's still a form of petrification of thought, of a non-historicizing way of relating to ourselves. Isn't a realist explanation in this sense somewhat opposed to what I would call the counter-intuitive sentiment of genealogical explanation, and doesn't it to some extent reinforce the existing limits of what it is possible to say, instead of opening up space. Or, to use a more Adornian language, isn't realism also a part of systemic thought? It is my belief that the fundamental political struggle today is over the meaning of the content of terms such as autonomy, freedom, so the fundamental task is to wrest these concepts from the petrified form in which they exist today as part of dominant ideology. It seems to me that genealogy is perfect for this task, but realism seems to petrify these meanings further.

Aleksandar Matković

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My question was in a sense posed by other members of the seminar, and concerns the relation between utopian thought and ideology. So, I'll just try to crystallize what we may term the role of utopian thought in two main political traditions of Europe, Marxism and liberalism. What's interesting to me, in these two political and theoretical currents, is how they differently conceive of utopian thought. Marxism has a pretty interesting history in the usage of utopian thought, but as a literary genre. For example, it uses it to historicize itself, if you recall Marx's and Engels' talking about compiling a list of literary genres that would present socialism and the historical tendency of European society. Kautski even wrote on More being a socialist, in France there was a movement that read More with the workers and envisage the future society based exactly on the utopian genre. Even Marxism itself could be considered as constituted as a critique of utopian thought.

On the other hand, it is interesting that in the liberal and even neoliberal imagination, utopian thought is very positively, even uncritically accepted as being constitutive of some versions of the free market. If you recall Mandeville and the *Fable of the Bees*, which has the subtitle 'private vices, public benefits', it's how these contradictions between our needs and desires actually conflict one another and produce a better society for us all. That is one of the premises of the free market, and I think this sort of utopian thought has in a sense been extended to neoliberal ideology today as we know it. For example, yesterday you spoke of Margaret Thatcher and there is no alternative statement. I also recall Milton Friedman who even had a television show which was sponsored by Ronald Reagan, where he would go, as this sort of neoliberal ethnographer, to different parts of the world, to Singapore, Berlin, etc. and speak about how the free market could function. He was this utopian ethnographer, who pointed out that this was the free market, it could function like that at home, etc. You could even recall Ludwig Gerhardt in Germany who used media extensively to implement *Marktwirtschaft* in Germany and the German society.

So I think that Thatcher, Friedman and Gerhardt are examples of how neoliberalism used utopian thought to constitute itself, and I think that this repeats itself, not only on the level of a literary genre, but on the level of abstract economic thought. I think this is a great problem, that even when you don't have philosophical and literary thought, you can have economic thought that is utopian, precisely because it does not question itself. If you think about what are the two main points that liberal critique, or self-critique, revolves around, those are the first two points that you outlined. Free market still doesn't exist, we need to bring it to existence, to somehow conceive it. It somehow transcends our schemes of categorization of reality, an instrument that would make our society better in a sense. And what's interesting is that this utopian thought actually pretends to be anchored in reality, it seems it is always in this sort of transition, which is important for Eastern European societies, this transitology, that we are supposed to reach this sort of utopian society. Which is very interesting because, if you think how liberalism presents utopian society, it is actually divorced from itself, from its own economic infrastructure.

This is for me an important point because there is no complete theory of utopia, utopian thought does not address these phenomena, and I find in your lecture a very important contribution to addressing these very issues. Think about the end of history, Fukuyama, think about the idea that here we are, we realized this utopia, and then when we saw that it doesn't function, we fall back to the two points that you outlined, that it still doesn't exist, that it somehow transcends our categories of today. Hence, I think that my main question would be how you envisage this relation between ideology and utopian thought, or have you for example commented upon different strands, such as the sociology of knowledge by Karl Mannheim, or with this sort of tradition. Basically, what's your conception of ideology and utopia?

Tamara Petrović Trifunović

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Keeping in mind that utopian thinking should not necessarily be understood as a set of injunctions for immediate action, I still have a question regarding the possibility of realization of utopian thinking in the sphere of professional politics and governance. While in theoretical work and in everyday life of the individual (but also as a constituent of the politics of resistance), the goal of relying on utopian thinking in coping with and in overcoming the conditions of our situation seems attainable if not necessary, what do you envisage as constraints in putting in motion and (maybe more importantly) continually relying on utopian thinking by those occupying the positions of political power? This is more so taking into account the inherent constraints of political sphere and the role of political discourse in the perpetuation of the symbolic domination and the status quo.

That is: even if the hypothetical political actor is determined to overcome those constraints, what do you see as obstacles to stepping out of the politics-as-usual in contemporary societies? Politics-as-usual here being understood as the politics of the possible encompassing some elements of moralism (where utopian is not always rhetorically most effective) together with tendencies towards the narrowing of the discursive space for discussion.

In other words, how do the criteria of (im)possibility, in your opinion, differ between theoretical and political fields?

Raymond Geuss

May I try to respond to these in reverse order? The third question is about the role of utopian thinking in actual politics. You talked a bit about obstacles to stepping out of the everyday form of politics and about the conditions under which politicians might constantly appeal to utopian speculation. I have a former student who is a professor in South Africa, who constantly is confronted with the question – during the struggle in South Africa against apartheid, politicians continually appealed to something which is a form of moralizing discourse, namely natural rights. If you look at the way the African National Congress and their representatives formulated their demands, they were in terms of human rights. And the idea was that human rights were a transcendent, non-empirically specifiable entity, and they played a role in this. From the South-African perspective, I am constantly getting people who say: you say that human rights don't exist, but that is a very unrealistic position to take. Look, you can't understand what happened in South Africa if you think that human rights are merely an illusion. That's what the people thought they were doing, you have to take that seriously.

And, my view is that of course one must take very seriously what people think, and if one wants to be a realist in politics one has to correctly cognize what people think, what views they have, what concepts they hold, and one must have a good, clear idea of what the power structures are. But, from the fact that you need to understand these things correctly in order to be politically effective, it doesn't follow that you need to endorse them. It is the case that in South Africa people thought that natural rights, human rights were the thing that motivated them to do what they did. But all sorts of things can motivate people to act, from the fact that you recognize that I'm motivated to act by some conception it doesn't follow that I need to endorse that conception. Think of Lukacs who talks about the English Civil War, he says the English thought they were arguing about the nature of the Eucharist, whereas they were arguing about something completely different. So I would say that that's the sort of answer I'd give to that, you have to both look at the internal perspective and the external perspective; in other words, you're not honouring people by endorsing what you have good reason to think is a misconception on their part, even if they've used that misconception to get a goal that you think is a good goal. I think it's part of the responsibility of intellectuals to take seriously what people think, take it very seriously, but also not simply to identify themselves with whatever they happen to think. That's the kernel of correctness in Lukacs' theory about imputed class consciousness. You have to know what people think, but you have to be able to have an analysis of the situation which allows you to judge that.

Aleksandar, I come from a particular context, I've lived for 20 years in Britain in a university where the only philosophical activity available is a certain pretty debased form of analytical philosophy, which still believes that there are facts and there is an ontological distinction between what's possible and what's not, and you have to take account of the facts. So I'm very keen to fight a particular battle, which is a battle which says that, no, the facts are not everything, and even talking

about the facts means you've construed the facts in a particular way. In a way, that's probably irrelevant to people in this room, because you don't need to be told that, you're interested in more sophisticated things. In a way, I do speak as if utopianism is something good but, of course, you're absolutely right, utopianism is good if you mean by utopianism the view that the world is not constituted simply by facts that are pre-given. Compared to that, the theoretical position that recognizes that, in order to even see what the facts are, you have to go beyond them, utopianism in that sense is necessary and good.

But that doesn't mean that every particular configuration of utopian thought is good, and you're absolutely right, neoliberalism is a form of utopian thought that is deeply ideological. The free market is a construct, it never exists, and in fact we have good reason for thinking, not only that it does not exist, but that it never could exist, because it's dependent. You can't marketize everything, because the market presupposes an existing structure, which allows the market to operate, which can't itself be marketized. So the market, by its very nature, can't be the end of the story; it's inherently contradictory, but it is a utopia, and it has the structure that you can always say: it doesn't work because we don't have enough of the market. So all things that are associated with that, the idea that market is perfect, that it's never wrong – I have a friend that works in the publishing industry, who publishes economics books, and he says: an economist is a person who thinks that the market is never wrong, except in the case of their own books. And in a way that's telling. So I agree with that completely.

Then of course, you're going to say (and its perfectly legitimate) if it's not the case that all forms of utopia are good, how do we tell which ones are good and which are bad, and then of course I say what you know I will say, which is that you can give some general principles about that, such as the ones that are cognitively closer to what we see the reality is like, but with those general principles you can't get an algorithm that will separate them, in the final analysis you will have to decide on the basis of contextual factors. Then you are going to have to ask me what context means, of course. I've been through this – and then I'm going to have to say: context itself is something that can only be contextually determined. And then you're going to say, well at that point, doesn't anything go? And I'm going to say no, it doesn't follow from the fact that everything is contextual, and that you can only say contextually what counts as the context, that you can't make some distinction between what is reasonably to be taken as context. So I say, it depends on the context, you say – what's the context; I say the context is contextually specified; you say how do I contextually specify the context; I say, that is something that can only be contextually specified. Then you say, haven't you lost the plot there, and I say – no, because to say that what the context is can only be contextually specified is not to say there are no criteria at all for saying what it is, it's to say that the criteria that there are, are in that context. So, from the fact that there is always a further context, it doesn't follow that in any given context, anything goes as the next context. And at that point, generally, the discussion stops, and I don't know whether it stops because I've won or lost, or because people have become fatigued.

Marjan, there are three entities, and you are asking quite rightly, again and again, about the relation between them. Actually, there are four – there's realism, which

I've talked about as the opposite of moralism. There's social critique, or ideological critique, there's genealogical analysis, and there is utopia. I take a lot of the questions to be essentially questions about the relation of those things. What's the relation between them - I wrote the first book on *Ideologiekritik*, then I wrote a book on genealogy. What's the relation between *Ideologiekritik* and genealogy? Then I wrote some stuff on realism - what's the difference between realism and *Ideologiekritik*, etc. So first there is a general question about the elucidation of that, second there is a specific supposition that you have, which is that, really, for the kinds of concepts that are most important in the modern world, your suspicion is that genealogical analysis will be the one that will turn out to be most useful. I don't myself think that genealogical analysis is going always to be as powerful perhaps as you take it to be.

In a genealogical analysis you analyse the way in which different components come together accidentally. Let me give one example - Foucault - we have a certain conception of feminine psychology. We had at a certain time in Western history this conception that certain features naturally come together, that women had a unitary psychic structure composed of a number of facts, and those facts were not put together at random, they held together, they had a kind of *Wahlverwandschaft*, there was an elective affinity between them. So, therefore, you can treat women as a unitary category, you don't have to worry about it. It's a *SelbstverstAendlichkeit*, something that's obvious, taken for granted. Genealogical analysis analyses ways in which that appearance of unity and semantic coherence is an appearance, and it's actually just the result of a contingent set of things. But of course, I can do that kind of genealogical analysis on almost anything, and it will be illuminating. So I can do that kind of analysis on my own conceptions of university career, etc, and there will be various components that come together there. From the fact that it's contingent, that these identities are contingent, it does not follow that I will reject them. I might think that the identity of being a philologist is something which has an accidental history, that's actually very good. So from the fact that I analyse them genealogically, I'm not necessarily motivated to reject them. To be motivated to reject them, it seems to me, I need also to see the role that they play sociologically in the world.

I need to see that thinking about women in that way is not something that everybody realizes and enjoys and now we can go on. I have to see not just that it had a certain history, but that it functions in a certain way, it functions repressively in a certain way. And I have to focus my analysis on that aspect of the situation too. So for me, an analysis that's genealogical, an analysis that's in your terms realistic in terms of the power relations that are involved in the constitution, and an analysis that's ideological, that talks about the way this functions in society, are compatible, and they are compatible parts of social criticism as a general enterprise. The general enterprise of social criticism needs a number of different ways of dealing with things, and we have to throw light on phenomena in a number of different ways, and I'd be very loath to reduce that simply to genealogical analysis. I think, for example, that for the notion of autonomy and the notion of freedom, it's very important to see how those notions actually function in the society in question. It isn't enough just to see where they come from and, I think, to see

how they function, you need to see that against the background of an imaginative conception.

Let me give you an example: my father was a steel worker in the United States, he worked on a railway that moves steel around from one part of the steel mill to another. I could have told him a genealogical story of great complexity about how that particular kind of work environment came to be organized, how it could have been organized differently, was organized differently in Japan, in other countries – it was only because there was a conjunction of this and that that the identity of a worker got established. This wouldn't in itself have moved him in any way to think. Every genealogy has within itself the possibility of being transformed into a pedagogy, in the terminology that I use; that is, he could, or would have seen it as a story of success. Yes, all of these accidents needed to come together for this wonderful thing to happen, this social role of a worker in the steel mill who has these things. To convince him to change his mind, you would have needed to talk more about the way in which that role prevented him from doing certain sorts of things, and that means contrasting it with certain possible other functions that could have been satisfied by elements of this conjunction of things. And to do that, I think you need a kind of imaginative going beyond of the actual story, which won't necessarily just be given by a genealogical analysis.

Predrag Milidrag

*Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory
University of Belgrade, Serbia*

Just two short questions. Could you tell us in what measure the philosophy of Ernst Bloch is still relevant for utopian thinking today. Is there any place in utopian thought today for his notion of the fatherland, *Heimat*? In Serbo-Croatian it is 'zavičaj'. The second question concerns negative utopia. Does utopian thought today think negative utopia at all? Is there any place for that notion? Is it necessary to define negative utopia through the totalitarian systems, or can we define it in some other way? For example, the film trilogy *Matrix* – a perfect world, perfectly virtual world, where people do not know it is virtual, and they live their lives without knowing that they are controlled all the time. Is it a kind of negative utopia; is, after all, negative utopia a utopia at all?

Božidar Filipović

*Faculty of Philosophy
University of Belgrade, Serbia*

My questions have already been to some extent answered today. They are not so interesting and intriguing. In order to pose the questions, I have to underline three important moments of your presentations today and yesterday. You have said that a 'utopian proposal cannot be directly implemented and acted upon', or, in other words, utopia is 'not a blueprint'. You have also been critical about the privileged position or viewpoint of the colonial master. We should 'abandon the literary fiction of an author who purportedly surveys a society at rest, and takes it all in'. And finally you said that 'it is not difficult to see that human society will never exist

without conflicts'. I'm pointing out these because of the question of criteria. When I say criteria I mean criteria for distinguishing between utopia and non-utopia, and by non-utopia I don't mean dystopia or negative utopia, I mean any political project. On the other side, I think that it's important to raise the question of criteria for distinguishing between utopian and non-utopian thinking. To be more precise, my question is, is it possible to have utopia without a privileged position, the viewpoint of the colonial master? How to know whether some society is close or closer to the utopian ideal, and some other further from it? And, if we have utopian projects of negotiation, or consent, can there be such a thing as unintended utopia, utopia without subjects, without privileged actors or position who will tell us what utopia is and what is not?

Also, you said something about the difference between utopia as totality, as total society which is included in utopia, and utopia as micro-utopia or micro-project. And you said something about the relationship between, on the one side, desires, needs, preferences and acting, and how this is connected. My question is, do we need experimental or empirical utopias to test all possibilities? Is it possible, if we don't have micro-utopia, but just the totality or whole society – can we test those relations between acting and wishing, acting and needs, preferences and so on?

Bojana Radovanović

*Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory,
University of Belgrade, Serbia*

The variety of utopia that you are in favour of, if I understood correctly, is the one that focuses, not on the picture of a perfect world, but rather on those human desires and needs that continue to torment us, but are incapable of being satisfied under present social circumstances. I would like to go back once more to needs, and I will build on what Jelena already said. You pointed out that needs are historically determined, some are luxurious, some are necessities. What is today a luxury, tomorrow might be a necessity. I wanted to ask whether utopian thought should be focused on luxuries or necessities, but I think you already said that it should be focused on vital human needs. However, what is a vital human need in the United States might be a luxury in Ethiopia. So should a utopian thinker from Ethiopia be focused on what is a vital need in Ethiopia or a luxury there, or what is a vital need or luxury in the States? Should there be some benchmark? Also, yesterday at the end of your talk you said that the main question is what should be done so that everyone leads a dignified life. And you said that the answer to this question is not the equality of resources, not the equality of material goods. This reminds me of Amartya Sen, who is also against the equality of material sources, because this equality wouldn't do justice, for example, to the disabled, who would need more resources to achieve the same level of functioning as someone who is not disabled. Today you said that, if I again interpreted correctly, that you are against this equality of material resources because of the instability. If everyone has the same amount of resources today, tomorrow we would again end up in inequality due to exchange. So is this the only reason? Finally, I would like to ask you how you would define dignified life, whether it is dependent on context or not.

Raymond Geuss

May I start with Predrag. Ernst Bloch. There is one thing in Ernst Bloch that I think is of exceptional importance and that is his notion of excess, or his notion of going beyond, or his notion of surplus. And his idea that even minimally taking account of the world appropriately means going beyond what in some sense is the mere content of the experience. I think that's really important, to have some notion of a semantic. I've always thought that Marx talks about *Mehrwert*, and, in a way, Bloch talks about *Mehrsinn*, surplus meaning. I've always thought this is absolutely crucial, and you can't find it in many other people (you find it in Adorno). Then you asked the specific question about *Heimat*, and that of course is a very difficult concept to deal with. I don't have any solutions to this, but I think it is important to try to detach a reasonable and laudable attachment to one's local context from nationalism. The neoliberal model is the model of a flat world, and we don't want to live in a flat world. I want to come to Belgrade, because I don't want to think I'm in Rimini or in Duesseldorf when I'm in Belgrade. If I am in Belgrade, I want Belgrade to be itself, and to be in some sense expressive of the people who are here, to be an appropriate locus, a place. It's of course an unsolved problem, how you can maintain that theoretically and practically and yet avoid some of the evils associated with excessive nationalism. And I have no solution to that, but, within limits, then, I would say that, yes, I think there's nothing wrong with Serbs wanting to live in a Serbian place where they feel at home. That's a perfectly reasonable thing to do. The crucial thing is detaching that from nationalism, and, of course, as you know, in a lot of cases, people have found that it's possible to cultivate certain local traditions better in a non-national context. The big hope of the European Union was that a lot of small states wouldn't need to be nationalistic in a politically deleterious way because they would have security, you wouldn't need to have a militarized Belgium because Belgium would be in a larger context in which some of its security needs would be met, and so you could get rid of the distorting influence of a lot of these structures and you could concentrate on other things. I know that is no solution to the problem, but that's the best I can say about that.

The second question was about negative utopia and, of course, I think that there are two slightly different things there. One is the notion of dystopia, and the other is the notion of negative utopia. The notion of a dystopia is the notion of an exaggeratedly bad place, a place which is extremely bad. The notion of a negative utopia is the notion of an imaginary state of affairs which would be better than the state of affairs that's presented in a work of literature. When Adorno says that Berg's *Wozzeck* is a kind of negative utopia, it means that you should read that work in the context of it having utopian significance, although you can't formulate what the utopian significance is, it points out the negativity in that state of affairs. And doing that makes you more aware of the possibility and necessity of something else. And I think that's a slightly different structure from the structure of dystopia. And the question about whether we can only imagine dystopia relative to totalitarian regimes: no, I think we can imagine all sorts of dystopias that are not particularly connected with what we know about totalitarian regimes. There's a very nice neoliberal dystopia that we can imagine, of course not.

Božidar, three questions there. The possibility of any kind of utopian thinking without a privileged standpoint. Well, yes and no, namely, as I said in response to the earlier question, of course utopia has to presuppose that there is a kind of privileged standpoint in the sense that a utopian theorist has to think that he or she has analysed a problem relative to which they have a better solution, there is something definitive about that. So to that extent there has to be a privileged position. But, of course, when we talk about the privileged position of a colonial administrator, we don't mean the privileged position in that sense. The colonial administrator has a privileged position that is connected to a whole apparatus of power. Every time I make an affirmation, in some sense I'm claiming a privilege because I'm claiming that what I'm saying is right. If privilege means privilege in that sense, then yes of course. But if privilege means privilege in the sense in which we train people in Cambridge and they go to India and have the power of life and death in this whole area, then not privilege in that sense.

Then there was a question about testing and utopia. That's of course the Popper question, namely isn't there some way in which you've left the realm of that which is testable, if you have a project that is not piecemeal but universal. Because if you have a universal project, the notion of testing the project makes no sense. Of course, I can drink water once and then twice, but I can't live my life and then live it over again, I can't live my first life as an experiment, and then do it the second time around learning from that. There's some way in which testing doesn't play a role in this. There's some way in which testing can't play the kind of role in human life as a whole that it plays in experimental science. And that's my answer to that, namely that I think it's not a problem with the theory, it's a problem with human life, that in some sense we have to live our lives as the unique phenomena that we know them to be. We can't repeat them, human societies can't ever go back. And that means that there are going to be limits on testing, testability and the role of testability doesn't mean there is no place where you can talk about testability, but it will depend on very complicated analogies, thinking analogically about the Roman Empire, about Japan, etc. It won't be a test in the standard way, but that's not an objection to utopian thinking, it's a fact about human life. And then your third question was about unintended utopias. Yes, the genuine utopia would be one in which you wouldn't know you were living in a utopia. Because why would you have to know it's utopia if it were completely perfect?

Bojana, another very important thing. And here again I'm on weak ground, I know. This is the question of what used to be called in critical theory the *Adresaten der Theorie*, who is the theory directed at. Does the Ethiopian theoretician direct her discourse to other Ethiopians, to everyone in Africa, to everyone in the world, to some imaginary cosmopolitan community, etc. And then, won't there be parallel differences in what counts as needs? The second question is about dignified life. The answer to that is: I don't see that one of those can possibly exclude the other. You can't nowadays, it seems to me, talk just to a Serbian audience or just to an Ethiopian audience, or just to an American audience, because the world is actually a place in which communication takes place. And you're not going to be able to. So it seems to me you're absolutely right, there's going to have to be a really complicated process of mediation involved, in which you take account of what's happening in the

rest of the world, but you also direct your statements to the people you are actually talking to. Let me take a better example, Somalia. As you know, in Britain it's a big problem that many Somalians think it's part of their social life, their form of life that there be genital mutilation of women, they engage in genital mutilation. Until very recently, the British government did not prosecute those people. It was a big change about six or seven years ago, when the government decided they were not going to allow Somali immigrants to genitally mutilate their girls, they were going to be prosecuted for that. They passed the law that said that doctors who suspected this had the responsibility and duty to report this, and they would be prosecuted. So you can't any more simply direct your remarks about what is a vital necessity to the Somali community or to the British community or to the worldwide community, you have to take account of all those at the same time. Now, how you're going to do that, I wish I had an answer to that question but I don't.

Dignified life – you're right, I don't know what to say about that, but let me give you an example of what I have in mind. At one time you could lead a perfectly good, simple life – this is perhaps an imaginative embellishment of what was actually the case, but you could buy good, nourishing brown bread that wasn't very expensive, wasn't very high quality, but you could eat bread, you could eat paprika, you could eat some cheese, wasn't very high quality, but it was available. We are moving now, in Britain, to a world where you can't get simple nourishing food unless you have a lot of money. If you go to the shops and buy what is on offer there, you're poisoning yourself. You're getting agro junk that's produced, that tastes like nothing, has addictive substances in it. And if you want to get something that is actually eatable you have to pay more money for that. So you're connecting the possibility of leading a decent life with having enough money to do that.

I'm not saying that I think it's irrelevant how goods are distributed, I'm not saying it's irrelevant whether many people have a lot and nobody has anything. Of course it's important that we don't have ten wealthy people who own the world. But what I'm saying is, just as Marx said, don't focus on distribution, focus on production, focus on relations of production, not of distribution. If you focus on relations of distribution you're never going to get anywhere at all. That doesn't mean that distribution is irrelevant, it doesn't mean that at all, it means you are only going to understand what's going on if you don't focus on the subordinate phenomenon, the distribution, and you get to the root of it, namely you get at the ways in which it's produced. And that's what I'm saying, when I say of course you should think about distribution of medical services, etc, but don't fall into the trap of thinking you can understand everything simply by assuming that human value is defined by monetary resources, and therefore we have to distribute them.

Think that there's something to that, and independent of that, and it's not disconnected from that, but it is something like leading a decent, dignified life, having the ability to get what you need, and you can do that, you can imagine a society in which you can do that even though there are still discrepancies in people's income. I think that was the thing Marx thought, of course there will be differences in people's consumption habits, some will consume more, some less, but basically there was enough for everyone. Think of Harry Frankfurt's objection: it isn't important that everybody gets the same, it's important that everyone gets enough. Or think

of the book by Avishai Margalit about the decent society, that's what I'm saying. Don't follow rules and think: we accept that everything's going to be monetarized, we accept that, of course the whole world is going to be monetarized, and now we look at the distribution of monetary resources, that's all we have to do. What I'm saying is don't think about it that way, think about it in terms of actual human self-affirmation, activity, leading a decent life, dignified life, look at that and look at patterns of distribution as connected to that, and look at the way this is possible in a given society relative to different patterns of distribution.

Dorde Pavićević

*Faculty of Political Sciences
University of Belgrade, Serbia*

One question is about the conditions of possibility. You said that you're against direct realization of any utopia and whether this includes some kind of self-reflection – I'm thinking about direct realization in terms of revolution, external intervention, like Plato thinks about the external ruler. If we have to restrict ourselves in the realization of our utopian ideas, does this include a kind of self-reflection that we have to think that part of our ideas is utopian? In terms that we cannot expect that we can realize them directly, and we have to accept some stubborn facts about reality, life or to adapt our mode of social and political action to these facts. I'm asking this because I think that most of utopian thinkers – we are considering them utopian – were not self-consciously utopian, in terms that they believed that their ideas were utopian. I'm thinking about 19th century thinkers, for example Saint-Simon, Fourier or even nationalist utopias like Manzini or ideas about harmony, inside the national state. To be brief and precise, I will restrict myself to one other question. I'm trying to figure out what is the difference between your conception of utopia and many other theories of realistic utopia that are based on Rousseau's injunction that we have to take account of men as they are and laws as they might be. My question is whether there is any essential distinction between this conception (later Rawls, for example, has this idea of a realistic utopia, even some sociologists like Olin Wright have an idea of real utopia) and your conception of utopia?

Rastko Jovanov

*Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory,
University of Belgrade, Serbia*

I'm going to be very brief. The first question is a methodological one, as it should be in every discussion. I cannot see the place of utopian thinking in philosophy, the space of that thinking in the philosophical field. Where is it? If I'm going to write in those utopian terms, am I going to write as a practical philosopher or as a practical politician, or is it the same as *theoretische Vernunft*? Also, do you want to rehabilitate utopian thinking, or do you think that utopian thinking should be our new way of critical thinking, because thinking is always a way of critical thinking? It's critical of *Dasein*, *Institution*, *bestehende Institution*. In that manner, how can you defend utopian thinking against those liberal criticisms of utopia from the middle of the last century? 1947, utopian nationalism, Popper, and after that, in the

50s and 60s, they criticized utopian thinking as a way of thought that leads not to peace but to struggle. I'm not fond of that, but my question is how you intend to defend your way of thinking against those liberal criticisms of utopian thought? Utopian thinking emerges after the First World War, Mannheim, Buber, Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Bloch – why? Where do you find a fruitful field for utopia – in international law. Why? Because we still don't have any stable definition in international law. And utopia should be there where the struggle is.

Petar Bojanić

*Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory,
University of Belgrade, Serbia*

Just two questions. One is some kind of invitation for you to explain to us, because you sent us this second chapter of your new book, *Realism and the Relativity of Judgement*, and you didn't send us the first chapter, "Dystopia and Elements". You used this chapter several times in the beginning of your lecture. This chapter is very interesting because you are talking about analytical philosophy. Would you be kind to tell us where is the place of utopian thinking in philosophy, probably in some kind of antagonism to political philosophy. Second, I'm not sure that this is one possible kind of utopia or paradise. Here you don't have a group, you have one agent (the egg), there is no collective intentionality, group agency, you have digestion, probably collective, but you know very well – I mentioned that in Fourier, for example, you have the action without limits, where he imagined a huge work with 500 000 people to change something in Sahara. Or you have for example the big Babylon Tower, as a huge construction of group work, group agency and acting together. I'm asking this because generally we are making the group with some kind of language. Because you use direct action and immediate action several times in your text, but generally you mention Plato.

Utopia, as you said, is first of all a description, you are doing something with words, as we are doing today. Also, it is a literary genre, and at the beginning of the text you are talking about the commonplace, because *topos* is commonplace. In Aristotle's *Rhetoric* you have this commonplace as a possibility (if you are using commonplace all the time, here we have some kind of group constitution). This is important because this is not commonplace, this is *topos* without *topos*. On the second page you said that this is Plato, that construction of utopian thinking is something which is done only with words, that means language. In that place, *The Republic* (592a–b), Plato said, 'I understand', this is a dialogue, 'you mean the city whose establishment we have described', this is only by words, 'the city whose home is in the ideal, for I think that it can be found nowhere on earth'. 'Well, said I, perhaps there is a pattern laid out in heaven for him who wishes to contemplate it, and so beholding to constitute himself as citizen'. 'But', Plato said, 'it makes no difference whether it exists now or will ever come into being'. Here I'd like to have your commentary – we are using some kind of projection, using language not in a performative way – I didn't plan to talk, as I saw that all the others are engaged, but I'd like to talk because I'm obliged to be part of the group. Here we have some kind of projection in utopian thinking, and this projection could be something that connects us.

Raymond Geuss

First Dörde. As you know, I have a lot of criticisms of Rorty, but he did say one thing that I thought is right, and I think it's a quotation from someone else. He says 'it's a sign of civilization that you can know that your own beliefs are contingent, your own values are contingent, and you can stand by them'. Not of course in all circumstances, but I can see that if I hadn't been born in the United States in a particular window of time and contingently had the education that I had, which was only possible during a brief period of time, I wouldn't have the values that I have. The values that I have are highly contingent and problematic, and yet I stand for some of them. I think that's the answer to your question about utopians who do or do not realize they are being utopians. I want to say, just as in every other case – think of Schiller between *Naïve* and *Sentimentalistiche Dichtung*, there are naïve poets who just talk about the world, and there are sentimental poets who reflect upon their own ways of looking at the world. And these are two different ways of being a poet. There are different ways of being utopian – there are people who make utopian projections but do not know they are utopian, there are people who do things, like the people who set up the Limoge cooperative, who don't realize they are engaged in a project that will work for 100 years but will stop working. There are unreflective and reflective people. In the modern period, we have little alternative but to be reflective about what we do. But I don't see there is any reason why I can't quite rightly say I'm committed to some sorts of views, I know that's utopian, they are not going to come about, but the very fact that I stand by them is a cultural fact.

Rousseau and realistic utopia. My problem with Rawls' notion of realistic utopia is that it seems to me his realistic utopia is neither realistic nor is it utopian. It's not realistic because it's never going to come about, it's not utopian because it's just an idealized ideological description of the American form of government, so it's not utopian, it's not really different from what exists. So for me, that's an instance of an ideological construct, not a utopian one. I know that's not an answer to your question, and I wish I could give a better one. There's nothing in general in my way of thinking which says that this can't be possible. As I said in response to Predrag, there are different forms – one is the utopia that can be realized, then there's a Kantian utopia which has the form of something which inherently can't be, and then there are utopias which are opening up different ways of thinking about things, but not actually making a view on things. So there is nothing in my view that makes that impossible.

Rastko, I must confess that I'm not actually that interested in philosophy *per se*, I'm not interested in disciplinary boundaries, I think that philosophy has to be integrated into the rest of the world, and I come from a culture where there's what seems to be a stultifying and demented interest in patrolling the boundaries of that which is philosophy. The boundaries of philosophy are clear, everything that's not philosophy is devalued, and I think the result of that is that philosophy becomes more and more limited. In Oxford you can't study philosophy without another subject, in Cambridge you have a single subject in philosophy. And that means that the only topic is the structure of the human mind and language. It strikes me they are very important topics, but they are not all. There is no aesthetics, political

philosophy, no real ethics. Bertrand Russell says in his 1910 book: ethics is not about acting, it's about the structure of propositions that have a certain form. That's exactly what I'm trying to get as far away from as possible. I want to say ethics has to do with acting, with good acting and of course the structure of propositions about what is good is an important topic to study, but not to the detriment of thinking about pictures, action, about getting yourself together and all of this. So, I think my real response to you is maybe what I do isn't philosophy and maybe this analysis of utopian thinking isn't really relevant to philosophy as it's constituted now. I wouldn't be terribly concerned by that, because sometimes in my life I've been in philosophy faculty, sometimes in political science. I'm more interested in thinking about things than in disciplinary boundaries, I think disciplines are necessary but the boundaries, the imposition of boundaries is becoming increasingly a detriment to serious thought, rather than a contribution to it.

Your second question was about the liberal criticisms of utopian thinking after the war, and actually, in a way, the whole project is directed against Popper and against Berlin. This is all against the poverty of utopianism and the *Open Society and Its Enemies*, so I can't say in one sentence what my response to it is, because my response is that we should continue to do this in a way which makes sense, which is different from anything he said. As I said in couple of places in the lecture, I try to turn some of his points against him. He thinks that because we can't predict the future of science we can't have utopian thinking. But, of course, you can turn that conclusion around, you can say because we can't predict the future of science, how do we know what's going to be impossible tomorrow? So you can take that point and run exactly the opposite way with it. If you look at the paper actually *sotto voce*, between the lines, if you can think of footnotes to Popper between the lines of every paragraph, that's my answer to it, that's one way of seeing the whole paper.

The third thing you asked is why there is such an upsurge in utopian thinking after the First World War. Of course, there had been utopian thinking before that, there was More, Campanella, Fourier, we all know about this. But there was a big upsurge of it after the First World War. In Germany, which had been defeated – and it doesn't seem to me that you need to be a sociologist to think that being massively defeated in a war to which you've invested your national resources is a good breeding ground for trying to think about different ways of organizing the world. There's nothing worse than success. Success is bad, because it makes you complacent. Even worse than that is half-success. Britain thinks it won World War II. Well, yes and no. There were also the Yugoslavs, Russians and Americans, so it's not that they won World War II. That configuration allowed Britain to fail to take the kinds of thoughts about itself that people in the rest of Europe did, which is: there were problems before the war, we have to change things. In Britain people thought you could reconnect with those things and continue on. So winning the war is not very good, it makes you complacent, half-winning the war is bad because it makes you self-deceived. French have their own version of that, which is, 'we were all in the Resistance'. Well, not actually true. Losing a war, however, is also not a good thing. I mean, the conclusion is that war is not good, whether you win it or lose it. If you win it, you're stultified, if you lose it, you are destroyed. So I think that the outburst of utopian thinking at the end of the war was a response to poverty, degradation,

the clear sense that something had gone wrong, that people had to try something else out, and that released this flood of thought.

Petar, you didn't say this, but I'll try to put words in your mouth. There's a really important task which is the construction of agency, the construction of a 'we'. How do we become a 'we'? How do we get a sense that we have common purposes, common goals, and what role can utopian projects play in this? We were talking about the British political system, and the fact that the conservatives succeeded in convincing a large number of members of the working class to identify imaginatively with the aspirations to being members of the middle class. And if you can identify imaginatively with those aspirations, of course you've won the political discussion. A similar thing can happen if you engage in common projects. As you begin to engage in common projects, that's not just a question of thought or forms of thinking, it's a form of action, of interaction. If you have a common project, writing a grant, you'll meet every day, and if you meet every day you'll get to know one another, and if you get to know one another, that will lead to the generation of new needs, as Marx says – you'll want to see one another. I don't mean to reduce that, and, as you said, this image is not an image of collective action, it's an image of collective consumption, and not even collective consumption. I absolutely agree that that's not a model for human life, human life has to be more active and has to be about the constitution of agency, collective agency.

This is, however, an image of a peasant's idea. If you're a peasant in the 16th century, you might have the idea that it would be nice not to have to have collective action. The peasants didn't have to be told about collective activities then, they were out in the fields all the time in collective activities. Their utopian conception was Sabbath, end of the day, rest like this. That's a utopian conception, it's not a good utopian conception for us, because we are confronted with completely different problems. We are confronted with the problem of getting ourselves together, constituting ourselves as subjects who can't be pushed around by other people, and who have a locus of our own generation of thoughts and actions and values. I completely agree with that and think that it's tremendously important, but I would say that in that project of collective action, words can play a role and they must play a role, and they'll play a role in different ways. They will play a role in everyday interactions in which you talk with one another, everyday forms of discourse, they'll play the role of essays you might write and read together. They'll play different sorts of roles and I want to expand the spectrum of things that can play a role in that. So, construction of agency. And that's connected of course with what you quite rightly said – that a lot of utopias are connected with projective uses of language, rather than interactive uses, we're projecting different ways in which we could talk with one another.

Then finally you ask about analytical philosophy; well I've written this paper in the book called 'Dystopia, the Elements', which is about why I think analytical philosophy had an important historical role around the time of the First World War, but is actually now completely run out of steam and is now rather repressive and an impoverishing way of thinking about the world. That's what's in the first chapter of the book there. And that's part of the project of trying to defend at the same time utopianism and criticism: thinking of the task of utopian thinking, criticism

and these tasks of the positive generation of collective forms of agency. I'm thinking that analytical philosophy plays little positive role in any of these. It played a certain positive role in criticism for a while, and still does. Analytical philosophy has one strength which is the attention to the critical use of language, which is very important. We must be clear about the language we use, about the meanings we use, but there is no such thing as absolute clarity. Absolute clarity does not exist, and the pursuit of clarity in analytical philosophy has become an end in itself in a way that is self-destructive. To say that something is clear is to say it's clear enough for me in a context in which I'm trying to do something, and that's not an absolute magnitude, that's a relative magnitude. To absolutize that, as certain form of analytical philosophy does, is a mistake. I try to talk about that there, and in another paper that I wrote in the last collection called *Vix Intellegitur*, which is about Cicero's comment on Thucydides, which is that some of the sentences in Thucydides can barely be understood, and what does it say about the world, if you have a major historian that's written statements that can barely be understood. And why certain forms of failure of complete clarity might have some value and how in any case the idea that clarity was an absolute magnitude is a mistake.