

Utopian/Dystopian Visions: Plato, Huxley, Orwell

Nic Panagopoulos*

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

Corresponding Author: Nic Panagopoulos, E-mail: npanagop@enl.uoa.gr

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: January 04, 2020

Accepted: March 23, 2020

Published: April 30, 2020

Volume: 8 Issue: 2

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

Keywords:

Utopia,

Dystopia,

Speculative Fiction,

Social Engineering,

Cultural Politics,

Censorship

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to theorize two twentieth-century fictional dystopias, *Brave New World* (2013) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984), using Plato's political dialogues. It explores not only how these three authors' utopian/dystopian visions compare as types of narrative, but also how possible, desirable, and useful their imagined societies may be, and for whom. By examining where the *Republic*, *Brave New World*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* stand on such issues as social engineering, censorship, cultural and sexual politics, the paper allows them to inform and critique each other, hoping to reveal in the process what may or may not have changed in utopian thinking since Plato wrote his seminal work. It appears that the social import of speculative fiction is ambivalent, for not only may it lend itself to totalitarian appropriation and application—as seems to have been the case with *The Republic*—but it may also constitute a means of critiquing the existing status quo by conceptualizing different ways of thinking and being, thereby allowing for the possibility of change.

INTRODUCTION

We usually imagine utopias as communitarian societies, such as the one proposed in Sir Thomas More's, *Utopia* (2003), yet it is easy to forget that Capitalism also began as a utopian project in early modernity promising unlimited individual and social progress through a combination of unfettered private enterprise and "trickle-down" economics. The early twentieth century subsequently saw totalitarian regimes of all hues offering radical alternatives to parliamentary democracy, enticing or coercing the citizenry to trade in its civil rights and liberties for paternalistic government in a social experiment that cost countless of lives. Historically, dystopias have the habit of presenting themselves as utopias to conceal the fact that they are promoting agendas quite contrary not only to their subjects' interests but also their stated aims. No-one, perhaps, understood this better than George Orwell, who had learned from his experience in the Spanish Civil War that...

All historical changes finally boil down to the replacement of one ruling class by another. All talk about democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity, all revolutionary movements, all visions of Utopia, or "the classless society", or "the Kingdom of Heaven on earth", are humbug ... covering the ambitions of some new class which is elbowing its way to power. (Orwell, 1947)

Orwell's comments come from his 1946 review of James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution* (1960) which argued that the two ideologies of the superpowers would one day merge in a global bureaucracy run by technocrats. Besides its relevance to the post-Cold War era of globalized capital where we are told that history has ended with the triumph of Western liberal democracy,¹ Burnham's predictive sociology may be useful in theorizing such technocratic dystopias as *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which ideological conflicts have either been eradicated or are used as an alibi by the ruling elite to enforce a scientific dictatorship on a global scale.

However, more useful in unraveling the complexities of Huxley's and Orwell's utopian/dystopian visions may be Plato's *Republic*, the first social engineering project in Western culture which set the stage for subsequent discussions of ideal societies in scientific, philosophical, and fictional terms. In the present paper, I begin by arguing that it is difficult to distinguish between fictional utopias and dystopias not only because of the indeterminacy of authorial intent and the irony which typifies the genre, but also because there can be no universal agreement as to what constitutes an ideal society. Moreover, even if we assume that a project like that outlined by Plato in *The Republic* is both desirable and realizable, the means necessary to carry it out may be deemed

unacceptable. What is interesting in the modern utopias/dystopias under investigation is that coercion is seen to be less effective than suggestion and punishment less useful than ideological indoctrination—ideas that we originally find in Plato's *Laws* (1975, 720d). Indeed, realized political utopias are able to employ both coercion and indoctrination when necessary, while the latter is preferred in today's globalized technocracy which covers up its collectivist nature with a neoliberal and philanthropic façade. In any case, whether we are speaking of militaristic or scientific dictatorships of the left or the right—fictionally represented by *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*, respectively—all forms of cultural as well as sexual expression are deemed to be the preserves of the state and appropriately fettered using a combination of cultural control and biopolitics that was first proposed in Plato's *Republic* more than two millennia ago. Nevertheless, for all the oppressive potential of utopian/dystopian visions and the totalitarian uses they may be put to, such narratives can also function as important vehicles for cultural critique, offering alternative perspectives on the official narratives or the totalizing rhetoric of a given regime. Thus, more important arguably than the way speculative fiction imagines alternative societies is its position on creative writing or *poiesis* itself, for to restrict or abolish that would be to deny the very conditions of its existence.

THE PROBLEM OF CLASSIFICATION AND AUTHORIAL INTENTION

Although a utopia may simply be “an imagined society put forward by its author as better than any existing society, past or present” (Morrison, 2007, p. 232), it is in fact a very elusive animal. Firstly, it is defined as much by what it includes as by what it excludes: those sociopolitical realities deemed by its author to be undesirable. Secondly, not only may one person's utopia be another's dystopia, but the categories are always more or less overlapping and difficult to delineate.² Thus, as Lyman Sargent originally observed, “[t]he major problem facing anyone interested in utopian literature is the definition, or more precisely, the limitation of the field” (Sargent, 1975, p. 137). Responding to Sargent's challenge, Antonis Balasopoulos has recently enumerated no less than ten different types of utopia/dystopia: 1. Satirical anti-Utopias, 2. Dogmatic fictional anti-Utopias, 3. Dogmatic non-fictional anti-Utopias, 4. Pre-emptive anti-Utopias, 5. Critical anti-utopias, 6. Dystopias of tragic failure, 7. Dystopias of authoritarian repression, 8. Dystopias of catastrophic contingency, 9. Nihilistic dystopias, and 10. Critical dystopias.³ Of course, as this critic admits, these categories depend largely on the interpretation of the texts to which they are applied and also inevitably converge. Nevertheless, Balasopoulos' nuanced albeit over-schematic typology aptly illustrates how the problem of definition is crucial in any discussion of the subject.

G.R.F. Ferrari, in *City and Soul in Plato's Republic*, singles out four different types of utopia: “idealistic,” “realistic,” “ironic,” and “writerly” (Ferrari, 2005, pp. 117-18), arguing that Plato's version cuts across all four of them. The *Republic* presents a society based on consummate reason

with the philosopher-king at the top of a more-or-less rigid class structure made up of Guardians, Auxiliaries, and Producers. However, one could argue that, in positing such a conflict-less and static world, the *Republic* attempts to abolish politics altogether. Given that Plato's magnum opus is considered the founding text of Western political philosophy, this could be something of a bad omen. *Brave New World* similarly presents a system which, by a combination of eugenics, biochemical control, and “hypnopaedia,” has brought about the so-called “ultimate revolution”⁴ after which society need not evolve any further. Oceania too, in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, has reached a kind of historical stasis in which social and personal development is arrested by means of a contrived state of permanent emergency, such as that theorized by Giorgio Agamben in *The State of Emergency* (2005). Thus, the systems presented in these utopian/dystopian visions can be said to aim at or to have achieved a final solution to humanity's problems, like that envisaged by Socrates when he says that “[t]here will be no end to the troubles of states, or indeed of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world” (Plato, 1987, 473d).

However, a closer reading of the *Republic*, *Brave New World*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* reveals that all the goals of their respective societies have not in fact been reached. At the beginning of Book VIII of the *Republic*, Socrates confesses that the all-wise rulers of Callipolis are unable to calculate the so-called “marriage number” without which it is impossible to maintain the eugenic separation of the different castes that make up the “good” or “beautiful city,” resulting in a “chaotic mixing of iron with silver and of bronze with gold” (Plato, 1987, 547a). The irony is that Socrates was married to a proverbially shrewish wife, Xanthippe, and so was unable to create an ideal domestic environment, even as he outlines his vision of the ideal state. Thus, it could be argued that, for all his optimistic rationalism, Plato despairs of being able to control human sexuality: it is the one thing that foils his plans to create a perfectly harmonious social system in which every citizen is content with their place and function. In Huxley's novel too, for all its plentiful supply of hallucinogenic drugs, the World State cannot stop some of its citizens from falling in love and feeling melancholy, or preferring Shakespeare to sex, pain to joy: the irrational element in the human soul cannot be entirely eradicated, it seems. Despite the gloomy picture that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* paints of the possibility of resistance, Orwell also adds something to the appendix of his novel which throws a spanner in the works of the Party's plans: the translation of such writers as Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Byron, and Dickens has proved so difficult for the Party, claims the frame narrator, that the final adoption of Newspeak has been postponed for the year 2050. The individual may be doomed in the coming totalitarian Superstate, implies Orwell, but the human spirit as expressed in great works of literature cannot be so easily suppressed. Thus, irony is employed by all three authors to signal gaps and inconsistencies in the official scripts of their respective utopias as well as in their full implementation, suggesting that not all is well in paradise.

The authorial intention behind philosophical and literary utopias/dystopias is invariably difficult to gauge, complicating the way we respond to and classify such works. The famous Orwellian critic Bernard Crick notes that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been read as “deterministic prophecy,” “science fiction,” “a humanistic satire on contemporary events,” and as “a total rejection of socialism of any kind” (Crick, 2007, p. 146). Crick’s personal preference is to view the novel as a social satire in the Swiftian mode—which is hardly easier to define—adding that “we should no more expect the future to resemble *Nineteen Eighty-Four* than we should expect to find the islands of Lilliput or Brobdingnag’ after reading *Gulliver’s Travels*” (Crick, 2007, p. 147). But things are not as simple or as apolitical as this critic suggests. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is arguably worse than being a dystopian vision of the future. As Richard Voorhees has observed, “[f]ar from being a picture of the totalitarianism of the future *1984* is, in countless details, a realistic picture of the totalitarianism of the present” (Voorhees, 1961, pp. 85-86). *Brave New World* is even more difficult to categorize, despite the author’s meta-fictional elucidations. Huxley referred to his futuristic novel as a “negative utopia,” and claimed that he wrote it in revolt against what he called the “horror of the Wellsian Utopia” (Huxley, 1969, p. 438). However, as Anthony Hitchens has observed, Huxley “often held and expressed diametrically opposed views,” while in *Brave New World*, “one can often detect strong hints of a vicarious approval of what is ostensibly being satirized” (Hitchens, 2003, p. xii). So is *Brave New World* a dystopia or a utopia? If like Orwell, Huxley wanted to tell his readers, “*Don’t let it happen. It depends on you*” (Crick, 1980, p. 395), his work could be unambiguously classified on the basis of authorial intent as a dystopia, or a “Pre-emptive anti-Utopia,” according to Balasopoulos’ scheme. But if Huxley, like Plato, is outlining what he considers the closest thing to an ideal society, then we would have to classify it as a utopia in disguise, a kind of ideological Trojan horse. The early-twentieth century produced many such speculative narratives designed to covertly promote the idea of the World State and act as a vehicle for the social Darwinist agenda of the scientific elite. H.G. Wells’ non-fictional *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* (1999) was subtitled “An Experiment in Prophecy,” whereas the utopian novel, *Men Like Gods* (2007), which clearly promotes Wells’ futuristic creed was described by the author as a “scientific fantasy” (Wells, 1934, p. x); but what is the difference, one might ask, between a prophecy and a fantasy. Michael Hoffman has called this kind of science fiction “predictive programming” which works by propagating “the illusion of an infallibly accurate vision of how the world is going to look in the future” (Hoffman, 2001, p. 205) that, once ingested on a cognitive level, become self-fulfilling prophecies, subtly conditioning readers to fatalistically accept the vision of the future presented to them.

Prophetic ability can only be verified after the event being prophesied, so to indulge in predictions of the future—utopian or dystopian—is to promote a certain ideology and a concomitant kind of social subject. As Louis Althusser

famously claimed, “in ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that expresses a will ... a hope, or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality” (Althusser, 2008, p. 234). Exploring this issue further, Balasopoulos has argued for a deconstruction of Mannheim’s distinction between *ideology* as a distortion which “occurs in the interests of preserving ‘a certain order’,” and *utopia* as one tending to “shatter the order of things prevailing at the time” (Balasopoulos, 2019, p. 59).⁶ However, the rhetorical sleight of hand in which what is merely proposed or imagined is presented as logically incontrovertible or teleologically inevitable is not the preserve of novelists like Aldous Huxley and H.G. Wells who dreamed of building a technocratic Eden on Earth in the twentieth century; philosophers have been known to practice it too. The form of the Platonic dialogue is intended to make it appear dialectical/dialogical rather than prescriptive or sermon-like, and sometimes this is achieved to masterful effect, as in the opening pages of the *Republic* in which Socrates debates with various sophists on the meaning of justice. However, in some dialogues, such as the *Laws*, there is little real debate because the conclusions have been drawn beforehand by the Platonic mouthpiece, and the interlocutors are ill-matched. Literary dialogues, on the other hand, may offer more room for discussion because they are not usually committed to promoting a particular political agenda. However, it is interesting to find a comparable false debate taking place between Mustapha Mond and John the Savage on individual freedom vs. collective happiness, in *Brave New World*, as well as between O’Brien and Winston Smith on the nature of power in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The dice are thus loaded in all kinds of utopian/dystopian narratives to conceal the fact that philosophical or scientific expertise, in itself, is no failsafe basis for political authority, nor indeed of social organization.

Plato has been accused by liberal theorists for being a totalitarian. Karl Popper, in *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1966), famously argued that Plato was a reactionary who rejected the emancipation of the individual that resulted from the rise of democracy in fifth-century Athens. If we define a totalitarian state as that in which the ends of society are not in dispute, the *Republic*, in enforcing the maximum degree of ideological consensus amongst its citizens, is indeed totalitarian. Ironically, it is often argued that the closest thing humanity has ever known to an ideal political system is the democracy which spawned Plato’s utopian visions, despite the fact that this was the same city which condemned Socrates to death for allegedly preaching heresies.⁷ Athens also limited the franchise to adult males and employed slaves; but it was a city which encouraged political debate and demanded participation of the citizens, not only in the deliberative and legislative process, but in government itself. What other kind of society, one might ask, would allow people to write such anti-democratic political tracts as the *Republic* if not a consummate democracy? In Plato’s *Laws*, too, the population of Magnesia is prevented from doing exactly what Socrates’ interlocutors were encouraged to do most of all: challenge what they believe and what they are told. Thus, it seems that Plato’s utopian/dystopian visions have the negative function

of confirming the importance of precisely those things which they seem to deny: freedom from coercion and freedom of thought. Leo Strauss, in his essay “Plato” (1987), has argued that this may have been the philosopher’s underlying intention, which, if true, would place the *Republic* in the same category of negative fictional utopias as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. However, Plato is writing about the needs of the state in a very specific albeit philosophical fashion and must be judged on the basis of the discourse he employs; one does not draft an extended manuscript of proposals dealing with every detail of social and political life as a mere rhetorical game.

SOCIAL ENGINEERING: THE QUESTION OF MEANS

A central presupposition of the present paper is that Plato was the first social engineer, viewing human beings as raw material to be fashioned and refashioned at will for the ultimate goal of creating an actual utopia on Earth—even if Socrates calls it a “city in speech” (Plato, 1987, 369a). It could be claimed that, even if Plato’s programme is impractical or only approximately realizable in day-to-day politics, it can still offer the statesman an ideal to aim at. However, as Donald R. Morrison points out, “the precondition for Callipolis is so dramatic, and the revolution it requires so total, that this utopian vision cannot be approached gradually” (Morrison, 2007, p. 244). All utopias, by their very nature, presuppose that existing social forces be neutralized so that the ideal society may be built on a socio-political *tabular rasa*, as it were. The *Republic* is no exception. As a culminating requirement for the city to come into being, Socrates proposes that the rulers “send out to the country all those in the city who happen to be older than ten” (Plato, 1987, 541a). What does Socrates mean by this surprising statement? It is possible that Socrates is implying that those whose basic education is complete will be useless for the Callipolis, and need to be exiled; but Socrates may also be euphemistically saying that everyone over the age of ten will have to be got rid of. Whichever way we interpret Plato’s words, their ramifications are disturbing and remind us of latter-day utopian/dystopian projects which included the wholesale elimination of undesirable citizens.

In *Brave New World*, dissent is nipped in the bud from birth and then systematically dissuaded by induced euphoria; only as a last resort are those dissatisfied by the regime physically removed by being exiled. One of the major disagreements between Orwell and Huxley is the latter’s belief that persuasion and suggestion were far more effective means of social control than coercion. Thus, recalling Michel Foucault’s argument that biopolitics superseded the death penalty as the prime means of social control in modernity (Foucault, 1990, p. 137-38), *Brave New World* regulates the citizen’s psychological development and mental processes in such a way as to preempt the need for the uglier methods of tyrannical rule practiced from time immemorial. As Huxley writes in *Brave New World Revisited* (1994),

control through the punishment of undesirable behaviour is less effective, in the long run, than control through the reinforcement of desirable behaviour by rewards, and

that government through terror works on the whole less well than government through the non-violent manipulation of the environment and of the thoughts and feelings of individual men, women and children. (Huxley, 1994, pp. 5-6)

Plato would have lauded Huxley’s preference for “soft power” over coercion. However, Orwell felt that such methods were unrealistic and contrary to the nature of power which can only affirm itself through conflict and opposition. “How does one man assert his power over another,” asks O’Brien; “Obedience is not enough. Unless he is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will and not his own?” (Orwell, 1984, pp. 229-230) Nevertheless, the constant surveillance of the citizen is of paramount importance for Ingso, for if no-one is perceived to be disobeying, then the security apparatus would be redundant and the power of the state much curtailed. However, the telescreen is not only a means of rooting out subversive activity, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; it would be practically impossible, in any case, for all the members of the Outer Party to be constantly scrutinized by the guards, as though in an enormous Panopticon. The primary function of the telescreen is to abolish the distinction between the private and the public so as to render the citizen physically and psychologically malleable. This is the main goal of biopolitics, after all. Just as children are encouraged to spy on their parents in Oceania and report any instance of “thoughtcrime,” so Plato pronounced in a way eerily prescient of twentieth-century dictatorships, “Anyone who makes any effort to assist the authorities in checking crime should be declared to be a great and perfect citizen of the state, winner of the prize for virtue” (Plato, 1975, 730b).

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as in Stalinist Russia, apprehended (or constructed) dissidents are erased from all official records, becoming “unpersons.” This is a much safer method of neutralizing potential threats in the socialist utopia of Ingso than public execution because it denies opponents of the regime the possibility of becoming martyrs and setting an example for others. Thus, as Winston realizes in the novel, “[h]e who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell, 1984, p. 213). The past is also thoroughly and systematically purged from people’s minds and hearts in *Brave New World* to make room for the scientific dictatorship masquerading as a Riviera hotel.⁸ “History is bunk” (Huxley, 2013, p. 38), explains the Resident Controller for Western Europe, “we don’t want people to be attracted by old things. We want them to like the new ones” (Huxley, 2013, p. 172). This would explain the mantras, “Ending is better than mending. The more stitches the less riches” (Orwell, 1984, p. 43) which are drummed into the citizens’ minds through hypnopædic indoctrination every night—just as consumerism is instilled into the consciousness of the modern citizen through endless advertizing. Moreover, one of the reasons why the regime encourages the New Worldians to be perennially intoxicated with the standard issue hallucinogenic drug is that it forces them to live in a constant present, without regard for past or future: “Was and will make me ill ... I take a gramme and only am” (Huxley, 2013, p. 89), recites Lenina Crowne as

she swallows her soma pill. Keeping the past alive is one of the main themes of Orwell's novel, and the reason why Winston Smith starts writing the diary which later becomes the basis of the book. As Krishan Kumar writes,

The importance of the past, as the only storehouse of alternative values and practices, is dwelt on throughout: in the old diary and the antique paperweight that Winston conceals and treasures, in the old-fashioned room above the junk-shop where the lovers meet, . . . in memories of his mother and sister, in the word "Shakespeare" that is on Winston's lips when he wakes from the dream. (Kumar, 1984, pp. 22-23)

In both *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Shakespeare possesses a signal importance for the rebels, not only because of the cultural capital which the Bard represents, but also because of his historical resonance. Totalitarian regimes of all ideological hues would like nothing better than to make humanist writers like Shakespeare unpersons; half the battle against individual freedom would then have been won.

This brings us to the question of censorship in the utopias/dystopias under investigation. Literature is mechanically produced in Orwell's novel, as in Book III of *Gulliver's Travels*, with the minimum of human intervention. Creative individuals, it seems, are deemed to be particularly dangerous to realized utopias. In *Brave New World* too, all the great cultural achievements of the past (e.g. ancient cities, mythologies, religions, works of art) are forbidden to everyone except the Resident Controllers. Mustapha Mond would therefore entirely agree with Plato that "some of the many authors of [classical] works have left us writings that constitute a danger" (Plato, 1975, 810b). Ironically, this would no doubt include Plato's dialogues too. Plato was the first to make mimetic art a political problem in Book III and X of the *Republic* where he argued that almost all existing poetry had to be banished from the ideal city as mendacious and morally corrupting for the Guardians. Totalitarian regimes also feel threatened by uncontrolled scientific research. In Plato's *Statesman*, for example, the Eleatic jokes that, if the laws of a given state were deemed inviolable, then all research leading to new knowledge would have to be outlawed, leading to the necessity of executing all those who showed themselves wiser than the law (Plato, 2003, 297d-300a). For Plato's mentor, Socrates, who paid for his love of knowledge with his life, this would not have been a funny proposition, but neither is it for Winston Smith who risks everything in order to research Oceania's history and find the occluded truth. Interestingly, "Newspeak has no word for 'science', and nothing in its vocabulary that expresses the empirical mode of thought" (Orwell, 1984, p. 249); to paraphrase one of the basic principles of Oceania, the ignorance of the citizen is the strength of the Party. Science is also viewed as a powerful social engineering tool in *Brave New World* that cannot be left to the discretion of scientists. As Mustapha Mond says, "all our science is just a cookery book, with an orthodox theory of cooking that nobody's allowed to question, and a list of recipes that mustn't be added to except by special permission from the head cook. I'm the head cook

now" (Huxley, 2013, p. 192). *Brave New World* suggests that, although unregulated art and science are both potentially subversive, art is the more dangerous cultural product since it can more easily escape state control.⁹ Although, as we have seen, the Appendix of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* paints a similar picture, more crucial ultimately for Orwell seems to be the shared objectivity of rational positivism, since, as Winston ruminates, "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows" (Orwell, 1984, p.73).

Plato held that all cultural activity had to be equally regulated by the rulers in the name of social and political stability. "Change," he wrote, "except in something evil, is extremely dangerous" (Plato, 1975, 797d). Callipolis therefore permits only a governmentally sanctioned form of religion, while Magnesia, the constitutional utopia of Plato's mature thought, also has laws against impiety and unacceptable religious beliefs. Just as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* religion has been replaced by the cult of Big Brother, the semi-divine leader whom all citizens must worship with complete self-abasement, so in *Brave New World* "Our Lord" has been replaced by "Our Ford" (Huxley, 2013, p. 21), the patron saint of the modern production line. Of highest political importance in *The Republic* is the education of the rulers, the unity of the city, and the correct ethos of the citizen; so, Plato advocates only those forms of cultural activity which, to his mind, promote these goals, banning everything else. However, content is relatively unimportant for the brand of censorship we find in modern utopias/dystopias—it does not really matter *what* the official deity is called. What matters for the regimes of *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is that citizens are denied genuine freedom of conscience and thought. Two plus two could thus be five, or anything else the authorities want it to be; Orwell makes clear that this is not so much a scientific as a political problem.

PRIVACY, SEX, AND THE LIBIDINAL ECONOMY

In modern times, Foucault has pioneered the analysis of the state's encroachment into what has traditionally been regarded as the private sphere, up to an including the subject's body and biological functions. It may surprise us to find, however, that this topic was not unknown to Plato, nor excluded from his social-engineering project. It is not uncommon to find Plato using the doctor/patient paradigm to describe the relationship between ruler and ruled, as when lying to the state is compared to someone in training lying to his doctor about his physical condition (Plato, 1987, 389b), or when laws are imposed on the citizen without explanation being likened to a slave-patient being treated by a slave-doctor (Plato, 1975, 720d). To the ancient Greeks who lived in tightly-knit communities in close quarters with their fellow citizens, the strict division between the public and private was unknown. Just as in Plato's Magnesia, marriage inspectors invade and survey the homes of citizens under the pretense of aiding family life (Plato, 1975, 784a), so, in modern totalitarian regimes, nothing that the citizen did in private should be allowed to go unseen, unrecorded, and unregulated. Plato thus seems to have harboured great mistrust for the institution of the

family and feared that all sorts of undesirable practices may go on undetected behind closed doors. As he writes in the *Laws*, “Our ideal, of course, is unlikely to be ever realized fully so long as we persist in our policy of allowing individuals to have their own private establishments, consisting of house, wife, children, and so on” (Plato, 1975, 807b). Thus, in Callipolis, procreation and child-rearing is entirely in the hands of the state, while in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the Party eventually intends to take children from their mothers at birth, “as one takes eggs from a hen” (Orwell, 1984, p. 230). Mothers actually feature prominently in the utopian/dystopian visions of Orwell and Huxley, as they do in their common source, *We*. The protagonist of Zamyatin’s novel, D-503, laments the fact that he has no mother of his own, while Winston Smith clings to the memories of his mother as a vital link to the unadulterated past. However, there is something anachronistic in the maternal figure that Winston recollects, while the selfless *caritas* that she represents appears as hapless in the sociopolitical realities of Oceania as the mother is in Huxley’s denatured World State in which children are not raised in homes but “hatcheries” (Huxley, 2013 p. 5). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as in *Brave New World*, the family as a source of private identity and security is anathema to the state, as it is in Plato’s political dialogues.

There are certain recommendations that Plato makes which, unadulterated, can be said to offer a theoretical basis for Communist totalitarian practices. There are also ways in which Capitalist utopias/dystopias seem to have taken Plato’s guidelines and reversed them so as to achieve the same results without appearing to be oppressive. A case in point is *Brave New World*’s position on sex. In the *Republic*, as in *Nineteen Eighty Four*, sex is divorced from pleasure and regarded by the regimes in question as merely a means of providing the state with new citizens. As O’Brien tells Winston, “Procreation will be an annual formality like the renewal of a ration card. We shall abolish the orgasm” (Orwell, 1984, p. 230). The added advantage of such a policy is that libidinous energies that might have been invested into fulfilling sexual relationships are sublimated and channeled into collectivist activities, such as war. Plato was a keen psychologist and although in his later writings he seems prepared to make concessions to accommodate the citizens’ physical desires into his political programme, in the *Republic*—which is also a soul-fashioning project—he is very strict about controlling the Guardians’ bodily appetites. As he writes, luxurious desires make a city “feverish” (Plato, 1987, 372e) and are “the sources of the worst evils for cities and individuals” (Plato, 1987, 373e). Huxley reverses this principle, making sex solely a means of recreation, in keeping with the general hedonistic outlook of the World State. Not only adults, but children are educated from an early age to indulge in non-procreative sexual activity without restraint and without emotional attachments. According to Freud’s repression hypothesis, this should result in rebellious behaviour and the breakdown of social order, but Huxley shows that, in a society which has abolished the family and by extension the Oedipus Complex, it is an even more effective means of social control than the most extreme enforced celibacy. Not

only is the city not destroyed by the “fever” of uncontrolled sexual passions, as Plato would have expected, but the citizens have no time or surplus energy to participate in any activity deemed dangerous to the state and cut (such as falling in love or reading Shakespeare). As Plato writes in the less puritanical *Laws*,

Every living creature has an instinctive love of satisfying desire whenever it occurs, and the craving to do so can fill a man’s whole being, so that he remains quite unmoved by the pleas that he should do anything except satisfy his lust for the pleasures of the body, so as to make himself immune to all discomfort. (Plato, 1975, 782d)

Thus, even if *Brave New World* promotes recreational sex—something which is only allowed for procreation in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—it is only in the interests of maintaining the status quo by inhibiting natural and free sexual relations; the objective in both works is the same: the total libidinal and, by extension, political control of the citizen.

If Plato could see what these authors have done with his wisdom, he would probably be taken aback, but it seems to keep society functioning harmoniously which is, after all, the primary goal of his own utopian project. Or is it? There is a passage in Book II of the *Republic* where Glaucon debates with Socrates about the so-called “city of pigs”: an alternative utopia to Callipolis in which people are said to live well-ordered and sensible lives, catering primarily for their physical needs and their security—indeed, very much as most people do in the modern world today. But the citizens of *huopolis* do no philosophy, and therefore neglect what was for Plato the most important constituent of human happiness, the cultivation of the soul. In Platonic terms, the “city of pigs” is a contradiction in terms because a *polis*, as the *Republic* tells us, is the social embodiment of justice and the love for the good, which animals presumably have no need for. Besides anticipating Aristotle’s distinction between *zein* and *eu zein*, biological as opposed to political life, the paradigm of *huopolis* suggests that, for Plato, the human soul loses its characteristically human quality when it leads a purely physical or hedonistic existence. However, this is exactly what Huxley’s vision of utopia is based on, and it seems to work. Thus, as Christopher Burlinson writes with regard to the plethora of animals that appear in More’s *Utopia* but which could also apply to Plato’s *huopolis*, “animals provide a figure in which the human and non-human can be brought together, where the differences between animals and humans are acknowledged but where their place in the world of our ethical concerns is re-evaluated” (Burlinson, 2008, p. 38).¹⁰ When we compare the “city of pigs” with *Brave New World*, certain difficult questions arise, such as whether human beings need philosophy to be happy. Perhaps, Plato is wrong in assuming that what he regards as the *sumum bonum* of political life, i.e. a philosophical utopia ruled over by philosopher-kings, is or should be subscribed to by all right-minded citizens. As Claude Lefort argues, “the whole utopian reorganization of *polis* life [in *The Republic*] is not only directed by the superior insight of the philosopher but has no other aim than to make possible the philosopher’s way of life” (Lefort, 1998,

p. 51). *Brave New World* also asks whether happiness based on unlimited drugs and sex is not *true* happiness. Does society actually need art, religion, and philosophy, or are these things expendable, a form of collective neurosis, as Huxley suggests? If we had to choose between contentment and art, or happiness and God, as the Savage is made to do in *Brave New World*, what would we choose? The answers that we might give to these questions reveal a fundamental disparity between the way Plato and the Greeks understood *eudemonia* and the way the moderns understand happiness, a difference predicated not only on the way the relationship between the animal and the human is conceptualized, but also on the hierarchy of values implicit in the classical Greek triad, *nous-psyche-soma*, or mind, soul, and body. Moreover, viewed from a political perspective, if the role of philosophy is to help people make choices, as Socrates demonstrates, then the regimes of *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are essentially the same in doing away with that need: slaves do not need philosophy, nor do those not required to make choices.

PLATO'S LEGACY: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Ironically, the practical value of Plato's political writings, regardless of what the philosopher intended, has turned out to be greater for those bent on founding dictatorships than for those genuinely interested in improving society. Indeed, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates warns against precisely such an eventuality when he asserts that writing is inherently vulnerable to misinterpretation, since it is "incapable of speaking in [its] own defense as ... of teaching the truth adequately" (Plato, 1995, 276c). What we are left with in such twentieth-century utopias/dystopias as *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is merely the shell of the Platonic ideal, i.e. the totalitarian social structure and the absolute authority figure of the philosopher-king in the guise of Big Brother or the Resident Controller. The ethical and political goal that Plato envisaged for his ideal city is absent. On the other hand, one could argue that the socially beneficial *telos* of Plato's political project would not justify the more-or-less oppressive means deemed necessary to achieve it, anyway. If so, then nothing much can be said to have changed in the two and a half millennia since the appearance of the first political utopia which proposed to put an end to history by crowning philosophers. What remains when the Nietzschean will-to-power flies in the face of Plato's political idealism is O'Brien's ultra-cynical view of government expounded in the Ministry of Love: "Power is not a means, it is an end. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power" (Orwell, 1984, p. 227).

More crucial, arguably, in a discussion of utopias/dystopias is not how speculative fiction envisages a better or a worse society, but where such narratives self-reflexively stand on the issue of freedom of expression and the intellectual and artistic forms which this may take. We have seen how Plato in the *Republic* takes issue with creative writers who do not follow strictly ethical principles in their work, but may represent the unseemly, corrupt, and immoral as freely as they do the beautiful, the just, and the good. Also,

in the *Laws*, the Athenian proclaims, "[n]o one should be allowed to show his work to any private person without first submitting it to the appointed assessors and to the Guardians of the Laws, and getting their approval" (Plato, 1975, 801d). However, is Plato entitled to condemn strictly non-philosophical ways of viewing the world, such as epic and tragic poetry, when he himself employs myths, allegories, symbols, and other figures of speech to teach—paradoxically—the difference between truth and falsehood? On the other hand, there is a certain consistency to Plato's thinking for, if a society had achieved the ideal state, any literature which promoted contrary opinions and entertained alternative values would indeed be dangerous for the health of the body politic. But, does not this contradict the very essence of the *polis*, which, as Balasopoulos following Aristotle has argued, resides in its plurality and heterogeneity (Balasopoulos, 2007, p. 133)?

If one could envisage an "ultimate revolution,"¹¹ that would more likely approximate Huxley's vision of society reduced to a bee colony in which human beings have been entirely deprived of their individuality and have been educated to "love their servitude" (Huxley, 1994, p. 154). Alternatively, social progress may be imagined as a species of "permanent revolution," but not in the sense that Marx and Engels describe in *The Holy Family* (1956) which Orwell can be said to parody through the state of permanent war in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, or even in Trotsky's transnational sense, reflected perhaps in the World State of Huxley's utopia/dystopia. The "permanent revolution" which speculative fiction encourages the reader to visualize may be closer to Nietzsche's notion of a "transvaluation" or "re-evaluation of all values" given that it does not allow any social ideal to escape critical scrutiny, including, paradoxically, the freedom to criticize itself. One could argue that herein lies a crucial difference between Plato's absolutist cultural theory and Socrates' dialectical method of debate, a difference which is not allowed to emerge as clearly as it could in the political dialogues since Socrates' voice is subsumed into Plato's and is never heard directly. Thus, we could assert that the social import of speculative fiction, philosophical or otherwise, is ambivalent, for not only may it lend itself to totalitarian appropriation and application—as seems to have been the case with *The Republic*—but it may also constitute a means of critiquing the existing status quo by conceptualizing different ways of thinking and being, thereby allowing for the possibility of change, which even Plato recognized as necessary "in something evil" (Plato, 1975, 797d).

END NOTES

1. This is the famous thesis of Frances Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), a book which ominously alludes to the provisional title of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "The Last Man in Europe," as well as to Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of "the last man."
2. See Laurence Davis (1999), "At Play in the Fields of Our Ford: Utopian Dystopianism in Atwood, Huxley, and Zemyatin", *Transformations of Utopia: Changing Views of the Perfect Society*, George Slusser, et al eds.

New York: AMS Press, pp. 205–214. Andrew Milner has traced the coinage of the terms “utopia” and “dystopia” to Thomas More and John Stuart Mill, respectively, adding that “simultaneously contradictory and complimentary meanings remain encoded in the subsequent history of the genre” (827). See Andrew Milner (2009), “Changing the Climate: The Politics of Dystopia,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 6, pp. 827-38.

3. See Antonis Balasopoulos (2006), “Anti-Utopia and Dystopia: Rethinking the Generic Field,” *Utopia Project Archive, 2006-2010*. Athens: School of Fine Arts Publications, pp. 59-67.
4. Both Huxley and Orwell got the idea of the ultimate revolution from Yevgeny Zamyatin’s (1993), *We*.
5. For this subject, see Nic Panagopoulos (2016), “*Brave New World* and the Scientific Dictatorship: Utopia or Dystopia?” *Comparatismi*, No. 1, pp. 302-310.
6. See also S.L. Arel and Dan R. Stiver, eds. (2019), *Ideology and Utopia in the Twenty-First Century: The Surplus of Meaning in Ricoeur’s Dialectical Concept*, London: Lexington Books.
7. Balasopoulos has explained this seeming paradox by asking “whether the *polis* or its historically privileged synonym—democratic Athens—designates the utopic *locus* of a cosubstantiation of philosophical reflection and political action or ... the origin of a disjuncture and even enmity between the two” (Balasopoulos, 2007, p. 119).
8. This is a metaphor which Orwell himself used in a review of *Brave New World*, *The Tribune*, 12 July 1940.
9. In this regard, *Brave New World* follows Zamyatin’s *We* which also presents poetry as socially liberating, in contrast to science and technology which lend themselves more easily to totalitarianism.
10. Antonis Balasopoulos (2013) has explored this subject in “Pigs in Heaven? Utopia, Animality and Plato’s *Huopolis*,” *The Epistemology of Utopia: Rhetoric, Theory and Imagination*, Jorge Bastos da Silva, ed., Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 8-27.
11. This phrase comes from a lecture that Huxley gave on 20 March 1962, at the Berkeley Language Center. See “The Ultimate Revolution” (1963), Community Audio, Audio Archive. <http://archive.org/details/AldousHuxley-TheUltimateRevolution>, Accessed 7 Dec. 2017.

REFERENCES

- Agamben, G. (2003). *The State of Exception*. Kevin Attell, trans. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Arel, S.L. and Dan R. Stiver, eds. (2019), *Ideology and Utopia in the Twenty-First Century: The Surplus of Meaning in Ricoeur’s Dialectical Concept*, London: Lexington Books.
- Althusser, L. *On Ideology* (2008). Ben Brewster, trans. London: Verso Press.
- Balasopoulos, A. (2006). “Anti-Utopia and Dystopia: Rethinking the Generic Field,” *Utopia Project Archive, 2006-2010*. Athens: School of Fine Arts Publications, pp. 59-67.
- . (2019). “Conrad, Ideology, and Utopia,” *Strange Vistas: Perspectives on the Utopian*. Justyna Gallant and Marta Komsta, eds. Frankfurt A.M.: Peter Lang, pp. 59-77.
- . (2007). “The Fractured Image: Plato, the Greeks, and the Figure of the Ideal City,” *Exploring the Utopian Impulse: Essays on Utopian Thought and Practice*. Michael J. Griffin and Tom Moylan, eds. Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. 117-137.
- . (2013). “Pigs in Heaven? Utopia, Animality and Plato’s *Huopolis*,” *The Epistemology of Utopia: Rhetoric, Theory and Imagination*. Jorge Bastos da Silva, ed. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 8-27.
- Burlinson, C. (2008). “Humans and Animals in Thomas More’s *Utopia*,” *Utopian Studies* Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 25-47.
- Burnham, J. (1960). *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Crick, B. (1980). *George Orwell: A life*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- . (2007). “*Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Context and Controversy,” *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*. John Rodden, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 146-159.
- Davis, L. (1999). “At Play in the Fields of Our Ford: Utopian Dystopianism in Atwood, Huxley, and Zemyatin,” *Transformations of Utopia: Changing Views of the Perfect Society*. George Slusser, et al eds. New York: AMS Press, pp. 205-214
- Ferrari, G.R.F. (2005). *City and Soul in Plato’s Republic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.
- Hitchens, C. (2003). Foreword to *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.
- Hoffman, M. (2001). *Secret Societies and Psychological Warfare*. Idaho: Independent History & Research Press.
- Huxley, A. (2013). *Brave New World*. Everyman’s Library, Introduction by John Sutherland. New York: Arnold A. Knopf.
- . (1994). *Brave New World Revisited*. Introduction by David Bradshaw. London: Vintage Books.
- . (1969). *Letters of Aldous Huxley*. Grover Smith, ed. New York: Harper & Row Perennial Library.
- Kumar, K. (1987). “Politics and Anti-Utopia: George Orwell and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,” *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 289-346.
- Lefort, C. (1998). *Democracy and Political Theory*. David Macey, trans. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Marx, K. & F. Engels. (1956). *The Holy Family Or Critique of Critical Critique*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Milner, A. (2009). “Changing the Climate: The Politics of Dystopia,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 6, pp. 827-38.

- More, T. (2003). *Utopia*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Paul Turner. London: Penguin.
- Morrison, D.R. (2007). "The Utopian Character of Plato's Ideal City," *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*. G. R. F. Ferrari, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 232-255.
- Orwell, G. (1984) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- . (1947) "Burnham's View of the Contemporary World Struggle," *New Leader*, March 29.
- . (1940). Review of *Brave New World*, *The Tribune*, 12 July.
- Panagopoulos, N. (2016). "Brave New World and the Scientific Dictatorship: Utopia or Dystopia?" *Comparatismi*, No. 1, pp. 302-310.
- Plato. (1995). *Phaedrus*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.
- . (1987). *Republic*. Translated with an Introduction by Desmond Lee. London: Penguin Books.
- . (1975). *The Laws*. Translated with an Introduction by Trevor J. Saunders. London: Penguin Books.
- . (2003). *Statesman*. Julia Annas and Robin Waterfield, eds., translated by Robin Waterfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Popper, K. (1994). *The Open Society and its Enemies*. Princeton, MA.: Princeton University Press.
- Sargent, L.T. (1975). "Utopia – The Problem of Definition", *Extrapolation* 16, pp. 137-148.
- Strauss, L. (1987). "Plato," *History of Political Philosophy*. L. Strauss and J. Cropsey, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Voorhees, R. J. (1961). *The Paradox of George Orwell*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.
- Wells, H.G. (1999). *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought*. New York: Dover Books.
- . (2007). *Men Like Gods*. London: Faber & Faber.
- . (1934). *Seven Famous Novels*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Zamyatin, Y. (1993). *We*. Translated and with an Introduction by Clarence Brown. New York: Penguin Books.