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CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

英国启蒙运动中的乌托邦思想

Utopias of the British Enlightenment

Edited by
GREGORY CLAEYS

中国政法大学出版社

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剑桥政治思想史原著系列

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在政治理论领域，“剑桥政治思想史原著系列”作为主要的学生教科丛书，如今已牢固确立了其地位。本丛书旨在使学生能够获得从古希腊到20世纪初期西方政治思想史方面所有最为重要的原著。它囊括了所有著名的经典原著，但与此同时，它又扩展了传统的评价尺度，以便能够纳入范围广泛、不那么出名的作品。而在此之前，这些作品中有许多从未有过现代英文版本可资利用。只要可能，所选原著都会以完整而不删节的形式出版，其中的译作则是专门为本丛书的目的而安排。每一本书都有一个评论性的导言，加上历史年表、生平梗概、进一步阅读指南，以及必要的词汇表和原文注解。本丛书的最终目的是，为西方政治思想的整个发展脉络提供一个清晰的轮廓。

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Introduction

Literally and figuratively, the domain of eighteenth-century British utopianism is largely *terra incognita*. The subject itself, indeed, was once thought hardly to exist. For the age called Augustan is often supposed to have been singularly hard-headed and worldly, its speculative energies prematurely squandered by the constitutional experiments of the mid-seventeenth century, its intellectual fancies modest beside the spuriously 'enlightened' musings beloved of the French *philosophes*. Britain's only contemporary literary masterpieces which adopted the utopian genre, this view presumes, were typically sceptical satires like *Gulliver's Travels*. None the less, this is in itself a fanciful portrait. There were, indeed, many satires upon the notions of primitive innocence and of terrestrial moral perfectibility in this era, as well as the widespread use of the utopian format primarily to lampoon existing social imperfections, rather than to recommend a superior regime. But these are not solely characteristic of an age which, after all, swarmed with projectors, adventurers, moralists and improvers of all sorts. Much enamoured of the idea of progressing somewhere, if only back to a more virtuous epoch, eighteenth-century Britain could not but imagine a variety of fictional ideal societies and (the genres are closely related) model commonwealths. These often distinctively portray well-ordered and virtuous if normally still imperfect regimes, where property is held in common or limited by agrarian laws. The diversity of such works, however, is considerable. Several authors mix satire and reform proposal so intimately that their real intent remains obscure. Some utopias are political tracts or constitutional proposals only scantily clad in utopian disguise. Others, more

literary, leap imaginatively into the lived personal experience of the ideal, concretizing hopes and aspirations as drier tracts of propaganda rarely can.

The more satirical, the constitutional, and the more idealistic literary texts can none the less be conceived as forming a single genre which retailed – or in the case of the satires, discounted – similar images of purportedly superior societies. In this period the anti-utopian satires and the ideal societies and model commonwealths together comprise some fifty texts. These include fictional critiques of utopian primitivism and perfectionism as well as Robinsonades, detailed constitutions in utopian form in the mould of James Harrington's *Oceana* (1656), and ideal societies of various types. With the exception of Defoe, Swift and their imitators, few of these texts have been studied carefully. They do, however, clearly form a genre, identified partly by form but also often, and more importantly, by content. Collectively, both utopias and anti-utopias focus primarily upon the idea of a community defined centrally by virtue and its absence, corruption. Not all such tracts, of course, focus *centrally* on the problem of corruption. A few do so only very marginally (e.g. [John Witherspoon], *The History of a Corporation of Servants*, Glasgow, 1765, which satirizes various developments in post-Reformation Protestantism). That such concerns were prominent in this literature is none the less unsurprising. For this theme was crucial to the prolonged debates about morals, manners and national survival in this period, which focussed on the immoderate increase in vice many contemporaries complained of. A few, like Bernard Mandeville in *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714), ridiculed such concerns. But many more lamented that the era was dissolute in the extreme. Often they blamed increasing access to luxury goods by the lower orders for a seeming breakdown in deference and self-control which was potentially corrosive of the entire social order. It was also widely evident that few periods had tolerated such political corruption, notably under the 'Robinocracy' or patronage system of Sir Robert Walpole, Prime Minister from 1721 to 1742. Given this broader debate about 'corruption', utopianism is clearly less marginal to our understanding of the period than has been assumed. But we still need to ascertain what is distinctive about its response to these issues.

In general, the utopian literary genre has been adopted primarily to imagine societies of greater virtue and equality, both as a means

of criticizing existing inadequacies, and of proposing more seriously ideas of or plans for greatly superior societies. In its negative, dystopian variety, the literary device also serves to ridicule as foolish, futile and whimsical efforts to institutionalize such qualities, at least in such an idealized form. The unique, extremely imaginative form of the genre permits normal social restrictions to be dissolved more readily than in other, more realistic, types of fiction. Among other things, this allows the expression of more extreme or implausible principles of social reform felt none the less to be practicable or desirable at some time and in some place. What might be seen as an embarrassing fantasy inadmissible in polite company when presented as a straightforward proposal becomes, in utopian disguise, with intentions masked, more circumspect, perhaps only an affable jest, but perhaps also an ardent wish. Frequently satirical to some degree, utopian authors have not always necessarily wished to see their plans materialize, at least in their own societies. Some, however, have been dedicated unswervingly to their legislative programmes. (Much ink has been spilt on how serious Thomas More, for example, was in this regard.) When seriously intended, their ideals, moreover, have altered somewhat from one era to the next. Utopias are hence not timeless in the sense of addressing only an hermetically sealed 'tradition', though a canon of texts clearly existed by 1700. Plato, More, Bacon, Harrington and others are thus customary reference points for the writers who concern us.[1]

But while they pay homage to this canon, utopias also confront the social and political transformations of their own time, and often propose more dramatic solutions than the mainstream political literature. This, in turn, is often how the form of a utopia or model common-

[1] James Burgh, for example, mentions More in *An Account of the . . . Cessares*, reprinted here (below, p. 73), as well as the ancient Jewish polity and Sparta under Lycurgus (p. 8.) The Scottish–American tract, *Equality – A Political Romance*, refers to Utopia and Lilliput, p. 1. *Bruce's Voyage to Naples*, also in this volume, turns to Lycurgus and Rome, while Robert Wallace invokes Plato, More, Harrington and Hume, in *Various Prospects of Mankind, Nature and Providence*, p. 36.

Where no precise reference is given in the original, I have tried to cite editions likely to have been used by the authors. The place of publication is London unless otherwise noted. Thanks for assistance with the texts is due to Lyman Tower Sargent, John Barrell, and Jack Clarke; to Rosalind Thomas for help with various classical quotations; and to the staffs of the following libraries: the British Library; the John Rylands University Library, Manchester; the Goldsmith's Library, University of London; the Library of the House of Lords, Westminster; Olin Library of Washington University; the Library of Congress; the Huntington Library; the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the Houghton Library, Harvard University; and Cambridge University Library.

wealth reveals a distinctive content. David Hume's 'Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth', for example, is his most adventurous, speculative and radical piece of writing, and places him uncomfortably close to Harrington compared to his other works (his *History of England* dismisses fantasies like *Oceana* as 'as chimerical as that of a perfect and immortal man', 1763 edn, 8 vols., vol. VII, p. 355). Similarly, Burgh's *Cessares* extends dramatically as a practical piece of social engineering the historical critique of manners of his much better-known *Political Disquisitions* (see, e.g., vol. III, pp. 1–97). Utopias thus can provide special insights into the history of social and political thought. As works of fiction which easily capture the imagination, moreover, they were often more successful at popularizing certain principles than constitutional or polemical tracts. Defoe and Swift, most notably, inspired many imitators, and within the utopian canon created the best-known sub-genres (the Robinsonade, Gulliveriana). Defining these literary genres thus remains of abiding interest, even it is not my main purpose here.

What, then, was the chief contribution of utopian writing to wider eighteenth-century social and political debates? And what can it tell us, looking forward to the explosion of practical utopianism which occurred after 1815, about the roots of early socialism? As we have seen, the growth of commerce, poverty, social inequality and moral and political corruption evoked considerable protest in this period. Responding to these problems, the less satirical utopian texts often called for greater egalitarianism, community of goods or limits on landed property, and the reformation of manners. Such proposals often went well beyond the speculations of even radical political pamphleteers. Both utopian writers and their critics were centrally concerned with how far civic and personal virtue could be institutionalized or sheltered against the ravages of time and the moral frailty of humanity. Both were keenly aware that the ancient republics, Christian monasticism, Cromwell's commonwealth and other models provided quite different responses to this question. In an admittedly sceptical age, what the more serious utopian proposals in particular helped to preserve, in light of these concerns, was a mixture of radical republicanism and Christian primitivism which provided an alternate ideal of sociability, moral economy and community against the growing individualism of the wider society. Utopian writers often reacted to the expansion of commercial society by resurrecting earlier ideals

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of moral and economic regulation. Some concocted schemes for community of goods and agrarian laws which were more radical than most were willing to contemplate. But these became increasingly popular early in the following century, when poverty and social dislocation suddenly became far more widespread. In some instances, too, utopian tracts led liberal and humanitarian thinking about individual rights, at least a century and sometimes two in advance of their times. In order to reconstruct this alternative view of the economy and social relations, we need to look first at some of the sources of utopian thinking in this period, and then at its leading principles.

Sources of utopian and anti-utopian thought in eighteenth-century Britain

Six factors underpinned most eighteenth-century writing about imaginary societies: (1) a burgeoning travel literature, which in utopian form included fantastic voyages to the moon (an established subgenre since the early seventeenth century); Crusoe-like shipwrecks in imaginary lands; and projected experimental colonies in the new world, where social reforms unlikely in Britain were both more imaginable and had sometimes been attempted, for instance in the Jesuit colony in Paraguay; (2) the increasing importance of science and technology, of Francis Bacon's 'the effecting of all things possible' (*New Atlantis*, 1629 (1659 edn), p. 28), which sometimes embraced an interest in prolonging life as well as in Hermetic efforts to turn base metals into gold; (3) the growing popularity of the secular idea of progress, which was applied to science and technology, to the notion of a succession of social stages towards opulence and refinement, and to human knowledge and the species' potential for greater spiritual and physical perfection (this did not replace, but operated beside, older ideas of the millennium and golden age); (4) the threat of poverty and social dislocation (crucial to More's *Utopia* in the sixteenth century as well as Winstanley's *Law of Freedom* in the seventeenth), with economic organization and greater productivity becoming more prominent themes in utopias from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries; (5) the age-old perception that commercial expansion and political corruption encouraged greed, vice and religious scepticism; and (6) the growing tendency, culminating in a partial fusion of utopianism and constitutionalist political theory

in the French revolution, for political reform proposals, especially by republicans, to be connected to more ambitious, even perfectibilist, utopian forms and aims.

Most British utopias in this period were indebted to two quite different approaches to the question of a superior society which lay outside the utopian canon proper. Those sceptical of the possibility of much greater social improvement expressed their doubts satirically, as utopias themselves often did in reference to existing vices. (The distance between satire and programme is sometimes curiously close. Indeed, the tradition itself thrives precisely on such ambiguity, with utopias feeding on their negation, and vice versa.) Jonathan Swift's Toryish *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), most notably, brilliantly lambasted political corruption (in the voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag); projectors and inventors (the voyage to Laputa); and finally, moralists who urged government by reason and a return to simplicity (the voyage to the Houyhnyhnms). But Swift himself clearly aimed at a degree of moral and political reform, and there is enough ambiguity in Gulliver's fourth voyage to the Houhnyhmns, in particular, to dismiss the work confidently as wholly anti-utopian. (Some thought the Houyhnyhnms good classical republicans: see Dr Bantley, *Critical Remarks on Gulliver's Travels*, 1735, p. 5.) Similarly, and very successfully, Edmund Burke's *Vindication of Natural Society* (1756) satirically contrasted primitive innocence to the dissipation of 'artificial' or 'political' society, but was itself sometimes misread as a straightforward utopian treatise. The second influential but non-traditional model for fantastic literature in this period, however, lay not in satire, but in the 'individualist utopia' of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Here the ideal of the well-ordered society is lived out mostly in solitude, partly taking the form of a fantasy of power (Crusoe becomes governor of his island), and a rumination on the development of conscience and the idea of returning to a state of nature. The latter, however, is rendered idyllic only by the most arduous labour, which helps to inspire Crusoe's religious conversion and hence salvation (*Robinson Crusoe*, 1719, p. 133). For many, too, the work is a discourse on *homo oeconomicus* which idealizes ambitious projectors, the middle station, and the Providential direction of the world.

In the sub-genres spawned by Swift and Defoe, and most of the other forms of utopian satire in this period, the dangers of luxury,

the idleness of rich and poor alike, and moral and political corruption are frequently advertised.[2] Those utopias and model commonwealths which contained serious designs for improved societies often linked these themes to republican theories of good government. The latter in this period were much indebted to Harrington's *Oceana* in particular, and reflections on it by men like Henry Neville, John Toland and Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun. (None the less there were certainly also political radicals, especially those highly favourable to commerce, like the Dissenter Joseph Priestley, who denied that More's *Utopia* or Harrington's *Oceana* could ever be reduced to practice; 'Lectures on History and General Policy', *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, vol. XXIV, 1803, p. 34.) Against the threat of executive tyranny, most republicans emphasized the benefits of rotation of office; the primacy of retaining popular control over government by, for example, voting by ballot to inhibit corruption (but Burgh still favoured an hereditary executive (below, p. 94); the value of public virtue or patriotism as the moral underpinning of wise polities; and the advantages of an agrarian law to limit property. They also condemned the use of a standing army instead of a citizens' militia, and, by the end of the century, were increasingly critical of economic specialization. (This issue would become crucial to socialists after 1815.) 'Independence' was the term which most encapsulated these ideals. 'Corruption' was its antithesis.

Some model constitutions grounded on such ideas were quite moderate: David Hume's essay, 'Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth' (1752; reprinted here), has a chiefly Harringtonian if also 'deliberately utopian' aim (John Plamenatz, *Man and Society*, Longman, 1971, vol. I, p. 331) to balance the gentry and aristocracy in order to neutralize faction. But it places no limits on property, and, while republican, hardly welcomes the political participation of the lower orders. But

[2] See *Memoirs of the Court of Lilliput* (2nd edn, 1727), p. 11; [Charles Johnstone], *The Reverie; or, A Flight to the Paradise of Fools* (Dublin, 1762), e.g., vol. I, p. 17; 'Sir Humphrey Lunatic', *A Trip to the Moon. Containing an Account of the Island of Noibla* (York, 1764), pp. 26–39; *The Modern Atalantis, or, the Devil in an Air Balloon* (1784), largely a satire on the nobility; *The Adventures of Sig. Gaudentia di Lucca* (1776), criticizes the perversion of the legal process by the rich (p. 154), praises a patriarchal, anti-partisan form of government (p. 160), and enjoins sharing goods in common and trading 'as one brother would do with another' (p. 162); and John Kirkby, *The Capacity and Extent of the Human Understanding; Exemplified in the Extraordinary Case of Automathes* (1745), which imagines a Christian island considerably more virtuous than England (pp. 16, 22).

others of Harrington's admirers, like Andrew Fletcher, extended such ideas further into the direction of what has been called 'an evidently utopian project' (J.G.A. Pocock, 'Clergy and Commerce. The Conservative Enlightenment in England', in *L'Eta dei Lumi*, Jovene, 1985, vol. I, p. 544). To limit wars, this proposed dividing all Europe into regions governed by twelve cities possessing their own militia and governing assembly (see 'An Account of a Conversation Concerning the Right Regulation of Governments for the Common Good of Mankind', 1704, in *The Political Works of Andrew Fletcher*, 1732, p. 432). And beyond these, stretching over the horizon towards undiluted fantasy, were various considerably more egalitarian schemes, some inspired by Sparta under Lycurgus, others a pre-Norman, Anglo-Saxon ancient constitution, or various images of the Christian community.

Not all critics of corruption who adopted the utopian form were republican, however. The 'Country party', sometimes Tory and sometimes Jacobite opposition to Walpole and the later Whig oligarchy also inveighed against mercantile greed and political knavery in defence of the landed gentry and monarchy. Swift did so, and, in a similar vein, *The Voyages, Travels & Wonderful Discoveries of Capt. John Holmesby* (1757) portrays a venal Whig oligarchy 'warmly opposed by those who possess the lands of this island', whose efforts are however foiled by 'an interest in opposition, which we called the Paper-interest' (the new financiers and government fund-holders). Like radical Whigs and republicans, Country writers cautioned that 'luxury, vice, and slavery, crept in under the terms of elegance, politeness, and civility'. They too reiterated that Britain's liberty was anchored 'in the virtue of the people', who were growing all too 'corrupt and profligate'. Often inspired by Bolingbroke, the Country remedy was a patriot-king who banished luxury and decadence, healed social divisions, and patronized science and learning.[3]

Some of the improvements proposed in eighteenth-century utopias, however, are inspired less by partisan politics than the prospect of a far-reaching reformation of morals suitable to most forms of

[3] E.g., *The Voyages . . . of Capt. John Holmesby* (1757), pp. 41, 88, 162–3, 171–2. See also *The Reign of George IV 1900–1925* (1763), where a virtuous monarch is prominent (e.g., p. xxviii). Similarly, the *Island of Content* (1709), reprinted here, retains an hereditary monarchy whose power, moreover, is unlimited, and underscores the people's obligations towards it (below, pp. 18–21).

polity. This is true, for example, with respect to pleas for women's rights. At a time when the issue was not widely discussed, the position of women and their rights in marriage was frequently addressed in British utopian works, as it was in French utopias of this period, like Saint-Jory's *Les Femmes Militaires* (1736). In *The Island of Content*, for instance, the most beautiful women are privileged and, while men still rule within the family, all women aged fifteen and over are granted their freedom, and divorce is simple (and is held to reinforce marital virtue) (below, pp. 12–14). *The Travels of Hildebrand Bowman* (1778), recognizes three grounds for divorce and, though women cannot inherit, they are granted an annuity on the death of their parents in order to limit marriages based on financial interest (pp. 223–5). In Sarah Scott's proto-feminist novel, *Millennium Hall* (1762), a charitable community for women alone is described in detail. By the 1790s, the problem of relations between the sexes was perceived as increasingly urgent. *An Essay on Civil Government, or Society Restored* (1793), for example, written shortly after Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), states that 'Perhaps nothing else shews clearer the infancy of the human race, than the yet domineering spirit of the male over the female sex' (p. 175). And William Hodgson, the author of *The Commonwealth of Reason*, termed despotism over women a 'scandalous remnant of feudal barbarism and gothic ignorance' (*Proposals, for Publishing by Subscription, A Treatise Called the Female Citizen: or, A Historical, Political, and Philosophical Enquiry into the Rights of Women*, ?1796).

Besides feminism, there were also other issues prominent in utopias which transcended partisan boundaries and reflected a wider concern with manners in general. Many texts condemn the century's notorious callousness towards animals, with some advocating vegetarianism (see *Bruce's Voyage to Naples*, below, p. 271. Proposals to banish gambling, bawdy houses and the like are common (*Memoirs of Planetes*, below, p. 195), as are pleas that public amusements become 'rational and instructive' (A.E., *Libellus*, 1798, p. 39). The benefits of religious toleration are stressed in many works (e.g., *The Travels of Hildebrand Bowman*, 1778, p. 200), as is elevating the lax moral standards of the clergy (e.g., *Private Letters from an American*, 1769, pp. 58–63; *A Journey . . . through the Air*, 1784, p. 29). Some utopias praise 'natural religion' or deism against the perversions of supposed Biblical revelation and false mysteries of clericalism. Slavery is fre-

quently denounced (e.g., *A Voyage to Cacklogallinia*, 1727, pp. 6–8). Legal reforms like the abolition of capital punishment and the game laws are widely mooted. So are the humane treatment of colonized peoples, and improvements in education and the poor law system. Such proposals are often interwoven with political concerns. But they as often project a more humane, just and deeply Christian society compatible with nearly any mild form of government.

This pervasive desire for moral reform reveals one of the great tensions in the utopian genre. Many such texts can be read as part of the early history of radical and liberal humanitarianism, and of the extension of rights from propertied white males to women, slaves, labourers, foreigners, children, and, very commonly, animals of all kinds, but especially beasts of burden. Yet there are also profoundly illiberal elements in many utopias which jar uneasily beside such libertarian and individualist concerns. These stem chiefly from a puritanical approach to morality, from the biases of a Protestant state, and from republican emphases on public virtue. Burgh's *Cessares*, for instance, disenfranchises Catholics, and prohibits gambling, lewd books and the theatre (below, pp. 100, 115, 118). *The Island of Content* rejects all learning beyond reading and writing as hostile to public order (but 'New Athens' to the contrary insists that national security requires increased popular education: below, p. 42). 'Innocent amusements' alone are condoned, while improper books, words and actions are suppressed in *The Travels of Hildebrand Bowman* (1778, p. 217). Similar forms of utopian regimentation, enforcing for example a uniformity of dress and housing, have consequently been seen as indicative more of the early history of totalitarianism than of liberalism. Some have indeed identified such constraints with the tradition *per se*, More's *Utopia* having set the precedent by prohibiting travel without leave or a passport, as well as idleness and alehouses, and regulating trades, clothing and much else (Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 44–60). In this view, utopias essentially embody an ideology of order rather than of freedom, and of paternal protection rather than increasing individual independence and responsibility. Underscoring such concerns is the political role assigned to elders. These arbitrate minor disputes in 'New Athens' (below, p. 46) and virtually rule in Lithgow's *Equality*. In *Bruce's Voyage*, the oldest person is the reigning prince

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