

1. Introduction: A return to utopia

Bart van Klink, Marta Soniewicka and Leon van den Broeke

1. UTOPIA AND ITS CRITICS

More than 500 years ago, in 1516, the British humanist Thomas More published *De Optimo Reipublicae Statu deque Nova Insula Utopia* in Leuven, Belgium (reprinted in More, 2008). In this book, More criticised the evils of contemporary society in Europe and contrasts it with the ideal society fictitiously located on the new island of Utopia, somewhere in the New World. As is well known, ‘utopia’ is derived from the Ancient Greek prefix *ou* (οὐ), meaning ‘not’, and *topos* (τόπος), or ‘place’. In English it is pronounced ‘eutopia’, which contains the Ancient Greek prefix *eu* (εὖ), meaning ‘good’. Therefore, it can be taken to refer both to a non-existing place or nowhere and to a good place. In Utopia, people have no private property; whatever they need they can acquire from warehouses in which goods are stored. There is no unemployment: everyone who is able to work, men and women alike, has to spend two years at a time farming in the countryside and, in addition, to learn some other trade, such as weaving, carpentry or masonry. People have to work no longer than six hours a day, although many work longer voluntarily. In Utopia, there is no room for privacy: everything has to be done out in the open, so that people are not tempted to do bad deeds. With all its rules and regulations, it provides for a pleasant and peaceful communal life, without much disturbance or excitement.

After the success of More’s *Utopia*, many other utopian texts were published, among them: *New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon and *The Isles of Pines* by Henry Neville.¹ In the history of its reception, the notion of utopia has been applied not only to fictional but also to non-fictional texts, written long before and after More published his *Utopia*, mostly in the field of political philoso-

¹ These three texts are collected in the Oxford’s edition *Three Early Modern Utopias* (More, Bacon & Neville, 2008).

phy, such as Plato's *Republic* and the works of Rousseau, Hegel and Marx.² Contemporary political philosophers, including Benhabib (1986), Habermas (2010) and Rawls (1999), sometimes acknowledge the utopian dimension of their theories. Up to the present day, utopias are written that, compared with the early modern utopias, less ambitious and all-encompassing than the early modern utopias, as they are written from a specific (feminist, libertarian, ecological or other) perspective. As Manuel and Manuel (1982, p. 803) have observed, '[u]topias are becoming highly specialised. There are political utopias, religious utopias, environmental utopias, sexual utopias, architectural utopias, along with dystopias that portray the future as a living hell.' In common parlance, utopia has become synonymous for a possibly desirable but, in any case, unrealistic and unrealisable vision of a perfect society – a dream, a fantasy or fancy.

Utopian thinking has been severely criticised by liberal philosophers, such as Isaiah Berlin and Sir Karl R. Popper. In political liberalism, utopia is traditionally conceived of as a blueprint for a radical reordering of the existing legal and political order. It engenders a static and harmonic vision of society in perfect balance. No trade-offs have to be made between competing values such as freedom versus safety or environmental protection versus economic growth, as in our world. There is no need for change because everything is as it should be. According to Berlin, politicians who believe in a 'final' or 'ultimate' solution for society's problems will take any measure to reach their goal, whatever the costs.³ He considers the search for perfection to be a 'recipe for bloodshed' (Berlin, 2013, p. 19). In his view, a perfect society cannot exist, given the differences in values and preferences among people: a state should only aim at preventing extreme suffering and protecting individual freedom.

In an essay written in the aftermath of World War II, Popper also links utopia to violence. In order to achieve its aim of an ideal society, utopia has to prevent the emergence of competing goals by suppressing dissent by all means available. Whatever its good intentions, it will only bring the 'familiar misery of being condemned to live under a tyrannical government' (Popper, 2002, p. 360). According to Popper, Plato offered the first theoretical model for utopian social engineering, which was later put into practice, with fatal consequences, in the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. In his reading (see Popper, 1971), *The Republic* paints a picture of a closed society where philosopher-kings rule by brute force, deliberately deceiving the people, allegedly for their own good, by telling them so-called 'noble lies'. Individual

² For an extensive overview of utopian thought in the Western world, see Manuel and Manuel (1982).

³ Berlin refers to Hitler, Lenin, Trotsky, Mao and Pol Pot, as historical examples.

freedom, which citizens enjoyed under Athenian democracy, is sacrificed for the common good. For Popper, a piecemeal approach is preferable because it enables democratic action, tolerates dissent and resolves conflict through reason and compromise instead of violence.

2. UTOPIA REVISITED

The liberal critique has undoubtedly contributed to the colloquial, mainly negative understanding of utopia. Despite the criticism, utopia managed to retain its attraction for those not satisfied with the present situation. We are living in desperate times: the Sars-CoV-2 virus is still raging in many parts of the world, environmental disasters occur more and more frequently due to global warming, social and economic inequalities deepen, refugees are seeking in vain a safe place to live, authoritarian populist regimes are on the rise and so on. In this seemingly hopeless world, people continue to look for spaces of hope. In his blog on political utopianism, Walzer (2009) raises the question of whether Berlin's plea for incremental change and limited state interference has sufficient motivational force. Berlin (2013, p. 20) himself acknowledged that his liberal programme may be 'a little dull' and '[n]ot the stuff of which calls to heroic action by inspired leaders are made'. Historically speaking, liberal and democratic regimes have emerged from resistance against authoritarian regimes, carried out by radical movements which were fuelled by utopian aspiration. According to Walzer, the most successful liberal regimes have adopted utopian ideologies. Utopian ideologies can be dangerous and may lead to tyranny and enslavement, as Berlin and others have rightly pointed out. However, as Walzer argues, 'dullness also has its dangers'. For its success and survival, liberalism needs to 'accommodate and deflect utopian aspiration'. Ricœur (1986, p. 283) even goes so far as to claim that a society without utopia is unthinkable: 'We cannot imagine (...) a society without utopia, because this would be a society without goals.' Society would be dead when there is nothing left to strive or fight for.

More recently, in *No is Not Enough*, Naomi Klein welcomes the revival of 'utopian dreaming', which was lacking in social movements around the world for too long (Klein, 2017, p. 254). In her view, this revival could provide an answer to the current rise of populism thriving on anger and resentment. According to Rutger Bregman, author of the international bestseller *Utopia for Realists* (Bregman, 2017), it is utopian visions that have driven humanity forward. In his sketch of an ideal world – characterised as a 'blueprint for

a liberal paradise⁴ – he makes a case for a 15-hour work week, a universal minimum income and a world with open borders. The French documentary *Demain (Tomorrow)*, directed by Cyril Dion and Mélanie Lauren, (2015) gives several inspiring examples of utopian experiments in the fields of agriculture, energy, economy, education, and democratic governance. Another example of utopia put into practice is Permatopia, a small community south of Copenhagen, which is built on the principles of permaculture: renewable energy, self-sufficiency, and a circular economy.⁵ Practising utopia has also resulted in the development of the Utopia Home – International Empathy Centre in Krakow, Poland. The Utopia Home creates space for art, culture, education and social activism based on an assumption of the power of utopian thinking in promoting creativity and improving the quality of everyday life.⁶

In her latest book *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (Levitas, 2013), Ruth Levitas argues for a so-called speculative sociology, that is, a sociology which deals not only with understanding and criticising current societies but also with improving them. For that purpose, she uses the method of utopia, consisting of three different but closely related components or ‘modes’: first, an *archaeological* mode, which reconstructs the vision of the good society underlying political programmes and social and economic policy proposals; second, an *ontological* mode, which describes what kind of people this vision presupposes and promotes, in other words the subjects and actors of utopia; and, finally, an analytical or *architectural* mode, which consists in the imagination of potential alternative scenarios for the future, taking into account the possible effects these have on the people who might inhabit this imagined society. It is not a free-floating fantasy, but the vision of the good society that has to be worked out concretely in an institutional design: ‘[U]topia as a method is concerned with the potential institutions of a just, equitable and sustainable society which begins to provide the conditions for grace’ (Levitas, 2013, p. xviii). As Levitas (2013, pp. 18–19) argues, utopia does not provide a blueprint for an ideal world:

Utopian thinking in this sense is not about devising and imposing a blueprint. Rather, it entails holistic thinking about the connections between economic, social, existential and ecological processes in an integrated way. We can then develop alternative possible scenarios for the future and open these up to public debate and

⁴ By Will Hutton in his review of the book in *The Guardian*, 13 March 2017, retrieved 1 December 2021, from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/mar/13/utopia-realists-how-we-can-get-there-rutger-bregman-review>.

⁵ For more information, see: <https://www.pbpsa.com/articles/content/permatopia-eco-village-dk>, retrieved 1 December 2021.

⁶ See the Utopia Home website, retrieved 1 December 2021, from <https://domutopii.pl/en/utopia-home/>.

democratic decision – insisting always on the provisionality, reflexivity and contingency of what we are able to imagine, and in full awareness that utopian speculation is formed always in the double squeeze of what we are able to imagine and what we are able to imagine as possible.

Utopia is, in Kant's words, a regulative idea or *focus imaginarius* that never can be known and realised fully (Kant, 1999, B672). As a speculative and counterfactual account, it presents an image which may strike us at first glance as strange and fully impracticable.

According to Gadamer, utopia does not provide an action programme but an ironic critique of the present. He criticises Popper for interpreting Plato's texts too literally and out of context. In his view, Plato's utopian vision has to be understood against the background of the decline of Greek *polis*. Plato rejected literature because he wanted to warn against the abuse of literary devices by sophists, who tried to manipulate and mislead the audience. Plato's dismissal of literature is thus an attack on sophistry, which serves two different purposes (see also Di Cesare, 2009, p. 151). To begin with, he intends to show the danger of an art that is only meant to please and to cheat without any concern for the truth. Subsequently, with his utopia, Plato aims to design an educational model which can contribute to the restoration of the *polis*. In his view, a good political order requires a good political education. Citizens have to learn to give priority to the common good over their private interests. It is 'not at all the authoritative education by the force of an ideal organization' (Gadamer, 1985b, p. 197; our translation), but it aims at transmitting the experience of justice. In this educational programme, philosophy plays a central role because it promotes self-reflection and care for others. It does not support a totalitarian state, as Popper argues; on the contrary, it helps to prevent and oppose the abuse of power. Utopia in this context refers to a place which goes beyond and outside the *polis* at hand, but which is indispensable for reflecting on the best way to organise it. From the no-place or not-yet-place of utopia, the philosopher gives an instruction, an indication or a 'suggestive image from far away' (Gadamer, 1985a, p. 251; our translation). Utopia's contribution should not be situated at the level of action – it does not offer a blueprint for a perfect society – but rather at the level of critical reflection: it generates ideas of how to organise the *polis* in a just and rightful manner by presenting an image of what seems utterly unrealistic and unrealisable. The point is, as Gadamer (1985b, p. 197; our translation) puts it, 'to bring about, within the image of the impossible, the possible'.

3. HOPE IN A HOPELESS WORLD

Building on Levitas's notion of utopia as method, this volume explores the role of utopia in law and politics, including alternative forms of social engineering, such as technology and architecture. Taking miscellaneous perspectives of law, political studies, theology, technology, art, literature, and architecture, we address the issue of utopian thinking. The idea of utopia is analysed from a multidisciplinary perspective. It is considered as an imaginative tool which aims at producing alternative future scenarios. Central questions addressed in this volume are:

- What vision of the good society can be found in the fields of law, politics, religion, technology, art, literature, and architecture?
- Why can the vision be considered utopian? Based on what conception of utopia can it be conceived as utopian?
- What concept of humans does this vision presuppose? What are its main subjects and actors?
- What alternative future scenarios do the texts present? In other words, in what ways must contemporary society be changed in order to bring about or advance the desired state of affairs?
- To what social or other problems in contemporary society is the vision offered as a possible solution?
- What are its implications for law and politics?
- To what extent does it constitute a desirable vision? What are its risks or dangers? How is utopia related to ideology?

To understand the concept of utopia, it is worth distinguishing the main functions of utopia which are introduced by Ricoeur (1986, p. 270; see Chapters 3 and 6 in this volume) and further discussed by Goodwin and Levitas (Levitas, 2010, pp. 201–2). First, utopia constitutes 'a dialectic nowhere'⁷ which enables us to look at the given world from a distance. Second, utopia provides a powerful tool for critiquing social reality by introducing its alternative; yet, 'it is also a refuge against reality' (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 309). Third, utopian thinking is directed toward the better future and explores the possible. Thus, it has also a transformative power of reconstructing reality by imagination.

Utopia as method offers both an instrument for analysing the normative presuppositions and ideals of texts and a tool for developing possible future scenarios. In these desperate times where doom scenarios seem to abound,

⁷ As Ricoeur (1986, p. 310) puts it: 'This function of utopia is finally the function of the nowhere. To be here, *Dasein*, I must also be able to be nowhere. There is a dialectic of *Dasein* and the nowhere.'

utopia can fill our imagination with alternatives for the future and thereby give hope. ‘And being imagined is the first stage of existence,’ as Olga Tokarczuk (2019, p. 23), Nobel Laureate in Literature from Poland, emphasises. Social imagination exercised by utopian thinking contributes to the internalisation of changes (Riccœur, 1986, p. 314) and is a powerful tool for transforming reality, since ‘what we dream of is already present in the world’, as Rebeca Solnit writes (Solnit, 2016, p. 19).

According to Levitas (2010, p. 221), ‘the essential element of utopia is not hope, but desire – the desire for a better way of being’. Yet, the power of utopian thinking to transform social reality depends on hope, which should not be confused with wishful thinking, but rather understood as ‘will-full action’ (ibid., p. 230). Hope is a forward-looking energy which calls for action and involves people actively in the process of becoming (as Bloch argued, discussed in Solnit, 2016, p. 36). Hope should neither be confused with optimism, nor with a mere expectation or prediction. Hope is rather a special kind of virtue – an attitude of trust in the unknown future, faithfulness in the hour of darkness in the source of inspiration and direct participation in the process of creation of the better world to come (see Chapters 4 and 6 in this volume). As Solnit (2016, p. 16) points out:

Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists. Optimists think it will all be fine without our involvement; pessimists take the opposite position; both excuse themselves from acting. (...) To hope is to gamble. It’s to bet on the future, on your desires, (...). To hope is dangerous, and yet it is the opposite of fear, for to live is to risk.

Having hope does not mean denying the reality with all its atrocities; however, it is a refusal to accept the hopelessness of one’s own situation or the world’s situation. Just as despair is ‘the capitulation before a certain *fatum* laid down by our judgment’, hope is its opposite; it results in ‘detachment from determinism’, as Gabriel Marcel (1951, p. 41) argues. Hope assumes engagement and active response, while despair results in non-engagement and passivity. Both hope and despair should be addressed in terms of ‘a fundamental relationship of consciousness to time’ (ibid., p. 52). In despair one perceives time as prison, as something closed and still, and thus, one anticipates one’s own failure, and by this anticipation one promotes the failure from within – like Kafka’s Josef K., who presents himself for judgement and determines his own punishment, believing in its necessity.⁸ Hope overcomes despair by providing confidence in

⁸ ‘The court does not want anything from you. It receives you when you come and dismisses you when you go’ (Kafka, 2009, p. 160). A similar situation occurs in another story of Kafka, where the sight of the gallows in the courtyard of the prison is such a ter-

the future. Having hope means to live in hope, that is, to embrace the process of becoming, to be open to new experience and possibilities, and to promote the anticipation of the good from within (*ibid.*, p. 35–61). Looking at utopia through the lens of hope provides a deeper understanding of its extraterritoriality and extra-temporality – utopian thinking of ‘no place’ and ‘no time’. Utopia should not be understood as a goal or a place to which you arrive but rather as the journey towards it, as Solnit (2016, p. 132) puts it:

When activists mistake heaven for some goal at which they must arrive, rather than an idea to navigate Earth by, they burn themselves out, or they set up a totalitarian utopia in which others are burned in the flames. Don’t mistake a lightbulb for the moon, and don’t believe that the moon is useless unless we land on it.

4. CONTENT

This volume consists of 15 chapters, divided into three parts. Part I explores the relationship between utopia and the law. At first sight, this might seem surprising, as law is not associated with utopian thinking, but bound to the status quo, the stabilisation and preservation of the current system of norms. Part II addresses the notion of utopian politics, both from Berlin’s critique of utopianism as a ‘recipe for bloodshed’ (Berlin, 2013, p. 19), and a more positive perspective of redemption for a society in despair. Part III presents utopia in architecture and technology, as utopia is a powerful concept, which is applicable in criticising, redefining and reconstructing social reality by means of imagination. These three parts are a reflection of the main theme and focus of this volume on hope for a hopeless world. In every chapter this notion of hope in relation to the notion of utopia is discussed. A more detailed description of the volume’s content and the individual contributions can be found below.

Part I: Utopia and the Law: Sketches for a New Society

In Part I, the relation between utopia and the law is explored. Usually, law is not associated with something fanciful, like utopian thinking. It appears to be bound to the status quo, as it aims to stabilise and preserve the current system of norms. According to Latour (2013, pp. 242–43), slowness is a fundamental quality of the law. Comparing law and science, he observes: ‘Although one might speak admiringly of “revolutionary science”, “revolutionary laws” have

rifying spectacle that the main character becomes convinced that it is for him and thus one night hangs himself on it. This story features in the third book of notes, entitled *Die Acht Oktavhefte* and edited and published by Max Brod on 25 January 1918, after Kafka’s death.

always been as terrifying as courts with emergency powers. All those aspects of law that common sense finds so irritating – its tardiness, its taste for tradition, its occasionally reactionary attitudes – are essential to law’s functioning.’ Law seems to be essentially conservative: it sticks to established practices and is reluctant to give up what it has acquired in decades of experience. As Příbáň (2007, p. 54) argues, ‘law is not primarily a matter of social experimentation’.

However, as the authors in this part show, the law can have a utopian quality, both at the practical level of how law is created, applied and implemented in policies, and at the normative level of the rules it sets and its underlying principles. It may offer us an indication or ‘glimpse’ of how we can transcend the present situation and can build a better, more equal and fair world. Following our introduction, Lynne Copson discusses in Chapter 2 first the historical development of utopia within social enquiry. She claims that the way knowledge is produced in late modernity has not been favourable to utopianism. Due to the positivist separation between is and ought, utopia was banned from the realm of science (together with normative thought in general). Utopia was seen not only as an impossibly naïve but also as a dangerous idea, since it may lead to authoritarianism. Piecemeal solutions were preferred over radical transformation. Moreover, social science was split into a whole range of subdisciplines, whereas utopian thinking requires a holistic approach which combines insights from various disciplines. Subsequently, Copson proposes an alternative approach which conceives of utopia not as a goal or final destination, but as an open-ended process. Drawing on the work of Levitas, she makes a case for developing utopia as a method of translating abstract expressions of desire into concrete articulations of hope. She applies this method to a specific criminal justice policy concerning knife crime in order to demonstrate the contemporary marginalisation of more radical responses to social problems as well as the potential of the utopian method for transcending this.

In Chapter 3, Bart van Klink discusses the relation between utopia and the rule of law. In political liberalism, as we mentioned in section 1, there exists a traditional deep distrust of utopian thought. It is conceived as a blueprint for a radical reordering of the existing legal and political order. In the liberal critique, utopia is taken quite literally and seriously as a design for a perfect society. As a blueprint, utopia is rejected not only because of *what* it strives for (the happiness of society) but also *how* it attempts to achieve its aims, that is: by means of authoritarian ruling and, most likely, violence. However, this critique fails to see that utopia is a literary genre which makes use of specific rhetorical devices and is open to multiple interpretations. Building on this hermeneutic reading, Van Klink argues that the rule of law can be seen from two different perspectives: as an *ideology* which stabilises the existing power structures in society and as a *utopia* which challenges these power structures. As a utopia, it contains the promise of a life in peace, freedom and equality,

where the law sets the limits that are needed for a civilised living together. According to Van Klink, the rule of law depends for its survival on its ideological as well as its utopian dimension. To prevent the rule of law being taken too much for granted as a self-evident and fixed idea, it is important to stress its utopian dimension. Conversely, its ideological stabilisation has to ensure that the rule of law does not become a free-floating fantasy.

In Chapter 4, Carinne Elion-Valter addresses the question of how legislation is related to hope and utopian thought. Inspired by utopian ideals of rationality and justice, legislation has been experienced for a long time as a source of hope. By expressing fundamental legal values, it fulfils an important constitutive function for society. Classic liberal rights and legal principles offer a hopeful vision of a ‘New Jerusalem’ of justice and liberty. However, to a growing extent, modern legislation fails to live up to its expectations. According to Elion-Valter, it has become more and more instrumental: it is mainly focused on realising short-term policy goals related to socio-economic, environmental, health and other welfare state issues without offering hope. To restore faith in legislation and to give hope, Elion-Valter proposes to conceive of modern legislative utopias as *topoi* or ‘empty’ places to be filled by a societal and democratic debate. In this way, legislation may become a ‘living utopia’.

In the final chapter of this part (Chapter 5), Leon van den Broeke investigates how Levitas’s notion of utopia as a ‘secular form of grace’ can be applied to the law. In *Utopia as Method*, Levitas (2013, p. 12) states: ‘The longing for *Heimat* and for the fulfilled moment can also be understood as the quest for a (sometimes) secular form of grace.’ Van den Broeke connects Levitas’s notion of secular grace with the religious notions of grace and sin in the work of the German theologian Paul Tillich (and others), to whom Levitas refers occasionally. Applied to law, grace can be found, according to Van den Broeke, in particular in the principles of fairness and equity in contract or property law. These principles enable parties in a contractual relation to depart from a strict application of the law that would result in blatant injustice. If they disagree about the nature of the common good, they still can demonstrate graciousness or mercy to each other. This secular quest for grace is connected with the longing for *Heimat* and the hope to create a better society by fighting injustice. As Van den Broeke argues, the notion of grace not only offers a critique of a society which leaves no room for grace, but it also gives hope for a hopeless world.

Part II: Utopian Politics: Redemption or a ‘Recipe for Bloodshed’?

Whereas Part I focuses on utopia and the law, Part II deals with utopian politics. As discussed above, Berlin considered the search for perfection a ‘recipe for bloodshed’. As explained, he feared that politicians who aim at a ‘final’ or

‘ultimate’ solution may take any measure to achieve this goal. Part II not only deals with this liberal criticism but also explores utopian politics as a source of redemption. Could utopia offer hope in a hopeless world? The concept of utopia can be helpful to reach and/or make space for redemption, because it can not only be connected with ‘tyranny’ and ‘misery’ (Popper, 2002, p. 360), but also with a just society, grace, and hope in a hopeless world. As Levitas (2013, pp. 18–19) argues, utopia should not be seen as a blueprint for a perfect society, but as an exploration of possible alternative worlds.

In Chapter 6, Marta Soniewicka addresses the politics of hope. She reflects on the notion of utopia as an exercise in social imagination. The notion ‘utopia’ in the common usage of the term includes such elements as: (1) the improvement of the human condition by human effort and (2) the attainability of a final stage of improvement. Soniewicka criticises the idea of utopia underlying this meaning as she points to the decoy it presents, of transforming a utopia into an ideology. Thus, she rejects the notion of utopia as a final stage of human perfection and turns to the discussion of utopia as method. Following Ricœur and Levitas, she distinguishes three main functions of utopia: escape, critique and reconstruction. She elaborates on this by providing the fascinating idea of practising utopia by the example of social imagination, namely the Polish anti-communist artistic movement. It is called the Orange Alternative and it embodies the idea of refigurative acts of social change.

In Chapter 7, Jan Willem Sap discusses the question whether a European republic is possible. He conceives of the political order of the European Union as a utopian ideal. Sap elaborates on Immanuel Kant’s use of a cosmopolitan language when it comes to his idea of Europe as a federation of independent states as a prototype for the world. Moreover, Sap points to the shadow side of the history of colonialism, but also of the decoy of uniformity against the current requirement of more respect for dialogue and recognition of cultural diversity. Therefore, he asks whether it is possible to present criteria for amending Kant’s federal idea. His suggestion is not to consider the Kantian idea of a Europe as a regulative idea, but as a message of hope and peace. This federal Europe respects local diversity that does not conflict with the principles of justice like human rights.

In Chapter 8, Oliver W. Lembcke addresses Giorgio Agamben’s vision of messianic politics. Agamben, who is well known for his *Homo sacer* project, offers a ‘dark’ vision in which law and politics are fatally connected. Is there a moment of utopia encapsulated in this dystopian vision? As Lembcke shows, in Agamben’s work there is also another, ‘light’ concept of politics, ‘true politics’, free of any ‘nomos’, law or sovereignty. This concept relates to his idea of a ‘coming society’. Lembcke understands Agamben’s messianic references, especially to Benjamin’s pure violence, as an invitation to reconstruct the different elements of true politics and integrate them into a broader scheme

of utopian thinking with the help of Levitas's understanding of 'utopia as method'.

In Chapter 9, George Harinck shows that utopian thinking may have a dystopian side by discussing the work of the Reformed Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder (1890–1952). During the First World War, Schilder was a young pastor. His experiences during this war and the next shaped his theological reflections. To many people in the West, the Russian Revolution was an attractive alternative, but not to Schilder. As Harinck explains, utopian ideas of a better society were connected with and inspired by the application of the last book of the Bible, namely the Book of Revelation. This also applies to Schilder, who gave lectures and wrote a book about the Book of Revelation from the perspective of the socialist utopia. However, and in contrast with the conventional view, Schilder interpreted the Apocalypse and the Book of Revelation not as a utopian book. This book of the Bible is complex to read and understand. Its prophecy is not about a world to come, let alone a better world, but about this world, and about the present-day society. Schilder, as a sobering prophet, explained that people are co-workers of God, neither in this sense to bring about or create heaven on earth nor to create a complete utopia. They are called to work every day of their lives in the confines of history. Thus, Schilder emphasised the here and now. There is no escape from history. Dreaming of this, and of other possible worlds, is dangerous escapism. Nevertheless, Schilder's anti-utopian view had utopian traits as well: the ideal society is not in the future, but starts here and now.

Subsequently, in Chapter 10 Maurits Berger discusses the relationship between utopia, politics and religion. Like Harinck, Berger also pays attention to the concept of a worldly utopia from a religious perspective; however, not within Christianity (as in the previous chapter) but within Islam in the interpretation of the Islamic state. For most religions the notion of utopia would be the life beyond this worldly and material life, be it heaven, paradise, Nirvana, or any other elevated state of being. In the case of Islam, however, the twentieth century has also introduced the new concept of a worldly utopia: the Islamic state. Berger describes the evolution of this term from a practical idea to a notion that acquired utopian properties. The Islamic state has always been depicted in idealist terms – justice, equality, benevolent leadership – or as the photo negative of the present world: the Islamic state is not how we live now. The result is the emergence of a utopian vision of 'Islamic state' which is still supported by some Muslims worldwide.

Part III: Utopia in Architecture and Technology: The Quest for Perfection

Utopia is a powerful concept which can be used in criticising, redefining and reconstructing social reality by means of imagination. In the previous parts we discussed the application of utopian thinking to legal and political institutions which constitute a society. In the last part of the volume, we go further with these considerations by exploring other dimensions of social life in which utopia can be applied as a method of social engineering – architecture, urban planning, consumerism, science, and technology.

Utopia has two important aspects which are worth emphasising – temporal and spatial. As temporal aspects of utopia were already discussed in the previous chapters, now, in Chapters 11 and 12, we turn to the spatial dimension of utopia, in which the authors discuss the application of utopia to urban planning and architecture. The problem of the spatial aspect of utopian imagination is addressed in the chapter by Ernestyna Szpakowska-Loranc (Chapter 11). She poses the question of whether contemporary ideal cities contribute to utopianism as understood by Ruth Levitas and can become a method for creating institutions and influencing society. To answer this question, the author analyses examples of twenty-first-century urban visions which illustrate the ideal city concept. One may distinguish between Apollonian concepts of the ideal city as a blueprint and Dionysian concepts, which are iconoclast. The former concepts are expressed in the state of transition and in the lack of a fixed *topos*. The latter ones abolish the rules of classical utopianism, followed by an evaluation of projects currently being implemented. The overarching conclusion of the study presented in this chapter is that the current tendency in architecture is utopian, although this is not visible at first sight. There are surprisingly many features linking Levitas's utopia as method and contemporary architectural visions. Therefore, the author challenges the frequently made claim that with the fall of the great modernist narratives, urban utopias have been replaced by a pragmatic approach.

In Chapter 12, Danielle Chevalier and Yannis Tzaninis address the question of utopia and space, arguing that utopia is a deeply and intrinsically spatial concept. They discuss the idea of the impact of utopian thinking on urban planning. Utopian imaginations in planning are considered through the concrete spatial dimensions of two examples of Dutch planning, executed within the same geographical context but in different moments in time. The authors compare the New Town Almere in the 1970s with Almere Oosterwold, a part of Almere currently in development. They employ Henri Lefebvre's conception of space as a product and show how utopian thinking has not stopped driving (Dutch) planning between modernism and today. They also demonstrate the nuances of the transition between then and now regarding utopian

ideals and spatial planning, especially the relationship between the ‘spatial’ and ‘social’ elements of this planning. In the conclusion of this chapter, we can read how utopian planning (in Almere) has experienced a pivotal shift, transitioning from blue-printing the spatial to imagining the social. As spatial manifestations of the utopian imaginations disclose the pitfalls and blind spots of these conceptions, they offer a concrete base to recalibrate and develop further imaginations of the possible, dancing between the limits of reality and unbounded ideals.

The remaining chapters in this part address the idea of technology as a tool for practising utopia or achieving utopian aims. According to Georg Picht, we live today in a technocratic utopia – science fiction applied to reality driven by the technological imperative: if something is possible, it should be done (Picht, 1981, p. 162). He calls it ‘blind utopia’ which is unaware of its own premises, and which does not reflect on its consequences or aims and may bring about self-destruction. In Chapter 13, Marc J. de Vries criticises heavily the idea of technological utopia based on the belief in unlimited progress. He claims that technological developments are driven by promises of a progress towards a better world thanks to new artefacts and systems. The extreme of those promises is the ultimate removal of all boundaries that keep humans from an ideal life in which happiness is complete. This ideal is often expressed by the term ‘unlimited’. De Vries argues that it is problematic since the notion of progress can mean different things to different people. Also, the ideal of removing the last barrier raises moral questions. He presents a Christian worldview as an alternative, claiming that it offers a balance between the pursuit of technological progress but with the acceptance of a non-ideal world included. Such a perspective fits well, as De Vries claims, with the way engineers are educated and work, namely, by constantly making trade-offs.

Technological utopias often assume that all problems of the world can be solved with the use of reason. Together with the scientific revolution, people started to believe in their own power to control nature, including human nature. Chapters 14 and 15 address the problem of technological transformation of humanity – the idea of transhumanism. In Chapter 14, Britta van Beers builds on Helmuth Plessner’s philosophical anthropology to come to a better understanding of the relation between two contemporary utopias: the humanist utopia of human rights and the transhumanist techno-utopia of human enhancement. According to transhumanist thinkers, transhumanism is the logical extension of humanism. They stress that their school of thought, like humanism, presupposes a rather utopian account of the human based on which individual choice and freedom are to be pursued and protected. For them, human enhancement is not only compatible with, but even commanded by human rights. Based on an analysis of the utopianism involved in humanism and transhumanism, the author argues that this position only holds superfi-

cially. Upon closer examination, the transhumanist's quest for techno-utopia, even if human rights is taken as a starting point, is likely to pave the way for a world that can hardly be viewed as utopian according to humanist standards. To come to that conclusion, Van Beers offers a comparison between humanism and transhumanism through the lens of Plessner's first and third fundamental law of anthropology: the law that humans are artificial by nature and the law of the utopian standpoint.

The problem of transhumanism is further discussed in the next chapter by Anna Bugajska (Chapter 15). The anthropological crisis in the Western humanities leads to the rise of many idealised visions of a posthuman world, looking to transcend or abandon the notion of 'human'. The chapter's aim is to verify if any of the propositions of 'posthuman' utopia allow for retaining hope for humanity. In the first part of the chapter, the author looks at the utopian proposition of transhumanists, roughly corresponding to evantropia (a biotechnological utopia). In the second part, the author considers the possibility of a non-human utopia, which would most properly be called posthuman. The third part addresses the challenge of an after-human utopia, which can be considered radical environmentalist utopia or even anti-humanist utopia. The conclusions of the chapter gather the insights from the three parts of reflection with reference to the will and the failure to imagine, the importance of hope, and the necessity of utopia as such.

The final chapter of this volume addresses the problem of what it means to be human and how new technologies affect its meaning from a different angle, by discussing the ethical and legal issues arising from the development of robots and artificial intelligence systems (RAIs). In Chapter 16, Zeynep İspir and Şükrü Keleş claim that RAIs play such a significant role in our lives that they are no longer primarily understood as utopian objects operating in an alternative reality. Although RAI technology offers undoubted advantages, rapid – and sometimes unforeseen – advances in this field have made it necessary to take a critical perspective in legal debates. İspir and Keleş compare the actions of RAIs with those of human beings, while bearing in mind the specific nature of the relationship between being an *entity* and being an *agent*. Accordingly, they assert that moral agency in human beings, or the ethical capacity to act alongside other potentialities, should be adopted as a determinant for the feasibility of any value-based social model of utopia in the new technology field. In conclusion, they argue that this capacity is a convenient tool in utopian thought that can be used, as Ruth Levitas suggests, to create a new social model.

As editors, we believe that utopian thinking is needed, in particular now that the times seem so desperate. With this multidisciplinary volume we intend to inspire scholars and citizens worldwide to reflect on the challenge of utopian-

ism – its attraction as well as its dangers. Our aim is to contribute to the global public debate on social, political and legal issues and we hope that the present volume may bring hope in a hopeless world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During our first expert meeting on utopia, Marjolein van Tooren (lecturer Literature and Society, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) gave a very interesting lecture on the novel *Monsieur Ibrahim et les fleurs du Coran* (2001) by the Franco-Belgian author Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt. Unfortunately, due to illness she was not able to finish her paper. We are very sorry that she passed away on 18 May 2022.

We would like to express our gratitude to several people and institutions that made this publication and project possible. It was CLUE+ which demonstrated its belief in our project and supported it financially. CLUE+ is the Interfaculty Research Institute for Culture, Cognition, History and Heritage of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands. We owe thanks to the Jagiellonian University for supporting the publication of the volume in open access. The open access licence of the publication was funded by the Priority Research Area Society of the Future under the programme ‘Excellence Initiative – Research University’ at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. Farah Rahali, student assistant at the Department of Legal Theory and Legal History at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, helped us with the editorial work. Ruth Levitas was so kind as to provide us with a general review of the volume. Moreover, we are very grateful to the two anonymous reviewers who gave useful suggestions for both the content and the structure of the volume. The Constant Foundation permitted us to use the picture for the front cover. Last but not least, we thank all the authors for their hard work, the good spirit and the hope they bring.

Amsterdam, Cracow and Kampen, 1 December 2021.

REFERENCES

- Benhabib, S. (1986). *Critique, norm, and utopia: A study of the foundations of critical theory*. Columbia University Press.
- Berlin, I. (2013). *The crooked timber of humanity: Chapters in the history of ideas* (H. Hardy, Ed.). Princeton University Press.
- Bregman, R. (2017). *Utopia for realists: And how we can get there*. Bloomsbury.
- Di Cesare, D. (2009). *Gadamer: Ein philosophisches Porträt*. Mohr Siebeck.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1985a). Platos Staat der Erzieher. In H. G. Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke. Band 5: Griechische Philosophie I* (pp. 249–262). Mohr Siebeck.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1985b). Plato und die Dichter. In H. G. Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke. Band 5: Griechische Philosophie I* (pp. 187–211). Mohr Siebeck.
- Habermas, J. (2010). The concept of human dignity and the realistic utopia of human rights. *Metaphilosophy*, 41(4), 464–479.

- Kafka, F. (2009). *The trial* (M. Mitchell, Trans.). Oxford University Press.
- Kant, I. (1999). *Critique of pure reason* (P. Guyer and A. Wood, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.
- Klein, N. (2017). *No is not enough: Defeating the new shock politics*. Allen Lane.
- Latour, B. (2013). *The making of law: An ethnography of the Conseil d'Etat* (M. Brilman and A. Pottage, Trans., Rev. Edn). Polity Press.
- Levitas, R. (2010). *The concept of utopia*. Peter Lang.
- Levitas, R. (2013). *Utopia as method: The imaginary reconstitution of society*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Manuel, F. E., & Manuel, F. P. (1982). *Utopian thought in the western world*. Basil Blackwell.
- Marcel, G. (1951). *Homo viator: Introduction to a metaphysic of hope*. Henry Regnery Company.
- More, T. (2008). *Utopia: On the best state of a republic and the new island of Utopia*. The Floating Press.
- More, T., Bacon, F., & Neville, H. (2008). *Three early modern utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis, and The Isle of Pines*. Oxford University Press.
- Picht, G. (1981). *Odwaga utopii (Mut zur Utopie. Die grossen Zukunftsausgaben; Technik und Utopie)*. (K. Maurin, K. Michalski and K. Wolicki, Trans.). Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Popper, K. R. (1971). *The open society and its enemies. Volume 1: The spell of Plato*. Princeton University Press.
- Popper, K. R. (2002). Utopia and violence. In K. R. Popper, *Conjectures and refutations: The growth of scientific knowledge* (pp. 355–363). Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Příbáň, J. (2007). *Legal symbolism: On law, time and European identity*. Ashgate.
- Rawls, J. (1999). *The law of peoples*. Harvard University Press.
- Ricœur, P. (1986). *Lectures on ideology and utopia*. Columbia University Press.
- Solnit, R. (2016). *Hope in the dark. Untold histories*. Wild Possibilities.
- Tokarczuk, O. (2019). *The tender narrator*. Nobel Lecture by Olga Tokarczuk, Nobel Laureate in Literature 2018, Svenska Akademien, The Nobel Foundation, retrieved 1 December 2021, from <https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2019/12/tokarczuk-lecture-english-2.pdf>.
- Walzer, M. (2009). Reclaiming political utopianism. *The Utopian Blog*, 14 December, retrieved 1 December 2021, from: <http://www.the-utopian.org/post/2410107552/reclaiming-political-utopianism>.