The Utopianism of Human Enhancement:
Impacting our Present through Images of the Future
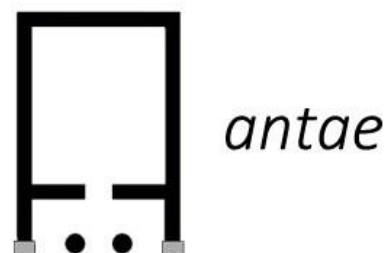
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> A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even
> glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always
> landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better
> country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.[1]

Introduction

This paper aims to explore the nature of utopia and the extent to which it is an integral part of
humanity and human society. Our aim, first and foremost, is to outline the extent to which
human existence—at both the individual and societal level—is connected to the notion of
utopia. Although the word "utopia" is itself relatively new, having been coined by Thomas
More only in 1516, the concept it embodies is much older. To quote Lyman T. Sargent: 'there
were social dreams before any word was invented to describe them'.[2] More's term, however,
is important in bringing together a particular duality in the search for utopia that is paramount
to our discussion. Cosimo Quarta explains that it condenses two distinct kinds of dream: with
the 'u' capturing both the negative particle '*ou*' (not) and the positive particle '*eu*' (good), so
that utopia means both *eu-topia* ('the place of good' or 'the good place') and *ou-topia* ('non-
place' or 'the place which does not exist').[3] Utopia, for More, is thus construed as 'the good
society' (that is to say a free, just, virtuous, secure, peaceful society) that 'does not exist.'[4]

Historically, we find that the first utopias were very much *eutopias* that exemplified paradise
and the good life on earth—for example, the Greek myth of 'The Golden Age' which appears
in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (c. 700BCE). Ancient eutopias such as this were usually
characterised by simplicity, unity, peacefulness, longevity (or immortality) and abundance.
Furthermore, they were usually the product of nature achieved without human effort. These
kinds of utopias are identified by Sargent as 'body utopias', which he distinguishes from 'city
utopias' on the basis that the latter are brought about as the result of human contrivance.[5] It is
with this move— the bringing of utopia under human control—that we begin to see more
familiar kinds of utopias, expressed as early as Plato's *Republic* (c. 350BCE).

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[1] Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man* (London: Arthur L. Humpreys, 1909), p. 20.
[2] Lyman Tower Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', *Utopian Studies: Journal of the Society for Utopian Studies,* 5 (1994), 1-37, (p. 10).
[3] Cosimo Quarta, 'Homo Utopicus: On the Need for Utopia', *Utopian Studies,* 7 (1996), 153-66, p. 155.
[4] This has become a fairly standard reading of the word 'utopia'. It is similarly elaborated on by both Sargent as well as Miguel Abensour in 'Persistent Utopia', *Constellations*, 15 (2008), 406-21: 'Utopia is thus a playful name, fruit of More's epigrammatic genius, that permanently oscillates between eu and ou, between the place where everything is good, the place of bliss (Eutopia), and the place of nowhere (Ou-topia)' (p. 406).
[5] 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', p. 10.

The distinction between body and city utopias merits some discussion, and is addressed in the following section, which articulates the human being as utopian. Nevertheless, we start to comprehend the multi-faceted nature of the term and begin to appreciate the role it has played in human history. At its core, utopia is a longing for, directing us towards the otherwise— away from the static present—and into a realm of possibility. It is this motivating aspect of utopia that underscores human development and achievement. We must however be careful that we do not confuse this continuous *striving for* as a quest for some teleological end-state, which is the case when the qualifier "perfection" is added. It is the push for change *itself* that embodies the utopian spirit, and, as Sargent vehemently argues in most of his works on utopia, we must reject the connection between utopia and perfection. The word perfection here means 'finished, completed, without change' and, as it will be shown, this is neither consistent with Thomas More's Utopia, nor with human nature.[6] Consequently, a utopia that is static in its perfection is no utopia at all—especially for beings such as us.

This, in turn, sheds new light on the human enhancement movement (HEM), which is considered to be a manifestation of an on-going and enduring utopian endeavour that is socially revealing. HEM, in the present usage, is the collective "grouping together" of academic literature open to the possibility and potential of various artificial means of enhancing human beings—that is, improving one or more of our capacities—so that we are capable of achievements beyond our present ability. This coheres to Julian Huxley's account, which, in first coining the term "transhumanism", predicted that technology would allow us to 'take evolution into our own hands' moving us toward 'a state of existence based on the illumination of knowledge and comprehension' and the realisation of 'new possibilities *of and for* our human nature'.[7]

Nick Bostrom, philosophy professor at Oxford University and founder of the Future of Humanity Institute, has long been at the frontlines on the specific faction of Pro-human enhancement authors who can be loosely grouped together as "transhumanists".[8] A general overarching ideology of the "transhumanists" can be found in the *Transhumanist FAQ*, collated by Bostrom, which articulates transhumanism as a forward-looking extension of humanism founded on the premise that 'the human species in its current form does not represent the end of our development but rather a comparatively early phase'. This intellectual and cultural movement 'affirms the possibility and desirability of improving the human condition […] by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical and psychological capacities'.[9]

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[6] Lyman Tower Sargent, 'In Defense of Utopia', *Diogenes,* 53 (2006), 11-17, (p.13).
[7] Julian Huxley, *New Bottles for New Wine: Essays* (Chatto & Windus, 1957), p. 16, my emphasis. Here, Huxley already recognises this utopian aspiration as part *of* our human nature, but also that it opens up new possibility *for* that nature to change and evolve.
[8] For a brief outline of some of the various political factions within transhumanism, see James J. Hughes, 'The Politics of Transhumanism and the Techno-Millennial Imagination: 1629-2030' Zygon 47(4) (2012), 757-776.
[9] Nick Bostrom, 'The Transhumanist FAQ: A General Introduction', *World Transhumanist Association*, (2003), p. 4. <http://www.nickbostrom.com/views/transhumanist.pdf>. [Accessed 25 April 2017].

Despite the transhumanist origin of these statements, we take them to represent the general tenor of what we have here called HEM.[10] The idea that we can make human beings and human societies better through more direct methods—which aims, in the broadest sense, to improve the functioning, abilities and possibilities of human beings—characterises HEM as a movement of hope that, in recognising the many shortcomings of humanity, acknowledging that our species still has room to grow, understanding that it is in our nature to seek such growth, and exploring new methods for achieving it.

These methods go beyond what we might call "traditional" or "accepted" methods of enhancement, such as various forms of education and training which attempt to build and hone human capacities, not just because they promise to more quickly and effectively bring about similar results—for instance, a language CPU embedded directly in the brain might allow people to understand languages immediately without having to go through years of instruction—but, in fact, hope to surpass what those methods can presently achieve.[11] For example, where training might help us attain Olympic running speeds, mechanical enhancements might permit us to dramatically outpace them without tiring. As such, "non-traditional"[12] methods represent the remaining alternatives, ranging from technological, computational, mechanical, and robotic alterations to the medical, genetic, and pharmaceutical ones, all made directly to human beings for the explicit *purpose* of improving them *beyond* the norm.

For our discussion, however, it is less important what form these enhancements take than that we recognise in a thematic way the intensions and hopes they represent and their implications for society. Moreover, it is beyond this essay's scope to debate the ethics of each, as this would push towards a discussion that is already thoroughly saturated with publications. The focus here, then, will not be to promote any particular enhancement technology but to investigate what the mere possibility of enhancement technologies reveals about our society and to show how the utopianism built into the pursuit of such technologies motivates us to shape society accordingly.

HEM is here taken at face value, accepting that it represents a growing interdisciplinary collection of well-respected academics, scientists, engineers, philosophers, and writers who

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[10] It is not my intention that this be read as an endorsement of this particular faction within HEM, as it remains my view that HEM here is understood holistically as an ideological movement, socially valuable for the general themes it embodies and expounds.

[11] Allen Buchanan provides a strong argument that these "traditional" methods, such as education, should be considered enhancements in order to make the point that the notion of enhancement itself is not morally novel. As such, the opposition to HEM in many cases is not "anti-enhancement" *per se*, but against the new forms of enhancements and the contexts of their application. See A. Buchanan, *Beyond Humanity? The Ethics of Biomedical Enhancement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[12] The term "non-traditional" simply distinguishes the methods of enhancement whose particular application remain controversial or beyond our present technical capacities from the tried and tested "traditional" methods and their accepted use. The notion of particular acceptance is important, for while the use of robotic prosthetics or gene-therapy in a hospital setting for the treatment of patients is not exactly "new", their use to enhance persons who are not unwell or incapacitated in some way certainly is; and has triggered a prolific debate on the distinction between "treatment" and "enhancement". "Non-traditional" methods in our usage, therefore, encompass traditional methods applied to new, often controversial, purposes.

do not, for the most part, blindly or naively promote the advancement of human beings in these ways. Moreover, HEM is here recongnised as more than an idle pondering of future possibilities; instead, it seeks to actively bring about this future by promoting such enhancement technologies after rigorously studying the ramifications, promises and potential dangers (ethical and otherwise) of these technologies. From the massive amount of literature on the topic, it is plain to see that HEM seeks the betterment of humanity—regardless of whether there is any agreement as to *if* this will be the case. This conception of HEM, as socio-politically active, combined with the on-going popularity of the topic and the relentless advancement of technologies that serve to enhance the lives of humans, gestures to a deep seated human drive evidenced in utopian thinking (despite the general aversion in academia to speak of human enhancement and utopia in the same breath). Michael Hauskeller explains that the promises of human enhancement, 'betray a very human ambition—to free ourselves from what limits us', and further, that forms a natural part 'of a journey that humanity has been on [*ab initio*]'.[13] This, in our understanding, is the very essence of the utopian endeavour.

Humans as utopian beings

Cosimo Quarta explains that 'humanity has always manifested an impelling, insuppressible, need for utopia' that stems from the character of our being and illuminates the presence of utopia throughout human history. He argues that developing the capacity for reflection and abstract thought allowed early humans to solve the problems they faced in a way that allowed for the formation of stable and stationary groups. However, this same capacity is responsible for a kind of 'restlessness' inherent in humanity that seeks to improve or change our situation for the better, and further, to 'explore and do things that had never been done before'. In short, the success of our developments did not quench the spark that prompted those developments, and so we still find ourselves constantly trying to take further steps forward— for human stagnation is not an option. Quarta identifies our capacity to perceive the myriad of possibilities in unpromising environments as a defining feature of humanity, and argues that it is in this sense that we present and characterise ourselves as 'animal[s] in becoming' in what amounts to a lifelong journey of utopic self-realisation.[14] This conception of humanity as a "coming to be" or "longing" is carefully articulated in the somewhat opposing works of Ernst Bloch and Emmanuel Levinas.

In *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch posits the existence of a utopian impulse as an anthropological given which underpins the human proclivity to long for a different kind of life, inscribing utopia into the very economy of our Being. According to Bloch, utopia comes from this ontological site to the extent that Being is thought of at once as process and as incompletion. Our existence is defined as a 'setting out' from the ontological category of the

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[13] Michael Hauskeller, 'Reinventing Cockaigne: Utopian Themes in Transhumanist Thought', *The Hastings Center Report,* 42 (2012), 39-47, (pp. 39, 46).
[14] Quarta, pp. 156, 158.

Not (the beginning), which through its fundamental lack (or 'Not-Having') sets to motion a drive, hunger or need directed at the Not-Yet (a form of anticipatory consciousness of that which is not present but implies a possible and eventual coming to pass) as the 'intensive realization factor which sets [our] world going and keeps it going'.[15] Human experience, in this sense, entails both a lack and a longing after. Following Bloch, Abensour locates the 'inextinguishable source' of utopia in this non-achievement of Being—in the Not-Yet—for it seems to set the task of 'the accomplishment of Being'.[16] Humanity itself is therefore defined by an essential '*unfinishedness*', and therein lies the steady tendency of humanity towards utopia understood as 'the fulfilment of humanity in the not yet realised future'.[17] Consequently the attainment of Being is established as the goal that drives us as we aim to return home in what Ruth Levitas describes as a 'quest for wholeness'.[18]

We experience this whenever we are struck by that ineffable questioning of why things are the way they are, and dream of a place where we are completely at home in our bodies, in control of our emotions, thoughts, and capacities, and are motivated to realise our potential. We sometimes come close to seeing how things might be when we find ourselves fully enveloped by a moment of creation, inspiration, or heightened intuition where understanding comes to us unhindered. It is in the cessation of those rare moments of our being operating in relative fullness that we are struck by a kind of fundamental disquiet and a longing for more. It is the radical insufficiency of the present, and the anxiety that consumes us here, that creates the positive drive towards the future.[19]

In a similar fashion to Bloch, we find in Levinas the source of utopia in the non-achievement of Being (or the Not-Yet). However, by his account, the Being of humanity is defined as a *perpetual* not yet. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas therefore rides parallel but in opposition to Bloch, moving against any line which would assert that we are in pursuit of Being or attempting to reconcile ourselves with it. Rather, by his account, we are already in the state of Being—its manifestation—articulated as a fundamental 'coming to be' (or Not-Yet).[20] Abensour conveys it not as an orientation towards another destination—'no longer a matter of seeking accord between being and man through utopia'—but rather as the proper expression of the destination already achieved: 'utopia as a manifestation of the human, an exit from Being as Being'.[21] In this way the very execution or "carrying out" of our Being entails a movement away from itself in its manifest presence to itself perpetually reborn anew. The idea is that we remain in an interminable state of departure while constantly arriving, and this is the character of the utopian human. It is in this sense that utopia allows

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[15] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope. Vol. I,* trans. by Neville Plaice (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 306–9.

[16] Abensour, p. 409.

[17] Tom Moylan, 'The Locus of Hope: Utopia Versus Ideology', *Science Fiction Studies,* 9 (1982), 159-66, (p. 159).

[18] Ruth Levitas, 'Looking for the Blue: The Necessity of Utopia', *Journal of Political Ideologies,* 12 (2007), 289-306, (p. 290).

[19] Moylan, p. 160.

[20] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991).

[21] Abensour, p. 411, my emphasis.

humanity to reveal itself persistently in the present and onwards into future and bolsters More's non-teleological conception of utopia as ever-elusive. For Levinas, the human is utopian in its very essence and make-up, or, in other words, human(ity) is utopia.[22]

Despite the opposing "sites" of utopia expounded by Bloch and Levinas, we can nevertheless see a joint conception of utopia as that which inspires humanity to fulfil itself either in pursuit of Being (Bloch) or as a manifestation of Being (Levinas). The utopian endeavour is in either account fundamental to the human character, entailing a forward dreaming that is no mere distraction but an 'unavoidable and indispensable element in the production of the future'.[23] The notion of perfection is once again displaced as incompatible with humanity, for it dissolves the vital tension present in each account which enflames the human spirit. The non-existence in Bloch and the renewed existence in Levinas amounts to a window open to the future, and the 'unattainability' of utopia, far from leading to nihilism and to desperation, leads humanity towards hope. It is this which spurs humanity towards 'moral and structural transformation, and therefore towards the construction of a society that is to be, as far as is possible, better than the one in which human beings find themselves living'.[24] It results in a tendency to self-transcendence and self-realisation that indelibly characterises humanity as a being that is fundamentally projective and utopian. More than simply revealing a utopian element at work in human life, we start to see in the utopian—the search for more—the defining feature of human life.

Having identified and understood the utopian element of human nature articulated above, one cannot help but see a distinct overlap with the aspirations of HEM; HEM is essentially an amplification of this human pursuit to become more. It recognises and cherishes humanity as a "work-in-progress", being continually reborn as constant adumbrations and even adulterations of its former self. However, it is humanity progressing with the reigns in our hands as opposed to evolution or chance. This control allows for intelligent progress that has the potential to belittle the achievements of Mother Nature—and do so in a far shorter timeframe. In short, what drives HEM is the same old desires expressed through the history of utopian thought: for a life not limited, constrained or beyond our control. What has changed, however, is that, for the first time, such an eventuation appears on the horizon as falling within the range of possibilities. As such, HEM can be considered alongside the Enlightenment and Humanist perspectives, which, Max More explains, 'assure us that progress is possible, that life is a grand adventure, and that reason, science, and good will can free us from the confines of the past'. HEM should not, therefore, be seen as an attempt to change human nature but, rather, as the full recognition and endorsement of the idea that human nature is fundamentally one of change. It is defined by mutation, by development. To 'halt our burgeoning move forward' would be a 'betrayal of the dynamic inherent in life and consciousness'.[25] Humanity cannot stagnate lest it ceases to be what it is.

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[22] Levinas, p. 79.
[23] Levitas, p. 291.
[24] Quarta, pp.155-6.
[25] Max More, 'On Becoming Posthuman', (1994).
<http://eserver.org/courses/spring98/76101R/readings/becoming.html> [accessed 25 April 2017].

We cannot help but feel an intuitive pull in this account of humanity, and subsequently recognise the accord between it and HEM. In the next section, we explore how this manifests itself at the level of society writ large and through which we can articulate a utopian prospect for change which HEM instigates.

Utopia and Society

Sargent describes the broad, general phenomenon of utopianism as 'social dreaming' concerned with improving the 'ways in which groups of people arrange their lives'.[26] This echoes Aristotle's famous description of humans as political animals, and reveals our profound concern for society and its development. It is, therefore, not surprising that literary utopian visions are almost entirely images of social constructions or blueprints for communities (rather than individuals). Nevertheless, there is an inescapable and intimate connection between the society and the individual present in the reciprocal influence they have on one another: the good society working toward the good individual and vice versa. Societies, growing and evolving as they are, are inextricably utopian in their search for improving how individuals of that society are glued together. For example, in Plato's *Republic*, we see that it 'aims at founding not only the just polis, but also the just man'—a connection that should not be overlooked. Along these lines, Quarta argues 'a model of the state cannot abstract from a corresponding model of humanity, if it is not to be abstract and therefore sterile with respect to praxis'.[27]

Despite the fact that, nowadays, it is increasingly difficult to escape our connection to society, the oft-felt desire to do so stems from our frequent questioning of it and its many shortcomings. Such 'social dreaming' most often occurs when we are faced with the dissatisfaction of our lives, but it is not limited to these occasions, seeing as how it similarly occurs when we recognise that other people's lives could be better than they are. Our visions are impregnated with social and historical baggage that connects our images of the futures to the failures of our past. All the progress we have made as a species is the result of the aforementioned utopian disposition which defines human nature, but this character cannot be divorced from our social nature. As such, all development in one aspect—whether directly intended to or not—impacts the other. Proper progress therefore entails positive development and flourishing of both the individual and society. As such, the utopianism of humanity goes hand-in-hand with the development of society, and for this reason we elevate it as the primary utopian concern. In other words, we seek to advance a society wherein we can realise our utopian nature as social beings. It is for this reason that the utopian spirit in society acts as the seed for revolution and change.

Consequently, a good society, rather than the individual, is the fruit of the utopian desire and, further, living in a society stimulates this desire. It does this in a dual manner: firstly, it provides a relatively stable situation for new generations to learn from the older, honing the

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[26] 'Three Faces of Utopianism Revisted', p. 3.
[27] Quarta, p. 157.

development of skills and capacities that inspire further learning and mastery. Secondly, it creates new opportunities for ingenuity and innovation that enrich collective human knowledge and our 'cultural heritage'.[28] In *The Image of the Future*, Fred Polak illustrates the profound impact utopianism has on the development of society by arguing that the projection of the future affects the actual future. He views human society and culture as being pulled towards the 'magnetic images of an idealised future'.[29] As such, our "image" or "vision" of the future plays an active role in our development as we move into it.

Levitas provides a useful distinction between the utopian vision and the societal push for change that vision inspires. In its simplest form, utopia represents what she calls 'looking for the blue'. This entails the already described searching for, or dreaming of, an alternative state of affairs for ourselves and the people we care about that would represent an improvement of life. However, inspired by Bloch's emphasis on the '*novum*' of utopia (which we previously saw entails a spur to action or coming to be), it also comes to 'signal a more concrete, systemic account of the social conditions for the fulfilment of human happiness—a more or less defined outline of a good society' which Levitas calls 'looking for the green'.[30] Earnest social utopianism, therefore, entails a shift from mere wishful thinking to political action and the attempt to improve society.

However, this shift to political action in recent history transformed utopianism to mean a pursuit of a particular and individual conception of "*the* good society". Michael Walzer emphasises the definite article present here as many politico-utopian visions used it to assert that 'there was only one good society, one correct idea of goodness, which men and women would one day, all of us, unite in acknowledging', and in so doing distorted it.[31] The idea championed by those writers was that the truly good society would, someday, recognise and endorse the same coherent set of values and political/social structure. However, this implied a moral universe without contradiction that, according to Isaiah Berlin is simply not the universe we live in. It is the belief in the definitive 'good society' and the forceful attempts to bring it into being that has warped our modern conception of utopia and lead authors such as Berlin to equate it with totalitarian or authoritarian regimes.

Insofar as utopianism is directed at a society, it is therefore important to recognise that it does not require a plan of action or blueprint for the betterment of society, merely a vision of it. In fact in post-WWII utopian literature there is, for obvious reasons, a distinct discomfort regarding the notion of a 'utopian plan'. We must, therefore, be careful not to fall into the trap of creating a static blueprint out of utopia. In 'The Decline of Utopian Thought in the West,' Berlin is cautious, even fearful, of utopian visions seeing them as inescapably violent and oppressive. He explains that if one believes, as some do, that a utopian solution to all of humanity's problems is possible, then 'surely no price is too heavy to pay for it; no amount of

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[28] Quarta, p. 169.
[29] Frederik Lodewijk Polak, *The Image of the Future*, trans. by Elise Boulding (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1973), p. 1.
[30] Levitas, p. 295.
[31] Michael Walzer, 'Should We Reclaim Political Utopianism?', *European Journal of Political Theory,* 12 (2013), 24-30, (p. 25).

oppression, cruelty, repression, coercion will be too high. This conviction gives wide license to inflict suffering on other men, provided it is done for pure, disinterested motives'.[32] Echoing this sentiment, Karl Popper argues that the creation of the ideal state according to a comprehensive blueprint cannot go forward without a strong government—most likely a dictatorship.[33] However, the need for force arises out of the disharmony between the supposedly perfect blueprint and the imperfect people to which it applies. As such, it is not utopianism that is at fault, but rather 'the insistence that a particular utopia is the *only* correct way of living that is the problem'.[34] Both Berlin and Popper's assertion that utopian thought naturally results in authoritarianism and hierarchy, while not unfounded, nevertheless illustrates a failure to recognise the distinction between what Abensour identifies as 'eternal' and 'persistent' utopias.

It is 'eternal utopias', when presented in political writings, which distort the ideology of utopia, as they do not permit change (for perfection does not require it). These invariably produce 'closed, static, authoritarian societies that negates temporality and does violence to plurality and individual singularity'. The persistent utopia, on the other hand, is defined by a constant 'ever-reborn movement towards something indeterminate' that serves to tear us away from the accepted and established order that seeks to still our utopian spirit.[35] The eternal utopia is in this way distinguishable from utopia *properly conceived*, in attempting to end, once and for all, the utopianism of man and society. For this reason, as with the utopia of humanity, we must do away with the idea of the perfect society. Utopia, as manifested at the level of society, must accommodate utopia at the level of the individual, and therefore remain in a state of constant renewal and growth. For when 'utopia is directly imagined and delivered there occurs an impoverishment which is due to the reduction of the multiple levels of the utopian idea to the single, relatively abstract, field of social planning'.[36] It is in this sense that utopia as ideology can be dangerous. This "ideological" misappropriation of utopia was successfully utilised in the 1970s and 80s by those who favoured the political-social regime of the time, where they spurned utopian thinking for dangerously breeding dissatisfaction and unrest in pursuit of something unattainable.

To counter this cultural baggage, Levitas alternatively describes the utopian method as the 'imaginary reconstitution of society'.[37] She thus reaffirms utopia as a real social concept to be utilised for pursuing a better world through the simple act of imagining a better future. This, in turn, serves as a mirror to society, revealing its many faults, and encouraging reflection and critical evaluation so that we can challenge ingrained assumptions and suggest alternatives. It sings of possibility and inspires hope. In the next section, it will become abundantly clear that HEM does precisely this and is, therefore, a social utopian movement

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[32] Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. by Henry Hardy (London: John Murray, 1990), p. 47.
[33] Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, *Vol. I* (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 159.
[34] 'In Defence of Utopia', p. 13, my emphasis.
[35] Abensour, p. 407.
[36] Moylan, p. 160.
[37] Levitas, p. 300.

that embodies a 'persistent utopia' fundamental to humanity in a way that is socially constructive.

Enhancing Society

The enhancements usually discussed in HEM are typically presented as *solutions*; that is to say, they would help to overcome our various limitations. In this sense, HEM embodies a real hope for the entirety of humankind that through the freely elected enhancement of individuals a better society is possible. While on the face of it this may sound good, it is a limited reading of the impact of HEM and not, I believe, its strongest component. HEM, as it has evolved through widespread academic involvement, has moved beyond the belief that by simply permitting us to embrace our utopian disposition at the level of the individual it will collectively result in the improvement of society. Rather, what the utopianism of HEM does is open up the possibility and indeed necessity for a radically different society that we cannot, as yet, properly begin to imagine. Nonetheless, the emphasis is that we should seek *difference* and not merely an "enhanced" *sameness*. In fact, to have our very same society but with enhanced humans would not only fail to realise the HEM's utopian spirit but would instead undermine it, as it very much relies on the existence of an altogether different society. We see the need for an enhanced future society to be radically different from our own as repeatedly illustrated in the overabundance of publication written against the desirability of human enhancement. It is, however, the unimaginative belief that HEM desires the same society we already have, simply with an enhanced population, that underscores many of the fears regarding human enhancement.

Critics of human enhancement envision the inadequacies, insufficiencies and injustices of our present society being compounded in an enhanced future society. While it may very well be true that if people (with their present outlook and values) and present society (with its current structures and institutions) were to remain the same, then adding enhancement to the mix would in all likelihood exacerbate social inequalities and lead to the exclusion and dominion of the weaker class of unenhanced humans while possibly creating a bifurcated society—this by no means reflects the ambitions of HEM. HEM, it has been argued, embodies a utopian quest for change and *improvement*; in many ways HEM (as a utopian endeavour) has already borne the fruit of its labours, benefiting from both sides of the argument on human enhancement. By vehemently pointing out the grave concern regarding justice in the imagined enhanced future, the opposition to human enhancement has unearthed not flaws with the notion of enhancement itself but fundamental problems in our society. In light of their depictions and arguments, we cannot but be overwhelmingly unsatisfied with the state of the world, for it already exhibits much of the injustice which they ascribe only to the enhanced future: we already have grave social, economic, and political inequalities. We come to realise that the many shortcomings of our present society make it incapable of presently utilising enhancement technologies in a utopian way. To rephrase, it would indeed be a risk to trust enhancement technologies with our present selves. However, this should then motivate us to change society and our competitive, individualistic, and power hungry

outlooks. In a very utopian way, HEM opens up the door for us to recognise this and actively pursue the desired change.[38]

Achieving such progress is no simple feat, and it is here acknowledged that such change rarely occurs without conflict or goes unchallenged. We would not, however, forego already attained social progress—for instance, the abolition of slavery—to avoid the conflict and unrest that accompanied it. Social change at such cost where there is a social harm, therefore, seems justified. We should not then (and neither does HEM) shy away from the potentially drastic changes to society that might eventuate from the pursuit of enhancements. In fact, HEM is not only open to the fact that we might lose much of our present society—that it might fundamentally and radically change—but relishes this with the hope that we would arrive at what Berlin aptly calls 'a new and nobler society'.[39] Change is indeed necessary if the aspirations of HEM are to be realised—that is, where humanity can prosper in a world that benefits from enhancement technologies.

In particular, a social shift is required that focuses on peaceful coexistence and mutual advancement. Berlin's concern that utopianism inevitably demands a steadily increasing exercise of power resulting in totalitarianism reveals in stark light exactly the ways in which our society is flawed, and the reasons for fearing enhancement technologies are justified. It is precisely this insight that is at the core of the proposal to guide the use and implementation of human enhancement technologies provided by Buchanan, Cole and Keohane.[40] They explain that if we are to permit and promote enhancement technologies then their arrival must be such that we limit—insofar as possible—their ability to be exploited for the oppression and isolation of others. As a society we need to build on the costly lessons of the past and nurture the achievements we have made as a species, particularly in the social realm. Previously utopian aspirations such as the existence of human rights and constraints on executive power now run deep in our political culture and should give us some hope for society's continued evolution.[41]

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[38] It is important to emphasise that an enhanced society would have to be a *changed* society, very different to ours at present. Introducing enhancement technologies to our society rightly sounds alarm bells because we might not be ready for them or, more accurately, society is presently structured in a way that makes it exceedingly likely that their arrival will worsen matters. Our competitive, power-hungry, and financial oriented society already regularly overlooks the suffering of people (particularly in countries not our own) in favour of our own prosperity. This is an attitudinal problem that is institutionally reinforced through-out our society: from the way we educate and grade children to the way we reimburse people for their time and celebrate the rich and the famous. Should this ethos carry over into an enhanced society it would result in the further ostracisation of people. While it is outside the scope of the paper to propose a solution to this, we imagine that efforts to create a more cooperative, egalitarian, and cosmopolitan social ethos would go a long way to mitigating these concerns.
[39] Berlin, p. 18.
[40] See Allen Buchanan, Anthony Cole, and Robert O. Keohane, 'Justice in the Diffusion of Innovation', *Journal of Political Philosophy,* 19 (2011), 306–32.
[41] Of course, we should not mistake the achievement of a catalogue of human rights with their actual enjoyment. The blatant human rights violation of a Parisian today, for example, would not go by without outrage and a show of force. However, much is still needed to instill the same level of disgust and to ignite the same call to arms by governments and citizens alike when such offences occur in the developing world. Nonetheless, the catalogue itself remains a pivotal event in socio-political life that has forever changed the relationship between those who govern and the governed. See Claude Lefort, 'International Law, Human Rights, and Politics', *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences,* 22 (2013), 117-37.

In the political sphere, utopia then represents a 'stubborn impulse towards freedom and justice—the end of domination, of relations of servitude, and of relations of exploitation'.[42] HEM mirrors this, with authors such as Buchanan taking great pains to emphasise that as we move towards the age of enhancement we keep the issues of domination and exploitation front and centre.[43] While not the sole political problem associated with enhancement technology, the potential for such enhancements to exacerbate social injustices and inequalities is in this way identified as the foremost concern, for it highlights the present failures of contemporary life. We are well aware of how our competitive society functions and we know full well the tendency of power to corrupt and for the advantaged to oppress the disadvantaged. Moreover, the kind of domination feared in the era of enhancement threatens to surpass historical inequalities by not simply multiplying the *means* and *areas* of oppression but also by strengthening the *justification* of such abuse. In other words, not only would the dominant class which possesses heightened abilities—such as increased health, strength, and longevity—be able to inflict their will on the weaker class, but their subsequent oppression may go beyond the exacerbation of already unfair wealth distributions and access to basic necessities, to the preclusion of a whole segment of the human population from the very possibility of a new world of experience granted by enhancements they might not even be unable to understand they are missing. This very "lack" exhibited by the unenhanced would then be utilised as proof of their lesser worth and be seen to justify the enhanced taking a position of dominance.

Nonetheless, these are still amplifications of already-present social and institutional injustices and inequalities. Proposals such as Buchanan's draw attention to this fact, and attempt to work against the unaltered continuation of our very flawed society into the enhanced future. He thereby recognises that enhancements themselves are not the cause of the problem and reaffirms that an enhanced future society necessarily needs to be drastically different to ours.

Our society and its institutions are, as such, presently not up to the task. Both must evolve by attempting to embody and live up to the future we imagine *before* we can even take the steps towards it. If, for example, our primary fear is of exploitation, then we need to create societies and individuals that are not driven to exploit by nurturing an ethos against exploitation, or by implementing institutional safe-guards to protect against it.[44] Buchanan et al. seek to do exactly this, arguing that radical changes are needed to present international

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[42] Abensour, p. 407.

[43] See Allen Buchanan, *Beyond Humanity? The Ethics of Biomedical Enhancement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 243-79.

[44] The human enhancement movement (HEM) has provided a variety of methods for achieving this. The presently, hotly debated, option of moral enhancement is one. See, for instance, Ingmar Persson, and Julian Savulescu, *Unfit for the Future: The Need for Moral Enhancement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Moral enhancements could increase our ability to empathise with others and to exercise our judgment and actions with greater concern for the wellbeing of others in a way that allows people to work more effectively together to address global injustices and later, through the new social ethos that would emerge from this, have a society were such injustices are preempted.

intellectual property regimes (IPR) that would curtail exploitative uses of technology and illustrating just one of the ways that we can change social structures to prepare ourselves.[45]

The proposed changes are important because they represent a proactive attempt to undercut the attitude of competition and exclusion present in such legal regimes, which serve to undermine the possibility of technologies reaching the citizens of the world who most desperately need them. The priority of the IPR as it stands is clearly not to benefit the most people or the worst off, and nor does it foster an ethos of positive cooperation. This is, of course, only one manifestation of the institutionalised warping of priorities in our society that stems from our overly competitive and financially-driven outlook.[46] As such, it is certainly not the only area for radical change.[47] However, what this essay emphasises is that their proposal opens the field for a new range of work which, building off the insights of philosophers such as Iris Marion Young, would alter the landscape of the enhancement debate, shifting the focus to how our various social institutions and their structures contribute to the kinds of injustices already present in the world and which we find so intolerable in the enhanced future.[48]

The emphasis, therefore, remains on change and improvement—to shed the societal shackles that prevent the pursuit of enhancements and utopia. Moreover, in keeping with Abensour's account of a 'persistent utopia', we cannot but recognise that even an enhanced future society will not be the end of social change, and that the flux of human existence will defy any attempt to make it so. We are unable to adequately even imagine the possibilities of the future that the utopian character of HEM keeps open for us. Society might take on forms we cannot presently envision or, possibly, it may flourish under structures we would presently dismiss as undesirable. The possibility for human society should not be made static by a fear of change and the limitations of present foresight. Utopia, explains H.G. Wells, 'must not be static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage leading to a long ascent of stages'.[49] HEM does not, and cannot, advocate a concrete picture of society because such a move is, as Levitas states, 'one of prohibition'—a prohibition grounded in the way in which we are fettered by our social and historical circumstances.[50] The beauty of HEM is that

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[45] See Buchanan, Cole, Keohane, pp. 306–32.

[46] We see a similar attempt to argue for institutional changes which seek to overcome the root of an identified social injustice in Thomas Pogge's famous 'Health Impact Fund' (HIF). The HIF aims to improve the focus (and use of resources) of the pharmaceutical industry by incentivising the development and distribution of medicines that would help the most people. See Thomas Pogge, 'The Health Impact Fund: Enhancing Justice and Efficiency in Global Health', *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities,* 13 (2012), 537-59.

[47] In fact, the problem is systemic in that the attitude is not only endorsed by our society in everything from our celebration of the rich and successful to the way employers assess potential employees at interviews, but is maintained and nurtured in the very way we construct and operate social institutions which utilize hierarchies that create an ethos of "deserving" that justifies unequal treatment and incentivises people to excel and the expense of others. There is no quick and easy solution to this problem; however, it remains a problem that would need to be overcome *before* we could embrace human enhancement technologies.

[48] Young illustrated that much social injustice stem from the structures of our society. This "institutionalised" injustice results in everyday citizens participating in the creation of grave social injustice without them, at the individual level, acting immorally or with malice, and certainly without them approving of those injustices. See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[49] Herbert George Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (Auckland: Floating Press, 2009), p. 13.

[50] Levitas, p. 303.

it exhibits an open outlook in this respect, embracing the plurality and potentiality of our species and seeking to free us from the constraints that curtail human variation and fulfilment. It challenges us to be better than we are, even as it escapes our ability to fully illustrate what this radically different and enhanced life might look like. This fundamental inability to grasp our future enhanced condition and life is the emphasis of Nick Bostrom's 'Letter from Utopia', even as he attempts to do exactly that.[51] Nonetheless, the picture painted is breath-taking.

Thus, we present HEM as a very utopian source of inspiration, which, by alluding to possible futures, reveals entirely novel social and individual possibilities that in turn promote critical reflection. However, it does not, and cannot, tell us what that society will look like, how it will be structured, and how it will come to be. It has nevertheless accurately pointed out what it cannot be and, therefore, what we must change. The justice-oriented focus of the literature which reaffirms HEM's utopian intent is, in this way, directed at human flourishing writ large. It is not the case, then, that human enhancement is pursued purely for the individual, for it would not be a victory for HEM if individual enhancement eroded peaceful social coexistence.[52] Nor would it be a victory that creates an enhanced transhuman society at the expense of the individual. In this way, the utopian aspiration we have argued is crucial to understanding HEM also acts as a constraint on particular enhancements; namely, that enhancements properly conceived are only those which positively advance humanity (at both the social and individual level) in a way that recognises the utopian character of human existence illustrated earlier in this paper and therefore keeps *open* the possibilities of human flourishing rather than diminishes them.

There is, as such, a gyroscopic movement present in the utopian aspiration of HEM (a circularity embodying utopianism at each stage). To be clear: before being able to pursue specific enhancements, we *first* need to create better social institutions that would permit the desirable use and distribution of such technologies. We cannot properly embrace an era of enhancement without *first* addressing the aspects of society which contribute to social injustice. The fact that we already recognise this is testament to our positive development so far, and demarcates us as already enhanced versions of our ancestral selves. Our particular development as a species, where our lives are—generally speaking—more comfortable than they have ever been (particularly in the developed world),[53] allows us to already be critical of the drastically different moral concern we have historically shown for "in-group" members as

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[51] Nick Bostrom, 'Letter from Utopia' (2010). <http://www.nickbostrom.com/utopia.pdf >. [Accessed 25 April 2017]. See also Nick Bostrom, 'Why I want to be a posthuman when I grow up', in *Medical Enhancement and Posthumanity*, ed. by Bert Gordijn and Ruth Chadwick (Dordretch: Springer, 2008), pp. 107-36.
[52] Even though the actual implementation of human enhancements would necessarily be an individual venture as any attempt to systematically enhance all humans smacks of the eugenics of old.
[53] It is worth noting the extent to which we have realised the "Millennium Development Goals" here. Today, there are less than half the number of people living in abject poverty than there was in 1990, despite the fact that that the global population has risen by more than 2 billion people. See the full UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2015. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf>. [Accessed 25 April 2017].

opposed to "out-group" members, and advance a more cosmopolitan concern not just for all human beings but for the lives of non-human animals as well.[54]

Given our relative state of enhancement, we are now better-placed to see how we can positively direct or shape society to better human existence in the future and to do so in a way that would certainly not have appealed to us even a few hundred years ago. In other words, it is from our present position that we are able to project forward and imagine the particular world we want (the first step in the "cycle"). This imagining of the future is paramount, and the taking steps towards this modification marks us as further improved since it requires that we live in the way we desire the future to be (the second step). The actual realisation of these then set the stage for further possibilities for society (the "final" step). Only then, having achieved the necessary social improvement and the attached individual improvement, are we situated to pursue "new" enhancement technologies that would allow for the cycle to repeat; us becoming enhanced versions of ourselves through individual improvement (permitted and guided by the previous social improvement) which positions us (indeed capacitates us) to envision and then bring about the creation of a better society that is presently hidden from us (the third "cycle"). It is at this point that we embrace the enhancement era that will entail further cycles after the same fashion. We are, therefore, in the important "pre-enhancement cycle" wherein we must create the proper foundations for the era of enhancement.

As such, HEM encourages us to entertain new ways of living: to hope that we might exist peacefully, globally, sustainably, free from the pettiness and selfishness of our present systems. We imagine that we will be able to occupy our time on human fulfilment in a world truly concerned with justice and freedom, and to embrace all the forms of joy that might result from enhancements. HEM, in true utopian fashion, therefore seeks to ground or underpin the change we seek, kindling the flames of possibility. In this way, it awakens utopianism from its slumber where—no matter how dormant at times—it serves to spur humanity on towards itself. In other words, it serves to liberate and reinstall the utopian spirit that never left us.

Conclusion

This essay illustrates the utopianism inherent in the human enhancement movement by first articulating the multi-faceted nature of utopia and then holding it up to the aspirations of HEM to see how it fits. In so doing, the utopian thought which is pervasive in human thought and ubiquitous with human endeavour is uncovered. This gave us good reason to investigate the claim that humanity itself is a form of utopia. By building on the work of Bloch and Levinas, we came to understand the human condition as the perpetual move towards the not-yet-achieved (and essentially unattainable). Human nature is therefore revealed as utopian in

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[54] For a very interesting and highly original exploration of the development of human morality in this respect, see Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

the dual sense expounded by Thomas More when he first coined the term; embodying both the quest for the good/better/improved (the 'eu') with the knowledge that it is never quite attainable (the 'ou'). With this as its defining feature, we are able to understand humanity as utopian in the sense illustrated by Abensour—namely, as a 'persistent utopia' which manifests as a continuous and perpetual departure from the old and arrival at the new.

This fundamental tension was carried over through the examination of the degree to which society (as an extension of humanity) is also a utopia. Our discussion here combatted the negative picture of utopia put forth by contemporary political writers. In particular, it allowed us to address Berlin's anxiety of utopia as inevitability totalitarian, and undermine the old-fashioned 'eternal' conception of utopia' as that which sought to confine the utopian spirit to the point of extinguishing it. Consequently, we are left with a social account of utopia which purports that utopia does not seek perfection but paints only a vision of possibility, hinting at John Rawls' conception of the 'realistic utopia'.[55] Utopia in this sense was revealed to embody nothing short of a 'clear imperative to make the world a better place'.[56]

Having explored both the utopianism of both human beings and human society, there can be seen perfect alignment with the aspirations of HEM, revealed as utopian in that it is born out of a dissatisfaction with our present human capacity (with its fleeting moments of brilliance) as well as our present society (with its lack of orientation towards human well-being and flourishing), and offers us hope for a glorious alternative future. As such, it embraces the ever changing and persistent utopia of man and society by pushing for an unfettered existence and recognises the barriers to such a life. Here, the utopianism of HEM was demonstrated as neither prioritising the individual nor society through emphasising their necessarily reciprocating existence and influence. Moreover, it breathes new life to the utopian disposition of hoping for a new future that allows us to be 'won over by the utopian game, which consists not in choosing such-and-such a "solution", but in being able relentlessly to image new figures of a free and just political community'.[57] At its centre, HEM opens us up to unbridled potential of humanity and encourages us to strive boldly into the future, collectively embracing self-creation and self-improvement in a manner that can only be seen as utopian.

In conclusion, HEM maintains that utopian element present since its earliest academic portrayals. The promising future it paints makes us critical of the aspects of society that would curtail that eventuality, and therefore motivates us to change those elements which breed social injustice. It challenges us to rethink our competitive and individualistic society by showing that such a social ethos would work against human flourishing in the enhanced future and thereby encourages us to change this way of life. The intimate connection between HEM and our utopian selves, together with its quest for improving our collective existence, marks it out as a movement to be embraced rather than feared, and reaffirms the positive

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[55] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 16.
[56] John Harris, *Enhancing Evolution: The Ethical Case for Making Better People* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 4–5.
[57] Abensour, p. 417.

socio-political impact that images of the future have against the shortcomings of the present. The final beauty is that, by emphasising the utopian character of HEM, we are set down a path to improve our world motivated only by the sheer *possibility* of radical enhancement technologies. Consequently, we will be engaged in a proactive utopian endeavour that benefits human life regardless of whether any such technologies ever become technologically feasible.

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