

PARADISE, THE GOLDEN AGE
THE MILLENNIUM AND UTOPIA
A NOTE ON THE DIFFERENTIATION
OF FORMS OF THE IDEAL SOCIETY

What is the difference between the earthly paradise, the Golden Age and the ideal city? This question is most important for whoever is interested in the various ways human societies have had for imagining an ideal state of perfection or social harmony. If we are not to confuse such different systems of representation as mythical thought, millenarianism and Utopia, it is absolutely necessary that we do not reduce the descriptions of an earthly paradise and a Golden Age to simple precursors of the ideal city of the Utopians.¹ It is especially important not to call “Utopian” every representation of the ideal society, Utopia being only one—and the most recent—of its modalities.² The Utopian dream

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¹ The principal approaches to an analysis of the various types of visions of the ideal state of social perfection (paradisiacal myth, millennium and Utopian city) are found in Laplantine, 1974 and Wunenburger, 1979. The latter is mainly inspired by that of G. Durand, 1979a and 1979b.

² Even the sociological approaches to Utopia tend to confuse it with the

takes up and at the same time alters the paradisiacal and millenarian imagination: it would be difficult to believe that the passage of primitive societies to great urban civilizations, then to modern society occurred without major repercussions on the vision of these societies, that the ideal state of social perfection did not vary from one to the other.

Consequently, we must look for common traits as well as variations when we go from the earthly paradise to the Utopian city and give all necessary importance to the turning points in this passage: the myth of cyclic ages, Messianism and millenarianism. This procedure permits us to see that the changes are not so much in the content of the vision of an ideal state of social perfection as in its spatio-temporal localization and the means employed to achieve it. If we exclude the conception of time and space in which are located the ideal, perfect society and also exclude the way the passage is made from actual society to the imagined society as an ideal, we find several common characteristics in the descriptions of paradise, the millennium and the ideal city of the Utopians:³ a) the absence of arduous work (physical and moral suffering, ageing and/or death (longevity and immortality)); b) a harmonious functioning of social relationships, a perfect communication with others,⁴ whether it be other human beings, animals, gods or the entire universe. It goes without saying that the realization of each of these characteristics may vary considerably according to the type of vision with which we are confronted. The absence of illness may be assured by the protection of the gods as well as by modern medicine; the absence of toil as much by magical practices as by the complete automation of industry; eternal youth by an elixir as well as by progress in biology;

vision of a state of social perfection in general. Cf. Duveau, 1961, Mannheim, 1956, Servien, 1967 and Bloch, 1976.

³ On the general presence of these traits in paradisiacal myths as well as in millenarianism and Utopia, see the works of M. Eliade, especially: Eliade, 1971, pp. 139-205; 1962, pp. 181-232; 1957, pp. 40-59 and 78-94. See also Wunenburger, 1979. On the representations of paradise, see Guhl, 1972, for a general review; Corbin, 1953 and 1963, and Soderblom, 1901, for the Iranian tradition; Daniélou, 1953, for Christianity. See also Gillet, 1975, for examples in literature.

⁴ A functioning that usually implies nudity and sexual liberty. See Eliade, 1962, pp. 181-232 and Desroches, 1978.

perfect communication by telepathic fusion as well as by telematic revolution.

Somewhat surprisingly, equality is not a universal trait of the vision of an ideal society. All Utopias are not egalitarian, nor are all millenniums or myths concerning the Golden Age or the earthly paradise.⁵ What is always found, however, is the conception of a harmonious social functioning in which everyone is perfectly content to fill the role assigned to him, whether the functioning of social relationships is hierarchic or egalitarian, organized or spontaneous.

If we now come to the differences, we realize that in the representations of paradise and the Golden Age the ideal society is not situated in a secular time or space, accessible by ordinary human means, contrarily to Utopia, that presents this world as accessible through purely human means. For conceptions arising from the paradisiacal vision, the passage between actual society and an ideal society is made through symbolic and ritual means, while in Utopian thought it is made through material means. The principal forms of millenarianism represent transitions and mixtures between these two extremes.

Utopia conceives the state of social perfection as realizable in this world, in a more or less near future, through technique, science and the rationalization of social relationships. Millenarian thought and the practices connected with it differ from Utopia on an essential point: the means employed are not those of reason and science but of attitudes and religious behavior, such as faith and prayer, the expectation of a savior and the reading of signs, as well as such socio-political attitudes as revolt or marginalization in communities. As for mythical thought (para-

⁵ The myths of paradise and the Golden Age speak of justice and abundance rather than of equality. See Eliade, 1952, pp. 73-119; the myth of the Golden Age in Hesiod, *Works and Days*; and Virgil, *IV Bucolics*. In Messianisms and millenarianisms, there is never political equality between the leader, his acolytes and the faithful, not always a real economic equality and rarely equality between men and women. See Barret and Gurgand, 1981; Cohn, 1970, for Western millenarianisms. See Lanternari, 1962, and Queiroz, 1968, for those of the Third World. As for Utopias, it is known that it would be difficult to call the Republic of Plato or the Abbey of Thélème of Rabelais egalitarian; the egalitarianism of More is strictly economic: on his island there is no political equality or equality between men and women. On Utopias, see Servier, 1967; Lapouge, 1978; Manuel and Manuel, 1979.

dise, the Golden Age), it does not locate the perfect society in a time and space definitively accessible to the majority of humans before death: only periodic rituals or more or less elaborated spiritual techniques permit, in this world, a temporary attainment of the paradisiacal state. On the contrary, the millennium and Utopia can be realized in this world.⁶

I. OPPOSITION BETWEEN PARADISIACAL MYTH AND UTOPIA

Let us consider systematically the analysis of the differences between the paradisiacal myth and Utopia. As we have mentioned above, the essential criteria here are the conception of space and time and the link between actual society and the envisioned state of social perfection.

For Utopian thought, this state is realizable in this world, in the future, through rational means⁷ (science, technique, planning of social relationships). For mythical thought, on the contrary, this state is not located in the future but rather in an immemorial paradoxical past that is confounded with the present.⁸ Paradise is never the work of humanity but of the gods. The role of humanity is a) to re-realize periodically the paradisiacal memory through rites, festivals and orgies symbolically evoking a return to primordial chaos and regeneration;⁹ b) to liberate itself from the constraints of the world through a spiritual ecstasy of the Shamanic type, which permits some individuals to reinstate temporarily the paradisiacal state before their death.¹⁰

However, the most fundamental difference between the paradisiacal myth and Utopia is the concept of time. Myth has a cyclic conception of time in which the latter has a negative value; on the contrary, Utopia implies a positive value of time conceived

⁶ Concerning the use of the conception of space and time and the passage between real society and ideal society as criteria of differentiation of the paradisiacal myth, the millennium and the Utopian city, see Eliade, 1963 and 1969; Desroches, 1969 and 1973; and Wunenburger, 1979.

⁷ On the link between science, rationalism and Utopia, see Eurich, 1967; Wunenburger, 1979; and Suvin, 1977.

⁸ On this aspect of mythical thought, see Eliade, 1963 and 1969.

⁹ See Eliade, 1969; and Eliade, 1949, ch. VII-XII.

¹⁰ See Eliade, 1951 and 1969.

as linear and irreversible. In the first case, only the periodic reinstatement of the eternal present and the symbolic and ritual destruction of the effects of the passing of time are liberators. In the second case, time flows toward a future conceived as the only place of human liberation with no possible return to a past that partially values its role as a rough draft of the present and the future.

The following table summarizes the principal oppositions between the paradisiacal myth and Utopia:¹¹

	Time			Space	Link between the actual social world and the ideal social world
	Location of the ideal world	Direction	Value		
Myth	Immemorial past Eternal present	Cyclic Repetitive	Negative (destructive)	Inaccessible in this world in a durable way	Symbolic (rites, festivals, Shamanism, etc.)
Utopia	Future	Linear Irreversible	Positive (progress)	Accessible in this world in a permanent way	Rational (technique, science, planning of social relationships)

Of course, this is a matter of extreme cases, corresponding to the paradisiacal myths of societies of hunters and gatherers and to liberal or socialist Utopias of the industrial West. The passage¹² from one extreme to the other is made by a series of transitions, whose main points are the cyclic conception of the ages of humanity, and millenarian thought (Messianism and eschatology).

¹¹ Compare with schemas of Desroches, 1973; and Wunenburger, 1979.

¹² On the place of this passage within the religious evolution of mankind, there is a mine of indications and information in Eliade, 1980.

II. THE PASSAGE FROM MYTH TO UTOPIA

Like Utopian thought, Messianism and millenarianism¹³ can adapt to a conception that the ideal society is realizable in this world in a durable way and in a future that is more or less near. On the contrary, Messianisms and millenarianisms differ from Utopia and come close to the paradisiacal myth in that they can adapt a cyclic and negative conception of historical time, and also because they do not give a determinant role to science and reason in the passage from actual society to ideal society (while not necessarily giving privilege to the rites and symbols proper to mythical thought).

For a better understanding of the meaning of the passage from paradisiacal myth to millenarianism and from the latter to Utopia, we must keep in mind a variant of mythical thought, present in the large urban societies for several thousands of years. This variant is more complex than the conception of the societies of hunters and gatherers, because the theory of the cyclic ages of mankind introduces into mythical thought certain elements of temporal linearity and eschatological expectation (return to the Golden Age).

1. *The cyclic ages of humanity*

Where the paradisiacal vision is concerned, primitive mythical thought involves a relatively simple conception of cyclic time. At its origin and creation, humanity enjoyed a social state of happiness and harmony, a state later abolished because of a ritual sin explained by particular mythical tales of the Prometheus type or of that of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Then began the

¹³ There is a considerable literature on millenarianism and Messianism. Essential information and bibliography will be found in Burrige, 1969; Des roches, 1969 and 1973; and Thrupp, 1962. For the West, see Cohn, 1967 and 1970; and Hobsbawm, 1963. For the Third World, a general survey in Lanternari, 1962; and Queiroz, 1968. Among the most interesting studies on the subject are those of Worsley, 1957, on the "cargo" cult in Melanesia and those of Métraux, 1928 and Clastres, 1975 on the disputed Messianism of the Guarani Indians.

time and living conditions of present-day man: death, sexuality, toil and suffering, with their train of destruction and degeneration.

Periodically, and usually annually, rites and ceremonies came to annul symbolically the effects of the passing of time: festivals and orgies, in which social rules were abolished, witnessed a return to the chaos that precedes any new creation and permitted the reactualization of the paradisiacal time of origin. It is through these rites that all may temporarily and collectively reinstate the paradisiacal condition, initiation and Shamanic practices being reserved for the privileged few.¹⁴

After death everyone will have a lasting access to this condition. In some cases, however, belief in reincarnation confers a temporary nature to the *post-mortem* sojourn in paradise.

The conception of a cyclic evolution of the cosmos and humanity through several different ages came to complicate this initial temporal doctrine, by permitting the introduction of a certain linearity within the cycle of ages. In the early agrarian and urban civilizations of the Near East, but also in India, China and the Mediterranean basin, a conception of time developed in which humanity and the cosmos were periodically destroyed and recreated.¹⁵

Within a cycle, however, conditions of existence are not the same from one age to another: ideal and paradisiacal (Golden Age) at the start, they later become progressively debased in the succeeding ages to end in a gloomy description of the present human condition (the Iron Age of the ancient Greeks and Romans, *Kali-yuga* for the Hindus). As in primitive conception, we see here that the passing of time has a negative value, implying destruction and moral decadence. The ineluctable succession of ages introduces a certain linearity of time, explicitly, within the cyclic process, and this linearity is precisely that of a degradation of human living conditions. *The cyclic aspect is dom-*

¹⁴ In the preceding two paragraphs is found the essential of Eliade's analysis (1963 and 1967), which is taken up by Wunenburger, 1979.

¹⁵ For the cyclic theory of ages, see the classic analysis by Eliade, 1969. The most elaborated versions of the myth of the ages of humanity are found in the ancient Greeks (Hesiod, *Works and Days*) and Romans (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*) and in India (Eliade, 1952, ch. II). For ancient Mexico, see Racine, 1965, and Yanez, 1964.

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inant, however, since each linear development is followed by an identical cycle.

It is not just because it introduces a relative temporal linearity that the cyclic theory of ages differs from the primitive conception *but also because it allows the establishment of a link between the ideal society and actual society that is different from the one implied by early mythical thought.* The constant reprise of the cycle of ages assumes, in fact, that with each Golden Age and after a cosmic destruction, mankind may again live in a paradisiacal way for a rather long time (the first age always being the longest).

Without having to renounce the periodic ceremonies of regeneration and reactivation of the memory of the primordial paradise, the cyclic theory of ages thus makes a way for the first millenary conceptions, *in which the hope for a return of the Golden Age is accompanied by Messianism and eschatology.*¹⁶

2. Millenarianism, messianism and eschatology

In addition to the fact that the cyclic theory of ages allows the hope for a return of the Golden Age on earth, two other symbolic phenomena linked to the culture of agrarian and urban societies facilitate the gradual passage to millenarianism. First, like societies of hunters and gatherers, agrarian societies often conceive life as an alternation between creation and the return to chaos: in this perspective, every sign of an imminent cataclysm may be considered as the prelude to a cosmic destruction, followed by a return to the Golden Age.

Second, in their periodic rituals of regeneration agrarian societies often connect the passage to a new creation to a ritual of purification of sins (the scapegoat, for example), symbolized by real or simulated human sacrifice. Moreover, these societies often place the passage toward a new age under theegis of a new king representing creative divinities. The combination of these two characteristics makes comprehensible the fact that, in the expectation of a return of the Golden Age, all signs of the coming of a heroic or royal personage or a Messiah, saving humanity by

¹⁶ This passage is particularly clear in the fourth *Bucolics* of Virgil.

taking on himself the burden of its sins, will be watched for.¹⁷

Thus in agrarian and urban civilizations we are farther and farther away from original mythical thought, as far as concerns the spatio-temporal localization of paradise and the means employed to achieve it. Human heroic or Messianic action can allow access to paradise, contrary to what primitive mythical thought assumed.

With Judaeo-Christianity, the separation becomes even wider, time becomes linear and irreversible, historical duration has a positive value and is transformed into sacred history.¹⁸ The expectation of the Golden Age becomes the expectation of the return of Christ, of the Last Judgment that will definitively separate the good from the bad, the just from the unjust, the chosen from the damned. After the final Resurrection of the body, the *eschaton* represents a return to paradise, but it is no longer at the beginning of time: it is at the end of time and outside time.¹⁹

3. *Utopia*²⁰

Thus are gradually reunited in Oriental thought all the essential elements that will subsequently be laicized by the Utopians: projection of paradise in an accessible future, linear and positive conception of irreversible time, the active intervention of humanity in the establishment of the Golden Age.

In ancient Jewish thought, time does not bring about an inevitable degeneration: it is a series of interventions of God in history, interventions that are positively directed toward a progressive salvation of the chosen people. Then in Christianity we see that if the coming, death and resurrection of Jesus again take

¹⁷ I took the two preceding points from Eliade, 1963 and 1969, and 1949, ch. VII-XII.

¹⁸ On Jewish Messianism, see Klausner, 1956, and Eliade, 1980.

¹⁹ See Cohn, 1970; Desroches, 1969; Rigaux, 1932; and Vulliaud, 1952.

²⁰ Like millenarianism, Utopia has been widely studied. The principal synthesized studies and bibliographies will be found in Manuel and Manuel, 1979; Servier, 1967; Suvin, 1977; Versins, 1972; and Wunenburger, 1979. Some other interesting studies are Buber, 1977; Cioranescu, 1972; Mucchielli, 1960; Mumford, 1966; and Ruyer, 1950. See also references in note 2.

up the regenerative scenarios of agrarian societies it is *to make irreversible historical events of them*.

Neither Jewish thought nor Christianity is absolutely clear as to the possibility of installing a new paradise on earth at the end of time, contrary to the cyclic theory of ages²¹ (for which the Golden Age appears in this world, recurrently). There are new heavens *and* a new earth.

St. Augustine²² was the first to define the line of thought of official Christianity in this matter. For the Bishop of Hippo the only possible perfection was that of the City of God; it seemed to him vain and illusory to try to realize it here on earth. From this arose polemics with various representatives of the Gnostic sects,²³ who thought it possible to have paradise in this world by retiring to small communities. For official Christian thought, the only way to link the actual social world and celestial paradise was to earn the latter upon death by faithfully living the example of Christ and following the teaching of His church. On this earth, the only authentic community was that of the spirit (*ecclesia*).

In his struggle against the Gnostic current, St. Augustine was fighting the effects of a contamination of Christian thought by the religious conceptions of the Greco-Roman world, in which were easily confused, following Hellenistic syncretism, the coming of the *eschaton* and the return of the Golden Age. However, the victory of Augustinian thought over Gnosticism was never to be definitive. All through the Middle Ages, the Church was exposed to millenarian and eschatological tendencies dreaming of the establishment of a millennium of justice, peace and happiness on earth, before the definitive return of Christ and the end of time.²⁴

Then, toward the end of the Middle Ages, Joachim of Flora developed an irreversible and progressive theory of the ages of humanity. From the age of the Father to that of the Son and

²¹ See Daniélou, 1953 on the different localizations of the Christian paradise.

²² See Salin, 1926, for Augustinian thought.

²³ For the disputes between St. Augustine and the Gnostics, see Decret, 1974. For Gnostic thought in general, see Leisegang, 1971 and Puesch, 1978.

²⁴ For the struggle of the millenarian movements against the Church, see Cohn, 1970.

that of the Holy Spirit, the human condition would constantly improve. The Calabrian abbot had, in addition, a strong tendency to confound the Age of the Spirit (which he believed had already arrived), the millennium and the *eschaton*.²⁵ This way of viewing the succession of the ages of humanity had an enormous influence, clearing the way for all sorts of attempts aimed at reestablishing the paradisiacal community in this world.

Throughout the Middle Ages, various millenarianisms were divided as to the way to bring about the kingdom of the just. An early tendency was passive: the reading of all the signs announcing the end of the world, penitential practices, hope for the coming of the personage who would install the millennium (emperor of the final days, Sebastianism). Another tendency was more active and violent: the Church was denounced and identified with Babylon and the Beast of the Apocalypse; Jews were persecuted.²⁶

This latter tendency culminated in the preaching of men like Thomas Müntzer and the Messianic order of Jean de Leyde at Münster.²⁷ To bring about the kingdom on earth it sufficed to make immediately the apocalyptic separation between the good and the bad (assimilated to the rich and the poor): the bad convert, or they are exterminated. We know to what degree this method of bringing about the state of social perfection will be taken up by the thinkers and political men of the French Revolution, whether it is a matter of St. Just or Robespierre (and also in Cromwell's England).²⁸

With the peasant revolts, followed by the siege of Münster that was inspired by the violent current of anabaptism, we are at the threshold of the takeover of millenarianism by the Utopian current: time is conceived as linear, irreversible and positive; the kingdom may be realized on earth through man's actions; the means of this action call more and more upon political violence of the rich against the poor and upon the ideal of economic egalitarianism.

²⁵ For the thought and influence of Joachim of Flora, see Bloomfield, 1957.

²⁶ For millenarian currents in the West, see Cohn, 1970 and Desroches, 1969 and 1973.

²⁷ On Müntzer, see Cohn, 1970. On Jean de Leyde, see Cohn, 1970; and Barret and Gurgand, 1979.

²⁸ See Manuel and Manuel, 1979.

However, religious thought still had to be replaced by reason, symbolic and ritual practices by scientific practice. Such a current of thought does not date from the Renaissance: the first signs are found in ancient Greece.²⁹ Even though its system of scrupulously divided and defined functions may make the republic imagined by Plato appear as supremely rational, we must not forget that the basis of all this organization is represented by the philosophers, and that Platonian philosophy accords to ideas an esoteric basis no doubt inspired by Pythagorism. Here it could not be a question of an exclusively rational basis for the ideal state of social perfection, even less of the prevalence of science and technique.

During the Renaissance the Platonic ideal of social perfection was resumed, at first with only a modification of its details. However, from More to Comenius, Campanella and Leibnitz, the modifications all went in the same direction: social perfection can only be realized if scientific activity and technical research are given a major place. Shortly before the Age of Enlightenment pan-Sophist philosophers, who dreamed of re-establishing a universal Christian republic and curing the great religious schism brought by the Protestant reform, succeeded in describing the ideal of social perfection as attributable to the full development of reason, science and technique, under theegis of faith.³⁰

Without a doubt, it is with Bacon's *New Atlantis* that science and technique achieved their autonomy in the Utopian project, in the face of a faith that was more and more abstract and disembodied. From the Age of Enlightenment on, it will be difficult to describe the perfect society without giving reason, science and technique an essential part. The part of reason is clearly seen in thinkers such as Rousseau, Turgot, Condorcet and Kant: with them the perfect social state rests on reason, economic equality and justice, and the "scientific" understanding of the social begins to be considered indispensable for the installation of an ideal social order. This central role of "scientific" comprehen-

²⁹ On Utopian thought in the Greco-Roman world, see Manuel and Manuel, 1979; Lapouge, 1978; and Ferguson, 1975. See also Servier, 1967.

³⁰ On the Utopian thought of More and the pan-Sophists, and on the emergence of the primacy of scientific rationality, see Manuel and Manuel, 1979; Eurich, 1967; and Desroches, 1972.

sion of the social in its process of betterment will be greatly reinforced with socialist and anarchist thinkers, from Fourier and Owen to Marx, Proudhon and Saint-Simon, proceeding through Babeuf, Blanqui, Cabet and Sorel.³¹

Even marginal thinkers like Sade and Fourier do not escape this ascendancy of the scientific process over the Utopian process: whether the first classes the vices and the second the passions, attributing to these aspects of human life a much more important role than did other Utopian thinkers who were more concerned with economic and political equality, it nevertheless remains that they submit the definition of the perfect social state to the rudiments of the scientific process (observation and classification of phenomena). The great concern of Sade and Fourier for tolerance and for respect for differences in man sets them far apart from the homogenizing egalitarianism of most of the other thinkers of their time, but it does not remove them from rationalism and the "scientificity" of the Utopian process.³²

In the 19th century, all thinkers who reflected on the definition of the state of social perfection agreed on several points: this perfection would be achieved in the future through science assisting in the domination (exploitation) of nature and rationalization of social relationships, by installing one or another form of political and economic egalitarianism. Affective happiness, harmonious rapport between the sexes and ages are relegated to second place (in spite of Fourierist dissidence) in what concerned the definition of the perfect social state as well as in what referred to the means of establishing it.

It was on the latter point that the divergences were accentuated. If, as Saint-Simon said, the Golden Age is not behind us but in front of us, if the new religion is science and the new magic technique, we still must specify how this redefined Golden Age may be achieved, and what the exact role of science, technique and politics will be in the process.

It seems that three principal tendencies confront each other

³¹ On this phase of Utopian thought, see Manuel and Manuel, 1979; Desroches, 1872; and Desanti, 1970.

³² The particular place of Sade and Fourier in Utopian thought is well covered by Lapouge, 1978. On Fourier, see Desroches, 1975, and Debout, 1978.

on this point: that of Marx, that of Proudhon and Owen and that of Saint-Simon. Marxism, anarchism and Saint-Simonism are not, however, airtight currents of thought and practices: at various times, influences were numerous and important.³³

For the Saint-Simonian current, the essential is the development of techniques, particularly the techniques of communication. Thus equality of opportunity and distributive justice would be assured by peacefully and progressively replacing the government of men by the administration of things, in a process mainly directed by industrialists. Priority is given to the application of technology in industry, and it is easy to see to what degree this current is still predominant today: as soon as a socio-economic crisis appears, we are presented with new technological solutions that must finally insure universal happiness. Today, we have bio-industry, space industry and telematics.³⁴

The view of Marxists and anarchists is less simplistic. It calls upon the working class, the people, rather than the industrial elite. Science and technique must be put to the service of the working class, through a real, not merely formal, democratic process, if we wish to reach a perfect society that is valid for all. Marx was without a doubt the most coherent in this process, claiming to prove scientifically that the appropriation of the means of production by a minority curbed techno-scientific development and delayed the arrival of the perfect society defined as a community of direct producers.

The divergences between Marxists and anarchists mainly concerned the political means to employ so as to assure the passage to the perfect society. According to the anarchist current, on the line of Fourier, Owen, Cabet, Proudhon and others, it was more important to establish communities of direct autonomous producers than to struggle against the capitalist social order. Contrarily, according to the Marxist current, priority is given to the organization of workers in unions and parties whose political struggle should aim at replacing and then destroying the bourgeois

³³ These interinfluences are pointed out well by Desroches, 1975 and Desanti, 1970.

³⁴ On telematic Utopia, see Toffler, 1980. In a way, the present opposing Utopia, centered on a change of conscience and recently set forth by M. Ferguson, 1981 evokes a return to the pan-Sophist view.

state. As is known, the place of clandestine or violent struggle in this process is the cause of all sorts of disputes and schisms inside Marxism itself.

We see that several cross-checks exist between the three currents: some anarchists and some Marxists agree on the use of violence in the struggle against the bourgeois state, some Marxists use Saint-Simonian democratic procedures, and so on. What concerns us here is not to analyze these details but to point out the problematics common to Utopian socialists, Saint-Simonians, anarchists and Marxists as concerns the perfect society. Several elements of this common problematics manifestly represent a laicization of millenarianism: science plays the role of religion; the working masses or the industrialists have a Messianic role; political violence recalls the rituals of the return to chaos before social regeneration; religious partition between the rich and the poor is replaced by an egalitarian partition of material goods according to economic and scientific criteria. It is not easy to free ourselves from symbolic thought, religious vision and the great initiation rituals.

Proceeding from these remarks, it is interesting to see that the enormous ideological success of Marxism, which still resists all practical and theoretical contradictions, may partly be explained by the fact that it is a unique synthesis between the fundamental aspects of millenarianism and Utopia. Of the first, it retains that the passage to the ideal society must be made through the elimination of the rich; of the second, that this society will be rational, egalitarian and scientific. There is still more, however, and it is undoubtedly the most essential: Marx claimed that a scientific analysis of history and the functioning of the capitalist society allows the inference of the Messianic role of the proletariat (chains = crucifixion) and the scientific necessity for the disappearance of the rich (capitalist proprietors of the means of production). The integration of millenary eschatology and Utopian rationalism could not be pushed farther. Before a doctrine that so intimately links magic fascination in the face of "liberating" technique and the apocalyptic vision of the Last Judgment in favor of the poor, no logical argument and no confrontation with

the facts will hold.³⁵ Small matter that the history of mankind is not essentially that of class struggle and that there had been no social classes before the last phase of this struggle; small matter that no dominated class had ever replaced a dominating class, that the feudal lords were not former serfs. Small matter that priority of economics is a snare, since language is as necessary to human social life as production. Small matter that revolutionary changes made in the name of Marxism have produced nothing other than new autocracies and that paradise is no more in the Soviet Union than it is in Cuba, in China than it is in Vietnam or Albania. The persuasive force of Marxism with the popular masses could not have arisen from its logic nor from its conformity to historical fact but much more easily from its conformity to human aspirations to the magic realization of a paradisiacal happiness and the punishment of the bad by the good.

This brief survey of the historical and logical advance that has led human vision from the paradisiacal myth to Utopian reason, proceeding through the cyclic theory of ages and the various forms of Messianisms and millenarianisms to end in a laicized synthesis of the principal elements of the three fundamental types of representation of the ideal society (paradise and Golden Age, Millennium, Utopia) gives rise to some basic questions. Since all attempts to bring about an enduring ideal society in this world have up until now been checkmated, this being as true for millenarianism as for Utopia, socialism as well as liberalism, should we not question the aims and the means proposed by these representations and by the practices they have inspired? Should we not doubt the belief that science and technique are the best course for the betterment of the human condition? Even more, should we not reconsider the possibility of arriving at the permanent realization in this world of a perfect society, even if we conceive

³⁵ This phenomenon is not proper to Marxism. In his study of an American group prophesying the imminent end of the world, L. Festinger, 1956, presented the paradox claiming that the failure of an eschatological prophecy is considered by the adepts of the prophet as a confirmation of his predictions.

this latter as an asymptotic and ideal tendency of history? Finally, should we not ponder the fact that all the great universal religions, from Hinduism to Taoism, from Buddhism to Christianity, have each in its own way affirmed that the kingdom is not of this world, that paradise is outside of time—or rather, at every moment of time, in the past as well as in the present or future, in the very movement made by the incessant transmutation of one moment into another?

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